

Rebirthday

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Horrified to learn that his birthday burger used to moo, Fred decided to atone for his crime and restore the cow to life.

He went to the butcher and bought as much beef as a hundred pounds (all his birthday money) could buy. He returned with a whole rack of ribs, twenty pounds of mince, several quality steaks, and a tongue.

He propped up the meat (burger included) with broomsticks, boxes, and rope, and he duct-taped leather strips (cut from the couch) over the raw flesh. He placed his parents' ornamental cow skull atop the quadruped and stuffed the tongue inside. It seemed a strange patchwork cow, but a cow nonetheless.

Fred breathed life into it by, well, breathing on it.

"Live again, cow! Today is your birthday, too," he said to the bovine homunculus and gave it an encouraging push.

It swayed and tottered and then, after careful hesitation, toppled over, splattering all over the green carpet.

His parents heard the noise and rushed into the room, asked the dazed boy what he was doing, and listened to him with growing concern. They told him to shower, while they cleaned up the mess.

But Fred wouldn't move. "I... ate a cow. Lots of 'em," he said. "I'm a murderer."

His parents reassured him about the societal intricacies of meat-eating, but their son would have none of it.

"If the cow can't live again on its own," Fred's eyes widened, "I will be the cow."

He grabbed the skull and fitted it over his head. He tried putting the tongue in his mouth, but spat it out (too close to eating). And then he got on all fours.

"MOO-DERERS!" he screamed, bull-rushed past his parents, and trotted briskly out to the backyard.

His parents found Fred grazing on the dry, unmown grass, pushing up the skull (it got in the way) whenever he bit off a clump of it.

"Stop this," his dad said and grabbed at his arm. Fred kicked his dad in the shin (though he aimed for the calf) — and his father howled.

"Your cake, Freddy," his mum pleaded, carrying his birthday cake, decorated with edible animals in a confectionary jungle. "Chocolate; it's your favourite."

Fred glanced at the cake and was momentarily torn between his identities as a budding cow and a teenage boy. The mood faded with another "Moo!" and he violently tore out some grass with his green-flecked teeth.

But the cow skull slipped off his head (the tape-strap ripped) and he fell onto it, cracking it nearly in half. Through the split bone, Fred saw the nasty-looking grass, and queasily realized his stomach was full of this. And he was sick.

He was thoroughly washed, apologised to his parents, and took a brief afternoon nap. When he awoke, he did so with a tremendous hunger. It was still his birthday — the day still had that birthday feel — and there was probably some cake left.

Soon Fred was sitting at the kitchen table, puffing his cheeks, and his mum served him two slices of cake with some milk. Calves still drank their mother's milk, he thought, and he was, after all, still a child, part human and (in his mind, at least) part cow.

"Thanks, Moo," Fred said, "I mean, Mum."