THE MOST DANGEROUS PIG EVER TO PUT ON A LEOTARD.

In book five of her enthralling adventures, Nanny Piggins discovers some startling truths about the ruthless Ringmaster, provides counselling to a Molavadinian princess with pre-wedding jitters, inadvertently wins a Nobel Prize while impersonating her sister and catches up with her favourite 4-tonne friend, Esmeralda the forgetful elephant.
Praise for the Nanny Piggins series

‘The Adventures of Nanny Piggins is the most exciting sage about a flying pig nanny ever told. There is a laugh on every page and a lesson in there somewhere. I recommend it highly.’

Former US Secretary of State
Madeleine Albright

‘Sarah Piggins is irrepressible, effortlessly eclipsing all her famous fictional peers.’

The Australian

‘Great for reading out aloud – although such subversiveness might best be enjoyed by individual readers tucked up in bed eating purloined chocolate. Lots of food, grand plans and wit – Nanny Piggins spreads happiness as liberally as jam donuts, except perhaps to Mr Green, school principals, doctors, gypsy queens and lawyers.’

4 STAR REVIEW, Bookseller + Publisher

‘Move over Nana and Mary Poppins, there is a new thoroughly modern and unorthodox nanny on the scene.’

Reading Time
‘Forget Mary Poppins! It’s time for action. Years 4 and up.’

*West Australian*

‘Nanny Piggins is subversive, crazy, funny and naughty. She embarks on high-risk adventures, pigs out on chocolate, has no respect for authority and, of course, the Green children love her, as will everyone between the ages of eight and 12 – those fed up with rules.’

*Children’s Book of the Month, Australian Women’s Weekly*

‘Frothy as a milkshake and just as sweet’

*Sunday Age*

‘This splendidly subversive take on the special relationship between paid carers and their charges is loaded with wit. Read it with a child, or to a child, but don’t let them carry it off into a corner for their exclusive enjoyment.’

*The Weekend Australian*

‘Australian TV writer Spratt’s Mary Poppins-cum-Paddington Bear with a sprinkling of Snickettian humor makes for a terrific read aloud. Each chapter’s a sitcom episode of delicious mayhem.

*Kirkus Reviews*
Previously on Nanny Piggins . . .

Congratulations! You are about to read the thrilling fifth instalment of the Nanny Piggins fourteenology. If you have not read the previous books in the series – don’t panic. Each one of Nanny Piggins’ adventures is an exciting tale in its own right, so you don’t have to read the books in any particular order.

But just in case you don’t believe me, here is a quick summary of what has happened so far: It all started when Nanny Piggins (the world’s most glamorous flying pig) ran away from the circus to escape the Ringmaster, a devious man whose crimes include kidnapping performers, forcing them to sign despicable 50-year binding contracts and refusing to supply chocolate biscuits in the break room.

Once she was a free woman Nanny Piggins took up a job as the Green’s nanny. The Green children – Derrick, Samantha and Michael – fell in love with her instantly. (Nanny Piggins does tend to have that effect on people. I think it’s all the sugar in the cakes she bakes for them.)

Their father, Mr Green, did go to some lengths to try to get rid of Nanny Piggins (he was embarrassed about having a pig for a nanny). But after seeing his
replacement nanny get dragged away by police, the school he tried to send his children to get knocked down with bulldozers, and his plans of marriage nearly result in him being forced to wed a stick-wielding Gypsy Queen, Mr Green largely gave up.

I should also mention Nanny Piggins’ brother, Boris the Russian ballet-dancing bear. He ran away from the circus too and now lives in the Green’s garden shed. (You might wonder how a pig comes to have a bear for a brother. The short answer is – adoption.)

And that’s about all you need to know. There are other characters – Hans the baker, Nanny Piggins’ thirteen identical twin sisters, a silly headmaster, a lovely Police Sergeant and a hapless truancy officer – just to name a few. But don’t worry, you will pick it all up as you go along because I helpfully refer to the Police Sergeant as ‘Police Sergeant’ and Hans the baker as ‘Hans the baker’, so you will be left in little doubt as to who everyone is.

So now you can sit back, relax and enjoy this book. For maximum enjoyment I recommend finding a large slice of cake and a big block of chocolate, then barricading yourself in a room where you won’t annoy anyone with your loud laughing.

Best wishes,
R. A. Spratt, the author
Also by R.A. Spratt:

The Adventures of Nanny Piggins
Nanny Piggins and the Wicked Plan
Nanny Piggins and the Runaway Lion
Nanny Piggins and the Accidental Blast-off

Coming soon:
Nanny Piggins and the Pursuit of Justice
To Samantha
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Nanny Piggins and the children were sitting around the dining table, eating breakfast with Mr Green. The children did not usually spend their Saturday mornings socialising with their father. In fact, if they could help it, they usually managed to go all the way from Friday afternoon when they came home from school, until Monday morning when they went back to school, without seeing him.
at all. But in this particular instance they had been grounded.

Mr Green had caught them using his best silk ties as a rope ladder, so they could climb up on the roof and fetch the antique porcelain fruit plate they had been using as a frisbee. He had regretted the grounding as soon as the words had come out of his mouth, because he knew it would lead to unpleasant circumstances such as this – actually having to be in the same room as his children while he was eating, which made it very difficult for him to digest his food.

Normally, at this time on a Saturday morning, Derrick, Samantha and Michael would be off with their reprobate nanny – damming the local creek with rocks, testing an ultra-light aircraft they had made entirely from empty ice-cream containers, or harassing some poor retailer of baked goods – thus allowing Mr Green to eat breakfast and read the newspaper in total solitude, before sneaking off to his favourite place in the entire world – work. Instead, he was struggling to read the paper while his youngest son glared murderously at him, his daughter sighed loudly, his oldest son nervously jiggled the entire table with his leg and the nanny stared at him with such obvious malicious intent there was absolutely
no doubt in his mind she was thinking up ways to get revenge on him.

Mr Green was just about to send them all to their rooms so he could enjoy his bowl of lukewarm porridge in peace, when the silent hostility was violently interrupted by a loud SMASH, as a brick flew in through the window, sending broken glass everywhere and landing with a plop, right in the pot of porridge in the centre of the table.

‘What the devil was that?!’ demanded Mr Green.

‘It looked like a brick!’ said Derrick.

‘Yes, it’s definitely a brick,’ said Nanny Piggins as she peered into the pot. ‘On the bright side, it will probably improve the flavour of the porridge.’

‘What sort of hoodlum would throw a brick through a man’s window at eight o’clock on a Saturday morning?!’ demanded Mr Green. He was taking deep breaths and puffing himself up, ready to launch into a full rant about the evils of today’s youth.

‘There’s no need to blow things out of proportion. It’s only half a brick,’ said Nanny Piggins as she fished the half-brick out of the porridge. ‘Remember, children, if you do ever need to smash someone’s window with a brick, it is always better to use a half-brick because it is lighter and easier to throw longer distances. A full brick
does make a nicer mess, but you have to stand a lot closer to throw it, which means you have to be very confident that you can run faster than the recipient.’

The children nodded and mentally filed away this useful titbit of advice.

‘Put that brick down,’ demanded Mr Green. ‘It is evidence! The police will need to fingerprint it.’

‘I think they may have a hard time getting a fingerprint off a porridge-covered brick,’ said Derrick politely.

‘Besides, it’s going to be pretty easy to work out who threw it,’ said Nanny Piggins, ‘because there’s a letter attached!’

Sure enough, when Nanny Piggins scraped away the bigger lumps of porridge, they could all see a thick crimson envelope tied to the brick with a purple ribbon.

‘Wow! That looks important,’ exclaimed Michael.

‘I know,’ agreed Nanny Piggins. ‘Expensive stationery, a real wax seal and a genuine Tuscan-imported brick. Whoever threw it through our window is clearly trying to make an impression.’

‘Who would send such a thing?’ asked Samantha.
‘I know quite a few brick-hurling, stationery-loving egomaniacs. But there is only one lunatic with such a flare for the dramatic,’ said Nanny Piggins as she tore open the envelope. ‘The Ringmaster!’

Everyone gasped. Even Mr Green. (He had never met the Ringmaster, but he gathered from the situation that gasping was appropriate.)

‘What does he want?’ asked Derrick.

‘It’s an invitation,’ explained Nanny Piggins. ‘You are cordially invited to attend the greatest feat of magic ever performed . . .’

‘What has cordial got to do with an invitation?’ asked Michael.

‘Perhaps they will be serving it to the guests,’ suggested Nanny Piggins, before continuing to read. ‘Prepare to be astounded when, today at 12 noon on the Town Hall steps, I shall make a person entirely disappear. Hope to see you there. Love and kisses – The Ringmaster.’

‘I didn’t know the Ringmaster could do magic!’ said Michael.

‘Strictly speaking I don’t think he could call himself a magician,’ explained Nanny Piggins. ‘But he has always been very good at making things disappear – money . . . difficult people . . . his entire circus, when the debt collectors come around.’
‘But if he is going to make someone disappear, why would he send you an invitation?’ asked Samantha.

‘Because he’s showing off, of course,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘The whole thing is just a publicity stunt for the circus. He’ll probably try to grab me and blast me out of a cannon, to give the event a bit of bang.’

‘So we’re not going to go?’ asked Derrick.

‘Of course we’re going to go!’ declared Nanny Piggins. ‘It would be rude not to when we’ve been invited, and on such expensive-looking stationery and masonry.’

‘But the children are grounded!’ blathered Mr Green.

‘Pish!’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘As nanny, I overrule your grounding!’

‘Can she do that?’ Michael whispered to Derrick.

‘Nanny Piggins can do anything,’ whispered Derrick.

‘On what grounds?’ asked Mr Green.

The children and Mr Green leaned forward, eagerly waiting to hear what creative excuse Nanny Piggins would come up with. Mr Green desperately hoped it was a good one. Even more than the children, he hoped that they would all just go away.

‘On the grounds that it is too good an educational experience to miss,’ concluded Nanny Piggins.
‘She’s right,’ agreed Derrick. ‘If the Ringmaster really does make someone vanish, this could be an important historical event.’

‘And a magic show is kind of like theatre, and theatre is educational,’ added Samantha.

‘And it will be good for us to know how to make a person disappear, in case we ever need to make it happen ourselves,’ concluded Michael (thinking about his maths teacher).

‘Yes, well then, of course, all right, I give my permission –’ began Mr Green.

He never got to finish his sentence because the children and Nanny Piggins had already fled the room, which was an enormous relief to Mr Green, as now he would be able to enjoy some peace and quiet without having to enforce that ridiculous debacle of a grounding. He might even be able to sneak out to the office for seven or eight hours for a spot of relaxing tax avoidance. Next time his children needed punishing, he really must remember to do something easy, like locking them in a broom closet. (He had spent many an hour locked in a broom closet as a boy and, apart from crippling his personality and giving him an irrational fear of brooms, it had done him absolutely no harm whatsoever.)
While Nanny Piggins and the children did run out of the room, they did not go straight down to the Town Hall. For a start, it was four hours until the event would occur. And secondly, they needed to find a really good disguise for Nanny Piggins, otherwise there was too great a risk that the Ringmaster would try to capture her and force her to resume her circus career as a flying pig.

So they went straight to their favourite costume hire shop. Nanny Piggins and the children always found it impossible to walk into a costume hire shop and spend any less than three hours in there. Particularly when they took Boris along with them. Being a ten-foot-tall dancing bear, he spent a lot of time in the corner weeping because none of the costumes fit him. But when he did find one made of sufficiently stretchy lycra that he could drag it over his 700-kilogram body, he would then be so delighted that he would leap up and perform a whole act of The Nutcracker (playing all the parts himself, including the nuts and the crackers).

When they eventually left the costume hire shop at 11.45 am, Nanny Piggins was completely
unrecognisable. She was dressed as a witch, and it was a very convincing disguise, because Nanny Piggins was such a tremendous actress. (It is a great injustice that she had never won an Academy Award. She did come close one year. But in the end the judges ruled that performances caught on convenience store security cameras could not be entered in the Academy Awards. Which is a great shame because her portrayal of an angry pig who wants her fifty cents back because the chocolate bar she had just bought had gone white on the outside after being improperly stored was very convincing.) No-one would believe that the withered old hag in the black dress and pointy hat could be someone as radiantly beautiful and glamorous as Nanny Piggins. Now that she had nothing to fear from unexpected abduction, they made their way over to the Town Hall steps.

When Nanny Piggins, Boris and the children arrived there was quite a crowd. Many of them were still holding the bricks their invitations had been wrapped around. The Ringmaster had obviously been very busy that morning (and the local glaziers would be very busy that afternoon). The steps of the Town Hall had been roped off and police were stationed all around to stop the crowd surging forward.
Nanny Piggins waved frantically at her old friend the Police Sergeant, yelling ‘Yoo-hoo, Police Sergeant’. But as he was standing next to his boss the Police Inspector and was not acquainted with any elderly witches, he just nodded politely and made a mental note to ring the local mental health facility to see if they’d had any recent escapes.

The thing that most caught the children’s eye was at the top of the steps. A glistening glass box, the size and shape of an old-fashioned telephone booth, was attached to a system of pullies dangling high above them from the Town Hall clock tower.

At noon, the Town Hall clock began to strike the hour. BONG . . . BONG . . . BONG . . .

The crowd held their breath, and the children grew nervous with excitement, but Nanny Piggins just rolled her eyes. ‘I do wish they would get on with it. If I had known they were going to faff about like this I would have tried on that Joan of Arc costume again.’

‘Armour suits you,’ agreed Boris.

‘And I do like the idea of getting a whole army to act out my dreams,’ added Nanny Piggins. ‘Particularly the one about me flying away on a giant purple dinosaur to a land where everything is made of strawberry marshmallows.’
‘BONG . . . BONG . . . BONG . . .’ continued the clock.

The crowd grew silent as they waited for the show to begin. And they were not disappointed. As soon as the clock struck its final BONG, air cannons blasted glitter into the sky, a cloud of smoke billowed out and fireworks shot forth in every direction as the Ringmaster leapt out through the Town Hall doors. ‘Good day, fair citizens, thank you all for coming!’ announced the Ringmaster.

‘Get on with it!’ heckled Nanny Piggins.

The Ringmaster turned and peered into the crowd. When he caught sight of the wizened witch, a huge smile broke across his face.

‘Sarah Piggins, darling! How good of you to come,’ smarmed the Ringmaster.

‘How did you know it was me?’ asked Nanny Piggins in surprise. ‘Have you been tracking me with satellites again? Or was there a GPS device in my chocolate?’

‘I recognised the children and Boris,’ explained the Ringmaster, ‘and I thought it unlikely that they would know two very rude, impatient, four-foot-tall women with that exact gorgeous hot pink handbag I have often seen you carrying.’
‘I told you you needed to rethink your accessories,’ said Boris.

‘Just get on with the conjuring trick,’ snapped Nanny Piggins, ‘so we can all go to the sweet shop and have some lunch.’

‘Very well,’ said the Ringmaster, turning to address the whole crowd again, ‘Today you shall be astounded to witness me make a human being entirely cease to exist on this corporeal plane!’

‘Blah blah blah,’ heckled Nanny Piggins. ‘We all read the invitation. We don’t need a recap. Just make somebody disappear.’

‘I shall do just that,’ said the Ringmaster. ‘But first I need a volunteer from the audience.’

The entire crowd of several hundred people simultaneously drew back. They might be silly enough not to have brick-proof windows, but they were not silly enough to voluntarily do anything with the Ringmaster.

‘Surely no-one will agree to that,’ whispered Michael.

‘Stop whispering,’ urged Nanny Piggins through unmoving lips. ‘If he sees your lips move he might take that as a sign of consent.’

At that moment a loud voice came clearly from the back of the crowd, ‘Get out of my way. Let me through!’
‘That voice sounds familiar,’ whispered Nanny Piggins.

‘We have a volunteer!’ exclaimed the Ringmaster.

The crowd parted, leaving a clear path.

‘That’s better,’ said the man. ‘I’ve a good mind to write a formal letter of complaint.’

‘Oh no,’ said Derrick, for he recognised the voice.

‘It’s Father!’ gasped all three children.

‘Why is he volunteering?’ asked Michael.

‘I don’t think he knows he is,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘I think he was just trying to get across the square on his way to work.’

‘Step this way, sir,’ beckoned the Ringmaster, bowing to Mr Green and ushering him forward.

‘Finally, someone with some manners,’ said Mr Green, allowing the Ringmaster to draw him away from the staring crowd. ‘What are you lot looking at? Have you never seen a man in a decent suit before?’

Unfortunately Mr Green was so busy chastising the onlookers, he entirely failed to realise that the Ringmaster had led him into the glistening box. Not until the door slammed behind him. Then it was too late.
The Ringmaster turned and addressed the crowd. ‘As you can see, this box is entirely made of bulletproof glass.’ This was evident because Mr Green was now beating on the glass so hard with his fists, it would be broken if it was ordinary glass. The Ringmaster tapped every side of the box with his riding crop (for some reason the Ringmaster always carried a riding crop, which was particularly perplexing because he never rode a horse). ‘There are no hidden doors, or secret compartments. I shall make this gentleman . . .’

The audience sniggered here, because no-one thought Mr Green was a gentleman.

‘I shall make this man disappear using nothing but the magic powers of my mind,’ claimed the Ringmaster.

‘Hah!’ snorted Nanny Piggins. ‘A double-A battery has more power.’

‘We’ll see about that. Raise the box!’ called the Ringmaster.

A drum roll started, and the strongman from the circus, who was standing by the pulley system, started heaving on the rope, hand over hand. Slowly Mr Green began rising off the ground. This apparently terrified Mr Green because he was now weeping and begging to be allowed out. (At least that’s what it
looked like he was saying. The audience had to lip-read because the glass box was very well made and, as a result, entirely soundproof.)

‘He doesn’t look like he’s enjoying himself very much,’ observed Boris.

‘Shouldn’t we rescue him?’ worried Samantha.

‘I suppose we should,’ agreed Nanny Piggins.

Neither Nanny Piggins nor the children leapt into action. They were too busy thinking about the billycart that Mr Green had thrown in a wood chipper the previous weekend, when their screams of enjoyment had interrupted his favourite radio program about being thrifty.

When the glass box finally reached its highest point, way up in the air above the Town Hall steps, the drum roll stopped.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ shouted the Ringmaster. ‘Behold as I make a fully grown man entirely DISAPPEAR!!!’

There was a flash of light, a billow of smoke and the bulletproof glass box suddenly plummeted towards the ground, the rope whipping through the pulleys.

‘Father!’ cried the children.

‘No!’ cried Nanny Piggins, leaping forward to catch the rope but getting there too late as the tail
end whipped up into the sky and the box smashed onto the steps, all six sides smashing open.

The weaker-minded members of the crowd screamed.

But then they realised that Mr Green was not in the box anymore. He had actually disappeared. Suddenly the audience burst into rapturous applause.

The Ringmaster beamed, winked at Nanny Piggins and bowed low (the only reason his top hat didn't fall off was because he used so much oil in his hair he had managed to achieve a complete seal about his head).

‘Now!’ said the Ringmaster. ‘I shall make Mr Green reappear . . . inside that portaloo!’

The Ringmaster pointed his riding crop dramatically towards a portable toilet by the edge of the crowd that no-one had noticed. He strode over to the portable toilet, and rapped on the door three times with his riding crop. ‘Mr Green, are you decent in there?’

The audience laughed.

Then the Ringmaster flung open the door and the crowd was astonished to see . . . nobody inside. Certainly not Mr Green.

‘Wow! What a trick,’ marvelled Michael.
‘I can’t believe it,’ said Nanny Piggins, reluctantly impressed. ‘He really did make Mr Green disappear. I wonder where he’ll really pop up.’

‘Perhaps he’s inside the Ringmaster’s hat,’ suggested Michael.

‘I doubt it,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘There’d be no room, what with the rabbit who already lives there.’

‘Wait, I think something is wrong,’ said Samantha.

They watched as the Ringmaster looked behind the portaloo, underneath the portaloo, then climbed inside and looked down into the bowl of the portaloo, all the time calling: ‘Mr Green, where are you? Come out, the trick is over now.’

Suddenly Samantha ran forward and snatched up something from the ground behind the portaloo. ‘Look! His briefcase!’

‘Oh my gosh!’ said Derrick.

‘No!’ said Michael.

‘Father would never go anywhere without this,’ explained Samantha. ‘He even takes it in the shower.’

‘What have you done?!’ demanded Nanny Piggins, turning on the Ringmaster. ‘How dare you make these children’s father disappear. Just because he is mean, unpleasant and so boring his
most interesting characteristic is his nut allergy, that doesn’t give you the right to make him vanish.’

‘Or has he vanished?’ asked Boris. ‘Perhaps this whole scenario is just an elaborate ruse to kidnap Mr Green.’

‘Why on earth would the Ringmaster kidnap Father?’ asked Derrick.

‘How else do you think they recruit people to scoop up the elephant poop at the circus,’ said Boris. ‘They don’t get many voluntary applicants for the job.’

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ spluttered the Ringmaster. ‘He was supposed to be here. I don’t have any kidnappings planned, at least, not for today.’

‘Michael,’ said Nanny Piggins, ‘hold my broomstick. I’m getting your Father back and I don’t care how many shins I have to bite to do it.’

Nanny Piggins launched herself at the Ringmaster and he fled into the crowd. He was surprisingly swift on his feet for a man with short stumpy legs, but he was no match for the superior athleticism of Nanny Piggins. She was just about to leap forward and grab him by his tail coat, when someone else grabbed her by the hem of her witch’s cape, causing her to fall flat on her bottom.
'What is the meaning of this then?' said a stern voice.

Nanny Piggins spun around ready to bite her captor, but the Police Sergeant quickly stood in the way, saying hurriedly, ‘Nanny Piggins, how lovely to see you. You look marvellous today. Is that a new handbag? Have I introduced you to my boss, the Inspector?’

The Police Sergeant stepped back to reveal an older police officer with lots of shiny badges on his lapel. The Inspector’s posture was so straight, he appeared to have had a steel rod surgically attached to his spine.

‘Perhaps the Inspector could give me one good reason why I should not bite his hand,’ said Nanny Piggins, struggling to contain her temper.

‘You were causing a public disturbance,’ said the Inspector.

‘The Ringmaster just kidnapped their father,’ protested Nanny Piggins, as she pointed to Derrick, Samantha and Michael, who were struggling to control their own instincts to cheer and dance for joy, due to their newly orphaned status.

‘So you claim,’ said the Inspector.

‘Claim?!’ exclaimed Nanny Piggins. ‘There were over five hundred people here who saw him do it.’
The Inspector looked at the crowd, who were all nodding their heads in agreement.

‘Kidnapping, well, that is a very serious matter indeed. You had better let us take care of it,’ said the Inspector. ‘Sergeant, arrest the Ringmaster.’

‘Sir, he’s disappeared,’ said the Police Sergeant. ‘Don’t be ridiculous, a fellow can’t just disappear,’ protested the Inspector.

‘Oh yes, they can,’ said Boris kindly. ‘We’ve just seen two of them vanish in the last five minutes.’

The Inspector glared at Boris, then turned back to Nanny Piggins. ‘Do you have a permit for this bear?’

Now the Police Sergeant had to grab hold of Nanny Piggins before she could attack the Inspector for his impertinence.

‘Sir, perhaps we should deal with the kidnapping first,’ said the Police Sergeant.

‘Do we know where this Ringmaster fellow lives?’ asked the Inspector.

‘He’s a Ringmaster, sir,’ said the Police Sergeant, trying hard not to roll his eyes in impatience. ‘He lives at the circus.’

‘Of course. You stay here and make sure this crowd disperses in an orderly manner. I’ll take the men, and those . . . er . . . news’ crews,’ said
the Inspector, as he smoothed his already smooth hair and straightened his already straight tie, ‘and go and arrest the Ringmaster myself.’

‘And search for our father,’ prompted Samantha.

‘What? Oh yes, we’ll do that too,’ said the Inspector. He soon had four squad cars full of officers speeding off, with sirens blaring, and five news’ crews following close behind.

Nanny Piggins and the Police Sergeant watched them go. ‘I don’t know about this, Nanny Piggins,’ confided the Police Sergeant. ‘Having kidnapped Mr Green in broad daylight in front of hundreds of witnesses, I doubt the Ringmaster would have gone home.’

‘I agree,’ said Nanny Piggins.

‘Where do you think he would go then?’ asked the Police Sergeant.

‘Hmmmm,’ considered Nanny Piggins. ‘He’d try to flee the country I should think.’

‘So we should go and look at the airport then?’ asked the Police Sergeant.

‘No,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘The Ringmaster is airport-aphobic.’

‘He’s afraid of flying?’ asked Derrick.
‘No, he’s afraid of the cost of aeroplane tickets,’ explained Nanny Piggins. ‘The Ringmaster is very miserly. So if we are going to look for him, the first place we should go is the harbour. He will try to sneak himself and Mr Green out of the country onboard a ship.’

Nanny Piggins, the Police Sergeant, Boris, the children and the young Police Constable (the Inspector had not taken him because he found his enthusiasm unnerving) all leapt in a police van and drove to the port.

There was only one boat scheduled to leave that day. So the Police Sergeant immediately boarded it and demanded to be allowed to search the vessel. Fortunately the Bulgarian sea captain had fallen in love with Nanny Piggins at first sight (which was amazing because she was still wearing the witch costume. But the sea captain had always been attracted to older women with facial warts) so he agreed to ‘whatever the beautiful lady wanted’.

The Police Sergeant and the young constable methodically searched the entire ship from bow to stern. But they found nothing.
‘I don’t know, Nanny Piggins. I think we’ll have to try looking somewhere else,’ conceded the Police Sergeant.

‘Not so fast, I have an idea’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘Get the sea captain to line up his crew.’

The men were soon out on deck in one long line. They were a brutish looking bunch of Bulgarians. It was almost as if they took pride in who could shave the least, wash the most infrequently and scowl the hardest. They were quite an intimidating sight. If Samantha had not had Boris’ hand to hold, she would have had to go back to the squad car and hide under the seat.

‘Are you going to pump them for information?’ asked Michael.

‘How can she?’ asked Derrick. ‘They only speak Bulgarian. You don’t speak Bulgarian, do you?’

‘Of course I do,’ said Nanny Piggins, with which she yelled at the men, ‘Zaveevam naokolo!’ (Which is Bulgarian for ‘turn around’.)

The men did as they were told. Then Nanny Piggins walked along, staring hard at the saggy, filthy seats of their pants, until she leapt forward with delight. ‘Ah-hah!’ yelled Nanny Piggins. ‘I’d recognise that unusually large bottom anywhere! It’s the Ringmaster!’
The shortest and biggest-bottomed Bulgarian immediately clutched his backside and tried to make a run for the gangway. But the Police Constable was too quick for him. He crash-tackled the seaman to the ground (re-enacting the try-saving tackle from his rugby game on the weekend). Nanny Piggins tore off the Bulgarian’s fake beard and grubby hat.

‘It is the Ringmaster!’ exclaimed the children, who until that moment had thought their Nanny had mistakenly encouraged the Police Constable to assault an innocent seaman.

‘I must say it is almost a relief to be discovered,’ confessed the Ringmaster. ‘I don’t know how much longer I was going to be able to bear this disguise. I detest improperly laundered clothes.’

‘Where’s Mr Green?’ demanded the Police Sergeant. ‘What have you done with him?’

‘I’ve got no idea,’ said the Ringmaster. ‘He was supposed to be in the portaloo. I’ve got absolutely no idea how he managed to actually disappear.’

‘Are you claiming you didn’t kidnap him?’ asked the Police Sergeant.

‘Even I, who have trained Finnish ferrets to waltz and Albanian aardvarks to breathe fire, even I could not possibly find a use for someone as boring as Mr Green,’ said the Ringmaster. ‘I would be better
off kidnapping a lump of mould. At least mould wouldn’t bore me with endless stories about his nut allergy.’

‘He’s got a point,’ said Derrick.

‘What do you think, Nanny Piggins?’ asked the Police Sergeant.

Nanny Piggins sniffed the Ringmaster, stared hard into his eyes, then pinched him hard on the thigh.

‘Ouch!’ squealed the Ringmaster.

‘I think he is telling the truth,’ said Nanny Piggins.

‘But if Father wasn’t kidnapped,’ asked Samantha, ‘then where is he?’

‘Either someone else kidnapped him, which would be quite a coincidence,’ said Nanny Piggins, ‘or Mr Green has run away under his own volition. And given that Mr Green is a weak-minded man of limited intelligence, where would he hide?’

‘Somewhere warm,’ said Derrick.

‘Somewhere quiet,’ said Samantha.

‘Somewhere with free tea- and coffee-making facilities,’ said Michael.

‘Exactly!’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘He would hide at work!’
Twenty minutes later Nanny Piggins, Boris and the children were with the Police Sergeant as he kicked in Mr Green’s office door and discovered him cowering under his desk, clutching several packets of company tea bags. Mr Green leapt to his feet. ‘It wasn’t me! I didn’t do it! You can’t prove anything!’

Eventually, after Nanny Piggins had emptied a vase of flowers over his head to silence his hysteria and the Police Sergeant dragged him down to the station and threatened to arrest him for perverting the course of justice, Mr Green finally explained what had happened. ‘I was standing in that box, beating on the glass, begging to be let out, when suddenly a trap door below me opened up and a strange hairy woman grabbed me by the ankle.’

‘You expect us to believe that?!’ exclaimed the Police Sergeant.

‘It’s all true,’ said the Ringmaster. ‘It was Rosalind, my bearded lady. She has excellent forearm strength.’

‘The next thing I knew I was inside a portable lavatory,’ said Mr Green, ‘and . . . I . . . I did not need to go to the lavatory at all.’ Mr Green started to weep.

‘What happened next?’ asked Nanny Piggins, fighting the urge to shake him.
‘I opened the door and looked out,’ sniffed Mr Green, ‘and the crowd was watching the box smash to the ground. So I took the opportunity to sneak away. I was so traumatised I forgot my briefcase.’

‘And nobody saw you go?’ asked the Ringmaster.

‘Nobody ever notices Mr Green,’ explained Nanny Piggins. ‘It’s like bird spotting. Unless he moves or squawks, you’d never realise he was there.’

‘Didn’t you realise we all thought you had been kidnapped?’ asked the Police Sergeant.

‘Oh . . . well . . . no . . . of . . . course . . . no such thing . . .’ stammered Mr Green.

‘Or did you realise exactly what was going on?’ asked Nanny Piggins. ‘And think this was your big opportunity to flee the country and abandon your children.’

‘Maybe,’ admitted Mr Green.

The Police Sergeant sighed. ‘You are lucky, Mr Green, that there are no laws against being a very annoying man, or else I would be able to lock you away for an extremely long time.’

‘You wouldn’t do that, would you?’ begged Mr Green. ‘I’m an important tax lawyer. I have tax exiles to support. Their wealth would be lost without me.’
‘You’d better leave before I throw the book at you,’ said the Police Sergeant.

‘Just throw it anyway, Sergeant,’ urged Nanny Piggins. ‘I throw books at him all the time; it is very cathartic.’

Mr Green scurried away.

The Ringmaster got to his feet. ‘Now that it has become apparent that I am entirely innocent,’ said the Ringmaster, ‘perhaps you would be so good as to remove these handcuffs and let me go.’

The Police Sergeant picked up his handcuff keys. ‘I suppose so.’

‘Not so fast!’ declared the Inspector, bursting into the station with three police constables trailing behind him, all carrying large document boxes. ‘Mr T. Ringmaster, you are under arrest!’

‘His name is Ringmaster?’ marvelled Derrick.

‘It’s a family name,’ explained Nanny Piggins. ‘He comes from a long line of Ringmasters. His mother was Peru’s leading ringmaster for many years.’

‘What does the T stand for?’ asked Michael.

‘The, of course,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘How many times have you heard me refer to him as The Ringmaster?’

The children’s minds boggled as they assimilated this information.
‘This is an outrage,’ declared the Ringmaster. ‘This is victimisation. On what grounds are you going to arrest me?’ (The Ringmaster had to ask because he knew it could be any number of things – llama rustling, tattoo forging, tent stealing . . . just to name a few.)

‘I am arresting you for failing to file a tax return,’ announced the Inspector smugly.

‘What?’ said Nanny Piggins.

‘According to these papers we found in the Ringmaster’s caravan, he has not filed a tax return,’ accused the Police Inspector. ‘Not ever!’

‘Come now,’ said the Ringmaster. ‘You’re not going to get upset about a little thing like paperwork, are you?’ He was smiling again now. ‘If it is a matter of a small fine, I’ll happily pay that now. With my apologies for the paperwork oversight.’

‘I don’t think you appreciate the gravity of this situation,’ said the Inspector, starting to look menacing. ‘The punishment for withholding tax and failing to file a tax return for twenty-five years is – three years in jail!’

‘You’ll never catch me!’ yelled the Ringmaster. Then, with a level of acrobatic athleticism that can only be picked up from years of working with trapeze artists, he sprang over the Police Sergeant’s desk.
(which is not easy when you are wearing handcuffs), ran across the room and leapt at the front window.

If it had been a normal window he would have smashed through and run off down the street. Unfortunately for the Ringmaster it was not a normal window. It was reinforced glass, so he thudded into it, slid down and landed in a heap on the floor.

‘Good,’ said the Police Inspector. ‘Now I can add resisting arrest to his list of charges.’

‘Sarah, do something, say something, you have to help me!’ pleaded the Ringmaster as two burly constables dragged him away.

‘You have been kidnapping circus performers, hoodwinking authorities and short-changing audiences for decades,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘Surely you knew your day of reckoning would come.’

‘But I always did it in the nicest possible way,’ protested the Ringmaster.

For once his cheesy smile had faded, even his slicked hair was a mess. For the first time since the children had known him, the Ringmaster looked like an ordinary man and not a larger than life character.

‘What can I do?’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘I am just one pig, and with no formal legal training.’ She turned to the Police Sergeant. ‘Watching Judge Gillian on TV doesn’t count as formal legal training, does it?’
The Police Sergeant shook his head.
‘I know, I’ll bake you a cake with an electric angle grinder cooked into it,’ called Nanny Piggins as the door slammed shut on the Ringmaster.
‘I’ll pretend I didn’t hear that, Nanny Piggins,’ said the Police Sergeant.

Later that evening, Nanny Piggins, Boris and the children sat around their kitchen table eating chocolate cake. They had sent Mr Green to bed with a bowl of soup (as punishment for being so naughty) and a copy of an addendum to the tax code (to help calm his nerves). Nanny Piggins had grounded him for a week, so that he would have the opportunity to reflect on his poor behaviour. And unlike Mr Green, she had no qualms about policing her punishment.

‘Well, children,’ said Nanny Piggins, ‘it’s been quite a day. Who would have thought your father would have the imagination to fake his own kidnapping.’

‘I don’t think we can give him credit for the idea,’ said Derrick. ‘It never would have occurred to him if the Ringmaster hadn’t stuffed him in a portaloo.’

‘True,’ agreed Nanny Piggins.
‘So are you pleased that the Ringmaster is finally behind bars?’ asked Michael.

Nanny Piggins thought for a moment before she answered. ‘No, I’m not.’

‘But now you don’t have to worry about him trying to kidnap you anymore,’ said Samantha. ‘Surely that’s a relief.’

Nanny Piggins smiled. ‘My dear child, I am a circus star. Being kidnapped by ambitious ringmasters is all part of the job. If there weren’t regular kidnap attempts on my person, I would begin to think I was losing my edge.’

‘So you’re sad that the Ringmaster is behind bars?’ marvelled Michael.

‘Yes, I am,’ said Nanny Piggins sincerely. ‘It’s like when you go to an aquarium and see a shark in a tank. Yes, it’s a man-eating killer and you wouldn’t want to fall in the tank with it. But it’s still pathetic to see such an impressive animal swimming around in circles.’

‘But things will be more peaceful now,’ Samantha pointed out.

‘True,’ agreed Nanny Piggins. ‘But I’ve always thought peace and quiet are terribly overrated.’