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Japan as a Nation of Animal Lovers -- As Pets Or When They're On a Plate

Roger Pulvers

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The Japanese consider themselves a compassionate people when it comes to an animal's fate. Memorial stones have been erected in whaling villages since the early Edo Period, as they are today at slaughterhouses. Buddhist priests are hired to read the sutras before altars set with incense and piled with fruit to pray for the souls of animals killed for food.

These rituals are called *ireisai* or *kanshasai*. They testify to the deep sentiment of gratitude that Japanese people feel toward the animals that sustain them.

Well, they may feel gratitude to animals they kill—and the affection (and money) lavished on pets in this country is obvious everywhere in Japan—but are Japanese people conscious of cows, pigs and chickens as creatures deserving of humane treatment while alive?

I have many Japanese friends who go to great lengths to buy organic vegetables, but they haven't a clue what goes into the meat they buy. The media make an almighty fuss about safe beef, turning it into a diplomatic event. But how many of the consumers in supermarkets I have seen interviewed on the television news realize that the *welfare* of the animals they eat is inextricably tied to the state of their own health?

Chickens are fed the waste products of fish processing and other feed, such as bone meal, blood meal and feather meal that they were never intended to eat. They are pumped with hormones and antibiotics. Egg-producing hens are debeaked with hot blades and housed in hideously cramped cages, less than three-quarters the size of an A4 sheet of paper for each bird. They can't walk or stretch their wings; nor do they ever see daylight in their short lives. (The European Union is phasing out battery cages and has banned their use by 2012, but no such legislation exists here.)

As for pigs, breeding sows are generally kept in individual stalls where they virtually cannot move at all. Pigs are intelligent, social animals that need to move about a pasture, or at least a dirt yard. Cramming them into stalls without even straw to lie on gives them osteoporosis and leads to neurotic behavior. (Sow tethers and stalls are being eliminated in Britain, and by 2014 all pigs will be free range or housed in straw yards.)

Are the Japanese, so seemingly fussy about every detail of food safety, oblivious to the fate of the animals they consume? Do they know that millions of suffering animals are overdrugged, overcrowded and over here? Where is the Japanese “nasake” (compassion)? Where is the “respect” for animals, who, according to Buddhist teaching, have souls just as we do?

The first Japanese legislation on animal welfare, the Law for the Protection and Management of Animals, was passed in 1973. That law, however, was no more than a token gesture, and was viewed primarily as applying to people and their pets. Subsequently the "Guidelines for Rearing and Managing Industrial Animals" recommended practices for minimizing maltreatment of farm animals, but these had no teeth. There was no checking mechanism or penalties. Then the 1973 law was amended, and went into effect in 2000, renamed as the Law for Humane Management of Animals; and there was an additional amendment going into effect in 2006. There are presently penalties in place, but the expectation is that the industry will self-regulate. The law is on the books, but authorities do not look at the pages.

Japanese have a lovely word to cover animal welfare and humane management (the word for human welfare, *fukushi*, does not apply to animals except to specialists in government and industry; this word is yet to come into general usage). It is *aigo*, which is composed of the characters for "love" and "protection." The implication is that people not only protect animals but give them much tender loving care. But this dobutsu aigo no seishin (the spirit of compassion for the well-being of animals) hardly extends to farm animals. It is effectively aimed at pets.

Traditionally, TLC of farm animals all over the world has not been the common practice. But it has been particularly lacking in Japan, where there was no large-scale animal husbandry before the Meiji Era began in 1868. Prior to then, Japanese were primarily an agrarian people with little or no close contact with farm animals. Their Buddhist precepts kept them from eating the flesh of these animals, save, on occasion, wild ones such as boar and deer. (The euphemistic term “botan” (peony) was applied to boar meat, probably because of the pink color and the arrangement of sliced meat that resembled a peony.) Very few Japanese people think about farm animals and how they live. Animal welfare has been, and still is, a major nonissue in this country.

In most of the developed world, however, animal welfare is an increasingly serious issue at the cutting edge of consciousness. The relative number of vegetarians in the West far exceeds that in Japan, despite the fact that *shojin ryori* is one of the world's earliest vegetarian diets, obviously inspired by Buddhist practices from India, China and Korea.

Many people in the West have sworn off veal, due to the cruel treatment dealt to veal calves, who are separated from their mothers almost immediately after birth. The French are under attack for the force-feeding of cornmeal to geese to obtain one of their national delicacies, pâté de fois gras. And there is a movement in the United States to boycott restaurants where live lobsters are "tortured to death." (Whole Foods, America's leading natural-food chain, has recently taken live lobsters off their shelves.)

I shop for food nearly every day of the week in Tokyo supermarkets, but I cannot remember ever seeing organ0fally farmed chicken, pork or beef, though these are readily available in supermarkets in other developed countries.

Princeton University bioethics professor Peter Singer has said, "In suffering, the animals are our equals." That statement should resonate with

Japanese, whose Buddhist philosophy teaches compassion toward all creatures on Earth.

Since the beginning of the Meiji Era, Japanese people have studiously avoided this vital aspect of the faith. By erecting memorial stones at slaughterhouses and holding thanksgiving services, they may be assuaging their own consciences. But these rituals don't do the animals a bit of good. They merely give people the illusion that they themselves are caring beings.

Modern agribusiness has turned animals into production units. If you pervert nature in the inhumane treatment of animals, you may pay a very high human price, be it with BSE in cows or avian and swine viruses that cross the species barrier to attack humans. (Is this some kind of revenge or retribution on the part of the animals?)

Koji pig factory farm uses microorganisms and citric acid to dissolve raw garbage into liquid feed

Japanese people will eventually be obliged to become conscious of the welfare of farm animals for the first time in their history. If they don't, they might be asking themselves the question, "Which came first, the chicken or the flu?"

It is with this as background that I ask you to read Miyazawa Kenji's marvelous story, "The Frandon Agricultural School Pig." This story, written more than 80 years ago and set in a fictitious village in Yorkshire (the pig is a Yorkshire pig), speaks directly to us now. It is just further proof of the fact that Miyazawa Kenji was a 21st-century writer born in the 19th century. He certainly had a 21st-century conscience.

The above is revised and updated from an article that appeared in The Japan Times on 26 August 2006. The translation of "The Frandon Agricultural School Pig" is copyright by Roger Pulvers, 2009, and may not be reproduced in any form without permission.

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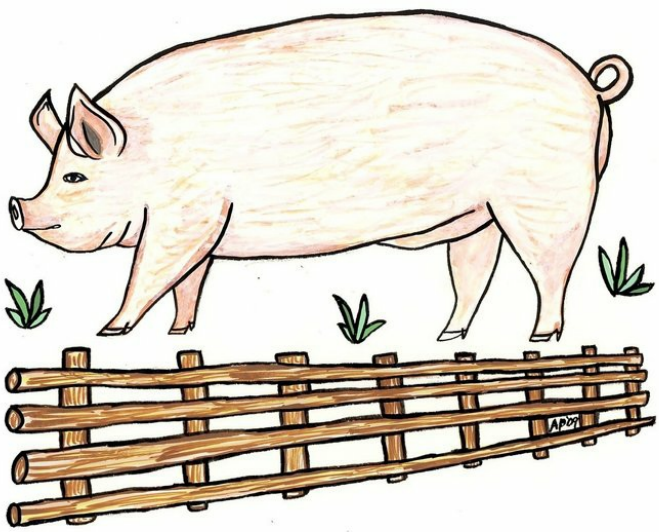
The Frandon Agricultural School Pig

By Miyazawa Kenji

Translated by Roger Pulvers

A pig was gazing up at the heavens one evening. He felt particularly happy within himself and was full of gratitude for all the things given to him.



Heaven-gazing pig courtesy of and copyright Alice Pulvers

That night, first-year students, fresh from studying chemistry, stood before the pig and gazed at him in wonder. As for the pig, he threw glances at them, raising his angry little eyes, shaped like broad beans.

"Pigs are really bizarre creatures," one of the students was saying. "They drink water and eat things like slippers and straw and turn it all into first-class fat and meat. I mean, a pig's body is, well, one big living and breathing catalyst. It's like platinum. If platinum is inorganic, then I guess a pig is its organic equivalent. The more you think about it, the weirder it gets."

The pig, of course, heard himself being mentioned in the same breath as platinum. He knew, too, that the price of platinum was exorbitant, so he was able in a flash to calculate, with his weight of 75 kilograms, just about how much his body would be worth. He made this calculation folding his ears right down, closing his lids into a narrow squint and twisting his front feet around. Based on the current price of platinum, which he happened to know, he reckoned that his body was worth a good 600,000 yen. This value put him roughly in the category of a first-class Frandon gentleman. He was pretty sure of that.

It was natural, then, that he should feel a deep sense of satisfaction, seeing as he was right up there with the gentlemen of Frandon; and he opened his big mouth, the shadow of which resembled a shark's, and grinned with joy.

However, the pig's joy did not last long.

Two or three days later, a big heap of food thudded down into his pen, and inside the heap he caught sight of an object with thin white hairs cut straight across. This is no time for mincing words: The object was plainly a Camel Brand toothbrush.

The pig immediately felt his heart leap into his mouth. The minute he set eyes on that brush, the hairs all over his body whirred like grasses blown by the wind. He screwed up his face, staring at the brush, and, after a while, felt dizzy and deeply repulsed. He immediately buried his head in the straw of his litter and was soon fast asleep, dead to the world.

The pig awoke quietly that evening and was feeling in a slightly better mood. Now, a slightly better mood for a pig is in no way to be compared with the crispness of an apple or the brightness of a cloudless blue sky. We are talking pigs' moods here, so let's call it a grey mood…a grey mood that's a trifle cold and transparent as the wind. Nevertheless, you really have to be a pig yourself to fathom the feelings of a pig.

Now, exotic Yorkshire or black Berkshire pigs don't think of themselves as indolent or slow on the uptake. The hardest thing to imagine is what a pig feels when his straight back is being thrashed with a rod. Could he express these feelings in Japanese or Italian? In German or English? How can a pig get them out? In the end, all he can do is scream. As Dr. Kant would tell us, a thing such as this defies human comprehension.

Anyway, the pig got pudgier and pudgier, sleeping and waking up day after day. A teacher of animal husbandry at the Frandon Agricultural School came to the pen every day, glaring at the pig and calculating its weight.

"Make sure you close the window down a bit tighter," said the teacher to his young assistant, who was wearing a light-blue jacket. "The room has to be dark for the fat to sweeten up, you know. It's high time we started really fattening this one up. I want you to start feeding him linseed."

The pig heard every word of this, and it really put him down in the dumps. It was the same feeling he felt when he saw the toothbrush. And even though he ought to have been happy being fed linseed, he simply found it hard to swallow. He knew in his gut by his tone of voice what that teacher of animal husbandry was getting at.

"Those two humans feed me, but they also sometimes look at my body with a stare as cold as a polar sky and have wicked thoughts about me. Oh, I'm frightened! So frightened!"

This is what was racing through the pig's mind as, unable to hold it in any longer, he butted the fence in front of him over and over again with his snout.

However, when there was exactly a month to go before the pig was to be slaughtered, the king issued an order, proclaiming the "Law of Signed Consent Governing the Slaughtering of Farm Animals." The proclamation stated that anyone wishing to kill a farm animal must first obtain a Certificate of Consent of Death from the animal in question. Moreover, these consent certificates must be signed by the animals themselves.

So, cows and horses and all the other animals around this time were forced by their owners, on the day before they were to be slaughtered, to plop their foot or hoof or whatever down as a mark of approval of their death. The really old horses, having had their horseshoes pried off them, pressed their hoof down to seal their fate, with tears flowing down their face.

The Yorkshire pig of Frandon got a look at his death certificate. This happened when the principal of the Frandon Agricultural School came to him one day with a big yellow sheet of paper on which it was printed. The pig had made a considerable study of languages, and in addition, thanks to having a soft tongue and a natural aptitude for speech, was fluent in humanese. He greeted the principal calmly.

"Fine day we're having, isn't it, principal."

The principal, the yellow certificate under his arm, put his hands in his pockets and smiled wryly.

"Yeah, well, it's not bad," he said.

Somehow the principal's words that entered the pig's ears got stuck around his throat. Besides, the way the principal was ogling his body reminded him of the way that teacher of animal husbandry gazed at him.

The pig, forlorn, lowered his ears.

"I must confess I'm pretty low these days," he said.

“Hmm. Low, eh?” said the principal, with the wry smile still on his lips. “I see. Fed up with this world, are you? Maybe that’s the reason, eh?”

The pig had such a glum look on his face that the principal suddenly fell silent. He and the pig just stood there, staring in silence at each other. They stood their ground, not a word passing between them. Finally, the principal spoke…

“So, anyway, you have a good rest,” he said, deciding to give up on the certificate for that day. “And don’t move about a lot, okay?”

The principal left with the big yellow certificate firmly under his arm.

After that, the pig went over and over the words of the principal in his mind, thinking about his wry smile and his ulterior motive. He trembled and said to himself…

“’So, anyway, you have a good rest. And don’t move about a lot, okay?’ What on earth does he mean by that? Oh, I can’t cope with this. I just can’t.”

These were the thoughts going through his trapezoidal head and splitting it with pain. That night there was a huge blizzard, and outside the winds raged and fragments of dry snow blew in through cracks in the hut where the pig lived, turning what was left of his food pure white.

However, the next day, the animal husbandry teacher came again, leading that same assistant in the light-blue jacket. He looked daggers at the pig, a look that virtually devoured him from his head and ears to his back and tail.

“You’re giving it linseed every day, I hope,” he said, with one pointed finger in the air.

“Yes, I am,” answered the assistant.

“Thought so. We’ll settle for tomorrow or day after tomorrow. We’ve gotta get the approval certificate signed. I wonder what happened. The principal definitely came in here with the certificate under his arm.”

“Yes, sir, apparently he did.”

“Well, then, I guess he’s already got what we need. He should have passed it on to us, by all rights.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Why don’t we make this room a bit darker than it is. And also, the day before we do the thing, don’t give it any feed.”

“No, sir, I don’t plan to.”

The teacher of animal husbandry threw another sharp glance at the pig, stared at him for a moment, then left the shed.

Once again, words went splitting through the pig’s head, and he was overwhelmed by anguish.

“What does he mean by ‘approval certificate,’” he thought. “What kind of approval certificate? They say they’re not going to feed me the day before. But, the day before what? What on earth does he want me to do? What on earth is he going to do to me? Is he going to take me far away and sell me? Oh, I can’t cope with this. I just can’t.”

The pig couldn’t sleep well at all that night due to frazzled nerves. However, the next morning, when the sun was finally up, three students, boarders at the school, entered the hut, cackling away. Once again, the pig, who had slept badly all night and whose head was wracked with pain, was forced to hear a most unwelcome conversation.

“When are they going to get it over with? I can’t wait to see it.”

“Not me. I don’t want to watch it.”

“I just want it to be soon. The leeks in storage will freeze if they’re left there like that.”

“The potatoes are there too.”

“There are over 50 kilos in storage. There’s no way we can get through that much by ourselves.”

“It’s freezing today,” said one of the students, blowing white breath onto his hands.

“Yeah, but the pig looks pretty warm.”

The three of them burst out into a raucous laugh.

“The pig’s got his fat an’ it’s just like he’s wearin’ a three-centimeter thick overcoat, so he’s warm as toast.”

“Yeah, toast. You said it. He’s so warm he’s givin’ off steam.”

The pig was so sad hearing this that it took all his strength just to totter on his feet.

“I just wish they’d do it and get it over with.”

The three students left the hut, whispering to each other.

Once they were gone, the pig’s thoughts once again agonized him.

“’I can’t wait to see it…I hope it will be soon…the leeks are freezing…over 50 kilos of potatoes…we can’t eat them all…an overcoat of fat three-centimeters thick….’ Oh, this is horrible. They look right through you. Horrible, horrible! But, what on earth do I have to do with leeks? Oh, I can’t cope with this. I just can’t.”

Just then, while the pig was in agony, the principal returned to the hut. He slapped the snow off him and, with that ambiguous wry smile on his lips, stood before the pig.

“How’s it going?” he asked. “Feeling happier today?”

“Yes, sir, thank you very much.”

“Happier, are you? That’s marvelous. Enjoying your food?”

“Thank you very much. It’s perfectly fine.”

“Fine, is it? Good to hear it. Now, actually, I’ve come today to have a very confidential talk with you. Your head’s clear, isn’t it?”

“It is,” answered the pig with a bit of a frog in his throat.

“Well, in actuality, every creature on this Earth has to die someday. Every single living thing actually dies. Even the nobility among humans, the rich, and also middle-class people like me and even the most worthless beggar.”

“I see,” said the pig, his voice sticking in his throat and not coming out very clearly.

“And, you see, even animals that are not human, for example, even horses and even cows and chickens, and even catfish and even bacteria…they all gotta die. The mayfly is born with the rising of tomorrow’s sun, yet it dies in the evening. A life that lasts only a single day. Everything’s gotta die. Take me and you. It’s our fate to die someday too.”

“I see.”

The pig couldn’t say anything more than that for the frog in his throat.

“So, now comes the thing I want to talk to you about. We here at the school have looked after you up to today. I’m not boasting here, but the school has done its best to take good care of you. Other pigs like you are scattered all over the place, and, well, I’m very aware of this…and, uh, it may sound funny but, uh, there’s no place where animals are treated better than right here.”

“I see.”

This is what the pig wanted to say, but the food that he had eaten before was now stuck in his throat, and no words could come out.

“So, anyway, this is what I came to talk about. If, uh, you have, because of all this treatment…if you have even a tiny bit of gratitude in you, I’ve got a teeny favor to ask, I mean, to ask for your permission.”

“I see.”

Again, the frog in his throat was preventing him from answering.

“It’s really just a teeny-weeny thing. See this sheet of paper here? This is what’s written on it. ‘Certificate of Consent of Death. I, long enjoying your solid patronage and as it suits you, do hereby accede to dying. Day month year, at Frandon Sheds. To the Principal of the Frandon Agricultural School, Yorkshire.’ That’s all it says.”

Having said this, the principal forged ahead at full tilt.

“What it means is that you’re going to die sooner or later, so you can die gracefully, you’re ready to die at any moment and that’s it’s really no big deal. No one at all would need to die if their time weren’t up. So, I just need you to give me your front foot and put your hoofprint on this. That’s the long and short of it.”

The pig knit his brow and carefully read the certificate that the principal was holding before him. If what the principal was saying was true, this “no big deal” was something absolutely terrifying. Finally, the pig spoke through his tears, doing his best to control himself.

“If one can die at any time, are you saying that that time should be today?”

The principal was taken aback, but soon regained his composure.

“Well, yes. But, it absolutely doesn’t have to be today. No.”

“Then, are you saying it will be tomorrow?”

“Well, uh, tomorrow…nobody’s saying it has to be that soon. Whenever…sometime. It’s really a vague sort of thing.”

“When you saying I’ll be dying, does it mean that I will be dying by myself?” asked the pig, again in a shrill voice.

“No, that’s not we’re asking at all.”

“No, I won’t. I won’t. I refuse to do this. I absolutely refuse,” the pig screamed, weeping.

“You refuse? Then there’s nothing we can do. You are really so ungrateful! You’re even lower than a dog or a cat!”

The principal shoved the certificate in his pocket and, taking big strides, stormed out of the hut, his face bright red from anger.

“I’m lower than a dog or a cat from the beginning, anyway, so what’s the difference? Waaaah!”

He couldn’t stop weeping and wailing as the bitter disappointment and sadness welled up in him. But, after a half day of weeping and wailing like this, the tiredness that he felt from not sleeping for two nights overcame him and, with tears flowing down his cheeks, he was lost to sleep.

Even while asleep, however, his legs shook and trembled over and over again from fear.

The next day dawned, and that same teacher, with his assistant in tow, arrived again. And again with that highly disturbing look in his eyes, he stared at the pig and spoke to his assistant. He was obviously in a filthy mood.

“What’s going on here, eh? The weight’s obviously not going up. Even a farmer can get a pig to this weight. What’s happening here, eh? Got any idea? Look at his hollow cheeks, will ya? And get a load of that shoulder, will ya? Got no flesh on it. Wouldn’t stand a chance in a show competition. What the hell’s goin’ on here, eh?!”

The assistant put his finger to his lip and thought for a moment.

“Well, the principal was here yesterday afternoon,” he said. “Perhaps that’s it.”

The teacher of animal husbandry jumped up.

“The principal? I see. The principal. He no doubt came to get the pig’s approval and bungled it royally. He gave the thing the willies, that’s what. So, the thing has been goin’ round and round the pen and hasn’t slept a wink all night. This is a revolting turn of events. And, what’s worse, he’s bungled the certificate. Revolting, positively revolting.”

The teacher grit his teeth in disappointment, making a creaking sound, and folded his arms over his chest.

“Well, there’s nothing to do about it. Open up the window all the way. Then, take the thing out and give it some exercise. We gotta beat it mercilessly and make it run. Then walk it on the grassy area, where there’s no snow, in the shadow of the stables, which doesn’t get much sun. Fifteen minutes at a time. Then don’t feed it. Make it a bit hungry. When it calms down, give it a little of the soft part of a cabbage. Then, when it gets all better, go back to the old routine. A whole month of fattening it up has gone down the drain in a single night. Got that?”

“Yes, sir. I will do it.”

The teacher went back to the staff common room, and the pig calmed down considerably. He didn’t feel like moving or screaming. All he wanted to do was stare at the far wall of the hut. Just then, the assistant, who had gone out, returned grinning, holding a thin whip in his hand. He opened the pen’s gate.

“How about a little walk, my friend?” he said, in the politest of voices. “It’s a beautiful day out there, with almost no wind to speak of. Please allow me to accompany you.”

The whip came down with a loud whistle on the pig’s back. The pain was unbearable. The Yorkshire pig could do nothing but walk sluggishly out of his pen. His heart was overflowing with sadness, and a fierce pain was piercing his body with every step he took. The assistant followed from behind with a carefree gait, whistling “It’s a long way to Tipperary” while swinging his dangling whip.

“What’s he doing singing ‘It’s a long way to Tipperary’ when I’m so filled with sadness?”

That’s what the pig thought, screwing up his mouth.

“I wonder if you could possibly be bothered to walk a little more to your left,” said the assistant.

The tone of his voice was exceedingly sweet, but he brought the whip down on the pig when he spoke.

“This life is so hard, so unbearable,” thought the pig. “This world is truly one of pain and suffering.”

He continued to walk while being severely beaten, with those thoughts rushing through his mind.

“Well now, would you care to take a rest about now?” said the assistant, bringing the whip down on the pig with great force.

The pig was forced to return to the shed, where he plopped down on his side in the straw. The assistant brought him a morsel of the young delicious part of a cabbage. The pig didn’t feel like eating it, but the assistant was standing up straight with an indescribably ferocious look in his eyes, waiting for him to eat. He had no choice, so he put a small amount in his mouth and pretended to chew until the assistant, apparently mollified, sighed once; then, smiling and whistling “It’s a long way to Tipperary,” he left. The window had been left wide open from before, forcing the pig to endure the unbearable cold.

In this way the Yorkshire pig spent three days as if in a dream, sinking into depression. On the fourth day, the teacher of animal husbandry came once again with his assistant. The teacher threw a single glance at the pig.

“This will not do, definitely not do,” he said to his assistant, waving a hand. “Why didn’t you do what I told you to?”

“I did. I opened the window all the way and gave the thing the good part of a cabbage. I exercised it carefully every day, 15 minutes at a time.”

“Did you? I’m surprised you didn’t get a result if you really did that. Well, the thing is just getting skinnier and skinnier. Neurotic undernourishment, that’s what’s the problem. We’ve got to do something before it becomes a bag of skin and bones. I don’t know if we’ll succeed like this. Look, close all the windows. We’ll forcefeed the thing mechanically and shove food down into it. Get three and a half kilos of wheat bran and about 400 grams of linseed, and also about a kilo of corn meal. Mix it all with about a liter of water and make dumplings out of it. Put them in the forcefeeder and feed that amount to the thing in two or three portions a day. We have a forcefeeding apparatus, don’t we?”

“Yes, sir, we do.”

“Tie the thing up now. No, before tying it up, we’ve got to get it to consent to its death. The principal really bungled things up royally, didn’t he.”

The teacher of animal husbandry hurried off in the direction of the classroom building, followed by his assistant.

Not long after that, the principal arrived in a great huff and puff. The pig, with no place to lie down, had dug a hole in his litter with his snout.

“Listen here. We’re running out of time. I’ve got the Certificate of Consent of Death here again. You’ve really got to put your hoof down on it today. It’s no big deal. Come on, give it your hoof.”

“I won’t. I refuse,” said the pig, sobbing.

“You refuse? Listen here. Stop thinking only of yourself. You have that body of yours thanks to the efforts of everybody at this school. From today we’re going to give you three and a half kilos of wheat bran, 400 grams of linseed, and a kilo of corn meal every day. So, come off your high horse and give us your hoof. Come on, do it.”

The principal looked very ferocious when he got angry like that, and the pig was petrified.

“I will. I’ll do it,” he said, in a hoarse voice.

“Good. Very well,” said the principal, now in good spirits.

He produced the yellow sheet of paper on which the Certificate of Consent of Death was printed, and spread it before the pig.

“Where do I put my hoofprint?” asked the pig in tears.

“Right here. Just under your name,” said the principal, looking at the pig’s little eyes through his glasses.

The pig nervously screwed up its mouth to one side, lifted its short right front hoof in trepidation and brought it down on the spot.

“Ah, excellent. This is smashing,” said the principal, now in a superb mood, pulling the sheet of paper to him and examining the mark.

The mean-spirited teacher of animal husbandry, who had been waiting in the doorway, suddenly entered.

“How’s it going? Did it go well?”

“Yep. We’ve got it. Well, then, I’ll just give this to you. So, how many days of forcefeeding will there be?”

“Well, we’ll keep an eye on it and monitor the situation. Chickens and ducks fatten up without any problem, but a pig who’s a nervous wreck like this one might not fatten up through forcefeeding so easily.”

“Oh, right. I see. Be that as it may, give it your best shot.”

With that, the principal left. It wasn’t long before the assistant showed up carrying a funny-looking canvas tube with screws sticking out of it and a bucket of something. At the instruction of the teacher of animal husbandry, the assistant put his hand in the bucket, checking its contents by picking some of it up in his fingers.

“Right. So, now tie the pig up.”

The assistant rushed into the pen with a hemp rope in his hands. The pig put up a good struggle, but eventually found himself in the corner of his pen with his two right feet tied to two iron rings.

“Smashing. Now put this end down its throat,” said the teacher of animal husbandry, passing the canvas tube to his assistant.

“Now, open your mouth. Come on, open up,” said the assistant calmly.

But the pig kept his mouth shut tight, clamping his teeth together.

“We’ve no choice. Put this between its teeth.”

The teacher handed the assistant a short steel pipe. The assistant squeezed the pipe in between the pig’s teeth. The pig roared and cried at the top of his voice, but the tube was eventually forced between his teeth. Now he could cry only at the base of his throat. The assistant pushed the canvas tube into the space made by the steel pipe and down the pig’s throat.

“Excellent. Now, let’s get started.”

The teacher transferred the food in the bucket into the end of the canvas tube, and, with the help of a weirdly shaped spiral, sent it down into the pig’s stomach. No matter how hard the pig tried not to swallow, he couldn’t stop the food from getting past his throat. The dumplings went down into his stomach, making him feel very heavy and full. This is what forcefeeding is all about.

The pig felt so awful that he wept uncontrollably for an entire day. The teacher came back to have a look the next day.

“Well done. It’s fatter. This has produced an effect. I want you and the caretaker to continue to feed it, two times a day each.”

And so, for seven days from that time on, the pig saw neither the light of day nor felt the wind in his face. All he knew was that his stomach was getting oppressively heavy and that his cheeks and flanks were becoming so bloated that every breath he took was a chore in itself.

The students took turns coming into the hut, discussing various matters in front of him. One day 10 of them showed up, gabbing away like this…

“It’s really gotten fat. I wonder how many kilos the thing weighs.”

“Well, the teacher says he can tell at a single glance, but it’s tough for us to do the same.”

“We don’t know its specific gravity, that’s why.”

“I know the specific gravity, if it’s specific gravity you’re talking about. It’s pretty much the same as water.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because that’s what it is, roughly. If you put the thing in water, it wouldn’t sink, but it wouldn’t float either.”

“Nope, it wouldn’t sink. It’d float for sure.”

“That’s because of the fat. But pigs have bones too. And they have meat on them. I’d bet that its specific gravity would be just about one.”

“So, if the thing’s specific gravity is about one, then how much would it weigh?”

“About 100 kilos, I’d say.”

“Rubbish. It wouldn’t be 100. It’d be at least 130.”

“No, it’d go over 130. Closer to 150 for sure.”

“Well, let’s settle for 140. A liter of water weighs a kilogram, so it would weigh in at 140 kilos.”

“Gosh, 140 kilos!”

The pig simply cried his eyes out upon hearing all this. It was just too much for him. They’re measuring someone’s body as they would merchandise…130 kilos, 140 kilos.

On the seventh day, the teacher and his assistant once again stood side-by-side in front of the pig.

“It looks fine now. Just right. This degree of fattening is just what the doctor ordered. Couldn’t be sweeter, I’d say. If you fatten them up too much, they get sick on you and you lose precious time. Tomorrow would be ideal, I’d say. Don’t feed it any more today. And wash the thing thoroughly with the caretaker. And change its litter. Got it?”

“Yes, sir. Will be done.”

The pig had pricked up its ears and listened intently to what the two men were saying.

“So, it’s to be tomorrow,” he thought. “It’s because of that death consent certificate. Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow. Oh, what’s going to happen to me? I can’t cope with this.”

The pig was in such agony that he butted his head hard against the planks of the pen.

The assistant returned that afternoon together with the caretaker. They freed the pig from the iron rings.

“How are we today?” said the assistant. “Today we’re having a nice little bath. It’s all ready and waiting for you.”

Before the pig could nod or say a word, the whip cracked down hard on his back. He had no choice but to start walking. But because he was so fat, even a single move was exhausting, and he was panting after taking only three steps.

The whip came cracking down again. The pig was on his last legs, but managed finally to walk out of the animal shed, where there was a huge wooden basin filled with hot water.

“Go on in now,” said the assistant, cracking the whip on the pig’s back.

With great difficulty the pig rolled over the tall top edge of the basin and into the water. The caretaker washed the pig clean using a large brush. But the pig shrieked its head off when he saw the brush; for, after all, the brush’s bristles were made of pig’s hair. While he was shrieking, his body turned pure white.

“Now, shall we go?” said the assistant, bringing his whip down on the pig with stinging force.

The pig could do nothing but get out of the water. The cold bit into every part of his body, and he let out a big sneeze.

“It’s gonna catch its death,” said the caretaker, with eyes like saucers.

“So what? Its meat won’t go off,” said the assistant, sneering.

The pig returned to the shed, where new straw had been laid in his pen. The cold cut through him with little blades. He hadn’t eaten since the day before, and his empty tummy was growling and rumbling like thunder. His eyes were closed. His head rang with pain. The entire life of this Yorkshire pig, with its many terrifying memories, went through his head, lighting up then going out like a stone lantern in the garden. He heard all sorts of horrifying noises in his head. He couldn’t even tell if they were ringing outside or inside him. The morning bell in the classroom building would be ringing by now. That moment, a babble of voices could be heard, and a big group of students came into the shed. Among them was the assistant.

“Shall we do it outside? I think outside is best. Take it outside. Hey, I said take it outside and I don’t want to hear any hemming and hawing. It’d just take the shine off everything.”

The teacher of animal husbandry was standing in the doorway, dressed this time in a brown gown-like coat.

“And how are we now?” said the assistant, entering the pen. “It appears to be a lovely day outside.” Bringing the whip down onto the pig’s back, he added, “Would you care for a little stroll today?”

The pig, without any protest whatsoever, swelled up his cheeks, gasped for breath, and hobbled out. He was completely knackered. The two black legs of each student moved forward and to the side as if in a dream.

Suddenly it was blindingly light. The pig walked listlessly, squinting his eyes at the brightness of sun shining on snow.

Where on earth were they taking the pig? There was a single cryptomeria tree in the distance. The pig flicked its head up and suddenly saw an intense white light flash scattering sparks throughout the sky before his eyes. Countless red flames shot out to the sides like spouts of water. A sharp metallic sound rang through the heavens. A torrent of water gushed out on all sides.

What happened after that I cannot say. Right beside the pig stood the teacher of animal husbandry, panting for all he was worth, his face a trifle pale, a huge iron sledgehammer in his hands. The pig lay at his feet. It twice let out a high-pitched purr from its nose, then ceased to move.

The students were a hive of activity. They washed the pig's body in the basin, then changed the water, rolled up the sleeves of their coats as high as they could and stood by patiently. The assistant thrust a large jackknife deep into the pig's throat.

This story is so full of misery, I don't feel that I can go on with it. Be that as it may, the pig was soon cut into eight slabs which were piled one atop the other behind the stables, then buried in the snow to keep them fresh.

That night the sky was crystal clear. Taurus the Bull, with its silver horns, came out sparkling, and a crescent moon, shining coldly, poured its light, like pale mercury, over the clouds. And buried in the snow, piled on its bed of snow like bodies at a battlefield cemetery, was the body of the pig, washed clean and sliced into eight pieces.

The moon passed over in silence. The cold night was, at last, bright and serene.

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