**Francis’ Triumph:**

“Congratulations on passing the bill, Minister,” said a random politician whom Francis did not know, raising his glass of pale green wine.

 Francis sat in the middle of a long table, which had dozens of ornate chairs on both sides. It was covered in a creamy white tablecloth, for which Francis was grateful. No matter how often he tried, he could not look dignified while sitting down. He had no knees, and even if he had knees, his hind legs would be too short to reach the floor. His hind legs stuck straight forward in the air, a foot above the floor.

Francis picked up his own glass, but he only pretended to sip. He liked alcohol, but he couldn’t risk getting even a little drunk. If anyone else slurred their words, the guests would assume they were fashionably tipsy. If he slurred his words, they’d assume that he was lying about his ability to speak English and doubt the language capabilities of sentient Animals.

 Minister Elliot preened. “I only did what was right. Imagine, a sentient Animal like Francis over here--” the Minister reached out as if to grasp Francis’ trotter, but he withdrew his hand before Francis could take it. “-- were served as a Sunday roast! What a waste of brains!”

 Francis forced himself to smile in a benign way. He’d learned that his teeth had the unintentional effect of frightening humans, so he’d learn to pull the sides off his lips up, shielding his teeth. “I deeply appreciate support for the cause,” he said, “and I know sentient Animals around our country would all vote for you, as soon as they obtain voting rights.”

 Chortling, Minister Elliot waved aside the compliment. “Well, one would hope that your kind wouldn’t be so ungrateful as to forget who saved them from the butcher’s block.”

 Francis glanced around the table. Most of the two dozen guests present were supporters of Minister Elliot’s bill, and they looked mostly indifferent. Except Minister Gregson, who’d chosen to inflict his scowling presence on this otherwise benign banquet.

 “This law wouldn’t affect animals-- I mean, non-sentient animals, would it?” inquired a sleek-looking businesswoman, patting her luxurious scarf. Five dead foxes looped around her neck and shoulders. Their plastic eyes stared at Francis. “As you well know, our company prides itself on having the best hand-stretched leather. None of this cheap synthetic, *vegan* leather you see on knockoff sites. Might as well be plastic wrap.” As she spoke, the paws of the foxes bounced on her chest, as if the ghostly foxes were plaintively shaking their paws.

 “Of course not,” Minister Elliot said soothingly. “In fact, the law is very clear that non-sentient animals will carry on as before. I assure you that your business, as well as all other businesses-- agriculture, culinary, and scientific research-- will be unaffected by this bill.”

 Francis looked down at his own plate. He didn’t really want to think of the animals who would be unaffected by the bill. He might have been on the menu if he weren’t able to converse.

Speaking of the menu. Francis gripped the fork and knife carefully. His trotters weren’t designed to grip human utensils, which were so small and required a certain dexterity of the wrist which he lacked. He found it frustrating how almost every human utensil-- buttons, chopsticks, pens, keyboards-- assumed that the user had opposable thumbs. He prodded at what the menu called a “chopped salad with iceberg, roasted peppers, lemon, and red wine vinaigrette.” He speared a limp green leaf with his fork and brought it to his mouth, chewing delicately.

“I’ve told you before and I’ll say it again,” said Minister Gregson. Ah. Francis had been wondering why Minister Gregson had been so quiet. “Elliot, you’re making a terrible mistake. This sets a dangerous precedent. What’s to stop some deluded activists from claiming that *all* ordinary animals are sentient? If all animals count, why, they’d far outnumber us humans.”

“I assure you, Minister Gregson,” Minister Elliot said, quite stiffly. “An Animal must *prove* that he is sentient to qualify for this bill. Ability to think, reason, to speak, the whole shebang. The kind of wholesale fraud you are imagining would be quite impossible.”

“Pshaw,” said Minister Gregson, and he stabbed the only remaining pepper on his plate as if it had done him a personal wrong. Then: “How do you know that these so-called sentient Animals don’t feel a greater affinity for their animal friends than for us? Perhaps your piggy little friend would go around advocating for the end of farming operations.”

“If I may,” Francis said. If Minister Gregson imagined he was a piggy revolutionist who’d plant bombs at farms, he was sorely mistaken. “What do I share with non-sentient pigs? Besides my appearance, I mean.” he added hastily. “What elevates humans above common beasts is their ability to think and reason. I am not a human, but my ability, if I do say so myself, surely elevates me above common, non-sentient animals and separates me from ordinary pigs.”

That seemed to shut Greg up. Francis triumphantly chewed his lettuce, as the other guests nodded their heads in an absent-minded way. He relaxed enough to wonder when the waiters would serve the main dish. He’d read up on the menu beforehand, and mushroom risotto was one of his favorite human foods, although it was a bit messy to eat. He would need to be careful. One of the biggest stereotypes associated with pigs was that they were messy eaters.

A troupe of tall humans in waistcoats marched into the hall. They set a large plate, topped with a silver plate cover, before each guest. Francis thanked the waiter quietly, but his smile died when he looked up and saw a strange look in Greg’s eyes. But before he could analyze Greg’s look, each waiter took off the plate covers with a flourish. A finger-thick slice of ham.

Gasps rang throughout the hall, but Francis could barely hear them. He had been born at Farmer Leroy’s pig farm, 20 years ago. His life was limited to the 10x10 foot pen he and dozens of other pigs had been confined to. He’d lived in terror that he’d be taken and killed, although he’d yet to learn why they were killed. He’d heard the squealing of his fellow-- of the pigs, when Farmer Leroy lifted them out of the pens and onto the butcher’s block. He’d long discovered why the pigs had been killed, but he had never seen a pork product in person before.

 “Ham is my favorite,” said Minister Gregson airily. “I requested a change of menu for tonight, I hope you all don’t mind.” He placed a fork into the pink flesh, which oozed a thin film of blood. He began cutting the slab with relish, as if it were Francis’ own flesh.

 Francis looked up at the beautiful crystal chandelier, but he could stil smell the sweet syrup and the disturbingly enticing scent of roasted flesh. Worse, he could almost smell the thick combination of blood and shit, which was all he’d smelled for the first 5 years of his life.

“Really, this is unseemly,” said Minister Elliot, whose sharp words snapped Francis out of his reverie. Francis looked towards his right, where the Minister gestured at one of the waiters to take Francis’ plate away.

Minister Gregson interrupted. “What’s all this fuss for? Didn’t the Pig say that he had nothing in common with ordinary pigs? He’d said normal pigs were fit for sale and consumption.” He grinned as if to say *gotcha*.

“Well, even so,” Minister Elliot said, “it’s not-- it isn’t fit.”

Minister Gregson shrugged, but when he opened his mouth to launch into another tirade--

“Minister Gregson is right,” Francis said. Everyone looked at him with surprise, even Minister Gregson. He forced himself to smile broadly. “I am not an ordinary pig, so why should this bother me?” He picked up his fork.

The rich pink color of the ham was indistinguishable from the color of his own trotter, which hovered indecisively over the plate. The whiteness of the tablecloth and plate only accentuated their similarity in color. Some meat, Francis knew, looked different when cooked. Cows, for example, cows turned a dark brown color when cooked. He didn’t know too much about it; he never perused periodicals about animals if he could help it, he only read a few when researching for Minister Elliot’s campaign. And he’d had to stop once he read how non-sentient cows and pigs and monkeys felt pain and love and grief. But the ham. He couldn’t even pretend that the ham was not derived from a pig. He forced himself to breathe.

“My, doesn’t this look delicious.” Francis used his fork and knife to saw off a portion of ham. The squeaking of the knife on the plate was excruciatingly loud in the completely silent room. Minister Gregson looked appalled.

Francis took a deep breath and held his breath. Perhaps if he could not smell it, it would not be so bad. He placed the ham in his mouth, took two bites, and swallowed immediately. He tried to wash away the taste of the ham by gulping down the wine, never mind his resolution not to get drunk, but it failed. He picked up the small silver pitcher of syrup next to his plate, and he soaked the ham in syrup until the strip of flesh was submerged under brown sweetness. Bite by bite, he finished eating the entire strip of ham.

The hall was still completely silent.

“Now, perhaps it’s time for dessert?” said Francis, as casually as he could.

“S-sure,” said Minister Elliot. He seemed shaken, but he quickly donned a politician's smile. “Er, Gregson, I hope you didn’t change the dessert menu either, I’m very partial to chocolate truffles.”

 When he returned home, Francis rushed to the toilet to vomit. He wretched and wretched but he could feel the ham lodged in his throat. He rinsed off his snout in the sink. He gargled with some Listerine.

 He passed his rooms-- his respectable rooms which he’d filled with books and chairs he could not sit in, the props he used to make himself think he was a human. He’d go down to the basement. It had been completely empty when he’d moved in, but it was now simultaneously his source of shame and the only place he could feel at home.

 Standing before the stairs, he took off his clothes. He did not wear clothes in his private life. Tailoring such suits for a pig’s body was ludicrously expensive and he’d had to custom-order them. And he didn’t like wearing most clothes anyways. He could not sweat, so clothes made him feel stiflingly hot.

 He trotted downstairs, comfortably on all fours. His back ached after he had forced himself to walk upright for hours.

 He flicked on the lights. He pulled the string which he’d attached to the lights. He could reach it if he stood on his hind legs-- after all, on his hind legs, he was roughly the height of a human male, albeit a short one. But he did not like being on his hind legs, and the occupants of the basement would not notice either way.

 The light illuminated the pigs in the pen. There were several large pens, each with dozens of pigs, separated by sexes. There was one smaller pen containing a singular sow, and that was the one Francis approached.

 “Hello, Betty,” Francis said quietly. He approached the pen but did not enter, staring at the sow within. Betty had been napping, and she snuffled happily at the edge of the pen.

“I had an interesting day today.” Francis talked with-- or rather, talked to Betty frequently, although Betty never responded. “The legislation passed. Animals civil rights now-- I mean, animals like me.” The ‘not like you’ part was unsaid, but Francis could hear it anyway. Although he knew it would not happen, he waited for some acknowledgement of what he’d said from Betty. She snuffled at him hopefully for treats, before drawing away in disappointment.

Francis had met Betty at Farmer Leroy’s. He had been a year old and had begun to think and reason, although he was unable to yet talk. Farmer Leroy had wanted the young pigs to hurry up and sire a new generation of pigs, and Francis had been paired up with Betty, through no volition of his own. He remembered the total helplessness and rage he’d felt when Farmer Leroy had hustled Betty into his pen and looked expectantly at him. Ignoring the pheromones that wafted off of Betty, Francis had stood and refused to do anything. Why should he degrade himself before Farmer Leroy? Farmer Leroy would kill him anyways, so why should he use his body to give Farmer Leroy more pigs to kill? Farmer Leroy had clucked with confusion and irritation-- Francis was not the only pig who needed to mate-- and he’d prodded at Betty’s backside, as if to check whether she was in heat or not. Francis remembered the indignity of having to mate with Betty in front of Farmer Leroy’s bored eyes.

“I committed cannibalism today,” Francis said. “I mean, technically I didn’t, since sentient Pigs and non-sentient pigs aren’t the same race anymore. I don’t know what that makes us.” He felt a hysterical laugh bubbling at his throat. Betty ignored him and walked off to sniff at the edges of her pen. “I wonder if that ham was-- anyone we knew.” Francis had had many brothers and sisters, although they’d been bemused by his rudimentary attempts to speak and uninterested in the shapes he drew in the dirt with his trotters. He had no idea what had happened to them. But the worst was the fate of his own children, the first litter. He’d sired them on Betty after the humiliating sessions which were supervised by Farmer Leroy, and he’d watched with mixed pride and horror when she delivered them. He’d half-hoped that at least one of the nine would have his ability to think, mostly because he was so lonely. None of them did, but he’d felt a bizarre tug towards them, a feeling which he’d later discovered must have been paternal. But Farmer Leroy had sold his children to a distant farm to be raised as feeder pigs. At least Francis had the cold comfort of knowing that his children were long-eaten by now, and he hadn’t consumed them. Minister Gregson was a wealthy man and he wouldn’t use years-old frozen pork for a stately banquet, even if it was to humiliate a Pig.

Suddenly he could not bear to look at Betty anymore. Why had he come? She couldn’t offer him the comfort and solace he wanted, even if it were only lies. He would go upstairs, Francis decided. He often thought of himself as compartmentalizing-- his animal self downstairs, his human side upstairs. It was an illusion, but it brought him comfort.

As Francis trotted towards the door, he stopped by the two largest pens and stared at the pigs within. His children stared back.

After he had bought his and Betty’s freedom from Farmer Leroy, Francis had vowed not to have any more children. What would happen when he died, and there’d be no one to buy Betty or their yet unborn children from bondage? Who would save them from the fate of being ground up into hamburger patties, the fate he feared that his first children had met? But then, Francis was an animal who was bound by animal rules, as much as he hated to admit it. And when Betty went into heat, he felt compelled to-- to do what pigs did when they were in heat. He didn’t know what bothered him more-- his body’s animalistic urges or the glassy, unintelligent look in Betty’s eyes, which queasily made him feel like he was taking advantage of some poor dumb beast, although he logically knew it was not true. Perhaps it was-- a form of intellectual bestiality.

The results of those shameful sessions were currently in the two pens. Over the course of his-- well, not marriage, non sentient animals were not permitted to marry-- his *partnership* with Betty, he’d sired 32 sons and 43 daughters. He’d initially kept them in pens, each by the litter they were born in, but he’d soon separated them by sex when they’d started mating with each other. He’d been repulsed, but then why should he? He knew that Pigs frequently mated with their close blood relatives, lacking the incest taboo of humans. In fact, although he did not like to think of it, he himself was probably the product of a mother-son union, or an uncle-niece union. He didn’t know what to do with his-- double-grandchildren, and he’d kept them-- thankfully, only 10 of them, in separate, gender-segregated pens of their own.

“As long as I live,” Francis muttered, “nothing will happen to you. You won’t get sent to the factories or to the meat processing plant.” But oh God, what about after he died? Surely they’d outlive him? Francis, Animal activist, dies, and the landowner comes into his house, sorts his books to send to the thrift store, sells his custom-made suits as novelty pieces, lumbers downstairs, and sees dozens and dozens of pigs. Non-sentient pigs, who were unprotected by the law. What then? They’d become pork chops, every single last one of them. He’d all but guaranteed it by supporting Minister Elliot’s bill.

Perhaps a sentient Pig would consume their flesh to prove how superior he was to them. Francis collapsed by his daughters’ pen and began to weep, quietly. His children looked back at him, unable to understand, smiling.