

Richards Laura Elizabeth Howe

The Pig Brother, and Other Fables and Stories



Laura Richards

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Other Fables and Stories**

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Laura E. Richards

The Pig Brother, and Other Fables and Stories / A Supplementary Reader for the Fourth School Year

THE PIG BROTHER

There was once a child who was untidy. He left his books on the floor, and his muddy shoes on the table; he put his fingers in the jam-pots, and spilled ink on his best pinafore; there was really no end to his untidiness.

One day the Tidy Angel came into his nursery.

“This will never do!” said the Angel. “This is really shocking. You must go out and stay with your brother while I set things to rights here.”

“I have no brother!” said the child.

“Yes, you have!” said the Angel. “You may not know him, but he will know you. Go out in the garden and watch for him, and he will soon come.”

“I don’t know what you mean!” said the child; but he went out into the garden and waited.

Presently a squirrel came along, whisking his tail.

“Are you my brother?” asked the child.

The squirrel looked him over carefully.

“Well, I should hope not!” he said. “My fur is neat and smooth, my nest is handsomely made, and in perfect order, and my young ones are properly brought up. Why do you insult me by asking such a question?”

He whisked off, and the child waited.

Presently a wren came hopping by.

“Are you my brother?” asked the child.

“No indeed!” said the wren. “What impertinence! You will find no tidier person than I in the whole garden. Not a feather is out of place, and my eggs are the wonder of all for smoothness and beauty. Brother, indeed!” He hopped off, ruffling his feathers, and the child waited.

By and by a large Tommy Cat came along.

“Are you my brother?” asked the child.

“Go and look at yourself in the glass,” said the Tommy Cat haughtily, “and you will have your answer. I have been washing myself in the sun all the morning, while it is clear that no water has come near you for a long time. There are no such creatures as you in my family, I am humbly thankful to say.”

He walked on, waving his tail, and the child waited.

Presently a pig came trotting along.

The child did not wish to ask the pig if he were his brother, but the pig did not wait to be asked.

“Hallo, brother!” he grunted.

“I am not your brother!” said the child.

“Oh, yes, you are!” said the pig. “I confess I am not proud of you, but there is no mistaking the members of our family. Come along, and have a good roll in the barnyard! There is some lovely black mud there.”

“I don’t like to roll in mud!” said the child.

“Tell that to the hens!” said the pig brother. “Look at your hands, and your shoes, and your pinafore! Come along, I say! You may have some of the pig-wash for supper, if there is more than I want.”

“I don’t want pig-wash!” said the child; and he began to cry.

Just then the Tidy Angel came out.

“I have set everything to rights,” she said, “and so it must stay. Now, will you go with the Pig Brother, or will you come back with me, and be a tidy child?”

“With you, with you!” cried the child; and he clung to the Angel’s dress.

The Pig Brother grunted.

“Small loss!” he said. “There will be all the more wash for me!” and he trotted on.

THE GOLDEN WINDOWS

All day long the little boy worked hard, in field and barn and shed, for his people were poor farmers, and could not pay a workman; but at sunset there came an hour that was all his own, for his father had given it to him. Then the boy would go up to the top of a hill and look across at another hill that rose some miles away. On this far hill stood a house with windows of clear gold and diamonds. They shone and blazed so that it made the boy wink to look at them: but after a while the people in the house put up shutters, as it seemed, and then it looked like any common farmhouse. The boy supposed they did this because it was supper-time; and then he would go into the house and have his supper of bread and milk, and so to bed.

One day the boy's father called him and said: "You have been a good boy, and have earned a holiday. Take this day for your own; but remember that God gave it, and try to learn some good thing."

The boy thanked his father and kissed his mother; then he put a piece of bread in his pocket, and started off to find the house with the golden windows.

It was pleasant walking. His bare feet made marks in the white dust, and when he looked back, the footprints seemed to be following him, and making company for him. His shadow, too, kept beside him, and would dance or run with him as he pleased; so it was very cheerful.

By and by he felt hungry; and he sat down by a brown brook that ran through the alder hedge by the roadside, and ate his bread, and drank the clear water. Then he scattered the crumbs for the birds, as his mother had taught him to do, and went on his way.

After a long time he came to a high green hill; and when he had climbed the hill, there was the house on the top; but it seemed that the shutters were up, for he could not see the golden windows. He came up to the house, and then he could well have wept, for the windows were of clear glass, like any others, and there was no gold anywhere about them.

A woman came to the door, and looked kindly at the boy, and asked him what he wanted.

"I saw the golden windows from our hilltop," he said, "and I came to see them, but now they are only glass."

The woman shook her head and laughed.

"We are poor farming people," she said, "and are not likely to have gold about our windows; but glass is better to see through."

She bade the boy sit down on the broad stone step at the door, and brought him a cup of milk and a cake, and bade him rest; then she called her daughter, a child of his own age, and nodded kindly at the two, and went back to her work.

The little girl was barefooted like himself, and wore a brown cotton gown, but her hair was golden like the windows he had seen, and her eyes were blue like the sky at noon. She led the boy about the farm, and showed him her black calf with the white star on its forehead, and he told her about his own at home, which was red like a chestnut, with four white feet. Then when they had eaten an apple together, and so had become friends, the boy asked her about the golden windows. The little girl nodded, and said she knew all about them, only he had mistaken the house.

"You have come quite the wrong way!" she said. "Come with me, and I will show you the house with the golden windows, and then you will see for yourself."

They went to a knoll that rose behind the farmhouse, and as they went the little girl told him that the golden windows could only be seen at a certain hour, about sunset.

"Yes, I know that!" said the boy.

When they reached the top of the knoll, the girl turned and pointed; and there on a hill far away stood a house with windows of clear gold and diamond, just as he had seen them. And when they looked again, the boy saw that it was his own home.

Then he told the little girl that he must go; and he gave her his best pebble, the white one with the red band, that he had carried for a year in his pocket; and she gave him three horse-chestnuts, one red like satin, one spotted, and one white like milk. He kissed her, and promised to come again, but he did not tell her what he had learned; and so he went back down the hill, and the little girl stood in the sunset light and watched him.

The way home was long, and it was dark before the boy reached his father's house; but the lamplight and firelight shone through the windows, making them almost as bright as he had seen them from the hilltop; and when he opened the door, his mother came to kiss him, and his little sister ran to throw her arms about his neck, and his father looked up and smiled from his seat by the fire.

“Have you had a good day?” asked his mother.

Yes, the boy had had a very good day.

“And have you learned anything?” asked his father.

“Yes!” said the boy. “I have learned that our house has windows of gold and diamond.”

THE COMING OF THE KING

Some children were at play in their play-ground one day, when a herald rode through the town, blowing a trumpet, and crying aloud, "The King! the King passes by this road to-day. Make ready for the King!"

The children stopped their play, and looked at one another.

"Did you hear that?" they said. "The King is coming. He may look over the wall and see our playground; who knows? We must put it in order."

The playground was sadly dirty, and in the corners were scraps of paper and broken toys, for these were careless children. But now, one brought a hoe, and another a rake, and a third ran to fetch the wheelbarrow from behind the garden gate. They labored hard, till at length all was clean and tidy.

"Now it is clean!" they said; "but we must make it pretty, too, for kings are used to fine things; maybe he would not notice mere cleanness, for he may have it all the time."

Then one brought sweet rushes and strewed them on the ground; and others made garlands of oak leaves and pine tassels and hung them on the walls; and the littlest one pulled marigold buds and threw them all about the playground, "to look like gold," he said.

When all was done the playground was so beautiful that the children stood and looked at it, and clapped their hands with pleasure.

"Let us keep it always like this!" said the littlest one; and the others cried, "Yes! yes! that is what we will do."

They waited all day for the coming of the King, but he never came; only, towards sunset, a man with travel-worn clothes, and a kind, tired face passed along the road, and stopped to look over the wall.

"What a pleasant place!" said the man. "May I come in and rest, dear children?"

The children brought him in gladly, and set him on the seat that they had made out of an old cask. They had covered it with the old red cloak to make it look like a throne, and it made a very good one.

"It is our playground!" they said. "We made it pretty for the King, but he did not come, and now we mean to keep it so for ourselves."

"That is good!" said the man.

"Because we think pretty and clean is nicer than ugly and dirty!" said another.

"That is better!" said the man.

"And for tired people to rest in!" said the littlest one.

"That is best of all!" said the man.

He sat and rested, and looked at the children with such kind eyes that they came about him, and told him all they knew; about the five puppies in the barn, and the thrush's nest with four blue eggs, and the shore where the gold shells grew; and the man nodded and understood all about it.

By and by he asked for a cup of water, and they brought it to him in the best cup, with the gold sprigs on it: then he thanked the children, and rose and went on his way; but before he went he laid his hand on their heads for a moment, and the touch went warm to their hearts.

The children stood by the wall and watched the man as he went slowly along. The sun was setting, and the light fell in long slanting rays across the road.

"He looks so tired!" said one of the children.

"But he was so kind!" said another.

"See!" said the littlest one. "How the sun shines on his hair! it looks like a crown of gold."

SWING SONG

As I swing, as I swing,
Here beneath my mother's wing,
Here beneath my mother's arm,
Never earthly thing can harm.
Up and down, to and fro,
With a steady sweep I go,
Like a swallow on the wing,
As I swing, as I swing.

As I swing, as I swing,
Honey-bee comes murmuring,
Humming softly in my ear,
"Come away with me, my dear!
In the tiger-lily's cup
Sweetest honey we will sup."
Go away, you velvet thing!
I must swing! I must swing!

As I swing, as I swing,
Butterfly comes fluttering,
"Little child, now come away
'Mid the clover-blooms to play;
Clover-blooms are red and white,
Sky is blue and sun is bright.
Why then thus, with folded wing,
Sit and swing, sit and swing?"

As I swing, as I swing,
Oriole comes hovering.
"See my nest in yonder tree!
Little child, come work with me.
Learn to make a perfect nest,
That of all things is the best.
Come! nor longer loitering
Sit and swing, sit and swing!"

As I swing, as I swing,
Though I have not any wing,
Still I would not change with you,
Happiest bird that ever flew.
Butterfly and honey-bee,
Sure 't is you must envy me,
Safe beneath my mother's wing
As I swing, as I swing.

THE GREAT FEAST

Once the Play Angel came into a nursery where four little children sat on the floor with sad and troubled faces.

“What is the matter, dears?” asked the Play Angel.

“We wanted to have a grand feast!” said the child whose nursery it was.

“Yes, that would be delightful!” said the Play Angel.

“But there is only one cooky!” said the child whose nursery it was.

“And it is a very small cooky!” said the child who was a cousin, and therefore felt a right to speak.

“Not big enough for myself!” said the child whose nursery it was.

The other two children said nothing, because they were not relations; but they looked at the cooky with large eyes, and their mouths went up in the middle and down at the sides.

“Well,” said the Play Angel, “suppose we have the feast just the same! I think we can manage it.”

She broke the cooky into four pieces, and gave one piece to the littlest child.

“See!” she said. “This is a roast chicken, a Brown Bantam. It is just as brown and crispy as it can be, and there is cranberry sauce on one side, and on the other a little mountain of mashed potato; it must be a volcano, it smokes so. Do you see?”

“Yes!” said the littlest one; and his mouth went down in the middle and up at the corners.

The Play Angel gave a piece to the next child.

“Here,” she said, “is a little pie! Outside, as you see, it is brown and crusty, with a wreath of pastry leaves round the edge and ‘For You’ in the middle; but inside it is all chicken and ham and jelly and hard-boiled eggs. Did ever you see such a pie?”

“Never I did!” said the child.

“Now here,” said the Angel to the third child, “is a round cake. *Look* at it! the frosting is half an inch thick, with candied rose-leaves and angelica laid on in true-lovers’ knots; and inside there are chopped-up almonds, and raisins, and great slices of citron. It is the prettiest cake I ever saw, and the best.”

“So it is I did!” said the third child.

Then the Angel gave the last piece to the child whose nursery it was.

“My dear!” she said. “Just look! Here is an ice-cream rabbit. He is snow-white outside, with eyes of red barley sugar; see his ears, and his little snubby tail! but inside, I *think* you will find him pink. Now, when I clap my hands and count one, two, three, you must eat the feast all up. One – two – three!”

So the children ate the feast all up.

“There!” said the Angel. “Did ever you see such a grand feast?”

“No, never we did!” said all the four children together.

“And there are some crumbs left over,” said the Angel. “Come, and we will give them to the brother birds!”

“But you didn’t have any!” said the child whose nursery it was.

“Oh, yes!” said the Angel. “I had it all!”

THE OWL AND THE EEL AND THE WARMING-PAN

The owl and the eel and the warming-pan,
They went to call on the soap-fat man.
The soap-fat man he was not within:
He'd gone for a ride on his rolling-pin.
So they all came back by the way of the town,
And turned the meeting-house upside down.

THE WHEAT-FIELD

Some children were set to reap in a wheat-field. The wheat was yellow as gold, the sun shone gloriously, and the butterflies flew hither and thither. Some of the children worked better, and some worse; but there was one who ran here and there after the butterflies that fluttered about his head, and sang as he ran.

By and by evening came, and the Angel of the wheat-field called to the children and said, "Come now to the gate, and bring your sheaves with you."

So the children came, bringing their sheaves. Some had great piles, laid close and even, so that they might carry more; some had theirs laid large and loose, so that they looked more than they were; but one, the child that had run to and fro after the butterflies, came empty-handed.

The Angel said to this child, "Where are your sheaves?"

The child hung his head. "I do not know!" he said. "I had some, but I have lost them, I know not how."

"None enter here without sheaves," said the Angel.

"I know that," said the child. "But I thought I would like to see the place where the others were going; besides, they would not let me leave them."

Then all the other children cried out together. One said, "Dear Angel, let him in! In the morning I was sick, and this child came and played with me, and showed me the butterflies, and I forgot my pain. Also, he gave me one of his sheaves, and I would give it to him again, but I cannot tell it now from my own."

Another said, "Dear Angel, let him in! At noon the sun beat on my head so fiercely that I fainted and fell down like one dead; and this child came running by, and when he saw me he brought water to revive me, and then he showed me the butterflies, and was so glad and merry that my strength returned; to me also he gave one of his sheaves, and I would give it to him again, but it is so like my own that I cannot tell it."

And a third said, "Just now, as evening was coming, I was weary and sad, and had so few sheaves that it seemed hardly worth my while to go on working; but this child comforted me, and showed me the butterflies, and gave me of his sheaves. Look! it may be that this was his; and yet I cannot tell, it is so like my own."

And all the children said, "We also had sheaves of him, dear Angel; let him in, we pray you!"

The Angel smiled, and reached his hand inside the gate and brought out a pile of sheaves; it was not large, but the glory of the sun was on it, so that it seemed to lighten the whole field.

"Here are his sheaves!" said the Angel. "They are known and counted, every one." And he said to the child, "Lead the way in!"

ABOUT ANGELS

“Mother,” said the child; “are there really angels?”

“The Good Book says so,” said the mother.

“Yes,” said the child; “I have seen the picture. But did you ever see one, mother?”

“I think I have,” said the mother; “but she was not dressed like the picture.”

“I am going to find one!” said the child. “I am going to run along the road, miles, and miles, and miles, until I find an angel.”

“That will be a good plan!” said the mother. “And I will go with you, for you are too little to run far alone.”

“I am not little any more!” said the child. “I have trousers; I am big.”

“So you are!” said the mother. “I forgot. But it is a fine day, and I should like the walk.”

“But you walk so slowly, with your lame foot.”

“I can walk faster than you think!” said the mother.

So they started, the child leaping and running, and the mother stepping out so bravely with her lame foot that the child soon forgot about it.

The child danced on ahead, and presently he saw a chariot coming towards him, drawn by prancing white horses. In the chariot sat a splendid lady in velvet and furs, with white plumes waving above her dark hair. As she moved in her seat, she flashed with jewels and gold, but her eyes were brighter than her diamonds.

“Are you an angel?” asked the child, running up beside the chariot.

The lady made no reply, but stared coldly at the child: then she spoke a word to her coachman, and he flicked his whip, and the chariot rolled away swiftly in a cloud of dust, and disappeared.

The dust filled the child’s eyes and mouth, and made him choke and sneeze. He gasped for breath, and rubbed his eyes; but presently his mother came up, and wiped away the dust with her blue gingham apron.

“That was not an angel!” said the child.

“No, indeed!” said the mother. “Nothing like one!”

The child danced on again, leaping and running from side to side of the road, and the mother followed as best she might.

By and by the child met a most beautiful maiden, clad in a white dress. Her eyes were like blue stars, and the blushes came and went in her face like roses looking through snow.

“I am sure you must be an angel!” cried the child.

The maiden blushed more sweetly than before. “You dear little child!” she cried. “Some one else said that, only last evening. Do I really look like an angel?”

“You *are* an angel!” said the child.

The maiden took him up in her arms and kissed him, and held him tenderly.

“You are the dearest little thing I ever saw!” she said. “Tell me what makes you think so!” But suddenly her face changed.

“Oh!” she cried. “There he is, coming to meet me! And you have soiled my white dress with your dusty shoes, and pulled my hair all awry. Run away, child, and go home to your mother!”

She set the child down, not unkindly, but so hastily that he stumbled and fell; but she did not see that, for she was hastening forward to meet her lover, who was coming along the road. (Now if the maiden had only known, he thought her twice as lovely with the child in her arms; but she did not know.)

The child lay in the dusty road and sobbed, till his mother came along and picked him up, and wiped away the tears with her blue gingham apron.

“I don’t believe that was an angel, after all,” he said.

“No!” said the mother. “But she may be one some day. She is young yet.”

“I am tired!” said the child. “Will you carry me home, mother?”

“Why, yes!” said the mother. “That is what I came for.”

The child put his arms round his mother’s neck, and she held him tight and trudged along the road, singing the song he liked best.

Suddenly he looked up in her face.

“Mother,” he said; “I don’t suppose *you* could be an angel, could you?”

“Oh, what a foolish child!” said the mother. “Who ever heard of an angel in a blue gingham apron?” and she went on singing, and stepped out so bravely on her lame foot that no one would ever have known she was lame.

THE APRON-STRING

Once upon a time a boy played about the house, running by his mother's side; and as he was very little, his mother tied him to the string of her apron.

"Now," she said, "when you stumble, you can pull yourself up by the apron-string, and so you will not fall."

The boy did that, and all went well, and the mother sang at her work.

By and by the boy grew so tall that his head came above the window-sill; and looking through the window, he saw far away green trees waving, and a flowing river that flashed in the sun, and rising above all, blue peaks of mountains.

"Oh, mother," he said; "untie the apron-string and let me go!"

But the mother said, "Not yet, my child! only yesterday you stumbled, and would have fallen but for the apron-string. Wait yet a little, till you are stronger."

So the boy waited, and all went as before; and the mother sang at her work.

But one day the boy found the door of the house standing open, for it was spring weather; and he stood on the threshold and looked across the valley, and saw the green trees waving, and the swift-flowing river with the sun flashing on it, and the blue mountains rising beyond; and this time he heard the voice of the river calling, and it said "Come!"

Then the boy started forward, and as he started, the string of the apron broke.

"Oh! how weak my mother's apron-string is!" cried the boy; and he ran out into the world, with the broken string hanging beside him.

The mother gathered up the other end of the string and put it in her bosom, and went about her work again; but she sang no more.

The boy ran on and on, rejoicing in his freedom, and in the fresh air and the morning sun. He crossed the valley, and began to climb the foothills among which the river flowed swiftly, among rocks and cliffs. Now it was easy climbing, and again it was steep and craggy, but always he looked upward at the blue peaks beyond, and always the voice of the river was in his ears, saying "Come!"

By and by he came to the brink of a precipice, over which the river dashed in a cataract, foaming and flashing, and sending up clouds of silver spray. The spray filled his eyes, so that he did not see his footing clearly; he grew dizzy, stumbled, and fell. But as he fell, something about him caught on a point of rock at the precipice-edge, and held him, so that he hung dangling over the abyss; and when he put up his hand to see what held him, he found that it was the broken string of the apron, which still hung by his side.

"Oh! how strong my mother's apron-string is!" said the boy: and he drew himself up by it, and stood firm on his feet, and went on climbing toward the blue peaks of the mountains.

THE SHADOW

An Angel heard a child crying one day, and came to see what ailed it. He found the little one sitting on the ground, with the sun at its back (for the day was young), looking at its own shadow, which lay on the ground before it, and weeping bitterly.

“What ails you, little one?” asked the Angel.

“The world is so dark!” said the child. “See, it is all dusky gray, and there is no beauty in it. Why must I stay in this sad, gray world?”

“Do you not hear the birds singing, and the other children calling at their play?” asked the Angel.

“Yes,” said the child; “I hear them, but I do not know where they are. I cannot see them, I see only the shadow. Moreover, if they saw it, they would not sing and call, but would weep as I do.”

The Angel lifted the child, and set it on its feet, with its face to the early sun.

“Look!” said the Angel.

The child brushed away the tears from its eyes and looked. Before them lay the fields all green and gold, shining with dewdrops, and the other children were running to and fro, laughing and shouting, and crowning one another with blossoms.

“Why, there are the children!” said the little one.

“Yes,” said the Angel; “there they are.”

“And the sun is shining!” cried the child.

“Yes,” said the Angel; “it was shining all the time.”

“And the shadow is gone!”

“Oh, no!” said the Angel; “the shadow is behind you, where it belongs. Run, now, and gather flowers for the littlest one, who sits in the grass there!”

THE SAILOR MAN

Once upon a time two children came to the house of a sailor man, who lived beside the salt sea; and they found the sailor man sitting in his doorway knotting ropes.

“How do you do?” asked the sailor man.

“We are very well, thank you,” said the children, who had learned manners, “and we hope you are the same. We heard that you had a boat, and we thought that perhaps you would take us out in her, and teach us how to sail, for that is what we wish most to know.”

“All in good time,” said the sailor man. “I am busy now, but by and by, when my work is done, I may perhaps take one of you if you are ready to learn. Meantime here are some ropes that need knotting; you might be doing that, since it has to be done.” And he showed them how the knots should be tied, and went away and left them.

When he was gone the first child ran to the window and looked out.

“There is the sea,” he said. “The waves come up on the beach, almost to the door of the house. They run up all white, like prancing horses, and then they go dragging back. Come and look!”

“I cannot,” said the second child. “I am tying a knot.”

“Oh!” cried the first child, “I see the boat. She is dancing like a lady at a ball; I never saw such a beauty. Come and look!”

“I cannot,” said the second child. “I am tying a knot.”

“I shall have a delightful sail in that boat,” said the first child. “I expect that the sailor man will take me, because I am the eldest and I know more about it. There was no need of my watching when he showed you the knots, because I knew how already.”

Just then the sailor man came in.

“Well,” he said, “my work is over. What have you been doing in the meantime?”

“I have been looking at the boat,” said the first child. “What a beauty she is! I shall have the best time in her that ever I had in my life.”

“I have been tying knots,” said the second child.

“Come, then,” said the sailor man, and he held out his hand to the second child. “I will take you out in the boat, and teach you to sail her.”

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