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opening extract from

# Beast

written by

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# One

**H**ere is a list of the ten worst things I have done:

1. Bullying: aged seven: forced my three-year-old brother, Chas, to smoke a fag.
2. Theft: aged eight: stole one hundred and twenty pounds of pension money from my gran's handbag.
3. Theft and slaughter: aged eight: nicked my first car (a Ford Fiesta) with my older brother, Selby, and crashed it into an old man's garden, killing the birds in his aviary. (Eight was a bad year for me.)
4. Trespassing: aged ten: crapped on my head teacher's doorstep after he kicked me out of primary school.
5. Emotional cruelty: aged eleven: told my father (my real one) that I wished he would die so I'd never have to see him again.
6. Arson: aged twelve: lit a fire in a skip in the playground which spread to three classrooms.
7. Perversion: aged thirteen: nicked a neighbour's white, lacy bra from her washing line.

8. Deception: aged fourteen: went round doorsteps collecting money from old people saying it was for starving children.
9. Biohazard sabotage: aged fifteen: spat results of bad cold into my foster sister's mango face cream to inflict small revenge.
10. Murder: aged seventeen: I haven't done it yet.

Number ten on my list is going to be the worst yet and it's taking a lot of planning. I still don't know if I'll go through with it. I know it's wrong to end a life. No matter how evil that life is. But I'm running out of choices and going slowly crazy.

I buy one pig a month. I can't afford any more than that. I've no idea whether this is enough, but it keeps him alive. He's still growing and this is a worry.

I go to four or five different butchers. Some are more expensive than others. Jimmy, my foster dad, always wants to know what I'm spending my money on. I'm pretty sure he suspects I have a drug problem. Nice, isn't it? He keeps dropping hints and leaving leaflets around. If he knew I was spending the money on pork he'd be really shocked.

Today I pull up outside Thorney's butchers in Bexton. Before I get out of the car I look around a bit to see if I recognize anyone. But the football is on the telly and the street is pretty much deserted.

Thorney is a small blond man who wears jeans under

his white blood-spattered coat. He eyes me up as I walk through the hanging chains into his shop. It smells of blood and cleaning fluid and Thorney has a special offer on for home-made beef sausages.

“Is it a big party?” he asks.

I feel confused. What party? Then I remember. In the past I’ve said that I work for a company that supplies pigs for hog roasts.

“Not especially big,” I say. “Why?”

He doesn’t answer and beckons me to follow him. I go behind the counter and into the back of the shop. There’s a kettle and a microwave and an old office chair that looks like it has come out of a skip. There is also a safe in the wall and the door is open a little bit. I can’t see inside. We go down a few steps to a set of steel doors. Thorney pulls them open and I get a rush of cold air in my face. There are shelves of meat and freezers which have clear doors with packets of mince and sausages inside, as well as a lot of stuff I can’t recognize. The carcasses of pigs, sheep, and half a cow hang from metal “S” shaped hooks. The floor is sticky beneath my shoes. It’s also freezing and my breath comes out in clouds.

“This is yours,” says Thorney, pointing to a massive headless creature. Its guts have been torn out and its trotters removed. “He’s not properly thawed yet, so mind he gets at least another day before he’s cooked.”

The animal dangling in front of me is far bigger than I ordered and I tell Thorney so. But he only shakes his

head. "This is all I got, son. Take it or leave it."

I have no choice but to take it. I haven't fed him for over four weeks and I'm worried he'll start making a racket. Sometimes he roars when he smells me coming. What if he is doing it now, pressed up against the bars of his cage? What if someone goes to see where the noise is coming from?

We carry the pig up the stairs together and the flesh is cold and slippery beneath my fingers. I hope I have enough money to pay for it.

Thorney wraps the pig in white plastic and helps me heave it into my car.

How the hell am I going to get the thing to the reservoir? I'll never manage it on my own. From the lay-by, there's a walk through a field and a climb over a six-foot fence before reaching the water. This is going to be a problem.

I slam the boot down hard to make it shut.

I wipe sweat from my forehead and pay Thorney one hundred and thirty pounds and get into my car. I sit back and feel a trickle of relief. It always makes me nervous, buying these pigs. What if someone I know sees me?

Thorney knocks on the window and I wind it down.

"Most people like the head kept on for a hog roast," he says. "Are you sure your boss won't be returning this to me?"

"It's fine," I say and switch on the engine.

The car cost me most of my savings. It is an old

Renault 5. Five door. Silvery-blue. It's an old banger but I had to have it. I passed my test six months ago. I worked at the melamine factory every minute I could to buy it. And it's fully insured and has an MOT and everything. I'm legal. Everyone is surprised at me. I've never saved up for anything before. I even surprised myself. I've hardly got any money left now. Not with the price of pigs. I have to think of some other way of feeding him, because last week I lost my job at Quality Melamine Homewares.

I decide that I'll take the pig back to the house and cut it up. Then I'll be able to manage it. This might sound simple to you, but it isn't really. You see my house isn't my home at all, even though I've lived there for three years. And the family aren't my real family. I am what is now known as a "Looked After Child". When I was younger they called it "Being In Care".

I drive the three or four miles out of Bexton to the Reynolds's house. Or should I say, My Current Home. They live pretty much in the sticks. At least by my standards they do. There's a pub and a couple of shops a bit further on in Gruton and that's it. My foster family consists of: Jimmy Reynolds, his wife Verity, and their son Robert (eleven) – I'll tell you about them later. At this precise moment I'm worried about running into the Reynolds's daughter, Carol, aged fifteen. Daughter of Satan. She doesn't miss much.

I pull off the road and park a little way up the gravel drive. It's about five o'clock in the evening. They've made

the garden pretty nice: lots of flowers and a swing in the tree and no crappy gnomes or statues like my gran goes in for. The Reynoldses don't have any neighbours. This must be good seeing as they've looked after kids like me and worse for so many years. Who would want to live next door to a house full of crazy teenagers? It's quite a large place. Everyone has their own room so there is enough space to get away from each other. I go indoors and wash my face in the kitchen sink. Then I make myself my favourite sandwich which is cheese and brown sauce melted together on white bread in the microwave.

"Somebody's got BO," announces a shrill voice behind me.

Carol. I ignore her.

"It's disgusting," she continues. "Didn't your mother teach you to wash?"

I dry my hands on the tea towel to annoy her. Then Jimmy, her dad, comes in and she seems to shrink into a pretty dark-eyed girl in red trousers and a pink T-shirt.

"Dad," she squeals. "That top does nothing for you."

"Cheeky," he says. He ruffles her hair and nods at me. He goes through to the conservatory where Verity is reading the paper. Carol turns and gives me a smug grin and flounces after him.

I sigh. I'm too old for this. I'm too old to be forced into other people's families, like a jigsaw piece from a different set. I've never fitted in anywhere.

I am about to go upstairs when Carol sidles back into the room.

"You've got blood on your neck," she says. "Bleeding zit?"

I wave her away but she ignores me. I spit on my hand and wipe at my neck. Carol and Robert are always screaming at each other and Verity and Jimmy let them get away with it. At home, me and my brothers always got a whack.

"We'll have to disinfect your room when you've gone," she says. She breaks into giggles and dances over the kitchen floor, her dark hair bouncing off her shoulders.

I have this belief. The more pink a girl wears, the more twisted and evil she is. Pink is Carol's favourite colour. She ought to have grown out of it by now. The band in her hair and the stripe at the top of her socks are pink. Even her cat, Dudley, has to wear a pink, fluffy collar. It doesn't suit him. He's this ten-year-old gangster with no ears.

In my room I look at the telly and one by one I hear the family go upstairs.

At about ten o'clock there's a knock on my door. It's Jimmy.

"Everything all right?" he asks. He looks at the walls and very hard at the lumps in the unmade bed. He scans the carpet, searching for evidence for some unknown crime.

"Fine," I say and switch the channel with the remote.

"Any luck with the job hunting?"

"Nope."



Jimmy leans against the door. "You'll need one if you want to keep that car legal."

"Yep."

Jimmy says he'll leave me in peace and he shuts the door quietly behind him.

He's all right really. He's about fifty odd. His official title is "Foster Carer". He's had kids like me coming and going in his house for twenty-five years. He's seen it all. Or maybe not. I think of the dead animal in the boot of my car, oozing blood into the carpet mats.

At two o'clock in the morning I pick up my torch and creep down the stairs. I tense at every creak because Carol has ears on stalks. She once caught me making a sneaky sandwich in the middle of the night and gave me such a look anyone would think I was burgling the place.

Jimmy keeps his tools in the garden shed which is always unlocked. I am amazed at this. You'd think that after having looked after kids like me for years he'd keep his saws and hammers and glue guns locked well away. I put the torch on the ground, open the boot of my car and somehow manage to get the pig on my shoulder. It's so heavy I can hardly breathe. The thing has thawed a bit. I begin to wonder if I'll make it to the shed. Everything hurts: my back, my shoulders, my neck. And my stomach feels like it is going to explode with the effort. My eyes begin to get used to the dark and I can see quite a lot. There is a half moon lighting

things up for me. When I reach the grass I have to drop the carcass because my limbs have gone all tired and shivery and won't work properly. I look back at the moonlit house to see if anyone is watching but the curtains are still. It is so quiet I can hear my heart beating. When I get my breath back I grab the wrapping and start dragging the thing. My fingers keep sliding off the plastic and when I finally move it, the plastic rips leaving the flesh exposed. I haven't got the strength to pick it up again so I roll it over and over. It thumps on the grass and I worry the sound will wake the family. But I have to keep going. At the door of the shed I kneel and shove the thing with all my strength, gritting my teeth and shutting my eyes. The pig comes to a halt nestled between the lawnmower and a bag of cat litter. I've done it. I allow myself to rest for a few moments. I'm breathless and a little bit giddy but I feel full of energy. It's quiet outside. Nobody knows what I am doing. I am safe. But I'm never going to get a pig as big as this again. I tear open the plastic but leave it underneath to catch any spillages. It will be hard to explain away any stains. I switch on my torch and find Jimmy's saw poking out of a bucket of tools. I fish it out and finger the serrated edge. I don't know where to begin cutting. I had this vague idea that I might somehow string the pig up and slice all the way down its backbone and cut the bloody thing in half. But the roof doesn't look strong enough to hold the weight so I decide to start working on a leg instead. If I manage to

get all four off, the main body of the pig will be lighter and easier to work with. Luckily for me the animal has already been gutted. I can't cope with messy intestines and stuff.

I kneel and put the blade on the cold flesh. I shudder. *Come on*, I tell myself, *you have to do it*. I shut my eyes and begin to saw. I am trembling and feel sick. I'll never be able to eat bacon again. As I saw, a metallic smell fills the shed and I have to turn away for a minute.

I once asked a butcher to cut up a pig for me. He said it would cost me ninety pounds. Now I know why. The flesh breaks quite easily, the legs have just about thawed, but then I get to bone and it feels like I am hacking away for hours, getting nowhere, covering myself with blood and fat and God knows what and feeling sicker and sicker every minute. I have an idea. I'll cut the pig where the bones join each other. Then I'll only have to saw through gristle and ligaments rather than bone. But it will mean starting all over again. I roll the pig over and feel around its shoulder. I resume work. I am getting hot and when I wipe the sweat from my face, my hands are sticky.

Then I see a flicker of light out of the corner of my eye.

Someone is coming over the lawn, torch light bouncing off their feet. They'll be here in a few seconds. Can I hide what I am doing? I taste blood as I bite my lip. I have to do something. I pull myself to my

feet and drop the saw. I open the door of the shed and close it carefully behind me. A white glare shines directly in my face.

“What are you doing in there?”

A silhouetted figure stands behind the torch.

“Stephen.” Carol’s voice wobbles. “You’re all covered in blood.”