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Ass or Pig

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A farmer was driving his pig along the road when the porter of a nearby monastery saw him coming and said to the father guardian, "Let's have a bit of sport. I'll tell him his pig is an ass — he'll insist it's a pig — and when there's a dispute, you come and decide it in my favour, and we'll keep the pig."

The father guardian agreed with a laugh.

So the porter hailed the farmer and declared his pig was an ass. The farmer said certainly not, it was a pig, and he knew his own pig. The porter proposed they put the matter to the father guardian. The farmer, perfectly confident of his case, agreed at once.

The father guardian duly arrived — and ruled it was an ass.

The farmer went home without his pig, and a slow, cold fury built in him all the way there.

The next evening, dressed as a poor girl, he knocked at the monastery gate and begged shelter from an approaching storm. The porter refused — women couldn't be admitted. The father guardian, hearing the argument, leaned out of his window, considered the matter carefully, and announced that charity required them to do something: the girl could spend the night in his own cell, seated upright in a chair, without undressing.

The "girl" agreed readily, settled into the chair, and sat quietly through the dark of the night. At the first grey light of dawn, a stout stick appeared from beneath the petticoats, and the father guardian received a thorough drubbing to the repeated refrain of: "So you think I don't know a pig from an ass, do you?"

The farmer slipped out and was gone before anyone stirred.



The next day he returned, dressed as a travelling doctor, asking if anyone needed treatment. The brother porter — eager to find a doctor who wouldn't ask awkward questions about the father guardian's mysterious injuries — ushered the stranger in immediately.

The "doctor" examined the bruises with professional gravity and announced that a certain rare herb was the only remedy. The entire community set off across the Campagna to search for it.

The moment they were out of sight, the farmer drew his stick and gave the father guardian a second beating, even more thorough than the first: "So you think I don't know an ass from a pig, do you?"

When the brothers came rushing back at the screams, the farmer was long gone.

The father guardian gathered his community and said quietly: "We have sinned, my brothers, and I have suffered justly for it. We had no right to take that man's pig. Return it to him, and with it, give him a donkey besides."

So the farmer got his pig back, and a donkey into the bargain.

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