

This is not a story about a dragon
who wasn't always a dragon,
or was he, but about a boy
who sometimes was a dragon,
or was he?

DRAGON BOY

Jim Murdoch



DREAMMEADOWPRESS

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This book is dedicated to my grandsons, all of whom are too young to read this. May this be one of their early reads. I look forward to hearing them read this to me.



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The Sunbeam

Once upon a time, is how some stories begin. But this story isn't like that. This is not a story about a dragon who wasn't always a dragon, or was he, but about a boy who sometimes was a dragon, or was he? You see I am not sure and I'm going to need your help to answer that question.

Meet Eric. He is ten years old and doesn't like school, or does he? What do you think? You see, Eric daydreams in class. He dreams of dragons, or does he? You tell me. If you ask Eric he will tell you emphatically that he does not dream of

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dragons, but that he actually becomes a dragon.

Well, that does not make Eric very popular, at least not in a good sense. He is very popular with the bullies and the teasers. So Eric would rather keep his dragon adventures to himself seeing as no one will believe him anyway.

Once upon a time, well I already said that this wasn't such a story, because there wasn't one time, there were several times. Several times when Eric dreamt of the dragon, or as he would tell you if he were telling this story, when he was a dragon. But that sounds silly, doesn't it? So rather than having you and everyone else laugh at me for telling a silly story, I spoke to Eric's teacher and classmates, to get their perspective of what actually happened and whether or not they saw any dragons or perhaps saw Eric change into a dragon.

Alas, it wasn't to be so simple, as you can now read.

So, once upon the first of the several times when Eric either dreamt of or became a dragon, Eric sat in class at his desk. Teacher was teaching about

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history and Eric was paying attention and listening very carefully until Teacher said,

“There are many myths and legends about mystical creatures and dragons.”

After that Eric can't for the life of him recall another single word Teacher said. Eric says that as soon as he heard the word “dragons” that he instantly was surrounded by a cloud of light, or white smoke which was very bright, although he didn't smell any smoke. He heard a roaring noise, the kind you hear when a strong fire blows up the chimney or maybe like the roar of a jet plane or a rocket taking off. Eric hadn't heard either a jet plane or a rocket taking off, but he guessed that must be what a jet or rocket sounded like, like this white light cloud which surrounded him while he sat there no longer listening to Teacher teach about history.

What Teacher and the other children saw was a sudden beam of sunlight shoot through the window as the clouds parted slightly, allowing the sunlight to shine through, right on top of Eric's

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head. It was only for two minutes, yet when the clouds again blocked the sunlight Eric blinked, shivered, looked around, and declared,

“I have just been a dragon and had a great adventure.”

Poor Eric. The entire room full of children burst into a mighty roar of laughter. They pointed their fingers at him and called him names like, “Daydreamer,” “Loopy loo,” “Bonker head,” and one which hurt him very much, “Dragon dozer.” When Eric looked at the clock above the door of the classroom he couldn’t quite understand what had happened. Had he travelled back in time? So much time had just passed, a long time, and yet the clock showed that only two minutes had passed.

Teacher was not amused and gave Eric extra homework for dreaming in class.

Eric went home feeling befuddled. When he tried to tell his Mummy what had happened she told him off worse than Teacher. “No daydreaming in class, Eric. You must pay attention. You have to listen to become smart and get a good job when

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you grow up.”

Eric didn't want to grow up. It was hard enough being little. Eric went up to his room to write down what he had experienced. On his shelf there was a thick notebook with a black fake leather cover and golden edges on the pages. It was a birthday present from his Auntie, to write down the interesting things that happen in his life. Well, he had never written anything because, apart from learning history and doing math in school, nothing ever happened. Nothing important enough to write it in his shiny new notebook - that is until now.

So here is what Eric wrote in his notebook from that day when he first was a dragon, or was he?

What the Others Didn't See

There I was, sitting on my chair at my desk in my classroom with my class, listening to our teacher teach about history, when suddenly out of nowhere came a white cloud of light and a sound of roaring. (Well I have already explained that bit so let's continue on.) It lasted for about ten seconds, then it went away. But instead of me sitting on my chair at my desk in my classroom, I was sitting on a big rock up a mountain.

The strange thing was when I looked at my feet they were big, very big, and green, with long claws. I was so taken aback that I flapped my

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wings. Wait, “my wings?” I had wings! I flapped my wings again and this time I rose straight up into the sky. It felt really breath-taking. There I was flapping away and hovering in the air, looking down at trees and fields and sheep. The funny thing is, seeing those sheep made me feel hungry. My tummy rumbled like thunder.

Without knowing what was happening I found myself suddenly soaring down towards the sheep. As I got closer to the sheep I filled my lungs with air, ready to blow. It was then I realised what I was about to do. As a dragon, roast sheep did sound very delicious. Even as a boy it sounded delicious. But I wasn’t about to roast a sheep. So I stopped in the field with my feet on the grass. Then, because my lungs were so full of air, and because something inside me felt hot, I blew out all of the air, and oh my, a hot flame came out and scorched a long streak of grass making it all brown and smoky. The sheep took one look at me and ran away to the other end of the field.

But my dragon tummy was still hungry. In the

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field were some apple trees. Oh good, I love apples. I went over to the nearest tree and picked several apples, almost all of them in fact, and sat down against the tree and proceeded to gobble them all up.

I still felt tempted to feast on a sheep so I thought I'd better flap my wings and fly away. As I flew over a hill, I saw a lake. Not a big lake, but big enough for a dragon to have a good splash. And splash I did. I flapped my wings down hard as I hit the water, creating such a big splash and a wave that rolled out in every direction. It was such great fun. I liked being a dragon.

After my swim, I got out and lay in the sun to dry off. That's when a big cloud went in front of the sun and put me in shadow. I sat up and blinked, and there I was back in my classroom. But when I told everyone what had just happened they laughed at me and called me names.

(I'll skip this bit because I've already told you the names they called him.)

The next day my Daddy was reading the

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newspaper and I noticed a photo. It showed an angry farmer beside an apple tree. The headline read: Thief picks nearly every apple from farmer's tree. In the background were a group of sheep all huddled together and off to the right a dark streak was in the grass. The article didn't mention the dark streak, but I knew it must've been the scorch-mark I made after landing. On the next page a small headline really made my eyes pop out. It said: Mini tidal wave hits mountain campers at small lake. I couldn't believe my eyes. So it *was* real. It really did happen. I read the stories myself, but there was no mention of a dragon at all.

Dragon Aid

Well, as you can imagine, young Eric felt so very frustrated. No one believed him at all. In fact, Eric even doubted it himself, except that his experiences as a dragon felt so real. It surely wasn't just daydreaming like his teacher and parents were suggesting. And then there were the stories in the newspaper. But why did no-one mention the dragon? Surely someone must have seen the dragon.

After tea, Eric went up to his room and lay on his bed. He wasn't sleepy and lay thinking about his dragon moments. Although Eric himself

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wondered if these moments were real, he felt angry that people didn't believe him. He closed his eyes, just for a second, to picture his recent dragon journey and there he was, sitting on the roof of his house looking out over the town where he lived.

He had never seen the town from up here before, yet he could recognise many things. There was the school, and the church, and over there was the old library building. Further away he could see the tall buildings in the town centre and way over there the tiny shape of a plane taking off from the airport.

It was early evening and getting dark. A few streets away he sensed something sinister. What a strange feeling. It felt like a dark shadow or something scary getting close. As a dragon he wasn't afraid, but rather intrigued. With a flap and a jump he soared up and out over the street below, gliding over the rooftops. He flew in the direction of the dark feeling. There below were two men working at a shop door, but Eric the dragon saw nothing wrong or bad and flew on. The dark shadow was now behind him so he turned around

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and had a closer look at those men.

He landed on a rooftop and peered down. It was amazing how clearly he could see. His dragon eyes saw every detail. The shop front had blue painted window and door frames. The paint was peeling off a little at the edges. One of the men held a long metal rod and was pushing one end into the slit between the door and the doorframe. Eric's dragon neck stretched out and the scales on his back stiffened. They are not workmen. They are robbers! They are trying to break into that shop.

Eric didn't like it when he heard stories about people breaking into homes and shops to steal things. He wished that they would just be good people and stop doing bad things. But Eric was watching this as a dragon, and he felt his dragon blood boil in anger. He hated stealing and he wanted to stop them right away. Taking a deep, deep breath he swooped down and blasted a gush of hot flame right at the unsuspecting robbers. They dropped everything and ran screaming down the street, holding their heads as they ran.

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Eric was so pleased with himself for stopping a robbery that he flapped his great wings and headed into the clouds above. He decided to have some fun and blow fire into the thick cloud clusters. The clouds turned dark, lightning shot out and there was a monstrous roar of thunder. This was so much fun that Eric the dragon did it several times.

“Eric! Time for bed.” The voice of his mother pierced through the noise of the storm and pulled him back to his room where he still lay on his bed.

“Yes, Mum.”

Was that real? Eric jumped up and looked out the window. The sky had dark swirling clouds and it looked like there would be rain. He fell asleep wondering much about if he really was a dragon. Were dragons real? Did he have two lives, one as a boy and one as a dragon? He couldn't grasp this and didn't understand what was happening to him. All he knew was it felt real and the dragon he was had some effect on his real world, the world where he was a boy.

The next day Eric scoured the newspapers and

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watched and listened to the news. Only a small article in a local paper mentioned the attempted robbery. The two men were picked up by police for setting fire to the front door of a shop. They swore they didn't start the fire. They said they were trying to break in when a sudden fire came down from heaven. They were so afraid that God was punishing them that they swore never to be bad again.

Eric smiled. They didn't mention the dragon, but he was pleased that these men wouldn't try anything bad again.

The weather report mentioned a sudden darkening of the sky and some lightening too. All of this made Eric wonder a lot. Was he making it all up? He couldn't quite figure it out.

The Psychologist

In school Eric had been having an increasingly difficult time. The other children laughed at him, as you know, and the teachers began scolding him whenever he mentioned dragons. When the class was asked to write an essay Eric of course wrote about dragons. His teacher ripped his paper into pieces and told Eric to write a new essay. He did, about angry teachers who tore up pupils' hard work. That got him into even more trouble and his parents were brought into the battle - against him.

In art class Eric thought he could at least express himself there. That is, after all, what art is for, isn't

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it? But after a while and a wall spotted with colourful dragon paintings the teacher asked him to paint something else. The poor boy was so flustered he wasted a whole art class just sitting thinking of something else to paint.

After a few weeks Eric was stunned, but really he wasn't surprised, when he was told to go to a certain room where a woman sat whom he hadn't seen before.

"Come in Eric," she said. She wore those narrow rectangular spectacles which Eric thought must be really difficult to see the whole world through. Her dark hair, with grey streaks, was tied up into a bun. A loose strand hung down over her left ear. 'In emergency pull the cord,' thought Eric to himself as he almost started giggling. "Sit down. I am Doctor Jordan. I am a psychologist. Do you know what that is?"

Eric sat in the chair at the desk facing Dr Jordan. "No, Miss."

"A phycologist is someone who looks at how the mind works and how people behave in various

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circumstances. I am here to give you a little test.”

She went on to talk about how the other teachers and his parents were very concerned about his extreme interest in dragons, a fantasy animal which didn't exist. Eric actually did know what a psychologist was. He had looked it up when he heard his teachers mention it to his parents. Now that the dear doctor psychologist was here Eric had a plan. He guessed she was here to assess him about the dragons. The more he spoke about dragons and drew dragons the more he got into trouble and became more and more unpopular at school. It was time, he decided, to keep the dragons to himself.

“Now, Eric, I'm going to show you some shapes on these cards. They are called ink blots. And there are no wrong answers here. I just want to know what you see in these shapes. Okay?”

Eric nodded. He knew exactly what was coming. Thanks to the Internet he had learned what these tests are and all about the ink blots.

“Then let's begin, shall we?” Dr Jordan smiled

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and flipped over the first card. “Now, Eric, tell me, what do you see?”

“An egg,” Eric answered without hesitating.

“An egg?” the lady turned the card around and looked at it. Normally she wouldn’t question what her patients see, but this seemed so odd.

“Yes, Miss. It’s like the fried eggs my Daddy makes. He spreads it all over the place like that shape. But Mum’s fried eggs are always nice and round.” He smiled and secretly laughed at Dr Jordan’s dumbfounded look.

“OK,” she said as she scribbled something onto her notepad. “The next card. What do you see here?”

Eric paused a little. This shape was more symmetrical; that means it was the same on both sides if you drew a line down the centre. “A butterfly.”

Dr Jordan nodded with a grunt. “Next.”

“An owl.”

And so it went on. There must have been about twenty cards and Eric always said some animal or

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object from the kitchen, but never once mentioned a dragon. Even though there were a few ink blot shapes which definitely looked like dragons to Eric, but he didn't say the word dragon once.

Then came the questions. The ones designed to dig into his mind and reveal any odd behavioural thinking. "You seem to write and draw a lot about dragons, Eric. Why do you think that is?"

"Oh, I got a dragon book for my birthday and I liked dragons. But I also like planes and rockets, especially rockets. Like the ones trying to get to Mars. Did you know they are using more efficient fuel these days than they were fifty years ago?"

"No, I didn't, I was wondering..."

But Eric didn't let her finish. He started explaining about how rockets worked, then he grabbed her notepad and drew some circles and squares and explained to an apparent clueless teacher how rocket propulsion worked.

After about half an hour, during which time Eric had explained how car engines worked, how a computer uses binary code to calculate everything

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and a few other scientific things he had gleaned from the Internet and science class, the doctor lady grabbed her notepad back, closed it, and said the session was over and he should return to class.

‘Well, that went well,’ Eric thought to himself as he made his way back to the classroom. From that moment on he never mentioned a dragon again, even though he still had many journeys as a dragon. But he tried really hard not to let that happen in class.

Eric’s days went better than before. The teachers and his parents bothered him less, at least in regards to being a dragon. He kept his notes and drawings of his dragon adventures very secret and hidden away in his room. The children at school still teased him, but never as much as before.

The journeys continued and Eric was still puzzled by them. He never actually went anywhere. No one ever asked, “Eric, where did you go?” or “Eric, you just disappeared and came back again.” Nothing like that was said at all. Usually, he tried to be alone, but sometimes it

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happened that mother or father came in and saw him and they would shake him and call him a daydreamer.

Whenever Eric had his dragon adventures he presumed it must be only in his mind, although it always felt so real. And then, of course, there were the real-life coincidences, like the eaten apples, the fire with the robbers, the lightning, and so on. Eric just couldn't figure out why that was. He really wanted to hear that someone had actually seen a dragon.

So he thought up a plan. He would create a ruckus at school as the dragon, then he would hear first-hand what all the children were saying and was sure that they would be talking about the dragon.

Dragon Storm

The next day during lunch break, as it was a dry day and the sun was out, all the children were out playing in the schoolyard. Girls were skipping with ropes, boys were kicking and throwing balls. Some played hopscotch on numbered squares chalked onto the ground. All were busy and no one noticed Eric slip round to the side of the school building. There he was out of sight and could ‘daydream’, if that is what he really did, and do it undisturbed.

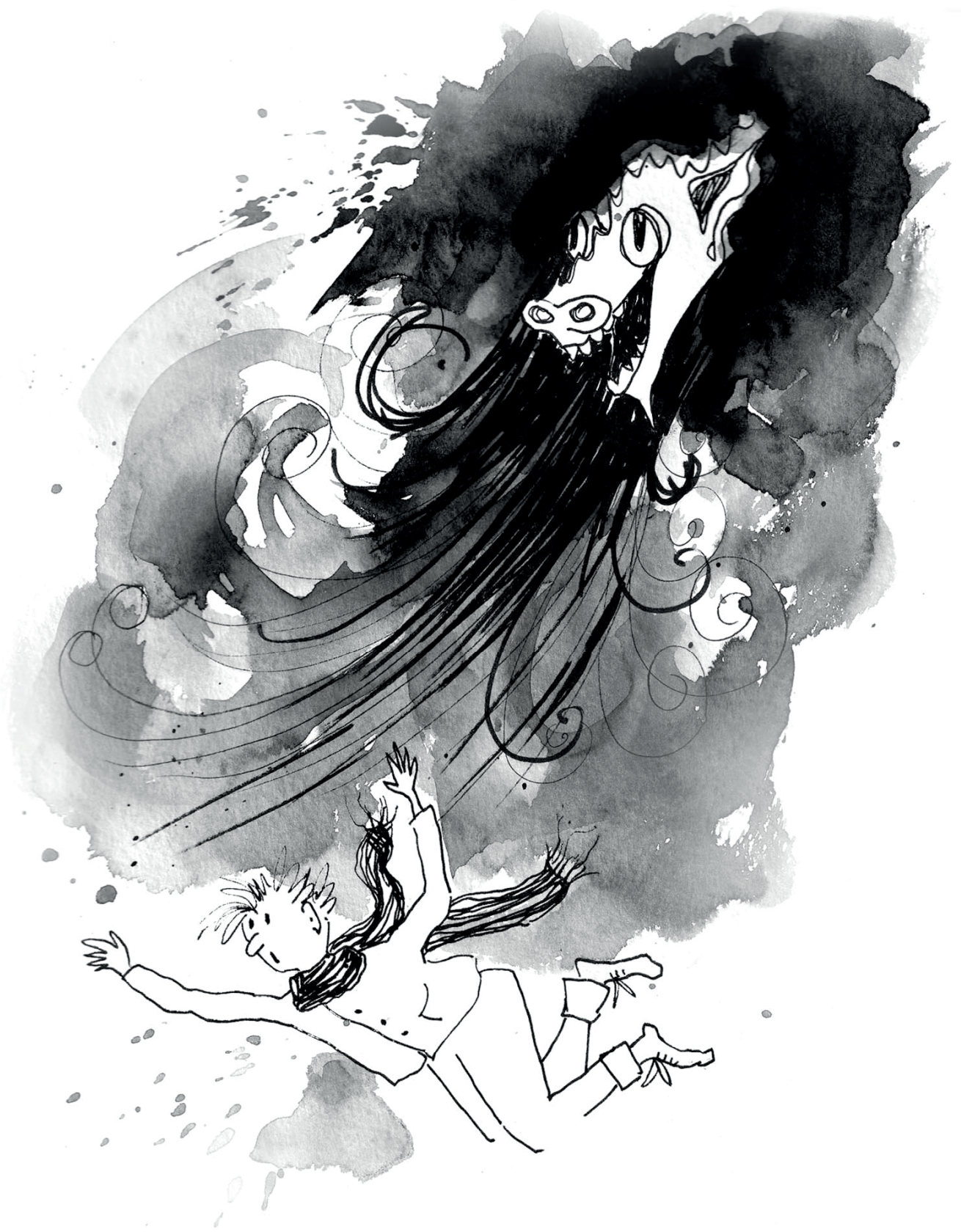
It never took long. He closed his eyes and thought ‘dragon’ and there he was a dragon sitting

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on the flat roof of the two-storey building. Through his dragon eyes, Eric watched the children for a while. There were a group of teachers keeping an eye on them. No-one seemed to notice a dragon sitting on the roof.

‘I’ll show them that I really am a dragon.’ Eric the dragon leapt into the air and, spreading his wings, he swooped down with a mighty swoosh over the heads of the children. Girls screamed, even some of the boys screamed, especially that big bully Billy who fell flat holding his head. Eric couldn’t resist it and slapped his bottom with his long dragon tail as he swept past. He just heard a second scream from Billy as he flew upward again.

The playground was in mayhem. Children were scattering everywhere, some holding their heads, others their ears and some their eyes. The teachers, sheltering their faces with their forearms, were trying to usher all the children back inside. As Eric the dragon landed again on the roof he flapped hard and sent a cloud of dust and stones falling into



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the school ground.

Eric opened his eyes. He was still a boy hiding at the side of the school. He could hear the commotion and the teachers shouting for everyone to get inside. Hurriedly he joined the last of the children rushing in through the school doors. Some were coughing, others shook dust from their hair or dusted their shoulders. Bully Billy was rubbing his backside and looked furiously embarrassed. Eric asked around what had happened.

“What was that?” he asked a girl.

“I don’t know. A big wind suddenly blew off the roof.”

“Did you see what did that?” he asked a boy.

“The wind did it, idiot. What else?”

Eric asked a few more and eavesdropped on the excited chatter of groups of children. But no one said they saw a dragon. How could that be possible? Eric didn’t understand. Dust was everywhere and he knew without any doubt that it was him who did that, him as a dragon of course. How could it be that no one saw a dragon?

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This made Eric angry. He clenched his fists in frustration. A teacher asked, “Eric are you alright?” “That stupid storm,” was all Eric could say as he stomped angrily into the classroom and sat down at his desk.

Eric was now really beginning to believe that he was imagining it all. Maybe he was making up the dragon stories after seeing the news or the storm. But the more he thought about it the more he realised that it didn’t happen that way. He saw the events happen or made them happen before the news came out. And here at the school it all happened at the same time as his being the dragon.

To him his experiences were very real. There was always some kind of reported incident which fitted.

The rest of school that afternoon was very difficult for Eric. He was too distracted by his thoughts and found it difficult to concentrate.

After school he decided to take the long way home through the woods. His favourite tree was there and he loved to sit in its branches and think

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about things. As he walked along the street towards the wooded area, he sensed someone following him. It was Enya, a brown-haired girl from his class.

Eric frowned. "What do you want? Leave me alone." He turned back and hurried towards the trees at the end of the street.

"You made that wind, didn't you?" Enya hurried to catch up.

"What?" Eric pretended he didn't know what she meant. "Don't be silly. Now go away. I'm going into the woods to think. I need to be alone."

Enya kept her little feet moving to stay beside him. "I believe you." Eric ignored her and hurried past the first trees. "I believe you about the dragon." Eric stopped. His chest heaved. Then he turned square facing Enya.

"How can you believe anything which you can't see?"

"I saw the wind, and I saw you sitting round the side of the school."

"So? That means nothing." Eric's brow

furrowed deeply.

“Then you came round to the front and you asked everybody what happened. You were disappointed that they didn’t say anything about a dragon.” Eric clenched his fist and puckered his lips, but said nothing. “I’m right, aren’t I?” Enya tilted her head and lifted her left shoulder as she smiled at Eric.

Eric’s resistance broke. Relaxing, he smiled. He liked Enya. She was different from the other children, different from the other girls. She often wandered off alone and sang a happy song. Sometimes the other girls teased her. “Well, yes. It was me, but you mustn’t tell anyone.”

“Not a soul.” Enya placed her hand over her heart. She tightened her lips and widened her eyes. Her expressions almost made Eric forget where he was going.

“What are you going to do now?” Enya asked.

Eric looked at her clothes. She wore a tee-shirt with flowers and rabbits, a short jacket with a zip which was unzipped and long blue pants and

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sneakers. “You’ll do. Come on. I’ll show you my secret tree.” He raised his eyebrows and then his pointer finger. “But tell no-one. It’s our secret, okay?”

“Okay.” Enya shrugged and followed Eric into the trees.