



# Billy Bob Button's Books





**BILLY BOB BUTTONS** is the award-winning author of eleven children's novels including the Ruberny Book Award FINALIST, Felicity Brady and the Wizard's Bookshop, the much loved The Gullfoss Legends, TOR Assassin Hunter, TOR Wolf Rising, the hysterical Muffin Monster and the UK People's Book Prize WINNER, I Think I Murdered Miss.

He is also a PATRON OF READING.

Born in the Viking city of York, he and his wife, Therese, a true Swedish girl from the IKEA county of Småland, now live in Stockholm and London. Their twin girls, Rebecca and Beatrix, and little boy, Alfred, inspire Billy Bob every day to pick up a pen and work on his books.

When not writing, he enjoys tennis and playing 'MONSTER!' with his three children.



S TIFFANY W  
SPARROW  
SPOOK SLAYER



BILLY BOE BUTTONS



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FOR THE  
**GODPARENTS**

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## CHAPTER I

### IS IT KETCHUP? OR BLOOD?

**M**Y NAME IS TIFFANY SPARROW AND MY JOB is to slay spooks. It can be messy work, but I enjoy it. Mostly. I get to do a lot of travelling which is fun, but often just to crumbling tombs and spidery cellars. My mum was a Slayer too and so was my grandmother. I miss them terribly. They were killed, you see, by Grimdorf the warlock, so now there's only me and my old grandad left.

I live in Devil's Ash – delightful, I know – a tiny town in the north of Scotland. It is very, VERY different to

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most other towns. Here, ghosts linger on every corner, perch in every tree and lurk in every cellar. Over on Voodoo Street, there's a pitchfork-shaped park named after a highwayman who was hung from a tree there. I often see him on a wet night, huddled on a bench, juggling his eyeballs. He's a cheery sort of fellow, for a maggoty corpse.

Now I know to you, a 'normal' kid, all of this must seem very, VERY odd, but YOU don't watch TV being cuddled up to by the ghost of Henry VIII – he's so fat there's hardly any room on the sofa for me – and when you shower, YOU don't share it with a shimmering, slightly wispy-looking Winston Churchill.

**YOU DON'T SEE GHOSTS EVERYWHERE YOU GO!**

And I, well – I do.

My grandad, bless him, tells me it's in my blood. He calls it my 'wonderful gift'. But I disagree. **STRONGLY!** And I call it my 'ruddy nightmare'. If ever I ask him why it is only I can see them, he always says in a very lofty sort of way, 'A person who's colour blind can't see red, but red is still there.' And when I press him, he just clams up.

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My grandad's that sort of person. You know, the sort who, if you ask him why birds fly all the way to Africa in the winter, he'll answer, 'Well, it's probably too far to walk.'

He's very clever, my grandad, but he can be very annoying too. And super-secretive.

Oddly, the only spot I never see ghosts is in the spooky cemetery on Bucket O' Blood Lane. They must be hiding, cowering in rotten, silk-lined coffins, scared the Spook Slayer will find them and send them, well – to be honest, I don't know where. But wherever it is, they don't seem to want to go.

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Now, don't get me wrong. I don't slay all ghosts. Just the pests, who think it's funny to skulk under children's beds or pinch toddlers' lollipops. The highwayman's not a problem – he only ever upsets dogs who want to play fetch with his eyeballs; yes, it seems dogs can see ghosts too – so I keep away from him; try not to stir him up. But there's a howling banshee in the Crusty Crypt Inn who's driving everybody crazy. He's top of my 'TO SLAY' list. And that, kids, is why I'm lurking by the door of the Hungry Skeleton Café on a moonless night. There's been a report of a spook in there who's up to no good and my job is to get rid of it.

The shop looks totally deserted, but I never go on looks. Too risky. This Monday, I popped in the Crusty Crypt Inn to pee and Genghis Khan's ghost was sleeping in the loo bowl. I wish I'd checked. I SO wish I'd checked. So now I pull out my silver compass and flip up the lid. Yes, just as I suspected. The arrow is spinning crazily. There must be a ghost in there; a big critter too by the look of it. Good job I'm fully kitted up in my steel-woven dress, my steel-capped boots buckled up to my knees. I check the Slayer tools

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hooked to my belt. Firstly, my skull bombs, just twist and toss. Three seconds later

# BOOM!

They emit electro-magnetic bursts; very nasty on all things 'spooky'. Then, my pumpkin lantern, steel-shelled, the candle a potent blend of wax and gunpowder. Blindingly bright. And, finally, and most important of all, my trusty scythe clutched in my fist. It is called HELL'S TALON.

Its job...

To send spooks packing; and not to a cosy B & B in Skegness.

All set! So, slowly, I creep over to the café. It is twenty feet back from the street, dimly lit by a flickering lamp over the porch. I try the door – well, you never know – but it's locked. I shrug and remedy the problem by elbowing in a window. It's cold for a July night and I'm in no mood to linger. Anyway, Percy Butts, the

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owner, he won't mind; he just wants rid of his spooky hooligan.

I climb gingerly in, dropping to the carpet with a glassy crunch. I sniff. It smells of burnt sugar in here, as if the spook I'm hunting is not so much the wispy leftovers of a person, but of an overly-baked choc-chip muffin. It's pitch black too, so I pull my lantern off my belt and switch it on. The café looks as if it had a wild bull for a customer: tipped-over stools, smashed lamps; and is that blood on the wall? With a nervy swallow, I put the tip of my finger in the red goo. Then I press it to my lips.

'Phew,' I murmur, ballooning my cheeks. It's just Ketchup. With a sigh, I check my compass. The needle is now spinning with the ferocity of a wind-chime in a tornado. I'm confident there's been a ghost in here, but where is it now?

It must be hiding so, slowly, I go over the café foot by foot. Being mostly swirling light and a sort of gloopy goo – oddly, very similar to most of my grandad's cooking – they can shrink to the size of a tennis ball, so I look in the bin, the cash till – it opens with a 'PING!'



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scaring the bejeebers out of me – I even check the pot of a prickly-looking, rugby ball-shaped cactus, but there's no sign of the spook.

I grit my teeth and sigh. I can't put it off any longer. The pesky ghost must be in the kitchen. Why oh why do they always go in there, I ponder crossly; a room full of pots, pans and rolling pins. Why not the bedroom? Then, all they can throw at me is a plumped-up pillow, a trashy Mills and Boon novel and a duvet.

Trying not to trip over all the mess – I seem to trip over most of it anyway – I skulk over to a door hidden in the shadows in the back of the shop. There is a tiny, oval window in the top of it and I peer in. Yes, there's the kitchen and, yes – SHOCK! HORROR! – just as I suspected, over by the oven, chomping on pepperoni pizza and surrounded by pots and pans (and a very hefty-looking rolling pin) is the ghost.

Hovering just a few feet over the newly-mopped floor, the wisps of energy shimmer and glow. It's sort of pretty; hypnotically so. But I know better. Through the foggy swirls I spot a short, burly-looking fellow in a bull-horned helmet and I think – yes, there is, there's a

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hatchet with a curved blade slung over his back. My chin drops to my chest. I remember him from my history books: the blood-thirsty eyes, the sunken cheeks, the perfectly trimmed hawk-like eyebrows. IT'S ATTILA THE HUN! What's the ghost of a 1,500 year old warlord doing here, in Devil's Ash? Apart from scoffing pepperoni pizza. Fretfully, I thumb the blade of HELL'S TALON. It is glowing crimson-red; it knows there's work to do.

Unsettled, I watch in disgust as a chunk of the pizza drops through the ghost and lands on the floor with a sticky PLOP! I find spooks often try to do the stuff they did when they were living: jump in the bath, scoff popcorn, even pop to the loo. But it never works. They just end up making a mess. But I think it helps them to feel better. Less like – worm food.

I switch off the lantern and hook it back on my dress. Now I've spotted the spook, I no longer need it. My Slayer blood is pumping through me. Suddenly, I feel sharper, no longer clumsy and I can see better than a barn owl. I drop to my knees and, very gently, push the door open. Keeping low, I shuffle in, working

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my way by a humming freezer and a glossy, steel sink.

Finally, I stop by a bin, the stench of rotten fish wafting up my nostrils. For a second, I hunker down there, listening to the ghost chomping on his midnight snack. Then I jump to my feet, levelling the scythe at the...

But the ghost is no longer there.

**SPLAT!**

A lump of soggy pizza lands on my shoulder. With a nervy gulp, I look up. There! Swinging from the lamp like a chimp. With a war cry, he zooms down at me.

'OH DRAT!' I yell, throwing myself to the floor. I roll over and over, bashing my shoulder on the bin and kicking over a mop and bucket, drenching my boots with mucky water. Then I jump to my feet. 'Now look,' I snap, rubbing my throbbing shoulder and glowering at the spook. I lift up my filthy left foot to show him. 'They were spotless.'

Suddenly, a frying pan hops off the top of the oven, thumping me in the eye. With a scowl, I finger the bleeding cut on my brow. Everybody knows a spook

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can't pick up and throw objects with his hand but, annoyingly, he can with the power of his mind. 'Listen up,' I snarl, as a rolling pin cartwheels over my red curls. 'If you stop misbehaving, you can stay in Devil's Ash. If you don't, I'll be forced to slay you. I don't want to but I will.'

But over by the bin, Attila just hoots and snorts, enjoying his fun. He thinks he's a cat and I'm a ball of string.

Seeing red, I grit my teeth and advance on the chuckling ghost. Another even bigger, **EVEN HARDER** frying pan jumps off the wall and cartwheels my way, but I drop kick it and it slams harmlessly into the oven door.

Then – I'm on him.

With a wolfish howl, I swing **HELL'S TALON**. Attila pulls his sword, steel meets iron and the sword shatters. Steel wins! Slashing to and fro, my shimmering blade rips into the snowy swirls of energy. They wriggle and twist, crying for mercy. But there's no mercy here. Only when I'm tucked up in my bed do I weep for them, often crying myself to sleep. The spook grows

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slowly paler and paler, fading to nothingness; hand in hand, the steel in my fist dulls and the fury in my chest drops to a simmer, a pot of bubbling water snatched off the hob.

Then, from nowhere...

# 'HE HAS RETURNED!'

The entity's icy words echo in my mind, ricocheting off the walls like the howl of a banshee.

'Who?' I demand,

'You know who,' Attila whispers slyly. 'Grimdorf. He will slay the Slayer.'

'Grimdorf,' I mutter, my legs turning to jelly. 'I – I don't understand.'

But the last of the shimmering swirls vanish. The ghost is no longer there to answer me.

Slowly, I sink to the floor, my knees up to my chin. Grimdorf killed my grandmother. HE KILLED MY MUM! A volcano of pitiless fury erupts in my body. My chin

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snaps up, my jaws fly open and with untold ferocity...

I HOWL!



Later, in bed, my mind will not let me sleep. I tumble over and over on my mattress, my sheets bunched up and knotted, drenched from my twisting body.

In my tortured skull I see the moon. Then, just for a second, the shadowy walls of Lurch Manor. It towers over me, a horror film of filthy windows and towers capped in crooked roofs.

I see...

I see...

Cobwebs. Iron cobwebs. Hundreds of them, all jumbled up. Like me, they tumble over and over...

Suddenly, they stop and in my bedroom I lay perfectly still. Now, there is a low chanting. In my mind, I see a tunnel. It is blacker than the night between the stars but I can still see it perfectly: the low roof, the glistening icy walls.

Slowly, I creep up it. Skulls blanket the floor and, not

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wishing to step on them, I keep my eyes to my boots.

The tunnel begins to widen. The chanting seems to be everywhere now, crashing over me, drumming on my skull. But the words echo off the cavern walls and I cannot decipher them.

I know I must get closer.

I know only then will I understand.