



Silverborn

THE
MYSTERY OF
MORRIGAN
CROW

A **Nevermoor**
BOOK

JESSICA TOWNSEND

Orion

ORION CHILDREN'S BOOKS

First published in Great Britain in 2025 by Hodder & Stoughton Limited
This paperback edition published in 2026

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Text copyright © Jessica Townsend, 2025
Illustrations copyright © Hannah Peck and Beatriz Castro, 2025

The moral right of the author and illustrators has been asserted.

*All characters and events in this publication, other than those clearly
in the public domain, are fictitious and any resemblance to
real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.*

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without
the prior permission in writing of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated
in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published
and without a similar condition including this condition being
imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 510 10736 6 (PAPERBACK)
ISBN 978 1 510 11446 3 (WATERSTONES)

Typeset in in 11/15.75pt Sabon LT Pro by Six Red Marbles UK, Thetford, Norfolk
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The paper and board used in this book
are made from wood from responsible sources.



Orion Children's Books
An imprint of
Hachette Children's Group
Part of Hodder & Stoughton Limited
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

The authorised representative in the EEA is Hachette Ireland, 8 Castlecourt Centre,
Dublin 15, D15 XTP3, Ireland (email: info@hbgi.ie)

An Hachette UK Company
www.hachette.co.uk

www.hachettechildrens.co.uk



CHAPTER TWO

Nightbeacons and
Fireblossoms

Four months earlier

Hallowmas,
Autumn of Three

They lit the candles from the fireblossom trees this year. It was Morrigan Crow's first time marching in the Black Parade on Hallowmas night, so she wasn't sure how the Wondrous Society usually did it – regular old matches, she supposed. It gave her a small thrill of pride to see the brass candleholders passed from hand to hand, each wick held up to a low-hanging branch in its blazing autumnal coat of orange and gold.

I did that, she thought with satisfaction. The ever-burning trees lining the driveway up to her school building, Proudfoot House, had been bare, black-limbed spindly things for over one hundred years. Cold and dead. She'd brought them back to life using the Wondrous Art of Inferno – a power she couldn't quite fathom and a skill she hadn't *entirely* mastered, though her grasp of both grew stronger every day.

And here they were, weeks later. Still burning brightly.

‘Loving yourself sick right now, aren’t you?’ said Cadence Blackburn, following Morrigan’s gaze up to the trees. Her face was deadpan, but her eyes gleamed with amusement. ‘Just carve your name into the trunks and be done with it.’

‘Shush,’ Morrigan muttered, shoving her friend in the side.

Together they watched an older Society member reach up to a fireblossom branch, a black wax candle held in his trembling hand. The wick flared into life, illuminating the man’s sad smile.

Extremely rare and valuable, the long-burning ‘nightbeacon’ candles were brought out of storage every year for Hallowmas and carried into the grounds in a heavy wooden chest. The nightbeacons had an actual job to do that night, but they also played an important symbolic role in the Black Parade. Each one represented a member of the Wondrous Society who had died, and was carried by a member of their own unit who marched in their memory. Morrigan wondered who the old man was remembering. She tried not to imagine lighting a candle for anyone in Unit 919. The friends she’d met three years ago were now considered her siblings, and the idea of any of them not being by her side was unthinkable.

She shivered, pulling her heavy cloak tighter against a sudden sharp breeze. Autumn had curled its bony fingers tight around Wunsoc and strangled every breath of warmth from it, and tonight it felt as if winter wasn’t far behind.

But any displeasure Morrigan might have felt at the cold was smothered by her nervous anticipation of the Black Parade. Hundreds of members of the Wondrous Society stood in rows with their respective units, the formation stretching all the way up the long tree-lined drive, ending on the broad marble steps of Proudfoot House. They were waiting for a signal from the Elders and then they’d be off, through the gates and along the memorised parade route through Nevermoor.

On Morrigan’s other side, Hawthorne Swift was chatting

with Mahir Ibrahim and fidgeting as if he had itching powder in his trousers. When he hitched up his cloak to adjust the clothes underneath, Morrigan caught a confusing glimpse of brown fur and plastic talons.

‘What in the Seven Pockets are you wearing?’ Mahir demanded, before Morrigan could open her mouth. ‘We’re supposed to be in uniform!’

‘On *Hallowmas*?’ said Hawthorne with disdain, picking a stray bit of lint off his furry chest. ‘No, thank you. I’m ditching this cloak as soon as we get to the end of the parade route. I won’t waste another *second* of my night not being a werewolf. You not wearing yours?’

Morrigan snorted. ‘Hawthorne, *nobody’s* wearing a costume yet except you.’

He raised his eyebrows and looked pointedly over Morrigan’s shoulder. She turned to see Cadence briefly open her cloak, showing a glimpse of an old-fashioned ivory lace frock and two painted bite marks on her neck, dripping with red.

‘I’m a vampire,’ Cadence said flatly. ‘Grr.’

On Mahir’s other side was Francis Fitzwilliam, whose eyes darted around restlessly, though the rest of him was frozen like a rabbit in a hunter’s beam, and on *his* other side was Lambeth Amara – perfectly still, small and solemn, perhaps the most dignified thirteen-year-old Morrigan had ever met.

‘I don’t want to march in the Black Parade,’ Francis whispered. ‘It gives me the heebie-jeebies.’

‘Oh, it’ll be fine,’ Mahir said in what sounded to Morrigan like a deliberately hearty, bracing tone. ‘Nothing bad’s going to happen. Right, Lam?’

Lam looked up in surprise. ‘How should I know?’

‘You’re the one who’s meant to . . . you know.’ Mahir made a vague wiggly fingered gesture around her head. ‘See what’s coming!’

‘*Some* things,’ she corrected him. ‘Not everything. I’m a short-range oracle, Mahir, not the weather report. Anything could happen.’

On Lam’s other side, Thaddea Macleod towered above the rest of their unit, shoulders back and eyes ahead, blazing with pride and eager to get going. Next to her, Anah Kahlo was a bundle of nervous excitement and had been told three times already by the older scholar behind her to stop bouncing on her toes. Finally, on the end of Unit 919’s row was Archan Tate, who’d chivalrously insisted on swapping spots with Anah, taking the outside position himself. He’d said it was in case of any shenanigans from the crowd, but they all knew it wasn’t the people in the crowd Arch was worried about. Not the living ones.

Morrigan craned her neck to look up the long driveway behind them, trying to spot a certain head of bright red hair amongst the crowd of black cloaks. Jupiter would of course be marching with his own Unit 895, none of whom Morrigan had met. Earlier that day she’d wondered aloud whether she might finally meet some of them tonight, but Jupiter was doubtful they’d stick around after the parade.

‘Busy people, Mog,’ he’d told her. ‘A bunch of busy, boring grown-ups. Things to do, places to go, people to see. You know how it is.’

Yes, she’d refrained from saying. I know exactly how it is.

Morrigan had never known anyone with quite so many things to do, places to go or people to see as her patron. Jupiter North was many things: the owner and proprietor of Nevermoor’s finest hotel, a captain in the League of Explorers, a volunteer bookfighter at the Gobleian Library and a Witness, which gave him the ability to see things others couldn’t . . . meaning he tended to stick his nose into every problem, riddle, adventure and escapade that came his way (and an *awful* lot of those seemed to come his way). All this

combined to make him just about the busiest grown-up in the entire Unnamed Realm.

She spotted him, finally – his ginger head nearly as bright as the candle he held – and began to wave, then stopped.

‘Oh,’ she said aloud, to nobody in particular.

Jupiter was holding a candle.

Morrigan swallowed, counting the members of his unit. There were six in the line-up, but only Jupiter carried a nightbeacon candle. That meant one member of his unit was dead – someone he’d been close to, probably – while another two simply weren’t marching tonight. (That was unusual, but not unheard of. Participation in the Black Parade wasn’t mandatory, only *very strongly* encouraged by the Elders.)

Feeling a prick of sympathy and curiosity, Morrigan resolved to ask Jupiter later who his candle was for. (Though *how* to ask such a sensitive question politely, she didn’t know.)

In the second it took her to make that mental note, something strange happened in Morrigan’s head. It felt like a shadow streaking across her vision, but not her *actual* vision. Sort of . . . across her *brain*. She’d seen, or rather *felt* something in the corner of her mind, but somehow she knew if she tried to examine it too closely, it would disappear. Like an urban fox stepping into the edge of a streetlamp’s glow, and then dashing out again before anyone could spot it.

What was that?

Was it something she’d forgotten? Something . . . she was supposed to *do*?

Morrigan stayed still, hoping the flighty thought would crystallise into something she could see or touch or remember.

‘Oi. You all right?’

‘What?’ Morrigan looked up, her unfocused vision resolving into a clear image of Cadence’s frowning face. ‘Sorry . . . what?’

‘You went funny again.’

‘Again?’

‘Yeah, all moony and faraway.’ Cadence narrowed her eyes.

‘Are you scared of the Unresting?’

Morrigan thought for a moment.

The Unresting.

Was that it? Was she scared of the Unresting? That must be it.

‘Yeah,’ she agreed, feeling oddly relieved that this explanation had been offered up. ‘Are you?’

‘Be an idiot if I wasn’t.’

‘I’m not scared,’ Hawthorne announced.

‘I rest my case.’

Before Hawthorne could respond, there was a sudden squeal of feedback from a microphone, and Elder Gregoria Quinn’s frail but amplified voice boomed from the steps of Proudfoot House. The gathered Society members hushed, turning to face her.

‘On this Hallowmas night,’ Elder Quinn began, her words ringing out across the grounds, ‘when the walls between the Living and the Dead grow thin, we will do our sacred, time-honoured duty. We will walk the streets trodden for hundreds of years by our Wondrous Society predecessors in the Black Parade.’

In the chill autumn air, the stooped woman looked like a small but mighty dragon breathing white frost from her nostrils. Elder Wong and Elder Saga stood to either side of her, as usual.

‘I shall remind you,’ Elder Quinn continued, ‘that each unit must watch over the younger unit marching ahead of them, according to tradition. Unit 919, this means you have the most important job of all. Unit 920 – the youngest and most vulnerable among us – need your care tonight. I know you won’t let them, or me, or your patrons down.’

At these words, Morrigan sensed Unit 919 standing taller, their shoulders straightening. The moment was slightly ruined by

a giggle from behind them, and a boy from Unit 920 whispering, ‘Bit dramatic.’

‘Yeah, it’s just a long walk,’ his friend agreed with a snort of derisive laughter. ‘*Most vulnerable* to what? Blisters?’

‘Oi,’ Cadence said in her low hum of a voice, twisting around to glare at them. ‘Why don’t you save this conversation for next Hallowmas, when you might have a clue what you’re talking about?’

The two younger scholars stared at Cadence with wide eyes, as if she was a ghost that had appeared out of the Gossamer. (Her ability to go unnoticed was one of the dubious benefits of being a mesmerist.)

Morrigan wasn’t sure how she felt about the responsibility of watching over these clueless numpties, but she couldn’t really blame them for their cluelessness. To Unit 920, the Black Parade was just another weird Wondrous Society tradition, a bit of pomp and ceremony to remind the city how very special they were in their black cloaks and gold pins – how very *important*.

Unlike Unit 919, the youngest scholars hadn’t yet learned the true purpose of the Society they’d pledged their lives to. As far as they (and the rest of Nevermoor) knew, the Wondrous Society was an elite academic institution and lifelong members’ club. A highly prestigious organisation of extraordinary people with extraordinary talents.

But the members of Wunsoc had another, much more secret role to play in Nevermoor. This was a dangerous city – beautiful and magical and ridiculous, but *dangerous* – more than most people would ever know, because its greatest perils were deliberately hidden from sight. The Wondrous Society saw to that.

These dangers were the relics left scattered across the city by generations of Wundersmiths – people like Morrigan, born with the ability to summon and control and create with Wunder, the

mysterious energy source that powered the realm and had a mind of its own unless you knew how to wield it.

Once upon a time, the Wondrous Society had existed to educate and elevate the Wundersmiths. Nine of them, always, born and reborn and reborn again through the Ages, one generation after another. The Wundersmiths were servants of the realm, but they were also powerful – infinitely more powerful than those they served. And power, Morrigan had learned, could be a dangerous and corrupting currency.

Until Morrigan, the Wundersmiths had been gone from Nevermoor for over one hundred years, and their creations – even the good, the great, the supremely *well-intentioned* ones – had been neglected and unmanaged in all that time. Which meant the Wunder that suffused and supported them, that was their lifeblood and skeletal framework all in one, had been left entirely to its own devices.

In some cases, that worked out just fine – the Wunderground train network, for example, was so meticulously engineered there'd been very little wiggle room for it to run wild and unchecked. *Yes*, occasionally a train gained sentience and held its passengers hostage, or a tunnel mysteriously blocked itself off for days at a time. But these minor inconveniences didn't present much of a threat to the lives of ordinary Free State citizens.

Some Wondrous Acts, however, had gone rogue, become monstrous. They had to be dealt with. That was what the Wondrous Society did: cleaned up the messes left by Wundersmiths past.

They called this secret purpose 'Containment & Distraction', or C&D for short. The Society contained the dangers by any means necessary, keeping them under control while simultaneously distracting the public from their existence. It was a never-ending, exhausting battle – a battle that every member of the Wondrous Society signed up for as children, without having the slightest clue what they were getting themselves into. Just like Unit 920.

Part of Morrigan felt smugly superior, knowing she and her friends shared a terrible and thrilling secret with the older Society members. That they were grown-up enough to be trusted with the most frightening of truths, while these younger scholars – these mere *children* – were still being kept in the dark.

Another, quieter part of her wished she was still one of them. A mere child, kept safe in the dark.

‘We will march in a dignified manner that befits our standing in the community,’ Elder Quinn was saying when Morrigan refocused her attention. ‘Remember, the eyes of Nevermoor will all be on you tonight. Make the Wondrous Society proud.’

With those words, a clock tower somewhere in the distance struck midnight, sending a chill down Morrigan’s neck. Elder Quinn gestured for them all to turn around. Hundreds of pairs of black boots swivelled, crunching softly on the gravel.

There was something waiting outside Wunsoc. Morrigan felt a wave of disquiet enter the campus like a gust of wind as the gates swung open.

Like the rest of her unit, she’d been told what to expect, and how to respond. That she wouldn’t see them, but she would *feel* them.

That she mustn’t react. Mustn’t let her eyeline stray. Mustn’t, in fact, show by any word, gesture or expression that she was aware of their presence. They wouldn’t like that.

The Unresting didn’t like to be noticed.