

# **Ninja Nan and Sidekick Grandad**

by

*Annaliese Matheron*

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**annaliesematheron.com**

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For Jason, Liberty, Krystal and Oakley

Thank you

and

For my Ninja Nan, Shelia

and her Sidekick

Grandad, Buster

**Other works by  
Annaliese Matheron.**

Ninja Nan Strikes Again

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# 1

## **Welcome to the holiday detention centre for grandkids**

Ben was bored out of his brain.

It was only four days into the summer holidays and he had already read all of his favourite comics – twice, filled his scrap-book, completed his big book of word search and crosswords and rode his bike round so much that it now had a flat tyre.

Not for the first time that day Ben's eyes wandered across the room and fell on his pile of summer homework. 'I'm not that bored yet!' he thought, plonking himself down on the bed with a huge sigh.

Ben caught sight of his old Ted sitting on the pillow, his black beady eyes fixed and staring.

'If I was at home I wouldn't be bored, I'd go round Jimmy's or Frank's. I could play football over the park or play on my computer,' he told Ted.

The old teddy bear looked at him with the same sympathetic expression he always had in times of personal crisis.

Trouble was, Ben wasn't at home. At the first sign of freedom both he and his older brother Kieran had been packed off to their grandparents' house, which was in a little village miles away from home – miles away from anywhere.

Ben sighed loudly, got up and went to the door. He opened it and walked quietly to the room across the hall. The door was open and he could see the old Beano pages which decorated the walls and the model spitfires that hung from the ceiling, now swaying gently in the evening breeze. This had been Uncle Gareth's room. It was so different to the one Ben was forced to sleep in. Ben had to stay in the room which had been his mother's as a girl and if *that* wasn't bad enough it was pink! Pink and girly and full of lace and ruffles and bows and trinkets and pictures of fluffy white kittens clutching at balls of soft pink wool. It was enough to make a boy sick!

Ben pushed open the door a little wider and instantly regretted it.

'What do you think you're doing?' In one bound Kieran was off the bed and shoving Ben out of the room. 'Get out, girl pants!'

'I just wanted to...'

'I don't care. Get out. Stay out!' Kieran slammed the door shut on Ben.

'Prat!' Ben muttered.

Kieran had been more and more of a jerk since his birthday, a very big birthday. Kieran was no longer a kid, he was... a teenager, and he didn't want to have anything to do with Ben anymore.

Ben went back to his room and sat on the bed. He stared at the fluffy Persian kitten clutching the wool. Things couldn't get much worse, and he still had over a week of torture left.

Ben wished Nan and Grandad had a PlayStation or even a telly – but the old timers just didn't have one. He wished there was someone else

to play with, but the youngest person within a three-kilometre radius was Mr Gregson, and he was at least eight years older than Ben's dad. Ben really wished Kieran would go back to normal.

As Ben lay on the pink lacy bedspread, the smell of dinner began to waft its way upstairs. He suddenly felt queasy.

Nan and Grandad loved vegetables: red cabbage, white cabbage, green cabbage, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, swede, kale, broccoli, broad beans, runner beans, green beans, squash (of never ending varieties), beetroot, turnip, parsnip, yams and many more Ben couldn't name – the list was endless. And each of these culinary delights was either blanched, boiled, steamed, roasted or mashed within an inch of its life, before being served with meat. Ben called it 'meat' because he never really knew what it was, and didn't want to either. There was tongue, kidney, heart, liver, hoof, tail, even fish heads. Every mealtime was like a pot-luck picnic of unwanted food.

Ben stood on the bed and opened the window wide, hanging out his head to take big gulps of fresh air which made him feel instantly better. The soft summer breeze blew on his face, replacing the smell of dinner with the scent of flowers and warm earth. Ben's attention wandered as he looked up and down the street. Then he saw Mrs Gillespie.

She was a strange old lady; she drove a motorised scooter and didn't mind knocking down anyone who got in her way. She also had a small, yappy Yorkshire terrier, called Pixie, whom she took everywhere. Pixie was currently in the basket of Mrs Gillespie's scooter and being as quiet as a mouse. Come to mention it, even Mrs Gillespie's scooter was

quieter than usual.

Then something happened. Mrs Gillespie stopped right underneath Ben's window; if she had stopped anywhere else he would never have seen it. At first Ben thought she was checking her watch for the time, but then he heard her talking. He couldn't hear what she was saying but he heard her mumbling. She was talking into her watch.

'Batty old woman's really lost it now!' Ben said to himself.

Mrs Gillespie touched her hearing aid as if trying to listen to an ear-piece. She spoke to her watch again, took a pair of glasses out of her handbag and put them on.

Ben saw her touching the arm of the glasses and he was sure he heard a noise like a camera shutter opening and closing.

When Mrs Gillespie had finished talking to her watch, she drove off down the street to her house a few doors away.

Ben was stunned. He stared after Mrs Gillespie.

'Ben! Dinner!' Nan called from downstairs.

## 2

### The Gillespie incident

Ben was up early, he was sure he'd be the first to breakfast. But Nan and Grandad were already there.

'Here you are love,' Nan said as she handed him a bowl of what can only be described as wood chippings, shredded cardboard and bird feed.

'Err... thanks Nan,' Ben said politely as he pushed the lumpy mixture with his spoon.

To complete his breakfast Grandad handed him a large glass of prune juice.

'There you are lad, that'll keep you regular.'

Ben swallowed everything as fast as he could, like a boa constrictor eating its prey whole. He couldn't chew it; if he chewed it he'd taste it! Then with a lump of cereal bulging in his throat he kissed his nan and headed straight out the back door.

'Don't go too far, Ben,' Nan called after him.

'I won't, Nan!' Ben shouted back.

Ben glanced at his bike. With his faithful steed out of action he'd have to go on foot. He walked down the side path and out into Honeypot Grove. The first thing Ben needed to do was to find Mrs Gillespie, then he'd follow her around and see what she was up to. He started off down the road towards her house.

He didn't want to look suspicious, so he started to walk slowly

down the street in a way that would make his mum whinge at him to pick up his feet. Ben found a stone. He started kicking it along. But his attention wasn't on the stone at all. It was firmly rooted on Mrs Gillespie's house.

Her windows were open, but that didn't mean she was in. Ben knew that even Nan left her windows open when she popped to the shop. He could see Mrs Gillespie's front garden. It looked like a barren desert compared with the tidy cottage gardens of her neighbours. It was covered in decorative shingle – the stuff usually found in cat litter trays – and surrounded by thorny bushes which had small oval shaped berries, the type that if you burst them would leave your hands dyed red for a day or two. Under the windows grew two monstrous rose bushes. Neither had flowers; instead they used all their energy to grow the longest, sharpest thorns Ben had ever seen.

Ben had almost reached the little gate between the thorny bushes and could clearly see the sign on it which read: **'Beware of the dog'**.

He grinned. 'Beware the dog doesn't bark your ears off,' he thought to himself. His football was bigger than that dog was and his friend Jimmy's baby sister had more bite than it did.

Ben paused and bent down, pretending to tie his shoelace, but really he was casing the joint. A thrill of excitement filled him for a moment, but then was gone the next as he realised something. All was unearthly quiet in the house; there was no barking from the dog, no sound of movement – nothing. It all seemed a bit too quiet. Then a thought struck Ben which made his mouth dry. What if the old woman was dead! You

hear about it all the time, little old ladies who drop down dead and aren't found for days. He stayed there for a few moments, crouched low, looking at the quiet house with the dead body inside it.

‘What do you think you’re doing loitering outside my house?’

Ben jumped up. It was the squeaky little voice of the very alive Mrs Gillespie, who fixed Ben with an icy stare over the top of her glasses. She was accompanied by Pixie who sat in the front basket of the motorised scooter, teeth bared and growling.

Ben tried to look her in the eye but couldn't. His gaze was drawn to her chin which sprouted long white hairs, making it look like the end of a silver skin onion. He tried to move his gaze to her eyes but was caught by a second wave of hair sprouting from her nostrils and top lip. Ben forced his eyes to the floor. Perhaps she hadn't noticed he was staring.

‘Well, what were you doing, boy?’ she demanded again, her voice sounding even squeakier.

Ben shrugged his shoulders and started pushing the stone around with the tip of his shoe.

Mrs Gillespie saw the stone. ‘Ahh!’ she exclaimed. ‘I know boys like you. Bored, got nothing to do except terrorise defenceless old ladies.’ She pulled her woolly blue cardigan about her thickset frame, as if it were a cold autumn's day.

Ben stared at her in disbelief. ‘But I...’

‘Creeping up on them as they make their way home, waiting to ambush them or throw stones through their windows to give them a fright. Oh yes, I know boys like you!’ Mrs Gillespie leaned forward on her

scooter, her face barely a hand's width away.

Ben could see her stained brown teeth. The top ones were marked with a line of brilliant red lipstick, the remainder of which was smeared over her wrinkly little puckered lips. He could smell her breath – an unwholesome mixture of tobacco and kippers.

‘We have ways of dealing with boys like you, don’t we Pixie!’

The dog yapped in agreement then continued baring its teeth.

Mrs Gillespie put one bony hand into the pocket of her cardigan and produced a cold chicken drumstick; it was speckled with blue fluff.

She dangled the drumstick in front of the dog who gazed intently at it. The growling stopped.

‘Wait for it!’ Mrs Gillespie said, her eyes fixed on Ben, who in turn was fixed on the fate of the drumstick. ‘Now!’ she ordered.

In a flash the dog lurched forward, snapped the drumstick in two and started to chomp on the bone and fleshy part it now had in its mouth. Mrs Gillespie continued to hold the other half with the knobbly knee joint between her fingers.

‘You may not know this, but the bones in a boy’s ankle are about the same size as the bone in a chicken drumstick. You also may not know that Pixie, here, is an extremely fast runner, much faster than you, I dare say.’

Ben was in shock. All he was able to do was nod his head up and down.

‘Here,’ said Mrs Gillespie, grabbing his hand and placing the dead drumstick remnant in it. ‘You can keep this. Call it a reminder never to

creep up on people again. Now go back to your grandma's, boy, before I have half a mind to tell her what you've been up to.'

Ben didn't need telling twice. He ran all the way back to Nan's, not stopping until he was down the side path and safely out of view. From there he watched Mrs Gillespie drive through the little gate up to her house.

The old hag! Making it out to be all him when she's the one who was sneaking about. She's the one who threatened to set her ferocious dog on him. She's the one who's up to something. Well, Ben wasn't about to let her get away with it.