

Chapter XX

The Hour of Triumph

SPECIAL announcement!" said the loud speaker in a pompous voice. "The management of the Fair takes great pleasure in presenting Mr. Homer L. Zuckerman and his famous pig. The truck bearing this extraordinary animal is now approaching the infield. Kindly stand back and give the truck room to proceed! In a few moments the pig will be unloaded in the special judging ring in front of the grandstand, where a special award will be made. Will the crowd please make way and let the truck pass. Thank you."

Wilbur trembled when he heard this speech. He felt happy but dizzy. The truck crept along slowly in low speed. Crowds of people surrounded it, and Mr. Arable had to drive very carefully in order not to run over anybody. At last he managed to reach the judges' stand. Avery jumped out and lowered the tailgate.

"I'm scared to death," whispered Mrs. Zuckerman. "Hundreds of people are looking at us."

"Cheer up," replied Mrs. Arable, "this is fun."

"Unload your pig, please!" said the loud speaker.

"All together, now, boys!" said Mr. Zuckerman. Several men stepped forward from the crowd to help lift the crate. Avery was the busiest helper of all.

"Tuck your shirt in, Avery!" cried Mrs. Zuckerman. "And tighten your belt. Your pants are coming down."

"Can't you see I'm busy?" replied Avery in disgust.

"Look!" cried Fern, pointing. "There's Henry!"

"Don't shout, Fern!" said her mother. "And don't point!"

"Can't I *please* have some money?" asked Fern. "Henry invited me to go on the Ferris wheel again, only I don't think he has any money left. He ran out of money."

Mrs. Arable opened her handbag. "Here," she said. "Here is forty cents. Now don't get lost! And be back at our regular meeting place by the pigpen very soon!"

Fern raced off, ducking and dodging through the crowd, in search of Henry.

"The Zuckerman pig is now being taken from his crate," boomed the voice of the loud speaker. "Stand by for an announcement!"

Templeton crouched under the straw at the bottom of the crate. "What a lot of nonsense!" muttered the rat. "What a lot of fuss about nothing!"

Over in the pigpen, silent and alone, Charlotte rested. Her two front legs embraced the egg sac. Charlotte

could hear everything that was said on the loud speaker. The words gave her courage. This was her hour of triumph.

As Wilbur came out of the crate, the crowd clapped and cheered. Mr. Zuckerman took off his cap and bowed. Lurvy pulled his big handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the sweat from the back of his neck. Avery knelt in the dirt by Wilbur's side, busily stroking him and showing off. Mrs. Zuckerman and Mrs. Arable stood on the running board of the truck.

"Ladeez and gentlemen," said the loud speaker, "we now present Mr. Homer L. Zuckerman's distinguished pig. The fame of this unique animal has spread to the far corners of the earth, attracting many valuable tourists to our great State. Many of you will recall that never-to-be-forgotten day last summer when the writing appeared mysteriously on the spider's web in Mr. Zuckerman's barn, calling the attention of all and sundry to the fact that this pig was completely out of the ordinary. This miracle has never been fully explained, although learned men have visited the Zuckerman pigpen to study and observe the phenomenon. In the last analysis, we simply know that we are dealing with supernatural forces here, and we should all feel proud and grateful. In the words of the spider's web, ladies and gentlemen, this is some pig."

Wilbur blushed. He stood perfectly still and tried to look his best.

"This magnificent animal," continued the loud speaker, "is truly terrific. Look at him, ladies and gentlemen! Note the smoothness and whiteness of the coat, observe the spotless skin, the healthy pink glow of ears and snout."

"It's the buttermilk," whispered Mrs. Arable to Mrs. Zuckerman.

"Note the general radiance of this animal! Then remember the day when the word 'radiant' appeared clearly on the web. Whence came this mysterious writing? Not from the spider, we can rest assured of that. Spiders are very clever at weaving their webs, but needless to say spiders cannot write."

"Oh, they can't, can't they?" murmured Charlotte to herself.

"Ladeez and gentlemen," continued the loud speaker, "I must not take any more of your valuable time. On behalf of the governors of the Fair, I have the honor of awarding a special prize of twenty-five dollars to Mr. Zuckerman, together with a handsome bronze medal suitably engraved, in token of our appreciation of the part played by this pig—this radiant, this terrific, this humble pig—in attracting so many visitors to our great County Fair."

Wilbur had been feeling dizzier and dizzier through

this long, complimentary speech. When he heard the crowd begin to cheer and clap again, he suddenly fainted away. His legs collapsed, his mind went blank, and he fell to the ground, unconscious.

"What's wrong?" asked the loud speaker. "What's going on, Zuckerman? What's the trouble with your pig?"

Avery was kneeling by Wilbur's head, stroking him. Mr. Zuckerman was dancing about, fanning him with his cap.

"He's all right," cried Mr. Zuckerman. "He gets these spells. He's modest and can't stand praise."

"Well, we can't give a prize to a *dead* pig," said the loud speaker. "It's never been done."

"He isn't dead," hollered Zuckerman. "He's fainted. He gets embarrassed easily. Run for some water, Lurvy!"

Lurvy sprang from the judges' ring and disappeared.

Templeton poked his head from the straw. He noticed that the end of Wilbur's tail was within reach. Templeton grinned. "I'll tend to this," he chuckled. He took Wilbur's tail in his mouth and bit it, just as hard as he could bite. The pain revived Wilbur. In a flash he was back on his feet.

"Ouch!" he screamed.

"Hooray!" yelled the crowd. "He's up! The pig's up! Good work, Zuckerman! That's some pig!" Every-



one was delighted. Mr. Zuckerman was the most pleased of all. He sighed with relief. Nobody had seen Templeton. The rat had done his work well.

And now one of the judges climbed into the ring with the prizes. He handed Mr. Zuckerman two ten dollar bills and a five dollar bill. Then he tied the medal around Wilbur's neck. Then he shook hands with Mr. Zuckerman while Wilbur blushed. Avery put out his hand and the judge shook hands with him, too. The crowd cheered. A photographer took Wilbur's picture.

A great feeling of happiness swept over the Zuckermans and the Arables. This was the greatest moment in Mr. Zuckerman's life. It is deeply satisfying to win a prize in front of a lot of people.



As Wilbur was being shoved back into the crate, Lurvy came charging through the crowd carrying a pail of water. His eyes had a wild look. Without hesitating a second, he dashed the water at Wilbur. In his excitement he missed his aim, and the water splashed all over Mr. Zuckerman and Avery. They got soaking wet.

"For goodness' sake!" bellowed Mr. Zuckerman, who was really drenched. "What ails you, Lurvy? Can't you see the pig is all right?"

"You asked for water," said Lurvy meekly.

"I didn't ask for a shower bath," said Mr. Zuckerman. The crowd roared with laughter. Finally Mr. Zuckerman had to laugh, too. And of course Avery was tickled to find himself so wet, and he immediately

started to act like a clown. He pretended he was taking a shower bath; he made faces and danced around and rubbed imaginary soap under his armpits. Then he dried himself with an imaginary towel.

"Avery, stop it!" cried his mother. "Stop showing off!"

But the crowd loved it. Avery heard nothing but the applause. He liked being a clown in a ring, with everybody watching, in front of a grandstand. When he discovered there was still a little water left in the bottom of the pail, he raised the pail high in the air and dumped the water on himself and made faces. The children in the grandstand screamed with appreciation.

At last things calmed down. Wilbur was loaded into the truck. Avery was led from the ring by his mother and placed on the seat of the truck to dry off. The truck, driven by Mr. Arable, crawled slowly back to the pigpen. Avery's wet trousers made a big wet spot on the seat.