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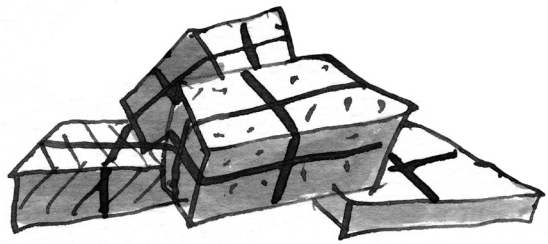
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ERIC
and the
GREEN-EYED GOD

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For the children of Priorslee School who knew Eric from the beginning

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ONE

When Eric woke up, he knew that something terrible was going to happen. He could feel it in his bones. It wasn't just that Mum was getting married on Saturday. Or that she was marrying his teacher. That was bad enough. (To be honest it was *really embarrassing!*) But he'd got used to it – sort of.

No! The real problem was this – Eric's crazy, trekking-around-the-world Auntie Rose was coming to the wedding. Doom! Auntie Rose spelled T.R.O.U.B.L.E. The presents she sent from South America had already turned Eric's world upside down.

So, if her presents could do that – what could Auntie Rose herself do? He dreaded

to think! He tried pushing it to the back of his mind. But he couldn't. Saturday's wedding loomed like a black cloud on the horizon.

Somehow, Eric dragged himself out of bed and went downstairs. Mum was in the kitchen singing a soppy song about love. Eric felt worse than ever.

'You look half-asleep, duck,' she said, handing him a slice of toast. 'Have some breakfast.' She hardly paused before she burst into song again, unaware of Eric's misery.

He reached for the marmalade and spread an extra-thick layer on the toast, just to cheer himself up. As he took the first bite, he noticed a letter on the worktop. The handwriting was bold and black and familiar.

'Is that from Auntie Rose?' he said, pointing at the envelope.

Mum stopped singing.

'Yes, duck,' she said. 'And I'm afraid it's bad news.'



Eric paused mid-chew, his cheeks bulging with soggy bread and marmalade.

'Sorry, love,' she said with a deep sigh. 'Rose isn't coming to the wedding. She can't make it.'

Eric could hardly believe his luck. This was good news of double mega proportions! He wanted to leap off his chair. Jump round the room. Fling open the window and tell the world. He felt great! No Auntie Rose. No presents. No magic.

But the feel-good factor didn't last long. In fact, it only lasted until Mum went upstairs and Eric read the letter.



Dear Christine,

I'm having terrible trouble getting a flight home. The floods caused havoc at the airport. So I'll miss your wedding. Boohoo! Please send me some photographs. I'm dying to see the dress.

I'm thinking of moving down to Ecuador next – or maybe Peru. I know I said I'd only stay another month or so, but I love South America! It's really exciting!

I've been staying with a family with twelve children and they are all so friendly. They said I should send you this local fertility symbol as a wedding present. Every bride in these parts is given one. People tell me it has magic powers. Tee-hee! So, watch out, Christine! You never know.

Anyway, magic powers or not, it's made of real gold and the stones are emeralds! I hope you like it. I think it's beautiful.

With love and kisses. Have a wonderful day.

From Rose
P.S. Hello Eric! XX

Eric shivered as he read the words 'magic powers'. Auntie Rose thought it was a joke. But it was no joke!

Everything she had sent so far had caused chaos. It was because of her that Mum and The Bodge (his teacher) went all soppy over each other and decided to get married. They even KISSED sometimes. Yuck! How could they at their age?

He read the letter again. Auntie Rose had sent a 'fertility symbol'. He had to find out what it was because he had to stay clear of it.

He went to the bottom of the stairs. 'Mum!' he shouted. 'What present did Auntie Rose send you?'

There was a pause, then Mum called back. 'It's a surprise! You'll see it on Saturday. Now get a move on, Eric, or you'll be late for school.'

Eric grunted and went to fetch his bag. He couldn't help wondering what a fertility symbol looked like. He hadn't a clue. He decided to ask his best friend, Wesley.

TWO

'A fertility symbol?' said Wesley, as they walked towards the school gate. 'Dunno, Ez. Unless it's one of those brass things drummers hit on a drum kit.'

'Don't think so, Wez,' said Eric glumly. 'Not that kind of cymbal.'

Wez sighed. 'Then I've never heard of one.'



Eric was worried. If he didn't know what a fertility symbol looked like . . . how could he avoid it?

The whistle blew in the playground and everyone began to file indoors.

'I've got to find out,' said Eric, moving slowly across the tarmac.

'We could look it up,' said Wez. 'There are some big dictionaries in the library. They've got hard words in them.'

Eric grinned. 'Smart thinking, Wez. We'll go after dinner.'

That morning in assembly, Mrs Cracker (known as the Big Cheese) announced a new project.

'As your head teacher,' she said, 'I am very concerned about conservation and recycling. So, when the mayor suggested we take part in a project called "Loving the Earth", I thought it was an excellent idea.'

There was a general buzz around the hall.

The Big Cheese continued. 'The whole school will join in,' she said, 'and you will all be Pollution Detectives.'



Everyone looked blank. Heads turned. Hands shot up. One or two called, 'Miss?' They were puzzled.

But the head teacher waved her hand. 'I'll explain,' she said. 'Each class will look out for litter or pollution that can be poisonous to wildlife. Think of the ways of making our world a nicer place. Think of ways of recycling.'

There were groans all round. It didn't sound like much fun.

'There will be a prize for the best class presentation,' she said. 'And this will be donated by the mayor himself.'

That made all the difference. The mayor was very rich and well known for his fabulous prizes. Last year he paid for a bunch of kids to go on holiday.

'Right,' said The Bodge, when they returned to class. 'Who's got an idea?'

'Me!' called out Brent Dwyer, the class bully. 'I've got a brilliant camera. I'll go round following people like they do on TV. *Spot the Litter Lout*.'

The Bodge frowned. 'Following people could get you into trouble, Brent,' he said. 'But you could write a diary. Keep a lookout around school and around town. Maybe take your own photographs of litter or pollution.'



Wez put his hand up. 'How about a noticeboard with a picture of the "Polluter of the Week"?'

Everybody thought it was a great idea. And Wez blinked with pleasure.

'Before we start,' said The Bodge, 'we need to choose a Chief Pollution Detective.'

'What's one of those, sir?' someone asked.

'The Chief will control the project,' he explained, 'and will present it to the mayor.'

Brent Dwyer leaped up and down, desperate to be chosen. But The Bodge had other ideas.

'I want you all to write the name of the person you want to be the project leader,' he said, giving out pieces of paper. 'The one who gets the most votes will be the Chief.'

Brent Dwyer grabbed hold of some of the smaller kids.

'Vote for me or I'll thump yer,' he hissed.

It didn't work except for Calvin Thomas, who wrote Brent's name on his piece of paper. But when Brent's back was

turned, Eric saw Calvin screw it up and drop it in the bin.

After the break, The Bodge announced the results.

Eric got the most votes. This was mainly because he had scored three goals in the match against Welling Road School the previous afternoon. All the team had voted for Eric. Wez had also voted for Eric. And *Eric* had voted for Eric. No contest!

As the Bodge pinned a large round badge on his chest, everyone cheered. Except for Brent Dwyer, who had plans for Eric's downfall.

