

Seven Pigs, a Tiger, and the little Polar Bear – Bill Kelly

Hello readers, I have a story to tell. You might think this tale is a bit fantastical or magical, but it's amazing what you can learn if you just let yourself believe. This is the story of what *really* happened in 2016, the Year of the Monkey, and the mystery of the disappearing baby Polar Bear from the Auckland Lantern Festival. I know for a fact that the bear left by choice on her own four feet, and had to make some difficult decisions that night, the question, readers is why? So, if you like riddles about cold polar bears, kung-fu pigs and noodle flamethrowers, you should read on to find the meaning behind it all.

It was a cold and stormy night as Xióng the little baby polar bear left the Auckland Domain looking for a new start. The wind was howling, and the trees of the park were moaning and creaking as she staggered through the city streets. Xióng was growing up and she didn't know where she fitted in the world anymore. She felt her spirit was drifting like a lost puzzle piece, her thoughts clouded with questions and confusion. She had no idea where she was or who she was, and her head was spinning. Exhaustion took a hold of her, and she dropped quietly into a doorway and fell into a deep unconscious slumber.

Xióng woke suddenly, startled by the glare of headlights and the grinding of tyres on tarmac. The polar bear pulled herself up to see a bright yellow noodle truck parking next to her. A noodle truck is rather like an ice cream van, but where delicious bowls of noodles are served from the hatch on the side rather than ice cream.

WAIT! The truck wasn't parking, it was screaming to a stop in the middle of the road! She watched cautiously as shadows dressed from head to toe in black leapt spinning from the top of the truck and waving weaponry. The cold little bear was petrified. The Pork Bandits!

She had heard of this group of seven kung-fu pigs who were bent on the destruction of the Chinese New Year celebrations. Xióng knew that ever since coming last in the Zodiac race, the New Year was known to make even usually honest and kind pigs angry. It was rare for the pigs to attend the Lantern Festival and celebrate with the other animals, but these Pork Bandits were taking things one step further. They wanted total domination of the other species so pigs could rule supreme.

The Bandits had spotted the warm red glow from the little polar bear sleeping in the dark, a symbol of joy and good luck. They surrounded Xióng, whirling nunchucks and swinging fighting sticks, ready to puncture her and put her light out forever. Cowering in the doorway, she watched terrified as the colourful noodle bowl on the top of the truck opened like a clam shell, and a flame thrower emerged. It started spinning and as the flames shot out, fire and smoke covered the street. A giant hog riding an enslaved growling tiger emerged from the black cloud. With nothing to lose Xióng took a deep breath and ran at the hog, but the tiger just swatted her away and she hit a wall, nearly falling into the flames.

“Stop!” shouted the little polar bear, “You’re all just a bunch of bullies! Don’t you know the New Year is a time of forgiveness and leaving the past behind. Pigs bring good fortune and happiness. Why are you lot always trying to ruin everything?”

The pigs stared at the ground, scolded by Xióng’s harsh words. A choked grunt escaped from one of them. “When everyone celebrates the New Year, it just reminds us that pigs are always last because one greedy swine stopped for a snack and fell asleep” he snivelled, revealing his deepest fears.

“I’m sorry we scared you,” the hog apologised with tears running down his snout, embarrassed and deeply ashamed of what he had done.

Xióng now stared directly into the dark and cunning eyes of the tiger, “and you” she said pointing her paw, “your fight is not won with violence, we need bravery and courage to welcome a better, brighter world!”

Reflecting on the wise words of the littlest lantern, the pigs and tiger put their weapons away, climbed back into the noodle truck and drove away. Overcome by emotions, the little polar bear soon fell back asleep, this time dreaming of being back with her mother and the family of penguins. She was now clear what her future held. She belonged at the Auckland Lantern Festival, helping people to let go of the past and welcome new beginnings. She belonged at home.