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Opening extract from

# The Witch's Revenge

Written by

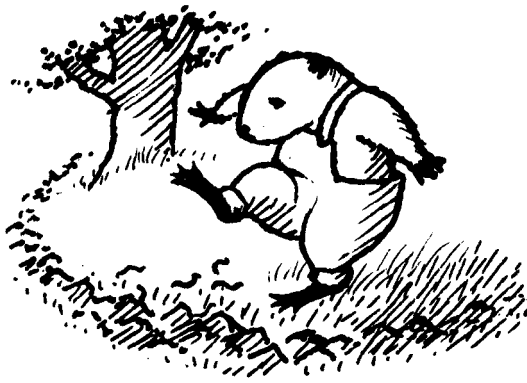
**Nigel Hinton**

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# CHAPTER ONE

On an island in the middle of the sea, a long way from anywhere, a small beaver was rocking up and down on a swing. His name was Baby B.

If you could have looked down on the island at that moment, you would have shouted, 'Look out, Baby B! There's something horrible coming just over the hill. Quick, run away.'

But you weren't there, so Baby B went on swinging happily.

He had been happy all day. His grandad, Mr Edgar Beaver, had taken him to see their old friend Mrs Badger. They had eaten a delicious lunch, then the grown-ups had decided to have a little snooze. So Baby B went into the garden to have a swing.

He loved to swoop up and down as high as he could. And while he was swinging he always made up songs. Today's song went like this:

'Zoom, zoom, buzz,whee
I am flying like a bee.
Zoom, zoom, buzz, why
Am I being like a fly?'

The 'Zoom, zoom, buzz, whee' bits were for when he was going forwards. The other bits were for when he was going backwards.

Sometimes Baby B stopped singing and shouted, 'Look at me, robin, I'm as highest as you!'

The robin was sitting on the branch above the swing. He liked it best when Baby B was singing because he could whistle along to the tune.

Baby B stopped singing and put all his effort into making the swing go higher. He pumped his little legs backwards and forwards and the swing climbed up and up.

'Look at me, robin,' he shouted, 'I'm as highest as . . .'. And then he stopped. His mouth fell open with fright and his eyes nearly popped out of his head.

Something that looked like a huge brown snake was wriggling down the hill behind Mrs Badger's house. It was moving very fast. Nearer and nearer. And it was enormous. Already its head was near the house and its body stretched all the way back to the top of the hill.

Suddenly the head of the snake came round the side of the house and started moving across the grass towards the tree. As it came nearer, Baby B saw that it wasn't a snake at all. Some-

thing was pushing the earth up out of the ground.

'Help, it's an earthquaker,' he shouted.

The tree began to tremble and there was a horrible hissing and rumbling. Baby B hung on to the swing and squeezed his eyes shut. A nasty smell like bad eggs and drains floated up to his nose.

The noise faded away and the shaking stopped.

Baby B's heart was beating fast and the horrible smell was making him feel sick. When he opened his eyes, the long line of earth stretched right underneath the swing and away into the forest behind him.

He jumped off the swing and started running to Mrs Badger's house. Suddenly, he felt something wet and squelchy under his feet. He stopped and looked. Thousands of pink, slimy worms were wriggling and squirming their way up out of the earth.

'Help! Wigglers!' shouted Baby B and he jumped and hopped and skipped his way to Mrs Badger's front door.

He burst into the parlour shouting and screaming.

'Wake up. Wake up. It's an earthquaker and wigglers. Look out, they're coming.'

He jumped into Mrs Badger's lap and hid his head under her apron.



## CHAPTER TWO

Mrs Badger and Mr Edgar woke up with a start.

'What? Eh? What?' mumbled Mr Edgar.

'Baby B, what are you doing?' said Mrs Badger and she lifted up her apron.

Baby B couldn't speak. He pointed outside and then pulled the apron down over his head again.

'Baby B, stop this silliness,' said Mrs Badger and she lifted him off her lap and stood him on the floor.

He still couldn't speak but he took Mr Edgar's paw and pulled him to the door.

'Well, I'll be blowed,' said Mr Edgar when he saw the long line of earth and the thousands of worms.

'It was an earthquaker, Grandpa,' Baby B said, finding his voice at last. 'I was just doing swinging and I thinked it was a snake and it tried to get me but it missed. Then all of them wigglers came

and started wiggling and they were all squelchy when I treaded on them.'

'Oh dear me, an earthquake,' Mrs Badger gasped.

'Now, now, hold your horses, you two,' Mr Edgar said as he stepped out of the door to have a closer look. 'We've never had an earthquake on the island. Besides, they make holes in the ground, but this – this looks as if . . .' he bent down and picked up some of the loose earth . . .'this looks as if something has gone along under the ground and pushed up the earth.'

'Perhaps it was a mole,' said Mrs Badger.

'I don't think so,' said Mr Edgar. 'Moles only make little hills. I can't think of any animal that could do this.'

Mr Edgar scratched his head. 'I wonder how far it stretches? And what's that horrible smell? Whatever it was must have almost choked the worms as well as giving them a dratted fright.'

'It didn't give me a dratted fright,' Baby B said.

'Baby B, how many times have I told you not to use that word? Really, Mr Edgar, you shouldn't encourage him.'

'Sorry, Mrs Badger – just slipped off me tongue. Won't happen again,' Mr Edgar said and then he quickly changed the subject. 'Look at the robin – he's never seen so much food in his life.'

The robin was standing in the middle of all the wriggling worms. He was turning his head from

side to side as if he wasn't sure where to start. Finally, he chose the fattest worm he could see. He picked it up in his beak and flew off to eat it in private. In less than a minute he was back for another.

'Hold on, Sergeant Robin,' Mr Edgar said. 'Your eyes are bigger than your tummy. I don't want you getting fat. I've got an important job for you to do.'

The robin looked sadly at all the tempting worms, then flew on to Mr Edgar's shoulder.

'Now listen, Sergeant, I want you to fly off and follow this line of earth. I must know where it comes from and where it goes to. Understand?'

The robin bobbed to show that he knew what to do, then flew off. They watched him until he reached the top of the hill and disappeared behind it.

'Well,' said Mrs Badger, 'while we're waiting, we may as well go inside and have a cup of something.'

Baby B sat on the window seat so that he could watch out for the robin. Mr Edgar said he'd make the tea, so Mrs Badger sat in her rocking-chair. In a couple of minutes Mr Edgar came back with tea for himself and Mrs Badger and a glass of milk for Baby B.

'I took the liberty of cutting three slices of your wonderful chocolate cake,' Mr Edgar said. 'I hope you don't mind, Mrs Badger.'

'Not at all,' she replied. 'I made it specially

when I knew you were coming. Be careful not to drop crumbs, Baby B.'

Baby B sat with his plate on his lap and made sure that not a single crumb was wasted.

'Well, Mr Edgar, what do you make of it all?' asked Mrs Badger when they had finished their drinks and cake.

'Delicious as ever, Mrs Badger, my dear.'

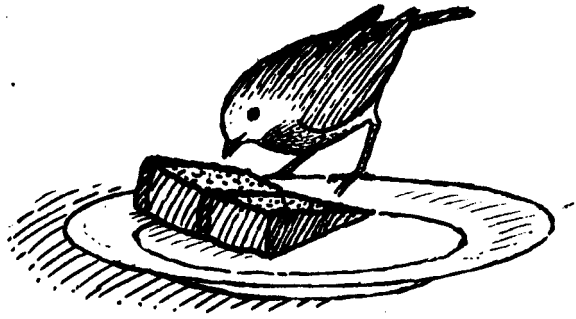
'No, I mean the earth and the worms.'

'Ah, that,' said Mr Edgar. 'Well, I don't want to say too much before I hear what the robin has found out. But if it turns out to be what I think it is, I'm afraid we've got trouble on our paws.'

Mr Edgar's voice was so serious that Baby B ran over to sit on Mrs Badger's lap.

He looked at his paws to see if there was any trouble on them. 'I'm not scared,' he said.

But he was.



## CHAPTER THREE

All the worms had gone down into the ground by the time the robin got back. He looked so disappointed at missing such a lovely feast that Mrs Badger gave him a small slice of cake instead. He pecked away at the cake and told them what he had seen.

The line of earth went from one side of the island to the other. It started near the Manor where Baby B lived, then went past Mrs Badger's house all the way to Mr Edgar's castle, Beaver Towers. After that it went straight towards the sea. At the edge of a high cliff, the line stopped. There was just a large hole where something had come out of the ground.

'So,' said Mr Edgar, when the robin had finished, 'she didn't find what she was looking for.'

'She? Who are you talking about?' asked Mrs Badger.

Mr Edgar took a deep breath and said quietly, 'I think we have had a visit from Oyin.'

'Oyin! Oh no!' gasped Mrs Badger and she looked at the window as if the terrible witch might be outside at that very moment.

'Is she c-c-come to hurting us, Grandpa?' Baby B whispered and his big eyes began to fill with tears.

'Fiddlesticks,' Mr Edgar said and lifted the little beaver on to his lap. 'Now don't you worry your head about Oyin. You heard what Sergeant Robin said – if it was her, she's come out of the ground and gone flying off somewhere else.'

'Why did you think it was her?' Baby B said.

'Oh, just putting two and two together. It was that horrible smell mostly. It reminded me of the smell she left behind at Beaver Towers. It's the kind of smell that comes from the World of Shadows. No wonder those poor worms had to come up for air.'

'You're right,' said Mrs Badger. 'I knew I'd smelled it before. It was the night all those growlers jumped on the fire.'

They shivered as they remembered that night. The witch, Oyin, had come to try and capture Beaver Towers so she could live there as Queen. She had caught nearly all the animals and she was going to make her growlers throw them on a big fire. Then, at the last moment, her plan had gone wrong. She had been called back to the World of Shadows and all the growlers had jumped on the fire and died.

'Will the growlers come back?' Baby B asked.

'No fear,' said Mr Edgar. 'They're all burned up for ever – and good riddance to bad rubbish.'

'But Oyin . . .' Mrs Badger whispered.

'Ah, now she's a different kettle of fish. She must still be furious about what happened – witches don't like having their plans ruined. I dare say she'd like to get her evil claws on the person who stopped her from getting control of Beaver Towers.'

'Me?' said Baby B.

'No,' laughed Mr Edgar, 'I don't mean you. If it had been anyone on the island, she wouldn't have gone away. No, she was looking for someone else. Someone who has been to the Manor and Beaver Towers and here, to Mrs Badger's house. Remember, the robin said the line only went near those three buildings.'

'She was searching for Philip,' Mrs Badger said and then looked at Mr Edgar. 'I'm sure of it.'

'I'm sure of it, too,' Mr Edgar said.

'Flipip,' Baby B shouted and jumped up and down happily. 'Hooray for Flipip.'

Even though he couldn't say his name properly, Philip was the best friend Baby B had ever had. The young boy had been brought to the island by mistake when one of Mr Edgar's spells had gone wrong. It was he who had stopped Oyin and saved everyone from the fire and the growlers. When Philip had gone home again, Baby B had

been very sad. Every day he wished they could have some more adventures together.

'Flipip's coming,' Baby B shouted, 'and he's going to bonk silly old Oyin on the head. Hooray!'

'Ssh, Baby B. Your grandpa doesn't mean that Philip is coming. He means that Oyin has gone to look for him. That's it, isn't it, Mr Edgar?' said Mrs Badger.

''Fraid so. And if she finds him, he's going to be in great danger because he rescued us.'

Baby B stopped jumping up and down and looked at his grandfather. 'Can't we reschew him?' he said.

'Easier said than done, young 'un,' Mr Edgar replied.

'Grandpa, we've got to. He reschewed us so we've got to reschew him or it's not fair.'

'Baby B is right,' Mrs Badger said. 'Philip did us a favour. We must help him if he's in danger.'

'I know, I know, Mrs Badger, but how?'

'Do it like you done before,' said Baby B. 'Send the cloud.'

'Good idea, young 'un. I'll beetle back to Beaver Towers and get the magic going. Let's just hope we're not too late. Now that Oyin knows he's not here, she'll be looking everywhere. And if she finds him . . .' Mr Edgar stopped and stood up. 'Get my coat, will you, Baby B – there's no time to lose.'



## CHAPTER FOUR

The thunderstorm started as soon as Philip left school. He stood under a large tree when the rain got really heavy. Lightning lit up the dark sky and the thunder boomed and rumbled along the wet street.

Suddenly he remembered that lightning sometimes hits trees. He ran out from under the tree and kept running until he got to the baker's shop. He stood in the doorway and drops of water ran down his face from his soaking hair. He watched the cars splashing through the puddles.

Now he was safe, Philip began to enjoy the storm. The wind was blowing the rain in sheets. Flashes of lightning crackled down. The thunder made the whole road jump.

It was one of the best storms he had ever seen. It was almost as wild as the one Oyin had sent so that the growlers could attack Mrs Badger's house. He thought about how the growlers had nearly

caught him. He could almost see their evil eyes and snapping yellow teeth. A drop of rain ran down his neck. He shivered.

Oyin, the growlers, Beaver Towers. It all seemed so far away. He would love to see Mr Edgar and Mrs Badger; and how he missed Baby B. He wished he could go back there for a few days. But most of all he wished his mother and father would believe him about Beaver Towers.

When he got back home after his adventures on the island, there had been terrible trouble. He had been missing for three whole days and his parents had been out of their minds with worry. As soon as he started to tell them what had happened, he knew how strange it must sound. Being carried off to an island on a kite. Helping animals to fight horrible monsters called growlers. Meeting a boy who looked like him and then finding out it was really a witch.

No wonder they hadn't believed him.

They had got angry and told him to stop telling lies. Then, when he had kept on telling the same story, they had taken him to see a doctor. But the doctor had said that there was nothing the matter with him and that it was best to forget all about it. Everybody said it had just been a dream but Philip knew it had been real. As real and true as anything.

When the storm stopped, Philip left the doorway and walked home. The clock outside the

station said nearly five o'clock. He was late. He began to run. When he turned into his road, his father's car was parked outside the house. There was a boy standing next to the car. Philip wondered if it was one of his friends.

He looked up and down the road carefully. There was no traffic so he crossed. When he looked towards his father's car again the boy had gone.

Philip ran along the pavement to his house. There was no sign of the boy. He opened the garden gate and noticed a faint smell of something horrible. Perhaps the rain had blocked up the drains.

He went round the side of the house and opened the kitchen door. His father and mother were sitting at the table.

'Hello,' Philip said. 'You're home early, Dad.'

'You're late. Where have you been?' his mother asked and she looked angry.

Philip started to tell them about the storm and how he had stood in the baker's doorway.

'We want the truth,' his father said, standing up quickly and walking towards Philip.

'It is the truth. It was a terrible storm and . . .'

'I know about the storm, but what I want to know is why you weren't at school this afternoon.'

'I was, Dad.'

'Don't tell me lies!' his father shouted. 'I saw you in town. I looked out of my office window

and you were walking along the pavement. I opened the window and called you, and you ran away. Now, what were you doing?'

'It wasn't me. I was in school. Honest.'

'Philip, I want the truth.'

'It *is* the truth. It *is*. Ask Miss Coppell – she'll tell you. She read us a story and then we did History. It was all about the Romans. Ask Miss Coppell.'

'That's exactly what I will do. And if you're telling us lies like all that other stuff about witches and animals – I warn you . . .'

While his father went out into the hall to phone, Philip stood in the kitchen. His mother sat at the table and didn't say anything. Philip's face was burning.

After a couple of minutes, his father came back carrying the telephone directory. No one had answered at the school. His father looked up Miss Coppell's home number and went out again. There was a long pause, then he heard his father's voice:

'Miss Coppell? Sorry to disturb you at home. This is Philip Tate's father. Philip says that he was at school this afternoon but I saw him in town and I . . . He *was* in school. I see . . . I must have made a mistake . . . Yes. Well, thank you – that's taken a weight off my mind . . . Yes . . . Thank you again. Goodbye.'

'Well, that's extraordinary,' his father said, when he came back. 'I'm sorry, Philip. Miss

Coppell says you were in school all afternoon. I can't understand it – that boy looked just like you. Anyway, my mistake. Sorry about the bad temper.'

His mother kissed Philip and said, 'Well, let's forget all about it. You hop upstairs and change and I'll make your favourite for tea – pancakes.'

Philip was pleased that the mistake had been cleared up. He ran upstairs and started to change.

Fancy his father seeing a boy who looked . . .

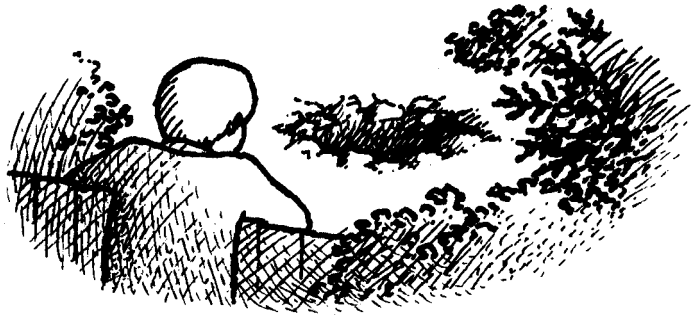
Suddenly a cold shiver ran down his back.

. . . a boy who looked exactly like him.

It was just like that terrible time in the library at Beaver Towers. A boy who looked just like him – but it hadn't been a real boy. It had been Oyin. Philip felt weak as he remembered how the boy's face had melted and become the awful face of a witch.

Another shiver ran down his back.

He was scared.



## CHAPTER FIVE

Philip pulled his clothes on quickly and ran downstairs before he could become more scared. His mother was making the pancakes and his father was out in the garden talking to Mr Tibbs next door. Philip read a comic.

'Well, a lot of strange things are going on today,' his father said as he came in and sat at the table. 'Mr Tibbs has just shown me a big hole in his garden. It's so deep you can't see the bottom. Looks just as if something has pushed its way up out of the ground.'

'How did it happen?' Philip's mother asked as she served the pancakes.

'No idea. Mr Tibbs says it wasn't there this morning. Must have happened sometime during the day. I've never seen anything like it.'

As soon as Philip had finished his tea, he ran outside and climbed up the fence to look over into Mr Tibbs's garden.

There was the hole – right in the middle of the lawn.

Philip leaned over the fence as far as he could and then noticed the horrible smell. It was the same one he had smelt outside his house, but much stronger here. It made him feel sick and, somehow, it reminded him of something.

He went back inside to talk to his father but he wasn't there.

'He's gone back to the office to do some work he should have done this afternoon,' his mother explained.

'There isn't half a horrible smell outside, Mum.'

'Is there, dear? Well, don't go out then – perhaps there's a drain broken somewhere.'

'No, it's not quite like drains. It's like . . . I don't know.'

Philip sat in the front room and tried to read his comic but he kept thinking about the smell. Where had he smelt it before? It was . . .

It came to him in a flash and he dropped the comic in fright. It was the smell of Oyin. The whole of Beaver Towers had smelt of it that night she was there.

He ran into the kitchen shouting, 'Mum! Mum!'

'What is it?'

'It's not drains – it's Oyin.'

'It's what?'

'Oyin. You know – the witch. The one I told you about. She came to Beaver Towers and . . .'

'Philip. Stop it!'

'But Mum, it's true. And that boy Dad saw wasn't me, it was her.' Philip was shouting and he could feel tears of fear filling his eyes.

His mother grabbed his shoulders and shook him. 'Stop that nonsense at once, Philip. I've told you before not to keep on telling those lies. You're just a naughty boy.'

The telephone rang and his mother let go of him and went to answer it. Philip looked out of the kitchen window.

The hole. The storm. The smell. The boy who looked like him. It had to be Oyin. She was here in the town looking for him. Perhaps the boy he had seen outside his house had really been her. Why was she here? What was she going to do to him?

His mother came back into the room. Philip tried to say something but she raised her hand and said, 'Now, no more – I'm warning you. If I hear another one of your silly lies, I shall get really angry.'

Philip closed his mouth and his mother went on, 'That was Mrs Jessup on the phone. She's not very well and she's asked me to go over there and do a few things for her.'

Philip watched as his mother put on her coat.

'Can I come, Mum?'

'I'd rather you didn't, Philip. You know how ill she is. She doesn't want any noise.'

'Oh, please, Mum. Let me. I don't want to stay

here all by myself. Please Mum – Oyin might come.'

As soon as he said it, he knew it was a mistake.

'That settles it. I warned you. You stay right here, my lad. And not another word out of you.'

She took some food out of the fridge and put it in her basket. Philip followed her to the front door.

'Mum,' he said.

'No!'

She opened the door and stepped outside.

'Perhaps this will teach you not to tell lies,' she said. 'You can stay by yourself for half an hour and think about what I've said.'

She pulled the door closed behind her. Philip heard her footsteps go away down the path. The garden gate clanged and she was gone.

He was alone in the house.