

Animal Farm: Chapter 9 - Boxer's Betrayal

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Summary

Boxer's split hoof from the Battle of the Windmill takes a long time to heal. He refuses to take any time off from work and says he wants to see the windmill completed before he retires. His twelfth birthday, the retirement age for horses, is the following summer.

The winter is hard. Rations are reduced for all animals except the pigs and dogs. Squealer explains that ration equality is not in keeping with the principles of Animalism. He insists they are doing better than they were under Jones. He produces figures.

In the spring, Napoleon's four sows produce thirty-one piglets: they are all obviously his own offspring. He announces plans for a schoolroom to educate them. Meanwhile, it becomes law that other animals must step aside for pigs on paths. Pigs may wear green ribbons on their tails on Sundays.

Animal Farm is declared a Republic and Napoleon is elected President, being the only candidate. New documents are produced proving that Snowball sold himself to both Pilkington and Frederick, and planned to betray the farm to both of them simultaneously. Moses the raven returns and resumes his stories about Sugarcandy Mountain. The pigs allow him to stay and give him a daily allowance of beer.

The animals work harder than ever. Life is exactly as it was under Jones, or arguably worse, but the animals feel a dignity in not being slaves. Napoleon declares weekly "Spontaneous Demonstrations" in which the animals march around the farm, listen to speeches, and celebrate their achievements. The animals find that hunger feels less acute after the demonstrations.

In the summer, Boxer is dragging stone to the windmill when he stumbles and falls. The animals rush to him. His lung has gone, he tells Clover quietly; he had felt it coming. He is not frightened; the others will be able to finish the windmill without him. He is looking forward to retirement now.

Squealer arrives and announces that Napoleon is arranging for Boxer to be treated at the Willingdon veterinary hospital. The animals are uncertain, but Squealer reassures them that the hospital is better equipped than anything on the farm. Boxer lies in his stall for two days. Clover and Benjamin keep him company. Boxer says he intends to use his retirement to learn the rest of the alphabet.

The van arrives during the daytime while most animals are in the fields. Benjamin races to raise the alarm. He reads the writing on the van's side: Alfred Simmonds, Horse Slaughterer and Glue Boiler, Willingdon. Dealer in Hides and Bone-Meal. Kennels Supplied. The animals shout to Boxer. They hear him kick feebly from inside. The van drives away and is not stopped.

Three days later, Squealer announces that Boxer has died in hospital. He was conscious almost to the end, and his final words were expressions of loyalty to Animal Farm and Comrade Napoleon. The rumour that he went to the knacker is, Squealer explains, simply malicious slander spread by enemies. The hospital had recently purchased its van from a knacker and had not yet had it repainted. Napoleon gives a speech and orders a wreath for Boxer's grave. He announces a banquet in Boxer's honour in a few days' time. On the day of the banquet, a crate of whisky arrives at the farmhouse. There is loud singing late into the night.

Analysis

This is the novel's most emotionally direct chapter. Orwell allows very little ironic distance in the sequence from Boxer's collapse to the van's departure. Benjamin's reading of the van, the animals shouting, Boxer's feeble kicks: these are presented without commentary. The effect is to make the reader's response immediate and personal.

The van's arrival while most animals are in the fields is a small but precise detail. It comes during the working day -- at a time when the animals are exactly where the system wants them. They cannot stop what they do not see. By the time Benjamin raises the alarm, it is too late: the system's timing has already outmanoeuvred any possible resistance.

Squealer's account of Boxer's death is the novel's most brazen lie. The detail of the recently purchased van from a knacker is almost insultingly flimsy as an explanation. But the animals accept it: partly because they want to believe it, and partly because they have no means to verify it. The whisky that arrives on the day of the banquet is the chapter's final detail. Orwell leaves the conclusion unambiguous but unspoken: the pigs have sold Boxer and spent the proceeds on alcohol.

The Republic's creation, Napoleon's unanimous election, the new laws about pigs on paths and ribbons on Sundays: these are the chapter's institutional backdrop, the bureaucratic escalation of pig privilege that continues while Boxer is destroyed. Orwell juxtaposes the new privileges with Boxer's fate: the two arcs run in parallel, and the contrast is the point.

Themes

- **Exploitation and its conclusion:** Boxer's arc is the novel's clearest demonstration of what the working class's fate is under Napoleon's regime: valued while productive, discarded when not. His loyalty, which was genuine and admirable, becomes the mechanism of his destruction. He is too loyal to question; too strong to retire before he is broken.
- **The lie and the inability to resist it:** Squealer's account of Boxer's death is easily disbelievable, but the animals lack the means to disprove it. This is the consistent condition of animals on the farm: they can sense the lie but cannot act on the suspicion. Benjamin can read the van; he cannot stop it.
- **Ceremony as concealment:** The banquet in Boxer's honour, the wreath ordered for his grave, Napoleon's speech: each is a performance that replaces the truth with an official narrative. The animals attend the commemoration; they cannot attend the real event because they were not permitted to witness it.
- **Religion and accommodation:** Moses's return and the pigs' allowance of his beer-funded preaching is an irony carefully placed next to Boxer's betrayal. The pigs initially opposed Moses because his talk of Sugarcandy Mountain distracted animals from revolution. Now, when revolution is long dead and the animals' lives are miserable, Moses is useful: he gives them hope of another life so they do not dwell on this one.