

# The Man who became a Pig

South Korea  
Asia



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**STORY OF THE MONTH - MAY 2026 - STORY CROSSROADS - STORYCROSSROADS.ORG**

In the county of Seung-pyong lived the respected minister Kim Yu. One day, a man from a distant region came to see him, asking for a private audience about a strange and troubling matter.

That evening, when all others had gone, the man returned and spoke. "My father," he said, "is nearly one hundred years old, yet until recently he was strong and healthy. One day, he called all of us—his children—into his room and said he wished to rest. He told us to close the door and not return until he called for us."

The children obeyed. Hours passed. No sound came from inside. As night fell, worry crept in. At last, they peered through a crack in the door. Inside, where their father had been lying, stood a great pig. Terrified, they opened the door. The creature grunted and lunged toward them as if trying to escape. In fear, they slammed the door shut again. Confused and frightened, the family argued over what to do. "Let us keep it," some said.

"No," said others, "we must hold a funeral and bury it as we would our father."

Unable to decide, the son had come to seek the minister's wisdom. Kim Yu listened carefully, deeply unsettled. After a long silence, he spoke. "Such a thing has never been heard of," he admitted. "I cannot claim certainty. But this much seems right: do not bury it while it still lives. And since it is no longer a man, it should not remain in your home."

He paused, then continued: "You say it wishes to escape. Then let it go. Take it deep into the mountains—far from people—and release it there, where it may live as such a creature belongs."

The son accepted this counsel. He returned home, and with his family, carried the pig far into the wilderness. There, in the depths of the mountains, they set it free. Afterward, they mourned their father. They buried his clothes in place of his body and observed the day of his transformation as the day of his passing.

And so, though no one could explain what had happened, they honored him as best they could—caught between the world of men and the mystery that had taken him away.

**In this Korean folktale, the emotional core rests on filial piety (rooted in the teachings of Confucius), as the children struggle to honor their father despite his mysterious transformation into a pig—an act that symbolizes a fall from human social order into something more instinctual rather than purely negative. The minister's humble, uncertain guidance reflects a cultural respect for moral balance without claiming absolute answers, while the family's decision to release the creature into the mountains—seen as a liminal space between worlds—and to bury the father's clothes instead of his body demonstrates the importance of maintaining ritual, dignity, and harmony even when faced with the unexplainable.**

