

PETUNIA

We were overprotected Jewish boys, on our own for the first time at the University of Florida. Gainesville was the perfect venue for testing our liberation and guns were to be the medium. The plinking club evolved. First tin cans, then bottles, dragon flies, on to tweety birds, and at the end of our sophomore year a complete set of china was laid waste in front of the firing line. The legendary pinnacle of this murderous frenzy was to be the wild boar.

Harvey and Phil set out to fulfill the promise. With the benefit of hundreds of religiously studied copies of *Field and Stream* and the *American Rifleman*, thousands of spent .22 cartridges, and Phil's mail order Carcano carbine they set out to prove their manhood.

The tale of the hunt is confused by Phil and Harvey's somewhat contradictory accounts. The facts are that a nursing domestic sow was shot, and one of the piglets was brought home alive. The claimed purpose was for Petunia to be fattened for a barbecue.

Pigs are smart. They are easy to house break, eat anything, show affection, and like beer. In the beginning Phil bottle-fed Petunia. The process generated quite a bond. As soon as she could eat solid food and with Phil's doting, Petunia was eating better than we were. Phil's father was a kosher butcher and he kept us

supplied with meat that was mailed packed in dry ice. It was hard to complain about Phil's indulging the pig.

Petunia's appetite grew with her size. She would accompany us when we would go shopping, and would wait outside of stores for us to complete our purchases patiently looking forward to what treats Phil might be buying. She was the life of a party, and a real hit around the neighborhood. Phil found that, when you were holding her, that the slightest pressure would make Petunia squeal. Taking advantage of that observation, Petunia with Phil could perform party tricks. Only Phil had to be sober. Petunia to the amazement of the other drunks could count, do simple arithmetic and provide advice on any matters of interest.

The end of the school term was approaching. We were all planning to be away for the summer, and the only plan for Petunia was the barbecue. The moment of truth arrived. Our very genteel graduate student neighbors, John and Joan, were having friends over for dinner. I was studying Russian and feigning indifference. Phil was weeping. Petunia was squealing. Harvey reached for his .22.

At first Phil thought Harvey could not go through with it. But when Harvey, with Petunia under one arm and the .22 cradled in the other, started down the stairs to the garage, concern mounted. As he left the apartment to go down to the garage where the deed was to be done, Phil yelled for him to stop. In the commotion John and Joan with their dinner guests came out to see what was going on. When they

realized the gravity of the situation, they too were pleading for Harv to stop. No one had a suitable alternative and Harv had made up his mind. Finally, Phil rushed into action, grabbed the Carcano carbine and threatened to shoot Harv if he did not stop. In an instant the testosterone saturated garage was bursting with conflicted guys, loaded guns, crying women and a squealing pig.

Nothing was working out like Harv and Phil had imagined when they started out on their hunt. Finally, a deal was struck and the guns were put down. Harvey would not shoot Petunia. Phil would sell her to be slaughtered by a butcher.

Phil found a slaughterhouse that would take her. Phil and Harv went together to deliver Petunia. Harv's account was that they went up to a counter and were quoted a price per pound. Phil handed over Petunia and she was placed on the scale. The clerk called for an assistant and the word "grinder" was mentioned. Phil bounded over the counter, rescued the would be sausage and took off with Petunia, leaving Harv at the counter to find his own way home.

We did not hear from Phil again until the next day. He returned without Petunia. The story was that he had convinced a local veterinarian she could count. The vet agreed to take her. Hoping it was true, no one questioned the story.