



Ghosts and Goosebumps: Ghost Stories, Tall Tales, and Superstitions (Brown Thrasher Books)

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Ghosts and Goosebumps is a rich collection of folktales and superstitions that capture the oral traditions of central and southeastern Alabama. In its pages one can glimpse the long-lost horse-and-buggy times, when people sat up all night with the dead and dying, hoed and handpicked cotton, drew water from wells, and met the devil rather regularly.

The book is divided into three parts—tales, superstitions, and slave narratives. The spirits of treasure-keepers, poltergeists, murderers and the murdered, wicked men and good-men-and-true float through the book's first section. Sue Peacock, for example, recalls seeing the ghost of her brother, and E.C. Nevin describes a mysterious light in a swamp. In other tales, reports of supernatural experiences are proved to be rationally explicable—Lee Wilson's devil in the cemetery turns out to be a cow and chains rattling near New Tabernacle Church in Coffee County belong not to specters but to hogs.

The superstitions are arranged according to subject and include such topics as love and marriage, weather and the seasons, wish making, bad luck, signs, and portents. Anonymous tellers confide that it is bad luck to carry ashes out after dark, to let a locust holler in your hand, to rock an empty rocking chair, to let your fishing pole cross someone else's, or to have a two-dollar bill (unless one corner has been removed).

The slave narratives, selected from the Works Progress Administration Folklore Collection, are substantial and yield a fascinating view of nineteenth century African-American folk life, replete with sillies and lazy men, preachers and witches, brave little boys, and reluctant bridegrooms. Although the times and places have changed, the spirit of the folk is unaltered. Taken together, these folktales are marvelously diverse—by turns fearsome, fantastical, witty, ribald, charmingly innocent—showing people from all backgrounds, their endless vices and occasional virtues, their hopes, fears, and loves.

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