**Will a magic parcel spell trouble for Eric?**

Eric is just no good at tests and schoolwork. His mum isn't happy about it and decides he needs extra lessons with his grumpy teacher Mr Hodgetts, much to Eric's horror. So when a mysterious magic stone arrives, Eric hopes it can grant his biggest wish of all...

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ERIC and the WISHING STONE

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BARBARA MITCHELHILL

Illustrated by Tony Ross

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*To David Williams and all the pupils*
*– past and present – of Bridgtown*
*Primary School*

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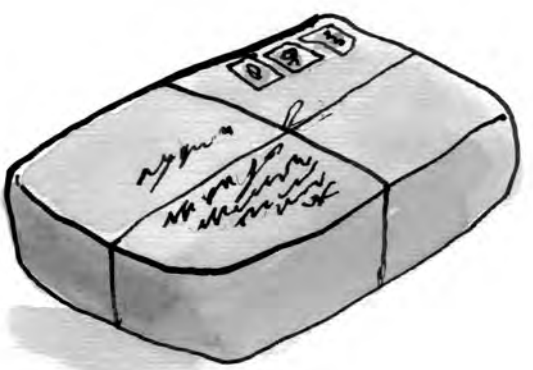
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# ONE

On the last day of term, a parcel arrived for Eric. From the stamps, he could tell it came from South America. From the handwriting, he knew Auntie Rose had sent it. Another hideous jumper! Another Striped Horror! No thank you! He abandoned the parcel under his bed and left it there unopened, gathering dust.



It was after the Easter holidays that things began to go wrong at school. By the end of the first week, he was in real trouble.

'What's got into you?' The Bodge demanded. 'Last term you were in *Junior Brain of the Year* on TV. Now look at this!' He rapped his pen on Eric's maths book. 'Your brain has turned to jelly in the holidays.'

Eric flinched.

'What's happened, lad?'

Eric lowered his chin onto his chest and glanced at Wesley, who winked back at him.

'It's stress, sir.'

'STRESS?'

'The television studio. It was very stressful in front of all those cameras. I haven't recovered yet.'

'RUBBISH!' The Bodge barked. 'That was weeks ago. You've had a holiday since then. How can you be stressed?'

'I don't know, sir.'

'Are you getting enough sleep?'

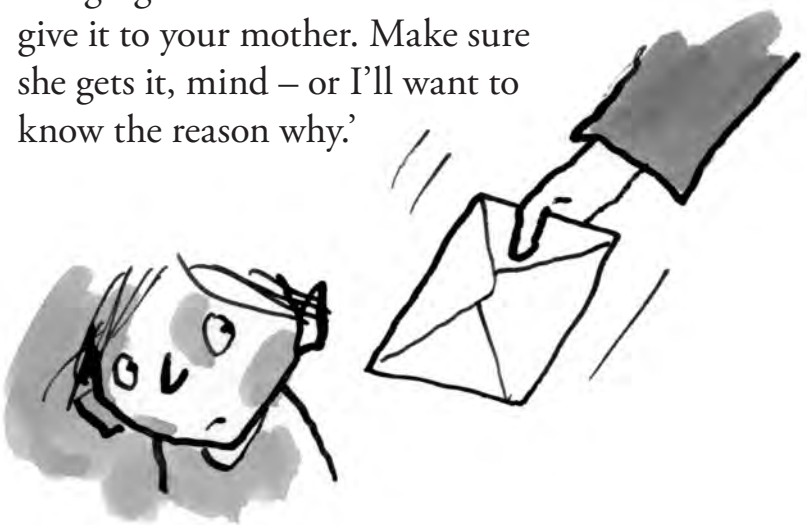
'Yes, sir.'

The teacher pulled himself up to his full height, folded his arms across his protruding belly and sighed. 'Then I'm going to have to look into this. Something very odd is going on and we've got to sort it out.'



Eric sighed and looked at his maths book. There was only one tick in a sea of crosses.

At the end of school that day, The Bodge gave Eric a letter. 'Take that and give it to your mother. Make sure she gets it, mind – or I'll want to know the reason why.'



'I don't stand a chance,' Eric complained bitterly to Wesley as they walked home. 'Just because I was on *Junior Brain of the Year* – you'd think they'd be satisfied. I didn't like being a genius anyway. It wasn't natural! I'm glad I'm back to normal.'

'Forget it, Ez. It's Saturday tomorrow. No school!'

Eric suddenly cheered up. 'Yeah! What are we doing then, Wez? Fancy a game of footie?'

'Count me out, Ez. My dad's taking me fishing.'

Eric stuffed his hands into his pockets. 'Lucky you. Wish I could go fishing. I keep asking Mum but she's not interested. Huh!'

'I'll see you Sunday, then.'

'OK.' Eric waved as they parted company and each headed their separate ways.

When he handed Mum the letter, she looked at it suspiciously. 'Are you in trouble again?' she asked as she tore open the envelope.



Outraged innocence spread across Eric's face. 'MUM!' he said indignantly and walked off into the living room, where he flopped on the rug in front of the television.

When Mum had read the letter she shouted, 'ERIC!' and marched into the living room, waving it in her hand. 'Why are you back at the bottom of the class, eh? Mr Hodgetts says you'll have to have extra help!'

Eric looked up, his eyes wide with alarm.

'EXTRA HELP?'

'He thinks,' she continued, 'you're playing too much football. It's sapping your strength. You can't concentrate.' She marched over to the television. Eric knew he was in trouble. 'But I don't agree. I think you spend too much time watching that telly!' She pressed the button and the screen went blank. 'Now go up to your room, please, and do some studying.'

'Mum!' Eric moaned and he slumped forward like a rag doll. He was depressed.

He could see hours and hours being wasted on homework, or, worse still, extra lessons at dinnertime or after school. His life wouldn't be worth living.

It was then that he remembered Auntie Rose's parcel.



# TWO

He fished the parcel out from under the bed. Maybe one of Auntie Rose's jumpers was the answer to his problem. The first one – the Striped Horror – improved his brain power no end for a time. Even though it did stink of sheep droppings.

'I'm desperate!' Eric said, tearing at the wrapping paper. 'I'm not having extra lessons if I can help it.'



He tossed the paper on the floor, layer by layer, until the contents of the parcel was revealed.

'I don't believe it!' he gasped.

Auntie Rose had not sent a jumper this time. She had sent a small round stone.



Eric sank onto the bed and buried his head in his hands. There was no help after all. He was doomed to extra lessons FOR EVER. As well as the stone, the parcel contained a letter from Auntie Rose.

*Dear Freckle Face,*

*This is my last stop before I begin my journey home. I have moved up into the mountains and I'm living in a small settlement. My Spanish has improved tremendously!*

*I am sending you this Wishing Stone. Do you like it? The locals gave it to me. They tell me it has amazing power. They say you must hold the stone in your right hand and make a wish. Just one! Then (can you believe this?) whatever you wish for will come true. It sounds like a fairy story to me but the locals believe it. Anyway, it will make a nice doorstop.*

*I've got lots to tell you, so I hope to see you soon.*

*Love and a kiss,*

*Auntie Rose xxx*

He picked up the stone and turned it over in his hands. It was painted with a pattern of red zigzags, yellow moons and green crosses.

'One wish, eh?' His heart began to race at the thought of it.



He flung himself back on the bed and closed his eyes. There was no problem in deciding what to wish for. Since the age of six he had desperately wanted to be Superman – or Superboy. He was brilliant. No need for extra lessons for him. And he could fly. He could zip off anywhere in the world.

It was when Eric imagined flying miles above the Earth that he began to wonder if he would really like it. After all, he hadn't even been on a plane.

'I think,' he said, opening his eyes and sitting up, 'I'll do a trial run. Find out what it's like to be high up.'

He decided to climb on top of the wardrobe. First, he balanced a chair on the bed and scrambled onto it. Then he heaved himself up until he was half on and half off the wardrobe. Grunting and groaning, he wriggled until he was lying flat across the top.

'Done it!' he said and then he poked his head over the edge and looked down. It was a terrible shock!



Everything looked so far away! So tiny! And it all seemed to be MOVING!

Eric closed his eyes as the room began to spin. He gripped onto the edge of the wardrobe. Now he was shaking uncontrollably, his forehead broke out in sweat and his stomach churned. And with the sickness came the realisation that he could never be Superboy.

He had found out that he was terrified of heights.

'ERIC!' Mum was standing in the doorway. 'WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING UP THERE?'



'I'm s-stuck,' Eric stammered. 'I can't move. Help me, Mum. Quick!'

Somehow, Mum managed to get him down, and sat him on the bed.

'What on earth were you up to?' she asked.

'A scientific experiment,' he replied weakly. 'I found out that I suffer from something called vertigo.'

She didn't believe a word of it. 'And is all this paper to do with your experiment?' she asked, pointing to the mess on the floor.

'It's Auntie Rose's parcel. Look – she sent me this.' Eric held the stone for her to see.

'That's interesting, duck,' she said, taking it from his hand and looking at it closely. 'She sends you some very unusual things, doesn't she? I wish—'

Eric lunged forward and grabbed the stone before Mum completed the sentence. She had almost wasted the wish. It was a near thing!

‘Mum,’ Eric said, quickly changing the subject, ‘do you fancy going fishing tomorrow? We could go to the canal. Or the reservoir. I could borrow a rod.’

Mum laughed. ‘Me, go fishing? No! I’m going into town to get you a new pair of jeans. Come with me. We’ll go shopping together.’

Eric grimaced. He didn’t want to go shopping. He wanted to go fishing.

‘My mum’s hopeless at some things,’ he mumbled to himself when she had gone downstairs. ‘I wish I had a dad.’

Suddenly his fingers began to tingle and turn cold. In his right hand was the stone. It was then he realised that, without meaning to, he had already made his wish.

