Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Helping you choose books for children

0-5 5-7 7-9 9-12 12+

Opening extract from

Flood and Fang: The Raven Mysteries

Written by

Marcus Sedgwick

Published by

Orion Children's Books

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

Please print off and read at your

Also by Marcus Sedgwick for older readers

Blood Red, Snow White
The Book of Dead Days
The Dark Flight Down
The Dark Horse
The Dead Days Omnibus
Floodland
The Foreshadowing
The Kiss of Death
My Swordhand is Singing
Witch Hill



Book 1

MARCUS SEDGWICK

Illustrated by Pete Williamson

Orion
Children's Books

First published in Great Britain in 2009
by Orion Children's Books
a division of the Orion Publishing Group Ltd
Orion House
5 Upper St Martin's Lane
London WC2H 9EA
An Hachette UK Company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Text copyright © Marcus Sedgwick 2009
Illustrations copyright © Pete Williamson 2009

The rights of Marcus Sedgwick and Pete Williamson to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work respectively have been asserted.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Orion Children's Books.

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

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

ISBN 978 1 84255 692 4

Printed in Great Britain by
Mackays of Chatham plc, Chatham, Kent

www.orionbooks.co.uk

For Ravens everywhere





One

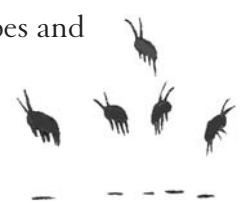
Castle Otherhand is
home to all sorts of
oddballs, lunatics
and fruitcakes.
It's just as well
for all of them that
they have a secret
weapon: he's
called Edgar.



I suspect I may have fleas again.

It is altogether a distinct possibility. What do they expect? Keeping me cooped up in this nasty old cage, or maybe allowing me to flap around the High Terrace, with its crumbling, weed-infested stones, it's hardly surprising that I pick up the occasional visitor, is it? It's not my fault. When awake, I spend as much time as I can rootling about with beak and claw, hunting the little chaps down, but I'm an old raven, and my neck hurts if I twist it too far. So then I think to myself, well, one or two visitors will just have to stay till next rootle, and I give up. It's not even as if they taste very nice.

Anyway, as I said, I'm an old raven, and I don't want to get into any more scrapes and



scraps, but I suspect I always will. The Otherhands are all so very stupid, even for people, and it looks very much as though I will have to go on getting this family out of the messes they get themselves in.



Take last Wednesday. Wednesday, never a good day if you think about it, began with the idiot boy, Cudweed, shrieking at the top of his voice that I'd escaped again. I swear he has it in for me at the moment, because of his pet monkey, Fellah. Ridiculous name for a monkey. I know it and you know it. But the truth is that Cudweed was taking misplaced revenge for his *own* naming, which was his parents' fault, of course. Actually, it was his mother alone who named

him Cudweed, having previously allowed her husband to name their first born, Cudweed's sister, Solstice. This is only to be expected from a couple called Valevine and Minty. In case you're wondering, Valevine is the head of the household, our lord and master. He really is a lord too, Lord Valevine Plantagenet Vesuvius Ropey Otherhand of Otherhand Castle.

Minty is his wife, the Lady Otherhand. Minty isn't her real name. That would be absurd. Her real name is Euphemia. Minty is one of those awful nicknames which people in love give each other. They're called pet names, but you wouldn't even call a pet monkey Minty.



You shouldn't call it Fellah either, but Cudweed had accurately assessed that nothing would irritate his father more than a name based in slang, and he was right. Slang has the power to irritate Lord Valevine beyond all reasonable measure, as does the dropping of Hs at the start of words, and something he refers to in a low and shaking voice as the 'glottal stop'. I have no idea what one of those is, but it sounds like it might hurt.



The monkey was a tenth birthday present, so no one could object to Cudweed's choice, but 'Fellah' was enough to get Cudweed banished to his room for a week, while Valevine stormed off to his laboratory in the East Tower and didn't emerge for two.

Cudweed is under the impression that I do not like his monkey, but he is wrong.

I hate his monkey.

I hate its continual gabber, and I hate its oggly eyes, and I hate its stupid little red waistcoat. I hate that most of all. But Solstice would tell me off if she knew what I was saying. She'd tell me that hate is a strong word, so let me just say instead that if I had the chance, I'd kill that monkey at the slightest opportunity.



Last Wednesday, therefore, when the bespectacled Cudweed spotted me flapping into the dining hall, he wasted no time in shrieking at the top of his voice.

'He's out again! Mother! Edgar's escaped again!'



Cudweed's not a bad child really. He has thin, short sticky hair, and thick glasses, which make his eyes look very small. He has eaten altogether a few too many of Cook's pies, and while he is not fat, he'd go down a treat on a stranded Antarctic expedition. Most of all, the poor boy is frightened. Always. He is fantastically, extraordinarily, amazingly, award-winningly scared, all the time.



He shivers through life, and right now, he's scared that I might do something to the monkey. Which I would, except I think Fellah might wring my neck if I let him get within arm's grab.



Now, as soon as Cudweed piped up, Fellah joined in and very soon the whole house was ringing to the sounds of stamping feet and shouts of 'There he is!' and 'Shut that window' and 'Where's the net gone?'

Then the cursed castle had to get involved, and suddenly all my routes were shut; not a window or door open to me. I was trapped in the scullery. I swear the castle picks on people sometimes, I really do, but why it was siding with the Otherhands that morning, and not me, I do not know. I've been here much longer than they have, for one thing.

I must have had the whole family and half the kitchen staff staring up at me as I sat on a beam near the ceiling.

They shouted and pointed, and I'm not afraid to admit that I got rather cross, and turned my back on the lot of them. It wasn't as if I had escaped for no reason, but some people just don't want to be helped. There are times when they simply don't seem to realise that I am their guardian angel.

I tucked my beak under my left wing, settled in for a good sulk, had a small rootle, and then it went quiet underneath me, and I heard Solstice call.

'Edgar?' she said. 'Edgar? Won't you come down?'

The devil take me, I don't know what it is about that girl, but suddenly I didn't feel so cross anymore, and I shuffled round on the beam and looked down.

Maybe it's her hair. It's long and shiny and black, as black as the feathers of old Mrs Edgar; black and shiny as coal, right up to the very day she fell off the tree and the dogs ate her. Happy days.

Solstice takes after her mother, or rather, her mother when she was young and interesting. A strange side to the family, Solstice and her mother, and Minty's mother, Grandmother Slivinkov, who lives in an attic high in the castle rafters. She's rarely seen, but that's fine by me, for she is a rather odd old lady,





if I may be polite about it.

'Come down, Edgar,' Solstice said, her voice all lovely like warm milk, and she lifted her arm up towards me. I caved in and jumped down from the beam, landing on her wrist with only a slight stumble. I twitched my beak a bit as if I'd meant to do it, and let Solstice take me back to the cage in the Red Room, behind the High Terrace.

'There, there, Edgar,' she crooned, and listening to her sweet voice, and being quite an old raven, I began to drift off, and completely

forgot why I'd been flapping around downstairs in the first place, what I'd seen out in the grounds, and what I'd smelt in the cellars.

Solstice gently popped me back on my perch, and clicked the door shut, locking it with the miniature padlock, and off she went, wondering to herself.



'How do you get out of there, Edgar? It's like magic.'

It's true, they will insist on locking me in the cage, 'so he doesn't hurt himself', and even Solstice, the smartest of them all, is at a loss to explain my excursions elsewhere.

She'd barely shut the door, when suddenly I caught a whiff of that smell again, and it all flooded back into my little bird brain.

'Futhork!' I squawked, which in raven speech is quite rude. I would have to take matters under my wing.

I tilted my head up to the top of the cage and, checking no one was around, flicked the little brass section of bars that secretly opens when pushed just so, and hopped out onto the rug.

Well, that will teach them to buy a second-hand cage from a retired magician, and besides, I have one or two tricks of my own.



Two

The castle was besieged 32 times before the Otherhands 'acquired' it from the Deffreeques. No one knows why they succeeded where the others failed.