



# The New Baby

Ben was sitting at the kitchen table  
practising his reading and stroking his dog  
Wilf at the same time. His mother  
was beside him, helping him  
out with the words he  
didn't understand.



There weren't many of these; his teacher said he was well above average at reading for someone who wasn't even eight. The story was about a boy who had a new baby brother and didn't like him much. Ben told his mother how much he sympathised. "Babies are so disgusting," he said.

His mother gave him a very odd look and said, "You don't really think that, do you? It's just that there's something we've been meaning to tell you."

Dad had been stirring the baked beans they were having for tea. The jacket potatoes were due to come out of the oven. But he stopped what he was doing and looked at Ben too, in a hopeful but worried kind of way.

*This is not good*, thought Ben.

His mother went on, "Soon you'll be getting a new baby brother or sister."

Ben stared at his parents as if he couldn't



believe it. He had just read the word “tragic” in his story. It meant that something was very bad. *Tragic, tragic, tragic* he thought. He buried his head in Wilf’s fur. It was soft and comforting.



“Ben,” said his dad,  
“I can’t see your face.  
Let go of Wilf for a  
minute so we can  
talk to you.”

“I don’t want to.”  
Ben’s voice was  
muffled by  
Wilf’s fur coat.

He thought he  
would be told off for being  
rude but his dad just said, “It’s exciting,  
getting a brother or sister. You’ll have  
someone to play with.”

Ben was happy just as he was and  
he didn’t want a baby brother or sister.

When he wanted to play, he could play with Mum and Dad or Wilf, or his best friends Maxine and Ollie, the twins who lived down the road. "I don't like babies," he said.

"Of course you do, Ben," his mother said.

"I don't," Ben argued. "They're horrible." And then he ran upstairs to his room and hid under his duvet.

Lying there, he thought of all the babies he knew. Fat babies, thin babies, small babies, big babies. The truth was, they were

all as bad as each

other and Ben was terrified of them.

They made this terrible roaring noise, day and night. It was so loud it seemed



like your ears would burst. And they were smelly with their horrible big poos, and their nappies needed changing all the time. And when there was a baby in the house, everybody thought it was wonderful and they didn't notice anybody else, just the squally baby.

Ben's mother came upstairs and eased him out of the duvet. She gave him a hug.

"Will the new baby look like me?" he wondered. His skin was golden brown and he had curly Afro hair.



“It might,” said Mum. “Or it might be as brown as your dad or as white as me. We’ll have to wait and see.”

“How long do babies take to grow up?” Ben wondered.

“They can walk and talk by the time they are about two,” his mother answered.

*Two whole years.* He didn’t even want to think about it.

Maxine and Ollie came round after tea to play basketball. The three of them played in the garden, using the net that was fastened to the wall of the shed. Maxine scored the most goals, which was very annoying. She was slightly taller than the boys and she was good at blocking their shots. They sat down on the step for a while, feeling too hot and out of breath.

“My mum said we’re getting a new baby,” Ben announced.



Maxine touched his shirt. She hadn't caught what he had said because his head had been turned away from her when he'd spoken. Although Maxine had some hearing and she could talk a bit and lip read, she usually did signing, as she was so much quicker at speaking that way. The twins had been teaching Ben sign language. He wasn't very good at it yet but he repeated his announcement using his hands and Maxine signed back, "Are you happy?"



Ben couldn't answer this by signing – it was too complicated. Luckily, Maxine was a very good lip reader, so once Ben had finished explaining how fed up he was about it, she signed, "Maybe it won't be as bad as you think."

"It will be worse," growled Ben.

Ollie and Maxine smiled at each other. They were used to Ben's tendency to see the downside and found it funny at times.

They went back to playing the game. Ben was determined to beat Maxine just this once. They got noisier and noisier but no one came out to tell them to be quieter.



One of the good things about Maxine being around was that Ben could shout a lot and not get told off by Mum and Dad. She didn't need him to shout, but the adults didn't know this so they let the children make as much noise as they liked.

"I wish I had a lolly." Ollie stopped again and wiped the sweat from his freckled face.

"Me too," said Ben,  
"but Mum hasn't got any.  
We won't get anything  
nice for two years now."

*"Two years?"*  
repeated  
Maxine,  
shaking  
a pebble out  
of her sandal.



“Babies cost a lot of money to keep,” replied Ben. “I wanted a new bike for my birthday. I’ll never get one now.” His bike was way too small. When he rode it, he had to crouch with his knees almost up to his chin. This was all right for a short time but after a while it got tiring. And he felt silly too.

“I wouldn’t mind a sister,” signed Maxine. Ben liked watching her sign. It looked as if she was dancing with her hands.

“You wouldn’t really like another baby,” said Ben gloomily. “Remember what Thomas was like when he was born.”

The three of them remembered Thomas. He was Ollie and Maxine’s little brother, who was now four. He had been a particularly





angry baby, not at all sweet and soft.

“Do you remember the nappies?” Ollie asked Maxine.

She did. She grinned, holding her nose.

“He broke my doll’s house,” Maxine signed. She wasn’t really interested in dolls, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t have a moan about the loss of her old house.

“He sat on it,” she continued. “He was just learning to stand up and he wobbled and fell over, crash, right on to the side of it. It didn’t hurt him much but the house was smashed to pieces.”



“Babies change things,” Ben stated gloomily.

“But Thomas is OK now. He’s quite good, really,” said Ollie.

Ben didn’t think Thomas was good at all. He was a chubby boy with huge legs that he kicked people with when they wouldn’t give him a lick of their ice cream. Ben certainly didn’t want a Thomas in his family.

Wilf ran into the garden to join them and Ben stroked his back. Why couldn’t they just get another dog?



Then there wouldn't be any need for another brother or sister at all.

When he went to bed that night, Ben dreamt about the new baby. It was massive, with dark green hair and yellow eyes.



With one kick, it launched him almost as far as the moon. But when he described this to his mum and dad, they wouldn't believe him. They thought the new baby was the best thing ever.



Every day after that, Ben checked his mother's tummy for signs of the baby. the bump was getting bigger and bigger, like it was going to burst at any moment. Like it was stuffed full of marshmallows. Ben knew they weren't nice, fluffy pink marshmallows. They were big, green gungey, evil marshmallows that tasted like bogies and were covered in slime. Soon the baby would come and then Ben wouldn't get a look-in any more. He would have to share his room. All his toys would get broken. And no one would even look at him – it would be baby this, and baby that, all the time.

When Ben came home from school one afternoon, his mother said, “We’re going shopping. We need to buy some things so we’re ready when the baby comes.”

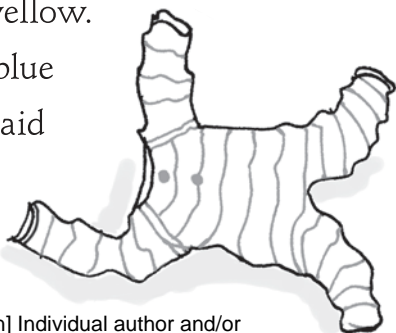
Ben hated shopping. The stores were always too hot and you had to stand around queuing for ages and ages. It was boring. He added shopping to the list of bad things that the baby was bringing into his life. And it wasn’t even born yet.

The shops were packed. Ben’s mum found little stretchy things called Babygros for the baby to wear when it arrived. There were stripey blue ones



and stripey pink ones. Ben’s mum didn’t want either colour, she wanted yellow.

“I like the blue better,” said Ben.





“You buy blue for a boy and pink for a girl. I don’t know what the baby will be yet, so yellow would be best.”

“That’s silly,” returned Ben. “Boys and girls should be able to wear the same.”

“You’re right,” Mum said. “It doesn’t really matter, does it?”

“Buy the blue,” Ben replied. “It’s definitely going to be a boy.”

“How do you know?” asked his mother, smiling.

“I just do,” said Ben.

They bought some of the blue ones and went to look for a buggy.

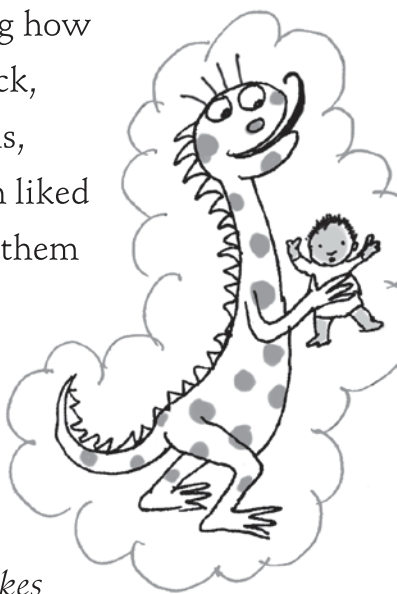
Ben wanted the orange one with the teddy bears on it, even though he knew he would be jealous when he saw the



baby sitting in it. *Teddies are babyish, of course*, he thought quickly to himself, but he still liked them. It didn't seem fair though that the new baby was getting so much nice, new stuff. Still, maybe it wouldn't be around for very long. All kinds of disasters could happen to babies, seeing how small they were. With any luck, it would be abducted by aliens, or eaten by a giant snake. Ben liked reptiles, he had a book about them and he looked at it almost

every day. Mum and Dad used to say "Aren't they scary, those creatures?" but Ben didn't think so. *It's a pity there aren't any buggies with snakes on them*, he thought.

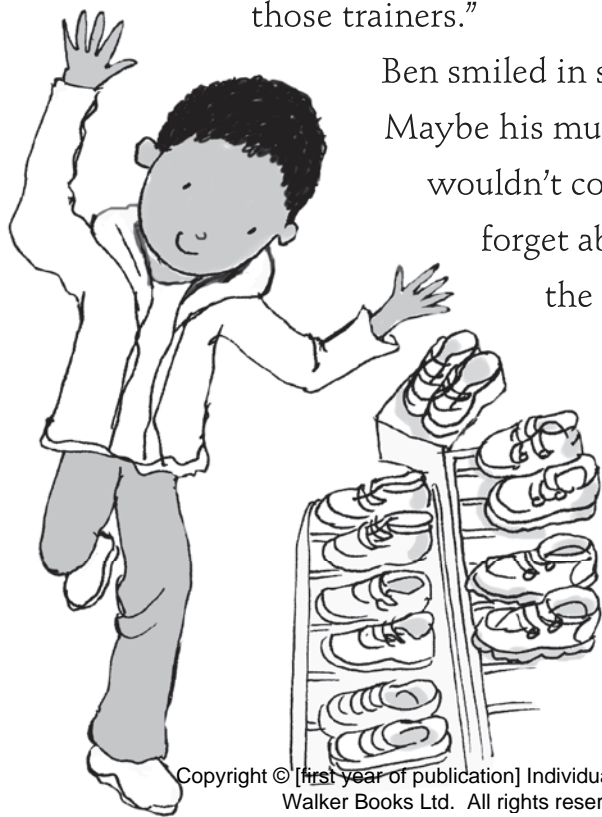
"And what shall we get for you then, Ben?" Mum asked. "How about some new trainers?"



Ben's face changed from cross to excited in an instant. "Can I have the silver ones we saw the other day?" he replied, although he thought he was probably pushing his luck.

"They were a bit expensive." Mum thought about it for a moment and then finally she said, "OK, we'll splash out. If we get the baby the plain orange buggy without the teddies, we'll have enough left over for those trainers."

Ben smiled in surprise.  
Maybe his mum and dad  
wouldn't completely  
forget about him once  
the baby came.



He began to feel a bit guilty for hoping the baby would get kidnapped or eaten by a snake.

The guilt soon wore off though and over the next few days Ben started worrying all over again. Sometimes he thought he could see the new baby sneaking

out of Mummy's tummy and bouncing its way through the clouds. It seemed as if it was glaring down at him from the sky and making him even

more naughty than usual. Ben was sure the new baby was tricking him into getting his sums wrong and his spelling was growing worse all the time. Ben became certain that the new baby could do some kind of tragic magic and that nothing good (apart from the new trainers) would ever happen again.



One day, Ben went to Ollie and Maxine's house after school. They had just started playing Ollie's new video game in the front room when there was a knock at the door. Ben's dad burst in and said, "We're going to the hospital, Ben, your mum's had the baby."

It had finally happened. Ben didn't want to go. He didn't want to see the new Tragic Magic baby. He wanted to be left alone.

"No," he answered firmly.

"What's the matter?" asked his dad. "You haven't wanted to talk about the baby at all for ages now, have you?"

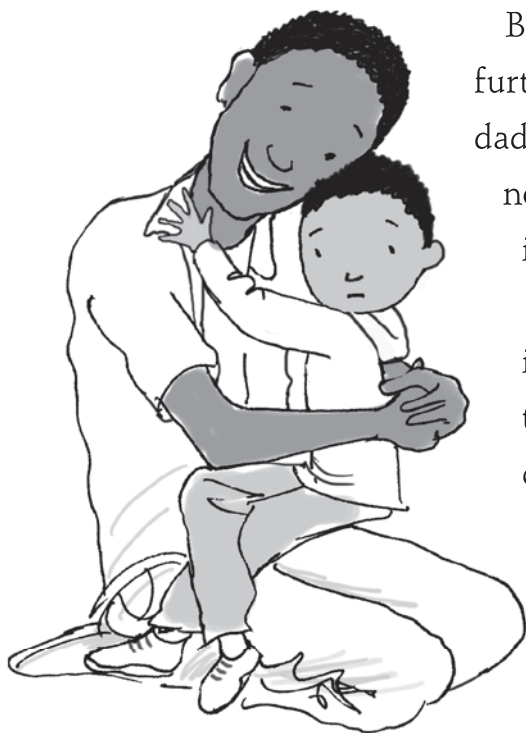
"I'm scared," said Ben, snuggling up to his father and leaning his head against his chest. It felt safer now Dad was beside him.

"What are you scared of?"

"I don't like the new baby and he'll never like me. He's got horrible green hair and yellow eyes and he does Tragic Magic and

makes me feel cross all the time and then I do things wrong.”

“The baby is a she and she looks just like you. She’s got curly dark hair and big brown eyes and golden skin. She doesn’t know any magic, I promise. And if she did, I’d get her to sort out a sports car and a win on the lottery.”



Ben nestled further into his dad’s chest. “It’s not really a girl, is it?”

“It certainly is. What do you think we should call her?”

Ben thought for a while. He hadn't considered that the baby might be a girl. Maybe a girl wouldn't be so bad. He was beginning to feel guilty about the bad thoughts he had had about the baby. He knew that his mum liked flowers, so he said, "How about Daffodil?"

"Not sure about that," replied Dad. "Any other ideas?"

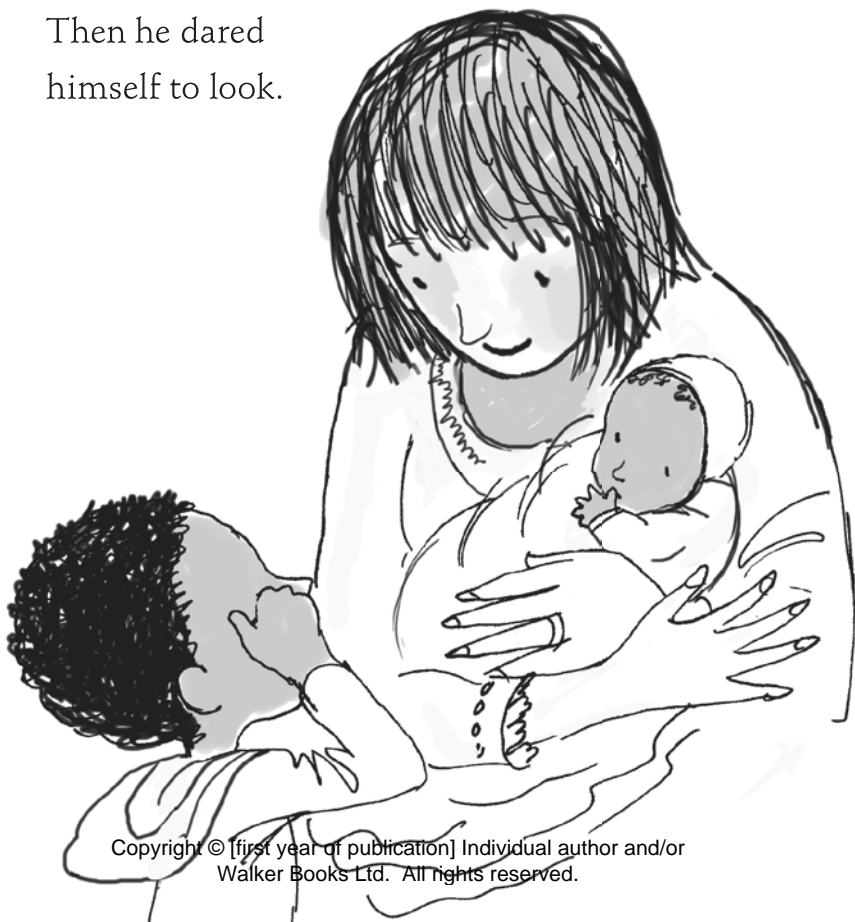
"Rose, then."

"Rose. Hm. That's not bad at all. Let's go and tell Mum and see what she says."

Ben could hardly speak all the way to the hospital. He wanted to see the new baby but at the same time, he didn't. *What if she is as terrible as I've imagined she'll be?* he thought. *What if I have to live with a horrible baby for two whole years?*

They walked down a very long hospital corridor. Ben held his dad's hand tight and hoped nobody would notice.

They reached the ward and Ben could see Mum as soon as he opened the door. She was sitting in a chair, holding the new baby. He crept up to her slowly, wondering what he might see. His mother pulled back the blue blanket that was hiding the baby's face. Ben covered his eyes for a moment. Then he dared himself to look.





The baby did have golden skin, the same as Ben's, but she was tiny and although her mouth was very big she didn't have any teeth, just gums. Her eyes weren't yellow at all, they were brown like Dad had said. She wasn't glaring at Ben – in fact, Ben thought she was almost smiling. She looked quite cute really, like Wilf, when he was a puppy. It was a pity she didn't have fur though. That would have improved her a lot.

“Hello Rose,” said Ben and he sat on Mum's bed close by. The baby wasn't that scary at all, not really.



Ben imagined her with fur that began growing on her legs and tummy and arms and face. As it covered her, she looked really beautiful – all soft and cuddly, like Wilf. Ben decided he would get Mum and Dad to buy Rose a nice fur coat.