
THE NOTHING to see HERE HOTEL
SEA-ING
IS
Believing!

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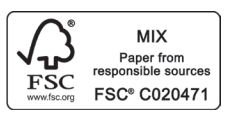
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THE NOTHING to see HERE HOTEL

SEA-ING IS Believing!

STEVEN BUTLER

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SIMON & SCHUSTER



DINNER IN THE DARK

'Hurry up and get this blunkin' thing over with!' my great-great-great-granny, Regurgita Glump, growled as she plonked her gargantuan bottom across three kitchen chairs with a painful creak. 'I can't be botherin' with stupidly nonkumbumps all night!'

'Och, come now, my deary,' Nancy said from the stove. She carried a pot of shrimp-scale tea over to the table and placed it among the plates of badger-milk buns and crispy fried mudwump fritters smothered in spicy mango chutney. 'It's a wee dinner party. It's going to be lovely!'

My grunion of a granny scowled around the room at all of us. Her hulking frame took up one

whole side of the kitchen table, and in the dim light she was a nightmare to behold. Her piggy eyes glinted copper and her nose scrunched up like she'd just caught the whiff of something disgusterous.

'Ch-ch-cheer up, Granny,' I stammered. It was at times like these I wished I wasn't one-quarter magical… that way I wouldn't be able to see so clearly in the dark. It'd be lovely not to have to look at her grizzly lumpish face.

'You can bog right off if you think I'm getting all jiggery and festivous!' the old troll grunted. 'I'm only here for the food, make no mistakings!' Then she scooped up a huge fistful of rattle-snitch sausages and stuffed them into her gaping gob, slobbering and drooling like a honking great hog in a stained nightdress.

'Well,' Mum said from the far end of the table. 'It's been a funny old summer, hasn't it? But that's not going to stop us celebrating Abraham's birthday.'

'Exactly!' Dad added as he took a seat next to her. 'It's only right that we have our little shindig in his honour.'

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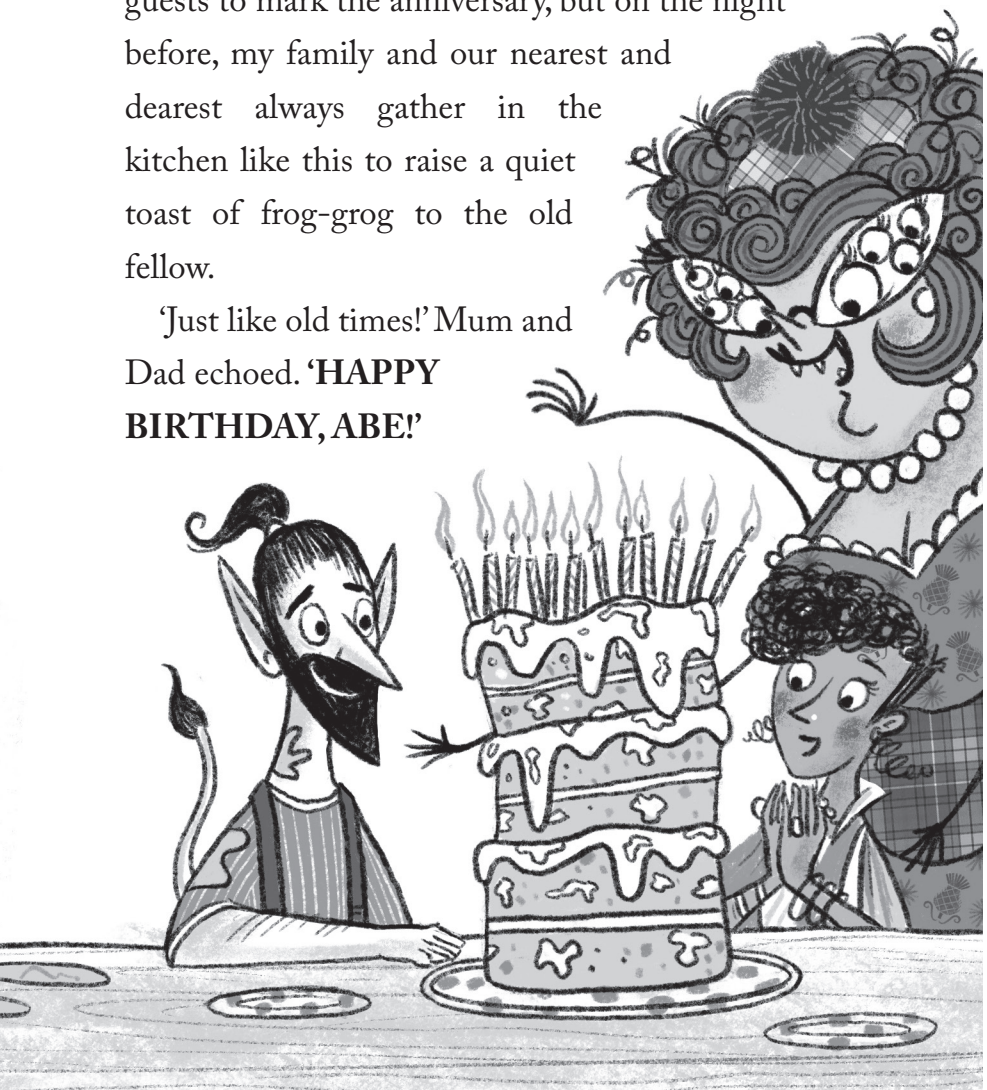
Mum turned to me and smiled a slightly nervous smile.

'Just like old times!' Nancy beamed as she brought over an enormous birthday cake, covered in bright-green seagull snot frosting and dotted with squillions of candles, placing it right in the middle of the spread.



If my great-great-great-grandad, Abraham Bannister, was still alive, it would be his one hundred and seventy-fifth birthday tomorrow. Every year, on the actual day, we have a big party with all our hotel guests to mark the anniversary, but on the night before, my family and our nearest and dearest always gather in the kitchen like this to raise a quiet toast of frog-grog to the old fellow.

'Just like old times!' Mum and Dad echoed. **'HAPPY BIRTHDAY, ABE!'**



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The truth is, though … it didn't feel like old times – **NOT AT ALL.** This little party felt super strange and was making me more uncomfortable than the day Dad had to ask Lady Mulch, queen of the compost pooks, to leave because of all the bad smell complaints from our customers.

Righty … before we get stuck in, I think I owe you an explanation.

In case we haven't already met, my name is Frankie Banister. **HELLO!** If you have read any of my books, you'll know that my home is one of the best holiday destinations for magical creatures in the whole world, **the Nothing To See Here Hotel.** It's been in the family ever since my great-great-great-grandparents built it over one hundred years ago, and these days I run



about with my mum, Rani, and my dad, Bargeous, trying to stop our constant flow of bonkers customers from demolishing it!

You might also know **ALL** about what's been going on lately. Things have been **MEGA-CRAZY … EVEN MORE THAN USUAL …** and that's saying something when you live in a place where weird is normal!

BUT!!! If you haven't heard any of my stories before, you'll be scratching your head and wondering what on earth I'm going on about.

Well, just read on and I'll tell you **EVERYTHING** quicker than you can yell, '**HONKSWALLOP!**'

You see … so far this summer my family have faced pirate battles and leprechaun curses, and ginormous, plummety falls, and minkle-meatballs that tasted like dryad droppings, and freak blizzards, and families of yetis, and ferocious lightning storms, and battalions of goblin guards, and our unfortunate guests nearly being eaten by colossal shrunken heads, and thickets of gnashing thorns, and the

statue of my Great-Great-Aunt Zennifer magically coming back to life in the foyer fountain, and talking magpies, and giant boulders exploding up through the garden … **AND THOSE ARE JUST THE LITTLE BITS!!**

Top all that off with watching a spoiled goblin prince accidentally being grunched-up by Mrs Venus, the giant fly-trap plant, and you're getting warmer … but that's not nearly the end of it.

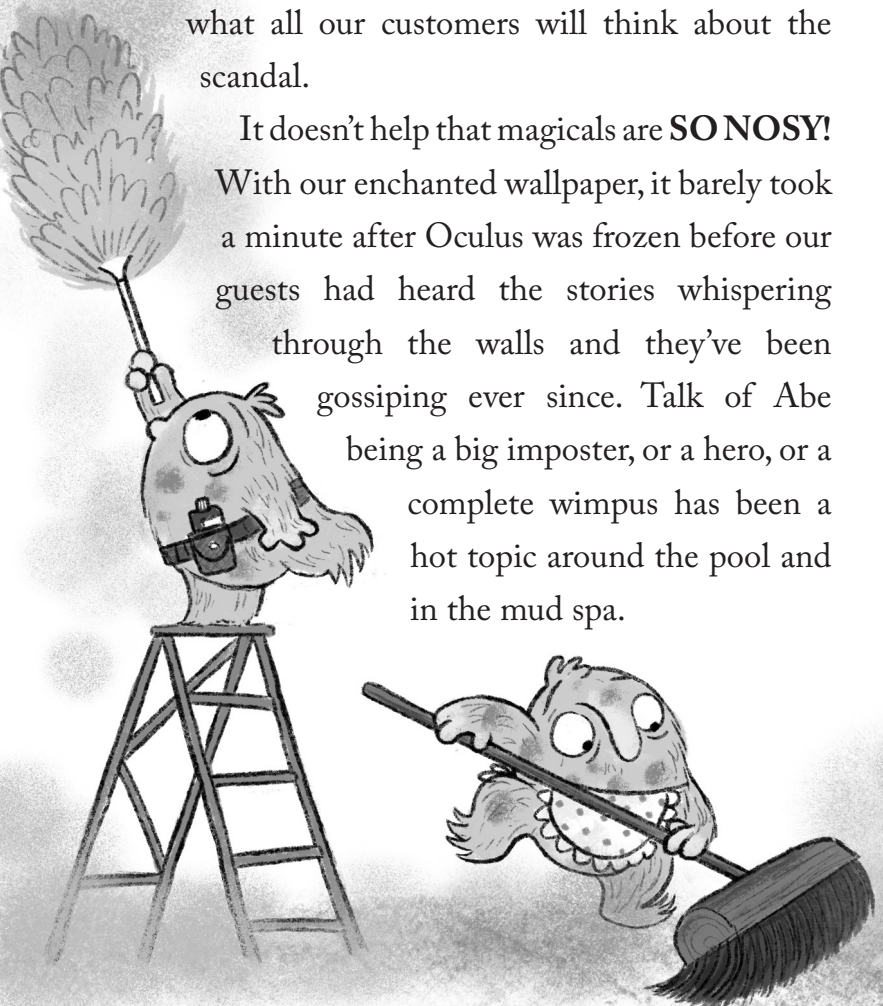
Just when we thought things couldn't get any more noggin-bonked, my long-lost great-great-uncle, Oculus Nocturne, arrived unexpectedly and tried to destroy everything by breaking our invisibility spells and exposing **the Nothing To See Here Hotel** to the outside world! He also told us some terrible things about Grandad Abraham being a coward and a great big fibster, and now I didn't know what to think about all this celebrating stuff. Abe had always been a hero to me, but suddenly I wasn't so sure he should be.

It feels like our lives have been turned upside down and shaken about, and my parents seem to be

making things even more scrambled, I swear!

Ever since my great-great-uncle was carted off to be stored away at the top of the Himalayas inside a block of ice, Mum and Dad have been in frantic overdrive. They refuse to believe the rumours about Grandad Abe, and haven't stopped worrying what all our customers will think about the scandal.

It doesn't help that magicals are **SO NOSY!** With our enchanted wallpaper, it barely took a minute after Oculus was frozen before our guests had heard the stories whispering through the walls and they've been gossiping ever since. Talk of Abe being a big imposter, or a hero, or a complete wimpus has been a hot topic around the pool and in the mud spa.

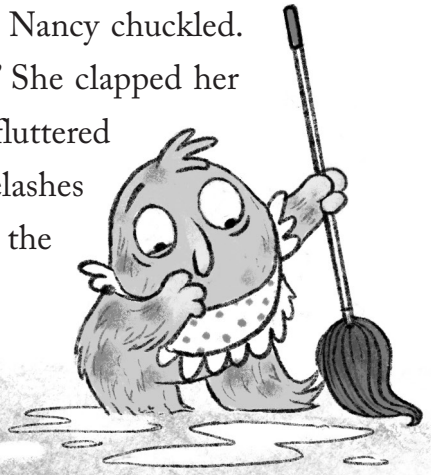


So Mum and Dad have been cooing and pampering our guests more than **EVER** lately to try and distract them. Mum's even hired a permanent team of home-sweet-home hobs who scrub and mop and fix and make the beds for that extra bit of luxury. You can't put your mug of hot chunklet down for more than three seconds before the hobs have cleared it away. I've never seen the hotel so clean and tidy!



Anyway … fast-forward three weeks from the Oculus drama and here we were, sitting in the dark around the kitchen table, ready to celebrate the anniversary of Great-Great-Great-Grandad Abe's birthday, and I was feeling very confused indeed.

'Och, it looks beauteous!' Nancy chuckled. 'Even if I do say so myself.' She clapped her four hands together and fluttered her eight sets of eyelashes cheerfully. 'A feast for the family!'



Oh … I forgot. This is probably a good time to tell you that Nancy is a spider. A massive Orkney Brittle-back to be precise … **SURPRISE!** She's worked at the hotel ever since it opened and is practically part of the family.

'Well, then…' Dad said, looking around at our glowing faces in the candlelight. 'Who wants to say a few words?'

'I will!' beamed Nancy, raising her glass of bluebottle brandy. 'To Mr Banister! Without you and our dear Regurgita, we wouldn't be living in this lovely hotel.'

'BLEEUUGH!' Granny scoffed, but we all ignored her and clinked our cups and mugs together.

'To Abraham!' Mum said.

Dad gave me a cheerful nod, but I shrugged and stayed silent, so he turned his attention to the raggedy troll, scowling on the other side of the table. 'Regurgita, would you like to say a few words?'

'What?' my troll granny snapped, spitting a half-chewed sticklefish nugget across the room.

'Why don't you say something nice about Abe?

He was your husband, after all,' Dad said, trying to smile encouragingly. 'Just speak from the heart.'

Granny Regurgita looked at Dad as if he'd been talking jibberish or had just started flapping around the kitchen like an over-excited rooster.

'SPEAK FROM THE HEART!?!?' Granny suddenly cackled with laughter. 'WHAT A DUNGLISH THING TO BE GLUBBER GRUNTING ON ABOUT, BARGEOUS!'

Dad's face fell into a frown.

'Abe Banister was a grobskwonking old gonk,' Granny continued with a wicked grin. 'Oh, he was a dreaderous husband! As useless as a chuffer in a bungle-box! Always jabbering on about blurty things like love and family and calling me "SCHMOOPSY POO!" and other rottly garbunk!'

'Those are lovely things!' Nancy said, reaching across the table and helping herself to a dandruff-dusted doughnut. 'It sounds very nice to me, my wee lamb.'

'Nice? NICE?' Granny scoffed. 'He wasn't so nice when he slunkered off like a sluglet and left me

alone to manage this muck-dump on my own, was he?'

'But, Granny, Abe didn't abandon you, he … popped his clonkers,' Mum mumbled. 'It's natural—'

'Natural? It's not natural, it's inconsiderate!! That clunkerous skrunt bogged off and left me here in this poodly hole with you bunch of scumlies!!'

I caught sight of Mum rolling her eyes in the gloom and nearly laughed out loud. Being completely human, she often forgets that even in near-total darkness our troll eyes can see her as clearly as if it was day.

'DON'T YOU ROLL YOUR EYES AT ME, RANI!' Granny blurted, as Mum's face twitched with horror. 'You're not too old for a smack on the bumly-bits, donchaknow? You can all coo and cudd-lump about that old blunker, but I'm not getting slobberchopsy, that's for sure!'

By now, my parents were staring with mouths wide open at my gruesome grandma. Dad even forgot he was crunching on a crab-shell-crostini,

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and it fell out from between his teeth, landing in his mug of tea with a loud **PLOP!**

'THAT OLD SKUNKUS WAS A LILY-LIVERED LUMPLING! HE WAS A GRIM-HEARTED GURNIP! A SWINDLE-SWIZZLER! ABRAHAM BANISTER WAS A-'

I think my great-great-great-granny could have gone on for ever if she hadn't been suddenly silenced by the kitchen door bursting open and Maudlin Maloney hobbling her way inside.

'Started without Manky Old Maloney, did you?' the ancient leprechaun croaked with a crooked leer. 'I might have known.'