

# Charlotte's Web



by **E.B. WHITE**

Author of **STUART LITTLE**

Pictures by **GARTH WILLIAMS**

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# 夏洛特的网（双语）

E. B. White

## 简介

Charlotte's Web is an award-winning children's novel by acclaimed American author E. B. White. First published in 1952, it tells the story of a pig named Wilbur and his friendship with a barn spider named Charlotte, in which Charlotte writes messages praising Wilbur (such as "Some Pig") in her web in order to persuade the farmer not to slaughter him.

## CHAPTER 1

### Before Breakfast

"Where's Papa going with that ax?" said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

"Out to the hog house," replied Mrs. Arable. "Some pigs were born last night."

"I don't see why he needs an ax," continued Fern, who was only eight.

"Well," said her mother, "one of the pigs is a runt. It's very small and weak, and it will never amount to anything. So your father has decided to do away with it."

"Do away with it?" shrieked Fern. "You mean kill it? Just because it's smaller than the others?"

Mrs. Arable put a pitcher of cream on the table. "Don't yell, Fern!" she said. "Your father is right. The pig would probably die anyway."

Fern pushed a chair out of the way and ran outdoors. The grass was wet and the earth smelled of springtime. Fern's sneakers were sopping by the time she caught up with her father.

"Please don't kill it!" she sobbed. "It's unfair."

Mr. Arable stopped walking.

"Fern," he said gently, "you will have to learn to control yourself."

"Control myself?" yelled Fern. "This is a matter of life and death, and you talk about 'controlling myself.'" Tears ran down her cheeks and she took hold of the ax and tried to pull it out of her father's hand.

"Fern," said Mr. Arable, "I know more about raising a litter of pigs than you do. A weakling makes trouble. Now run along!"

"But it's unfair," cried Fern. "The pig couldn't help being born small, could it? If I had been very small at birth, would you have killed me?"

Mr. Arable smiled. "Certainly not," he said, looking down at his daughter with love. "But this is different. A little girl is one thing, a little runty pig is another."

"I see no difference," replied Fern, still hanging on to the ax. "This is the most terrible case of injustice I ever heard of."

A queer look came over John Arable's face. He seemed almost ready to cry himself.

"All right," he said. "You go back to the house and I will bring the runt when I come in. I'll let you start it on a bottle, like a baby. Then you'll see what trouble a pig can be."

When Mr. Arable returned to the house half an hour later, he carried a carton under his arm. Fern was upstairs changing her sneakers. The kitchen table was set for breakfast, and the

room smelled of coffee, bacon, damp plaster, and wood smoke from the stove.

"Put it on her chair!" said Mrs. Arable. Mr. Arable set the carton down at Fern's place. Then he walked to the sink and washed his hands and dried them on the roller towel.

Fern came slowly down the stairs. Her eyes were red from crying. As she approached her chair, the carton wobbled, and there was a scratching noise. Fern looked at her father. Then she lifted the lid of the carton. There, inside, looking up at her, was the newborn pig. It was a white one. The morning light shone through its ears, turning them pink.

"He's yours," said Mr. Arable. "Saved from an untimely death. And may the good Lord forgive me for this foolishness."

Fern couldn't take her eyes off the tiny pig. "Oh," she whispered. "Oh, look at him! He's absolutely perfect."

She closed the carton carefully. First she kissed her father, then she kissed her mother. Then she opened the lid again, lifted the pig out, and held it against her cheek. At this moment her brother Avery came into the room. Avery was ten.

He was heavily armed - an air rifle in one hand, a wooden dagger in the other.

"What's that?" he demanded. "What's Fern got?"

"She's got a guest for breakfast," said Mrs. Arable. "Wash your hands and face, Avery!"

"Let's see it!" said Avery, setting his gun down. "You call that miserable thing a pig? That's a fine specimen of a pig, it's no bigger than a white rat."

"Wash up and eat your breakfast, Avery!" said his mother. "The school bus will be along in half an hour."

"Can I have a pig, too, Pop?" asked Avery.

"No, I only distribute pigs to early risers," said Mr. Arable. "Fern was up at daylight, trying to rid the world of injustice. As a result, she now has a pig. A small one, to be sure, but nevertheless a pig. It just shows what can happen if a person gets out of bed promptly. Let's eat!"

But Fern couldn't eat until her pig had had a drink of milk.

Mrs. Arable found a baby's nursing bottle and a rubber nipple. She poured warm milk into the bottle, fitted the nipple over the top, and handed it to Fern. "Give him his breakfast!" she said.

A minute later, Fern was seated on the floor in the corner of the kitchen with her infant between her knees, teaching it to suck from the bottle. The pig, although tiny, had a good appetite and caught on quickly.

The school bus honked from the road.

"Run!" commanded Mrs. Arable, taking the pig from Fern and slipping a doughnut into her hand. Avery grabbed his gun and another doughnut.

The children ran out to the road and climbed into the bus. Fern took no notice of the others in the bus. She just sat and stared out of the window, thinking what a blissful world it was and how lucky she was to have entire charge of a pig. By the time the bus reached school, Fern had named her pet, selecting the most beautiful name she could think of.

"Its name is Wilbur," she whispered to herself.

She was still thinking about the pig when the teacher said: "Fern, what is the capital of Pennsylvania?"

"Wilbur," replied Fern, dreamily. The pupils giggled. Fern blushed.

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## CHAPTER 2

### Wilbur

Fern loved Wilbur more than anything. She loved to stroke him, to feed him, to put him to bed. Every morning, as soon as she got up, she warmed his milk, tied his bib on, and held the bottle for him. Every afternoon, when the school bus stopped in front of her house, she jumped out and ran to the kitchen to fix another bottle for him. She fed him again at suppertime, and again just before going to bed. Mrs. Arable gave him a feeding around noontime each day, when Fern was away in school. Wilbur loved his milk, and he was never happier than when Fern was warming up a bottle for him. He would stand and gaze up at her with adoring eyes.

For the first few days of his life, Wilbur was allowed to live in a box near the stove in the kitchen. Then, when Mrs. Arable complained, he was moved to a bigger box in the woodshed. At two weeks of age, he was moved outdoors. It was apple-blossom time, and the days were getting warmer. Mr. Arable fixed a small yard specially for Wilbur under an apple tree, and gave him a large wooden box full of straw, with a doorway cut in it so he could walk in and out as he pleased.

"Won't he be cold at night?" asked Fern.

"No," said her father. "You watch and see what he does."

Carrying a bottle of milk, Fern sat down under the apple tree inside the yard. Wilbur ran to her and she held the bottle for him while he sucked. When he had finished the last drop, he grunted and walked sleepily into the box. Fern peered through the door. Wilbur was poking the straw with his snout. In a short time he had dug a tunnel in the straw. He crawled into the tunnel and disappeared from sight, completely covered with straw.



Fern was enchanted. It relieved her mind to know that her baby would sleep covered up, and would stay warm.

Every morning after breakfast, Wilbur walked out to the road with Fern and waited with her till the bus came. She would wave good-bye to him, and he would stand and watch the bus until it vanished around a turn. While Fern was in school, Wilbur was shut up inside his yard. But as soon as she got home in the afternoon, she would take him out and he would follow her around the place. If she went into the house, Wilbur went, too. If she went upstairs, Wilbur would wait at the bottom step until she came down again. If she took her doll for a walk in the doll carriage, Wilbur followed along. Sometimes, on these journeys, Wilbur would get tired, and Fern would pick him up and put him in the carriage alongside the doll. He liked this. And if he was very tired, he would close his eyes and go to sleep under the doll's blanket. He looked cute when his eyes were closed, because his lashes were so long. The doll would close her eyes, too, and Fern would wheel the carriage very slowly and smoothly so as not to wake her infants.

One warm afternoon, Fern and Avery put on bathing suits and went down to the brook for a swim. Wilbur tagged along at Fern's heels. When she waded into the brook, Wilbur waded in with her. He found the water quite cold - too cold for his liking. So while the children swam and played and splashed water at each other, Wilbur amused himself in the mud along the edge of the brook, where it was warm and moist and delightfully sticky and oozy.

Every day was a happy day, and every night was peaceful.

Wilbur was what farmers call a spring pig, which simply means that he was born in springtime. When he was five weeks old, Mr. Arable said he was now big enough to sell, and would have to be sold. Fern broke down and wept. But her father was

firm about it. Wilbur's appetite had increased; he was beginning to eat scraps of food in addition to milk. Mr. Arable was not willing to provide 瞻养 for him any longer. He had already sold Wilbur's ten brothers and sisters.

"He's got to go, Fern," he said. "You have had your fun raising a baby pig, but Wilbur is not a baby any longer and he has got to be sold."

"Call up the Zuckermans," suggested Mrs. Arable to Fern. "Your Uncle Homer sometimes raises a pig. And if Wilbur goes there to live, you can walk down the road and visit him as often as you like."

"How much money should I ask for him?" Fern wanted to know.

"Well," said her father, "he's a runt. Tell your Uncle Homer you've got a pig you'll sell for six dollars, and see what he says."

It was soon arranged. Fern phoned and got her Aunt Edith, and her Aunt Edith hollered for Uncle Homer, and Uncle Homer came in from the barn and talked to Fern. When he heard that the price was only six dollars, he said he would buy the pig. Next day Wilbur was taken from his home under the apple tree and went to live in a manure pile in the cellar of Zuckerman's barn.

## CHAPTER 3

### Escape

The barn was very large. It was very old. It smelled of hay and it smelled of manure. It smelled of the perspiration of tired horses and the wonderful sweet breath of patient cows. It often had a sort of peaceful smell - as though nothing bad could happen ever again in the world. It smelled of grain and of harness dressing and of axle grease and of rubber boots and of new rope. And whenever the cat was given a fish-head to eat, the barn would smell of fish. But mostly it smelled of hay, for there was always hay in the great loft up overhead. And there was always hay being pitched down to the cows and the horses and the sheep.

The barn was pleasantly warm in winter when the animals spent most of their time indoors, and it was pleasantly cool in summer when the big doors stood wide open to the breeze. The barn had stalls on the main floor for the work horses, tie-ups [美sl.] 拴系牲畜的地方 on the main floor for the cows, a sheepfold 羊栏 down below for the sheep, a pigpen down below for Wilbur, and it was full of all sorts of things that you find in barns: ladders, grindstones, pitch forks, monkey wrenches, scythes 长柄的大镰刀, lawn mowers, snow shovels, ax handles, milk pails, water buckets, empty grain sacks, and rusty rat traps. It was the kind of barn that swallows like to build their nests in. It was the kind of barn that children like to play in. And the whole thing was owned by Fern's uncle, Mr. Homer L. Zuckerman.

Wilbur's new home was in the lower part of the barn, directly underneath the cows. Mr. Zuckerman knew that a manure pile is a good place to keep a young pig. Pigs need

warmth, and it was warm and comfortable down there in the barn cellar on the south side.

Fern came almost every day to visit him. She found an old milking stool that had been discarded, and she placed the stool in the sheepfold next to Wilbur's pen. Here she sat quietly during the long afternoons, thinking and listening and watching Wilbur. The sheep soon got to know her and trust her. So did the geese, who lived with the sheep. All the animals trusted her. She was so quiet and friendly. Mr. Zuckerman did not allow her to take Wilbur out, and he did not allow her to get into the pigpen. But he told Fern that she could sit on the stool and watch Wilbur as long as she wanted to. It made her happy just to be near the pig, and it made Wilbur happy to know that she was sitting there, right outside his pen. But he never had any fun, no walks, no rides, no swims.

One afternoon in June, when Wilbur was almost two months old, he wandered out into his small yard outside the barn. Fern had not arrived for her usual visit. Wilbur stood in the sun feeling lonely and bored.

"There's never anything to do around here," he thought. He walked slowly to his food trough and sniffed to see if anything had been overlooked at lunch. He found a small strip of potato skin and ate it. His back itched, so he leaned against the fence and rubbed against the boards. When he tired of this, he walked indoors, climbed to the top of the manure pile, and sat down. He didn't feel like going to sleep, he didn't feel like digging, he was tired of standing still, tired of lying down. "I'm less than two months old and I'm tired of living," he said. He walked out to the yard again.

"When I'm out here," he said, "there's no place to go but in. When I'm indoors, there's no place to go but out in the yard."

"That's where you're wrong, my friend, my friend," said a voice.

Wilbur looked through the fence and saw the goose standing there.

"You don't have to stay in that dirty-little dirty-little dirty-little yard," said the goose, who talked rather fast. "One of the boards is loose. Push on it, push-push-push on it, and come on out!"

"What?" said Wilbur. "Say it slower!"

"At-at-at, at the risk of repeating myself," said the goose, "I suggest that you come on out. It's wonderful out here."

"Did you say a board was loose?"

"That I did, that I did," said the goose.

Wilbur walked up to the fence and saw that the goose was right – one board was loose. He put his head down, shut his eyes, and pushed. The board gave way. In a minute he had squeezed through the fence and was standing in the long grass outside his yard. The goose chuckled.

"How does it feel to be free?" she asked.

"I like it," said Wilbur. "That is, I guess I like it."

Actually, Wilbur felt queer to be outside his fence, with nothing between him and the big world.

"Where do you think I'd better go?"

"Anywhere you like, anywhere you like," said the goose. "Go down through the orchard, root up the sod! Go down through the garden, dig up the radishes! Root up everything! Eat grass! Look for corn! Look for oats! Run all over! Skip and dance, jump and prance! Go down through the orchard and stroll in the woods! The world is a wonderful place when you're young."

"I can see that," replied Wilbur. He gave a jump in the air, twirled, ran a few steps, stopped, looked all around, sniffed the

smells of afternoon, and then set off walking down through the orchard. Pausing in the shade of an apple tree, he put his strong snout into the ground and began pushing, digging, and rooting. He felt very happy. He had plowed up quite a piece of ground before anyone noticed him. Mrs. Zuckerman was the first to see him. She saw him from the kitchen window, and she immediately shouted for the men.

"Ho-mer!" she cried. "Pig's out! Lurvy! Pig's out! Homer! Lurvy! Pig's out. He's down there under that apple tree."

"Now the trouble starts," thought Wilbur. "Now I'll catch it."

The goose heard the racket and she, too, started hollering.

"Run-run-run downhill, make for the woods, the woods!" she shouted to Wilbur. "They'll never-never-never catch you in the woods."

The cocker spaniel heard the commotion and he ran out from the barn to join the chase. Mr. Zuckerman heard, and he came out of the machine shed where he was mending a tool. Lurvy, the hired man, heard the noise and came up from the asparagus 芦笋 patch where he was pulling weeds. Everybody walked toward Wilbur and Wilbur didn't know what to do. The woods seemed a long way off, and anyway, he had never been down there in the woods and wasn't sure he would like it.

"Get around behind him, Lurvy," said Mr. Zuckerman, "and drive him toward the barn! And take it easy - don't rush him! I'll go and get a bucket of slops (food for pigs)."

The news of Wilbur's escape spread rapidly among the animals on the place. Whenever any creature broke loose on Zuckerman's farm, the event was of great interest to the others. The goose shouted to the nearest cow that Wilbur was free, and soon all the cows knew. Then one of the cows told one of the sheep, and soon all the sheep knew. The lambs learned about it from their mothers. The horses, in their stalls

in the barn, pricked up their ears when they heard the goose hollering; and soon the horses had caught on to what was happening. "Wilbur's out," they said. Every animal stirred and lifted its head and became excited to know that one of his friends had got free and was no longer penned up or tied fast.

Wilbur didn't know what to do or which way to run. It seemed as though everybody was after him. "If this is what it's like to be free," he thought, "I believe I'd rather be penned up in my own yard."

The cocker spaniel was sneaking up on him from one side, Lurvy the hired man was sneaking up on him from the other side. Mrs. Zuckerman stood ready to head him off 阻止, 拦截 if he started for the garden, and now Mr. Zuckerman was coming down toward him carrying a pail. "This is really awful," thought Wilbur. "Why doesn't Fern come?" He began to cry.

The goose took command and began to give orders. "Don't just stand there, Wilbur! Dodge about, dodge about!" cried the goose. "Skip around, run toward me, slip in and out, in and out, in and out! Make for the woods! Twist and turn!"

The cocker spaniel sprang for Wilbur's hind leg. Wilbur jumped and ran. Lurvy reached out and grabbed. Mrs. Zuckerman screamed at Lurvy. The goose cheered for Wilbur. Wilbur dodged between Lurvy's legs. Lurvy missed Wilbur and grabbed the spaniel instead.

"Nicely done, nicely done!" cried the goose. "Try it again, try it again!"

"Run downhill!" suggested the cows.

"Run toward me!" yelled the gander (male goose).

"Run uphill!" cried the sheep.

"Turn and twist!" honked the goose.

"Jump and dance!" said the rooster.

"Look out for Lurvy!" called the cows.

"Look out for Zuckerman!" yelled the gander.

"Watch out for the dog!" cried the sheep.

"Listen to me, listen to me!" screamed the goose.

Poor Wilbur was dazed and frightened by this hullabaloo (ruckus, uproar, confusion). He didn't like being the center of all this fuss. He tried to follow the instructions his friends were giving him, but he couldn't run downhill and uphill at the same time, and he couldn't turn and twist when he was jumping and dancing, and he was crying so hard he could barely see anything that was happening.

After all, Wilbur was a very young pig - not much more than a baby, really. He wished Fern were there to take him in her arms and comfort him. When he looked up and saw Mr. Zuckerman standing quite close to him, holding a pail of warm slops, he felt relieved. He lifted his nose and sniffed. The smell was delicious - warm milk, potato skins, wheat middlings (小麦的)粗粉, Kellogg's Corn Flakes, and a popover left from the Zuckermans' breakfast.

"Come, pig!" said Mr. Zuckerman, tapping the pail. "Come pig!"

Wilbur took a step toward the pail.

"No-no-no!" said the goose. "It's the old pail trick, Wilbur. Don't fall for it, don't fall for it! He's trying to lure you back into captivity-ivity. He's appealing to your stomach."

Wilbur didn't care. The food smelled appetizing. He took another step toward the pail.

"Pig, pig!" said Mr. Zuckerman in a kind voice, and began walking slowly toward the barnyard, looking all about him innocently, as if he didn't know that a little white pig was following along behind him.



"You'll be sorry-sorry-sorry," called the goose.

Wilbur didn't care. He kept walking toward the pail of slops.

"You'll miss your freedom," honked the goose. "An hour of freedom is worth a barrel of slops."

Wilbur didn't care.

When Mr. Zuckerman reached the pigpen, he climbed over the fence and poured the slops into the trough. Then he pulled the loose board away from the fence, so that there was a wide hole for Wilbur to walk through.

"Reconsider, reconsider!" cried the goose.

Wilbur paid no attention. He stepped through the fence into his yard. He walked to the trough and took a long drink of slops, sucking in the milk hungrily and chewing the popover. It was good to be home again.

While Wilbur ate, Lurvy fetched a hammer and some 8-penny nails and nailed the board in place. Then he and Mr. Zuckerman leaned lazily on the fence and Mr. Zuckerman scratched Wilbur's back with a stick.

"He's quite a pig," said Lurvy.

"Yes, he'll make a good pig," said Mr. Zuckerman.

Wilbur heard the words of praise. He felt the warm milk inside his stomach. He felt the pleasant rubbing of the stick along his itchy back. He felt peaceful and happy and sleepy. This had been a tiring afternoon. It was still only about four o'clock but Wilbur was ready for bed.

"I'm really too young to go out into the world alone," he thought as he lay down.

## CHAPTER 4

### Loneliness

The next day was rainy and dark. Rain fell on the roof of the barn and dripped steadily from the eaves. Rain fell in the barnyard and ran in crooked courses down into the lane where thistles and pigweed grew. Rain spattered against Mrs. Zuckerman's kitchen windows and came gushing out of the downspouts. Rain fell on the backs of the sheep as they grazed in the meadow. When the sheep tired of standing in the rain, they walked slowly up the lane and into the fold.

Rain upset Wilbur's plans. Wilbur had planned to go out, this day, and dig a new hole in his yard. He had other plans, too. His plans for the day went something like this:

Breakfast at six-thirty. Skim milk 脱脂乳, crusts, middlings, bits of doughnuts, wheat cakes with drops of maple syrup sticking to them, potato skins, leftover custard pudding with raisins, and bits of Shredded Wheat.

Breakfast would be finished at seven.

From seven to eight, Wilbur planned to have a talk with Templeton, the rat that lived under his trough. Talking with Templeton was not the most interesting occupation in the world but it was better than nothing.

From eight to nine, Wilbur planned to take a nap outdoors in the sun.

From nine to eleven he planned to dig a hole, or trench, and possibly find something good to eat buried in the dirt.

From eleven to twelve he planned to stand still and watch flies on the boards, watch bees in the clover, and watch swallows in the air.

Twelve o'clock - lunchtime. Middlings, warm water, apple parings 削下的皮, meat gravy, carrot scrapings, meat scraps, stale hominy, and the wrapper off a package of cheese. Lunch would be over at one.

From one to two, Wilbur planned to sleep.

From two to three, he planned to scratch itchy places by rubbing against the fence.

From three to four, he planned to stand perfectly still and think of what it was like to be alive, and to wait for Fern.

At four would come supper. Skim milk, provender (fodder, hay or grain used as animal feed), leftover sandwich from Lurvy's lunchbox, prune skins, a morsel of this, a bit of that, fried potatoes, marmalade drippings, a little more of this, a little more of that, a piece of baked apple, a scrap of upsidedown cake.

Wilbur had gone to sleep thinking about these plans. He awoke at six, and saw the rain, and it seemed as though he couldn't bear it.

"I get everything all beautifully planned out and it has to go and rain," he said.

For a while he stood gloomily indoors. Then he walked to the door and looked out. Drops of rain struck his face. His yard was cold and wet. His trough had an inch of rainwater in it. Templeton was nowhere to be seen.

"Are you out there, Templeton?" called Wilbur. There was no answer. Suddenly Wilbur felt lonely and friendless.

"One day just like another," he groaned. "I'm very young, I have no real friend here in the barn, it's going to rain all morning and all afternoon, and Fern won't come in such bad weather. Oh, honestly!" And Wilbur was crying again, for the second time in two days.

At six-thirty Wilbur heard the banging of a pail. Lurvy was standing outside in the rain, stirring up breakfast.

"C'mon, pig!" said Lurvy.

Wilbur did not budge. Lurvy dumped the slops, scraped the pail, and walked away. He noticed that something was wrong with the pig.

Wilbur didn't want food, he wanted love. He wanted a friend – someone who would play with him. He mentioned this to the goose, who was sitting quietly in a corner of the sheepfold.

"Will you come over and play with me?" he asked.

"Sorry, sonny, sorry," said the goose. "I'm sitting-sitting on my eggs. Eight of them. Got to keep them toasty-oasty-oasty warm. I have to stay right here, I'm no flibberty-ibberty-gibbet. I do not play when there are eggs to hatch. I'm expecting goslings (baby goose)."

"Well, I didn't think you were expecting woodpeckers," said Wilbur, bitterly.

Wilbur next tried one of the lambs.

"Will you please play with me?" he asked.

"Certainly not," said the lamb. "In the first place, I cannot get into your pen, as I am not old enough to jump over the fence. In the second place, I am not interested in pigs. Pigs mean less than nothing to me."

"What do you mean, less than nothing?" replied Wilbur. "I don't think there is any such thing as less than nothing. Nothing is absolutely the limit of nothingness. It's the lowest you can go. It's the end of the line. How can something be less than nothing? If there were something that was less than nothing, then nothing would not be nothing, it would be something - even though it's just a very little bit of something."

But if nothing is nothing, then nothing has nothing that is less than it is."

"Oh, be quiet!" said the lamb. "Go play by yourself! I don't play with pigs."

Sadly, Wilbur lay down and listened to the rain. Soon he saw the rat climbing down a slanting board that he used as a stairway.

"Will you play with me, Templeton?" asked Wilbur.

"Play?" said Templeton, twirling his whiskers. "Play? I hardly know the meaning of the word."

"Well," said Wilbur, "it means to have fun, to frolic, to run and skip and make merry."

"I never do those things if I can avoid them," replied the rat, sourly. "I prefer to spend my time eating, gnawing, spying, and hiding. I am a glutton but not a merry-maker. Right now I am on my way to your trough to eat your breakfast, since you haven't got sense enough to eat it yourself." And Templeton, the rat, crept stealthily along the wall and disappeared into a private tunnel that he had dug between the door and the trough in Wilbur's yard. Templeton was a crafty rat, and he had things pretty much his own way. The tunnel was an example of his skill and cunning. The tunnel enabled him to get from the barn to his hiding place under the pig trough without coming out into the open. He had tunnels and runways all over Mr. Zuckerman's farm and could get from one place to another without being seen. Usually he slept during the daytime and was abroad only after dark.

Wilbur watched him disappear into his tunnel. In a moment he saw the rat's sharp nose poke out from underneath the wooden trough. Cautiously Templeton pulled himself up over the edge of the trough. This was almost more than Wilbur could stand: on this dreary, rainy day to see his breakfast being

eaten by somebody else. He knew Templeton was getting soaked, out there in the pouring rain, but even that didn't comfort him. Friendless, dejected, and hungry, he threw himself down in the manure and sobbed.

Late that afternoon, Lurvy went to Mr. Zuckerman. "I think there's something wrong with that pig of yours. He hasn't touched his food."

"Give him two spoonfuls of sulphur 硫磺 and a little molasses (dark thick syrup produced during the refining of sugar 糖蜜)," said Mr. Zuckerman.

Wilbur couldn't believe what was happening to him when Lurvy caught him and forced the medicine down his throat. This was certainly the worst day of his life. He didn't know whether he could endure the awful loneliness any more.

Darkness settled over ever thing. Soon there were only shadows and the noises of the sheep chewing their cuds, and occasionally the rattle of a cow-chain up overhead. You can imagine Wilbur's surprise when, out of the darkness, came a small voice he had never heard before. It sounded rather thin, but pleasant. "Do you want a friend, Wilbur?" it said. "I'll be a friend to you. I've watched you all day and I like you."

"But I can't see you," said Wilbur, jumping to his feet. "Where are you? And who are you?"

"I'm right up here," said the voice. "Go to sleep. You'll see me in the morning."

## CHAPTER 5

### Charlotte

The night seemed long. Wilbur's stomach was empty and his mind was full. And when your stomach is empty and your mind is full, it's always hard to sleep.

A dozen times during the night Wilbur woke and stared into the blackness, listening to the sounds and trying to figure out what time it was. A barn is never perfectly quiet. Even at midnight there is usually something stirring.

The first time he woke, he heard Templeton gnawing a hole in the grain bin. Templeton's teeth scraped loudly against the wood and made quite a racket. "That crazy rat!" thought Wilbur. "Why does he have to stay up all night, grinding his claspers and destroying people's property? Why can't he go to sleep, like any decent animal?"

The second time Wilbur woke, he heard the goose turning on her nest and chuckling to herself.

"What time is it?" whispered Wilbur to the goose.

"Probably-obably-obably about half-past eleven," said the goose. "Why aren't you asleep, Wilbur?"

"Too many things on my mind," said Wilbur.

"Well," said the goose, "that's not my trouble. I have nothing at all on my mind, but I've too many things under my behind. Have you ever tried to sleep while sitting on eight eggs?"

"No," replied Wilbur. "I suppose it is uncomfortable. How long does it take a goose egg to hatch?"

"Approximately-oximately thirty days, all told (on the whole)," answered the goose. "But I cheat a little. On warm

afternoons, I just pull a little straw over the eggs and go out for a walk."

Wilbur yawned and went back to sleep. In his dreams he heard again the voice saying, "I'll be a friend to you. Go to sleep - you'll see me in the morning."

About half an hour before dawn, Wilbur woke and listened.

The barn was still dark. The sheep lay motionless. Even the goose was quiet. Overhead, on the main floor, nothing stirred: the cows were resting, the horses dozed. Templeton had quit work and gone off somewhere on an errand. The only sound was a slight scraping noise from the rooftop, where the weather-vane swung back and forth. Wilbur loved the barn when it was like this calm and quiet, waiting for light.

"Day is almost here," he thought. Through a small window, a faint gleam appeared. One by one the stars went out. Wilbur could see the goose a few feet away. She sat with head tucked under a wing. Then he could see the sheep and the lambs. The sky lightened.

"Oh, beautiful day, it is here at last! Today I shall find my friend."

Wilbur looked everywhere. He searched his pen thoroughly. He examined the window ledge, stared up at the ceiling. But he saw nothing new. Finally he decided he would have to speak up. He hated to break the lovely stillness of day by using his voice, but he couldn't think of any other way to locate the mysterious new friend who was nowhere to be seen. So Wilbur cleared his throat.

"Attention, please!" he said in a loud, firm voice. "Will the party who addressed me at bedtime last night kindly make himself or herself known by giving an appropriate sign or signal!"



Wilbur paused and listened. All the other animals lifted their heads and stared at him. Wilbur blushed. But he was determined to get in touch with his unknown friend.

"Attention, please!" he said. "I will repeat the message. Will the party who addressed me at bedtime last night kindly speak up. Please tell me where you are, if you are my friend!"

The sheep looked at each other in disgust.

"Stop your nonsense, Wilbur!" said the oldest sheep. "If you have a new friend here, you are probably disturbing his rest; and the quickest way to spoil a friendship is to wake somebody up in the morning before he is ready. How can you be sure your friend is an early riser?"

"I beg everyone's pardon," whispered Wilbur. "I didn't mean to be objectionable."

He lay down meekly in the manure, facing the door. He did not know it, but his friend was very near. And the old sheep was right - the friend was still asleep.

Soon Lurvy appeared with slops for breakfast. Wilbur rushed out, ate everything in a hurry, and licked the trough. The sheep moved off down the lane, the gander waddled along behind them, pulling grass. And then, just as Wilbur was settling down for his morning nap, he heard again the thin voice that had addressed him the night before.

"Salutations!" said the voice.

Wilbur jumped to his feet. "Salu-what?" he cried.

"Salutations!" repeated the voice.

"What are they, and where are you?" screamed Wilbur. "Please, please, tell me where you are. And what are salutations?"

"Salutations are greetings," said the voice. "When I say 'salutations,' it's just my fancy way of saying hello or good

morning. Actually, it's a silly expression, and I am surprised that I used it at all. As for my whereabouts, that's easy. Look up here in the corner of the doorway! Here I am. Look, I'm waving!"

At last Wilbur saw the creature that had spoken to him in such a kindly way. Stretched across the upper part of the doorway was a big spiderweb, and hanging from the top of the web, head down, was a large grey spider. She was about the size of a gumdrop一种水果糖. She had eight legs, and she was waving one of them at Wilbur in friendly greeting. "See me now?" she asked.

"Oh, yes indeed," said Wilbur. "Yes indeed! How are you? Good morning! Salutations! Very pleased to meet you. What is your name, please? May I have your name?"

"My name," said the spider, "is Charlotte."

"Charlotte what?" asked Wilbur, eagerly.

"Charlotte A. Cavatica. But just call me Charlotte."

"I think you're beautiful," said Wilbur.

"Well, I am pretty," replied Charlotte. "There's no denying that. Almost all spiders are rather nice-looking. I'm not as flashy as some, but I'll do. I wish I could see you, Wilbur, as clearly as you can see me."

"Why can't you?" asked the pig. "I'm right here."

"Yes, but I'm near-sighted," replied Charlotte. "I've always been dreadfully near-sighted. It's good in some ways, not so good in others. Watch me wrap up this fly."

A fly that had been crawling along Wilbur's trough had flown up and blundered into the lower part of Charlotte's web and was tangled in the sticky threads. The fly was beating its wings furiously, trying to break loose and free itself.

"First," said Charlotte, "I dive at him." She plunged headfirst toward the fly. As she dropped, a tiny silken thread unwound from her rear end.

"Next, I wrap him up." She grabbed the fly, threw a few jets of silk around it, and rolled it over and over, wrapping it so that it couldn't move. Wilbur watched in horror. He could hardly believe what he was seeing, and although he detested flies, he was sorry for this one.

"There!" said Charlotte. "Now I knock him out, so he'll be more comfortable." She bit the fly. "He can't feel a thing now," she remarked. "He'll make a perfect breakfast for me."

"You mean you eat flies?" gasped Wilbur.

"Certainly. Flies, bugs, grasshoppers, choice beetles, moths, butterflies, tasty cockroaches, gnats, midges, daddy longlegs (type of spider that has a tiny body and very long thin legs), centipedes 蜈蚣, mosquitoes, crickets - anything that is careless enough to get caught in my web. I have to live, don't I?"

"Why, yes, of course," said Wilbur. "Do they taste good?"

"Delicious. Of course, I don't really eat them. I drink them - drink their blood. I love blood," said Charlotte, and her pleasant, thin voice grew even thinner and more pleasant.

"Don't say that!" groaned Wilbur. "Please don't say things like that!"

"Why not? It's true, and I have to say what is true. I am not entirely happy about my diet of flies and bugs, but it's the way I'm made. A spider has to pick up a living somehow or other, and I happen to be a trapper. I just naturally build a web and trap flies and other insects. My mother was a trapper before me. Her mother was a trapper before her. All our family have been trappers. Way back for thousands and thousands of years we spiders have been laying for flies and bugs."

"It's a miserable inheritance," said Wilbur, gloomily. He was sad because his new friend was so bloodthirsty.

"Yes, it is," agreed Charlotte. "But I can't help it. I don't know how the first spider in the early days of the world happened to think up this fancy idea of spinning a web, but she did, and it was clever of her, too. And since then, all of us spiders have had to work the same trick. It's not a bad pitch, on the whole."

"It's cruel," replied Wilbur, who did not intend to be argued out of his position.

"Well, you can't talk." said Charlotte. "You have your meals brought to you in a pail. Nobody feeds me. I have to get in own living. I live by my wits. I have to be sharp and clever, lest I go hungry. I have to think things out, catch what I can, take what comes. And it just so happens, my friend, that what comes is flies and insects and bugs. And furthermore," said Charlotte, shaking one of her legs, "do you realize that if I didn't catch bugs and eat them, bugs would increase and multiply and get so numerous that they'd destroy the earth, wipe out everything?"

"Really?" said Wilbur. "I wouldn't want that to happen. Perhaps your web is a good thing after all."

The goose had been listening to this conversation and chuckling to herself. "There are a lot of things Wilbur doesn't know about life," she thought. "He's really a very innocent little pig. He doesn't even know what's going to happen to him around Christmastime; he has no idea that Mr. Zuckerman and Lurvy are plotting to kill him." And the goose raised herself a bit and poked her eggs a little further under her so that they would receive the full heat from her warm body and soft feathers.

Charlotte stood quietly over the fly, preparing to eat it.

Wilbur lay down and closed his eyes. He was tired from his wakeful night and from the excitement of meeting someone for the first time. A breeze brought him the smell of clover - the sweet-smelling world beyond his fence. "Well," he thought, "I've got a new friend, all right. But what a gamble friendship is!

Charlotte is fierce, brutal, scheming, bloodthirsty - everything I don't like. How can I learn to like her, even though she is pretty and, of course, clever?"

Wilbur was merely suffering the doubts and fears that often go with finding a new friend. In good time he was to discover that he was mistaken about Charlotte. Underneath her rather bold and cruel exterior, she had a kind heart, and she was to prove loyal and true to the very end.

## CHAPTER 6

### Summer Days

The early summer days on a farm are the happiest and fairest days of the year. Lilacs bloom and make the air sweet, and then fade. Apple blossoms come with the lilacs, and the bees visit around among the apple trees. The days grow warm and soft. School ends, and children have time to play and to fish for trouts in the brook. Avery often brought a trout home in his pocket, warm and stiff and ready to be fried for supper.

Now that school was over, Fern visited the barn almost every day, to sit quietly on her stool. The animals treated her as an equal. The sheep lay calmly at her feet.

Around the first of July, the work horses were hitched to the mowing machine, and Mr. Zuckerman climbed into the seat and drove into the field. All morning you could hear the rattle of the machine as it went round and round, while the tall grass fell down behind the cutter bar in long green swathes. Next day, if there was no thunder shower, all hands would help rake and pitch and load, and the hay would be hauled to the barn in the high hay wagon, with Fern and Avery riding at the top of the load. Then the hay would be hoisted, sweet and warm, into the big loft, until the whole barn seemed like a wonderful bed of timothy and clover. It was fine to jump in, and perfect to hide in. And sometimes Avery would find a little grass snake in the hay, and would add it to the other things in his pocket.

Early summer days are a jubilee (time of celebration and rejoicing) time for birds. In the fields, around the house, in the barn, in the woods, in the swamp - everywhere love and songs and nests and eggs. From the edge of the woods, the white-throated sparrow (which must come all the way from Boston) calls, "Oh, Peabody, Peabody, Peabody!" On an apple bough,

the phoebe teeters and wags its tail and says, "Phoebe, phoe-bee!" The song sparrow, who knows how brief and lovely life is, says, "Sweet, sweet, sweet interlude; sweet, sweet, sweet interlude." If you enter the barn, the swallows swoop down from their nests and scold. "Cheeky, cheeky!" they say.

In early summer there are plenty of things for a child to eat and drink and suck and chew. Dandelion stems are full of milk, clover heads are loaded with nectar, the Frigidaire is full of ice-cold drinks. Everywhere you look is life; even the little ball of spit on the weed stalk, if you poke it apart, has a green worm inside it. And on the under side of the leaf of the potato vine are the bright orange eggs of the potato bug.

It was on a day in early summer that the goose eggs hatched.

This was an important event in the barn cellar. Fern was there, sitting on her stool, when it happened.

Except for the goose herself, Charlotte was the first to know that the goslings had at last arrived. The goose knew a day in advance that they were coming - she could hear their weak voices calling from inside the egg. She knew that they were in a desperately cramped position inside the shell and were most anxious to break through and get out. So she sat quite still, and talked less than usual.

When the first gosling poked its grey-green head through the goose's feathers and looked around, Charlotte spied it and made the announcement.

"I am sure," she said, "that every one of us here will be gratified to learn that after four weeks of unremitting effort and patience on the part of our friend the goose, she now has something to show for it. The goslings have arrived. May I offer my sincere congratulations!"

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" said the goose, nodding and bowing shamelessly.

"Thank you," said the gander.

"Congratulations!" shouted Wilbur. "How many goslings are there? I can only see one."

"There are seven," said the goose.

"Fine!" said Charlotte. "Seven is a lucky number."

"Luck had nothing to do with this," said the goose. "It was good management and hard work."

At this point, Templeton showed his nose from his hiding place under Wilbur's trough. He glanced at Fern, then crept cautiously toward the goose, keeping close to the wall. Everyone watched him, for he was not well liked, not trusted.

"Look," he began in his sharp voice, "you say you have seven goslings. There were eight eggs. What happened to the other egg? Why didn't it hatch?"

"It's a dud, I guess," said the goose.

"What are you going to do with it?" continued Templeton, his little round beady eyes fixed on the goose.

"You can have it," replied the goose. "Roll it away and add it to that nasty collection of yours." (Templeton had a habit of picking up unusual objects around the farm and storing them in his home. He saved everything.)

"Certainly-ertainly-ertainly," said the gander. "You may have the egg. But I'll tell you one thing, Templeton, if I ever catch you poking-oking-oking your ugly nose around our goslings, I'll give you the worst pounding a rat ever took." And the gander opened his strong wings and beat the air with them to show his power. He was strong and brave, but the truth is, both the goose and the gander were worried about Templeton. And with good reason. The rat had no morals, no conscience, no



scruples, no consideration, no decency, no milk of rodent kindness, no compunctions (uneasiness of conscience, remorse), no higher feeling, no friendliness, no anything. He would kill a gosling if he could get away with it - the goose knew that. Everybody knew it.

With her broad bill the goose pushed the unhatched egg out of the nest, and the entire company watched in disgust while the rat rolled it away. Even Wilbur, who could eat almost anything, was appalled. "Imagine wanting a junky old rotten egg!" he muttered.

"A rat is a rat," said Charlotte. She laughed a tinkling little laugh. "But, my friends, if that ancient egg ever breaks, this barn will be untenable."

"What's that mean?" asked Wilbur.

"It means nobody will be able to live here on account of the smell. A rotten egg is a regular stink bomb."

"I won't break it," snarled Templeton. "I know what I'm doing. I handle stuff like this all the time."

He disappeared into his tunnel, pushing the goose egg in front of him. He pushed and nudged till he succeeded in rolling it to his lair under the trough.

That afternoon, when the wind had died down and the barnyard was quiet and warm, the grey goose led her seven goslings off the nest and out into the world. Mr. Zuckerman spied them when he came with Wilbur's supper.

"Well, hello there!" he said, smiling all over. "Let's see ... one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Seven baby geese.

Now isn't that lovely!

## CHAPTER 7

### Bad News

Wilbur liked Charlotte better and better each day. Her campaign against insects seemed sensible and useful. Hardly anybody around the farm had a good word to say for a fly. Flies spent their time pestering others. The cows hated them. The horses detested them. The sheep loathed them. Mr. and Mrs. Zuckerman were always complaining about them, and putting up screens.

Wilbur admired the way Charlotte managed. He was particularly glad that she always put her victim to sleep before eating it.

"It's real thoughtful of you to do that, Charlotte," he said.

"Yes," she replied in her sweet, musical voice, "I always give them an anaesthetic so they won't feel pain. It's a little service I throw in."

As the days went by, Wilbur grew and grew. He ate three big meals a day. He spent long hours lying on his side, half asleep, dreaming pleasant dreams. He enjoyed good health and he gained a lot of weight. One afternoon, when Fern was sitting on her stool, the oldest sheep walked into the barn, and stopped to pay a call on Wilbur.

"Hello!" she said. "Seems to me you're putting on weight."

"Yes, I guess I am," replied Wilbur. "At my age it's a good idea to keep gaining."

"Just the same, I don't envy you," said the old sheep. "You know why they're fattening you up, don't you?"

"No," said Wilbur.

"Well, I don't like to spread bad news," said the sheep, "but they're fattening you up because they're going to kill you,

that's why."

"They're going to what?" screamed Wilbur. Fern grew rigid on her stool.

"Kill you. Turn you into smoked bacon and ham," continued the old sheep. "Almost all young pigs get murdered by the farmer as soon as the real cold weather sets in. There's a regular conspiracy around here to kill you at Christmastime. Everybody is in the plot - Lurvy, Zuckerman, even John Arable."

"Mr. Arable?" sobbed Wilbur. "Fern's father?"

"Certainly. When a pig is to be butchered, everybody helps. I'm an old sheep and I see the same thing, same old business, year after year. Arable arrives with his .22, shoots the ..."

"Stop!" screamed Wilbur. "I don't want to die! Save me, somebody! Save me!" Fern was just about to jump up when a voice was heard.

"Be quiet, Wilbur!" said Charlotte, who had been listening to this awful conversation.

"I can't be quiet," screamed Wilbur, racing up and down. "I don't want to be killed. I don't want to die. Is it true what the old sheep says, Charlotte? Is it true they are going to kill me when the cold weather comes?"

"Well," said the spider, plucking thoughtfully at her web, "the old sheep has been around this barn a long time. She has seen many a spring pig come and go. If she says they plan to kill you, I'm sure it's true. It's also the dirtiest trick I ever heard of. What people don't think of!"

Wilbur burst into tears. "I don't want to die," he moaned. "I want to stay alive, right here in my comfortable manure pile with all my friends. I want to breathe the beautiful air and lie in the beautiful sun."

"You're certainly making a beautiful noise," snapped the old sheep.

"I don't want to die!" screamed Wilbur, throwing himself to the ground.

"You shall not die," said Charlotte, briskly.

"What? Really?" cried Wilbur. "Who's going to save me?"

"I am," said Charlotte.

"How?" asked Wilbur.

"That remains to be seen. But I am going to save you, and I want you to quiet down immediately. You're carrying on in a childish way. Stop your crying! I can't stand hysterics."

## CHAPTER 8

### A Talk At Home

On Sunday morning Mr. and Mrs. Arable and Fern were sitting at breakfast in the kitchen. Avery had finished and was upstairs looking for his slingshot.

"Did you know that Uncle Homer's goslings had hatched?" asked Fern.

"How many?" asked Mr. Arable.

"Seven," replied Fern. "There were eight eggs but one egg didn't hatch and the goose told Templeton she didn't want it any more, so he took it away."

"The goose did what?" asked Mrs. Arable, gazing at her daughter with a queer, worried look.

"Told Templeton she didn't want the egg any more," repeated Fern.

"Who is Templeton?" asked Mrs. Arable.

"He's the rat," replied Fern. "None of us like him much."

"Who's 'us'?" asked Mr. Arable.

"Oh, everybody in the barn cellar. Wilbur and the sheep and the lambs and the goose and the gander and the goslings and Charlotte and me."

"Charlotte?" said Mrs. Arable. "Who's Charlotte?"

"She's Wilbur's best friend. She's terribly clever."

"What does she look like?" asked Mrs. Arable.

"Well-l," said Fern, thoughtfully, "she has eight legs. All spiders do, I guess."

"Charlotte is a spider?" asked Fern's mother.

Fern nodded. "A big grey one. She has a web across the top of Wilbur's doorway. She catches flies and sucks their

blood. Wilbur adores her."

"Does he really?" said Mrs. Arable, rather vaguely. She was staring at Fern with a worried expression on her face.

"Oh, yes, Wilbur adores Charlotte," said Fern. "Do you know what Charlotte said when the goslings hatched?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Mr. Arable. "Tell us."

"Well, when the first gosling stuck its little head out from under the goose, I was sitting on my stool in the corner and Charlotte was on her web. She made a speech. She said: 'I am sure that every one of us here in the barn cellar will be gratified to learn that after four weeks of unremitting effort and patience on the part of the goose, she now has something to show for it.' Don't you think that was a pleasant thing for her to say?"

"Yes, I do," said Mrs. Arable. "And now, Fern, it's time to get ready for Sunday School. And tell Avery to get ready. And this afternoon you can tell me more about what goes on in Uncle Homer's barn. Aren't you spending quite a lot of time there? You go there almost every afternoon, don't you?"

"I like it there," replied Fern. She wiped her mouth and ran upstairs. After she had left the room, Mrs. Arable spoke in a low voice to her husband.

"I worry about Fern," she said. "Did you hear the way she rambled on about the animals, pretending that they talked?"

Mr. Arable chuckled.

"Maybe they do talk," he said. "I've sometimes wondered. At any rate, don't worry about Fern - she's just got a lively imagination. Kids think they hear all sorts of things."

"Just the same, I do worry about her," replied Mrs. Arable. "I think I shall ask Dr. Dorian about her the next time I see him. He loves Fern almost as much as we do, and I want him to know

how queerly she is acting about that pig and everything. I don't think it's normal. You know perfectly well animals don't talk."

Mr. Arable grinned. "Maybe our ears aren't as sharp as Fern's," he said.

## CHAPTER 9

### Wilbur's Boast

A spider's web is stronger than it looks. Although it is made of thin, delicate strands, the web is not easily broken. However, a web gets torn every day by the insects that kick around in it, and a spider must rebuild it when it gets full of holes. Charlotte liked to do her weaving during the late afternoon, and Fern liked to sit nearby and watch. One afternoon she heard a most interesting conversation and witnessed a strange event.

"You have awfully hairy legs, Charlotte," said Wilbur, as the spider busily worked at her task.

"My legs are hairy for a good reason," replied Charlotte. "Furthermore, each leg of mine has seven sections - the coxa, the trochanter, the femur, the patella, the tibia, the metatarsus, and the tarsus."

Wilbur sat bolt upright. "You're kidding," he said.

"No, I'm not, either."

"Say those names again, I didn't catch them the first time.

"Coxa, trochanter, femur, patella, tibia, metatarsus, and tarsus."

"Goodness!" said Wilbur, looking down at his own chubby legs. "I don't think my legs have seven sections."

"Well," said Charlotte, "you and I lead different lives. You don't have to spin a web. That takes real leg work."

"I could spin a web if I tried," said Wilbur, boasting. "I've just never tried."

"Let's see you do it," said Charlotte. Fern chuckled softly, and her eyes grew wide with love for the pig.

"O.K.," replied Wilbur. "You coach me and I'll spin one. It must be a lot of fun to spin a web. How do I start?"



"Take a deep breath!" said Charlotte, smiling. Wilbur breathed deeply. "Now climb to the highest place you can get to, like this." Charlotte raced up to the top of the doorway. Wilbur scrambled to the top of the manure pile.

"Very good!" said Charlotte. "Now make an attachment with your spinnerets, hurl yourself into space, and let out a dragline as you go down!"

Wilbur hesitated a moment, then jumped out into the air. He glanced hastily behind to see if a piece of rope was following him to check his fall, but nothing seemed to be happening in his rear, and the next thing he knew he landed with a thump. "Ooomp!" he grunted.

Charlotte laughed so hard her web began to sway.

"What did I do wrong?" asked the pig, when he recovered from his bump.

"Nothing," said Charlotte. "It was a nice try."

"I think it try again," said Wilbur, cheerfully. "I believe what I need is a little piece of string to hold me."

The pig walked out to his yard. "You there, Templeton?" he called.

The rat poked his head out from under the trough.

"Got a little piece of string I could borrow?" asked Wilbur. "I need it to spin a web."

"Yes, indeed," replied Templeton, who saved string. "No trouble at all. Anything to oblige." He crept down into his hole, pushed the goose egg out of the way, and returned with an old piece of dirty white string. Wilbur examined it.

"That's just the thing," he said. "Tie one end to my tail, will you, Templeton?"

Wilbur crouched low, with his thin, curly tail toward the rat. Templeton seized the string, passed it around the end of the

pig's tail, and tied two half hitches. Charlotte watched in delight. Like Fern, she was truly fond of Wilbur, whose smelly pen and stale food attracted the flies that she needed, and she was proud to see that he was not a quitter and was willing to try again to spin a web.

While the rat and the spider and the little girl watched, Wilbur climbed again to the top of the manure pile, full of energy and hope.

"Ever body watch!" he cried. And summoning all his strength, he threw himself into the air, headfirst. The string trailed behind him. But as he had neglected to fasten the other end to anything, it didn't really do any good, and Wilbur landed with a thud, crushed and hurt. Tears came to his eyes. Templeton grinned. Charlotte just sat quietly. After a bit she spoke.

"You can't spin a web, Wilbur, and I advise you to put the idea out of your mind. You lack two things needed for spinning a web."

"What are they?" asked Wilbur, sadly.

"You lack a set of spinnerets, and you lack know-how. But cheer up, you don't need a web. Zuckerman supplies you with three big meals a day. Why should you worry about trapping food?"

Wilbur sighed. "You're ever so much cleverer and brighter than I am, Charlotte. I guess I was just trying to show off. Serves me right."

Templeton untied his string and took it back to his home. Charlotte returned to her weaving.

"You needn't feel too badly, Wilbur," she said. "Not many creatures can spin webs. Even men aren't as good at it as spiders, although they think they're pretty good, and they'll try anything. Did you ever hear of the Queensborough Bridge?"

Wilbur shook his head. "Is it a web?"

"Sort of," replied Charlotte. "But do you know how long it took men to build it? Eight whole years. My goodness, I would have starved to death waiting that long. I can make a web in a single evening."

"What do people catch in the Queensborough Bridge - bugs?" asked Wilbur.

"No," said Charlotte. "They don't catch anything. They just keep trotting back and forth across the bridge thinking there is something better on the other side. If they'd hang head-down at the top of the thing and wait quietly, maybe something good would come along. But no - with men it's rush, rush, rush, every minute. I'm glad I'm a sedentary spider."

"What does sedentary mean?" asked Wilbur.

"Means I sit still a good part of the time and don't go wandering all over creation. I know a good thing when I see it, and my web is a good thing. I stay put and wait for what comes. Gives me a chance to think."

"Well, I'm sort of sedentary myself, I guess," said the pig. "I have to hang around here whether I want to or not. You know where I'd really like to be this evening?"

"Where?"

"In a forest looking for beechnuts and truffles and delectable roots, pushing leaves aside with my wonderful strong nose, searching and sniffing along the ground, smelling, smelling, smelling..."

"You smell just the way you are," remarked a lamb who had just walked in. "I can smell you from here. You're the smelliest creature in the place."

Wilbur hung his head. His eyes grew wet with tears.

Charlotte noticed his embarrassment and she spoke sharply to the lamb.

"Let Wilbur alone!" she said. "He has a perfect right to smell, considering his surroundings. You're no bundle of sweet peas yourself. Furthermore, you are interrupting a very pleasant conversation. What were we talking about, Wilbur, when we were so rudely interrupted?"

"Oh, I don't remember," said Wilbur. "It doesn't make any difference. Let's not talk any more for a while, Charlotte. I'm getting sleepy. You go ahead and finish fixing your web and I'll just lie here and watch you. It's a lovely evening." Wilbur stretched out on his side.

Twilight settled over Zuckerman's barn, and a feeling of peace. Fern knew it was almost suppertime but she couldn't bear to leave. Swallows passed on silent wings, in and out of the doorways, bringing food to their young ones. From across the road a bird sang "Whippoorwill, whippoorwill!" Lurvy sat down under an apple tree and lit his pipe; the animals sniffed the familiar smell of strong tobacco. Wilbur heard the trill of the tree toad and the occasional slamming of the kitchen door. All these sounds made him feel comfortable and happy, for he loved life and loved to be a part of the world on a summer evening. But as he lay there he remembered what the old sheep had told him. The thought of death came to him and he began to tremble with fear.

"Charlotte?" he said, softly.

"Yes, Wilbur?"

"I don't want to die."

"Of course you don't," said Charlotte in a comforting voice.

"I just love it here in the barn," said Wilbur. "I love everything about this place."

"Of course you do," said Charlotte. "We all do."

The goose appeared, followed by her seven goslings. They thrust their little necks out and kept up a musical whistling, like a tiny troupe (traveling band of performers) of pipers. Wilbur listened to the sound with love in his heart.

"Charlotte?" he said.

"Yes?" said the spider.

"Were you serious when you promised you would keep them from killing me?"

"I was never more serious in my life. I am not going to let you die, Wilbur."

"How are you going to save me?" asked Wilbur, whose curiosity was very strong on this point.

"Well," said Charlotte, vaguely, "I don't really know. But I'm working on a plan."

"That's wonderful," said Wilbur. "How is the plan coming, Charlotte? Have you got very far with it? Is it coming along pretty well?" Wilbur was trembling again, but Charlotte was cool and collected.

"Oh, it's coming all right," she said, lightly. "The plan is still in its early stages and hasn't completely shaped up yet, but I'm working on it."

"When do you work on it?" begged Wilbur.

"When I'm hanging head-down at the top of my web. That's when I do my thinking, because then all the blood is in my head."

"I'd be only too glad to help in any way I can."

"Oh, I'll work it out alone," said Charlotte. "I can think better if I think alone."

"All right," said Wilbur. "But don't fail to let me know if there's anything I can do to help, no matter how slight."

"Well," replied Charlotte, "you must try to build yourself up. I want you to get plenty of sleep, and stop worrying. Never hurry and never worry! Chew your food thoroughly and eat every bit of it, except you must leave just enough for Templeton. Gain weight and stay well - that's the way you can help. Keep fit, and don't lose your nerve. Do you think you understand?"

"Yes, I understand," said Wilbur.

"Go along to bed, then," said Charlotte. "Sleep is important."

Wilbur trotted over to the darkest corner of his pen and threw himself down. He closed his eyes. In another minute he spoke.

"Charlotte?" he said.

"Yes, Wilbur?"

"May I go out to my trough and see if I left any of my supper? I think I left just a tiny bit of mashed potato."

"Very well," said Charlotte. "But I want you in bed again without delay."

Wilbur started to race out to his yard.

"Slowly, slowly!" said Charlotte. "Never hurry and never worry!"

Wilbur checked himself and crept slowly to his trough. He found a bit of potato, chewed it carefully, swallowed it, and walked back to bed. He closed his eyes and was silent for a while.

"Charlotte?" he said, in a whisper.

"Yes?"

"May I get a drink of milk? I think there are a few drops of milk left in my trough."

"No, the trough is dry, and I want you to go to sleep. No more talking! Close your eyes and go to sleep!"

Wilbur shut his eyes. Fern got up from her stool and started for home, her mind full of everything she had seen and heard.

"Good night, Charlotte!" said Wilbur.

"Good night, Wilbur!"

There was a pause.

"Good night, Charlotte!"

"Good night, Wilbur!"

"Good night!"

"Good night!"

## CHAPTER 10

### An Explosion

Day after day the spider waited, head-down, for an idea to come to her. Hour by hour she sat motionless, deep in thought.

Having promised Wilbur that she would save his life, she was determined to keep her promise. Charlotte was naturally patient.

She knew from experience that if she waited long enough, a fly would come to her web; and she felt sure that if she thought long enough about Wilbur's problem, an idea would come to her mind.

Finally, one morning toward the middle of July, the idea came. "Why, how perfectly simple!" she said to herself. "The way to save Wilbur's life is to play a trick on Zuckerman. If I can fool a bug," thought Charlotte, "I can surely fool a man. People are not as smart as bugs."

Wilbur walked into his yard just at that moment.

"What are you thinking about, Charlotte?" he asked.

"I was just thinking," said the spider, "that people are very gullible."

"What does 'gullible' mean?"

"Easy to fool," said Charlotte.

"That's a mercy," replied Wilbur, and he lay down in the shade of his fence and went fast asleep. The spider, however, stayed wide awake, gazing affectionately at him and making plans for his future. Summer was half gone. She knew she didn't have much time.

That morning, just as Wilbur fell asleep, Avery Arable wandered into the Zuckerman's front yard, followed by Fern.



Avery carried a live frog in his hand. Fern had a crown of daisies in her hair. The children ran for the kitchen.

"Just in time for a piece of blueberry pie," said Mrs. Zuckerman.

"Look at my frog!" said Avery, placing the frog on the drainboard and holding out his hand for pie.

"Take that thing out of here!" said Mrs. Zuckerman.

"He's hot," said Fern. "He's almost dead, that frog."

"He is not," said Avery. "He lets me scratch him between the eyes." The frog jumped and landed in Mrs. Zuckerman's dishpan full of soapy water.

"You're getting your pie on you," said Fern. "Can I look for eggs in the henhouse, Aunt Edith?"

"Run outdoors, both of you! And don't bother the hens!"

"It's getting all over everything," shouted Fern. "His pie is all over his front."

"Come on, frog!" cried Avery. He scooped up his frog. The frog kicked, splashing soapy water onto the blueberry pie.

"Another crisis!" groaned Fern.

"Let's swing in the swing!" said Avery.

The children ran to the barn.

Mr. Zuckerman had the best swing in the county. It was a single long piece of heavy rope tied to the beam over the north doorway. At the bottom end of the rope was a fat knot to sit on.

It was arranged so that you could swing without being pushed. You climbed a ladder to the hayloft. Then, holding the rope, you stood at the edge and looked down, and were scared and dizzy. Then you straddled the knot, so that it acted as a seat. Then you got up all your nerve, took a deep breath, and jumped. For a second you seemed to be falling to the barn floor far below, but then suddenly the rope would begin to catch you,

and you would sail through the barn door going a mile a minute, with the wind whistling in your eyes and ears and hair. Then you would zoom upward into the sky, and look up at the clouds, and the rope would twist and you would twist and turn with the rope. Then you would drop down, down, down out of the sky and come sailing back into the barn almost into the hayloft, then sail out again (not quite so far this time), then in again (not quite so high), then out again, then in again, then out, then in; and then you'd jump off and fall down and let somebody else try it.

Mothers for miles around worried about Zuckerman's swing. They feared some child would fall off. But no child ever did. Children almost always hang onto things tighter than their parents think they will.

Avery put the frog in his pocket and climbed to the hayloft.

"The last time I swang in this swing, I almost crashed into a barn swallow," he yelled.

"Take that frog out!" ordered Fern.

Avery straddled the rope and jumped. He sailed out through the door, frog and all, and into the sky, frog and all. Then he sailed back into the barn.

"Your tongue is purple!" screamed Fern.

"So is yours!" cried Avery, sailing out again with the frog.

"I have hay inside my dress! It itches!" called Fern.

"Scratch it!" yelled Avery, as he sailed back.

"It's my turn," said Fern. "Jump off!"

"Fern's got the itch!" sang Avery.

When he jumped off, he threw the swing up to his sister. She shut her eyes tight and jumped. She felt the dizzy drop, then the supporting lift of the swing. When she opened her eyes

she was looking up into the blue sky and was about to fly back through the door.

They took turns for an hour.

When the children grew tired of swinging they went down toward the pasture and picked wild raspberries and ate them.

Their tongues turned from purple to red. Fern bit into a raspberry that had a bad-tasting bug inside it, and got discouraged. Avery found an empty candy box and put his frog in it. The frog seemed tired after his morning in the swing. The children walked slowly up toward the barn. They, too, were tired and hardly had energy enough to walk.

"Let's build a tree house," suggested Avery. "I want to live in a tree, with my frog."

"I'm going to visit Wilbur," Fern announced.

They climbed the fence into the lane and walked lazily toward the pigpen. Wilbur heard them coming and got up.

Avery noticed the spider web, and, coming closer, he saw Charlotte.

"Hey, look at that big spider!" he said. "It's tremenjus."

"Leave it alone!" commanded Fern. "You've got a frog - isn't that enough?"

"That's a fine spider and I'm going to capture it," said Avery. He took the cover off the candy box. Then he picked up a stick. "I'm going to knock that ol' spider into this box," he said.

Wilbur's heart almost stopped when he saw what was going on.

This might be the end of Charlotte if the boy succeeded in catching her.

"You stop it, Avery!" cried Fern.

Avery put one leg over the fence of the pigpen. He was just about to raise his stick to hit Charlotte when he lost his balance. He swayed and toppled and landed on the edge of Wilbur's trough. The trough tipped up and then came down with a slap. The goose egg was right underneath. There was a dull explosion as the egg broke, and then a horrible smell.

Fern screamed. Avery jumped to his feet. The air was filled with the terrible gases and smells from the rotten egg. Templeton, who had been resting in his home, scuttled away into the barn.

"Good night!" screamed Avery. "Good night! What a stink! Let's get out of here!"

Fern was crying. She held her nose and ran toward the house. Avery ran after her, holding his nose.

Charlotte felt greatly relieved to see him go. It had been a narrow escape.

Later on that morning, the animals came up from the pasture - the sheep, the lambs, the gander, the goose, and the seven goslings. There were many complaints about the awful smell, and Wilbur had to tell the story over and over again, of how the Arable boy had tried to capture Charlotte, and how the smell of the broken egg drove him away just in time. "It was that rotten goose egg that saved Charlotte's life," said Wilbur.

The goose was proud of her share in the adventure. "I'm delighted that the egg never hatched," she gabbled.

Templeton, of course, was miserable over the loss of his beloved egg. But he couldn't resist boasting. "It pays to save things," he said in his surly voice. "A rat never knows when something is going to come in handy. I never throw anything away."

"Well," said one of the lambs, "this whole business is all well and good for Charlotte, but what about the rest of us? The

smell is unbearable. Who wants to live in a barn that is perfumed with rotten egg?"

"Don't worry, you'll get used to it," said Templeton. He sat up and pulled wisely at his long whiskers, then crept away to pay a visit to the dump.

When Lurvy showed up at lunchtime carrying a pail of food for Wilbur, he stopped short a few paces from the pigpen. He sniffed the air and made a face.

"What in thunder?" he said. Setting the pail down, he picked up the stick that Avery had dropped and pried the trough up. "Rats!" he said. "Fhew! I mighta known a rat would make a nest under this trough. How I hate a rat!"

And Lurvy dragged Wilbur's trough across the yard and kicked some dirt into the rat's nest, burying the broken egg and all Templeton's other possessions. Then he picked up the pail. Wilbur stood in the trough, drooling with hunger. Lurvy poured. The slops ran creamily down around the pig's eyes and ears. Wilbur grunted. He gulped and sucked, and sucked and gulped, making swishing and swooshing noises, anxious to get everything at once. It was a delicious meal - skim milk, wheat middlings, leftover pancakes, half a doughnut, the rind of a summer squash, two pieces of stale toast, a third of a gingersnap 姜饼, a fish tail, one orange peel, several noodles from a noodle soup, the scum off a cup of cocoa, an ancient jelly roll, a strip of paper from the lining of the garbage pail, and a spoonful of raspberry jello 布丁甜点.

Wilbur ate heartily. He planned to leave half a noodle and a few drops of milk for Templeton. Then he remembered that the rat had been useful in saving Charlotte's life, and that Charlotte was trying to save his life. So he left a whole noodle, instead of a half.

Now that the broken egg was buried, the air cleared and the barn smelled good again. The afternoon passed, and evening came.

Shadows lengthened. The cool and kindly breath of evening entered through doors and windows. Astride her web, Charlotte sat moodily eating a horsefly and thinking about the future. After a while she bestirred herself.

She descended to the center of the web and there she began to cut some of her lines. She worked slowly but steadily while the other creatures drowsed. None of the others, not even the goose, noticed that she was at work. Deep in his soft bed, Wilbur snoozed. Over in their favorite corner, the goslings whistled a night song.

Charlotte tore quite a section out of her web, leaving an open space in the middle. Then she started weaving something to take the place of the threads she had removed. When Templeton got back from the dump, around midnight, the spider was still at work.

## CHAPTER 11

### The Miracle

The next day was foggy. Everything on the farm was dripping wet. The grass looked like a magic carpet. The asparagus patch looked like a silver forest.

On foggy mornings, Charlotte's web was truly a thing of beauty. This morning each thin strand was decorated with dozens of tiny beads of water. The web glistened in the light and made a pattern of loveliness and mystery, like a delicate veil. Even Lurvy, who wasn't particularly interested in beauty, noticed the web when he came with the pig's breakfast. He noted how clearly it showed up and he noted how big and carefully built it was. And then he took another look and he saw something that made him set his pail down. There, in the center of the web, neatly woven in block letters, was a message. It said:

SOME PIG!

Lurvy felt weak. He brushed his hand across his eyes and stared harder at Charlotte's web.

"I'm seeing things," he whispered. He dropped to his knees and uttered a short prayer. Then, forgetting all about Wilbur's breakfast, he walked back to the house and called Mr. Zuckerman.

"I think you'd better come down to the pigpen," he said.

"What's the trouble?" asked Mr. Zuckerman. "Anything wrong with the pig?"

"N-not exactly," said Lurvy. "Come and see for yourself."

The two men walked silently down to Wilbur's yard. Lurvy pointed to the spider's web. "Do you see what I see?" he asked.

Zuckerman stared at the writing on the web. Then he murmured the words "Some Pig." Then he looked at Lurvy. Then they both began to tremble. Charlotte, sleepy after her night's exertions, smiled as she watched. Wilbur came and stood directly under the web.

"Some pig!" muttered Lurvy in a low voice.

"Some pig!" whispered Mr. Zuckerman. They stared and stared for a long time at Wilbur. Then they stared at Charlotte.

"You don't suppose that that spider ..." began Mr. Zuckerman - but he shook his head and didn't finish the sentence. Instead, he walked solemnly back up to the house and spoke to his wife. "Edith, something has happened," he said, in a weak voice. He went into the living room and sat down, and Mrs. Zuckerman followed.

"I've got something to tell you, Edith," he said. "You better sit down."

Mrs. Zuckerman sank into a chair. She looked pale and frightened.

"Edith," he said, trying to keep his voice steady, "I think you had best be told that we have a very unusual pig."

A look of complete bewilderment came over Mrs. Zuckerman's face. "Homer Zuckerman, what in the world are you talking about?" she said.

"This is a very serious thing, Edith," he replied. "Our pig is completely out of the ordinary."

"What's unusual about the pig?" asked Mrs. Zuckerman, who was beginning to recover from her scare.

"Well, I don't really know yet," said Mr. Zuckerman. "But we have received a sign, Edith - a mysterious sign. A miracle has happened on this farm. There is a large spider's web in the doorway of the barn cellar, right over the pigpen, and when



Lurvy went to feed the pig this morning, he noticed the web because it was foggy, and you know how a spider's web looks very distinct in a fog. And right spang (precisely (Slang) in the middle of the web there were the words 'Some Pig.'" The words were woven right into the web. They were actual part of the web, Edith. I know because I have been down there and seen them. It says, 'Some Pig,' just as clear as clear can be. There can be no mistake about it. A miracle has happened and a sign has occurred here on earth, right on our farm, and we have no ordinary pig."

"Well," said Mrs. Zuckerman, "it seems to me you're a little off. It seems to me we have no ordinary spider."

"Oh, no," said Zuckerman. "It's the pig that's unusual. It says so, right there in the middle of the web."

"Maybe so," said Mrs. Zuckerman. "Just the same, I intend to have a look at that spider."

"It's just a common grey spider," said Zuckerman.

They got up, and together they walked down to Wilbur's yard.

"You see, Edith? It's just a common grey spider."

Wilbur was pleased to receive so much attention. Lurvy was still standing there, and Mr. and Mrs. Zuckerman all three, stood for about an hour, reading the words on the web over and over, and watching Wilbur.

Charlotte was delighted with the way her trick was working.

She sat without moving a muscle, and listened to the conversation of the people. When a small fly blundered into the web, just beyond the word pig," Charlotte dropped quickly down, rolled the fly up, and carried it out of the way.

After a while the fog lifted. The web dried off and the words didn't show up so plainly. The Zuckermans and Lurvy

walked back to the house. Just before they left the pigpen, Mr. Zuckerman took one last look at Wilbur.

"You know," he said, in an important voice, "I've thought all along that that pig of ours was an extra good one. He's a solid pig. That pig is as solid as they come. You notice how solid he is around the shoulders, Lurvy?"

"Sure. Sure I do," said Lurvy. "I've always noticed that pig. He's quite a pig."

"He's long, and he's smooth," said Zuckerman.

"That's right," agreed Lurvy. "He's as smooth as they come. He's some pig."

When Mr. Zuckerman got back to the house, he took off his work clothes and put on his best suit. Then he got into his car and drove to the minister's house. He stayed for an hour and explained to the minister that a miracle had happened on the farm.

"So far," said Zuckerman, "only four people on earth know about this miracle - myself, my wife Edith, my hired man Lurvy, and you."

"Don't tell anybody else," said the minister. "We don't know what it means yet, but perhaps if I give thought to it, I can explain it in my sermon next Sunday. There can be no doubt that you have a most unusual pig. I intend to speak about it in my sermon and point out the fact that this community has been visited with a wondrous animal. By the way, does the pig have a name?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Zuckerman. "My little niece calls him Wilbur. She's a rather queer child - full of notions. She raised the pig on a bottle and I bought him from her when he was a month old."

He shook hands with the minister, and left.

Secrets are hard to keep. Long before Sunday came, the news spread all over the county. Everybody knew that a sign had appeared in a spider's web on the Zuckerman place. Everybody knew that the Zuckermans had a wondrous pig. People came from miles around to look at Wilbur and to read the words on Charlotte's web. The Zuckermans' driveway was full of cars and trucks from morning till night - Fords and Chevies and Buick roadmasters and GMC pickups and Plymouths and Studebakers and Packards and De Sotos with gyromatic transmissions and Oldsmobiles with rocket engines and Jeep station wagons and Pontiacs. The news of the wonderful pig spread clear up into the hills, and farmers came rattling down in buggies and buckboards, to stand hour after hour at Wilbur's pen admiring the miraculous animal. All said they had never seen such a pig before in their lives.

When Fern told her mother that Avery had tried to hit the Zuckermans' spider with a stick, Mrs. Arable was so shocked that she sent Avery to bed without any supper as punishment.

In the days that followed, Mr. Zuckerman was so busy entertaining visitors that he neglected his farm work. He wore his good clothes all the time now -got right into them when he got up in the morning. Mrs. Zuckerman prepared special meals for Wilbur. Lurvy shaved and got a haircut; and his principal farm duty was to feed the pig while people looked on.

Mr. Zuckerman ordered Lurvy to increase Wilbur's feedings from three meals a day to four meals a day. The Zuckermans were so busy with visitors they forgot about other things on the farm.

The blackberries got ripe, and Mrs. Zuckerman failed to put up any blackberry jam. The corn needed hoeing, and Lurvy didn't find time to hoe it.

On Sunday the church was full. The minister explained the miracle. He said that the words on the spider's web proved that human beings must always be on the watch for the coming of wonders.

All in all, the Zuckermans' pigpen was the center of attraction. Fern was happy, for she felt that Charlotte's trick was working and that Wilbur's life would be saved. But she found that the barn was not nearly as pleasant - too many people. She liked it better when she could be all alone with her friends the animals.

## CHAPTER 12

### A Meeting

One evening, a few days after the writing had appeared in Charlotte's web, the spider called a meeting of all the animals in the barn cellar.

"I shall begin by calling the roll. Wilbur?"

"Here!" said the pig.

"Gander?"

"Here, here, here!" said the gander.

"You sound like three ganders," muttered Charlotte. "Why can't you just say 'here'? Why do you have to repeat everything?"

"It's my idio-idio-idiosyncrasy (individual quality, unique characteristic)," replied the gander.

"Goose?" said Charlotte.

"Here, here, here!" said the goose. Charlotte glared at her.

"Goslings, one through seven?"

"Bee-bee-bee!"

"Bee-bee-bee!"

"Bee-bee-bee!"

"Bee-bee-bee!"

"Bee-bee-bee!"

"Bee-bee-bee!"

"Bee-bee-bee!" said the goslings.

"This is getting to be quite a meeting," said Charlotte.

"Anybody would think we had three ganders, three geese, and twenty-one goslings. Sheep?"

"He-aa-aa!" answered the sheep all together.

"Lambs?"

"He-aa-aa!" answered the lambs all together.

"Templeton?"

No answer.

"Templeton?"

No answer.

"Well, we are all here except the rat," said Charlotte. "I guess we can proceed without him. Now, all of you must have noticed what's been going on around here the last few days. The message I wrote in my web, praising Wilbur, has been received. The Zuckermans have fallen for it, and so has everybody else. Zuckerman thinks Wilbur is an unusual pig, and therefore he won't want to kill him and eat him. I dare say my trick will work and Wilbur's life can be saved.

"Hurray!" cried everybody.

"Thank you very much," said Charlotte. "Now I called this meeting in order to get suggestions. I need new ideas for the web. People are already getting sick of reading the words 'Some Pig!'. If anybody can think of another message, or remark, I'll be glad to weave it into the web. Any suggestions for a new slogan?"

"How about 'Pig Supreme'?" asked one of the lambs.

"No good," said Charlotte. "It sounds like a rich dessert."

"How about 'Terrific, terrific, terrific'?" asked the goose.

"Cut that down to one 'terrific' and it will do very nicely," said Charlotte. "I think 'terrific' might impress Zuckerman."

"But Charlotte," said Wilbur, "I'm not terrific."

"That doesn't make a particle of difference," replied Charlotte. "Not a particle. People believe almost anything they see in print. Does anybody here know how to spell 'terrific'?"

"I think," said the gander, "it's tee double ee double rr double rr double eye double ff double eye double see see see

see see."

"What kind of an acrobat do you think I am?" said Charlotte in disgust. "I would have to have St. Vitus's Dance to weave a word like that into my web."

"Sorry, sorry, sorry," said the gander.

Then the oldest sheep spoke up. "I agree that there should be something new written in the web if Wilbur's life is to be saved. And if Charlotte needs help in finding words, I think she can get it from our friend Templeton. The rat visits the dump regularly and has access to old magazines. He can tear out bits of advertisements and bring them up here to the barn cellar, so that Charlotte can have something to copy."

"Good idea," said Charlotte. "But I'm not sure Templeton will be willing to help. You know how he is - always looking out for himself, never thinking of the other fellow."

"I bet I can get him to help," said the old sheep. "I'll appeal to his baser instincts, of which he has plenty. Here he comes now. Everybody keep quiet while I put the matter up to him!"

The rat entered the barn the way he always did - creeping along close to the wall.

"What's up?" he asked, seeing the animals assembled.

"We're holding a directors' meeting," replied the old sheep.

"Well, break it up!" said Templeton. "Meetings bore me."

And the rat began to climb a rope that hung against the wall.

"Look," said the old sheep, "next time you go to the dump, Templeton, bring back a clipping from a magazine. Charlotte needs new ideas so she can write messages in her web and save Wilbur's life."

"Let him die," said the rat. "I should worry."

"You'll worry all right when next winter comes," said the sheep. "You'll worry all right on a zero morning next January when Wilbur is dead and nobody comes down here with a nice pail of warm slops to pour into the trough. Wilbur's leftover food is your chief source of supply, Templeton. You know that. Wilbur's food is your food; therefore Wilbur's destiny and your destiny are closely linked. If Wilbur is killed and his trough stands empty day after day, you'll grow so thin we can look right through your stomach and see objects on the other side."

Templeton's whiskers quivered.

"Maybe you're right," he said gruffly. "I'm making a trip to the dump tomorrow afternoon. I'll bring back a magazine clipping if I can find one."

"Thanks," said Charlotte. "The meeting is now adjourned. I have a busy evening ahead of me. I've got to tear my web apart and write 'Terrific.'"

Wilbur blushed. "But I'm not terrific, Charlotte. I'm just about average for a pig."

"You're terrific as far as I'm concerned," replied Charlotte, sweetly, "and that's what counts. You're my best friend, and I think you're sensational. Now stop arguing and go get some sleep!"



## CHAPTER 13

### Good Progress

Far into the night, while the other creatures slept, Charlotte worked on her web. First she ripped out a few of the orb lines near the center. She left the radial lines alone, as they were needed for support. As she worked, her eight legs were a great help to her. So were her teeth. She loved to weave and she was an expert at it. When she was finished ripping things out, her web looked something like this:

Note: Similar to a wagon wheel with spokes

A spider can produce several kinds of thread. She uses a dry, tough thread for foundation lines, and she uses a sticky thread for snare lines - the ones that catch and hold insects.

Charlotte decided to use her dry thread for writing the new message.

"If I write the word 'Terrific' with sticky thread," she thought, "every bug that comes along will get stuck in it and spoil the effect."

"Now let's see, the first letter is T."

Charlotte climbed to a point at the top of the left hand side of the web. Swinging her spinnerets into position, she attached her thread and then dropped down. As she dropped, her spinning tubes went into action and she let out thread. At the bottom, she attached the thread. This formed the upright part of the letter T. Charlotte was not satisfied, however. She climbed up and made another attachment, right next to the first. Then she carried the line down, so that she had a double line instead of a single line. "It will show up better if I make the whole thing with double lines."

She climbed back up, moved over about an inch to the left, touched her spinnerets to the web, and then carried a line

across to the right, forming the top of the T. She repeated this, making it double. Her eight legs were very busy helping.

"Now for the E!" Charlotte got so interested in her work, she began to talk to herself, as though to cheer herself on. If you had been sitting quietly in the barn cellar that evening, you would have heard something like this:

"Now for the R! Up we go! Attach! Descend! Pay out line! Whoa! Attach! Good! Up you go! Repeat! Attach! Descend! Pay out line. Whoa, girl! Steady now! Attach! Climb! Attach! Over to the right! Pay out line! Attach! Now right and down and swing that loop and around and around! Now in to the left! Attach! Climb! Repeat! O.K.! Easy, keep those lines together! Now, then, out and down for the leg of the R! Pay out line! Whoa! Attach! Ascend! Repeat! Good girl!"

And so, talking to herself, the spider worked at her difficult task. When it was completed, she felt hungry. She ate a small bug that she had been saving. Then she slept.

Next morning, Wilbur arose and stood beneath the web. He breathed the morning air into his lungs. Drops of dew, catching the sun, made the web stand out clearly. When Lurvy arrived with breakfast, there was the handsome pig, and over him, woven neatly in block letters, was the word TERRIFIC. Another miracle.

Lurvy rushed and called Mr. Zuckerman. Mr. Zuckerman rushed and called Mrs. Zuckerman. Mrs. Zuckerman ran to the phone and called the Arables. The Arables climbed into their truck and hurried over. Everybody stood at the pigpen and stared at the web and read the word, over and over, while Wilbur, who really felt terrific, stood quietly swelling out his chest and swinging his snout from side to side.

"Terrific!" breathed Zuckerman, in joyful admiration. "Edith, you better phone the reporter on the Weekly Chronicle and tell

him what has happened. He will want to know about this. He may want to bring a photographer. There isn't a pig in the whole state that is as terrific as our pig."

The news spread. People who had journeyed to see Wilbur when he was "some pig" came back again to see him now that he was "terrific."

That afternoon, when Mr. Zuckerman went to milk the cows and clean out the tie-ups, he was still thinking about what a wondrous pig he owned.

"Lurvy!" he called. "There is to be no more cow manure thrown down into that pigpen. I have a terrific pig. I want that pig to have clean, bright straw every day for his bedding. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Lurvy.

"Furthermore," said Mr. Zuckerman, "I want you to start building a crate for Wilbur. I have decided to take the pig to the County Fair on September sixth. Make the crate large and paint it green with gold letters!"

"What will the letters say?" asked Lurvy.

"They should say Zuckerman's Famous Pig."

Lurvy picked up a pitchfork and walked away to get some clean straw. Having such an important pig was going to mean plenty of extra work, he could see that.

Below the apple orchard, at the end of a path, was the dump where Mr. Zuckerman threw all sorts of trash and stuff that nobody wanted any more. Here, in a small clearing hidden by young alders (type of tree) and wild raspberry bushes, was an astonishing pile of old bottles and empty tin cans and dirty rags and bits of metal and broken bottles and broken hinges and broken springs and dead batteries and last month's magazines and old discarded dishmops and tattered overalls

and rusty spikes and leaky pails and forgotten stoppers and useless junk of all kinds, including a wrong-size crank for a broken ice-cream freezer.

Templeton knew the dump and liked it. There were good hiding places there - excellent cover for a rat. And there was usually a tin can with food still clinging to the inside.

Templeton was down there now, rummaging around. When he returned to the barn, he carried in his mouth an advertisement he had torn from a crumpled magazine.

"How's this?" he asked, showing the ad to Charlotte. "It says 'Crunchy.' 'Crunchy' would be a good word to write in your web."

"Just the wrong idea," replied Charlotte. "Couldn't be worse. We don't want Zuckerman to think Wilbur is crunchy. He might start thinking about crisp, crunchy bacon and tasty ham. That would put ideas into his head. We must advertise Wilbur's noble qualities, not his tastiness. Go get another word, please, Templeton!"

The rat looked disgusted. But he sneaked away to the dump and was back in a while with a strip of cotton cloth. "How's this?" he asked. "It's a label off an old shirt."

Charlotte examined the label. It said PRESHRUNK.

"I'm sorry, Templeton," she said, "but 'Pre-shrunk' is out of the question. We want Zuckerman to think Wilbur is nicely filled out, not all shrunk up. I'll have to ask you to try again."

"What do you think I am, a messenger boy?" grumbled the rat. "I'm not going to spend all my time chasing down to the dump after advertising material."

"Just once more - please!" said Charlotte.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Templeton. "I know where there's a package of soap flakes in the woodshed. It has writing

on it. I'll bring you a piece of the package."

He climbed the rope that hung on the wall and disappeared through a hole in the ceiling. When he came back he had a strip of blue-and-white cardboard in his teeth.

"There!" he said, triumphantly. "How's that?"

Charlotte read the words: "With New Radiant Action."

"What does it mean?" asked Charlotte, who had never used any soap flakes in her life.

"How should I know?" said Templeton. "You asked for words and I brought them. I suppose the next thing you'll want me to fetch is a dictionary."

Together they studied the soap ad. "'With new radiant action,'" repeated Charlotte, slowly. "Wilbur!" she called.

Wilbur, who was asleep in the straw, jumped up. "Run around!" commanded Charlotte. "I want to see you in action, to see if you are radiant." Wilbur raced to the end of his yard.

"Now back again, faster!" said Charlotte.

Wilbur galloped back. His skin shone. His tail had a fine, tight curl in it.

"Jump into the air!" cried Charlotte.

Wilbur jumped as high as he could.

"Keep your knees straight and touch the ground with your ears!" called Charlotte.

Wilbur obeyed.

"Do a back flip with a half twist in it!" cried Charlotte.

Wilbur went over backwards, writhing and twisting as he went.

"O.K., Wilbur," said Charlotte. "You can go back to sleep. O.K., Templeton, the soap ad will do, I guess. I'm not sure Wilbur's action is exactly radiant, but it's interesting."

"Actually," said Wilbur, "I feel radiant."

"Do you?" said Charlotte, looking at him with affection. "Well, you're a good little pig, and radiant you shall be. I'm in this thing pretty deep now - I might as well go the limit."

Tired from his romp, Wilbur lay down in the clean straw. He closed his eyes. The straw seemed scratchy - not as comfortable as the cow manure, which was always delightfully soft to lie in. So he pushed the straw to one side and stretched out in the manure. Wilbur sighed. It had been a busy day - his first day of being terrific. Dozens of people had visited his yard during the afternoon, and he had had to stand and pose, looking as terrific as he could. Now he was tired. Fern had arrived and seated herself quietly on her stool in the corner.

"Tell me a story, Charlotte!" said Wilbur, as he lay waiting for sleep to come. "Tell me a story!"

So Charlotte, although she, too, was tired, did what Wilbur wanted.

"Once upon a time," she began, "I had a beautiful cousin who managed to build her web across a small stream. One day a tiny fish leaped in to the air and got tangled in the web. My cousin was very much surprised, of course. The fish was thrashing wildly. My cousin hardly dared tackle it. But she did. She swooped down and threw great masses of wrapping material around the fish and fought bravely to capture it."

"Did she succeed?" asked Wilbur.

"It was a never-to-be-forgotten battle," said Charlotte. "There was the fish, caught only by one fin, and its tail wildly thrashing and shining in the sun. There was the web, sagging dangerously under the weight of the fish."

"How much did the fish weigh?" asked Wilbur eagerly.

"I don't know," said Charlotte. "There was my cousin, slipping in, dodging out, beaten mercilessly over the head by the wildly thrashing fish, dancing in, dancing out, throwing her threads and fighting hard. First she threw a left around the tail. The fish lashed back. Then a left to the tail and a right to the mid section. The fish lashed back. Then she dodged to one side and threw a right, and another right to the fin. Then a hard left to the head, while the web swayed and stretched."

"Then what happened?" asked Wilbur.

"Nothing," said Charlotte. "The fish lost the fight. My cousin wrapped it up so tight it couldn't budge."

"Then what happened?" asked Wilbur.

"Nothing," said Charlotte. "My cousin kept the fish for a while, and then, when she got good and ready, she ate it."

"Tell me another story!" begged Wilbur.

So Charlotte told him about another cousin of hers who was an aeronaut.

"What is an aeronaut?" asked Wilbur.

"A balloonist," said Charlotte. "My cousin used to stand on her head and let out enough thread to form a balloon. Then she'd let go and be lifted into the air and carried upward on the warm wind."

"Is that true?" asked Wilbur. "Or are you just making it up?"

"It's true," replied Charlotte. "I have some very remarkable cousins. And now, Wilbur, it's time you went to sleep."

"Sing something!" begged Wilbur, closing his eyes.

So Charlotte sang a lullaby, while crickets chirped in the grass and the barn grew dark. This was the song she sang.

"Sleep, sleep, my love, my only,

Deep, deep, in the dung and the dark;

Be not afraid and be not lonely!

This is the hour when frogs and thrushes

Praise the world from the woods and the rushes.

Rest from care, my one and only,

Deep in the dung and the dark!"

But Wilbur was already asleep. When the song ended, Fern got up and went home.



## CHAPTER 14

Dr. Dorian

The next day was Saturday. Fern stood at the kitchen sink drying the breakfast dishes as her mother washed them. Mrs. Arable worked silently. She hoped Fern would go out and play with other children, instead of heading for the Zuckermans' barn to sit and watch animals.

"Charlotte is the best storyteller I ever heard," said Fern, poking her dish towel into a cereal bowl.

"Fern," said her mother sternly, "you must not invent things. You know spiders don't tell stories. Spiders can't talk."

"Charlotte can," replied Fern. "She doesn't talk very loud, but she talks."

"What kind of story did she tell?" asked Mrs. Arable.

"Well," began Fern, "she told us about a cousin of hers who caught a fish in her web. Don't you think that's fascinating?"

"Fern, dear, how would a fish get in a spider's web?" said Mrs. Arable. "You know it couldn't happen. You're making this up."

"Oh, it happened all right," replied Fern. "Charlotte never fibs. This cousin of hers built a web across a stream. One day she was hanging around on the web and a tiny fish leaped into the air and got tangled in the web. The fish was caught by one fin, Mother; its tail was wildly thrashing and shining in the sun. Can't you just see the web, sagging dangerously under the weight of the fish? Charlotte's cousin kept slipping in, dodging out, and she was beaten mercilessly over the head by the wildly thrashing fish, dancing in, dancing out, throwing ..."

"Fern!" snapped her mother. "Stop it! Stop inventing these wild tales!"

"I'm not inventing," said Fern. "I'm just telling you the facts."

"What finally happened?" asked her mother, whose curiosity began to get the better of her.

"Charlotte's cousin won. She wrapped the fish up, then she ate him when she got good and ready. Spiders have to eat, the same as the rest of us."

"Yes, I suppose they do," said Mrs. Arable, vaguely.

"Charlotte has another cousin who is a balloonist. She stands on her head, lets out a lot of line, and is carried aloft on the wind. Mother, wouldn't you simply love to do that?"

"Yes, I would, come to think of it," replied Mrs. Arable. "But Fern, darling, I wish you would play outdoors today instead of going to Uncle Homer's barn. Find some of your playmates and do something nice outdoors. You're spending too much time in that barn - it isn't good for you to be alone so much."

"Alone?" said Fern. "Alone? My best friends are in the barn cellar. It is a very sociable place. Not at all lonely."

Fern disappeared after a while, walking down the road toward Zuckermans'. Her mother dusted the sitting room. As she worked she kept thinking about Fern. It didn't seem natural for a little girl to be so interested in animals. Finally Mrs. Arable made up her mind she would pay a call on old Doctor Dorian and ask his advice. She got in the car and drove to his office in the village.

Dr. Dorian had a thick beard. He was glad to see Mrs. Arable and gave her a comfortable chair.

"It's about Fern," she explained. "Fern spends entirely too much time in the Zuckermans' barn. It doesn't seem normal. She sits on a milk stool in a corner of the barn cellar, near the

pigpen, and watches animals, hour after hour. She just sits and listens."

Dr. Dorian leaned back and closed his eyes.

"How enchanting!" he said. "It must be real nice and quiet down there. Homer has some sheep, hasn't he?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Arable. "But it all started with that pig we let Fern raise on a bottle. She calls him Wilbur. Homer bought the pig, and ever since it left our place Fern has been going to her uncle's to be near it."

"I've been hearing things about that pig," said Dr. Dorian, opening his eyes. "They say he's quite a pig."

"Have you heard about the words that appeared in the spider's web?" asked Mrs. Arable nervously.

"Yes," replied the doctor.

"Well, do you understand it?" asked Mrs. Arable.

"Understand what?"

"Do you understand how there could be any writing in a spider's web?"

"Oh, no," said Dr. Dorian. "I don't understand it. But for that matter I don't understand how a spider learned to spin a web in the first place. When the words appeared, everyone said they were a miracle. But nobody pointed out that the web itself is a miracle."

"What's miraculous about a spider's web?" said Mrs. Arable. "I don't see why you say a web is a miracle - it's just a web."

"Ever try to spin one?" asked Dr. Dorian.

Mrs. Arable shifted uneasily in her chair. "No," she replied. "But I can crochet 钩针编织 a doily and I can knit a sock."

"Sure," said the doctor. "But somebody taught you, didn't they?"

"My mother taught me."

"Well, who taught a spider? A young spider knows how to spin a web without any instructions from anybody. Don't you regard that as a miracle?"

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Arable. "I never looked at it that way before. Still, I don't understand how those words got into the web. I don't understand it, and I don't like what I can't understand."

"None of us do," said Dr. Dorian, sighing. "I'm a doctor. Doctors are supposed to understand everything. But I don't understand everything, and I don't intend to let it worry me."

Mrs. Arable fidgeted. "Fern says the animals talk to each other. Dr. Dorian, do you believe animals talk?"

"I never heard one say anything," he replied. "But that proves nothing. It is quite possible that an animal has spoken civilly to me and that I didn't catch the remark because I wasn't paying attention. Children pay better attention than grownups. If Fern says that the animals in Zuckerman's barn talk, I'm quite ready to believe her. Perhaps if people talked less, animals would talk more. People are incessant talkers - I can give you my word on that."

"Well, I feel better about Fern," said Mrs. Arable. "You don't think I need worry about her?"

"Does she look well?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, yes."

"Appetite good?"

"Oh, yes, she's always hungry."

"Sleep well at night?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then don't worry," said the doctor.

"Do you think she'll ever start thinking about something besides pigs and sheep and geese and spiders?"

"How old is Fern?"

"She's eight."

"Well," said Dr. Dorian, "I think she will always love animals. But I doubt that she spends her entire life in Homer Zuckerman's barn cellar. How about boys - does she know any boys?"

"She knows Henry Fussy," said Mrs. Arable brightly.

Dr. Dorian closed his eyes again and went into deep thought.

"Henry Fussy," he mumbled. "Hmm. Remarkable. Well, I don't think you have anything to worry about. Let Fern associate with her friends in the barn if she wants to. I would say, offhand, that spiders and pigs were fully as interesting as Henry Fussy. Yet I predict that the day will come when even Henry will drop some chance remark that catches Fern's attention. It's amazing how children change from year to year. How's Avery?" he asked, opening his eyes wide.

"Oh, Avery," chuckled Mrs. Arable. "Avery is always fine. Of course, he gets into poison ivy and gets stung by wasps and bees and brings frogs and snakes home and breaks everything he lays his hands on. He's fine."

"Good!" said the doctor.

Mrs. Arable said goodbye and thanked Dr. Dorian very much for his advice. She felt greatly relieved.

## CHAPTER 15

### The Crickets

The crickets sang in the grasses. They sang the song of summer's ending, a sad, monotonous song. "Summer is over and gone," they sang. "Over and gone, over and gone. Summer is dying, dying."

The crickets felt it was their duty to warn everybody that summertime cannot last forever. Even on the most beautiful days in the whole year - the days when summer is changing into fall the crickets spread the rumor of sadness and change.

Everybody heard the song of the crickets. Avery and Fern Arable heard it as they walked the dusty road. They knew that school would soon begin again. The young geese heard it and knew that they would never be little goslings again. Charlotte heard it and knew that she hadn't much time left. Mrs. Zuckerman, at work in the kitchen, heard the crickets, and a sadness came over her, too. "Another summer gone," she sighed.

Lurvy, at work building a crate for Wilbur, heard the song and knew it was time to dig potatoes.

"Summer is over and gone," repeated the crickets. "How many nights till frost?" sang the crickets. "Good-bye, summer, good-bye, good-bye!"

The sheep heard the crickets, and they felt so uneasy they broke a hole in the pasture fence and wandered up into the field across the road. The gander discovered the hole and led his family through, and they walked to the orchard and ate the apples that were lying on the ground. A little maple tree in the swamp heard the cricket song and turned bright red with anxiety.

Wilbur was now the center of attraction on the farm. Good food and regular hours were showing results: Wilbur was a pig any man would be proud of. One day more than a hundred people came to stand at his yard and admire him. Charlotte had written the word RADIANT, and Wilbur really looked radiant as he stood in the golden sunlight. Ever since the spider had befriended him, he had done his best to live up to his reputation. When Charlotte's web said SOME PIG, Wilbur had tried hard to look like some pig. When Charlotte's web said TERRIFIC, Wilbur had tried to look terrific. And now that the web said RADIANT, he did everything possible to make himself glow.

It is not easy to look radiant, but Wilbur threw himself into it with a will. He would turn his head slightly and blink his long eye-lashes. Then he would breathe deeply. And when his audience grew bored, he would spring into the air and do a back flip with a half twist. At this the crowd would yell and cheer. "How's that for a pig?" Mr. Zuckerman would ask, well pleased with himself. "That pig is radiant."

Some of Wilbur's friends in the barn worried for fear all this attention would go to his head and make him stuck up. But it never did. Wilbur was modest; fame did not spoil him. He still worried some about the future, as he could hardly believe that a mere spider would be able to save his life. Sometimes at night he would have a bad dream. He would dream that men were coming to get him with knives and guns. But that was only a dream. In the daytime, Wilbur usually felt happy and confident. No pig ever had truer friends, and he realized that friendship is one of the most satisfying things in the world. Even the song of the crickets did not make Wilbur too sad. He knew it was almost time for the County Fair, and he was looking forward to the trip.

If he could distinguish himself at the Fair, and maybe win some prize money, he was sure Zuckerman would let him live.

Charlotte had worries of her own, but she kept quiet about them. One morning Wilbur asked her about the Fair.

"You're going with me, aren't you,, Charlotte?" he said

"Well, I don't know," replied Charlotte. "The Fair comes at a bad time for me. I shall find it inconvenient to leave home, even for a few days."

"Why?" asked Wilbur.

"Oh, I just don't feel like leaving my web. Too much going on around here."

"Please come with me!" begged Wilbur. "I need you, Charlotte. I can't stand going to the Fair without you. You've just got to come."

"No," said Charlotte, "I believe I'd better stay home and see if I can't get some work done."

"What kind of work?" asked Wilbur.

"Egg laying. It's time I made an egg sac and filled it with eggs."

"I didn't know you could lay eggs," said Wilbur in amazement.

"Oh, sure," said the spider. "I'm versatile."

"What does 'versatile' mean - full of eggs?" asked Wilbur.

"Certainly not," said Charlotte. "'Versatile' means I can turn with ease from one thing to another. It means I don't have to limit my activities to spinning and trapping and stunts like that."

"Why don't you come with me to the Fair Grounds and lay your eggs there?" pleaded Wilbur. "It would be wonderful fun."

Charlotte gave her web a twitch and moodily watched it sway.



"I'm afraid not," she said. "You don't know the first thing about egg laying, Wilbur. I can't arrange my family duties to suit the management of the County Fair. When I get ready to lay eggs, I have to lay eggs, Fair or no Fair. However, I don't want you to worry about it – you might lose weight. We'll leave it this way: I'll come to the Fair if I possibly can."

"Oh, good! " said Wilbur. "I knew you wouldn't forsake me just when I need you most."

All that day Wilbur stayed inside, taking life easy in the straw. Charlotte rested and ate a grasshopper. She knew that she couldn't help Wilbur much longer. In a few days she would have to drop everything and build the beautiful little sac that would hold her eggs.

## CHAPTER 16

### Off to the Fair

The night before the County Fair, everybody went to bed early. Fern and Avery were in bed by eight. Avery lay dreaming that the Ferris wheel 费里斯转轮 had stopped and that he was in the top car.

Fern lay dreaming that she was getting sick in the swings.

Lurvy was in bed by eight-thirty. He lay dreaming that he was throwing baseballs at a cloth cat and winning a genuine Navajo blanket. Mr. and Mrs. Zuckerman were in bed by nine. Mrs. Zuckerman lay dreaming about a deep freeze unit. Mr. Zuckerman lay dreaming about Wilbur. He dreamt that Wilbur had grown until he was one hundred and sixteen feet long and ninety-two feet high and that he had won all the prizes at the Fair and was covered with blue ribbons and even had a blue ribbon tied to the end of his tail.

Down in the barn cellar, the animals, too, went to sleep early, all except Charlotte. Tomorrow would be Fair Day. Every creature planned to get up early to see Wilbur off on his great adventure.

When morning came, everybody got up at daylight. The day was hot. Up the road at the Arables' house, Fern lugged a pail of hot water to her room and took a sponge bath. Then she put on her prettiest dress because she knew she would see boys at the Fair. Mrs. Arable scrubbed the back of Avery's neck, and wet his hair, and parted it, and brushed it down hard till it stuck to the top of his head - all but about six hairs that stood straight up. Avery put on clean underwear, clean blue jeans, and a clean shirt. Mr. Arable dressed, ate breakfast, and then went out and polished his truck. He had offered to drive everybody to the Fair, including Wilbur.

Bright and early, Lurvy put clean straw in Wilbur's crate and lifted it into the pigpen. The crate was green. In gold letters it said:

### ZUCKERMAN'S FAMOUS PIG

Charlotte had her web looking fine for the occasion. Wilbur ate his breakfast slowly. He tried to look radiant without getting food in his ears.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Zuckerman suddenly made an announcement.

"Homer," she said to her husband, "I am going to give that pig a buttermilk (liquid remaining after butter has been separated from milk) bath."

"A what?" said Mr. Zuckerman.

"A buttermilk bath. My grandmother used to bathe her pig with buttermilk when it got dirty I just remembered."

"Wilbur's not dirty," said Mr. Zuckerman proudly.

"He's filthy behind the ears," said Mrs. Zuckerman. "Every time Lurvy slops him, the food runs down around the ears. Then it dries and forms a crust. He also has a smudge on one side where he lays in the manure."

"He lays in clean straw," corrected Mr. Zuckerman.

"Well, he's dirty, and he's going to have a bath."

Mr. Zuckerman sat down weakly and ate a doughnut. His wife went to the woodshed. When she returned, she wore rubber boots and an old raincoat, and she carried a bucket of buttermilk and a small wooden paddle 桨; 搅棒 .

"Edith, you're crazy," mumbled Zuckerman.

But she paid no attention to him. Together they walked to the pigpen. Mrs. Zuckerman wasted no time. She climbed in with Wilbur and went to work. Dipping her paddle in the buttermilk, she rubbed him all over. The geese gathered around

to see the fun, and so did the sheep and lambs. Even Templeton poked his head out cautiously, to watch Wilbur get a buttermilk bath. Charlotte got so interested, she lowered herself on a dragline so she could see better. Wilbur stood still and closed his eyes. He could feel the buttermilk trickling down his sides. He opened his mouth and some buttermilk ran in. It was delicious. He felt radiant and happy. When Mrs. Zuckerman got through and rubbed him dry, he was the cleanest, prettiest pig you ever saw. He was pure white, pink around the ears and snout, and smooth as silk.

The Zuckermans went up to change into their best clothes. Lurvy went to shave and put on his plaid shirt and his purple necktie. The animals were left to themselves in the barn.

The seven goslings paraded round and round their mother.

"Please, please, please take us to the Fair!" begged a gosling. Then all seven began teasing to go.

"Please, please, please, please, please, please ..." They made quite a racket.

"Children!" snapped the goose. "We're staying quietly-ietly-ietly at home. Only Wilbur-ilbur-ilbur is going to the Fair."

Just then Charlotte interrupted.

"I shall go, too," she said, softly. "I have decided to go with Wilbur. He may need me. We can't tell what may happen at the Fair Grounds. Somebody's got to go along who knows how to write. And I think Templeton better come, too - I might need somebody to run errands and do general work."

"I'm staying right here," grumbled the rat. "I haven't the slightest interest in fairs."

"That's because you've never been to one," remarked the old sheep. "A fair is a rat's paradise. Everybody spills food at a fair. A rat can creep out late at night and have a feast. In the

horse barn you will find oats that the trotters and pacers have spilled. In the trampled grass of the infield you will find old discarded lunch boxes containing the foul remains of peanut butter sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, cracker crumbs, bits of doughnuts, and particles of cheese. In the hard-packed dirt of the midway, after the glaring lights are out and the people have gone home to bed, you will find a veritable treasure of popcorn fragments, frozen custard dribblings, candied apples abandoned by tired children, sugar fluff crystals, salted almonds, popsicles, partially gnawed ice cream cones, and the wooden sticks of lollypops. Everywhere is loot for a rat - in tents, in booths, in hay lofts - why, a fair has enough disgusting leftover food to satisfy a whole army of rats."

Templeton's eyes were blazing. "Is this true?" he asked. "Is this appetizing yarn of yours true? I like high living, and what you say tempts me."

"It is true," said the old sheep. "Go to the Fair, Templeton. You will find that the conditions at a fair will surpass your wildest dreams. Buckets with sour mash sticking to them, tin cans containing particles of tuna fish, greasy paper bags stuffed with rotten ..."

"That's enough!" cried Templeton. "Don't tell me any more. I'm going."

"Good," said Charlotte, winking at the old sheep. "Now then - there is no time to be lost. Wilbur will soon be put into the crate. Templeton and I must get in the crate right now and hide ourselves."

The rat didn't waste a minute. He scampered over to the crate, crawled between the slats, and pulled straw up over him so he was hidden from sight.

"All right," said Charlotte, "I'm next." She sailed into the air, let out a dragline, and dropped gently to the ground. Then she

climbed the side of the crate and hid herself inside a knothole (节孔 hole in a piece of lumber where a knot once was) in the top board.

The old sheep nodded. "What a cargo!" she said. "That sign ought to say 'Zuckerman's Famous Pig and Two Stowaways'."

"Look out, the people are coming-oming-oming!" shouted the gander. "Cheese (stop (Slang) it, cheese it, cheese it!"

The big truck with Mr. Arable at the wheel backed slowly down toward the barnyard. Lurvy and Mr. Zuckerman walked alongside. Fern and Avery were standing in the body of the truck hanging on to the sideboards.

"Listen to me," whispered the old sheep to Wilbur. "When they open the crate and try to put you in, struggle! Don't go without a tussle. Pigs always resist when they are being loaded."

"If I struggle I'll get dirty," said Wilbur.

"Never mind that - do as I say! Struggle! If you were to walk into the crate without resisting, Zuckerman might think you were bewitched. He'd be scared to go to the Fair."

Templeton poked his head up through the straw. "Struggle if you must," said he, "but kindly remember that I'm hiding down here in this crate and I don't want to be stepped on, or kicked in the face, or pummeled, or crushed in any way, or squashed, or buffeted about, or bruised, or lacerated, or scarred, or biffed (hit, strike). Just watch what you're doing, Mr. Radiant, when they get shoving you in!"

"Be quiet, Templeton!" said the sheep. "Pull in your head they're coming. Look radiant, Wilbur! Lay low, Charlotte! Talk it up, geese!"

The truck backed slowly to the pigpen and stopped. Mr. Arable cut the motor, got out, walked around to the rear, and

lowered the tailgate. The geese cheered. Mrs. Arable got out of the truck. Fern and Avery jumped to the ground. Mrs. Zuckerman came walking down from the house. Everybody lined up at the fence and stood for a moment admiring Wilbur and the beautiful green crate. Nobody realized that the crate already contained a rat and a spider.

"That's some pig!" said Mrs. Arable.

"He's terrific," said Lurvy.

"He's very radiant," said Fern, remembering the day he was born.

"Well," said Mrs. Zuckerman, "he's clean, anyway. The buttermilk certainly helped."

Mr. Arable studied Wilbur carefully. "Yes, he's a wonderful pig," he said. "It's hard to believe that he was the runt of the litter. You'll get some extra good ham and bacon, Homer, when it comes time to kill that pig."

Wilbur heard these words and his heart almost stopped. "I think I'm going to faint," he whispered to the old sheep, who was watching.

"Kneel down!" whispered the old sheep. "Let the blood rush to your head!"

Wilbur sank to his knees, all radiance gone. His eyes closed.

"Look!" screamed Fern. "He's fading away!"

"Hey, watch me!" yelled Avery, crawling on all fours into the crate. "I'm a pig! I'm a pig!"

Avery's foot touched Templeton under the straw. "What a mess!" thought the rat. "What fantastic creatures boys are! Why did I let myself in for this?"

The geese saw Avery in the crate and cheered.

"Avery, you get out of that crate this instant!" commanded his mother. "What do you think you are?"

"I'm a pig!" cried Avery, tossing handfuls of straw into the air. "Oink, oink, oink!"

"The truck is rolling away, Papa," said Fern.

The truck, with no one at the wheel, had started to roll downhill. Mr. Arable dashed to the driver's seat and pulled on the emergency brake. The truck stopped. The geese cheered. Charlotte crouched and made herself as small as possible in the knothole, so Avery wouldn't see her.

"Come out at once!" cried Mrs. Arable. Avery crawled out of the crate on hands and knees, making faces at Wilbur. Wilbur fainted away.

"The pig has passed out," said Mrs. Zuckerman. "Throw water on him!"

"Throw buttermilk!" suggested Avery.

The geese cheered.

Lurvy ran for a pail of water. Fern climbed into the pen and knelt by Wilbur's side.

"It's sunstroke," said Zuckerman. "The heat is too much for him."

"Maybe he's dead," said Avery.

"Come out of that pigpen immediately!" cried Mrs. Arable. Avery obeyed his mother and climbed into the back of the truck so he could see better. Lurvy returned with cold water and dashed it on Wilbur.

"Throw some on me!" cried Avery. "I'm hot, too."

"Oh, keep quiet!" hollered Fern. "Keep qui-et!" Her eyes were brimming with tears.

Wilbur, feeling the cold water, came to. He rose slowly to his feet, while the geese cheered.



"He's up!" said Mr. Arable. "I guess there's nothing wrong with him."

"I'm hungry," said Avery. "I want a candied apple."

"Wilbur's all right now," said Fern. "We can start. I want to take a ride in the Ferris wheel."

Mr. Zuckerman and Mr. Arable and Lurvy grabbed the pig and pushed him headfirst toward the crate. Wilbur began to struggle.

The harder the men pushed, the harder he held back. Avery jumped down and joined the men. Wilbur kicked and thrashed and grunted.

"Nothing wrong with this pig," said Mr. Zuckerman cheerfully, pressing his knee against Wilbur's behind. "All together, now, boys! Shove!"

With a final heave they jammed him into the crate. The geese cheered. Lurvy nailed some boards across the end, so Wilbur couldn't back out. Then, using all their strength, the men picked up the crate and heaved it aboard the truck. They did not know that under the straw was a rat, and inside a knothole was a big grey spider. They saw only a pig.

"Everybody in!" called Mr. Arable. He started the motor. The ladies climbed in beside him. Mr. Zuckerman and Lurvy and Fern and Avery rode in back, hanging onto the sideboards. The truck began to move ahead. The geese cheered. The children answered their cheer, and away went everybody to the Fair.

## CHAPTER 17

### Uncle

When they pulled into the Fair Grounds, they could hear music and see the Ferris wheel turning in the sky. They could smell the dust of the race track where the sprinkling cart had moistened it; and they could smell hamburgers frying and see balloons aloft. They could hear sheep blatting in their pens. An enormous voice over the loudspeaker said: "Attention, please! Will the owner of a Pontiac car, license number H-2439, please move your car away from the fireworks shed!"

"Can I have some money?" asked Fern.

"Can I, too?" asked Avery.

"I'm going to win a doll by spinning a wheel and it will stop at the right number," said Fern.

"I'm going to steer a jet plane and make it bump into another one."

"Can I have a balloon?" asked Fern.

"Can I have a frozen custard (软冻 sweet dish made of eggs and milk) and a cheeseburger and some raspberry soda pop?" asked Avery.

"You children be quiet till we get the pig unloaded," said Mrs. Arable.

"Let's let the children go off by themselves," suggested Mr. Arable. "The Fair only comes once a year." Mr. Arable gave Fern two quarters and two dimes. He gave Avery five dimes and four nickels. "Now run along!" he said. "And remember, the money has to last all day. Don't spend it all the first few minutes. And be back here at the truck at noontime so we can all have lunch together. And don't eat a lot of stuff that's going to make you sick to your stomachs."

"And if you go in those swings," said Mrs. Arable, "you hang on tight! You hang on very tight. Hear me?"

"And don't get lost!" said Mrs. Zuckerman.

"And don't get dirty!"

"Don't get overheated!" said their mother.

"Watch out for pickpockets!" cautioned their father.

"And don't cross the race track when the horses are coming!" cried Mrs. Zuckerman.

The children grabbed each other by the hand and danced off in the direction of the merry-go-round, toward the wonderful music and the wonderful adventure and the wonderful excitement, into the wonderful midway where there would be no parents to guard them and guide them, and where they could be happy and free and do as they pleased. Mrs. Arable stood quietly and watched them go. Then she sighed. Then she blew her nose.

"Do you really think it's all right?" she asked.

"Well, they've got to grow up some time," said Mr. Arable. "And a fair is a good place to start, I guess."

While Wilbur was being unloaded and taken out of his crate and into his new pigpen, crowds gathered to watch. They stared at the sign ZUCKERMAN'S FAMOUS PIG. Wilbur stared back and tried to look extra good. He was pleased with his new home. The pen was grassy, and it was shaded from the sun by a shed roof.

Charlotte, watching her chance, scrambled out of the crate and climbed a post to the under side of the roof. Nobody noticed her.

Templeton, not wishing to come out in broad daylight, stayed quietly under the straw at the bottom of the crate. Mr. Zuckerman poured some skim milk into Wilbur's trough, pitched

clean straw into his pen, and then he and Mrs. Zuckerman and the Arabes walked away toward the cattle barn to look at purebred cows and to see the sights. Mr. Zuckerman particularly wanted to look at tractors. Mrs. Zuckerman wanted to see a deep freeze. Lurvy wandered off by himself, hoping to meet friends and have some fun on the midway.

As soon as the people were gone, Charlotte spoke to Wilbur.

"It's a good thing you can't see what I see," she said.

"What do you see?" asked Wilbur.

"There's a pig in the next pen and he's enormous. I'm afraid he's much bigger than you are."

"Maybe he's older than I am, and has had more time to grow," suggested Wilbur. Tears began to come to his eyes.

"I'll drop down and have a closer look," Charlotte said. Then she crawled along a beam till she was directly over the next pen. She let herself down on a dragline until she hung in the air just in front of the big pig's snout.

"May I have your name?" she asked, politely.

The pig stared at her. "No name," he said in a big, hearty voice. "Just call me Uncle."

"Very well, Uncle," replied Charlotte. "What is the date of your birth? Are you a spring pig?"

"Sure I'm a spring pig," replied Uncle. "What did you think I was, a spring chicken? Haw, haw - that's a good one, eh, Sister."

"Mildly funny," said Charlotte. "I've heard funnier ones, though. Glad to have met you, and now I must be going."

She ascended slowly and returned to Wilbur's pen. "He claims he's a spring pig," reported Charlotte, "and perhaps he is. One thing is certain, he has a most unattractive personality."

He is too familiar, too noisy, and he cracks weak jokes. Also, he's not anywhere near as clean as you are, nor as pleasant. I took quite a dislike to him in our brief interview. He's going to be a hard pig to beat, though, Wilbur, on account of his size and weight. But with me helping you, it can be done."

"When are you going to spin a web?" asked Wilbur.

"This afternoon, late, if I'm not too tired," said Charlotte. "The least thing tires me these days. I don't seem to have the energy I once had. My age, I guess."

Wilbur looked at his friend. She looked rather swollen and she seemed listless.

"I'm awfully sorry to hear that you're feeling poorly, Charlotte," he said. "Perhaps if you spin a web and catch a couple of flies you'll feel better."

"Perhaps," she said, wearily. "But I feel like the end of a long day." Clinging upside down to the ceiling, she settled down for a nap, leaving Wilbur very much worried.

All morning people wandered past Wilbur's pen. Dozens and dozens of strangers stopped to stare at him and to admire his silky white coat, his curly tail, his kind and radiant expression. Then they would move on to the next pen where the bigger pig lay. Wilbur heard several people make favorable remarks about Uncle's great size. He couldn't help overhearing these remarks, and he couldn't help worrying. "And now, with Charlotte not feeling well ..." he thought. "Oh, dear!"

All morning Templeton slept quietly under the straw. The day grew fiercely hot. At noon the Zuckermans and the Arables returned to the pigpen. Then, a few minutes later, Fern and Avery showed up. Fern had a monkey doll in her arms and was eating Crackerjack. Avery had a balloon tied to his ear and was chewing a candied apple. The children were hot and dirty.

"Isn't it hot?" said Mrs. Zuckerman.

"It's terribly hot," said Mrs. Arable, fanning herself with an advertisement of a deep freeze.

One by one they climbed into the truck and opened lunch boxes. The sun beat down on everything. Nobody seemed hungry.

"When are the judges going to decide about Wilbur?" asked Mrs. Zuckerman.

"Not till tomorrow," said Mr. Zuckerman.

Lurvy appeared, carrying an Indian blanket that he had won.

"That's just what we need," said Avery. "A blanket."

"Of course it is," replied Lurvy. And he spread the blanket across the sideboards of the truck so that it was like a little tent. The children sat in the shade, under the blanket, and felt better.

After lunch, they stretched out and fell asleep.

## CHAPTER 18

### The Cool of the Evening

In the cool of the evening, when shadows darkened the Fair Grounds, Templeton crept from the crate and looked around. Wilbur lay asleep in the straw. Charlotte was building a web. Templeton's keen nose detected many fine smells in the air. The rat was hungry and thirsty. He decided to go exploring. Without saying anything to anybody, he started off.

"Bring me back a word!" Charlotte called after him. "I shall be writing tonight for the last time."

The rat mumbled something to himself and disappeared into the shadows. He did not like being treated like a messenger boy.

After the heat of the day, the evening came as a welcome relief to all. The Ferris wheel was lighted now. It went round and round in the sky and seemed twice as high as by day. There were lights on the midway, and you could hear the crackle of the gambling machines and the music of the merry-go-round and the voice of the man in the beano (bingo (game of chance) booth calling numbers. The children felt refreshed after their nap. Fern met her friend Henry Fussy, and he invited her to ride with him in the Ferris wheel. He even bought a ticket for her, so it didn't cost her anything. When Mrs. Arable happened to look up into the starry sky and saw her little daughter sitting with Henry Fussy and going higher and higher into the air, and saw how happy Fern looked, she just shook her head. "My, my!" she said. "Henry Fussy. Think of that!"

Templeton kept out of sight. In the tall grass behind the cattle barn he found a folded newspaper. Inside it were leftovers from somebody's lunch: a deviled ham sandwich, a

piece of Swiss cheese, part of a hard-boiled egg, and the core of a wormy apple.

The rat crawled in and ate everything. Then he tore a word out of the paper, rolled it up, and started back to Wilbur's pen.

Charlotte had her web almost finished when Templeton returned, carrying the newspaper clipping. She had left a space in the middle of the web. At this hour, no people were around the pigpen, so the rat and the spider and the pig were by themselves.

"I hope you brought a good one," Charlotte said. "It is the last word I shall ever write."

"Here," said Templeton, unrolling the paper.

"What does it say?" asked Charlotte. "You'll have to read it for me."

"It says 'Humble,'" replied the rat.

"Humble?" said Charlotte. "'Humble' has two meanings. It means 'not proud' and it means 'near the ground.'" That's Wilbur all over. He's not proud and he's near the ground."

"Well, I hope you're satisfied," sneered the rat. "I'm not going to spend all my time fetching and carrying. I came to this Fair to enjoy myself, not to deliver papers."

"You've been very helpful," Charlotte said. "Run along, if you want to see more of the Fair."

The rat grinned. "I'm going to make a night of it," he said. "The old sheep was right - this Fair is a rat's paradise. What eating! And what drinking! And everywhere good hiding and good hunting. Bye, bye, my humble Wilbur! Fare thee well, Charlotte, you old schemer! This will be a night to remember in a rat's life."

He vanished into the shadows.



Charlotte went back to her work. It was quite dark now. In the distance, fireworks began going off - rockets, scattering fiery balls in the sky. By the time the Arables and the Zuckermans and Lurvy returned from the grandstand, Charlotte had finished her web. The word HUMBLE was woven neatly in the center. Nobody noticed it in the darkness. Everyone was tired and happy.

Fern and Avery climbed into the truck and lay down. They pulled the Indian blanket over them. Lurvy gave Wilbur a forkful of fresh straw. Mr. Arable patted him. "Time for us to go home," he said to the pig. "See you tomorrow."

The grownups climbed slowly into the truck and Wilbur heard the engine start and then heard the truck moving away in low speed. He would have felt lonely and homesick, had Charlotte not been with him. He never felt lonely when she was near. In the distance he could still hear the music of the merry-go-round.

As he was dropping off to sleep he spoke to Charlotte.

"Sing me that song again, about the dung and the dark," he begged.

"Not tonight," she said in a low voice. "I'm too tired."

Her voice didn't seem to come from her web.

"Where are you?" asked Wilbur. "I can't see you. Are you on your web?"

"I'm back here," she answered. "Up in this back corner."

"Why aren't you on your web?" asked Wilbur. "You almost never leave your web."

"I've left it tonight," she said.

Wilbur closed his eyes. "Charlotte," he said, after a while, "do you really think Zuckerman will let me live and not kill me when the cold weather comes? Do you really think so?"

"Of course," said Charlotte. "You are a famous pig and you are a good pig. Tomorrow you will probably win a prize. The whole world will hear about you. Zuckerman will be proud and happy to own such a pig. You have nothing to fear, Wilbur nothing to worry about. Maybe you'll live forever - who knows? And now, go to sleep."

For a while there was no sound. Then Wilbur's voice:

"What are you doing up there, Charlotte?"

"Oh, making something," she said. "Making something, as usual."

"Is it something for me?" asked Wilbur.

"No," said Charlotte. "It's something for me, for a change."

"Please tell me what it is," begged Wilbur.

"I'll tell you in the morning," she said. "When the first light comes into the sky and the sparrows stir and the cows rattle their chains, when the rooster crows and the stars fade, when early cars whisper along the highway, you look up here and I'll show you something. I will show you my masterpiece."

Before she finished the sentence, Wilbur was asleep. She could tell by the sound of his breathing that he was sleeping peacefully, deep in the straw.

Miles away, at the Arables' house, the men sat around the kitchen table eating a dish of canned peaches and talking over the events of the day. Upstairs, Avery was already in bed and asleep. Mrs. Arable was tucking Fern into bed.

"Did you have a good time at the Fair?" she asked as she kissed her daughter.

Fern nodded. "I had the best time I have ever had anywhere or any time in all of my whole life."

"Well!" said Mrs. Arable. "Isn't that nice!"

## CHAPTER 19

### The Egg Sac

Next morning when the first light came into the sky and the sparrows stirred in the trees, when the cows rattled their chains and the rooster crowed and the early automobiles went whispering along the road, Wilbur awoke and looked for Charlotte. He saw her up overhead in a corner near the back of his pen. She was very quiet. Her eight legs were spread wide. She seemed to have shrunk during the night. Next to her, attached to the ceiling, Wilbur saw a curious object. It was a sort of sac, or cocoon. It was peach-colored and looked as though it were made of cotton candy 棉花糖.

"Are you awake, Charlotte?" he said softly.

"Yes," came the answer.

"What is that nifty little thing? Did you make it?"

"I did indeed," replied Charlotte in a weak voice.

"Is it a plaything?"

"Plaything? I should say not. It is my egg sac, my magnum opus."

"I don't know what a magnum opus (masterpiece) is," said Wilbur.

"That's Latin," explained Charlotte. "It means 'great work.' This egg sac is my great work - the finest thing I have ever made."

"What's inside it?" asked Wilbur. "Eggs?"

"Five hundred and fourteen of them," she replied.

"Five hundred and fourteen?" said Wilbur. "You're kidding."

"No, I'm not. I counted them. I got started counting so I kept on - just to keep my mind occupied."

"It's a perfectly beautiful egg sac," said Wilbur, feeling as happy as though he had constructed it himself.

"Yes, it is pretty," replied Charlotte, patting the sac with her two front legs. "Anyway, I can guarantee that it is strong. It's made out of the toughest material I have. It is also waterproof. The eggs are inside and will be warm and dry."

"Charlotte," said Wilbur dreamily, "are you really going to have five hundred and fourteen children?"

"If nothing happens, yes," she said. "Of course, they won't show up till next spring."

Wilbur noticed that Charlotte's voice sounded sad. "What makes you sound so down-hearted? I should think you'd be terribly happy about this."

"Oh, don't pay any attention to me," said Charlotte. "I just don't have much pep any more. I guess I feel sad because I won't ever see my children."

"What do you mean you won't see your children! Of course you will. We'll all see them. It's going to be simply wonderful next spring in the barn cellar with five hundred and fourteen baby spiders running around all over the place. And the geese will have a new set of goslings, and the sheep will have their new lambs ..."

"Maybe," said Charlotte quietly. "However, I have a feeling I'm not going to see the results of last night's efforts. I don't feel good at all. I think I'm languishing, to tell you the truth."

Wilbur didn't understand the word "languish" and he hated to bother Charlotte by asking her to explain. But he was so worried he felt he had to ask.

"What does 'languishing' mean?"

"It means I'm slowing up, feeling my age. I'm not young any more, Wilbur. But I don't want you to worry about me. This is

your big day today. Look at my web - doesn't it show up well with the dew on it?"

Charlotte's web never looked more beautiful than it looked this morning. Each strand held dozens of bright drops of early morning dew. The light from the east struck it and made it all plain and clear. It was a perfect piece of designing and building. In another hour or two, a steady stream of people would pass by, admiring it, and reading it, and looking at Wilbur, and marveling at the miracle.

As Wilbur was studying the web, a pair of whiskers and a sharp face appeared. Slowly Templeton dragged himself across the pen and threw himself down in a corner.

"I'm back," he said in a husky voice. "What a night!"

The rat was swollen to twice his normal size. His stomach was as big around as a jelly jar.

"What a night!" he repeated, hoarsely. "What feasting and carousing (drink heavily, consume large quantities of alcohol)! A real gorge! I must have eaten the remains of thirty lunches. Never have I seen such leavings, and everything well-ripened and seasoned with the passage of time and the heat of the day. Oh, it was rich, my friends, rich!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Charlotte in disgust. "It would serve you right if you had an acute attack of indigestion."

"Don't worry about my stomach," snarled Templeton. "It can handle anything. And by the way, I've got some bad news. As I came past that pig next door - the one that calls himself Uncle I noticed a blue tag on the front of his pen. That means he has won first prize. I guess you're licked, Wilbur. You might as well relax - nobody is going to hang any medal on you. Furthermore, I wouldn't be surprised if Zuckerman changes his mind about you. Wait till he gets hankering (strong desire) for some fresh

pork and smoked ham and crisp bacon! He'll take the knife to you, my boy."

"Be still, Templeton!" said Charlotte. "You're too stuffed and bloated to know what you're saying. Don't pay any attention to him, Wilbur!"

Wilbur tried not to think about what the rat had just said. He decided to change the subject.

"Templeton," said Wilbur, "if you weren't so dopey (drugged, stupefied; stupid), you would have noticed that Charlotte has made an egg sac. She is going to become a mother. For your information, there are five hundred and fourteen eggs in that peachy little sac."

"Is this true?" asked the rat, eyeing the sac suspiciously.

"Yes, it's true," sighed Charlotte.

"Congratulations!" murmured Templeton. "This has been a night!" He closed his eyes, pulled some straw over himself, and dropped off into a deep sleep. Wilbur and Charlotte were glad to be rid of him for a while.

At nine o'clock, Mr. Arable's truck rolled into the Fair Grounds and came to a stop at Wilbur's pen. Everybody climbed out.

"Look!" cried Fern. "Look at Charlotte's web! Look what it says!"

The grownups and the children joined hands and stood there, studying the new sign.

"'Humble,'" said Mr. Zuckerman. "Now isn't that just the word for Wilbur!"

Everyone rejoiced to find that the miracle of the web had been repeated. Wilbur gazed up lovingly into their faces. He looked very humble and very grateful. Fern winked at Charlotte. Lurvy soon got busy. He poured a bucket of warm slops into the

trough, and while Wilbur ate his breakfast Lurvy scratched him gently with a smooth stick.

"Wait a minute!" cried Avery. "Look at this!" He pointed to the blue tag on Uncle's pen. "This pig has won first prize already."

The Zuckermans and the Arables stared at the tag. Mrs. Zuckerman began to cry. Nobody said a word. They just stared at the tag. Then they stared at Uncle. Then they stared at the tag again. Lurvy took out an enormous handkerchief and blew his nose very loud - so loud, in fact, that the noise was heard by stableboys over at the horse barn.

"Can I have some money?" asked Fern. "I want to go out on the midway."

"You stay right where you are!" said her mother. Tears came to Fern's eyes.

"What's everybody crying about?" asked Mr. Zuckerman. "Let's get busy! Edith, bring the buttermilk!"

Mrs. Zuckerman wiped her eyes with her handkerchief. She went to the truck and came back with a gallon jar of buttermilk.

"Bath time!" said Zuckerman, cheerfully. He and Mrs. Zuckerman and Avery climbed into Wilbur's pen. Avery slowly poured buttermilk on Wilbur's head and back, and as it trickled down his sides and cheeks, Mr. and Mrs. Zuckerman rubbed it into his hair and skin. Passersby stopped to watch. Pretty soon quite a crowd had gathered. Wilbur grew beautifully white and smooth. The morning sun shone through his pink ears.

"He isn't as big as that pig next door," remarked one bystander, "but he's cleaner. That's what I like."

"So do I," said another man.

"He's humble, too," said a woman, reading the sign on the web.

Everybody who visited the pigpen had a good word to say about Wilbur. Everyone admired the web. And of course nobody noticed Charlotte.

Suddenly a voice was heard on the loud speaker.

"Attention, please!" it said. "Will Mr. Homer Zuckerman bring his famous pig to the judges' booth in front of the grandstand. A special award will be made there in twenty minutes. Everyone is invited to attend. Crate your pig, please, Mr. Zuckerman, and report to the judges' booth promptly!"

For a moment after this announcement, the Arables and the Zuckermans were unable to speak or move. Then Avery picked up a handful of straw and threw it high in the air and gave a loud yell. The straw fluttered down like confetti into Fern's hair. Mr. Zuckerman hugged Mrs. Zuckerman. Mr. Arable kissed Mrs. Arable. Avery kissed Wilbur. Lurvy shook hands with everybody.

Fern hugged her mother. Avery hugged Fern. Mrs. Arable hugged Mrs. Zuckerman.

Up overhead, in the shadows of the ceiling, Charlotte crouched unseen, her front legs encircling her egg sac. Her heart was not beating as strongly as usual and she felt weary and old, but she was sure at last that she had saved Wilbur's life, and she felt peaceful and contented.

"We have no time to lose!" shouted Mr. Zuckerman. "Lurvy, help with the crate!"

"Can I have some money?" asked Fern.

"You wait!" said Mrs. Arable. "Can't you see everybody is busy?"

"Put that empty buttermilk jar into the truck!" commanded Mr. Arable. Avery grabbed the jar and rushed to the truck.

"Does my hair look all right?" asked Mrs. Zuckerman.



"Looks fine," snapped Mr. Zuckerman, as he and Lurvy set the crate down in front of Wilbur.

"You didn't even look at my hair!" said Mrs. Zuckerman.

"You're all right, Edith," said Mrs. Arable. "Just keep calm.

Templeton, asleep in the straw, heard the commotion and awoke. He didn't know exactly what was going on, but when he saw the men shoving Wilbur into the crate he made up his mind to go along. He watched his chance and when no one was looking he crept into the crate and buried himself in the straw at the bottom.

"All ready, boys!" cried Mr. Zuckerman. "Let's go!" He and Mr. Arable and Lurvy and Avery grabbed the crate and boosted it over the side of the pen and up into the truck. Fern jumped aboard and sat on top of the crate. She still had straw in her hair and looked very pretty and excited. Mr. Arable started the motor. Everyone climbed in, and off they drove to the judge's booth in front of the grandstand.

As they passed the Ferris wheel, Fern gazed up at it and wished she were in the topmost car with Henry Fussy at her side.

## CHAPTER 20

### 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!" Everyone 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.

## CHAPTER 21

### Last Day

Charlotte and Wilbur were alone. The families had gone to look for Fern. Templeton was asleep. Wilbur lay resting after the excitement and strain of the ceremony. His medal still hung from his neck; by looking out of the corner of his eye he could see it.

"Charlotte," said Wilbur after a while, "why are you so quiet?"

"I like to sit still," she said. "I've always been rather quiet."

"Yes, but you seem specially so today. Do you feel all right?"

"A little tired, perhaps. But I feel peaceful. Your success in the ring this morning was, to a small degree, any success. Your future is assured. You will live, secure and safe, Wilbur. Nothing can harm you now. These autumn days will shorten and grow cold. The leaves will shake loose from the trees and fall. Christmas will come, then the snows of winter. You will live to enjoy the beauty of the frozen world, for you mean a great deal to Zuckerman and he will not harm you, ever. Winter will pass, the days will lengthen, the ice will melt in the pasture pond. The song sparrow will return and sing, the frogs will awake, the warm wind will blow again. All these sights and sounds and smells will be yours to enjoy, Wilbur - this lovely world, these precious days ..."

Charlotte stopped. A moment later a tear came to Wilbur's eye. "Oh, Charlotte," he said. "To think that when I first met you I thought you were cruel and bloodthirsty!"

When he recovered from his emotion, he spoke again. "Why did you do all this for me?" he asked. "I don't deserve it. I've never done anything for you."

"You have been my friend," replied Charlotte. "That in itself is a tremendous thing. I wove my webs for you because I liked you. After all, what's a life, anyway? We're born, we live a little while, we die. A spider's life can't help being something of a mess, with all this trapping and eating flies. By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that."

"Well," said Wilbur. "I'm no good at making speeches. I haven't got your gift for words. But you have saved me, Charlotte, and I would gladly give my life for you - I really would."

"I'm sure you would. And I thank you for your generous sentiments."

"Charlotte," said Wilbur. "We're all going home today. The Fair is almost over. Won't it be wonderful to be back home in the barn cellar again with the sheep and the geese? Aren't you anxious to get home?"

For a moment Charlotte said nothing. Then she spoke in a voice so low Wilbur could hardly hear the words.

"I will not be going back to the barn," she said.

Wilbur leapt to his feet. "Not going back?" he cried. "Charlotte, what are you talking about?"

"I'm done for," she replied. "In a day or two I'll be dead. I haven't even strength enough to climb down into the crate. I doubt if I have enough silk in my spinnerets to lower me to the ground."

Hearing this, Wilbur threw himself down in an agony of pain and sorrow. Great sobs racked his body. He heaved and grunted with desolation. "Charlotte," he moaned. "Charlotte! My true friend!"



"Come now, let's not make a scene," said the spider. "Be quiet, Wilbur. Stop thrashing about!"

"But I can't stand it," shouted Wilbur. "I won't leave you here alone to die. If you're going to stay here I shall stay, too."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Charlotte. "You can't stay here. Zuckerman and Lurvy and John Arable and the others will be back any minute now, and they'll shove you into that crate and away you'll go. Besides, it wouldn't make any sense for you to stay. There would be no one to feed you. The Fair Grounds will soon be empty and deserted."

Wilbur was in a panic. He raced round and round the pen. Suddenly he had an idea - he thought of the egg sac and the five hundred and fourteen little spiders that would hatch in the spring. If Charlotte herself was unable to go home to the barn, at least he must take her children along.

Wilbur rushed to the front of his pen. He put his front feet up on the top board and gazed around. In the distance he saw the Arables and the Zuckermans approaching. He knew he would have to act quickly.

"Where's Templeton?" he demanded.

"He's in that corner, under the straw, asleep," said Charlotte.

Wilbur rushed over, pushed his strong snout under the rat, and tossed him into the air.

"Templeton!" screamed Wilbur. "Pay attention!"

The rat, surprised out of a sound sleep, looked first dazed then disgusted.

"What kind of monkeyshine is this?" he growled. "Can't a rat catch a wink of sleep without being rudely popped into the air?"

"Listen to me!" cried Wilbur. "Charlotte is very ill. She has only a short time to live. She cannot accompany us home, because of her condition. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that I take her egg sac with me. I can't reach it, and I can't climb. You are the only one that can get it. There's not a second to be lost. The people are coming - they'll be here in no time. Please, please, please, Templeton, climb up and get the egg sac."

The rat yawned. He straightened his whiskers. Then he looked up at the egg sac.

"So!" he said, in disgust. "So it's old Templeton to the rescue again, is it? Templeton do this, Templeton do that, Templeton please run down to the dump and get me a magazine clipping, Templeton please lend me a piece of string so I can spin a web."

"Oh, hurry!" said Wilbur. "Hurry up, Templeton!"

But the rat was in no hurry. He began imitating Wilbur's voice.

"So it's 'Hurry up, Templeton,' is it?" He said. "Ho, ho. And what thanks do I ever get for these services, I would like to know? Never a kind word for old Templeton, only abuse and wisecracks (joke; sarcastic remark) and side remarks. Never a kind word for a rat."

"Templeton," said Wilbur in desperation, "if you don't stop talking and get busy, all will be lost, and I will die of a broken heart. Please climb up!"

Templeton lay back in the straw. Lazily he placed his forepaws behind his head and crossed his knees, in an attitude of complete relaxation.

"Die of a broken heart," he mimicked. "How touching! My, my! I notice that it's always me you come to when in trouble.

But I've never heard of anyone's heart breaking on my account. Oh, no. Who cares anything about old Templeton?"

"Get up!" screamed Wilbur. "Stop acting like a spoiled child!

Templeton grinned and lay still. "Who made trip after trip to the dump?" he asked. "Why, it was old Templeton! Who saved Charlotte's life by scaring that Arable boy away with a rotten goose egg? Bless my soul, I believe it was old Templeton. Who bit your tail and got you back on your feet this morning after you had fainted in front of the crowd? Old Templeton. Has it ever occurred to you that I'm sick of running errands and doing favors? What do you think I am, anyway, a rat-of-all-work?"

Wilbur was desperate. The people were coming. And the rat was failing him. Suddenly he remembered Templeton's fondness for food.

"Templeton," he said, "I will make you a solemn promise. Get Charlotte's egg sac for me, and from now on I will let you eat first, when Lurvy slops me. I will let you have your choice of everything in the trough and I won't touch a thing until you're through."

The rat sat up. "You mean that?" he said.

"I promise. I cross my heart."

"All right, it's a deal," said the rat. He walked to the wall and started to climb. His stomach was still swollen from last night's gorge. Groaning and complaining, he pulled himself slowly to the ceiling. He crept along till he reached the egg sac. Charlotte moved aside for him. She was dying, but she still had strength enough to move a little. Then Templeton bared his long ugly teeth and began snipping the threads that fastened the sac to the ceiling. Wilbur watched from below.

"Use extreme care!" he said. "I don't want a single one of those eggs harmed."

"Thith thtuff thticks in my mouth," complained the rat. "It'th worth than caramel candy."

But Templeton worked away at the job, and managed to cut the sac adrift and carry it to the ground, where he dropped it in front of Wilbur. Wilbur heaved a great sigh of relief.

"Thank you, Templeton," he said. "I will never forget this as long as I live."

"Neither will I," said the rat, picking his teeth. "I feel as though I'd eaten a spool of thread. Well, home we go!"

Templeton crept into the crate and buried himself in the straw. He got out of sight just in time. Lurvy and John Arable and Mr. Zuckerman came along at that moment, followed by Mrs. Arable and Mrs. Zuckerman and Avery and Fern. Wilbur had already decided how he would carry the egg sac - there was only one way possible. He carefully took the little bundle in his mouth and held it there on top of his tongue. He remembered what Charlotte had told him - that the sac was waterproof and strong. It felt funny on his tongue and made him drool a bit. And of course he couldn't say anything. But as he was being shoved into the crate, he looked up at Charlotte and gave her a wink. She knew he was saying good-bye in the only way he could. And she knew her children were safe.

"Good-bye!" she whispered. Then she summoned all her strength and waved one of her front legs at him.

She never moved again. Next day, as the Ferris wheel was being taken apart and the race horses were being loaded into vans and the entertainers were packing up their belongings and driving away in their trailers, Charlotte died. The Fair Grounds were soon deserted. The sheds and buildings were empty and forlorn.

The infield was littered with bottles and trash. Nobody, of the hundreds of people that had visited the Fair, knew that a

grey spider had played the most important part of all. No one was with her when she died.

## CHAPTER 22

### A Warm Wind

And so Wilbur came home to his beloved manure pile in the barn cellar. His was a strange homecoming. Around his neck he wore a medal of honor; in his mouth he held a sac of spider's eggs. There is no place like home, Wilbur thought, as he placed Charlotte's five hundred and fourteen unborn children carefully in a safe corner. The barn smelled good. His friends the sheep and the geese were glad to see him back.

The geese gave him a noisy welcome.

"Congratu-congratu-congratulations!" they cried. "Nice work."

Mr. Zuckerman took the medal from Wilbur's neck and hung it on a nail over the pigpen, where visitors could examine it. Wilbur himself could look at it whenever he wanted to.

In the days that followed, he was very happy. He grew to a great size. He no longer worried about being killed, for he knew that Mr. Zuckerman would keep him as long as he lived. Wilbur often thought of Charlotte. A few strands of her old web still hung in the doorway. Every day Wilbur would stand and look at the torn, empty web, and a lump would come to his throat. No one had ever had such a friend – so affectionate, so loyal, and so skillful.

The autumn days grew shorter, Lurvy brought the squashes and pumpkins in from the garden and piled them on the barn floor, where they wouldn't get nipped on frosty nights. The maples and birches turned bright colors and the wind shook them and they dropped their leaves one by one to the ground. Under the wild apple trees in the pasture, the red little apples lay thick on the ground, and the sheep gnawed them and the geese gnawed them and foxes came in the night and sniffed

them. One evening, just before Christmas, snow began falling. It covered house and barn and fields and woods. Wilbur had never seen snow before. When morning came he went out and plowed the drifts in his yard, for the fun of it. Fern and Avery arrived, dragging a sled. They coasted down the lane and out onto the frozen pond in the pasture.

"Coasting is the most fun there is," said Avery.

"The most fun there is," retorted Fern, "is when the Ferris wheel stops and Henry and I are in the top car and Henry makes the car swing and we can see everything for miles and miles and miles."

"Goodness, are you still thinking about that ol' Ferris wheel?" said Avery in disgust. "The Fair was weeks and weeks ago."

"I think about it all the time," said Fern, picking snow from her ear.

After Christmas the thermometer dropped to ten below zero. Cold settled on the world. The pasture was bleak and frozen. The cows stayed in the barn all the time now, except on sunny mornings when they went out and stood in the barnyard in the lee of the straw pile. The sheep stayed near the barn, too, for protection. When they were thirsty they ate snow. The geese hung around the barnyard the way boys hang around a drug store, and Mr. Zuckerman fed them corn and turnips to keep them cheerful.

"Many, many, many thanks!" they always said, when they saw food coming.

Templeton moved indoors when winter came. His ratty home under the pig trough was too chilly, so he fixed himself a cozy nest in the barn behind the grain bins. He lined it with bits of dirty newspapers and rags and whenever he found a trinket or a keepsake he carried it home and stored it there. He continued

to visit Wilbur three times a day, exactly at mealtime, and Wilbur kept the promise he had made. Wilbur let the rat eat first.

Then, when Templeton couldn't hold another mouthful, Wilbur would eat. As a result of overeating, Templeton grew bigger and fatter than any rat you ever saw. He was gigantic. He was as big as a young woodchuck.

The old sheep spoke to him about his size one day. "You would live longer," said the old sheep, "if you ate less."

"Who wants to live forever?" sneered the rat. "I am naturally a heavy eater and I get untold satisfaction from the pleasures of the feast." He patted his stomach, grinned at the sheep, and crept upstairs to lie down.

All winter Wilbur watched over Charlotte's egg sac as though he were guarding his own children. He had scooped out a special place in the manure for the sac, next to the board fence. On very cold nights he lay so that his breath would warm it. For Wilbur, nothing in life was so important as this small round object - nothing else mattered. Patiently he awaited the end of winter and the coming of the little spiders. Life is always a rich and steady time when you are waiting for something to happen or to hatch. The winter ended at last.

"I heard the frogs today," said the old sheep one evening. "Listen! You can hear them now."

Wilbur stood still and cocked his ears. From the pond, in shrill chorus, came the voices of hundreds of little frogs.

"Springtime," said the old sheep, thoughtfully. "Another spring." As she walked away, Wilbur saw a new lamb following her.

It was only a few hours old.



The snows melted and ran away. The streams and ditches bubbled and chattered with rushing water. A sparrow with a streaky breast arrived and sang. The light strengthened, the mornings came sooner. Almost every morning there was another new lamb in the sheepfold. The goose was sitting on nine eggs. The sky seemed wider and a warm wind blew. The last remaining strands of Charlotte's old web floated away and vanished.

One fine sunny morning, after breakfast, Wilbur stood watching his precious sac. He wasn't thinking of anything much. As he stood there, he noticed something move. He stepped closer and stared. A tiny spider crawled from the sac. It was no bigger than a grain of sand, no bigger than the head of a pin.

Its body was grey with a black stripe underneath. Its legs were grey and tan. It looked just like Charlotte.

Wilbur trembled all over when he saw it. The little spider waved at him. Then Wilbur looked more closely. Two more little spiders crawled out and waved. They climbed round and round on the sac, exploring their new world. Then three more little spiders. Then eight. Then ten. Charlotte's children were here at last.

Wilbur's heart pounded. He began to squeal. Then he raced in circles, kicking manure into the air. Then he turned a back flip. Then he planted his front feet and came to a stop in front of Charlotte's children.

"Hello, there!" he said.

The first spider said hello, but its voice was so small Wilbur couldn't hear it.

"I am an old friend of your mother's," said Wilbur. "I'm glad to see you. Are you all right? Is everything all right?"

The little spiders waved their forelegs at him. Wilbur could see by the way they acted that they were glad to see him.

"Is there anything I can get you? Is there anything you need?"

The young spiders just waved. For several days and several nights they crawled here and there, up and down, around and about, waving at Wilbur, trailing tiny draglines behind them, and exploring their home. There were dozens and dozens of them. Wilbur couldn't count them, but he knew that he had a great many new friends. They grew quite rapidly. Soon each was as big as a BB shot. They made tiny webs near the sac.

Then came a quiet morning when Mr. Zuckerman opened a door on the north side. A warm draft of rising air blew softly through the barn cellar. The air smelled of the damp earth, of the spruce woods, of the sweet springtime. The baby spiders felt the warm updraft. One spider climbed to the top of the fence. Then it did something that came as a great surprise to Wilbur. The spider stood on its head, pointed its spinnerets in the air, and let loose a cloud of fine silk. The silk formed a balloon. As Wilbur watched, the spider let go of the fence and rose into the air.

"Good-bye!" it said, as it sailed through the doorway.

"Wait a minute!" screamed Wilbur. "Where do you think you're going?"

But the spider was already out of sight. Then another baby spider crawled to the top of the fence, stood on its head, made a balloon, and sailed away. Then another spider. Then another. The air was soon filled with tiny balloons, each balloon carrying a spider.

Wilbur was frantic. Charlotte's babies were disappearing at a great rate.

"Come back, children!" he cried.

"Good-bye!" they called. "Good-bye, good-bye!" At last one little spider took time enough to stop and talk to Wilbur before making its balloon.

"We're leaving here on the warm updraft. This is our moment for setting forth. We are aeronauts and we are going out into the world to make webs for ourselves."

"But where?" asked Wilbur.

"Wherever the wind takes us. High, low. Near, far. East, west. North, south. We take to the breeze, we go as we please."

"Are all of you going?" asked Wilbur. "You can't all go. I would be left alone, with no friends. Your mother wouldn't want that to happen, I'm sure."

The air was now so full of balloonists that the barn cellar looked almost as though a mist had gathered. Balloons by the dozen were rising, circling, and drifting away through the door, sailing off on the gentle wind. Cries of "Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye!" came weakly to Wilbur's ears. He couldn't bear to watch any more. In sorrow he sank to the ground and closed his eyes. This seemed like the end of the world, to be deserted by Charlotte's children. Wilbur cried himself to sleep.

When he woke it was late afternoon. He looked at the egg sac. It was empty. He looked into the air. The balloonists were gone. Then he walked drearily to the doorway, where Charlotte's web used to be. He was standing there, thinking of her, when he heard a small voice.

"Salutations!" it said. "I'm up here."

"So am I," said another tiny voice.

"So am I," said a third voice. "Three of us are staying. We like this place, and we like you."

Wilbur looked up. At the top of the doorway three small webs were being constructed. On each web, working busily was

one of Charlotte's daughters.

"Can I take this to mean," asked Wilbur, "that you have definitely decided to live here in the barn cellar, and that I am going to have three friends?"

"You can indeed," said the spiders.

"What are your names, please?" asked Wilbur, trembling with joy.

"I'll tell you my name," replied the first little spider, "if you'll tell me why you are trembling."

"I'm trembling with joy," said Wilbur.

"Then my name is Joy," said the first spider.

"What was my mother's middle initial?" asked the second spider.

"A," said Wilbur.

"Then my name is Aranea," said the spider.

"How about me?" asked the third spider. "Will you just pick out a nice sensible name for me - something not too long, not too fancy, and not too dumb?"

Wilbur thought hard.

"Nellie?" he suggested.

"Fine, I like that very much," said the third spider. "You may call me Nellie." She daintily fastened her orb line to the next spoke of the web.

Wilbur's heart brimmed with happiness. He felt that he should make a short speech on this very important occasion.

"Joy! Aranea! Nellie!" he began. "Welcome to the barn cellar. You have chosen a hallowed doorway from which to string your webs. I think it is only fair to tell you that I was devoted to your mother. I owe my very life to her. She was brilliant, beautiful, and loyal to the end. I shall always treasure

her memory. To you, her daughters, I pledge my friendship, forever and ever."

"I pledge mine," said Joy.

"I do, too," said Aranea.

"And so do I," said Nellie, who had just managed to catch a small gnat.

It was a happy day for Wilbur. And many more happy, tranquil days followed.

As time went on, and the months and years came, and went, he was never without friends. Fern did not come regularly to the barn any more. She was growing up, and was careful to avoid childish things, like sitting on a milk stool near a pigpen. But Charlotte's children and grandchildren and great grandchildren, year after year, lived in the doorway. Each spring there were new little spiders hatching out to take the place of the old. Most of them sailed away, on their balloons. But always two or three stayed and set up housekeeping in the doorway.

Mr. Zuckerman took fine care of Wilbur all the rest of his days, and the pig was often visited by friends and admirers, for nobody ever forgot the year of his triumph and the miracle of the web. Life in the barn was very good - night and day, winter and summer, spring and fall, dull days and bright days. It was the best place to be, thought Wilbur, this warm delicious cellar, with the garrulous geese, the changing seasons, the heat of the sun, the passage of swallows, the nearness of rats, the sameness of sheep, the love of spiders, the smell of manure, and the glory of everything.

Wilbur never forgot Charlotte. Although he loved her children and grandchildren dearly, none of the new spiders ever quite took her place in his heart. She was in a class by herself.

It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both.

THE END

## 1. 早餐之前

"爸爸拿着斧子去哪儿了?"在他们收拾桌子准备吃早饭时,芬问她的母亲。

"去猪圈了,"阿拉贝尔太太回答。"昨晚生了几只小猪。"

"我不明白他为什么需要一把斧子,"只有八岁的芬继续说。

"哦",她的母亲说,"其中的一头是个小个子。它长得又小又弱,没有任何可留下

来的价值了。所以你爸爸决定去消灭它。"

"消灭它?"芬尖叫。"你是说杀死它?就因为他比别人的个子小?"

阿拉贝尔太太把一罐乳酪放到桌上。"别嚷,芬!"她说。"你爸做的对。那头猪不论如何都会死的。"

芬推开挡在面前的椅子就往门外跑。草地湿漉漉的,泥土里散发着春天的气息。等芬赶上她的爸爸时,她的运动胶鞋全都湿透了。

"请别杀它!"她呜咽道。"这不公平!"

阿拉贝尔先生止住了脚。

"芬",他温柔的说,"你该学会自我控制。"

"自我控制?"芬哭叫道,"这可是一件生死大事!你却对我说什么自我控制!"泪水流到芬的面颊上。她抓住了斧头柄,想把它从父亲手中抢下来。

"芬",阿拉贝尔先生说,"养小猪的事我比你知道的多。一个体质差的小猪很难养活的。现在你该放我走了!"

"可是这不公平,"芬哭叫着。"这头猪愿意让自己生下来就小吗,它愿意吗?如果我生下来时也很瘦小,你就会杀死我吗?"

阿拉贝尔先生微笑了。"当然不会了,"他说着,低下头慈爱地望着女儿。"但这是不一样的。一个小女孩是一码事儿,一个小瘦猪是另一码事儿。"

"我看没什么不一样,"芬回答着,仍死抓着斧柄不放。"这是我曾经听到过的最恐怖的案件!"

约翰·阿拉贝尔先生的脸上出现了某种奇特的表情。他好像也要哭了。

"好吧，"他说。"你先回家吧。等我回家，我会把那头小猪带回来。我将让你用奶瓶喂他，象喂婴儿一样。那时你就会明白一头小猪会多么麻烦了。"

半小时后，阿拉贝尔先生胳膊下夹着一个纸板盒回了家。芬正在楼上换她的运动鞋。厨房的桌子上摆好了早餐，房间里都是咖啡，熏肉的香味，湿湿的灰泥味儿，还有从炉子里荡出来的柴火烟味儿。

"把它放到她的椅子上！"阿拉贝尔太太说。阿拉贝尔先生把纸板盒放到芬的位子上。然后他到洗手池洗了手，用池边滚筒上的毛巾把手擦干。

芬慢慢地下了楼。因为刚刚哭过，她的眼还是红红的。当她走近她的椅子，纸板盒开始晃动起来，里面传出了抓搔声。芬看了看她的父亲。然后她掀起了盒盖。从那里面打量着她的，正是那新生的小猪。它是白色的。早晨的阳光把它的耳朵映得粉红。

"他是你的了，"阿拉贝尔先生说。"是你使他免于死。愿上帝能原谅我这愚蠢的行为。"

芬不错眼珠地看着这头小小猪。"哦，"她轻声赞美。"哦，看他呀！他漂亮极了。"

她小心的关上了盖子。她先吻了爸爸，又吻了妈妈。然后她又揭开盖子，把小猪举起来，让他贴到自己的脸上。这时，她的哥哥埃弗里走了进来。埃弗里十岁了。他的身上可是全副武装呢--一只手里拿着气枪，一只手里攥着一把木制匕首。

"那是什么？"他问。"芬得了什么了？"

"她有了一位来吃早餐的客人，"阿拉贝尔太太说。"埃弗里，去洗手洗脸！"

"让我看看它嘛！"埃弗里说着，放下他的枪。"你说这可怜的小东西是一头猪？这不过是一头猪的小型复制品而已--他还没有一只白老鼠大呢。"

"去洗脸吃饭，埃弗里！"他的妈妈说。"半小时内校车就要来了。"

"我也能有一头小猪吗，爸？"埃弗里问。



"不，我只把小猪送给早起的人，"阿拉贝尔先生说。"为了制止这世界上的不公正行为，芬天刚亮就起床了。结果，她现在有了一头小猪。当然了，他的确是特别小，可不管怎么说这都是一头小猪。这只是表明，如果一个人能迅速地从床上爬起来，会有什么样的事情发生。让我们开饭吧！"

但是芬要等到她的小猪喝完牛奶后才肯吃饭。阿拉贝尔太太找出一个婴儿用的奶瓶和奶嘴儿。她把温乎乎的牛奶倒进奶瓶里，又把奶嘴儿安上，才把奶瓶递给了芬。"给他吃早餐吧！"她说。

一分钟后，芬坐在厨房角落里的地板上，把她的小宝贝抱在膝头，开始教他如何从瓶中喝奶。这小猪虽然那么小，却有一个好胃口，而且也学得很快。

路上响起了校车的喇叭声。

"快跑！"阿拉贝尔太太命令着，把小猪从芬那里抱下来，将一张油煎圈饼放到她的手上。埃弗里赶忙抓起他的枪和另一张油煎圈饼。

孩子们跑到路边，上了校车。在车里，芬没有注意其他的人。她只是坐在那里朝车窗外看，想着这是个多美好的世界，自己又是多么幸运，居然可以拥有一头小猪。在车开到学校的那一刻，芬已经给她的宝贝起好了名字，选的是她能想到的最漂亮的名字。

"它的名字是威伯"，她喃喃的自语。

当老师在课堂里问她："芬，宾夕法尼亚州的首府叫什么？"时，她还在想着那头小猪。

"威伯"，芬出神的回答。同学们格格地笑起来。芬脸红了。

## 2.威伯

芬爱威伯胜过了一切。她喜欢抚摩着他，喂他，抱他上床睡觉。每天早晨，只要她一起床，

就亲自给他热牛奶，再为他系上围嘴儿，为他拿着瓶子。每天下午，当校车停到她家门前，她就会跳下车，跑到厨房为他准备另一瓶牛奶。晚饭时她还要一遍遍地喂他，直到上床就寝前为止。每天下午，芬刚离开学校的时候，阿拉贝尔太太就替芬喂威伯。威伯虽然喜欢喝奶，但只有芬为他热奶时，他才感到莫大的幸福，这时他会站起来，用充满深情的眼睛注视着她。

在威伯出生后的最初数天里，他被允许住在厨房火炉旁的盒子里。可后来，阿拉贝尔太太开始抱怨说，他该搬到柴棚那儿的大一点房子里去住。因此在两周大的时候，他被挪到了户外。已经快到苹果树开花的时候了，天气正在变暖。阿拉贝尔先生在苹果树下为威伯特别圈了一座小院子，在里面给他搭了一个铺满稻草的大房子，房子底下还留出一个小门，如果他高兴，他可以随时从中进出。

"他在夜里不会冷吗？"

"不会的，"她的父亲说，"你只要看他都在做什么就知道了。"

芬拿了一瓶牛奶，坐到小院子里的苹果树下。威伯立刻朝她跑过来，她握住奶瓶喂他喝。吸吮完最后一滴后，威伯打着满意的呼噜，睡意朦胧地踱进小房子里去了。芬趴在房门口往里窥视。见威伯正用他的鼻子拱那些稻草。只一小会儿，他就在稻草间掘出了一个坑。他爬进坑里，完全被稻草盖住了，就此从芬的视线里消失。芬简直看入迷了。她这才放了心，因为她知道她的宝宝睡得既舒服又暖和。

每天早饭后，威伯都和芬一起走到路上，直到校车开来。等她挥手和他说完再见，他便站在那里望着汽车，直到车拐个弯儿开远。当芬上学时，威伯就被关到他的院子里。但只要下午芬一回来，她就会把他领出来，他便跟着她到处溜达。如果她进屋，威伯便也跟着往里走；如果她上了楼，威伯便在台阶上等着，直到她再次走下来；如果她用婴儿车带着自己的玩具娃娃去散步，威伯也会在后面跟着。有时，威伯有点儿走累了，芬就把他抱起来，放到车里的娃娃边上。他很喜欢这样。如果他非常的累，他就闭上眼睛，在娃娃身上蒙着的毯

子下进入梦乡。他闭着眼的时候看起来格外的酷，因为他的眼毛是那么的长。娃娃也会闭眼睛呢。这时芬就会慢慢的、稳稳的推着小车，以免把她的宝宝们从梦中摇醒。

一个温暖的下午，芬和埃弗里穿上他们的游泳衣去小河边游泳。威伯也紧紧在芬的脚后跟着，和她一齐涉进水里。可他感觉水很凉——凉得让他非常不喜欢。所以当孩子们开始游泳并互相撩水玩儿时，威伯就在河边的泥地上玩，那里又暖又湿，让他很开心。

每日都是快乐的，每夜都是宁静的。

因为生在春天，所以威伯是头农夫们所谓的“春猪”。当他有五星期大时，阿拉贝尔先生说，他现在大得可以出卖了，因此应该被卖掉。芬听后，放声大哭起来。但她的父亲却还是坚持要卖威伯。威伯的食量变大了，除了牛奶他也开始吃散碎的食物了，阿拉贝尔先生不愿意再养他。他已经卖掉了威伯的十个哥哥姐姐了。

“他必须得走，芬，”他说。“你已经体验到了养小猪的乐趣了，可威伯不再是小猪了，得被卖掉才行。”

“给祖克曼舅舅打个电话，”阿拉贝尔太太对芬建议。“你霍默舅舅也养过猪。如果威伯卖到他那里，你就能顺着小路去看威伯了——只要你愿意的话。”

“我该向他要多少钱呢？”芬很想知道这一点。

“该要多少呢，”她的父亲说，“他长得这么瘦。告诉你霍默舅舅，你有一头小猪，只卖他六美元，看他有什么意见。”

这事一会儿就办妥了。伊迪丝舅妈听到芬打来的电话，便大声的叫在谷仓干活的霍默舅舅来听。当他听说小猪只卖六美元时，便说他决定买下了。第二天，威伯被从他在苹果树下的小房子里带走，住进了祖克曼先生的谷仓下面，地窖里的牛粪堆旁。

### 3. 逃跑

谷仓很大，也很旧。里面全是干草和粪肥的气味。还有种跑累了马身上的汗味儿与好脾气的母牛喷出的奇妙的香甜味道。空气中常驻的，是一种和平的气息--好像这个世界上再不会有坏事情发生了。这里偶尔还会有谷粒的香味，马具上的草料味，车子上的润滑油味，橡胶靴子味，或是新扎的草绳味儿。如果猫儿叼着人们扔给他的鱼头到这里来享受时，谷仓里就会多了股鱼腥味儿。不过，这里面最浓的味道却是干草味儿，因为谷仓上面的大阁楼里总是堆满了干草。这些干草被不断的扔给下面的母牛、马、绵羊们吃。

冬天，当动物们在外面呆久了，回来后会觉得这个谷仓格外的温暖；而夏天呢，当谷仓的门大大敞开着，微风吹进来，这里又变得说不出的凉爽。谷仓上层有马厩、牛棚，下层的地窖里是羊圈、威伯住的猪圈；里面还堆着你能从谷仓里找到的各类的器具：梯子，磨石，长柄草叉，活手搬子，大号的镰刀，割草机，清雪铲，斧子柄儿，牛奶桶，水桶，空粮食袋子，生锈的捕鼠夹等等。这是燕子们喜欢来筑巢的谷仓。这里的一切都是属于芬的舅舅，霍默·L·祖克曼先生的。

威伯的新家在谷仓的下层，正好在牛棚底下。祖克曼先生知道牛粪堆是养小猪的好地方。猪喜欢温暖，而谷仓下朝南的地窖正是温暖而又舒适的地方。

芬差不多每天都来看威伯。她找到一张没人要的挤奶凳，于是便把凳子搬到紧挨着威伯的猪圈的羊圈旁。整个漫长的下午，她就这么静静地坐在那里，望着威伯，想着，听着。绵羊不久便认识她，并信任她了。和羊住在一起的母鹅也是。所有的动物都信任她，因为她是那么的文静、和善。祖克曼先生不让她把威伯带出去，也不让她进猪圈。不过，他告诉芬，如果她愿意，她坐在凳子上看威伯多久都行。能靠近威伯她就感到很幸福了；知道芬就坐在他家的外面，威伯也感到无比的快活。只是他却再不能做从前的乐事了--不能再散步，不能再坐婴儿车，也不能再去游泳了。

六月的一个下午，差不多两个月大的威伯游荡到他在谷仓外的院子里。那天芬没像往常一样来看他。站在阳光下的威伯，觉得孤单而

又无聊。

"在这里从没任何事儿可做，"他想。他慢慢地走到食槽前，用鼻子搜寻着，想找找是否有忘了吃的午餐。他发现了一小截土豆皮，就把它吃了下去。他感到背有点儿痒，就斜靠到栅栏上，在木板上使劲的蹭着。当他蹭腻了，便走回他的家门口，爬到牛粪堆顶上，坐了下来。他不想睡，也不想再乱拱了，他厌倦了再这么静静的傻站着，也厌倦了睡觉。"我才活了不到两个月，就对生活厌烦了，"他说。他又往院子里去了。

"当我来到这儿，"他说，"除了回家没别的地方可去。当我进了家，除了院子也没别的地方可逛。"

"你错了，我的朋友，我的朋友。"一个声音说。

威伯往栅栏那边看去，发现一只母鹅就站在那里。

"你不用老呆在那个肮脏的-小 肮脏的-小 肮脏的-小院子里，"母鹅说得相当的快。"这儿有一块木板松了。推开它，推-推-推开它，就能够出去！"

"什么？"威伯说。"说慢一点儿！"

"让-让-让，让我冒险重复一遍，"母鹅说，"我的意思是，建议你跑出去。这外面的世界精彩极了。"

"你是说有块木板松了？"

"那就是我要说的，那就是。"母鹅说。

威伯走到栅栏旁，发现母鹅说得对--真的有一块木板松了。他低下头，闭起眼，用力撞过去。木板松开了。没用一分钟，他就挤过了栅栏，来到院子外的长草丛中了。母鹅嘎嘎大笑起来。

"自由的滋味如何？"她问。

"我喜欢，"威伯说。"我的意思是说，我想我喜欢这感觉。"

实际上，当威伯站在栅栏外，望着这个与自己毫无阻隔的大大的世界的时候，他只有种梦幻般的，说不清的感觉。

"你说我去哪儿比较好？"

"你喜欢的任何地方，你喜欢的任何地方，"母鹅说。"到果园那里去，把路上的草皮翻出来！到花园去，把萝卜拱出来！拱开一切！吃

草！找玉米粒儿！寻找燕麦！把一切都压倒！蹦高和跳舞，后脚立地跳起来！走过果园，去树林里漫步！在你年轻时世界是多么美妙。”

“我明白你的意思，”威伯回答。他在空气中跳跃着，转了几个圈儿，又跑了几步，才停了下来，四处搜寻着，嗅着午后的气息，不久，他向果园走去。他停到一棵苹果树荫下，把他强壮的鼻子插进土里，开始尽情地拱、挖、掘。他感到非常的快活。在有人注意到他之前，他已经掘起很多土了。祖克曼太太是第一个看见他的。她从厨房的窗子里望见了，便开始喊人。

“霍--默！”她喊。“猪跑出来了！鲁维！猪跑了！霍默！鲁维！猪跑了。他在那棵苹果树下面呢。”

“现在麻烦来了，”威伯想。“现在我要被抓住了。”

母鹅也听见了她的吵嚷，便对威伯大喊。“跑-跑-跑到下坡去，往树林里跑，树林！”她拼命地嚷。“他们在树林里永远-永远-永远抓不住你。”

听到这场骚动的长毛狗从谷仓里跑出去追。祖克曼先生听到喊声，忙从工作间里跑出来，放下了手中正在修理的农具。在龙须菜地里拔草的雇工鲁维，听到喊声，也赶紧跑了出来。每个人都在朝威伯逼近！威伯不知所措了。到树林的路似乎是那么远，而且，他还从没进过树林，也不知道是否会喜欢呆在树林里呢。

“绕到他身后去，鲁维，”祖克曼先生说，“把他朝谷仓这边赶！小心点儿--别吓坏他！我去拿一桶猪食来。”

威伯逃跑的消息在这里的动物中间迅速传开了。以前从没有任何一只动物能逃离祖克曼先生的农场呢，因此这事情引起了大家极大的兴趣。母鹅对离她最近的母牛嚷道，威伯自由了，不久所有的母牛都知道了这个新闻。然后一头母牛把这消息告诉了一只绵羊，不久所有的绵羊也知道了。羊羔们又从他们的母亲那里了解了一切。谷仓的马厩里的马们，竖起的耳朵也听到了母鹅的喊叫，因此不久所有的马也明白发生了什么事。“威伯逃了，”他们说。每一个动物都兴奋地抬起头，变得分外的激动，因为他们知道他们的一个朋友已经获得了自由，再不用被紧紧的关在圈里了。

威伯不知该怎么做，往哪里跑。看起来好像每个人都在追他。“如果这就是美好的自由，”他想，“我还不如被关在我自己的院子里呢。”

长毛狗从一边悄悄地靠过来，雇工鲁维也正从另一边渐渐逼近。祖克曼太太摆出了一副准备拦截的架势--如果威伯要往花园里跑的话。现在，祖克曼先生拎着桶正朝威伯走过来。"这真太可怕了，"威伯想。"为什么芬还不来？"他开始哭了。

母鹅给威伯发出一个又一个指令。

"别傻站着，威伯！快逃，快逃！"母鹅大叫。"转圈跳，往我这儿跳，溜过来冲出去，过来出去，过来出去！往树林跑！迂回前进！"

长毛狗猛地蹿起来咬向威伯的后腿。威伯蹦着高儿跑开。鲁维冲上前去抓威伯。祖克曼太太对鲁维尖叫起来。母鹅还在为威伯加油。威伯从鲁维的双腿间逃了出去，鲁维没有抓到威伯，反一把搂住了长毛狗。"干得好，干得好！"母鹅叫道。"再来一个，再来一个！"

"往下坡跑！"母牛们出主意。

"向我这里跑！"公鹅尖叫。

"往上坡跑！"绵羊大喊。

"迂回前进！"母鹅嘎嘎地叫着。

"跳，蹦高儿！"公鸡叫。

"小心鲁维！"母牛提醒。

"小心祖克曼！"公鹅扯着嗓子喊。

"小心那条狗！"绵羊大叫。

"听我的，听我的！"母鹅尖叫。

可怜的威伯被他们的乱叫弄得又晕又怕。他可不喜欢成为这些乱子的焦点。他本想试着听从朋友们给他的建议，可他不能同时既往上坡跑，又往下坡跑，而且，他也不能一边蹦起来一边迂回前进，更何况他哭喊得这么厉害，几乎弄不清周围都发生了什么事。真的，威伯毕竟只不过是一头比婴儿大不多少的小猪罢了。他只希望芬此刻在场，能把自己抱起来安慰一番。当他抬头看到祖克曼先生就静静地站在身旁，手里拎着盛满热乎乎的稀饭的食桶时，才稍稍宽了心。他耸起鼻子使劲儿闻着。那些味道多鲜美呀--有热牛奶，土豆皮，粗麦粉，凯洛格牌玉米片，还有祖克曼先生早餐吃剩的酥饼呢。

"来呀，小猪！"祖克曼先生说着，敲了敲食桶。"来呀，小猪！"

威伯朝那只桶走了一步。

"不-不-不！"母鹅说。"这桶是个并不新鲜的骗局，威伯。别上套儿！别上套儿！他是想以此诱捕你。他正在用好吃的诱惑你的肚子。"

威伯不在乎。这食物闻起来太开胃了。他又朝食桶走了一步。

"小猪，小猪！"祖克曼先生甜蜜地叫着，开始慢慢地往谷仓方向走，同时弄出一副纯真的表情回头看着，好像他不知道这头小白猪正跟在他后面走一样。

"你会后悔-后悔-后悔的。"母鹅叫道。

威伯不在乎。他还在朝食桶走。

"你会失去你的自由的，"母鹅大喊。"一小时的自由要比一大桶猪食更可贵！"

威伯还是不在乎。

祖克曼先生走到猪圈附近，便爬过栅栏，把猪食倒进了猪食槽。然后他把那块松动的木板从栅栏上全拽下来，好让威伯能很容易的进去。

"再想想，再想想！"母鹅提醒道。

威伯什么别的也没想。他一步步走进栅栏，到了他的院子里。他走向食槽，吸食了半天，大口大口地喝着牛奶，嚼着酥饼。能再回家真是太好了。

就在威伯饱餐之际，鲁维取了把锤子和一些八分长的钉子来，把那块板子钉了回去。然后，他和祖克曼先生懒洋洋地倚在栅栏旁。祖克曼先生用一根柴枝搔着威伯的后背。

"他真是一头猪，"鲁维说。

"是的，他会成为一头好猪的，"祖克曼先生说。

威伯听到了对他的赞扬。他感到肚子上的牛奶暖暖的。他也很愿意在那根柴枝上蹭痒。他既幸福又满足，想去睡一觉了。这真是一个令人疲倦的下午。虽然此刻只不过才四点钟，威伯却准备上床就寝了。

"我真的太年轻，还不适合一个人在这世上闯，"躺下时他这么想。



#### 4. 孤独

第二天是个阴沉的雨天。雨珠儿落到谷仓上面，又一滴一滴地从屋檐上滑了下来。雨珠儿落到谷仓旁边的地上，一路溅跳到长满刺儿菜和灰菜的小路里面。雨珠儿轻轻拍打着祖克曼太太厨房的窗子，顺着玻璃汨汨地往下淌。雨珠儿也落到正在草地吃草的绵羊们的背上。当绵羊们在雨中吃腻了，便慢吞吞地沿着小路回到了羊圈里。

雨打乱了威伯的所有计划。今天威伯本打算出去散个步，在他的院子里掘一个新坑呢。而且他还有其他的计划。他今天的所有计划大致如下：

六点半吃早饭。早饭包括脱脂奶，面包渣儿，粗麦粉，一小块油煎圈饼，上面沾着枫蜜的麦糕，土豆皮，缀着葡萄干的小块布丁，零碎的麦片。

早餐将在七点结束。

从七点到八点，威伯打算和住在他的食槽下面的耗子坦普尔曼谈天儿。虽然和坦普尔曼谈天不是这世上最有趣的事情，但至少比什么都不做要好。

八点到九点，威伯想在外面的太阳下打一个盹儿。

九点到十一点，他打算挖一个洞，或者一条小沟也行，没准儿还能从脏土里翻出什么好吃的呢。

十一点到十二点，他只想默默地站着，瞧瞧落在木板上的苍蝇，瞅瞅在苜蓿花间的蜜蜂，望望天空里的燕子。

十二点钟--该吃午餐了。午饭有粗麦粉，温水，苹果皮，肉汁，尖尖的胡萝卜，肉末儿，陈玉米粒儿，去皮的干酪。用餐将在下午一点结束。

从一点到两点，威伯打算睡觉。

两点到三点，他准备在栅栏上蹭痒。

三点到四点，他打算静默而又完美地站在地上，想想生活的乐趣到底是什么，并且等芬来看他。

四点钟吃晚饭。晚饭有脱脂奶，剩饭，鲁维的午餐盒里剩下的三明治，干梅皮，一小片这个，一小块那个，还有炸薯片，稀稀的果

酱，一点儿苹果干，一块蛋糕等等这些那些东西。

昨晚睡觉时，威伯还一直想着这些计划。可是今早六点睁开眼，却看到外面正在下雨，这可真让他无法忍受。

"我把计划订得多么完美呀，可天却下起了雨，"他说。

他忧郁地在屋里站了一会儿。然后他走到门口往外看。雨滴碰到了他的脸。他的院子里又冷又湿。他的食槽里足有一英寸厚的雨水。不知道坦普尔曼躲到哪儿去了。

"你在吗，坦普尔曼？"威伯喊道。没有谁回答他。陡然间，威伯觉得自己是那么的孤独，无助。

"今天就像昨天一样没劲，"他叹息。"我很年轻，我在谷仓里没有真正的朋友，雨会下一早晨，甚至整个下午，这样的坏天气，芬可能也不会出来。唉，她准不会来！"威伯又难过得哭起来，这两天里，他已经哭了两次了。

六点半，威伯听到了食桶晃动的声音。鲁维正在外面的雨里给自己准备早饭呢。

"来吃吧，小猪！"鲁维说。

威伯动都懒得动。鲁维把饲料倒进食槽，又刮了刮桶壁，才走开了。他注意到小猪好像有毛病了。

威伯想要的不是食物，而是关爱。他想有一个朋友--某个能和他一起玩儿的人。他把这心思对在羊圈角落里静静坐着的母鹅讲了出来。

"你愿意来和我一起玩儿吗？"他问。

"抱歉，宝贝儿，抱歉，"母鹅说。"我正在孵我的蛋呢。他们共有八个，得时刻让他们又干-干-干又暖。因此我只好呆在这儿，不能走走-走开。我孵蛋时不能玩儿。我盼着能早点孵出小鹅来。"

"当然，我想你一定不愿孵出一群啄木鸟来，"威伯酸溜溜地说。

威伯又试着去问羊羔。

"你能来和我一起玩儿吗？"他请求。

"当然不能了，"一只羊羔说。"首先，我无法进到你的院子里，因为我还太小，跳不过这篱笆。其次，我对猪一点儿也不感兴趣。照我

看，猪比啥都不是还不是。"

"什么叫比啥都不是还不是？"威伯回答。"我不认为有什么东西会比啥都不是还不是。'啥都不是'已经不是到了顶了，那绝对是天地的顶端，世界的尽头了。怎么可能还会有比啥都不是还不是的东西呢？要是你说得对，那'啥都不是'就该是点啥，哪怕只是那么一丁点儿。但是如果'啥都不是'就是'啥都不是'，那么你就找不到会比啥都不是还不是的东西。"①

"哎呀，吵死了！"羊羔说。"自己上一边儿玩去！我就是不和猪一起玩儿。"

威伯悲伤地躺下来，去听雨的声音。不久，他看见耗子正在顺着一块他自称为楼梯的，斜放在那里的木板往下爬。

"你愿意和我玩儿吗，坦普尔曼？"威伯恳求。

"玩儿？"坦普尔曼说着，捻了捻他的胡子。"玩儿？我都不懂这词儿是什么意思。"

"哦，"威伯说，"玩就是做游戏，嬉耍，跑跳，找乐子。"

"我从不愿意在这些事儿上浪费时间。"耗子冷冷的回答。"我宁愿把我的时间用在吃，咬，偷，藏上面。我是一个贪吃的老鼠，不是游戏主义者。我要去吃你食槽里的早餐了，反正现在你也不想去吃。"老鼠坦普尔曼说完，便沿着墙缝爬进他开凿的那条贯穿门和食槽的秘密通道里去了。坦普尔曼是只非常狡猾的耗子，也很有些高明的手段。这条通道不过是他的狡猾与挖洞技巧的一个证明而已。这条通道能令他不用在谷仓的明处露面，就能在谷仓和自己在猪食槽下的藏身处来回。他在祖克曼先生的农场里挖了很多条地道，这样就可以不被发现的任意来去了。通常他都在白天睡觉，夜深才出来活动。

威伯看着他爬进了通道。瞬间来历，他就看见耗子的尖鼻头从木头食槽下面探出来。坦普尔曼小心地顺着食槽边爬了进去。威伯几乎再也不能忍受了：谁愿意在一个忧伤的下雨天，看到自己的早餐被别人吃掉呢？他知道外面的雨水正浇着在那里大嚼的坦普尔曼，可这也不会使他感到有所安慰。无助，失意，饥饿……他趴在牛粪堆里啜泣起来。

傍晚，鲁维去见祖克曼先生。"我想你的猪有毛病了。他没吃食。"

"给他喝两勺硫磺，里面和点儿糖水。"祖克曼先生说。

当鲁维抓住威伯，强行把药水灌到他喉咙里时，威伯还不能相信这些发生在自己身上的事。这是他一生中最糟糕的一天。他不知道自己是否还能再忍受这可怕的孤独了。

黑暗朦胧了一切。不久，除了影子和绵羊咀嚼的声音，还有头顶的牛牵动链子发出的哗啦声外，什么也感觉不到了。所以你一定能想象得出，当一个从未听见过的纤细的声音从黑夜中传出来时，威伯是多么的惊奇。这声音相当的微弱，但听来却那么使人愉快。"你想要一个朋友吗，威伯？"那个声音说。"我将成为你的朋友。我已经观察你好多天，我喜欢你。"

"可我看不到你呀，"威伯说着，踮起脚来寻找。"你在哪儿，你是谁？"

"我就在这儿，"那个声音说。"你先睡吧。明早你就会看到我了。"

注释①：威伯对小羊的这通解释，翻译时把我累得直冒烟--这绝不是因为我当时抽的纸烟太冲的关系。而是原因以我的水平，怎么看都迷糊的缘故。它们的原文如下：

"what do you mean, less than nothing? "replied wilbur. "I don't think there is any such thing as less than nothing. nothing is absolutely the limit of nothingness. It's the lowest you can go. It's the end of the line.。 How can something be less than nothing? If there were something that was less than nothing, then nothing would not be nothing, it would be something--even though it's just a very little bit of something. but if nothing is nothing, then nothing has nothing that is less than it is. "

也许别人觉得这很容易，但我不。于是就求助新语丝的高手，因此得到了乐平，Brant，暮紫，虎子等的精彩的译文，还有亦歌等朋友的指点，非常感谢！下面就是其中的三种译文。（当然，最后一种是爆笑版的，但也很有趣，不是吗？）

"我认为猪还不如一文不值你什么意思？比一文不值还不如？我不认为有什么东西还不如一文不值的。一文不值已经到头啦，那是最无价值的东西。怎么还会有东西比一文不值还要不值的呢。如果有东西比一文不值还要无价值，那原来的一文不值就不是一文不值，而是值得一文了。即使

只是值得一文。但是一文不值就要真真正正的一文不值，你找不到比他还不值的东西了"--Brant

"什么叫比啥都不是还不是。"威伯答道："既然啥都不是了，怎么会有比它还不是的？'啥都不是'绝对绝对就是'不是'到了顶了，那是天地的底端、世界的尽头。怎么还会有比'啥都不是'还不是的呢？要是你说得对，那'啥都不是'就该是点啥，哪怕只是那么一丁点。要是'啥都不是'就是'啥都不是'，那么你说的就不对。"--乐平

"你以为你是谁啊？百兽之王啊？动物园管理员啊？在我看来，你什么都不是，比什么都不是还要不是！还是好好地做你猪这份有前途的职业去吧。"

"小羊，你又在吓我！什么叫比什么都不是还不是啊？既然什么都不是了，怎么还有比什么都不是还不是？本来什么都不是就是一点点东西都没有，但是现在有了个比什么都不是还不是的，什么都不是就比比什么都不是还不是多了一点点了。怎么可以有了什么都不是，又有比什么都不是还不是？如果有了比什么都不是还不是，什么都不是怎么会是什么都不是？大家讲讲道理嘛。现在你想清楚，我数一二三，你告诉我什么是比什么都不是还要不是。"

"我KAO！大家看见了，这个家伙整天哼哼唧唧，像是一只猪……不不不，一大群猪在那里哼哼，救命啊……现在大家知道，我为什么不喜欢和他玩了吧。"

## 5. 夏洛

夜好像变长了。威伯的肚子是空的，脑子里却装得满满的。当你的肚子是空的，可脑子里却满是心事的时候，总是很难入睡的。

这一夜，威伯醒了很多次。醒时他就拼命朝黑暗中望着，听着，想弄明白是几点钟了。谷仓从没有完全安静的时候，甚至在半夜里也还是老有响动。

第一次醒来时，他听到坦普尔曼在谷仓里打洞的声音。坦普尔曼的牙使劲儿地嗑着木头，弄出很大的动静。"那只疯耗子！"威伯想。"为什么他整夜的在那里磨牙，破坏人们的财产？为什么他不去睡觉，像任何一只正常的动物那样？"

第二次醒来时，威伯听到母鹅在她的窝里来回挪着，自顾自的傻笑。

"几点了？"威伯低声问母鹅。

"可能-能-能十一点半了吧，"母鹅说。"你为什么睡不着，威伯？"

"我脑子里的东西太多了，"威伯说。

"唔，"母鹅说。"我没这样的麻烦。我脑子里什么东西都没有，不过我的屁股下面倒有很多东西。你试过坐在八个蛋上睡觉吗？"

"没有，"威伯回答。"我猜那一定很不舒服，一个鹅蛋得孵多久？"

"他们说大约-约要三十天，"母鹅回答。"可我有时会偷懒。在温暖的午后，我常衔来一些稻草把蛋盖上，一个人去散步。"

威伯打了个哈欠，进入了梦乡。梦里他又仿佛听到了那个声音，"我将成为你的朋友。去睡吧--明早你会看见我。"

大约在天亮前的半小时，威伯醒了，开始倾听。谷仓里还是很黑。绵羊睡得很沉。甚至那只母鹅也很安静。头上的主楼那里也没什么动静：牛正在休息，马在打盹儿。坦普尔曼也不见了，可能到别处工作去了吧。只有谷仓顶上才有些轻微的响动，那是风信鸡在风里晃来晃去。威伯很喜欢这时的谷仓--一切都那么静谧，安详，只等曙光的来临。

"白天就要来了，"他想。

一缕微光从小窗子里透了进来。星星们一个接一个的熄灭了。威伯现在能看清几步远的母鹅了。她的头藏到了翅膀的下面。接着，他也能看清绵羊和羊羔了。天亮了。

"哦，美丽的白天，它终于来了！今天我会找到朋友了。"

威伯四处搜寻着。他把家里查了个遍。他检查了窗台，又望了望天花板。但却什么新变化都没发现。最后他只好决定喊话了。尽管他不愿用自己的声音来打破这可爱的黎明时分的寂静，但他想不出还有什么别的办法可以找出那位无处可见的，神秘的新朋友。因此威伯清了清嗓子。

"请注意！"他用特别洪亮的嗓门说。"请在昨晚就寝时友好的和我谈话的那位先生或女士给我打一个手势，或者发个信号！"

威伯停下来，听了听。别的动物都抬起头瞪向他。威伯脸红了。但他还是决心找出这个陌生的朋友。

"请注意！"他说。"我再重复一遍。请昨夜睡前和我亲切谈话的朋友出来说话。请告诉我你在哪里，如果你是我的朋友的话！"

绵羊们互相交流着厌恶的表情。

"别说胡话了，威伯！"最老的绵羊说。"如果你在这里有一个新朋友，你就是在妨害他的休息；而且在他早晨准备起床前把他吵醒，也是打破友谊的最快方法。你能确定你的朋友喜欢早起吗？"

"各位，请原谅，"威伯的声音低了下来。"我并不想打扰别人。"

他脸朝门委屈地躺了下来。他没想到会打扰别人，但如果他的朋友就在不远，早就该听到了。可能老羊说得对--这个朋友还没睡醒呢。

不久鲁维来送早饭了。威伯冲出去急忙把食物吃光，还把食槽舔了个遍。绵羊们向小路走去，后面跟着摇摇摆摆的公鹅。就在威伯准备躺下来睡个早觉时，他又听到了昨夜的那种声音。

"致敬！"那个声音说。

威伯跳了起来。"致什么？"他问。

"致敬！"那声音重复道。

"这个词儿是什么意思，你又在哪儿？"威伯尖叫起来。"求求你，求求你，告诉我你在哪儿吧。还有，致敬是什么意思？"

"致敬是句问候用语，"那个声音道。"当我说'致敬'，就等于对你说'你好'或是'早上好'。实际上，这是种愚蠢的表达方式，真奇怪我刚才怎么会用这么一个词儿。你想知道我在哪儿吗？那很容易。往门框上角看！我在这儿。看，我在挥手哩！"

威伯终于找到了如此友善的和自己交谈的动物。门框的上方拉着一张大蜘蛛网，一只大灰蜘蛛正倒挂在网的高处。她只有一粒树胶糖丸那么大。她长着八条腿，正用其中的一条腿友好地对威伯致意呢。"现在看到我了？"她问。

"噢，确实看见了，"威伯说。"确实看见了！你好！早上好！致敬！很高兴认识你。请问芳名？我可以问你的名字吗？"

"我的名字，"蜘蛛说，"叫夏洛。"

"夏洛什么？"威伯渴切地问。

"夏洛·A·卡瓦蒂娜。你就叫我夏洛好了。"

"我觉得你真很漂亮，"威伯说。

"谢谢，我是很漂亮，"夏洛回答。"那是毫无疑问的。几乎所有的蜘蛛都长得相当好看。我不像别的蜘蛛那么艳丽，不过我也算可以了。我希望能看清你，威伯，就像你能看清我一样。"

"你为什么看不清我？"小猪问。"我就在这儿呀。"

"是的，不过我近视，"夏洛回答。"我的近视十分严重。这对我既有好处，也有坏处。你看我来抓住这只苍蝇。"

一只刚才在威伯的食槽边上爬的苍蝇飞了起来，却愚蠢地碰上了夏洛的网，被那些粘粘的丝线缠住了。苍蝇愤怒的拍打着翅膀，想要挣脱。

"首先，"夏洛说，"我要悄悄靠近他。"她慢慢地头朝下往苍蝇那里爬去。在她往下荡的时候，一根细丝线从她的尾部抽了出来。

"接着，我要把他包起来。"她抓住苍蝇，往他身上缠了几道黑丝线，丝线越绕越密，直到裹得苍蝇一动也不能动。威伯惊恐地看着这一切。他几乎不敢相信他所看到的场面，尽管他也憎恨苍蝇，可还是为这只苍蝇感到难过。

"看，"夏洛说。"现在我要把他弄晕，他就会觉得舒服点儿了。"她咬了苍蝇一口。"他现在毫无知觉了，"她说。"他将是我的一顿美味的



早餐。"

"你是说你吃苍蝇?"威伯喘了起来。

"当然。苍蝇，小虫子，蚱蜢，漂亮的甲虫，飞蛾，蝴蝶，可口的蟑螂，蚊子，小咬儿，长脚蚊子，麻蚊子，蟋蟀--任何粗心地撞到我网上的小昆虫我都吃。我总得吃饭吧，是不是?"

"为什么?哦，是的，当然。"威伯说。"他们的味道美吗?"

"美妙极了。当然，我不是真的吃掉他们。我喝他们--喝他们的血。我喜欢喝血，"夏洛说。她的声音听起来越来越清脆，越来越快活了。

"别再说下去了!"威伯呻吟。"请不要讲这件事儿了!"

"为什么不?真的，我说的是真的。虽然我也不愿意吃苍蝇和小虫子，但那是我的生存方式。一个蜘蛛必须要设法谋生，而我恰巧可以作一名捕猎者。我生来就会织网，用它来捕食苍蝇和别的昆虫。在我之前，我的妈妈是一个捕猎者；在她之前，她的妈妈也是。我们全家都是捕猎者。千百万年以前，我们蜘蛛就靠捕食苍蝇和虫子为生了。"

"那是多么可悲的遗传。"威伯幽幽地说。他真为新朋友的残忍难过。

"是的，"夏洛表示同意。"但我也没办法改变这特性。我不知道世上最早的第一只蜘蛛是怎么想出织网这个奇妙的主意的，可是她却想出来了，她可真聪明。从那时起，我们所有的蜘蛛都会这么做了。总的来说，这个发明不坏。"

"这是残酷的发明。"威伯简捷地回答。他并不打算为此而争论。

"噢，你不能这么说，"夏洛说。"你有别人给你送饭吃。可没人喂我呀。我不得不独力谋生。我只有靠我的智力活着。为了避免挨饿，我只好变得又敏捷又聪明。我不得不想方设法，去抓住我能抓到的东西，享用他们的血。就是这么回事儿，我的朋友，我吃的就是我抓到的苍蝇和别的小昆虫。此外，"夏洛说着，挥起一条腿儿，"你明白如果我不抓小虫子吃，小虫子们就会增多，繁殖，直到多得足以破坏地球，毁灭一切吗?"

"真的吗?"威伯说。"我可不想发生这种事。可能你的网真是个好东西吧。"

一直听着这场对话的母鹅嘎嘎自语。"对于生活，威伯不懂的还多着呢。"她想。"他真是一头天真的小猪。他甚至都不知道圣诞节会发生什么事儿呢；他根本就不知道祖克曼先生和鲁维正在密谋杀掉他呢。"母鹅稍稍抬抬身子，把她的蛋往身下推得更近些，以便他们能更好的接收到她温暖的身体和柔软的羽毛下面的热量。

夏洛在苍蝇的上方静停了一会儿，准备去吃它了。威伯忙闭上双眼，躺了下来。昨晚没睡好，再加上首次遇到新朋友的激动，使他感到分外的疲倦。微风把苜蓿的香味给他送了过来--他的栅栏外的世界里充满了甜香的气息。"很好，"他想，"我有了一个新朋友，真不错。但这是多危险的友谊呀！夏洛凶猛，残酷，狡诈，嗜血--这些我都不喜欢。虽然她是那么可爱，当然，也很聪明，可我怎么能让自己去试着喜欢她呢？"

威伯像那些初交新朋友的人一样，被猜疑和恐惧困扰着。以后，他将发现自己误解了夏洛。其实，在她那可怕冷漠的外表下，有着一颗善良的心，以后发生的事情将证明，她对朋友是忠实，真的，每一刻都是如此。

## 6. 夏日

农场的初夏，是一年中快乐最美好的时候。紫丁香开花了，把空气薰得又苦又香。等到丁香花开败了，苹果花就露出了笑脸。这时候，蜂儿们就会成群地到苹果树中间来观光了。天气渐渐变暖了。学校放假了，孩子们也更有空儿去玩耍，或者去小河边抓鳟鱼了。埃弗里经常兜里揣着一条鳟鱼回家，准备在晚饭时把它们煎着吃。

既然放了假，芬就有更时间去参观谷仓了。她几乎每天都去，静静地坐在她的小凳上观察着。动物们已经把她当自己人看待了。绵羊安静地躺在她的脚边，一点儿也不怕。

差不多在七月的第一天，祖克曼先生便开始把割草机套在马的脖子上，自己跳进座位里，赶着马往田野里去了。整个的早晨你都能听到割草机转来转去的嘎嘎声，看到高高的草渐渐的在长条割刀的后面排起了长长的绿行的情景。第二天，如果没有雷阵雨，所有的人就会来帮着用耙子把割下来的草收拢到一起，装上高高的干草车往谷仓拉，芬和埃弗里则坐到了车的最顶上。然后，暖暖的散发着清香的干草会被卸进大阁楼，直到堆得整个谷仓看起来像无数的筒状草与苜蓿铺起的奇妙的大床一样。如果你跳上去，一定感觉很舒服，躲到里面也没人看得见。偶尔，来这里玩的埃弗里能在干草堆里找到一条可爱的小草蛇，便把它和兜里的别的宝贝装到一起。

初夏简直是鸟儿们的狂欢节。在田野间，房子四周，谷仓里，树林中，湿地上--到处都有欢爱，歌声，鸟巢和鸟蛋。白喉雀（从波士顿飞来的）在树林边叫，"啊，皮儿剥，皮儿剥，皮儿剥！"在苹果树杈间，京燕颤巍巍地晃着尾巴走来走去，嘴里喊着："波碧，波儿-碧！"深知生命是多么可爱和短促百灵鸟说，"快乐的，快乐的偷闲！快乐的，快乐的，快乐的偷闲。"如果你来到谷仓，就会听见燕子们从他们的巢里一头扎过去叱责。"无耻，无耻！"他们说。

初夏里有很多孩子们喜欢吃，喝，吮，嚼的好东西。蒲公英的花梗里都是乳汁，苜蓿花的芯里盛满了琼浆，冰箱里放了那么多冰凉的饮料。到处都是勃勃的生机，甚至粘在草茎上的小雪球里，也会躺着一只小绿虫，如果你把它捅开的话。在土豆枝叶的下面，还有鲜橙色的薯虫蛋呢。

初夏的某天，小鹅们被孵出来了。在谷仓的地窖里，这可算一件大事情。当时，芬正在她的凳子上坐着呢。

除了母鹅之外，夏洛是第一个得知小鹅出世的消息的。母鹅头一天就知道小鹅们快要出来了--她听到了蛋壳里传出的微弱叫声。她知道他们已经在里面呆不安稳，急着打破蛋壳出来走走了。于是她就静静地坐着，话也比平时少多了。

当第一只小鹅从鹅妈妈的羽毛里探出灰绿的小脑袋，开始四处观望时，夏洛第一个瞥见了它，并发布了一个声明。

"我相信，"她说，"我们中的每一位都将高兴地获悉，经过四周的不懈努力与耐心的等待，我们的朋友母鹅终于取得了骄人的成绩。小鹅出世了。请让我在这里衷心地表示祝贺！"

"谢谢你，谢谢你，谢谢你！"母鹅点点头，不好意思地鞠了一躬。

"谢谢你，"公鹅说。

"祝贺！"威伯喊。"一共有几只小鹅？我只看见一只呀。"

"有七个，"母鹅说。

"太好了！"夏洛说，"七是个幸运数字。"

"这可与什么幸运无关，"母鹅说。"这需要很好的筹划和辛苦的劳动。"

这时，坦普尔曼从他在威伯食槽下的藏身处露出了鼻子。他偷看了芬一眼，然后贴着墙小心地朝母鹅这边溜过来。大家都警惕地看着他，因为他既不讨人喜欢，也不被人相信。

"看，"他尖细地叫起来，"你说你有了七只小鹅。可共有八只蛋呢。第八只蛋怎么了？你没有孵吗？"

"它是只坏蛋，我猜，"母鹅说。

"你将怎么处理它？"坦普尔曼那圆溜溜的小眼珠盯向母鹅，继续说道。

"你可以把它带走，"母鹅回答。"把它滚到你那些肮脏的收藏品里去吧。"（坦普尔曼有把农场里没人要的东西收藏到家里的习惯。他什么都收藏。）

"当然-然-然，"公鹅说。"你可以拿走这只蛋。但我有件事要告诉你，坦普尔曼，如果我发现你把你那丑陋的鼻子伸-伸-伸到我们的小鹅身边的话，我就会给你一记一只耗子从来没受过的重拳。"说着，公鹅张开他强壮的翅膀，用它们使劲扑打着空气，好让老鼠看看他是多么的孔武有力。他虽然既结实又勇猛，但事实上，母鹅和公鹅还是有对坦普尔曼担心的充分理由。这只耗子不讲道义，没同情心，无所顾忌，不顾他人，没有品德，没有啮齿类动物的仁慈心肠，从不会良心不安，毫无高尚情感，没有友情，什么好的地方都没有。如果可以逃脱惩罚，他就会杀死小鹅的--母鹅深知这一点。大家也知道。

母鹅用她扁扁的嘴巴把那只没有孵出来的蛋推到了她的巢外，全体的伙伴都带着憎恶的表情看着耗子把它搬走。甚至连几乎什么都吃的威伯见此情景也感到恶心。"想想吧，竟有人愿意要一只臭烘烘的破蛋！"他嘟囔着。

"老鼠不愧为老鼠。"夏洛的笑声好像风里的铃儿一样。"但是，我的朋友，如果这只蛋被打碎了，这个谷仓就会让人受不了的。"

"那是什么意思？"威伯问。

"这就是说那传出的气味会薰得我们无法在这里住下去的。一只坏了的蛋通常都是非常臭的。"

"我不会弄破它的，"坦普尔曼气恼地说。"我知道我在干什么。我可是常搬这类东西的。"

他推着面前的鹅蛋钻进了他的地道。他小心地把蛋滚着，直到安全到达他在猪食槽下的窝。

那天下午，当风渐弱，谷仓里变得又静又暖的时，灰色的母鹅把她的七只小鹅领到了巢外的世界。祖克曼先生在给威伯送晚饭时看到了他们。

"哈，那是什么！"他笑着说，"让我来看看……一、二、三、四、五、六、七。七只鹅宝宝。它们多可爱呀！"

## 7. 坏消息

威伯一天比一天更喜欢夏洛了。她对昆虫发动的战争似乎是英明的，有益处的。农场周围几乎没人为苍蝇说一句好话，因为苍蝇把他们的所有时间都用来骚扰别人了。母牛恨他们。马憎恶他们。绵羊讨厌他们。祖克曼先生和太太也总是抱怨他们，所以特意装上了纱窗。

威伯也欣赏夏洛的行事方法。他很高兴她能在吃她的受害者之前先把他们弄睡。

"你那么做可真体贴，夏洛，"他说。

"是的，"她用甜甜的嗓音回答，"我总是先麻醉他们，这样他们就不会感到疼了。这是我的一项小小的免费服务。"

很多天过去了，威伯长了又长。他一天要吃三头猪的饭量了。他把时间都花在躺着，小睡，做美梦上了。他的身体非常健康，体重也增长了许多。一天下午，当芬正在她的凳子上坐着时，那只老羊走到谷仓来拜访威伯。

"你好！"她说。"我看你好像正在变胖。"

"是的，我想是，"威伯回答。"在我这个年纪胖起来是好事儿。"

"虽然如此，可我却不嫉妒你，"老羊说。"你知道他们为什么要把你养这么胖吗？"

"不知道，"威伯说。

"呃，我不喜欢传播坏消息，"老羊说，"但我还是要告诉你，他们喂胖你，其实是为了将来杀你，这就是原因。"

"他们将来要做什么？"威伯尖叫。坐在凳子上的芬也听呆了。

"杀死你。把你做成腌肉和火腿。"老羊继续说。"几乎所有年青的小猪到了冬天来的时候都会被农场主谋杀。这里有个尽人皆知的阴谋，就是你将在圣诞节被杀掉。每个人都在参与这个计划--鲁维，祖克曼甚至约翰·阿拉贝尔。"

"阿拉贝尔先生？"威伯啜泣起来。"芬的爸爸？"

"当然了。宰一头猪时，每人都要来帮忙的。我是一只老羊，这样的事儿见得多了，每一年都是这老一套。阿拉贝尔会带着他的0.22口径的枪，来射向……"

"别说了！"威伯尖叫。"我不想死！救我，来人哪！救我呀！"这尖叫几乎把芬吓得跳起来。

"镇静，威伯！"一直听着这段恐怖对话的夏洛说。

"我不能镇静，"威伯大嚷着跑来跑去。"我不想被杀死。我不想死。老羊说的是真的吗，夏洛？冬天来时他们真会杀我吗？"

"唔，"夏洛说着，轻轻地拉了拉她的网，"老羊已经在这谷仓住很久了。她看过很多来去的春猪。如果她说人们打算杀你，我想那就是真的。这也是我听过的最可耻的诡计。人类有什么想不出来！"

威伯号啕大哭起来。"我不想死，"他呻吟。"我想在这里活着，就呆在我舒服的牛粪堆旁，和我所有的朋友在一起。我想呼吸甜美的空气，躺在美丽的太阳底下。"

"你说的全是美丽的胡话。"老羊迅速地打断了他的话。

"我不想死！"威伯尖叫着，瘫到地上。

"你不会死的，"夏洛轻快地说。

"什么？真的吗？"威伯叫。"谁会来救我呢？"

"我，"夏洛说。

"怎么救？"威伯问。

"办法以后会有的。但是在我正考虑怎么救你的时候，我希望你立刻安静下来。你哭叫的样子简直像个小孩子。不要哭！我不能忍受歇斯底里。"

## 8. 家庭谈话

星期六早上，阿拉贝尔先生和太太还有芬正坐在厨房吃早餐。埃弗里已经吃过了饭，便上楼找他的弹弓去了。

"你们知道霍默舅舅的小鹅孵出来了吗？"芬问。

"孵出了多少个？"阿拉贝尔先生问。

"七个。"芬回答。"本来有八个蛋，但有一个没孵出来。母鹅告诉坦普尔曼她不想要这个蛋了，所以他把蛋带走了。"

"母鹅说什么了？"阿拉贝尔太太惊奇而又担心地盯着女儿问。

"她告诉坦普尔曼，她不想再要那个蛋了，"芬重复道。

"谁是坦普尔曼？"阿拉贝尔太太问。

"他就是那只老鼠，"芬回答。"我们都不太喜欢他。"

"谁是'我们'？"阿拉贝尔先生问。

"噢，就是住在谷仓地窖里的所有人。威伯，绵羊，羊羔，母鹅，公鹅，小鹅，夏洛和我。"

"夏洛？"阿拉贝尔太太说。"谁是夏洛？"

"她是威伯最好的朋友，她非常的聪明。"

"她长得什么样儿？"阿拉贝尔太太问。

"嗯，"芬仔细想了想，说，"她有八条腿。所有的蜘蛛都如此，我猜。"

"夏洛是一只蜘蛛？"芬的母亲问。

芬点点头。"一只很大的灰蜘蛛。她在威伯的门口上方织了一张网。她能抓苍蝇，还吸他们的血。威伯可崇拜她了。"

"他真的崇拜她？"阿拉贝尔太太几乎听糊涂了。她用一种担忧的表情盯着芬的脸。

"噢，是的，威伯崇拜夏洛。"芬说。"你知道当小鹅出世时夏洛说什么了？"

"我可什么都不知道，"阿拉贝尔先生说。"跟我们讲讲。"

"好吧。当第一只小鹅从鹅妈妈的身下伸出他的小脑袋时，我正在旁边的凳子上坐着，夏洛就在她的网上挂着。她发表了一场演说。她



说：'我们在谷仓地窖里的每一位都将高兴地获悉，经过四周的不懈努力与耐心的等待，我们的朋友母鹅终于取得了骄人的成绩。'你不认为她说的是件大喜事吗？"

"是的，我承认，"阿拉贝尔太太说。"现在，芬，该到上主日学校的时间了。告诉埃弗里做好准备。今天下午你可以把你霍默舅舅谷仓里的事儿再告诉我们一些。你在那里花了不少时间吧？你几乎每天下午都去，是不是？"

"我喜欢那儿，"芬回答。她擦擦嘴巴跑上了楼。她离开房间后，阿拉贝尔太太和她丈夫低声交谈起来。

"我为芬担心，"她说。"你听见她是怎么信口开河地说那些动物的吗，好像他们会说话一样？"

阿拉贝尔先生微笑了。"可能他们真会说话吧，"他说。"我有时也觉得这很奇怪。不管怎样，不必担心芬--她不过是有生动的想象力罢了。小孩子认为他们什么都能听到。"

"虽然如此，我还是担心她，"阿拉贝尔太太回答。"我想我下次看到多里安医生时，该对他谈谈芬的事儿。他几乎像我们一样的爱芬，我要问问他，芬自以为能听懂猪和别的动物的谈话，这是不是很奇怪。我不认为这是正常的。你完全知道动物们根本不会说话的。"

阿拉贝尔先生咧开嘴笑起来。"可能我们的耳朵不像芬那么尖吧，"他说。

## 9. 威伯的大话

一张蜘蛛网实质上要比它看上去的样子要结实。虽然它是用精细的丝线织成的，但却不太容易被弄破。可是，一个蜘蛛网每天都要被那些昆虫又撞又踢，所以里面还是会出现残破的地方。如果里面的破洞太多了，蜘蛛就得重新把网织好才行。夏洛喜欢在傍晚织网，芬也喜欢坐在旁边看她织。一天下午，芬听到了一场最有趣的谈话，并目睹了一起奇怪的事件。

"你长着可怕而又多毛的长腿，夏洛，"当夏洛正在忙着她的工作时，威伯说。

"我的腿上有毛，是有原因的，"夏洛回答。"此外，我的每条腿都由七节骨头构成——髌骨，坐骨，大腿骨，膝盖骨，胫骨，跗骨，蹠骨。"

威伯猛地坐了起来。"你骗人"，他说。

"不，我一点儿也没骗你。"

"把那几个名字再说一遍，我没记住。"

"髌骨，坐骨，大腿骨，膝盖骨，胫骨，跗骨，蹠骨。"

"天哪！"威伯说着，往下看看自己的胖腿。"我不信我的腿上有七根骨头。"

"哦，"夏洛说，"你和我的生活方式不同。你不用织网，那可全是用腿干的活儿。"

"如果我学学，也能会织网，"威伯吹嘘道。"我只是从没学过而已。"

"让我看看你能否学会，"夏洛说。芬圆睁着眼睛满是爱意地看着威伯，偷偷的笑了。

"O.K，"威伯回答。"你教我织一张网吧。织网一定是特别好玩的。我先要怎么做呢？"

"深呼吸！"夏洛微笑着说。威伯深吸了一口气。"现在爬到你能到的最高地方去，就像这样。"夏洛跑到了门框的最上端。威伯爬到了牛粪堆的最上面。

"很好!"夏洛说"现在用你的丝囊造丝把自己用力抛向空中,下落时把丝线抽出来!"

威伯犹豫了一下,然后朝空中跳去。他扭身回望,看后面是否有一小根能阻止他下落的粘线,可却发现后部似乎什么变化都没有,接着他便听到了自己重重地撞在地上的声音。"嗷姆!"他咕噜着抱怨道。

夏洛笑得连她的网都摇晃起来。

"我哪一步做错了?"清醒过来以后,威伯问道。

"都没错,"夏洛说。你练得很好。"

"我想我该再试一次。"威伯又来劲儿了。"我相信这一次我只需要一段能拴住我的绳子就够了。"

威伯走到院子里。"你在吗,坦普尔曼?"他喊道。老鼠从食槽下探出了头。

"我能向你借一小根绳子吗?"威伯请求。"我要用它来织网。"

"好的,可以。"有绳子的坦普尔曼回答。"这事儿很容易,你不必客气。"他推开洞口的那只鹅蛋,钻进了洞里,一会儿就抓着一根脏旧的白绳子出来了。威伯检查了一下。

"就是这东西,"他说。"坦普尔曼,请你把绳子的一头系到我的尾巴上,好吗?"

威伯趴下来,把他那根又细又弯的尾巴朝向老鼠那边。坦普尔曼抓住绳子,把它绕到威伯的尾巴尖上,打了两个结。夏洛开心地看着这一切。像芬一样,她也是真心的喜欢威伯,这不只是因为他那肮脏的猪圈与尿的臭味儿能招来她需要的苍蝇,还因为她骄傲地看出他不是个懦夫,勇于一再的学习织网。

就在老鼠,蜘蛛和小女孩的注视下,威伯又满怀着活力与希望爬到牛粪堆的顶上。

"大家看着!"他叫着,拼着全身的力气,头朝前往空中跳去。绳子虽然系在他身后,但是他忘了把另一头拴到什么地方了,这可真糟糕,威伯砰的一声就着了陆,把自己跌伤了。泪水开始在他的眼眶打转了。坦普尔曼呲着牙大笑起来。夏洛沉默了片刻,才开始说话。

"你不能织网，威伯，我劝你把这念头从脑子里赶出去吧。你缺少织网所必需的两种东西。"

"那都是什么？"威伯丧气地问。

"你缺少一副丝囊，你也缺乏织网的技巧。但是振作些，你不需要织网，反正祖克曼先生每天都给你提供三顿大餐。你又何必为捕食的事情操心？"

威伯悲叹。"你比我要聪明伶俐得多，夏洛。刻我也想显一显我的能耐。我这是活该。"

坦普尔曼把他的绳子解下来，带回了他的家。夏洛又继续她的织网工作了。

"你不必太难过，威伯，"她说。"不是所有的动物都会织网的。即使人类也不能织得像蜘蛛一样好，虽然他们自认很优秀，可以学会任何事情。你听说过昆斯伯勒大桥（Queensborough）吗①？"

威伯摇摇头。"那是一张网吗？"

"有点儿像吧，"夏洛回答。"你知道人们用了多久才建成它的吗？整整八年。我的老天，如果我的网等那么久才能织成，我早饿死了。我只用一个晚上就能织出一张网。"

"人们在昆斯伯勒大桥上抓什么--虫子吗？"威伯问。

"不，"夏洛说。"他们什么也不抓。他们只是觉得那上面比别的地方更好，所以就不停地在那里来回疾驰。如果他们头朝下静静地挂在桥上等着，也许会等来一些好东西吧。可他们却不这么做--人们总是在桥上狂奔，狂奔，狂奔，每分钟都是如此。我很高兴我只是一只定居的蜘蛛。"

"定居是什么意思？"威伯问。

"就是说，我大部分时间都可以静静地呆着，不必满世界乱跑。当我一眼望去，就会发现什么是好东西，我的网就是一个好东西。因为在织网或等待什么东西飞来时，我总有我充分思考的机会。"

"哦，那么我也是一种定居的动物，我猜，"威伯说。"因为不管喜不喜欢我都得呆在这儿。你知道今天晚上我最想去哪里吗？"

"哪里？"

"我想去大森林里寻找柏子，麦蕈，还有令我开心的树根，用我那奇妙而又强壮的鼻子把腐叶都清走，沿着地面搜索，吸取，闻呀，闻呀，闻呀……"

"好像你正在森林里闻似的，"刚走进来的羊羔挖苦道，"我从这里就能闻到你的味儿。你是这地方最臭的动物。"

威伯伤心地垂下了头。他的眼睛被泪水打湿了。看到他难过的样子，夏洛毫不客气地讥讽起羊羔来。

"用不着你管威伯！"她说。"生活在这种环境里，他已经算是很干净的了。你自己也不是什么甜豌豆。此外，你正在打搅我们之间的愉快谈话。我们谈到哪儿了，威伯，在我们的谈话被无礼打断之前？"

"噢，我不记得了，"威伯说。"这没什么关系。我们别再谈下去了，夏洛。我有点儿困了。你还是继续把你的网修补完吧，我就躺在这儿看你织。这是一个多么可爱的夜晚。"威伯伸了个懒腰躺下了。

薄暮的余晖把祖克曼先生的谷仓笼罩在宁静、平和的气氛里。芬知道差不多到晚饭时间了，却还是舍不得离去。燕子无声地拍着翅膀，从门口飞进飞出，一遍遍的给他们的孩子衔来食物。小路那边有一只夜鸱（Whippoorwill）在唱："威普威噢，威普威噢！"②鲁维坐在一棵苹果树下，吸着他的烟斗；动物们都闻到了那种熟悉的刺鼻的烟草味儿。威伯听到了树蟾的颤音和不时传来的开关厨房门的声音。所有的这些声音都让他感觉惬意而又幸福，因为他热爱生活，愿意成为这夏夜世界的一分子。但是，当他躺在那里时，他忽然记起了老羊告诉过他的话。他开始想到了死，就害怕得哆嗦起来。

"夏洛？"他轻轻地说。

"什么事，威伯？"

"我不想死。"

"你当然不想，"夏洛安慰道。

"我爱谷仓。"威伯说。"我爱这里的一切。"

"当然，"夏洛说。"我们都爱这里。"

母鹅出现了，身后跟着她的七只小鹅。他们歪着他们的小脖子，哼着同样的旋律，就像一小队吹笛手。威伯满是爱意地听着这种声音。

"夏洛？"他说。

"嗯？"蜘蛛说。

"你曾承诺过不让他们杀我，你是认真的吗？"

"在我一生中还没这么认真过呢。我不会让你死的，威伯。"

"你打算怎么救我呢？"强烈想知道这点的威伯问。

"唔，"夏洛含混地说，"我还不知道呢。但是我正在制订计划。"

"好极了，"威伯说。"这计划的开始是怎么样的，夏洛？你已经想出很多步骤了吗？它进展得非常顺利吗？"威伯又打了一个冷战，可夏洛还是非常冷静。

"哦，计划就快弄好了，"她轻声地说。"这计划还刚刚开头，没有成形，不过我会弄好的。"

"你什么时候能想好？"威伯乞求。

"在我倒挂在我的网上的时候吧。那时我才能想事情，因为那时全身的血才会涌到我的脑袋里。"

"我非常愿意在我力所能及的范围内帮你。"

"哦，我将一个人解决它，"夏洛说。"我一个人时会想出更好的办法。"

"好吧，"威伯说。"但是如果有什么我能做的，不管是多么小的事儿，你也别忘了告诉我。"

"好的，"夏洛回答，"你必需加强你的信心。我要你保持充足的睡眠，不要再担忧了。永远也不要着急和担心！慢慢地吃光你的每一点食物，除了你剩给坦普尔曼的那些。把自己吃胖，好好活着--这就是你能帮我做的。保持健康，不要气馁。你明白了吗？"

"是的，我懂了，"威伯说。

"那么上床休息吧，"夏洛说。"睡眠是很重要的。"

威伯迅速地跑到猪圈里最黑的角落，躺了下来。他闭上了眼睛。几分钟后他又说开了。

"夏洛？"他说。

"什么事，威伯？"

"我可以到食槽去看看是否还有剩下的晚餐吗？我想我还剩了点儿土豆泥。"

"可以，"夏洛说，"不过吃完你得立刻回来睡觉。"

威伯颠颠地向他的院子跑去。

"慢点儿，慢点儿！"夏洛说。"永远不要着急和担心！"

威伯硬生生的放慢了脚步，开始缓缓地往食槽爬。他找到一小块土豆，便细细地咀嚼，咽下，然后才回到了床上。他闭上眼，沉默了一小会儿。

"夏洛？"他低语道。

"什么事？"

"我可以喝点儿牛奶吗？我想我的食槽里还剩几滴牛奶呢。"

"不，食槽已经空了，我要你马上睡觉。不许再讲话！闭上眼睡觉！"

威伯闭上了眼。芬从她的小凳上站起来，开始往家走，她看见、听到的每一件事都装到了脑子里。

"晚安，夏洛！"威伯说。

"晚安，威伯！"

又静了一会儿。

"晚安，夏洛！"

"晚安，威伯！"

"晚安！"

"晚安！"

注释① 昆斯伯勒大桥 (Queensborough)，位于纽约皇后区。是曼哈圀中城跨东河(East River)连接皇后区的干桥。在它下游不远还有一条新隧道，但收费不菲。俺们劳动人民到皇后区中国城打牙祭，都走免费的皇后区桥--半山友情提供

注释② 夜鸱 (Whippoorwill)，一种北美东部所产的夜间出没的怪鸱。

## 10. 爆炸

为了想出一个主意，这只蜘蛛在网上倒悬了一天又一天。她就那么一连数小时静静地坐着，苦苦地思索。她已经对威伯许诺过要拯救他的生命，因此她决定实现自己的承诺。

夏洛天生就十分有耐心。以往的经验告诉她，如果耐心等待得够久，苍蝇会撞到她的网里来的；所以她知道如果对威伯的问题思考的时间足够久，一个好办法最终也会想出来的。

将近七月中旬的一个早晨，好主意终于来了。"为什么没早想出来，这主意多简单呐！"她自语道。"拯救威伯的办法就是对祖克曼玩一个把戏。如果我能骗一只小虫子上当，"夏洛想，"我一定也能愚弄一个人。人类未必像虫子一样聪明。"

这时威伯走进了他的院子里。

"你在想什么呢，夏洛？"他问。

"我正在想，"这只蜘蛛说，"人类是很容易上当的。"

"'容易上当'是什么意思？"

"就是容易被骗，"夏洛说。

"那可太好了，"威伯回答着躺进栅栏的阴影里，很快就入睡了。这只蜘蛛仍然很清醒地呆在那里，深情地望着她的朋友，正在为他的将来做打算。夏天已经过去一半了。她知道她没有太多的时间了。

那天早上，就在威伯仍在熟睡时，埃弗里·阿拉贝尔溜达到了祖克曼先生的前院，身后跟着芬。埃弗里手里抓着一只活青蛙。芬的头上戴着一顶金灿灿的雏菊花冠。两个孩子跑进了厨房。

"马上就可以吃浆果馅饼了，"祖克曼太太说。

"看我的青蛙！"埃弗里说着把青蛙放到了水槽里，然后伸出手去要馅饼。

"把这东西拿走！"祖克曼太太说。

"他完了，"芬说。"那青蛙快死了。"

"他没死，"埃弗里说。"他只是两眼中间那里被我抓伤了。"青蛙跳进祖克曼太太那满是肥皂沫的洗碗桶里。



"你在这等着吃你的馅饼吧，"芬说。"我能去找找鸡窝里的蛋吗，伊迪丝舅妈？"

"上外边玩去。你们两个！不许打扰母鸡！"

"水溅得到处都是，"芬大喊。"他面前的馅饼上都是水！"

"过来，青蛙！"埃弗里叫着，去水中捞他的青蛙。青蛙又踢又蹬，把肥皂水溅到浆果馅饼上面。

"又是一场惨剧！"芬悲叹。

"我们去荡秋千吧！"

孩子们飞跑到谷仓去了。

祖克曼先生有一个村子里最棒的秋千。它是一根一端系在谷仓北门房梁上的粗壮的长绳子。绳子的末端有一个可以坐上去的宽宽的绳结。这种秋千不必靠别人推就能荡起来。你先从上面的梯子下爬到放干草的地方，再握住绳子站在那上面，这时如果往下看你可能会感到害怕和头晕。接着，你又起腿坐在绳结上，就像坐在座位里一样。然后你就鼓起你所有的勇气，做一个深呼吸，开始往上荡。在一秒钟之内你还觉得自己好像就要跌到谷仓下面的地上了，但猛然间那绳子却拉住了你，让你以每分钟一哩的速度由谷仓门那里往天空航行，呼呼的风声掠过你的眼睛，耳朵，头发。然后将笔直地飞升进天空里，看见云彩。绳子会盘旋起来，你也会和它扭在一起，往天上飞。然后你会下落，下落，从天空回航到谷仓里来，几乎都扎进干草堆那里了。接着你又飞出去了（这次飞得就不那么远了），再次飞出去（也不会飞那么高了），再飞出去，再飞回来，去，回；这时你该从秋千上跳下来让别人玩了。

附近的母亲们都为祖克曼先生的秋千担心。她们怕会有孩子从上面掉下来。但从没哪个孩子摔下来过。孩子们总是抓得比他们的父母所想象得还要牢。

埃弗里把青蛙装进兜里爬上了干草堆。"我上次在这荡秋千时，差点砰地一声撞到谷仓上的燕子呢。"他叫道。

"把青蛙拿出来！"芬命令道。

埃弗里又起腿坐到绳子上荡起来。他飞出门口时，兜里的青蛙和别的东西也一起飞上了天。接着，他又飞回了谷仓。

"你的舌头都紫了！"芬高叫。

"你的也是！"埃弗里叫着，又和那只青蛙一起飞出去了。

"我的衣服里都是干草！痒死了！"芬喊道。

"挠一挠！"埃弗里飞回来时叫道。

"该我了，"芬说。"你下来！"

"芬的身上痒痒啦！"埃弗里唱了起来。

他跳下来，把秋千扔给了妹妹。她紧闭着眼荡了上去。她荡回来时感到有点头晕，可秋千又很快把她拉了上去。她睁开眼，在再次飞回到门口之前，看到了蓝蓝的天空。

他们轮流玩了一小时。

当孩子们荡累了，他们便去草场找覆盆子吃。他们的紫舌头都吃红了。芬在一个覆盆子里吃到了一个恶心的小虫子，才不敢再吃了。埃弗里找到一个空的糖果盒，便把青蛙装了进去。青蛙好像今早在秋千上玩累了。孩子们慢慢向谷仓晃去。他们已经累得几乎没有力气走了。

"让我们造一座树上的房子吧，"埃弗里建议。"我想住在树上，和我的青蛙在一起。"

"我要去看威伯了，"芬宣布。

他们爬过栅栏，进了院子，懒洋洋地往猪圈挪。听到他们的脚步声，威伯忙爬了起来。

埃弗里注意到了那张蜘蛛网，走上前去，就看见了夏洛。

"嘿，看那只大蜘蛛！"他说。"它可真大呀。"

"别碰它！"芬命令。"你已经有了了一只青蛙了--这还不够吗？"

"那可是只不错的蜘蛛，我要抓到它，"埃弗里说。他掀开糖果盒的盖子，然后又拾起一根小棍子。"我要把那大蜘蛛打到这盒子里，"他说。

当看到他在做什么时，威伯的心跳几乎都停止了。如果这个男孩成功地抓住了她，夏洛就完了。

"你住手，埃弗里！"芬叫起来。

埃弗里一条腿迈上了栅栏旁的猪食槽。就在准备举起棍子捅夏洛时，他突然失去了平衡。他摇摇晃晃地倒栽在威伯的食槽边上。绑在那里的食槽啪地一声掉了下来，正好砸在那下面的鹅蛋上。蛋随着一声钝响爆炸了，立刻散发出一种极其可怕的气味。

芬尖叫。埃弗里跳起来。空气中全是这只臭蛋的可怕味道。正在家里休息的坦普尔曼急急躲进了谷仓。

"天哪！"埃弗里尖叫。"天哪！什么臭味儿！我们快离开这里吧！"

芬叫着，捏着鼻子朝房子跑去。埃弗里也捏着鼻子紧随其后。看到他逃走了，夏洛才大大松了一口气。刚才真是死里逃生。

那天早上晚些时候，动物们都从草场那边走回来了--绵羊，羊羔，公鹅，母鹅，七只小鹅。他们对这可怕的气味发出很多抱怨，因此威伯不得不把这个阿拉贝尔家的男孩如何想要抓夏洛，而打碎的蛋又是怎样及时地把他赶跑的故事讲了一遍又一遍。"正是那只破鹅蛋救了夏洛一命，"威伯说。

母鹅为这场历险中有自己的功劳而骄傲。"我很高兴那只蛋没孵出来，"她急急地说。

当然，可怜的坦普尔曼可悲地损失了他收藏的蛋。可他却情不自禁在那里自夸起来。"这就是收藏的回报，"他以一种不容置喙的口气说。"一只老鼠从不知道何时会发生意想不到的事情。因此我从不扔掉我的任何收藏。"

"是呀，"一只羊羔说，"整件事情只对夏洛有好处，可对我们其余的人呢？这味儿真让人受不了。谁想住在全是臭蛋味儿的谷仓里？"

"不必担心，你会习惯的，"坦普尔曼说。他坐起来，揪揪长胡子，然后到垃圾堆参观去了。

中午时分，鲁维拎着给威伯的食桶走了过来，停到猪圈前。他抽抽鼻子作了个鬼脸。

"怎么了？"他说着，放下食桶，拎起埃弗里扔在那里的棍子把食槽侦察了一番。"老鼠！"他说。"对了！我早该猜到老鼠会在食槽下打洞的。我多恨老鼠！"

鲁维把威伯的食槽拽到了院子中间后，往耗子洞踢进了一些脏土，将那只破蛋和坦普尔曼其他的收藏品一起盖上。然后他才拎起了

食桶。在食槽边等候的威伯，馋得口水都流出来了。鲁维把饲料倒下去，残渣溅得威伯满眼满耳都是。威伯打着呼噜冲过来。他吞了又吸，吸了又吞，急急挥舞着鼻子，迫不及待地吞食着每一样东西。这顿饭丰盛极了--有脱脂奶，粗麦粉，薄煎饼渣，半张油煎圈饼，南瓜皮，两片烤面包，三分之一块的脆饼干，一条鱼尾巴，一块橙子皮，面条汤里捞出的几根面条，一杯残剩的可可，一个干硬的小圆面包，食桶上剥落的纸片，还有一匙覆盆子果冻。

威伯吃了个痛快。他本打算给坦普尔曼留下半根面条和几滴牛奶，可是又一想老鼠也有救夏洛的功劳，而夏洛又在准备救自己，便给老鼠留了一整根儿的面条，而不是半根。

现在那只破蛋已经被埋起来了，空气也清新起来，谷仓又恢复了原来的气味。下午过去了，夜晚来了。

影子变长了。凉爽宜人的夜风从门和窗子透过来。蹲坐在网里的夏洛，正在心事重重地吃着一只马蝇，想着以后的事情。不久，她突然振奋起来。

她降落到网的中央，开始把某些地方的丝拉断。她不断地，慢慢地工作着，而这时别的动物都在打瞌睡呢。所以没有一个人，甚至那只母鹅也没有注意到她在工作。深深躺在他的软床里的威伯，也正睡得呼呼的。在他们最喜欢呆的角落里，小鹅们正在哼着夜之歌。

夏洛已经把她的网撕开不少地方了，中间留出了很大的一块空间。然后她开始在那里重新织起来。当坦普尔曼从垃圾堆那里回来时，已是块半夜了，可夏洛还在工作着。

## 11. 神迹

第二天起雾了。农场里的一切都被雾水打湿了。草地看起来像有魔力的地毯。龙须菜地看起来则像一片银色的森林。

晨雾中，夏洛的网显得异常的绮丽。每一缕细细的丝线上都缀满无数的小珠子。这张在晨光中泛着莹光的网，里面织着可爱而又神秘的图案，看起来就如同一层纤美的面纱。即使从来对美丽不是很在意的鲁维，在给威伯送早饭时也注意到了这张网。他注意到这网被编织得有多么大，多么的精致。当他再看时，发现了某种使他吃惊的事，慌乱中不觉扔下了食桶。那儿，就在网的中心，织着两排漂亮的大写字母，好像是在传达某种信息。那上面的字母是：

"好猪！"①

鲁维怔住了。他用手来回揉了揉眼睛，死死地盯向夏洛的网。

"我看到什么了？"他喃喃说着，跌跪下去，急急地祈祷了一番。然后，他忙回到房子里去喊祖克曼先生，全没想到威伯的早餐。

"我想你最好到猪圈去一下，"他说。

"怎么了？"祖克曼先生问。"猪出什么毛病了吗？"

"不-不是，"鲁维说。"你自己去看吧。"

两个男人悄悄来到威伯的院子里。鲁维指向那蜘蛛网。"你看我看见了什么？"他说。

祖克曼先生盯着网上的字母，念着上面的"好猪"这个词。然后他看了看鲁维。这时他们都开始哆嗦了。昨夜忙碌了一宿的夏洛，此刻已经醒来，正微笑着看着这一切。威伯一直朝网这边走过来。

"好猪！"鲁维低声嘟囔着。

"好猪！"祖克曼先生低语。接下来的很长一段时间里，他们只是把威伯看了又看，然后才朝夏洛看去。

"你不是猜是那…那只蜘蛛……"祖克曼先生摇摇头，没再继续说下去。他神色庄重地回到房子里，把这事情说给他的太太听。"伊迪丝，某种事情发生了，"他噤噤着，走进起居室坐下。祖克曼太太跟了过来。

"我有些话要告诉你，伊迪丝，"他说。"你最好还是坐下来。"

祖克曼太太陷到了椅子上。她吓得脸都白了。

"伊迪丝，"他试着让他的声音听起来不那么激动，"我想你最好知道，我们有了一头极不寻常的猪。"

祖克曼太太的脸上显出一副迷惑不解的神情。"霍默·祖克曼，你到底想要说什么？"她说。

"这是一件非常严肃的事情，伊迪丝，"他回答道。"我们的猪完全是出类拔萃的。"

"这猪有什么特别的地方？"祖克曼太太问着，开始不那么害怕了。

"嗯，我也不知道该怎么说，"祖克曼先生说。"我们得到了一个暗示，伊迪丝--一个神秘的暗示。一个奇迹已经在这个农场上出现了。谷仓地窖门口有一个大蜘蛛网，它就在猪圈上边。今早我和鲁维去喂猪时，因为雾的关系他看到了那张网，你知道一张蜘蛛网在雾里显得有些特别。就在网的中央，写着'好猪'这个词。这个词完全是由蜘蛛网织出来的。它们本身就是网的一部分，伊迪丝。我知道这点，因为我在那儿看到了它。那上面写着的'好猪'，看起来再清楚不过了。我绝不能看错的。一个奇迹发生了，一个神示在地球上出现了，它就在我们的农场，我们有了一头不同凡响的猪。"

"哦，"祖克曼太太说，"我觉得你好像弄拧了。我看我们是有了一头不同凡响的蜘蛛才对。"

"噢，不！"祖克曼说，"是这猪不一般，那蜘蛛网的中间就这么说的。"

"可能如此吧，"祖克曼太太说。"虽然如此，我还是打算去看看那只蜘蛛。"

"那只是一只很普通的灰蜘蛛。"祖克曼说。

他们站起来，一同往威伯的院子走。"你看到了吗，伊迪丝？它是只很平常的灰蜘蛛。"

威伯很高兴能如此引人注目。还在那儿站着的鲁维，祖克曼先生和太太，三个人一起在那里站了大约一小时，一遍遍地读着网里的词，并观察着威伯。

夏洛为她成功地愚弄了这些人而开心。她一动不动地坐在那里，听着人们的交谈。一只小苍蝇撞到网里，马上就要朝“猪”这个字爬过来了。夏洛见了忙跑过去把苍蝇缠住，拖远。

不久，雾散了。网也干了，这些字母看起来也不那么美了。祖克曼夫妇和鲁维走回了房子。在离开猪圈前，祖克曼先生最后又看了威伯一眼。

"你知道，"他庄重地说，"我想从哪方面看我们的猪都格外的优秀。他是头很结实的猪，比别的猪都壮实。你注意到他的肩膀下有多么结实吗，鲁维？"

"当然，当然，"鲁维说。"我总是注意那头猪。他是头不一般的猪。"

"他是那么的长，身上那么的光滑，"祖克曼说。

"的确，"鲁维表示同意。"他比别的猪光滑得多。他是头好猪。"

祖克曼先生回到了家，便脱下工作服，穿上了他最好的衣裳。然后他进了他的车，向牧师家驶去。他在牧师那里花了一小时，讲述在他的农场出现的奇迹。

"到现在为止，"祖克曼说，"这个地球上只有四个人知道这个奇迹--我，我妻子伊迪丝，我的雇工鲁维，还有你。"

"先别对任何人说，"牧师说，"我们还不知道那预示着什么，但如果我思考一下，就能在下周的布道会上解释这一切。无疑，你有了一头最不寻常的猪。我打算在我的布道会上指出，这个社区出现了一种多么不寻常的动物。顺便问一句，那猪有名字吗？"

"是的，有，"祖克曼先生说。"我的小外甥女叫他威伯。她是个相当古怪的小孩--脑子里都是奇特的念头。她用奶瓶给这头猪喂奶，当小猪一个月大时，我才把他从她那里买来的。"

他和牧师握了握手，然后离开了。

秘密是很难被保住的。远在星期日到来之前，这消息就传遍了整个村子。每个人都知道一个神示在祖克曼先生家的蜘蛛网里出现了。每个人都知道祖克曼一家有了一头奇异的猪。人们从四面八方赶来看威伯，读着夏洛的网里的字。祖克曼家的车道上从早到晚都停满了小车和大卡车--福特，雪佛莱，别克，通用皮卡、普利茅斯、斯塔德贝

克、帕卡德、带陀螺变速器的德索托、带火箭引擎的奥兹莫比尔、旅行吉普和庞蒂亚克牌汽车等等都开过来了。②这头神奇的小猪的消息也传进了山里，那些农场主们都赶着他们各式的马车来了，一小时接一小时地在威伯的猪圈里艳羡地看着这头神奇的动物。所有人都声称在一生中从没见过这样的猪。

当芬把埃弗里曾想把祖克曼的蜘蛛用棍子打下来的事告诉了她的妈妈后，阿拉贝尔太太一怒之下没让埃弗里吃晚饭，就把他赶上了床，以示惩罚。

接下去的几天里，祖克曼先生由于整天忙着招待这些来访者，竟然忘记了他的农活。他时刻穿着他最好的衣服--早上一起床就往人群里走。祖克曼太太给威伯准备了特别的饭菜。鲁维刮了脸，也理了发；他在农场里最首要的任务就是在人们来参观时喂那头猪。

祖克曼先生命令鲁维把威伯的吃饭次数从一天三次增加到四次。祖克曼一家如此忙于应付这些来访的人众，都忘了农场里还有别的事情要做了。黑莓熟了，可祖克曼太太却忘了把它们采摘，做成果酱。玉米地需要锄草了，可鲁维却找不到时间去锄草。

星期日，教堂挤满了人。牧师对这奇迹解释了一通。他说这蜘蛛网上的字说明，人类必须时刻准备去观察神迹的出现。

祖克曼家的猪圈成了众人注意的焦点。芬很开心，因为她知道夏洛的把戏取得了成效，威伯的命也保住了。只是她觉得谷仓里现在不那么令她高兴了--那里的人太多了。她更愿意能和她的动物朋友单独在一起。

注释① 好猪：这个词的原文是Some pig。

注释② 这里涉及到的车名我除了几个外，几乎都不知道，只好请索易的洪立为我翻译，特此致谢。其中的部分原文如下：“...and GMC pickups and Plymouths and Studebakers and Packards and De Sotos with gyromatic transmissions and Oldsmobiles with rocket engines and Jeep station wagons and Pontiacs。”据新语丝的朋友半山说，这里写的那些带“陀螺变速器，火箭发动机”的汽车，对不熟悉老美汽车文化的中国读者，大概没有车名汉译标准，何况Studebaker, Packard, De Soto 是倒闭几十年的老车厂，除了古



董车收藏家，一般美国人都未必熟，所以很难翻译。有全能说出这些车的厂家，国别的人请告诉我，谢谢。

## 12. 一个会议

在夏洛的网里的字出现了几天后的一个晚上，夏洛把谷仓地窖里的全体动物招集到一起，开一个会。

"下面我开始点名了。威伯？"

"到！"威伯说。

"公鹅？"

"到，到，到！"公鹅说。

"你听起来像三只公鹅，"夏洛嘟囔着。"你为什么不只喊一声'到'？为什么你喜欢重复一切？"

"这是我的习-习-习惯。"公鹅回答。

"母鹅？"夏洛说。

"到，到，到！"母鹅说。夏洛瞪了她一眼。

"七只小鹅？一个一个来！"

"必-必-必！""必-必-必！""必-必-必！""必-必-必！""必-必-必！""必-必-必！""必-必-必！"

小鹅们回答。

"这个会可越开越有意思了，"夏洛说。"任何人都以为我们这里有三只公鹅，三只母鹅，二十一只小鹅呢。绵羊？"

"咩-咩-咩！"绵羊们一起回答。

"羊羔？"

"咩-咩-咩！"羊羔们一起回答。

"坦普尔曼？"没人回答。

"坦普尔曼？"还是没人回答。

"好吧。除了老鼠我们都在这里，"夏洛说。"我想没有他，会也可以开始。现在，你们大家一定注意到了过去几天里这儿发生了什么事情。我织在我网里的那句称赞威伯的话，已经收到了效果。祖克曼一家已经上套了，每个人都是。祖克曼把威伯看作一只不寻常的猪，所以也不会想杀死他、吃掉他了。我敢说我的把戏取得了成功，威伯的生命也得救了。"

"万岁！"全体欢呼。

"非常感谢你们，"夏洛说。"现在我召开这个会议是为了听取大家的意见。我需要织网的新构思。人们已经读腻了'好猪！'这个词了。如果谁能想出另一句话，或是评语，我会很高兴地把它织进我的网里的。谁有什么关于新口号的建议？"

"'无比的猪'怎么样？"一只羊羔问。

"不好，"夏洛说。"这听起来像一道油腻的餐后甜点的名字。"

"'很棒，很棒，很棒'怎么样？"母鹅问。

"把后面的两个'很棒'去掉还不错，"夏洛说，"我想'很棒'这个词可能会打动祖克曼。"

"可是夏洛，"威伯说，"我并不是很棒。"

"那没关系，"夏洛回答。"这没多大影响。人们几乎相信他们看到的每一个词。这里有什么人知道'很棒'这个单词怎么拼吗？"

"我想，"公鹅说，"它是由一个字母T，两个ee，两个rr两个rr，两个眼睛两个ff两个眼睛，两个看见看见看见看见看见组成。"①

"你以为我是个卖艺的吗？"夏洛生气地说。"除非我有圣威图斯那样的跳舞技巧（St.Vitus's Dance）②才能把这么多的字母织到我的网里。"

"对不起，对不起，对不起，"公鹅说。

然后老羊开始说话了。"如果可以救威伯的命，我也同意在网里织进新词汇。如果夏洛需要谁来帮她找新词儿，我想她能从我们的朋友坦普尔曼那里得到帮助。老鼠常去垃圾堆翻，能从那里找到旧杂志。他可以撕一点上面的广告回来，带到谷仓的地窖里，这样夏洛就可以把有用的话抄下来了。"

"好主意，"夏洛说。"但我不知坦普尔曼是否肯帮我。你了解他是怎样的--总是为自己打算，从不想到别人。"

"我打赌，我能让他帮你，"老羊说。"我将利用他自私的天性，他可是非常自私的。现在他过来了，在我对他说话的时候大家要保持肃静！"

老鼠以他一贯的方式进了谷仓--顺着墙角匍匐前行。

"发生了什么事儿？"他看着聚会的动物问。

"我们正在开一个董事会。"老羊回答。

"好，散会！"坦普尔曼说。"我最受不了开会。"老鼠开始往悬在墙对面的绳子上爬去。

"嘿，"老羊说，"你下次去垃圾堆时，坦普尔曼，只要从杂志带回一份剪报来就行。夏洛需要能织到网里的新词儿，这可以用来救威伯的命。"

"让他死好了，"老鼠说。"我不会想他的。"

"冬天来时你就会完全想他的，"老羊说。"在一月份的冰冷的早晨，你完全会发愁的，那时威伯已经死了，没人再把温暖的猪食倒进猪食槽了。威伯的剩饭不是你最主要的食物来源吗，坦普尔曼？你知道这一点。威伯的食物就是你的食物，因此威伯的命运紧紧和你联在一起。如果威伯被杀了，他的食槽每天就都会是空的，你就会饿得肚子空空的，那时我们将都能看透你的胃，知道那里面都有什么东西了。"

坦普尔曼的胡子都吓抖了。

"可能你是对的，"他沙哑地说。"明天下午我会去垃圾堆看看。如果我能找到一本杂志，我会带一份剪报回来。"

"谢谢，"夏洛说。"会议到此结束。我今晚还有事情要忙呢。我将要把我的网撕开一部分，在里面织上"很棒"。"

威伯脸红了。"可是我真的不是很棒，夏洛。我不过和一般的猪差不多而已。"

"你比我看上去的样子还棒，"夏洛甜甜地回答，"就是这样。你是我最好的朋友，所以我想你就是很棒。现在不许吵了，睡个好觉！"

注释① terrific，我的很多朋友告诉我，它在美国口语里多是真的棒，太棒了的意思，为了行文的需要，我在这里翻译成"很棒"。这个词的第一个字母是"T"，于是公鹅用"Tee"来代替；下几个字母里的"l"被公鹅读成了"eye"，即"眼睛"；最后一个字母"c"被公鹅说成了"see"，即"看见"。而且，每个字母都被公鹅重复了几遍--没办法，这是古今中外的鹅的老习惯，不信你去听听就知道了。

注释② St.Vitus, 我不知道是谁, 朋友洪立为我查出, 公元三世纪有个基督教少年殉教者也叫这个名字--会是他吗? 谁能告诉我?

### 13. 尽善尽美

深夜，其他的动物都睡了，夏洛还在织他的网。她把网中央附近的一些圆线拉掉，只留下一些支撑住整张网的放射状线。在她工作时，她的八条腿起了很大的作用，她的牙也是。她喜欢织网，对这工作也很胜任。当她把多余的线都拆除以后，她的网看起来就像这样一个圆环：（原文下有图）

一只蜘蛛能吐出很多种丝线。她用一种干的粗线作主线，用另一种黏的丝线作陷阱线--这些线是用来抓和粘昆虫的。夏洛决定用她的干丝线来织这新的预言。

"如果我用黏线来织'很棒'这个单词，"她想，"每个撞上去的虫子都能破坏字的效果的。"

"现在让我想想，第一个字母应该是T"。

夏洛爬到网左边的高处，把她的丝囊摆到正确的位置，横着拉了一条线，然后才开始下落。当她下落时，她的织网管开始运作起来，从中释放出丝线。荡到网底时，她收住了线。现在"T"这个字母的横线织成了。可是夏洛觉得它看上去并不理想。她又爬上去，在那道横线的右下方另外拉出了一条线，这样她就织好两道线了。"如果我把所有的字母都用双线织，看起来效果一定更完美。"

想着，她便往上爬回去，挪到左边织出的第一道横线下面约一英寸的地方，拍拍丝囊，向右平行地又拉出一道丝线，织成了由双线构成的字母"T"的上半部。接着她又同样的开始去织那两道竖线。她的八条腿不停地忙碌着，一会儿就把这个字母全织成了。

"现在该织字母E了！"

夏洛对她这工作的兴趣越来越浓了，她一边干一边自语起来，好像这样能令她更兴奋。如果那天夜里你正静坐在谷仓地窖里，你就会听到下面的话：

"现在开始织字母R！我们往上去！系住！下降！抽丝！停！系住！好的！你往上去！再来！系住！下降！抽丝。停，小姑娘！预备！系住！爬！系住！往右拽！拉线！现在往右往下转个圈儿转圈转圈儿！现在往左边来！系住！爬！再来！OK！小意思，把那些线连起

来！现在，往下织R的一条腿儿！放线！停！系住！下降！再来！好姑娘！”

夏洛就这样一面自语着，一面做着她艰难的工作。这一切都弄完之后，她感到饿极了。她吃了一只事先储存的小虫子，便睡着了。

第二天一早，威伯醒来后，便来到了网跟前。他的肺尽情呼吸着早晨的空气。网上的露珠，把阳光返照到网里，使那张网看起来格外清晰。当鲁维来送早餐时，一眼就看到了那头漂亮的猪，和猪的头顶上的那些织得整整齐齐的大写字母，那些字母拼成了一个单词“很棒”。这又是一个神迹。

鲁维冲出去喊祖克曼先生。祖克曼先生冲出去喊祖克曼太太。祖克曼太太跑向电话给阿拉贝尔家打电话，阿拉贝尔一家钻进他们的卡车急忙赶了过来。

每个人都站到猪圈里盯着蜘蛛网，把那单词反复读了又读。这时威伯也觉得自己很棒了，他骄傲地挺着胸脯站在那里，快活的把鼻子不停地晃来晃去。

“很棒！”祖克曼以带着羡慕的骄傲说。“伊迪丝，你最好给《时代周刊》的记者打个电话，告诉他们这里出了什么事儿。他们会对这个感兴趣的，没准儿还会派个摄影记者来呢。我们整个州都没有我们这么棒的猪。”

消息传开了。当威伯是“好猪”时，那些曾从远方来看的人，现在又回来看他是多么的“很棒”了。

那天下午，在祖克曼先生去给母牛挤奶并清理牛粪时，他还在想着他拥有了一头多么奇异的猪。

“鲁维！”他喊。“不要再把牛粪倒进猪圈了。我有了一头很棒的猪。我想让那头猪保持清洁，每天用稻草给他铺床。明白了吗？”

“是的，先生。”鲁维说。

“另外，祖克曼先生说，‘我要你给威伯造一个板条箱，我决定把这头猪带到九月十六日的郡农业展览会（County Fair）<sup>①</sup>上去。把这箱子造大些，漆成绿色，上面写上金字儿！’”

“写什么字呢？”鲁维问。

“上面应该写‘祖克曼家的名猪’。”

鲁维拾起长柄叉去弄干净的稻草了。有了这样一头重要的猪，就意味着要有大量的额外工作，他能明白这一点。

苹果园下的小路尽头，是祖克曼先生扔各种垃圾和废物的地方，没人愿意到那里去。那儿，在一丛小桦树与野覆盆子的遮掩下，有一小块开阔地，里面堆满了多得惊人的垃圾：有旧瓶子，空罐头盒，破链条，坏弹簧，废电池，上月的杂志，用旧的破碗刷，褴褛的工作服，生锈的钉子，漏了的桶，被遗忘的塞子，还有各种别的无用的垃圾，甚至包括从一个破冰激凌机上掉下来的，不能用的曲柄。

坦普尔曼熟悉这个垃圾堆，也喜欢这里。这是个藏身的好地方--对一个老鼠特别合适。那里还通常有可口的，吃剩的罐头。

坦普尔曼此刻正在那里搜寻。当他回到谷仓时，他的嘴里咬着从一本皱巴巴的杂志里撕下来的一条广告词。

"这个怎么样？"他把这广告递给夏洛问。"这上面写着'脆生生'，'脆生生'是你可以织到网里的一个好词儿。"

"这是个糟糕的词，"夏洛回答。"不能再糟了。我们不想让祖克曼以为威伯是脆生生的，这样他就会联想起脆的、嚼起来嘎嘎带响儿的腌肉和美味的火腿来的。这个词绝对能给他这种印象。我们要宣扬的是威伯的贵族气质，而不是他的滋味。请找个别的词来吧，坦普尔曼！"

老鼠有些不太高兴了。但他还是又偷偷爬回垃圾堆，带了一块布回来。"这个如何？"他问。"这是一件破衬衣上的商标。"

夏洛检查着这标签。上面写着"事先缩过水。"

"抱歉，坦普尔曼，"她说，"'事先缩过水'这个词太离谱了。我们想要祖克曼觉得威伯很丰满，而不是缩了水的。我不得不请你再试一次了。"

"你以为我是谁，一个小搬运工吗？"老鼠抱怨。"我可不想把我的时间浪费在去垃圾堆翻广告词上面。"

"就再去一次--求你了！"夏洛说。

"我告诉你我这次给你带什么来，"坦普尔曼说。"我知道柴棚里有一个肥皂包装盒，那上面也写着广告。我给你撕一小块带回来吧。"



他顺着悬在墙上的绳子爬进天花板上的一小洞里去了。当他再回来时，嘴里咬着一片蓝白相间的硬纸板。

"这个！"他胜利地说。"怎么样？"

夏洛读着上面的字："带着闪光的新行动"②。

"那是什么意思？"一生中从没用过肥皂的夏洛问。

"我怎么知道？"坦普尔曼说。"你是在问我带来的这些字是什么意思吗？我想你马上要让我替你找本字典来吧。"

他们一起研究着这条肥皂广告。"带着闪光的新行动"，夏洛慢慢地重念着。"威伯！"她喊道。

正在稻草堆里睡觉的威伯跳了起来。

"转圈跑！"夏洛命令。"我想看你动起来的样子是不是闪光。"

威伯跑到了院子的尽头。

"现在跑回来，快点！"夏洛说。

威伯飞奔过来。他的皮肤很光滑。他的尾巴很好看，上面还打着一个漂亮的卷儿。

"往天上跳！"夏洛喊道。

威伯跳得尽可能的高。

"伸直腿，耳朵挨到地面！"夏洛道。

威伯照做不误。

"在空中转个半圈儿。"夏洛喊。

威伯扭过身子，转着圈子跳了起来。

"OK，威伯，"夏洛说。"你可以回去睡觉了。OK，坦普尔曼，这条肥皂广告还可以，我猜。我只是不能确定威伯跑时是否闪着光，不过那却很有意思。"

"实际上，"威伯说，"我感觉我在闪光。"

"是吗？"夏洛说着，深情地看着他。"是的，你是一头可爱的小猪，你也会闪光的。我在这件事儿上花的时间够多了--我想还是到此为止吧。"

乱蹦了半天的威伯也累了，便躺进干净的稻草堆，闭上了眼睛。这稻草好像有点儿痒--不像牛粪那么令人舒服。软软的躺在牛粪堆里

的感觉才舒服呢。因此他把稻草拱到一边，扒进了牛粪堆里。威伯叹了一口气。他在变得很棒后的第一天可真够忙的。下午有数不清的人到他的院子里参观，所以他不得不一直装模作样地傻站在那里，好使自己看起来显得确实很棒。现在他累极了。芬已经来了，就在角落里的那张小凳子上静静地坐着。

"给我讲一个故事吧，夏洛！"威伯睡前说。"给我讲个故事！"

虽然夏洛也很疲倦，可还是满足了威伯的请求。

"从前，"她开始讲，"我有一个美丽的表妹，在一条特别小的小溪上空织了一张网。一天，一条跳出水的小鱼蹦到了她的网里。当然，我的表妹很吃惊。那条鱼发疯地在里面跳着。我表妹吓得开始都不敢去抓它。但她镇静了一下，就勇敢地爬过来，往鱼身上缠了大量的丝线，准备抓住它。"

"她成功了吗？"威伯问。

"那是一场永远-不-会-忘-记的战斗，"夏洛说。"那只一条鳍被缠住的鱼，尾巴摆动得那么粗野，还在太阳下闪着银光呢。那张网，也危险地随着鱼的重量往下陷。"

"那条鱼有多重？"威伯急切地问。

"我不知道，"夏洛说。"我只知道我的表妹在不停地闪躲、进攻着，虽然她的脑袋被那条拼命蹦的鱼残忍地揍了很多下，也还是在和鱼做着殊死的搏斗。她先往鱼尾的左边抛了一道丝，于是鱼就往右蹦；接着她往鱼尾左边抛了一道丝，又往中间偏右的地方抛了一道，鱼便往回跳。然后她溜到另一边，往鱼的右边缠线，去捆右边的那条鳍。等她的线缠到左边的鱼头时，网开始剧烈地摇晃起来。"

"接着怎么样了？"威伯问。

"没什么，"夏洛说。"鱼失去了战斗力。我表妹把它紧紧捆得不能动了。"

"完了呢？"威伯问。

"完了就完了呗，"夏洛说。"我表妹让鱼在那里呆了一会儿，等她恢复了精力后，就把它吃了。"

"再给我讲个别的故事！"威伯央求。

夏洛就又给威伯讲了她的另一个当飞艇驾驶员的表妹的故事。

"什么是飞艇驾驶员？"威伯问。

"就是热气球驾驶员，"夏洛说。"我的表妹常把脚站在头上，抛出很多游丝，把它们缠成一个大气球。然后她就在这气球放向空中，自己也随之乘着暖暖的风往上飘。"

"那是真的吗？"威伯说。"或者你是在胡编？"

"那是真的，"夏洛回答。"我有好几个本领高强的表妹呢。现在，威伯，你该去睡觉了。"

"唱个歌儿吧！"威伯闭上眼，求着夏洛。

伴随着草丛和渐暗的谷仓里传出的蟋蟀的低吟，夏洛轻轻地唱了一支催眠曲。她是这么唱的：

睡吧，睡吧，我的爱，我唯一的宝贝，  
深深地，深深地，在粪堆和静夜里安睡；  
不知道恐惧也不知道孤单的滋味！

此刻只有那些青蛙和画眉

在树林和灯心草间将世界赞美。

安心地休息吧，我唯一的宝贝，  
深深地，深深地，在粪堆和静夜里安睡！

威伯还没有听完就睡着了。当这支歌唱完，芬才站起身回了往家。

注释① 郡农业展览会 (County Fair)：我在这里笼统的翻译为展览会。根据我的朋友螳螂，亦歌，洪立等的说法，这一词直译就是"郡市集"或者"郡露天集会"，指县、郡即农村的展览会，在会上大家来比谁种的瓜大、谁家的猪肥。或者是指一种大圩（集），一般一年一次，集游乐农贸于一体。

注释② "带着闪光的新行动" (With New Radiant Action)：这个词一看就感觉很明白，一翻译我就觉得说不清楚，只好四处请教朋友。朋友们的说法很多，但基本相似。如我的朋友筋斗云认为，可以翻译成"新的亮丽表现"，因为radiant这个词在字典跟"bright"类似意义，smile和brightsmile差不多意思。本来就有指物体表面与精神状态两意。所以一起或者译为"新的亮丽表现"。而"bright"这个词，接受

了朋友们的指点后，我又想了半天，还是把它翻译成"闪光"这个普通的词，因为我想不出更好的了。

#### 14. 多里安医生

次日是星期六。芬站在厨房的水槽边，擦着母亲刚洗完的早餐用过的碗碟。阿拉贝尔太太静静地干着。她希望芬能出去和别的孩子一起玩，而不是有空就往祖克曼家的谷仓跑，坐在那里看动物。

"夏洛是我见过的人中，故事讲得最棒的，"芬说着，用餐巾纸抹着饭碗。

"芬，"她的母亲严厉地说，"你不要再胡说了。你知道蜘蛛根本不会讲故事。蜘蛛不会说话。"

"夏洛能，"芬回答。"她的声音虽不大，但却能说话。"

"她讲什么故事了？"阿拉贝尔太太问。

"嗯，"芬开始道，"她给我们讲了一个她表妹用蜘蛛网捕鱼的故事。你不觉得那有趣极了么？"

"芬，亲爱的，鱼怎么会跑到蜘蛛网里去了呢？"阿拉贝尔太太说。"你知道这不可能。你在撒谎。"

"噢，就是有这么回事，"芬回答。"夏洛从不骗人。她的表妹在小溪中间拉了一张网。一天，她正在网里呆着，一条跳上水面的小鱼蹦到了她的网里。这条鱼的一条鳍被捆住了，妈妈。它的尾巴拼命地摇晃，还在太阳下闪着银光呢。你见过被一条鱼压得几乎坠到水面的蜘蛛网吗？夏洛的表妹来回闪躲着，进攻着，虽然脑袋被那条乱蹦的鱼残忍地揍了很多下，也还是在和鱼搏斗着，不停地往鱼身上缠丝……"

"芬！"她的母亲打断了她。"别说了！别再编造这些荒唐的故事了！"

"我没编造，"芬说。"我只是在告诉你事实而已。"

"那最后怎么样了？"她的母亲问。这时她反有点儿好奇了。

"夏洛的表妹赢了。她把鱼都包了起来。等她休息过来，就把鱼吃了。蜘蛛也吃东西，就像我们一样。"

"是的，我想是吧，"阿拉贝尔太太有气无力地说。

"夏洛还有一个汽球驾驶员表妹。她从头顶放出许多丝，乘着它们在风里飞。妈妈，你不喜欢这么做吗？"

"是的，我喜欢，"阿拉贝尔太太回答。"但是芬，亲爱的，我希望你今天别去霍默舅舅的谷仓了，到外面和别的孩子玩吧。找几个好伙伴，在户外一起玩。你在谷仓花的时间太多了--你一个人孤独地在那里并不好。"

"孤独？"芬说。"孤独？我最好的朋友都在谷仓地窖里呢。那是个很好的交际场所。在那里一点儿也不会孤独的。"

芬出去了，不久她又走上了去祖克曼家谷仓的路。她的母亲打扫着起居室。她一边干着一边想着芬的事情。一个小女孩如此对动物着迷，似乎不太正常。最终，她下定决心，去找多里安医生，听听他的意见。她上了车，往医生的乡村诊所驶去。

多里安医生是个大胡子。看到阿拉贝尔太太，他很高兴地请她坐到了一把舒适的椅子上。

"是关于芬的事情，"她解释道。"芬把太多的时间都花在了祖克曼家的谷仓里。这好像不太正常。她就坐在谷仓地窖角落里的一个挤奶凳上，在猪圈旁边，一小时一小时地看那些动物。她只是坐在那里看和听。"

多里安医生仰面躺进椅子上，闭着眼听着。

"多令人心醉呀！"他说。"那一定是个不错而又宁静的地方。霍默不是还有一些绵羊吗？"

"是的，"阿拉贝尔太太说。"但所有的事情都由我们让芬用奶瓶给一头小猪喂奶开始的。她管小猪叫威伯。霍默买了那头猪。而自从小猪走了，芬就天天去舅舅家看那头猪。"

"我也听说过那头猪，"多里安医生睁开眼说。"他们说那是头不一般的猪。"

"你听说过那些织在蜘蛛网里的话了吗？"阿拉贝尔太太神秘地问。

"是的，"医生回答。

"那么，你明白那是怎么回事吗？"阿拉贝尔太太问。

"明白什么？"

"你明白那蜘蛛网里怎么会有那些字吗？"

"哦，不，"多里安医生说。"我不明白。我连蜘蛛是怎么学会织网的都不明白。当那些字被织出来后，人人都说那是个奇迹。却没人指出蜘蛛网本身也算一个奇迹。"

"蜘蛛网有什么神奇的？"阿拉贝尔太太说。"我不明白你为何说蜘蛛网是奇迹--它不过是张网嘛。"

"你也织过一张网？"多里安医生问。

阿拉贝尔太太不安地在椅子上动了动。"不，"她回答。"但是我能钩一张茶杯垫，我也会织一只袜子。"

"的确，"医生说，"但那是有人教你的，不是吗？"

"我母亲教我的。"

"很好，可谁来教蜘蛛呢？一只年轻的蜘蛛不需任何人的指导就懂得织网。你不认为这是个奇迹吗？"

"我想是吧，"阿拉贝尔太太说。"以前我从没想过这种事情。我不明白那些话是怎么织到网里去的。我不明白这个，而且我也不喜欢我不能明白的东西。"

"我们都是如此，"多里安医生叹息道。"我是一个医生。医生被认为什么都懂。但是我几乎什么都不懂，我不打算让它们来困扰我。"

阿拉贝尔太太烦躁起来。"芬说动物们能互相交谈。多里安医生，你相信动物能说话吗？"

"我从没听人这么说过，"他回答。"但那证明不了什么。很可能有一个动物曾礼貌地对我讲过话，而我却没听到，因为我根本就没去注意。孩子们比成人更注意这些。如果芬说祖克曼的谷仓里的动物能说话，我倒很愿意相信她。也许人类若少说一点儿，动物就能多说一些吧。成人都是滔滔不绝的演说家--我想对你说的意思就在这些话里。"

"不过，现在我更担心芬了，"阿拉贝尔太太说。"你不觉得我该为她担心吗？"

"她看起来怎么样？"医生问。

"哦，还行。"

"胃口好吗？"

"噢，是的，她总是很饿。"

"晚上睡得好吗？"

"哦，是的。"

"那就没什么可担心的了。"医生说。

"你不认为她该想想除了猪，绵羊，母鹅，蜘蛛以外的事情吗？"

"芬多大了？"

"她八岁了。"

"哦，"多里安医生说，"我想她会永远喜爱动物的，但我不信她会把她全部时间都花在霍默·祖克曼的谷仓地窖里。和男孩子们--她认识某个男孩吗？"

"她认识亨利·富塞。"阿拉贝尔太太轻快地说。

多里安医生又闭上眼，陷入了沉思。"亨利·富塞"，他嘀咕。"嗯，值得注意。不过我还是认为你没什么好担心的。如果她高兴，就让芬和她在谷仓的朋友在一起吧。我要说的是，我只是随便说说，那蜘蛛和猪几乎同亨利·富塞一样有趣。我推想，有一天亨利终究会引起芬的注意的。孩子们的兴趣会一年年的变得让你惊奇的。埃弗里怎么样？"他睁大了眼睛问。

"噢，埃弗里，"阿拉贝尔太太笑了。"埃弗里总是很好。当然，他有时会爬到野葛里去，被黄蜂和蜜蜂蜇着，还会把青蛙和蛇带到家里，打碎他手边的每一件东西。他很好。"

"太好了！"医生说。

阿拉贝尔太太道了再见，又对多里安医生的忠告表示了由衷的感谢。她感到心里特别的轻松。



## 15. 蟋蟀

蟋蟀们在草丛中歌唱着。他们唱起了一曲悲伤而又单调的，夏天的挽歌。"夏天去了，"他们唱。"去了，去了。夏天正在死亡，死亡。"

蟋蟀感到他们有责任警醒每一个人，夏日的好时光不会永远的继续下去。即使到了一年中最美丽的日子--夏即将被点染成秋的那一天--蟋蟀们也还是在传唱着这些有关悲伤与变迁的谶言。

所有人都听到了蟋蟀的歌声。在尘土飞扬的路上走着的埃弗里和芬听到这歌声，知道学校不久就要开学了；小鹅们听到这歌声，知道他们将不再是小鹅了；夏洛听到这歌声，知道她已经没有多少剩下来的时间了；在厨房工作的祖克曼太太听到这歌声，一种忧伤的情绪也立即从心头袭过。"又一个夏天过去了，"她轻声叹息；给威伯做板条箱的鲁维听到这歌声，知道到了去地里挖土豆的时候了。

"夏天去了，"蟋蟀一遍遍地哀唱。"离下霜时还剩几天？"蟋蟀凄吟。"再-见-了，夏天，再-见-了，再-见-了！"

绵羊听到蟋蟀的歌，感觉异常的烦躁，以至竟在草场上的篱笆里撞出了一个洞，就从那里穿过小路茫然地徘徊到田野里。公鹅发现了这个洞，就领着他的一家人由此而出，走到果园去吃熟落在地上的苹果。湿地上的小枫树听到蟋蟀的歌，由于焦急使自己变得鲜红。

威伯现在是农场里最引人注目的。那些不断送来的美餐和定期来参观的人流足以表明这一点：威伯是一头令任何人都足以骄傲的猪。每天都有超过一百人在他的院子里赞美他。夏洛已经把写有"闪光"字样的网织好了。在金色的阳光下的威伯看起来也真的闪闪发光。自从这只蜘蛛帮助了他以后，他一直在尽力使自己做得更好。当夏洛的网里写着"好猪"时，威伯努力使自己看上去像头好猪；当夏洛的网里织着"很棒"时，威伯又勉力使自己看起来很棒；现在那网里说"闪光"，他便尽可能的去做每一件使自己闪光的事。

看上去能闪光并不容易，但威伯还是愿意这样去努力。他会轻轻地晃着脑袋，让他长长的睫毛闪闪颤动起来。然后他再做一个深呼吸。当他的观众看腻了这些，他就会跳起来做一个后空翻。这时人群将会大声喝起彩来。"那猪怎么样？"祖克曼先生会满心自豪地问别人。"那猪真是闪闪发光。"

谷仓里的一些威伯的朋友担心他会骄傲，但他不会的。威伯是最谦虚的，名气不能毁了他。他还在为将来担心，因为他几乎不敢相信仅仅一只蜘蛛就能救他的命。有时夜里他还会做噩梦，梦见人们拿着刀子和枪来杀他。但那不过是个梦境罢了。白天时，威伯总是感到快乐而又自信。没有一头猪有过这么真诚的朋友，他意识到友谊是这世界上令人最幸福的东西之一。甚至连蟋蟀的歌也没有让威伯感到太悲伤。他知道他快去参加郡展览会了，他渴望着这次旅行。如果他能在会上有卓越的表现，就可能赢得奖品，那时祖克曼更会善待他了。

夏洛则在为自己担心，但却没对别人表露这一点。一天早上威伯问她有关展览会的事。

"你会和我一起吗，夏洛？"他说。

"哦，我不知道，"夏洛回答。"开会那天对我来说是个坏日子。那时我将很难有力气离家，更别说离家数天了。"

"为什么？"威伯问。

"噢，我只是不愿离开我的网。有太多事要做了。"

"请跟我去吧！"威伯乞求。"我需要你，夏洛。去参加展览会时没你我无法忍受的，你还是去吧。"

"不，"夏洛说，"我相信我最好还是留在家里，我有工作要做。"

"那是什么工作？"威伯问。

"产卵。那时我该造一个囊，往里产卵了。"

"我不知道你还能产卵哩，"威伯惊奇地说。

"哦，我当然会，"蜘蛛说。"我多才多艺。"

"'多才多艺'是什么意思--身上都是卵吗？"威伯问。

"当然不是，"夏洛说。"'多才多艺'是说我能轻松地做很多事。那意味着我不仅仅只会织网和抓小虫，还懂得产卵的绝技。"

"你为什么不跟我到展览会去产卵？"威伯恳求。"产卵一定有趣极了。"

夏洛拉了拉她的网，忧郁地看着这些丝线轻轻晃动的样子。"恐怕不那么有趣，"她说道。"你不了解产卵的重要性，威伯。我不能不顾我的家庭，跟你去展览会。当我准备产卵时，我就得产卵，不管有没

有展览会。无论如何，我不想你担心--你会因此变瘦的。让我们这么约定吧：如果有可能，我就去和你参加展览会。"

"噢，好吔！"威伯说。"我就知道你在我最需要的时候不会抛下我的。"

那一整天，威伯都呆在谷仓里，享受着稻草堆里的舒适生活。夏洛休息了一会儿，吃了个蚂蚱。她知道她以后不能再帮威伯了。几天后她将停下手头的一切，开始造一个用来盛放她的卵的美丽的小囊了。

## 16. 到展览会去

展览会的前夜，每人都早早地上了床。芬和埃弗里八点就上床了。埃弗里梦见自己正高高地坐在展览会里的费里斯大转轮①上最高的位子里。芬则梦到自己在那大转轮上转迷糊了。

鲁维八点半上的床。他梦见自己在"布猫队"里 (at a cloth cat) ②打篮球赛，还赢得了一块真正的拿佛和③地毯。祖克曼先生和太太在九点上上的床。祖克曼太太梦见了一排电冰箱。祖克曼先生梦见了威伯。他梦见威伯长到一一六尺长，九十二英尺高，赢得了展览会上的所有奖品。浑身披满蓝色的丝带，甚至尾巴尖上还系了一条蓝丝带。

谷仓下的地窖里的动物们也都早早的睡了，只除了夏洛。明天就要开展览会了，每个动物都打算早早起来为威伯这次伟大的冒险送行。

第二天，每个人都在黎明就起了床。那天很热。小路上头的阿拉贝尔家的房子里，芬往卧室拎了桶热水，用毛巾简单擦了个澡。然后她穿上了她最漂亮的衣服，因为她知道会在展览会上看到男孩们。阿拉贝尔太太把埃弗里的脖子后面擦了又擦，又往他的头上掸了些水，把他的头发往两边梳起来。她梳得非常用力，直到把头发梳干，竖立起来为止--结果除六根头发之外，其余的头发全都笔直地竖起来了。埃弗里穿上干净的内裤、牛仔裤，还有干净的衬衫。阿拉贝尔先生已经穿戴好了，吃完了早饭，就出去擦他的卡车了。他要开车把每个人送到展览会上，也包括威伯。

天刚亮，鲁维就在威伯的大板条箱里铺上干净的稻草，将箱子抬到了猪圈。这箱子是绿色的，上面写着金色的大字：祖克曼家的名猪。

夏洛为了展览会把她的网整修得很漂亮。威伯在慢慢吃他的早餐。他试图不让食物沾到他的耳朵上，好让自己的样子更加闪光。

祖克曼太太突然在厨房喊起来。

"霍默，"她对丈夫说，"我打算给那猪洗一个酸奶澡。"

"一个什么？"祖克曼先生说。

"一个酸奶澡。当猪变脏时我祖母就常用酸奶给它们洗澡--我才想起来。"

"威伯并不脏。"祖克曼先生骄傲地说。

"他的耳朵后面很脏，"祖克曼太太说，"每次鲁维喂他时，猪食都会溅到他的耳朵四周。它们干了以后就结成硬块儿了。他常躺在粪堆里的那边身子也有埋汰的地方。"

"他可是躺在干净的稻草上，"祖克曼先生更正。

"算了，他很脏，他需要洗澡。"

祖克曼先生只好无奈地坐下来，去吃油煎圈饼。他妻子向柴棚走去。当她回来时，脚上蹬了双水靴，身上穿了件旧雨衣，一手拎着一桶酸奶，一手拿着一把小木刷。

"伊迪丝，你疯了，"祖克曼小声嘀咕道。

但她没理他。他们一起往猪圈走去。祖克曼太太一点儿也没浪费时间，她爬进猪圈来到威伯身边就开始工作了。她用蘸着酸奶的刷子把威伯全身刷了个遍。母鹅一家都来参观这有趣的一幕，绵羊和羊羔也跑来看。甚至坦普尔曼也好奇地伸出脑袋，去看威伯洗酸奶澡。夏洛也很感兴趣，便随着一根长丝线从网上慢慢地荡下来，以便能看得更清楚。威伯安静地闭着眼站在那里。他能感觉酸奶流遍了全身。他张开嘴，一些酸奶便淌了进去。那味道可真好。他觉得自己是闪光的，他幸福极了。当祖克曼太太把他洗完擦干，他便成了一头你曾经见过的最干净，最漂亮的猪。他浑身雪白，耳朵和鼻子是粉红的，毛皮像缎子一样的光滑。

祖克曼一家回去穿上他们最好的衣服。鲁维去刮了脸，穿起他的格子衬衫，打上他的紫领带。动物们离开他们的住所涌进了谷仓。

七只小鹅在他们的妈妈周围转来转去地嚷起来。

"请，请，请带我们去参加展览会吧！"一只小鹅央求。接着所有的七只小鹅都乞求起来。

"请，请，请，请，请，请……"他们发出很大的吵闹声。

"孩子们！"母鹅尖叫。"我们要安静-静-静地呆在家里。只有威伯-伯-伯才去展览会。"

就在那时，夏洛打断了母鹅。

"我也去，"她轻轻地说。"我已经决定和威伯一起去了。他可能会需要我。我们不知展览会上可能发生什么意外。谁知道怎么写字可以和我一起去。我想坦普尔曼最好也去--我可能需要有人跑腿，做些复杂的工作。"

"我就在这儿呆着，"老鼠不满地说。"我对展览会一丁点儿兴趣都没有。"

"那是因为你从来没去过展览会，"老羊提醒道。"展览会是老鼠的天堂。展览会上的人都把食物乱丢。一只老鼠可以在夜里溜出去吃一顿宴席。在马厩你能找到马吃剩的燕麦，在有人迹的草地你会找到人们扔掉的午餐盒，里面有花生三明治，煮鸡蛋，面包渣，小块的油煎圈饼，还有干酪。当灯光熄灭，人们回家睡觉后，你还会在游乐场里到处都是的垃圾袋中间找到真正的财宝：碎爆米花，往下直淌的果冻，累了的孩子们丢下的蜜饯，水晶般闪光的糖球，咸杏仁，冰棒，一块被咬掉的冰激凌，带着小木棍儿的棒棒糖。对一个老鼠来说到处都可以掠夺--帐子里，摊床上，草堆中--为什么不去呢？一个展览会上有那么多美味的食物，足够一个老鼠大军吃的。"

坦普尔曼的眼睛放光了。

"是真的吗？"他问。"你是在馋我吧？我喜欢超值的享受，你说的完全打动了。"

"真的，"老羊说。"去展览会吧，坦普尔曼。你会发现展览会上的好东西远比你最疯狂的梦里想出来的还多。上面沾满了好吃的东西的桶，吃剩的金枪鱼罐头，油腻腻的食品袋里装着的烂……"

"够了！"坦普尔曼叫。"不要再对我说了。我去。"

"很好，"夏洛说着，朝老羊挤挤眼睛。"那么现在--就没有太多的时间可以浪费了。威伯马上就会被放进板条箱。坦普尔曼和我也必须钻进板条箱躲起来。"

老鼠一分钟也没有耽误。他迅速地钻进了板条箱，爬到板条的缝隙间，又拉了几根稻草把自己盖上，这样便没人能看见他了。

"好，"夏洛说，"该我了。"她扯起一根长丝线，往空中荡去，轻轻地落到了箱子上。然后她爬进去，躲到箱子最上面的一块木板的结孔里。

老羊点点头。"多满的一箱子货!"她说。"那些金字应该改成'祖克曼家的名猪与两名偷渡客'才对。"

"当心，人来-来-来了!"公鹅喊。"小心，小心，小心!"

阿拉贝尔开着大卡车慢慢地倒进谷仓的空地。鲁维和祖克曼先生在边上跟着走。芬和埃弗里正站在卡车的后车厢里，手抓着护栏。

"听我说，"老羊对威伯耳语。"当他们打开箱子想把你装进去时，你要挣扎!不要不经过争斗就走。当猪被装进车里他们总是要反抗的。"

"如果我挣扎会被弄脏的，"威伯说。

"别管那些--照我说的做!挣扎!如果你毫无反抗地走进箱子，祖克曼可能会以为你有毛病了，那时他就不敢送你去参加展览会了。"

坦普尔曼从稻草里探出了头。"如果你要挣扎，"他说，"一定要好心肠地想到，那时我正在板条箱里躲着呢。我可不想被踩瘪，或者被踢花脸，或者被揍伤，或者被压坏任何地方，或者被挤扁，或者被打晕，或者被打青，或者被擦破皮，或者落个疤，或者受到别的什么重击。你挣扎时一定要看着点儿，闪光先生，当他们把你往箱子里推的时候!"

"安静，坦普尔曼!"老羊说。"把你的脑袋缩回去--他们正在走过来。看起来闪光点，威伯!往里躲，夏洛!大声的叫，鹅们!"

卡车慢慢地倒进了猪圈，停了下来。阿拉贝尔先生关上发动机，下车走到卡车后面，放下尾板。鹅们欢叫起来。阿拉贝尔太太下了卡车。芬和埃弗里跳到地面上。祖克曼太太正从房子里走过来。每个人都来到栅栏前，欣赏了一会儿威伯和那个美丽的绿板条箱。没人知道箱子里已经装进了一只老鼠和蜘蛛了。

"那真是头好猪!"阿拉贝尔太太说。

"他很棒。"鲁维说。

"他是闪光的。"芬说着，想起了他生下来的那天。

"是的，"祖克曼太太说，"怎么看他都非常干净。这都是酸奶的功效。"

阿拉贝尔先生仔细观察着威伯。"是的，他是一头完美的猪，"他说。"很难相信他当初是那一窝里最瘦小的一头。你将能用它做特别好

的火腿和腌肉，霍默，当那头猪被宰的时候。"

听到这些话，威伯的心跳几乎都停住了。"我想我要昏过去了，"他轻声对在一边看着的老羊说。

"跪下来！"老羊低叫。"让血液倒流到你的头上！"

威伯跪下去，身上所有的闪光都消失了。他的眼睛阖上了。

"看呐！"芬尖叫。"他的光彩消失了！"

"嘿，看我！"埃弗里叫罢，匍匐着爬进了板条箱。"我是一头猪！我是一头猪！"

埃弗里的脚踩到了稻草下面的坦普尔曼。"真倒霉！"老鼠想。"男孩子是多么可怕的动物！我为什么要让自己到这里来受罪？"

鹅们看到埃弗里进了箱子，都一齐喝起彩来。

"埃弗里，你马上给我从箱子里出来！"他的母亲命令道。"你以为你是什么？"

"我是一头猪！"埃弗里叫着，将满把的稻草扬向空中。"哼，哼，哼！"

"卡车开走了，爸，"芬说。

卡车突然间失去了控制，向下坡滑去。阿拉贝尔先生冲进驾驶室，去拉紧急制动闸。卡车停住了。鹅们欢呼。夏洛蜷起身子，使自己尽可能小地缩到那结孔里，这样才不会被埃弗里发现。

"马上出来！"阿拉贝尔太太喊。埃弗里手脚并用爬出了板条箱，对威伯做了一个鬼脸。威伯已经昏过去了。

"那头猪昏倒了，"祖克曼太太说。"给他泼点儿水！"

"泼酸奶！"埃弗里建议。

鹅们又大叫起来。

鲁维向水桶跑去。芬爬进猪圈在威伯身边跪下来观察。

"它中暑了，"祖克曼说。"他受不了这么热的天气。"

"他可能死了，"埃弗里说。

"你给我立刻离开猪圈！"阿拉贝尔太太喊。埃弗里听从了母亲的吩咐，爬上卡车后座。鲁维带着冷水回来了，把水淋到了威伯身上。

"给我也淋点儿水！"埃弗里叫。"我也热。"



"噢，安静！"芬喊。"安-静！"她眼里满是泪水。

威伯被冷水一激，就恢复了知觉。在鹅们的叫声里，他缓缓地站了起来。

"他站起来了！"阿拉贝尔先生说。"我猜他就没什么毛病嘛。"

"我饿了，"埃弗里说。"我要吃苹果蜜饯。"

"威伯现在没事了，"芬说。"我们可以出发了，我要去坐费里斯大转轮。"

祖克曼先生和阿拉贝尔先生还有鲁维抓住了猪，把他头朝前往板条箱里推。威伯开始挣扎了。男人们推得越厉害，他就往回顶得越凶。埃弗里也跳过来帮忙。威伯胡噜胡噜地叫着又踢又蹬。"这头猪没毛病，"祖克曼先生高兴地说着，用膝盖顶着威伯的身体后部。"现在，大家一起用力，孩子们，推！"

随着一声欢呼，他们终于把威伯塞进了板条箱。鹅们又叫起来。鲁维在箱子上钉了几根钉子，这样威伯就跑不出来了。接着，男人们用着全身的力气把箱子抬上了卡车。他们不知道箱子里的稻草中躲着一只老鼠，一个木板结孔里还趴着一只大灰蜘蛛。他们看到的仅仅是一头猪。

"大家上车！"阿拉贝尔先生招呼道。他发动了卡车。女士们跟着他进了驾驶室里。祖克曼先生和鲁维还有芬、埃弗里上了后车厢，手抓着护栏。卡车开始往前开了。鹅们欢呼起来。孩子们也一同欢呼着。所有的人都离开这里，往郡农业展览会场去。

注释① 费里斯大转轮 (The Ferris Wheel)，也译作阜氏大轮，是一种供游戏的竖立大轮，即大观览车。轮缘装有座位，供人回旋。

注释② a cloth cat: 怀疑是美国篮球队的名字，具体不详。

注释③ 拿佛和 (Navajo)，居于美国Arizona, New Mexico以及Utah各州保留地的一支印第安主要种族。

## 17. 伯伯

当他们一到展览会场，就听到音乐声，看到在天空中的费里斯大转轮。他们能闻到洒水车喷出的道道水迹里散发出的尘土气息，闻到油煎三明治的香味，看到徐徐升起的大气球。他们还能听到绵羊们在圈里咩咩地叫。扩音器里有个很大的声音喊道：请注意！请车牌为H-2349号的庞蒂亚克的车主把你的车从放焰火的地方开走！

"能给我点儿钱吗？"芬问。

"也能给我点儿吗？"埃弗里问。

"我要去玩旋转轮，让它停到正确的数码上，好赢回一个小娃娃，"芬说。

"我要去开喷气式飞机，用它去撞别的飞机。"

"我可以买个气球吗？"芬问。

"我能买一个牛奶果冻，一张干酪肉饼，一瓶蔗莓汽水吗？"埃弗里问。

"在那头猪被卸下来之前，让你的孩子们都闭嘴！"阿拉贝尔太太说。

"我说还是让孩子们自己去玩吧，"阿拉贝尔先生建议。"展览会一年可是只有一次。"阿拉贝尔先生给了芬两枚两毛五分的银币，两枚一角的银币①。

他又给了埃弗里五角银币和四枚五分钱的镍币。"现在玩去吧！"他说。"记住，这些钱是留给你们一整天花的！不要在几分钟内就轻易的花光。下午回到卡车这里来，那时我们要一起吃午饭了。不要吃太多的零食，不然开饭时你们就什么也吃不下了。"

"如果你们去坐那大转轮，"阿拉贝尔太太说，"一定要抓紧！抓得非常紧。听到了吗？"

"不要跑丢了！"祖克曼太太说。

"不要把身上弄脏了！"

"不要玩得太疯！"他们的妈妈说。

"留心扒手！"他们的父亲警告。

"马跑过来时不要横穿赛道！"祖克曼太太叫。

孩子们手挽手蹦跳着向旋转木马那边跑去，跑向那充满迷人音乐，精彩冒险与神奇刺激的奇妙的游乐场。那里没有父母的阻拦和唠叨，可以尽情地玩个痛快。阿拉贝尔太太默默地看着他们的背影，轻叹了一口气。接着，她又吁了一口气。

"你真的以为他们会没事吗？"她问。

"哎呀，他们早晚要长大的，"阿拉贝尔先生说。"展览会里是一个很好的锻炼地方，我想。"

当威伯被抬下车，从板条箱里带到他的新猪圈时，好多人都围过来看。他们看到了"祖克曼家的名猪"那行字。威伯回看着人们，试图让自己显得格外的出众。他对他的新家很满意。那里面有很多草，可以为他遮挡从棚顶上照过来的阳光。

夏洛找个机会溜出板条箱，爬到棚顶下的一根杆子上。没人注意到她。

坦普尔曼可不想在白天露面，就悄悄地在箱子里的稻草间躲着。祖克曼先生往威伯的食槽里倒了些脱脂奶，又往里添了些干净的稻草，然后和祖克曼太太，阿拉贝尔夫妇到牲口棚去看纯种奶牛，并四处观光去了。祖克曼先生特别想去看拖拉机。祖克曼太太想去看电冰箱。鲁维闲逛着，希望会遇到朋友，在游乐场里找点儿乐事。

人们刚一离开，夏洛便对威伯说起来。

"还好，你没看到我刚才看见的，"她说。

"你看到什么了？"威伯问。

"你旁边的猪圈里有一头特别大的猪，恐怕要比你大得多。"

"可能他的年纪比我大，有更多的时间来往大里长吧，"威伯说着，泪水不禁涌上了眼眶。

"我要荡过去仔细看一下，"夏洛说。她顺着杆子往那个猪圈爬去。她拖着一条丝线往空中飘去，正好飘到了那头猪的鼻子上方。

"我可以问你的名字吗？"她礼貌地问。

那头猪看了看她。"我没名字，"他用很粗的嗓门说，"你就叫我伯伯吧。"

"好的，伯伯，"夏洛回答。"你是什么时候出生的？你是一头春猪吗？"

"我就是春猪，"伯伯回答。"你以为我是什么，一只春天生的小鸡吗？呵，呵--这笑话不错吧，呃，小妹妹？"

"有点儿意思，"夏洛说。"不过我还听过更有意思的笑话。很高兴认识你，现在我要走了。"

她慢慢地收起丝线，往上退回去，不久就回到了威伯的猪圈。

"他说他是头春猪，"夏洛说，"可能他真的是。不过，他非常的不讨人喜欢。他也太冒失，太吵，而且他讲的粗俗笑话也一点都不可笑。还有，他并没有你这么干净，更没你这么有礼貌。经过刚才的简短交谈，我发现我非常讨厌他。不过，威伯，考虑到他的个头和体重，他可能会是一个很难击败的对手。但如果有我帮你，你就能赢他。"

"那你要在什么时候织网呢？"威伯问。

"下午晚些时候吧，如果那时我不太累的话，"夏洛说。"这些天里，就是最轻的活儿也会使我疲倦的。我好像不再有以前那样的精力了。可能是我老了吧。"

威伯看着他的朋友。她看起来相当的憔悴，一脸倦容。

"听到你说感觉不好，我非常难过，夏洛，"他说。"也许你织一张网，抓到几只苍蝇后就能感觉好一点儿。"

"也许，"她无力地说。"但是我感觉那些漫长的日子快结束了。"她爬上猪圈的顶层睡着了，把忧心忡忡的威伯留在下面。

整个早上人们都从威伯的猪圈旁走过。无数的陌生人在此驻足，羡慕地看着威伯那丝绸一样光滑的白皮肤，卷曲的尾巴，还有他那善意的表情，光彩照人的样子。然后他们去看下一个猪圈里的那头更大的猪。威伯听到好几个人在赞美那个伯伯的个头。他忍不住去偷听那些评论，并情不自禁地担心起来。"现在，夏洛的感觉又不好……"他想。"唉，天呐！"

坦普尔曼一早上都在稻草里熟睡。天气像火一样热。下午祖克曼夫妇和阿拉贝尔夫妇回到了猪圈。几分钟后，芬和埃弗里也出现了。芬的胳膊下夹着一个玩具猴，嘴里嚼着琥珀爆米花<sup>②</sup>。埃弗里的耳朵上系着一个汽球，嘴里吃着苹果蜜饯。孩子们的身上都是汗，看起来很脏。

"很热吧？"祖克曼太太问。

"热死了，"阿拉贝尔太太说着，用手里的那份冰箱广告当扇子扇起来。

他们一个又一个地走进卡车，打开午餐盒。到处都是热辣辣的阳光，晒得人没有兴致吃饭了。

"裁判什么时候能宣布威伯的名次？"祖克曼太太问。

"明天吧，"祖克曼先生说。

鲁维走了过来，扛着刚才赢来的印第安毛毯。

"那正是我们需要的，"埃弗里说。"一条毛毯。"

"当然了，"鲁维回答。他把毛毯围在卡车护栏的四周，使后车厢看起来就像个小帐篷。孩子们坐在毛毯围出的阴影里，感觉舒服多了。

午餐后，他们都躺下来，睡了。

注释① 此处的原文是 two quarters and two dimes。这美国钱是什么模样我哪里知道？中国钱我都没见全呢。只好请教新语丝的朋友。虎子，筋斗云，亦歌等朋友告诉我说，Quarters，是美国最常用的硬币，是镍币，面值为二十五美分，是日常生活中使用最频繁的硬币，搭车洗衣服打公用电话都少不了它。如果到过LASVAGAS就会知道二十五美分的老虎机支撑了一半的赌城。Dime，是十美分的硬币。据说也是美国硬币中唯一含银的。

注释②：这本书里提到很多吃的，但我都多数不知道是什么，除了这个琥珀爆米花，因为我的朋友，尤其是暮紫给了我非常详尽的介绍，让我格外惊喜。他说，琥珀爆米花（原文是Cracker-Jack），是美国Frito-Lay食品公司的食品系列之一，这种零食在学校的小店，平常的市场市场里都有，在垒球赛场上也和花生、热狗一样常见。下面的话是我从他给我提供的一段英文中译出来的：

Cracker-Jack是用一种特别的，红罌粟般颜色的玉米加工而成的，这种玉米最早由美国印地安人在公元800年左右杂交而成。某些新英格兰的部族曾把这种玉米涂上一层枫糖浆，制成蜜饯。第一种具有独特口味的Cracker-Jack，是F.W. Rueckheim在芝加哥举办的第

一届世界工业博览会发明的。F.W. Rueckheim 与其兄弟 Louis Rueckheim 组建了一家 F.W. Rueckheim 兄弟公司。

Louis Rueckheim 发现了防止蜜糖粘到爆米花上的办法。这个秘方今天还在使用，而且至今仍是个秘密。Louis Rueckheim 在 1896 年对推销员推销这产品时，推销员喊道："那是 Cracker Jack!" 这就给他的产品说出了一个不朽的商标。

Cracker-Jack 这个商标，被 1908 年的一首叫"带我去参加棒球赛"流行歌唱成了不朽，因为那歌里曾反复唱道："给我买点儿花生和 Cracker-Jack"。"每盒都有奖品"的口号在 1912 年被提出，当时每件玩具的包装盒里都装着 Cracker-Jack。1918 年，动画明星大力水手杰克和他的叫 BINGO 的狗的形象第一次出现在 Cracker-Jack 包装盒上，只是杰克的脸被换成了 F.W. Rueckheim 的小孙子 Robert 的。

总部在美国俄亥俄州首府的哥伦布的一家公司购买了 Cracker Jack 公司，使它在 1964 年成了一家分公司。Frito-Lay 在 1997 年购买了 Cracker-Jack 的商标权。

## 18. 凉夜

黑暗模糊了展览会场后，凉爽的傍晚来临了。坦普尔曼从板条箱里爬出来，开始四处观望。威伯还在稻草中间睡着。夏洛正在织一张网。坦普尔曼那敏锐的鼻子在空气中嗅到很多好闻的味道。老鼠又饿又渴，决定出去探险了。他没和任何人打招呼，就往外溜去。

"给我带一个字回来！"夏洛在他的身后喊。"今晚我要最后一次往网里织字！"

老鼠嘴里嘟囔了一句什么，消失在黑暗里了。他一点儿也不愿意被看成一个小搬运工。

忙碌的白天过去后，夜晚对所有人来说，都是放松的好时候。费里斯大转轮上现在轻松多了。它一圈圈地在空中转着，好像比白天时转得还要高两倍。游乐场里灯火通明，能听到从里面传出的游戏机的响声，还有旋转木马旁的音乐声，电话亭里的男人呼叫电话号码的声音。

孩子们在小睡之后又恢复了活力。芬遇到了她的朋友亨利·富塞。他邀请她一同去坐费里斯大转轮，还送了她一张票，这样她就不必花钱去买了。阿拉贝尔太太偶然望向繁星点点的夜空，看到她的小女儿正和亨利·富塞坐在一起，往天上转得越来越高。当看到芬那幸福的样子，她不相信地摇了摇头。"看，看呐！"她说。"那不是亨利·富塞吗？真没想到！"

坦普尔曼始终躲避着灯光。在牲口棚后面的高草丛里，他发现了一张折叠起来的报纸。里面包着某个人吃剩的午餐：油煎火腿三明治，一块瑞士奶酪，一点儿煮鸡蛋，一个有蛀虫的苹果核。老鼠爬进去把这些全吃光了。然后他从报纸上撕下一个字，卷起来，往威伯的猪圈叼去。

当老鼠带着那片报纸回来时，夏洛的网几乎快织成了。她事先在网中间留了一个空。这时，猪圈四周并没有人，只除了老鼠，蜘蛛和那头猪。

"我希望你给我带来一个好词儿，"夏洛说。"那将是我织的最后一个词了。"

"这就是，"坦普尔曼说着，打开了纸卷儿。

"上面说什么?"夏洛问。"你最好读给我听。"

"上面写的是'谦恭', "老鼠回答。

"谦恭?"①夏洛说。"'谦恭'有两个意思。一个意思是'不骄傲', 一个意思是'贴近大地', 这词对威伯太合适了。他不骄傲, 而且他也和土壤非常亲近。"

"很好, 我希望你能满意, "老鼠讽刺。"我要去把我所有的时间都用到拿和搬上了。我到展览会来是为了使自己开心的, 而不是为了送报纸的。"

"你帮了很大的忙, "夏洛说。"快去吧, 如果你想展览会上找到更多的好东西的话。"

老鼠咧开嘴笑了。"我要去狂吃一整夜, "他说。"老羊说得对--这个展览会老鼠的天堂。那么多吃的! 那么多喝的! 到处都有可以攫取的好东西。再见, 再见, 我谦恭的威伯! 也对你说声再见吧, 夏洛, 你这个老阴谋家! 这将是一只老鼠一生中最难忘的夜晚。"

他在黑暗中消失了。

夏洛回到她的工作上来。现在, 天已经很黑了。不远处, 焰火开始升空了--无数灿烂的火球笔直地喷洒进夜空中。等阿拉贝尔一家与祖克曼夫妇, 还有鲁维从大看台那里回来时, 夏洛已经织完了她的网, "谦恭"这个词被整齐地织在网中央。在黑暗中, 没有人注意到它。每个人都玩得又累又尽兴。

芬和埃弗里爬进卡车躺下来, 把那条印第安毛毯盖到身上。鲁维给威伯加了一叉新鲜的稻草。阿拉贝尔先生拍了拍他。"我们该回家了, "他对那头猪说。"明天见。"

大人们悄悄地进了卡车。威伯先听到了引擎开动的声音, 继而又听到了卡车慢慢离去的声。如果夏洛此刻不陪在身边的话, 他一定会孤独和想家的。只要有夏洛在身边, 他就永远不会感到孤独。不远处传来旋转木马旁的音乐声。

就在快要入睡时, 他对夏洛说了起来。

"再给我唱一遍那支歌吧, 就是关于粪堆和黑夜的那支。"他央求道。



"今晚不能了，"她用一种微弱的声音说。"我太累了。"她的声音好像不是从她的网里传出来的。

"你在哪儿？"威伯问。"我看不到你。你在网里吗？"

"我在后面，"她回答。"猪圈后的一个角落上面。"

"你为什么不在你的网里？"威伯问。"你可是从不离开你的网的。"

"我今晚得离开了，"她说。

威伯闭上眼。"夏洛，"他过了一会儿说，"你真的认为祖克曼会让我活下去，冬天来时也不杀我吗？你真的这么认为吗？"

"当然，"夏洛说。"你是头名猪，也是头好猪。明天你可能会得大奖的。整个世界将会知道你的名字的。祖克曼会为拥有你这样一头猪而骄傲、幸福的，你不要害怕，威伯--什么也不必担心。你大概会永远活下去的--谁知道呢？现在去睡吧。"

静了一会儿，又听到了威伯的声音：

"你在那上面做什么呢，夏洛？"

"哦，造一样东西，"她说。"造一样东西，像往常那样。"

"那是给我造的吗？"威伯问。

"不，"夏洛说。"这次不同，这次是为我自己造的。"

"请告诉我那是什么吧，"威伯请求。

"我会在明天早晨告诉你，"她说。"等到天空中出现第一道晨光，麻雀们开始喳喳叫，母牛把他们的身上的链子弄得嘎嘎作响的时候；等到公鸡啼叫，星光黯淡的时候；等到早起的汽车在高速公路上奔跑的时候，你再抬头看我要你看的東西。我将给你看我的一件杰作。"

在她说完之前，威伯已经睡着了。威伯从稻草里传出的呼噜声告诉了她这一点。

数里外的阿拉贝尔家，父亲正围坐在厨房的餐桌旁，吃着桃子罐头，想着白天发生的事情。埃弗里已经在楼上睡着了。阿拉贝尔太太正在给芬掖被子。

"你在展览会上玩得开心吗？"她问着，吻了女儿一下。

芬点点头。"在我一生中，不管在哪里，在什么时候，都没有在那里时玩得开心。"

"好极了！"阿拉贝尔太太说。"那真是太好了！"

注释① 谦恭，原文humble。我的朋友筋斗云告诉我，它有两个意思：1.having or showing a consciousness of one's defects or shortcomings,not proud; not self-assertive;modest 2. low in condition,rank or position;lowly ;unpretentious. 它的词根来源是Humilis ,(low ,small ,soil ,earth)。所以它有土壤与土地之意。humble有差点、低级点的意思，也有做谦词的，以前见过"蓬壁增辉"有译成"inmyhumblehouse"。另外"Inmyhumble opinion"也常见。

## 19. 卵囊

第二天早晨，当第一缕晨光从天空出现，麻雀们开始在树上叫时；当母牛把身上的链子摇得直响，公鸡也开始啼叫时；当早行的汽车从路边呼啸而过时，威伯醒了，开始寻找夏洛。他在猪圈后面上方的一个角落里看到了她。她显得很安详，八条腿都松松地张在那里。她似乎在一夜之间缩小了。在她身旁，威伯看到了一个奇怪的东西，就粘在猪圈的顶层上。那是一种囊，或者说是茧。看起来是桃红色的，好像是用棉花糖做出来的。

"你醒了吗，夏洛？"他轻声问。

"是的，"她回答。

"那漂亮的小东西是什么？是你造的吗？"

"是我造的，"夏洛用微弱的声音回答。

"那是个玩具吗？"

"玩具？应该说不是。这是我的卵囊，我的Magnum opus。"

"我不懂Magnum opus是什么意思，"威伯说。

"那是一句拉丁语，"夏洛解释说。"它的意思就像'最伟大的作品'。这个卵囊就是我最伟大的作品--是我曾经造出的最好的东西。"

"里面装的是什麼？"威伯问。"卵吗？"

"514枚卵，"她回答。

"514枚？"威伯说。"你在骗我。"

"不，我没有，我数过的。我先是一个一个地数着，然后就一直数到完--这正好可以消磨时间。"

"这是一个完美的卵囊，"威伯骄傲地说，好像这个卵囊是他自己造的一样。

"是的，它是很完美，"夏洛用她的两条前腿拍着卵囊说。"此外，我还能保证，它是非常结实的。它是用我最粗的丝线造出来的。它还能防水。这些卵在里面会时刻保持温暖、干燥的。"

"夏洛，"威伯做梦般地说，"你真的会有514个孩子吗？"

"如果没有意外的话，会有的，"她说。"可是，他们得明年春天才会孵出来。"

威伯注意到夏洛的语调显得很悲伤。

"是什么使你的声音听起来那么伤心？我想你该为此狂喜才对。"

"噢，不用在意我，"夏洛说。"我只是没有力气了。我感到悲伤，是因为我将看不到我的孩子们了，我想。"

"你为什么认为你看不到你的孩子们！你当然能了。我们都会看见他们的。到了明天春天，看着514只小蜘蛛在谷仓地窖跑来跑去，一定是很开心的。那时，母鹅将孵出又一群小鹅，绵羊也会生出新的羊羔来……"

"可能吧，"夏洛轻轻地说。"不管怎样，我都有一个预感，我将不会看到我昨夜努力的成果了。我现在的感觉很糟。告诉你实话吧，我想我正在衰残下去。"

威伯不明白"衰残"的意思，也不好意思总请夏洛来做解释。但由于极度的担心，他觉得还是有必要问个清楚。

"'衰残'是什么意思？"

"就是说我的行动正在变得迟缓，岁月已经不饶人了。我不再年轻了，威伯。但我不要你为我担忧。今天是你的好日子。看我的网--在里面有露珠时，看起来效果不是很好吗？"

夏洛今天早上织的网，看起来比以往任何时候织出来的都要美。每根丝线上都缀饰着光闪闪的晨露。从东边照过来的阳光使里面的字显得格外的清晰、美丽。那是一张无论构思还是织工都十分完美的网。一、两个小时，如流的人群将会涌过来，赞美着，读着，对威伯看着，为眼中出现的奇迹而惊叹。

当威伯正在观赏那张网时，几缕小胡子和一张尖尖的面孔出现了。坦普尔曼慢慢地蹭回猪圈，躺到了角落里。

"我回来了，"他哑着嗓子说。"多美的一夜！"

老鼠胀得比平时足足胖了两倍。他的肚子就像一个大圆果酱瓶子。

"多美的一夜！"他沙哑地重复道。"多么丰盛的酒宴！真正的狂吃！我一定吃下了整整三十份剩下来的午餐。我从没见过这么好的剩

饭，白天的火热和这么长时间的烘烤恰好使得这些东西变得格外的够味。噢，太丰盛了，我的朋友，太丰盛了！"

"你该为你的行为感到羞耻，"夏洛厌恶地说。"如果你得了严重的消化不良，那可是活该。"

"用不着你为我的肚子操心，"坦普尔曼咆哮。"它可以容纳任何东西。顺便说一句，我得到一个坏消息。当我从那头猪旁边经过时--就是叫伯伯的那头猪--我看到他的猪圈前面贴着一个蓝标签。那表示他得了头奖。我猜你输了，威伯。你可要尽量想开呀--没人会来给你挂什么奖章了。此外，如果祖克曼先生对你改了主意，我也不会吃惊的。活到他想吃鲜猪肉和熏火腿、脆腌肉的时候为止吧！那时他会对你挥舞起刀子来的，我的宝贝。"

"住嘴，坦普尔曼！"夏洛说。"你吃得太多了吧，撑得你都开始说胡话了。别听他的，威伯！"

威伯尽力使自己不去回想刚才老鼠说过的话。他决定换个话题，来分散注意力。

"坦普尔曼，"威伯说，"如果你不是吃傻了，就该注意到夏洛已经造了个卵囊。她要做妈妈了。告诉你一个消息，那个桃色的小卵囊里有514枚卵呢。"

"那是真的吗？"老鼠的眼睛好奇地盯着卵囊问。

"是的，真的，"夏洛轻声道。

"恭喜！"坦普尔曼嘟囔道，"这是个不平凡的夜晚！"他闭上眼，拖过一些稻草盖到身上，美美地睡了。威伯和夏洛很高兴能暂时摆脱老鼠的纠缠。

九点钟，阿拉贝尔先生的卡车开回展览会场，停到威伯的猪圈旁。每个人都下了车。

"看！"芬叫。"看夏洛的网！看上面说什么！"

大人和孩子们手牵着手站在那里，观察着这个新织的字。

"谦恭"，祖克曼先生说。"这个词对威伯太合适了！"

每个人都说蜘蛛网里又出现了奇迹。威伯神情可爱地望着人们的脸。他看起来既谦恭，又讨人喜欢。芬会意地朝夏洛眨了眨眼。不久

鲁维开始忙起来。他把一桶温乎的猪食倒进食槽，又在威伯吃早饭时，用一根光滑的小棍子轻轻地给他抓痒。

"等一下！"埃弗里说。"看这个！"他指着"伯伯"的猪圈上的蓝标签说。"这头猪已经赢得了大奖。"

祖克曼一家与阿拉贝尔一家盯住了那张标签。祖克曼太太开始哭起来。没人再说一句话。他们只是呆呆地看着那标签。然后他们看看"伯伯"，再看看标签。鲁维掏出一方特别大的手绢大声地擤着鼻子--这声音很大，大得连那边马厩里的马夫都听见了。

"能给我点儿钱吗？"芬问。"我想去游乐场。"

"你就在这儿呆着！"她的母亲说。泪水开始在芬的眼里打转。

"你们都哭什么？"祖克曼先生说。"让我们忙起来！伊迪丝，拿酸奶来！"

祖克曼太太用手绢擦擦眼睛。她走向卡车，带回一个装着一加仑酸奶的瓶子。

"洗澡时间！"祖克曼先生欢叫。他和祖克曼太太，埃弗里走进威伯的猪圈。埃弗里慢慢地往威伯的头和背上倒着酸奶，当酸奶流到威伯身上时，祖克曼夫妇就把它往威伯的毛发和皮肤上抹。过路的人都停下来参观。不久，一头漂亮的猪出现了。威伯又白又光滑，变得非常漂亮。早晨的阳光映过了他粉红色的耳朵。

"他不像那个圈里的猪那么大，"一个旁观者说，"但他更干净。这就是我喜欢他的地方。"

"我也这么想，"另一个男人说。

"他也很谦恭，"一个女人读着网里的字说。

每个来参观的人都对威伯说了些赞美的话。大家都对那张网感到惊奇。当然，没人注意到夏洛。

突然，扩音器里传出了声音。

"请注意！"那里面说。"请霍默·祖克曼先生把他的名猪带到大看台上的裁判场来。二十分钟后，将在那里颁发一项特别奖。每个人都被邀请参加。请把你的猪装进箱子，祖克曼先生，立即向裁判场报到！"

在这通告发布完的一瞬间里，阿拉贝尔一家与祖克曼一家几乎什么也说不出，也不能动了。然后，埃弗里抓起一大把稻草兴奋地大叫

着向空中撒去。这些稻草就像婚礼上撒的五彩纸般，飘上了芬的头发。阿拉贝尔先生吻了阿拉贝尔太太。埃弗里吻了威伯。鲁维对大家挥手示意。芬紧紧抱住了她的母亲。埃弗里抱住了芬。阿拉贝尔太太抱住了祖克曼太太。

在猪圈顶层上的阴影里，无人察觉的夏洛正蹲在那里，前腿激动地紧抱着她的卵囊。她的心不象以前跳得那么有力了，她感觉自己现在既衰老又无力，但她相信，最后她终于救了威伯的命，所以她的心里非常的满足。

"我们不要浪费时间了！"祖克曼先生喊。"鲁维，帮我抬箱子！"

"可以给我点钱吗？"芬问。

"你等等！"阿拉贝尔说。"你看不到大家都在忙着吗？"

"把空酸奶瓶送回卡车上！"阿拉贝尔先生命令。埃弗里抱着瓶子冲上了卡车。

"我的头发看起来还好吧？"祖克曼太太说。

"还好，"祖克曼先生敷衍道，在他和鲁维把板条箱放到威伯面前的时候。

"你根本就没看我的头发！"祖克曼太太说。

"你很好，伊迪丝，"阿拉贝尔先生说。"只要你保持镇静。"

睡在稻草里的坦普尔曼，听到响动，醒了过来。他根本就不知道发生了什么事，但他看到男人们正在把威伯往板条箱里抬，就也决定跟着去。他找个没人看到的时机溜进了板条箱，藏到稻草的最下面。

"孩子们，准备！"祖克曼先生喊。"我们走！"他和阿拉贝尔先生、鲁维、埃弗里扛起箱子往卡车走去。芬跳上车，坐到了箱子上。她的头发上还粘着稻草，显得格外的俏皮可爱。阿拉贝尔先生发动了引擎。大家都上了车，往裁判场那里驶去。

当他们经过费里斯大转轮时，芬望了大转轮一眼，希望她能和亨利一起坐到大转轮最高处的座位里。

## 20. 胜利时刻

"特别消息！"广播喇叭里以一种炫耀的声音说。"展览会的主办者正在非常荣幸地为各位介绍霍默·L·祖克曼先生和他的名猪。装着这头非凡的动物的卡车现在正朝我们开过来。请往后退，让卡车开过来！这头猪马上就要被送到大看台前的特别裁判场来，并在那里被授予特别奖。请大家后退，让卡车通过。谢谢你们。"

当听到这些报道时，威伯颤抖起来，他幸福得都要晕过去了。卡车慢慢地往前开着，周围挤满了人。阿拉贝尔先生不得不开得很小心，以免压到人。最后他终于设法开到了裁判场前。埃弗里跳下车，打开后车门。

"我要吓死了，"祖克曼太太低语。"几百人在看着我们呢。"

"振作些，"阿拉贝尔先生回答。"那不是很有趣嘛。"

"请把你们的猪抬下来！"扩音器里说。

"现在，一起用力，孩子们！"祖克曼先生说，几个男人抬起箱子从人流中穿过去。埃弗里是几个人中最帮的一个。

"把你的衬衫掖进去，埃弗里！"祖克曼太太喊。"再紧紧你的裤带。你的裤子要掉下来了。"

"你没看见我正忙着吗？"埃弗里不高兴地回答。

"看，"芬叫着指去。"那是亨利！"

"别喊，芬！"她妈妈说。"不许指指点点！"

"能给我点儿钱吗？"芬问。"亨利又请我去坐大转轮了，可我想他没钱了，他把钱都花光了。"

阿拉贝尔太太打开她的手袋。"给，"她说。"这是四毛钱。别跑丢了！一会儿到猪圈那里的老地方等我们！"

芬跑进了人群，挤来挤去的寻找着亨利。

"祖克曼家的猪现在正被从板条箱里带出来，"扩音器里嗡嗡地喊着。"请大家静等通告！"

坦普尔曼趴在板条箱底的稻草下面。"都在胡说什么呀！"他嘟囔着。"吵死了！"



夏洛正在猪圈上方，一个人静静地休息。她的两条前腿还在紧紧地抱着卵囊。夏洛能听到扩音器里说的每一句话。那些话为她增添了不少勇气。这是她的胜利时刻。

当威伯从板条箱里走出来时，人们开始鼓掌喝彩。祖克曼先生脱帽鞠躬致谢。鲁维从口袋里拽出他的大手绢，擦着脖子后面的汗。埃弗里跪在威伯身边，不停地抚摩着他，炫耀着。祖克曼太太和阿拉贝尔太太正站在卡车的脚踏板上。

"女士们先生们，"扩音器里说，"我们现在向诸位介绍霍默·L·祖克曼先生的杰出的猪。这头不寻常的动物的名声早已经传到了地球最远的角落，他为我们这个伟大的国家吸引了很多尊贵的游客。你们中的很多人可能仍然记得今年夏天早些时候的那个永-不-会-忘-记-的日子，那天，在祖克曼先生的谷仓里，有一个词被神秘地织在那里的蜘蛛网上面，它令所有人都注意到了这个事实，即那头猪完全是卓越不凡的。这个奇迹从未被完全地解释清楚，尽管学者们已经到祖克曼家的猪圈参观过，并观察、研究过这一现象。最近的分析表明，我们目前只知道我们在这里讨论的是一种超自然的力量，我们都应该为此而自豪和感恩。那张蜘蛛网里的写的词，女士们先生们，就是'好猪'。"

威伯脸红了。他完美地静立着，让自己站得像最好的猪。

"这个壮美的动物，"扩音器里继续说，"真的是很棒。看看他，女士们先生们！请注意他那雪白、光滑的毛皮，观赏他那一尘不染的皮肤，还有他那耳朵与鼻子上散发出的健康的，粉红色的光辉。"

"那是酸奶的缘故，"阿拉贝尔太太对祖克曼太太耳语道。

"请注意这个动物身上无处不在的光辉！这会让人想起'闪光'这个词清晰地出现在蜘蛛网里的那一天。这个神秘的字迹从何而来呢？它不是来自于蜘蛛，我们完全能保证这一点。蜘蛛虽然有织网的本能，但它却不能写字，这一点是无须多说的。"

"噢，他们不能这么说！怎么能这么说？"夏洛自言自语。

"女士们先生们，"扩音器里继续说，"我不必再浪费你们的宝贵时间了。作为展览会主办者的代表，我有幸向祖克曼先生颁发一笔二十五美元的特别奖金，同时颁发的还有一块漂亮的花纹精美的青铜奖章，它将用来象征我们对这头猪的赏识--这是一头闪光的，很棒的，"

谦恭的猪--正是他把这么多的参观者吸引到我们这伟大的展览会上来。"

这些无休止的恭维使威伯越来越承受不住了。当他听到人们再次开始欢呼和鼓掌时，他突然幸福得昏了过去。他的腿瘫了，大脑一片空白，毫无知觉地躺到了地上。

"出什么毛病了？"扩音器里问。"发生了什么事情，祖克曼？你的猪有麻烦了吗？"

埃弗里跪到威伯的头前，抚摸着威伯。祖克曼先生也跃过来，用他的帽子给威伯扇凉。

"他没事，"祖克曼先生喊。"他被这些话弄晕了。他是最谦虚的，受不了夸奖。"

"很好，可我们不能给一头死猪发奖，"扩音器说。"这是从没有过的事。"

"他没死，"祖克曼高喊。"他只是晕了。他很容易被夸倒。拿点水来，鲁维！"

鲁维跑下裁判场，不见了。

坦普尔曼从稻草里探出了头。他发现威伯的尾巴尖就在他的眼前。坦普尔曼呲呲牙。"我要这样帮他，"他咯咯地笑起来。他把威伯的尾巴塞到嘴里，尽自己最大的力气狠狠咬了一口。威伯一下子就疼醒了。他猛地站了起来。

"嗷！"他尖叫。

"万岁！"人们狂叫。"他站起来了，这头猪站起来了！干得好，祖克曼！那是头好猪！"每个人都兴奋起来。祖克曼先生是最高兴的。他放心地吁了一口气。没人看到坦普尔曼。老鼠的活儿干得太漂亮了。

现在，一个裁判带着奖金进了裁判场。他递给祖克曼先生两张十美元的钞票与一张五美元的钞票，然后又把奖章挂到了威伯的脖子上。当威伯变成大红脸时，他和祖克曼先生握了握手。埃弗里伸出手来，裁判也和他握了握手。人们欢呼起来。一个摄影师给威伯照了一张像。

一股无比幸福的暖流席卷了祖克曼一家与阿拉贝尔一家。这是祖克曼先生一生中最美的时刻。在这么多人面前获得奖金，令他深深地

感到满足。

当威伯被送回板条箱时，鲁维拎着一桶水从人群挤出来。他的眼发疯地搜寻了一会儿，就毫不犹豫地把手向威伯泼去。由于太紧张，他瞄错了地方，于是水都泼到了祖克曼先生和埃弗里身上。他们全都淋湿了。

"看在上帝的份上！"完全被淋透的祖克曼先生咆哮起来。"你有病吗，鲁维？你看不见那头猪已经没事了吗？"

"你要我淋的水，"鲁维怯怯地嘀咕。

"可我没要淋浴，"祖克曼先生说。人们哄笑起来。后来，祖克曼先生也笑起来。发现自己身上湿了的埃弗里可乐坏了，立刻开始扮起小丑来。他假装自己正在洗淋浴；他做着鬼脸，转圈跳着，往他的腋窝下打着并不存在的肥皂。然后他又用了一条根本就没有的毛巾给自己擦身。

"埃弗里，停下来！"他的母亲喊。"别丢人现眼了！"

可人们却爱看。埃弗里除了人们的喝彩外也什么都没听到。他喜欢在大看台前的裁判场里做一个人人注目的小丑。当他发现桶里还剩了些水，便把桶高高举起，把剩下的水也泼到自己身上，同时又做了许多鬼脸。大看台旁的孩子们都赞赏地尖叫起来。

最后，一切都平静下来。威伯被装上了卡车，埃弗里被他的母亲领下了裁判场，带到卡车里的座位上。阿拉贝尔先生开着卡车慢慢往猪圈的方向去。埃弗里的湿裤子在座位里留下了一大滩水迹。

## 21. 最后一天

夏洛和威伯又单独在一起了。这两家人都去找芬了。坦普尔曼睡着了。参加完激动而紧张的庆典的威伯正躺在那里休息。他的奖章还在脖子上挂着；他的眼睛正望着从他躺的位置可以看到的角落。

"夏洛，"过了一会儿，威伯说，"你为什么这么安静？"

"我喜欢静静地呆着，"她说。"我一向喜欢安静。"

"我知道，不过你今天似乎有些特别，你感觉还好吧？"

"可能有一点点累吧。但是我感到很满足。你今早在裁判场上的成功，在很小的程度上，也可以算是我的成功。你的将来没危险了。你会无忧无虑地活下去的，威伯。现在没什么能伤害你的了。这个秋天会变短，也会变冷。叶子们也会从树上摇落的。圣诞节会来，然后就是飘飘的冬雪。你将活着看到那个美丽的冰雪世界的，因为你对祖克曼有很重大的意义，他再也不会想伤害你了。冬天将过去，白天又会变长，草场池塘里的冰也会融化的。百灵鸟又会回来唱歌，青蛙也将醒来，又会吹起暖暖的风。所有的这些美丽的景色，所有的这些动听的声音，所有的这些好闻的气味，都将等着你去欣赏呢，威伯--这个可爱的世界，这些珍贵的日子……"

夏洛沉默了。片刻之后，泪水模糊了威伯的眼。"哦，夏洛，"他说。"记得刚遇到你的那一天，我还认为你是个残忍嗜血的动物！"

等情绪稳定下来后，他又继续说起来。

"为什么你要为我做这一切？"他问。"我不值得你帮我。我从来也没有为你做过任何事情。"

"你一直是我的朋友，"夏洛回答。"这本身就是你对我最大的帮助。我为你织网，是因为我喜欢你。然而，生命的价值是什么，该怎么说呢？我们出生，我们短暂的活着，我们死亡。一个蜘蛛在一生中只忙碌着捕捉、吞食小飞虫是毫无意义的。通过帮助你，我才可能试着在我的生命里找到一点价值。老天知道，每个人活着时总要做些有意义的事才好吧。"

"噢，"威伯说。"我并不善于说什么大道理。我也不能像你说得那么好。但我要说，你已经拯救了我，夏洛，而且我很高兴能为你奉献

我的生命--我真的很愿意。"

"我相信你会的。我要感谢你这无私的友情。"

"夏洛，"威伯说。"我们今天就要回家了。展览会快结束了。再回到谷仓地窖的家，和绵羊、母鹅们在一起不是很快活吗？你不盼着回家吗？"

夏洛沉默了好一会儿。然后她用一种低得威伯几乎都听不到的声音说：

"我将不回谷仓了，"她说。

威伯吃惊得跳了起来。"不回去？"他叫。"夏洛，你在说什么？"

"我已经不行了，"她回答。"一两天内我就要死去了。我现在甚至连爬下板条箱的力气都没有了。我怀疑我的丝囊里是否还有足够把我送到地面上的丝了。"

听到这些话，威伯立刻沉浸到巨大的痛苦和忧伤之中。他痛苦地绞动着身子，哭叫起来。"夏洛，"他呻吟道。"夏洛！我真诚的朋友！"

"好了，不要喊了，"夏洛说。"安静，威伯。别哭了！"

"可是我忍不住，"威伯喊。"我不会让你在这里孤独地死去的。如果你要留在这里，我也要留下。"

"别胡说了，"夏洛说。"你不能留在这里。祖克曼和鲁维还有约翰·阿拉贝尔以及其他的人现在随时都会回来，他们会把你装到箱子里，带你离开的。此外，你留在这里也没什么好处，这里不会有人喂你的。展览会不久就会空无一人的。"

威伯陷入了恐慌之中。他在猪圈里转着圈子跑来跑去。突然他想起了一件事--他想到了卵囊和明年春天里将要出世的那514只小蜘蛛。如果夏洛不能回到谷仓里的家，至少他要把她的孩子们带回去。

威伯向猪圈前面冲去。他把前腿搭在木板上，四处察看着。他看到阿拉贝尔一家和祖克曼一家正从不远处走过来。他知道他必须赶快行动了。

"坦普尔曼在哪里？"他问。

"他在稻草下面的角落里睡着呢。"夏洛说。

威伯奔过去，用他有力的鼻子把老鼠拱上了天。

"坦普尔曼！"威伯尖叫。"醒醒！"

从美梦中惊醒的老鼠，开始看起来还迷迷糊糊的，随即就变得气愤起来。

"你这是搞什么恶作剧？"他怒吼。"一只老鼠挤个时间安静地睡一小会儿时，就不能不被粗暴地踢上天？"

"听我说！"威伯叫，"夏洛快死了，她只能活很短的一段时间了。因此她不能陪我们一起回家了。所以，我只能把她的卵囊带回去了。可我上不去，我不会爬。你是唯一能帮我的人了。再等一秒种就来不及了，人们就要走过来了--他们一到就没时间了。请，请，请帮帮我，坦普尔曼，爬上去把卵囊带下来吧。"

老鼠打了一个哈欠。他梳了梳他的胡子，才抬头朝卵囊望去。

"所以！"他厌恶地说。"所以又是老坦普尔曼来救你，对吧？坦普尔曼做这个，坦普尔曼做那个，请坦普尔曼去垃圾堆为我找破杂志，请坦普尔曼借我一根绳子，我好织网。"

"噢，快点！"威伯说，"快去，坦普尔曼！"

可老鼠却一点儿也不急。他开始模仿起威伯的声音来。

"所以现在该说'快去，坦普尔曼'了，对不对呀？"他说。"哈，哈。我很想知道，我为你们提供了这么多的特别服务后，都得到了什么感谢呀？从没有人给过老坦普尔曼一句好听的话，除了谩骂，风凉话和旁敲侧击之外。从没有人对老鼠说过一句好话。"

"坦普尔曼，"威伯绝望地说，"如果你不停止你的议论，马上忙起的话，什么就都完了，我也会心碎而死的，请你爬上去吧！"

坦普尔曼反而躺到了稻草里。他懒洋洋地把前爪枕到脑后，翘起了二郎腿，一副完全与己无关的自得模样。

"心碎而死，"他模仿。"多么感人呀！啊唷，啊唷！我发现当你有麻烦时总是我来帮你。可我却从没听说谁会为了我而心碎呢。哦，没人会的。谁在乎老坦普尔曼？"

"站起来！"威伯尖叫。"别装得跟一个惯坏了的孩子似的！"

坦普尔曼咧嘴笑笑，还是躺着没动。"是谁一趟趟的往垃圾堆跑呀？"他问。"为什么，总是老坦普尔曼！是谁用那个坏鹅蛋把阿拉贝家的男孩子臭跑，救了夏洛一命呀？为我的灵魂祈祷吧，我相信这

件事又是老坦普尔曼做的。是谁咬了你的尾巴尖儿，让今早昏倒在人们面前的你站起来的呀？还是老坦普尔曼。你就没想过我已经厌倦了给你跑腿，为你施恩吗？你以为我是什么，一个什么活都得干的老鼠奴仆吗？”

威伯绝望了。人们就要来了，可老鼠却在忙着奚落他。突然，他想起了老鼠对食物的钟爱。

“坦普尔曼，”他说，“我将给你一个郑重的承诺。只要你把夏洛的卵囊给我拿下来，那么从现在起每当鲁维来喂我时，我都将让你先吃。我会让你先去挑选食槽里的每一样食物，在你吃饱之前，我绝不碰里面的任何东西。”

老鼠腾地坐了起来。“真的吗？”他说。

“我保证。我在胸口划十字保证。”

“好极了，这是个划得来的交易，”老鼠说。他走到墙边开始往上爬。可是他的肚子里还存着许多昨天吃的好东西呢，因此他只好边抱怨边慢慢地把自己往上面拉。他一直爬到卵囊那里。夏洛为他往边上挪了挪。她就要死了，但她还有动一动的力气。然后坦普尔曼张开他丑陋的长牙，去咬那些把卵囊绑在棚顶的线。威伯在下面看着。

“要特别小心！”他说。“我不想让任何一个卵受伤。”

“它粘到我嘴上了，”老鼠抱怨，“它比胶皮糖还黏。”

但是老鼠还是设法把卵囊拉下来，带到地面，丢到威伯面前。威伯大大松了一口气。

“谢谢你，坦普尔曼，”他说。“我这一辈子也不会忘记的。”

“我也是，”老鼠说着，剔剔他的牙。“我感觉好像吞下了满满一线轴的线。好吧，我们回家吧！”

坦普尔曼爬进板条箱，把自己埋到稻草下面。他消失得正是时候。鲁维和约翰·阿拉贝尔，祖克曼先生那一刻正好走过来，身后跟着阿拉贝尔太太和祖克曼太太，还有芬和埃弗里。威伯已经想好怎么带走卵囊了--这只有一种可能的方法。他小心翼翼地把这个小东西吞到嘴里，放到了舌头尖上。他想起了夏洛告诉过他的话--这个卵囊是防水的，结实的。可这让他的舌头觉得痒痒的，口水开始流了出来。这时他什么也不能说了，但当他被推进板条箱时，他抬头望了一眼夏

洛，对她眨了眨眼。她知道他在用他所能用的唯一方式，在对自己说再见。她也知道她的孩子们都很安全。

"再-见！"她低语。然后她鼓起全身仅剩的一丝力气，对威伯挥起一只前腿。

她再也不能动了。第二天，当费里斯大转轮被拆走，那些赛马被装进货车拉走，游乐场的摊主们也收拾起他们的东西，把他们的活动房搬走时，夏洛死了。这个展览会不久就被人遗忘了。那些棚屋与房子只好空虚地，孤单地留在那里。地上堆满了空瓶子之类的废物和垃圾。没有一个人，参加过这次展览会的几百人中，没有一个人知道：那只大灰蜘蛛在这次展览会上扮演了一个最重要的角色。当她死亡时，没有一个人陪在她的身旁。



## 22. 和畅的风

威伯就这样回到他在谷仓地窖里的，牛粪堆旁的家。他回来时的样子很奇特：脖子上挂着一枚荣誉奖章，嘴里含着一个蜘蛛的卵囊。没有一个地方像家里这么温暖，当他把夏洛的514个没出世的孩子小心地放到安全的角落后，他想。谷仓里的味道真好。他的朋友们，绵羊和鹅们都很高兴看到他回来。

鹅们以他们特有的方式表示欢迎了。

"恭-恭-恭喜！"他们喊着。"干得漂亮。"

祖克曼先生把奖牌从威伯脖子上摘下来，挂到猪圈上方的一根钉子上，这里很容易被参观者看到，威伯也可以随时看到它。

往后的日子里，他过得非常幸福。他长得出奇的大。他不再担心被杀掉了，因为他知道祖克曼先生会让他一直活下去的。威伯也经常想到夏洛。她旧网里的几根残丝仍然在门框上挂着。每天威伯都会走到那里站一会儿，望望那张残破不堪的空网，这时他就会哽噎起来。从没有人有过这样一个朋友--这样亲密的，这样忠诚的，这样聪慧的朋友。

秋天过得很快，鲁维把丝瓜，南瓜们从园子里堆藏到谷仓里面，在这里它们才不会被霜夜的寒冷冻坏。枫树和桦树们变得分外鲜艳，在秋风的吹动下，它们的红叶子一片，一片地落到了地上。草场里的野苹果树下，可爱的小红苹果躺得满地都是，绵羊和鹅们都来吃它们，夜里狐狸们也会来吞食它们。圣诞节前的一个夜里，开始下雪了。房子上，谷仓里，田野间，树林中，到处都覆盖着雪。威伯以前从没见过雪。当他早晨起来后，就到院子里去拱雪堆，感觉这特别有趣。芬和埃弗里拖着雪橇走过来了。他们顺着小路往外滑去，一直滑到草场那边结冰的池塘上。

"坐雪橇是最有意思的了，"埃弗里说。

"最有意思的是，"芬反驳，"是在费里斯大转轮停在那里，我和亨利走进最高的位子，然后亨利就让我们座位摇晃着往前走的时候。那时我们能看到每一件东西，不管它是在多么远，多么远的地方。"

"老天，你还在想着那个大转轮呀？"埃弗里不屑地说。"展览会是很多很多星期前的事了。"

"我可是时刻都在想着，"芬说着，掸了掸耳朵上的雪。

圣诞节后，温度计上的指数落到零下十度了。寒冷统治了世界。草场上变得一片凄清。母牛们现在整日呆在谷仓里了，除非在阳光充足的早上，他们才会走出来，在院子里稻草堆旁的避风处站一会儿。为了取暖，绵羊们也呆在谷仓里，很少出去了。渴了他们就吃雪。鹅们就就像男孩子们在药店里一样，在院子里无精打采地走着。为了让他们高兴，祖克曼先生给他们喂玉米和芜菁。

"非常，非常，非常感谢！"当他们看到送来的食物时总是这么说。

冬天来时，坦普尔曼搬到屋里来住了。他在猪食槽下的家已经变得太冷了，因此他在谷仓后的粮仓里给自己造了一个安乐窝。他往那里垫上了碎报纸和破布条，还把任何他能找到的东西都储存在那里。他仍是每天拜访威伯三次，都正好在吃饭的时候出现，威伯也一直遵守他许下的诺言，让老鼠先吃。等到老鼠撑得不能往嘴里塞任何东西时，威伯才过来吃。由于吃得太多的缘故，坦普尔曼长得越来越大，比你见过的任何一只老鼠都要肥。他简直成了一只"庞然大鼠"了，几乎和一只小土拨鼠不相上下。

一天，老羊对他说起了他的个头。"你可能活久一点的，"老羊说，"如果你少吃一点的话。"

"谁想永远活下去？"老鼠轻蔑地说。"我天生就是个特别能吃的，正是从吃喝上面我才得到

了无穷的满足。"他拍拍肚子，对绵羊冷笑了一声，爬上楼躺下了。

整个的冬天威伯都在照看着夏洛的卵囊，好像在呵护他自己的孩子一样。他在离栅栏不远处的牛粪堆旁，给卵囊腾出了一个特别的地方。每个寒冷的夜晚，他都躺在那里，让自己的呼吸使它温暖。对威伯来说，他的生命中没有一件东西比这个小圆球更重要。他耐心地等着冬天的结束，小蜘蛛们的到来。当你在等待什么发生或被孵出来时，生活总是变得漫长而又单调。可冬天终于还是过去了。

"我今天听到青蛙叫了，"老羊一天晚上说。"听！现在你就能听到他们。"

威伯静静地站着，竖起了耳朵。从池塘那边，传来了数百只小青蛙的高声合唱。

"春天，"老羊深思着说。"又一个春天。"当她走开时，威伯看到她身后跟着一只新羊羔。它才被生下来一小时。

积雪融尽了。小溪和壕沟被潺潺的流水填满了。一只胸脯下带着美丽条纹的雀儿，跳过来开始唱歌。天光渐亮，早晨不久就到来了。几乎每天一早都有一只新生的羊羔降生到羊圈里。母鹅正坐在九个蛋上。天空似乎更宽广了，到处都是和畅的风。夏洛的旧网里剩下的最后几缕丝线也被吹得无影无踪了。

一个阳光遍地的早晨，吃过早饭的威伯又在观察他那珍贵的卵囊了。他本来没有抱太大的期望的，可是当他静静地站在那里观望时，居然发现有什么在那里动。他便走近一些盯着它看。一只很小的蜘蛛从卵囊里爬出来了。它还没有一颗沙粒大，也并不比一根大头针的针头大。它的身体是灰的，下面带有黑色的斑纹，它的腿是灰褐色的。它看起来就像夏洛一样。

当他看到它时，威伯惊喜得浑身颤抖起来。这只小动物向他爬过来。威伯朝卵囊走得更近了。两只更小的蜘蛛也爬了出来，在空中漂浮着。他们在卵囊周围爬了一圈又一圈，探索着他们的新世界。接着又出来三只更小的蜘蛛。接着是八个。然后是十个。夏洛的孩子们最后都在这儿了。

威伯心里充满了骄傲。他幸福地狂叫起来。接着他开始转着圈儿的跑，把牛粪向空中踢去。然后他又跑回来，抬起他的前脚，停到了夏洛的孩子们面前。

"你们好！"他说。

第一只小蜘蛛也说了你好，但它的声音太小了，威伯根本没听到。

"我是你们妈妈的一个老朋友，"威伯说。"我很高兴能看到你们。你们都好吗？什么都好吗？"

小蜘蛛们对他挥动着他们的前腿。威伯见了知道他们也很高兴看到他。

"我能为你们做任何事吗？你们有任何需要帮忙的吗？"

年轻的蜘蛛们只是朝他挥挥脚。一连几天几夜，他们就这么这里那里，上下左右地爬着，对威伯挥着脚，从身后扯出细小的丝线，在他们的家里探险。这里足有几百只蜘蛛。威伯虽然数不过来，却知道他有了无数的新朋友。他们长得很快。不久就都像弹丸那么大了。他们在卵囊附近还织了很多小网。

一个寂静的早晨，当祖克曼先生打开北边的门时，有件事情发生了。从谷仓地窖里轻轻吹出一股温暖的上升气流。空气中满是泥土的清芬，树木的香味，甘甜的春天气息。小蜘蛛们感受到了这温暖的上升气流。一只蜘蛛爬到了栅栏上面，然后他做了件令威伯非常惊奇的事。这只蜘蛛把腿放到头上，把身后的丝囊对向天空，开始放出云一样的游丝。这些丝线形成了一个大气球。就在威伯看着的时候，这只蜘蛛让自己离开栅栏往天空飞去。

"再-见！"当它飞过门口时说。

"等一等！"威伯尖叫。"你想去哪里？"

但是这只蜘蛛已经远得看不见了。然后另一只蜘蛛也爬上了栅栏，站在头上，做了一个汽球，向天空飞去。然后是又一只。又是一只。空中不久就充满了无数的小汽球，每个汽球下都挂着一只蜘蛛。

威伯已经发狂了。夏洛的宝宝们都以惊人的速度消失了。

"回来吧，孩子们！"他哭喊。

"再-见！"他们回答。"再-见，再-见！"

最后一只飞去的小蜘蛛在造它的汽球之前和威伯谈了一会儿。

"我们要随着这温暖的上升气流离开这里了。这是我们起航的时刻。我们是汽球驾驶员，我们要到世界各地，为我们自己织网。"

"可你们去哪里呢？"威伯问。

"风把我们带到任何地方。不管是高处，矮处，近处，远处，东边，西边，北边还是南边。我们乘着微风，我们开心地离去。"

"你们都要走吗？"威伯问。"你们不能都走，我一个人在这里，会没有朋友的，你们的妈妈不想发生这种事，我能肯定。"

空中满是汽球驾驶员，谷仓的地窖里现在看起来就像起了一层大雾。汽球们一个接一个地升起，盘旋，从门口飘远，在和畅的蕙风里航行着。无数声的"再-见，再-见，再-见！"轻轻地不断传进威伯的耳

朵。他受不了再这么看下去了。他悲痛地沉到地上，闭上了眼。被夏洛的孩子们遗弃之后，威伯感觉就像到了世界的末日。威伯孤独地痛哭着睡了过去。

当他醒来时，已经快到傍晚了。他看看卵囊，它已经空了。他朝空中望去，汽球驾驶员们也都走了。他凄伤地走到门口，来到夏洛的网曾经存在过的地方。他正站在那里，追怀着她时，他听到了一个细小的声音。

"致敬！"那声音说。"我在这上面。"

"我也是，"另一个细微的声音说。

"我也是，"第三种声音说。"我们三个留下来了。我们喜欢这里，我们也喜欢你。"

威伯抬头望去。在门框的上方有三个小蜘蛛正在那里织网呢。每一个网里，都有一个正在忙碌地工作着的夏洛的女儿。

"我可以这么想，"威伯问，"你们决定住在这谷仓地窖里，而我也将有了三个新朋友了吗？"

"你可以这么想，"蜘蛛们说。

"请问，你们都叫什么？"威伯带着狂喜问。

"我将把我的名字告诉你，"第一只小蜘蛛回答，"如果你告诉我你为何颤抖的话。"

"我在颤抖是因为极度的快乐（Joy），"威伯说。

"那么我的名字就叫乔利（Joy）吧，"第一只小蜘蛛说。

"我妈妈的中间名字是什么？"第二只小蜘蛛问。

"A，"威伯说。

"那么我的名字就叫阿兰娜吧（Aranea），"这只小蜘蛛说。

"那么我呢？"第三只小蜘蛛问。"你能给我一个好名字吗--不太长，不太夸张，也不要太沉闷的？"

威伯使劲儿想起来。

"内利（Nellie）？"他建议。

"很好，我非常喜欢，"第三只蜘蛛说。"你可以叫我内利。"她动作优雅地把她的一根圆线织到了身边的网里。

威伯的心里盛满了幸福。他感到应该为这个重要时刻发表一场简短的演说。

"乔利！阿兰娜！内利！"他开始说。"欢迎你们到谷仓地窖来。你们已经选择了在一个神圣的门口拉你们的网。我只想告诉你们，我非常热爱你们的母亲。我的生命就是她挽救的。她是卓越的，美丽的，对朋友的忠诚直到生命的最后一刻。我将永远珍藏着对她的回忆。对你们，她的女儿们，我要发誓，我们的友谊，将永远不变。"

"我发誓。"乔利说。

"我也发誓，"阿兰娜说。

"我也是。"刚设法捉到了一只小咬儿的内利说。

对威伯来说，这是个幸福的一天。以后，也是一连串幸福，宁静的日子。

随着时间的推移，很多月，很多年过去了，威伯再没缺少过朋友。芬不再定期来看他了。她正在长大，不再让自己去做那些诸如坐在猪圈旁的挤奶凳上一类的孩子气的事情了。但是夏洛的孩子们和孙女们，重孙女们，都年复一年地生活在地窖门口。每年春天都有一些新的小蜘蛛被孵出来，代替那些老去的蜘蛛，他们中的大多数都乘着他们的汽球飞去了，但总有两三只留下来，在这门口安家。

祖克曼先生在威伯的余生里对他照顾得很好。他经常被朋友们和崇拜者参观，因为没有人会忘记他取得胜利的那一年和那些蜘蛛网里的奇迹，谷仓里的生活总是非常愉快的--不管是在白天黑夜，冬夏春秋，还是阴天晴天。它是最好的地方，威伯想，这个温暖宜人的地窖里，有絮叨的鹅们，变幻的季节，温暖的阳光，迁徙的燕子，自私的老鼠，固执的绵羊，可爱的蜘蛛，好闻的牛粪，还有一切值得赞美的东西。

威伯从来没有忘记过夏洛。尽管他是那么的爱她的孩子们和孙女们，但没有一只新来的蜘蛛能代替夏洛在他心中的位置。她是独一无二的。很少有人能同时既是真正的朋友，又是天才的织网家。而夏洛却是。

完

2000年3月11日下午3点10分，这是个值得我纪念的时刻。

正是在那一刻，我用我笨拙的中文把夏洛彻底杀死了。这之后，由于往电脑里录入译文，校对译稿的原因，我至少又看了四遍夏洛死的那一章。每次看到这章，看到夏洛的死，心里都是酸酸的。

当然--毫不害羞的说--我只为夏洛哭了一次。

一次也就够了。这就是我翻译这本书的主要原因之一。从2月25日收到朋友奇奇送来的《夏洛的网》那天晚上开始，直到3月11日止，我所有的空闲时间都在翻译《夏洛的网》。我翻译了十六天，又校对了两天的时间（3月12日至13日），最后修改了一天（3月14日），才终于把它弄完。这中间的工作时间（差不多是从八点到下午四点吧），包括午休时间，我几乎都在往工作单位的电脑里录入我的译文。（因为我家连电视都没有，更别说电脑了。）所以头天晚上在家里写好译文后，次日再往单位的电脑里敲，非常费力，可我也没办法。

这半个月来，我真的是很累。但是我愿意为此而累。因为我是如此深爱这本书，而我又是费了如此多的心力，才有机缘拥有它的，所以我一定要把它翻译成中文，虽然仅仅是为了我自己，还有一些朋友们。

小时候，我就曾经看过这故事，去年，看过一篇严锋发表在去年《万象》上的介绍《夏洛的网》的读书笔记后，我就想找到这本书的完整中译本。可是，我只买到了一种署名凌云编译的简单的译文--说简单，是因为里面的内容太少了，几乎只有原书的一半，剩下的细节都被无情的删去了。所以得到朋友奇奇送的书后，我真是欣喜若狂。

在翻译过程中，凌云编译的这本《夏洛的网》，还是给了我很多帮助的，起码让我有个可以参照的译本。而且，里面有些译文比我最初想得要准确得多，给了我很大帮助，所以我要在这里说声谢谢。不过，我觉得也许不该谢凌云，因为我感觉他可能仅仅是个一般的编者，可能连原文都没见过。不然，他就不会在他编译的本子里把英文的"514"翻译成"540"，也不会在里面增加不少原书中没有的奇怪的句子了。

所以，当对照凌云编译的译文翻译了几天后，我把《夏洛的网》全部译出的决心更大了。不过，像一位朋友指出的，我的英文很差，

很差，对书里涉及的美国风物等知识也一无所知，所以我其实是非常不配翻译这本书的。

只是，虽然比我懂英文，比我配翻译它的人多得数不清，但他们却不来译，我就只好自己来做了。好在这是为了我，不是为了用来骗钱，不是为了用来唬人，所以我才"自私地"执意要翻译。

翻译中，我遇到了很多困难。无奈之中，我只好把我最不理解的译文抄下来，请朋友，尤其是新语丝的朋友帮我翻译。所以，如果你的译文中发现有精彩的译文，那一定是在朋友们的帮助下弄出来的；如果你在里面发现了错误，那一定就是我的罪过，完全与我的朋友无关。

除了新语丝的朋友，还有索易编辑《每日新闻》的洪立（他是索易的Where为我介绍认识的，所以我也要感谢where），他也帮了我很多忙。

这些朋友们的帮助非常让我感动。这些朋友中，除了筋斗云，螳螂等几个老朋友外，其余的不是我原先不太熟悉的，就是我以前从不相识的。他们都是看到我幼稚的问题后，才主动出来，给我以指教的--不管是新朋友，还是老朋友。因为一本歌颂友谊的书认识了这么多朋友，真让我感到莫大的快乐和幸福。友情是人生最重要的东西之一--我完全和威伯有同感。

因此，为表示我对这些朋友的感谢，特把他们的名字写在下面。他们是--

筋斗云，暮紫，亦歌，Brant，半山，乐平，虎子，螳螂，古平，Sam等，还刚才提到的洪立以及许多我不知名的朋友。谢谢你们！

这些人里，暮紫，亦歌，Brant，虎子，乐平等为我翻译了一段我认为很难的那段威伯对小羊的对话（有些我收到我的译注里了），非常感谢；

筋斗云在很多翻译问题上给了我特别多的帮助，亦歌也为我解决了不少难题，也谢谢你们；

暮紫为我提供了一则关于琥珀爆米花（Cracker-Jack）的史话及其他帮助，洪立则为我把那些难译的汽车名字译了出来，也在别的问



题上帮了我的忙，也特别谢谢你们；

别的朋友的帮助当然也很大，只是恕不在这里列举了，因为具体我在我的译注中都分别说明，以示感谢了。

夏洛死前说的那些话里，有一段我几乎照抄了严锋在他的读书笔记里引用的译文，也特此说明并感谢，虽然我根本不认识他（她？）。

怀特本身对美国农场非常熟悉，这从这本书里的细节就可看得出来。可对这些细节我根本不懂，翻译时就遇到了不少困难，只是在朋友的帮助下，加了很少的注释（凡是没注出处的注释，都是我自己在资料里查出来的），真是抱歉。

由于本书里有一只贪吃的老鼠，因此里面写了许多的食物名字，其中不少的名字在我的词典里查不到。不然，都分别注释出来一定是很有意思的。只有暮紫提供的对Cracker-Jack的注释，非常的详尽。让我再次对他说声谢谢吧。

我要强调，尽管有许多朋友帮我，但我不能把全部的原文抄给朋友审阅，因此我的译文中的错误还是很多的（我自己独立翻译的那些）。但以我的水平来说，我已经是尽力了。我不能再做得更好了，请大家原谅。如果谁在里面发现译文错误（一定很多），请不客气的给我指出来，如果你愿意的话，我将非常感谢。

唉，我的译文可能已经玷污了这本杰作，可是我又有办法呢？虽然我自认中文还不是非常差劲，但我明白我的英文却真的是非常差劲的。如果以后发现了好的译文，我会推荐给你们的，也会把我的译文抛到垃圾堆里去的。

不过，有一点可以保证，我的译文肯定比凌云编译的那本要好很多倍。因为那里的好的译文都已经被我吸收到我的译文里来了，而那里的缺点，远比我这里要多。

还有两点要说明。一是原文的标点和中文的习惯不同，不知为什么，我曾经改成我们习惯的，但为尊重原著的关系，又改了回来。所以，看起可能有些别扭。二是书中的动物代称，几乎一律用的是"she, he"等，而不是"it"，所以我也没有改，照译成"他，她"，因为我觉得他们和人类应该是平等的。

这些年来，总是找不到活着的感觉，只是在纷扰的人事中把自己站成雕像--但看了《夏洛的网》后，才有了活着的感觉，才知道生活是什么。谢谢怀特！

再强调一遍：如果你有这本书的原本，自己又愿意看的话，请直接去看原文--因为在这种情况下我的译文根本就不值得看。

最后，再说一句别的。我要感谢为我寻找过《夏洛的网》的中译本的幽浮、青鸟、Where还有一些新语丝的朋友等等数不清的朋友们，虽然你们没有为我找到，我也一样的感谢你们。有朋友真好，那会让你的生命完全不同的。我真幸福，会有这么多的朋友。

好了，快十点半了，累了这么多天，我也该休息了。