

## When the Animals Laughed

The day my mother brought home the talking parrot, the whole world went crazy. That glowing feather duster never ceased prattling. But, instead of uttering the usual, "Polly-want-a-cracker," this babbling bird told jokes. When he made the rounds of the neighborhood and farms and told his jokes, all the animals started laughing. They chortled and guffawed, making a real ruckus, rolling around, gripping their sides, and neglected their chores. An awful racket ensued. The whole town sounded like the local theatre during a Steve Martin movie. The howling went on day and night.

Worse yet, the people couldn't laugh anymore. They'd grown morose and belligerent because they couldn't understand the jokes. Because of the confounded racket, the town's people were furious with me and my mother. I had to find a way to shut that blabbering bird up. I tried convincing mother to return him to the store, but she just smiled and said, "Isn't he a lovely thing?" She liked watching him flap his rouged feathers, while yammering like a stand-up comic. "He looks like a circus clown," she remarked innocently. I said I'd like to turn him into a Punch and Judy Show. She just smiled and said, "Yes, he puts on a nice show." You see, mother's deaf as dirt. That's why his infernal yakking didn't faze her.

So, I gave up that idea and left for a walk to think things over. On the way out, I tripped over a big gray cat. I said, "Excuse me," and went on my way. On the way, I met my neighbor out walking his dog. His dog spied the bully bulldog coming towards him. They stopped dead, nose-to-nose, then fell over, yelping with delight—probably over some joke they just heard. A common sight those days, I fear. My neighbor glared at me, loudly expressing his opinions of my mother's new pet. His words lacked a certain neighborly courtesy, so I bid him "Good-day," and continued on, devising some sly scheme to stuff that show-off bird's beak.

I passed by farmer Farley's meadow and saw his cows, heads stretched up like giraffes, baaing like sheep. Strange how cows laugh, I thought. Then I saw his sheep tumbling all around on the ground, looking like over-sized tennis balls with feet. They were having a jolly time of it. Farmer Farley waved his milking stool at me as I passed, cursing like a veteran sailor. I tipped my hat and proceeded on, thinking hard about this dilemma. I knew I had to shut that beastly bird up before the whole town tarred and feathered me.

I spied that useless parrot out in the meadow yakking away. Birds were dropping out of the sky, their wings clutched around their fat bodies, squawking raucously. Mice scampered around senselessly, cackling like hyenas. Gophers and rabbits were hopping and popping up all over the fields—and me without a hammer. I sat down under a tree for some serious cogitating. As I sat there, a voice called down. A small girl with long blond braids, holding a big gray cat, asked me why I seemed so somber. I explained my predicament. She said, "Brighten up. I know just what to do." She handed me a bright pink feather and said to place it under my pillow when I went to sleep. In the morning, the world would be right again.

Grasping the feather, I thanked her and ran off. Next morning, not a sound stirred. The world again was quiet. And—blessed relief—no sound came from that over-blown parakeet. The only sound was a low, soft rumble from the big, gray cat sitting on my head. Bright green and blue feathers lay by his front paw. He possessed the most irrepressible grin, purred like a well-tuned motor, and burped loudly.