

The Starburster

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Random House Children's Publishers UK

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About the Book

Tam isn't keen on his baby sister, Blue. All she does is cry! Tam wishes she'd just go away. But then one terrible night Blue does disappear and an ugly changeling is left in her place. Great-gandpa knows the secret of how to get Blue back but he is far too old for adventures, so Tam must travel alone to Faery and save his little sister . . .

An enchanting tale of an unlikely but brave hero from this Carnegie Medal winning author.



Berlie Doherty

Illustrated by Lesley Harker

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For Tim, Verena and Baby



Blue

On the day Tam's baby sister was born, he painted his finger blue.

"Look at that boy with the blue finger," some people said. "He must be very special."

One of these people was his great-grandpa Toby. He winked at Tam and said, "You must be very special. Your little sister will be proud of you one day."

Other people said, "Look at that boy with the blue finger. He must be very silly."

One of these people was Dad. "Don't be silly, Tam," he said. "You don't want your little sister to be scared of you, do you?" He made Tam wash the paint off and took him to the hospital to see Mum and the baby. Mum was in bed and the baby cried all the time and Tam wished he still had his blue finger.

On the day the baby was brought home from hospital Tam hid in the bathroom. The baby cried all the time when she wasn't drinking milk from Mum. Tam decided to make her a drink of her own. He squeezed some toothpaste into a jug of warm water and stirred it round with the end of his toothbrush, then carried it carefully downstairs.



"My word, she'll enjoy that," Great-grandpa Toby said.
But Dad took one sniff at it and poured it down the sink.

"Would you like to hold Baby for a bit?" Mum said.

"No," said Tam, and ran up to his room. "I wish that baby would go away!" he shouted.

Great-grandpa followed him up to his room. "I've got a present for you, Tam," he said. "It's my most special thing." He went into his room and came back with a yellow sock in his hand.

"A sock?" said Tam.

"Look inside it."

Tam put his hand in the sock and pulled out a little tube.

"Hold it up to your eye, and swizzle it round," said Great-grandpa. "What do you see?"

It was the most marvellous thing. When Tam looked through it, he could see eight Great-grandpas all cut into little pieces. He couldn't stop giggling. When he turned it towards the bed, he could see eight beds all topsy-turvy, and all kinds of patterns of colours. He had eight new red dressing gowns, and they swayed and billowed like princes' cloaks. And when he looked out of the window, he could see eight gardens in tiny slices of colour, as brilliant as rainbows.



"It's called a kaleidoscope," said Great-grandpa. "But I call it a starburster. Yes, starburster's a good name for it."

"Can I really keep it?" Tam asked. He couldn't stop looking at things and twisting the tube round to make them glow and splinter and swirl with colours. It really did look as if stars were bursting open inside it.

"Of course you can. Shall we go down and look at Baby through it?"

Baby was asleep when they went downstairs. Tam looked through the kaleidoscope at her and twisted it this way and that, so there were eight pink blobs and sixteen fisty hands and sixteen stubby feet.

"Would you like to hold her?" Dad said.

"No thank you," said Tam, peering at him through the kaleidoscope.

"You've broken into lots of pieces."