

A Story

By *M.T.*

Morning has broken on the 64th Annual Congress of the Animal Republic. Animal representatives from near and far have gathered to elect a new leader for their country. Hundreds of Sheep, Cows, Goats and Pigs pour through the doors, followed by the Gorillas, Horses, Donkeys and the Giraffes, clumsily bending their necks to pass through the gate. The predators came last, taking the back seats, and were by far the least represented group. The Chimps and Orangutans had already taken the front row seats, illuminated by the flashes of a hundred cameras, held by Parrots and Mockingbirds. The Birds had taken the upper reaches of the hall, looking down on the congress from their roosts. The Crows and their Peacock companions had taken the highest and most luxurious spaces, being above all the other birds, even the mighty Eagles, who once held those spots.

Most of the animals had worn their party colors, representing the two dominant parties, the Chimps, in blue, and the Orangutans, in orange. Some predators, like the Lions and Wolves, carried their own, green banners, although they weren't visible in the shady back seats which they had been forcibly segregated to. The clamoring of a thousand animals soon became applause, of hooves, clefts, wings, hands and paws. The Chimpanzee representative spoke first. He promised the assembly a utopian society, where their equity was determined solely by their hard work and ingenuity. Amongst his promises was the promise of reducing taxes for everyone, and ended his speech with his party slogan, "Every animal a king!" The thunderous applause continued as the Orangutan speaker stepped up to the podium. He gave the animals a realistic view of their country, refusing to sugarcoat anything, promising that they can do better, but only with some sacrifices. He finished his speech by bowing,

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and stepped down. The vote tally began. The voting was done by a simple show of hands, or any other appendage. Some of the sheep were chanting the Chimpanzee slogan whilst raising their hooves when the Chimpanzee vote began. The Predators either voted for the Orangutans, or simply boycotted the vote, still proudly waving their banners.

The wait was over. The Chimpanzees had won. The rousing cheers were soon followed by a disorderly exit from the assembly, as each animal shoved their way through to continue with their day. As Winston Churchill would say: “The best argument against Democracy is a five minute conversation with the average voter.”

The sheep returned to their service jobs, working as cashiers, store keeps and desk jockeys. In their break time, they’d chew tobacco or stare at their phone while in the outhouse. Ironically, this device that contained the sum of all of Animal kind’s knowledge would be used for checking what the Peacock stars wore to the assembly, or for a video that would make them chuckle briefly, only for them to forget it in a moment’s notice, never any wiser or more noble. After their 8 hour shifts, they’d head home, open up a bag of hay, and turn on the TV. The thing that would greet them would be the Nightly News. The Animal Republic had three main news stations: The Parrot News, owned and controlled by the government, that would exaggerate and idealize all of the positive effect that the government has on society, whilst diminishing or diverting the blame for any scandals or misgiving that they may have caused. The second one was The Hawk News. They would appeal to the patriot in all animals, spewing propaganda about their military or about wars in far off countries, how the albino lions and the black lions kill each other in brutal conflicts. The last one was the Mockingbird News, a privately held news source. Sensationalism was the name of the game for them, cherry-picking the most,

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desirable stories, operating solely for profit. The sheep would be bombarded with images of the peacock divas, or the score of last night's game between the rhinos and the bulls. Later programming would show the dire situation of starving Dogs and Wolves in the slums, making the sheep say "Thank God I'm not Them!" Media itself is paradoxical: It cannot be state-run or it will become a government echo chamber, but it cannot be for profit either, because it would only tell people (or animals) what they want to hear, glossing over the important issues. The Parrot news would then inform them of the icecaps melting, or that this was the hottest summer on record. The sheep would not care. These were different times. The cold war between the Apes and the Bears was over. The threat of nuclear hellfire was imminent, while the threat of the Planet warming was a slow burner, surely it would resolve itself eventually, or someone else would solve it, so why should they care? The Sheep would then go to sleep, their body awaiting the 7 am. Alarm to wake up and go to work, and regain some sense of purpose. They'd fall asleep to the whistles and smoke bellowing from the neighboring factory, where the Horses and Donkeys toiled away.

The life of a Horse was a laborious one. In every sense they were the powerhouse of the Animal World. They would sweat away in 10 hour shifts at the local factory, working only for the promise of a better life, believing that through hard labour, they can achieve anything. The idea of a retirement would circulate through this horse's head for the entirety of this day. He had worked at the factory for 18 years, a significant portion of his life, and he had dreams of finding a house by a big open plain, with plenty of space for running. These dreams were fragile, and difficult to achieve in the Animal Republic. He would have to work for the longest part of his years at the factory, only to retire when he is old and frail, with not a lot of life left for living free from work. That is, if he even

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manages to reach retirement. His current place of residence is one work accident away from becoming the graveyard, or if he can't afford a proper burial, the glue factory. Or he could be replaced by a younger, more energetic horse, left without anyone to take him in, or with enough money to retire. Or he could, like a lot of his friends and coworkers, be replaced with a different beast altogether, a beast of silicone, and steel. Upon finishing his shift, he would tread lightly through the predator slums to reach his home, a derelict, gray apartment complex. He'd enter his residence, barely squeezing in, and laying down on the mattress on the floor. His work left him no time to find love, so he lived alone, in this dark, damp place. He'd look at a painting of a wide open May field, covered in flowers, and he'd say to himself: "Just a bit more!" He'd fall asleep to the sound of gunshots coming from the neighborhoods near him.

The gunshots woke a young pup sleeping on the floor in a small, white kennel. He'd awoken to the huddling of several dogs around a radio, listening to a boxing match between two kangaroos. They'd cheered for two animals bludgeoning each other, two animals that they had never seen, as many had never even left the ghetto, two animals that would never affect them in the slightest. The blaring of car horns from the overpass that went over their house, completely ignoring their neighborhood, the car horns from sheep returning from their mundane jobs, completely disconnected from these struggles of theirs. The pup waddled over to his bowl of food, licking up the few bits of dog chow left for them. Since eating meat was illegal, most predators were forced to eat synthetic food. Those that couldn't, like the pup's father, were caught by police hounds and pigs, and stuffed the prison population, which was mostly predators: "They made eatin' a crime!", said one of the dogs to the pup's mother. One of his brothers had suffocated in his sleep, and his sister was sold into the police force so that the family could eat for a couple more weeks. The pup understood that his life probably wouldn't last very long. The gunshots continued. **HE END**

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The Pig arms dealer, who had probably sold them those guns, looked down at the downtrodden slum. Only half the lights were on, as the majority couldn't even afford electricity. He was looking down from the balcony of his castle, which once belonged to The King of the Lions, and their struggles, struggles which he had never known and probably never will, were to him just flashes of light. The slum that he was looking down upon had tens of thousands of animals in it, from Rats to Dogs to Cats and even the mighty Lions, who once ruled the Animal Kingdom with an iron fist. Those thousands of animals would live and die in that filth, never even dreaming of the luxuries that he had. His golden necklace was probably worth more money than all the animals in that slum had. He drank his elaborate cocktail and turned away from the balcony, removing the ghetto from his mind. He turned towards the gate, at which two gorilla bouncers threw out a fox trying to sneak his way in. The pig simply walked through into the New Year's party, with the gorillas paying him no mind. When he entered the room, he had no reaction to the otherworldly glamour, gold plated walls, priceless artworks, and diamond chandeliers, the glamour that he had become completely numb to. Nothing could satisfy him anymore. All of the "usuals" were there, the Longhorn Bulls showing off their muscles, the Chimps with their Ferret and Parrot pets, trying to lead any conversation their way, the Hogs accompanied by Peacocks in their fancy clothes and accompanied by several Dog servants, many of whom were from the ghettos. The room was filled with the soft music of a Gibbon monkey playing on the piano. The Gibbons weren't Apes, so many of them lived in the same low-class neighbourhoods with the Dogs and Wolves. He played the piano with a troubled look on his face, almost tearing up, knowing full well that if he fails, all the effort that his family put into his education and him getting this opportunity will be for naught. The pig stepped up to the podium,

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and the Gibbon could get some rest, stopping his music in sync with the rising applause. The pig spoke of the rising sales of his company, sales made possible entirely through the toil of horses, with approval from the crowd. These animals, whose ancestors had bet money on the racetrack or the derby, now bet their money on the stock market, making their absurd fortunes there. He spoke in front of a painting of Horses and Bulls overthrowing the King Lion, after which the Animal Kingdom became the Animal Republic. He ended his speech by saying: “The prey decides what’s for dinner now, so the lions will starve!” Echoing applause soon followed. The Gibbon sat there, with a tense look on his face. A Pig came up to him and asked him why he wasn’t playing. No response. They brought out a whip and started lashing him. No response. Eventually, they stopped. The monkey just sat there, staring blankly. A few moments later, he awoke from this trance, and he pulled out a gun. He started yelling: “This is enough! I will not let you grow rich off of our hard work! In what world do the Sheep rule the Lions!?” “He started shooting across the room, shattering the chandelier. “I’m mad as hell and I won’t take it anymore!” he said, pointing the gun to his head. His final shot was drowned out by the bells, signaling a New Year. A New Year welcomed by an old system, and opened by a tragedy, or, in the eyes of the Republic, statistics.

THE END

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