



## CHAPTER ONE

Eric Wishbone waited patiently with his two best friends outside his head teacher's office.

At his left side stood Freddie Neptune, tall and confident, and to his right stood Bobby Spoon, whose legs shook like jelly.

"Come in!" Miss Isle's voice blasted out from the other side of the door. Eric gulped.

The entire school knew how rotten she was.

Once she hung a boy upside down by his underpants – for a whole week, throughout winter, from the staffroom window!

"I don't like boys..." Miss Isle began, pacing one way then the other, growing madder and madder. "I don't like boys standing around in groups of three!"

Pausing only to jab a bony finger at Eric she continued. "In case you're wondering ... three boys standing together make a gang and I don't like gangs standing around either!"

But before Eric could even open his mouth to complain, Miss Isle was breathing heavily into his ear.

"Your behaviour will not be tolerated!"

She stepped back and gave each of the boys her fiercest laser stare and a week's worth of litter picking.

Eric and Freddie looked at Bobby; Bobby looked down at his knocking knees.

"She's completely mad," Eric whispered secretly on their way back to class, as soon as he was sure they were out of earshot. "Just keep reminding yourselves she's completely mad!"

As Eric and his friends sat down to get on with their lesson, Liam Snidy - school snitch and Miss Isle's favourite pupil - emerged from behind a set of curtains at a tall window back in Miss Isle's office.

He grinned smugly.

Liam Snidy did not like Eric Wishbone. He thought Eric Wishbone was everything he was not and he was right. Eric was popular and clever, whereas nobody liked Liam Snidy.

Miss Isle tolerated Liam Snidy because he brought her snippets of school gossip; and he carried out errands for his head teacher without questioning the *why's* and *who's* and *REALLY?!*

"There's going to be an ice cream van at the school gates after school today, Liam pet," Miss Isle sniggered, waving a leaflet in the air. It had arrived through the school letter box that morning.

"At 3.15pm precisely!" she pointed out.

On the front was a picture of a big ice cream with a smiling face on it. Liam Snidy's eyes were drawn to the words underneath: "*Any flavour you can imagine...!*"

Miss Isle spoke bitterly. "I have a little chore for you, Liam pet," and curled a loose strand of her flame red hair around one of her bony fingers. "The other children will ask for their favourite flavour and I want you ... I want you ...," she

stuttered, searching for the right words. “I want you ... I want you ... to ask for a rabbit.”

There was a long pause.

“But I don’t want a rabbit,” Liam Snidy mumbled.

“You’ll get it!” snapped Miss Isle, slamming her fist hard on her desk. “I will not tolerate disobedience!”

“A rabbit?”

“A rabbit!” confirmed Miss Isle frostily.

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An ice cream van *jingle-jangle-diddly-dongled* through town, and drew up outside the gates to Eric’s school at 3.15pm precisely.

Its driver, a soft bald headed man, poked his head out from the hatch at the side of his van. Beaming a broad smile he waited for the onrush of children.

He didn’t have to wait long. The school bell sounded, indicating to the children it was time for them to run home, and they headed straight for his brightly coloured van.

“Any flavours children.” The driver laughed at the disorderly line in front of him. “Any flavour you can think of.”

“Strawberry!” a loud-mouthed boy shouted rudely.

“Chocolate!” a girl called out.

“Ignore the pictures,” the man smiled over the small crowd. “They’re just for show”.

“*Choco-doughnut-strawberry-whirl* please,” Bobby giggled into his hands. His words were unexpected, even to him, and he blushed instantly and lowered his head.

Quietly and without a fuss, the man reached into the back of the van and handed something over resembling a *choco-doughnut-strawberry-whirl* just as Bobby had imagined it.

“I don’t believe it,” he mumbled open mouthed, finding sufficient courage to take the ice cream quickly in case the driver asked for it back.

Freddie edged his way to the front of the line and said he’d like a *swimming-pool-desert-island-lime-and-apricot-oooh-that’s-good* like he was trying to catch the man out.

But the driver leant back, just as quietly as before, and picked out a fresh cone which he filled from a machine on the side.

It looked close enough to Freddie as to how he imagined a *swimming-pool-desert-island-lime-and-apricot-oooh-that’s-good* would look, so he slurped away and licked it greedily.

Amidst the hubbub around him, the man delved into the box for a third cone and delivered a third ice cream.

“For you?” he said and gave Eric a magnificent triple-domed sculpture of colour and patterns and pointy bits, like a castle or a cathedral. Eric stared in amazement for a jaw dropping moment before he tentatively reached out and accepted the cone.

“Come on Eric,” cried Freddie from the back of the mob. “You’re holding up the queue.”

“What have you got?” asked Bobby, *lick, lick, lick*.

“I don’t know really,” Eric replied slowly, as much to himself as to his friends.

“He means what flavour have you got?” Freddie pointed out under raised eyebrows, *slurp, slurp, slurp*.

“No, really,” Eric said mildly. “I really don’t know.”

“What did you ask for?” said Bobby, *slurp, slurp, slurp*.

“It looks amazing whatever it is,” Freddie said admiringly, peering over some heads.

“I know,” said Eric. “It’s the most amazing thing ever and ... and I didn’t even ask for it.”

Freddie and Bobby stopped their slurping and lessened their licking. Eric joined them away from the commotion and now their four eyes fixed themselves on him.

“It’s the most amazing thing ever,” Eric repeated and then wondered ...

“Unless,” he said slowly, “Unless it tastes like a *sports-car-rocket-launch-cloud-drifter-with-a-hint-of-toffee* ... That’s the thing that would be the most amazing thing ever.”

“Why would it do that?” asked Freddie frowning.

“Because,” Eric said, trying to make sense of it all, “that’s what I was thinking about at the time,” but both Freddie and Bobby had switched off from listening to Eric. A *busy-doing-something-somewhere-else* look had already washed itself across their sticky faces.

Bobby licked his *choco-doughnut-strawberry-whirl* lovingly.

Freddie sloppily slurped his *swimming-pool-desert-island-lime-and-apricot-ooh-that’s-good* eagerly.

Eric, meanwhile, closed his eyes, stuck out his tongue and tasted ... *sports-car-rocket-launch-cloud-drifter-with-a-hint-of-toffee*.

“Mmmmm!”