

THE SPOOKS STORIES WITCHES

*Born to use
dark magic . . .*



JOSEPH DELANEY

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About the Author
The Wardstone Chronicles
Also by Joseph Delaney
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About the Book

WARNING: NOT TO BE READ AFTER DARK

For years, the local Spook has been keeping the County safe from ghosts and boggarts, but more especially from witches.

And here are five dark and terrifying witch stories from the Spook's own collection. There are child-eating witches, witch assassins, Celtic witches, dead witches, and witches so beautiful they can break a man's heart.

These stories will chill your blood and frighten you to your very bones. Just remember not to read them after dark.

THE
SPOOKS
STORIES
WITCHES



JOSEPH DELANEY

Illustrated by David Wyatt

RED FOX

To Marie

How to Read Spook's Symbols

Boggarts

Beta for Boggart

B P ← ripper

B Naturally bound boggart

X ← rank

Gregory ← name

B Artificially bound boggart

I - dangerous

X - hardly detectable

Ghosts/Ghasts

γ

I - dangerous

X - hardly detectable

X

Gregory

Witches

O

M - malevolent

B - benign

U - unaware

M

Gregory

CHARACTER PROFILES

Tom

Thomas Ward is the seventh son of a seventh son. This means he was born with certain gifts – gifts that make him perfect for the role of the Spook's apprentice. He can see and hear the dead and he is a natural enemy of the dark. But that doesn't stop Tom getting scared, and he is going to need all his courage if he is to succeed where twenty-nine others have failed.

The Spook

The Spook is an unmistakable figure. He's tall, and rather fierce looking. He wears a long black cloak and hood, and always carries a staff and a silver chain. Like his apprentice, Tom, he is left-handed, and is a seventh son of a seventh son.

For over sixty years he has protected the County from things that go bump in the night.

Alice

Tom can't decide if Alice is good or evil. She terrifies the local village lads, is related to two of the most evil witch clans (the Malkins and the Deanes) and has been known to use dark magic. But she was trained as a witch against her will and has helped Tom out of some tight spots. She seems to be a loyal friend, but can she be trusted?

Mam

Tom's mam has always known he would become the Spook's apprentice. She calls him her 'gift to the County'. A

loving mother and an expert on plants, medicine and childbirth, Mam has always been a little different. Her origins in Greece remain a mystery. In fact, there are quite a few mysterious things about Mam ...

THE HIGHEST POINT IN THE COUNTY IS MARKED BY MYSTERY.
IT IS SAID THAT A MAN DIED THERE IN A GREAT STORM, WHILE BINDING
AN EVIL THAT THREATENED THE WHOLE WORLD.

THEN THE ICE CAME AGAIN, AND WHEN IT RETREATED, EVEN THE
SHAPES OF THE HILLS AND THE NAMES OF THE TOWNS IN THE VALLEYS
CHANGED.

NOW, AT THAT HIGHEST POINT ON THE FELS, NO TRACE REMAINS OF
WHAT WAS DONE SO LONG AGO, BUT ITS NAME HAS ENDURED.

THEY CALL IT -

THE WARDSTONE.

MEG
SKELTON

THIS IS A tale that must be told; a warning to those who might one day take my place. My name is John Gregory and I'm the local Spook; what now follows is the full and truthful account of my dealings with the witch Meg Skelton.

CHAPTER 1 THE FIGHT WITH THE ABHUMAN



FOR FIVE YEARS my master, Henry Horrocks, had trained me as a spook, teaching me how to deal with ghosts, boggarts, witches and all manner of creatures from the dark. Now my apprenticeship was completed and I was fully qualified, still living at my master's Chipenden house and working alongside him to make the County a safer place.

Late in the autumn, an urgent message came from Arnside, to the north-west of the County, begging my old master and me to deal with an abhuman, a foul, monstrous creature that had brought terror to the district for far too long. Many families had suffered at its cruel hands and there had been many deaths and maimings.

Henry Horrocks's health had been deteriorating for quite some time, and three days before the message arrived he'd taken to his bed.

'You'll have to go on ahead, lad,' he told me, struggling for breath, his chest wheezing as he spoke. 'But take care - abhumans can be very strong. Keep it at bay as I've taught you, using your staff, then stab it through the forehead. If the job looks too dangerous, keep watch from a distance. As soon as I'm fit enough, I'll follow you north. Hopefully tomorrow ...'

With those words we parted, and carrying my staff and bag, I set off for Arnside. Had I been going to face a witch,

I would have borrowed my master's silver chain, but there were doubts about its effectiveness against abhumans, which have varying levels of resistance towards such tools of our trade as rowan wood, salt and iron. No – a blade was the best way to deal with such a creature.

I visited Arnside village and a few farms to gather as much information as possible concerning the nature of what I faced and where I would find it. What I heard did little to boost my confidence. The creature was immensely strong and had attacked a farmer only a week earlier, ripping his head from his shoulders while the terrified milkmaid watched from her hiding place in the barn. After killing her unfortunate employer, the abhuman drank his blood, then tore the raw flesh from his bones with its teeth. It had now made its home in a tower and usually went hunting for prey soon after midnight. People for miles around were living in fear; no home was safe.

I came down into the forest at dusk. All the leaves had fallen and lay on the ground, rotten and brown. The tower was twice the height of the tallest trees, like a black demon finger pointing up at the grey County sky. A girl had been seen waving from its solitary window, frantically beckoning for aid. I'd been told that the creature had seized her for its own and now held her as its plaything, imprisoning her within those dank stone walls.

First I made a fire and sat gazing into its flames while I gathered my courage. It would be better to wait for Henry Horrocks to arrive; two of us would have a far greater chance against the creature. But despite his assurances I had no confidence that he would join me. His condition had been steadily worsening rather than improving. Besides, the creature would probably kill again this very night. It was my duty as a spook to deal with it before then; my duty to the people of the County.

Taking the whetstone from my bag, I sharpened the blade of my staff until my fingers could not touch its edge

without yielding blood. Finally, just before midnight, I went to the tower and hammered out a challenge upon the wooden door with the base of my staff.

The creature came forth brandishing a great club and roared out in anger. It was a foul thing dressed in the skins of animals, reeking of blood. Almost seven feet tall, with a chest like a barrel, it was a truly formidable opponent. I am a spook and trained to deal with creatures of the dark, and I was strong then and in my prime, but my courage faltered as it attacked me with a terrible fury.



At first I retreated steadily, but I released the blade from its recess in my staff and waited for my chance to counter-attack. Jabbing repeatedly at the beast to keep it at bay, I