



Cleeve Prior Chroniclers

Victory- Killing the Pig

Ernie was content.

The sultry August sun burned down on the rich dark soil.

Long lines of feathery carrots and sprawling onions, dry in the sun, stretched before him.

Foot high Brussel sprouts were giving birth to dozens of little knobs up the stems.

Peacocks and red admirals flitted from one colour to another, up the long rows of static.

Ernie, a quiet man of few words, grew in stature as an embodiment of his secret aesthetic nature. They added to his great sense of satisfaction, and besides, they sold very well.

“Those Sprouts look well Ernie”

No good morning, no nice morning from Eli, as he settled himself comfortably alongside, leaning over the gate was a Sunday morning routine. Ring the church Bells, leave before the service, walk the apple orchard, check the ripeness of the vics and admire the cash crops almost ready for harvest.

“Those sprouts be about ready all Saints Day, Pig killing time”

The two enjoyed a comfortable silence, Eli knew Ernie to be short of words, genial, quiet. He waited for Ernie’s next well thought out comment

Back in the spring they had watched the ten week old piglets carefully- made their choice, haggled and bargained with the farmer, caught a little pig by the hind leg to be carried in a sack over the shoulder and home.

Housed in ramshackled sties at the bottom of the cottage gardens the weaners were thriving. Eli was new to pig keeping but in Ernie he had a source of advice and expertise second to none.



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Pig keeping was essential to the family to see them through the winter months, putting meat on the table.

But Ernie's stock phrase when talking of pigs was

"It's not as simple as it seems"

The little pigs must grow naturally until it was mature in size, it must eat from a small sized trough, too deep a trough would result in a hunch on its back.

No more food must be given than could be eaten straight away, in one sitting so to speak. It must be fed three times a day; its bed of straw shaken daily and its sty kept scrupulously clean.

It must be told all the family news, scratched between the ears and must sleep for long periods of time.

Eli, a first time pig keeper began to relate the virtues and merits of his pig. Being an old soldier Eli had named his weaner 'Victory'. Victory lived like a pig in clover.

"Now he's mature I'm giving him quantity & quality food to finish him off"

"I'll put his name down on the list I'm sending to the pig killer" commented Ernie

"I think you had better run me through pig killing day, it being my first time"

Ernie lifted his cap, mopped his brow, there was a marked change in Ernie's demeanour, his voice was higher, his eyes lively as he began to tell his friend how the transfer of Victory from his ramshackled sty to the walls of his kitchen, would take place.

"Now then, it will take six or seven of us,. We'll meet at the sty when it's Victory's turn"

Ernie was gesticulating to emphasize his points



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“We’ll hope for a nice frosty morning, if it’s wet it will be harder to keep hold of him. Victory is a big pig from what you say, Eli, quantity & quality produces a big ‘un, it will take all our strength to hold him down.”

Look Eli, you know he will shriek, it’ll be piercing, heart rendering, like he’s crying, before the pig killer can stick him. You must be ready to catch the blood when it spurts, it makes good black pudding, but makes a bit of a mess.”

Eli listened without interruption. He had been to pig killings for pig killing day was a great event, but he had always been nothing more than helper, now he was emotionally involved.

Ernie was describing with relish the demise of a family friend, almost a pet. He was beginning to feel like a traitor, a family friend who knew all the family’s ultimate secrets.

“Next” Ernie continued “We’ll lie him on a layer of straw, you’ll scatter some on his back, tuck some between his legs, he might ‘kick the bucket’ a bit at this stage but it’s only a death spasm”

Eli remembered the smell from the burnings, a strange smell of singed hair and pictured the sheets of steam rising from the pig when the washing began.

“After a couple of firings you’ll need a strong broom to brush away the smut, the straw & the burnt bristles” Ernie continued.

Eli felt himself sweating under the warm August sun, he contemplated the tragic end of a family friend who had enjoyed the bliss of eating & sleeping, had grown fast and fat and had greeted with joy every morning at feeding time, squealing with anticipating.

Every morning over the past two months he walked down the garden path to see Victory’s snout and anxious eyes looking over the sty door. Now he was having to listen to Ernie describe what would happen next.



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“You will have to borrow a pig ladder so we can carry him up the garden and put him outside your wash house. The butcher will be able to work on him, scrape of his skin from head to tail. The young lads will be milling around, waiting for him to pull the nails from his toes to gnaw & suck.

Next the butcher will make a long cut and leave it to you to sort out Victories inards, while he has his breakfast-entrails, liver, lights, heart & tongue. My God Eli you’ll eat well for the next few days, Chitterlings, faggots, wonderful”

Eli could not believe Ernie was still referring to Victory by name, it was most upsetting.

“When the butcher has finished his breakfast, you will need to get Victory on the pig spike and into the wash house and when he is nice and cold the butcher can joint him”

Ernie spared no detail

“The Butcher will cut off his head, cut it I half, take out his eyes and you will need a saucer for his brains.”

“Look at the time Ernie- the missus will be waiting for these carrots”

Eli set off home, but he had lost his appetite about the time of Victory’s second burning, His missus wouldn’t understand for Eli had spent Friday afternoon wringing the neck, plucking & drawing a fine young spring cockerel named Winston, for Sunday dinner.

Author unknown