



An extract from  
**Nevermoor**



There were three loud knocks on the front door. Silence fell.

‘Who on earth would visit at a time like this?’ Ivy whispered. ‘Reporters? Already?’ She smoothed down her hair and dress, picking up a spoon to check her reflection.

‘Vultures. Trying to get the scoop, are they?’ said Grandmother. She pointed at the maid. ‘Send them away with your most contemptuous sneer.’

Moments later they heard a brief, murmured conversation from the entrance hall, followed by the fall of heavy boots coming up the hallway, the maid’s timid protests echoing close behind.

Morrigan’s heart pounded with each footstep. *Is this it?* she thought. *Is this Death, come to take me? Does Death wear boots?*

A man appeared in the doorway, silhouetted by light.



# Nevermoor

He was tall and slender with wide shoulders. His face was half obscured by a thick woollen scarf, and the remaining half was made of freckles, watchful blue eyes and a long, broad nose.

All six-plus feet of him were decked out in a long blue coat over a slim suit with mother-of-pearl buttons – stylish but slightly askew, as if he'd just come from a formal event and was in the process of undressing on his way home. Pinned to the lapel of his coat was a small golden W.

He stood with his feet wide apart and hands stuffed into trouser pockets, leaning casually against the doorframe as if he had spent half his life standing in that spot and couldn't think of a place he felt more at home. As if he himself owned Crow Manor and the Crows were merely his dinner guests.

His eyes locked on to Morrigan's. He grinned. 'Hello, you.'

Morrigan said nothing. There was silence but for the ticking of the clock on the wall.

'Sorry I'm late,' he continued, his voice slightly muffled by the scarf. 'Was at a party on a remote island in Jet-Jax-Jaida. Got chatting to the *dearest* old man, a trapeze swinger – fascinating chap, once swung over an active volcano for charity – and I forgot all about the time difference. Silly old me. Never mind, I'm here now. Got your things ready? I'm parked out the front. Are those parsnips? Lovely.'

Grandmother must have been in shock, for she didn't utter a word as the man snaffled a large piece of roast parsnip straight from the platter and ate it, licking his fingers with relish. In fact, all the Crows seemed to have lost the capacity for speech, not least of all Morrigan.

Several moments passed as their uninvited guest rocked on



# Nevermoor

his heels and waited, politely expectant, until something occurred to him.

‘I’m still wearing my hat, aren’t I? Goodness me. How rude.’ He arched an eyebrow at his dumbfounded audience. ‘Don’t be alarmed; I’m ginger.’

‘Ginger’ was an understatement, Morrigan thought, trying to hide her astonishment as the hat came off. ‘Ginger of the Year’ or ‘King Ginger’ or ‘Big Gingery President of the Ginger Foundation for the Incurably Ginger’ would have been more accurate. His mane of bright copper waves could probably have won awards. He unravelled the scarf from his head to reveal a beard that was only slightly less shocking in hue.

‘Um,’ Morrigan said, with all the eloquence she could muster. ‘Who are you?’

‘Jupiter.’ He looked around the room for signs of recognition. ‘Jupiter North? Jupiter North of the Wondrous Society? Your patron?’

Her patron. Jupiter North. *Her* patron. Morrigan shook her head in disbelief. Was this another prank?

She’d signed the contract. Of course she’d signed the contract, because it had been wonderful, *glorious* to pretend – just for five minutes – that it was all true. That there was really something called the Wondrous Society, and that they’d invited *her* – Morrigan Crow, of all people! – to join them. That she would live long enough to start the mysterious trials in spring. That some thrilling future waited for her on the other side of Eventide.

Of course she’d signed that blank space at the bottom. She’d even doodled a little black crow next to her name, to cover up a splotch of ink that had dropped from her pen.



## Nevermoor

Then she'd thrown it on the fire.  
She hadn't for a second believed that any of it was real. Not really. Not deep down.

Corvus at last found his voice. 'Preposterous!'

'Bless you,' said Jupiter as he renewed his attempts to usher Morrigan from the dining room to the hallway. 'I'm afraid we really do have to hurry, Morrigan. How many suitcases do you have?'

'Suitcases?' she echoed, feeling dim-witted and slow.

'Dear me,' he said. 'You *have* packed, haven't you? Never mind, we'll pick you up a toothbrush when we get there. I trust you've already said your goodbyes, but we have time for a quick round of hugs and kisses before setting off.'

Following that extraordinary suggestion (another first for the Crow household), Jupiter rushed around the table, squeezing each of the Crows in turn. Morrigan wasn't sure whether to laugh or run away when he leaned in to plant a loud, wet kiss on her father's horror-struck face.

'That is quite enough!' spluttered Corvus, rising from his chair. It was one thing for a man to arrive unannounced at Crow Manor on Eventide, but quite another to bring the notion of physical affection with him. 'You are nobody's patron. Leave my house immediately, before I call for the town guard.'

Jupiter smiled as if tickled by the threat. 'I *am* somebody's patron, Chancellor Crow. I am the patron of this slow-moving but otherwise delightful child. It's all legal and aboveboard, I can assure you. She signed the contract. I have it right here.'

He whipped out a wrinkled, fold-creased, shabby piece of paper that Morrigan recognised. Jupiter pointed at her signature, complete with the tiny black crow that covered the accidental



# Nevermoor

ink smudge.

But that was impossible.

‘I don’t understand,’ said Morrigan, shaking her head. ‘I watched it burn to ashes.’

‘Oh, it’s a Wondrous contract.’ He waved it around without care. ‘It creates identical copies of the original as soon as you sign it. That does explain the singed edges, though.’

‘I never signed that,’ said Corvus.

Jupiter shrugged. ‘I never asked you to.’

‘I’m her father! That contract requires my signature.’

‘Actually, it only requires the signature of an adult guardian, and—’

‘Wondrous contracts are illegal,’ said Grandmother, at last finding her voice, ‘under the Misuse of Wunder Act. We ought to have you arrested.’

‘Well, you’d best do it quickly, I’ve only got a few minutes,’ said Jupiter, sounding bored. He checked his watch. ‘Morrigan, we really must go. Time is running out.’

‘I know time is running out,’ said Morrigan. ‘You’ve made a mistake, Mr North. You can’t be my patron. Today’s my birthday.’

‘Of course! Happy birthday.’ He was distracted, moving to the windows to peek through the curtains. ‘Mind if we celebrate later, though? It’s getting quite late and—’

‘No, you don’t understand,’ she interrupted. The words felt heavy and dry in her mouth, but she forced them out. ‘I’m on the Cursed Children’s Register. Tonight is Eventide. I’m going to die at midnight.’

‘My, aren’t you a Negative Nelly.’

‘That’s why I burned the contract. It’s worthless. I’m sorry.’



## Nevermoor

Jupiter was gazing anxiously out the window now, a frown creasing his forehead. ‘You did actually *sign* the contract before you burned it, though,’ he said without looking at her. ‘And who says you’re going to die? You don’t have to die if you don’t want to.’

Corvus slammed his fist on the table. ‘This is intolerable! Who do you think you are, waltzing into my home and upsetting my family with this nonsense?’

‘I told you who I am.’ Jupiter spoke patiently, as if to a senseless child. ‘My name is Jupiter North.’

‘And I am Corvus Crow, the state chancellor of Great Wolfacre and a ranked member of the Wintersea Party,’ said Corvus, puffing up his chest. He was on a roll now. ‘I demand that you go at once, and allow me to mourn the death of my daughter in peace.’



‘*Mourn the death of your daughter?*’ echoed Jupiter. He took two deliberate steps towards Corvus and paused, his eyes glittering. The hairs on Morrigan’s arms stood up. Jupiter’s voice dropped an entire octave, and he spoke with a cold, quiet anger that was terrible to behold. ‘Can you possibly mean the daughter standing right in front of you? The one who is demonstrably, superbly, *brilliantly* alive?’

Corvus sputtered and pointed to the clock on the wall, his hand shaking with outrage. ‘Well, *give it a few hours!*’

Morrigan felt something squeeze in her chest, and she wasn’t sure why. She’d always known she was going to die on Eventide. Her father and grandmother had never kept it secret. It shouldn’t have been a surprise that Corvus was so resigned to her fate, but Morrigan suddenly realised that to him, she might as well already be dead. Perhaps in his heart, she’d been dead



# Nevermoor

for years.

‘Morrigan,’ said Jupiter, in a voice very different from the one he’d just used with her father. ‘Don’t you want to *live*?’

Morrigan flinched. What sort of a question was that? ‘It doesn’t matter what I want.’

‘It does,’ he insisted. ‘It matters so very, very much. Right now it’s the only thing that matters.’

Her eyes flicked from her father to her grandmother to her stepmother. They all watched her intently, uneasily, as if seeing her properly for the first time.

‘Of course I want to live,’ she said quietly. It was the first time she’d ever spoken the words aloud. The tightness in her chest eased a little.



‘Good choice.’ Jupiter smiled; the cloud disappeared from his face as quickly as it had arrived. He turned back to the window. ‘Death is boring. Life is much more fun. Things happen in life all the time. Unexpected things. Things you couldn’t possibly expect because they’re so very . . . unexpected.’ He stepped backwards, inching away from the window and reaching blindly for Morrigan, fumbling to take her hand. ‘For instance, I bet you didn’t expect your so-called death to arrive three hours early.’



Morrigan felt something powdery land on her face. Wiping it away, she looked up to see the light fixtures shaking and cracks appearing in the plaster. The light bulbs stuttered and buzzed. The windows began to rattle. There was a faint smell of burning.

‘What’s that?’ She squeezed his hand automatically. ‘What’s happening?’

Jupiter leaned down to whisper in her ear. ‘Do you trust me?’



# Nevermoor

She answered without thinking. ‘Yes.’

‘You sure?’

‘Positive.’



## ‘Welcome to Nevermoor.’

The mist cleared, revealing an enormous stone archway with silvery gates that shimmered like heat from a stovetop.

*Nevermoor.* Morrigan rolled the word around in her mind. She’d seen it only once before, in her bid letter from the Wondrous Society. It had meant nothing to her at the time, just a nonsense word.

‘Nevermoor,’ she whispered to herself.

She liked the way it sounded. Like a secret, a word that somehow belonged only to her.

Jupiter put *Octavia* into gear as he read from a screen displaying notices. ‘“Local time 6:13 a.m. on the first day of Morningtide, Spring of One, Third Age of the Aristocrats. Weather: chilly but clear skies. Overall city mood: optimistic, sleepy, slightly drunk.”’

The gates groaned open and the arachnipod shuddered into life. Morrigan breathed deeply as they entered the city. Having never been outside the town of Jackalfax, she was unprepared for what lay beyond the gates.

In Jackalfax, everything had been neat and orderly and . . . *normal*. Homes sat side by side in uniform rows – identical



# Nevermoor

brick houses on straight, clean streets, one after the other. After the first neighbourhood in Jackalfax had been built one hundred and fifty years earlier, subsequent boroughs were all built in, if not precisely the same style, similar enough that if one were looking at Jackalfax from above, one might guess the entire town was designed by a sole miserable architect who hated her life.

Nevermoor was no Jackalfax.

'We're in the south,' said Jupiter, pointing at a map of Nevermoor on the screen of his control panel. The arachnipod scuttled low through the darkened, mostly quiet streets, dodging the odd pedestrian here and there.

Evidence of the night's Eventide celebrations was strewn about the darkened streets. Balloons and streamers littered front yards and lampposts, and early-morning street sweepers collected discarded bottles in huge metal bins. Some people were still out celebrating in the bluish predawn light, including a group of young men crooning the poignant Morningtide Refrain as they stumbled out of a pub.

*'Oh, beeeeeee not weeeary, frieeend of mine—*

*'While saaaaailing o'er the tiiiiides of time – Pete, you're flat, that's – no, stop singing, you're flat—'*

*'The New Age greeets us at the shore—*

*'Just liiiike the Olden Age before – no, it goes – it goes down at the end, not up—'*

Octavia sped through cobbled lanes, narrow alleys and sweeping boulevards, some neat and old-fashioned and others flamboyantly hectic. They floated through a borough called Ogden-on-Juro that looked like it was sinking. The streets there were made of water, and people rowed little boats through



## Nevermoor

swirling mists that rose around them.

Everywhere Morrigan looked there were rolling green parks and tiny church gardens, cemeteries and courtyards and fountains and statues, illuminated by warm yellow gaslights and the occasional rogue firework.

She was up out of her seat, moving from window to window, pressing her face to the glass as she tried to take it all in. She wished she had a camera. She wished she could jump out of the arachnipod and run through the streets!

‘Check that screen for me,’ said Jupiter, gesturing with his head as he steered *Octavia* through a mess of backstreets. ‘What time is sunrise?’

‘It says . . . six thirty-six.’

‘We’re running late. Show me some speed, Occy,’ Jupiter muttered, and the arachnipod’s engine roared.

‘Where are we?’ asked Morrigan.

Jupiter laughed. ‘Have you been asleep? We’re in Nevermoor, dear heart.’

‘Yes, but where *is* Nevermoor?’

‘In the Free State.’

Morrigan frowned. ‘Which one’s the Free State?’ There were four states that made up the Republic: Southlight, Prosper, Far East Sang and of course Great Wolfacre, outside of which Morrigan had never before ventured.

‘This one,’ he said, steering *Octavia* into a side street. ‘The Free State is the free state. The one that’s actually free. State number five, the one your tutors never taught you about, because they didn’t know about it themselves. We’re not technically part of the Republic.’ He wiggled his eyebrows at her. ‘You can’t get in without an invitation.’



## Nevermoor

'Is that why the Hunt of Smoke and Shadow stopped at the clock tower?' she asked, returning to the passenger seat. 'Because they didn't have an invitation?'

'Yes.' He paused. 'Basically.'

She watched his face closely. 'Could . . . could they follow us here?'

'You're safe, Morrigan.' He kept his gaze on the road. 'I promise.'

Morrigan's excitement faltered. She'd just seen him lie so skilfully to the border guard, and it wasn't lost on her that he hadn't properly answered her question. But very little about this strange night made sense. A tornado of questions swirled in her head, and all she could do was try to grab at them as they flew by.



'How – I mean . . .' Morrigan blinked. 'I don't understand. I was supposed to die on Eventide.'



'No. To be precise, you were supposed to die at *midnight* on Eventide.' He slammed his foot on the brakes, waited for a cat to cross the road, then hit the accelerator hard. Morrigan clutched the sides of her chair, her fingers turning white. 'But there was no midnight on Eventide. Not for you. Nevermoor is about nine hours ahead of Jackalfax. So you skipped right past midnight – out of one time zone and into another. You cheated death. Well done. Hungry?'

Morrigan shook her head. 'The Hunt of Smoke and Shadow – why were they chasing us?'

'They weren't chasing us, they were chasing you. And they weren't chasing you. They were hunting you. They hunt all the cursed children. That's how cursed children die. Good grief, I'm famished. Wish we had time to stop for breakfast.'



## Nevermoor

Morrigan's mouth had gone dry. 'They hunt children?'

'They hunt *cursed* children. I suppose you could call them specialists.'

'But why?' The tornado in her head gained speed. 'And who sends them? And if the curse says I'm supposed to die at midnight—'

'I could murder a bacon butty.'

'—then why did they come early?'

'Haven't the foggiest.' Jupiter's voice was light, but his face was troubled. He switched gears to navigate through a narrow cobbled street. 'Perhaps they had a party to get to. Must be rubbish having to work on Eventide.'



'I know what you're thinking,' said Jupiter as they locked *Octavia* up in a private garage. He pulled a chain next to the vast rolling door and it descended. The air was frosty, turning their breath to clouds of steam. 'Nevermoor. If it's so great, why haven't you heard of it? Truth is, Morrigan, this is the best place – the *best* place – in all the Unnamed Realm.'



He paused to slip out of his tailored blue overcoat and drape it around Morrigan's shoulders. It was much too long for her, and her arms didn't quite reach the end of the sleeves, but she hugged it close, revelling in its warmth. Jupiter ran one hand through his wilting coppery updo and, taking Morrigan's hand with the other, led her along the chilly streets as the sky began to lighten.

'We've got great architecture,' he continued. 'Lovely restaurants. Reasonably reliable public transport. The climate's great – cold in winter, not-cold in not-winter. Much as you'd



## Nevermoor

expect. Oh, and the beaches! The *beaches*.' He looked thoughtful. 'The beaches are rubbish, actually, but you can't have everything.'

Morrigan was struggling to keep up, not just with Jupiter's rapid-fire monologue but also with his long, skinny legs, which were half-skipping, half-running down a street signposted HUMDINGER AVENUE.

'Sorry,' she panted, half-hobbling and half-limping from the cramp that was beginning to seize her calf. 'Could we . . . slow . . . down a bit?'

'Can't. It's almost time.'

'Time . . . for what?'

'You'll see. Where was I? Beaches: rubbish. But if you want entertainment, we've got the Trollosseum. You'll *love* that. If you love violence. Troll fights every Saturday, centaur roller derby Tuesday nights, zombie paintball every second Friday, unicorn jousting at Christmas and a dragonriding tournament in June.'



Morrigan's head was spinning. She'd heard stories about a small centaur population in Far East Sang and she knew there were dragons in the wild, but they were incredibly dangerous – who would think of *riding* one? And trolls, zombies? *Unicorns*? It was hard to tell whether Jupiter was serious.

They turned into a street called Caddisfly Alley, flat-out sprinting now down the twisting, maze-like backstreet. Morrigan thought it would never end, but at last they stopped outside a curved wooden door with a small sign reading HOTEL DEUCALION in faded gold lettering.

'You . . . live in . . . a hotel?' Morrigan puffed.

But Jupiter didn't hear her. He was fumbling with a brass ring of keys when the door flew open and Morrigan nearly fell

# Nevermoor

over backwards.

Looming in the doorway was a cat. Not just a cat. A *giant cat*. The biggest, scariest, toothiest, shaggiest cat she'd ever seen in her life. It sat back on its haunches and still struggled to fit in the frame. Its face was squashed and wrinkled as though it'd run into a wall, and it snuffled and fuffed just like a huge, prehistoric version of the kitchen cats at Crow Manor.

If she'd been shocked by its appearance, that was nothing to how Morrigan felt when it turned its enormous grey head towards Jupiter and spoke.

'I see you've brought my breakfast.'

Find out more about the talking cat and Morrigan's magical adventure in

