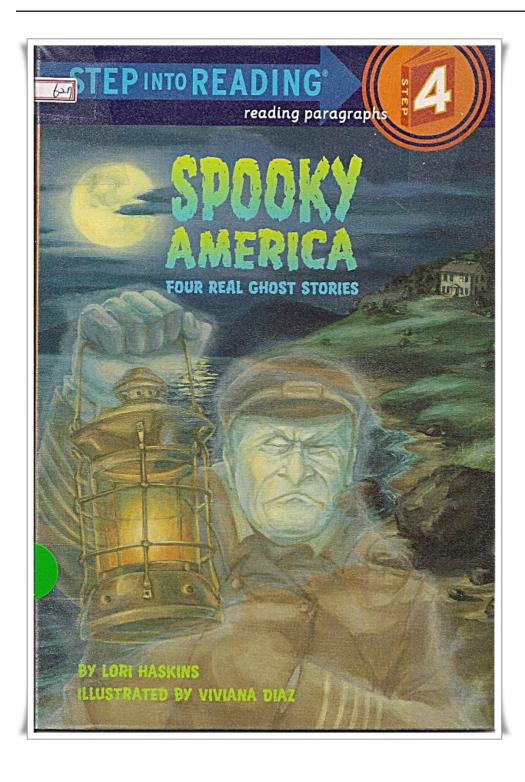
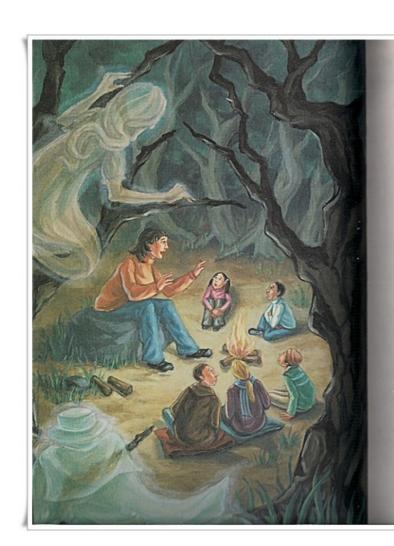
Spooky America

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Is America haunted?

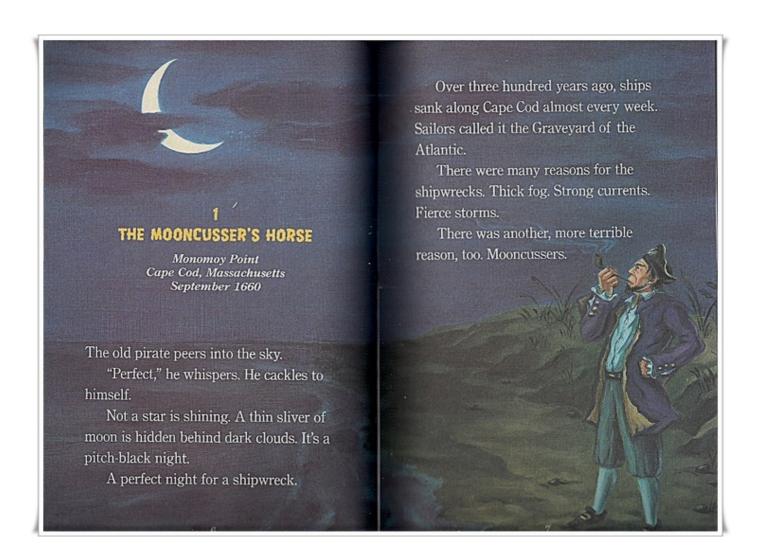
Across the country, in tiny towns and in big cities, you hear ghost stories. Thousands of them! Ask around. Chances are, there's a strange and spooky tale about your hometown.

But are these stories true?

Many of them, like the ones in this book, started with real people, places, or events. Somewhere along the way, legend got mixed up with history. Today it's hard to tell what *really* happened.

What we do know is that at one time or another, people believed the four stories you're about to read.

The question is . . . do you?



Mooncussers were pirates. But not the usual kind. They didn't sail the ocean, looking for ships to attack. Instead, mooncussers worked on land. They paced the shore in the dead of night. Over their heads they swung lanterns.



Off in the distance, a ship would see the lanterns bobbing. The captain would mistake them for the lights of another ship, safely passing Cape Cod. He'd follow the lights—and crash onto the shore!

As soon as the ship wrecked, the mooncussers sprang into action. They murdered the crew and stole the cargo.



The pirates' trick worked only on the darkest of nights, when the moonlight wouldn't give them away. That's how they got their name. On bright nights, they "cussed" the moon!



One pirate, the Monomoy Mooncusser, was especially greedy. He didn't want to share his loot. So he worked alone, on an empty spit of land called Monomoy Point.



His only partner was a beautiful horse. He chose her for her color. Except for a small white patch on her forehead, she was all black.

In the dark, she was almost invisible.

One moonless night, the pirate went to work. He tied a lantern to his horse's mane, and another to her tail. He lit the wicks inside. Yanking on the horse's reins, he trotted her along the shore.

Above, thick storm clouds rolled in. Rain began to fall, first lightly and then in great sheets. The wind shrieked.

The pirate grinned. The more awful the weather, the more likely a ship would wreck!

The waves beat higher and higher against the sand. The horse whinnied nervously. But the pirate ignored her.

He ignored the waves, too. Even when they soaked his ankles. Then his knees. Then his hips.

Suddenly, a huge wall of water rose up.

It crashed over the shore—and swept the pirate and his horse out to sea!





The mooncusser screamed for his horse to take him on her back.

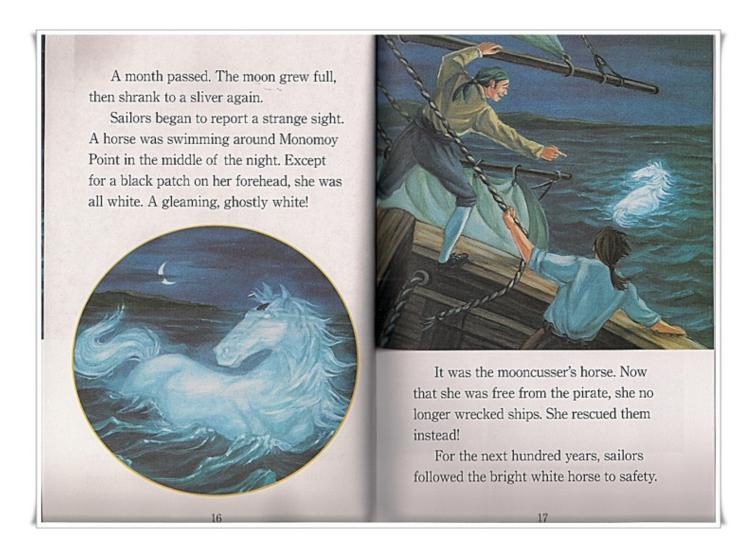
But the horse broke free. She swam away, hard and fast through the churning water. First the lantern on her mane sputtered and went out. Then the one on her tail went black, too. That's when the pirate knew he was doomed. It would be impossible to spot his horse in the darkness. After all, that is why he chose her.

At dawn, the mooncusser's body washed up on the shore.

His horse was nowhere to be found.

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Today, ships have little trouble sailing around Cape Cod. There is rarely a shipwreck anymore.

But some sailors swear that on the darkest of nights, you can still see the mooncusser's horse. They say she has never stopped trying to make up for the mooncussing at Monomoy Point.

And she never will.



Today the ghost horse isn't the only help that sailors have. A lighthouse was built on Monomoy Point in 1823.

2 PICKY AUNT PRATT

Shirley Plantation Charles City, Virginia January 2002

A visitor stares at a painting on the first floor of the Shirley Plantation museum.

The painting hangs a bit crooked.

Otherwise, it looks perfectly ordinary.

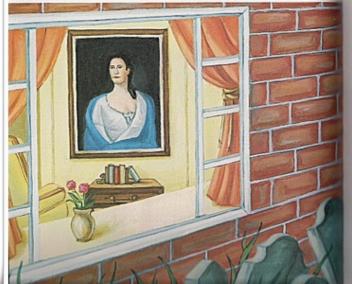
The woman in the picture is Martha Hill Pratt. Her brother-in-law built this grand house nearly three centuries ago. Members of her family still own it today. They call Martha "Aunt Pratt."

And they know her painting is not ordinary at all!

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Aunt Pratt was born at Shirley. She lived there until she married and moved to England in the early 1700s.

After she left, her picture was hung in the bedroom on the first floor. It was a nice, sunny spot. Across the room was a big window. Outside lay the green grass of the family cemetery.





Shirley Plantation. Some people believe Martha Hill Pratt's spirit haunts the house.

The painting stayed in the same place for the next hundred years or so. Generations of the family came and went.

Finally, in the 1800s, the family decided to change things around. They took down Aunt Pratt's picture and put it in the attic.

That's when the trouble started!

Around midnight, the family heard a sound. It was coming from upstairs.

Tap, tap, tap.

The family checked the attic. Everything seemed fine. But the spooky noise didn't stop. Night after night, it continued.

Tap, tap, tap.

The family was baffled. The only thing different was Aunt Pratt's painting. Could the picture have something to do with the tapping? It seemed impossible.



They moved the picture to the third floor.

The noise moved, too!

Tap, tap, tap.

They tried the second floor.

Tap, tap, tap.



Finally, they hung the painting on the first floor again.

That night, the house was silent!

Aunt Pratt was trying to tell them something. She wanted her old spot back! Maybe it was because she could see out the window. She could watch over her loved ones in the cemetery outside.

The family gave in to Aunt Pratt's wishes. They left the painting on the first floor. There it stayed for at least another hundred years.





Then, in 1974, Aunt Pratt's picture was moved again—this time all the way to New York City! There was a display of haunted objects at Rockefeller Center. Aunt Pratt's picture was going to be part of it.

No one knew it would be the main attraction!

The minute the painting was hung, it began to act up. It rattled against the wall. Tap, tap, tap.

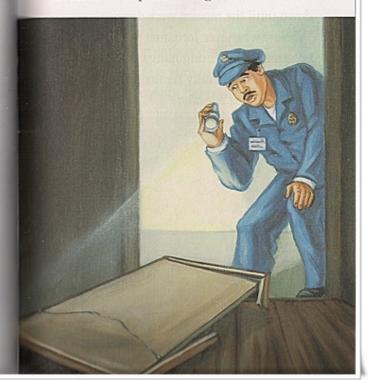
Then it started to swing on its hook! Back and forth, higher and higher. Aunt Pratt's picture would not stay still!

Crowds gathered to see the restless painting. NBC News even ran a report about it! The people at Rockefeller Center locked the painting in a closet overnight for safekeeping.

Aunt Pratt didn't like that at all!

The night watchman heard loud
banging coming from the closet. He was
pretty sure he heard a woman crying, too.

The closet door was opened. There lay the picture, facedown on the floor. Its frame was smashed! Aunt Pratt's family decided she had had enough. Once the frame was fixed, they took the picture home. They hung it in its favorite place—for good.



These days, Aunt Pratt seems happy. There's just one thing. In 2001, the first floor needed repairs. Jordanna Musard works at Shirley. She took the picture down until the repairs were done.

Now whenever Jordanna goes into the museum, the painting hangs crooked!

It's just a friendly reminder from Aunt Pratt . . . leave me alone!



Martha Hill Pratt's mysterious picture

3 THE BONY BACHELOR

Buckskin Joe Mining Camp Buckskin Joe, Colorado March 1866

J. Dawson Hidgepath is dead.

Annie Lewis is sure of it. She saw him buried last year with her own two eyes. Yet here he is, standing on her front porch!

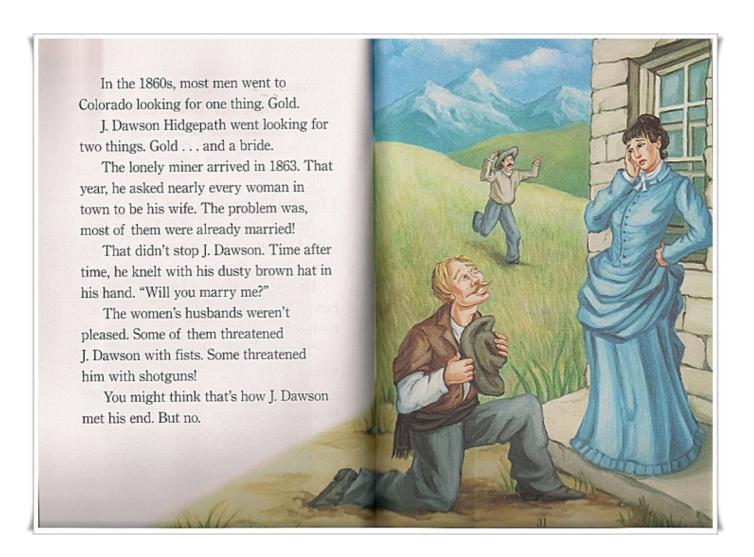
He's got his same old brown hat on his head. That is, on the skull that *used* to be his head.

"I think I'm going to faint," Annie whispers.

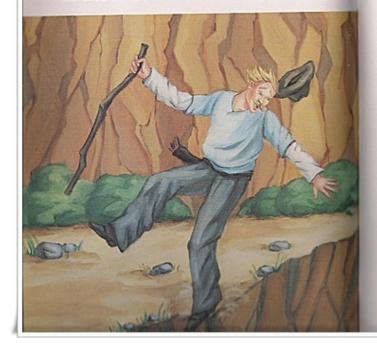
The skeleton pulls off his hat. He drops to one bony knee.

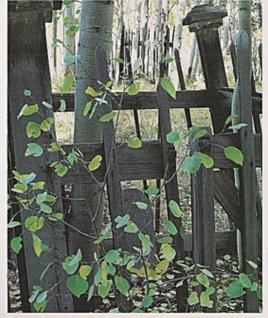
"Annie," J. Dawson says softly. "Will you marry me?"

Flump! Down goes Annie.



One hot July day in 1865, J. Dawson couldn't find any ladies to visit. So he decided to go for a hike on nearby Mount Bross. Halfway up the trail, he took a wrong step—and plunged to his death off the side of the mountain!





Buckskin Cemetery, where J. Dawson Hidgepath's bones were said to be buried—and buried, and buried again. . . .

The people of Buckskin Joe buried J. Dawson in the cemetery just outside of town. They thought his courting days were over.

They were dead wrong!

33

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It wasn't long before J. Dawson started showing up again. His skeleton knocked on every door in town. First he called on the town seamstress.

Then the schoolteacher.



Then the barmaid from the saloon.



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Each time, the people of Buckskin Joe buried J. Dawson's bones again.

Each time, he came back.

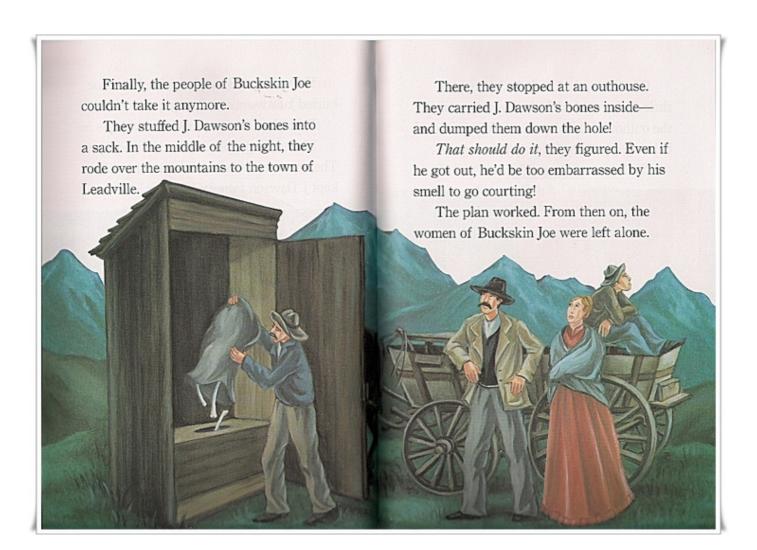
The townspeople dug his grave deeper.

They put heavy rocks on it. But nothing kept J. Dawson from looking for love!



He proposed to the barber's daughter. The banker's sister.

Even the mayor's wife!



Of course, the Leadville ladies had their own troubles. Each time they visited the outhouse, they heard a soft voice from below.

"Will you marry me?"



BY HOOK OR BY CROOK

Easkoot House Stinson Beach, California July 1903

Old Captain Easkoot is stubborn.

He doesn't care how hot the summer gets. He doesn't want any kids on his beach.

It's not hard to keep them away. After all, the captain looks scary.

His face is rough from years at sea, and he always wears a scowl on it. His left hand is shriveled up like a claw. Every morning he straps a shiny gold hook to his wrist. When anyone comes near, he just shakes the hook and hollers. "Stay off my land!"

Sure enough, the kids steer clear. They are all terrified of Captain Easkoot.

And he's not even a ghost . . . yet!



Captain Easkoot, without his infamous hook.



Alfred Derby Easkoot wasn't always scary. But he *was* always stubborn.

As a boy, he wanted to become a sailor. He ran off to sea when he was just nine years old! Later, his hand was burned in a fire on the ship. But that didn't stop him. He learned to sail one-handed. He even became the captain of his own ship.

Years passed. Alfred's ship went down near Stinson Beach. The stubborn captain decided to stay right there.



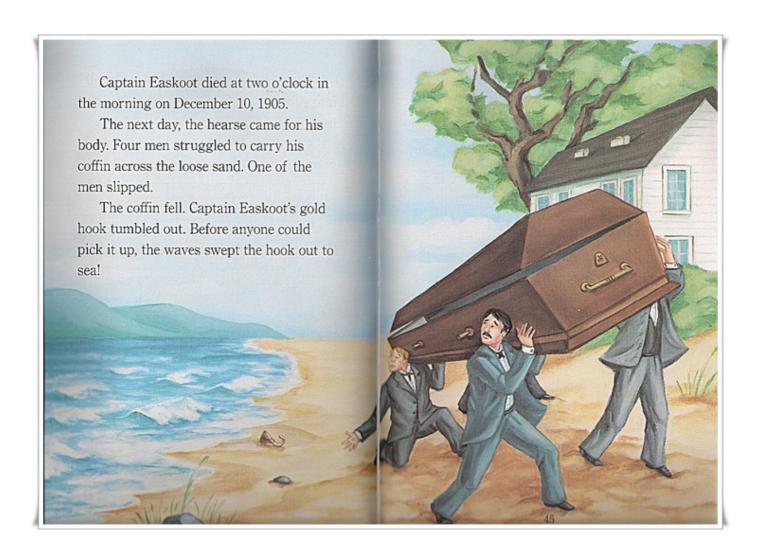
He built a fine house on the beach and married a lady named Amelia Dumas. Together, they opened a campground. Alfred told stories and Amelia sang songs for the campers. Everyone liked the sea captain and his pretty wife.

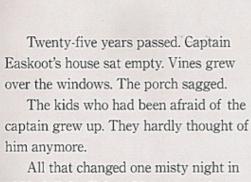
Then, one terrible evening, Amelia fell into Alfred's arms—dead! Doctors said her heart had burst.

After that, Alfred's own heart was never the same. He turned angry and bitter. He stopped welcoming people to his beach. Instead, he spent the rest of his life scaring them away.



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All that changed one misty night in 1930. A light flickered in an upstairs window at the old Easkoot house.

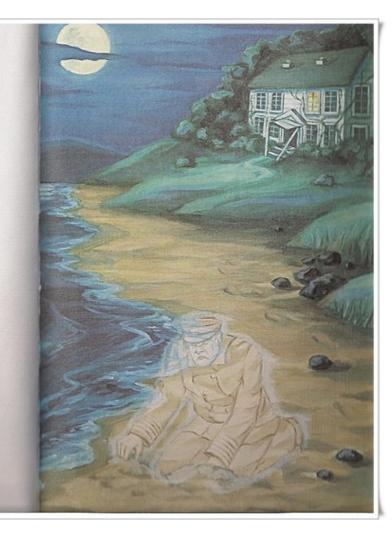
Someone was in there. Moving from room to room. Searching for something.

The front door creaked open. A figure stumbled down the steps. It looked like a man. He fell to his knees on the beach.

With one hand, he pawed the sand.

"Where's my hook?" he hollered. "GIVE ME MY HOOK!"

The news spread through Stinson Beach. Captain Easkoot was back!



People claim the captain's ghost haunts the beach to this day.

He appears at two o'clock in the morning—the hour of his death. And he spends each night searching for his gold hook.

Will he ever give up? It doesn't seem likely. After all, Captain Easkoot was always stubborn. And he probably always will be!



Easkoot House—a haunted house?

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