For Liza Meggitt, or 'mother dearest' as you insist I call you.
Vengeance shall be mine.
J. M. P.



For Jack
I. F.

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The BEAST and the BETHANY

REVENGE OF THE BEAST



Jack Meggitt-Phillips
Illustrated by Isabelle Follath











The Beastly Beginning

When Ebenezer Tweezer was eleven years old, the world was much younger.

Instead of cars on the streets, there were horses and carriages. In place of phones and computers, people would communicate via letters and hopeful shouting.

There was no such thing as photographs, and so if you were the sort of person who liked to capture the moment whenever you happened to be wearing a nice outfit or eating a pretty meal, you would have to travel around with your own personal portrait artist. Electricity was nothing more than a silly word back then, which meant that you could only read books past bedtime if you had an extensive collection of candles.

In short, it was a pretty rotten time to be alive. And for poor Ebenezer, it was especially rotten, because he was a deeply unpopular child.

It's hard to say exactly what made him so unpopular. Perhaps it was because he had a smug-looking face, or it might have had something to do with the fact that his outfits were always rather extravagant – filled with ruffles and colourful patterns.

Whatever the reason, it was clear that the other children did not care for young Ebenezer. He was never invited to their feasts, jester jousts, or theatre trips, but this didn't deter him from arriving uninvited. In fact, Ebenezer would spend most afternoons lurking outside *The Muddlington Pie Shoppe*, because he knew that, from time to time, the children would gather there and challenge each other to impromptu pasty-eating competitions.

More often than not, though, Ebenezer would spend entire days outside the pie shop, and no children would arrive. Ebenezer would use the time to practise his conversation skills by talking to the wall. He'd say things like;

"Isn't it a fine day we're having?"

Or:

"Have you seen that new comedy by Willy Whatshisname?



No, I didn't get any of the jokes either."

And:

"Such a rotter about that plague, isn't it?"

Invariably, the wall didn't have anything to say. But Ebenezer didn't mind, because he saw all of these one-sided chats as terribly good warm-ups for the real thing. He was sure that if he could only strike upon the right topic of conversation, or wear the right number of ruffles on his shirt, then the other children would let him join in with their pasty-filled merriment.

On one such day, when he was lurking outside the pie shop, Ebenezer became aware of a commotion taking place in the square. The town crier had given up his usual shouting about the wonderful deals available at his wife's haberdashery and was now crying something in an urgent voice. Ebenezer wasn't able to hear the exact words, because the commotion and uproar in the street was too loud.

Serious-looking men, wearing some very silly scarlet capes and green stockings, were dismounting from their horses. They each carried a trumpet in their hand, as if it were a weapon, and their faces were grave with worry.

"You there, boy!" shouted one of them. Ebenezer saw there was a crest on his cape, which read *Division of*



Removing Rapscallions in Secret. "Have you seen the deadliest creature that has ever tormented this earth?"

Ebenezer was pretty sure that he would have remembered such a creature, but he was a well-behaved child, and he wanted to be as helpful as possible. It took him about twelve seconds to flick through his memories.

"No, I'm almost certain I haven't," said Ebenezer. "Is this a game of hide-and-seek? No one's agreed to play it with me yet, but I don't think you're meant to ask for help."

"This is no game, boy! If we don't capture the creature,

before it regains its strength, there's no telling what might happen," said the cape-wearer.

"Oh, deary me," said Ebenezer. "I wish I could help. But like I said, no creatures have crossed my path. Sorry."

The cape-wearer seemed to take this remark as a personal insult. He huffily returned to his horse and trotted away from Ebenezer. The rest of the cape-and-stocking-wearers continued their search – bursting into establishments, and asking pointed questions – but Ebenezer's attention was soon drawn elsewhere, when he spotted three children approaching the pie shop.

"I hear they caught it in Lady Morgana's basement. Apparently she'd been keeping it hidden from the Division for centuries," said Nicholas Nickle, an unpleasant boy, with a suitably unpleasant face.

"No one lives for centuries, so that's clearly not true, brother dearest," said Nicholas's distinctly un-dear sister, Nicola Nickle. "*I* heard that the creature used to be the size of a small hill, until the Division fed it a trumpet. One of Morgana's neighbours said they saw the creature deflating like a balloon and whooshing out of the house."

"I WANT SOME STOCKINGS!" said Nicco Nickle, the youngest child of the ghastly family.

The Nickles were generally viewed by the rest of the neighbourhood as menaces, but Ebenezer was not in a position to be fussy about friends. As they approached, Ebenezer tousled the ruffles on his shirt, and tried to remember his small-talk training.

"Isn't it a rotter about this willy comedy, eh? No, I didn't get the plague at all," said Ebenezer. A frown wrinkled his brow. "Hang on a moment, I think I might have got that a bit up-jumbled."

The Nickles' faces lit up. Ebenezer mistook this as an expression of friendship, so his face lit up too.

"Well, well, well – look who's here for another beating. It's only Mr Ebenoozer Looooooseerrrr," said Nicholas.

"I love it when you call me that," said Ebenezer, deadly serious. "I read somewhere that it's very important for friends to have nicknames for one another."

"We're not your friends, Ebenooozer. I thought we showed you last time what happens when you call us that," said Nicholas.

"Hmm? Oh yes, that game where you chase me whilst throwing sticks and stones is great fun," said Ebenezer. "But perhaps this time we could just have a little chat instead? The wall and I have been practising for hours."

However, it soon became clear that the Nickles were not in the mood for a spot of sparkling conversation. The three of them charged at Ebenezer, chasing him through the square and out onto the fields that led to the back of his house. They hurled names, insults, and the occasional rock at the back of his head.

Ebenezer was comfortably able to outrun them, because he was blessed with a pair of long, gangly legs. As he ran, he tried to convince himself that this was just another game, even though he knew, deep down, that it wasn't. Like everyone else, the Nickles had taken an immediate dislike to Ebenezer, and he was powerless to do anything about it. There was no amount of shirt-shopping or wall-talking that was going to make them like or respect him.

But then, as he was sprinting through the final stretch, he stepped on something squishy. He looked under his shoe, and found that the squishy something was a worm-sized blob of grey. As he peered even closer, he was able to make out three black eyes, two black tongues, and a dribbling mouth. It had a set of tiny limbs, and its breath stank of boiled cabbage.

"*Help me,*" said the squishy something, as he scraped it off his shoe.

Ebenezer was so shocked by the voice that he dropped the squishy something. He quickly picked it back up, and dusted away the specks of mud from its eyes.

"Terribly sorry about that," he said. As he looked at the squishy something, he knew he was holding something extraordinary. For a few seconds, he just stood gazing at it, but then, he remembered his manners. "My name's Ebenoo – I mean, Ebenezer."

"And I am a beast. Please, you're my only hope – help me."

