Chickpocalypse joined the Girls in a soft, murmuring hymn at the funeral, which was held on a hillside orchard that overlooked . Beaufore loved the smell of the upturned earth of the orchard and reveled like a dog half his age in the great red mound which was piled beside the grave. Wes spoke sharply to him, but Jim advised that Calla would want her funeral to be a joyous celebration of her life and so Baufore, belly up on the mound, ground his back and shoulders joyously into the

as they laid Calla the goat to rest in the hillside orchard that looked over the farm houses. The cousins came from across the creek and laid down daisies and buttercups on the soft earth. Jim and Uncle Earl took a break from the Apple Cottage restoration and stood in attendance while Wes and each of the cousins said a few words about Calla the Goat and her many contributions to life on Mosey’s farm.

“A darned waste we’re not eating her,” Uncle Earl grumbled under his breath.

Jim and Uncle Earl returned to the renovation of the Apple Cottage

After the service, Uncle Earl returned to repairing the Apple Cottage, and Jim resumed picking pairs to sell at the Knoxville farmer’s market that weekend

“Organic farming,” Mosey had hissed. “The things my young’ns wll come up with to keep from getting a job.

Mosey’s dismissals only hardened Jim’s resolve, and left him determined to prove he could make a go of the farm. Jim left a job in computers to return to the farm when the Department of Children’s Services deposited Wes on his doorstep that first time last winter. Wes’s mom, Karen, had been arrested for criminal trespass and vandalism in activiites related to her involvement with animal rights causes. Karen appealed for Wes to be left not with his father, but with her Mother in Chatanooga. Jim, she said, had been an uninvolved and distant dad since the time they were divorced when Wes was three. As a result, Wes had a number of social and academic issues and required diligent parental attention. Karen’s mom was retired and had ample time to devote to Wes’s needs.

Wes corroborated his mom’s account of his relationship with his father and begged the judge to send him to Chatanooga with his maternal grandmother. But Wes was not yet 12 -- an age where the court begins to give a degree of deference to a child’s wishes in such matters. Wes went home with Jim. Karen’s senteance wasn’t very long, Just a few weeks in the county lockup.Wes would return to her care when she got out, provided she submitted to a psychiatric evaluation and refrained from owning or keeping animals at her home.

That was the first time the DCS caseworker came to Jim’s door. The second time was to inform Jim that Karen had ended her life in jail. County jailers were investigating exactly how it was that she had gotten access to the prescription medications she consumed in her cell. She died peacefully and without pain.

Wes looked upon his father with hate-filled eyes and heard the news. There followed a chase through traffic in Jim’s neighborhood that ended with Wes seized, spanked and sent to his room. There he grieved alone.

Jim moved back to the farm with Wes and his second wife, Ellen. She hadn’t wanted to leave their home in the city. She liked having her friends close. She dreadead the forty minute commute to her job. She was unconvinced that Jim was really cut out for farming.

But Wes. How can we even begin to imagine his grief? How can we expect him to get by with anything less than a fulltime parent? He has a devoted grandmother in Chattanooga with unlimited time and capacity for nurturing. He’ll be twelve soon. Great deference at age twelve.

And so they settled into this new domestic adventure on the farm. Wes and Jim had loud aguments about the volume of the television and the appropriateness of the programming while Ellen secluded herself upstairs with a tablet computer on her lap and headphones over her ears. Listless mornings followed nights of half-sleep as Jim and Ellen lay in a half-waking state awaiting the entrance of Wes, who would announce he was unable to sleep alone.

Fights over homeword. Fights over vegetables. Items missing or destroyed. Wes wished Jim dead at the top of his lungs while Ellen lay upstairs and suffer terrible migraines. Now she kept a small refrigerator by her bed for the purpose of keeping the compress cool. Lately she’d started keeping beer there too.

Jim felt nothing at all when she told him she was leaving. She waited a long while for Jim to say something, and when he didn’t she took up her bags. She paused at the door.

“I know you’re afraid of losing him.” She didn’t look back. She was gone several minutes before Jim finally answered.

“I’m not afraid of losing him. I’m afraid I already have.”

The next day, they buried Calls in the hillside orchard that overlooked the farm houses. Wes and the farm animals out on the deck

There was a good bit less tension in the house following Ellen’s departure. Wes started spending more time outside. The day after Calla’s funderal found him on the deck with a laptop computer.

“Your ornamental and flighty.”

“It says here you’re flighty and ornamental,” said Wes.

Chickpocalypse was delighted.

“Ornamental!” she said, allowing the word roll lovingly from her tongue. The Girls fell into jealous murmurings.

“But you leghorns! It says your spritely, and you have great style. You’re the most popular breed in America!”

“I’m a retriever,” said Huggins . The most popular dog.”

“I’m a treeing walker hound,” said Klutin. “I climb trees.”

“You don’t climb trees,” said Wes. “You chase opossums and raccoons.”

“Glad to know that,” said Kutin. “I was a little worried.”

“What kind of a dog am I?” asked Beaufore.

“You,” said Wes. “Well you’re a mixed breed of some sort.”

“A mutt, you mean, said Beaufore.

“Well, yeah, I guess. But mutts are great dogs, loveable, you know.. Lots of times, purebreds have genetic problems.”

“… And hybrid vigor!” chimed Cerino “Don’t forget hybrid vigor!”

“A mixed breed is not the same thing as a hybrid,” said Zelda. “So please top with the hybrid vigor.” Cerino’s offering of rotten fruit and fungus lay spurned in the corner of her cage.

The door to the Apple Cottage opened and Blind Aunt Marnie exited. She sniffed suspiciously at the air and glowered in the direction of the orchard, where the laying hens were pecking ahe mound of red earth excavated for Calla’s grave. Wes shuddered at the site of her. She felt her way to the pig enclosure using guidelines set up for that purpose, and carried a leash with a choke chain collar. The pig greeted her enthusiastlly. Marnie opened the gate, slipped the collar around the pig’s neck, and allowed herself to be led into the orchard.

The image of Marnie being led around the farm by the pig was, by now, commonplace on the farm, but, for the public at large, the use of pigs as a service animal was a very rare thing. Unheard of, in fact, so when word got to the Fissionberry observer, they sent a reporter to write a feature story. Three weeks later, the regional Nashvanooga Times sent a reporter and a photographer and Marnie and McGulicuddy appeared above the fold on the front page, and were the subjects of a full page feature story in the Local section. It wasn’t long before Marnie and McGillicuddy begain appearing on national cable networks.

The attention couldn’t have come at a better time for McGillicuddy. He was only weeks from the slaughterhouse when his story got out, and it wasn’t long until fans formed a movement devoted to McGillicuddy’s salvation. Uncle Earl was condemned on local editorial pages and on animal-themed cable television networks. Letters arrived by the truckload.

Earls produce sales suffered. Cars sped past his roadside stand and yuppies veered away from his both at the Nashvanooga farmers market. Still he stood firm in the belief that a man had the right to dispose of his own god-given pig in that manner as best suited his own needs and temperament. Pigs were put here on earth for a very specific purpose, and that purpose remained constant, no matter what tricks his sister had been able to teach one. And, even if people didn’t know it, a 300-pount boar was a poor choice of service animal for anyone, particulary for a frail blind woman. Its tusks were razor sharp and it could eviscerate Marnie without any provocation or warning.

Marnie told her story on a network morning show.

Whereas McGuilicuddy the Wonder Pig is a resident of Anderon County, Tennessee, and

Whereas McGillicuddy the Wonder Pig performs a singular humanitarian service for Marnie Hooper, also a resident of Blount County, Tennessee, who tragically became blind as an adult, and

Whereas McGillicuddy the Wonder Pig accompanies Marnie on walks on her family farm

Whereas McGuillicuddy the Wonder Pig, affords Marnie Hooper a degree of independence that would not be practical without McGillicuddy the Wonder Pig, and

Whereas McGillicuddy the Wonder Pig is a distiquished and remarkable representative of his species, and joins such bovine luminaries as Pigasus, Curley Boy, The Tamsworth Two, the great King Neptune, Monster Pig, Hogzilla, Big Norm, Toby the Sapient Pig and the unnamed Learned Pig of 1864

Therefore be it Resolved that this Bount County Commisssion herewith extols, and implores those parties to allow McGillicuddy the Seeing Eye Wonderpig be exempted from those \* and \* usually accorded farmyard livestock and allowed to continue his good work on behalf of the less fortunate.

Customers and friends deserted him. Uncle Earl was a reed shaken and he would now relent. The only media outlet with which he had any comfort at all was a local sports talk show.

“92.7 WPSM, home of the Nashvanooga State Fighting Possums bringing you news, analysis, talk and all things possum, welcome caller, you’re on Sports All Day with Vic and Bill.”

“Hey Vic and Bill, this is Earl P. Hooper. I’m the feller with that pig everybody keeps talking about. I just want to say I love your show and I think you guys to great job.”

“Thanks Earl”

“I’ve got a question and a comment today, if it’s OK. My question is do either of ya’ll know if coach Blevins is doing anything to recruit some talent for their secondary? They haven’t really stopped anybody from passing the ball all season. And my comment is that I’ve decided I’m not going to slaughter that pig of mine, I’m just going to let is stay on the farm until it dies on its own or everyone loses interest in it.”

“Well,” said Vic. “We normally try to limit our subjects to just sports, but we can’t resist a scoop when one just falls in our laps. As many of our listeners know, Mr. Hooper here has maintained that he’s going to butcher and freeze his pig, known to the nation as McGillicuddy, even though the pig serves as a service animal for his own blind sister. What was it that changed your mind, Mr. Hooper.”

“I guess it comes down to my own personal family values,” said Earl. “I believe there’s three things a man should always put before himself. That’s God, family and football.”

“Well,” said Bill. “I’m sure everyone’s going to be very happy that you’ve made the decision you have.”

“And country!” Earl interrupted. “I forgot about country. It’s God, family, country and then football. So I guess really there’s four things a man should put ahead of hisself. And maybe five if you count honor, and I do. I’m a man who really believes in personal honor at all times. You know, Vic and Bill, it’s really hard to put an exact count on the things a man should put ahead of hisself. You probably don’t really have to worry about it much as long as you go to church regular.”

“Thanks, Mr. Hooper,” said Vic. “Now if I can just come back to your question about recruiting …”

“No man can know,” continued Earl. “Why God in his wisdom saw fit to strike that woman blind in the prime of her life. Some believe god sent adversity to our family to test our faith. Others believe it had to do wth the evil nature of Marnie’s heart.”

“I’m going to have to cut you off there, Mr. Hooper. Thanks for your call. Now Bill, If you’ll just respond to the question about recruiting.”

“Well, Vic, I’m sure it’s occurred Coach Blevins would love to improve his defense by putting faster players on the field. But there aren’t all that many players coming out of high school with the kind of speed to make a real difference at this level. And to get those few that there are, coach Blevins has to compete with the other schools in the conference and, for that matter, nationwide.”

“Thanks Bill. Hello caller, you’re on Sports All Day with Vic and Bill.”

“It was Earl Hooper’s rank moonshine whiskey that caused me to go blind, not God like Earl just said. Earl Hooper condenses his moonshine through the radiator of an old Dodge Powerwagon that’s been sitting there at the farm since before Dad bought it, and I regret that I ever took one sip of that stuff. Never ever buy moonshine whiskey from that man!”

“Were going to have to cut you off there, caller, who I believe was … Is that correct? Yes, that was Marnie Hooper, the blind woman at the center of the controversy of the seeing eye pig. We’re giving her an opportunity for some equal time, we’re going to go back to sports now, ou’re on Sports All Day.”

“Well, you’d think out of six children I’d have at least one that could get and keep a steady job...”

“And there you have it,” said Vic, hanging up on Mosey. “McGillicuddy the Seeing Eye Wonder Pig saved from the slaughterhouse and you heard it here first on WPSM FM.”

And so there was jubilee and great merry making on the farm. Wes opened the door to the pen, and out stepped McGuillicuddy.

“You’re free! You’re free!” cried the chickens, who fell in behind him and clucked an elaborate paean as McGillicuddy strutted about the farmyard. This continued for a good long time, and would have continued for a while longer had not Pig Triumphant eaten one of his heralds.

The other hens were stunned to paralysis at the site McGillicuddy devouring one of their own, feathers and all. By the time the terrified birds regained their senses enough to flea, McGilicuddy had eaten two more. McGillicuddy declined to give chase, and instead crunched absently at his chicken bones and went peaceably to his pen when Marnie came with her leash.

He was a changed pig. Earl no longer went into his pen and the chickens fled in terror when he approached with Marnie.

McGillicuddy led Marnie up the hill to the mound of earth that had been excavated for Calla’s grave. The chickens abandoned something they’d found in the upturned earth. Marnie crouched at the spot and felt for it on the ground. She brushed it off and put in in her pocket, then continued on her work.

“I’ll bet she’s collecting for a potion,” said Wes. “None of you eat whatever it is she turns Uncle Earl into.”

“The great pigs of the ages

Snobbin and the Tamsworth Two for cunning and aplomb

Feats of mental

Or of prodigious feats girth

But none top old McGuillicut, the greatest pig on earth

If I had two more I’d win the war

With two more still I’d win it.