

ESMERALDA

PIG

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BOOK ONE

ESMERALDA

AND

VLADIMIR

Colin Whittemore

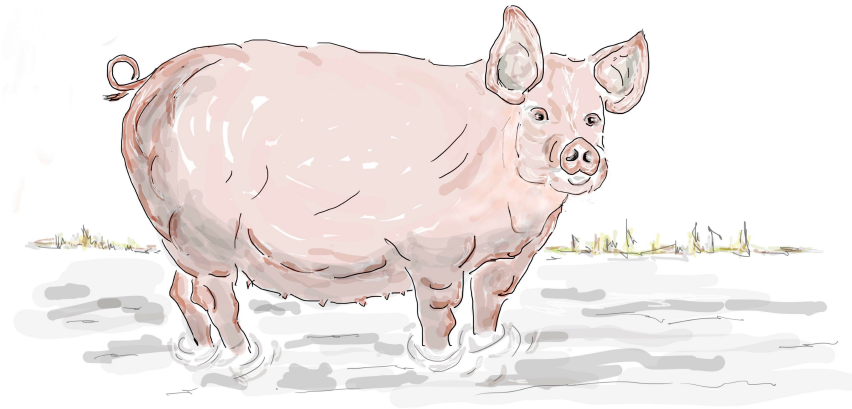
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Esmeralda meets Vladimir

Esmeralda was pink, but she usually tried to hide it, preferring a touch of grey – mud-grey. Esmeralda loved to roll about in the mud. Before she came to her special place near the back door of the farmhouse, Esmeralda had lived with her sister in a big wet boggy field with plenty of grey oozy mud.



Her sister had not been given any proper name that was known of. She was called Esmeralda's Sister (naturally). Nathaniel's family had eaten the sister, though not Esmeralda, who was so far spared. Nathaniel's mother had a rule that things that had been given Christian names should not be eaten. So if anything was to be eaten, to be sure it would not be named. But because Esmeralda was now all alone – her sister having

been eaten and all of that – she had been moved from the muddy grey field into the farmyard.

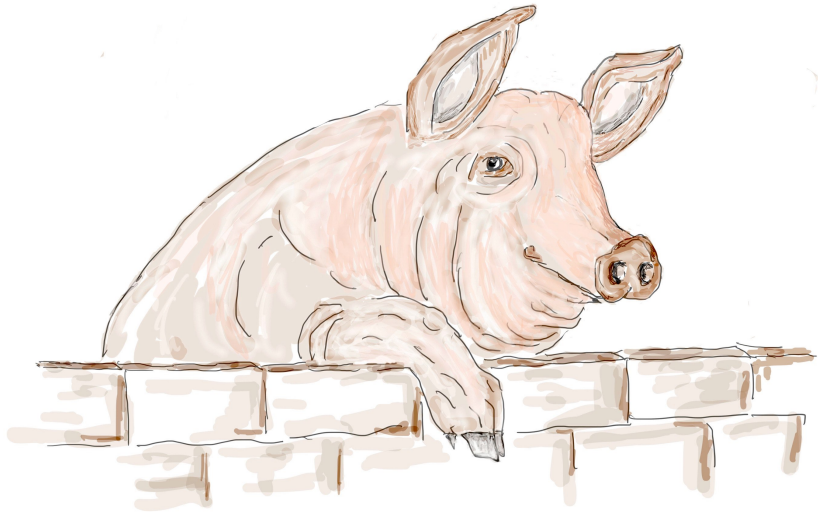
Nathaniel, the farmer's youngest boy, had never met a pig before he met with Esmeralda. His own bigger brothers and sisters – his family – Nathaniel *had* met (though he did not much care for them), and the sheep dogs, and the little white terrier Yap Dog (he was called yap dog because if anything happened on the farm, he would be there – yapping away like mad). But the first real animal Nathaniel met close up and personal was Esmeralda, providing of course that hens are not counted as animals – even though the hens, and the wretched crowing rooster, *did* have names. The reason for Nathaniel first meeting Esmeralda – rather than the farm cows and sheep – was that Esmeralda had come to live in the pig sty right outside the kitchen door of the farmhouse where Nathaniel lived. And if Esmeralda was ever let out of her sty – which was quite often because she was a well-mannered pig – she would do her best to get through the kitchen door and right into the kitchen. Even when Esmeralda was inside her sty she would think about the kitchen; she would jump up onto her hind legs onto the wall of her sty and look longingly across toward the farm house door. So, when Nathaniel came out of his kitchen and onto his farmyard, he would be met

by Esmeralda's big pink face, grunting to be let out.

Esmeralda liked to be in the kitchen because in the kitchen was the swill bin. And in the swill bin was food – Esmeralda food. Esmeralda was given to eat everything that the family did not eat. Insides of pigeons and rabbits and sheep's-head brains, and potato peelings and apple cores, porridge-pot scrapings and lard from the roasting tin, and everything that had become not nice to eat because it had gone bad – like old squashy pears, smelly ham, and furry-fungus crust-ends of bread.

Esmeralda was a rather fat pig, on account of all the food she got to eat. Nathaniel's family had lots of people in it – what with two brothers, three sisters, aunty Margaret, and old Granny and Grampy (as well as his father and mother) all living in the farmhouse; not counting the sheepdogs and the Yap Dog, and the hamster and the rabbit and the guinea pig and the rat (well, three rats, but the other two Nathaniel kept as a secret – keeping secret rats in the farmhouse was quite easy really, because it was rather big and messy and there were lots of ratty sorts of places in which they could hide). Anyway, the point was that with so many people in Nathaniel's house eating so much food, there

was rather a lot going spare, so Esmeralda got plenty to eat and that was why she was so big and fat.



Problem was, Nathaniel's father had a rule about everything on the farm having to be *useful*. And Esmeralda did not do anything useful except eat and grow bigger and fatter. Something had to be done about it. A husband would have to be found for Esmeralda, so she could do something useful, like have baby pigs – ones that could be grown for the family to eat. A husband would have to be got for Esmeralda, there was no doubt about that. There was however no room for *two* pigs outside the kitchen door (even if they were living together as husband and wife), never mind *inside* the kitchen door grubbing about in

the swill bin. So to provide somewhere for Esmeralda's husband-to-be to live, Esmeralda was put back into her big wet boggy field; there to await the arrival of a fine boar called Harold. Harold lived away down the road, so getting him up to the farm yard would take a day or two to organise, during which time Esmeralda would have to wait in her muddy field. Esmeralda did not mind the mud, but she did very much mind not getting all those lovely scraps to eat. A life for a pig without pig swill from a swill-bin was no sort of piggy life at all.

Esmeralda had heard of Harold. What she had heard was not good. He was a bully-boots, a bossy-boots. He was not at all nice to his wives. He hustled and bustled and bullied and chased. He was even bigger and fatter than Esmeralda. He never said 'please' and never said 'thank you'. He was a very horrid boar. So Esmeralda was not looking forward at all to seeing Harold. In fact, she was rather frightened at the very idea.

So, while awaiting her hateful husband-to-be, Esmeralda thought-up a 'bucket list' of things to do before the dreadful day arrived and she would be chased round and round her field by horrible Harold. She determined that she would do three things. One, escape from the field. Two, find

some food. And three, before settling down to married life with lots of little piglings, have a proper adventure. The adventure would, Esmeralda being Esmeralda, naturally include lots of food – preferably stinky. Esmeralda waited until dusk began to fall and a bright moon rise into the evening sky and the owls in the nearby wood begin to hoot before she began work upon her Grand Plan.

The first bit was rather simple, because like all pigs, Esmeralda had a powerful snout that was just perfect for rooting up the ground and looking for sweet roots of trees and shrubs and grass to eat. And if Esmeralda chose to go rooting and digging next to the field fence, then for sure she would be rooting up not just roots, but the field fence as well. Which is what she did. In no time at all she was under the wire and away. Free!

Esmeralda sniffed the air and smelled, a little way away, the lovely scent of farmhouse kitchen. That's where the food would be, that's where she would go – to the farmhouse. No sooner had she set into a piggy trot across the moonlit fields, nose pointed toward the farmyard, than another smell wafted across her long elegant snout. Esmeralda sniffed the night air. These smells were not coming from the farm, they were

coming from quite another direction – The Dark Wild Wood.



The big fat pig stopped in her tracks; what were those fantastical sniffs? There were roots – plenty of tree root smells to be sure – but tree roots are not anything special. What was special was

Well, first there was the very special stink of dead rabbit, which Esmeralda rather liked. The rabbit, or so it smelt, had been dead for not too long – just long enough. But that wasn't what had stopped her in her tracks. What had brought her to a standstill was the most wondrous smell of *fungus*. Not mouldy-bread fungus smell, a

thousand times better than that. Not rotting-apple fungus smell, ten thousand times better than that. But a mushroomy sort of smell. Not old-mushroom-from-the-fridge mushroom smell, a hundred thousand times better than that.

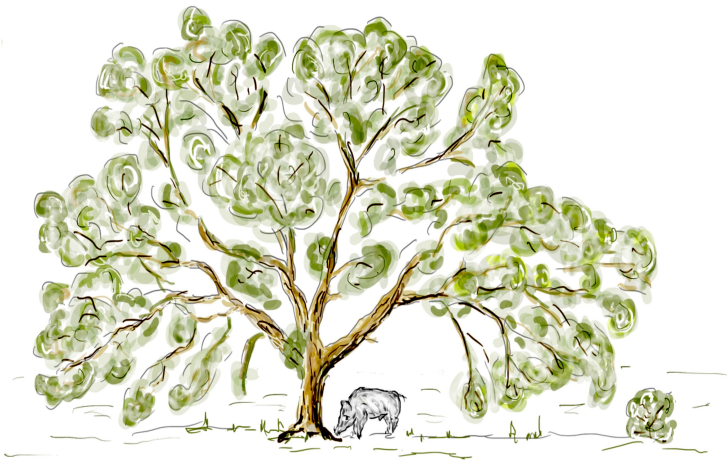
It was the smell of *Truffles*. And not just Truffles, but being-dug-up Truffles. Being dug up *right now* Truffles. Like *now*, like *there*, in the wood. Esmeralda could not even think about resisting, because all pigs love truffles with a longing that no pig can deny. The farmhouse kitchen quite forgotten, off into the Dark Wood she ran, faster and faster till she was cantering like a team of overweight cart-horses, her big fat body swaying from side to side underneath her as she went.

Now, although Esmeralda could not resist the smell of Truffles, she had no idea what a Truffle was and had most certainly never tasted one before. Nor did Esmeralda know that these Truffles were growing under an oak tree in the wood and that someone else had already found them.

No such thing anything like a Truffle ever got near the farmhouse kitchen. No farmhouse soup or farmhouse omelette made from the eggs the hens laid ever got flavoured with any such thing so exotic as a *Truffle*. As you know, only the

most upper-class chefs have truffle in their most upper class kitchens.

Truffles, as you *also* know, are very scarce, more expensive to buy than any spice or herb, more strange and special even than oysters, or Jamaican Blue-mountain coffee beans, or scallops. Truffles smell so powerful, so disgusting, so horrid, so foul, that Truffles are more delicious than anything else in the whole world. They can not be grown like other things,



or made in a factory. Truffles are wild and only grow where and when they choose. They look like black walnuts of constipated donkey dung. They hide deep under the soil where they live on the roots of old oak trees in the middle of woods. On this occasion in the wood right next to

Esmeralda's escape route, and at this particular moment in the very process of being dug up – right there, right then. That was why the smell was so strong and why Esmeralda could not resist it.

The oak tree with the truffles growing on its roots was near the middle of the wood. By the time Esmeralda had got there the entrancing smell was already getting weaker. That wasn't right; it should have been getting more strong as she got closer, but it wasn't, it was getting *less* strong. And when she finally arrived, Esmeralda could see why. At the foot of the oak tree was a hole. Next to the hole was the very person who had dug it, looking very pleased with himself. He was, in fact, absolutely delighted with himself. So delighted that he wanted give himself a big big hug. Or more precisely give a big hug to his tummy, which was feeling rather happy just at that very moment. But the truffle hunter could not hug anything, never mind himself. He could dig, with his snout, but not hug. He had, after much grunting and snorting dug his way down to the truffles, and having got to them, straightway scoffed them. Scoffed all of them. Gone. Everyone.

What Esmeralda saw chomping up the last remnants of the wonderful fungus was a brown-

grey, lean, muscly, ferocious beast, with rather elegant upward curving tusks for teeth, thick neck, long elegant snout, dark hairy body and sparkly eyes. Esmeralda had not seen anything so beautiful in all her life; and the aroma all around about him was entrancing; transfixing even. He was nothing at all like Harold.

Esmeralda was so taken with the sight of the wild boar – for that is what he was – that she nearly fainted on the spot. She was in love. In an instant, head over heels in love. She forgot about truffles and could think only of what stood before her in all his magnificence. She should have been terrified, for he was a terrifying sight. But instead of running away, she just wanted to be closer by him. The wild boar began frothing at the mouth, big globs of slobber falling to the ground in front of him. So overcome was Esmeralda to be in the presence of so fine a man, with all that smelly drool dripping from his long snout, that she was rooted to the spot.

Upon seeing the effect that he had had upon Esmeralda, the wild man of the Dark Wild Woods remembered his manners. He introduced himself as Vladimir; ‘Just-call-me-Vlad’ he grunted. He quite liked the look of Esmeralda; he liked the fact that she was big, with a big swingy belly. Esmeralda told him she was called

‘Just-call-me-Esme’. Which was not true, but people say silly things when they have fallen instantly in love with complete strangers.



What pig in her right mind could want horrid Harold for a husband when they could have Just-call-me-Vlad. Esmeralda would definitely not be needing hateful Harold from down the road for a husband. Harold would have to find another pig to be his wife. It would be *Vladimir* who would be giving her some little piglings to look after.

Esmeralda and Vladimir spent two or three days together in the woods, before Just-call-me-Vlad became somewhat bored with the rather too slow rather too fat, rather too large Esme. Esmeralda, Vladimir decided, was too soft to be a wild-woods pig. Besides, he already had two of his own wild women – proper wild sows – in the dark thickets

of the Wild Wood to look after. And so it was that one morning Esme woke to find her lover upped-and-gone from her nice nest of dried grass and tree saplings. All by herself now, Esmeralda became home-sick and decided to make her way back to the farmer's field from which she had escaped the week previous.

* * * * *

While Esmeralda was frolicking in the Dark Wood with Vlad, and before it was realised that Esmeralda had escaped, Nathaniel and his father had gone down the road to the neighbouring farm where Harold, the boar, lived. Harold was used to being led, or driven, up roads and down roads where, at the end of his journeys he would be sure to find another new wife waiting for him. A girl he could push around and chase about and bully and get his way with. So when Nathaniel and his father turned up, Harold was willing enough to be encouraged back up the road to their farm. He was rather disappointed however, as indeed were Nathaniel and his father, to find himself ushered into a field which was empty of any type of pig, never mind one that could be a wife. All that was in the field was a lot of mud and a fence with a hole under it. Nathaniel searched hard for Esmeralda, reckoning that she would have come down from

the field to the farmhouse looking for food. They never thought to look in the wood – not that they would have found her even if they had. Vlad was a wily woodland beast, and Esme was with him for every moment – until he left her that was.

Esmeralda eventually came out of the Dark Wood and back to the farm in her own good time. At the beginning she was put back into the boggy field where Harold was waiting for her. Very strangely, Harold was minded to pay Esmeralda no attention at all.

That was because Harold could smell Vladimir. And that smell was so strong, so wild, so *Vlad*, that it made Harold extremely frightened. Esmeralda was quite covered in the smell of wild ferocious Vlad. Harold, for the first time in his life, was terrified. If he started bullying and chasing Esmeralda, Vladimir might come to her rescue. And by the smell of him, the wild boar of the woods would make short work of a farmyard softie like Harold. Esmeralda had no use for Harold – she knew that Vladimir's piglings were already growing inside of her. Harold spent his days hiding under bushes and behind trees.

With nothing happening between Harold and Esmeralda, Nathaniel's father was of the opinion that Esmeralda was not interested in having

piglings (how wrong could he be – her tummy was already filling up with Vladimir’s love children), so Harold would be sent home the very next week and Esmeralda would be destined for making into bacon and sausages. Christian name or no Christian name, one way or the other Esmeralda would be *useful*. If she wasn’t interested in making piglings with Harold then she would have to make herself useful in another way – by being made into sausages (which was even worse than being bullied about by horrible Harold).



Esmeralda was put back to take up residence in her pen close by the farmhouse door; getting her fill of kitchen swill so she could be even bigger and even fatter ready to be made into sausages. Harold was left, dismissed, disappointed and

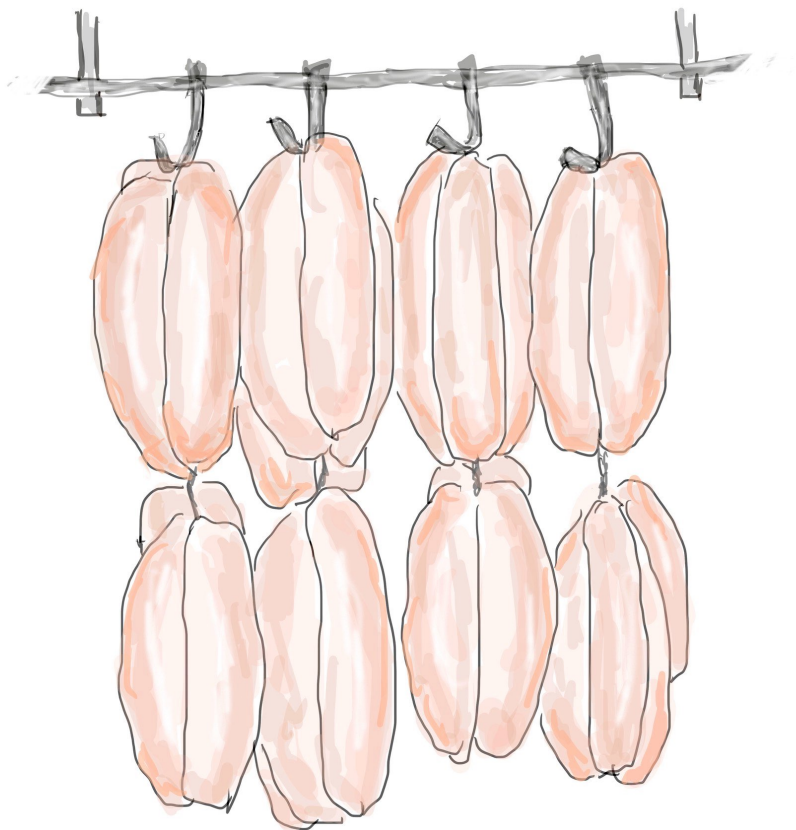
dissatisfied, in the field, awaiting the journey back down the road again to his home. Esmeralda concentrated on growing bigger and fatter and being pregnant. Being pregnant was quite hard work, for inside were eight Vladish piglings. But the Farmer did not know this. The farmer had sausages in mind for Esmeralda, not piglings – he would phone the butcher next day.

Nathaniel did not like to hear talk of making Esmeralda into sausages. It wasn't her fault she did not have a family of little piglings. After all, Aunty Margaret was big and fat and pink and she did not have any children either, and Nathaniel had not heard anybody suggest that *she* was to be made into sausages (though, thinking about it, Nathaniel considered *that* might not be such a bad idea – Nathaniel was not over-fond of his Aunty Margaret, who kept correcting his table manners).

And Nathaniel had also noticed a nasty change in the way Esmeralda was being spoken about. She was no longer 'Esmeralda', she had become 'The Pig'. 'The Pig was to be kept out of the kitchen', 'The Pig needed to be fed', 'The Pig's pen should have new straw put in it', and so on and so on. Esmeralda had been de-Christian-named. This was not a good sign.

But Esmeralda was being useful. Her piglings inside her were getting bigger every day. And nobody – apart from her and Vladimir – seemed to know. And tomorrow the butcher would be on his way to make sausages of her.

Esmeralda however was not the only person able to make Grand Plans. Nathaniel was hatching his own Grand Plan too.



The Grand Plan ends in sausages

Nathaniel had made his way up the farm lane to the gate. There he waited. This was his Grand Plan. First he had made sure that nobody was looking, then he had crept out of the house, and then he had run up to the big wooden farm gate where he now waited.



Nathaniel liked Esmeralda; anyway she was special because she was the first proper animal he had met up with close and personal as it were. She was a fun sort of pig, with all her snuffling and rooting and grunting; and she always ate up all her lunch. He did not want her

to be made into sausages – even though Nathaniel really liked sausages. Nathaniel's father had told the family that very morning at breakfast (bacon and eggs) that the butcher would be coming at ten-thirty precisely to 'attend to' 'The Pig'. Nathaniel quivered with fear at the thought, but even so he bravely continued with what he had to do to make his Grand Plan work out.

Quite soon, a big white van with '*Oswald Slaughter – Family Butchers*' written on the side in red fancy writing came slowly up the farm lane toward the gate where it stopped. Nathaniel felt his knees go all wobbly and his tummy hurt, but nevertheless he went up to the driver's door and looked upwards.

"Are you the butcher-man?"

A big florid red-faced man stuck his big florid red face out of the driver's window. "And what's that to you, young man?"

"My father said I was to meet you and take you to The Pig."

"You'd be a trifle young for getting a pig for butchering I'd have thought" said Oswald Slaughter.

“My father said it would be *you* who would be attending to The Pig” said Nathaniel.

“You be a knowing child by all accounts” said Oswald Slaughter in a sneery sort of way, “I doesn’t much like knowing children.” “But if your father says you’ve to come, then you’ve to come.” “Hop in, and you can show me where this ’ere pig is.”

Nathaniel opened the farm gate wide to let the Butcher’s van through. Oswald stretched across the passenger seat of the Butcher’s van and opened the passenger door.

“Get in, and off we’ll go. Where’s this ’ere pig then. In the farmyard I’ll be bound.”

“No” said Nathaniel shakily bouncing around in the passenger seat as the van bumped along down the farm track. “The pig is in the field. That one, the muddy one, over there.” He pointed to Esmeralda’s field.

“Proper pig’s field that” said Oswald Slaughter, “I shall be as brown as a black-pudding afore I’m through the day.”

The van stopped at the field gate. Nathaniel opened the gate while the van turned around and backed through just a little way. The butcher got out of the driver's seat, opened wide the back doors of the white van and put down a ramp, just right for a pig to walk up into the van's inside.



Then Oswald Slaughter returned to the front of the cab and took out an old battered bucket. It had pig nuts in the bottom of it. He went a few steps into the field. "Pig Pig Pig" he called, shaking the bucket so the pig nuts rattled inside, "Pig Pig Pig". Across the field ambled the big fat pig. The Pig smelt pig food in the bottom of the bucket. In went the snout. Oswald, who had done this many times before, walked backwards up the ramp and into the van, with The Pig following, snout busy guzzling the nuts from the bottom of the bucket. Before realising it, the pig

was in the van and the butcher had slammed shut the doors behind.

“That’ll do fine!” said Oswald Slaughter. “Now young man, while I attend to the pig, you go on up to the farm and tell your father that I’ll be taking the pig for butchering at my shop and I’ll bring back the hams and the chops and the sides for bacon and the sausages tomorrow morning. And that’ll be the pig well attended to for good and all.”

The white van bumped off down the farm track with Harold inside grunting happily as he finished off the last of the pig food from out of the bucket.

Nathaniel went as he was told, but did not go looking for his father. Instead he hid in the back of Esmeralda’s pig sty by the kitchen door and waited. He knew there was going to be big trouble, and he would be in the middle of it.

Inside the farmhouse kitchen Nathaniel’s father and mother were having a mug of tea at the kitchen table. The kitchen door was half open, Nathaniel could hear them talking.

“Where’s that butcher?” asked Nathaniel’s father. “It’s nigh on twelve o’clock and he was due ten-

thirty. It's not like Oswald to be late on a butchering job."

"Where's Nathaniel?" asked Nathaniel's mother. "I've not seen him since breakfast."



Nathaniel didn't know what to do for the best, there seemed to be no 'best' at all, only lots of 'worsts'. So, after scratching Esmeralda's back (which she always really liked), and picking off a couple of lice from behind her ear, Nathaniel decided that he should escape from the sty and run away. He was going to get such a hiding; there was no doubt about that. He opened the sty door and slipped out. Across the farm yard, up the lane, round the boggy field now

completely empty of pig, across another field and into the Dark Wood. Into which he disappeared.

Esmeralda meanwhile, spying that her sty door and the kitchen door were now both open, decided to see if there were any pickings to be had from the kitchen swill-bin. Into the kitchen she came, pushing the door wide open to fit her bulk through.

“Hey there Pig!” shouted Nathaniel’s father. “Who’s let you out. Come for a last meal before the butcher takes you away, have you?” Here Mother, give her some scraps before The Pig is made into bacon and sausage.”

“Don’t talk so!” said Nathaniel’s mother “The Pig will hear you, she’ll be distressed if she hears what’s in store for her. And stressed pigs don’t make good pork.”

Esmeralda got her snout well into the swill-bin and was guzzling happily away when the phone rang.

“Yes” answered Nathaniel’s father. “Hi Oswald, it’s you. We’ve been expecting you for over an hour now. Where’ve you been. Something wrong?”

There was silence in the kitchen, all save for Esmeralda's happy grunting. Nathaniel's mother strained to hear what the Butcher was saying at the other end of the phone, but she couldn't make out the words.

"What?" Shouted Nathaniel's father down the phone. "You're coming back tomorrow? With the bacon sides, the hams and the sausages? What you saying? You haven't been *here* yet. How can you be coming *back* with butchered pork, when you haven't even yet been here to get the pig?"

Strain as she might, Nathaniel's mother could not hear what the Butcher was saying, only what Nathaniel's father was saying.

"Nathaniel did what?" Nathaniel's father could not believe what he was hearing. He started shouting even louder down the phone. "You've got the *boar*!" "*Don't butcher that boar*. He's not even mine – he's borrowed. Bring him back. You've got the wrong pig. You've got Harold! You have the prize boar, he's got a name, he's Harold. Don't butcher Harold"

This time Nathaniel's mother *could* hear the Butcher's voice down the phone, for now he too was shouting back down the line.

“I do just what I does when I’m told. I’m told to take the pig. I takes the pig. I’m told to butcher the pig. I butchers the pig. I don’t mess about. Jobs done. Pig’s not pig any more, whether its called Harold or not. Christian name or no. The pig’s pork. And I’m bringing him up to you in bits tomorrow. G’d day.”

Nathaniel’s mother’s face started as serious as it could, but she could not help a twinkle in her eye, and then a wrinkle in her cheeks, then a little smile, then a bigger smile, then a broad grin. The grin turned to a snigger and the snigger to a giggle till she started shaking all over so her body bounced up and down with laughter. Nathaniel’s father was grim as he put down the phone, but seeing his wife now helpless with laughing he just had to join in too. He could see the funny side of things, and maybe he was a small-bit proud of his son as well. In no time at all the pair had fallen off their chairs and onto the floor, clutching their sides in merriment. There was such a commotion that Esmeralda thought she had better remove herself from the kitchen and get back to the safety of her sty, but being an intelligent pig, she decided also to take the opportunity of dragging the swill-bin in her teeth across the kitchen floor with her, for there was still plenty of old bread and bacon scraps from

breakfast in it. Out of the door and back into the sty went Esmeralda, swill-bucket and all.

There had been so much racket from the kitchen that Aunty Margaret bundled in to see what all the noise was about. She could see only the most strange of sights. Nathaniel's mother and father hugging each other and rolling round on the kitchen floor getting covered in the pig swill that had spilt from the swill-bin as Esmeralda had pulled it across the floor. She was appalled at such a state of affairs. She despaired of her sister. It was no wonder Nathaniel was such an ill-mannered boy, with parents like this. She demanded an explanation.



“It would appear” said Nathaniel's father, when he had recovered his breath back, “It would appear that Nathaniel took it into his mind to rescue Esmeralda from the butcher's knife, and got Harold the boar sent down the road instead. He met the butcher on his way here and ‘re-directed’ him, as you might say.”

“What a naughty child” said Aunty Margaret. “Such a naughty boy. He must be most severely punished for doing such a wicked thing. He must be given a good beating with a belt for so shocking a deed. That boy needs a good leathering ...”

“No” said his father. “Nothing will be said about it, one way or the other. He was bad, but he was also brave and clever. And he saved someone who he cared for. He is fond of Esmeralda, and he wanted her spared. He did well for his friend, even though she is just a pig. Nothing will be said, one way or the other – do you hear, Margaret.”

Margaret was not at all pleased and waddled off, tut-tut-tutting as she went.

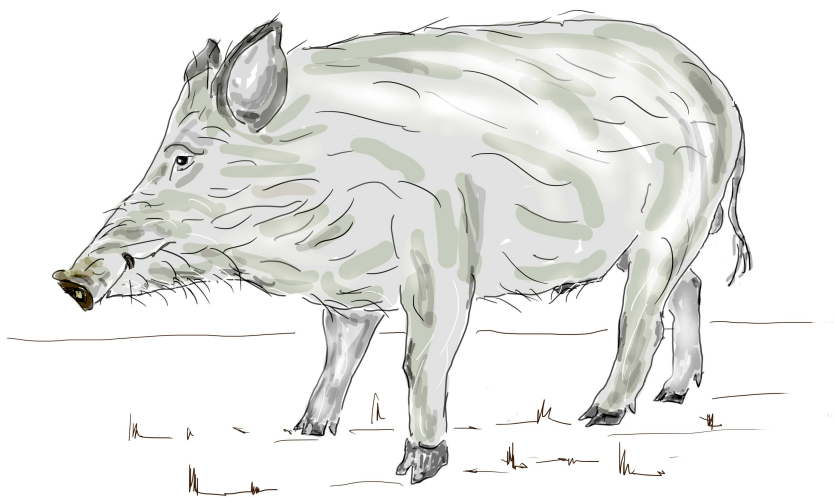
“Where *is* Nathaniel anyway?” asked his mother.
“Nobody seems to know. Does anybody know where Nathaniel is?”

Nathaniel by this time was well lost, deep in the wood. *He* did not know where he was either. Even if he thought to go back to his home, he had no idea which way that might be. Anyway, he was none too sure of the reception he would get from his mother if he did go home; for he realised that whilst hiding in Esmeralda’s pig sty he had managed to get his clothes covered in Esmeralda’s pig muck.



Nathaniel meets Vladimir

Vladimir of course, being as he was a *Wild Boar*, got scent of Nathaniel the moment Nathaniel had entered the big dark wood. *Vladimir's* Dark Wild Wood. Vladimir territory. Nobody (unless they were actually piggy people – and girly piggy people at that) was allowed in unless they had Vladimir's personal permission. If anybody came into the wood *without* permission they would be feeling the weight of a full-on pig charge and a bite from those huge and ferocious teeth. Nathaniel did not have permission. Vladimir was on his way to teach him a lesson he would not forget.



Vladimir would be making sure that Nathaniel would not be straying into the wood without Vladimir's express permission ever again. If he ever even got out of the wood, that was. Which, the ways things were going, he likely would not.

Vladimir sniffed and snuffled his way through the thick undergrowth of the wood. As he got closer and closer to Nathaniel he began to notice new smells. Daniel did not just smell of small human boy. He smelt of something else, but Vladimir was not yet quite sure what that might be.

Nathaniel's mother and father had become seriously worried about Nathaniel, for he was obviously not at home. They had searched and called for him all round the house, then all round the farmyard – in the cattle yard, the dairy parlour the horse stable, the goat pen, the sheep shed, even the pig sty. No sign of Nathaniel. Had something terrible happened to him.? Maybe he had been taken away in the butcher's van? Maybe he had fallen off the hay bales, maybe he had slipped into the slurry pit, maybe

Nothing of course terrible had happened to Nathaniel; he was lost in the Dark Wood. Nothing terrible had happened to Nathaniel ... yet ... but it was just about to

Nathaniel's father thought they had better start looking in the fields; the pig field maybe. Perhaps Nathaniel had fallen into a ditch?

"Well, you've to take the dogs" said Nathaniel's mother. "The sheep dogs will be able to sniff where he's gone."

The two sheep dogs charged out of the kitchen door, tails wagging, noses sniffing.

"Find! Find Nathaniel! Go find him! Find him."

Being good sheep dogs they picked up Nathaniel's scent immediately they got to the pig sty door. Off they sped, noses to the ground, across the farm yard, through the field gate and over the paddock making straight for the Dark Wood. The white Yap Dog came too. He didn't know what was happening at all, but it was obviously important and exciting so he yapped and yapped and went round in circles after the sheep dogs. Nathaniel's father, seeing that they were headed for the wood, took his big stick from behind the kitchen door and followed after, striding across the fields as fast as he could

"Take care!" shouted Nathaniel's mother from the kitchen door.

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Nathaniel by now was overcome with misery, alone in the clearing in the middle of the wood with his back to an old oak tree, trying not to cry, and hoping that somebody would find him very soon. Which indeed *somebody* would.

And that somebody had just about reached the far-side edge of the clearing where Nathaniel was. Snuffling and grunting, Vladimir had Nathaniel in his sights. A stranger ... in *his* wood ... without his express permission. There would be blood spilt by those wicked white teeth sticking out from that fearsome wild-pig snout.

Nathaniel saw Vladimir charge across the glade straight for him. Tail up. The boar was grunting an awesome grunt. A fighting battlegrunt.





Nathaniel was ready to run, but realised in a split second he could not out-run a charging boar. He would have to fight – but he had nothing to fight with. Not even a stick. Nathaniel was so frightened he wet his pants.

In the same instant he saw the farm sheepdogs rushing into the clearing with the Yap Dog coming behind, and behind the Yap Dog his father with a big stick. But the rescue would be too late because Vladimir had reached Nathaniel and his jaws were open wide, snarling those huge teeth ready to tear apart the intruder onto *his* territory.

But then Vladimir hesitated. Because into his long snout had wafted that different sort of smell. A smell he knew very well indeed. It was not the smell of small boy; it was the smell of *Esmeralda*. His wife of not so very long ago. Was this an

Esmeralda pigling then? Even maybe his very own son.

Nathaniel had stretched out his hand in a pathetic attempt to ward-off the charging boar. Vladimir, in his confusion as to what exactly it was he was about to tear apart, dug in all his feet and pulled up to stop. His head just touching Nathaniel's chest. A chest which smelt exactly like Vlad's very own Esme (which was not surprising as Nathaniel had got very mucky from being in Esmeralda's pig pen). Nathaniel, realising that this black hairy beast was nothing less, or more, than a pig, did what he always did with the pigs he knew – scratched it behind its ear, on the bits where the black pig-lice were. Vlad rather liked that and his fighting snort turned into a grunt of content.

This was not wise, because Vladimir was by now himself under attack from two angry sheepdogs and one small Yap Dog who had his sights on Vlad's black hairy tail, which was standing straight up. Vladimir could kill a sheep dog with one bite.

Nathaniel's father was quick to see that his son was in no danger, but his dogs were.

“Leave! Leave it! Leave it! He shouted. “Down dogs! Down!” The sheep dogs obeyed. The Yap Dog did not. Yap Dogs never ever obeyed. Besides, the Yap Dog now had hold of Vladimir’s tail.

Vladimir’s tail was much like a rat and yap dogs with a rat never ever let go. Vladimir turned to bite the dog behind him. But the Yap Dog was attached to his tail, so there was nothing behind. Vladimir went round and round in three circles trying to get at the white thing holding onto his back-end. However even his long snout could not reach his tail, however hard he tried. In exasperation Vladimir charged off out of the clearing and back into the dark depths of the wood, with a white Yap Dog still hanging onto his behind.



Nathaniel finally burst into tears “I’ve wet my pants” he yowled.

Nathaniel, his father with his stick, and two sheep dogs trudged out of the wood back toward home. The heroic little Yap Dog would not be back till some hours later – a little the worse for wear.

Nathaniel held on to his father’s hand. It seemed his father was not cross. Nathaniel had expected him to be *very* cross; because of Harold, because of not doing as he was told, because of hiding in the pig sty and getting his clothes covered in pig muck, because of running away and because of getting lost and worst because of wetting his pants. But it seemed Nathaniel’s father was not cross. It seemed he wasn’t anything.

“Father?” said Nathaniel, not daring to look up.

“Yes, Nathaniel.”

“What will happen to Harold”

“Nothing.” said his father. “Nothing.” “ ’Cause it’s already happened.”

“What?” asked Nathaniel.

“It’s already happened. Harold is already attended to. What used to be Harold will be delivered by Mr Slaughter to the farmhouse tomorrow, mostly as Sausages.”



Nathaniel thought for a little while about this as they crossed the paddock and through the gate into the farmyard. “And Esmeralda, what will happen to Esmeralda?”

“Nothing.” said his father.

“Oh!” murmured Nathaniel rather quietly, “is Esmeralda sausages now as well?”

“No she is not.” Replied Nathaniel’s father. You have saved your friend. Well for now anyway.

We will get her another husband and try again to see if she will have some piglings and can be of some use on the farm.”

But Esmeralda already had piglings inside her. Just-call-me-Vlad’s piglings. Ones that would be born in about three month’s time. Ones that would be very different to the usual farm piglings.

Vladimir’s children would be darker – more mud-brown than pink – and have stripes!

However, only Esmeralda knew that.



