

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

brings you here, but you are welcome to stay." And so began a most unusual friendship between man and beast.

The next day the lad introduced the hare to his bees. For as any beekeeper will tell you, bees insist on knowing everything that's going on where they live. Either that, or they'll up and move elsewhere. The lad carried the hare from hive to hive, stopping at each. The bees buzzed around the creature's head, but she was no more frightened of them than she was of the beekeeper.

That afternoon an old woman stopped at the beekeeper's cottage. At first, the lad thought she had probably come to buy some honey, but the old woman had eyes only for the hare.

"That's a fine looking hare you have there," she said. "How much are you asking for her?"

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

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

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

A few bees had been hovering near the beekeeper, and off they flew to the hives. A moment later a large swarm of bees returned and began buzzing angrily around the old woman. She started to back away, then turned and ran. "Keep a close eye on that hare, lad," she warned

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.

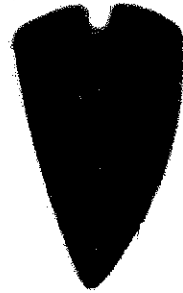
An hour later he caught up with the wagon, pulled over beside the lane beneath the shade of some trees. The beekeeper could tell from the delicious smells coming from the wagon that the gypsies were having their midday meal.

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


She paused for a moment, then continued, "One good turn deserves another, we always say. I'll tell you what you can do, but you'll need your bees' help." The old gypsy woman outlined a plan. The lad thanked her, then headed home.

"All Hallows' Eve is approaching. That's when witches have their greatest powers," "You've not seen the last of that witch," the gypsy woman warned. the next day wanting to buy her. hare had arrived on his doorstep, and about the old woman who appeared And then the beekeeper understood. He told the gypsies how the

"That is no hare," she said with certainty. "You've got yourself a lassie who's been bewitched."



at the beekeeper. 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 beekeeper. "Surely you've seen a hare before." tucked in the crook of his arm. "What have you there?" he asked. Only then did the gypsy lad notice the hare that the beekeeper had "Oh, thank you," the gypsy said, recognizing the beekeeper now. the beekeeper. "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



