

Breaking the Pig -Etgar Keret

Breaking the Pig Dad wouldn't buy me a Bart Simpson doll. Mum actually said yes, but Dad said I was spoiled. "Why should we, eh?" he said to Mum. "Why should we buy him one? All it takes is one little squeak from him and you jump to attention." Dad said I had no respect for money, that if I didn't learn it when I was young when would I? Kids who get Bart Simpson dolls too easily grow up to be louts who steal from kiosks, because they're used to getting whatever they want the easy way. So instead of a Bart Simpson doll he bought me an ugly china pig with a flat hole in its back, and now I'll grow up to be OK, now I won't be a lout. Now every morning I have to drink a cup of cocoa, even though I hate it. Cocoa with skin is a shekel, without skin it's half a shekel and if I throw up right away I don't get anything. I put the coins into the pig's back, and when you shake it it rattles. When the pig is full and it doesn't rattle when you shake it I'll get Bart Simpson on a skateboard. That's what Dad says, that way it's educational.

Actually the pig's cute, his nose is cold when you touch it and he smiles when you push the shekel inside his back and when you push in half a shekel too, but the nicest thing is that he smiles even when you don't. I gave him a name, I called him Pesachson, after a man who once lived in our mailbox and my Dad couldn't peel off his label. Pesachson isn't like my other toys, he's much calmer, without lights and springs and batteries that leak inside him. Only you have to watch that he doesn't jump off the table. "Pesachson, be careful! You're made of china," I tell him when I catch him bending down a bit and looking at the floor, and he smiles at me and waits patiently for me to take him down by hand. I'm crazy about him when he smiles, it's only for him that I drink the cocoa with skin every morning, so that I can push the shekel into his back and see how his smile doesn't change a bit. "I love you, Pesachson," I say to him afterward. "Honest, I love you more than Mum and Dad. And I'll always love you, no matter what, even if you break into kiosks. But don't even think of jumping off the table!"

Yesterday Dad came, picked up Pesachson from the table, and began to shake him savagely upside down. "Careful, Dad," I said to him, "you're giving Pesachson a tummyache." But Dad went on. "It's not making a noise, you know what that means, Yoavi? Tomorrow you'll get a Bart Simpson on a skateboard." "Great, Dad," I said. "Bart Simpson on a skateboard, great. Just stop shaking Pesachson, it's making him feel bad." Dad put Pesachson back on the table and went to call Mum. He came back after a minute, dragging Mum and holding a hammer. "See, I was right," he said to Mum. "Now he knows how to value things. Right, Yoavi?" "Sure I know," I said, "sure, but what's the hammer for?" "It's for you," said Dad and put the hammer in my hand. "Just be careful." "Sure I'll be careful," I said, and I really was careful but after a few minutes Dad got fed up and he said, "Go on, then, break the pig." "What?" I asked, "break Pesachson?" "Yes, yes, Pesachson," said Dad. "Go on, break it. You deserve the Bart Simpson, you've worked hard enough for it."

Pesachson smiled at me with the sad smile of a china pig who knows that his end has come. To hell with the Bart Simpson. Me, hit a friend on the head with a hammer? "I don't want the Bart." I gave Dad the hammer back. "Pesachson's enough for me." "You don't understand," said Dad. "It's alright, it's educational, come on, I'll break it for you." Dad was already lifting the hammer, and I looked at Mum's crushed eyes and Pesachson's tired smile and I knew that it was up to me, if I didn't do anything he was dead. "Dad." I grabbed him by the leg. "What, Yoavi?" said Dad, the hand with the hammer still in the air. "I want another shekel please," I

begged. "Give me another shekel to stick into him, tomorrow, after the cocoa. And then we'll break him, tomorrow, I promise." "Another shekel?" Dad smiled and put the hammer on the table. "Yes, see? I've developed the boy's awareness," I said. "Tomorrow." There were already tears in my throat.

When they left the room I hugged Pesachson very hard and I let the tears out. Pesachson didn't say anything, only trembled quietly in my hands. "Don't worry," I whispered in his ear, "I'll save you."

At night I waited for Dad to finish watching TV in the living room and go to bed. Then I got up very quietly and sneaked out through the porch with Pesachson. We walked for a long time in the dark until we reached a thorn field. "Pigs are crazy about fields," I said to Pesachson as I laid him on the floor of the field, "especially fields with thorns. You'll like it here." I waited for an answer but Pesachson didn't say anything, and when I touched him on the nose to say good-bye he just gave me a sad look. He knew he'd never see me again.