

'Fizzes and crackles with magic and mystery!' KAREN FOXLEE

# REECE CARTER



# The Lost Notes of the Soul Spinners



Illustrations by  
**SIMON HOWE**

REECE CARTER

The  
Lost Notes  
of the  
Soul  
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ALLEN & UNWIN  
SYDNEY • MELBOURNE • AUCKLAND • LONDON



# 1

# Girl

When it comes to imagination, I've been told I have a lot of it. *Too much*, according to my best friend. She doesn't mean it. Sometimes she just says stuff like that. Anyway, I don't mind because imagination is exactly what it takes to picture how Elston-Fright's town hall must have looked before it sank into disrepair. From where I'm standing at the side of its stage, tucked behind a curtain and peeking out, I decide the hall is the kind of place that must have been grand and impressive once.

Not anymore.

The town hall's lemon-coloured paint is peeling in some places and bubbling in others. There's a creeping stain in the centre of the ceiling, and the floorboards are scuffed. Everything smells musty, but then again that could just be the curtain. I lean closer to check—

—then pull away again.

*Yep. It's definitely the curtain.*

'You're at it again, Girl,' Flip whispers.

I stop humming. 'Accident. Didn't even realise I was doing it.'

'Are you nervous? Lately you've been humming when you're Worried.'

Flip Little is a friend of mine, and he talks like that sometimes, as if certain words have Extra Importance. Since it began a few days ago, that's what he's called it – my *Worry*. Like it's a living, breathing thing.

'Yes,' I admit.

Truth is, I hum when I'm all kinds of things. I hum when I'm dancing. When I'm exploring. When I'm daydreaming. Flip's right, though – this time, I was doing it because I'm Worried. Right at



this very moment, people are trickling through the doorway, chattering among themselves and eyeing the stage as they take their seats in long rows of fold-out chairs. It's enough to make any kid ghost a bit nervous – especially when their best friend, who should be here by now, isn't.

'Where *is* she?' I mutter.

'Corpse still has a few minutes before the meeting starts,' Flip's nan tells me.

To be honest she seems a bit nervous herself, which makes sense given that what we're about to do is something Nan Little has been waiting to do for her entire life. Anticipation dances behind her eyes: silver, like her grandson's, and framed by pale skin that reminds me of crepe paper. She's wearing an emerald-coloured jacket, complete with a starfish-shaped brooch, and a matching skirt that reaches to her ankles, with brown shoes, polished until shiny, poking from beneath it. Her outfit is the type of thing a person wears when they have something important to say, when they're demanding to be taken seriously. It's a big change from the fluffy robe she normally wears at the lighthouse



where she lives with Flip, and which Corpse and I have been haunting since the Littles invited us to move in with them.

Oh – Corpse is a ghost, too. I don't think I mentioned that bit.

'You don't reckon anything happened to her, do you?'

'I must admit, I'm feeling a touch uneasy about it myself,' says Nan Little. 'But then it's not unlike her and Simon to lose track of time while they're out searching for the weresquid. You know what she's been like lately.'

I *do* know what she's been like lately. Corpse has been spending barely any time at the lighthouse. Each morning for the past five days, she's headed out to sea with our friend Simon to try to track down Mister McKraken, who's gone missing. Mister M is a monster – a weresquid, to be exact – and it's highly unusual that he would disappear when he was supposed to be doing us a favour.

'Maybe they found him?' Flip suggests. 'Maybe Corpse and Simon finally tracked Mister McKraken down?'



‘Yeah,’ I agree. ‘Maybe.’

I’m not sure I mean it. I can’t shake my Worry.

Flip tries and fails to smooth his white hair, which has been slicked sideways but doesn’t want to stay that way. He’s in a crisp shirt, buttoned all the way to the top, which his nan made him wear. ‘She’ll be here,’ he says. ‘Corpse knows what a big deal today is.’

I suppose now’s the time to explain *why* today is a big deal. Firstly, it’s important to understand that the people who live in Elston-Fright have no clue their town draws evil magical things to it like flies. In fact, most of the town’s living residents (fleshies, Corpse and I call them) don’t believe in magic at all. The Littles are an exception. Flip’s family has a long history of trying to defend Elston-Fright against evil magic. Apart from them and their friend Mr Nguyen, people in Elston-Fright seem happy enough to believe that all the terrible stuff that’s ever happened around here is down to rotten luck. It doesn’t make much sense to me, but Mr Nguyen says it’s just the way they are. ‘Some folks prefer a familiar lie over an uncomfortable truth,’ he explained.

The second thing to know is that today is the day those same folks are going to have their worlds turned upside down. Flip calls it the Very Big and Important Plan that Will Change Everything.

It was his nan's plan, really. Days ago, on the morning after we fought off a band of dangerous weather ghouls called the Poltergusts, she decided it was time the town learned the truth about magic. They needed to know, she said, so that when something bad like the Poltergusts came to Elston-Fright next, they'd be prepared for it. She rang the police chief and demanded he call a town meeting.

He *should* have said yes straightaway. After all, police chief Jack Burley had come face to face with the ghouls himself. There was no way he could deny magic existed after that.

But he *did* deny it. He refused to call a town meeting.

'With or without you, mark my words, I'm going through with it,' Nan Little barked into the phone receiver. 'It's up to you whether you want to be on the right side of things.'

Burley still refused, so Flip and his nan dropped flyers into every mailbox in town:

**URGENT  
ANNOUNCEMENT  
— PERTAINING TO —  
THE SAFETY *of*  
ELSTON-FRIGHT**

We are a town unprepared.  
Evil visits our shores, unchecked and unseen.  
Discover the past. Know the threat.  
Uncover the truth.  
Town Hall, Sunday, 10 am

While his nan decided on the wording, Flip was the one to write the flyers by hand. I thought they were a bit much, and I didn't like how they made it sound as if *all* magic is evil when it isn't, but I didn't tell Flip that. He'd seemed so pleased with his work.

The final thing to explain is that I have an important role to play in the Plan. So does Corpse – *if* she ever shows up.

'Ah,' says Nan Little. 'Hoang is closing the doors. That must be everybody.'

At the far end of the hall, with creased brown skin, friendly eyes and a woollen cap that he never seems to take off, is Mr Nguyen. Once he's closed the double doors he takes a seat in the very back row and gives us a thumbs up.

Flip tears his eyes from the gathered fleshies and looks at me.

Or, well . . . he *kind of* looks at me.

He tries to – but misses.

I should probably point out, since Flip and his nan are fleshies, that means I'm invisible to them. Since Flip can't see where I am, he aims his words in the direction my voice is coming from but ends up speaking to something over my shoulder. 'I guess I was wrong about Corpse making it in time after all. Will you be okay doing it on your own?'

'I reckon we need to wait,' I say. 'I can't do magic. If the whole point of the Very Big and Important Plan that Will Change Everything is to prove magic exists, shouldn't we wait for Corpse so she can do a spell like she was gonna?'

Nan Little turns in my direction, too. Her words end up being directed at my elbow. 'I'm afraid there's



no time for that. This might be the only chance we get. Besides, there's more to the mystical forces than just magic. Corpse might be the one with spells up her sleeve, but you're still a ghost. You have abilities of your own. What you can do will be more than enough to convince people to listen to what I have to say. If you're having second thoughts—'

'I'm not,' I say. 'Only . . . *why isn't she here yet?*'

'Let's get this over and done with quickly,' Flip suggests. 'Then we can go find Corpse and Simon.'

His nan nods. 'Hoang can take the two of you in his boat. I'll stay back and deal with any' – she pauses, trying to find the right word – '*questions* people may have. I imagine there will be a few of them.'

We all agree, then Nan Little inhales deeply as if to shake off the last of her nerves. Flip leans down to collect a metal box by his feet.

When the three of us step out from behind the curtain, the fleshies' mumblings grow louder.

'Not quite the turnout I was hoping for,' Nan Little mutters.

I do a quick headcount and realise only fifteen people have shown up – sixteen if you count

Mr Nguyen. Fifteen strangers. That means fifteen sets of unfamiliar eyes looking up at us. Green ones. Brown ones. Blue ones. They can't see me, of course, but that will change soon enough.

We come to a stop, and Nan Little steps to the front of the stage. She pulls her shoulders back and stands a little taller.

A hush falls over the gathered fleshies.

'Good morning and thank you for coming. I'm sure you're wondering why I've called you here today—'

'We came to see if the old lady from the lighthouse has lost her marbles the way Burley says she has!' a man laughs.

A flurry of snickers follows, but Nan Little waves them away. 'Yes, yes – you're very funny, and we're all quite impressed. As it happens, I'm well aware of the rumours our police chief has spread about me. He isn't the first Burley to silence the warnings the Little family has tried to share with this town.'

'Warnings about *evil visiting our shores?*' the heckler says.

'Is it true you believe in magic?' calls somebody else.



‘Hush!’ comes a third voice. ‘Some of us want to hear what she’s got to say.’

‘I do believe in magic, as a matter of fact. I’ll have you know our town is a magnet for it, and my family has spent a long time documenting the shadowy goings-on around these parts. Still, I had a hunch you might take some persuading, so perhaps rather than trying to convince you, it’s best if I simply show you.’

Taking his cue, Flip places the box on the stage and opens it. Inside is my patchwork cape, folded neatly. Draped over that are two white gloves.

‘All I ask is that you don’t panic,’ Flip’s nan continues. ‘There’s no need to get your tentacles in a tangle over what you’re about to see. Not all that’s mystical is cause for alarm. I assure you she won’t hurt anyone.’

Mutterings pass through the hall.

‘She? Who is *she*?’

‘What are we supposed to be looking at?’

‘Wait . . . did she say *hurt* us?’

‘You’re on, Girl,’ Flip whispers.

Since I can’t do magic, my part of the Plan involves using the Ghostly Acts. There are three of

them all up – three special powers reserved for the dead – and I can do two of them. The first, Spooking, is what allows me to speak with fleshies. It would be easy to assume, since I was talking to Flip and his nan behind the curtain, that all ghosts can do this. But that’s not the case. Ghosts are voiceless unless they can Spook.

Then there’s the *other* thing Spooking lets you do. I raise my hand towards the box—

—and a single glove springs from inside it. It shoots through the air and slips itself over my hand as if I’m made of flesh and bone.

There’s a gasp from the audience.

I Spook my second glove.

Another gasp.

My cape follows. It ties itself beneath my chin and falls over my shoulders before I take a step closer to the front of the stage and perform the *second* Ghostly Act.

I Fly.

I try to imagine it through the fleshies’ eyes – a fluttering cape lifted into the air, gloves floating on their own.

‘How’re you doing that?’ someone shouts.



‘What is this trick?’ asks another.

‘What the jellyfish is going on?’ cries the heckler.

‘Hello,’ I say – loudly and clearly, as we planned.

The sound of chair legs scraping against floorboards fills the hall as people jump to their feet. They stumble backwards, pointing and questioning. Only Mr Nguyen and two fleshies sitting in the front row don’t react.

‘My name’s Girl and I’m a—’

*BOOM!*

The hall’s doors burst open.

‘GHOST!’ cries the person running through it, a stranger with blue-tinged skin and long black hair that drags along the floor.

Nan Little gasps. Her hands race to the sides of her head. ‘Cover your ears! Don’t listen to a word she says!’

Mr Nguyen cups his hands over his ears as instructed. So do the two fleshies in the front row. Nobody else pays attention to Nan Little’s warning.

‘Girl!’ Flip shouts. His eyes have turned wide like silver coins. ‘You have to get out of here!’

‘Why? Who is—?’

‘Now, Girl,’ he pleads. ‘You’re in danger!’



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