



**Praise for *Maggie Blue and the White Crow***


‘A deeply thoughtful, inventive and sophisticated fantasy’  
**Nicki Thornton, author of *The Last Chance Hotel***

‘Stunning and immersive . . . explores family, identity and  
purpose’ **E L Norry, author of *Fablehouse***


‘A sophisticated tale which will leave readers desperate for  
the third instalment’ ***Just Imagine***

‘Another thrilling and distinctive fantasy adventure’  
***Books for Keeps***

‘Tingling with a tangible current of emotion and a thrill-a-  
minute story’ ***Lancashire Evening Post***



‘It’s not easy to create a convincing fantastical realm that  
explores real-world, emotional issues with such seamless  
strength, but in this beautifully-written book Anna Goodall  
does exactly that’ ***LoveReading***



**Praise for *Maggie Blue and the Dark World***

SHORTLISTED FOR THE COSTA  
CHILDREN’S BOOK AWARD

‘What distinguishes this well-crafted debut is  
the freshness of its prose and the way it sidesteps  
clichés . . . happily the first of a series’  
***The Sunday Times Children’s Book of the Week***

‘Awash in sinister villains and perplexing plights . . .  
bursting with invention’ ***The Financial Times***

‘Bizarre, brilliant, fantastical, & exciting . . . one to watch’  
**Kiran Millwood Hargrave**



‘Thrilling and wonderfully imaginative, whilst also exploring mental health issues in a sympathetic and original way’ ***The School Librarian***

‘This compelling fantasy adventure explores the nature of happiness, friendship and trust. Engaging characters and a gripping plot will hook readers from the start’ **Book Trust**

‘If you have fans of manga, fans of headstrong, flawed characters, witty and brave sidekicks and truly gut-wrenching monsters, then this is the one for you. I can’t recommend it enough’  
**Lucas Maxwell, School Librarian of the Year**

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**Bookwagon UK**

‘Deeply thought-provoking . . . I recommend to all’  
**Louisa Reid**

‘The characters are so well drawn and delightfully eccentric that one can become totally engaged in this well-developed story’ **LoveReading.co.uk**

‘A story about how important it is to care for those around us and to help each other through the inevitable dark times in our lives’ **Spread Book Joy blog**

MAGGIE BLUE  
*and*  
THE WHITE CROW

ANNA GOODALL



**GUPPY  
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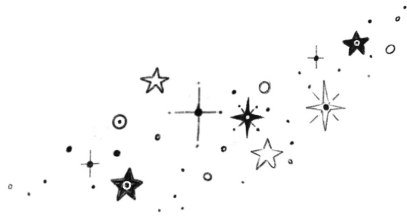


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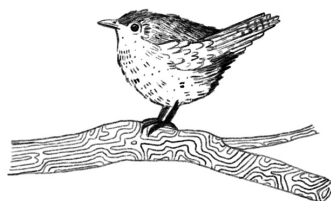
ALSO BY ANNA GOODALL

Maggie Blue and the Dark World

# PART ONE








# 1

## MISTRESS NOBODY

The blue wren was poised on a branch, so light she swayed with it in the breeze that tried and failed to pierce the late June heat. She was watching the girl, as she had watched her through the winter, spring, and now the summer.


Maggie Blue was lying on a rug in the sunshine beside the considerable spread of the one-eyed tabby cat, her trusty companion. The girl was small and slight – she did not take up much room. Her fine hair trailed messily out behind her. Her grey eyes, now closed, were considerably too large for her face and often changed to green or light grey: the colour of the sea in this world.

The wren had not tried to read her; those were not her orders. She had only observed. The girl was shy and there was some deep melancholy in her that Bathsheba couldn't help but feel radiating from her diminutive form. This was alleviated by occasional bursts of laughter, at other times,




a fierce anger that lit up her eyes and coloured her skin deep red.

Maggie Blue could cross between the worlds; in this way Bathsheba knew that she was extraordinary. But she spent her life doing very ordinary things. She walked to school; she sat in class; she walked home; she lay on the dusty couch talking to the cat (Bathsheba had never come across a human capable of talking to an animal, that too was curious) and watched images flicker across a paper-thin screen. The girl slept, she bathed remarkably often, she cried occasionally, she had bad dreams, and recently she'd been spending all her time with two other children: one pale and very fair, the other slender and dark.



The sound of a shrill bell rippled out into the garden from an open window of the flat. The girl stirred drowsily then shot up and ran into the house. At the same time every week the metallic rings would summon Maggie to speak into a curious black machine that Ulrich had explained to her was called a telephone.



Bathsheba flitted over to a lilac bush that grew up against the kitchen window so she could peer in and watch the girl standing in the narrow dark hallway. As always when she talked on it at this particular time, a crease appeared in her forehead and her huge eyes seemed to focus on something far away, something that caused her pain.

The wren watched for a little while until she heard a familiar screech coming from the back of the unkempt

garden behind her – it meant her grouchy comrade, Ulrich, was ready to take over.


She sang out her trilling melodic response and then, with one more quick glance at Maggie, flitted noiselessly across the garden until she landed upon the great oak. It astonished her, perhaps more than anything else about the people in this world, that they considered trees almost as inanimate objects, as dumb and lifeless as the crumbling brick wall the tree grew beside, on which the fox cubs played at dusk.

She alighted next to the great grey owl and shifted. So that when Ulrich swivelled his enormous head, he saw beside him a very small blue-haired woman with sharp matching blue eyes that were already laughing at him. With anyone else he would have been insulted, but for some reason he couldn't get angry with her.

'What's Mistress Nobody up to today then?' he asked grumpily.



'Not a thing,' Bathsheba replied airily, knowing this would annoy him. 'She's on the telephone.'

'With a night of inactivity to follow, I can only imagine.' Ulrich spat down onto the parched soil below, or spat as well as an owl could, which was not very well at all. 'The day Mistress Nobody does something interesting, believe me, I will go into shock. I think Roda is trying to punish me.' He ruffled the feathers on his great head. 'But for what?'



Without waiting for a reply, he flew up into the air. Bathsheba watched as he landed amidst the leaves of the neighbour's dying ash tree. With his extraordinary sight, he could spy on Maggie from anywhere in the garden. He looked so fierce sitting there, his huge eyes permanently astonished, that Bathsheba began to laugh. If something didn't happen soon he would explode.

But then a sense of bad things to come shivered through her. She stopped laughing – war was raging in her homeland. Soon she would be called away and they would long for these dull boring days on the watch; soon everything would change, and not for the better.





## 2

# THE DINOSAURS

‘**D**id you know that the dinosaurs lived on earth for 165 million years before they became extinct?’

It was the middle of July and boiling hot. In the distance she could hear the shouts of kids playing football and dogs barking and running after balls over the yellowed grass of the big field. The sky was a blue dome above Maggie’s head, both endless and bound by some invisible force. Everything was slow and lazy.

Except for Will who kept talking: ‘And *we’ve* only been here for seven million. I mean, isn’t that incredible?’

Ida was leaning back on her elbows, the long blades of grass vying to brush against her smooth brown arms. ‘Yes, Will, incredible. But it’s not like they did anything interesting in their 165 million years, did they? They just ate each other.’

‘Well, that’s not strictly true. Many of them were herbivores, like the stegosaurus, for example. But anyway,

the meteorite is probably the most interesting part,' Will hurried on, trying to hold their attention. 'Everything right at the epicentre was incinerated instantly. Whoosh! The excess carbon in the air destroyed what was left, or almost everything that was left. It was like a nuclear bomb times a million.'

'That's a scientific figure, is it?' Ida asked.

Will continued as if he hadn't noticed the heavy sarcasm. 'Then there was all this dust, so much dust swirling around the entire earth. Seventy-five per cent of all life forms were destroyed. It was dark all the time, no daylight.'

Maggie started slightly and looked over at Ida, but she didn't flinch – she never flinched.

'I mean, actually, we could do our whole project just on the meteorite,' Will said.

Ida sat up now, mockery flickering in her eyes. She smiled. 'I mean we *could*. But then again, who wants to do a project about a lump of rock that took out some reptiles millions of years ago? Come on, Will. It's like medieval people or something. Who cares?'

'And the suffragettes are *so* fascinating?'

'They were brave and brilliant women who changed our world. They paved the way for the opportunities girls and women have today.'

Ida's opinions often sounded like things she'd read in a book that she just parroted out verbatim. The thought

flickered into Maggie's mind in unwanted rebellion and she quickly snuffed it out.

Will sniffed. 'I find them boring.'

'Just because they're women.'

'Incorrect.' Will pushed his heavy blond fringe out of his eyes and away from his perspiring forehead, and the thick hair stayed stuck out at a strange angle. Even in the shade it was boiling.


Ida suddenly turned to her. 'What do you think, Maggie?'

Maggie didn't like it when they put the spotlight on her. She blushed slightly and shrugged. 'I'm fine with either.'

Ida and Will both groaned and then carried on arguing. Maggie couldn't understand why they liked to argue with each other so much. For her part, she didn't care whether they did their summer project on dinosaurs, suffragettes, medieval people or medieval people's suffragette dinosaurs. It was all just school to her . . . a monotonous flow of boring tasks and judgements that she never seemed to come out of very well.


Her mind drifted away from their conversation again. She could no longer imagine rain or cold or grey skies; it was like there had always been a heat wave. And she, Ida and Will had always been friends.

At first Ida had used the summer project as the reason to call, but then she'd stopped bothering to explain and Maggie began to assume they would see each other every




day. Will and Ida both moaned about how bored they were, so Maggie made sure she did the same. But secretly it was the best summer holiday she'd had for a long time.

After everything that had happened in the Dark World, life had been very calm and very normal. And although when they'd gone back to school in January, Ida hadn't *exactly* kept her promise about them sitting together and everything, she, Helena and Daisy no longer bothered her, and occasionally Ida said hello and smiled. Then Mrs Thomas had put them on the same biology project, and by chance, Will had joined them having come in late from a dentist's appointment. Though Maggie wondered if Mrs Thomas was trying to help her out, because she was bottom of the class, and the other two were at the top.



Will Snowden was kind of a loner, but he had this amazing confidence that seemed to radiate off his helmet of white-blond hair. No one bullied him even though he was a bit of a know-it-all, and he genuinely didn't seem to care what other people thought of him. Maggie wished she could be like that.



After the project, they started doing their homework together in the library occasionally, or Will and Ida did their homework and Maggie copied their answers. Ida even walked home with her once in a while. On these walks Ida never asked Maggie any questions. She just talked about herself and her friends and what they were doing in non-stop chatter. She was careful never to mention the Dark

World or how afraid she'd been or any of the things she'd told Maggie that day in Moss Hill on Christmas Eve. And Maggie understood – she did not want to talk about it either.

And then in the summer holidays they'd formed this unlikely trio. (Helena and Daisy were both away, but still.) Maggie had never been in a group before and it was such a good feeling, the feeling that you belonged with other people. She wasn't going to let anything jeopardise it.

She tugged absentmindedly at the narrow silken end of the French plait Ida had done for her that morning – Ida had pulled her hair so tight it still hurt her scalp. They had looked in the mirror admiring her handiwork and Ida told her she looked amazing, but Maggie knew it was a lie. Especially standing next to Ida. Her hair all scraped back like this only made her huge grey eyes look even bigger and weirder. She would never be beautiful like her friend.

And despite having turned thirteen a few weeks ago, Maggie had barely grown at all. Ida, on the other hand, had got at least two inches taller. This gave Ida's mother the perfect opportunity to give Maggie her daughter's old clothes. Now Maggie had good jeans (albeit with the ends rolled up several times), and lots of expensive T-shirts and jumpers, all still carrying a delicious whiff of the fabric softener the Beechwoods' housekeeper used.

Maggie knew it was very kind, but secretly she couldn't

help feeling a solid nugget of shame whenever she thought about it . . . so she tried not to think about it.

The other two were standing up now. Shielding her eyes against the insistent sun, she saw Ida look down at her, a silhouette against the sky. ‘Come on.’

Maggie put her old shoes on and the worn inner soles were deliciously cool on her bare feet. Her feet were much smaller than Ida’s, which was something of a relief. Her trainers were badly scuffed and had holes in them, but she preferred it to more hand-me-downs – this way she wasn’t a total charity case.

They crossed the grass and went up a cool alley between two brick houses until they emerged into a street with a row of shops and an Italian restaurant near to where Will lived. Maggie glanced at Ida and wondered if she’d ever been to Will’s house. She thought about Ida’s diary: the revelation that Ida actually liked Will, *liked* him. She’d never asked Ida about it, though she kept meaning to. She wondered if they ever spent time together without her? But again, she pushed the thought away. Why was she always trying to ruin things?

They went into the newsagent. It was dark and slightly dank inside. Mr Floros greeted them in his soft high voice with the usual refrain.

‘Don’t steal anything,’ he said from behind his paper.

Will peered into the freezer, trying to make the decision between a Cornetto, a Feast and a Twister. It was a genuinely tough call.

‘Are you going anywhere on holiday, Maggie?’ he asked, his back still turned to her as he rummaged around in the freezer cabinet. Will was going to Norway to see family and then Spain, and Ida was going to Italy for several weeks.

‘Um, we’re going back to Norfolk for a bit. Not as exciting as you guys, but . . .’ She felt her cheeks redden and inwardly cursed herself for it.

She had no idea why she’d started lying now and again, but little fibs just kept slipping out. Maggie could feel Ida’s laughing eyes upon her – her friend had the uncanny ability to know when she was making stuff up – but Maggie didn’t turn to meet her gaze. She felt relieved that she didn’t feel Ida’s emotions any more, or anyone’s for that matter. That had all stopped since she had come back from the Dark World.

‘Oh, cool. Norfolk’s great,’ said Will, and he made a grab for a strawberry Cornetto.

When Maggie got back to Milton Lodge, the one being whose mind she could always read was waiting for her on the front door mat. He scowled as she approached and his tail flickered with irritation.

‘Is it too much to ask that you or the old bag keep some kind of regular hours? A cat could easily atrophy waiting for one of you to turn up.’

Maggie smiled indulgently as Hoagy, the old one-eyed cat and her best friend, deigned to leave his spot to come

and curl around her legs. His soft heavy tail tickled her legs and she stroked his tatty fur as he purred heavily. In truth, Hoagy was not only her best friend; he was the person, or creature, she felt most comfortable with.

They walked together round the side of the house to the messy garden that was yellow and parched, sizzling in the heat. The man on the radio this morning had said it was officially a drought.

Maggie looked up at the heavy blue sky. ‘When was the last time it rained, Hoagy?’ she asked.

‘Pah! How would I know?’ he retorted. ‘Now are you going to get me the rest of my tuna out of the fridge, or aren’t you?’

She opened the back door and found the place empty and full of stale heat. Her Aunt Esme was out, as per usual. ‘Come on then.’

It was a source of great frustration and some humiliation to Hoagy that, even teetering on his sturdy hind legs, he wasn’t able to open the heavy fridge door. Once Maggie found him, wild with desperation, clawing at the rubber seal trying to get at some scraps of leftover salmon Esme had promised him and then promptly forgotten all about.

Maggie emptied the half tin of tuna into his bowl with a handful of cat kibbles and soon his chops were delicately partaking. Afterwards he came and stretched out on the sofa beside her and began his rigorous cleaning procedure,

which took up most of his time, though he always looked exactly the same afterwards.


He had fully recovered from his ordeal in the Dark World, save for the long impressionistic scar that Miss-Cane-the-wolf had ripped down his belly. But the old cat had lost his taste for a fight since only just surviving their adventures. These days he much preferred to be endlessly fussed over and gloriously well fed by Esme, who adored him beyond all reason.

The official line was that since his great adventures in another world, he had become bored by petty suburban squabbles, which were quite frankly beneath him. Thus he had willingly conceded his three-street territory (the evening slot) to a huge slob of a ginger tom called Franz. According to Hoagy, Franz had a violent temper, an intimidating body-weight ratio and an alarmingly fast right hook. He was also two years old. From the comfort of Esme's old sofa cushions, Hoagy assured Maggie that his former streets would not be changing paws for some time. Not that he cared, of course.

Now his one eye looked at her expectantly. Since his recovery, Hoagy's formerly rather esoteric film tastes had relaxed, and he was currently obsessed with comedy films from the eighties and nineties.



'So are we going to watch *Big* or *Mermaids*?'

When Maggie had been recovering from her own injuries inflicted on her by the now-deceased Miss-Cane-the-wolf,



Esme had dug out a TV, an ancient VCR player and some videotapes for them to watch. It turned out she had a surprisingly big and varied collection. These days Maggie and the cat would often sit and watch stuff together, as Hoagy rarely felt like sneaking into the old cinema down the road like he used to.

Esme would join them in the evening sometimes, though of course Maggie's aunt assumed that Hoagy was dozing and/or thinking of chicken, not compiling mental notes on actors and story structure. The videos were often very bad quality and lines would flicker up the screen, or a crucial scene would have been accidentally taped over by a short clip from the *Antiques Roadshow*. But Maggie found their little film club comforting, especially in summer when the warm air wafted in through the open door, and the light from the tiny TV screen illuminated their three faces. It felt like they were a family then, albeit a somewhat unconventional one.



But that afternoon Hoagy really did doze off and after a while, ripples of interference invaded the video just as Tom Hanks was playing 'Chopsticks' on the huge toy-store keyboard. Maggie tried bashing the old TV, but a sea of white-noise snow had descended and eighties New York was lost in the blizzard.

Reluctantly she gave up and turned it off. It was cool in the dusty living room but outside the heat still beat down relentlessly. She felt anxiety gnawing at her: she didn't like

to be on her own any more. When there was no one else about, she often thought about the Dark World and what she'd seen there.

In her dreams she would see Mr Yates' awful, distorted face pressed against the hot glass, or Miss Cane-the-wolf coming towards her, or Frank's body lying in the woods, or she would feel Eldrow's hands around her throat. And now she found herself thinking about Dorothea Dot, the old lady, the moon witch and Esme's great friend. She had disappeared suddenly after Christmas . . . apparently without trace, though now they knew . . .

The phone rang in the hall, relieving Maggie of her unwanted thoughts. There was only one phone now – the museum piece that used to sit by the sofa had finally packed up and not been replaced. Maggie made no move to pick up and soon Esme's embarrassing answerphone message played out.

After the beep, a familiar ice-cold voice cut through the hot air: 'Good afternoon, Ms Durand. This is Dr Naradnam calling from the hospital. Please do return my call at your earliest convenience.' Then the line went dead.

Maggie hated this woman's voice. She didn't think anyone with a voice like that could possibly look after or care about anyone else. She always imagined that this doctor considered her mum like some sort of lab rat. She started walking round the living room, unable to be still all of a sudden.

‘Could you *please* stop your incessant pacing?’ came a grouchy voice from the sofa after a while.


‘Could you *please* shut up?’ Maggie snapped back.

She didn’t bother to wait for Hoagy’s response, but burst out into the back garden. The heat rammed into her, but its intensity made her feel better. The old wall at the bottom was still broken down; the garden was still a mess. It pleased her. She walked down and sat on the crumbling pinkish bricks and felt her skin prickling in the sun.

This was the other thing she tried not to think about: her mum. She was still in hospital with severe depression. But Dr Naradnam had phoned one day to say that Cynthia was becoming increasingly paranoid, which was not in line with her usual behaviour. She claimed that someone she knew had been murdered and was convinced that she was being watched and would be next. They had increased her medication, because that was all the doctor ever suggested they do – she didn’t seem to have any other advice except ‘increase the medication’. Why did it take seven years to learn that?

Esme didn’t bother to let Lionel Brown know. Maggie’s dad had been in Toronto for the last nine months with his new girlfriend, and had only managed a few postcards and the odd call. Maggie couldn’t say she missed him that much and he certainly wouldn’t be any help to her mum: he obviously didn’t care about either of them at all.

Maggie could feel her nose beginning to burn so she



got up and walked back inside. She needed to pull herself together and stop thinking about the past. The truth was that, in so many ways, her life had never been better. She had friends and a sort-of family. And best of all, she was free. Nothing had happened since her dramatic escape with Ida and Hoagy; the Dark World had let her go for ever.

