

The Moorchild

A book by Eloise McGraw

by Carolyn Wilhelm

Characters:

Moorchild--- (Saaski & Moql) ----

Tam---

Children 1, 2, and 3:

Gypsies 1 and 2:

Palm Reader:

Old Bess:

Prince:

Pittittiskin:

Yanno:

Anwara:

Shepherd:

Talabar (Saaski's Folk Mother):

Folk 1, 2, and 3 (who have no feelings):

Fergil the Fisherman:

Bruman:

Helsa:

Tinkwa (Folk):

Zmr (Folk):

Leoran and Lekka:

Narrator:

Scene One: The Moor

Moql: Isn't the sky enormous? It is great to be on the moor. Every night we get to run and skip on the moor.

Folk 1: I like the fresh sharp smell of the air.

Folk 2: I like to smell the heather and rain.

Folk 3: I just like to be outside.

Folk 1: Remember to stay on the Folk paths tonight while we do our work. Tonight we are getting reeds for bundling into torches.

Folk 2: I like it better when we have to collect thistle-silk for the spinners back in the Mound.

Folk 1: I like collecting tufts of wool left here and there by the human's browsing sheep.

Tam: I'd like to introduce myself, I'm Tam. Later you'll learn who I am in the story of the Moorchild. These are the Folk children. They are at school now, going through the Schooling House in the Mound and passing through the portal to the human world and the moor. Their jobs include finding old twists of cobweb for the Mound's weavers and cord makers. They will learn to find wild fruits and herbs and mushrooms for the cooks. They live in the Mound, with the fairy FOLK.

Folk 1: It is just before dawn. We need to find the portal behind the bolder and return to the Schooling House.

Folk 2: After we rest and eat at the Schooling House, we can venture out into the Gathering, the Mound's central common.

Folk 3: I can't wait to get to the Gathering and see what's happening.

Folk 2: What human would believe we live in a hollow rock?

Folk 3: And a crystalline rock at that, with coldfire torches embedded in the rock walls?

Folk 1: A lovely glowing rock?

Folk 2: I like the nights we have no work at all and can play the bagpipes. Let's find the portal now; maybe tomorrow we can play the bagpipes.

Folk 3: Why can't we play the bagpipes every night? I like to play more than I like to work.

Tam: Suddenly one night, a human appeared. The Folk younglings knew what to do; disappear by winking or shape shift to be something else.

Pittittiskin: I have instructed the younglings to do a shape change or a color change, or go dimlike. I told them to run up a tree, or just wink out—that's the best.

Tam: But, Moql was caught by her hooded jacket one day, when the younglings were finally let out in the sunshine. She realized her tricks had not worked.

Shepherd: A pixie, all right enough. What are you, little one? Can't or won't. There's tales of your kind. So I went and caught one. Let's make a bargain. They say your kind has stores of gold hid all around these hills. Is it so, then?

Moql: It is.

Shepherd: Eh?

Moql: IT IS.

Shepherd: Right then! Just show me where, you see, and I'll let you go, I will.

Moql: I'm afeard of your dog.

Shepherd: Al, never you mind about Trusty, he'll do as he's big and naught else. Here, off with you boy, round up your stragglers! Now, no tricks, where's the treasure hid?

Moql: Let me loose and I'll take you there.

Shepherd: Think I'm a noddikins?

Moql: Well, gold's down in the woods yonder, a snake length near the foxhole.

Shepherd: Well then, you show me. You dig, pixie!

Tam: Gladly she burrowed into the soft mold of earth and last year's leaves, and in a moment twisted toward him, offering a little handful of golden coins with the dirt still clinging to them.

Shepherd: They're real! I never believed it.

Moql: Plenty more 'ere.

Shepherd: Move aside and let me there, I can dig faster nor you.

Tam: In one leap Moql ran away. She could hear the outraged bellow from the foot of the tree.

Shepherd: PIXIE! Where'd you get to? Ahhh, the hoaxing creetur! I mighta known!
(Sound really mad, the gold has turned to moss.)

Tam: Back near the Mound, she was in trouble with Pittittiskin who had seen the whole thing.

Pittittiskin: Clumsy youngling!

Moql: But I did it right!

Pittittiskin: The gold trick, aye, but everything else, all wrong.

Slow. Bad. Risky. You never winked out at all. Back to the mound.

Moql: Back to the mound at midday? But we are barely beginners.

Pittittiskin: Nay, just you. The others are beginners. You're a blunder head.

Moql: Let me try again. I'll do better.

Pittittiskin: We'll have to see the Prince. I suspicion you're a menace to the Band.

Tam: They found the Prince on his rock ledge a quarter ways up on the wall of the Gathering, where he liked to lounge on one elbow among his leafy cushions, head propped on one long fingered hand. He was old, the Prince, and seldom went out anymore except on May Day, Harvest Dancing, or Midsummer's Eve.

Prince: So, Pittittiskin? A bit of trouble, have we?

Pittittiskin: Aye, a bit of trouble, about his size. (*pointing at Airen*)

Prince: Big trouble can come in little parcels. What's your name, m'dear?

Moql: Moql'nkkn.

Pittittiskin: She can't hide.

Moql: Yes, I can, it was just, I just ----

Pittittiskin: Ssst.

Prince: You can't wink out?

Moql: Aye, I can! Leastways, I thought I -----

Prince: You can do it or you can't. Let's see you try.

Moql: Right now?

Prince: Right now.

(*Moql—gasp a big breath and hold it, squeeze your eyes shut.*)

Pittittiskin: See that? And you can tell that's she is trying.

Pittittiskin: What do you think?

Prince: Try a shape change, little one.

(Moql, try to move like you are trying to get into a new shape. Nothing happens.)

Prince: Get her mother, Talabar.

(Pittittiskin—walk towards Talabar and bring her over to the Prince.)

Prince: Now, Talabar, was there anything unusual about Moql when she was born?

Talabar: It was a long time ago. Oh, you sweet little duckling. What a dear baby you were. Sweet as honeycomb. That's all you wanted, Prince?

Prince: Yes, run along.

(Talabar leaves.)

Prince: Moql, you are half human and half Folk. You will never belong to either side. You are neither one thing, nor the other. Pity, but there it is.

Moql: I don't want to be changed! I want to stay here. I don't like humans! I won't be one. I don't know how! Please don't make me.

Pittittiskin: Stop makin' a bother.

Moql: But I'm scared! What'll it feel like? Why can't I?

Pittittiskin: Hsst! It's settled. Come along.

Prince: You'll be in your father's world. You'll be starting over. Luck to you.

Pittittiskin: You'll be forgetting all about us. Prince'll see to it.

Moql: You mean, as soon as I'm changed?

Tam: At the Schooling House, Zmr and others were there. They had all heard.

Moql: Help me.

Zmr: Can't.

Tam: She went to bed a Folk and woke up a baby human. She cried and screamed for many months. Her new parents didn't know what to do.

Anwara: She cries all the time.

Yanno: She doesn't seem to like me at all.

Tam: It wasn't him, but Yanno was a blacksmith and the iron on his belt caused pain to little Saaski, as Moql was now called. Years went by and Saaski grew from a little ill favored baby to an odd, outlandish-looking little girl. Old Bess knew the child was different. Everyone who walked by stared at Saaski like there was something wrong with her. One day Saaski was sent to pick up firewood with the Village Children.

(Village Children---walk past Saaski and stare and whisper; walk away.)

Child 1: It's the smith's girl. That one.

Child 2: The freaky-odd one?

Child 3: Will she hurt us?

Child 2: Are you a changeling?

Child 1: What is wrong with you?

Child 3: Don't pick up the best wood, or I'll tell me Da'.

Saaski: 'Tisn't anyone's wood. I'll pick up what I see.

Gypsy 1: How come your hair is like that?

Gypsy 2: Why are your fingers long?

Gypsy 1: Your eyes are funny, too.

Child 3: Freaky-odd.

Gypsy 2: A strangeling!

Tam: Later, Saaski asked her mother about what happened.

Saaski: Mumma, what's a changeling? Mumma?

Anwara: Now where did you hear that word?

Saaski: Eh, one of the young 'uns said it. What is it then?

Anwara: Just an old tale. Nothing to it, like as not. Fairies' prank, is what I've heard.

Tam: Usually Saaski was lonely. Lonely in the cottage. Lonely in the village. She toughened herself to accept that life would always be so.

And then when she was eleven, the tinker Bruman wandered through the village and up onto the moor with his hooded pony car, three goats, old dog Warrior, and his orphan boy

Tam. That's when Saaski finally met me. The day started our poorly the day she met me.

Yanno: 'Tis only right. Because you were careless we eat burnt bread. Saaski, you have to eat the burnttest.

Saaski: I was careless baking the bread today.

Anwara: Why did you find no milk in the cow?

Saaski: I don't know. I tried my best.

(Saaski leaves walk away. Furguil comes out.) Furguil: I know you I saw you before. (Saaski goes to moor. Meets shepherd.)

Shepherd: Pixie? I'm onto you.....

Saaski: My da's the blacksmith. Go ask him yourself! Let me
(Saaski runs into a goat.)

Saaski: Go away.

Tam: (Walks toward Saaski.) What are you doing with me goats?

Saaski: Are they yours?

Tam: No, they're Bruman's. But it me as looks after 'em. While Warrior looks after Bruman.

Saaski: A warrior?

Tam: Not a real one, just Bruman's old dog.

Saaski: Is Bruman your da'?

Tam: Nay, me da's dead. Mumma, too. Bruman's the tinker.

Tam: We passed a pleasant day, but Saaski was forbidden to go to the moor again when she went home.

Old Bess: A child needs freedom! She needs the moor.

Anwara: Mother, what blather! Any child needs to learn to mind a house and do the tasks.

Old Bess: A child needs freedom! She needs the moor.

Anwara: The moor! Why you know as well as I---doesn't she go daily to gather wood? That's roaming a plenty. When the sheep shearing's done next week, I'll put her to washing my fleeces.

Tam: When that was done, Saaski came upon a set of bagpipes in the cupboard. She began to play.. Yanno's was the first shocked face to appear in the doorway. He stared frantically around, and then up. (Villagers come close.)

Yanno: Come down from there! Stop that and come down. Put those pipes back, d'you hear me? And come down from there.

Anwara: Child how did you learn to play the pipes?

Saaski: Learn?

Anwara: Aye, learn! It is plan enough you have learned somehow or other. Who was't taught you?

Saaski: Nobody taught me.

Anwara: But you were playing them!

Saaski: I was. They were made for playing. Can you not play them yourself.

Anwara: I? No more than I can breathe underwater! And it's the same for your da.

Saaski: But the pipes where here in the cupboard.

Yanno: The pipes were my da's. He was a champion piper, he was. But I'll have no young one fidgeting about with my da's pipes, and mebye leaving 'em out in the wet, or--
--“

Saaski: I'll never do so!

Yanno: Saaski!

Anwara: Hold you peace, Yanno. She's not hurting the pipes. Did you know hear how she can play? And without teaching. 'Tis a gift from God.

Old Bess: More likely, the pipes will keep her from mischief. Come now, Yanno, of what use to anyone are they in that cupboard?

Yanno: Acch, well-an-all. What's a man to do with three against one! I wash my hands of it.

Tam: And so Saaski got to keep the pipes. The music helped her days, and later she was able to go to the moor. Our talks helped her through many days. One day, the gypsies were in town. Saaski wanted her palm read.

Palm Reader: Buy ribbon? Bangle?

Saaski: Will you read my hand?

Palm Reader: Goot fortun a'ready, eh? No hurt?

(Palm Reader takes Saaski's hand and look it over, be sad, and let go of it.)

Palm Reader: Cannot.

Saaski: Didn't I pay enough beeswax?

Palm Reader: Na, na, na. I try read hand. I cannot. I wish for you very good fortune. But beware.

Tam: Eleven days after the gypsies left town, the children in town became ill. Saaski did not become ill. The village people began to blame her for many things that were going wrong. They thought she had put curses on them and their children, cows and other things.

Helsa: My husband used to be the richest man in the village, he had three cows until Saaski made one ill. Now we are just a two-cow family. I blame that Saaski and her curses!

Tam: Saaski noticed her palms didn't have lines as human hands did. She noticed more differences and how people treated her. I even mentioned once she might be Folk. Many things began to bother Saaski until she realized she indeed was Folk, she remembered she was half human and half Folk. She could walk up walls and her eyes changed colors, as the Folk eyes do. She realized what the best present she could give to Anwara might be. Can you guess what it might be?

Saaski: Tam!! Midsummer's eve is soon. I escaped from the rowan picking and I realized that the door to the mound will be open!

Tam: Tonight?!

Saaski: Yes and we must get Anwara her babe back. Will you help?

Tam: All right.

(Saaski runs to Furguil house)

Saaski : Furguil keeps the pipes for me.(Hands Dale pipes.)

Furguil: What? Keep ?

(Saaski runs off)

Saaski: all right Tam lets find the mound.

(Everyone stand still until Tam is finished)

Tam: We found the mound. Well at lest Saaski did, I couldn't see it lest wise.

Saaski: See? Let's go in. But remember not a bite or a sup.

Tam: Right.

(Tinkwa stands in front or Saaski and Tam.)

Tinkwa: What are you a doing 'ere?

Tam: Let us in.

Tinkwa: No. First you let me have them pipes.

Saaski: After I'll give them to you after we are done.

Tinkwa: Shhh. Mmm . Maybe, well alright. But you can't go in without true folk. Follow my lead.

(Tam and Saaski follow Tinkwa. Rest of the folk dance around.)

(Then everyone is still while Tam speaks)

Tam: There were lots of folk and soon me and Saaski are lost among the folk. But Saaski Found me and pulled me down a tunnel.

Saaski: Shhhhhhh. You might wake the nursery .

Tam: Look at all the gold! Ya never told me you lived like kings!
This was not true because the folk have a spell that hide the true mound that was moss
and dirt.

(Saaski grasps a bottle and dunks Tams eye)

Tam: What ya doing with me eye ya ruined it! Don't see gold. This was the folk water
that can make you see the true folk.

Nurse: What get away!!!!!!!
(Saaski and Tam run away.)

Saaski: Look! (Saaski points to Mia.)

Leka : What you what?

Tam: Saaski said something in the old tongue of the folk . That I couldn't understand.
But it made Leka come .

Saaski: Lets go! Oh no look Burman!

(Saaski, Tam, and Leka run away.)

Tam: We made it. But Bruman didn't. I guess he had a bite or a sup.

Tinka : Give me de'm pipes, Molk'nk

Saaski: Go to Furguil.

(Tinkwa runs away.)

Tam: Now to get Leka back to Anwara.

Saaski: Ya.

(Anwara comes to take Leka)

Old Bess: Look at 'er. Loren , yes Loren.

(Anwara and Old Bess go a little away they all wave.)

Tam: I'll take you live with me and da goats.

Saaski: All right.

Tam: Well, Loren grew and did fine weaving unlike Saaski. And one day Anwara crawled up to the moor. She thought she heard bagpipes, but she was never sure about that.

THE END