

The Heart of Porkness

With Ideas and Characterizations by Makai Norwood.

Which being the long awaited sequel to *Pig Tales* and relating the further adventures of Swinestein the pig and his plucky pal Shortstraw, and their doughty crew of dauntless companions as they boldly venture into the heart of the Dark Continent in search of an ancient legend. Rejoin our old friends and follow them as they brave the savage unknown beset by constant perils on every side and subjected to the iniquitous machinations of scallywags and rascallions. Journey with them to the fabled landscapes of the interior as they encounter a veritable bestiary of new friends and confront foes old and new.

'And what of the quest? Be it folly of the most egregious kind, or be it glorious triumph? Shall the hand of fate fall heavy upon those who dare to tempt it, or shall fortune favor the brave? What say the runes? What say you, my friends? I therefore pray thee read on, and all will be revealed. Maybe.

Enjoy!

Authors note.

Despite the fact that this is a work of fiction and intended for young readers, I hope that people who are from, or are familiar with, Africa, will find that continent faithfully and lovingly represented. The story, characters and episodes in this book are entirely original, except for one, which I blatantly swiped from something Andy Kibby told me, in Kenya, many moons ago.

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Chapter 1. The Renaissance of Swinestein.

The small picturesque town of Scratchingmudwallow in the Mead lay still and silent under a heavy blanket of snow, and the icy crystals glistened white under the starry starry light of a million heavenly beacons. Under that spectacular and awe inspiring canopy, a small cottage lay in darkness save for the light emanating from a roaring log fire set in an old and beautifully constructed terracotta fireplace.

In front of the fire, illuminated by its orange and carmine glow, sitting almost buried in the embrace of an enormous satin covered armchair, deep in contemplation, sat, alone and disconsolate, Swinestein the pig.

On the warm warm wooden floorboards in front of him, a huge hearty mug of cocoa steamed. The light from the fire was reflected in his dark pupils as he stared into the flames, a faraway expression on his face, as if he looked beyond the fire to something beyond, something from another place and time. Swinestein heaved his shoulders and gave a deep sigh. He focused his gaze upon the flames.

Normally Swinestein loved to look into the fire, and watch the flames dance and the shapes whirl and transform into magical images of writhing snakes and dragons with coal black eyes, and golden rivers cascading over crimson cliffs into carmine seas, and vapid vanishing genies that disappeared before you could make a wish, and mermaids with flowing fiery hair, and enchanted melting caramel castles and beautiful ethereal butterfly ghosts and strange ephemeral faces that gazed back at you for a second with some hidden meaning contained in their fleeting eyes, which were gone forever before you had the chance to understand it.

But now it was different. There were no messages in the eyes of fiery faces. No beguiling and entrancing images swirling before his eyes, no hot shimmering mirages. Only burning logs. Something was wrong. And he knew it. There was nothing wrong with the fire. It was the same cheerful crackling warmy toasty fire as always. It was himself that was different. Something was lost. Nothing seemed the same. The colors were not as bright, the songs of the birds not so pretty, the morning air not so sweet. The world seemed a sadder place, somehow, and he didn't know why.

For all his much vaunted intelligence he couldn't put his trotter on the source of the problem. He should be feeling happier than ever before. The great adventure had been a resounding success and had come to a marvelous conclusion. His friend Shortstraw was

happily married, and deeply in love, and living an idyllic life with his wife Porcetta in a picture perfect primrose painted little cottage with a pink picket fence that her father, Colonel Bristle, had given them for a wedding present.

Of course, he didn't get to see as much of his dear little friend as he used to. Not nearly so much really. Actually, hardly at all these days in fact. But that was perfectly natural and proper and as it should be and to be expected. Newlyweds need their privacy, and don't want some stuffy old pompous pig sticking his snout and his opinions in all over the place. Of course they don't. Shortstraw had a new life now, his own life, and was embarked on a wonderful new adventure of a different kind, where Swinestein wasn't needed.

He was always welcome, of course, and he knew that, and they always made a great fuss over him, but he always got the feeling that the young couple were secretly kind of glad went he went away, so that they could go back to being blissfully happy by themselves, and his visits had become less and less frequent. Swinestein told himself it was just the way of things, and as it should be, but still.....

He still saw his other friends, of course, old Doc Drool, and Angus, and Maddy, and sometimes they all got together for tea and toast, or breakfast and buns, just like before, but it didn't seem quite the same, somehow. The gatherings never seemed quite as merry as they had been before, as if something was missing.

“HHHhaaaaaa” sighed Swinestein, out loud to himself, “How I miss the.....”

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

The banging on the heavy wooden door sounded loud in quiet room in the silent night and Swinestein was abruptly disturbed from his reverie, and with an inquisitive and mildly concerned expression on his chops, and his noble brows wrinkled into deep furrows, he struggled and wrestled his way out of the giant all-embracing chair, which seemed reluctant to let him go, and lumbered over to the door.

“Special delivery! Swinestein the pig!” said a friendly mellifluous voice.

Swinestein gripped the door knob in his beefy trotter and pulled the door open to see who was there. He was somewhat surprised to see who was there. Nobody! There was nobody there.

Swinestein peered out into the darkness. He looked left and right and left again. Nothing! Being the practical and cautious pig that he was, Swinestein waited a moment to allow his eyes to adjust to the darkness, in case somebody stood in the shadows at the periphery of the

firelight cast from within. Still he saw no one. Mildly perplexed, but too disheartened and depressed to be intrigued, Swinestein turned to go back inside.

“Oi. Are you blind as well as daft? I’m down ‘ere you silly a’peth. It’s me. Penelope. Penelope Plume! Ring a bell?”

Swinestein looked down, and to his amazement saw the pert and pretty figure of Pee Pee, immaculate in her cap and uniform, gazing up at him fondly from his doormat, with a mischievous gleam in her eye and a sly smile on her beak.

“If I had a bell to ring, you wouldn’t have had to knock, now would you?” said Swinestein, with an enormous grin cleaving his prodigious chops from ear to ear.

“Penelope, what an absolute pleasure,” he continued, his voice quavering with emotion, “Come in. Come in.”

Penelope flapped past Swinestein’s ear and alighted on the arm of his chair. She eyed his cocoa and gave him a sideways look as he shuffled back and flopped heavily into his chair, making her bounce a little, and slumped down.

“It’s gone cold” she said, with just the tiniest hint of a question in her voice, indicating his beaker with an inclination of her head.

Swinestein followed her look. The mug of cocoa had stopped steaming, and sat there untouched and ever so slightly congealed, with little wrinkles on its surface.

“Ah, Oh ‘er yes well, I erm, I was deep in thought. I must have forgotten about it. I’ll warm it up. Would you care for one?”

“Yes, I’d love one. Bit nippy flapping around on a night like this.”

Swinestein extricated himself from the chair, making her bounce again, and picking up his mug, trundled off into the kitchen. While he was gone, Pee Pee opened her satchel, and scabbled about inside until she found a large letter, wrapped around with string and sealed with a large blob of red wax. She set it down on the small round table that was next to Swinestein’s chair.

Swinestein returned carrying a tray, with his own mug, which had gone back to steaming again, and a smaller one for Pee Pee, and a plate of buttered shortbread biscuits.

“That arrived for you this morning,” said Pee Pee, as Swinestein handed her her cocoa.

Swinestein barely glanced at it as he plumped himself back down into the all devouring folds of the chair, making Pee Pee bounce yet again and almost spill her cocoa, causing her to give him a severe stare.

“Oi, watch it, you great oaf,” she said, and then, “Well, aren’t you going to open it?”

Swinestein looked at her.

“I’ll open it later,” he said, “Now tell me about.....”

“It says urgent, on it.” Pee Pee said. “That’s why I flapped all the way over here at this hour. I didn’t think it should wait until morning.”

“Urgent, hey?” said Swinestein, in a tone that suggested he wasn’t really bothered if it was urgent or not.

Pee Pee set down her cup with a loud chink, let an exasperated sigh escape from her beak, and said.

“Alright then. Let’s be ‘aving you. Out with it?”

“Out with what?”

“You’ve got a face like a wet weekend, you let your cocoa get cold, and an urgent package arrives in the middle of the night, and you can’t even be bothered to open it. Something’s up. Now what is it?”

Swinestein watched his little friend studying him, her expression somewhere between annoyed and concerned. He smiled at her gently.

“Penelope,” he said, “I wish I could tell you. I wish I knew myself. It’s just that lately I’ve been feeling.....out of place, somehow. As if, suddenly I don’t belong in the place I’ve belonged to all my life. Something has changed, Pee Pee. Something in me, and I don’t know what to do about it.”

“I do,” said Penelope, firmly.

“What?” said Swinestein, with the slightest tinge of hope in his voice.

“Adventure,” she said, “You need an adventure, pal!”

“But, Pee Pee. I’ve just had one. The adventure to end all adventures. It was marvelous. Thrilling. Exhilarating. Why it was.....”

“Exactly!” Penelope said, interrupting him, “That’s your problem!”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand, Pee Pee,” Swinestein said, looking bemused.

“Eeeeeeh,” she said, with a smile, “For somebody so smart you can’t ‘alf be thick sometimes. You’re missing the thrill of the chase. An adventure like yours changes everything, don’t you see? You can’t ever go back to your old life. It seems dull and mundane. You miss the far horizons and the uncertainty. Even the danger. You’ve been bitten by the adventure bug, I’m afraid, and the only cure is another adventure.”

Swinestein instantly and visibly brightened. Immediately he seemed more alert, as if her words had energized him. The old fire was kindled in his eyes. He jumped out of his chair, bouncing Penelope yet again, and strode over to the fire, where he began to pace up and down. He looked bigger and plumper than he had looked only seconds ago. He looked restored!

“By Jove, Pee Pee. I do believe you’re right. Why I feel better already. Of course. It’s so simple. Why didn’t I see it? That’s it. An adventure. A quest. But what?”

He stopped pacing and turned to face Penelope with his back against the lintel and his trotters extended towards her. There was a searching expression on his face.

“Pee Pee,” he said, his voice both urgent and imploring, “Whatever shall I do? How can I possibly find another adventure to compare with the last one?”

“Mmmm,” she replied, “Not easy, I grant you. But where there’s a will there’s a way, as they say. You might start by opening the letter.”

“Ah. The letter. Yes.”

He marched over to the chair and retrieved the letter from where it had fallen deep down into the folds of the cushions. He struggled to pull it free, as if the chair didn’t want to let it go. He slid his trotter under the flap and pulled out a note, hand written in red ink on unusual looking green paper. He read it aloud.

My dear old friend.

Many rains have fallen since last our last adventure together, and many times has the full moon arisen to light the rim of the falls and send gold and silver cascading down into the mighty flood. I hope my letter finds you in fine fettle. Actually, given the circumstances, I hope it finds you at all. The postal service around here is precarious to say the least. The last three messengers got eaten! Anyway, I digress.

Lately my friend, I have been feeling the shadows grow long. My whiskers are turned white, my tusks are yellowed, and my eyes grow red and dim. But I have lived a long and adventurous life, and I am not going to allow myself to fade away, like an old soldier. No

sir! I am about to embark on one last great adventure. And it may very well prove to be my last. It is fraught with danger, and peril lurks around every bend in the river and in every shadow along the trail. I care not. I am going, and already my pulse races with excitement at the thought of it.

Now, here's the thing, old boy. I have encountered a sort of a map. A map to the fabled city of Atlantis and the fabulous golden hoard that is said to be found therein. But my problem is, the darned thing is an enigma, riddled with riddles, double dosed with double entendres, and infuriatingly inundated with innuendos, and I can't make snout nor tail of it. This is where you come in. I need your notably nimble noodle to rescue me from bamboozled bewilderment, and lead us to immortality and unimaginable wealth. I therefore implore you to join me, with all possible haste my dear Swinestein.

I realize what I am asking, and will fully understand if you decline. If you come, I can promise you only hardship, toil, discomfort, life threatening situations and substandard rations. But if we succeed, we will be beasts of legend, and we will go down in history. If we don't, we'll just erm, well, go down.

Anyway, I leave from the port of Hambasa, on the East coast, on the thirteenth of April, and head inland by river boat. Should you decide to accompany me, that gives you three months to prepare. I shall be delighted to see you. If not, then farewell my friend, for our paths may never cross again in this world. Know that it has been a privilege to call you my friend.

Yours affectionately,

Rumpo Hogwild.

When he finished reading, for a long moment he and Penelope just stared at each other, their eyes wide. Then Swinestein let the letter fall from his trotter and abruptly reached down and grabbed Penelope, and pressing her to his chest began to waltz her around the room.

“Oi, put me down you big lug. You’re squashing me.” she said, laughing.

Swinestein placed Penelope gently of the arm of the all devouring chair and made a deep theatrical bow. Then he assumed his full height, and with a huge grin splitting his snout, and his eyes aglow, he announced.

“Madam. Swinestein the pig rides again!”

Rudy Rootsuffle wasn’t miserable. Miserable didn’t even begin to describe what he was. Somebody was going to have to come up with a new word to describe how bad Rudy was feeling. Like *bleatosquealysobweepgloomomorrible* for example. Not only was he *bleatosquealysobweepgloomomorrible*, he was heartbroken, lost, lonely, and incandescently, simmeringly, smolderingly angry. He was practically molten with frustrated rage.

He looked at himself in the cracked mirror behind the bar. He almost didn’t recognize himself. No longer was he the dapper and immaculate pristine picture of porcine perfection that he had once been. He was rumped and crumpled and creased, and in a dire state of dirty disarray. His once plastered and pomaded black hair looked like a scragged nest, and was now the color of ashes, and his formerly well-scrubbed snout was grimy and greasy and his chubby chops were no longer clinically cleansed.

Sartorially speaking, he was a catastrophe. The hand stitched bespoke tailoring of yore, the Saville row suits, the dandy duds and thoroughbred threads, were either in tatters or had been replaced by mismatched and oft mended flea market cast off rags that would have embarrassed a scarecrow.

And worst of all was his facial expression. Gone was the supercilious leer, the permanent look of haughty superiority and disdain. Now, a confused and humiliated face peered back at him, almost cowering at its own reflection, afraid to look itself in the eye. All trace of arrogance was gone, leaving only a meek and timorous mask of submission.

Only the shifty eyes still held a tiny something of the old Rudy. Somewhere within them a faint fire still glowed. A fire that imperceptibly but steadily grew in strength, fueled by bitter memories of injustice and an insatiable desire. For revenge!

In his present bleatosquealysobweepgloomomorrible existence, it was all that kept him going from day to day, the thought that one day he would get the opportunity to take his revenge against the person who had destroyed his life. Shortstraw!

Shortstraw looked different. For one thing he had increased in rotundness. Even though only a few short months had passed since his marriage to Porcetta, already the steady and relentless supply of pies pasties and pastries, and the incessant succession of succulent sundries emanating from Porcetta's kitchen was having its effect, applying pressure to the waistline of his pants, and putting the buttons of his waistcoat in severe jeopardy of popping.

But the real change was his demeanor and carriage. Gone was the shy timid little piglet scared of his own shadow. Instead, a confident self-assured and contented pig about town walked on his trotters. You could see the difference in face, in the expression of calm confidence that it wore, and in his voice, which was measured and steady and lacked the diffidence and hesitancy of old. Except when he had to talk to Colonel Bristle, of course, but the Colonel was the Colonel after all.

Porcetta had blossomed like spring rose turned into a summer bloom, and she radiated a joy and happiness that affected everyone around her. She was even more beautiful than ever before, as if her contentment shone from within the way the light shines through a candle. She was immensely proud of her new house, which she labored tirelessly to keep spic and span, and she absolutely adored it when friends came to visit and she could sit them down to tea and toast under the apple tree in the fabulously florescent bee buzzing bird singing garden on sunny days, or in the chintzy chinking china drawing room when it rained.

The house was small, with a thatched roof that had a hole in the straw, and bats lived in it, and the doors sometimes creaked, and the windows rattled when it was very windy, and it had a recalcitrant tap in the bathroom that sometimes refused to turn on, and sometimes, after it had finally agreed to turn on it refused to turn back off again, but as far as Porcetta was concerned her house was perfect, and she wouldn't swap it for Porkingham Palace.

Porcetta was happily fussing with flimsy doilies and putting violets into vases with a small private contented smile on her face, when she heard the doorbell ring. The small private contented smile became a big public joyful grin and she skipped to the front door.

"Oooh. Goody gumdrops. Guests,' she sang to herself.

She could tell by the dimensions of the figure that loomed through the pink frosted glass in the door that it was Swinestein, and she swept the door open and jumped up and planted a big wet one on his chops before he had time to be pompous and dignified, so he was forced to be jovial instead.

“I say, steady on old girl,” he said, with a chuckle, “Hubby at home, is he?”

“Why yes. He’s pruning the roses. Go ahead.”

Swinestein started to step through the door.

“Oi. Wipe your trotters?” Porcetta said, a tone of mocking reproof in her voice.

Swinestein grinned sheepishly, shook his head, did as he was bidden, and walked through the dainty little house and out of the French windows and into the garden, where he could see Shortstraw bent assiduously to his task with oversize gloves on and a rather silly floppy hat drooping over his eyes. Swinestein smiled to himself as he strode towards his friend.

Porcetta brewed herself a cup of tea and went to sit under a pink and purple paisley pattern parasol, happily watching her husband and his friend as they engaged in what seemed to be a somewhat earnest conversation. She was curious, and wished she could move closer to eavesdrop on what was going on, and had begun to scheme up some pretext for doing so when her curiosity turned to mild alarm as she saw Shortstraw suddenly take off his hat and stand there staring at the grass with his shoulders drooped.

She was sure something was amiss and she determined that she was going to go and find out what it was, but before she could move, she saw Swinestein solemnly shake his trotters with Shortstraw and stride towards her. He bent down and gave her a peck on the cheek, but did not say anything as he walked past her and back out through the house and into the street. She heard the door close softly behind him.

She hurried towards where Shortstraw stood, still staring at the grass.

“Is something wrong, dear?” she asked, with concern in her voice.

Shortstraw looked up. There were tears in his eyes.

“He’s going to Africa,” he said.