

THE MAGPIE AND THE BULL

There once lived a bull, a beautiful black bull. He lived on a wonderful farm where every creature was treated with dignity, where kindness ruled.

The bull was much loved and admired by the farmer and by all the animals too. Indeed he was so adored that every morning the farmer would hang a glorious garland of flowers around his neck. All day long the bull would stand at the door of his pen gazing longingly out over the fields. The farmer cared for him very lovingly, tending to his every need, but for weeks and months now the door of his pen had stayed shut.

One evening late a magpie flew down into the farmyard. "Is something the matter?" he asked the bull. "You look a bit sad? I just thought you might like some company."

"How very kind of you," said the bull. "It's true that tonight I should love to have someone to pass the time with, for I know tonight will be the longest of my life. And to be quite honest with you I don't think I'm going to sleep. So you can stay and keep me company for as long as you like."

"I envy you your beautiful garland," said the magpie.

"That's strange," said the bull, "because I envy you. If there's one thing I've always wanted to do, it's to fly. I promise you there's nothing I'd like more than to fly out of here and never come back."

"But why?" said the magpie, "This is the most peaceful farm I've ever known. Everyone is kind. I think this is the best place in the world to live."

"But I want to know. Tell me how it is to be up there in the sky," said the bull, "to fly wherever you want. What's it like?"

All night long the magpie told him how it was to be a bird, to soar and swoop, to lift off and land, to float on the warm air, to be buffeted by the wind, how it was to fly free. And as she talked, the bull closed his great eyes and dreamed he could fly. All night long he flew free, and was happy.

As the first rays of the morning sun touched the bull's forehead he opened his eyes. It was the dawn he had so much dreaded. The magpie was still there, perched on the door of his pen.

"You have stayed all night with me like a true friend," said the bull. "I should like you to have my garland; it is all I have to give."

Soon after, the magpie flew off, the bull's glorious garland streaming out behind him like a kite. "I am flying your garland high in the sky, my friend," he cried. "You're up here with me. You're flying with me."

But when the magpie returned later that day, the garland still around her neck, the bull's pen was empty. The farmer was sitting under a tree nearby, his head in his hands.

"Where's the bull gone?" the magpie asked.

"They took him away. They've killed him," said the farmer.

"But why?"

"Why indeed?" the farmer replied. "Why indeed?"

The next day they found the garland draped over the door of the pen, and the magpie lying dead on the straw inside, her heart broken.

Moral: Kindness is as precious as life itself.

