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Opening extract from

Dream On, Amber

Written by

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So the best place to start is nowhere near the beginning. No major disasters happened when I was a baby. True, I could have won an award for being the freakiest-looking mixed-up baby alive, but basically all I did was the usual icky pukey baby stuff and that was about it.

Later on things got about a zillion times more interesting. So interesting, in fact, that it would have been better if I'd stayed icky and pukey and lived an easy life. Actually, no. Forget I said that. But at least babies don't come up with ingenious brainwaves that lead to all kinds of trouble.

You know how sometimes you get an idea? And then you follow that idea and complicate your life so





badly that you wish it had never popped into your head? Yeah. That's what happened. Me and my genius ideas.

It's not all bad, though. Something good came of it. Something amazing, actually. Something that changed my life.

But before I tell you about my idea, there are some things about me you should know or you just won't get what I'm talking about. So here goes.

My name is

Ambra Alessandra Leola Kimiko Miyamoto.

I have no idea why my parents gave me all those hideous names but they must have wanted to ruin my life, and you know what? They did an amazing job. Obviously I don't use them all because it would take me about a month just to tell people what I'm called. Officially, my name is Ambra, which sounds fine in an Italian accent because the 'm' sounds like you're chewing a toffee and you've got that roly-poly 'r'. But not when English people say it because they say *Am bra*. I am a bra. This is beyond embarrassing because

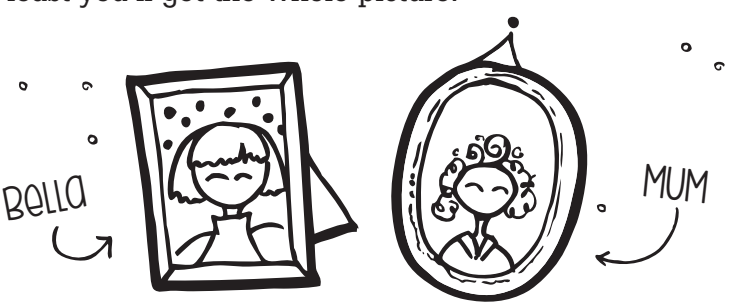


I don't even need one yet.

So I use the English version of my name, which is AMBER.

I have this mad name because I'm half Italian and half Japanese. It's not easy to be half this and half that, especially two halves that are so completely different. I'm nearly twelve and I live in South London with my mum and my little sister, Bella. My dad doesn't live with us. He was a Japanese computer science student and he met my mum at Kingston University. That's where the surname Miyamoto comes from (Japan, not Kingston University). But we don't see him any more. Which is kind of what triggered this whole business off.

But before I get to the messy stuff, you need to know more about my family or this just won't make any sense. It might not make any sense anyway, but at least you'll get the whole picture.



So for starters, my mum's name is Bob and she's a graphic designer. Having a mother called Bob might seem embarrassing (and trust me, it is) but her full name is Roberta Fiorella Santececca Miyamoto, so Bob is actually an improvement.

Her hair is wild and curly and she dyes it all shades from red to purple. She wears bright glittery dresses, big biker boots and dangly earrings, and that's for Sunday afternoon shopping trips – you should see her when she's going out in the evening. And she has this colourful tattoo of a koi on her lower back. Koi is the Japanese name for a carp, but a carp sounds like a stupid thing to tattoo on your skin, and a koi sounds romantic and interesting. I think the tattoo was for my dad. Mum says it 'symbolises strength and determination' but I think it means something cheesy like 'I love your fishy face' or 'your soul is forever hooked to mine' or something.





My genius idea didn't have that much to do with my mum. But it had everything to do with Bella.

She's six and she got lucky: my parents must have used up their entire list of hideous names on me because she's just Isabella, and they even shortened that. She was born in a Mini Cooper on the way to hospital because she came out way too fast. My dad had to zip into a supermarket car park on the way to St George's and deliver her on the back seat, which is totally gross because we still own that car and I have to sit in it. I refuse to sit in the back, though, unless Nonna (my grandma) is coming with us and then I have no choice. But Bella loves it and invites all her friends and teachers to come and see where she started out in the world. And now on every car journey, she counts the other Mini Coopers on the road and thinks that's how many babies have been born since we left the house. So, unlike me, she came out in a weird way and has carried on being weird ever since.



Bella's seriously obsessed with pink, but don't think she's some cute fairy princess because she isn't. She's super bossy and *molto* embarrassing. (*Molto* is the Italian word for 'very' – these words just pop out from time to time.) She likes wearing fancy dress when we go out, even to the shop up the road, and always asks a zillion random questions. She makes me take her to the park to feed the ducks and tells them stories in a really loud voice so you wish you'd never agreed to take her. And when she's going to sleep, she picks her nose and wipes it on the wall, which means she has bogeys stuck right next to her head. That is right up there with the top ten most disgusting things I have ever seen.



I'm warning you: the heartbreaking part is coming up so if you don't like sad stuff you can go off and watch TV or something.

If you're still reading, this is what happened.

When I was six years old and Bella was one, my dad left home and never came back. I don't know why. Maybe Mum and Dad had a big fat argument. Maybe they had lots of them; I don't remember. And that was the end of that.

I have no idea where my dad is now. I don't even know if he's alive or dead because he never writes and he never calls. He doesn't turn up to see our school plays or take us to the zoo on Sundays like other dads who have left home. He doesn't send us birthday cards even though he obviously knows when our birthdays are because he was there when we were born. He just left one night without saying goodbye and I haven't seen him since.

Mum doesn't like to talk about it. When I bring it up she makes a face and says it's complicated and she'll explain when I'm older because until then, I just won't get it. It makes his departure kind of mysterious but in a bad way. Even if I don't get it, I'd still like to try because not knowing makes you imagine all kinds of things.



Maybe he spent all his time playing computer games so Mum strangled him and chucked his body in the Thames.

Or the Japanese mafia kidnapped and tortured him for hacking into their secret website.

He might have got a big donk on the head, lost his memory and he's wandering around somewhere trying to remember who he is and where he lives.

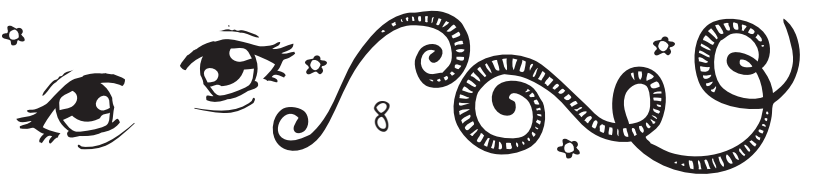
He could have run off with Miss Cronin, my Year 2 teacher, because she left at about the same time. They say she went to another school but who knows?

Or maybe he was just cold and heartless and had no love to give so he went to live in a cave for the rest of his grumpy life and now he's a weird, twisted creature like Gollum in *The Hobbit*.

I'm sure the truth is far less exciting than all the things I imagine when I lie in bed.

I tried googling him once but I wasn't sure if any of the people that came up were really him. It kind of creeped me out, and then Mum walked into the room so I closed the page *veloce*. It felt so icky and weird to do an Internet search for him that I haven't done it again, and anyway, I don't know what I'd actually do if I found him. He's not exactly my hero or anything. I'm pretty angry with him if you must know.

I can't understand how he doesn't care about us at all. He must wonder how we're doing, or how big we are now. Sometimes, when I'm walking down





the road, I look behind me in case he's following me, wearing dark glasses to disguise himself. Or I check the trees in the park to see if he's hiding behind one, peeking out to see if I'm doing OK.

Worst of all, when I see Japanese men on the Tube, I stare at them, wondering if they're my dad. I know what my dad looks like from photos and everything, but maybe he changed: grew a pointy beard, got fatter, got taller, changed his nose with plastic surgery or something. Then I realise it's almost definitely not him because the man I'm staring at is, like, seventy and probably can't speak any English, and I know my dad is thirty-five and can.

My dad leaving feels like there's this massive black hole in me, like the ones up there in space. It twists in a dark, silent spiral, super heavy, sucking some of the good things in and swallowing them up. I don't know why it bothers me so much when I've lived nearly half my life without him but there are times when that black hole crushes me from the inside. But that's only sometimes.



It's *molto* sad and everything but that's what happened. Nothing's perfect in this life, or so my mum keeps telling me. So now you know a bit about me, I can tell you how I got my genius idea and this whole mad story started.

