

THE
POISONED
PIE
MYSTERY
NICKI THORNTON



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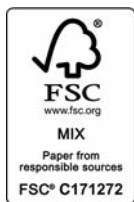
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*For Oliver, Simon, Sam, Emily and Matthew –
all the cousins*

Also by Nicki Thornton

The Last Chance Hotel
The Bad Luck Lighthouse
The Cut-Throat Cafe
The Howling Hag Mystery

PART ONE



1. THE UNLUCKIEST BOY IN THE WORLD

When something terrible is about to happen, it's helpful to know in advance. So Oakmoss Hornbeam always kept a lookout for signs. His best friend Veena said he was an accident waiting to happen, usually as she handed him back his broken glasses.

Today, as he walked down the lane through the woods that led from his home to the school bus, the wind was setting up a blustery dance. Twigs, leaves and even branches frolicked past him with such joy



it was as if they were on their way to a party.

They were certainly heading in the opposite direction to the school bus.

That had to be a sign, Oakmoss thought. A sign that he should abandon going to school today? A sign he should go fishing instead?

Even the clouds were in a feverish mood, whipped up into a frothy race across the skies. That one was shaped like a pig and it was running ahead of one that looked like a velociraptor. If the pig won . . .

You couldn't ignore a sign like a pig outrunning a velociraptor.

Trees either side of the lane stretched and bent their branches. Were they trying to touch their toes, or . . . trying to whisper an urgent message? *Danger! Oakmoss Hornbeam, beware! Head home, Oakmoss! Don't go to school today! Gooooo fiiishiiiiing . . .*

No, it would take more than a strong wind, wild branches and clouds behaving excitedly to make him abandon Veena to the 'banter' dished out on the Dogberry Academy school bus. Usually by Flanagan.

And then a black cat dashed right across the path in front of him. A black cat crossing your actual path was the very worst sign of bad luck you could possibly get. You could not ignore that.

Something bad was about to happen.

The cat stopped. It turned. It looked right at Oakmoss with unblinking green eyes and Oakmoss froze.

From above came a sharp splintering crack.

‘Look out!’ came a cry.

And Oakmoss did look – in shock – right at that black cat. Cats didn’t talk. That had to be a—

‘Look UP!’

This was the last thing he heard before an enormous branch came crashing down right on top of him.