

Spotty

Lucy Maud Montgomery
1911

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L. M. Montgomery

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When Bessy Johnson married Ben Williams, not only without her father's consent but against his express command, he disowned her.

"She is no more a daughter of mine," he told his weeping wife sternly. And David Johnson was a man who stuck to his word. Every article belonging to Bessy had been packed up and sent after her, her colt and cow despatched to the Williams' farm, and that, as far as David Johnson was concerned, was to be the end of it.

"There never was no truck between the Johnsons and the Williamses," he said, "and there ain't going to be. I told Bessy fair and square that if she married Ben Williams she'd be a stranger to me from that out. She has made her choice and she can abide by it. Neither her nor her husband shall ever darken my door, and I'll never darken theirs. That's final, mother, and you needn't try to patch matters up. Leave them be."

Meek, timid little Mrs. Johnson, who had given in to her husband all the years of their married life, was obliged to yield, though she pined and fretted secretly. Bessy was her only child and the mother's heart yearned over her. Though she never dared to say so, she didn't blame the child for marrying the man of her choice. Ben Williams was a steady, industrious young fellow, although he was poor, and he and Bessy had loved each other from their schooldays.

David Johnson was a man who said, in the heat of anger, things of which he soon repented but stubbornly stood by. As months went by his heart softened to his daughter, but he would never admit it. Indeed, lest any one should suspect it, he was outwardly harsher and more bitter than ever. When he met her on the road or at church he never even looked at her—a proceeding which nearly broke Bessy's heart. He forbade his wife to speak to her and would not allow her name to be mentioned in his presence.

When Bessy's baby was born she named him after her father, and secretly hoped that the child would be the means of making peace between them. But David Johnson gave no sign of relenting, and in all likelihood would have gone to his grave at enmity with his daughter had it not been for a certain business transaction which Ben Williams had with Deacon Boyle one day.

It did not look, to be sure, as if it could affect Bessy's fortunes or influence David Johnson's hard old heart at all, when Ben Williams, in order to pay a pressing debt, sold his little spotted cow to Deacon Boyle. He hated to do it, for she was a great pet; he had brought her up by hand from a calf, and she almost seemed like one of the family. Bessy, who loved the shapely, glossy-coated little animal, cried on the day she was taken away, and Spotty looked at her friends with almost human reproach in her large, gentle eyes. But she had to go, and Deacon Boyle, who had jewed Ben down to the last penny, chuckled with delight over his bargain. Two days afterwards he sold her to David

Johnson at a big advance in price, and Bessy's pet went home to the Johnson homestead. Her new quarters were really much better than her old ones, but Spotty was homesick. The very first day on which she was turned into the spring pasture, where the clover, such as never grew on the Williams' stony acres, was up to her knees, she jumped the fence and made her way back home.

Ben Williams found her basking in her favorite corner of the sunshiny yard that afternoon. Bessy ran out and kissed her on the white star on her forehead; but of course Spotty couldn't stay. Ben, who didn't know anything as yet about the Johnson-Boyle transaction, drove her down to the Boyle farm, and when he learned the truth left Jimmy Boyle to take her back to Johnson.

Two days afterwards Spotty came home again. Ben wouldn't set foot on David Johnson's land for a hundred cows, but he drove Spotty up the road to the Johnson gate and then got a passing small boy to take her up the lane and tell old David Johnson that the next time his cow ran away he could come after her himself.

Ben felt a good deal of satisfaction in sending that message, for he thought a Williams was as good as a Johnson any day, and he could not forgive his father-in-law for his high-handed proceedings.

What David Johnson said is unknown. The small boy said that he swore, but small boys are not always reliable. At any rate, poor Spotty was shut up in the barnyard, over the fence of which no cow could dream of jumping, and kept there until David Johnson thought she must have surely forgotten her old home. Then she was turned into the spring meadow again.

When Ben Williams went out from dinner that day Spotty was loping up the lane, and she came around the corner of the house under the poplars at a run. If ever a cow looked glad Spotty did—"right human," Ben and Bessy declared. It seemed cruel to think of sending her back.

"I wash my hands of the affair," said Ben. "I told your father if he let her get away again he could come for her himself. I haven't time to be tracing around the country taking back cows. He knows where she is, and he'll get her when he comes or sends, but till he does she stays here."

When David Johnson found that Spotty was not among the other cows that night in the spring meadow he glowered with rage. He knew very well where she had gone and he knew Ben Williams wouldn't send her back this time. His own pride would not stoop to ask any stranger to go for her, and he had nobody of his own to send.

"But I won't go if I never get her back," he growled. "I said I'd never set foot on Ben Williams' land, and I ain't going to for forty cows. That little spotted brute can stay if she has a mind to. Them as prefers Williamses to Johnsons can have them, I say, be they cows or women."

It was all very well to talk in this way, but when three days had passed without any news of Spotty, David Johnson got fidgety. His pocket was even a sorer place than his pride. He had paid Boyle an "outrageous high figger" for that cow, and she was a valuable one. He had really hoped that Ben would send her back for all, but when Ben didn't, it began to look as if he must go for her himself if he wanted to get her.

So he did, at last, though with a very bad grace. He meant to stalk down to the Williams' homestead and demand the cow as any stranger might. But there was nobody in sight when he got there and he had to knock at the door.

Bessy herself opened it, with her baby in her arms. She had been crying, as her father could plainly see, for Ben was away and times were hard, and she felt her estrangement from her parents keenly. But she smiled brightly at him as if it were the most natural thing in the world to see him standing there.

"Why, father, come in."

"I'm after that cow," said David Johnson gruffly. He had vowed never, never to set foot in Bessy's house; but then he had vowed never to set foot on Williams' land, yet he had done it. So he might as well go in now. Bessy bustled around nervously to get the most comfortable chair.

"Spotty's in the stable," she said. "Ben ain't home, but I'll show you where she is. It's too bad you've had such trouble with her. She's always been a great pet so I suppose we've kind of spoiled her."

The baby was laughing in her arms as she sat down opposite to her father. It stretched out its tiny hands to the grim old man and cooed.

"I s'pose this is young David," said old David sheepishly. "He's a fine little chap. Come here, sir."

He took the baby in his big hands and held him rather gingerly. He had not held a baby for over twenty years, ever since Bessy herself had been a baby, with just such big blue eyes and coos and dimples as this little Williams.

"How is mother?" asked Bessy timidly.

"Not as well as usual," said her father, more gently. "She's kind of pining—you might run up and see her some of these days if you get time, Bessy."

"O, I will," cried Bessy, tears of joy springing to her eyes. "I'd have come before—long ago—but I thought—I thought—"

"Yes, I know," said old David awkwardly. "I s'pose I've been an old crank. But when a man like me says a thing it's awful hard for him to go back on it. I said I'd never come here, but you see here I be, all on account of that blessed cow. So my word is broke, but I ain't sorry. Come up and see your mother and bring the baby. He's a fine little chap."

"Won't you stay to tea?" said Bessy happily. "Ben will be home in a few minutes and I'll get it right ready."

"Not this time," said old David, getting up. He knew now that he would

have to make up with Ben Williams sooner or later, but he wasn't ready to sit down at his table just yet. "Ma'll be waiting for me. And about that cow—she's the blamedest homesick critter I ever saw. I don't see as it's much use to take her home."

"We've spoiled Spotty petting her so much, I guess," said Bessy with a sigh. "Ben hated to sell her, but he needed the money, so he let her go. We can't afford to buy her back just yet. I'll go out and show you where she is."

"Well, all things considered, maybe you needn't mind," said her father, handing the baby back to her. "I haven't time to be looking after runaway cows, and she'd probably jump again if I took her back. There must be something powerful attractive about the Williamses, that's all I can say. She can stay here. Young David can have her—I'll make him a birthday present of her. There, you needn't bother thanking me. Mind you come up and see your mother soon."

When her father had gone Bessy flew out to the barn, and kissed and hugged and laughed over Spotty.

"You blessed little cow! Do you know what you've done? You've made it all up between father and me. O, Spotty, I am so happy and how I do love you! You shall live in clover all your days, and you shall never be sold or killed—never, you darling!"

And Spotty blinked contentedly.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *Spotty* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]