SCOTLAND

The hare in this tale is not what she seems, but you may have guessed that already from the title. While this Scottish tale can be enjoyed any time of year, reading it by candlelight on the last day of October is especially appropriate.

The Blue-Eyed Hare

At the edge of the moor there once lived a lad who was a beekeeper. Everyday he would stroll among his hives, talking to his bees and fussing over them. People in those parts claimed the bees could understand what the lad said, and that he, in turn, understood them. Maybe there was some truth in that.

One day as the lad was returning to his cottage for his evening meal, he was surprised to find a wee hare sitting on the stoop. The creature wasn’t a bit timid and stood still when the beekeeper bent down to stroke her fur. He opened the door to his home, and the hare hopped right into the cottage. And she kept hopping, until she’d hopped onto a chair and onto the table, and made herself comfortable right next to the beekeeper’s plate!

The beekeeper noticed there was something unusual about this hare. Her eyes weren’t brown, nor were they pink; instead they were as blue as a cloudless sky on a summer’s day.

“You’re a lovely thing,” the lad said to the hare. “I don’t know what
then turned and ran. "Keep a close eye on that hare, lad," she warned.

bees buzzing around the old woman. She started to back away,

A moment later a large swarm of bees returned and

ew to the hive. A few bees had been hovering near the beekeeper, and of they

this hare." "I'll tell you again," the lad said firmly. "I don't intend on selling

and handing the beekeeper a fistful of honey. "I'll make it well worth your while," the woman went on, taking

"This hare is not for sale," the lad replied.

"Are you asking for help?"

"Here's a fine looking hare you have there," she said. "How much

for the hare.

but the old woman had eyes only

probably come to buy some honey.

At first, the lad thought she had

stopped at the beekeeper's cottage.

That afternoon an old woman

then she was of the beekeeper

around the creature's head, but she was no more frightened of them

had carried the hare from hive to hive, stopping at each. The bees buzzed

on where they live. Either that or they'll up and move elsewhere. The

beekeeper well tell you, bees insist on knowing everything that's going

The next day the lad introduced the hare to his bees. For a any

unusual friendship between man and beast.

began you here, but you are welcome to stay" And so began a most
as she disappeared from view.

From then on, the beekeeper kept the hare with him at all times. She even went to town with him on market day. On one such day the beekeeper was startled to see the old woman walking about the village square. He asked one of the other merchants who she was.

"They say she's a witch," whispered the merchant, making the sign of the cross. Well, the lad had no way of knowing if this were true or not, but he decided to keep an even closer watch on the hare, just in case.

The summer days gradually grew shorter and autumn finally arrived. The colder weather slowed the bees' activity, and the beekeeper knew that soon they would not be leaving the warmth and protection of their hives. The shorter days were sending the birds south, too, and before long the wandering gypsies would follow.

One crisp day in early October, a brightly colored gypsy caravan pulled by a bony horse lumbered past the cottage. The beekeeper looked up and waved in greeting. Only when the wagon was out of sight did he notice that something had fallen from it onto the road. It was a sack of grain, no doubt feed for the horse. With the hare under one arm, and the sack of grain upon his shoulder, the beekeeper set off after the gypsies.

An hour later he caught up with the wagon, pulled over beside the lane beneath the shade of some trees. The beekeeper could tell from the delicious smells coming from the wagon that the gypsies were having their midday meal.

"Hallo," called the beekeeper. "Is there anyone home?"
her, then headed home.

Your bees, help! The old Gypsy woman outlined a plan. "The lad thumped another, we always say, "I'll tell you what you can do, but you'll need

She paused for a moment, then continued. "One goodurn deserves
est powers."

"Halloween Eve is approaching. That when witches have their Great-

"You've not seen the last of that witch," the Gypsy woman warned.

"The next day wanting to buy her

have had arrived on his doorstep, and about the old woman who appeared

and then the bekeeper understood. He told the Gypsies how the

sell a lassie who's been bewitched,"

with certainty. "You've got your-

That is no hare," she said

at the bekeeper

the window. Her eyes narrowed as she gazed first at the hare and then a

wizened woman with a shawl draped over her head appeared at

called, "Come see what this lad has with him:"

"Never one with blue eyes," the Gypsy replied. "Grandmother," he

"A hare," laughed the bekeeper. "Surely you've seen a hare before:"

"A hare in the crook of his arm," what have you there?" he asked.

Only then did the Gypsy lad notice the hare that the bekeeper had

"Oh, thank you," the Gypsy said, recognizing the bekeeper now.

"Only to return this sack of grain that fell from your wagon," replied

"What is it you want?" he asked suspiciously.

A Gypsy lad poked his head out of the window of the caravan.
On All Hallows' Eve, the last day of the month, the beekeeper did just as the old gypsy woman had instructed. He went from hive to hive asking the bees to help him that night. Then he picked up the hare and climbed into his wagon. Giving the reins a shake, they set off.

On and on they went, never pausing, as day melted into evening and evening into night. The full moon was so bright the beekeeper's pony had no trouble keeping to the lane. All the while the lad kept a firm hold on the hare.

Then suddenly the hare gave a jerk and began to wriggle and twitch. The lad knew it must be midnight and that the witch was using all her powers to reclaim the hare. The beekeeper tightened his grasp.

For a moment he feared he had lost the hare when a dark cloud swept in front of the moon. But when the clouds parted, the lad was still holding tight, but instead of a hare he held a lovely, blue-eyed lass in his arms. The lassie told the beekeeper how she had come to be under the wicked witch's spell.

That Sunday the two were wed at the village church. On market day the newlyweds rode into town with their honey. The merchant