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Opening extract from

The Beast of Grubbers Nubbin

Written by

Guy Bass

Illustrated by

Pete Williamson

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VISIT THE AUTHOR'S WEBSITE AT:

www.guybass.com

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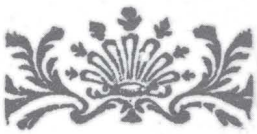
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THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

CLOWNING AROUND

(That's enter-trainment)



MAD MUSING NO. 224

"If madness be the food of science, serve me a double helping."

From *The Occasionally Scientific Writings of Professor Erasmus Erasmus*

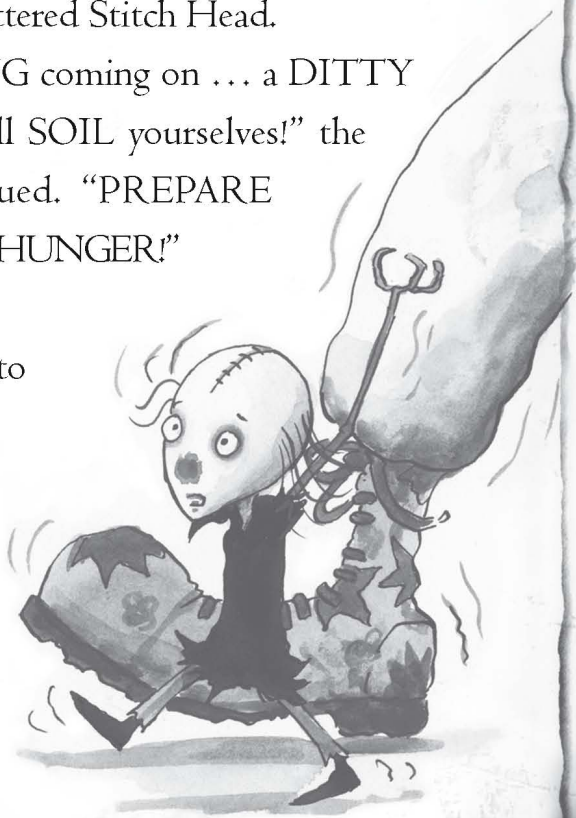
"*That's* what the Creature was doing all this time? Turning itself into a *clown*?" said Arabella, as the Creature skipped into the room.

"EXACTLY! And what BETTER way to distract the awfuls than with ENTER-TRAINMENT?" explained the Creature.

"Uh-oh," muttered Stitch Head.

"I feel a SONG coming on . . . a DITTY so DROLL you'll SOIL yourselves!" the Creature continued. "PREPARE to FORGET your HUNGER!"

With that the Creature broke into tuneless song, with Ivo dancing an enthusiastic jig beside it.



BREAD and EGGS and BACON and a
LANCASHIRE hot POT,
CAKES and BUNS and FRUIT and
ALE are things you HAVEN'T got!
APPLE pie and PUDDING, all washed
DOWN with ginger BEER,
SAUSAGE and POTATOES are
unlikely to appear!
TREACLE TART with CUSTARD or a
TASTY hot cross BUN,
The CHANCES you will eat 'em are
a MILLION to one!
'Cause you are HUNGRY! HUNGRY!
All you want is FOOD!
You're DESPERATE to
fill your guts
Is what we must CONCLUDE
Oh, you are HUNGRY! HUNGRY!
All you want's a MEAL
You're desperate to EAT something
We DON'T know how you feel!

"SING along!" cried the Creature, gleefully. "Even though you DON'T know the WORDS!"

You're SCRAPING by on ANTS and
FLIES, whatever you can find,
You LITERALLY would KILL your
friend for MOULDY bacon rind
You're eating SCABS from off your
KNEES, it's NOT much of a TREAT
But HERE'S a little DITTY that
is GOOD enough to eat!
OH, you are HUNGRY! HUNGRY!
All you want is FOOD!
You're DESPERATE to fill your guts
That's what we must
CONCLUUUUUUUUUDE!

The Creature and Ivo struck a showy pose, their arms out wide, broad grins across their faces.

There was a long silence.

Then the rumble of a stomach.

Then a single cough.

Then:

"You sloppy muck-heads!" howled Arabella. "You're meant to be making us – I mean *them* – forget their hunger, not remind 'em of it!" She pointed at the children, clutching their aching bellies.

"Don't WORRY, we're just getting STARTED! Ivo, PULL my TOGGLE of HILARITY!" cried the Creature.

Ivo obediently yanked on a rope hanging from the Creature's belt. Its trousers fell to the floor to reveal a pair of spotty bloomers.

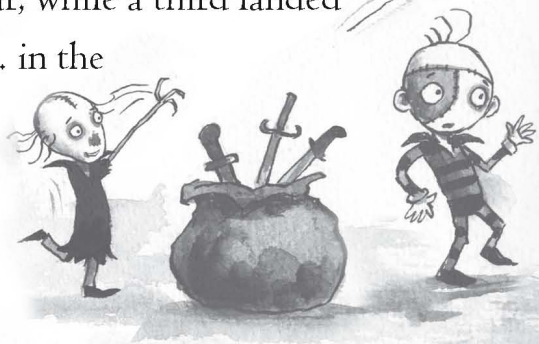
"See how the underwear amuses!" declared Ivo. Stitch Head leaped out of the way as the Creature broke into a forward roll, crashing into a chair and then colliding with the table.

"Now watch THIS! Ivo, hand me the BLADES of MERRIMENT!" the Creature continued, pulling up its trousers as it leaped to its feet.

"*Blades?*" blurted Stitch Head. Ivo drew a sharp knife out of the bag and then flung it at the Creature! The knife flew past its ear and landed with a SHUNK in the wall.

"KEEP 'em COMING!" cried the Creature, tugging the knife out. "It DOESN'T count as JUGGLING until I've got at least THREE!

"But . . . wait!" cried Stitch Head, as Ivo threw more knives at the Creature. One landed with a THUD-D-D in the table. Another bounced off a wall and whooshed past Arabella's ear, while a third landed with a THOP . . . in the Creature's foot.



"AAH!" cried the Creature.

"Aaah!" screamed the orphans.

"Aaaaah!" added Ivo. "Was accident!"

"This actually *is* pretty entertaining," chuckled Arabella.



"There are no – OW – accidents in ENTER-TRAINMENT," the Creature said, gingerly pulling out the knife. "Just – OOWW – opportunities for HILARITY!"

"Hilaritunities!" cried Ivo.

"It's WORKING . . . they're LOVING it!" concluded the Creature. "Time to bring out the BIG guns . . . the FLAMING UNICYCLE!"

"The *what*?" Stitch Head shrieked, as Ivo dragged out a tiny, single-wheeled cycle out of the bag. The Creature clambered on to it and immediately started to pedal furiously, back and forth. Ivo then produced a lit candle from inside his coat – and held it to the wheel.

"Just – YOOW – like in REHEARSAL!" the Creature yelped, as the flames spat upwards, igniting the seat of his trousers. It zoomed backwards and forwards, desperately trying to blow out the fire.



"Stop this!" Stitch Head cried. "Stop before—"

It was then Stitch Head heard something he hadn't heard in days – the sound of *laughter*. What started out as a giggle quickly progressed to a chuckle, and ended up as a full-blown guffaw. The Creature was right – it *was* working. The children were laughing!

"They like it. They actually like it..." Stitch Head whispered excitedly. "It's *perfect*. Creature, Ivo, don't stop! I mean, unless you need to put the flames out..."

"No PROBLEM!" cried the Creature. "I think I was MADE to be an ENTER-TRAINER! I've finally found my CALLING..."

Stitch Head grabbed Arabella by the arm and dragged her towards the door.

"Oi! Where we going?" she said. "I ain't finished kicking the Little Terrors out of the castle!"

"I've got a better idea," replied Stitch Head. "The Creature just bought us some time..."

"Time? For what?" Arabella asked, with a hint of disappointment.

"A *cure*," Stitch Head said. "One of the

orphans is going to *change* at nightfall. If the Creature can keep them happy here, then I can work on creating a potion to cure the beast. I have 'til the end of the day."

"*Or* we could just—" began Arabella, but Stitch Head was already speeding out of the room. She watched the children howl with laughter as the Creature accidentally set fire to its tail.

"Oi, Stitch Head! Wait for me!" she cried, and raced after him.