

Ghoulies and Ghosties

by Patricia Bridgman

DEATH DID NOTHING to improve Will Lugg. If anything, he became more of a bully. As if I hadn't faced enough trials, he also became my own particular problem.

In life, Will Lugg was seven feet tall, with a chest like the prow of a ship. He was a bad 'un who used his size to get his way, even if it meant hurting others in the process. Here on the coast of Cornwall, we citizens make a living by fishing, mining tin, and fair-trading (called smuggling by some). Will Lugg did none of these things: He made a living off of us.

He started earning his bad name around 1750 or so, four years before I was born. As I was learning to crawl, young Will Lugg was raiding the salting houses and stealing barrels of pilchards as fast as the fishermen could catch them. He "protected" the tinner's as they transported their ore to the coining towns—

and squeezed a hefty share of their profits from them. He threatened the fair-traders until they gave up their hiding places, then helped himself to their French brandy and lace.

This year Will appeared at the May Day celebration in St. Ives when I was Queen of the May. He and his gang loitered at some distance and watched us dance around the Maypole.

The girls and I wore white, with crowns of wildflowers in our hair. It being May and the pilchard season not yet begun, the scent of the flowers almost masked the everlasting smell of fish on our hands, our hair, and our gowns.

My gown had been my mother's. She was a little thing and fine boned, as I am, so the dress fit well enough. I also have her pale coloring and hair like new copper. On May Day, I wore it in a thick braid down my back.

Illustrated by Nathan Hale

PILCHARDS ARE A KIND OF
FISH, SIMILAR TO HERRING.



My brothers barely recognized me all dressed up like that. One of them mistook me for our poor dead ma and started to cry. Another said, with genuine surprise, “You’re a *girl!*”

We laughed heartily at that one. They were used to seeing me in Dad’s old clothes, my hair up under a cap, and dirt on my face. With Ma and Pa dead, I was the only parent the five boys had. Keeping them housed and fed was hard work. I was determined not to let them down.

But May Day was different. I was different, and people noticed. Old ladies pinched my cheeks and chuckled slyly. Young men buzzed around, offering me ribbons and posies and asking me to dance.

Then Will Lugg approached. “Dance with *me*, Hope Wallis,” he said.

I did not want to risk his displeasure, so we danced . . . if you could call it dancing. Will was a good two feet taller than I, so while he loped and circled, I hung on for dear life. He finally put me down.

“Now, pretty Hope Wallis,” he said, out of breath, “I should like to make you mine.”

“I’m just thirteen, sir,” I said, “and tend a house full of children.”

“The children can aid me in my work,” Will replied.

“But, sir, when the pilchards are running, I help with the catch. The smell can be fierce. You wouldn’t want a fishy wife.”

“You’ll be my own wee mermaid,” Will said.

Since I had not yet discouraged him, I added, “My family is accursed. Last fall, a black dog visited our doorstep. Soon after, my mother

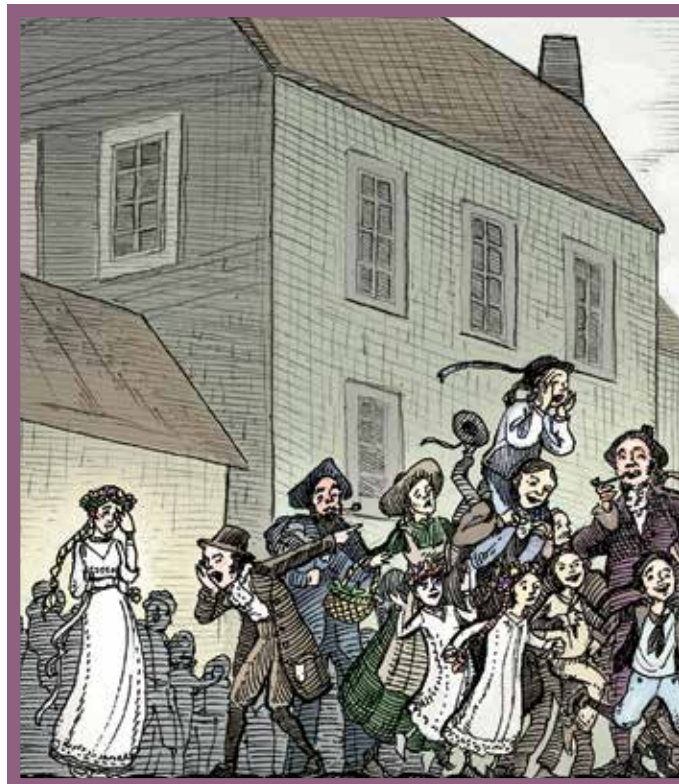
died, being delivered of twins. Then my father was caught in a fishing net and drowned.”

“If some witch has a curse on you,” he answered, “I will pound her into the ground like a Maypole. Everyone knows I am the strongest man in Cornwall. Watch this . . .”

St. Ives has several huge stones left by giants in the olden days. Will wrapped his arms around one of them. He grunted like a wild boar. Then he staggered to his feet and lifted the stone off the ground.

“If I . . . can carry . . . this stone,” Will sputtered, “I can carry . . . you and your brothers . . . through life!”

Soon Will was sweating. He turned purple and gasped for air. The crowd egged him on. His friends tried to help him, but he lurched away. Will Lugg was in trouble.



The town fathers were worried. “Get behind him, everyone,” Alderman Curnow said. “Move him along. If he dies in this parish, his ghost will torment us till kingdom come.”

So we all fell in line in a macabre parade behind Will Lugg. He was still carrying the stone and struggling to breathe. We were struggling to shoo him out of town.

But our Pied Piper had a plan of his own. He was leading us through St. Ives’s crooked alleyways, right up to my family’s house on Rope Street. There, Will stopped and fell to his knees, dropping the stone, and collapsing on top of it.

Will Lugg gave up the ghost.

But I misspeak. Will did not “give up the ghost.” He was dead, all right. But since his

death was an accident, his ghost would linger where he fell to bedevil the living.

Here in Cornwall, we’re accustomed to the dead. Every night shipwrecked sailors cry for help from the bottom of the sea. Girls who died of broken hearts sigh their faithless lovers’ names. Ghosts such as Will Lugg’s shake the cupboards and stalk the cliffs and crossroads. ’Tis my belief that the restless dead far outnumber the living. Now Will Lugg is one of them. And he had made me his.

As a ghost, Will is an invisible but insistent presence in our home. From day down to cockcrow he can set upon us at any time. There’s rarely any warning. Sometimes I feel a weird wind. Or hear our tiny fairy piskies skitter out of his way.

More likely, before I know what is happening, my whole cumbrous bed, with me screaming on top of it, will fly through the air and drop with a thump. ’Tis dead Will Lugg, showing off again.

He does a variety of things—mean, mischievous, dangerous, and devious—to keep us on our toes. He startled my brother Tom so badly one night that Tom threw the chamber pot at him. But ghosts have less delicate sensibilities than humans do. This did not deter Will Lugg.

Nor does our nightly prayer:

*From ghoulies and ghosties
and long-leggety beasties
and things that go bump in the night,
Good Lord, deliver us!*





It is now December. Will Lugg and the boulder he dropped at our doorstep have been with us for more than seven months. We are at the end of our tether.

I try to make ends meet by mending fishermen's nets. But Will Lugg tears a new hole for every one I fix.

I used to sell charms that cure warts. But Will cried, "Bucca-boo! Bucca-boo!" at my best customer, Gracie Murt, who warned all the ladies against me.

Then there were the stargazy pies I once sold to Cook at the manor house. Pretty fish

pies, with six whole pilchards poking their little heads up through the crust. Will fixed that one for me, too. When Cook's boy came for my last batch, the pilchards started winking and singing. He bolted out the door so quickly that he nearly collided with Will's boulder, then scrambled to his feet and ran, not once looking back. I sold no more pies after that.

The only good turn Will Lugg has done me is with Anthony Denis, the fair-trader. Mr. Denis now stores more of his goods at our house, knowing that my seven-foot ghoulie keeps the excise men away.



My brothers and I are down on our luck. The catch was poor last summer, and we've only half the dried pilchards we'll need this winter. Most of the time, all we have to eat is a kiddley broth of bread and boiling water. Sometimes we don't even have that. Lately the piskies, under Will Lugg's bad influence, have been upturning the bowls and putting maggots in the bread.

For the few farthings it brings, I've sent eleven-year-old Tom and nine-year-old Bob to the mines. Six-year-old Ed will help me and the other women with the next pilchard harvest.

The twins are still babies. After my mother died, the piskies took care of them for me, singing them fairy songs and rocking them to sleep. Now they pinch the babies all day, leaving cruel red welts and making them cry.

Now that I'm fourteen, I hope to marry. My life is so hard. But Will Lugg sends most suitors fleeing down the hill. All except one: brave Harry Hawkins, the fair-trader's apprentice.

Harry is a practical man, and he takes Will in stride. He brought me a fine pair of boots once, only to see them walk out the door by themselves. This was Will Lugg's work, of course, but Harry just laughed and fetched the boots back.

Will dropped a live mouse in Harry's teacup one day. Harry took the creature outside and said, "Don't worry, Hope. Wee mouse didn't drink much."

Will may not bother Harry, but I want him to leave.

Our priest knows how to lay spirits down. You can seal them into an unused room. But with six of us in the house, not counting Will Lugg, we don't *have* a spare room. Or you can brick them up under the hearth. But Will is so strong and so loud, I don't want him in the house at all. Besides, I cannot afford to pay the priest.

Our only hope is an idea I got from a wandering droll-teller. Now, these tellers of tales spin lies more than truth. But this fellow swore that his trick would work: Lure the ghost out of doors and trap him under something that is heavy enough to hold him forever.

I first thought of the boulder that stands outside our door, but I want Will trapped forever, under something I know he can never move. There is an ancient stone horse trough in front of our house. No one uses it and it's too heavy to carry away. If we could just tip it over on top of Will Lugg . . .

When I shared my idea, every man in the neighborhood agreed to help. They, too, were tired of hearing Will rattle and rant. Harry Hawkins would help as well.

We planned the deed for midnight, when spirits are most active. In preparation, the men heaved the trough onto its side.

Midnight came.

"Will Lugg?" I said. "Are you here?" A table hopped into the air and settled with a thud. "I have thought it over, Will, and decided to make peace with you. Follow me outside. I've made you a pallet on the ground. We can talk as you take your rest."





An unseen hand opened the door. A cold cloud pushed me into the street. There were blankets and pillows on the cobblestones before the trough. My neighbors were hidden behind it.

The blankets stirred. A ghostly head pressed the pillows.

“Will Lugg,” I said, “now you are *mine!*” At this signal, the men pushed the trough over onto the ground, trapping Will inside.

Their good deed done, my neighbors clapped one another on their backs and ambled home. Harry stood with me awhile beside the upside-down trough. We heard muffled sounds from inside, like a fist pounding on stone. Then nothing. I bid Harry good-night and went inside for my first solid night’s sleep in months.

Several peaceful weeks have passed. No dancing furniture. No sounds from the trough. The piskies have returned to their playful, kindly selves. Only the boulder remains as a reminder of the events of the past. Harry Hawkins and I will soon marry. He is a big help to us all.

Today, Harry and I sit drinking tea, when—oh horror—a field mouse comes out of nowhere, *plunk* into Harry’s cup. I scream and clutch Harry’s arm. But Harry, calm as ever, looks up and smiles. Soon I am smiling, too.

My brother Ed, the prankster, is sitting at the top of the stairs, holding his sides with laughter. This time, he’s the one who sent mousie for a swim.

“Can I have my mouse back?” he asks. “I have named him Will Lugg.” 