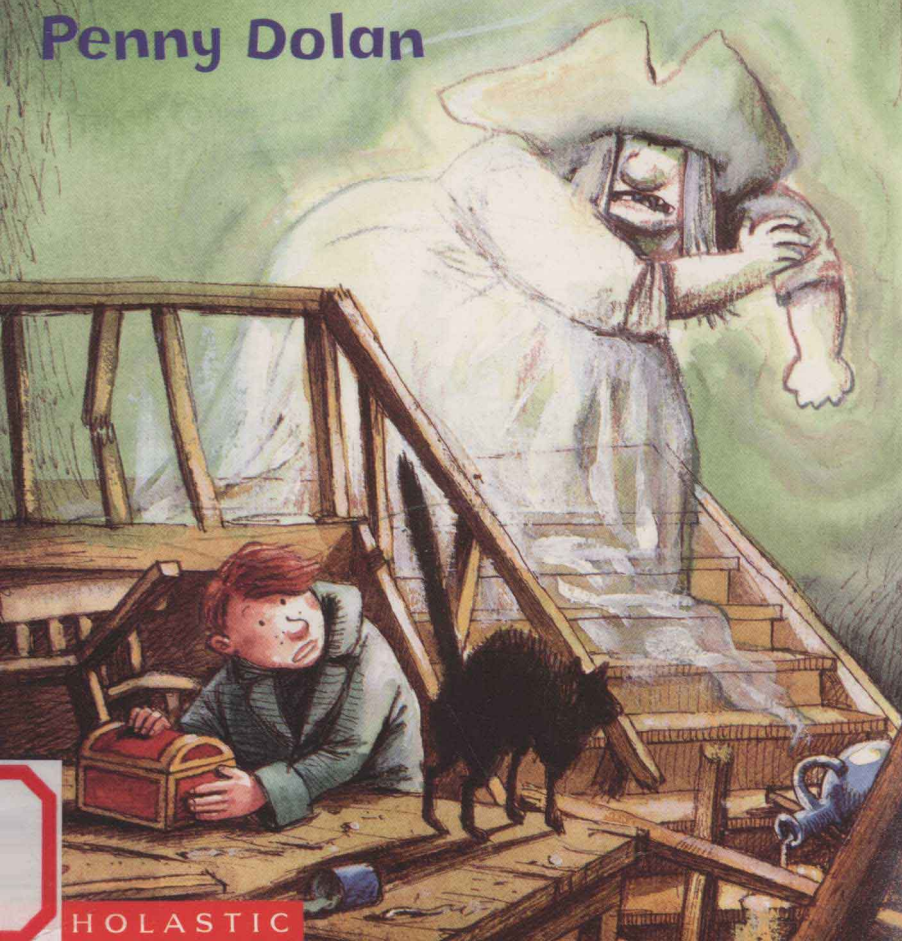




# The Ghost of Able Mabel

Penny Dolan



HOLASTIC

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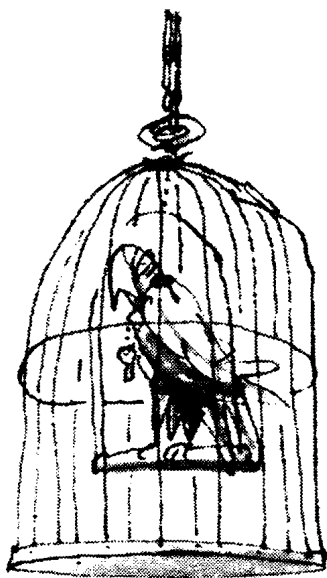




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# The Ghost of Able Mabel



Penny Dolan  
illustrated by Philip Hopman

*To Jim, Tom and Eleanor,  
with love and thanks.*

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# Chapter One



Over a hundred years ago, young Sam Sprockett lived with his grandfather in a small stone cottage. Outside the cottage ran a path, but nobody ever, ever passed along it. Sam wondered about that path. Below him, the wide, worn stones of the path wound down into Hopethwaite Village. Above him, the path disappeared into the looming darkness of Hagworth Fell. At night, the grey moor-mist swirled down the becks towards Sam's home.

*The thin, black cat sat on Sam's sill and stared out at the moon with her bright blue eyes.*



Hopethwaite folk were so poor they begged crumbs from the church mice on Sundays. Day by day, they went quietly about their business. Only the broad, bold cobbles of the village street told that Hopethwaite had once bustled with life.



One night, as Sam watched the kettle sing on the hearth, a question came into his head. He stroked and stroked the thin, black cat, but the question would wait no more.

"Grandad, why does no one use the path outside?"



Old Nathaniel sighed, and sucked at the stem of his clay pipe. "Lad, a terrible tale it is, but you shall hear it." The old man paused, gathering his thoughts. In the firelight, Sam saw to his astonishment that his grandfather's face was bright with remembered happiness.



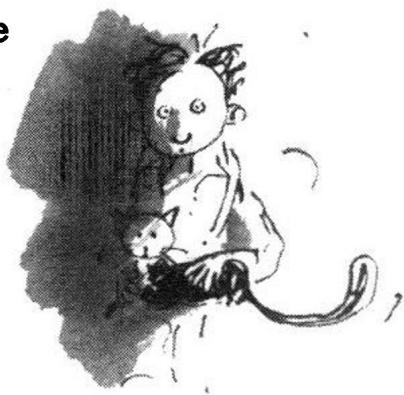
"Once, Sam," Nathaniel began, "Hopethwaite was full of pretty shops and the rowdy calls of the great market. . ."

Sam nearly fell off his seat. "Here? If a sheep runs along Hopethwaite street, people talk about it for days! You say there was a market?"

"Aye, the grandest market hereabouts, stretching from top to bottom of the village! I'd long to go to Hopethwaite to see the sights."



Sam's eyes were wide as potlids. "Didn't you live in this cottage then, Grandad?"



"Nay! When I was but fourteen, I lived –" Nathaniel pointed a bony finger towards the dark moor – "up there!"

"On the Hagworth Fell?" cried Sam. "You? You told *me* I must never go up there!"

"Sam, 'twas different days. That very path outside was the one roadway for all comers. Folk would be always passing on it, carrying their goods – cloth and cheese, flour and fish, salt and spices, gewgaws and nick-nacks and all manner of finery."

"But weren't folk afeared? Isn't the moor a big, broad step to cross, Grandad?"

"Right, Sam, but then nobody minded that it took more than a day from t'other side

to this. Midway across was the haven of the Halfway Inn. Outside it might be wind and mire, but inside, on the welcoming hob, bubbled brimming stew-pots. Sam, that was where I was living, happy as the hours were long, serving the folk travelling to and from Hopethwaite Market."



Old Nathaniel sighed wistfully, and puffed at his pipe. He patted Sam's shoulder.



“It wasn’t only I who lived there. The inn belonged to young Widow Warmley, barely more than a lass herself. Comfort by name and comfort by nature. She was as cheerful as a cherry pie – until that dark night...”

## Chapter Two



Sam saw a tear burst from the old man's eye. "What happened?" he asked.

The old man gave a deep sob and began. "Oh, it was on a dark and stormy night..."

"Aye, Grandad," said Sam, stroking the thin, black cat. "It would be."

"Come eight o'clock and dinner just served, the front door of the inn crashed open, and a huge figure stood there, with the howling wind tossing her thatch of wiry hair about.

On her shoulder crouched an evil-looking, grey macaw with a yellow eye. Comfort Warmley's mouth dropped open.

"'Mabel?' she gasped. 'Is that you?'"



"The woman gave a wicked grin. Her gold teeth glinted ominously in the candlelight.



"Broad she was as a bolster, but there was no comfort in her look. A coarse apron, spotted with stains from every sea-port in the world, wrapped her round. As she strutted her way between the tables, her boot-heels hit like hammers on the boards.

"Mabel reached the bar, and lolling back, took a large cigar from behind her ear. She puffed foul-smelling smoke into plump rings that floated upwards against the ceiling. Glasses stayed half-raised to

lips, soup-spoons stayed unsupped, and not a word was spoken. The puddings sat trembling in their dishes.

"Comfort Warmley grasped a stripy tea-towel desperately to her bosom. 'Sister? What is it you want?'

"Mabel cackled. 'Surely you hadn't forgotten, Comfort? How I told you I'd return from the Seven Seas one day?'

"She took six large pickled onions from the jar on the counter, and swallowed five down. The last she held out teasingly between her fingers. The grey parrot hopped up and down greedily on her shoulder.

"'Stay, Barnacle! Stay!' Mabel commanded, as she walked around the room again. "'Tis a pleasant place you have, our Comfort,' Mabel said. 'I'll enjoy myself here.'

"'You're stopping?' said Comfort, turning pale.