

'Ghoulishly charming. I loved it!' Jessica Townsend, bestselling author of *Nevermoor*

# REECE CARTER

# A Girl Called COPPER



Illustrations by  
**SIMON HOWE**

‘*A Girl Called Corpse* is ghoulishly charming.  
A spooky, funny, magical and atmospheric  
adventure with a compelling hero you will adore.  
*Corpse* feels like a worthy successor to *Coraline*  
by way of *The Witches*, with a creepy, comic touch  
of *Round the Twist* for good measure. I loved it!’

**JESSICA TOWNSEND**

*New York Times* bestselling author of  
the Nevermoor series

‘Wonderfully imaginative and enthralling.’

**JACLYN MORIARTY**

award-winning author of the  
Kingdoms and Empires series

‘Fizzes and crackles with magic, mystery and  
exactly the correct amount of huntsman spiders.  
I loved this book so much.’

**KAREN FOXLEE**

bestselling author of *Dragon Skin* and  
*Lenny’s Book of Everything*

'Frightfully good. Death has never seemed such fun.'

**JEREMY LACHLAN**

award-winning author of  
the Jane Doe Chronicles

'Fresh, modern and inclusive while as spine-tinglingly creepy as an old abandoned cemetery, this masterfully told tale of the dead beats with a genuine human heart.'

I loved this with my entire soul!

**SHIRLEY MARR**

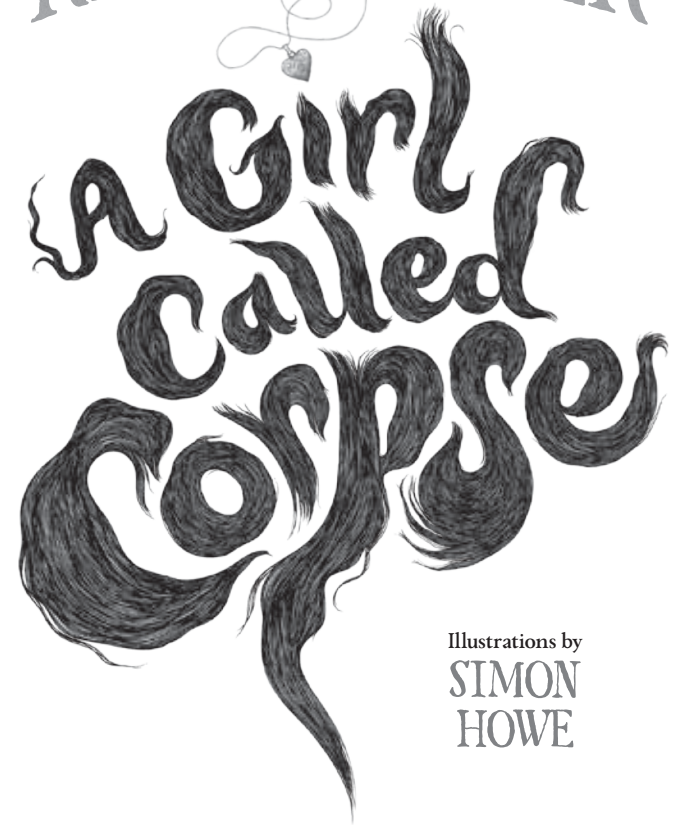
award-winning author of  
*A Glasshouse of Stars*

'Dramatic and spooky, with the most delightful lively voice.'

**AMELIA MELLOR**

bestselling author of  
*The Grandest Bookshop in the World*

REECE CARTER



Illustrations by  
**SIMON  
HOWE**

  
**ALLEN & UNWIN**  
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*For my family – the one I was born into,  
and the one I found along the way.*





# Zero

If my hair looks like bright green seaweed, it's because that's exactly what it is. My eyes, a pair of abalone shells, polished blue by sand. Teeth, two rows of pebbles.

And my skin is made of wax.

I spent a very long time collecting the wax, I'll have you know, from *their* burning candles. And it was an extremely hard thing to do, too. I had to steal it, drip by drip, whenever *they* weren't watching. In the darkest parts of the night, I would whisk the wax away, little by little. And if one of them had ever bothered to glance up, they might very well have seen the glistening droplets that I was beckoning dance on the air, slip over rotting beams and disappear

through a gap in the iron ceiling. But nobody ever looked up. Nobody noticed.

I made sure of that.

It took years to shape the wax into my sort-of-odd-looking head. My skinny neck and awkward shoulders. Arms and legs, which if I'm honest, are kind of knobbly.

Fine . . . so I'm not perfect looking.

But as skinny and awkward and knobbly as my wax body might be, it's still a million times better than having no body at all. That was the absolute worst. Maybe *some* ghosts enjoy walking through walls and being invisible – not me. I never wanted any of that.

I never asked to be a kid ghost.

I mean, I guess nobody really *asks* to be a ghost, do they? Nobody asks to wake up dead. Just like nobody asks to be snatched by Witches and taken from their family.

Wait . . . I didn't mention there are Witches, did I?

Well, there are.

But before you go and flip out, just remember that these particular Witches live far away from you, inside a rickety old shack built from rotting stilts and

decaying scrap metal. A shack that is tucked deep inside the cave of an elephant-shaped rock.

And that rock is surrounded by sea.

If you were to ask most people – most *living* people, I mean – they would probably tell you that the rock I'm talking about doesn't even exist. I'm not saying that it's invisible, exactly. It's more like you forget that you've seen it the moment you stop looking at it. One minute it's there, clear as day. But as soon as your eyes slide past, it's like somebody has taken to your brain with a sponge. All that you remember is cold and empty ocean.

The rock-that-doesn't-exist sits off the coast from a town, nestled among trees, that nobody ever visits. Summer tourists don't register the little fishing village, or the empty lighthouse that looms over it, preferring instead the glitzy resorts and white-sand beaches up the way. Nobody stops to bother with the town, its people or its secrets. And even *I've* forgotten the town's name. But don't worry; I'm certain that it's nowhere near you.

Well . . . not *certain*, obviously.

I mean it has to be somewhere, doesn't it?

What I should say then is that it's *probably* nowhere near you – depending, I suppose, on exactly where it is that you are. But if you *do* happen to be somewhere near the town-that-nobody-visits, my advice would be to get out of there as quickly as you can. I'd tell you to grab your family and your friends and whatever else you care about, and run.

I'd tell you to keep running. Then run some more.

Because if where you are – where you are right this very second – is close to the town-that-nobody-visits, that would mean you're near the rock-that-doesn't-exist, too.

With its damp cave and its rickety shack. And its Witches.

Not that you'd know it, of course.



I should probably introduce myself. I'm Corpse. Obviously it's not the name I was born with. I forgot *that* one as soon as I died. If I've counted right, that means I forgot my name nearly thirteen years ago to the day. And if I had to guess, I'd say that's about the same number of years that I was alive, too.

Give or take.

I couldn't bring my name with me when I died, just like I couldn't bring any of my memories. When you become a ghost, every trace of your life vanishes. The faces of your family. The house where you lived. You even forget how it is that you died.

All of it just slips away, as if taken by the tides, and



by the time your very last memory is gone, you can't help but wonder whether you might have just always been a ghost.

Every single memory from your life disappears . . .  
. . . and all you're left with is questions.

That's why I call myself Corpse, I guess. Because I have no idea whether I was an Alice or an Annabelle. A Sophie or a Sarah. A Poppy or a Prudence.

Or anything else like that.

'What do you think of these?' I ask Simon now, holding a pair of periwinkles for him to see. I turn them this way and that, letting them catch the afternoon's silver light.

*Click-click-click*, he says.

'Hmm . . . maybe you're right.'

I fling the periwinkles out to sea, where they disappear beneath the glassy surface. 'But it's hard to find a pair that are *exactly* the same size, you know.'

*Click-click.*

'I think you're being a bit fussy today, Simon.'

Simon is a spider, by the way. A huntsman spider, to be exact.

He's got grey-brown fuzz, and eight wriggly legs

that tickle my wax skin whenever he crawls across it. Right now, though, he's sitting on my shoulder.

'Come on then,' I say. 'Let's keep looking.'

(Yes, I can talk to animals. All ghosts can.)

I hurry ahead, scampering over the tide pools that fringe the rock-that-doesn't-exist. And as I go, I scan underfoot for something that might work as a new set of ears. A pair of limpets, maybe? Matching ram's horns? A couple of dead jellyfish? Anything has got to be better than the sea squirts I've been using lately. They keep falling off. Every now and again I collect something, hold it up to the side of my head and ask Simon for his honest opinion. And every single time – *click-click-click-click!* – he suggests that we keep looking.

'Fine,' I tell him. 'But you're being *very* picky.'

I mean . . . it's not like I need ears, exactly. Not in the way that a fleshie does, anyway. Fleshies are what I call people who haven't died yet, and obviously *they* need ears.

(You know, to hear and stuff.)

Us ghosts, on the other hand, can hear perfectly fine without them. Just like how we can see without

eyes and smell without noses. Still, I like having all those things.

Having them makes me feel less dead.

I guess it's lucky, then, that I discovered I'm different to other ghosts. I can do something that most others can't. In fact, there have been heaps of other kid ghosts who have come and gone from the rock-that-doesn't-exist, but I've never met any who were able to pour themselves into a body like I can. Not a single one. And being able to Possess this body . . .

. . . well, it's about as close to being alive as a ghost can be.

This body lets me touch stuff and remember what things feel like. I can pick things up. Move them around. But more important than any of that, having this body helps me stick around. It helps keep away the thing that comes *after* you turn into a ghost.

It helps keep me out of Death Proper's clutches.

'What about these?' I ask Simon now.

(This time, I'm holding a pair of violet snails.)

. . . *click*.

'No need to be rude,' I grumble. 'A simple "no" would do.'

And with a sigh, I toss the snails into the ocean.

Then, I hurry ahead.

I probably wouldn't admit it to him while he's being like this, but I'm glad that Simon comes on these beachcombing missions with me. Normally, spiders are very easily scared creatures, even though you wouldn't think so. They don't like to leave home much if they can help it. Not Simon, though. He's pretty brave for a spider.

'*URGH!*'

Shuddering, I pull my foot away from the soft and squishy something that I just stepped on. Even before I look down, I know what I'm going to find.

Yep . . . three dead cormorants.

*Yuck.*

The Witches did it. No doubt about that. I've seen them do the spell a thousand times before. To leave the rock-that-doesn't-exist and cross the water to the town-that-nobody-visits, each of the three Witches first needs to steal the shape of a creature that can swim or fly. But this particular spell comes with a price, and today it's the cormorants who paid it.

'I really do *bate* the Witches,' I say to Simon.

*Click-click-click*, he agrees.

I scan the skies, just in case, but there's nothing to see except steely and polished clouds. Further out to sea, the sky is beginning to grow inky and dangerous. The first signs of a coming storm dance on the air. But nope . . . there's no sign of the Witches.

(Still, I know they'll be back soon.)

'It's been hours since they left,' I say.

*Click-click.*

'They've been away so much lately.'

*Click-click-click.*

I only ever dare to step outside when the Witches are away from the rock-that-doesn't-exist because, somehow, they've never worked out that I haunt the roof above their shack. They have no clue that a ghost made of wax shares this place with them. And I can't *ever* let them find out. I don't want to think about what would happen if they did.

*Click-click-click*, Simon says.

I nod. 'Maybe a *little* bit longer.'

Darting forwards, and accidentally startling a family of rock crabs as I go, I come to a stop beside a glassy pool, where I watch an octopus tuck himself

into a crack. He's just finished disguising himself to look like a rock when I spot something pretty resting beside him.

'What about this?' I say.

I plunge my hand into the icy water and retrieve it. A chunk of amber sea glass. Running a thumb over it, I smile at how smooth and cool and hard it feels beneath my touch.

(Kind of like a jewel or something.)

'Yes, I *do* realise I would need two of them,' I tell Simon, before he gets a chance to say something about needing more than one ear. 'But it doesn't have to be an ear. Maybe it could be a nose! I haven't had a new nose in ages. What do you think?'

*Click.*

'Good,' I say, and pocket the sea glass in my overalls. They're tatty and don't fit me properly, but I like them for my own reasons. 'That's something, at least.'

*CLICK!*

'What?'

*CLICK-CLICK-CLICK!*

Simon jabs one long and crooked leg back in the direction of the rock that houses the Witches' shack.

In its shadow, an unfamiliar figure is shuffling towards us. Hunched over and slow, the figure is all invisible creases and blurred colours and shifting outlines. Another ghost, appeared as if from nowhere.

Only this ghost doesn't have a body. This ghost isn't like me. He's just a regular ghost. As he shuffles closer, a swooping gull passes right through him.

'Is that . . . is that an *old man ghost*?'

Hurrying to tuck myself behind a boulder sort-of-thing, I crouch down and peek around the side of it to get a better look. Only I still don't believe what I'm seeing.

'Why would an old man ghost be out here?'

*Click-click?* Simon suggests.

I shake my head. 'No. The Witches didn't snatch him.'

They only ever snatch kids, because when it comes to doing their most horrible magics and brewing their most disgusting concoctions, only kids are of any use to them.

He must have died at sea, then, or found some other way here.

Except that there *is* no other way here. No way on

or off the rock-that-doesn't-exist. If there was, I would have found it by now. I've been looking for one since I got here.

'Wait . . . where is he?' I whisper.

I only looked away for a second, but now the old ghost is gone.

Something strange fizzes over my wax skin, dancing along the place where my spine should be, then wriggling up my neck. *Danger*, it seems to be warning me.

'Simon, did you see wh—'

'There you are.'

The voice, grumbling and gruff, is coming from right behind me. I spin around to find that the old ghost isn't gone at all. My whole body turns rigid.

He takes a lumbering step forwards.

'Found you,' he growls.

I jump up. 'Go away.'

All that fizzing energy rushes to my legs, making them feel like loaded springs. Every part of my body is tense and ready for action. Whoever this ghost is . . .

. . . he can't be good news.

OUT NOW

'Ghoulishly charming. I loved it!' Jessica Townsend, bestselling author of *Nevermoor*

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