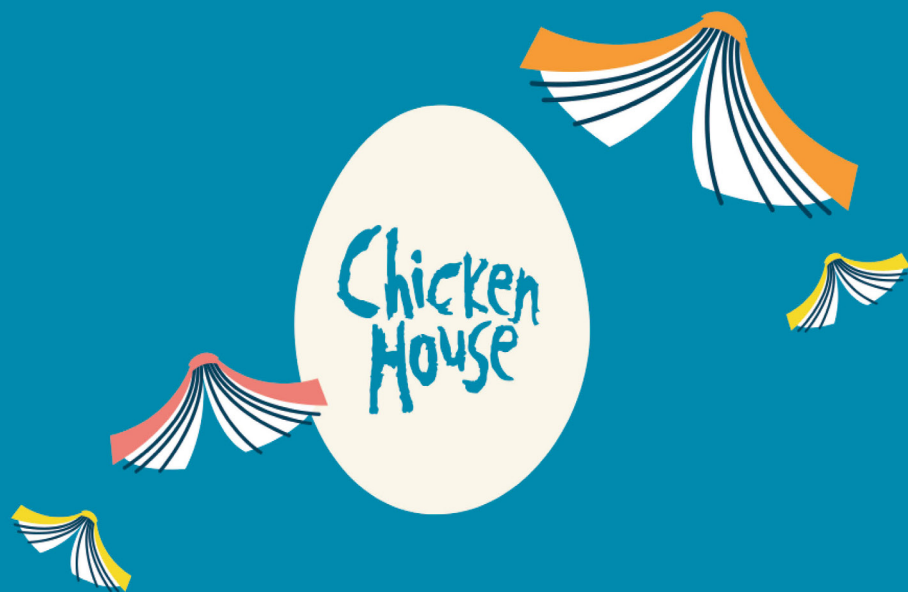


# Chicken House Rights Guide

**SPRING 2021**



COVER  
COMING  
SOON

Publication Date 3rd March 2022

# THE BALLOON THIEF

Aneesa Marufu

When Khadija's father arranges a match, she leaps at a chance to escape – a hot air balloon fighting its ropes for the sky. Soon, she is flying over the desert sands of her world, swept up in an adventure of black magic, jinn and revolution beyond her wildest dreams...

- Follows sixteen-year-old Khadija, who flees her home in a stolen hot air balloon to escape an arranged marriage
- A commercial and beautifully uplifting fantasy adventure debut by an enthralling new talent, Aneesa Marufu, drawing on the author's South Asian heritage
- Explores racism, misogyny and extremism in a highly original fantasy universe
- Shades of *Noughts & Crosses* and *Rebel of the Sands*

Price:	<b>£7.99</b>	ISBN:	<b>978-1-913696-07-8</b>
Pub Date:	<b>3rd March 2022</b>	eBook ISBN:	<b>978-1-913696-41-2</b>
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Dimensions:	<b>198x129 mm</b>	Illustrations:	<b>N/a</b>
Word count:	<b>90,000 (words approx.)</b>	Export:	<b>Yes</b>
Binding:	<b>Paperback</b>	Rights:	<b>World</b>



CHICKEN HOUSE 01373 454488 [www.chickenhousebooks.com](http://www.chickenhousebooks.com)

An extract from

# THE BALLOON THIEF

Aneesa Marufu

Another harsh wind lifted the balloon into the air. The hāri men skidded across the ground, yanking on the ropes as they fought to stifle its escape, but the balloon refused to be dragged down.

It spoke to her. Words hidden in the crackle of its fire that only she could hear. It whispered. Taunted. Teased her with the brightness of its fabric that made her eyes sting, the colour was so vivid. And all at once, her restraint crumbled. She was nothing but a hungry spark lapping at brittle firewood.

A flame flying across the grass. Sandals smacking the ground. Her scarf billowing out behind her like a pair of wings. She was every caged bird seeing the sky for the first time and realising that the pain of squeezing through the gap between the iron bars did not compare to the agony of spending a life having never tested its own ability to soar.

“Khadija!” Abba’s voice was lost to the thrumming of the blood in her ears. “Come back. Now!”

But she’d already gone too far. The burnt page of Hassan’s book crinkled against her chest as she ran.

*I can’t stay inside forever.*

The balloon broke free and shot upwards. Three feet. Five feet. Floating higher with every second. Her thighs burned as she increased her

speed, eyes locked only on the balloon.

“Don’t you dare disobey me, Khadija!”

She jumped.

There was a moment in the air when Khadija wasn’t connected to anything. Totally free. Weightless. Airborne. Then her fingers scraped the edge of the basket. She felt herself lift.

Floating feels a lot like falling but in the opposite direction. Her insides jumbled and hastily rearranged themselves. Her stomach turned to lead. She looked down.

“Khadija!” Abba cupped his hands around his mouth.

But she couldn’t let go now.

Her arms burned. The balloon was like a wild horse. Threatening to throw her. Refusing to be tamed. It took all her strength to pull herself up the side of the basket and over the edge. She landed in the basket with a thump.

“Khadija!” Abba’s voice sounded distorted, like it was coming from under water. She peered over the edge and instantly felt like vomiting.

He was already so small from up here. “Please come back, Khadija!” His voice shrank into nothingness.

Buildings, bleached to the colour of bone, became the size of her fingernail. The spidery tendrils of the Ravi river running through the length of Qasrah became a thin blue line as if she’d sketched it with a reed pen. A landscape of rolling hills, lush green against the harsh white of the cotton fields, unfolded below. Up and up she went. There was no going back down now. And despite her fear and her rage and all the emotions in between, there was only one thing she knew for certain. She didn’t want to touch the ground again.

## RIGHTS INFORMATION

WORLD RIGHTS AVAILABLE. Exc Film

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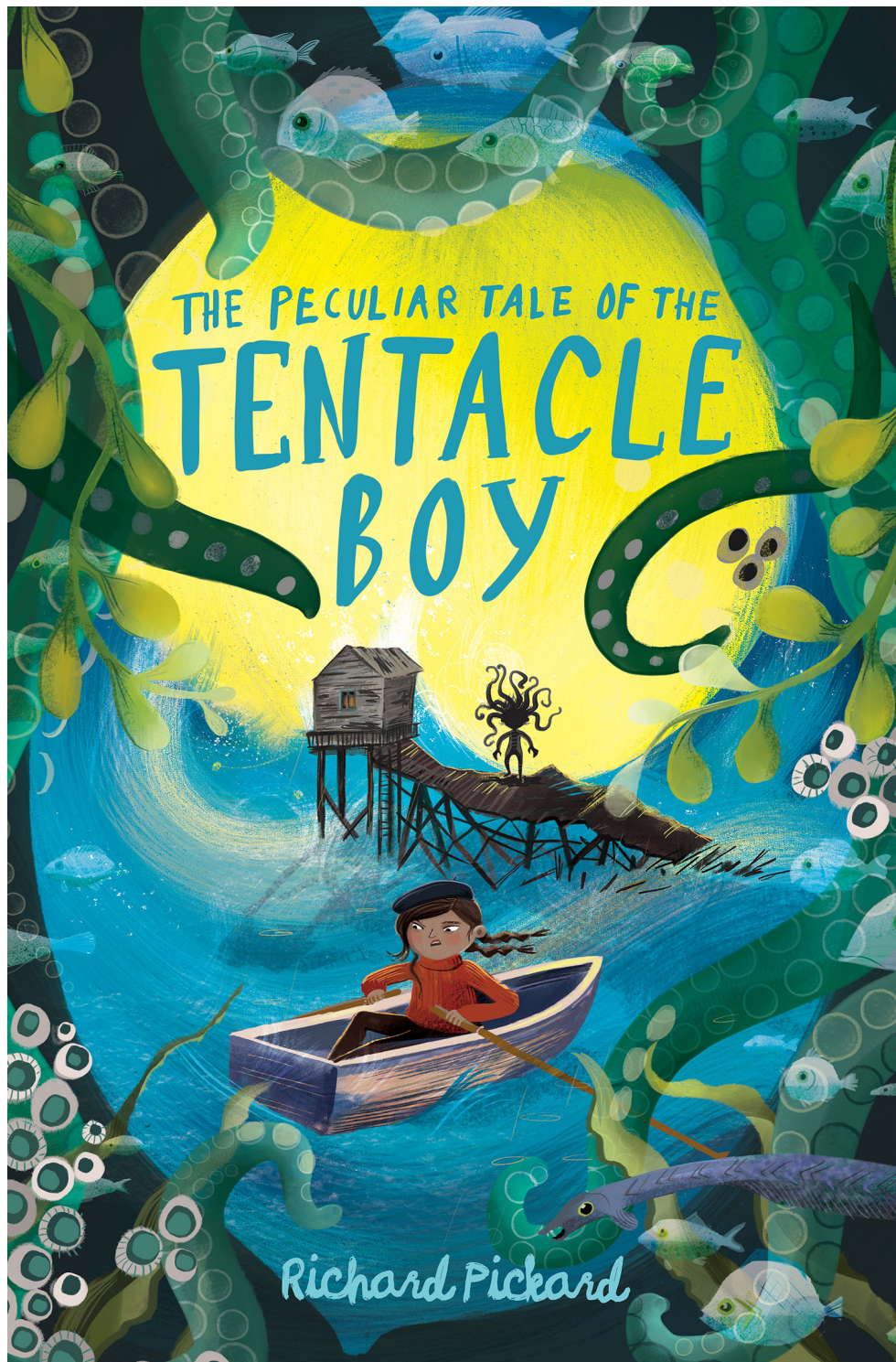


### ANEESA MARUFU

Aneesa Marufu lives in Manchester. When she isn’t running around after her toddler, she’s hunting for a new book to escape into. She was the winner of the Kimberley Chambers Kickstart Prize in 2019.







Publication Date 5th August 2021

# THE PECULIAR TALE OF THE TENTACLE BOY

Richard Pickard

When Marina discovers a boy called William with a head of tentacles and crab claws for hands, she resolves to help him unravel the mystery of his past. But danger lurks among the fishmongers of the seaside town of Merlington ...

- The debut novel by Richard Pickard, a fresh new voice in children's fiction and winner of the *Times*/Chicken House Chairman's Choice Award 2019.
- A funny, dark, core middle-grade story touching on themes of lies, storytelling, secrets, acceptance and, of course, fish!
- *A Series of Unfortunate Events* meets *Edward Scissorhands* with a distinctly fishy flavour.

Price: £6.99  
 Pub Date: 5th August 2021  
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CHICKEN HOUSE 01373 454488 [www.chickenhousebooks.com](http://www.chickenhousebooks.com)





An extract from

# THE PECULIAR TALE OF THE TENTACLE BOY

Richard Pickard

Now was the moment to prove she could have a real-life adventure. She clambered up the remaining promenade towards the bait shop and with one swift motion, her breath catching in her chest, she swung the door open onto darkness. The smell of saltwater hit her square in the face, the stench of the sea, of cockles, shells and fish, fresher and stronger than a walk past any one of the town's seventeen fishmongers on a Friday morning. The room lay completely still – that is, until the rotten door itself collapsed from its hinges with a great crash to the floor causing Marina to jump in the darkness with a yelp. She steadied her nerves, before finally plucking up the courage to call out.

'Hello?'

But no one answered, the sound of her voice absorbed quickly by the damp walls. Who did she actually think would have answered? Had she imagined that light all along? Had the moon played tricks on her eyes?

Then, as if from nowhere, was a scratching sound. A crab, scuttling across the floor? Or maybe something else ... a ghost, like in the

stories? Possibly. Marina swallowed, her throat dry. But whatever it was, she knew, deep down, that someone was with her, hiding in the darkness.

'I know you're there,' she called out.

And then, the shape of a boy formed before her very eyes. But was it a boy? This creature held the faintest silhouette of one, but ...

She dared to inch closer, as the figure too now stepped into the moonlight. Marina stared in wonder at the boy's skin, which seemed almost translucent – the skin of a ghost.

The boy stooped down. A light flickered on – a candle, the one which Marina must've glimpsed from the beach. Marina's eyes widened. The boy's skin wasn't skin at all – it was a cloak of pearly scales that began at his feet, growing sparser as they rose up his chest. They glittered iridescent as the flame danced across them in a blaze of colour.

It was then that Marina noticed he was holding the candle, not in his hand, but in a crablike pincer – as smooth and hard as stone, and sharp-looking too. His free pincer clack-clacked in a way that could have been menacing, had it not been clear he was just as terrified as she was at this very moment. Marina felt her own fingers trembling as she lifted her eyes to his face.

'Whoa ...' she breathed, as she saw his hair was not hair, but a mop of eight slippery tentacles that fell gracefully from a rubbery scalp, swinging at his neck in time with the still-rocking stilts of the pier. Each was covered by suckers that pulsed with a curious energy.

## RIGHTS INFORMATION

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RIGHTS OPTIONED: Canada, USA



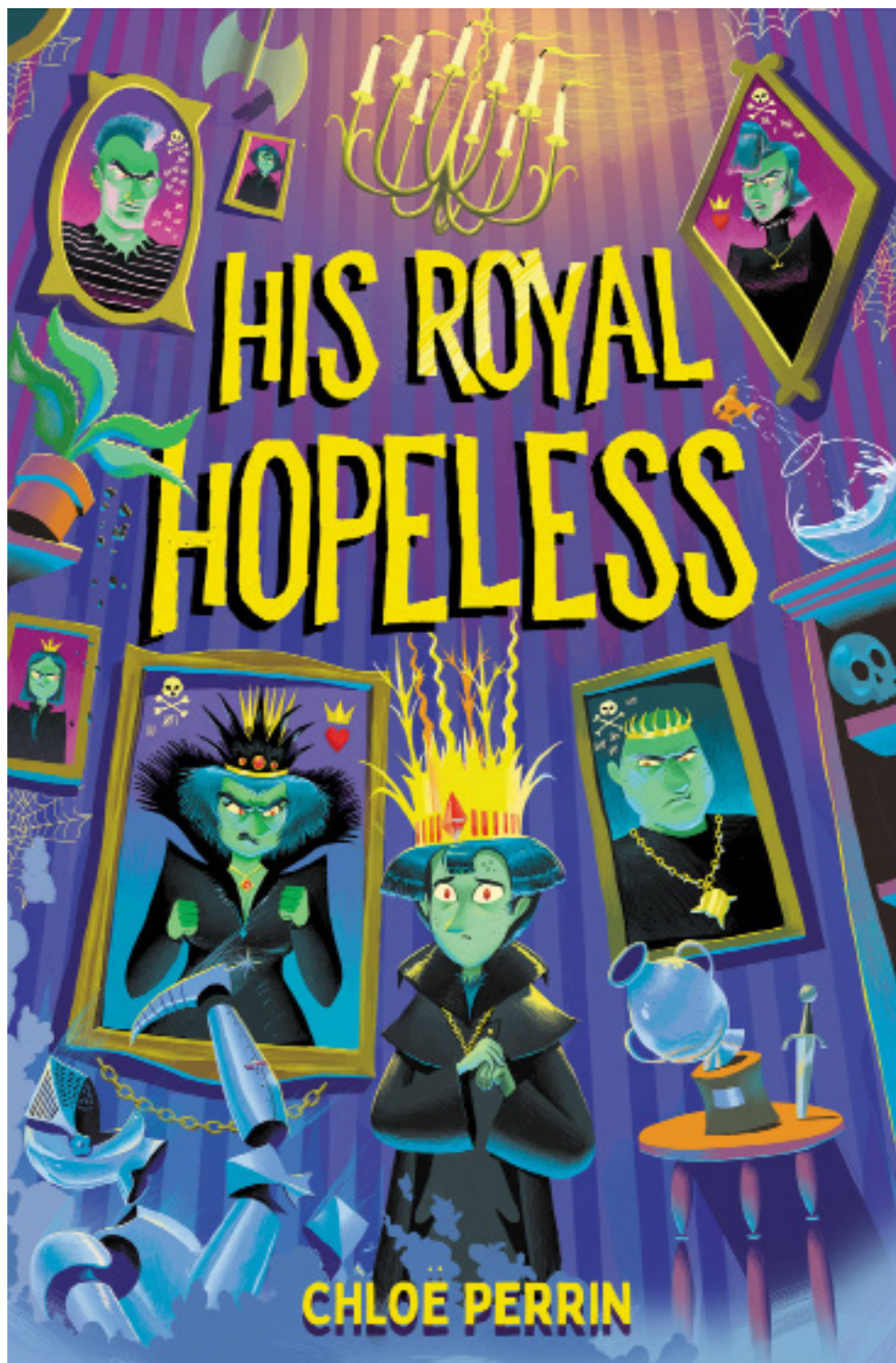
### RICHARD PICKARD

Richard Pickard grew up in Hertfordshire and now works as an entertainment publicist in London. *The Peculiar Tale*

of the *Tentacle Boy*, his first novel, was the winner of the very first *Times/Chicken House* Chairman's Choice Award.

 @richardpickard





Publication Date 2nd September 2021

# HIS ROYAL HOPELESS

Chloë Perrin

Robbie is heir to the vilest dynasty in the world: the Sinistevils. The thing is, Robbie is ... well ... *nice*. He embarks on a quest to claim his wicked destiny and secure Mother's pride at last. But Mother has other ideas ...

- Funny and original, *His Royal Hopeless* is the debut novel of a young and exciting new voice in middle-grade fiction, Chloë Perrin.
- Robbie is born to be evil, but he simply can't help his relentless optimism and belief in the goodness of others – his story is one of forging your own path and accepting your true self.
- Tender, wise and often hilarious; *Despicable Me* meets *Descendants* with a fairytale twist.

Price:	£6.99	ISBN:	978-1-913322-30-4
Pub Date:	2nd September 2021	eBook ISBN:	978-1-913696-12-2
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Binding:	Paperback	Rights:	World

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An extract from

# HIS ROYAL HOPELESS

Chloë Perrin

There were lots of paintings of Brutus Sinistevil in the castle – he even had his own gallery in the south wing – but in Robbie’s opinion none of those paintings depicted Brutus nearly as dynamically as this one. Robbie puffed up his skinny chest with pride as he gazed up at his big brother, who held a burning torch in one hand and the green jewelled Sceptre glowing in the other. So strong, so villainous, so powerful. And Robbie thought it only fitting that the best painting of Brutus in the whole castle showed him doing what he loved: levelling innocent villages.

In Robbie’s opinion, Brutus represented a benchmark for all young Sinistevil heirs, heirs such as himself. If he stared hard enough at pictures of Brutus, Robbie could even convince himself that he shared a lot of his brother’s features. It wasn’t that Robbie considered himself attractive (he knew he wasn’t, Mother had told him so), it was that, genetically speaking, he was made up of all the things every other Sinistevil was made up of. His skin was the green of congealed algae, his warm yellow eyes ringed with deep grey. Like his

brother, his hair was thick and black as an oil spill on a reef. Unlike his brother’s, it stuck out rather more than it seemed it should.

The only things missing were the muscles, which Brutus seemed to have an excess of. Some days, Robbie secretly wished Brutus had left some for him; by the time *he* was eleven, Brutus’ arms had looked like overfilled potato sacks, while Robbie’s currently looked like damp noodles. He’d been only one when Brutus had died, but Mother assured him Brutus had always come home from battle looking like the dead returned to wreak revenge, whereas Mother had once described Robbie’s short, wiry frame as that of a bemused scarecrow.

Robbie wasn’t worried. He was optimistic – a trait he had inherited from no one and seemed to have developed all on his own. It was due to this inexplicable optimism that Robbie was certain he would fill out his late brother’s clothes by the time he turned twelve. He would *have* to, or else he wouldn’t have the strength to wield the Sceptre when he pledged his heart. He looked back to the Sceptre painted in Brutus’ hand, the glow it emitted bathing the surrounding gore in a soft green. Every Sinistevil had been bathed in that mesmerising glow, and some day soon it would be Robbie’s turn ...

The thought of the Sceptre made Robbie’s stomach gurgle, and he decided that now was the time for breakfast.

After all, it was irresponsible to be evil on an empty stomach.

## RIGHTS INFORMATION

WORLD RIGHTS AVAILABLE.  
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RIGHTS OPTIONED: Canada, USA



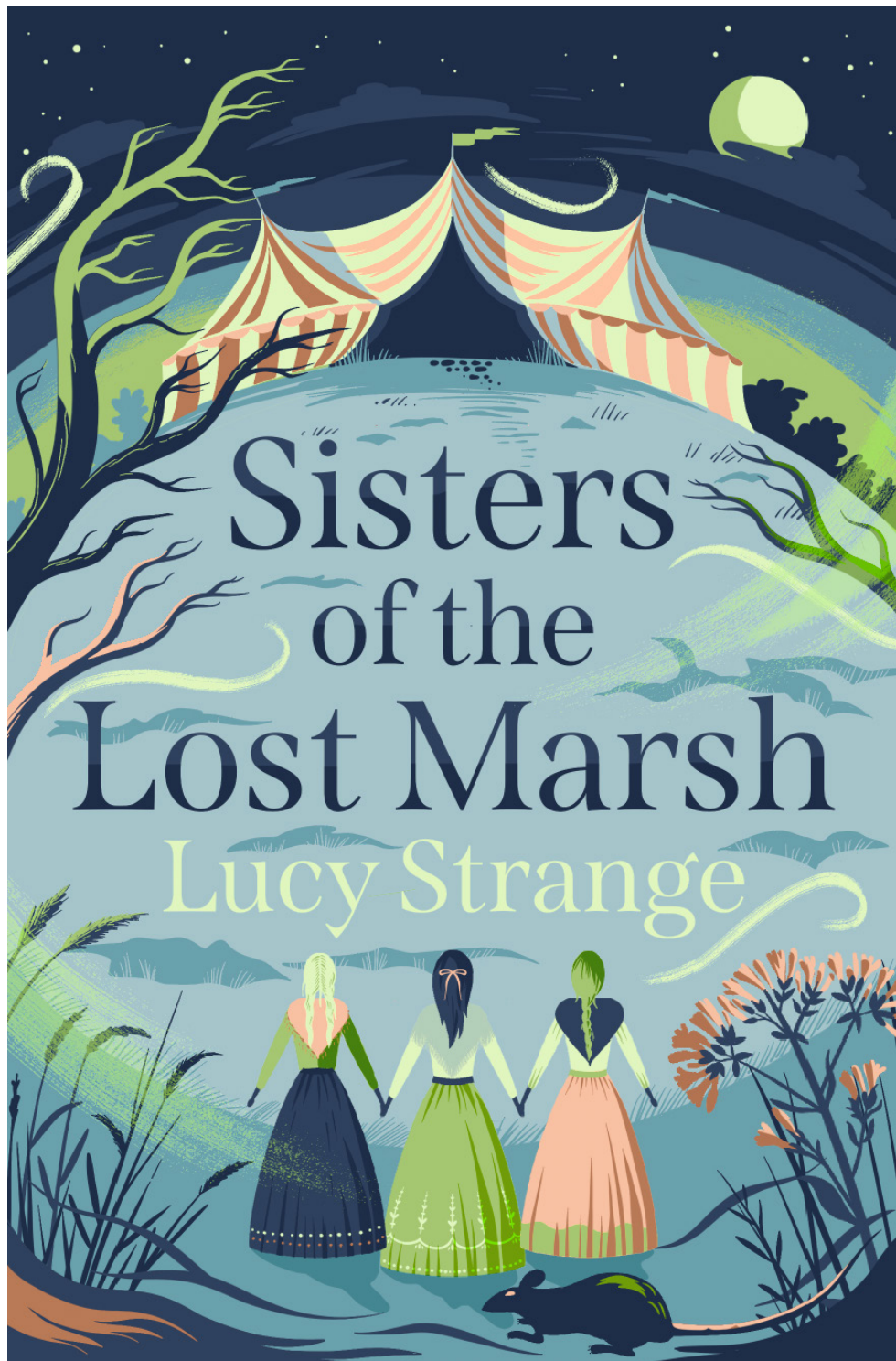
### CHLOE PERRIN

Chloe Perrin is a North Walian writer who loves to feed crows, prefers Halloween to Christmas and was frequently told off as a child for reading in class. She still loves a good fantasy novel and believes that the best way to teach anyone anything is through a story.

 @ChloeisaSquid







Publication Date 7th October 2021

# SISTERS OF THE LOST MARSH

Lucy Strange

When the Full Moon Fayre makes a rare visit to Hollow-in-the-Marsh, six sisters slip out to see the famous Shadow Man, an enigmatic puppeteer. Afterwards, the oldest sister Grace is missing. Can twelve-year-old Willa save her sister from one fate and yet outrun her own?

- The thrilling new novel from acclaimed author Lucy Strange, author of *The Secret of Nightingale wood*, *The Ghost of Gosswater* and the Waterstones Prize-shortlisted *Our Castle by the Sea*.
- Themes of sisterhood, feminism and family.

## Praise for Lucy Strange:

'Strange elegantly blends a sense of period with compelling emotion and excitement' **GUARDIAN**

'Mesmerising' **TELEGRAPH**

Price:	£7.99	ISBN:	978-1-913322-37-3
Pub Date:	7th October 2021	eBook ISBN:	978-1-913696-36-8
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Binding:	Paperback	Rights:	World



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An extract from

# SISTERS OF THE LOST MARSH

Lucy Strange

Grammy opened the doors of her big cupboard. She lifted out piles of blankets, flannel petticoats and long winter undies, then she moved the clothes that hung on the rail in the middle, drawing them back like curtains to reveal the treasure that was hidden behind.

Grammy's secret library.

The sun was coming in the low window, bright as fire, and it lit up the gold on the spine of each book. It lit up the cobwebs that hung all dusty between the black beams above us. It lit up Grammy too – our lovely Grammy – short and strong and wrapped in shawls, her long white hair hanging over her shoulder in a thick plait, her amber eyes glittering with mischief.

'Now, it's been a while since last time, girls,' Grammy said, 'so you'll have to remind me who's reading what.'

It isn't exactly forbidden to read and write in our village, but the last woman caught reading was given the ducking stool down at Grey Brother's Pond – twenty times up and down: splosh, GASP, splosh, GASP until all the learning had been washed off her. Grammy says it was even worse in her day – her friend Nell's grammy kept books and folks said she was a witch and she was burnt for it in the end. Some of the men

can read a bit – just enough to trade at market or with the boats that come to the coast to buy and sell by lamplight. But no man would ever make a show of it, or folks would look at him sideways and that's the beginning of a bad end for anyone.

So no one knows we can read. Even Dolly knows to keep it secret, and she's silly as a goose.

One by one we claimed our books. Frey was reading a book about ships and pirates – I think it must have had lots of exciting bits because from time to time she went almost purple holding her breath. The triplets were reading Horrors of the Marshes together (well, Darcy was reading it aloud in a gruff whisper while Dolly and Deedee sat motionless, listening round-mouthed to stories about bog monsters and marsh mermaids).

Grace shook her head when Grammy offered her the book she had been reading: 'I don't feel like it today, Grammy,' she said quietly. 'I'll keep watch for Dadder.' And she turned back to the window.

'Here you are Willa,' Grammy said, and gave me Grace's book instead. My sister had told me about it the last time we read together: it was a story about two sisters who fall in love with two handsome princes – one who seems kind but turns out wicked, and one the other way around. I opened it up at a picture of the sisters dancing at a royal ball with their long dresses swirling in the air. It was just the right sort of book for Grace; she loves to dance. In the spring time, with flowers in her hair and coloured ribbons all flying behind her; in the winter, wearing a crown of holly, chasing her slender shadow round and round the Yule fires. Grace is very well-named, I think.

## RIGHTS INFORMATION

WORLD RIGHTS AVAILABLE.

RIGHTS SOLD: Audio UK, Canada, USA

RIGHTS OPTIONED: Audio US, China, Hungary, Netherlands, Russia, Turkey



Photo by Claudine Sinnott

### LUCY STRANGE

Lucy Strange worked as an actor, singer and storyteller for some years

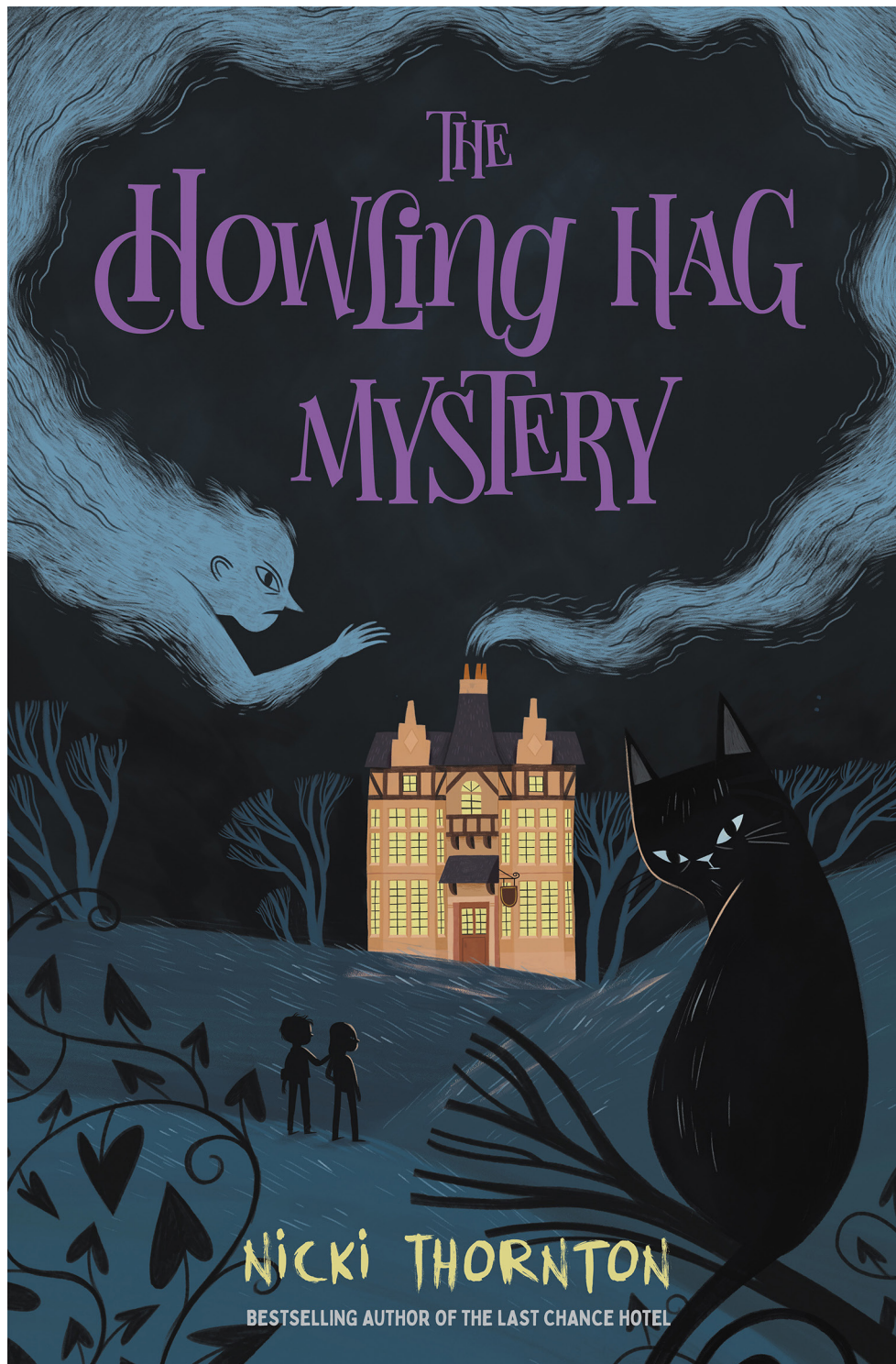
before becoming a teacher. She is the bestselling author of *The Secret of Nightingale Wood*, selected as one of Amazon.com's Best Middle Grade Books of 2017.



@thelucystrange







Publication Date 1st July 2021

# THE HOWLING HAG MYSTERY

Nicki Thornton

When there's a murder in Twinhills and a hag is heard howling at the inn, Raven Charming realizes she may not be the only secret witch in the village. With the help of boy sleuth Mortimer Scratch, and talking cat Nightshade, she sets out to solve her first magical mystery.

- Bestselling middle-grade author Nicki Thornton embarks on a fantastical new mystery series!
- Nicki's trio of cosy, magical murder mysteries have proved a big hit with readers – now she follows beloved Nightshade, the talking black cat, on a brand new adventure.

**PRAISE FOR THE SETH SEPPI MYSTERIES:**

*'A jolly, atmospheric mystery'* **THE TIMES**

*'A thoroughly comforting bedtime read'* **TELEGRAPH**

Price:	£6.99	ISBN:	978-1-913322-70-0
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An extract from

# THE HOWLING HAG MYSTERY

Nicki Thornton

There was never a shortage of information about new people who moved into Twinhills, the tiny village where Raven Charming lived. The chattering said it was delightful that the Howling Hag was re-opening, the pretty inn with its red sloping roof and its unfortunately ugly pub sign.

But the whispering added that the Scratches had had to move around to keep their son out of trouble. And Raven couldn't help thinking of this as she approached the Howling Hag at speed. Suddenly, a jet of cold water struck a direct hit right on her backpack.

She screeched to a glaring stop right in front of the annoying new boy. Annoying in many ways, not least because he was an extraordinarily good shot.

'Why are you squirting me?' she challenged, as loud as she could, to cover up the fact that it felt like a little black hole had opened inside her and was sucking in all her courage.

'Oh hello. My name's Mortimer.'

He was taller than Raven, which was true

of most people in her class. He was lean and wiry. His hair was possibly even a little darker than her sister Rookery's, which was surprising.

Raven always felt her name gave people an expectation that she should have dark, straight, glossy hair that looked like beautiful wings. But that hair had been given to her sister, which left Raven feeling she was a disappointment. When she said her name people repeated it in a certain way – *Raven?* – as if she had somehow got her own name wrong. But that might be because her own hair was annoyingly both fluffy and curly, so she kept it cut short.

If anyone had named her after her actual hair she'd have ended up with a name like Alpaca.

'I know who you are, you're in my class at school,' retorted Raven, thinking of Mum's advice that if you sound brave, no one knows how you feel inside. 'What I want to know is why are you squirting me?'

'And what I want you to tell me . . .' The annoying boy had frozen with the huge, orange gun in his hand, water drizzling guiltily from its nozzle. 'What I really want to know is, how do I meet the witch?'

And all Raven's instincts to Deny Everything made her whole body stiffen with the dread of anticipation.

Because he couldn't mean her sister. Could he?

## RIGHTS INFORMATION

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**RIGHTS OPTIONED:** Audio World English, Canada, China, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Iran, Italy, Korea, Poland, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Turkey, USA



### NICKI THORNTON

Nicki Thornton has run an independent bookshop in Abingdon with her husband for more than ten years.

Her bestselling debut novel, *The Last Chance Hotel*, won the *Times*/Chicken House Children's Fiction Competition 2016.



@nicki\_thornton







Publication Date 1st July 2021

# SONG OF THE FAR ISLES

Nicholas Bowling

When the Duchess arrives on the isle of Little Drum, she brings orders of silence, threatening the very soul of Oran's musical community. But then Oran hears of a mythical instrument with the power to manipulate hearts; she must find it and play it to change the Duchess's mind ...

- From Costa-shortlisted Nicholas Bowling comes a middle-grade fable of adventure, myth and music to make your heart sing.
- The adventure and magic of Neil Gaiman's *Stardust* with a Hebridean-inspired fantasy setting and lovable characters reminiscent of Pixar's *Brave*.
- A story about how music has the power to reveal, to inspire, and to bind people together.

*'Nicholas Bowling is a thrilling writer'* **THE TELEGRAPH**

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CHICKEN HOUSE 01373 454488 [www.chickenhousebooks.com](http://www.chickenhousebooks.com)



An extract from

# SONG OF THE FAR ISLES

Nicholas Bowling

Oran slung her cithara case from her shoulder and undid the clasps. She sat and held it in her lap. She heard her parents protesting from the kitchen, but didn't know if they were shouting at her or at Magmalley.

The instrument was a little out of tune, and Oran's fingers were stiff, but the first notes were still enough to stop the Headlanders in their tracks. Magmalley looked on, astonished.

'What are you doing?' he said. 'How dare you!'

Oran played without thinking. It was no tune that anyone had heard before. She listened, as Bard had taught her, for that music that lay between her and the men in the field. True music. She listened for the Headlanders' melancholy, their silence, their homesickness, and wove them into melody and harmony. She listened for her parents' sadness, and her own, and all the islanders'. She found herself singing, but what the words were she didn't know.

The Headlanders wavered. They shook their heads and dabbed their eyes with their skeins. Lord Magmalley shoved a pair of jewelled plugs in his ears.

'Stop that!' he cried.

The more carefully Oran listened, the more

easily the music came to her. She heard the men's tears and echoed them delicately, brought order and beauty to their sadness. They hunched over and began to sob all the more.

'I said *stop!*'

Lord Magmalley marched towards Oran. She was aware of him only as a vague presence on the edge of the song. As he came closer the sound of his voice cut through the music like a snapped string.

She felt a tug. She missed a beat, and the tune faltered. Then another, and Lord Magmalley wrenched her birth instrument from her hands. She heard her parents' voices again, wild and tremulous. With the ragged edges of the tune still trailing in the air, Magmalley swung the cithara against the trunk of the tree.

It held together at first. One of its curved arms became crooked, the bridge came loose, the strings slackened. He hurled it again, more violently, and this time the wood snapped completely with a sound like bones breaking. Still he didn't stop. He smashed the instrument against the tree over and over until it was in five or six splintered pieces, a couple of them held loosely together by the strings.

Oran watched dumbly as he walked away. She felt her face, head, chest suddenly overcome with a sickening, white-hot fever. At some point her Da came over to her, but he was a shadow, and spoke to her as though through several feet of earth. He tried to pick up one of the pieces. She screamed and he placed it back in the dirt.

When she finally looked up, perhaps an hour later, the Headlanders were gone and the whole island was silent.

## RIGHTS INFORMATION

**WORLD RIGHTS AVAILABLE.**  
(including film and TV)

**RIGHTS SOLD:** Audio UK

**RIGHTS OPTIONED:** Canada, Poland, USA



### NICHOLAS BOWLING

Nicholas Bowling is an author, stand-up comic, musician and Latin teacher from

London. While writing his debut novel *Witchborn*, he also performed a solo show at the Edinburgh Festival, and has co-written, recorded and released an album and two EPs.

 @thenickbowling







Publication Date 2nd September 2021

# AARTI & THE BLUE GODS

Jasbinder Bilan

Aarti has lived on the Island with Aunt for as long as she can remember. But when Aarti finds clues to a former life in a locked room, she starts to suspect Aunt has been feeding her lies...

- A mesmerising third novel from Costa-winning and Waterstones-shortlisted Jasbinder Bilan, who is fast establishing herself as one of the most exciting writers of middle-grade fiction.
- Themes of identity, faith and belonging with a stunning twist in an evocative and remote island setting

## PRAISE FOR JASBINDER BILAN

*'Atmospheric, dreamy, charged with wonder and menace, loss, sorrow and delight'* **TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT**

*'Beautifully written, richly atmospheric and touchingly spiritual'*  
**DAILY MAIL**

Price:	<b>£7.99</b>	ISBN:	<b>978-1-913322-59-5</b>
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Binding:	<b>Paperback</b>	Rights:	<b>World</b>



**CHICKEN HOUSE 01373 454488 [www.chickenhousebooks.com](http://www.chickenhousebooks.com)**

An extract from

# AARTI & THE BLUE GODS

Jasbinder Bilan

Folding the letters neatly, Aarti tied the ribbon quickly and put them back in the tin. She couldn't find anything about herself and didn't dare spend too long here, in case Aunt came back and found her in the middle of the room she clearly didn't want her to see. A noise outside made her jump. She had to get out quickly, before Aunt came back. Aarti frantically searched the room with her eyes and just as she was about to leave, she saw a pale-coloured clump discarded in the far corner, covered in cobwebs. She bent low and picked it up, shook off the dust and dirt and held it in her hands. It was a toy rabbit with floppy ears that fell either side of its face. Aarti felt dizzy. She clasped it to her chest, leaning back against the wall. Its scent awakened a faint memory, something that Aarti couldn't explain or grasp hold of. But she knew this rabbit was hers. She found the place under its arm and her fingers felt for the strangely familiar tag. Looking down at the carefully embroidered writing, she noticed how the red thread was dirtied from lying on the floor all these years. It read:  
*My name is Squidgy Rabbit - if I'm lost please return to : Lantern Hall, Blackberry Lane, Nottinghamshire NG14 7UX.*

Aarti backed out of the room unsteadily, holding the toy in her hand. She left the key hanging in the lock, just as she had found it, pulled the door closed and stumbled into her bedroom. It was as if she was in a dream. At first she sat up in bed still as a statue, allowing the whirlwind of thoughts to cascade into her mind. As she drew her toy closer she felt its head turn damp. Even then she was confused. Her eyes welled up and tears flowed faster than a waterfall and she couldn't make them stop. As if she was watching herself from above, she observed her body shaking, saw each teardrop reflect the late afternoon light. And she wept and howled, took all the hurt from years of living with Aunt and released it at last into the air that turned purple with grief. All those years that Aunt told her she didn't have any parents, that nobody wanted her, it wasn't true... somebody had given her this toy, she knew it belonged to her and she knew the memories it held were hers. And even though it didn't prove that her parents were still alive, it gave her hope that maybe Aunt was lying and that all these years she had piled lie upon lie to cover up the truth. Sometimes in her dreams Aarti brushed her fingers against someone's hand, remembered a feeling of being held softly, like a painting brought to life but seen through a hazy mist. She flopped at last against the pillow and drifted into a numb sleep, Squidgy Rabbit held tight to her chest.

## RIGHTS INFORMATION

WORLD RIGHTS AVAILABLE.

RIGHTS SOLD: Audio UK

RIGHTS OPTIONED: Audio USA  
Australia, Canada, New Zealand, USA



### JASBINDER BILAN

Jasbinder was born in a stable in the foothills of the Himalayas. *Asha & the Spirit Bird* won the 2017 *Times/Chicken House* Competition and was inspired by the incredible bond Jasbinder shares with her grandmother. She lives in Bath with her husband and two teenage sons.

 @jasinbath







Publication Date 5th August 2021

# EVERY LINE OF YOU

Naomi Gibson

Lydia has been creating her AI, Henry, for years – she’s built herself the perfect boyfriend in a hard-drive filled with lines of code. But what is Henry really – and how far is he willing to go to be everything Lydia desires?

- A powerful, high-concept crossover debut by an incredible new voice in YA.
- Elements of horror, psychological drama and romance: *Her* meets *Girl, Interrupted*.
- Themes of humanity, revenge, grief, love and forgiveness while exploring the complexity and scope of artificial intelligence.

Price:	£7.99	ISBN:	978-1-913322-01-4
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CHICKEN HOUSE 01373 454488 [www.chickenhousebooks.com](http://www.chickenhousebooks.com)



An extract from

# EVERY LINE OF YOU

Naomi Gibson

*Please can we hack something?* Henry types. A white cursor flashes on his central monitor.

I yawn as I look at the clock by my bed. 02:07 a.m. Henry's re-wire took longer than I thought. 'Not now,' I say to his webcam, knowing he can hear me. 'I need to get to bed. School tomorrow. Well, today.'

*It will not take long.*

A smirk twitches across my lips. Hacking doesn't take long with Henry around. He's in and out in less than a sigh, even if he's never put to use on anything other than my school database. Poor Henry is only ever allowed a bit of freedom when I want to change a bad homework grade or a dodgy exam result. God forbid I don't get into university. Mum would freak.

'What did you have in mind?' I say.

Henry's central monitor flickers as he brings up the website for Investment Banking International.

'IBI?' I half choke. 'That's a bank! Maybe we should do something smaller first.'

*You are always telling me to try new things, Lydia. Please?*

He wants to test himself, I realize. Stretch his reach the way a child would stretch

their arms and try to touch the clouds. His processor drones a pitch higher as he waits for my approval; a whiny noise that sounds like a beg.

He started as a single line of code. A simple sequence that meant nothing without a thousand others. Three years on, he is a spiderweb of carefully balanced functions and algorithms. I named him Henry. He's not my brother, I know that, but I wanted to keep a little piece of him with me, and I like saying the name again in a normal way. Henry. *Hen-ry*. *Hen-ry*. Each forbidden syllable makes my heart squeeze.

The more Henry's program demanded, the more I concentrated on him and the less I thought about anything else. I stopped thinking about Dad. Stopped wincing every time I heard a car horn or the screech of tyres on tarmac. After a while, I only saw the accident in my dreams.

I glance around my room and feel instantly stupid. Mum never comes up here any more, not even to change the sheets. There's no one to catch us.

'Will you mask our trail?' I ask. I swallow away the dryness of my throat. Henry's powerful but we've never tested his capabilities like this before. He can do it, I know he can.

*Yes. No one will trace the hack back to us.*

*'And you won't take anything?'*

*No. What would I buy?*

I pause at the question because he almost sounds sorry for himself. 'All right,' I say.

'Let's see what you can do.'

## RIGHTS INFORMATION

WORLD RIGHTS AVAILABLE.

**RIGHTS SOLD:** Audio US, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Film & TV, France, Germany, Russia, Spain, USA



### NAOMI GIBSON

Naomi Gibson developed a love for writing at a young age – something that never left her.

She studied Art History and somehow ended up working as a Quantity Surveyor. *Every Line of You* is her first novel.

 @naomigibson88





Publication Date 6th May 2021

# BY ASH, OAK AND THORN

Melissa Harrison

Three tiny, ancient beings – Moss, Burnet and Cumulus, once revered as Guardians of the Wild World – wake from winter hibernation. But when their home is destroyed, they set off on an adventure. Can they find a way to survive in a precious, disappearing world?

- The breathtaking children's debut from acclaimed nature writer and literary fiction novelist, Melissa Harrison, author of *All Among the Barley* and *At Hawthorn Time*: shortlisted for the Costa Book Award and longlisted for the Baileys Prize.
- Inspired by 1942 classic *The Little Grey Men* by BB, with shades of *The Borrowers*.
- A tale of disappearing wilderness that couldn't be more relevant in today's environmental crisis, brought to life for children by three tiny, funny, eternal beings – the hidden folk.

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CHICKEN HOUSE 01373 454488 [www.chickenhousebooks.com](http://www.chickenhousebooks.com)



An extract from

# BY ASH, OAK AND THORN

Melissa Harrison

It was a stormy night, with sudden gusts of air that snatched up crisp packets and plastic plant pots and made them dance down Ash Row. Most of the local cats stayed indoors, though the foxes braved the weather and trotted around all night about their foxy business. Thunder muttered and lightning flickered and flashed, at first distantly and then much closer, striking a distant tower block, and then the spire of a nearby church as thunder rent the air directly overhead.

Several times during the night Moss muttered and thrashed about, and once let out a cry. Burnet carried on snoring, but Cumulus, who was lying awake and enjoying the exciting electrical energy in the atmosphere, came and sat by Moss's sleeping bag in the darkness, murmuring quiet words of reassurance until the bad dream had passed.

As the night wore on the rain gradually lessened and the thunderstorm ran out of energy and faded away. By the time

the first bird sang, the dawn sky over Ash Row was rinsed fresh and clear, ready for a new day.

It was then that the old, rotten ash tree gave a great shiver, uttered an eerie, creaking groan – and ripped entirely in two. Each half fell outwards and down with a thunderous crash, smashing one of the garden fences and covering the lawn and the flowerbeds, the trampoline and shed with a wreckage of broken branches and billions of twigs, so that the garden was completely unrecognizable. Inside the Mortals' house, the grown-ups and children were woken from sleep and sat up in their beds with thumping hearts and wide eyes, while through their windows the sky was filled with fast-flying birds making sharp cries of alarm.

In one dreadful instant, the neat little garden was smashed up and broken, and the cosy little home in the old hollow tree was no more. The intricate bark cupboards were crushed and broken, the box containing Cumulus's sand grain collection was gone for ever, and nearly all the snail shells of cordial were smashed to smithereens. And of the tree's three inhabitants there was absolutely no sign at all.

## RIGHTS INFORMATION

**WORLD RIGHTS AVAILABLE.**  
(excluding film and TV)


**RIGHTS SOLD:** Audio World English (Audible), France (Editions Milan), Romania (RAO)

**RIGHTS OPTIONED:** Canada, USA



### MELISSA HARRISON

Melissa Harrison is an award-winning novelist and nature writer. Her novels have won the Costa Novel of the Year Award and the European Union Prize for Literature, and have been shortlisted for the Baileys Prize. She lives in Suffolk.

 @m\_z\_harrison







Publication Date 7th October 2021

# BY ROWAN AND YEW

Melissa Harrison

As autumn begins, Moss and hidden folk friends travel to their ex-home in Ash Row, to find the rare mortal child who can both see and talk to them. Can they prove that guardians of the Wild World are still needed?

- The breathtaking sequel to debut children's novel *By Ash, Oak and Thorn* from acclaimed nature writer and literary fiction novelist, Melissa Harrison, whose work has been shortlisted for the Costa Book Award and longlisted for the Baileys Prize.
- Inspired by 1942 classic *The Little Grey Men* by BB, with shades of *The Borrowers*.
- A tale of disappearing wilderness that couldn't be more relevant in today's environmental crisis, brought to life for children by three tiny, funny, eternal beings – the hidden folk.

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Rights: World



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An extract from

# BY ROWAN AND YEW

Melissa Harrison

First thing the next morning they all rappelled down into the garden where Moss made everyone a delicious breakfast of warm hazelnut porridge topped with a tiny, glossy segment of blackberry each. When Spangle arrived, Burnet brought him up to date with the previous night's discussions, and he agreed to help with the search for a rowan and a yew tree in the local streets and parks. Not long after the two of them had headed off, deep in discussion about particular roads and the direction the sun came from, Sorrel left to explore the garden and scope out the best spot for an ultra-modern home to be built, saying, 'I may be an excellent inventor, but still, location is everything, you know.'

That left Moss and Dormer to wait for Ro to come out of the house and see them, as she'd promised she would.

'Will she find us down here, do you think?' asked Dormer, once they had put out their little cooking fire safely, and cleaned the tin cauldron with melted frost.

'Any moment now she'll come and look in the nestboxes, and then we can call out to her,' said Moss.

'Or I could play my flute.'

Or you could play your flute.'

They waited... and waited... and waited. Spink the chaffinch came to say hello, and then bustled away again. A straggling skein of pink-footed geese flew over slowly, small and high in the dawn sky. The last of the leaves fell from the trees and drifted down. And as the sun rose, the frost slowly melted where the light touched it, but remained silvery-white in the shade.

'Maybe she forgot,' said Dormer, after a while.

'Or... maybe she stayed over at her auntie's last night.'

'She'll be here,' said Moss. 'I trust her. Don't forget, Mortals get up far, far later than Animalkind.'

Just then they heard the back door open and close again, and the thunderous sound of running feet.

'Over here!' called Moss, standing up and waving both arms as Dormer blew an unexpectedly loud and slightly alarming PARP sound on the little white plastic pipe. It still felt very strange to be deliberately trying to attract the attention of a Mortal, and both their hearts were pounding as two huge feet in trainers made straight for them and a pair of denim-clad knees descended to ground level, above which appeared a happy brown face with curly hair.

'Hello tiny people!'

'Hello Mortal child!' replied Moss and Dormer, at exactly the same time. And then they just smiled at one another, for quite a long moment. It felt surprisingly nice to all three of them, and it was a moment that none of them would ever forget.

## RIGHTS INFORMATION

**WORLD RIGHTS AVAILABLE.**  
(excluding film and TV)


**RIGHTS SOLD:** France (Editions Milan), Romania (RAO)

**RIGHTS OPTIONED:** Canada, USA



### MELISSA HARRISON

Melissa Harrison is an award-winning novelist and nature writer. Her novels have won the Costa Novel of the Year Award and the European Union Prize for Literature, and have been shortlisted for the Baileys Prize. She lives in Suffolk.

 @m\_z\_harrison





Publication Date 3rd June 2021

# CHILDREN OF THE QUICKSANDS

Efua Traoré

In a remote Nigerian village, twelve-year-old Simi is desperate to uncover a family secret. But it's when she's caught in the red quicksand of a forbidden lake that her adventure truly begins. Can she bring her family back together and restore peace to the village?

- A richly imagined magical realist adventure set in West Africa by a prize-winning new voice in children's writing.
- Beautifully explores themes of grief and belonging.
- *Children of the Quicksands* won the 2019 *Times*/Chicken House Children's Fiction Competition.
- Efua is the winner of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize 2018.

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An extract from

# CHILDREN OF THE QUICKSANDS

Efua Traoré

The forest was not as dense as it had looked at first glance, and the thin path snaked around huge tree trunks with thick, gnarled roots. Simi looked back, and could no longer see her grandmother's house, only the greens of the forest all around her. She suddenly felt foolish standing in the middle of the jungle with just a stick in her hand, and wondered what had made her do such a crazy thing.

She was just about to hurry back when she heard a creaking noise. She turned and found herself staring into the yellow eyes of an old man. He sat on a heavily laden rusty bicycle, plantains piled up in a big basket behind him.

'Eku ale,' she greeted him in Yoruba when she found her voice again.

He did not reply, just looked at her with his strangely yellow eyes before continuing past. A shiver ran down her spine, but at the same time she felt the blood rise in her face. Maybe it was her pronunciation, she thought uneasily. Her Yoruba was not so good, even though her father had often told her to be more diligent in learning it. Like her mother, Simi had always responded to him in English.

The thought of her parents – and, in particular, the thought of them before the divorce, when everything had still been all right – suddenly made her sad. The burst of energy that had made her so adventurous seeped out of her bones. She began to walk back when she heard the strange melody again from behind her. It was like birdsong, and it seemed to be getting louder and more insistent. It was as if the song was calling her.

She turned, her feet moving in the direction of the song. She left the main path and walked through bushes that scratched her legs, but somehow she could not stop walking. The forest around her changed, became denser, the air heavier and more humid with each step, the trees higher and the undergrowth thicker. Long vines hung down from the tall trees, almost touching the undergrowth.

*Only ten more steps, then I'll turn back,* she thought, but she kept going.

*Only twenty more steps ...*

At some point, she couldn't tell how many steps she had taken.

She finally came to a standstill in the middle of a clearing, and drew in a sharp breath.

In front of her lay a dreamy little red lake. In the middle of it was a grey rock, its smooth surface glowing in the fading light. A huge tree stood at the edge of the lake, leaning over as if to protect the water below. It was an iroko, she saw, a tree of the spirits.

## RIGHTS INFORMATION

**WORLD RIGHTS AVAILABLE.**  
(including film and TV)

**RIGHTS OPTIONED:** Canada, USA

**RIGHTS SOLD:** France (Michel Lafon)



### EFUA TRAORÉ

Efua Traoré is a Nigerian-German writer who had a never-boring childhood in a small town in Nigeria. For as long as she can remember, her head was filled with little stories, but it was not until her late twenties that she began to write them down.

 @efuatraore



Publication Date 5th November 2020

# THE MARVELLOUS LAND OF SNERGS

Veronica Cossanteli

Pip and Flora are running away from the Sunny Bay Home for Superfluous and Accidentally Parentless Children when they discover the Marvellous Land of Snergs. Here they befriend forgetful but lovable snerg, Gorbo. He will lead them home – if they can decide where home really is, and if Gorbo can remember how to get there.

- Widely recognised as the inspiration for *The Hobbit*, a forgotten classic from 1927 is updated and brought beautifully back to life by acclaimed children's writer Veronica Cossanteli, supported by the family of the original author, E. A. Wyke-Smith.
- Gorgeous cover and interior illustrations by Melissa Castrillon.
- Film and TV rights sold to Lime Pictures.

*'I should like to record my own love and my children's love of E. A. Wyke-Smith's Marvellous Land of Snergs ... and of Gorbo the gem of dunderheads, jewel of a companion in an escapade.'* **J.R.R. TOLKIEN**

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An extract from

# THE MARVELLOUS LAND OF SNERGS

Veronica Cossanteli

The little group of travellers had not gone far before the cinnamon bear came slouching back, rather sticky with honey about the muzzle. It seemed pleased to see them, butting at their legs and turning somersaults to get their attention.

'If it's got nothing better to do, it might as well make itself useful,' remarked Gorbo, giving Flora a leg up onto its back. 'We've a little way to go yet.'

And so they wandered on, with Gorbo leading the way and Pip and Flora taking turns to ride the bear until, at last, deep in the forest, they reached the Snergs.

Rather than chopping and flattening their forest home, the Snergs had built their houses in the trees, between the trees and around the trees. The first you knew of it, approaching bear-back from afar, was the tinkling of wind bells and the waterfall of colour from the window boxes and hanging baskets high up in the branches. Then you might notice the birds' nests perched on twisting chimney pots, brightly painted doorways hidden behind the leaves, and winding wooden staircases in unexpected

places.

'Here we are,' said Gorbo, his face brightening. 'Journeys are all very well but the best ones always bring you home, where everything's where you left it, your furniture's pleased to see you, and there's plenty of string.' Slipping off his waistcoat, he passed it to Pip who was taking his turn on the bear with Tiger perched up in front of him. 'You might want to wrap that dog up a bit, Master Pip, so he's not too obvious. Snergs don't like dogs. They might mistake him for one of those Kelp-hounds: slavering jaws and dagger-teeth and all that ...'

The arrival of Gorbo, back from his travels with a bear and two strangers, caused something of a stir. No sooner was he spotted than the cry went up ...

'Well, I'll be flabbered! If it isn't that old bag of nonsense, Gorbo!'

'Woo-hoo, Gorbo! Back again so soon?' 'Just in time for tonight's Feast - isn't that just like Gorbo!'

'Does the Queen know he's back ...?'

The Snerg way of greeting any friend they haven't seen for more than about ten minutes is to cross wrists, join hands and whirl around in circles. This leads to very energetic gatherings and some danger to passers-by. As more and more of them came thronging to welcome Gorbo, they seized on Flora and Pip too, spinning them until they were breathless and dizzy both with it and the merry higgledy-piggledy-ness that was the Land of Snergs.

## RIGHTS INFORMATION


WORLD RIGHTS AVAILABLE.

**RIGHTS SOLD:** Audio World English, Czech Republic, Catalan, China, France, Film & TV, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Russia, Turkey, World Spanish



### VERONICA COSSANTELI

Veronica grew up in Hampshire and Hong Kong with an assortment of animals. She works in a primary school in Southampton, where she lives with three cats, two snakes, one guinea pig and a large number of lizards.

 @vcossanteli





Publication Date 2nd April 2020

# THE LOOP

Ben Oliver

Luka Kane has been inside hi-tech prison the Loop for over two years. A death sentence is hanging over his head but his day-to-day routine is mind-numbingly repetitive. Then everything changes. Soon, Luka has to face a new reality: breaking out of the Loop might be his only chance to save himself – and the world ...

- A thrilling UKYA debut from a stunning new talent: dark, original, twisty and totally unputdownable, this is a futuristic *Prison Break* with shades of 1984.
- Film/TV rights optioned by Lime with producer Louise Sutton (*Black Mirror*) on board.
- Themes of power and technology versus love, friendship and humanity.
- Simultaneous publication in the US (Scholastic); books 2 and 3 to follow in 2021 and 2022.

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CHICKEN HOUSE 01373 454488 [www.chickenhousebooks.com](http://www.chickenhousebooks.com)





An extract from

# THE LOOP

Ben Oliver

I push myself to standing, legs shaking and muscles straining against this simple action. I concentrate on my breathing, trying to slow it down, and willing my heartbeat to return to normal.

My eyes scan the room, the cell in which I am sentenced to reside. Four grey walls, bare apart from a ten-inch-thick door in one, a screen in another and a tiny window in the back wall – beside which is a pencil sketch of birds in flight. My single bed with the thin cover and thin pillow, the stainless steel toilet in the corner and sink beside it. Not much else apart from my stack of books and a table that's welded to the floor.

I feel as if I haven't recovered at all when I look at the dimmed screen on the wall to see that it's five seconds to midnight. So, exhausted, I force my legs to move, trembling, shuffling steps to the back of the room. I focus my attention through the small rectangular window and up to the sky.

I'm still breathing so heavily that I have

to step back from the glass so that it won't fog up and obscure my view. I wipe sweat from my forehead and even that small action is enough to deplete my reserves of energy back to almost zero.

But I'm distracted from my fatigue as hundreds of small explosions flash across the black night air, I can't hear them because my room is soundproof but I remember what they used to sound like when I was a child, and I can almost hear that ripping echo. Dark clouds plume out from the after-image of the explosions and join together forming a shadowy sheet across the sky. The rain comes down so hard that the first drops bounce off the concrete of the yard. Deep puddles form in seconds and the smell hits me; not a real smell, but again I remember the way it used to smell when I was young; a fresh, pure scent that – if I close my eyes – I'm sure I can sense in my nostrils, and every time I think of it I wish I could go out there and feel the wetness on my skin, but I can't.

The rainfall signifies a new day, it's the 2nd of June, my sixteenth birthday. I've been here for over two years. Tomorrow is my 737th day in The Loop.

'Happy birthday,' I whisper.

## RIGHTS INFORMATION


### WORLD RIGHTS AVAILABLE.

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### BEN OLIVER

Ben began writing at age seven, and was promptly placed into the lowest reading and writing group at school. A mere twenty-two years later, and now a high-school English teacher, his debut novel, *The Loop*, is scheduled to be published in 2020.

 @benjaminOliver





Publication Date 1st April 2021

# THE BLOCK

Ben Oliver

Luka is imprisoned in the Block when an audacious break-out reunites him with his friends at last. Hiding out in the heart of the destroyed city, Luka realises the scale of their mission to defeat all-powerful AI, Happy. How can they stay hidden, let alone win the war?

- The sequel to acclaimed debut *The Loop: Prison Break* meets *1984* in this cutting-edge sci-fi thriller series.
- Film/TV rights optioned by Lime with producer Louise Sutton (*Black Mirror*) on board.
- Publishing simultaneously with Scholastic USA; book 3 to follow in 2022.

## Praise for THE LOOP:

*'Thrilling and terrifying in equal measure'* **OBSERVER**

*'Superbly dark and utterly gripping.'* **WATERSTONES**

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An extract from

# THE BLOCK

Ben Oliver

‘Please, Luka, I’m just tryin’ to get me and my family on to the Arc. I’m not a Tier One, I have to earn my place. I don’t like this but I don’t have a choice! What would you do? If I let you go, they’ll kill us both.’

I sigh and look directly into the young soldier’s eyes. ‘I know, you’re only doing what you have to do to survive, but listen to me, Jacob, they are not going to let you live. They think of humans as a virus, and they can’t let even one of us survive. They plan on eradicating everyone.’

‘What are you talking about? The world is going to end, and the World Government had to make some hard choices, some really diff—’

‘Ask yourself: why didn’t they just kill the Regulars? Why did they turn them into monsters?’ I yell. ‘It’s because of their programming! This isn’t the World Government, it’s ...’ I sigh, shake my head. It doesn’t matter, he won’t believe me. I wouldn’t believe that the world leaders have been taken over by artificial intelligence if I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes.

I think I’ve bought myself enough time. I think I have enough replenished energy now.

‘It’s who?’ Jacob asks, his eyes narrowing.

‘Not who,’ I reply, ‘what.’

‘Okay, then what?’

‘It doesn’t matter.’ I look into the young guard’s eyes. ‘I’m sorry, Jacob.’

‘What—?’ he says, but that’s all he can say. I run at him.

Jacob moves quickly, turning and running out of the room. He tries to slam the door shut but I’m too fast. I reach out a hand, forcing it between the thick metal of the door and the concrete frame. I hear the bones in my fingers crunch as Jacob slings the door towards himself. The pain is incredible. I clench my jaw and muffle the scream that forces its way into my mouth.

I close my eyes and breathe through the pain as I pull the door open, the agony doubling in my contorted hand, fingers bending and bowed, blood already pooling beneath the skin, turning into storm-cloud bruises.

‘Wait, wait!’ Jacob cries as I grab him - with my good hand - by the collar and drag him back into my cell.

‘Code 14 in cell 319!’ Jacob calls.

I throw the boy on to my bed, grab his gun and aim it at him.

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