

THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

Nanny Piggins



R. A. SPRATT

To Diggy Doo

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CHAPTER I

Nanny Piggins gets in Trouble

‘You ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself!’ yelled Nanny Piggins.

Nanny Piggins and the children were sitting outside the editor’s office at their local newspaper. They were waiting for him to turn up so that Nanny Piggins could tell him off for the terrible suggestions given in his paper’s advice column. And while they waited, Nanny Piggins was practising what she was going to say.

‘I wouldn’t use your newspaper to line the bottom of a budgerigar’s cage!’ hollered Nanny Piggins. (She enjoyed a good telling off once she got into full swing.) ‘You aren’t good enough to lie beneath budgie poop!’

‘Don’t you mean “your newspaper isn’t good enough to lie beneath budgie poop?”’ asked Derrick.

‘I mean exactly what I say,’ declared Nanny Piggins, before turning to Samantha. ‘Did you get that all down?’

‘I think so,’ said Samantha, looking up from her notepad, ‘but how do you spell budgerigar?’

‘If you’re not sure, just put “parrot”,’ suggested Nanny Piggins.

The rest of the newspaper staff were enjoying Nanny Piggins’ visit tremendously. They were even chipping in with suggestions of mean things she could say. ‘Tell him he’s lazy,’ suggested the editor’s secretary.

‘No, tell him everybody knows he wears a toupee,’ suggested a girl cadet journalist.

‘But he doesn’t wear a toupee,’ argued the senior copy editor. (She knew this because she’d had occasion to pull the editor’s hair very hard during her last contract negotiation.)

‘I know,’ said the girl cadet journalist, ‘which is why telling him we know he wears a toupee will really freak him out.’

‘I won’t have time to talk to the editor about his hair, no matter how bad it may be,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘I will be too busy denouncing him for the terrible advice your paper gives big-boned readers.’

Boris wept loudly here, because he was one of those bigger-boned readers. (And that is not just a figure of speech. Being a ten-foot-tall dancing bear, his bones really were a lot larger.)

‘Telling people to “stop eating cake”!’ ranted Nanny Piggins. ‘I’ve never heard such terrible advice! Everyone knows if you want to lose weight the best thing to do is exercise. And if you are going to take up exercise, obviously you need to eat *more* cake to give you the energy for all that running around.’

The staff in the open-plan office nodded at the wisdom of this. Nanny Piggins had brought a large caramel cream cake with her to provide tangible evidence for her argument. And the office staff had to agree that since having several large slices each they all felt considerably perkier.

‘Now where was I?’ asked Nanny Piggins.

Samantha read back over her notes. ‘You had just finished telling him he had the intellectual capacity

of a lump of lichen and had moved on to telling him he was unworthy of being covered in parrot droppings.’

‘Ah yes,’ said Nanny Piggins, regaining her train of thought. ‘Had I told him I had a good mind to bite his shins yet?’

‘Um . . . shins, no,’ said Samantha, scanning the notes.

‘Good,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘I don’t want to give him any forewarning.’

At this moment the hapless editor returned from lunch. As it turns out he was actually a big-boned man himself, so eating lunch was the highlight of his day. And Friday lunch was the highlight of his week, because that’s when he would take an important advertiser with him to a fancy restaurant and charge the whole thing to the newspaper’s credit card. So at three o’clock on Friday afternoon, after a four-course lunch with three extra side dishes, he was looking forward to getting back to the office, closing his door and having a nice long nap.

‘That’s him,’ hissed the copy boy.

Nanny Piggins watched the editor as he lumbered along the central aisle of the open-plan area. ‘Good gracious!’ she exclaimed. ‘His hair really is dreadful. I’m amazed any of you ever get any work done when

you could spend all your time staring at it, or trying to poke it to see if it's a well-trained rodent sitting on his head.'

'Who's this?' asked the editor, mopping his brow. (The combination of eating an enormous lunch and then walking all the way from the lift had made him work up a sweat.)

'I am Sarah Matahari Lorelai Piggins,' announced Nanny Piggins, puffing up to her full four feet of height, 'and I have come here today to denounce you, sir! For –'

Nanny Piggins suddenly stopped talking.

'What's wrong?' asked Michael.

'Shhh,' said Nanny Piggins as she carefully sniffed the air.

'What's the meaning of this?' asked the editor. He was beginning to get upset because Nanny Piggins was blocking his path to the large comfy sofa in his office. 'I demand to know – mmpffff!'

The editor stopped talking here because Nanny Piggins had whipped a chocolate chip cookie out of her handbag and shoved it into his mouth to silence him.

'Be quiet,' she urged. 'I can smell something.'

Now everyone in the open-plan office was sniffing about.

‘What is it?’ whispered Derrick.

Nanny Piggins sniffed some more. A few short exploratory sniffs, then one long deep sniff, sucking in so much air around her that papers rustled and the editor’s secretary had to grab the desktop photograph of her children to stop it being sucked into Nanny Piggins’ nose.

‘I smell cake,’ whispered Nanny Piggins. All thoughts of the editor and revenge were now totally forgotten.

‘Of course you do,’ said Samantha. ‘You brought in a lovely caramel cream cake when we arrived.’

‘And it was delicious, thank you,’ said the crime reporter.

‘Yes, but it’s gone now,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘Now I smell another cake. It’s got chocolate, cherries –’ she sniffed some more – ‘cream, sprinkles and –’ She sniffed again – ‘strawberry jam!’

‘That sounds tasty,’ said Boris. The prospect of cake had made him stop weeping for a moment.

‘We must have some,’ declared Nanny Piggins.

‘But where is it?’ asked Michael.

Nanny Piggins was sniffing side to side in a tracking pattern as she slowly made her way in the direction of the cake. She climbed over desks and journalists as she tracked down the delicious smell,

until her snout was pressed hard against a sheet glass window.

‘There it is!’ exclaimed Nanny Piggins, pointing to the high-rise building opposite. ‘Quick! Someone bring me something to smash the glass.’

‘Couldn’t you just open the window?’ suggested Samantha.

‘Oh yes,’ said Nanny Piggins, ‘I suppose that would work too.’ She lifted the sash and leaned out into the fresh air, inhaling deeply. ‘I was right! Chocolate cream cherry cake with a strawberry jam centre. And . . .’ she inhaled deeply again, ‘the words *Happy Birthday* written in solid chocolate on the top.’

‘Come on,’ said one of the more cynical journalists. ‘How can she possibly sniff that?’

‘Nanny Piggins,’ Michael informed him seriously, ‘can do anything.’

There was a crowd gathered around Nanny Piggins now as they stood looking out the window. In the building opposite they could see a lovely cake sitting on the table in the break room as a young woman put candles on the top.

‘Candles! Definitely a birthday cake!’ declared Nanny Piggins.

‘You see,’ said Michael proudly.

‘There’s no time to lose,’ said Nanny Piggins.
‘We must get over there or we’ll miss out.’

‘It’s just a cake,’ said the bloated editor.

Nanny Piggins grabbed him by the lapels and shook him. ‘Get a grip of yourself, man,’ she said.
‘Do you know what you’re saying?’

‘Sorry,’ said the editor.

‘I need a rope and a grappling hook,’ declared Nanny Piggins. ‘Do any of you keep those things in your desks?’

The newspaper employees all shook their heads.

‘No wonder you publish such a dreadful newspaper,’ said Nanny Piggins, turning to the editor once more. ‘You obviously haven’t trained your staff properly if they aren’t equipped to launch an assault on a neighbouring building without a moment’s notice.’

‘Sorry,’ said the editor again.

‘Never mind,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘I’ll just have to improvise. Derrick, fetch me the fire hose from that wall over there. Michael, fetch me the largest hole punch you can find. And Samantha, fetch me the plate the caramel cream cake was on so I can lick it clean. If I’m going to get to that chocolate cake I’ll need all the energy I can muster.’

A few moments later Nanny Piggins had entirely

unravelled the fire hose, tied the hole punch to the end and was swinging it in large circles about her head as she leaned out the office window.

‘Wouldn’t it be easier just to go downstairs in our lift, walk across the road, then go upstairs in their lift to get to the cake,’ suggested the editor.

‘There’s no time for that!’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘They’ll start singing Happy Birthday soon, and once the candles are blown out, it’s all over. I know what office workers are like. They’re so bored out of their brains, they’ll fall on that cake like a swarm of locusts. Anything to break the monotony.’

Nanny Piggins threw the hose-tethered hole punch and then watched as it sailed high through the air, smashed in through the window opposite and caught on the window frame.

‘Aaaagggghhh,’ screamed the young woman preparing the cake.

‘You there!’ Nanny Piggins called to her. ‘Tie my hose to the door handle of your refrigerator. I’m coming over.’

The young woman did as she was told. Fortunately she had been a Girl Guide so she knew the knots for everything from rigging a sailing ship to detaining a terrorist with nothing but your shoelaces.

‘What do you mean you’re going over there?’ panicked Samantha. ‘This is a twelve-storey building.’

‘Yes,’ said Nanny Piggins, ‘but it’s only twenty metres from here to there. I’ll just tightrope walk over and back. It’ll take no time, and I’ll bring you back a slice of cake.’

‘But you can’t tightrope walk across that,’ protested Derrick.

‘Why not?’ asked Nanny Piggins.

‘It’s a hose,’ said Derrick.

‘I know,’ agreed Nanny Piggins, ‘and therefore it is wider than the tightropes we used at the circus. But hopefully the tightrope purists won’t hold it against me when I explain that it is for a good cause – eating cake.’

‘But it’s not like tightrope walking inside the Big Top,’ said Michael. ‘This is outside. And it’s a windy day.’

‘Don’t worry,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘I don’t mind if my hair gets a little windswept.’

‘But what if you fall?’ wailed Samantha.

‘Oh, I’ll deal with that when it happens,’ said Nanny Piggins as she stepped out onto the hose.

‘I can’t look,’ said Samantha, hiding her face in Boris’ fur.

‘Don’t worry,’ said Boris. ‘There’s no way Nanny Piggins would fall on the way to getting a slice of cake.’

‘She wouldn’t?’ asked Samantha hopefully.

‘No,’ said Boris, ‘although she might fall on the way back if she was too busy licking her fingers.’

‘Quick, Nigel,’ called the editor. ‘Fetch the photographer. We’ll need pictures of this.’

‘For the newspaper?’ asked Derrick.

‘No, in case she falls,’ explained the editor. ‘For occupational health and safety.’

But they need not have feared. Nanny Piggins progressed slowly but confidently across the hose. Despite the gale-force gusts of wind, screams of horror from pedestrians below and being hit in the head by a chocolate bar that Boris had thrown at her as encouragement, she soon made it to the other side.

Everyone cheered.

‘Clear the front page!’ yelled the editor, finally snapping out of his calorie-induced stupor. ‘We’ve got a new lead story!’

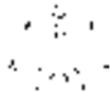
‘What’s the headline?’ asked the senior copy editor. ‘High Wire Hog Heroics?’

‘No,’ said the editor. ‘Potty Pig Defies Death.’

Meanwhile in the building opposite, Nanny Piggins was having a lovely time leading the office

workers in the singing of Happy Birthday and cutting up the cake herself to make sure that everybody, especially Melanie from accounts (the birthday girl) got a really big slice.

Unfortunately, at that moment Nanny Piggins' luck turned. The wonderful adrenalin-induced hysteria of the impromptu party was ruined by a team of police officers bursting into the break room and telling Nanny Piggins she was under arrest.



And so a few short hours later Nanny Piggins, Boris and the children were sitting outside a courtroom waiting for Nanny Piggins' case to come up before the local magistrate. Nanny Piggins was using the opportunity to practise.

'This is ridiculous!' yelled Nanny Piggins. 'It's a miscarriage of justice!'

'You're not going to say that to the judge, are you?' asked Derrick.

'The Police Sergeant did warn you that he was going on a two-week holiday,' Samantha reminded her, 'and that you should try to stay out of trouble while he was away.'

‘But how was I to know that his replacement would be such a stickler for the rules?’ protested Nanny Piggins.

‘Police officers usually are,’ said Michael. ‘It’s kind of the whole point of their job.’

‘Please don’t let them send you to jail,’ sobbed Boris. ‘If you’re put away, who is going to brush all the knots out of my fur in those hard-to-reach places?’

‘Pish! They’re not going to send me to jail!’ declared Nanny Piggins. ‘I rang Isabella Dunkhurst’s office. She’s the best courtroom lawyer in the country, plus she can tap dance (for further information, see Chapter 1 of *Nanny Piggins and the Accidental Blast-off*), so I’m sure she’ll have us home in time to watch *The Young and the Irritable*.’

‘Ahem.’ A man behind them pretended to cough to get their attention. ‘I’m afraid Ms Dunkhurst could not be here today.’

Nanny Piggins, Boris and the children turned to see a very pompous but smartly dressed man, with slicked-back hair and a self-important air about him.

‘Who are you?’ asked Nanny Piggins rudely. She did not care for men who put more oil on their hair than their salad dressing.

‘My name is Montgomery St John,’ explained Montgomery St John. ‘Ms Dunkhurst is touring Central Africa with her little dancing show at the moment. Apparently she has a large fan base in Botswana, but she left strict instructions about what to do if you should call and need legal help.’

‘She did?’ asked Nanny Piggins. ‘But how did she think that sending a pompous man with greasy hair would help me?’

‘I am the firm’s leading barrister,’ said Montgomery. ‘I have not lost a case in nine years. Rest assured I won’t have any trouble getting you out of this little difficulty.’

‘Why did you lose nine years ago?’ asked Nanny Piggins shrewdly.

‘What?’ asked Montgomery. He clearly had not been expecting this question.

‘Why did you lose the last case you lost?’ asked Nanny Piggins again.

‘Oh, there wasn’t anything wrong with my arguments,’ said Montgomery.

‘Then what happened?’ pushed Nanny Piggins.

Montgomery was starting to look a little embarrassed. ‘I had a cold and I kept sneezing when I should have been saying “Objection!”’

‘Hmm,’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘Then I suppose you’ll do, as long as we keep plenty of antihistamines handy.’

‘The People vs Piggins,’ called the bailiff.

‘That’s us,’ said Montgomery. ‘We’d better go in.’

They all filed into the courtroom.

‘What defence are you going to use?’ Derrick asked Montgomery.

‘Temporary insanity,’ said Montgomery. ‘I’ll tell the judge that she is a pig and that the smell of cake makes her insane.’

‘What?!’ exploded Nanny Piggins. ‘You’ll say no such thing! The smell of cake does not make anybody insane. On the contrary, it makes you more sane. It puts everything in perspective and makes sense of the world. One whiff of that buttery cocoa-laden bliss and instantly you know there is nothing more important in the entire universe than putting that in your mouth.’

‘Yes yes, you can say that when they put you on the stand,’ encouraged Montgomery. ‘It will support my argument nicely.’

‘Hold my handbag,’ Nanny Piggins said to Samantha. ‘I’m going to bite him.’

Fortunately for the trouser legs of Montgomery

St John's Armani suit, Nanny Piggins never got the opportunity to bite him because at that very moment the bailiff called out, 'All rise for the Honourable Judge Birchmore.'

Everyone stood up, except Montgomery. He went very pale and started to shake. 'That bailiff didn't say Judge Birchmore, did he? Perhaps he said Judge Darmon or Judge Hsu?'

'No, he definitely said Birchmore,' Michael assured him.

'Oh no!' said Montgomery, beginning to tremble.

'What's wrong?' asked Michael.

'She's awful,' whispered Montgomery. 'She's so mean to everyone. The only reason I got to be senior defence counsel at our firm is because she made the last two senior defence counsels cry and quit the law forever.'

'What did she do to them?' asked Nanny Piggins.

'Make rude comments about their weight?' guessed Boris. (That always reduced him to tears.)

'Or force them to do extra maths homework,' guessed Michael. (That would certainly break his spirit.)

'No, she was just plain mean,' shuddered Montgomery. 'The way she can yell and scream at a lawyer

is horrifying. I don't know how she does it. I think it involves circular breathing and excellent voice projection.'

Just then there was a shuffle of movement behind the magistrate's desk.

'She's coming,' said Michael.

'You'll have to excuse me a moment,' said Montgomery. 'I left my chapstick in the car.'

'What?' protested Nanny Piggins.

But Montgomery St John had already sprinted out of the courtroom.

'He is coming back, isn't he?' worried Samantha.

'Of course,' said Nanny Piggins. 'He's a professional lawyer. He can't just run away from the courtroom.'

Unfortunately Nanny Piggins' words were immediately contradicted by what they all saw out the courtroom window. They saw Montgomery run to his expensive Italian sports car, jump in and speed away.

'He said he left the chapstick in his car, not his house, didn't he?' said Nanny Piggins.

'Silence in the court,' called the bailiff.

They turned and looked at Judge Birchmore. She seemed harmless enough to the children. She

was a small wizened old lady of at least 75, perhaps even 80 years old. But Nanny Piggins was not so confident. 'I don't like this,' she whispered.

'You're worried because your defence lawyer just ran away,' guessed Michael.

'No, I'm worried that the judge is so thin,' said Nanny Piggins. 'She clearly hasn't had a slice of cake in decades. And if she doesn't eat cake, how can I bribe her?'

Judge Birchmore looked up from her papers and peered out at the courtroom, her gaze resting on Boris. 'Why is that bear crying?' she demanded.

Nanny Piggins stood up. 'Because he is worried that I may be sent to jail, your Justiceness.'

Judge Birchmore peered over her glasses at Nanny Piggins. 'Well *he'll* be sent to jail himself if he doesn't stop blubbing in my courtroom.'

'Michael, perhaps you'd better take Boris outside,' said Nanny Piggins. 'Being Russian, I don't think he is capable of going through a whole court case without crying. And I don't think prison food would agree with him. I doubt they would supply bear-sized portions.'

Michael led the weeping Boris away.

'Where's your lawyer?' demanded Judge Birchmore.

‘He ran away,’ said Nanny Piggins truthfully.

‘Hmm,’ said Judge Birchmore reading over her papers. ‘Given the litany of charges against you, that seems only sensible.’

‘Don’t worry, your Honourableness, I am fully prepared to defend myself,’ said Nanny Piggins confidently.

Judge Birchmore peered over her glasses again. ‘Really?’ she asked, smiling the way a crocodile might smile just before it bites off your leg. ‘You are aware of the saying that anyone who defends themselves has a fool for a client?’

‘Well that wouldn’t be true in my case, would it?’ said Nanny Piggins, ‘because clearly I’m not a fool, I’m a pig.’

‘Yes, well I’ve reviewed your case. It seems like a fairly simple matter of recklessly endangering the public, needlessly causing panic and violently trying to bite the shins of three separate policemen,’ said Judge Birchmore.

‘In my defence,’ interrupted Nanny Piggins, ‘my mouth was so full of cake, even if I had been able to get hold of their legs, I don’t think I could have fit their shins in my mouth.’

‘Do not interrupt me when I am telling you off!’ snapped Judge Birchmore.

‘I thought as defence attorney I was meant to defend myself,’ protested Nanny Piggins.

‘Only when I say so,’ yelled Judge Birchmore so loudly that everyone in the courtroom flinched. (It was really extraordinary that such a small and wizened woman could generate such a loud and unpleasant noise.)

‘Then that isn’t much of a defence, is it?’ argued Nanny Piggins. ‘In boxing, if someone hits you you’re allowed to hit them straight back. You don’t have to wait until they finish and tell you it’s your turn.’

‘This is not a boxing match!’ hollered Judge Birchmore.

‘I wish it was,’ muttered Nanny Piggins. ‘I know who would win.’

‘I’ve never heard such insolence!’ exclaimed Judge Birchmore.

‘Then you obviously haven’t been listening properly,’ said Nanny Piggins.

‘I was going to let you off with a warning,’ screamed Judge Birchmore, ‘but now I’m going to give you one hundred hours community service!’

‘But you haven’t let Nanny Piggins present her defence yet!’ protested Derrick.

‘Haven’t I?’ Judge Birchmore looked at the bailiff.

The bailiff looked intimidated, but he was a brave man, having been in the marines for twenty years, so he found the courage to shake his head ever so slightly.

‘Very well,’ said Judge Birchmore. ‘What’s your defence?’

‘My defence against the charge of public endangerment is that it is all a load of piffle,’ stated Nanny Piggins.

‘That is not a proper legal argument!’ berated Judge Birchmore.

‘But it’s the truth,’ Nanny Piggins assured her. ‘I am an international circus megastar. There’s no way I’d ever fall off a tightrope onto the heads of the crowd beneath and crush them to death, no matter how windy it was. Especially not when there was a delicious chocolate cream cake to be eaten.’

‘The deliciousness of the cake is immaterial to this court case,’ yelled Judge Birchmore.

‘You only say that because you didn’t get a slice,’ argued Nanny Piggins. ‘If you let me whip up a replica cake I’m sure I can convince you otherwise.’

‘Just get on with your argument!’ screamed Judge Birchmore.

‘Do you think the judge is so cranky because

she is worried she'll miss *The Young and the Irritable* too?' wondered Derrick.

'My defence against the charge of resisting arrest,' continued Nanny Piggins, 'is that the police really should be thanking me for the opportunity I gave them. Arresting an elite athlete like me actually proved to be an invaluable training exercise for the officers involved, and a much better use of their time than hanging out in the doughnut shop chatting up the cashier, which I happen to know was all they were doing at the time, because I saw them when I was up on the tightrope.'

The police officers, who were sitting in court waiting to give evidence, all blushed. They had indeed been in the doughnut shop, but it was not their fault. There is something universal about wearing a blue uniform that makes a person crave deep fried, jam-filled cake.

'All right, I've heard enough!' shrieked Judge Birchmore. 'I sentence you to 200 hours community service.'

'I know maths isn't my strong suit,' said Nanny Piggins, 'but didn't that figure just go up?'

The children nodded.

‘But that’s unfair!’ protested Nanny Piggins. ‘All I did was walk across a hose pipe and eat a slice of cake. Since when is that a crime?’

‘Since I said it is!’ yelled Judge Birchmore, ‘and I’m adding contempt of court to your list of misdemeanours! So that’s 300 hours community service.’

‘I don’t have contempt for the court!’ declared Nanny Piggins. ‘I only have contempt for you!’

Everyone in the room gasped.

‘You obviously have no idea how to bake a cake yourself,’ continued Nanny Piggins, ‘or you wouldn’t be so short and skinny.’

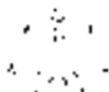
Judge Birchmore was now shaking with rage. ‘That’s it!’ she declared. ‘I am giving you five thousand hours community service!’

Now everyone in the courtroom gasped. Even the blushing police officers. They had actually quite enjoyed arresting Nanny Piggins. It was much more exciting than telling off shoplifters or giving out speeding tickets. They did not want to see her get in that much trouble.

But the Judge’s decision was final. She slammed her gavel onto her desk.

Fortunately for Nanny Piggins, Judge Birchmore immediately got up and turned to leave the room so she did not see Nanny Piggins lunge across the court

in a last minute attempt to bite her scrawny shins, or that it took all three children, Boris and the bailiff to drag her out of the courtroom.



‘At least she didn’t send you to jail,’ said Samantha later that afternoon, as they all sat around their kitchen table feeling gloomy.

‘Hah!’ said Nanny Piggins. ‘A jail sentence is nothing! You’re forgetting I escaped from the circus. So it would take much more than a twelve-foot-high electrified cyclone fence and guards with machine guns to hold me.’

‘But what about the community service?’ said Michael. ‘Five thousand hours is a lot. Even if you worked ten hours a day it would still take you a year and a half. How will you find time to look after us?’

‘You don’t suppose there’s any chance the judge might just forget about it all?’ asked Nanny Piggins, looking a little worried.

They all shook their heads sadly. Nanny Piggins looked depressed. But then she put a very large slice of cake in her mouth, and you could almost see the chemical transformation it had on her body. She sat up straight, colour returned to her cheeks

and a sparkle to her eye. She licked the icing off her trotters. 'Piffle!' said Nanny Piggins. 'I'm sure it will all work out. These things always do. Terrible things are never as bad as you think they are going to be. Except for carrot cake. That is always atrocious. As long as they don't expect me to eat carrot cake, I'm sure this community service will fly by.'

The children were not so confident. They loved their nanny very much. But seeing sense was not her strong suit. So they suspected that the following months would not be easy at all.