

Pee Wee: Pig Racer

By Jody Studdard

Chapter 1

Rusty the rooster stood in the middle of the barn. A line of excited piglets stood to his side, digging their hooves into the barn's hard, dirt floor.

"On your marks," Rusty said, raising one of his wings into the air like a starting flag. "Get set. Go!"

The piglets darted. They raced from one side of the barn to the other, squealing loudly as they jockeyed for position. The smallest of the group, a pink piglet named Pee Wee, took the lead by jumping over a bail of hay that the others had to run around. He ducked under a parked tractor, sidestepped a rake, and crossed the finish line well before his competition.

Rusty shook his big, red head from side to side. "He's the fastest thing I've ever seen," he said. "Truly amazing."

"And he's clever," Grandpa Goose said. Grandpa Goose sat on a bucket near the finish line. "Did you see the way he jumped that hay? Brilliant. I haven't seen a piglet do anything like that in years."

"That kid's going to go places," Rusty said, "If he's given the chance. And I'm going to help him get his chance."

Without another word, he motioned Pee Wee over to him, then led him to the barn's main gate. He wrapped a wing around the piglet's shoulders as they stared outside. The sun was setting behind a distant cornfield.

“What do you think of farm life?” Rusty asked.

“It’s okay,” Pee Wee said. He was still breathing heavily, not yet fully recovered from the race.

“What if I told you there was something better?”

“Better?” Pee Wee asked, his eyes large with interest. “There’s something better than living on a farm?”

“Most certainly,” Rusty said. “For a piglet as fast as you, the sky is truly the limit.”

“What do you mean?” Pee Wee asked.

“You need to go to the fair,” Rusty said.

“The fair? What’s a fair?”

“It’s a big place where people meet for fun. They have rides, and booths, and shows, and all kinds of events for us animals to compete in. It’s a place where a talented animal can really make a name for himself.”

“What do you mean?”

“When I was little, Farmer Ned took me to the fair. I was nervous at first, but I took a deep breath and did my best.”

“At what?”

“The crowing contest, of course. Here, let me try one.” At that, Rusty let forth with a loud cock-a-doodle doo, much like the ones he did every morning at sunrise. Unfortunately, near the end of his performance, he lost his breath and coughed repeatedly. He tapped his chest with one wing as he cleared his throat, desperately trying to regain his composure. “I guess I’m not as young as I used to be,” he said. “But boy oh

boy did I crow a beauty on that day. I won first prize, and they pinned a blue ribbon on my chest, and Farmer Ned was so proud. I've been living the good life ever since." He tapped his big, round belly. "Maybe a little too good. But anyway, if you can find a way to the fair, you'll be set. You'll be famous."

"Famous?" Pee Wee asked. He had never heard that word before. "What's famous?"

"It's when everyone knows who you are. They put your name in lights, and you're the talk of the entire town."

Pee Wee was getting more and more excited. Being famous sounded like great fun. "What will I do? How will I become famous?"

A big smile crossed Rusty's beak. "Racing, of course. You'll be the fastest piglet at the whole fair. Why, you might even be the fastest piglet in the whole county. But remember, I'm your agent, so I get a cut of everything. All awards, prizes, the works. Everything you win. Got it?"

Pee Wee had no idea what an agent was, but Rusty's news about the fair had made him so excited that he would have agreed to anything.

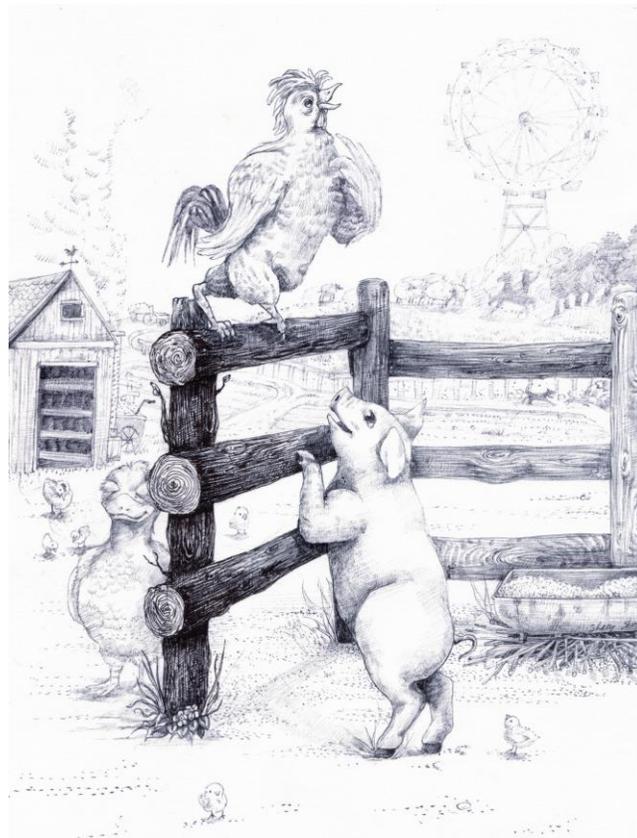
"Good," Rusty said. "We'll cut everything eighty/twenty. I get eighty percent, and you keep the remaining twenty. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Just make sure you get yourself to the fair. Keep an eye on Farmer Ned's son. Word is he's heading out to the fairgrounds tomorrow afternoon."

That night, Pee Wee couldn't sleep. Never before had he been so excited. He wanted to go to the fair and see if it really was as good as Rusty claimed. In addition, he wanted to enter a contest and win a big, blue ribbon, just like Rusty had won. Winning barnyard races against his brothers and sisters was fun, but winning a ribbon at the fair would be the greatest. Everyone would be proud of him.

All he had to do was get to the fair.



Chapter 2

The next day, Pee Wee had a mission. He hid at the edge of the cornfield and watched as Farmer Ned's son, Jesse, loaded a pickup truck full of cages of rabbits that were going to be shown at the fair that day. When Jesse walked away to get the last cage, Pee Wee hurried to the pickup and jumped in the back. It was quite a jump, and he barely made it onto the pickup's tailgate, but after a mad scramble he managed to pull himself inside. He hid just as Jesse returned and slid the final cage into place. After one last glance, to make certain everything was secured properly, Jesse hopped into the truck's cab, started it up, and drove away.

"Good luck, kid," Rusty called from the barn. At his side was Grandpa Goose. "You can do it. And remember - I get eighty percent!"

Pee Wee wanted to waive to him, to say good-bye, but he was afraid he would give himself away. As such, he remained quiet as the truck bounced its way along the narrow, dirt road.

"What are you doing here?" asked one of the rabbits from inside his cage. He was a plump, black rabbit with pointed ears. Pee Wee had met him once before. His name was Ralph.

"I'm going to the fair," Pee Wee said, a hint of pride in his voice. "I'm going to be a star."

"Yeah, right," another rabbit said. His name was Bob, and he didn't sound impressed. "And I'm a jackelope's uncle. The fair isn't all they say it is. I've been there

three years in a row, and I've never won a darn thing."

"I don't understand," Pee Wee said. "Rusty said it was great."

"For the winners, maybe," Ralph said. "But how many animals do you think are winners? Animals come from all over the county to compete in the fair. Just because you're the fastest pig at our barn doesn't mean you're the fastest pig in the county. The competition is fierce. You'd be wise to go back now, before you embarrass yourself. And your family."

"Yeah," Bob said. "You'll never make it at the fair. You should be happy back at the barn. Life is simpler there. No worries. If I had the choice, I'd never go to the fair. Never."

At first, Pee Wee didn't know what to say. He was shocked and dismayed, and more than a little discouraged. The rabbits' view of the fair was completely different than Rusty's. Slowly, however, Pee Wee's confidence returned.

"I think I can do it," he said. "I think I can be the fastest pig in the whole county."

Ralph and Bob shook their heads in dismay. Ralph looked at Bob. He wiggled his long whiskers. "Remember when we were like that? So young and youthful. So—"

"Foolish," Bob said, completing his sentence. He turned back to Pee Wee. "Don't get your hopes too high. They're just going to get shattered."

Pee Wee couldn't understand what Ralph and Bob were saying, nor why they were saying it. Rusty had said the fair was great, and Pee Wee believed him.

For the rest of the long, bumpy, dusty ride, Pee Wee sat in the back of the pickup truck, daydreaming about the moment when a pretty woman would pin a ribbon to his

chest. He saw himself on a big stage, with people standing all around him, cheering and clapping loudly. It would be great—the greatest moment of his life.

Unfortunately, his eyelids grew heavy and, despite the day's excitement, he drifted off to sleep.