ROALD DAHL

PIG

ONCE upon a time, in the City of New York, a beautiful baby boy was born into this world, and the joyful parents named him Lexington.

No sooner had the mother returned home from the hospital carrying Lexington in her arms than she said to her husband, “Darling, now you must take me out to a most marvellous restaurant for dinner so that we can celebrate the arrival of our son and heir.”

Her husband embraced her tenderly and told her that any woman who could produce such a beautiful child as Lexington deserved to go absolutely anywhere she wanted. But was she strong enough yet, he inquired, to start running around the city late at night?

“No,” she said, she wasn’t. But what the hell.

So that evening they both dressed themselves up in fancy clothes, and leaving little Lexington in the care of a trained infant’s nurse who was costing them twenty dollars a day and was Scottish into the bargain, they went out to the finest and most expensive restaurant in town. There they each ate a giant lobster and drank a bottle of champagne between them, and after that they went on to a nightclub, where they drank another bottle of champagne and then sat holding hands for several hours while they recalled and discussed and admired each individual physical feature of their lovely newborn son.

They arrived back at their house on the East Side of Manhattan at around two o’clock in the morning and the husband paid off the taxi driver and then began feeling in his pockets for the key to the front door. After a while, he announced that he must have left it in the pocket of his other suit, and he suggested that they ring the bell and get the nurse to come down and let them in. An infant’s nurse at twenty dollars a day must expect to be hauled out of bed occasionally in the night, the husband said.

So he rang the bell. They waited. Nothing happened. He rang it again, long and loud. They waited another minute. Then they both stepped back on to the street and shouted the nurse’s name (McPottle) up at the nursery windows on the third floor, but there was still n? response. The house was dark and silent. The wife began to grow apprehensive. Her baby was imprisoned in this place, she told herself. Alone with McPottle. And who was McPottle? They had known her for two days, that was all, and she had a thin mouth, a small disapproving eye, and a starchy bosom, and quite clearly

she was in the habit of sleeping too soundly for safety. If she couldn't hear the front doorbell, then how on earth did she expect to hear a baby crying? Why this very second the poor thing might be swallowing its tongue or suffocating on its pillow.

"He doesn't use a pillow," the husband said.

"You are not to worry. But I'll get you in if that's what you want." He was feeling rather superb after all the champagne, and now he bent down and undid the laces of one of his black patentleather shoes, and took it off. Then, holding it by the toe, he flung it hard and straight through the dining-room window on the ground floor.

"There you are," he said, grinning. "We'll deduct it from McPottle's wages."

He stepped forward and very carefully put a hand through the hole in the glass and released the catch. Then he raised the window.

"I shall lift you in first, little mother," he said, and took his wife around the waist and lifted her off the ground. This brought her big red mouth up level with his own, and very close, so he started kissing her. He knew from experience that women like very much to be kissed in this position, with their bodies held tight and their legs dangling in the air, so he went on doing it for quite a long time, and she wiggled her feet, and made loud gulping noises down in her throat. Finally, the husband turned her round and began easing her gently through the open window into the dining-room. At this point, a police patrol car came nosing silently along the street towards them. It stopped about thirty yards away, and three cops of Irish extraction leaped out of the car and started running in the direction of the husband and wife, brandishing revolvers.

"Stick "em up!" the cops shouted. "Stick "em up!" But it was impossible for the husband to obey this order without letting go of his wife, and had he done this she would either have fallen to the ground or would have been left dangling half in and half out of the house, which is a terribly uncomfortable position for a woman; so he continued gallantly to push her upward and inward through the window. The cops, all of whom had received medals before for killing robbers, opened fire immediately, and although they were still running, and although the wife in particular was presenting them with a very small target indeed, they succeeded in scoring several direct hits on each body-sufficient anyway to prove fatal in both cases.

Thus, when he was no more than twelve days old, little Lexington became an orphan.

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The news of this killing, for which the three policemen subsequently received citations, was eagerly conveyed to all the relatives of the deceased couple by

newspaper reporters, and the next morning the closest of these relatives, as well as a couple of undertakers, three lawyers, and a priest, climbed into taxis and set out for the house with the broken window. They assembled in the living-room, men and women both, and they sat around in a circle on the sofas and armchairs, smoking cigarettes and sipping sherry and debating what on earth should be done now with the baby upstairs, the orphan Lexington.

It soon became apparent that none of the relatives was particularly keen to assume responsibility for the child, and the discussions and arguments continued all through the day. Everybody declared an enormous, almost an irresistible desire to look after him, and would have done so with the greatest of pleasure were it not for the fact that their apartment was too small, or that they already had one baby and couldn't possibly afford another, or that they wouldn't know what to do with the poor little thing when they went abroad in the summer, or that they were getting on in years, which surely would be most unfair to the boy when he grew up, and so on and so forth. They all knew, of course, that the father had been heavily in debt for a long time and that the house was mortgaged and that consequently there would be no money it all to go with the child.

They were still arguing like mad at six in the evening when suddenly, in the middle of it all, an old aunt of the deceased father (her name was Glosspan) swept in from Virginia, and without even removing her hat and coat, not even pausing to sit down, ignoring all offers of a martini, a whisky, a sherry, she announced firmly to the assembled relatives that she herself intended to take sole charge of the infant boy from then on. What was more, she said, she would assume full financial responsibility on all counts, including education, and everyone else could go back home where they belonged and give their consciences a rest. So saying, she trotted upstairs to the nursery and snatched Lexington from his cradle and swept out of the house with the baby clutched tightly in her arms, while the relatives simply sat and stared and smiled and looked relieved, and McPottle the nurse stood stiff with disapproval at the head of the stairs, her lips compressed, her arms folded across her starchy bosom.

And thus it was that the infant Lexington, when he was thirteen days old, left the City of New York and travelled southward to live with his Great Aunt Glosspan in the State of Virginia.

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Aunt Glosspan was nearly seventy when she became guardian to Lexington, but to look at her you would never have guessed it for one minute. She was as sprightly as a woman half her age, with a small, wrinkled, but still quite beautiful face and two lovely brown eyes that sparkled at you in the nicest way. She was also a spinster, though you would never have guessed that either, for there was nothing spinsterjsh about Aunt Glosspan. She was never bitter or gloomy or irritable; she didn't have a moustache;

and she wasn’t in the least bit jealous of other people, which in itself is something you can seldom say about either a spinster or a virgin lady, although of course it is not known for certain whether Aunt Glosspan qualified on both counts.

But she was an eccentric old woman, there was no doubt about that. For the past thirty years she had lived a strange isolated life all by herself in a tiny cottage high up on the slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains, several miles from the nearest village. She had five acres of pasture, a plot for growing vegetables, a flower garden, three cows, a dozen hens, and a fine cockerel.

And now she had little Lexington as well.

She was a strict vegetarian and regarded the consumption of animal flesh as not only unhealthy and disgusting, but horribly cruel. She lived upon lovely clean foods like milk, butter, eggs, cheese, vegetables, nuts, herbs, and fruit and she rejoiced in the conviction that no living creature would be slaughtered on her account, not even a shrimp. Once, when a brown hen of hers passed away in the prime of life from being eggbound, Aunt Glosspan was so distressed that she nearly gave up egg-eating altogether.

She knew not the first thing about babies, but that didn’t worry her in the least. At the railway station in New York, while waiting for the train that would take her and Lexington back to Virginia, she bought six feeding-bottles, two dozen diapers, a box of safety pins, a carton of milk for the journey, and a small paper-covered book called The Care of Infants. What more could anyone want? And when the train got going, she fed the baby some milk, changed its nappies after a fashion, and laid it down on the seat to sleep. Then she read The Care of Infants from cover to cover.

“There is no problem here,” she said, throwing the book out of the window. “No problem at all.”

And curiously enough there wasn’t. Back home in the cottage everything went just as smoothly as could be. Little Lexington drank his milk and belched and yelled and slept exactly as a good baby should, and Aunt Glosspan glowed with joy whenever she looked at him and showered him with kisses all day long.

By the time he was six years old, young Lexington had grown into a most beautiful boy with long golden hair and deep blue eyes the colour of cornflowers. He was bright and cheerful, and already he was learning to help his old aunt in all sorts of different ways around the property, collecting the eggs from the chicken house, turning the handle of the butter churn, digging up potatoes in the vegetable garden and searching for wild herbs on the side of the mountain. Soon, Aunt Glosspan told herself, she would have to start thinking about his education.

But she couldn’t bear the thought of sending him away to school. She loved him so much now that it would kill her to be parted from him for any length of time. There was, of course, that village school down in the valley, but it was a dreadful-looking place, and if she sent him there she just knew they would start forcing him to eat meat the very first day he arrived “You know what, my darling?” the said to him one day when he was sitting on a stool in the kitchen watching her make cheese. “I don’t really see why I shouldn’t give you your lessons myself.”

The boy looked up at her with his large blue eyes, and gave her a lovely trusting smile. “That would be nice,” he said.

“And the very first thing I should do would be to teach you how to cook.”

“I think I would like that, Aunt Glosspan.”

“Whether you like it or not, you’re going to have to learn some time,” she said. “Vegetarians like us don’t have nearly so many foods to choose from as ordinary people, and therefore they must learn to be doubly expert with what they have.”

“Aunt Glosspan,” the boy said, “what do ordinary people eat that we don’t?”

“Animals,” she answered, tossing her head in disgust.

“You mean live animals?”

“No,” she said. “Dead ones.”

The boy considered this for a moment.

“You mean when they die they eat them instead of burying them?”

“They don’t wait for them to die, my pet. They kill them.”

“How do they kill them, Aunt Glosspan?”

“They usually slit their throats with a knife.”

“But what kind of animals?”

“Cows and pigs mostly, and sheep.”

“Cows!” the boy cried. “You mean like Daisy and Snowdrop and Lily?”

“Exactly, my dear.”

“But how do they eat them, Aunt Glosspan?”

“They cut them up into bits and they cook the bits. They like it best when it’s all red and bloody and sticking to the bones. They love to eat lumps of cow’s flesh with the blood oozing out of it.”

“Pigs too?”

“They adore pigs.”

“Lumps of bloody pig’s meat,” the boy said. “Imagine that. What else do they eat, Aunt Glosspafl?”

“Chickens.”

“Chickens!”

“Millions of them.”

“Feathers and all?”

“No, dear, not the feathers. Now run along outside and get Aunt Glosspan a bunch of chives, will you, my darling.”

Shortly after that, the lessons began. They covered five subjects, reading, writing, geography, arithmetic, and cooking, but the latter was by far the most popular with both teacher and pupil. In fact, it very soon became apparent that young Lexington possessed a truly remarkable talent in this direction. He was a born cook. He was dextrous and quick. He could handle his pans like a juggler. He could slice a single potato in twenty paper-thin slivers in less time than it took his aunt to peel it. His palate was exquisitely sensitive, and he could taste a pot of strong onion soup and immediately detect the presence of a single tiny leaf of sage. In so Young a boy, all this was a bit bewildering to Aunt Glosspan, and to tell the truth she didn’t quite know what to make of it. But she was proud as proud as could be, all -a. the same, and predicted a brilliant future for the child.

“What a mercy it is,” she said, “that I have such a wonderful little fellow to look after me in my dotage.” And a couple of years later, she retired from the kitchen for good, leaving Lexington in sole charge of all household cooking. The boy was now ten years old, and Aunt Glosspan was nearly eighty.

With the kitchen to himself, Lexington straight away began experimenting with dishes of his own invention. The old favourites no longer interested him. He had a violent

urge to create. There were hundreds of fresh ideas in his head. “I will begin,” he said, “by devising a chestnut souffle.” He made it and served it up for supper that very night. It was terrific. “You are a genius!” Aunt Glosspan cried, leaping up from her chair and kissing him on both cheeks, “You will make history!”

From then on, hardly a day went by without some new delectable creation being set upon the table. There was Brazilnut soup, hominy cutlets, vegetable ragout, dandelion omelette, creamcheese fritters, stuffed-cabbage surprise, stewed foggage, shallots a la bonne femme, beetroot mousse piquant, prunes Stroganoff, Dutch rarebit, turnips on horseback, flaming spruceneedle tans, and many many other beautiful compositions. Never before in her life, Aunt Glosspan declared, had she tasted such food as this; and in the mornings, long before lunch was due, she would go out on to the porch and sit there in her rocking-chair, speculating about the coming meal, licking her chops, sniffing the aromas that came wafting out trough the kitchen window.

“What’s that you’re making in there today, boy?” she would call out.

“Try to guess, Aunt Glosspan.”

“Smells like a bit of salsify fritters to me,” she would say, sniffing vigorously.

Then out he would come, this ten-year-old child, a little grin of triumph on his face, and in his hands a big steaming pot of the most heavenly stew made entirely of parsnips and lovage.

“You know what you ought to do,” his aunt said to him, gobbling the stew. “You ought to set yourself down this very minute with paper and pencil and write a cooking-book.”

He looked at her across the table, chewing his parsnips slowly.

“Why not?” she cried. “I’ve taught you how to write and I’ve taught you how to cook and flow all you’ve got to do is put the two things together. You write a cooking-book, my darling, and it’ll make you famous the whole world over. “All right,” he said. “I will.”

And that very day, Lexington began writing the first page of that monumental work which was to. occupy him for the rest of his life. He called it Eat Good and Healthy.

Seven years later, by the time he was seventeen, he had recorded over nine thousand different recipes, all of them original, all of them delicious.

But now, suddenly, his labours were interrupted by the tragic death of Aunt Glosspan. She was afflicted in the night by a violent seizure, and Lexington, who had rushed into her bedroom to see what all the noise was about, found her lying on her bed yelling

and cussing and twisting herself into all manner of complicated knots. Indeed, she was a terrible sight to behold, and the agitated youth danced around her in his pyjamas, wringing his hands, and wondering what on earth he should do. Finally in an effort to cool her down, he fetched a bucket of water from the pond in the cow field and tipped it over her head, but this only intensified the paroxysms, and the old lady expired within the hour.

“This is really too bad,” the poor boy said, pinching her several times to make sure that she was dead. “And how sudden! How quick and sudden! Why only a few hours ago she seemed in the very best of spirits. She even took three large helpings of my most recent creation, devilled mushroomburgers, and told me how succulent it was.”

After weeping bitterly for several minutes, for he had loved his aunt very much, he pulled himself together and carried her outside and buried her behind the cowshed.

The next day, while tidying up her belongings, he came across an envelope that was addressed to him in Aunt Glosspan’s handwriting. He opened it and drew out two fifty-dollar bills and a letter.

Darling boy [the letter said], I know that you have never yet been down the mountain since you were thirteen days old, but as soon as I die you must put on a pair of shoes and a clean shirt and walk down to the village and find a doctor. Ask the doctor to give you a death certificate to prove that I am dead. Then take this certificate to my lawyer, a man called Mr Samuel Zuckermann, who lives in New York City and who has a copy of my will. Mr Zuckermann will arrange everything. The cash in this envelope is to pay the doctor for the certificate and to cover the cost of your journey to New York. Mr Zuckermann will give you more money when you get there, and it is my earnest wish that you use it to further your researches into culinary and vegetarian matters, and that you continue to work upon that great book of yours until you are satisfied that it is complete in every way. Your loving aunt-Glosspan.

Lexington, who had always done everything his aunt told him, pocketed the money, put on a pair of shoes and a clean shin, and went down the mountain to the village where the doctor lived.

“Old Glosspan?” the doctor said. “My God, is she dead?”

“Certainly she’s dead,” the youth answered. “If you will come back home with me now I’ll dig her up and you can see for yourself.”

“How deep did you bury her?” the doctor asked.

“Six or seven feet down, I should think.”

“And how long ago?”

“Oh, about eight hours.”

“Then she’s dead,” the doctor announced. “Here’s the certificate.”

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Our hero now sets out for the City of New York to find Mr Samuel Zuckermann. He travelled on foot, and he slept under hedges, and he lived on berries and wild herbs, and it took him sixteen days to reach the metropolis.

“What a fabulous place this is!” he cried as he stood at the corner of Fifty-seventh Street and Fifth Avenue, staring around him. “There are no cows or chickens anywhere, and none of the women looks in the least like Aunt Glosspan.”

As for Mr Samuel Zuckermann, he looked like nothing that Lexington had ever seen before.

He was a small spongy man with livid jowls and a huge magenta nose, and when he smiled, bits of gold flashed at you marvellously from lots of different places inside his mouth. In his luxurious office, he shook Lexington warmly by the hand and congratulated him upon his aunt’s death.

“I suppose you knew that your dearly beloved guardian was a woman of considerable wealth?” he said.

“You mean the cows and the chickens?”

“I mean half a million bucks,” Mr Zuckermann said.

“How much?”

“Half a million dollars, my boy. And she’s left it all to you.” Mr Zuckermann leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands over his spongy paunch. At the same time, he began secretly working his right forefinger in through his waistcoat and under his shirt so as to scratch the skin around the circumference of his navel-a favourite exercise of his, and one that gave him a peculiar pleasure. “Of course, I shall have to deduct fifty per cent for my services,” he said, “But that still leaves you with two hundred and fifty grand.”

“I am rich!” Lexington cried. “This is wonderful! How soon can I have the money?”

“. ” Well, Mr Zuckermann said, luckily for you, I happen to be on rather cordial terms

with the tax authorities around here, and I am confident that I shall be able to persuade them to waive all death duties and back taxes."

"How kind you are," murmured Lexington.

"I should naturally have to give somebody a small honorarium."

Thatever you say, Mr Zuckermann."

I think a hundred thousand would be sufficient.

Good gracious, isn't that rather excessive?"

Never undertip a tax inspector or a 265 policeman," Mr Zuckermann said. "Remember that."

"But how much does it leave for me?" the youth asked meekly.

"One hundred and fifty thousand. But then you've got the funeral expenses to pay out of that."

"Funeral expenses?"

"You've got to pay for the funeral parlour. Surely you know that?"

"But I buried her myself, Mr Zuckermann, behind the cowshed."

"I don't doubt it," the lawyer said. "So what?"

"I never used a funeral parlour."

"Listen," Mr Zuckermann said patiently. "You may not know it, but there is a law in this state which says that no beneficiary under a will may receive a single penny of his inheritance until the funeral parlour has been paid in full."

"You mean that's a law?"

"Certainly, it's a law, and a very good one it is, too. The funeral parlour is one of our great national institutions. It must be protected at all costs.

Mr Zuckermann himself, together with a group of public-spirited doctors, controlled a corporation that owned a chain of nine lavish funeral parlours in the city, not to mention a casket factory in Brooklyn and a postgraduate school for embalmers in Washington Heights. The celebration of death was therefore a deeply religious affair

in Mr Zuckermann's eyes. In fact, the whole business affected him profoundly, almost as profoundly, one might say, as the birth of Christ affected the shopkeeper.

"You had no right to go out and bury your aunt like that," he said. "None at all."

"I'm very sorry, Mr Zuckermann."

"Why, it's downright subversive."

"I'll do whatever you say, Mr Zuckermann. All I want to know is how much I'm going to get in the end, when everything's paid."

There was a pause. Mr Zuckermann sighed and frowned and continued secretly to run the tip of his finger around the rim of his navel.

"Shall we say fifteen thousand?" he suggested, flashing a big gold smile. "That's a nice round figure."

"Can I take it with me this afternoon?"

"I don't see why not."

So Mr Zuckermaim summoned his chief cashier and told him to give Lexington fifteen thousand dollars out of the petty cash, and to obtain a receipt. The youth, who by this time was delighted to be getting anything at all, accepted the money gratefully and stowed it away in his knapsack. Then he shook Mr Zuckermann warmly by the hand, thanked him for all his help, and went out of the office.

"The whole world is before me!" our hero cried as he emerged into the street. "I now have fifteen thousand dollars to see me through until my book is published. And after that, of course, I shall have a great deal more." He stood on use pavement, wondering which way to go. He turned left and began strolling slowly down the street, staring at the sights of the city.

"What a revolting smell," he said, sniffing the air. "I can't stand this." His delicate olfactory nerves, tuned to receive only the most delicious kitchen aromas, were being tortured by the stench of the diesel-oil fumes pouring out of the backs of buses.

"I must get out of this place before my nose is ruined altogether," he said. "But first, I've simply got to have something to eat. I'm starving." The poor boy had had nothing but berries and wild herbs for the past two weeks, and now his stomach was yearning for solid food. I'd like a nice hominy cutlet, he told himself. Or maybe a few juicy salsify fritters.

He crossed the street and entered a small restaurant. The place was hot inside, and dark and silent. There was a strong smell of cookingfat and cabbage water. The only other customer was a man with a brown hat on his head, crouching intently over his food, who did not look up as Lexington came in.

Our hero seated himself at a corner table and hung his knapsack on the back of his chair. This he told himself, is going to be most interesting. In all my seventeen years I have tasted only the cooking of two people, Aunt Glosspan and myself-unless one counts Nurse McPottle, who must have heated my bottle a few times when I was an infant. But I am now about to sample the art of a new chef altogether, and perhaps, if I am lucky, I may pick up a couple of useful ideas for my book.

A waiter approached out of the shadows at the back, and stood beside the table.

“How do you do,” Lexington said. “I should like a large hominy cutlet please. Do it twentyfive seconds each side, in a very hot skillet with sour cream, and sprinkle a pinch of lovage on it before serving-unless of course your chef knows a more original method, in which case I should be delighted to try it.”

The waiter laid his head over to one side and looked carefully at his customer. “You want the roast pork and cabbage?” he asked. “That’s all we got left.”

“Roast what and cabbage?”

The waiter took a soiled handkerchief from his trouser pocket and shook it open with a violent flourish, as though he were cracking a whip. Then he blew his nose loud and wet.

“You want it or don’t you?” he said, wiping his nostrils.

“I haven’t the foggiest idea what it is,” Lexington replied, “but I should love to try it. You see, I am writing a cooking-book and…”

“One pork and cabbage!” the waiter shouted, and somewhere in the back of the restaurant, far away in the darkness, a voice answered him.

The waiter disappeared. Lexington reached into his knapsack for his personal knife and fork. These were a present from Aunt Glosspan, given him when he was six years old, made of solid silver, and he had never eaten with any other instruments since. While waiting for the food to arrive, he polished them lovingly with a Piece of soft muslin.

Soon the waiter returned carrying a plate on which there lay a thick greyish-white slab of something hot. Lexington leaned forward anxiously to smell it as it was put down

before him. His nostrils were wide open to receive the scent, quivering and sniffing.

“But this is absolute heaven!” he exclaimed. “What an aroma! It’s tremendous!”

The waiter stepped back a pace, watching his customer carefully.

“Never in my life have I smelled anything as rich and wonderful as this!” our hero cried, seizing his knife and fork. “What on earth is it made of?”

The man in the brown hat looked around and stared, then returned to his eating. The waiter was backing away towards the kitchen.

Lexington cut off a small piece of the meat, impaled it on his silver fork, and carried it up to his nose so as to smell it again. Then he popped it into his mouth and began to chew it slowly, his eyes half closed, his body tense.

“This is fantastic!” he cried. “It is a brand-new flavour! Oh, Glosspan, my beloved Aunt, how I wish you were with me now so you could taste this remarkable dish! Waiter! Come here at once! I want you!”

The astonished waiter was now watching from the other end of the room, and he seemed reluctant to move any closer.

“If you will come and talk to me I will give you a present,” Lexington said, waving a hundreddollar-bill. “Please come over here and talk to me.”

The waiter sidled cautiously back to the table, snatched away the money, and held it up to his face, peering at it from all angles. Then he slipped it quickly into his pocket.

“What can I do for you, my friend?” he asked.

“Look,” Lexington said. “If you will tell me what this delicious dish is made of, and exactly how it is prepared, I will give you another hundred.”

“I already told you,” the man said. “It’s pork.”

“And exactly what is pork?”

“You never had roast pork before?” the waiter asked, staring.

“For heaven’s sake, man, tell me what it is and stop keeping me in suspense like this.”

“It’s pig,” the waiter said. “You just bung it in the oven.”

“Pig!”

“All pork is pig. Didn’t you know that?”

“You mean this is pig’s meat?”

“I guarantee it.”

“But…but…that’s impossible,” the youth stammered. “Aunt Glosspan, who knew more about food than anyone else in the world, said that meat of any kind was disgusting, revolting, horrible, foul, nauseating, and beastly. And yet this piece that I have here on my plate is without doubt the most delicious thing that I have ever tasted. Now how on earth do you explain that? Aunt Glosspan certainly Wouldn’t have told me it was revolting if it Wasn’t”

“Maybe your aunt didn’t know how to cook it,” the waiter said.

“Is that possible?”

“You’re damned right it is. Especially with pork. Pork has to be very well done or you can’t eat it.”

” Eureka!” Lexington cried. “I’ll bet that’s exactly what happened! She did it wrong!” He handed the man another hundred-dollar bill. “Lead me to the kitchen,” he said. “Introduce me to the genius who prepared this meat.”

Lexington was at once taken to the kitchen, and there he met the cook who was an elderly man with a rash on one side of his neck.

“This will cost you another hundred,” the waiter said.

Lexington was only too glad to oblige, but this time he gave the money to the cook. “Now listen to me,” he said. “I have to admit that I am really rather confused by what the waiter has just been telling me. Are you quite sure that the delectable dish which I have just been eating was prepared from pig’s flesh?”

The cook raised his right hand and began scratching the rash on his neck.

“Well,” he said, looking at the waiter and giving him a sly wink, “all I can tell you is that I think it was pig’s meat.”

“You mean you’re not sure?”

“One can never be sure.”

“Then what else could it have been?”

“Well,” the cook said, speaking very slowly and still staring at the waiter. “There’s just 9 chance, you see, that it might have been a piece of human stuff”

“You mean a man?”

“Yes.”

“Good heavens.”

“Or a woman. It could have been either. They both taste the same.”

“Well-now you really do surprise me,” the youth declared.

“One lives and learns.”

“Indeed one does.”

“As a matter of fact, we’ve been getting an awful lot of it just lately from the butcher’s in place of pork,” the cook declared.

“Have you really?”

“The trouble is, it’s almost impossible to tell which is which. They’re both very good.”

“The piece I had just now was simply superb.”

“I’m glad you liked it,” the cook said. “But to be quite honest, I think that it was a bit of pig. In fact, I’m almost sure it was.”

“You are?”

“Yes, I am.”

“In that case, we shall have to assume that you are right,” Lexington said. “So now will you please tell me-and here is another hundred dollars for your trouble-will you please tell me precisely how you prepared it?”

The cook, after pocketing the money, launched Upon a colourful description of how to roast a loin of pork, while the youth, not wanting to miss a single word of so great a recipe, sat down at the kitchen table and recorded every detail in his notebook.

“Is that all?” he asked when the cook had finished.

“That’s all.”

“But there must be more to it than that, surely?”

“You got to get a good piece of meat to start off with,” the cook said. “That’s half the battle. It’s got to be a good hog and it’s got to be butchered right, otherwise it’ll turn out lousy whichever way you cook it.”

“Show me how,” Lexington said. “Butcher me one now so I can learn.”

“We don’t butcher pigs in the kitchen,” the cook said. “That lot you just ate came from a packinghouse over in the Bronx.”

“Then give me the address!”

The cook gave him the address, and our hero, after thanking them both many times for all their kindnesses, rushed outside and leapt into a taxi and headed for the Bronx.

The packing house was a big four-storey brick building, and the air around it smelled sweet and heavy, like musk. At the main entrance gates, there was a large notice which said VISITORS WELCOME AT ANY TIME, and thus encouraged, Lexington walked through the gates and entered a cobbled yard which surrounded the building itself. He then followed a series of signposts (THIS WAY FOR THE GUIDED TOURS), and c2me eventually to a small corrugated-iron shed set well apart from the main building (VISITORS’ wA1T1N00M). After knocking politely on the door, he went in.

There were six other people ahead of him j the waiting-room. There was a fat mother with her two little boys aged about nine and eleven. There was a bright-eyed young couple who looked as though they might be on their honeymoon. And there was a pale woman with long white gloves, who sat very upright, looking straight ahead, with her hands folded on her lap. Nobody spoke. Lexington wondered whether they were all writing cooking-books like himself, but when he put this question to them aloud, he got no answer. The grown-ups merely smiled mysteriously to themselves and shook their heads, and the two children stared at him as though they were seeing a lunatic.

Soon, the door opened and a man with a merry pink face popped his head into the room and said, “Next, please.” The mother and the two boys got up and went out.

About ten minutes later, the same man returned “Next, please,” he said again, and the honeymoon couple jumped up and followed him outside.

Two new visitors came in and sat down a middle-aged husband and a middle-aged

wife, the wife carrying a wicker shopping-basket containing groceries.

“Next, please,” said the guide, and the woman With the long white gloves got up and left.

Several more people came in and took their Places on the stiff-backed wooden chairs.

Soon the guide returned for the fourth time, and now it was Lexington ‘s turn to go outside. “Follow me, please,” the guide said, leading the youth across the yard towards the main building.

“How exciting this is!” Lexington cried, hopping from one foot to the other. “I only wish my dear Aunt Glosspan could be with me now to see what I am going to see.”

“I myself only do the preliminaries,” the guide said. “Then I shall hand you over to someone else.”

“Anything you say,” cried the ecstatic youth.

First they visited a large penned-in area at the back of the building where several hundred pigs were wandering around. “Here’s where they start,” the guide said. “And over there’s where they go in.”

“Where?”

“Right there.” The guide pointed to a long wooden shed that stood against the outside wall of the factory. “We call it the shackling-pen. This way, please.”

Three men wearing long rubber boots were driving a dozen pigs into the shackling-pen just as Lexington and the guide approached, so they all went in together.

“Now,” the guide said, “watch how they shackle them.”

Inside, the shed was simply a bare wooden room with no roof, and there was a steel cable with hooks on it that kept moving slowly along the length of one wall, parallel with the ground, about three feet up. When it reached the end of the shed, this cable suddenly changed direction and climbed vertically upward through the open roof towards the top floor of the main building.

The twelve pigs were huddled together at the far end of the pen, standing quietly, looking apprehensive. One of the men in rubber boots pulled a length of metal chain down from the wall and advanced upon the nearest animal, approaching it from the rear. Then he bent down and quickly looped one end of the chain around one of the animal’s hind legs. The other end he attached to a hook on the moving cable as it went

by. The cable kept moving. The chain tightened. The pig's leg was pulled up and back, and then the pig itself began to be dragged backwards. But it didn't fall down. It was rather a nimble pig, and somehow it managed to keep its balance on three legs, hopping from foot to foot and struggling against the pull of the chain, but going back and back all the time until at the end of the pen where the cable changed direction and went vertically upward, the creature was suddenly jerked off its feet and borne aloft. Shrill protests filled the air.

"Truly a fascinating process," Lexington said.

But what was the funny cracking noise it made as it went up?"

"Probably the leg," the guide answered.

Either that or the pelvis."

"But doesn't that matter?"

"Why should it matter?" the guide asked.

You don't eat the bones."

The rubber-booted men were busy shackling up the rest of the pigs, and one after another they were hooked to the moving cable and hoisted up through the roof, protesting loudly as they went.

"There's a good deal more to this recipe than just picking herbs," Lexington said. "Aunt Glosspan would never have made it."

At this point, while Lexington was gazing skyward at the last pig to go up, a man in rubber boots approached him quietly from behind and looped one end of a chain around the youth's own ankle, hooking the other end to the moving belt. The next moment, before he had time to realize what was happening, our hero was jerked off his feet and dragged backwards along the concrete floor of the shackling-pen.

"Stop!" he cried. "Hold everything! My leg is caught!"

But nobody seemed to hear him, and five seconds later, the unhappy young man was jerked off the floor and hoisted vertically upward through the open roof of the pen, dangling upside down by one ankle, and wriggling like a fish.

"Help!" he shouted. "Help! There's been a frightful mistake! Stop the engines! Let me down!"

The guide removed a cigar from his mouth and looked up serenely at the rapidly ascending youth, but he said nothing. The men in rubber boots were already on their way out to collect the next batch of pigs.

“Oh, save me!” our hero cried. “Let me down! Please let me down!” But he was now approaching the top floor of the building where the moving belt curled like a snake and entered a large hole in the wall, a kind of doorway without door; and there, on the threshold, waiting to greet him, clothed in a dark-stained yellow rubber apron, and looking for all the world like Saint Peter at the Gates of Heaven, the sticker stood.

Lexington saw him only from upside down, and very briefly at that, but even so he noticed at once the expression of absolute peace and benevolence on the man’s face, the cheerful twinkle in the eyes, the little wistful smile, the dimples in his cheeks-and all this gave him hope.

“Hi there,” the sticker said, smiling.

“Quick! Save me!” our hero cried.

“With pleasure,” the sticker said, and taking Lexington gently by one ear with his left hand, he raised his right hand and deftly slit open the boy’s jugular vein with a knife.

The belt moved on. Lexington went with it. Everything was still upside down and the blood was pouring out of his throat and getting into his eyes, but he could still see after a fashion, and he had a blurred impression of being in an enormously long-room, and at the far end of the room there was a great smoking cauldron of water, and there were dark figures, half hidden in the steam, dancing around the edge of it, brandishing long poles. The conveyor-belt seemed to be travelling right over the top of the cauldron, and the pigs seemed to be dropping one by one into the boiling water, and one of the pigs seemed to be wearing long white gloves on its front feet.

Suddenly our hero started to feel very sleepy, but it wasn’t until his good strong heart had pumped the last drop of blood from his body that he passed on out of this, the best of all possible worlds, into the next.