

You Can't Kiss it Better

Diana Hendry

Random House Children's Books

Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

Epigraph

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Twenty
Chapter Twenty-One
Chapter Twenty-Two
Chapter Twenty-Three

Postscript

Acknowledgements

Also by Diana Hendry

Copyright

About the Book

In Megan's rambling house above the river live Anna, Raymond, Sam and Brent. Not exactly a family - Megan calls them a jumbily; a jumble of people trying to become a family. They each have their problems, which lead to a great deal of trouble ... trouble as turbulent as the waters below the house ...

A very human story - heart-warming and thought-provoking. Diana Hendry is masterly in her handling of character.

**YOU CAN'T
KISS IT BETTER**
DIANA HENDRY

Red Fox

FOR DELIA
- BEST OF EDITORS, BEST OF FRIENDS -
WITH LOVE

Look at the children of the world
Looking out at us to say hello
All from their lonely photographs.

What's to be done? What's to be done?
The hungry dogs are come to town.
Where have your father and mother gone?

Look at the children of the world
Breaking our hearts but not enough
While we eat our money up.

from: *Look At The Children* by W. S. Graham

THE RIVER COULD TELL THIS STORY. The river starts high in the Pentland Hills then nips and tucks its way through the outlying villages until it enters the heart of the city. Then off it goes, throwing itself over the weir in a roaring sheen of molten silver, plummeting down the gorge, hurrying under the tall grand bridge, then the little low bridge, on past cemeteries, old warehouses, tall rich houses with tumbling gardens until at last it joins its great grandparent, the sea.

The river could tell stories that are centuries old. It could tell of the millers and tanners, the snuff- and paper-makers who once worked by and with the river. It could tell of badgers, stoats and foxes; swans, ducks, bats and owls. Generations of bluebells, snowdrops, brambles and nettles are remembered by the river as are the children. Children who swam and fished and dreamt and wished here - children like Anna, Raymond and Sam who live with Megan in her rambling house high above the river.

Megan's house isn't one of the rich ones, though once upon a time it might have been. Megan's house needs just about everything doing to it, from a new roof to windows that close properly and heating that does more than groan and gurgle. Anna, Raymond and Sam aren't exactly a family. They're more what Megan calls a *jumbily*, a jumble of people trying to *become* a family.

For those like Megan and her jumbily, the river's not an easy companion. It's moody. There are days when it's slow and dreamy. Days when the wind's up and the water rises and the river becomes all busy and cheerful. On days like this it hurries along as if it's saying to itself 'Can't wait, can't wait! Off to sea! Off to sea!', all self-important and

pleased with itself. For weeks on end the river can seem quiet and playful and you could convince yourself that it's a nice, kindly creature. That's when it turns nasty. That's when it's like someone in prison who's mad to get out. That's when it hurls itself over the weir as if it's hell bent on smashing everything and everyone in its way. It's all roar and rush and hullabaloo and you'd best keep out of its way.

The moods of the river are like the moods in Megan's house. You might wonder if the weather affected people the way it affected the river so that when the river's angry, someone in the house is angry too. Maybe Raymond. Or maybe Anna. Or Sam. Megan thinks this is nonsense.

There's only one person who knows the true secrets of the river and that's the River Woman. But the River Woman won't tell, won't talk. That's why it's Anna who begins this story.

Chapter One

THIS IS MY FOURTH foster home. 21 Teviotdale Place, EH 10 4HY. You get to remember addresses really quickly when you move around. My social worker, Clara, says I ought to write a Life Story Book. They like to get kids doing things like that so that when you go to your next place, they know something about you. Who your tummy-mummy was. What vaccinations you've had. How you've been doing at school. Stuff like that.

Clara says, 'It's nice to have a records of the past, Anna. You could do drawings. Put some pictures in.'

But I don't want to do any of that. I want to write my *own* book with my *own* thoughts in it. I'm not too keen on facts. Facts don't tell you that much about a person, do they? I mean things like, 'I was born on April 5, 1990 at Victoria Infirmary. Weight 6 lbs 4 oz.' What does that tell you? That I was a skinny baby and that I'm twelve. That's what. It doesn't tell you anything about me, *now*.

I've been here three months. There's just me and Raymond. Raymond's ten and doesn't speak. It's not that he *can't* speak. It's just that he *won't* speak. Or only when he must. He's got this tight little closed-up face. He can't bear anyone touching him either. Not that I try. But Megan does. Megan's our foster mum. She's keen on hugs. The only thing Raymond cares about is Toby. Toby's the dog. He's got black and white patches like a cow and a tail like a question mark. He belongs to Megan really but he's taken to Raymond and Raymond's taken to Toby. Big time!

Raymond's in long-term foster care. There's three kinds of foster care - short-term, long-term and permanent. Oh and emergency. I'm shortish. I expect I'll be going home any day now. My mum's a famous actress. You've probably

seen her on TV. I shall be one too, one day. Or maybe a famous author. I haven't decided yet.

This place is better than the last one. The foster parents were Mr and Mrs Thomas. He worked with computers and she was a teacher. They said they couldn't cope with me because I was always making up stories and disturbing the other children with them. I was a 'disruption'. Major. Some of the stories I made up on Mr Thomas's computer. He didn't like that at all. Said I'd destroyed some records he badly needed. Megan doesn't have a computer. It's a shame. I could write this book much better if I had a nice little laptop or something. Megan doesn't have a husband either. Well, I think she had one once, but he's gone. 'Vanished off the face of the earth,' Megan said. Though he can't have done, can he? Unless he's on another planet. Which is possible, I suppose. Maybe one night he'll come back on a space shuttle or something. But I hope not.

Anyway, what Clara (my social worker, remember?) said to the Thomases when I left, was, 'Anna is rather given to magical thinking.' She put her arm round me when she said it.

I don't quite know what magical thinking is, but I like the sound of it. I think I may have a talent for it. The Thomases were very factual people. I don't think Megan is like that because this house isn't all tidy like the Thomases' was. Or tried to be. It's rather a mess, in fact. Fact! Ha ha. But a comfy sort of mess. And it's right by the river. That's the best thing of all. I can look out of my bedroom window and see the river. And I can hear it at night. Burbling along. Sometimes slow, sometimes fast.

I like the river because when I was at the Thomases' I read this book - well, not *all* of it, called *The Wind in the Willows*. Mrs Thomas (I always called her that) had these really old books that she said had belonged to her little girl. Most of them were really dull. Anyway, *The Wind in the Willows* was about these animals that live by the river. They

can all talk, so I reckon the author was quite good at magical thinking, too. What really got me was that right at the beginning it talks about spring arriving with a 'spirit of divine discontent and longing'. I think that's what I've got. Divine discontent and longing. Course I've got *ordinary* discontent, too. Like being fed up about moving from house to house. And ordinary longings, too. Like for a lap top and for that T-shirt I saw in *Kookai* last Saturday.

I told Mrs Thomas I had divine discontent one night when she was going on at me about tidying up my bedroom and not deliberately tearing my clothes. (I've got a bit of a habit about that. It's just when I'm anxious.)

'I've got divine discontent,' I said and Mrs Thomas said, 'Anna, *nobody* has divine discontent these days.'

That's what she thinks. I don't suppose she's ever read *The Wind in the Willows*, or if she has, she's forgotten. Anyway, you know if you've got it, divine discontent and longing that is, because you feel it in your stomach. It's a kind of empty feeling as if you really badly, badly want something only you don't know what it is. Maybe I'll find out. Maybe the River Woman will tell me.

I only saw the River Woman last week. She's very, very old. About two hundred and fifty I'd guess. Old enough to know *everything*. She wades about the river in these old wellies and sometimes she has a bonfire on the banks. I said 'hello' to her the other day but she just stared at me and grunted. She's got these piercing blue eyes. I didn't tell Megan about her because Megan would be sure to make up another House Rule about not talking to strange old women who make bonfires.

Every house I've been in has had different House Rules. You'd think the government would make a list so we could all have the same ones. I mean why is it that in one house they want you to put all your dirty washing in a basket and in another house you have to bring it down and put it in the machine? And in some houses there's actually no television

until five o'clock and in others it's on first thing in the morning. And you're expected to know all this as soon as you walk in the door. Or almost. When I have a house of my own I'm not going to have any rules at all.

The River Woman doesn't look as if she has rules. Her hair is very white with bits of sticks and leaves in it. I think she lives in a tree house. Without rules. Anyway, I'm going to find out. And I won't tell Raymond. Raymond thinks the river is *his*.

Our river's got willows, too, like the ones in the book. But no talking animals. Or none that I've met!