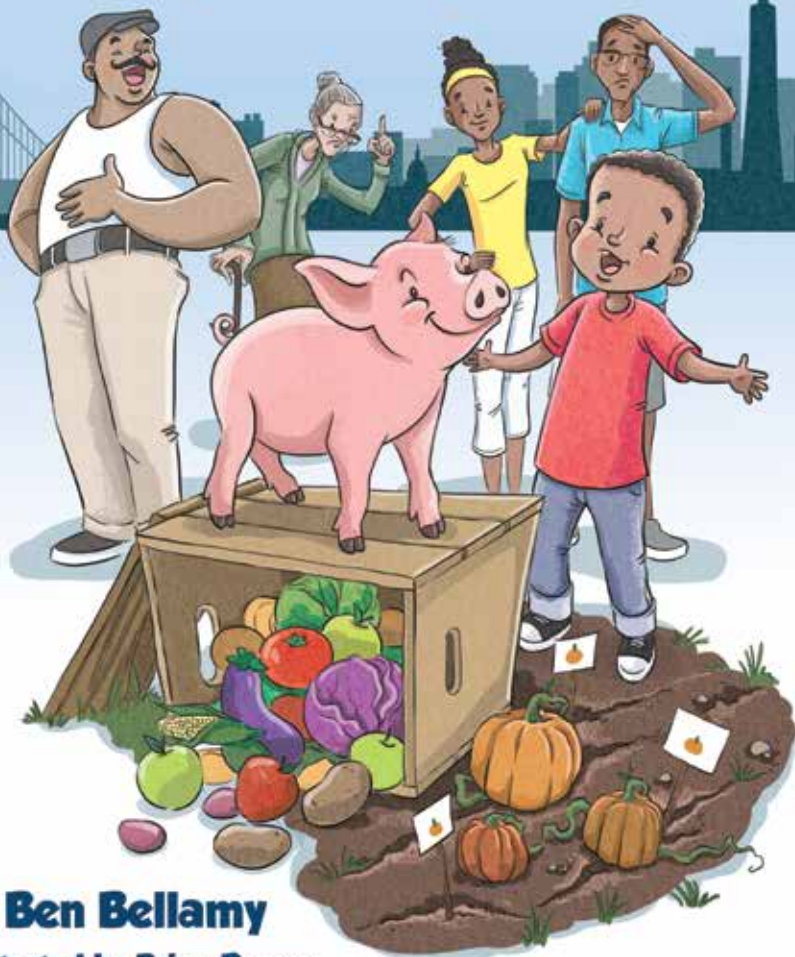




MARVELOUS MARVIN



by Ben Bellamy

illustrated by Brian Dumm

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1

Uncle Albert's Surprise

“Uncle Albert is here!” Nick yelled.

“Oh dear,” said Nick’s mom and dad.

Uncle Albert didn’t visit much, but when he did, it was always interesting.

Nick ran out the door of their apartment. He ran down the stairs of their building and out to the busy city street. A big red van was pulling up.

On its side, crossed out, were the words

Amazing Alberto's Moving Magic Show.
Below that, the words *Awesome Albert's*
Traveling Circus were also crossed out. And
below that, in messy black letters, were the
words *Al's Portable Petting Zoo.*

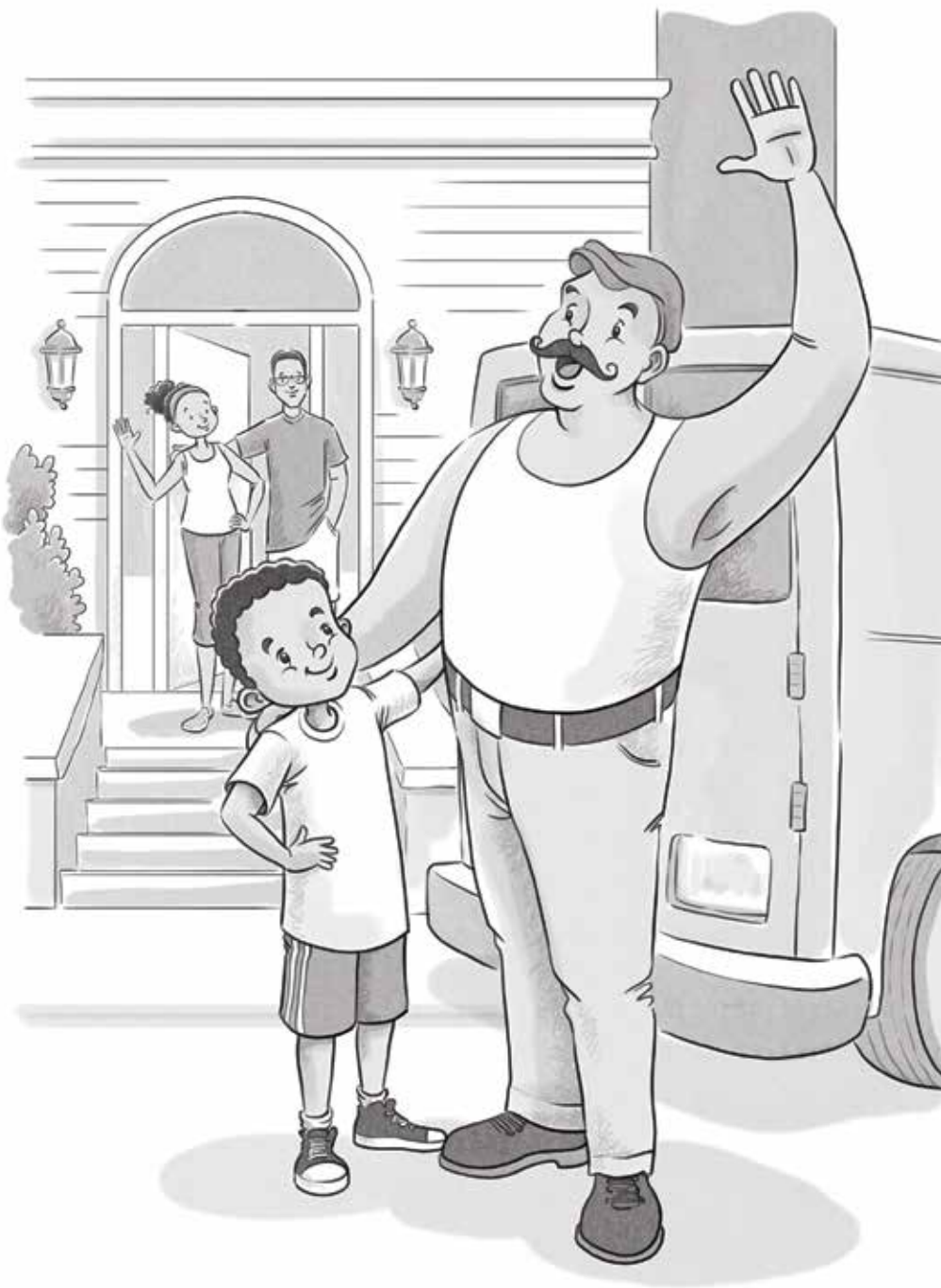
The van came to a stop and burped black smoke. Nick's parents, Harry and Angie Wheeler, coughed on the sidewalk.

"My favorite nephew!" Albert's deep voice boomed. He jumped down from the van with a great thud. "How old are you now? 21?" He stroked his mustache, pretending to think.

"I'm eight!" Nick laughed.

"My goodness," he replied. "Look how much you've grown!" He gave Nick a bear hug, pulling him into his chest. Then he waved to Nick's parents. "Harry! Sis! Hello!"

"Hello, Albert," Mr. Wheeler replied.



“How is the petting zoo going?”

“Better than the circus and the magic show I hope!” Mrs. Wheeler chuckled. “Remember when you had to fit all the lions and clowns in the same van?”

Albert gave a deep, booming laugh. “I remember!” he said. “And I’m afraid my petting zoo is going just as badly. But no matter! I am destined for greater things. Isn’t that right, Nick?”

“That’s right!” said Nick proudly.

“In fact, that’s what I’m here to tell you about.” He beckoned the family close with his enormous arms. “My talents are wasted on the road. They belong on the silver screen.” He swept a hand across the horizon. “I’m going...to Hollywood!”

He grinned at them. Nick’s parents stared blankly, but Nick’s eyes gleamed. “Wow!” he said.

“I knew you’d like that,” Albert replied. “But there’s one thing I have to do first.” He crouched down next to Nick. “I have to give you your present.”

Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler looked at each other nervously. Last time, they’d had to stop him from giving them an elephant. And the time before that, he’d given them an exploding deck of cards that almost set their apartment on fire.

“What is it this time?” Mr. Wheeler asked.

“You’ll love it,” Albert said. “See, I had to sell off my petting zoo animals for gas money. My llamas. My goats. My sheep. But there was one animal I just couldn’t bring myself to sell...”

He opened up the back of the van. Inside was a bed of straw. And jumping up from the straw was something very small and very pink. It squealed with excitement and

scampered to the very edge of the doorway.

Its hooves made little clanking noises on the metal.

“Meet Marvin,” said Albert.

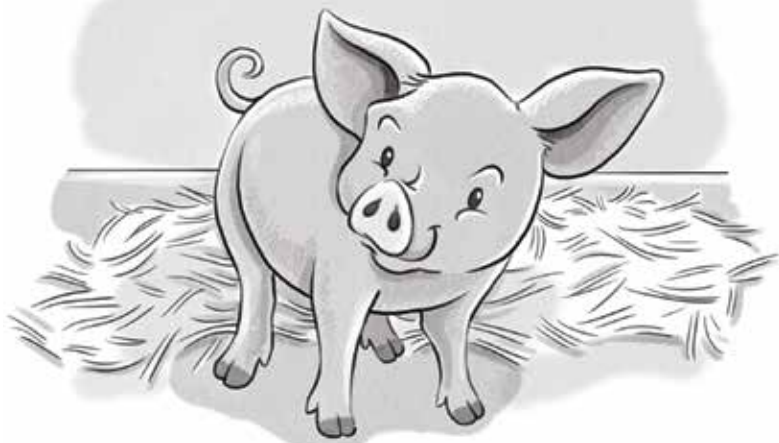
Marvin gave a tiny snort.

“He’s a pig!” Nick cried.

“A pig?” Nick’s parents repeated, with high-pitched voices.

“A pig,” said Albert. “A marvelous pig.”

Marvin wagged his curly tail and looked out at them all.



Mr. Wheeler looked back at him. “What’s so marvelous about him?” he asked.

“He’s what you call a teacup pig,” Albert replied. “Because he’s small enough to fit inside a teacup!”

“But won’t he get bigger?”

“That’s what’s so marvelous!” Albert boomed. “He’ll always be small! At least I think so...” He stroked his mustache in thought. He didn’t seem sure.

Marvin thrust his nose toward Nick and snorted again.

“I love him!” said Nick. “Can we keep him? Please?”

“Nick, you know pets aren’t allowed,” his dad said. He pointed to the sign that hung just inside their building. It listed all the things that weren’t allowed. Nick knew it well. The downstairs neighbor, Mrs. Finnegan, liked to grab him by the ear with her bony hand and

drag him in front of it whenever he broke a rule.

“It says no cats or dogs,” said Nick. “But it doesn’t say anything about pigs.”

“Clever boy!” said Albert.

“He’s right,” Nick’s mom said. “We could have a pig.”

“Angie!” said Mr. Wheeler. “We could not. We aren’t farmers. We live in San Francisco!”

“I know,” she sighed. She was staring at Marvin’s bright little face. “But he’s so cute.”

“And he was the star of my petting zoo!” said Albert, butting in. “Just watch this. Marvin, find the apple!”

Marvin leaped out of the van and into Mrs. Wheeler’s arms. She caught him and stumbled backwards. Marvin dug his snout into her pocket and pulled out a slice of



apple.

“You see? He has the greatest nose in the world!” Albert laughed. “Sorry, Sis. I hid that in your pocket when you weren’t looking!”

“Oh, he is marvelous!” laughed Mrs. Wheeler. She petted Marvin while he ate.

“Angie, please,” said Mr. Wheeler. “That pig is probably dirty.”

“A cruel myth!” said Albert. “Pigs are the cleanest animals in the world!”

Nick and Mrs. Wheeler tickled Marvin under his chin. Marvin nuzzled both of them, loving the attention.

Mr. Wheeler just frowned.

Albert said, “Look, it’s no problem if you can’t take him. There are lots of farms I could sell him to.”

Nick turned sharply. “But what will they do with him?”

Albert blew out his cheeks. “Oh, I don’t know,” he said. “Lots of things. Ham, bacon, pork chops...”

“Pork chops?” Nick shouted. “Bacon? Oh no, please, we’ll take him! Won’t we, Mom? Dad?”

Nick’s mom looked at her husband with loving eyes. It was the one look he could never say no to.

“Honey,” she said. “You can see Marvin doesn’t belong on a farm. And he certainly

doesn't belong in a ham sandwich. He belongs here."

Mr. Wheeler smiled at his wife and sighed. "Oh, all right," he said.

Nick cheered and clutched Marvin to his chest. Marvin squealed in delight. "We're going to be best friends," Nick said.

Mrs. Wheeler gave her husband a kiss on the cheek. "Thank you," she said. "And thank you, Albert."

"Don't mention it," he replied. He slammed his van's rear doors closed and hopped into the driver's seat.

"But this is the last time you give us a present!" Mr. Wheeler insisted.

"I can't promise that!" Albert laughed. He flashed a Hollywood smile. His van sputtered to life. And in a cloud of smoke, he was gone.

"What a brother you have there," said Mr.

Wheeler.

“And what a pig we have here!” said Nick.

They all looked down at the newest member of their family. He wriggled in Nick’s arms. Even Mr. Wheeler had to admit it—Marvin was quite marvelous.





2

The Big Baby

Uncle Albert was wrong about one important thing. Marvin was not a tiny teacup pig. He was a baby regular pig. And regular pigs don't stay tiny for long.

A few weeks after Uncle Albert left, summer was over. Marvin had gone from a six-pound piglet to a 30-pound pig. He was the size of a bulldog and still growing. That meant he was very, very hungry.

“Easy, boy. Easy,” Nick said. Marvin gobbled up his breakfast oats in less than a minute. Then he looked up at Nick with pleading eyes. “That’s all I’ve got!” said Nick. “I can’t help that you’re a greedy pig.”

“Humph!” Marvin grunted, like a grumpy old man. He stomped away, bumping the kitchen table. Mr. Wheeler’s coffee spilled all over his newspaper.

“Marvin!” Mr. Wheeler shouted.

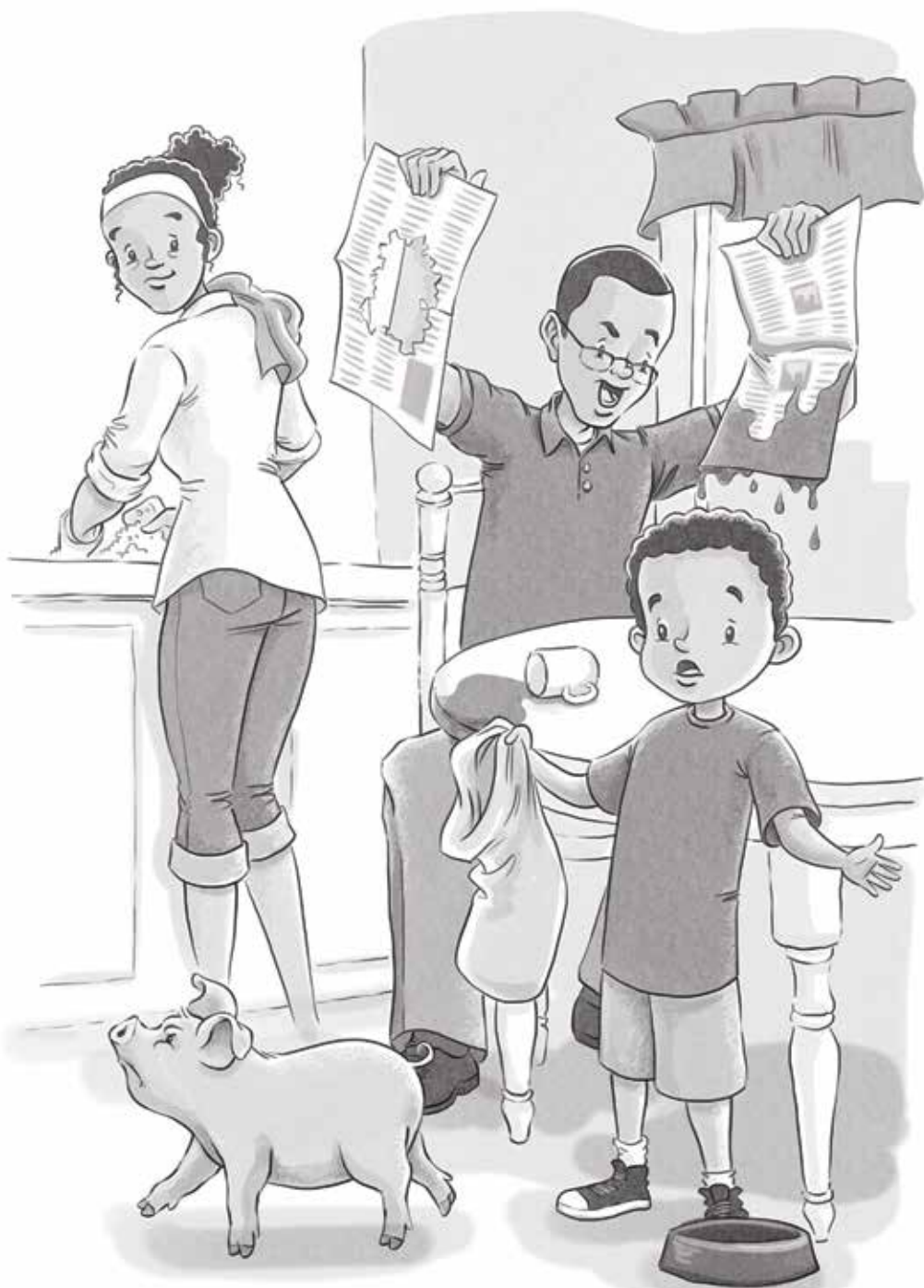
“Don’t yell at him, Harry,” said Mrs. Wheeler. “It was an accident.”

“Well, was this an accident?” Mr. Wheeler held up another bit of the paper with a big hole in the middle of it. “He ate the sports section. Again.”

Mrs. Wheeler tried to hide a smile.

Marvin went, “Weh, weh, weh,” like he was laughing.

“It’s not funny, Marvin,” said Mr. Wheeler.



Marvin lowered his head sadly.

“Poor thing,” Mrs. Wheeler said to Marvin. “It’s not fair to keep you inside all day. That’s why you get grumpy, isn’t it?”

Marvin snorted.

“What if I run home on my lunch break?” Nick asked. “I could walk and feed him!”

Marvin looked up, his curly tail wagging. Mr. Wheeler wasn’t sure you could walk a pig, but Mrs. Wheeler thought it was a great idea.

So later that day, when the school bell rang for lunch, Nick dashed home.

Just before he got there, he ran into Mrs. Finnegan on the stairs.

“You’re home early,” she sniffed. “Skipping school?”

“No,” Nick gulped.

“And what have you got up there making all that noise?” she asked. She peered at him



over her thin glasses.

“Nothing,” said Nick.

“Don’t tell me ‘nothing.’ You know what the sign says about dogs in this building, don’t you?”

“It’s not a dog, it’s...” Nick didn’t want to tell her the truth. He didn’t think she would take it very well. “It’s my baby cousin,” he lied. “We’re babysitting for my Uncle Albert.”

“A baby?” said Mrs. Finnegan. A smile spread across her face. “I love babies!”

Nick hadn’t expected that.

Just then, a loud snort came from the Wheeler apartment above them. Mrs. Finnegan frowned and said, “That doesn’t sound like a baby.”

“He’s...teething,” said Nick.

“Well,” said Mrs. Finnegan. “Bring him down. I want to meet him!”

Nick gulped. How was he going to sneak Marvin past her now? And where would he find a baby?

Suddenly, he had an idea.

Upstairs, he dug through his parents’ closet. All the way in the back, Nick found what he was looking for: his old red baby pajamas and stroller.

First, he stuffed Marvin into the pajamas. Next, he lured Marvin into the stroller with

an apple from his lunch box. Then, he put a blanket over Marvin's hooves and sunglasses on his face. At last, he added the final touch: a cute little baby's cap.

"Weh, weh, weh!" Marvin laughed at the disguise.

Nick laughed too, but he was nervous. "I sure hope this fools Mrs. Finnegan," he said.

Slowly, he wheeled Marvin down the stairs. When Mrs. Finnegan saw them, she squealed with delight. A bit like a pig, Nick thought.

"Oh, he's precious," she cooed. "And what a big baby he is!" Nick pulled the cap down as low as it would go on Marvin's head.

"Is he hungry? He looks like he's drooling."

Marvin grunted. He was hungry.

"No!" said Nick quickly. "He's just sloppy. From the teething."

"Well, he looks hungry to me," she said.



“Let me get him a cookie.”

She went to get her handbag and pulled out a ginger snap.

“No, don’t!” Nick yelled.

Marvin leaped out of the stroller and gobbled the cookie right out of Mrs. Finnegan’s hand.

“Aaah!” she screamed.

“Squeeeee!” Marvin squealed.

“That’s no baby!” she shouted. She swung her handbag at him. Marvin ducked and dashed down the stairs.

Nick chased after him. Outside, people turned their heads to see a big, squealing baby bounding down the sidewalk on all fours.

“Marvin, wait!” Nick shouted. But Marvin smelled something in the city air. Something delicious. His tongue dangled from his mouth, and he started running even faster.

“Look out!” Nick shouted.

Marvin dashed across the street. A car honked and slammed on its brakes.

“Runaway baby!” yelled a man on a bike. He swerved and flipped over his handlebars.

Marvin made it to the other side of the road and kept running, with Nick close behind.



Nick chased him all the way to Manzano's Market. People outside screamed and jumped behind their shopping carts. Marvin squealed and turned down an alley next to the store. Finally, he screeched to a halt next to a wooden crate of apples.

"Wow," panted Nick as he caught his breath. "You smelled those all the way from home?"

Marvin snorted with pride. Then he buried his face in the apples and started munching away.

"Stop!" Nick said. "Those are Mr. Manzano's apples!"

As if on cue, Mr. Manzano stormed out the side door of his grocery store. "What is going on here?" he demanded.

Marvin looked up from the apple crate and snorted again. He had chunks of apple all over his face. Juice dripped from his

snout. And, of course, he was still wearing the baby disguise.

Mr. Manzano took one look at Marvin and burst out laughing. He laughed so hard that tears rolled down his face. When he finally caught his breath, he wiped his eyes and asked, "What's your name, kid?"

"I'm Nick. And this is Marvin."

"Well, Nick, I want to thank you. I haven't laughed like that in years. Marvin can eat all the apples he wants."

"Really?" said Nick.

"Really! I was going to throw those apples away anyway," he said. "No one will buy them. They aren't perfect enough, I guess. Too big, too small. Too red, too green. People are so fussy."

Marvin grunted in agreement.

"Well, thank you, sir," said Nick. "This is the best meal he's ever had."



“It is, eh?” said the old grocer. He stroked his chin. “Well, look, I don’t like to waste food. And I like you two. So bring Marvin here whenever you want, and I’ll give him whatever I’m throwing away. My treat.”

“Wow! Thank you, Mr. Manzano!” said Nick.

He went home that afternoon with a bag of apples so heavy he almost couldn’t carry it. Marvin followed with a belly so full he could barely walk.

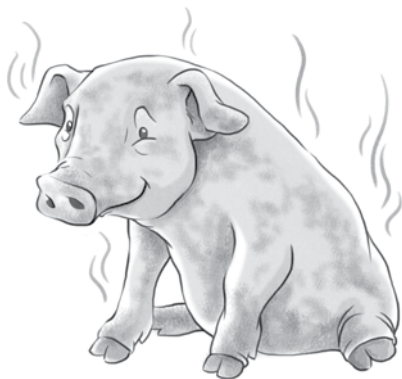
When they got home, Nick’s parents were both there too. Mrs. Finnegan had called them at work, and they were mad.

So Nick told them the whole story. His mom laughed almost as hard as Mr. Manzano had. And she laughed so hard that his dad started laughing too.

“It’s our fault,” said Mr. Wheeler when they finally stopped laughing. “We should

have told Mrs. Finnegan about Marvin.”

Nick petted Marvin’s back. “She just needs to learn how marvelous you are!” he said. But deep down, he was worried about Mrs. Finnegan. Having a pet pig wasn’t going to be as easy as he’d thought.

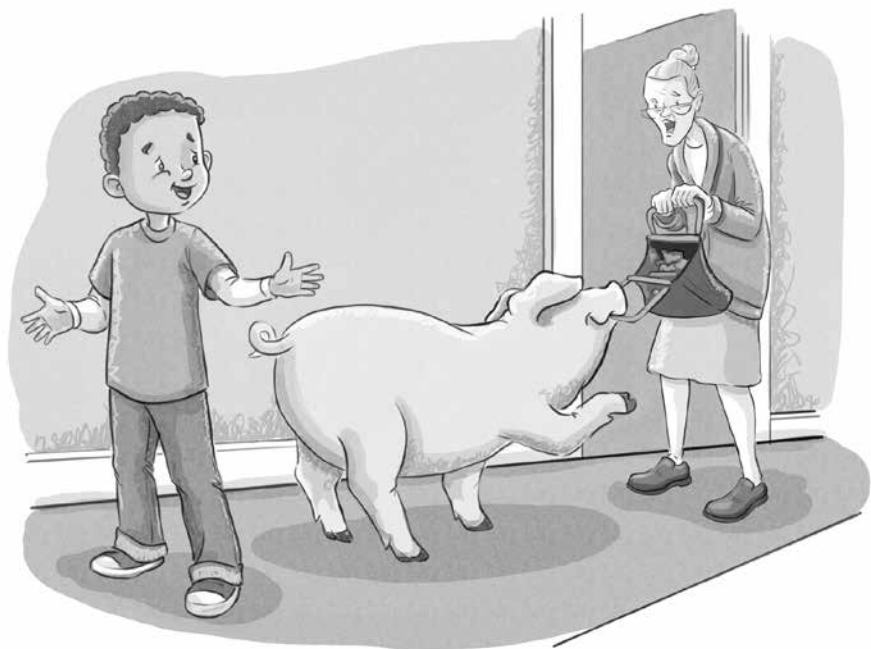


3

Show and Tell Pig

As Marvin got bigger, his nose got stronger. He could find crumbs behind the couch cushions. He could sniff through the laundry to find candy wrappers in Nick's pockets. And of course, he could always find Mrs. Finnegan's ginger snaps.

Whenever he saw her, he would bound over and beg for cookies. Then he'd stick his snout into her handbag.



“Get away!” Mrs. Finnegan always snapped.

“But he likes you!” Nick told her.

“Well, I don’t like him,” she replied.

Marvin did like Mrs. Finnegan. But then again, he liked anyone with food.

One October day, Mr. Wheeler came home from Manzano’s with a big bag of onions. As soon as he came through the door, Marvin

tackled him. He went straight for the onions and started gobbling noisily.

“He smelled you coming, Dad!” Nick laughed. “Can I take him to school tomorrow for show and tell? I could show off how good at smelling he is.”

Marvin jumped excitedly in a circle. He loved showing off.

“Well, he sure does smell!” said Mr.



Wheeler. He made a face and plugged his nose. Marvin was starting to stink of onions.

“Are pigs allowed at school?” Mrs. Wheeler asked.

“Sure!” said Nick. “Ms. Greep said it’s OK to bring pets. Someone brought a guinea pig last week.”

“Marvin is hardly a guinea pig,” said Mr. Wheeler. “He’s over a hundred pounds.”

“Oh, but he’s still such a sweet little baby piggy. Aren’t you, Marvin?” cooed Mrs. Wheeler. Marvin snorted happily and nuzzled her. Mr. Wheeler rolled his eyes.

In the end, Nick’s parents agreed that Marvin could go. “Just don’t let him near any onions,” said Mr. Wheeler.

The next day, Nick put an apple in his pocket and walked Marvin to school.

When they got to class, Ms. Greep said, “Good evening. I mean...afternoon. I mean

morning!” She was frantically opening and closing her desk drawers. “Nick, have you seen my pencil anywhere?”

“It’s in your hair again, Ms. Greep!” said Nick.

“Oh, yes,” she said. “Silly me!” She reached up into her curly hair, which looked like a messy bird’s nest.

“Weh, weh, weh,” went Marvin.

“Who is this? A new student?” Ms. Greep asked.

“This is Marvin!” Nick said.

“Marvin? Oh, dear, where did I put my glasses?” Ms. Greep leaned in and squinted at Marvin. “Oh!” she yelped. “He’s a pig!”

“A marvelous pig!” said Nick.

The rest of Nick’s class crowded round. None of them had ever seen a real live pig before, let alone a marvelous one.

“I’ve never heard of that kind of pig,”

said Ms. Greep, scratching her bird's-nest hair. "What makes him marvelous?"

"Watch," said Nick. First, he tied one of his dad's ties around Marvin's eyes like a blindfold. Next, he took the apple from his pocket and put it inside one of Ms. Greep's desk drawers.

"Is that for me? Why, thank you, Nick!" said Ms. Greep.

But as soon as he closed the drawer, Nick said, "Go, Marvin!"

Marvin's curly tail twitched. His snout sniffed the air. Then he oinked and bounded over to the desk. He opened the drawer with his snout, rooted into it, and pulled out the shiny red apple. Nick's classmates cheered.

Ms. Greep clapped. "I wish I had a nose like that," she said. "It would help me keep track of things!"

Marvin snorted, pleased with himself.

Then he froze. He sniffed the air again.

“What is it, boy?” Nick asked.

In a flash, Marvin ran across the classroom. He was still blindfolded, but he leaped right through an open window and took off across the playground. The class cheered again.

“Look, class! He’s running toward the vegetable garden we planted!” said Ms. Greep.



Nick's eyes went wide. "Ms. Greep, did we plant onions in that garden?" he asked.

"Did we? Oh, let me think," she said. "Let me see...carrots, lettuce, onions, pumpkins, peas..."

"Onions! Oh no!" Nick shouted. He sprinted out of the classroom. His whole class followed right behind.

They got to the garden just as Marvin did.



They watched him dive into it. He rooted through the soil. He ripped up weeds. He stepped on pumpkins and lettuces. He pulled out carrots and snap peas.

Finally, he found what he was looking for. Onions. He gobbled up every onion he could find. When he was finished, he lay down on his side in the dirt, full and happy and stinking.

Nick put his head in his hands. He imagined spending the rest of the year in the principal's office. He imagined Marvin getting sent to a farm where they turned bad pigs into bacon.

Then, Ms. Greep gasped with joy. "My ring!" she cried. Lying next to Marvin in the soil was a diamond ring, caked in mud. She picked it up.

"This was my mother's! And my grandmother's before her. And...someone's



before her,” she said. “It must have come off while I was gardening. I thought I’d lost it forever! Thank you, Marvin.” She patted him on his very full belly.

“But what about the garden?” said Nick. “It’s ruined!”

“Oh, don’t worry. We can plant it again,” said Ms. Greep. Then she scratched her hair. “Now where did I put that shovel?”

“Marvin can help!” said Nick. “He can dig holes for the seeds with his snout!”

“He can?” Ms. Greep asked.

“Oh, yes!” said Nick. “I told you he was marvelous.”

Marvin let out a loud burp. The whole class laughed.

After school, Nick took Marvin home for a bath. He hoped they wouldn’t run into Mrs. Finnegan. But there she was on the stairs again, like always.

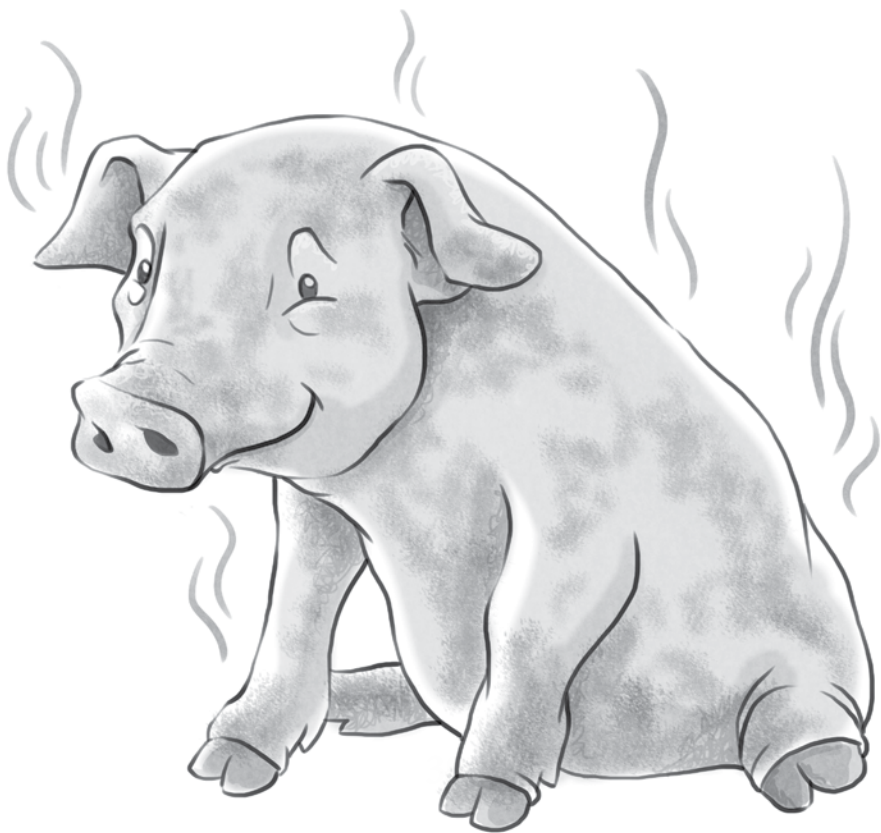
“Stay back!” she yelled. But Marvin snorted and bounded over to her. He rubbed his muddy body against her, sniffing for ginger snaps.

“Ugh, he stinks!” said Mrs. Finnegan. “What a filthy animal!”

“Don’t worry, pigs are the cleanest animals in the world,” Nick tried to reassure her. “My uncle Albert said so.”

“Your uncle is obviously wrong,” snapped Mrs. Finnegan. And with that, she stormed off, stinking of onions.

Nick looked at big, smelly Marvin and sighed. His uncle had been wrong about a lot of things, he thought to himself.





4

How to Train a Pig

“You were wrong about everything!” Mr. Wheeler told Albert over the phone. “He’s not a teacup pig at all!”

Nick listened anxiously and put his arms around Marvin. They barely reached around his body.

It was November now, and Marvin weighed over three hundred pounds. When he jumped in circles, the whole building



shook. When he slept next to Nick at night, he took up most of the bed. He even hogged the covers.

“Well, sure, he’s marvelous, Albert,” Mr. Wheeler went on. “But our neighbor doesn’t think so. Maybe you should take him back.”

Mrs. Wheeler snatched the phone from her husband. “Harry, shame on you,” she whispered. Then she spoke into the phone.

“Don’t do that, Albert. We just need your advice.”

She listened while Albert told her his idea.

“Training? Like for dogs?” she asked.

Nick and Mr. Wheeler both raised their eyebrows.

“I had no idea pigs were so smart,” said Mrs. Wheeler. “If you think it will work, we’ll give it a try!”

“Humph,” grunted Marvin.

One week later, Nick nervously led Marvin up to the door of *Jenny Chow’s Dog School*. He didn’t know how the dog owners would feel about having a pig in the class. And he hoped Marvin could stay out of trouble, for once.

Nick and Marvin peeked their heads into the classroom. A bald man in an expensive suit was showing off his tiny poodle.

“Of course, Fifi is so well-behaved,” the

man said. He stroked her soft fur that looked like fluffy white clouds. “She doesn’t even really need training, but I want her to be perfect!”

“Oh, I quite agree, Mr. Penniworth,” tittered an old lady wearing a pearl necklace. “My Princess here may be the finest Maltese in the city, but training is always wise.”



The other dog owners all agreed. Mr. Sparkles the pug and Cristina Maria the Chihuahua and Gunther the Great Dane were all nearly perfect dogs. They just needed a little bit of training to be fully perfect. Nick gulped.

The trainer, Jenny Chow, wore a red tracksuit and a whistle around her neck like a P.E. teacher. When she saw Nick and Marvin, she said, “Listen up, everyone! Today I am super excited for class, because we have a very special guest. Please say hello to Marvin, the marvelous pig!”

All the dog owners turned to stare at Marvin. Nick saw their jaws drop open. He heard them mutter to each other.

Marvin oinked and jumped in circles, showing off as usual.

“Sorry,” said Nick. “He’s a bit of an attention hog.”

Mr. Penniworth looked away from Marvin with his nose in the air. “My Fifi-kins would never behave like that,” he said.

But Fifi was watching Marvin with bright, curious eyes.

“OK, let’s get started with a little warmup,” said Jenny cheerily. “Just walk your pet around the room!”

“Show them how it’s done, Fifi-woo,” Mr. Penniworth said. He led her around the room on a sparkling leash. She trotted proudly next to him like a queen. The other dogs and owners tried to copy them.

Marvin, on the other hand, didn’t want to just walk. He wanted to frolic. He danced around the room, kicking out his legs and shaking his massive body.

“We’re not frolicking, Marvin!” said Jenny, as cheerily as she could. “We’re walking!”

Fifi watched Marvin. Frolicking looked like much more fun than just walking in circles. So she started frolicking too.

And then all the other dogs joined in. Soon, every animal in the class was joyously frolicking around the room.

“Fifi-cakes, stop! This is so unlike you!” Mr. Penniworth cried.

At last, Jenny gave a long, loud whistle.



All the animals froze. “Phew!” she said. “I think we need to practice sitting and staying next!”

She pulled out a bucket of dog treats. “Sit!” she said to Fifi. Fifi calmly sat down. “Stay,” said Jenny. Fifi didn’t move. “Good dog.” Jenny tossed a treat into Fifi’s waiting mouth.

She moved to Marvin. “Sit!” she said, but



Marvin had a better idea. He thrust his snout up into the bucket and sent it flying out of Jenny's hands.

The treats rained down. "Arf!" Fifi barked excitedly. She dove through the air and caught a treat in her mouth. Marvin squealed and started gobbling up as many as he could. And sure enough, all the other dogs joined in.

Jenny blew her whistle over and over. All the dog owners pulled at their dogs' leashes.

"Enough!" Mr. Penniworth shrieked. "That pig is trouble! When we come back tomorrow, I want it gone. Good day!" And with that, he led Fifi right out the door.

"He's right!" said the old lady with the pearl necklace. "The pig has to go!"

All the other dog owners agreed.

"He was only having fun," Nick said.

"It's good to have fun," said Jenny. "But

not if it makes trouble. Marvin has to leave. I'm sorry."

With a heavy heart, Nick led Marvin outside. "Oh, Marvin," he said. "What are we going to do now?"

But Marvin wasn't paying attention. He was staring at a large bush. He gave a low snort.

"What is it, boy?" Nick asked.

Mr. Penniworth was walking Fifi right past the bush. "Come along, Fifi-cakes," he said. "That pig is bad for you."

Fifi whined and pulled against the leash. She wanted to play with Marvin.

Just then, a man jumped out of the bush. He grabbed Fifi, unclipped her from her leash, and took off.

Mr. Penniworth shrieked with horror. "Stop! Thief! Oh, my baby! My woofy-kins! Help!"



A flash of pink flew past him. It was Marvin. Nick had never seen him run so fast, even for apples or onions.

Marvin threw himself at the thief. The thief screamed. Three hundred pounds of pig barreled into him. “Oof!” shouted the thief.

Fifi flew out of his hands. She yipped as she flipped through the air.

“Don’t worry! Daddy’s got you!” cried Mr. Penniworth.

He tried to make a diving catch. So did the thief. And so did Marvin.

All three tumbled onto the hard pavement with a mighty *THUD*. Then Fifi landed with a soft thump right on top of Mr. Penniworth. Who was right on top of Marvin. Who was right on top of the thief.

“Get off me!” the thief gasped.

“Never!” said Mr. Penniworth.

“Weh, weh, weh,” oinked Marvin.

“Arf, arf, arf!” yipped Fifi.

Soon, the police showed up to take the thief away. Nick proudly told them the whole story. They were very impressed with Marvin.

“We’ve been trying to catch this dog thief for months,” said one policeman. “What a pig!”

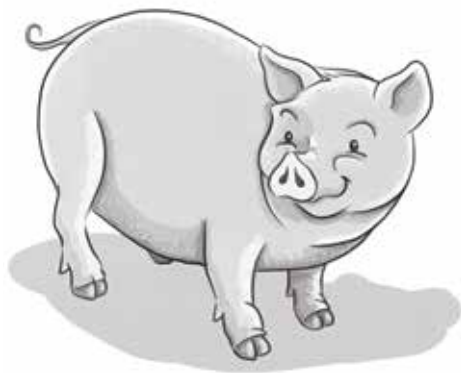


“A marvelous pig,” piped up Mr. Penniworth. He clutched Fifi to his chest. “I owe him everything. I don’t know what I would do without my darling little Fifi-foofy-woofy-diddums.” He buried his face in Fifi’s fur and gave her lots of kisses.

Nick and Marvin looked at each other. “Don’t worry, Marvin, I won’t kiss you,” Nick laughed. “But I do love you.” He gave him a belly rub instead. Marvin liked those better anyway.

Mr. Penniworth smiled. “I see now that Marvin is special, just like my little Fifi,” he said. “Come on, let’s go back to class. Together.”

Nick was so happy that he hugged Mr. Penniworth right then and there. Maybe, just maybe, he thought, Marvin’s days of getting in trouble were finally over.



5

A Marvelous Christmas

Mrs. Finnegan loved Christmas. Every year, she strung Christmas lights along the stairs. She hung a beautiful wreath on her door. And she made hundreds of delicious gingerbread men for the local Christmas fair.

Of course, Mrs. Finnegan knew how Marvin felt about ginger cookies. “Keep that beast away from my gingerbread men!” she warned Nick. “Or I’ll turn him into a

Christmas ham!”

“Don’t worry,” said Nick. “He’s a trained pig now. Aren’t you, Marvin?”

Marvin snorted.

But Mrs. Finnegan was not convinced. Marvin was bigger than ever. He was the size of a couch and weighed over five hundred pounds. He could gobble up a whole army of gingerbread men if he really wanted to.

Then, on Christmas Eve, Nick went to take Marvin for a walk. The moment he opened the front door, Marvin squealed and burst out at full speed.

“Marvin! What’s wrong?” Nick cried.

Marvin bounded down the stairs to Mrs. Finnegan’s door. He scratched at it frantically with his hoof.

“No, Marvin. Those gingerbread men aren’t for you!” said Nick.

“Humph!” Marvin grunted. He took a

big step back. Then, with a great snort, he lunged at the door.

“Marvin, stop!” Nick yelled.

Marvin jumped. His huge body smashed through Mrs. Finnegan’s door. Bits of wood went flying. Mrs. Finnegan’s Christmas wreath broke apart. And with a great *CRASH*, Marvin landed inside her apartment.



Right away, Nick smelled smoke. In a panic, he climbed through the pig-shaped hole in the door. He raced after Marvin into the kitchen. Black smoke poured out of the oven. “Fire!” Nick cried.

He realized that Mrs. Finnegan had left her oven on when she went out shopping. He grabbed a big metal pot and filled it with



water. Then he opened the oven.

He coughed. His eyes stung. As quickly as he could, he threw the pot of water onto the fire. It went out right away.

“Phew!” Nick gasped. He looked at his pet pig in amazement. “Marvin! You saved the day!”

Marvin oinked with pride.

But right at that moment, Mrs. Finnegan came home.



“AAAH!” she screamed. “My door! My wreath! My gingerbread men! What have you done?!”

“It was Marvin!” Nick said proudly.

“Marvin!” she cried. “I should have known!” She angrily picked up her phone.

“No, you don’t understand,” said Nick. “He smelled the smoke! He saved your apartment! He saved the building! He saved our lives!”

But Mrs. Finnegan was already calling the police. “Hello?” she said. “I’d like to report many, many crimes. Breaking and entering! Destruction of gingerbread men! An illegal pig! Yes, that’s right! I want it taken to pig prison!”

Nick ran home, with Marvin right behind him. He found his dad reading the newspaper in the kitchen. Holding back tears, Nick told him everything that had happened.

Mr. Wheeler listened quietly. Then he thought long and hard.

“They won’t take Marvin away, will they?” Nick pleaded.

Mr. Wheeler sighed. “I need to make some phone calls,” he said. He walked out of the room.

Nick hung his head. He knew what that meant. His dad was going to call Albert again to tell him to take Marvin back.

Half an hour later, Mrs. Finnegan and a policeman knocked on the Wheelers’ door. Nick stood next to his parents with his arms around Marvin.

“Mr. Wheeler and Mrs. Wheeler? I’m Officer Davis,” said the policeman. He saw Marvin and grinned. “Hey, I know you! You’re the pig who caught that dog thief! Hi there, big fella!”

“Ahem!” Mrs. Finnegan said.

“Oh, right, sorry,” said Officer Davis. “Where was I?” He looked down at his notes. “Now, I’m here because...um...” He glanced nervously at Mrs. Finnegan.

“The pig!” she finished for him.

“Right! The pig,” said Officer Davis. “Yes, it’s illegal to keep a pig in an apartment. I think.”

“Which means the pig has to go!” snapped Mrs. Finnegan.

“It does?” said Officer Davis. “Oh, right, yes. It does. The pig has to go.”



Marvin hung his head. Nick held him tight.

“But then who’s going to eat all my leftovers?” a voice said. Everyone turned to see Mr. Manzano rushing up the stairs.

“And who will help with our vegetable garden?” said Ms. Greep, following right behind him.

“And who will play with my Fifi-kins?” said Mr. Penniworth, carrying Fifi behind Ms. Greep.

“Arf!” yipped Fifi.

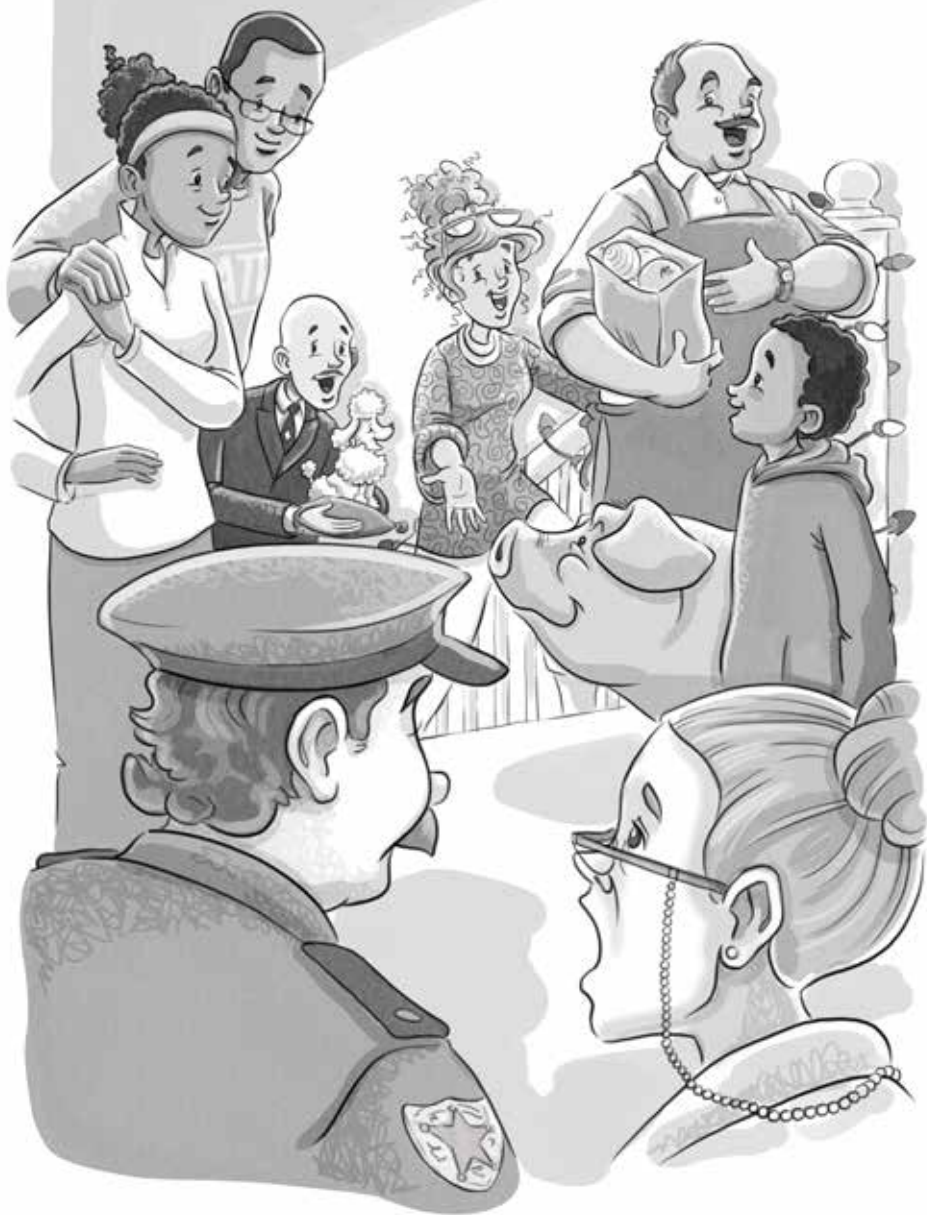
“What are these people doing here?” grumbled Mrs. Finnegan.

“We’re Marvin’s friends!” said Mr. Manzano.

“Mr. Wheeler called us,” said Ms. Greep.

“He told us Marvin was in trouble,” added Mr. Penniworth.

“He did?” Nick asked. He looked up at his



dad. He'd never loved him more.

"I did," said Mr. Wheeler. "Marvin belongs with his friends."

"And his family," added Mrs. Wheeler. She put her arms round her husband.

"No!" snapped Mrs. Finnegan. "The law is the law. I've let you get away with this long enough."

"You're right, Mrs. Finnegan," Mr. Wheeler replied calmly. "Marvin can't live in this apartment anymore."

Nick gasped. He looked at his dad in shock. He felt tears sting his eyes.

"That's why we are here, Nick," said Mr. Manzano. "Marvin is going to live with us instead."

Nick's tears stopped. "With you?" he asked.

"Yes!" said Ms. Greep. "He can sleep in a pen by the garden at school. As long as he

leaves the onions alone!”

“And he can come to me for his meals!”
said Mr. Manzano.

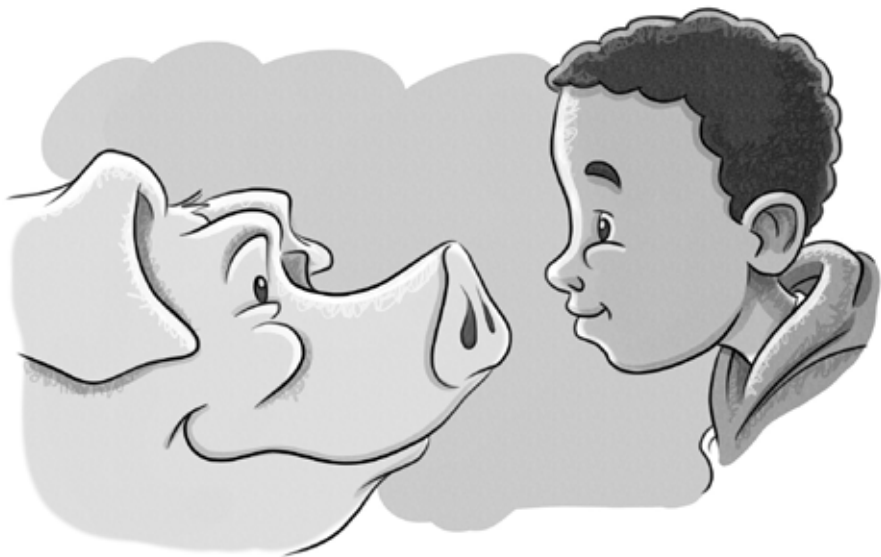
“And I’ll still take him to his lessons with Fifi!” said Mr. Penniworth.

Fifi yipped her approval.

Mr. Wheeler smiled at his son. “And of course, you can still see him whenever you want. But it’s up to you, Nick. What do you say?”

Nick was speechless. He looked at Marvin, his best friend. He would miss having him at home, but he also wanted to do the right thing. And more than anything, he wanted Marvin to be happy. “It’s not up to me,” he whispered. “It’s up to Marvin.”

For once in his life, Marvin didn’t make a sound. He didn’t snort or grunt or squeal. He just looked deep into Nick’s eyes. And Nick understood.



“OK,” said Nick. “Marvin can go.” His mother and father hugged him like they’d never hugged him before.

Officer Davis said, “Well, I don’t know what just happened, but I think my job here is done. Case closed!”

Marvin squealed with joy. Everyone cheered. Even Mrs. Finnegan smiled. It looked like everything was going to work out.

Then they heard a booming voice go, “Ho, ho, ho!”

“Santa?” gasped Officer Davis.

They all turned to see a large man with a big mustache striding up the stairs.

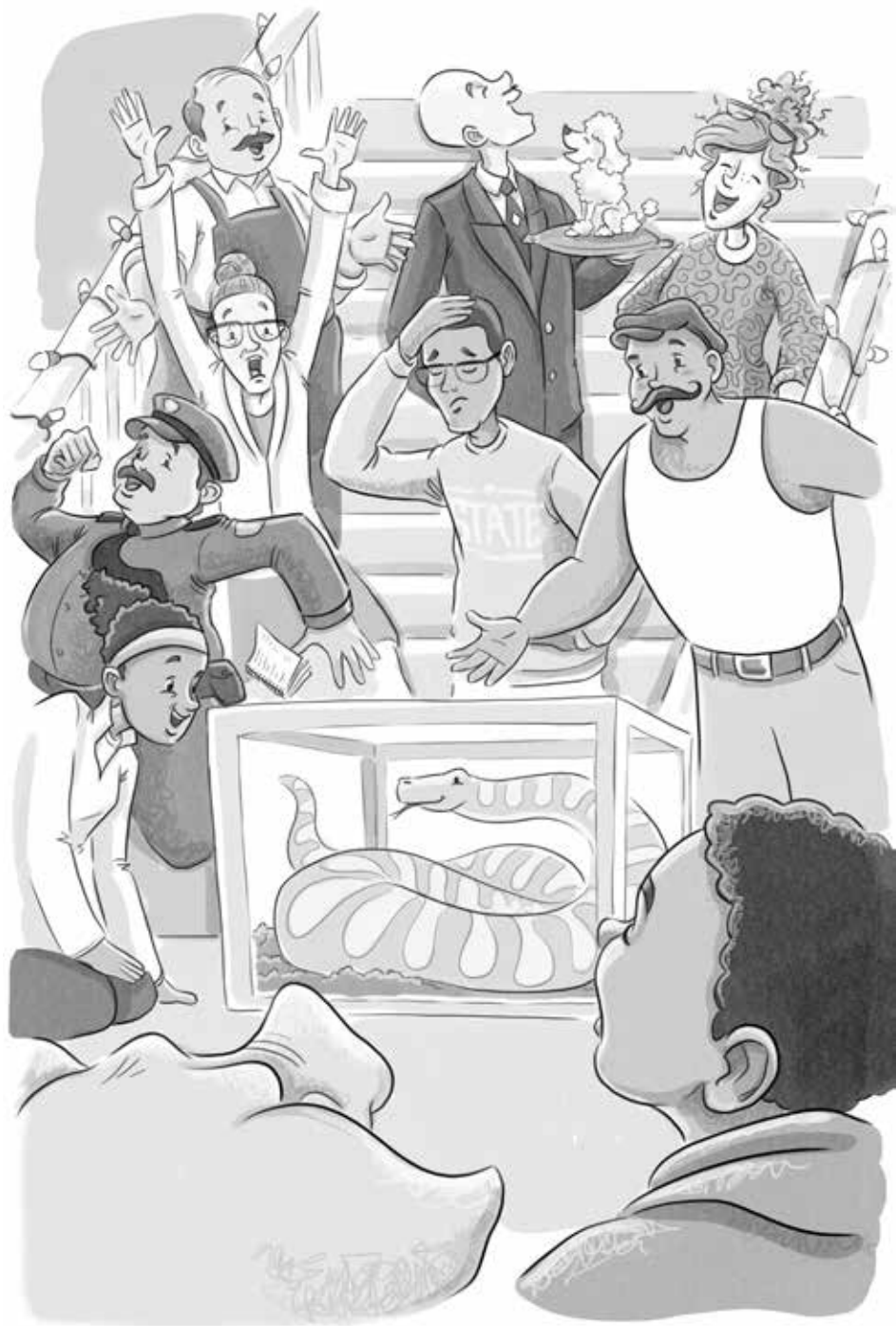
“That’s not Santa!” said Nick. “It’s Uncle Albert!”

“Merry Christmas, family!” Albert boomed. He gave Nick a big bear hug. “How is Marvin? Still causing trouble? You know, I could take him to Hollywood with me if you want. Imagine it! The first pig movie star!”

“No, Albert,” laughed Mr. Wheeler. “We couldn’t send Marvin so far away.”

“Our friends are going to look after him instead,” said Mrs. Wheeler.

“Well, splendid!” Albert laughed. “That’s good. Hollywood is no place for gentle giants like us, anyway. Is it, old buddy?” He



gave Marvin a loving pat.

Marvin snorted happily.

“So, Sis, that means you’ll have room for my Christmas present now!” Albert said.

“Oh no,” said Mr. Wheeler.

Everyone turned towards the stairs. Two men were carrying up a large glass cage. “Meet Roberta,” said Albert.

Inside the cage, slithering and hissing, was a huge python.

Mrs. Finnegan shrieked and fainted into Mr. Manzano’s arms.

“A snake! Call the police!” Officer Davis screamed and ran down the stairs.

Mr. Wheeler put his head in his hands.

“Weh, weh, weh,” Marvin laughed.

Nick hugged his pig and started laughing too. Soon, everyone was laughing.

It looked like it was going to be a marvelous Christmas.

Ben Bellamy is a writer and educator from London, England. Today, you can find him in San Francisco, either running through Golden Gate Park or reading a book with Quincy, his pet cockatiel, perched on his shoulder. He hopes his work with the Institute of Reading Development continues to help children everywhere discover the joy of reading wonderful stories.

Brian Dumm is a professional artist, designer, and art educator. His award-winning artwork has been published globally since 2005 in children's literature, digital apps, advertising, package design, and more.