



The Three Furies (Erec Rex)

By Kaza Kingsley

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Introducing himself to the Nightmare King at first seems like the easiest task that Erec has faced. But when he learns that the Nightmare King traps souls for eternity, Erec must try to accomplish what all those before him have failed to do. On top of this impossible task, Aлыпium is falling apart because the Clown Fairy has gone missing. And worst of all, Bethany has been entranced by Baskania, and to save her, Erec will have to face his worst enemy....

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Kaza Kingsley is a writer, artist, and singer who loves travel and adventure, especially in dangerous and mystical realms. Kaza is also a movie buff and reads constantly when she's not writing books. When she is not off exploring, she can be found in Cincinnati with her loving family...although she may be dreaming of the stars.

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CHAPTER ONE

Letters in Pie

HERE ARE TERRIFYING monsters in our world, like the Grumbleswitch of Alexia and the frightful Minotaur. There are beautiful places, too, like Smoolie in Otherness, which is so delightful you can feel the butterflies of disbelief fluttering in your stomach when you first arrive. There are sweet things, like the Valkyries in Lerna who spend their lives happily serving the families who grew them from seeds.

But there is nothing in the universe that is more annoying than being teased again and again by a sibling. And again. And again. And again.

Except maybe being teased by two siblings.

Erec Ulysses Rex should have been having a wonderful time at home in New Jersey. It was like having a vacation in his own house. He had been away for months doing quests to become the next king of Alympium. That was the hidden land where he had been born, where magic was still known and practiced. Now he was enjoying a well-earned break. His adoptive mother, June, had been cooking his favorite meals since he came home last month. And he didn't even have to go to school, like his five siblings did. When he returned to Alympium he would meet with a tutor instead—a tutor who taught magic. Really, he should have been enjoying himself now, in every way.

But Erec had no such luck. When his five siblings were in school he was bored beyond belief. With his mother working, there was nobody for him to talk to. And when his brothers and sisters did come home, things only seemed to get worse. Danny and Sammy, his twin brother and sister who were adopted like the rest of the kids, seemed to know exactly the wrong things to say. Or, more like, the right things to make him furious. And when Erec's face turned red it was just an invitation for Danny to dish out some more.

They teased him about being "special," becoming a king, and getting spoiled at home. But those things weren't a big deal to Erec. It was the *other* thing that they kept bringing up that tormented him—a thing that was already torturing him inside. It was the very reason he was staying in New Jersey, bored and teased, instead of returning to Alympium to finish more of his quests.

That thing was Bethany, his best friend in the world. She had traveled with him from New York into wild unknown places that they had never thought existed. She was smart and funny and a lot of fun. Beyond that, she really understood him. She knew what it was like to be different. In fact, she was the only other person Erec knew who had grown up in Upper Earth but later learned that she had been born in Alympium.

The problem was, right before he came home, he had done something to completely ruin their friendship.

Well, *maybe* he had ruined it. Erec still wasn't sure from all the snail mail letters she was sending to him.

He had kissed her.

Really, it wasn't as bad as it sounded. He *had* to kiss her to save her from a deathly enchantment that Baskania, the evil Sorcerer Prince, had put on her. But he had liked kissing her. A lot. So much that it was really starting to bother him. Kissing was not what he had in mind, not as far as his best friend was concerned.

Bethany seemed to be handling their kiss better than he was. At first her letters seemed totally normal, just chatting about Erec's dog, Wolfboy, that she was watching in Alympium for him. Then she started asking when Erec was coming back, then why he wasn't returning her letters. Erec wanted to write back. He was just confused about what to say. And the longer he had waited, the harder it seemed to pick up a pen. How would he explain why he had been ignoring her?

Part of Erec wanted things to be just like they were, when they were only good friends. And another part was terribly afraid that things really *were* the same, and they were still only friends, and nothing more. If he could just sort out his own head about things, and if the twins would leave him alone about it, maybe he could find a way to write her back and explain.

It had not seemed this bad right after, when Bethany and he were together, in person. Just a little embarrassing, but no big deal. But being away from her and dealing with his crazy, mixed-up thoughts was making it worse.

Erec shrank back into the overstuffed chair in the living room of their small apartment and dug his chin into his fist. He'd have to write her back soon. He didn't want her to think that he was mad at her. If he only knew what *she* thought about the whole kiss thing, it would help. . . .

The family's coat rack had been watching him and decided it was time to try cheering him up. The coat rack was, in nearly every sense, alive—as were the alarm clock, toaster, and toothbrush that Erec's mother had bought from a magical store called Vulcan. The coat rack skipped on its short legs into the middle of the room juggling four winter hats and a mitten. The act was surprisingly good, but Erec just crossed his arms. He had seen this performance so many times this winter that even the coat rack's best efforts couldn't make him smile anymore. The thing tried to toss the hats farther and skip higher, until it finally tripped, crashing into the couch and throwing hats all over the room.

From the hallway came the sounds of feet running and the apartment door slamming. Erec quickly grabbed a book that he had already finished and pretended that he was reading.

Danny burst into the room first, running a hand through his sandy brown hair. He was getting taller by the day, and he towered over Erec even though they were both almost fourteen.

“Woo-hoo!” Danny shouted, and plopped himself on the arm of Erec's chair. He tossed a frightened-looking snail into Erec's lap. “You got another snail mail thing. It was sitting outside near the front step. Looks like it's from lover girl again. Let's see it, dude.”

Sammy came in after him, a slender girl-version of her twin, with long hair pulled into a bow in back.

Erec stuffed the snail into his pocket. “As if. The last time I was stupid enough to open one of these in front

of you, I heard about it for weeks.” He was relieved that the snails gave their letters only to the people they were sent to. The only problem was that Danny and Sammy seemed to be experts at finding his letters no matter where he put them.

Danny winked at him. “I understand. It’s obviously true love, or you wouldn’t need to hide anything.” He grinned. “Ah, the secrets you two must have. . . .”

Erec bit his lip, trying to keep himself from whipping the letter out of the snail just to prove Danny wrong—which, of course, was exactly what Danny wanted. Danny would find *something* in the letter to make fun of. Something small that Erec wouldn’t have even noticed. And then Erec would start to wonder what that little thing meant. Which Danny probably knew would happen. Which was making everything going on in Erec’s head worse and worse.

Sammy walked over, swinging her backpack around before dropping it on a chair. She bowed low to Erec, nearly touching her head to her knees. “King Erec,” she said when she stood. “I understand your queen has sent you another love letter.”

Erec scowled at her. “Give it a rest, Sammy. Just because you don’t have a boyfriend, you don’t need to be all over my case.”

Sammy’s face lit up. “Did you hear that, Danny? He admitted it! That’s the first time he admitted he was Bethany’s boyfriend.” She smiled at him. “We’re making progress.”

“Ugh!” Erec dropped his head into his hands. “I didn’t say that at all.”

There was only one thing he could do to get rid of them. It was a cheap trick, but it worked every time. He looked up at the twins with a grin, and played with his eyes.

Erec had once had a dragon friend named Aoquesth. The dragon had given him both of his eyes before he died saving Erec in a battle. They had been attached to the back of Erec’s own eyes by a magician-surgeon. In the beginning it had been hard for Erec to swivel his eyes in their sockets so that his dragon eyes faced out, but after practicing at home, rotating his eyes had now become second nature.

Sammy backed away, knowing what was coming. She hid her face with her hand. “Oh, no . . .”

But Danny wasn’t expecting it. Erec rolled his eyes up and up until he saw all the way into the darkness of their sockets. Seconds later his dragon eyes emerged into view. The room looked bright green as he looked up through the slitlike pupils. He rolled them slowly to the left until he was looking into darkness again, and then from the right his normal eyes appeared.

Danny watched him a moment, trembling. Then he walked away with a queasy look on his face.

Erec smiled. It was a cool thing to be able to do. And a darn shame that he had to hide it from the other kids in New Jersey. Wouldn’t it be fun to get a reaction from someone that had never seen magic?

Heck, even people who knew all about magic would probably scream if they saw him do that. He was the only one ever to have a dragon eye, let alone two.

The only person who didn’t seem to mind watching him roll his eyes around was his adopted brother Trevor.

Redheaded Trevor, nine years old, sat down by Erec's feet on the floor and looked up, watching with a quiet reverence. Trevor had his own way of looking at the world. He didn't speak much, and most people thought he didn't understand what was going on. But every now and then he would pop up with some amazing statement that showed he not only got it, but he was quite brilliant.

Once Danny and Sammy went into the kitchen, Erec pulled the snail out of his pocket and slid out a long slip of white paper. Bethany's handwriting was scrawled on it. It looked like she wrote it in a hurry.

Erec,

I hope you are okay. I'm really starting to get worried that something is wrong. Are you angry at me? I hope you don't mind that I e-mailed your mother. I thought that maybe you were missing or that something horrible happened to you. But she said you were fine.

So why aren't you writing me back? Did I do something wrong? If so, please tell me so we can get over this. I really don't understand.

Like I said before, you should come back here soon. I've been getting these weird ideas in my head. Something is telling me that I need to leave this house and go find Baskania. I know it sounds crazy, but I'm having a harder time resisting it. Something is making me want to go, bad. I have a feeling that if I do go, I'll find him easily, too.

But what will I do if I do find him? I mean, I'm supposed to be hiding from him. I know that. Maybe if I found him, I could talk to him and that would make everything better. Oh, I don't know. None of it makes sense.

Anyway, I'm sure if you were here I would know the right thing to do. I miss you!

Your friend,

Bethany

Erec's heart sank when he read the letter. He had not been a good friend at all. Now was the time to write her back. So what if he was confused about things and didn't know what he wanted? He could just keep that all to himself.

He stuffed the paper back into his pocket when the twins walked back into the room. What was she talking about, though? Wanting to find Baskania? That was crazy. The evil Shadow Prince, Baskania, wanted to capture her. He was convinced, from a prophecy he had heard, that Bethany held the secret that would let him learn the Final Magic. With that power he would have ultimate control over life and death. Just what Baskania didn't need.

Erec's father, King Piter of Alypium, had assured him that Bethany would be safe in his house, as long as she didn't leave. Her older brother, Pi Cleary, would be there too, to watch over her. But Bethany knew better than to leave. What was coming over her? She wasn't making this up just to get him to come back, was she? She was probably beyond frustrated that Erec never answered her letters. But no . . . Bethany would never make things up like this.

Danny pulled a paper out of his pocket and read it, a funny look on his face. "Weird. Check this out, guys."

Sammy looked at the letter, then sat down on the couch and stared at it harder. “I’ve never seen anything like this. It looks like it’s written in . . . *pie*.”

“That’s what I was thinking,” Danny said. He sat next to her and stared at the paper. “Blueberry pie, actually.”

“Uh-huh.” Sammy nodded. “I thought it was boysenberry, but you’re right. It’s blueberry. How did it get in your pocket?”

“No clue. Someone must have slipped it in without me noticing.”

Erec’s curiosity got the better of him. “What are you guys talking about?” He sat on the other side of Sammy and looked. Symbols covered the page, and they seemed sloppily drawn in a purplish mess, as if someone actually had dipped a stick into a pie and wrote with it. “Maybe this was drawn with some kind of dye . . . or a falling-apart marker, maybe.”

Both Danny and Sammy looked at him like he was crazy. “It’s pie,” Danny said. “That’s pretty obvious. But what worries me is what it says.” He leaned the note toward Erec, a concerned look on his face.

Sammy nodded, but Erec only stared harder at the page. He had no idea why they thought it was obvious that this was written in pie—and no clue what it said. The symbols made no sense at all. “You guys understand this?”

“You don’t?” Sammy said. “It’s pretty clear. I’m hoping it’s a sick joke.”

Danny raised an eyebrow. “What’s not to understand here? Maybe true love has finally gotten to your brain.”

Erec grabbed the paper and studied it. The smudges looked like a thick, messy exclamation point, followed by a pattern of small smears and then an upside-down rainbow and a small handprint. After that was a box completely filled in with blueberry pie filling, or whatever the note was made with.

“Guys, I’m thinking this is just a bunch of stains. Someone probably used this paper instead of a napkin.”

Danny lowered his eyebrows at Erec. “Don’t be a dope. This is as simple as a message with an eye, a heart, and the letter *U*. I love you. You know, like your girlfriend writes you in her letters.”

Erec swallowed down the anger brought up by that comment. “All right, then. What does this thing say?”

Sammy looked at him strangely, as if he really should know already. She pointed at each blotch in order. “This footprint is smudged, showing that someone was running. It says we must run away. Then the splattered pie after it says ‘Be careful,’ like someone got a pie in their face.”

“What?” Erec was incredulous. “How can you tell that is pie in someone’s face? It looks like rain to me.”

“Rain?” Danny looked as amazed as Erec. “This is totally obvious. The frowns and the handprint say there are bad men coming to capture us. And the dark box says go hide, right away.”

“Eew—kay.” Erec raised his eyebrows, but the twins were too caught up in the letter to notice.

“This isn’t funny,” Sammy said. “Is someone trying to scare us?”

“I don’t know.” Danny went to look out of a window. When he didn’t see anything unusual he sat back down. “There’s nothing we can do. Just keep an eye out for other strange things, I guess.”

Neither of them looked happy. In a moment the door opened and Nell came in with her walker. “Hey, Erec. I found a snail mail for you outside by the front step.”

Another one? Erec went and got it from her. Who could this be from? He was too curious to wait to open it this time. Could Bethany have written back so soon?

Erec,

Something is really wrong with me. It’s getting harder and harder for me to stay in the house. I’m really fighting it, but I have to go out and try to find Baskania. I don’t know what’s making me do it, but I don’t think I can control it anymore.

If I do go, I’m going to take a bunch of snails and paper with me so I can let you know where I am.

Don’t worry, I have a feeling everything will be okay.

Bethany

Erec gulped. Everything would *not* be okay. Had she gone crazy? He grabbed some paper and wrote her back.

Bethany,

Do not, I repeat, do not go out of the house. You would be in terrible danger. I don’t know why you want to go find Baskania. He’d capture you right away.

Just talk to King Piter about it. I’ll try to come soon.

And sorry for not writing back sooner. I was just being stupid.

Erec

If he only had his mother’s magical Seeing Eyeglasses. They let the wearer see and talk to the person they missed the most, so he could get in touch with Bethany right away.

He had no sooner given the letter to the snail when a crash resounded. Bits of sparkling glass shot through the room. A silver baton with glittering blue ends had been thrown through the window and hit the wall not far from where Erec stood.

“What’s this?” Danny picked up the baton. A paper was tied to it with string. He unfolded it and grew pale.

“What is it?” Sammy took it from his hand. Erec saw more smudges on the paper, like the one before, except this time they were brown. “It says, ‘Get away now. You are in danger.’ This one is written in chocolate cream pie.”

“Are you sure that’s what it says?” Erec asked.

Sammy shot him an annoyed glance. “Of course. I think we should call Mom. *Someone* threw this in here, and they must still be outside.”

Danny and Erec looked out the broken window, but they saw nobody on the lawn. Trevor appeared behind them and pointed. “Look.”

“What?” Erec didn’t see anything.

“It’s another snail. I bet it’s for you.”

Erec rushed out and scooped the small creature up. In a flash he pulled a crumpled paper from its thin, flat shell.

Erec,

I had to go out. I’m being careful, don’t worry. I just wanted to let you know.

I have more snails with me. If anything happens I’ll let you know.

Bethany

Erec smacked his head. *No!* He had to get to Alypium fast and find her. As he ran back inside, though, there was another crash.

A red ball shattered another window. Everyone looked afraid to pick it up. Finally, Danny went over to it and pulled a note off of the ball. “It says, ‘Get away from your apartment immediately, or you will be captured. Run.’” He closed his eyes a moment. “I’m not sure if we should believe this note. At least Zoey is safe at day care until Mom picks her up.”

Danny picked up the phone and called their adoptive mother, June, on her cell phone, and told her what happened. She told them to call the local police station, which was a few blocks away, and see if an officer would come pick them up. She would meet them at the station.

Trevor tapped Erec on the shoulder and pointed out the window. There, unmistakably, was another snail shell sitting on the grass.

Erec gasped. Whether or not crazy people were throwing things into their apartment, nothing was going to keep him away from this letter. Trembling, he ran outside to pick it up.

Erec,

Sorry. I must be worrying you. I know I’m being an idiot. I just have to let you know I decided to go to the Green House, where President Inkle lives. I don’t know why, but I’m sure Baskania is there, and he is waiting for me.

I wanted to let you know where I was in case anything happened.

If it does, I am forever sorry.

Your best friend,

Bethany

Erec ran back inside, torn between fear and anger. How could she do this? She knew better. It was like walking into sure death. How could he stop her?

Then, all of a sudden, he stumbled across the floor. The room was spinning. He grabbed onto a wall to steady himself.

A scene flashed through his mind like a short movie:

*Bethany wandered in through the front doors of the **Green House**, a blank look on her face. Five paces into the building a tall man grabbed her by the arm and pulled her forward. She did not resist.*

*Thanatos **Baskania** stood at the other end of the room, laughing. Tall and imposing in his flowing black pin-striped cloak, he smirked at **Bethany**. Three eyes glared from his forehead and one from each cheek. “Let her go, **Mauvis**. She’ll come to me on her own—won’t you, my dear? I see you are right on time.”*

***Mauvis** let go, and **Bethany** continued straight toward **Baskania**, looking confused.*

***Baskania** pointed at her slowly, eyes narrowing. A puff of smoke shot from his finger, and . . .*

The vision faded.

Erec looked down at his hands, where dragon scales had appeared. They were now fading away. It had happened to him again. He had just had another cloudy thought.

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Users Review

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