

CHAPTER 1

GHOSTS

Dawn forced its way across a night sky full of dark grey storm clouds and rain drizzling on the quiet landscape below. The wind blew in typical winter fashion, persistent and penetratingly cold, chilling to the bone anyone foolish enough to stay too long in its grasp. It blew along the cobbled streets of Deepcar, a small village set in the heart of Yorkshire. It gusted around the mining cottages, finding every nook and cranny, its icy fingers reaching into every room of the basic homes of the miners.

The miners depended on the local coal mines for their survival and worked long hours for poor wages, trapped into a future of little hope or chance of improvement. It was a life of coal dust and dark mines, long hours of back-breaking work and basic food with nothing to spare for even basic luxuries. This was all they had ever known.

Joseph woke at his usual time of five a.m. Swinging his legs out of bed on to one of the washed coal sacks placed strategically to make walking somewhat more comfortable, he groped under the bed, pulled out a chamber pot and without standing proceeded to urinate, careful not to wet his thumb gripping the top of the pot.

His wife Alathea stirred alongside and rose. She pulled a chamber pot from under her side of the bed. Pulling her nightdress up she squatted over the pot, followed by the sound of running water.

The small cottage was crude in construction, built from ganister brick, a basic clay brick from the local Ganister mine. The inside walls were painted with whitewash, which added some light to the otherwise dark rooms. The walls were bare except for a framed picture of Queen Victoria and her consort Prince Albert, a photo taken three years earlier to celebrate the turn of the twentieth century.

On the mantelpiece were china ornaments, treasured by Alathea and some of the few precious possessions she owned. There was little other furniture apart from a kitchen table made of four planks nailed together and scrubbed to a coarse smoothness. In the middle of the table was a large china bowl with small blue violets painted on it. A full water jug sat inside it. Hanging on the wall next to the fireplace was a large tin tub used by the family for bathing and washing clothes.

Joseph, dressed in a shirt grey from being washed many times and long coarse woollen underpants, shuffled over to the open fire that was burning down to its last embers. He threw small pieces of wood on to the fire, topping them with a large log. The fire flared up and lit the room in a warming glow. He walked slowly across to his two sons, sleeping top to tail in their crude three-quarter bed. He leaned down and gave both a shake.

The boys reluctantly stirred. They knew there was little to look forward to on this day, as on every other long day in the village of Deepcar. Their strongest urge was to roll over and go back to sleep in the warmth of their rough wool blankets and sack cloths, but even in their sleepy state they knew that would last about one minute before their father grabbed them by the ear and dragged them out of bed— something they only had to experience a couple of times to ensure they didn't do it again.

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Joseph loved his children dearly and was proud of what little achievements they had made in this God-forsaken place, but he rarely showed his feelings, preferring to hide behind a gruff exterior. He was not a cruel man but he did not have time to molly-coddle his children and believed boys could never become men unless they were treated like men. He had little understanding of children's needs and desires, having little in common with his sons except boxing.

This was shared with a passion, because Joseph was the heavyweight bare-knuckle boxing champion of Yorkshire, a title he had held for the past three years; the people of Deepcar and his family were very proud of his achievement. He could walk tall in any street knowing people looked up to him. The local children revered him almost like a god.

Joseph walked to the corner of the room, taking off his underwear and dressing in his mining clothes of similar, but dirtier, coarse grey underwear, a long-sleeved dark grey shirt, black trousers, a well-worn waistcoat, a dark grey jacket with the elbows almost worn through and heavy black leather boots. His clothes were coated with coal dust from the previous day's work, despite Alatheia beating them with a rod every day. Jack and Thomas, Joseph's sons, were dressing in similar clothes that were no less clean from the coal dust.

Whilst they were dressing Alatheia prepared their lunchtime meals of bread and dripping, known to the miners as greasy fat, and placed them in tin containers called snap tins. The snap tin consisted of two pieces, one sliding inside the other, the shape of a loaf of bread. They were flat at one end and round at the other, deep enough to take a thick sandwich. A clip snapped over the tin, keeping the two halves together. This was their only sustenance through the whole of the twelve-hour shift. Their only source of water was their Dudley bottles, round metal bottles made from tin with corks in the top for easy access.

'You lads ready yet?' Joseph asked, walking to the front door.

'Yes dad,' replied Thomas, the younger of the two boys, quietly following behind.

'Bye luv,' Joseph murmured, kissing his wife softly on her lips as he went out the door.

'Bye mum,' the boys echoed as they each kissed her in turn. She followed them out the door, having said little since arising. Alatheia handed them their containers in turn as they left and wiped her lips after the kisses. The whiskers from Joseph's moustache tickled and she could never quite get used to the feel of it.

Joseph and the boys immediately felt the cold wind as they walked down the street. They pulled the collars of their jackets up and wrapped their arms around their chests. As they walked through the narrow streets leading to the mine, they were joined by other workers.

'Hey Joe, ya reckon you'll win on Sunday?' one of the other miners called as they neared the pit.

'Blowed if I know,' replied Joseph. 'He's a tough nut, won't be easy. He's already beaten Jimmy Lyons and that fella from York, Bob Lamb, and he's one of the best.'

'Yea, but you're the best, Joe; you'll beat him. I got faith in you,' the miner enthused.

'Dad'll knock his socks off, won't ya Dad?' Thomas added proudly.

'We'll see lad, we'll see. It won't be that easy,' Joseph replied.

As they came to the fields, half way to the mine, Jack stopped and pulled some long grass and milk thistle.

'It's too cold for messin' about like that,' Joseph said in an irate voice.

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‘Just a coupla handfuls, Dad,’ Jack replied, repeating the same plea nearly every day.

‘Ah, but you’re a soft ‘apeth, Jack; it’ll be the bloody death of you. You think more of yon ponies than you do of yer sen,’ Joseph replied as he continued walking.

Jack scurried about, picking handfuls of milk thistle and fresh green grass and cramming them into his pockets. They were full in a short time and he ran to catch up to his father and Thomas. This ritual was repeated almost every day, and Jack enjoyed feeding the pit ponies and making their day just a little better. One of his most enjoyable times was when he helped take care of the pit ponies during the rare occasions they were brought to the surface for the mine holidays, which was only three times a year. He would collect them at the mine cage when they were brought up to the surface, frisky but obedient. Jack could see they were excited about coming up to the fresh air and green grass for the first time in months. He and some of the other boys who worked on the surface took great delight in caring for them and would have a sneaky ride when no one could see them. The ponies didn’t mind and enjoyed the attention.

He also remembered the dark side of caring for them and hated every second of it, rubbing his injured leg as he thought of it. It had been one of those rare spring days, a clear mid-blue sky with scattered white clouds. A light, cool breeze blew, and the ponies ran around the fields enjoying the feel of cool air in their nostrils. Rain had fallen during the night making the long grass fresh and moist. Then the ponies’ world fell apart, Jack and another pit boy had come into the field accompanied by two miners carrying ropes, coiled in loops, and the ponies knew that their time on the surface was gone. They had seen it too many times. The human attendants had come to take them back down the mine.

‘We’ll take yon Bella there,’ George, one of the miners, said. ‘She’s fairly placid an’ shouldn’t give too much trouble.’ Bella lifted her head and snorted as if to warn them, whilst Ted and the other ponies watched from a distance moving nervously away. ‘Toby you get round that side. Jack you get over there and I’ll get the rope on her.’

The boys moved behind, trying to distract the pony. She followed them with her eyes, turning her head as she watched them move behind her. When her head was turned George moved in quickly and dropped the loop over her head.

‘See. It’s easy when you know what you’re doing,’ he said with a grin.

Bella suddenly realised the rope was on her neck and turned away, leaping into a run, pulling George off his feet. She ran towards the top end of the field dragging George along; he clung desperately to the rope, sliding across the wet grass like a sled.

Jack, Toby, and Lloyd, the other miner, roared with laughter and offered no assistance as George slid away.

‘Ooh, aye. You knows how to get’s ’em like,’ Lloyd said between laughter. ‘I suppose us dumb buggers should come and help you,’ he called as he walked towards the fence.

Jack and Toby ran and grabbed the end of the rope, quickly tying it around the fence post. Lloyd tied a cloth over Bella’s eyes and the four of them tugged and pulled her to the mine cage where another group of miners took her into the cage and tied her feet to stop her kicking.

One by one they caught the other ponies and took them to the mine cage. George made sure that the others were holding the end of the rope each time. Finally only Ted, Jack’s favourite pony, remained. They approached him carefully, knowing how much he resisted leaving. They ushered him into a corner of the field so he had nowhere to go. George threw the rope over his head and the

pony reared , trying to strike the rope and the miner holding it, but George was ready and moved quickly out of range.

The boys ran to either side of the pony, to what they thought was safety behind him. Ted slammed down on his front legs and his hind legs kicked out. Jack saw the change too late. The hooves flashed towards him, striking him on the upper thigh. He felt as if he'd been hit with a hammer and staggered away from the scuffle, dropping onto his left hip.

'Hang on, lad. We'll get to you as soon as we've sorted Ted out,' George said, concerned for Jack's condition.

They threw a rope around one of Ted's rear legs, slowing him down, and placed a cloth over his eyes to enable them to drag him to the mine cages.

Jack felt like a traitor as he watched Ted being led away struggling. The pain of watching him being taken to that dark, dirty, underground black hell was worse than the kick to his leg. He would gladly have traded places and let Ted stay on the surface. He felt tears run down his cheeks and wiped them away before the others came back.

'Hey, Jack. Wake up.' Joseph's voice brought him out of his thoughts.

'Sorry, Dad,' Jack replied, not wanting to explain.

They had walked nearly two kilometres before they entered the mine, a depressing place with a brick-walled front and a gateway opening onto an immense yard. The yard contained rows of railway lines on which stood numerous timber rail wagons. Some were full of coal, waiting to be taken away. Others were standing empty, waiting to receive the hard-won coal.

To the left of the gateway was a two-storey brick building approximately two hundred feet long; in the background were two towers holding the large spoked wheels used to raise and lower the coal and the miners from the depth of the pit. Behind the towers was a huge hill of slag and rejected coal. Its size was menacing; it looked set to collapse at any moment.

All these things had something in common: everything was covered in coal dust. Everything was black and gritty.

Joseph walked into the lamp room and selected a Davey lamp. Jack did the same. As they walked out the doorway a young boy called out.

'Mr. Cardwell! Can I ride with you? I'm starting underground with Mr. Walker today, looking after the pit ponies.'

'It's too scary for the likes of you down there,' Jack teased the boy. 'You'd be better up top,' he grinned.

'Nothing frightens me,' the boy replied defiantly, pushing his chest out.

'Is that so, Ben?' Joseph answered, and winked at Jack and Thomas. 'We'll see.'

Thomas said goodbye to Joseph and Jack and wandered towards the coal sorting area. A large steel and timber frame supported fifty people as they sat and picked out the slag and low quality coal. This was tedious, backbreaking work that only women, girls and boys up to the age of twelve performed. Once they turned twelve the boys vied for jobs underground as they paid more money. They saw themselves as men, not boys, doing a dangerous but more profitable job. Thomas stood near the sorting area watching his brother and father getting into the lift. 'One more year and I'll be able to be a man instead of doing this sissy job,' he thought as he watched them enter the mine cage.

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Joseph stood at the side of the cage as Jack and Ben entered, followed by other miners, closing the wire door after the last of them had entered.

Ben saw Jack smiling and caught the wink from him to his father. He wondered what was so funny. He had been careful to wear the same clothes and cap as the others to avoid upsetting anyone.

‘Hold the rail tight, lad,’ Joseph said to him in a quiet voice.

‘I am holding tight,’ he thought to himself. ‘I’m not a child anymore.’

The cage fell away suddenly from under his feet, dropping six feet per second. He was suspended with his feet off the ground until his body accelerated enough to keep up with the cage. He felt his stomach heave into his throat and the terrible sensation of his body lifting up. He heard a half moan, half howl and didn’t realize it was himself making the noise until Joseph put his arm around his shoulder.

‘It’s alright, lad, you’ll be ok. It’s always like this the first few times,’ he said, putting Ben’s other hand on the rail.

Ben stood terrified and frozen, staring up at Joseph with pleading eyes. He was going to crash at the bottom, dying before he had even started. The falling seemed to go on forever. Then just as suddenly as it had started, the cage began to slow, and the men bent their legs automatically as they pulled to a stop. In the light of the lamps they could see Ben white with fear; his hands shook uncontrollably.

‘I thought you weren’t frightened of nothing?’ Jack teased with a wide grin. ‘Don’t worry, it’s always like that the first time, you’ll get used to it.’

Joseph held Ben’s shoulder gently and, turning to Jack, pointed down the tunnel. ‘Take him to Charlie Walker, Jack, you know where he is. I’ll see you at the pit face.’

Ben was beginning to gain a little composure now his feet were on steady ground. ‘Th... th... thank you, Mm... Mm... Mr. Cardwell,’ he stuttered, the colour slowly returning to his face.

‘Come on,’ Jack said, pulling at Ben’s jacket. ‘It’s not far.’

Toby, one of the other putty boys, joined them, ‘I’ll go with you,’ he said in a matter-of-fact way. ‘I know you,’ he said to Ben. ‘You were sorting the coal up top. What you doing here?’

‘Mr. Walker’s given me a job helping with the ponies; now I’ll get another bob a week more,’ he replied, feeling pleased with himself.

Jack winked at Toby, unnoticed by Ben.

‘There are all sorts of things down here,’ he whispered as they walked along the tunnel. ‘There are the ghosts of dead miners who died down here and their spirits can’t get out. Every time they get in the cage the draught sucks ’em back out, so they’re trapped down here until they can find a body with a weak spirit they can push out.’

Jack stopped Ben in his tracks. ‘Have you got a weak spirit, Ben? ’Cause they’ll have you.’

‘N... N... No— ah... ah... I’m str... str... strong,’ Ben stuttered, his eyes wide with fear. ‘They won’t get in me.’

‘Well, you make sure they don’t. Let me know if they do and we will throw them out, but it’s very difficult.’

‘Wh... wh... when do they attack you?’ Ben whispered.

‘Usually at lunch time, when we’re sitting an’ eating. They hide in the dark spots and you can only see a whiff of white smoke drifting up behind you. Then you have to jump up and shout as

bad a swear word as you can think of so they won't get in your body.'

'What sort of swear words? I don't know any except bugger and damn, and they're not real swearing.'

'Hell, they're no good!' Toby scoffed. 'You got to have real bad swear words to make it work and scare them off. You haven't got any hope with that lot, you're a gonna for sure.' He shook his head, holding it down so Ben couldn't see him sniggering. He looked out of the corner of his eye at Jack, who had a hand held over his mouth to hide a grin. Ben, oblivious to their antics, was starting to see ghosts in every corner.

'Please teach me some bad swear words. I don't want to lose my body,' he pleaded.

'We-e-l-l— we could...' Jack drew out the words. 'But you can't tell anyone we taught you because it's supposed to come from you, and if the spirits or the other miners find out it'll show you're weak.'

'Then they'll jump in your body,' Toby added emphatically, his face close to Ben's.

'I won't tell anyone— honest! I swear, just tell me,' he said, grabbing Jack's coat.

'Ok, here's some of the worst.' Jack began to whisper. 'Repeat them after me.' He leaned towards Ben.

Toby joined in with enthusiasm, adding a few choice words of his own. 'No, no, not like that,' he interrupted as Ben pronounced the swear words. 'Put some feeling into it. You've got to mean it; shout it out loud, but not now— do it when the spirits get near you.'

Ben put more emphasis into his swearing and looked at Jack for approval.

'That's more like it,' Jack encouraged him. 'Just do it like that, real loud, and you'll be safe— and don't forget to stand up and wave your arms up and down to fend them off.'

'How come the spirits haven't tried to get in your bodies?' Ben queried suspiciously.

Toby looked at Jack and made an 'oops' shape with his lips. Jack, a fast thinker, replied, 'They have tried— and they nearly got poor Toby, didn't they Toby?'

Toby shook his head enthusiastically. 'Yeah, it was bloody close. I was nearly a gonna.'

'Ooh, what happened?' There was a tremble in Ben's voice.

Toby again looked at Jack, deferring to his quicker thinking, and Jack picked up immediately.

'W-e-e-l-l,' he drawled, 'poor Toby had just finished his greasy fat and bread at snap time and was nodding off to sleep, when this white wisp drifted towards his back. It was just about to jump in his body when Toby's Dad saw it and started yelling, and Toby woke up and scared him off.'

'How did he scare him off?' Ben whispered.

'Oh, he jumped up and down waving his arms and swore some horrible swear words. Once a spirit realises you're strong they'll leave you alone from there on, and look for some-one weak.'

'That's why we're both safe,' added Toby confidently.

By this time they had reached the stables where the pit ponies were kept, deep underground with poor lighting. The stables were as comfortable as any on the surface. They were given straw and fed regularly with oats and hay, and their water was kept clean of coal dust by their young attendants.

Jack patted the nearest pony and gave it some of the grass and milk thistle out of his pocket. The pony ate it eagerly.

'This is my mate Ted. Me and Toby looked after him and the other ponies when we was workin' up top. An' this is Molly,' he said, giving a handful of grass to the second horse and

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stroking her head. ‘She’s quiet and easy to handle. Bella there is a bit flighty. Here, you can give her some grass.’ Jack offered grass from the other pocket to Ben.

‘Oh, ta. I’ll bring some tomorrow. Are they easy to get out of the pit?’ Ben asked as he fed the grass to Bella.

‘Taking them up is easy. They’re smart, they are, and know when we’re taking them up top.’

‘How do they know you’re taking them up top? They can’t talk.’

‘When they’re taken away from their usual track they know something’s going on and get real lively like, and start shaking their heads up an’ down. An’ when they smell the fresh air and see the cage they get real excited and dance about.’

‘Have we got many ponies?’ Ben asked. ‘There’s only eight here.’

There’s another eight in the other shaft, but some of the big mines have got nearly a hundred. It can take a full shift to take them up top,’ Jack replied. ‘They’re pretty good going up. We take them up two at a time. But it’s different coming down again.’

‘Yeah, Jack should know. Ted went and kicked him once when we were bringing them back,’ Toby said. ‘They don’t like coming back. We have to tie them up and blindfold them to stop them kicking everyone.’

‘It wasn’t his fault,’ Jack said, patting Ted. ‘He just didn’t want to come back down here. But we need them, so we’ve got no choice.’

‘You the only one that brings ’em grass?’ Ben asked.

‘No, a lot of the blokes don’t like them being down here and they bring them something—apples or grass, things like that. It makes them feel better,’ Jack said.

‘About bloody time!’ a voice boomed from the back of the stalls. ‘I was about to put another lad on instead of you.’

A large man with a stomach threatening to burst his trousers limped from the back of the stalls, a legacy of being kicked by a pony once too often.

Jack and Toby quickly left when they heard the man shout, not wanting to get Ben into trouble.

‘Sorry Mr. Walker, but it’s not six o’clock yet,’ Ben replied in a quiet voice.

‘Well, never mind your lip; shovel this shit out of bloody road and put it in yon wagons. Then you can clean out stalls and put fresh hay in there, and mind bloody ponies don’t kick you. They don’t like people behind ’em.’

‘Yes, Mr. Walker, I’ll do a real good job,’ Ben replied and picked up the shovel.

‘Well, I hope you do better than last lad,’ Mr Walker growled.

‘Oh, did you sack him?’

‘No he’s bloody dead,’ Bob Walker replied, snapping the words out.

‘D –d-d-dead!’ Ben stuttered, thinking that the mine spirits might have entered his body, or something more sinister.

‘Yeah, he was a nice kid too,’ Bob Walker said in a softer voice. ‘He died over there,’ he added, pointing to a bend a hundred yards away.

‘Did the spirits get him?’ Ben asked, eyes wide with fear.

‘What, you daft ’apeth? No, a big lump of coal fell on his head from roof, must have weighed nearly half a ton, never had a chance.’

Ben didn’t know what to say and went back to cleaning. The reality of the danger involved in mining was brought home to him and he spent the rest of the morning looking at the roof every

few minutes.

Jack arrived at the ‘family tunnel’, opened a small wooden door and crawled on hands and knees to join his father at the coal face. The tunnel they worked in was only six feet wide and four high, and with insufficient room to stand up straight they could only squat or sit. It was thirty feet long with coal dust covering everything and in complete darkness except for a glimmer of light from the Davey lamp that Joseph had mounted near the coal face. The light cast a weak glow on the face, where he was methodically chipping away with his pick.

Jack joined him and commenced moving the coal, putting it in small carts that he dragged from the coal face through the small doorway to the main wagons outside, where he tipped the coal into the wagons after first closing their tunnel door to keep the air flowing down the main tunnel.

Along the length of the main mine shaft were other small tunnels where each miner had their own section or seam to mine with the help of family members. They were paid on how much they produced and had to work a minimum of twelve hours a day to meet their quota and earn enough money to survive on.

There was little conversation whilst Joseph and Jack were working because the dust in the air would fill their mouths in a very short time. They wore handkerchiefs over their faces but didn’t have water to spare to keep washing their mouths out. ‘The best way to keep the coal dust out is to keep your trap shut,’ Joseph told Jack when he first joined him underground.

They both stripped to their trousers and boots, as the heat was too oppressive to wear any other clothes. Their bodies were caked in perspiration and coal dust, making them as black as their surroundings.

Jack thought he heard the whistle a dozen times as he waited impatiently for crib time, but the time passed slowly. When it finally came, the midday crib was welcomed with relief and pleasure. They crawled from their tunnel to join a group of miners sitting nearby to eat their snap and talk about everything within their world. The biggest topic was the weekend’s boxing tournament between Joseph and a man from Huddesfield, a butcher of some boxing repute who was known to have inflicted serious damage to a number of his opponents.

Jack and Toby sat together, sharing a large lump of coal as a seat. The other putty boys had found a number of empty containers and blocks of wood to sit on. Ben came down from the stables to join them; he had recovered from the morning, but was noticeably nervous as he sat down.

‘How’s the new job going, Ben, sick of horseshit yet?’ Toby enquired.

‘I’d rather shovel horseshit than shovel coal,’ he replied. ‘And it’s cleaner. An’ Mister Walker’s all right, but he told me I had taken over the job of a boy killed by falling coal.’

‘Yeah, that was Cyril Mason, it only happened a few days ago, got him dead to rights,’ Jack said.

‘His spirit will be trapped down here till he can find a weak body to jump into,’ Toby added, a little too enthusiastically.

‘Wonder where he is now— probably looking for a chance to find a new boy.’ Toby gave Jack a covert wink, both observing that Ben was rather pale.

‘Remember what we told you to do if they do come near you,’ Jack said.

‘And make sure you do it loudly, otherwise they’ll know you’re weak,’ Toby added.

Ben nodded his head. ‘I will, don’t worry, I don’t want to be tipped out,’ Ben said, referring to his spirit being displaced.

Jack and Toby changed the subject and pretended to talk about the football game they played

each Sunday. After a while Jack looked up and saw a cloud of steam vapour drifting from one of the pit ponies and gave Toby a nudge. Toby, busy drawing a football field in the dust, looked up and saw the cloud. Winking at Jack he looked over Ben's shoulder and, giving a loud gasp, pointed behind Ben, pretending not to be able to talk.

'Oh no,' Jack said, feigning horror and grabbing his cheeks with both hands.

'What's wrong?' Ben gasped. He jumped up and turned around to see the cloud of steam drifting towards him. He let out a girlish squeal and felt as if he was going to choke. He remembered the boys' words to scare off the 'spirits' and, waving his arms around frantically, proceeded to swear at the top of his voice using words no miner would be proud of.

The other miners stopped in mid bite, some in the middle of drinking their water, transfixed by the antics of this obviously mad young fool.

'What the bloody hell do you think you're doing, you foul-mouthed little bugger?' one of the miners demanded, jumping up and grabbing Ben by the collar.

'We'll have none of that sort of language down here,' another said.

'But the spirits— th... th... they'll get me if I d... d... don't do that,' Ben replied, trying to pull away from the man's grip.

Jack and Toby fell off the coal seat, laughing so hard that Toby was curled up and Jack was leaning up against him holding his stomach.

'Spirits, what spirits? What rubbish are you talking about, lad?' Joseph asked.

'The ones that jump in your body if you're weak, you have to swear at them to keep them away,' Ben said in a trembling voice.

'Where the bloody hell did you hear that rubbish? There's no spirits down here,' Joseph replied.

'Th, th, they t, t, told me— it's true!' Ben stuttered, pointing at Jack and Toby.

Jack looked up, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes. Toby still held his side in hysterics.

'Is this true?' Joseph enquired staring at them. Already he and the others were beginning to appreciate the joke played on Ben.

'I'm sorry, Dad, I couldn't resist. He just fell right into it,' Jack gasped, trying to control himself. 'Nobody got hurt,' he added in defence, tears still running down his face from laughing.

Some of the other miners chuckled, and the hint of a smile came to Joseph's lips.

'Well, like you say, no one got hurt. But from now on, no more swearing, you understand, Ben?'

'Yes, sir,' Ben said with a bowed head, 'Sorry, sir.'

'Any more tricks from you, young Jack, and you'll get my boot up your backside.'

By this time Jack, Toby and Ben were suitably chastened and stood holding their caps in their hands. Jack knew it would be a long time before they let 'the spirits' loose again on another young miner.