

The Tale of None

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Once upon a time there lived a bug. She wasn't a big bug – she was a little bug – and her name was None. She was called None because she didn't have any spots – none at all. This made her sad. All her brothers and sisters (and she had many brothers and sisters) had spots. They had two spots, four spots, six spots, and some even had eight spots, but she was spotless.

“Oh, what an unhappy thing to be so plain,” she said to herself. “I wish I had spots – even just two.”

Now, being spotless should not be *such* a problem – but it was. For this bug was a ladybug. Her head was just as black as all the other ladybugs, and her back was just as red. Indeed, she had a beautiful red back – as glossy and red as red can be.

“But what use is a beautiful red back if I don't have spots!” she cried. “I wish I was spotty!”

So little ladybug None set out from home. She was tired of being teased and laughed at, and decided to find herself some spots. Off she flew, over hills and plains till she came to India. It was a long, long way, but at last she came to India. There she met a spotted cow, with wide, wavy horns, huge brown eyes and large black spots on its hide.

“Ah,” said the little bug to herself, “that animal has huge spots. Perhaps she will give me some of hers.” So she landed on the cow's nose, and said, “O, Beautiful Beast of the Wide Horns! O, Mother of the Brown Eyes! May I have some of your spots?”

“Moo,” said the cow, much pleased with such fine names, “Moo! Moo! Gladly would I give them to you, but they are much too big. They are so heavy that you would not be able to fly.”

“But if I find two tiny spots may I have them?” she begged. “I will be able to fly with two tiny ones.”

“Yes,” replied the spotted cow. “If you can find them, you may have them.”

So she wandered over the cow's hide, looking here and there and everywhere until she found two tiny spots hiding inside the cows' ear.

"I found some! I found some!" she shouted happily. "I found two tiny spots!"

"That's wonderful," said the cow, "but please stop shouting so loudly. I can hardly hear myself chew!"

"I'm sorry, Madam Cow," said the ladybug in a very quiet voice. "I forgot I was inside your ear!" and she put the two spots on her back, thanked the cow, and went on her way.

She flew and she flew until she came to America. It was a long, long way, but at last she came to a valley in the middle of California. There she met a spotted magpie with a beautiful yellow beak – and on the beak were two little spots.

"Ah," said the ladybug, "what a beautiful creature. She has wonderful wings and legs and spots – she must surely be a cousin of mine. I will ask her for the two spots on her beak."

So the little bug flew and landed on the magpie's beak.

"O Great Bird of the Yellow Beak! O Spotty Flyer of the Blue Skies!" she said, curtsying up and down. "May I have those two little spots on your magnificent beak?"

"Of course," replied the spotted magpie, very pleased with such fine names, "you may have my beak-spots."

So the little ladybug put them on her back, thanked the magpie many, many times and went on her way. And from that time on the magpies in the middle of California never had spots on their beautiful yellow beaks anymore.

On little None flew, her four spots glistening in the sun, until she came to Africa. It was a long, long way, but, yes, she flew all the way to Africa. There she met a leopard. She took one look at him, and exclaimed, "Oh, what a beautiful beast! He is so strong and fast and so very, very spotty! I shall ask for some of his," and she flew to the leopard and landed on his nose.

"Dear Magnificent Lord of Spots," she said, bowing down low, "Dear Most Handsome Beast, such spots I have never seen! You have the finest spots that have ever been! O King of Spottyness, may I have some of your spots?"

“Purr! Purr!” said the leopard, so very pleased with such a fine speech, “Purr! Purr! Yes, I will gladly give you two of my spots – one from each side of my back.”

And that is why, no matter how often you count a leopard’s spots, there are always two spots less than there should be.

Then the little ladybug went home with her six spots shining on her back. There she was just like all the other ladybugs – except that she had a story to tell. Soon her tale became famous in Ladybug Land and was passed on from mother to daughter as ‘The Tale of None’.