

'Hilarious and wild ...
I love it!'
LOUIE STOWELL

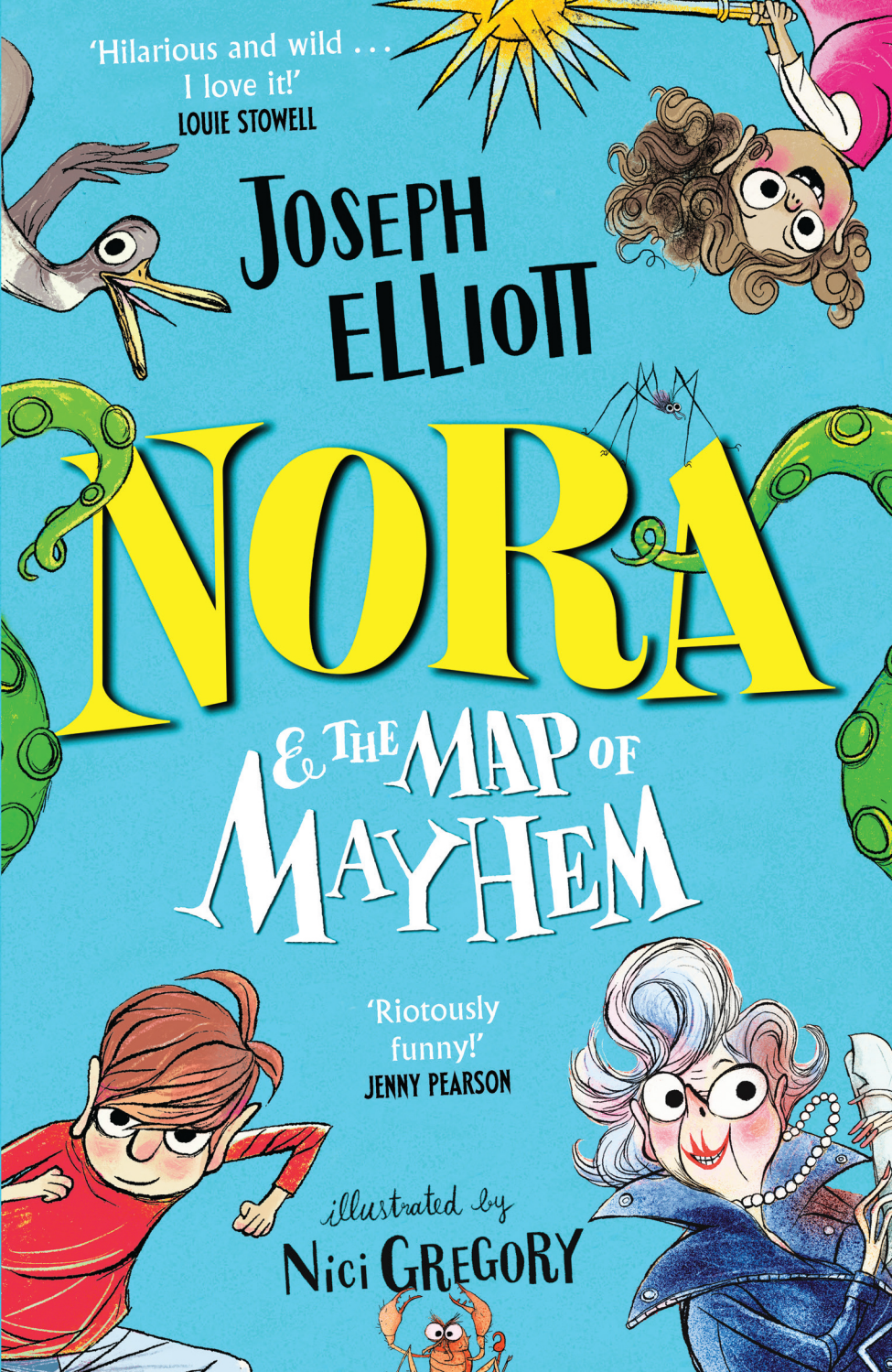
JOSEPH
ELLIOTT

NORA

& THE MAP OF
MAYHEM

'Riotously
funny!'
JENNY PEARSON

illustrated by
Nici GREGORY





‘Okay, okay, come in,’ I eventually said.

They all bundled into my skinny hallway.

‘*Efharistó*, Yaya Nora, thank you,’ said Niko, giving me a kiss on both cheeks. Niko is Liam’s husband. He’s 50% Greek, 50% Iranian and 100% gorgeous.

‘Don’t forget, Atticus doesn’t like sweetcorn, Autumn is allergic to horses, and we have a strict “no screens after 7 p.m.” policy,’ said Liam, placing two large suitcases at the bottom of the stairs.

‘Yes, yes, yes,’ I replied, not really listening to what he was saying. As much as I adore Liam, he does like to fuss.

‘Okay, I’m going to have to go or I’ll miss my flight,’ he said. ‘See you tomorrow night around seven.’

‘Off you go, then,’ I said, shooing them towards the door. ‘Say goodbye to your dads, kids.’

‘Goodbye, Daddiiiiiiiiieeeeeees!’ shouted Autumn, in that annoying way small children like to speak.

‘Bye, Dad. Bye, Pappá,’ said Atticus, barely looking up from his phone.

‘No, that’s not good enough for me,’ said Niko, wrapping his long arms around Atticus.

‘You hug too hard, Pappá!’

‘It’s the Greek way. It shows how much I love you.’ He planted a big kiss in the middle of Atticus’s forehead, then scooped up Autumn for a farewell squeeze.

‘Do I get one too?’ I asked.

‘Of course, Yaya, the biggest hug for you.’

Niko gave me a tight embrace (which was very lovely), then Liam gave me a hug and thanked me again. He kissed Atticus and gave him a hug, then Autumn gave Liam a hug but didn’t want to let go, so I had to take her and give her another hug . . . Basically there was a whole

lot of hugging until eventually Liam and Niko gave a final wave and left.

I shut the door and, after all the hullabaloo of the goodbyes, it was suddenly very quiet in my little cottage. Atticus was back on his phone – which was making tedious pingping noises – and Autumn was running up and down the hallway, occasionally head-butting the front door.

I got a squirming feeling in my stomach, like it was filled with prawns rolling around on little prawn roller skates. It was the feeling that I had made a mistake. A big one.

It was the first time I’d ever looked after the two children on my own. Niko had a conference in Birmingham on the same day that Liam had to be in Stockholm, which is how I ended up dumped with them. I can never quite remember what Niko does, but it’s something to do with the environment. Essentially, he’s one of the people who’s going to save us when the ice caps

melt and the world falls apart, which – at the rate we’re going – looks like it’s going to be sooner rather than later.

‘I need a poo,’ said Autumn, looking up at me with big, innocent eyes, as if she’d just told me she loved me. Those eyes don’t fool me.

‘Well, you know where the toilet is,’ I said, pointing at the doorway under the stairs.

‘You have to wipe my bottom afterwards.’

The prawns in my stomach were now doing double-speed somersaults. I’m too old and too dignified to be wiping little girls’ poeey bottoms.

‘Can’t your brother do it?’ I looked at Atticus.

He glanced up from his screen long enough to give a small, pained shake of his head, then wandered into the living room and plonked himself on my leopard-print sofa.

That pretty much tells you all you need to know about Atticus and Autumn, but to summarise:

Atticus: 10 years old. Dull. Annoying. Always on his phone.

Autumn: 3 years old. Wild. Annoying. Needs help wiping her bum.



Now can you understand why I was dreading spending the whole weekend with them? Of

course, at that point, I had no idea quite how catastrophic the next two days were going to be . . .

»→ *That was a little teaser, by the way – something to keep you interested, in case you got bored by that part where not much happened except a lot of hugging.*

I won't go into all the (smelly) details, but safe to say, Autumn had her poo (so very, *very* smelly. What does that girl eat?!), and I held my breath and did the necessary wiping. Don't worry, I'm not going to mention *every* time someone in the story has a poo, but in this case it felt necessary. There is one more instance of a lot of poo coming up later, but again, I only mention it because it's integral to the story. If you're averse to big piles of poo, I suggest you skip over pages 287-293.

Afterwards, Autumn informed me that she was hungry. Instead of just telling me, like any

normal child would, she let me know by opening and slamming all of my kitchen cupboard doors while chanting, 'Where the cookies?! Where the cookies?! Where the cookies?!' She sniffed the shelves as she went, like a hound on the hunt.

I'd finished off my last pack of ginger nuts the night before, so she had to make do with a Ryvita (which she did not enjoy) smothered in syrup-soaked plums (which she enjoyed a little too much). The plums were a gift from Uncle Edward about eight Christmases ago, which Autumn found by rooting around at the back of my odds-and-ends cupboard. They were a couple of years out of date, but that didn't seem to bother her.

She was just shovelling in the last mouthful when there was a loud thump on the front door. My first thought was that it was Liam or Niko – and my heart skipped a beat at the possibility