**ANNIE DALTON** 

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Honeysuckle Hope



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ANNIE DALTON Illustrated by Griff



HarperCollins Children's Books

# To Sophie and IZZie with love

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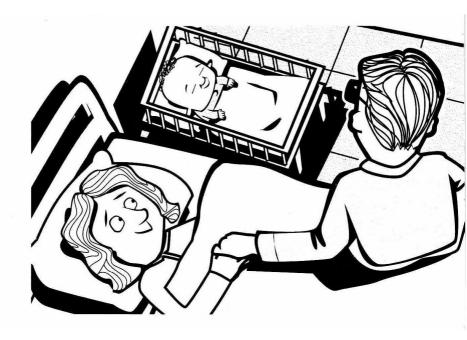


# 1. Honey Against The World!

This story starts with a blob.

A bald stinky little blob in a hospital cot, a few weeks before Christmas.

"How do you like your brother, Honey?" smiles

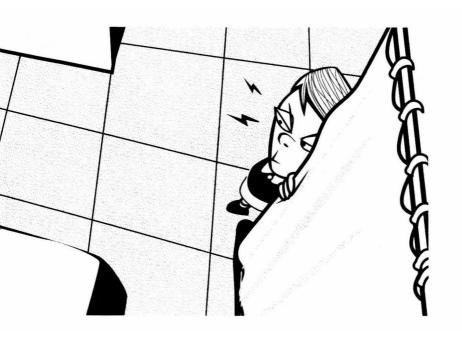


my stepmum Ellie.

"He smells like mice," I say in my coldest voice.

Ellie picks up the little Blob and sniffs his rear end. "I don't believe it!" she groans. "This little rascal needs changing again."

"Let me!" says Dad, as if people are queuing up. He starts unpopping poppers on the Blob's tiny sleep suit. "We're calling him Joe," he beams.



"Don't you think Joe Hope is a great name?"

"It's your kid," I mutter: "Call it what you like."

"Apart from the mouse smell," Ellie says brightly. "What do you think of the new member of the family?"

I tell my dad, "I'll be in the waiting room."

The waiting room is down the corridor. I ignore the dads and grannies reading magazines and go to look at the fish tank.



I'm interested in fish. I've got a fish tank in my bedroom, but I take care of mine. This one hasn't been cleaned for weeks. The water is turning into green gravy. The fish look so unhappy that I'm scared I'm going to cry.

Dad comes up behind me. "Are you OK?"

I quickly wipe my eyes. "No I'm not!" I growl.

"This tank is disgusting!"

Dad puts his arm round me. "This is a big change for you. Ellie and I realise that."

"These people don't care about fish!" I rant. "They want a pretty background for visitors. Well, fish aren't a background! They're real!"

My dad isn't even listening. "But some changes are for the better," he says. "Marrying Ellie, having Joe, these are good changes. It's a new start, Honey."

"Dad, these fish are sick! You've got to tell someone."

My dad sounds stressed. "OK. I'll ask the nurse to clean the tank. Listen, Honey, I just want you to know you'll always be my special little Honey Bun, even if Ellie and I have five children."

"They're going to DIE, Dad!" I scream. "Don't you even CARE!"

When I get home I fly upstairs to check on my fish.

They're fine, swimming around happy as anything.

My fish are beautiful, like teeny-tiny rainbows, and they're smart too. They read each other's minds! They swim SO fast, yet they always manage to change direction at the exact same moment.

When I die I'm coming back as a fish. We'll go everywhere in a happy rainbow-coloured gang, and the other fish will never think bad things about me.

I press my face against the cool glass of the aquarium.

Two little fish swim up and give me fishy kisses



through the glass. They wouldn't do that would they, if I was a bad person? I think they understand I'm just doing my best.

That's what Miss May told the class, when we started in the juniors. "The wonderful thing about Honey is she always does her best."

She doesn't think I'm so wonderful any more.

At the last parent-teacher evening, she said, "Mr Hope, I'm concerned about Honey's behaviour. She is extremely aggressive. None of

the other children will play with her."

Dad said, "I thought she was friends with Lara and Bella?"

"She was," sighed Miss May. "Who knows what happened there? That little girl is just at war with the whole world."



Neither of them noticed the door wasn't closed. They didn't know I'd heard every word.

It's not true what Miss May said.

I'm not at war with the whole world. It's only humans I can't stand.

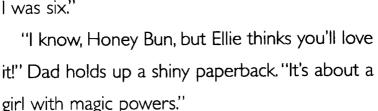


All day, Ellie and Dad try to get me to come out. "Won't you help me bath him?" wheedles Ellie. "I'm new to this. I could use some help."

She and Dad use a special voice when they talk to me these days, like I'll explode if they speak to me like a normal person.

At bedtime Dad comes in to ask if I'd like him to read me a story.

I roll my eyes.
"Newsflash, Dad! I've
been able to read since
I was six."



"I hate those stories," I snap. "Everybody knows kids have NO power whatsoever. We have to do everything you tell us! But instead of

telling the truth, writers make up stories about kids with amazing superpowers."

Dad looks startled. "Oh, right. Well, erm, I'll just leave it there in case you change your mind."

Ellie comes in. The Blob is draped limply over her shoulder, making piggy grunts. "You two having fun?" she beams.



"Honey was telling me she doesn't believe in magic," Dad says. He sounds slightly hurt.

"Really?" says my stepmum in surprise. "Haven't you ever made a birthday wish when you blew out your candles?"

"Don't remember," I growl.

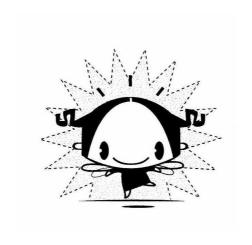
"I'm a sucker for magic," Ellie smiles. "I'm a big kid at heart."

"That's why I love you!" says Dad mushily.

He kisses her nose then Ellie kisses his nose.

"This IS still my room," I protest.

But they're in a little world of their own and they don't hear. Now they're kissing little Blobby. It's like they've forgotten I exist.



# 2. Seven Perfect Birthdays

I was fibbing to Ellie.

I used to believe in magic. And I used to love my birthdays.

I remember every birthday wish I've ever