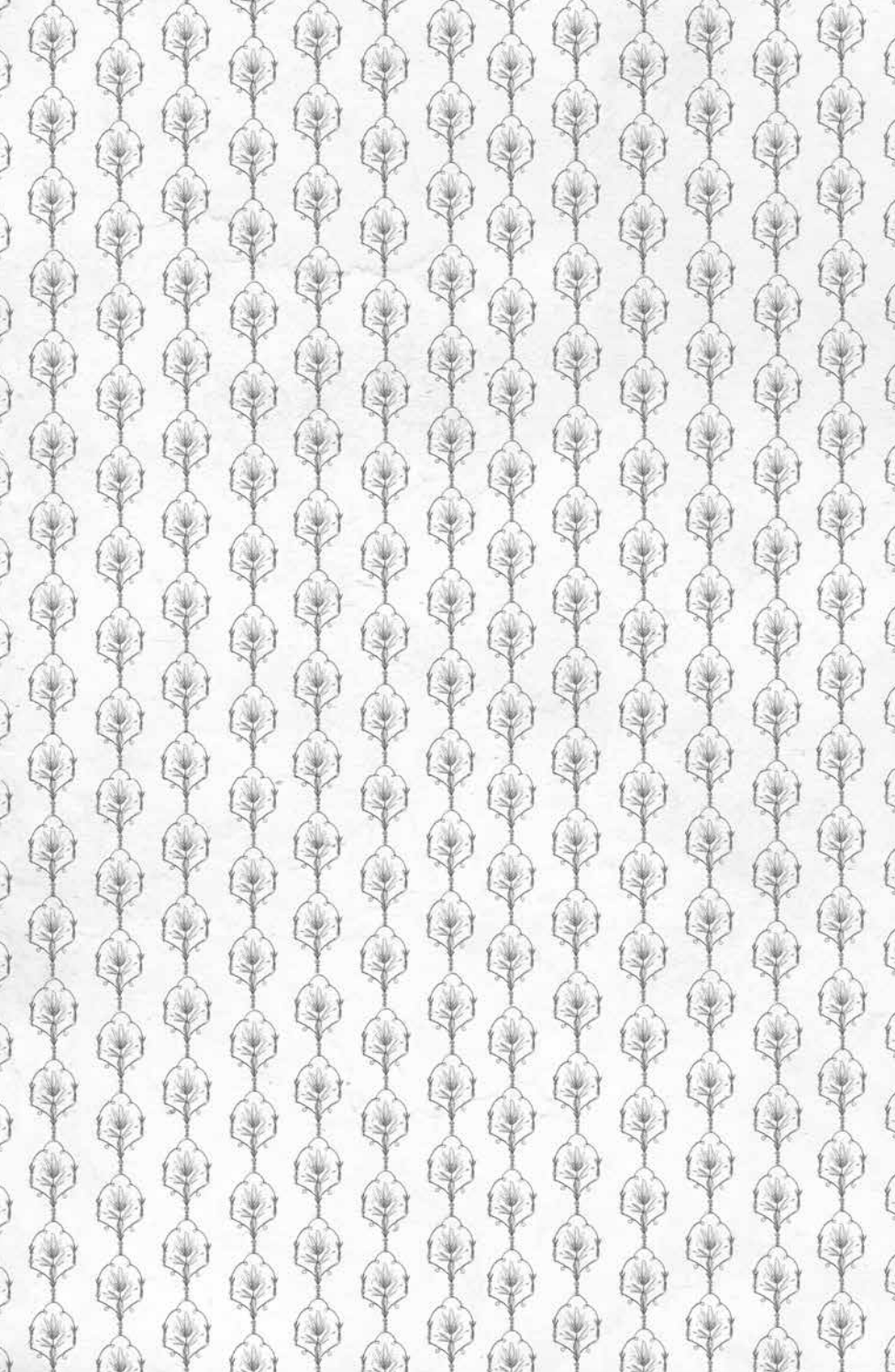


# The Beast and the Bethany

## Child of the Beast



*For my boggingly beastly father, Matthew Phillips. Thank you for being nothing like Bethany's parents.*
*J. M. P.*

First published in Great Britain 2023 by Farshore

An imprint of HarperCollins*Publishers*
I London Bridge Street
London SEI 9GF

Text copyright © 2023 Jack Meggitt-Phillips
Interior illustrations copyright © 2023 Dynamo

The moral rights of the author and cover illustrator have been asserted

ISBN 978 0 00 856817 7

farshore.co.uk

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

Printed and bound in the UK using 100% renewable electricity at CPI Group (UK) Ltd
I

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher and copyright owner.

Stay safe online. Any website addresses listed in this book are correct at the time of going to print. However, Farshore is not responsible for content hosted by third parties. Please be aware that online content can be subject to change and websites can containcontent that is unsuitable for children. We advise that all children are supervised when using the internet.

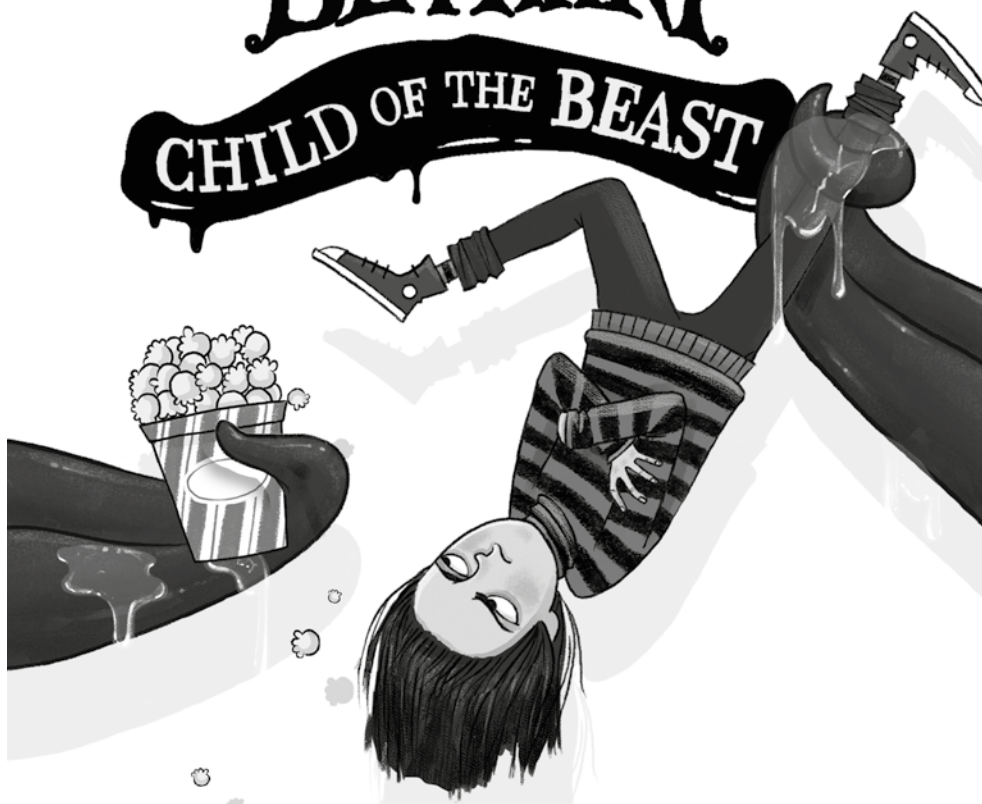
MIX
Paper | Supporting responsible forestry
FSC™ C007454
FSC
www.fsc.org

This book is produced from independently certified FSC™ paper to ensure responsible forest management.

For more information visit: www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

# The BEAST and the BETHANY

## CHILD OF THE BEAST



JACK MEGGITT-PHILLIPS

Farshore







# The Educated Beast

The beast's attic was once the most dangerous room in the universe. It used to be deadlier than the war chambers of Mars, it was home to more corpses than the Graveyard of Dying Stars, and it had once smelled even cabbagier than the underground lair of the Grizzly Gardener of Grimsby. But now that same attic had been turned into a classroom.

After centuries of scheming, feasting and generally being the most despicable dribbler in the universe, the beast had finally decided that it was going to use its powers for good. Unfortunately, this involved far more work than the beast had anticipated.

"Let's try this one more time," said the young 512-year-old Ebenezer Tweezer. Ebenezer had once brought delicious, noisy meals to the beast's attic, but now he brought tiresome lessons instead. "Eating people is . . .?"

"Delicious!" said the beast.

"No!" said Ebenezer.

"Fun?" said the beast

"*Non!*" said Ebenezer. He had learned the word 'NO' in several languages, in the hope that the message might get through to the beast.

"Crunchy?" said the beast.

"*Nyet!*" said Ebenezer.

"Moreish?" said the beast.

"*Nein, nein, nein!*" said Ebenezer. "Eating people is *bad*."

"Oh yes, of course." The beast felt that it was finally getting somewhere. "Eating people is bad for indigestion. Their kidneys give me the most terrible wind."

Ebenezer's usually creaseless face was crumpled with frustration. He was sorely missing the beast's other teacher, Bethany.

"Eating people isn't bad because of indigestion. It's bad because it's just plain wrong!" he said. "All those creatures you've eaten . . . every poor, unfortunate meal I used to



bring up to your attic . . . it's all *wrong*. Don't you see that?"

"But I was hungry!" said the beast. "And besides, anyone who was stupid enough to be tricked into my attic deserved to be eaten."

Ebenezer removed a feathery quill from his jacket, and marched over to a nearby flip board. In capital letters, he wrote and underlined the words 'NOBODY DESERVES TO BE EATEN'.

On the same flip board, he and Bethany had written sentences like 'IT IS NOT ACCEPTABLE TO TURN PEOPLE INTO PUDDLES', 'STOP VOMITING HAMMERS' and 'POODLES ARE NOT APPETISERS'.

"You're going to have to try a lot harder," said Ebenezer.

"But I haven't snacked upon so much as an ant for months!" said the beast. "Do you have any idea how hard that has been for me? I was born to feast and create chaos and destruction aplenty!"

Then, as if to demonstrate how difficult a pulse-free diet had been, the beast's belly made a noise that was somewhere between the howl of a wolf and the screech of a knife being run down a blackboard.

Ebenezer fetched a silver briefcase from the hall, emblazoned with the initials D.o.R.R.i.S.. It was a gift from

a secret agency who had provided Ebenezer and Bethany with various gadgets that would help them in their quest to redeem the beast.

The briefcase contained items like: three-eyed X-ray goggles that were designed to help the beast see people's inner goodness, roller wellies with an anti-gravity setting to allow the beast to travel around the neighbourhood, and a small, circular button that could summon a small army of secret agents at a moment's notice in case the beast should fall back into its old, horrifying habits.

Ebenezer put the D.o.R.R.i.S. button in his jacket pocket and removed a small red pillbox from the briefcase. Each pill was designed to keep the beast nourished for months at a time, but the beast ate several each day and was still left feeling hungry.

"This'll soon quiet your belly," said Ebenezer, as he put a pill on a spoon. "Be a good beast and open up."

The beast delivered a look of withering disdain. The look of disdain turned to fury as Ebenezer tried to get the beast to open its mouth by making a *choo-choo* sound.

"I'm not a snotty toddler who poops itself," began the beast. "That's not going to work on –"

Unfortunately, by opening its mouth to speak, it had



given Ebenezer a window into which he slipped the pill, spoon and all. The beast was disgusted by the bland, screamless flavour of the meal.

"How about we try a different approach?" Ebenezer said, as he returned to his feathery quill and flip board. "Let's think about what Bethany would make you do."

"*Non, nyet, NEIN, NEIN, NEIN!*" roared the beast. "We can make me into a good beast without the help of that snotty-nosed brat!"

"Bethany is not a brat, and she's only occasionally snotty. If you really want to become a better beast, you should listen to her," said Ebenezer. He sighed. "All right, let's talk about regrets instead."

"Are regrets a rare and delicious species of hedgehog?" asked the beast.

"You know full well what regrets are, and I bet you have plenty," said Ebenezer. "If you think about the things you wish you hadn't done, you might find it easier to tell right from wrong. It's a bit like bow ties. Sometimes you have to wear them with the wrong outfits to know which ones would suit them perfectly."

"I regret . . . not eating more dodos while they were still hopping around the place," said the beast.

Ebenezer refused to write 'NOT EATING MORE DODOS' on the flip board. The beast sighed a stinky, cabbagey sigh.

"I regret . . . my time in that D.o.R.R.i.S. laser cage."

"That's better," said Ebenezer. He didn't write 'LASER CAGE' on the board. "But you should really regret the things that put you into the laser cage in the first place."

The beast roared with frustration and vomited a hammer at the flip board. It was just about to tell Ebenezer that he could take all his talk of regrets and shove it up his pretty bottom, when they both heard a noise from one of the many storeys below.

"Oh no," groaned the beast.

"Oh yay!" squealed Ebenezer at the same time.

Bethany stomped into the attic. Her arms were laden with bags, and she had the sort of scowl on her face that could pop a hot-air balloon.

"All right, gitface?" she said to Ebenezer, before turning her attention to the beast. "Oi, oi, Cabbage Breath!"

"I regret . . . not eating her when I had the chance," said the beast.

"Yeah, well, I regret not trumpeting you to death," said Bethany. "How's it going?"



"Marvellously!" said the beast.

"Monstrously!" said Ebenezer. "Thank goodness you're here."

"Sozza, but I've got no time to help, 'cause I need to find the perfect outfit to watch *D.I. Tortoise* in style," said Bethany. "Did you get Cabbage Breath to think about its regrets? Oh, and did you get it to vomit out more bandages for the children's hospital?"

The beast was furious that it had been tricked into taking part in a lesson Bethany had planned. However, Ebenezer was too interested in Bethany's shopping bags to notice. Usually, whenever Bethany went shopping, she returned with comics, catapults or cushions filled with whoopee, but today was different.

"Bethany, have you been *clothes shopping*?" he asked, a trifle hurt. "Why didn't you invite me? I LOVE clothes shopping."

Bethany blushed and attempted to hide the bags. This merely resulted in her accidentally spilling the contents on the floor.

"Are those *dresses*?" Ebenezer quickly rushed over to take her temperature, before realising he had never taken anyone's temperature before. He shoved two fingers up

her nose. "Your nostrils seem sweaty. Very, *very* sweaty. Is that normal?"

"It would explain the smell," said the beast.

"I am NOT sweaty," said Bethany, as she stuffed the spilled dresses into her bags. "Only nervous people are sweaty, and I'm not nervous!"

"She IS nervous," said the beast in delight. It slithered its tongues further into the room. "I'm tasting odours of desperation and severe discomfort. For the first time in her life . . . No, it couldn't be . . . YES, it is . . . Bethany actually wants to impress someone!"

"But who could Bethany want to impress?" asked Ebenezer. "Hold on, did you say you were going to watch a film? Oh my goodness – it's tonight, isn't it? Tonight's the night you're going on your first date with Geoffrey!"

"It is NOT a date!" said Bethany. "It's just two people watching a film with some popcorn, and maybe wearing some nice clothes."

"Sounds like a date to me," said Ebenezer.

The beast grimaced. "Sounds like something that'll make me throw up."

Bethany bunched her fists and stomped downstairs to try on her shopping.



"Let me know if you need any help!" shouted Ebenezer. "Mother Tweezer used to make me button her into her outfits all the time."

"I do NOT need any help. It's a dress – how hard can it be?" Bethany shouted back.

There was a pause.

"HELP! HEEELLLLP!"

Ebenezer rushed downstairs. Bethany wasn't so much wearing a dress as being attacked by it. The arm bits had got caught round her neck, ever so slightly strangling her.



"It's worse than I thought," said Ebenezer, aghast.

"Just get me out," hissed Bethany.

Ebenezer artfully manoeuvred the dress until it was the right way round.

"Somehow, you look even worse," Ebenezer said, shaking his head.

Bethany scowled as she changed into a different dress.

"Equally awful," said Ebenezer. "The shop assistant clearly hated you. NEXT!"

Bethany's scowl burrowed deeper as Ebenezer barked 'NEXT!' at increasingly hysterical volumes. They got through three bags, until Bethany finally put on a dress that Ebenezer liked. It was a turquoise, striped number – which looked like a refined version of the jumpers Bethany usually wore.

"Oh my," cooed Ebenezer. He'd seen many remarkable sights over the course of his long, long life, but this was the most moving of the lot. "Bethany, you look –"

"STUPID!" said Bethany. She'd stomped over to one of the many mirrors to see what all the fuss was about. "Geoffrey's gonna think I'm trying way too hard for this not-a-date!"

Bethany ran down a few flights of stairs. She returned



wearing a pair of ripped jeans and the smelliest of her unwashed jumpers.

"Come on, gitface, let's get going," said Bethany.

"But you looked so –" Ebenezer began.

"Don't wanna hear it," she said. "Hurry up, Geoffrey's such a goody two shoes about being on time."

"Maybe we could take the beast with us?" suggested Ebenezer hopefully. "D.o.R.R.i.S. said it should mingle with the world a little more."

The look on Bethany's face told Ebenezer that the beast was not invited to the not-a-date. Ebenezer sighed and headed back to the attic, where the beast had vomited out several more hammers and written a variety of rude words on the flip board.

"Where are you two going?" asked the beast. "Shall I put on the roller wellies? I'd like to find out what 'anti-gravity setting' actually means."

"I'm afraid this is a Bethany and Ebenezer trip," said Ebenezer. "When we come back, I want you to have at least three more regrets."

"But I want to roller-welly!" said the beast stroppily. It blew a double-tongued raspberry at Ebenezer. "I hate these stupid lessons. I hate them!"

"Becoming a better beast is going to take a lot of hard work," said Ebenezer. "You can't just vomit out a solution to your problems this time."

Ebenezer left the attic, and then the house. The beast was alone, with nothing but its own thoughts for company.

The beast chewed its tongues as it thought over Ebenezer's parting words. It wondered whether there might be a way to vomit out a solution to its problems – a way of giving itself a little shortcut to becoming a better sort of beast.

The beast closed its three eyes and shut its dribbling mouth. It wiggled its blob of a body from side to side and let out a hum that was as deep as the ocean.

The beast poured every ounce of concentration into its belly, because it was about to vomit out something that it had never vomited before.



# The Date with Destiny

Bethany and Ebenezer had never been to the Cussock Cinema before. They soon wished they'd never bothered. The building was not so much a cinema as a monstrous monument to one of their least favourite people in the neighbourhood: Gloria Cussock.

Gloria was a deeply unpleasant and untalented child who was constantly threatening to tap-dance or break into song. When Gloria sang, she sounded like a goat being tortured, and when she danced, she looked like someone who had mistaken a bottle of itching powder for their perfume. However, the cinema's architect seemed to know nothing of this, and had designed every inch of the