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The book is dedicated, with gratitude,
to the literary agent George Greenfield,
who gave me so much encouragement
when I first started writing.

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Chapter One

The Dangerous Gift

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I know what you're thinking. In fact, I know every one of your secrets. But don't be scared of me. By myself I have no special powers at all.

I'm Matt, nicknamed Spud because my nose looks a bit like a potato.

And I'm the most ordinary boy you'll ever meet. Or I was until … now I'm jumping ahead. And I want to tell you everything, just as it happened.

It all started when I was left something in Mrs Jameson's will. I was totally amazed. I'd never been left anything in a will before.

Mrs Jameson was a very old lady. I first visited her with a harvest festival gift from our school.

She frowned at me. "None of it looks very fresh – and bananas give me indigestion."

"Me too," I grinned. "I can't stop burping for days."

She looked at me suddenly, and a faint smile crossed her face. "I suppose I could try to eat some of it. You'd better come in."

We sat in her kitchen. She poured me a glass of orange juice. Then I asked her if she liked living on her own.

"Yes, of course I like it," she snapped. "Other people only cause problems. You can't trust a single one of them." She glared at me. I hastily changed the subject.

Around her neck hung a crystal on a long silver chain. It caught my eye right away. She saw me looking at it.

"This crystal was left to me by my great aunt, who took a shine to me. A strange woman – used to call herself a wizard. You didn't know there were any female wizards, did you?"

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Actually, I didn't know many male wizards either – not personally, anyway.

She leaned forward. "This crystal is priceless. But no one else knows my crystal's true worth – and that's how it must stay. Otherwise I'd never have a moment's peace."

She was exaggerating now. She must be.

Still, I must admit the crystal fascinated me. Maybe because there were flashes of so many colours in it.

"I love all the colours you can see," I said, "especially the sky blue at the centre." Then I added hastily, "It is blue, isn't it?"

She looked puzzled by my question, so I thought I'd better explain. "I'm what they call colour-deficient. I can see every single colour – I just see it in different ways. So I might see red as brown and brown as red. Blue and purple are pretty confusing too. That's why I asked."

"The crystal is blue in the centre, just as you said," she interrupted. Her eyes were blue too, and they were staring intently at me.

"Oh good, because sometimes I can make embarrassing mistakes. I went into a pet shop

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once and asked for the yellow hamster."

For the first time she gave a wheezy laugh, then said slowly, "You just see in your own world of colour, that's all. I expect my crystal is more beautiful in your eyes than anyone else's." I really liked the way she said that. She made me feel sort of special.

After that I visited her almost every day. We sat in her kitchen talking about practically everything. But then she became ill. She had pneumonia. She didn't want to leave her home but the doctor insisted. She'd only been in hospital for a couple of days when she died quite suddenly. She'd done that just to spite the doctor. That's what I told myself to try to cheer myself up.

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I thought about her a lot over the next few days.

Then I discovered she'd left her precious crystal to me. She'd written me a letter too. On the envelope she'd put: STRICTLY PRIVATE – FOR MATTHEW COLLINS ONLY. I'm not sure why, but my hands shook as I opened the envelope.

Inside was her letter to me. Her handwriting was very shaky and difficult to read. Finally I made out:

Dear Matthew, I am leaving you my most valuable possession in gratitude for all those enjoyable hours we spent talking together. I do not want anyone else to discover how special my crystal is – ONLY YOU. But, Matthew, you must keep the secret and you must be careful, because my gift can be VERY DANGEROUS. As you will discover …

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This was followed by some squiggles, which I couldn't read.

I leant closer, trying to somehow read the final words. I had to know what Mrs Jameson meant about my crystal being very dangerous. It just didn't make any sense.

Then my mum peeked over my shoulder at the letter. "Poor thing," she said. "She was probably wandering in her mind when she wrote that. I expect she just wanted to make sure you took care of her gift."

But I didn't think that was true. Mrs Jameson's mind was as sharp as a pin right to the end. No, she was trying to tell me something about the crystal, something incredibly important.

But what?

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Chapter Two

Secrets of the Crystal

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I put the crystal on a keyring. I wore it to school on a loop on my belt. Even some of the teachers admired it.

After school, the crystal sat on the telly in my bedroom. When the sun came down, the crystal would shine all these different colours onto my wall, blue, pinkish-red, green, yellow. Then it did seem like a magic crystal. I thought of Mrs Jameson's great aunt, the wizard. Did she cast spells with this crystal? Maybe she turned people into slugs.

I wouldn't have minded turning Finn into a slug.

He's a new boy at our school who just loves himself. He's always showing off about his house – or how he's got more friends online than anyone else in the entire universe.

Actually, he's a real turnip-head. I mean, he's bottom of the year in maths. But not even that bothers him, he is so super-confident. I sort of envied his confidence, but I hated it as well. Especially the way he smirked around school like a cat that's not only swallowed all his cream, but all of yours too.

So just messing about, I picked up my crystal, closed my eyes and said, "Magic crystal turn Finn into a slug and never, ever turn him back."

I was only fooling around and I never expected anything to happen.

But something did all right.

The crystal suddenly started getting warmer.

It was like when you put your hand on a radiator that has just been switched on. You can feel the heat stealing up your fingers, can't you?

Well, it was the same with my crystal. And the crystal went on getting hotter, until in the end it seemed to be burning into my hands. I

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wasn't able to hold it any more. I had to let it drop onto my bed.

For a few seconds my fingers were still tingling. I couldn't believe how hot that crystal had become. I shivered with the shock.

I gave the crystal a quick prod. It was cold again. Yet as soon as I picked it up, exactly the same thing happened – the crystal got warm, and then after thirty-four seconds (yeah, I timed it) it became so hot I had to let it go.

But how weird was that?

I was tempted to run downstairs and tell Mum and Dad. But Alison, my older sister and my mortal enemy, was also downstairs. She'd already cast envious eyes on my crystal, saying how it was wasted on me.

And some words from Mrs Jameson's note rushed into my head. "You must keep the secret."

I'd never heard of a crystal that could get hot all by itself. That would certainly make it very valuable.

But Mrs Jameson hadn't just written 'valuable', she'd put 'very dangerous' as well.

I still didn't understand that. Then I suddenly

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thought – what if the crystal could put spells on people too? What if one second Finn is posing about by his pool and the next he's slithering around as a slug?

I'd love to see his parents' faces when this slug starts chattering to them, claiming to be their marvellous son.

Of course, I was only messing about. Finn would be back at school tomorrow, wouldn't he?

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Chapter Three

A Tremendous Discovery

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But next morning, Finn wasn't at school. My hopes began to rise. And I wasn't at all ashamed that I'd turned him into a slug. Trust me, he deserved it.

Then at break time, very disappointingly, he appeared – that so annoying grin plastered all over his face as usual. Today he was wearing his new green designer-label shirt. He looked like a long processed pea in it. To make matters worse, he was talking to Emma.

Despite what you may have heard, Emma is not my girlfriend. Dream on! She is a mate

though. My best mate to be exact.

Maybe you think that's a bit unusual. But she's been my best mate for nearly a year now.

At first I'd just spotted her at school – she's dead pretty and very friendly. I'd also see her taking her pet spaniel, Bess, for a walk. She always grinned at me while I struggled to think of something, *anything*, to say to her – and I'm not normally as shy as that – but I never could say anything even vaguely intelligible.

Until the day Bess went missing.

"I only left the front door open for one tiny second," Emma told me, "and the next thing I knew, she'd gone. And the thing is, Bess is a total wimp and not brave at all. She badly needs someone to look after her—"

"Don't worry," I interrupted, "I'll find her for you. Leave it to me." No superhero could have sounded more determined.

And guess what? I did find Bess. She was sniffing about in someone's bin and when I called her, she immediately followed me back to Emma's house. It was dead easy actually. But Emma treated me, well, exactly like a superhero

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– of course I lapped that up. Then her parents insisted I stay for tea.

And that's when all my shyness rushed back. Did I mention Emma's very pretty? But then I noticed she kept glancing at a football match on the telly.

"You like football, don't you?" I said.

"Thought I'd only like netball, did you?" she replied with heavy sarcasm. "Whenever a girl shows an interest in football, why do all boys' chins hit the ground?"

"My chin's just fine," I replied. "I bet you know far more about football than me anyway."

And she really did. But then she'd gone to her first football match with her dad when she was only four.

"What team do you support?" she asked me suddenly.

"Spurs," I began.

Her eyes lit up. "So do I!"

That was so lucky, as she was a massive fan. She proudly showed me her Spurs calendar, Spurs torch and four Spurs shirts.

Then her dad offered to take us both to a

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Spurs game. I tell you, it's so much better than watching it on the telly, for when you're there you're a real part of it. Now her dad was hoping to get us tickets for one of the biggest matches of the season – Spurs v Arsenal. I was really looking forward to seeing that with Emma.

Only, would you believe it, Finn is a massive Spurs fan too. He's always talking about them with Emma. And tons of other stuff too. She claims she doesn't really like Finn at all. But I have this horrible feeling she's far more impressed by him than she lets on.

That's why I decided to tell Emma about my crystal. After all, my crystal was way more exciting than anything Finn could boast about. In fact, my crystal was probably the only one of its kind.

I planned to tell her at lunchtime.

I stood waiting for Emma in the corner of the playground where we usually meet up.

I wanted to check the crystal was still working. I held it and nothing seemed to be happening. My heart sank. Maybe it only worked at night. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Finn walking

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towards me. He was the last person I wanted to talk to now. I deliberately looked away.

Then heat started to surge through it again. I let out a great sigh of relief. In the back of my head I could hear Mrs Jameson whisper, "You must keep the secret." I felt a stab of guilt. But I would swear Emma to secrecy and I wouldn't tell anyone else. Not ever.

Then I heard another voice whisper:

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Great that Emma's dad has good seats for the Spurs v Arsenal match! I bet she takes me not Spud this time. I'm a much bigger fan than him. He only pretends to follow Spurs.

I recognised the voice instantly. It was Finn. I jumped around, thinking he was right behind me – that was how close he sounded. But in fact he was still a couple of metres away from me.

I let go of the crystal.

He strolled towards me, grinning. "Waiting for Emma, are you?"

He said this so casually I could only stutter,

"Y–Yes." Then he gave me this big friendly wave and he was gone.

I stared after him. I couldn't believe the way he'd blurted all that out to me and then acted so cool. He must be very sure of himself.

I was extremely uneasy now. And for the moment, I forgot about my crystal. Instead, I let Emma know what Finn had said. She was totally amazed. "I just happened to mention to him that my dad had got the tickets, that's all. I was going to tell you too."

"Were you?"

"Of course I was," she laughed. "I only told him because he was showing off as usual and I wanted to shut him up."

"I see," I laughed as well, half-reassured.

After school we confronted Finn together. He played a blinder. He denied saying anything to me about Emma's football tickets. He claimed they were the last thing on his mind.

He gave quite a performance, I must admit that. He even swore on his life that he hadn't said anything to me. Still, he could deny it as often as he liked, I'd heard him.

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On the way home – Emma's house is on the way to mine – I said to her, "Finn's trying to cover up now by saying he didn't say anything about your tickets. Still, you know Finn, his face would explode if he told the truth."

Emma sort of laughed, then went very quiet for a moment before saying, "Everyone's been asking me about the Spurs v Arsenal match. My dad was so lucky to get tickets. People keep coming up to me saying what big Spurs fans they are and can they come with me?"

I stiffened.

"Perhaps," she went on, "I could put all their names into a hat, or maybe I should have a quiz about Spurs and let the biggest fan come with me. What do you think?"

I was too hurt to reply. What was she playing at? I was her best mate. Therefore, I should go with her. End of story. Having those tickets had really gone to Emma's head.

Well, I'd show her I wasn't bothered. I still had my amazing crystal. Emma was about to get a shock in a moment. But she wasn't the one who got the shock – it was me.

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For I suddenly heard her whisper:

Finn sounded as if he was telling the truth. Did Matt make all that up about the tickets just to turn me against Finn? I think he did and I don't like that at all.

I was stunned. Not just by what Emma was saying, but the way she was speaking as if I wasn't there. Was she trying to be funny?

I turned to argue with her. She was still babbling away about how I didn't own her but her lips weren't moving.

HER LIPS WEREN'T MOVING.

In fact her whole face was completely still.

What was going on here?

The hairs rose along the back of my neck.

This was positively freaky. It was as if Emma's voice had somehow escaped from her body. I could hear it so clearly. It sounded as if she was whispering something very confidential in my ear.

Only she wasn't.

Really she was deep in thought, completely

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unaware that I could hear her.

The crystal was becoming very hot now. I had to let go of it. At once, Emma's voice sprang back into her body again.

I gaped at her in amazement. My heart was beating furiously.

"What's the matter?" asked Emma. This time her lips were moving again.

"The matter," I muttered. My mouth was dry; I could hardly swallow.

"You look like you've seen a ghost … Are you all right?"

"No, I feel a bit sick, that's all." And that was true. I felt sick with shock. "So I won't stop off at your house this evening, I'll go straight back."

Emma looked surprised. "OK … actually you do look a bit … rough. Are you sure you will be all right?"

"Oh yeah, say hello to Bess for me – and Finn really did say all that stuff, you know. You've got to believe me."

"Don't be silly. Of course I believe you," said Emma.

I stumbled off.

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"Matt."

I turned round. Emma gave me a wicked grin. "No, I'll tell you later," she said.

I walked a few metres, but my legs felt like lead. Then I stopped. What had just happened didn't make any sense. People only spoke without moving their lips in films that hadn't been dubbed properly.

Either I was going mad or I had just made the most tremendous discovery about my crystal.

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