

## CHAPTER 4

# The Fall of Taggerty

ON TUESDAY EVENING Taggerty trundled the pigmeal bin across the yard as usual. And in it was the same pale, boring mixture. He bought it in sacks labelled 'GROWFAST – ALWAYS RELIABLY THE SAME'.

The pigs knew the sound of the pigbin trundling across the farmyard. And they always squealed and grunted loudly at the prospect of food. It was only half-full tonight. Why waste money on big meals when the pigs were to be sold tomorrow, Taggerty reasoned.

Tonight, Taggerty saw the pigs waiting near the gate as usual, but in complete silence.



The pigs were not looking at the bin. They were glaring at him – at him! And they weren't moving.

What's up? he wondered. It's so quiet. Why are they all staring at me? What's got into them?

He slowed down, uncertain. It's a bit spooky, he thought.

Then he reminded himself that they were only animals, and what's more, his animals, and he pushed the bin up to the gate. He put it down with a louder clank than usual, opened the gate and wheeled the bin in. He turned to close the gate.

At that moment Runtling gave a short piercing squeal. That was the signal. Thirteen heavy pigs, bunched together, charged the open gateway. Taggerty stood in front of it. He tried to dodge. Too late. The pigs could no more avoid him than he them. He was knocked off his feet. Down he went, hard, his head hitting the concrete yard.

Through the open gate, across the yard and

away up the farm lane, at top speed, streamed the pigs. At the road they turned right, though where that led they had no idea. Runtling was in the lead. They ran in single file, keeping close to the hedgerows and the wayside trees, hidden, or so they hoped.

But their presence was already known to some. A late blackbird chink-chinked an alarm call. Far down the road a rabbit raised its head and sat up, nose twitching, then bolted across the road for cover. Three young horses in the roadside field grew curious. They ambled down to the hedge. They thought there was some sort of party going on and cantered excitedly along beside the pigs on the other side of the hedge.

‘Go away!’ hissed Runtling. ‘Go away.’

But the young horses went on cantering around, in their silly way, until the pigs were out of sight.

Close behind Runtling ran Hawthorn. Though Hawthorn could easily have outrun

them all, that wasn't allowed – Runtling was the leader. Then came the rest of the pigs. Right at the end behind Bramble came the Piglings. Only fear kept them from lagging behind.

'They turn you into sausages if they catch you,' panted one. 'The cat said so.'

'No, not sausages! It was pies she said. I remember, it was pies. Which is worse, do you think? Sausages or pies?' They were close to tears.

Their fear grew as the road narrowed and walls replaced the shelter of the hedgerows. The grass verge had disappeared too. On the soft grass they had run silently but for a muffled thudding of hooves. Now they were running, thirteen of them, on the hard road.

'We're making an awful noise. Someone will hear us,' gasped one of the Piglings.

'I know, it's our hooves. They clatter ...' puffed the other.

Runtling was aware of it too. 'People might hear us before they see us, so even if we try to

hide ... but there's nowhere on this road to hide, nowhere. What shall we do? Think ... think fast.'

But he found it difficult to think fast and run fast at the same time. Besides, he couldn't stop thinking of Taggerty. Was he dead? Or was he even now getting up from where he had fallen with such an awful thud? Maybe he was already through the gate and running after them?

Busy with his fears, Runtling nearly missed seeing that a lane, partly hidden by a clump of trees, led off the road.

'A lane! A lane!' he shouted over his shoulder and turned down it.

It was an old lane with a bank on one side that sheltered the pigs from sight. As they trotted along, the bottom of the lane grew wetter and stonier. Here and there brambles arched over it. They stumbled on. The lane seemed to get narrower and the bank higher. Bracken grew tall and curved into a green tunnel for them.

Here they felt safe, and dared to stop and rest for a moment.

A trickle of water usually meandered down the lane. But lately heavy rainfall had turned the trickle into a stream that had eaten its way into the bank, turning it into thick squelching mud. The Piglings, too tired to stand, lay sprawled in the mud.

It was cool and satisfying. They began to roll in it for pleasure. When they rose, their smooth pink backs and legs were a splodgy black.

‘Let’s all do that!’ cried Hawthorn, ‘and be splodgy dark. Then we won’t show up so much, we’ll be ... what’s the word? Camouflaged!’

So they all rolled and tumbled in the mud. It was pure delight. Everything else was forgotten until a good deal later when Runtling remembered that he was leader of a great escape. He stood up, black and glistening.

‘We must keep going. At night we can’t be seen. Night is our one chance of getting too far



away for Taggerty ever to find us. We must trot on and on and on through the night. When daytime comes we'll lie up somewhere hidden, and sleep!

'What about eating?' asked one.

'I'm afraid there's nothing to eat,' answered Runtling.

Silence fell. It was a full day since their last meal and their supper lay spilt all over Taggerty's yard.

The Piglings looked at each other, alarmed. 'Nothing to eat. Nothing to eat ...'