

## *The Good Liar* by Gregory Maguire

Coming back one evening from the farm where we went to get milk, Pierre, René, and I began to run. Mirabeau pranced alongside us, yapping her delight. Pierre swung the milk pail around in a circle, and the milk stayed inside. This seemed a miracle to me!

“How does it do that?” I asked. I was too young to understand the force of centrifugal motion. “Let me try.”

“You’re too small,” said René.

“Oh, let him try,” said Pierre, peering at me kindly through his spectacles. (He had inherited them from the village doctor when the doctor died. It had been hoped that seeing better might make him a little smarter, but that hope was soon dashed.)

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“He’ll get us into trouble,” said René.

I *was* too small to get up enough speed to swing the milk pail. When Pierre let me try, the milk went slopping out over the road, splashing the dark wild weeds with dripping mustaches. I remember the milk even dotting the fretwork of a spider’s web with tiny pearly drops, small as bugs’ teeth.

This was a serious loss. There wasn’t enough milk to waste in accidents, nor money for replacing it. Especially since our father was away. Legally, it was all my fault; *I* had spilled the milk. Luckily, as the youngest I should get the lightest punishment. But Pierre and René felt bad. After all, *they* had swung the pail first. *They* had urged me to take a try. We chattered in fear, the threat of our angry mother more real and terrible to us than the threat of the approaching German army. Would it be possible to avoid punishment altogether?

“Think, René,” commanded Pierre, who had draped his arm on my shoulder to cheer me up. He was strong and good to me.

René thought. Then we made a detour. When we arrived back in our kitchen, we had a milk pail filled with opening iris blossoms. “Look,” we chorused with our fake enthusiasm, “look what the nuns gave us!”

“Where’s our milk?” asked Maman suspiciously.

“Oh, Mother Superior saw us on the road and begged us to give her the milk!” René was glib as a mockingbird. “They had a very, very, *very* sick nun who needed fresh milk right away. The mother superior gave us flowers from her garden to thank us for our Christian charity!”