



Prologue

The first day of school is always frightening. Moving up a year involves new teachers and textbooks, new facts and fractions, new words and bigger ones at that! But, for an entirely new student, a first day also brings the unpleasant possibility of not fitting in right away and potentially eating lunch alone, wondering if every new face is friend or foe.

If a new student happened to be particularly prone to worrying, they might not sleep the night before and instead spend the entire time staring wide-eyed at the ceiling, fearing the worst, terrified that not only will they not know

any of the answers in class, but everyone, teachers and students alike, will hate their guts.

That's what it was like for Harriet Harper, anyway. She'd just moved to Crowood Peak, and the thought of not making any friends was her worst fear. Harriet hadn't had many friends before. She thought maybe it was because she was a little bit odd. She wasn't allowed friends round for tea, she'd never had a birthday party or a sleepover, and if she was ever invited to other children's houses, she had to turn down the invitation right away. She loved her family, but she recognized that they were . . . different.

At her old school, most children were dropped off at the gates in ordinary cars with school bags packed neatly and their ordinary lunch boxes filled with ordinary cheese-and-pickle sandwiches. Harriet's grandma, on the other hand, insisted on driving Harriet to school in the sidecar of her motorbike that left a trail of smoke wherever it went. Harriet's school bag always had the right textbooks, but there were usually pages missing or they were chewed at the edges. Her teacher never believed her excuse that the dog ate her homework, mainly because she didn't have a dog. And at lunchtime no one ever sat next to her due to the fact that her lunch often consisted of a huge slab of meat (usually very rare). Her dad had been a butcher then, you see, and was very serious about the subject.

‘It’s all about the protein!’ he’d say at dinner as he carved yet another thick joint of beef.

Harriet’s family and their odd ways certainly lost her the few friends she had at her old school. After a while, everyone stopped inviting her, and a while after that they stopped hanging out with her altogether. Harriet knew there was a good reason she wasn’t allowed to do all the things other kids could do, so she didn’t dare complain too much. She just wished things were different.

So Harriet Harper decided to put her best foot forward on her first day at school in Crowood Peak and dressed herself in her favourite outfit. She donned her leather jacket, which was covered in thorns from all her favourite roses (she’d sewn them on herself). She painted her lips the darkest shade of black she had (it was called Bottomless Pit), and she styled her raven-black hair the best way she knew how: with an entire can of hairspray misted from root to tip so almost every strand zigzagged away from her face like lightning bolts. She’d also painted her nails a bright blood-red to finish off the whole look.

Harriet dressed this way to outwardly reflect how she wanted to be. Someone cool and confident. Someone who didn’t jump at shadows or feel tears prickle the backs of their eyes when they felt the least bit anxious or scared. She dressed like the person she longed to be in an attempt to hide the person she was.

Harriet stared into the mirror and smiled. She was nervous, sure, but this was a fresh new start.

On the other side of town, Orville Thomas was also a little nervous on his first day at school, but it was mixed with a huge slice of thrill. Yes, Orville had been *thrilled* to move to Crowood Peak. It was a small town, but it had so much history.

He wasn't worried about making friends because he seemed to find that quite easy, no matter where he went. Maybe that's because he had no real interest in making friends, so the ones he did make were simply a bonus. School was about learning, but Orville also had a secret mission, and he intended to keep his eyes on the prize.

He packed his brown satchel with a notepad and a pencil case filled until it was bursting at the seams with pens in all different colours. He slid his arms into the tweed jacket passed down to him by his dad, who'd got it from his dad, who'd got it from his dad, who'd got it from his, and from his, and from his, and from his, who'd got it from his brother! It was still in perfect condition and had all the names of those who had worn it before Orville embroidered on the back. Every one of them had sewn their name themselves, and Orville intended to do so as well (which meant he'd have to learn how first, but he'd cross that bridge when he came to it).

The final thing Orville needed before heading to his new school was his camera, which was on a black leather strap around his neck, ready to snap his first pictures of Crowood Peak.

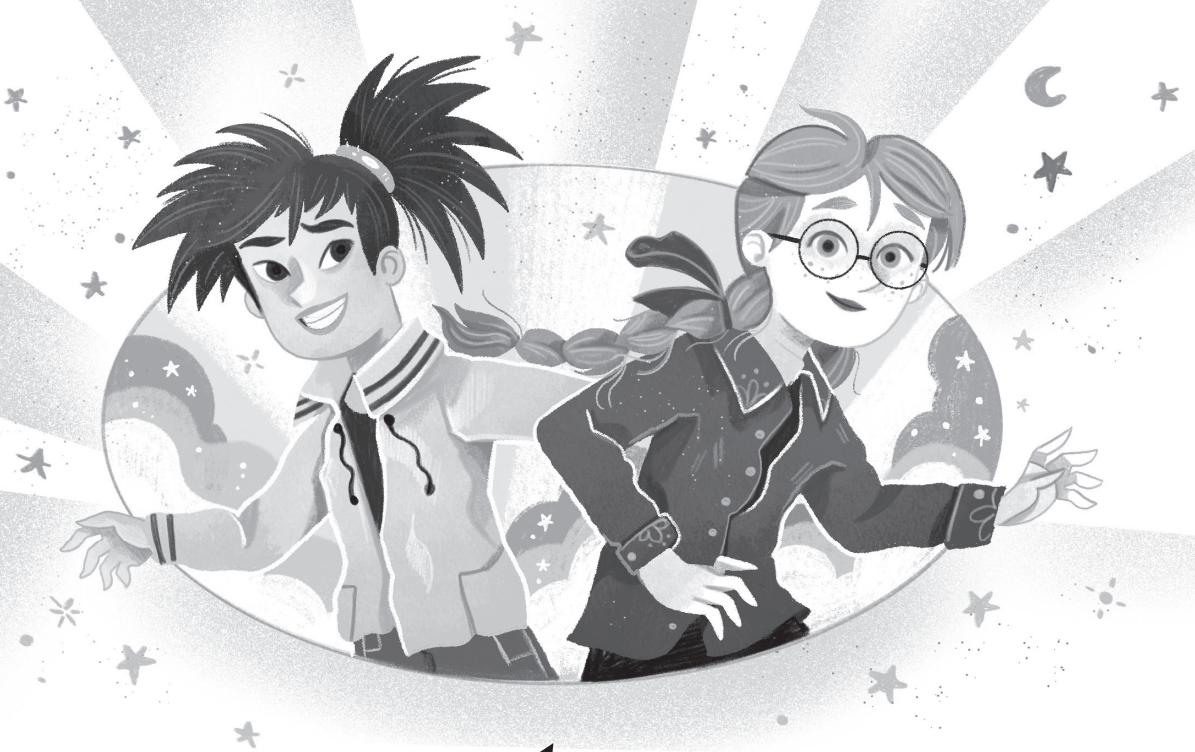
Spencer Sparrow also loved taking photos, but mainly of himself. He snapped a selfie on his phone, then looked at it and sighed. Spencer took great pride in his appearance. He always styled his red hair in a quiff with one curl that coiled down the centre of his forehead. He wore his favourite earrings, which looked like little spiders and hung down from his ears as if they were dangling from a web. Over his all-black outfit, he put on a floor-length velvet coat in his favourite colour, forest green (he'd painted his nails the night before to match).

Spencer threw his brown leather satchel over his shoulder, checked the weather to see that there was a thick cover of cloud over Crowood Peak that day and then didn't stop to say goodbye to his parents before sauntering out of the house with his trusty black umbrella tucked under his arm.

The early September mornings had a chill to them in Crowood Peak. All the leaves had begun to fall and settle like a crumpled orange blanket across the dewy grass. Harriet jumped in every puddle on her way to school and often stopped when the scent of someone's breakfast caught in her nostrils and made her belly growl.

Orville saw most of his journey to school through the lens of his camera and snapped at least fifty photographs before he got there. That was almost as many photographs as the number of times Spencer checked his quiff in any reflective surface he could find: car mirrors, shop windows, duck ponds, you name it. Yet he was still smoothing his hair when he arrived.

Amid the hustle and bustle on the path leading to the school, these three new students found themselves standing close together, gazing up at the gates. A mixture of terror and glee washed over them in the autumn breeze. Harriet, Orville and Spencer all drew a deep breath and took their first steps into Crowood School.



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Magic in Crowood

Ever since Maggie and Ivy had helped banish the curse of the Crowood Witch, the Double Trouble Society had become (almost) *famous*. Everyone had wanted to shake hands with the witches and congratulate all the children on their triumph, but Maggie and Ivy became town heroes for a brief time. The mayor of Crowood Peak was quite beside himself trying to think of what he could do to commemorate their achievements.

‘We could rename the library! How about the Eerie Tomb Library? Oh . . . no . . . that won’t do at all! Perhaps something at the cemetery?’

‘Honestly, Mr Mayor,’ Ivy said, ‘there’s nothing we want. We’re just happy everyone’s safe and that Emerald’s not evil any more.’

‘Yeah,’ added Maggie. ‘You don’t need to name anything after us. But maybe the occasional free biscuit or two from the Cosy Cauldron cafe wouldn’t go amiss – OW!’ She yelped as Ivy elbowed her.

‘We don’t want anything at all,’ said Ivy firmly. ‘We’re just happy that everyone’s safe.’

Maggie and Ivy were also happy because the Double Trouble Society now had LOADS of new members.

There was Maggie and Ivy, of course, but since the return of the Crowood Witch they’d recruited Eddie, the brightest boy in their year, and Isaac, who had the most curious and adventurous mind they knew. Then there was creative and crafty Jennifer, who had made them all their own broomsticks (whether they could fly them or not). Jamie had a real eye for fashion and made sure that everyone had the perfect costume for the upcoming Halloween bash. Jemima no longer had a bad thing to say about anyone (well, hardly ever . . .) and Darla was keen to learn what everyone had to teach her, like a little sponge soaking up all their knowledge.

Then, of course, there were the original members of the Double Trouble Society: Bill Eerie, Ivy’s father, and Max Tomb, Maggie’s dad. Bill and Max had been friends since they were at school together, and their antics had earned

them the name the Double Trouble Society, given to them by their exasperated teachers. The two fathers then bestowed the name on their daughters when they appeared to be as inseparable as Bill and Max had been at that age.

After the shenanigans at last year's Festival for the Twelve, Bill and Max were thrilled to see the society they'd begun welcome so many new members. However, they did wish their first adventure had been a little less . . . rocky. (Occasionally, both Bill and Max still found tiny bits of gravel stuck in their teeth after being turned to stone by the Crowood Witch, but they were mostly just happy to be alive.)

Finally, the newest and arguably most exciting recruits to the Double Trouble Society were the twin-sister witches, Amethyst and Emerald. They had joined after all the very scary goings-on during the last blue moon and Emerald's regrettable attempt to eat the heart of a Crowood child. She didn't, though, and swore hand on heart that she wouldn't ever attempt to do so again.

After something like that, however, it did prove a little hard to gain everyone's trust. Luckily, when Amethyst and Emerald proved what an asset two magical beings could be to the little town of Crowood, everyone fell in love with them.

Amethyst's and Emerald's powers were very different and served two very different purposes. Amethyst was a moon witch, meaning that she was most powerful at night-time. If

anyone had trouble sleeping, Amethyst could not only help them doze off quickly and peacefully, but she could give them happier dreams too. If any nocturnal creatures were rooting through bins or digging up flower beds, Amethyst was able to talk to them and politely ask them to stop.

She was also incredible at making potions using moon water. This was any rainwater that Amethyst had collected under a full moon and ‘charged’. She used it in almost all her spells like a cook would add salt and pepper.

Emerald, on the other hand, drew her power from the earth. Since she’d arrived, it was as if the ground beneath her feet had sensed her presence and come alive. Suddenly the grass was greener, and trees sprang to life and bore fruit when before you’d be lucky to get a single apple. Flowers bloomed wherever she walked, and she had helped everyone’s gardens grow and become prettier than ever before.

However, now that autumn was here, it was the most colourful season the people of Crowood Peak had ever seen. The chestnuts were so big you could barely hold one in your palm; there were so many apples and blackberries that Mrs Anderson, the owner of the Cosy Cauldron, couldn’t bake pies fast enough.

Emerald had even managed to grow things that never grew, and would never grow, in Crowood like cinnamon, bananas and pineapples. There was no limit to what she could make sprout from the earth, and this meant that everyone’s

kitchens and tummies were full, and everyone's gardens and vases were even fuller. Crowood Peak was a happier and more spectacular place because of the two witches.

Amethyst and Emerald also couldn't believe their luck. While not everyone had been accepting of them (some people still crossed the street when passing Hokum House and others steered their children away from the two witches in the supermarket), most of the townsfolk had embraced them, powers and all. It meant more to Amethyst and Emerald than they were able to explain, so they showed their gratitude through their magic.

For every apple crumble and rhubarb pie they were given, Amethyst made sure Mrs Anderson had the most beautiful dreams. For every glowing story Max wrote about them in the local newspaper, Amethyst gave him a potion to improve his cooking (although this was mostly because she was fed up of the smell of smoke pouring from his kitchen window every morning when he burned toast or bacon or, on one occasion, the orange juice!). Every time Max and Bill allowed Maggie and Ivy to come to Hokum House for dinner, the two witches made sure the girls went home with tummies full of the most delicious food and heads filled with only happy thoughts.

They had also started their own cleaning business in Crowood Peak. For those who were happy to accept magic into their homes, Amethyst and Emerald had come up with a range of magical products that eliminated the need to do

chores. No matter how dirty the self-cleaning dishes got, once you'd finished your meal, you just had to put them in a cupboard, close the door and say, 'Save me a job and clean yourselves!' The next time you looked, they'd be so clean and sparkly you could use them as a mirror!

The soak-and-sweep was a very well-mannered mop-and-broom set that got to work when you left the house. They worked as a team to make sure the floors were spotless by the time you came home.

Then there was the spray that made your house smell like your favourite things – freshly mown grass or gingerbread warm from the oven! All you had to do was think about the scent you wanted and then squirt the bottle. Some people made their homes smell like orange groves, some went for campfires on the beach and others chose freshly folded linen.

All in all, Crowood Peak had become a wonderful place to live, and there was no more talk of demons or curses or eating hearts. Just magic and dreams and hope for the future of the town and its children.

THE END

Ha! Did you really think that was it? No chance! There's much more to come – all kinds of spooks and scares – just you wait. Keep reading to find out what scrape the Double Trouble Society have got themselves into this time.