

# THE SPOOKS SACRIFICE

*Should he trust  
his enemies?*

JOSEPH DELANEY

# Contents

Cover

About the Book

Title Page

Dedication

How to Read Spook's Symbols

Character Profiles

Map

Epigraph

Chapter 1: The Maenad Assassin

Chapter 2: The Spook's Bestiary

Chapter 3: A Changeling?

Chapter 4: Decisions

Chapter 5: Alice Deane

Chapter 6: A Dreadful Prophecy

Chapter 7: The Journey Begins

Chapter 8: The Young Ladies

Chapter 9: What I Am

Chapter 10: A Delegation of Thirteen

Chapter 11: Night Attack

Chapter 12: Lamias

Chapter 13: My Blood

Chapter 14: Portents

Chapter 15: The Approach to the Ord

Chapter 16: Fill the Cup

Chapter 17: Fire Elementals

Chapter 18: A Bargain

Chapter 19: Your Fate

Chapter 20: The Truth of Things

Chapter 21: A Sharp Tooth

Chapter 22: Last Words

Chapter 23: His Fearsome Majesty

Chapter 24: It can't be True

About the Author

The Wardstone Chronicles

Also by Joseph Delaney

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## About the Book

WARNING: NOT TO BE READ AFTER DARK

*'Witches, Mam? We've made an alliance with witches?'*

As the Spook's apprentice, Tom's first duty is to protect the County from the dark. But now Mam needs his help in her homeland of Greece to rise up against one of the Old Gods, the Ordeen.

Mam has summoned a powerful group to fight, but among them are the Pendle witches. Can Tom go against all the Spook has taught him and ally himself with the enemy?

What is the secret that Mam is keeping from Tom? And what sacrifices must be made in the battle against the dark?

***The sixth chilling tale in the Wardstone Chronicles***

THE  
SPOOKS  
SACRIFICE



JOSEPH DELANEY

Illustrated by David Frankland

RED FOX

for Marie

# How to Read Spook's Symbols

## Boggarts

Beta for Boggart

**B** P ← ripper  
X ← rank

Gregory ← name

I - dangerous

X - hardly detectable

**B** Naturally bound boggart

**B** Artificially bound boggart

## Ghosts/Ghasts

**γ** I - dangerous  
X ← X - hardly detectable  
X  
Gregory

## Witches

**O** M ← 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*

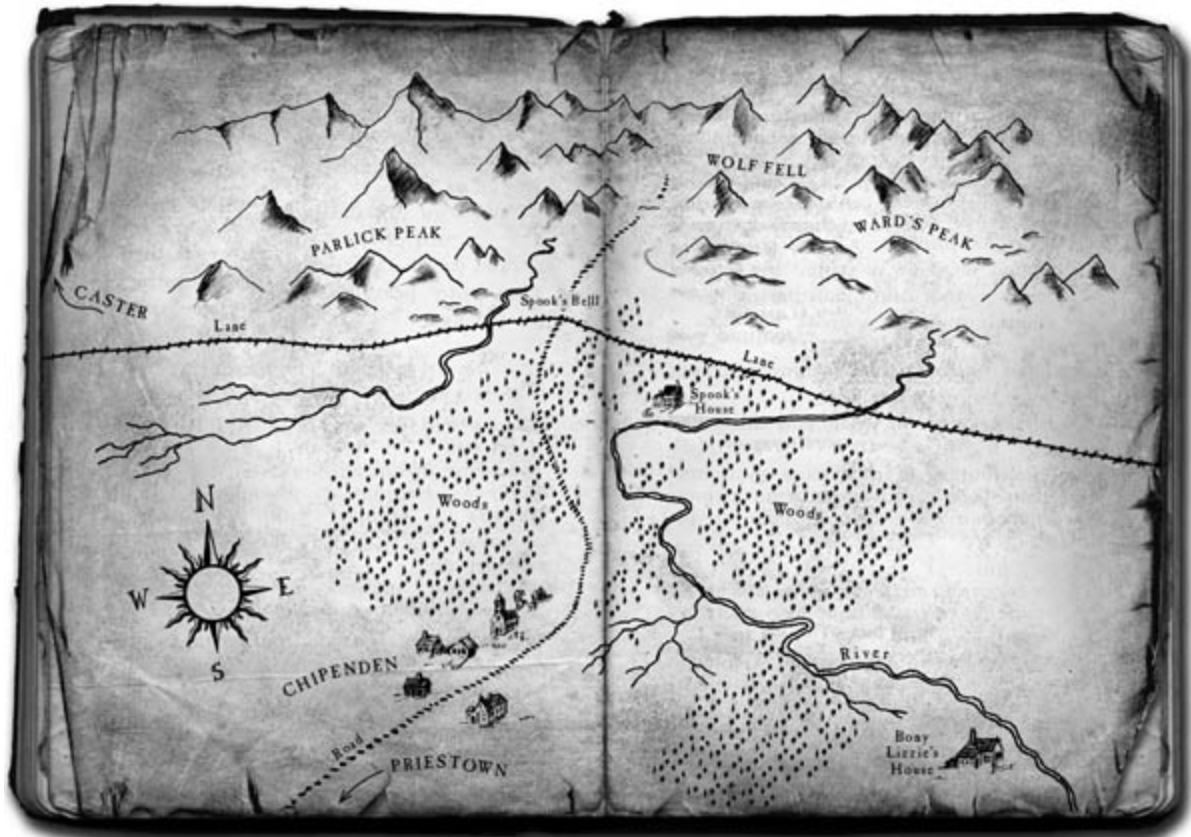
Tom can't decide if Alice is good or evil. She terrifies the local village lads, is related to two of the most evil witch clans (the Malkins and the Deanes) and has been known to use dark magic. But she was trained as a witch against her will and has helped Tom out of some tight spots. She seems to be 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 FELLS, NO TRACE REMAINS OF  
WHAT WAS DONE SO LONG AGO, BUT ITS NAME HAS ENDURED.

THEY CALL IT -

**THE WARDSTONE.**

CHAPTER  
1  
THE MAENAD ASSASSIN



I AWOKE SUDDENLY with an urgent sense that something was wrong. Lightning flickered against the window, followed almost immediately by a tremendous crash of thunder. I'd slept through County storms before, so it wasn't that which had woken me. No, I had a feeling that some kind of danger threatened. I jumped out of bed, and suddenly the mirror on my nightstand grew brighter. I had a glimpse of someone reflected in it and then it quickly vanished. But not before I'd recognized the face. It was Alice.

Even though she'd trained for two years as a witch, Alice was my friend. She'd been banished by the Spook and had returned to Pendle. I was missing her but I'd kept my promise to my master and ignored all the attempts she'd been making to contact me. But I couldn't ignore her this time. She'd written a message for me in the mirror and I couldn't help but read it before it faded away.

Danger! Warning!  
Assassin in garden!

What was a maenad assassin? I'd never heard of such a thing. And how could an assassin of *any* kind reach me when it had to cross the Spook's garden - a garden guarded by his powerful boggart? If anyone breached the boundary, that boggart would let out a roar that could be heard for miles, and would then tear the intruder to pieces.

And how could Alice know about the danger anyway? She was miles away in Pendle. Still, I wasn't about to ignore her warning. My master, John Gregory, had gone off to deal with a troublesome ghost and I was alone in the house. I had nothing with me that I could use in self-defence. My staff and bag were down in the kitchen, so I had to get them.

*Don't panic, I told myself. Take your time and stay calm.*

I dressed quickly and pulled on my boots. As thunder boomed overhead once more, I eased open my bedroom door and stepped cautiously out onto the dark landing. There I paused and listened. All was silent. I felt sure that nobody had entered the house yet, so I began to tiptoe down the stairs as quietly as I could. I crept through the hallway and into the kitchen.

I put my silver chain in my breeches pocket and, taking up my staff, opened the back door and stepped out. Where was the boggart? Why wasn't it defending the house and garden against the intruder? Rain was driving into my face as I waited, carefully searching the lawn and trees beyond for any sign of movement. I allowed my eyes to adjust to the dark but I could see very little. Even so, I headed for the trees in the western garden.

I'd taken no more than a dozen paces when there was a bloodcurdling yell from my left and I heard the pounding of

feet. Someone was running across the lawn, directly towards me. I readied my staff, pressing the recess so that, with a click, the retractable blade sprang from the end.

Lightning flashed again and I saw what threatened. It was a tall thin woman brandishing a long, murderous blade in her left hand. Her hair was tied back, her gaunt face twisted in hatred and painted with some dark pigment. She wore a long dress, which was soaked with rain, and rather than shoes, her feet were bound with strips of leather. So this was a maenad, I thought to myself.

I took up a defensive position, holding my staff diagonally the way I'd been taught. My heart was beating fast but I had to stay calm and take the first opportunity to strike.

Her blade suddenly arced downwards, missing my right shoulder by inches, and I whirled away, trying to keep some distance between myself and my opponent. I needed room in order to swing my staff. The grass was saturated with rain, and as the maenad came at me again, I slipped and lost my balance. I almost toppled over backwards but managed to drop down onto one knee. Just in time I brought my staff up to block a thrust that would have penetrated deep into my shoulder. I struck again, hitting the maenad's wrist hard, and the knife went spinning to the ground. Lightning flashed overhead and I saw the fury in her face as, weaponless, she attacked again. She was shouting at me now, mad with rage - the harsh guttural sounds contained the odd word that I recognized as Greek. This time I stepped to one side, avoided her outstretched hands with their long sharp nails and gave her a tremendous thwack to the side of her head. She went down on her knees and I could have easily driven the point of my blade through her chest.

Instead, I transferred my staff to my right hand, reached into my pocket and coiled the silver chain around my left

wrist. A silver chain is useful against any servant of the dark - but would it bind a maenad assassin? I asked myself.

I concentrated hard, and the moment she came to her feet she was illuminated by a particularly vivid flash of lightning. Couldn't have been better! I had a perfect view of my target and released the chain with a *crack!* It soared upwards to form a perfect spiral, then dropped around her body, bringing her down on the grass.

I circled her warily. The chain bound her arms and legs and had tightened around her jaw, but she was still able to speak and hurled a torrent of words at me, not one of which I understood. Was it Greek? I thought so - but it was some strange dialect.

It seemed the chain had worked though, so wasting no time, I seized her by her left foot and began to drag her across the wet grass towards the house. The Spook would want to question her - if he could understand what she was saying. My Greek was at least as good as his and she made little sense to me.

Against one side of the house was a wooden lean-to where we kept logs for the fire so I dragged her in there out of the rain. Next I took a lantern down from the shelf in the corner and lit it so that I could get a better look at my captive. As I held it above her head, she spat at me, the pink viscous glob landing on my breeches. I could smell her now - a mixture of stale sweat and wine. And there was something else too. A faint stench of rotting meat. When she opened her mouth again, I could see what looked like pieces of flesh between her teeth.

Her lips were purple, as was her tongue - signs that she'd been drinking red wine. Her face was streaked with an intricate pattern of whorls and spirals. It looked like reddish mud but the rain hadn't managed to wash it off. She spat at me again so I stepped back and hung the lantern on one of the ceiling hooks.

There was a stool in the corner, which I placed against the wall, sitting well out of spitting range. It was at least another hour until dawn so I leaned back and closed my eyes, listening to the rain drumming on the roof of the lean-to. I was tired and could afford to doze. The silver chain had bound the maenad tightly and she'd no hope of setting herself free.

I couldn't have been asleep for more than a few minutes when a loud noise woke me. I sat up with a jerk. There was a roaring, rushing, whooshing sound, which was getting nearer by the second. Something was coming towards the lean-to and I suddenly realized what it was.

The boggart! It was rushing to attack!

I hardly had time to get to my feet before the lantern went out and I was blown onto my back, the impact driving the breath from my body. While I gasped for air, I could hear logs being hurled against the wall, but the loudest sound of all was that of the maenad screaming. The noise went on in the darkness, for a long time; then, but for the pattering of heavy rain, there was silence. The boggart had done its work and gone.

I was afraid to light the lantern again. Afraid to look at the maenad. But I did it anyway. She was quite dead and very pale, drained of blood by the boggart. There were lacerations to her throat and shoulders; her dress was in tatters. On her face was a look of terror. There was nothing to be done. What had happened was unprecedented. Once she was my bound captive, the boggart shouldn't have so much as touched her. And where had it been when it should have been defending the garden?

Shaken by the experience, I left the maenad's body where it was and went back into the house. I thought about trying to contact Alice with the mirror. I owed her my life and I wanted to thank her. I almost weakened, but I'd made a promise to the Spook. So, after struggling with my



conscience for a while, I simply had a wash, changed my clothes and waited for the Spook to return.

He came back just before noon. I explained what had happened and we went out to look at the dead assassin.

'Well, lad, this raises a fair few questions, doesn't it?' my master said, scratching at his beard. He looked seriously worried and I couldn't blame him. What had happened made me feel very uneasy too.

'I've always felt confident that my house here at Chipenden was safe and secure,' he continued, 'but this makes you think. Puts doubts in your mind. I'll sleep less easily in my bed from now on. Just how did this maenad manage to get across the garden undetected by the boggart? Nothing's ever got past it before.'

I nodded in agreement.

'And there's another worrying thing, lad. Why did it attack and kill her later, when you had her bound with your chain? It knows not to behave like that.'

Again I nodded.

'There's something else I need to know - how did *you* know she'd got into the garden? It was thundering and raining hard. You couldn't possibly have heard her. By rights, she should have entered the house and killed you in your bed. So what gave you warning?' asked the Spook, raising his eyebrows.

I'd stopped nodding and was now gazing at my feet, feeling my master's glare burning into me. So I cleared my throat and explained exactly what had happened.

'I know I promised you I wouldn't use the mirror to talk to Alice,' I finished, 'but it happened too quickly for me to do anything about it. She's tried to contact me before but I've always obeyed you and looked away - until now. It was a good job I did read her message this time though,' I said a little angrily, 'otherwise I'd be dead!'

The Spook stayed very calm. 'Well, her warning saved your life, yes,' he admitted. 'But you know how I feel about you using a mirror and talking to that little witch.'

I bristled at his words. Perhaps he noticed because he let the matter drop. 'Do you know what a maenad assassin is, lad?'

I shook my head. 'One thing I do know - when she attacked, she was almost insane with fury!'

The Spook nodded. 'Maenads rarely venture from their homeland, Greece. They're a tribe of women who inhabit the wilderness there, living off the land - eating anything from wild berries to animals they find wandering across their path. They worship a bloodthirsty goddess called the Ordeen, and draw their power from a mixture of wine and raw flesh, working themselves up into a killing frenzy until they are ready for fresh victims. Mostly they feed upon the dead but they're not averse to devouring the living. This one had anointed her face to make her appear more ferocious; probably with a mixture of wine and human fat - and wax to hold the two together. No doubt she'd killed someone recently.'

'It's a good job you managed to knock her down and bind her, lad. Maenads have exceptional strength. They've been known to tear their victims to pieces using just their bare hands! Generations of them have lived like that, and as a result they've regressed so that now they're barely human. They are close to being savage animals but they still have a low cunning.'

'But why would she sail all the way here to the County?'

'To kill you, lad - that's plain enough. But why you should pose a threat to them in Greece I can't imagine. Your mam's there fighting the dark though, so no doubt this attack has something to do with her.'

Afterwards the Spook helped me unwrap my silver chain from the body of the maenad and we dragged her into the eastern garden. We dug a narrow pit for her, deeper than

its length and breadth, me doing most of the work as usual. Then we eased her into that dark shaft head first. She wasn't a witch, but the Spook never took any chances with servants of the dark - especially those we didn't know too much about. One night when the moon was full, dead or not, she might try to scratch her way to the surface. She wouldn't realize that she was heading in the opposite direction.

That done, the Spook sent me down to the village to find the local stonemason and blacksmith. By late evening they'd fashioned the stones and bars over her grave. It hadn't taken my master long to deduce the answer to his two other questions. He'd found two small wooden bloodstained troughs right at the edge of the garden. Most likely they'd been full of blood before the boggart had drunk its fill.

'My guess, lad, is that there was something mixed into the blood. Maybe it made the boggart sleep, or confused it. That's why it didn't detect the maenad entering the garden and later killed her when it shouldn't have. Pity she died. We could have questioned her and found out why she'd come and who'd sent her.'

'Could the Fiend be behind it?' I asked. 'Could he have sent her to kill me?'

The Fiend, also known as the Devil, had been loose in the world since the previous August. He'd been summoned by the three Pendle witch clans - the Malkins, Deanes and Mouldheels. Now the clans were at war with each other - some witches in thrall to the Fiend, others his bitter enemies. I'd encountered him three times since then, but although each encounter had left me shaken to my very bones, I knew it was unlikely the Devil would try to kill me by his own hand because he'd been hobbled.

Just as a horse can be hobbled, having its legs tied together so it can't wander too far, the Fiend had been hobbled by someone in the past; his power limited. If he

chose to kill me himself, he would rule the world for only a hundred years, a span that he would consider far too short. So, according to the rules of the hobble, he had one choice: get one of his own children to kill me, or try to win me to his side. If he could manage to convert me to the dark, he'd rule the world until its very end. That's what he'd tried to do the last time we met. Of course, if I died by some other hand - that of the maenad, for example - then the Fiend might slowly come to dominate the world anyway. So had he sent her?

The Spook was looking thoughtful. 'The Fiend? It's a possibility, lad. We must be on our guard. You were lucky to survive that attack.'

I almost reminded him that it was the intervention of Alice rather than luck but thought better of it. It had been a hard night and nothing would be gained by annoying him.

The following night I found it hard to sleep and after a while I got out of bed, lit my candle and started to re-read Mam's letter, which I'd received in the spring.

Dear Tom,

The struggle against the Dark in my own land has been long and hard and is approaching a crisis. However, we two have much to discuss and I do have further things to reveal and a request to make. I need something from you. That and your help. Were there any way at all to avoid this, I would not ask it of you. But these are words that must be said face to face, not in a letter, and so I intend to return home for a short visit on the eve of midsummer.

I have written to Jack to inform him of my arrival so I look forward to seeing you at the farm at the appointed time. Work hard at your lessons, son, and be optimistic, no matter how dark the future seems. Your strength is greater than you realize.

Love,  
Mam

In less than a week it would be midsummer and the Spook and I would be travelling south to visit my brother Jack's farm and meet Mam. I had missed her and couldn't wait to see her. But I was also anxious to find out what she wanted from me.

## CHAPTER 2 THE SPOOK'S BESTIARY



THE FOLLOWING MORNING it was lessons as usual. I was in the third year of my apprenticeship to my master and was studying how to fight the dark: in the first year I'd learned about boggarts, in the second, witches; now my topic was 'The History of the Dark'.

'Well, lad, prepare to take notes,' commanded the Spook, scratching at his beard.

I opened my notebook, dipped my pen into the bottle of ink and waited for him to begin the lesson. I was sitting on the bench in the western garden. It was a sunny summer's morning and there wasn't a single cloud in the wide blue sky. Directly in front of us were the fells, dotted with sheep, while all around we heard birdsong and the pleasant drowsy hum of insects.

'As I've already told you, lad, the dark manifests itself in different ways at different times and different places,' said the Spook, beginning to pace up and down in front of the bench. 'But, as we know to our cost, the most formidable aspect of the dark in the County and in the wider world beyond is the Fiend.'