

# Snowball's Chance by *John Reed*

THE OLD PIGS WERE DYING.  
FIRST, IT WAS Dominicus a secondary functionary who had given over his life to that rather crucial task of interpreting and graphing statistical data. He wore black-rimmed glasses and liked to sing opera as he sat at his desk where, one drizzly afternoon, he collapsed into a plate of Camembert. By unanimous proclamation, he was named Animal Hero, First Class. The next pig to die was Napoleon himself. The great Berkshire boar. The father of all animals. Saviour of equality, liberty and free-

dom. He had died in a manner fit to his station passing in his sleep, between sheets of Egyptian cotton (with an extremely high thread-count).

In commemorative tribute, a twelve-foot statue of Napoleon was erected outside the barnhouse, at the former site of Old Major's skull, for those who remembered Old Major, the pig who had started it all, and those days those early, early days.

The statue was bronze; Napoleon wore his black coat and his leather leggings. Standing on his hind-legs, he puffed his pipe and looked to the horizon. Behind the statue, painted in white letters on the tar wall of the barn, was the single Commandment—*Most animals are equalish*. To the left of the Commandment, the verses of *Founding Father Napoleon* were

painted in the same white letters .  
The poem, dedicated to the fallen  
leader, was authorised by Minimus,  
who was known to be a pig with a  
poetic soul-

*Napoleon taught us how to read.  
Napoleon gives us grass and feed.  
Napoleon shows us bread can rise,  
With a swill o' swell guidance from  
the swine.*

*The pigs are a species of splendidous  
knowing,  
But also of helping, and also of show-  
ing*

*That the animals of the Manor Farm  
Are the tippest-toppest animals any-  
where!*

*Gosh-darn!*

*So let's give a honk and a quack and  
a squeak!*

*An oink and a moo and a whinny  
and a peep!*

*Let's doodle-doo, let's snort, and let's  
baaa!*

*Let's give a bark and a hoot and a  
caaw!*

*Don't hold it back! You squeal and  
you neigh!*

*Napoleon, Napoleon, you're king am-  
-ongst the hay!*

*Napoleon, Napoleon, we know you'll  
lead the way!*

*Napoleon, Napoleon, guide us ev-  
eryday!*

To further observe the accomplishments of the great Leader, the portrait of Napoleon, which surmounted the poem was refreshed. Six pigeons, with a retouch of colour, gave dimension to the white profile-under the tutelage of the pigs, the birds had acquired the skill of rendering.

In the year that followed, several more of the old-time swiners cast off

their mortal coil. One would drown in the bathtub (through no fault of his own) when he found himself unable to get out. Another would fall victim to a swollen liver-downing his last mug of whiskey, he quietly moved on to the next life. Yet another would die of a patient torturer called cancer-fortunately, as he had long taken up Napoleon's habit of enjoying a good pipe several times an hour, he was offered much consolation in his final months. All, heroes of the rebellion, were declared Animal Heroes, First Class.

The younger pigs filled their places well-enough, it seemed, though they were a reserved generation more aloof, and perhaps, more lenient. They were led by their elder, Squealer, who for years had been Napoleon's chief counselor. He was a pig who could wag

his tail and tongue quite persuasively- so much so that in the end, he may have convinced even himself that he was a pig of the populace. Though he had been saying for years that rations were increasing, for the first time that anyone could remember (aside from the pigs, who were always firm in their conviction that things were always getting better) it seemed possible that the ration-bag was a little rounder-and noticeably so. When Squealer died, he himself had grown so fat that he was blinded by his own face. The cause of death, it was pronounced, was over-work. In another first (or at least the first that anyone could remember), this pronouncement by the pigs was openly derided. At the posthumous awards presentation (Animal Hero, First Class), there were even a few stealthy hecklers-hooters and honkers. Squealer wasn't

so terrible, after all-but surely, a pig who in his last days was pushed around in a wheelbarrow, as he could not even sustain his girth on four legs, was no pig who had, as it was claimed, died of "a lifetime of exertion". It would have taken old Squealer himself to explain that a pig buried in a piano case wasn't funny.

The last of the old pigs to take control was Minimus. He, like the others before him, was considered one of the original heroes of the rebellion. (And yet his ascent was cause for much surprise, as aside from compose a few poems, nobody could accurately pinpoint what he had done.) Though robust, Minimus was quite advanced in years-and to address concerns that the next succession might be turbulent, Pinkeye, the most powerful, and incidentally, well-liked pig of the younger generation, was se-

lected to fill the newly created position, Next Leader. So Pinkeye kissed ducklings and lambs, as Minimus went about managing the farm. A silent Leader, Minimus was a mystery to be feared and respected. The dogs were loyal to his service, as were the other pigs, just as it had always been. And yet there was a new calm unprecedented a calm bespeaking, perhaps, a better future, or perhaps, the darkness of days to come.

It was one night-an average sort of normal May night-that there was an extra extraordinary disturbance in the stalls. The moon low on the horizon, a figure had appeared at the gates. It was a strange figure-unfamiliar in his dark suit with pleated pants and a wide-lapel. The animal (was it an animal?) walked on two feet, wore shoes and a brimmed hat, and carried a briefcase. A few steps behind



him, a goat was similarly accoutered. (Was it a goat? Yes, it was a goat. Surely, a most sophisticated goat.)

The dog in attendance at the outer gate barked ferociously at the pair—though not many of the barn animals paid him much mind, as the dogs at the outer gate were particularly high-strung beasts, known to be incited to woof by causes of innocuous as moon shadows and silverfish. One of the cows, no doubt bolstered by the anonymity of night, belted out her exasperation at having been, once again, so rudely awoken—  
"Sha-at-up!"

In actuality, however, the scene that took place at the outer gate was not nearly so common as the cow imagined for although the cause of the shepherd's excitement was a stranger and not of a silverfish, after what seemed scarcely more than a few well-chosen

words, the guard dog, having dropped to his forelegs, was backing away on his belly. Mouth closed, eyes wide, he lowered his head and tucked his tail under his haunches-as the brief-cased pair, cutting elegant if foreboding silhouettes against the indigo sky, breached the outer gate with no more discussion.

From her perch in the hayloft, Norma the cat, who had been watching the moon through the chinks in the barn, was the single animal to witness the brief exchange. Norma, like most cats, was more interested in being a cat than a member of the Manor Farm. Yet she was always an extremely personable creature; always playful. And excepting those times she was lazing around in the shade while other animals were huffing in the sun, she was widely appreciated.

“Sssssssss!” she hissed at the broken windowpane, her back arched, her claws extended, her hair on end.

This, as would be expected, immediately woke the rats, who endeavored to keep themselves well attuned to the cat.