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About Face

Edna Henry*

*Iowa State College

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Abstract

"Always dreaming! Do you think you can bring the cows in alone or must we send someone along to keep you awake?"...



About Face

by *Edna Henry*

“**A**LWAYS dreaming! Do you think you can bring the cows in alone or must we send someone along to keep you awake?”

“I’ll go right away,” I replied and ran down the lane.

How I hated those words. I longed to be like the rest of my brothers and sisters, not always “just a dreamer.”

Although the sun was still quite high above the horizon, I knew it was nearly evening. I could tell by the feel of the grass on my bare feet, dry but cool, and by the crow of the rain bird, which grew more melancholy at the close of day. The spider webs hanging between the fence wires were getting harder to see, too, for it was that purple time of day which happens only on late afternoons in summer. I sat down to watch as a spider feverishly wrapped a captured fly in a roll of silk. It was just like a baby, cuddled in a blanket. I hoped he wouldn’t eat it!

I wanted to stay to watch the play to the finish but it was chore time and since I was cow-girl today, I’d better move faster, especially if I were going to change my ways.

I unwound my long legs, arose from the dry grass, and

wandered along the fence row. Here and there bits of sheep wool were stuck on the barbs of the fence. I picked them off and, since I had no pockets, tucked them into my bloomer leg. If I saved enough, I might make a quarter when the old rag-man came around to collect next time. My legs were so thin that I had plenty of room in my bloomers for all the important things I found along the way, thus leaving my hands free to search for more. Sometimes the weight got so much that my pants hung rather low, but I didn't care. I felt like a queen, owning so much treasure.

A kill-deer whirred out of the pasture grass right in front of me. As my quickened heart quieted its beating, I realized that there must be a nest or I wouldn't have been able to approach so closely. I slid down on my knees and carefully parted the grass here and there. In a little pocket in the ground, made by a cow's hoof on some soft, wet day, there were three small eggs. I longed to touch the fragile things, but remembered that one must never, never even breathe on a bird's eggs or they wouldn't hatch. I got as near as I dared, and then just to be still safer, lifted the hem of my dress and pressed it to my mouth. Now my germs would be safely locked within me.

"Ooh hooo!"

The voice came rolling over the meadow. It sounded strange, and sweet and far away, and a little sad, too. It had an echo that called right back, even more melancholy. But I knew that it meant "Hurry, you dreamer."

Just this morning my mother had said, "I don't see what takes that girl so long to do her tasks. Those green eyes see everything they're not supposed to see, but the work at hand goes unnoticed. It's a strange thing; she's like the Millers in looks, and is set in her ways like her father; but there all likeness ends. She's the only bottle-fed one of the family. Guess that makes her different."

It didn't make sense, but I vowed to myself that I would try harder than ever to be like the others.

The cows were probably down in the south pasture by the spring. No wonder! Not every cow was so lucky as to have a real spring in its pasture. If I ran, maybe I could stop long enough to clean away some of the dark, wet leaves and get a drink for myself.

Tucking my dress into the top of my bloomers to keep it out of the way and clean, I knelt, putting my whole face into the sweet water. My lips met those of the girl who looked back up at me from the little pool, and we drank. It did taste so sparkling and cool. Father said our well at home tapped into the same spring but it certainly didn't have the flavor of this water. Long after the buttercups were all gone from along the roadside, they still bloomed here around the spring. They were such big ones. I guess the water really tasted a little like buttercups. Later, the wild strawberries would be blooming and bearing fruit here. I licked my lips, recalling the flavor of the delicate fruit. Everything loved our spring.

Again in the distance, I heard the voice, urgent even in its smallness. I jumped up, started calling the cows by name, and finally got them cornered and going in the same direction toward home. I had named most of them myself; Daisy, Belle, Clara and the mean one I called Satan, although she was a girl. Sometimes she refused to "let her milk down" and I worried a bit for fear it was my fault. After all, I had given her a boy's name, and she might not like the idea of giving milk.

The dust in the path was lying thick and soft and warm. I could think of no other feeling so satisfying as being bare-footed and walking down such a path. I liked to look behind to see the footprints I was leaving, just to prove to myself that I was going somewhere. Sometimes I walked backwards to fool the imaginary people who might try to follow me.

A grasshopper jumped in front of me and I grabbed it. Holding it very carefully, I pressed it to my dress front and said, "Spit tobacco juice or I'll kill you right away!" Immediately he left a small streak of brown juice. I'd never yet found one who didn't obey me when I made that threat. I grinned and put the hopper on a wooden fence post so he'd have a good solid place to spring from, then waved goodbye.

Almost home now. I'd better step lively so they'd think I'd been hurrying all the time. Whip-poor-wills were calling out their weary evening songs and I peered between the wires trying to see them. Never yet had I seen one. To me they

were only voices, but Father had said they were birds, so I knew it must be so.

"Where *have* you been all this time? You've been gone an hour, and everything is late because of your dawdling. What were you doing?" I was jarred from my reverie.

"Oh, Father, I saw — Oh, nothing. I just stopped to look at a nest of eggs." No use explaining; I'd tried that before.

He looked at me a moment, unsatisfied with the answer. Shaking his head, he turned to close the gate. "That girl!" he muttered. "What will become of her?"

"Give me a ride," I cried and climbed on the gate. As it made its full arc and swung shut, the whole farm passed before my eyes. This wonderful, wonderful place. I loved every inch of it.

Right below me, an old mother pig with nine little pink ones strung along her side like beads, looked at me curiously, so I asked her quite a proper question before leaving: "An-cay ou-yay alk-tay ig-pay atin-lay?" She only grunted.

I felt so good that I wanted to spill over like the spring. In my mind I hugged myself closely, feeling great self-love and deep satisfaction. And then it dawned on me! I could never change. I didn't even want to. If this was dreaming, I'd stay a dreamer. My heart sang a new song: I'd rather be me than anyone.

