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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SHINING COW ***

This is NOT a story about sinister aliens from outer space. This is simply the story of what happened to poor Junius when she found herself much too close to a Flying Saucer, long enough so she could be analyzed and long enough to cause some strange happenings on that farm.

the shining cow

by ALEX JAMES

Robbie whined and acted like his eyes were burning, as if he'd gotten dust or something even stranger into them....

ZACK STEWART stared sleepily into the bottom of his cracked coffee cup as his wife began to gather the breakfast dishes.

Mrs. Stewart was a huge, methodical woman, seasoned to the drudgery of a farm wife. Quite methodically she'd arise every morning at 4:00 A.M. with her husband and each would do their respective chores until long after the sun had set on their forty-acre farm.

"You've jest got to find Junius today, Zack," Mrs. Stewart spoke worriedly, "Lord only knows her condition, not being milked since yesterday morning."

"Yeah, I know, Ma," Zack said wearily as he rose from the table, "I'll search for her again in the north woods, but if she ain't there this time, I give up."

A dog suddenly howled outside. There was a brief instant when neither moved, then Zack suddenly exclaimed, "It's Robbie!" and dashed outside.

In the light from the open doorway Zack saw the dog creeping along on his haunches, howling and whining, and scratching frantically at his tear-streaming eyes.

"Skunk finally got ya, eh boy?" Zack spoke sympathetically as the dog, fawning, came closer.

"Stay away, Robbie, stay away now!" he ordered the dog. Robbie whined and scratched again, furiously. Zack sniffed cautiously, expecting any moment the pungent smell of skunk fluid to hit his nostrils. He sensed nothing but the clean, fresh

smell of the morning air, so he leaned closer. Within a foot of Robbie, he sniffed again. Nothing. He realized it wasn't a skunk that caused Robbie's eyes to burn. He knelt down and took the dog's head tenderly in his rough, calloused hands and examined his eyes. They were bloodshot and watery. He took some water from the well and dashed it into the dog's eyes as Robbie struggled.

"Hold still, boy, I'm trying to help ya," Zack soothed. He took out a blue work bandanna and wiped tenderly around Robbie's eyes.

"What did it, boy? How did it happen?" Zack asked. Robbie merely whined.

"What's wrong with him?" Mrs. Stewart, broom in hand, asked from the doorway.

"Don't rightly know," Zack patted the dog, "acts like he got something in his eyes."

"Skunk?"

"Naw," Zack shook his head. "He don't smell. Something else."

"Cat?"

"No scratches, either. He acts like they're burnin' him, like he got dust or somethin' in 'em."

"Well, take him out to the barn and you better get after Junius."

"Yeah, Ma. Come on, Robbie." He led Robbie to the barn and made him lie on a bed of hay in one of the stalls then returned to the kitchen for his lantern. He put on his thick denim jacket and work cap and turned to his wife.

"If she ain't in the woods, I'll come back and git the truck and drive over to the Leemers and see if he seen her."

He left the kitchen and shone the lantern around in the farmyard to get his bearings, then headed for the north end of his farm. He could see the faint glimmer of dawn in the east, more pronounced in the northeast, and even more so due north. He rubbed his eyes. A much brighter glow outlined the treetops in the north woods, that made the dawn on the eastern horizon look like a dirty gray streak. His first thought was of fire, but there was no smoke, no flame.

Zack walked dazedly toward the woods, his eyes glued to the light above the trees. Soon he was in the woods, and he could see the brightness extended down through the trees from the sky, on the other side of the woods. He approached cautiously as the light grew brighter, and came to the clearing where it was most intense. A thick bush obstructed his view, and Zack moved it aside then uttered a hoarse gasp, as he clutched at his eyes.

For a moment he felt he was dreaming. He squinted between the slits of his fingers. The glow was still piercing, but he could see the brightly lit Junius, radiating blue-white light, nibbling at the sparse grass in the clearing. Zack stood transfixed, his eyes widening behind his fingers. He felt the tears and the burning sensation, and squinted tightly, turning his head from the unbelievable scene.

Zack didn't remember his return to the farmhouse, or incoherently trying to explain to his wife the scene he had witnessed. A stiff jolt of elderberry wine drove off the jitters and reasoning returned. His wife sat patiently, eyeing him oddly, as Zack muttered over and over again, "It's unbelievable! It's unbelievable!"

Mrs. Stewart rose. "I'm going out and see fer myself. And, Zack, if yer lying to me—"

Zack jumped from the chair, barring her way.

"Believe me, maw, it's true. Don't go out there. It might be too much fer ya."

"It's the craziest thing I ever heard," Mrs. Stewart scoffed. "A cow that shines like the sun!"

"Look, maw, will ya jest come with me as fer as the pasture, you can see the glow from there, and mebbe that might convince ya."

"Yes, yes, I will." Mrs. Stewart jerked off her apron. "I declare, Zack, I think these chores are getting the best of ya."

They walked to the pasture, their eyes on the treetops of the north woods. A faint glow began to appear.

"See! See!" Zack pointed, laughing crazily.

"Let's get closer, looks like a fire," Mrs. Stewart said.

"Ain't no fire." Zack's tone was angry. "It's Junius and she's all lit up like a Christmas tree."

"Zack, now you stop that kinda crazy talk. There's a reason behind everything, and I'm sure there's one fer this."

"There is a reason, maw. Junius. She's got the whole clearing lit up like the noonday sun. Lord only knows how she got that way, but she's shining out there like a great big light bulb, only brighter."

Mrs. Stewart quickened her pace towards the clearing.

"I'm going to see fer myself," she said determinedly, "and put an end to this foolish nonsense."

"Alright, maw," Zack spoke resignedly, "if yer mind's set. But I'm warning ya, ya better squint yer eyes tight. She's too bright to look at. Poor Robbie must have got too good a look at her."

Mrs. Stewart approached the clearing ahead of her husband, and moved the same bush aside that had obstructed her husband's view. Her gaze caught the brightly radiating figure of Junius, and Mrs. Stewart screamed, clasping her face with her hands. Zack had his head turned, but he groped for his wife, grasped her arm and led her from the clearing.

"It's too crazy to believe, Zack," she whispered in awe; "What are we going to do? What has happened to poor Junius?"

"I don't know what happened to her," Zack answered, "but I know what I'm going to do about it. I'm going to call the University and git them scientist fellas down here."

"You suppose they can git close enough to milk the poor thing?" Mrs. Stewart clasped her hands in frustration. "She's probably in misery."

Zack shook his head. "Ain't no tellin' what they're liable to do after they seen her. Most likely they'll want to ship her to the University to examine her and see how she got that way."

"Why don't we call the Vet'nar'n?" Mrs. Stewart asked. "It might be some kind of new disease."

"It ain't no disease, maw. It's something nobody in the whole world ever seen or heard of before. I jest hope I can convince them University fellas to come down here."

"Don't you think you better tie Junius so she won't stray?"

"Better wait and see what them scientists say. Besides, if she strays, all we gotta do is follow the light!"

Zack did the most important chores and at eight A.M. on the dot he called the State University.

The operator at the switchboard answered sleepily.

"Good morning, State University."

"Mornin', ma'am. I'd like to talk to one of them scientist fellas."

"To whom in particular did you wish to speak?"

"Any of 'em that ain't busy. I got somethin' important to tell 'em."

"If I knew what it was about," the operator was becoming irritated, "I'd connect you with the right party."

Zack hesitated, reluctant to give his startling news to a mere operator. Instead, he hedged. "Well, who would have charge of things that light up?"

"Oh, you want the electrical engineering lab. Just a moment, sir."

There was a series of clicks and buzzes in the earpiece then Zack heard a man's deep voice.

"Hello."

"Hello," Zack replied, "this the electrical engineering lab?"

"Yessir, that's right."

"Well, my name is Zack Stewart and I own a forty-acre farm on the Canal Road just outside of Smithville."

"I'm Professor Donnell, can I help you?"

"Yeah," Zack took a deep breath then began, "my cow Junius was missing since yesterday morning and this morning when I went out to search for her again, I found her."

"Mr. Stewart," Professor Donnell's voice was impatient, "I'm a very busy man with a heavy class schedule. Why in the world would I care if you found your cow or not?"

"You'd care if you knew how I found her."

"Alright, Mr. Stewart, how did you find your cow, with some new kind of radar?"

"Nossir, I found her by following the bright light in the north wood and when I got there, there was Junius lit up like a neon sign."

"Mr. Stewart, are you drunk?"

"I knew you wouldn't believe me. All I can say is, come see for—"

Zack heard a sudden click then an immediate buzzing. Professor Donnell had hung up.

He had no sooner replaced the phone when there was a pounding on the door. He opened it and saw six state troopers and four important-looking gentlemen in civilian dress. A trooper who looked as though he might be in charge, spoke to Zack.

"Sir, we don't want you or your wife to get panicky, but we have reason to believe that something strange is going on in your woods. These men are from the atomic research laboratory at the University and they are convinced that a flying saucer has landed out there."

"It ain't no flying saucer," Zack spoke wearily.

"It isn't?" one of the gentlemen asked, disappointed, "then what is it?"

"It's Junius, my cow."

"Your—WHAT?" the state trooper exclaimed incredulously. "Are you nuts?"

Angrily, Zack jerked his thumb in the direction of the north woods.

"Jest go out there and see fer yourself and then tell me I'm nuts."

They hurriedly left the house, looking back skeptically at Zack.

Zack and his wife stood in the doorway, watching them until they were out of sight in the woods.

"You watch 'em come busting back here in a minute, maw."

In a few moments they saw the men scrambling out of the woods, rushing madly for the house, holding their eyes.

"Now I don't have to convince anybody," Zack smirked.

By the time they reached the porch, they were all talking excitedly and rubbing their eyes. The state trooper in charge pulled Zack aside.

"Mister," he asked ominously, "what the hell happened to that cow?"

"I don't know," Zack spoke with sarcasm, "jest the way I found her."

The important-looking civilian bustled past the patrolman and confronted Zack.

"I'd like to use your phone," his hands moved nervously, "where is it?"

Zack showed him and the man rushed to it and hastily dialed a number.

"This is Professor Jonathon Sims, Nuclear Physicist at State University. Put me through immediately to the Governor. It's very important."

There was a slight pause as Sims drummed impatiently on the phone.

"Hello! Hello, Governor? Professor Sims. I'd like a contingent of National Guardsmen around the farm of Zack Stewart on the old Canal Road. A most astounding thing has happened out here. For the welfare of the Public, I urgently request this farm be placed under tight security check at once and the Federal Government notified immediately."

"Hey now, wait a minute, Mister—" Zack protested.

Sims motioned him into silence, his ear glued to the phone.

"Sir," he hesitated, glancing at the group sideways, "you won't believe this until you see it. But we have positive proof a saucer has landed here. Mr. Stewart's cow is radiating intense blue and white light, the kind that has been associated with the glow of flying saucers."

Sims paused, listening to the Governor. Zack saw him fidget and stick a forefinger in his collar.

"Honestly, Sir! I am not drunk! The cow is radiating light."

"See?" Zack grinned at him. "Now ya know how I felt."

Sims ignored him, concentrating on the phone.

"Yessir, there is a state trooper here." He turned to the one in charge. "He wants to speak to you." The trooper took the receiver.

"Hello, Governor. Sgt. Les Johnson of the Highway Patrol." Pause. "That's right, sir. There's a number of people here who can swear to it. Yessir." This time the trooper fidgeted. "I seen it too. Blue-white light, yessir. Nossir, we are not having a drinking party. The light was reported by the pilot of the Continental Airways early this morning and we investigated. Yessir." He held the receiver towards Sims. "He wants to talk to you again."

The Governor was finally convinced something indeed strange was happening at the Stewart place, but being a solid citizen and faithful servant of the people who elected him, he couldn't believe the fantastic story the professor and the trooper told him. He decided to see for himself and rang for his chauffeur after his telephone conversation with Professor Sims.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Stewart turned to Sims.

"Will you please tell us if Junius can be milked?"

"I really don't know yet, Mrs. Stewart. I'll have to investigate the area for harmful radio-activity first, then I'll have to check the cow, herself. Pardon me." He turned to the phone again.

Trying to keep his voice and emotion under control, Professor Sims called his laboratory at the University and ordered among other technical equipment, a Geiger counter, a gamma-ray detector, a portable lead shield, body and temperature thermometers, a portable X-ray machine, and a dozen pairs of smoked glasses.

The equipment arrived within the hour, and Professor Sims distributed it among his assistants with his instructions. It was understood that he alone would approach Junius, wearing his smoked glasses and carrying the protective lead shield, to make the initial test. If his tests proved that Junius could be safely approached, he would go back for the others.

"You look like one of them flying saucer fellas, yerself," Zack laughed, seeing Professor Sims donned in the lead shield and the dark glasses.

Sims waved at the crowd in the farmyard and walked awkwardly toward the glow in the north wood, less pronounced now in the daylight. They watched until his retreating figure disappeared into the woods, and they were still watching the spot for what seemed a long time afterward. One of the assistants fidgeted and looked at his watch.

"He's been in there twenty minutes. Wonder what he's doing?"

"I hope he's milking her," Mrs. Stewart said hopefully.

Zack chuckled as a thought struck him.

"What's so funny, Zack?" his wife asked.

"Junius," Zack's chuckle bubbled into laughter, "will be the first cow to give radiated milk."

Finally, after another fifteen minutes, they saw Professor Sims emerge from the woods. As he came across the pasture they could see that his smoked glasses were propped above his eyebrows and he was concentrating on a small notebook in his hand, shaking his head from time to time.

When he finally joined the waiting group, he was flooded with questions.

He gestured them into silence.

"Please, I cannot answer any questions as yet until I have consulted with my assistants. Sgt. Johnson, will you please have your men guard the clearing while we hold a conference?"

"Is it safe to get that close to her?" the trooper asked, unbelieving.

"I can assure you that it is. There is just a negligible amount of radio-activity present, and no more ultra-violet rays than there are in an average sun lamp. But you must wear your glasses." Turning to his aides he said, "Come gentlemen," and they followed him into the farmhouse.

"Can she be milked?" Mrs. Stewart wailed after them.

"What a gadawful situation," Zack muttered, grabbing a pitchfork and heading for the barn.

The scientists seated themselves around the big dining-room table and faced Professor Sims.

"Gentlemen, it's the most amazing thing that ever happened. That cow is glowing out there like a miniature atomic pile, and under the circumstances as we know them, should be deader than a door nail, but there she stands, shining like the morning sun, chewing her cud and just mooing away as if nothing happened."

"What is your theory, Professor?" one of the assistants asked.

"I have one, but it's utterly fantastic," Sims answered.

"So is that cow out there. Let's hear it!"

"Do you remember how much more frequent saucer sightings were reported in this area alone?" Sims asked. All the assistants nodded their heads.

"Well," Sims went on, "I am of the opinion that a saucer actually landed out there and they came across the cow by accident. They either shot her with some sort of radium ray gun, or some luminous substance unknown to us."

"Why didn't Junius die?" one of the assistants asked.

Sims shook his head. "They wished to examine her. You see, gentlemen, whatever it was, it served a threefold purpose. It made her luminous, immobile and—" Sims placed both hands on the table and leaned forward for emphasis, "transparent."

There was a gasp and exclamations.

"Transparent? How?—"

"I was within a foot of the cow, felt her hide, and through the glasses I could see the skeletal frame, the chest cavity, the heart beating within, the entire intestinal tract, much, much more clearly than could be seen by the best X-ray."

As if on command, the assistants all rose simultaneously.

"Sit down, gentlemen, the cow isn't going anywhere. We shall have to face this situation with sound scientific reasoning. There will be a closed van here soon to pick up Junius and haul her to the laboratory where we can examine her more thoroughly. Now my belief is that the saucer took off in haste, such great haste that they forgot to extinguish poor Junius. I believe they will be back looking for her, therefore we shall have to return her tonight and conceal ourselves around the area and watch."

"Splendid idea, Professor Sims!" one of the assistants exclaimed.

Yelling voices in the farmyard caught their attention. They saw Sgt. Johnson through the dining-room window, coming across the yard, yelling and pointing to the sky. Sims rushed from the house, met Johnson, grasped him by the shoulders, shaking him.

"What happened, man, what happened?" Sims asked.

"Black light, black light!" Johnson shouted, pointing skyward. Sims looked up. Nothing but the serene blue of the summer sky and an occasional bird caught his eye.

Sims shook him again, more roughly.

"Speak, man, what happened?"

"Black light flashed down on the cow! Blackest light you ever saw!"

The group gathered around him in the yard, trying to make sense out of what he said. So engrossed were they with his babblings, that none but Mrs. Stewart was aware of the fact that Junius had entered the farmyard and was eyeing them curiously.

"Junius!" she exclaimed.

"Mooooo!"

The crowd looked up to see the ordinary, unlit Junius standing calmly by the gate.

"Hurry and get the milk pail, Zack, Junius is all right now!" Mrs. Stewart yelled happily to her husband, as Professor Sims and his assistants led the hysterical trooper into the house.

High over the horizon, a faint, silvery disc was disappearing at fantastic speed into outer space.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SHINING COW ***

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