

Percy has a Plan

I'm a pig.

Not in my manners, as good as you'd get in someone without an opposable thumb whose utensil of choice is a trough. No, I'm a real pig, a Gloucester Old Spot to be precise. I was a charity worker before my accident, and I'd like to think a decent soul, which makes all this karma stuff seem a mite nonsensical.

You're right.

I'm talking about reincarnation.

I was never a believer, so maybe that incurred a penalty of a few cosmic points. One minute I'm hearing a squeal of brakes while crossing the street, the next thing I know I'm hovering over a hospital bed looking down at a body pierced by a multitude of tubes, ogled by a bunch of gloomy medical staff. Then it went a bit hazy until I found myself fighting six other piglets for my new mother's milk.

It took a while to accept my pigness. At first, I thought it was a dream, then I considered the possibility that I'd been sewn into an animal suit as a practical joke. When the farmer finally appeared, I tried to explain my predicament, but all that came out were a series of oinks and grunts. The other pigs looked at me as if I was deranged. I now realise that they understood some of what I'd said, in much the same way as I'd interpret a physics professor explaining string theory.

Pigs are supposed to be intelligent animals, but I found my comrades dull and boring. I picked up the language almost immediately, but their topics were limited to food, sleeping arrangements and mating. I made every effort to warn them about their inevitable fate—all that achieved was to make me an outcast.

I resolved to escape. This proved easier than expected. I was four months into my new life when a group of my elders were chosen to take the long road to the supermarket shelf. The rest of us were given extra delicious swill as a diversion. I timed my run to perfection, squeezing through the gate while sending a farmhand spinning into the air. The woods beyond offered sanctuary and acorns. I trotted deep into the shelter of the trees.

The barks of dogs alerted me to the inevitable pursuit. The scent of a pig, even one as fastidious as me, is no challenge to a competent dog. However, a pig who doubles back on his tracks and splashes through streams can easily evade the average canine chase.

I became a creature of the forest. For the first time in my lives I tasted truffles, a luxury even to a pig, given that the alternative was leaves and roots. I spent my days craving the stimulating companionship of humanity, my nightly visions focussing on the soft rumps of young sows.

My hopes rose when I saw the cottage. Set in a clearing, smoke drifting upwards from its single chimney. Tinkling chimes and rainbow-coloured windmills spoke of New Age, a probability enforced by the strong smell of cannabis detected by my sensitive porcine snout. These looked like the sort of people who might accept an intelligent pig. Caution made me wait in the shadow of the trees until I could observe the family. Two adults, two children, all with braided hair, the man bearded and necklaced. Their multi-coloured clothing confirmed my initial opinion.

Satisfied, I waited until mid-day when they went indoors, then trotted out and scraped the word “HELP” in the bare earth outside the front door. I then emitted a series of loud oinks.

The family emerged, and their faces registered a panoply of emotions: fear changed to shock and then amazement. Satisfied, I scraped “ME” at the end of my previous effort. They reacted as I hoped. I was feted with apples, potatoes, and cooked rice. A small outbuilding was cleared for my accommodation. Perhaps my mistake was wallowing in these luxuries rather than attempting to expand my communication.

I'd decided that I would relax until the next day before attempting to write a more complicated message explaining my predicament. When the sun rose the following morning, I was ready. I wanted to share the moment with my hosts.

I did not expect a van marked "Stefano's Circus" to roll up, and four burly hands to force me into the back with a combination of rope and pointed sticks. A dark and bumpy ride ended when I was tethered in a tent and prodded by a large, moustached man with an Italian accent.

Any hope was soon extinguished, even though my immediate future lay as a performer rather than pastrami. A brush was strapped to my right front trotter. I faced a pot of red paint and a white board lying on the ground. For a moment, I intended to write a message to the world until the brute appointed my trainer forced my forelimb to execute the shape of the letter "P". He beat me if I attempted any other letter. Through this sustained torture I realised he was trying to make me write my ring name: "Percy the Pig".

There was no escape. The gold lead that my trainer held in the ring contained a wire. Any attempt to deviate from the script was rewarded with several hundred volts scorching my neck. Life became so unbearable I longed for the release of the abattoir. Alas, with the alleged exception of the Gadarene Swine, suicide is not an easy option for a pig.

I suffered this indignity for six months, travelling from unknown town to unknown town in a dirty, smelly, cramped van, fed on leftovers and rotten vegetables, confined in my own filth. Imagine my surprise and relief when a pleasant young lady led me to a clean truck, where I enjoyed a comfortable ride, culminating in a spotlessly clean pen. Best of all, I read a sign proclaiming that my new home was part of a university.

In my past life, I'd have described my emotion as "happy as a pig in shit". Now I was a pig ecstatic after being released from faeces. I'd climbed Maslow's hierarchy of needs in a single bound.

Academics swarmed round me. I accepted the electrodes taped to my head while I thought of strategies to communicate with my new admirers. If only they would let me use my paintbrush!

As the days dragged on, my frustrations increased, tempered by growing doubts. Whose were the brains swimming in formaldehyde I could see in an adjoining room? Were those high-pitched noises fellow animals in distress?

My captors, as I now saw them, talked incessantly to each other about unusual gamma activity and increased levels of hi-beta, concepts which I assumed were related to brainwaves. My unconcern over their babbling evaporated at the first use of the word “dissection”.

It was clear they had a theory, and their research was restricted to proving it true. The fools were unaware they stood on the edge of one of the most important discoveries in human existence. My only hope lay in breaking through the walls of their tunnel vision.

I thought I had a lucky break. A lab assistant dropped a pencil on the floor. Even though we pigs are omnivorous, she was amazed to see me apparently consume a writing implement. Left alone in my pen, I manipulated my find so I could write using my mouth. I scribbled, “I have been reincarnated. I was..” before my pencil snapped.

I had been observed.

Had it been a professor, a student, or any open-minded resident of the university, humanity would have now emerged from the fog of superstition to a new certainty about mortality. Alas, the watcher was a deeply religious security guard who rushed off to tell his spiritual advisor of my ability.

A strong faith is impervious to truth and logic, and those whose *raison d'être* is the promise of everlasting glory after death could not accept my situation. It is a small leap to assume a dumb creature trained to write “Percy the Pig” could also be taught to scribble a message about reincarnation, if indeed my attempt was not merely an elaborate student hoax.

Subtle pressure was no doubt brought to bear, and in the name of animal rights I was “liberated” to spend my days alone in a pen guarded by monks. I had no illusions about what might happen if I tried again to explain my identity. When I fell ill, no vet came to cure me. Had I not recovered in time, the slaughterhouse would have accelerated my demise.

I imagined what would happen if I died and found myself reborn as a human. Would I remember my last life as a man? Or would my porcine existence be all I recalled? Most likely, my previous incarnations would be forgotten, and I would again lapse into the normal state of humanity, clinging to my beliefs and conviction, disregarding anything that suggests otherwise, ignoring anyone whose words are hard to understand.

I am a social animal. This loneliness was intolerable, life itself unbearable. I knew there could only be one way out.

For two days I have refused to eat. Today my guards found me lying on my side, my faint cries barely audible, trotters twitching. They did nothing but watch as my movements grew slower until now I lay still and silent, fluttering eyes the only sign of activity.

Hunger has weakened me, but I still have the strength to execute my plan. My eyes open for a brief second, and I see the butcher’s van appear. Any second now, they’ll open the gate to let him in.

When they do, I’ll run.

Beyond the gate is a forest, and on the faint breeze I smell the unmistakable scent of a piggery. If I cannot lead humanity into a new era of consciousness, then I shall surely liberate, then command, my fellow swine.

After all, some animals are more equal than others.

As you may soon find out.