
THE WILD GHOST CHASE

by Sallie Tierney

This novel is dedicated to all the wonderful Pagans in my life.

Blessed be!

And of course to George Gordon, Lord Byron

with appreciation, admiration,

and abject apologies.

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Summary: Allegrina Parceval, gifted Wiccan priestess is scrambling to finish her English Literature degree amid the shambles of her love life when her spirit guide sends her on a journey to England to recover a long-lost document related to the The Wild Ghost Chase legendary poet Lord Byron - a document that, once published, will be the making of her academic career - and in the process change forever how the world views Byron. Allegrina takes up the challenge but she has not reckoned on the lengths to which the ghost of Byron will go to stop her.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: This book is a work of fiction. Name, The Wild Ghost Chase characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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And finally, thanks to my fellow members of the Burien Senior Writer's Workshop of Burien, Washington for putting up with my Lord Byron obsession over the last decade - and to Dale Randall for suggesting I put Byron's ghost into a novel. The Wild Ghost Chase

She walks in beauty, like the night

Of cloudless The Wild Ghost Chase climes and starry skies

And all that's best of dark and bright

Meet in her aspect and her eyes

Thus mellowed to that tender light

Which heaven to gaudy day denies

Lord Byron

Chapter 1

"There's still time to change your mind before you end up on a talk show - but not in good way," said Dana, uncorking a bottle of two-dollar merlot.

"It probably won't come to that," I said, hoping I was right.

I threw another log on the fire and watched a blizzard of firefly sparks circle up the flue. Outside, the bamboo grove thrashed the windowpane. A nasty storm was blowing in from Puget Sound. *What else was new?* May was poised to go out like a lion. As had March and April. I was beginning to think spring The Wild Ghost Chase had decided not to show up before summer made way for fall.

"If what this so-called spirit guide of yours says is true you'll be pulling the plug on an archetype - an The Wild Ghost Chase icon," continued Dana, pouring the wine. "Jeeze, Allegrina, the English Department is going to crucify you. You'll be lucky if all they do is throw you out of grad school. They might The Wild Ghost Chase have you committed as a danger to yourself." A worried frown played over her face.

"Look, sweetie," I said. "You may be right but I didn't come up with this out of thin air - well maybe I did - still, it might turn out to be a good thing. I've been floundering in the program for quite some time. Chessman appeared in a bright green flame on Beltane and practically threw The Wild Ghost Chase this idea in The Wild Ghost Chase my face. I'd be foolish to second-guess a manifestation that powerful. "

I took a deep breath.

"I'm thinking of following through with it," I said.

"How can you? You have nothing to go on, just the word of a willow-the-wisp. You can't submit a paper consisting of speculation and fantasy."

"Of course not, but Chessman assures me the materials will be in my hands before the end of next month. The direct quote was: 'By the next full moon you will have what you require'. That gives me plenty of time."

"And that's another thing," said Dana. "What kind of a spirit guide has a name like Chessman? Sounds like the name of a butler The Wild Ghost Chase in an Agatha Christie novel. How can you trust this guy? Or whatever it is."

"You're thinking of Jeeves - and that wasn't Christie, it was P. G. Wodehouse. And the entity is feminine, not masculine - at least as far as an incorporeal being can be said to have gender. You aren't far wrong about the butler thing though. According to her, she was a housekeeper for the rich and famous in many of her past lives."

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"Terrific," said Dana. "You tell me that an ectoplasmic housekeeper says she has proof The Wild Ghost Chase that what the world knows as Lord Byron was nothing more than an elaborate hoax and you hop on it like a tick on a wolfhound."

"I think this could be just what I've needed, Dana. My blog is going nowhere and the The Wild Ghost Chase Glenarvin thesis paper probably won't to be done until the end of summer. If this thing pans out it would generate more traffic to the blog and set me apart from the The Wild Ghost Chase rest of the English Department. It could make my career."

"Or The Wild Ghost Chase send you straight into living out of a shopping cart under the I-90 overpass."

"You're exaggerating."

"You want to bet?"

"The truth is, the paper on Glenarvin will probably meet my graduation requirements but I'm only going through the motions with it. No one but the committee will ever read it. If even I can't get excited about it, what chance does it have of interesting anyone else?" I said. "No, either I come up with a blockbuster scoop on Byron or my career is stillborn. I'll be teaching English 101 in some rural community college until dementia sets in. The English Department isn't going to hire yet another dreamy English Romantic poets major. They are looking for someone more politically edgy who'll draw grants and students to the department - something along the lines of feminist literature, African American literature, Gay literature - not someone who is doing her thesis on an abominable novel written by an ex-lover of Lord Byron, of all topics."

"So why did you choose that for a topic if it's such a snore?"

"After a hundred years of scholars picking over the good topics that's pretty much all that's left. It was the only proposal I came up with that the committee would okay."

"Yeah, I can relate. I ran into a little of that with my committee too." said Dana. "So you've decided to spice things up by shooting holes in a legend? You love that Lord Byron, you know you do. How can you even consider trashing his street cred?"

"And personally," she continued. "I think it's kind of creepy and borderline neurotic getting so caught The Wild Ghost Chase up in a guy who's been dead a couple of hundred years. That being said, how can you betray a guy - dead or alive - who means that much to you? And on the say-so of a spirit The Wild Ghost Chase who's probably all too familiar with spirits of the bottled variety. Speaking of which . . ." She chucked her wine The Wild Ghost Chase and poured herself another glass.

Outside, something heavy hit the side of the house. I entertained a fleeting image of Dorothy sucked into the cyclone.

"Betraying is a harsh word," I said. "Technically you can't betray a dead man. When you look at it in a certain light, I'll be resurrecting him as a human being. History sees him as no longer relevant. A cartoon. Even boring. He's a poet who has been done to The Wild Ghost Chase death in literary journals, graduate dissertations, and biographies since the Victorian Era, leaving nothing seemingly of any importance left to say. I'll be making the old guard sit up and take another look at him as a man."

I slopped some more wine into my glass and took a large gulp. This was a three-glass night if ever there was one. At this rate the bottle wasn't going to last long. I wondered if I should send Dana up to the corner store for another before the storm got too intense. And before either one of us was too slozzled to drive. Plenty of time for that, I thought.

"Lord Byron was larger-than-life," I continued, feeling myself shift into a tipsy version of my English teacher persona. "A mythic character that's still a stock in trade of the Romantic novel, the 'Byronic hero'. Enough said, would be the committee's view. This is the 21st Century, they would say - era of the anti-hero, the common man/woman. Who wants to read about a titled pistol-shooting womanizer swashing and buckling in a floppy shirt ala Fabio around Regency London? Good riddance, they'd say. But I'd like to show them a real-life Byron, sweetie, the vulnerable man behind the great lover mask. I want to show the world what The Wild Ghost Chase he really was - an insecure man-child who nevertheless wrote like an angel."

I finished my wine with a shaky flourish, setting the glass down on the coffee table a little more forcefully than I'd intended.

"But let's back up," said Dana. "I want to get this straight, The Wild Ghost Chase Chessman is saying that the poet was a shy, pudgy, unattractive dweeb who could write, but that his valet was a stunning hottie. Together they decided to change places, putting the valet forward as the poet, while the real lord stayed in the background penning verses. That it was all about fooling the media? Like having a body-double? Like they use in action films?"

"That's what I'm getting from Chessman, that there were two Byrons, one a very private genius and the other an over-the-top extrovert. The real Lord Byron was a puppet master, manipulating the image he had created."

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