

The Swine King

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The swine king was dying of a rare hoof-and-mouth disease—it was eating up his insides little by little. One day he called his trusted advisers—also swine—to his side, and delivered them his wishes.

“First,” he said, shouting, even though his advisors were quite close, “know that I have exhausted every means of keeping myself alive, and when I leave you at last, it will not be by choice. But even so, all animals must die, even great ones, and my time is swiftly approaching. Thanks to you who have stuck by me all these years—I hope the world goes easy on you. But to the matter of my body: shortly after my death, summon a butcher, who should bind me and string me upside down. He or she will then cut my throat—don’t worry, I won’t feel a thing—and collect my blood in a basin, which will need to be very large, given my girth. The basin, I should add, should be equipped with a small spigot—which is how the blood will flow into the very minuscule vials that all of you will be filling and corking and then setting aside. Don’t worry if a little spills. That being done, I’m to be brought down, untied, and then placed whole into a smoker, where I should remain the rest of the day. I would recommend erring on the side of oversmoking me, for safety’s sake. Once finished, let me cool, then proceed to carving me. Chop my flesh into extremely small pieces, and then vacuum seal each individual piece. Now perhaps you see what I have in mind. Pair each piece with a vial of blood, package them together and mail them to my defenders, who are very fine creatures indeed. Each person shall receive one piece of meat and one vial of blood—you yourselves may take two or three each as repayment for your loyal service. It is said that we swine rarely eat our own kind, but I suspect that, loving me as they do—as you do—they will not hesitate to eat and drink of me. These are my wishes, thank you.”

A few days later, the swine king finally gave up the ghost, and affairs were carried out according to his wishes. His blood was drained and bottled, his flesh smoked and sealed, and each of his swine defenders were mailed their share. In the throes of grief, they were greatly moved by this gift, and few could resist drinking the blood straight away. The flesh, however, was a different matter: although each had been informed, via a small note, of their freedom to enjoy these royal gifts however they wished, not one, even among the advisors, thought to eat it. Some placed it on the mantle, near a picture of their king, others opened the plastic, sniffed it, then sealed it back up to be enjoyed at a later date.

That day came soon enough. A memorial was organized in the capital the following week, and swine from all over the kingdom made great sacrifices in order to attend. Each was encouraged to bring their own personal piece of the king’s flesh, as well as any fond memories they wished to share.

The day got off to a splendid start: there were emotional speeches, heartfelt testimonials, the swine national anthem was played. No violent incidents were reported. At sundown the king’s most trusted advisor took to the podium and asked the crowd to do the thing all knew was needed to move on. The countdown began, sobs were heard, then the crinkling of plastic, and when zero was reached not a scrap of the king remained. Some, unable to let go, kept it in their mouths a bit longer, rolling it around on their tongues and savoring it, but before long the deed was done.

What happened next was a tragedy. And a preventable tragedy, at that, had the advisors only smoked the king a little longer, in accordance with his wishes.

