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A Pig Named Caesar

A pig isn't exactly known as man's best friend, but what does "exactly" even mean in a town of 20 people?

Not even James knew, and he actually lived there.

Ok, not exactly. His home was just past the Cheeseville limits down the road, where the road curves as it prepares to cross the only bridge between the "Population 20" sign and the lonely bar on the corner that marked the entrance to another town no one knew of.

It was actually just 2.1 miles from the sign to the bar, but those are the kind of details no one cares about, not even a pig. Actually, maybe Caesar did care, and maybe that's why he to James he was more than just a pig.

Caesar truly was more than just a pig. Not only was he a Hampshire of the highest pedigree, but he had a broad black chest and slim line down through his shoulder blades and down his back where a single stripe of white color separated the front from the powerful hind legs that said blueblood even if you couldn't spell it.

"Spell?" That's something you learn in school, but James had never been.

His mother had taught him through fifth grade, but after that, it was just him, textbooks, and the summer he spent practicing talking to the only friend he had, Caesar the pig.

As summer turned to fall, the county fair drew near and with that so did their goodbye. Except neither Caesar nor James talked about it. Instead, James reflected that most folks who win purple ribbons know the judge or have a daddy who won champion back in '88. Except James had neither.

In that sense, James and Caesar were the same. They had fathers, but if they knew who they were they didn't talk about them. I guess that's a given, though, as pigs don't talk, but listen they do and that summer he heard every conversation James prepared

for in case someone enquired of his family.

“Any twins?”

James was quick to say, “No” before they could even finish. And then he answered the follow-up question to save time, “Yes, all the same mom and dad.”

He wanted to say that’s why he appreciated Caesar’s company, because pigs don’t ask those kinds of questions; they just listen, and for a summer, that was all James needed. He told him everything as if he were the friend he was supposed to have and not the four legged animal that Caesar actually was.

Fair time still came though, and Wednesday was show night. James expected to place a distant third to the kids whose families owned hundreds of acres for so long that no one knew if the road came first or the family whose name was printed on the sign.

Except Caesar won that night. Not everything for that would have been enough to prove the existence of God, and no pig is purebred enough to lay claim to that kind of fame. He did well, though, good enough for Reserve Champion Barrow. Which means he took 2nd place among all the male pigs.

A large ribbon was stapled above his pen, and for the final days of the fair, visitors stopped to marvel at the barrel-chested animal that everyone now knew was the “Reserve Champion.”

Sunday was just a few days away, though and even though he was “just” an animal, James felt like he owed Caesar the whole story.

No one has a really good answer on how to say goodbye, much less when it’s just a teenage kid and the animal that had become their only friend. James decided to play it straight as if Caesar had two legs and not four hooves.

On Saturday night, as the fair began to shut down and the only people who remained were the police officers and the dads who needed to finish their pitchers of beer before making amends at church the next morning. Back in the corner, all alone, James opened the pen and sat down in the fresh sawdust and put his arm around Caesar’s neck like he had a thousand times before.

“Well, fellow, tomorrow is goodbye, and I know you are just a pig,

but..." That's when James started to cry.

You aren't supposed to cry for a pig, but James did, and for once he didn't care who saw him.

Caesar weighed 257 pounds, and at Thursday night's auction, he had fetched \$3.25 a lb, so James knew that was approximately enough money to buy cereal for his 13 siblings for maybe the next 2 or even 3 months.

That's really what James was trying to tell Caesar.

"I never meant for us to become friends, but a friend is the one thing I haven't had in a while."

After that, James left the rest unsaid. He wanted to say he had raised a pig for the fair so he could buy groceries for his little siblings who always went hungry, but he didn't want Caesar to feel any more sadness on the last night before he was sent to the butcher.

So instead, James just hugged his friend Caesar the pig and told him the same thing he whispered to his siblings every night, "Someday I am going to be rich, and when I am, we will drink Orange juice every morning."

That's a funny thing to say to a pig, but Caesar wasn't just a pig; he was James's best friend.

For a moment they sat in silence and then James thought better of it and one last time he lifted the Hampshire pig's ear and this time he changed the story, "Someday I am going to get out of this town and I don't know where I'll go, but when I get there I'll tell everyone about the summer I spent with my friend Caesar the pig."