

Charlotte's Web

By Mrs. Fuller (based on the book by E. B. White)

(The action begins at the Arable farm.)

Fern: Where's Papa going with that ax?

Mrs. Arable: Out to the hoghouse. Some pigs were born last night.

Fern: I don't see why he needs an ax.

Mrs. Arable: Well, 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.

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

Mrs. Arable: Don't yell, Fern! Your father is right. The pig would probably die anyway.

Fern: Please don't kill it! It's unfair.

Mr. Arable: Fern, you have to learn to control yourself.

Fern: Control myself? This is a matter of life and death, and you talk about controlling myself.

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

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

Mr. Arable: Certainly not. But this is different. A little girl is one thing. A little runty pig is another.

Fern: I see no difference. This is the most terrible case of injustice I ever heard of.

Mr. Arable: All right. I'll let you start it on a bottle, like a baby. Then you'll see what trouble a pig can be.

Avery: Hey, I want a pig.

Mrs. Arable: Oh, Avery, your pockets are already filled with frogs and lizards and all sorts of stuff.

Avery: Oh yeah! Like this! (He holds up a snake.)

Narrator 1: Fern named the pig Wilbur. She fed him, played with him, and put him to bed. They had a wonderful time. When the pig was five weeks old, Mr. Arable said he was big enough to sell. It was soon arranged. Next day, Wilbur went to live in a manure pile in the cellar of Zuckerman's Farm. At Zuckerman's Farm, Wilbur was very lonely. He tried to make friends with the other animals.

Wilbur: Hello. Would you like to play?

Goose: Play? You want me to play play play? I'm too busy busy busy to play play play. Can't you see I'm sitting sitting sitting on eggs?

Wilbur: Sorry. Hi there, little lamb. Would you like to play?

Lamb: Sorry, piggie. I don't play with wine.

Narrator 1: Wilbur didn't have much luck making friends until one day, he heard a voice.

Charlotte: Salutations!

Wilbur: Salu-what?

Charlotte: Salutations!

Wilbur: What are they? And where are you? Please tell me where you are and what are salutations?

Charlotte: Salutations are greetings. 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. I'm up here. Look, I'm waving. See me now?

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

Charlotte: My name is Charlotte.

Wilbur: Charlotte what?

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

Wilbur: I think you are beautiful.

Narrator 1: Charlotte and Wilbur became very good friends. They had lots of fun in the barn cellar. Wilbur liked Charlotte better and better each day. Her campaign against insects seemed sensible and useful. As the days went by, Wilbur grew and grew. He ate three big meals a day. He enjoyed good health and gained a lot of weight. One afternoon, the old sheep stopped by to visit Wilbur.

Sheep: Hello. It seems to me you're putting on weight.

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

Sheep: Just the same, I don't envy you. You know why they're fattening you up, don't you?

Wilbur: No. Why?

Sheep: Well, I don't like to spread bad news, but they're fattening you up because they are going to kill you, that's why.

Wilbur: They're going to what?

Sheep: Kill you. Turn you into smoked bacon and ham. Almost all young pigs get murdered by the farmer as soon as real cold weather sets in. there's a regular conspiracy around here to kill you at Christmastime. Everybody is in on the plot - Lurvy, Mr. Zuckerman, Mr. Arable.

Wilbur: Fern's father?

Sheep: 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 rifle, shoots the...

Wilbur: STOP! I don't want to die! Save me, somebody! Save me!

Charlotte: Be quiet, Wilbur.

Wilbur: I can't be quiet. I don't want to be killed. I don't want to die. Is it true, Charlotte, what the old sheep says. Do they really plan to kill me?

Charlotte: Well, the old sheep has been around this barn a long time. He has seen many a spring pig come and go. If he 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: I don't want to die! I want to stay here in the beautiful sun, in my beautiful manure pile, breathe in the beautiful air...

Sheep: You're certainly making a beautiful noise.

Wilbur: I don't want to die!

Charlotte: You shall not die.

Wilbur: Really? Who is going to save me?

Charlotte: I am.

Wilbur: How?

Charlotte: I don't know yet, but I'll think of something.

Narrator 1: Charlotte thought and thought of a way to save Wilbur's life. At last an idea came to her. She worked hard all through the night. The next morning, there in the web, neatly woven, were the words SOME PIG.

Lurvy: (looks astonished when he sees the web, then runs to tell Mr. Zuckerman) Mr. Zuckerman! (He brings Mr. Zuckerman to see the web.)

Mr. Zuckerman: Oh my stars! (He runs to get Mrs. Zuckerman.) Edith! Come see! (Mrs. Zuckerman enters and looks astonished.) It's a miracle.

Lurvy: Yep, we got us some pig.

Mrs. Zuckerman: It seems to me we've got some spider.

Narrator 1: The news spread all over the county. Soon, everybody knew that a sign had appeared in a spider's web on the Zuckerman place. Everybody knew that Zuckerman had a wondrous pig. People came from miles around to look at Wilbur and to read the words in Charlotte's web. They traveled for miles just to take a look at the miraculous pig. People said they had never seen such a pig before. One evening, a few days later, the spider called a meeting in the barn cellar.

Charlotte: I shall begin by calling the roll. Wilbur?

Wilbur: Here!

Charlotte: Gander?

Gander: Here, here, here!

Charlotte: You sound like three ganders. Why can't you just say HERE? Why do you have to repeat everything?

Gander: It's my idio-idio-idiosyncrasy.

Charlotte: Goose?

Goose: Here, here, here!

Charlotte: Goslings?

Goslings: Here, here, here!

Charlotte: Sheep?

Sheep: Here!

Charlotte: Lamb?

Lamb: Here!

Charlotte: Templeton? Templeton? Well, we are all here except the rat. 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.

All animals: Hurray!

Charlotte: Thank you very much. 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.

Lamb: How about PIG SUPREME?

Charlotte: No good. It sounds like a rich dessert.

Goose: How about TERRIFIC, TERRIFIC, TERRIFIC?

Charlotte: Cut that down to one TERRIFIC and it will do nicely. I think TERRIFIC might impress Zuckerman.

Wilbur: But Charlotte, I'm not terrific.

Charlotte: That doesn't make a bit of difference. Not a bit. People believe almost anything they see in print. Does anybody know how to spell TERRIFIC?

Gander: I think it's T double E double R double I double F double I double C C C C C.

Charlotte: What kind of acrobat do you think I am?

Gander: Sorry, sorry, sorry.

Sheep: 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 finding words, I think she can get it from our friends the rat. Templeton visits the dump and get old magazines. Then Charlotte can copy the words.

Charlotte: Good idea. But I don't think we can count on Templeton's help.

Sheep: I'll get him to help. Watch. Here he comes now.

Templeton: What's up?

Sheep: We're holding a meeting.

Templeton: Well, break it up. Meetings bore me.

Sheep: Templeton, Charlotte needs new words for her web. So next time you go to the dump, bring back some old magazine clippings. They could help her save Wilbur's life.

Templeton: Let him die. I should worry.

Sheep: You'll worry all right when next winter comes. 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. Wilbur's leftover food is your chief source of supply, Templeton. You know that. Wilbur's food is your food. 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: All right. I'll bring back a word, if I find one.

Narrator 1: Later, Templeton explored the dump. He liked the dump. There were great hiding places and lots of leftover bits of food. On his next trip, he found a clipping from a magazine and brought it back to Charlotte.

Templeton: How's this? It says CRUNCHY. Crunchy would be a good word for your web.

Charlotte: Just the wrong idea. Couldn't be worse. We don't want Zuckerman to think Wilbur is crunchy. He might start thinking about bacon. No, we must advertise Wilbur's noble qualities, not his tastiness. Go get another word, Templeton.

Narrator 1: The rat grumbled and returned to the dump, sneaking through the piles of discarded tin cans for just a taste of leftover tuna. He soon returned to Charlotte with a strip of cloth.

Templeton: How's this? It's the label off an old shirt.

Charlotte: I'm sorry, Templeton, but PRE-SHRUNK is out of the question. We want Zuckerman to think Wilbur is nicely filled out, not all shrunk up. You'll have to try again.

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

Charlotte: Just once more, please.

Templeton: I'll tell you what I'll do. 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 that package.

Narrator 2: Templeton went off to the woodshed, grumbling all the time. He soon returned with a strip of cardboard.

Templeton: There! How's that?

Charlotte: WITH NEW RADIANT ACTION. What does it mean?

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

Charlotte: With new RADIANT action. Wilbur!

Wilbur: Yes, Charlotte?

Charlotte: I want to see you in action, to see if you are radiant. Race to the end of your yard. Now back again, faster. Jump into the air! Keep your knees straight and touch the ground with your ear. Do a back flip with a half-twist in it. OK, Wilbur. You can go back to sleep. OK, Templeton, the soap ad will do. I'm not sure that Wilbur's action is exactly radiant, but it is interesting.

Wilbur: Actually, I feel radiant.

Narrator 2: Mr. Zuckerman was so excited about his TERRIFIC pig that he decided to take Wilbur to the Fair. Charlotte and Templeton went along too, just in case. (Mr. Arable, Mr. Zuckerman, Avery, and Lurvy carry the crate to the fair.) One night, Templeton was anxious to go exploring and started to sneak away.

Charlotte: Bring me back a word, Templeton. I shall be writing tonight for the last time.

Narrator 2: The rat mumbled something to himself and then disappeared into the shadows. He did not like being treated like a messenger boy. On the fair grounds, he discovered some wonderful treasures. Someone had tossed away their lunch sack. Inside Templeton found a crust of bread with little chunks of tuna on it, a hard-boiled egg with just one bite out of it, a wormy apple that had turned brown. Oh, he was delighted as he feasted. Then he remembered his promise to Charlotte and returned to the pig pen with a piece of newspaper.

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

Templeton: Here.

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

Templeton: It says HUMBLE.

Charlotte: HUMBLE? Humble has two meanings. It means NOT PROUD and it means LOW TO THE GROUND. That's Wilbur all over. He's not proud and he is near the ground.

Templeton: Well, I hope you're satisfied. I'm not going to spend all my time fetching and carrying. I came to this fair to enjoy myself, not to deliver papers.

Charlotte: You've been very helpful. Run along if you want to see more of the fair.

Templeton: I'm going to make a night of it. The old sheep was right. This fair is a rat's paradise. What eating! And what drinking! Everywhere is 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.

Narrator 2: Templeton vanished into the shadows while Charlotte went back to work. As it grew dark, fireworks appeared in the night sky, as Charlotte worked and worked creating her new HUMBLE web for Wilbur. the next morning, Wilbur saw the new web and a curious object next to Charlotte. It was a sort of sac or cocoon. It was peach-colored and looked as though it were made of cotton candy.

Wilbur: Are you awake, Charlotte?

Charlotte: Yes.

Wilbur: What's that?

Charlotte: This is my egg sac, my magnum opus, my great work, the finest thing I have ever made. Inside are my eggs, five hundred and fourteen of them. I guarantee 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.

Narrator 2: As Wilbur was studying the egg sac and the new word in 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.

Templeton: I'm back. What a night! What feasting! A real gorge! Oh, it was rich, my friends, rich!

Wilbur: Templeton, Charlotte has made an egg sac with five hundred and fourteen little eggs inside.

Templeton: Congratulations! This has been a night.

Narrator 2: Suddenly the pen was surrounded by people and an announcer spoke.

Announcer: Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the fair, I have the honor of awarding a special prize to Mr. Zuckerman, in token of our appreciation of this pig, this RADIANT, this TERRIFIC, this HUMBLE pig.

Mrs. Zuckerman: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, very much!

Avery: I can't wait to taste this pig. He'll make great bacon!

Fern: Uncle Homer, you'll never kill Wilbur now, will you? (Everyone stares at Mr. Zuckerman.)

Everyone: Please!

Mr. Zuckerman: Of course not! Wilbur is too terrific, too radiant to ever eat.

Everyone: Hooray!

Narrator 2: Wilbur loved his medal and felt more RADIANT than ever. After everyone left, he showed his medal to Charlotte. Charlotte seemed happy, but also sad.

Wilbur: Charlotte, do you feel all right?

Charlotte: A little tired perhaps. But I feel peaceful. Your success in the ring today was to a small degree my success. You will live, secure and safe, Wilbur. You mean a great deal to Zuckerman and he will not harm you, ever.

Wilbur: Charlotte, why did you do this for me?

Charlotte: You're my friend, Wilbur.

Wilbur: We're going home today. Aren't you anxious?

Charlotte: I will not be going back to the barn.

Wilbur: What?

Charlotte: I'm done for. In a day or two I'll be dead.

Wilbur: Charlotte! No, Charlotte! My true friend.

Charlotte: Come now, calm down, Wilbur.

Wilbur: But I can't stand it. I won't leave you here alone to die. I will stay with you.

Charlotte: You can't stay here. Zuckerman and Lurvy and the others will be back any minute to put you in the crate.

Narrator 2: Wilbur was in a panic. He raced around the pen. Suddenly he had an idea.

Wilbur: Where's Templeton?

Charlotte: He's in that corner, under the straw, asleep.

Wilbur: Templeton. Wake up. Pay attention!

Templeton: What kind of monkeyshine is this? Can't a rat catch a wink of sleep without being rudely popped out of bed?

Wilbur: Listen! Charlotte is very ill. She only has a short time to live. She cannot go home with us. So it is absolutely necessary that I take her egg sac with me. You are the only one who can get it. Please Templeton.

Templeton: So it's old Templeton to the rescue again, is it?

Wilbur: Please Templeton. Hurry.

Templeton: Why should I?

Wilbur: Templeton, if you get the egg sac for me, I will make you a promise. From now on, when Lurvy slops me, I will let you eat first. I will wait until you are all finished before I touch a bite in the trough.

Templeton: You mean that?

Wilbur: I promise. Cross my heart.

Templeton: All right. It's a deal.

Narrator 2: Templeton dragged himself up to Charlotte's web and got the egg sac for Wilbur. Wilbur waved goodbye to Charlotte as Mr. Zuckerman took him away from the fair and back to the barn cellar. Charlotte waved back weakly, happy that her children were safe. Charlotte died later that day, all alone at the fair. (Mr. Zuckerman, Mr. Arable, Avery, and Lurvy carry the crate back to the barn.) Sadly, Wilbur returned to the barn cellar with the precious egg sac. Day after day he watched over it, wondering when Charlotte's babies would arrive. One morning, he noticed something move. He stepped closer and stared. A tiny spider crawled from the sac. It looked just like Charlotte. The little spider waved at him. Wilbur moved closer. Then more baby spiders crawled from the sac and waved. Charlotte's children were here at last!

Wilbur: Hello there!

Spiders: Hello.

Wilbur: I am an old friend of your mother. I'm so glad to see you. Are you all right? Is there anything I can do for you?

Narrator 2: The young spiders just waved. For several days and several nights they crawled here and there, around and about, waving at Wilbur, exploring their home. There were so many of them. Wilbur tried to count them, but they kept moving and there were so many. Then one morning, as a warm wind blew softly over Zuckerman's farm, one tiny spider leaped away into the wind.

Baby Spider: Goodbye!

Wilbur: Wait!

Narrator 2: Wilbur watched in horror as the little spider floated away on the wind. Then suddenly, another baby spider leaped into the wind as well and floated away. Then another and another.

Wilbur: Stop! Come back, children!

Baby Spider: We're leaving 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.

Wilbur: But where?

Baby Spider: Wherever the wind takes us. High, low, near, far, east, west, north, south. We take to the breeze, we go as we please.

Wilbur: No. Please don't go. I'll be all alone. Your mother wouldn't want that to happen, I'm sure. Please don't go.

Narrator 2: Soon the sky was filled with baby spiders, floating away on the wind. Wilbur sank to the ground, crying, his heart broken once more. Then suddenly he heard a voice.

Joy: Salutations. Here I am.

Aranea: So am I.

Nellie: So am I. Three of us are staying. We like this place and we like you.

Wilbur: Really? You are staying here in the barn cellar with me? Am I really going to have three friends?

Joy: Yes, indeed.

Aranea: Indeed!

Nellie: Indeed!

Wilbur: What are your names please?

Joy: My name is Joy.

Aranea: And I'm Aranea.

Nellie: Just call me Nellie.

Wilbur: Joy! Aranea! Nellie! Welcome to the barn cellar. I am so happy you are here. Your mother was my very best friend. She saved my life, you know. To you, her daughters, I pledge my friendship forever.

Joy: I pledge mine.

Aranea: I do too.

Nellie: And so do I.

Narrator 2: It was a happy day for Wilbur. He and his new friends played together day after day. And Wilbur told them all the stories about their mother.