

The Cow With the Ponytail



Story by Michele Klevens Ritterman
Illustrations by Gale Epstein

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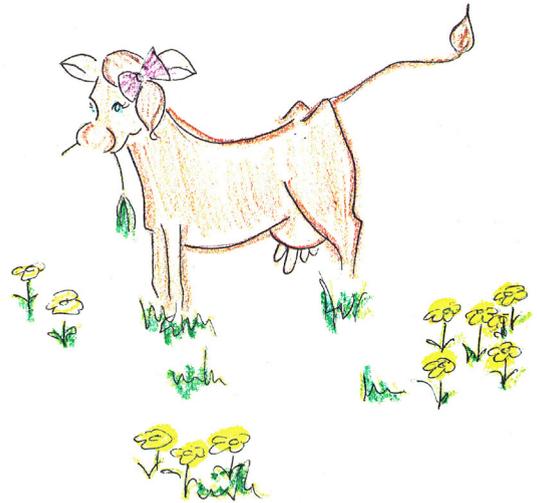
The Cow With the Ponytail

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Once upon a time, there was a cow named Madeline.

Madeline was an ordinary cow, except for one thing:

she had a ponytail hanging from her forehead.



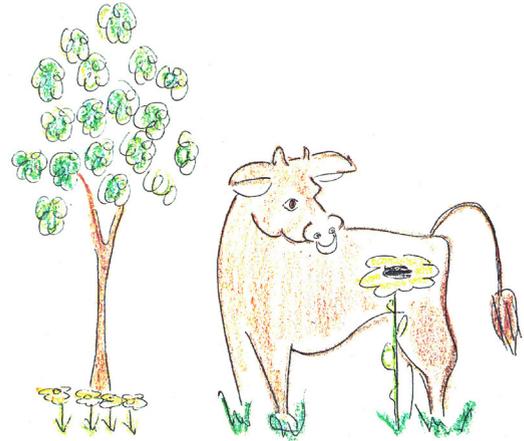
The family that owned Madeline lived in a pretty white house.

The children in this family loved Madeline and her ponytail very much.



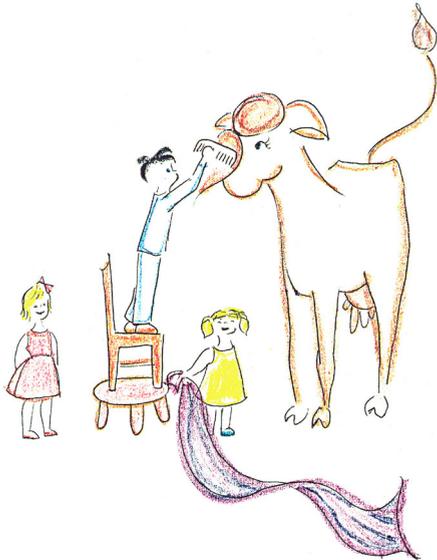
Besides the children, Madeline had one other friend.

This friend was Buddy.



He was a baby bull the age of Madeline.

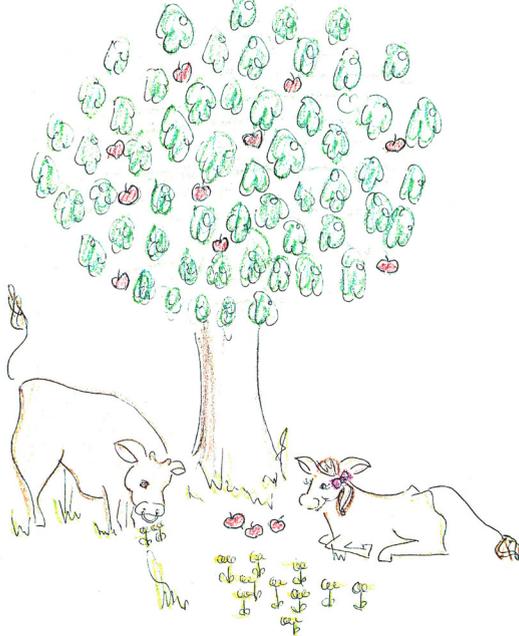
Every day after lunch the children would run out of the house to play with Madeline and Buddy. They brought one stool, one brush, and one shiny purple ribbon. They brushed Madeline's long ponytail and tied the ribbon in a big bow around it.



Then they would run through the pasture, or by the stream, or in the apple orchard, playing hide-and-seek, until everyone got giddy and tired and lay down in the thick grass to rest.



When the children went inside, Madeline and Buddy would walk off together to the shade of their favorite apple tree, eat buttercups, laugh, and have a lot of fun.



Now, you would think Madeline's ponytail would make her quite pleased. But until a few surprising events had passed, it only made her unhappy.

Whenever Madeline walked by the other cows, they turned their backsides to her, twitched their tails and stomped their hooves. They whispered to each other just loud enough for Madeline to hear!

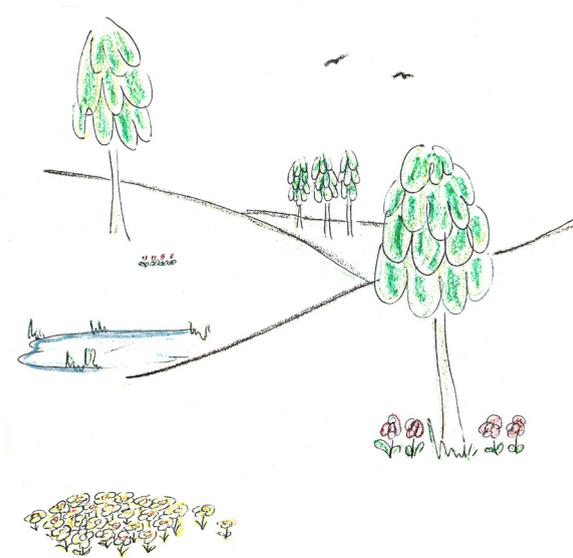
They said, "She's showing off with her ponytail."



If only they knew the truth...but what could Madeline do?

Madeline looked out over the countryside, at the yellow daffodils and grassy hills. She heard the song of birds, and she was not happy.

Would you have been happy?

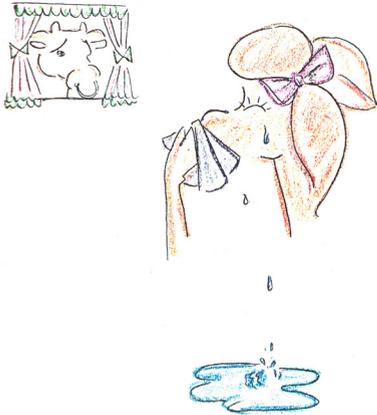


One day Madeline became very sick. She did not go out to play with the children and Buddy. She just lay on her bed of hay in the barn, with a thermometer in her mouth and an icepack on her head, and felt miserable. The children decided to call the cow doctor.



The doctor examined Madeline and afterwards he shook his head and shrugged his shoulders and said, "This is a strange case. A very strange case indeed!"

No one could figure out what was ailing Madeline – well, except for Buddy and Madeline herself, that is. They both knew she was sick over her ponytail.

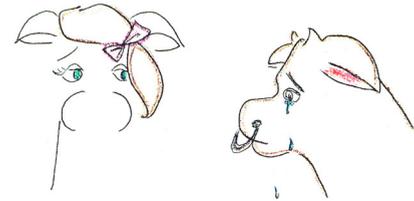


Madeline told Buddy through her tears,

“I can’t feel good until I feel ordinary!”

One day, Madeline told Buddy that she was going to Salinas Beauty Salon to get her ponytail cut off once and for all.

“That is that!” she said with determination.



With tears in his big brown eyes, Buddy worried that without her ponytail the children might not love her in the same way!

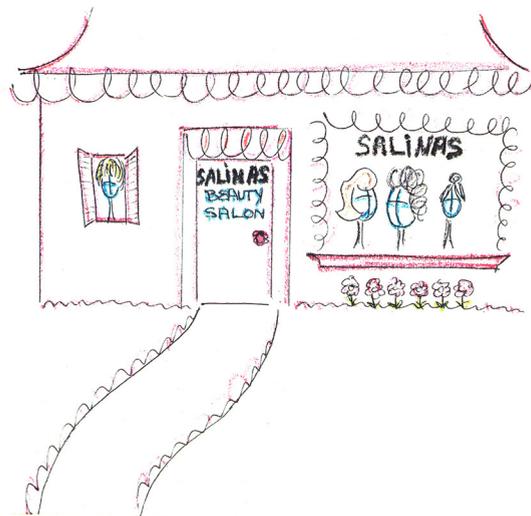
But Madeline insisted.



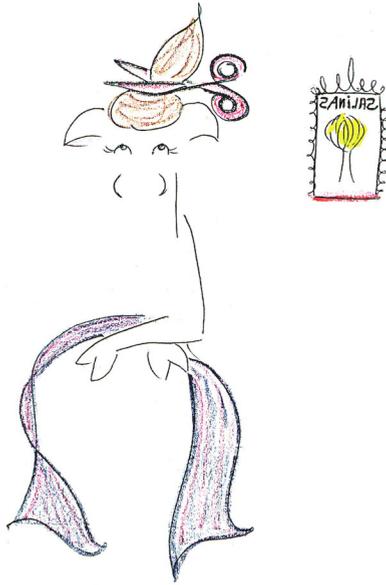
The very next morning, Buddy walked Madeline to the winding, shady road to the salon. “I know I’ll like you however you are, Silly Madeline,” Buddy said. “Oh, Buddy, you’ll just like me more!” she laughed; and as she laughed, the tiny coin purse she brought jangled like little bells.

At last! She was there at Salinas Beauty Salon. A small, kind man asked, “May I be of assistance to you?” Madeline swished her ponytail and said, “This – must go!”

“As you wish,” he said, “although long hair is quite the thing these days.” He led Madeline to a chair in front of a huge mirror, tied a cape around her, and...



Snip-snip! Snap-snap! went the scissors, and there lay Madeline's ponytail on the floor.



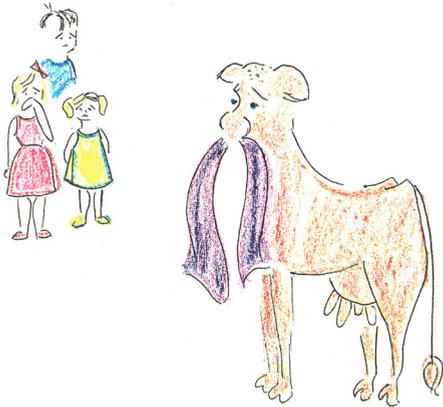
Madeline looked at herself in the mirror, this way and then that way. "Good!" she said, and handed the man the coins. "By the way, would you like to keep a lock of hair as a remembrance?" "Definitely not!" snapped Madeline. "But thank you!"

Madeline was humming her favorite song and feeling excited to see Buddy and the children, and especially the other cows, to show everyone that she was ORDINARY!!!



But when the other cows saw her coming, they huddled together. Then one snuck up behind her and said, "Boo!" and Madeline jumped and turned in fear. When the cows noticed the little bald spot on Madeline's head where her ponytail had been, they twitched their tails, hooted, and mooed, until their eyes were running with tears.

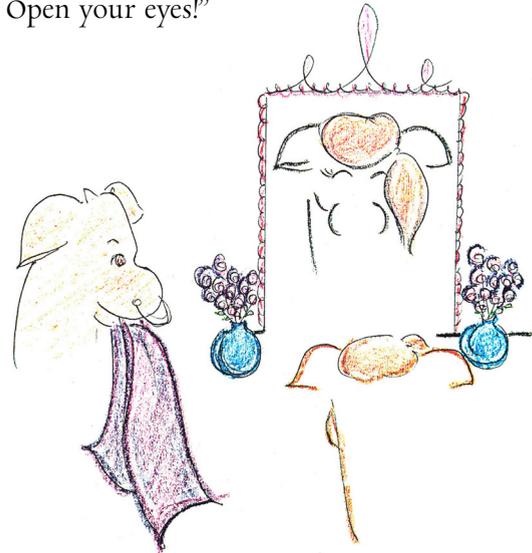
Well, by the time Madeline got to the farmhouse, she was crying. The children couldn't help but cry. But Buddy ran to Madeline's side. "Don't worry, the kids and I will always love you, Maddy." he said.



But Madeline was sadder than ever! She told Buddy, she missed swirling her ponytail around and looking at the sun through it.

And now she'd made the children unhappy!

Well...life went on, and on the morning of Madeline's next birthday, a postman came to her door with THREE boxes! "Ah, Miss Madellen, or Marilyn?" "Madeline?" she said. A card on the first box read, "Unwrap this gift. Open your eyes!"



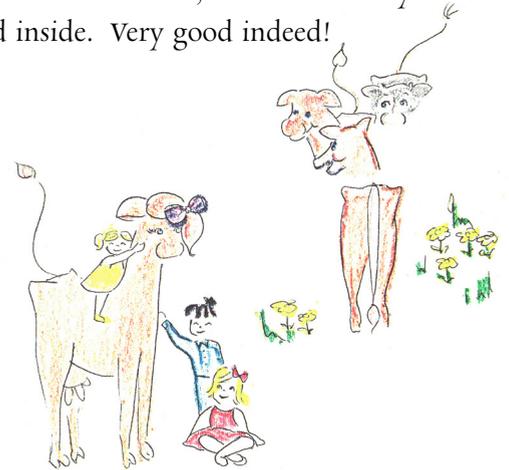
Inside the first box, Madeline found a silver mirror. And then she saw the most wonderful thing of all! Buddy and the kids had kept it a secret, but her ponytail was growing back!

Inside the second box were flowers! Red and yellow roses and white carnations and pink peonies! She leaned the mirror against a wall and stepped back to see how she looked holding her bouquet!



Inside the third box was a brand new purple ribbon from Buddy and the children with a note that read, "To our one and only Cow with a Ponytail!"

Madeline saw the white house ahead, with Buddy and the children in the grass, waiting for her. She looked out at the hills and the trees and heard the songs of the birds and smelled the sweet air, and she felt very good inside. Very good indeed!



After lunch, Madeline, Buddy and the children played together, combed her ponytail and tied it with a purple ribbon and played hide-and-peek in the orchard. Afterwards, Buddy and Madeline went off to rest under the shade of their favorite apple tree, laugh, eat buttercups, and have a lot of fun.

And do you know what happened? Now that Madeline liked herself, some of the other cows decided they did, too! One by one, they asked if they could come play with her and Buddy. And they asked nicely!



Madeline looked at Buddy, and Buddy looked at Madeline, and they laughed.

And Madeline smiled, and thought to herself,

“Life really is a wonderful thing after all!
Especially if you have a ponytail!”



The End