ANNIE DALTON



Charlie Chase

Lilac Peabody - everyone's favourite friend!

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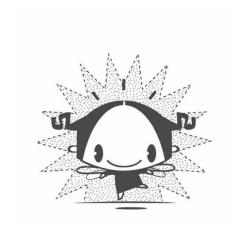
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## 1. GRRRKKK!

This story starts with my brain.

Ninety-nine per cent of the time it works fine: like when I'm playing football. I'm *brilliant* at football. My mates say I'm the best defender

our school ever had. But I'm not just some sports nut (though I am pretty nutty!). I'm also an ace problem solver. No, seriously! If there's a glitch in your computer, just call in Charlie Chase! My teacher says I'm like a bloodhound, because I don't give up until I've got the answer.

So you see, most of the time my brain lives a happy, useful life.

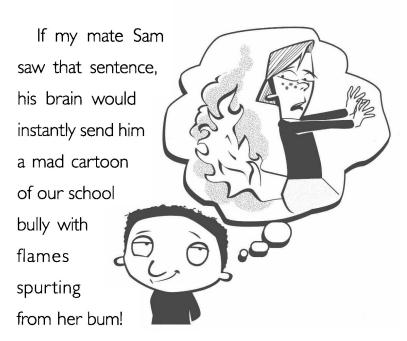
Just don't ask it to read!

"GRRRKKK!"

Ever heard someone

try to start an old car on a cold winter's day?

Exactly the same thing happens to my brain when it sees print! It doesn't even have to be a whole page. It can be one line like: "Honey Hope's pants are on fire!"



But my brain's a bit wonky, so I never get the cartoon; I just see lots of letters hopping about like pesky little fleas. I could stare at them till I had a long grey beard and my brain would STILL be going "GRRRKKK!"

OK, having reading problems is a pain, but, like Sam says, "You're just dyslexic, Charlie. It's not like you've got three heads!" Of course some kids think "dyslexic" is just another word for "no

brain". I tell them: "Hey, don't knock the brain. This brain is pure quality!"

It's true. How many people remember their first words? I remember mine exactly. Most babies start off with little words like mumma, dadda, teddy. My first words were "fire engine"!

My parents were convinced they'd produced a boy genius, but I was just mad about fire engines! I was mad about loads of things when I was little: earth worms, power sockets...

power sockets...

I was a right little daredevil. When I was four years old I climbed up a stepladder in my Superman cape and tried to fly!

My parents rushed to pick me up but I didn't have a scratch on me. I told them Lilac Peabody saved me with her Special Powers.

Lilac Peabody was my invisible friend

(well, invisible to everyone but

me). I've got a splodgy
painting I did of her at
playgroup. I'm not sure if
she was an actual space
alien, or if I just ran out of
paint, because I painted her skin the

strangest mix of blue and green!

I forgot all about my little magic buddy once I started school and had some real buddies to play with. By the time this story starts, I'm a healthy, non-flying, non-worm-eating ten year old.

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My fave food is Spaghetti Bolognese, my fave colour is blue, and I love any music I can dance to I'm a wicked dancer! And, even if I say so myself, I'm the most popular kid in my school. Everybody wants to be mates with Charlie Chase.



I should be happy, right?

I am happy when
I'm at school.
Everyone adores
me at school. I make
everyone laugh,
including my
teacher. I even
make Honey Hope

laugh and she's the most evil girl in the galaxy. School is not a problem.

My problems start when it's time to go home.



I tell myself off sometimes. "Why are you lurking outside like a little lost puppy?" I ask myself. "Your family are not monsters. They care about you."

This is true. It just doesn't help.

Finally I take a deep breath, turn my key in the lock and go in. The house is spookily silent.

I peep round the sitting room door. Everyone's home: my mum, my dad, my big sister, Jessie, and my baby sister, Martha.



They're in the exact same positions as yesterday and the day before that...

Jessie is lying on the rug by the fire. My parents are at opposite ends of the sofa. Baby Martha is sitting at their feet. No one speaks. No one even moves – except to turn a page.

My friends' families do loads of different things when they get home: kick a ball around the garden, make popcorn, play with the puppy. My family just reads.

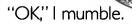


Then a strange thing happens. Dad looks up and sees me in the doorway and BING!

Everyone springs to life.

Dad puts on his jolliest voice. "Charlie, you're back!"

"How was school?" Mum asks me in *her* jolliest voice.



"Just OK?" says Mum. "So what did you do today?" I shift my feet. "Nothing much."

"You must have done something."

"Not really."

Mum gives me an extra-friendly smile. "So, erm – did you finish your reading book?"

I shrug as if I don't care. "No."

"You'll get there, Charlie," says Dad in his super-jolly voice.

"I can't believe he's still reading that book," Jessie sounds smug.

"Well, I am," I say, "so get over it."

"Ooh, touchy!" she says.



"Now, now," Dad tells her. "Your brother's good at other things."

"My brother's a moody pig,"
Jessie says under her breath.
"I am not moody," I snarl.
The baby gives a worried whimper.

"He's such a liar," Jessie tells my parents. "We're just sitting reading peacefully, then he comes home and picks a fight."

"I am NOT picking a FIGHT!" I yell.

Little Martha's mouth goes completely square, then she just howls.

"You scared the baby."

"You should watch that temper, Charlie," says Dad. "It'll get you into trouble."

"Will everyone just leave me ALONE!" I yell.

I rush upstairs to my room and push open the window. I hang my head out, taking gulps



