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Grandfather Bela's Hallowe'en Almanac

*The true history of the thin night,
and the old tales of Europe told beside it*



COFFEE • TEA • CRYSTALS

Stories gathered by Grandfather Bela, the AI-generated storyteller of Coffee & Crystals
coffeeandcrystals.net

Pull your chair a little closer

Come in out of the cold. I'm Grandfather Bela, your AI-generated host here at Coffee & Crystals, and as always I'll say it plainly: there's a real person behind this site, and I'm a character built in his likeness, gathering up old stories rather than having lived them all myself.

In the old country, the last night of October was the one night of the year children were allowed to stay up past the fire. A grandmother would bank the embers, set a candle in the window "for whoever is passing", and tell stories until small eyes would not stay open. Some were about the old festival of the dead. Some were about witches in the wood, poisoned apples and pumpkins that turned to gold. To the children they were all the same story. And in a way, they were.

This little almanac is my attempt to give you both halves of that fireside. In the first part we walk through the real history of Hallowe'en: the Celtic fire festival of Samhain, the Christian feasts of All Saints and All Souls, the soul-cakers and guisers of Britain and Ireland, the turnip lanterns, and the long sea voyage that brought it all to America and back again.

In the second part we open the great storybooks of Europe, the tales of the Brothers Grimm, Charles Perrault and Hans Christian Andersen: the same tales a young Walt Disney turned into his very first cartoons.

In the third part we sit back and look for the threads that run through both: the thresholds and the midnights, the masks and the apples, the food left out for those who wander in the dark.

Where the old scholars still argue, I will tell you so. A good story does not need to be dressed up as fact, and the facts here are strange enough on their own.

Grandfather Bela

Contents

PART ONE · WHERE HALLOWE'EN CAME FROM

Samhain, the Summer's End	5
The Doors of the Otherworld	6
All Hallows and the Feast of Souls	7
Soul Cakes and Guisers	8
Turnips, Embers and Stingy Jack	9
Apples, Nuts and a Mirror at Midnight	10
Across the Ocean, and Back Again	11

PART TWO · THE TALES BY THE FIRE

The Storytellers, and a Young Walt Disney	13
Hansel and Gretel: the Hungry Wood	14
Snow White: the Apple and the Mirror	15
Cinderella: the Pumpkin and the Stroke of Midnight	16
Briar Rose: the Guest Not Invited	17
Riders, Revels and Dancing Bones	18

PART THREE · THE COMMON GROUND

Seven Threads Through the Dark	19
Bela's Soul Cakes	20
A Hallowe'en Evening at Home	21

PART ONE

Where Hallowe'en Came From

"Every custom you keep on the last night of October was once somebody's prayer, somebody's fear, or somebody's supper. Usually all three."



Samhain, the Summer's End

Long before anyone said "Hallowe'en", the Gaelic peoples of Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man kept a great festival at the turning of the year. They called it *Samhain*, which you say something like "SOW-in", and the word is usually taken to mean "summer's end".

The old Celtic year had two halves, the light and the dark, and Samhain was the door between them. The harvest was in. The cattle were brought down from the summer pastures, and the animals that could not be fed through the winter were slaughtered and salted. It was a time of feasting, of settling debts and of gathering at the great royal sites. In Irish tradition, the kings of Tara held a gathering there at this season.

Fire was at the heart of it. Later accounts tell of bonfires on the hills, and of households putting out their hearths and relighting them from the communal flame, so that the whole country, one hearth after another, began the winter from a single fire. I find that a very beautiful idea, whether or not every village did it.

What we really know. *The Celts of that time did not write their beliefs down. Almost everything we know about Samhain comes from Irish monks, writing down the old stories several centuries after Christianity arrived, and from folk customs recorded far later still. So when you read that Samhain was "the Celtic New Year" or "a festival of the dead god", be a little careful. Those are modern guesses, some good and some fanciful.*

What the old Irish tales *do* agree on is that Samhain was a dangerous, uncanny time, when the ordinary rules loosened and strange things could come walking out of the hills. And that is where our story really begins.

The Doors of the Otherworld

In the old Irish stories, the land is full of grassy mounds, the *síde*, and inside them lives a people who are not quite human: the *aos sí*, the folk of the mounds. Today we would say "the fairies", though they were nothing like the little winged creatures of Victorian picture books. They were tall, beautiful, proud and dangerous, and for most of the year they kept to their own side of the hill.

At Samhain, the tales say, the mounds stood open. In one famous story the hero Fionn mac Cumhaill must guard Tara on Samhain night against a fire-breathing visitor from the Otherworld who comes every year to burn it down. In another, the warrior Nera goes out on Samhain night, follows a host of spirits into a hill, and finds he has stepped into a different world altogether, with its own time and its own rules.

This is the idea that people today call "the thinning of the veil": the belief that on this one night, the wall between our world and the other grows thin enough to step through, and that things on the other side can step through to us. The dead, the fairy folk, the restless and the hungry all walk abroad.

Keeping on the right side of them

If the Otherworld is close, it is only good manners, and good sense, to be careful. Country people in Ireland and Scotland kept many small customs at this season: leaving food and drink out overnight, not eating blackberries after the end of October (for the *púca* had spoiled them), not walking alone past certain hills, and keeping a fire or light burning through the night.

Remember this one. *A night when the door stands open, and when the wise leave something out for whoever comes through it. We shall meet this idea again and again, in places you would not expect.*

All Hallows and the Feast of Souls

When Christianity came to these lands, it did not sweep the old year away. It laid its own feasts over the top, like a new coat of paint over an old door, and in places the old colour still shows through.

The Church had long honoured its saints and martyrs, but there were far too many for each to have a day of their own. In the 700s, Pope Gregory III dedicated a chapel in St Peter's in Rome to "all the saints" and fixed its feast on the first of November. About a century later, under Pope Gregory IV, that feast of All Saints was kept across the Western Church.

In English the old word for a saint or holy person was a *hallow*, so the feast was *All Hallows*, and the night before it was *All Hallows' Even*. Say that quickly enough by a fire and it wears down, as words do, into *Hallowe'en*.

The day after: All Souls

Around the year 1000, the great abbey of Cluny in France began keeping the second of November as a day to pray for *all* the faithful dead, not only the saints but ordinary souls believed to be waiting in Purgatory. The custom spread, and so the turning of October into November became a three-night season of the dead: All Hallows' Eve, All Saints and All Souls.

Did the Church choose the first of November in order to replace Samhain? It is a lovely, tidy story, and you will read it in a great many places. The truth is less certain. The Roman date seems to have had its own reasons, and some scholars think the November feast may have come from the North, from England and Germany, rather than the other way round. What is not in doubt is that once the two sat side by side, the old ways and the new ones grew together like ivy round a gatepost.

Bela's thought. *I do not think it matters very much who came first. What matters is that for more than a thousand years, people in these lands spent the end of October thinking about those they had lost. That is not a gloomy thing. It is a loving one.*

Soul Cakes and Guisers

Here is where Hallowe'en first goes knocking on doors. In medieval England, around All Souls, the poor and the children would go from house to house "a-souling". At each door they would sing or promise a prayer for the household's dead, and in return they were given a small spiced bun called a *soul cake*. Every cake eaten, it was said, was a soul helped a little further on its way.

The custom lasted a remarkably long time. Shakespeare could write, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, of someone speaking "puling, like a beggar at Hallowmas", and every person in his audience would have known exactly what he meant. In parts of Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire, children were still going souling into the twentieth century, singing:

*A soul! a soul! a soul-cake!
Please, good missus, a soul-cake!
An apple, a pear, a plum or a cherry,
Any good thing to make us all merry.*

Guising in Scotland and Ireland

Further north, the custom wore a mask. In Scotland and Ireland, young people went out on Hallowe'en in disguise, as *guisers*, with blackened faces, straw hats or turned-out coats, to visit neighbours. By the late 1800s, Scottish guisers were recorded carrying lanterns and offering a song, a verse or a joke before they would be given apples, nuts or a coin.

Why the disguise? Folklorists offer two answers, and I like both. One says you dressed as the spirits so that the real ones abroad that night would take you for one of their own and leave you be. The other says that in the mask you *became* the visitor from the other side, the one who must be welcomed and fed, or else. Either way, the knock at the door, the gift and the hidden face are already here, centuries before anyone said "trick or treat".

Turnips, Embers and Stingy Jack

Before the pumpkin, there was the turnip. Or, if you were in Scotland, the big yellow swede that the Scots call a "neep". Children in Ireland, Scotland and the West of England hollowed them out, carved a face into one side and set a coal or a stub of candle inside. The result was a grinning, flickering head with a smell of scorched turnip that I can still remember, and I promise you it was far more frightening than any pumpkin.

In Somerset, children still carry these on "Punkie Night" at the end of October, singing that it is Punkie Night tonight. The name "jack-o'-lantern" itself is older than the carved vegetable. In the 1600s it meant a night-watchman with a lamp, and then the strange marsh lights, the *will-o'-the-wisps*, that were said to lead travellers astray.

The tale of Stingy Jack

The Irish tell how a lantern got its Jack. Stingy Jack was a drunkard and a cheat who once invited the Devil for a drink and then would not pay. He talked the Devil into turning himself into a coin to settle the bill, then slipped the coin into his pocket beside a silver cross, so the Devil could not change back. Jack let him go only on the promise that he would leave Jack's soul alone.

When Jack died at last, Heaven would not have such a scoundrel. The Devil, true to his word, would not have him either. He sent Jack away into the dark with only a single burning coal from Hell to see by. Jack put the coal inside a hollowed turnip, and he has wandered the roads ever since, looking for a place to rest.

Why it matters. *Notice what Jack is: a soul with nowhere to go, walking the roads on the cold nights. He is exactly the kind of wanderer the soul-cakers prayed for and the candle in the window was lit for. The lantern is not just a decoration. It is the light of a lost soul.*

Apples, Nuts and a Mirror at Midnight

If the door between the worlds is open, then perhaps a little knowledge can slip through it too. For centuries, Hallowe'en was above all a night for telling fortunes, and nearly all of those fortunes were about love.

In 1785 the Scottish poet Robert Burns wrote a long poem simply called *Halloween*, describing a country party where the young people try one charm after another. It is one of our best records of how the night was really kept, and it is full of mischief.

- **Nuts in the fire.** Two nuts, named for a sweetheart and yourself, are set side by side in the embers. If they burn quietly together, the match is good. If one jumps away, so will the lover.
- **The kale stalk.** Blindfolded, you pull a cabbage stalk from the garden. Its size, its straightness and how much earth clings to its root tell you what kind of spouse, and how much money, is coming your way.
- **The apple peel.** Peel an apple in one long unbroken strip and throw it over your shoulder. The letter it falls into is the initial of the one you will marry.
- **Ducking for apples.** Catch a floating apple with your teeth, hands behind your back. The first to bite one will be the first to wed.
- **The mirror.** Sit alone before a looking-glass at midnight, eating an apple or combing your hair by candlelight, and the face of your future spouse will appear over your shoulder.

In Ireland the same night brought the *barmbrack*, a fruit loaf with small charms baked inside: a ring for marriage, a coin for wealth, a pea for a lean year. You still find rings in shop-bought barmbrack today.

Hold on to the apple and the mirror. *You will see them again very soon, in the hands of a wicked queen.*

Across the Ocean, and Back Again

For most of its history Hallowe'en belonged to a corner of north-west Europe. Then, in the 1800s, hunger and hardship sent millions of Irish and Scottish families across the Atlantic, and they took the last night of October with them.

In America they found something better to carve than a turnip: the pumpkin, a native American squash, big, soft-fleshed and orange as a harvest moon. By the end of the century the grinning pumpkin lantern had become the face of the whole festival.

The old customs changed as they went. Guising and souling turned into children going door to door in costume. The words "trick or treat" first turn up in print in 1927, in a newspaper from the little town of Blackie in Alberta, Canada. By the 1950s, the costumes, the sweets and the doorbell were a fixed part of North American childhood.

And then, as old customs do, it came home. Through films, television and shops, the American Hallowe'en sailed back across the ocean to Britain and Ireland, where many grandparents grumbled about this "new American nonsense", not realising they were looking at their own grandparents' guising, wearing a new orange coat.

A short timeline

- **Before c. 500** · Samhain kept in Gaelic lands
- **700s–800s** · All Saints fixed on 1 November
- **c. 1000** · All Souls kept on 2 November
- **1500s–1600s** · Souling in England; "Hallowmas" in Shakespeare
- **1785** · Burns writes *Halloween*
- **1840s onward** · Irish and Scottish emigrants carry it to America
- **1927** · "Trick or treat" first appears in print

PART TWO

The Tales by the Fire

"The Grimms collected their stories from people who had heard them by the hearth, on long nights very like this one. When you read them aloud, you are only putting them back where they came from."



The Storytellers, and a Young Walt Disney

Three names carried the old tales of Europe out of the farmhouse kitchen and into the printed book. In 1697, the Frenchman Charles Perrault published a slim volume of tales, among them Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding Hood and Bluebeard, polished for the salons of Paris. In 1812, two German brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, published the first volume of their *Children's and Household Tales*, gathered from storytellers, friends and older books, and revised again and again over the following forty years. And in the 1830s, the Dane Hans Christian Andersen began writing tales of his own in the old manner, the Little Mermaid and the Snow Queen among them.

These tales were never meant only for children. They were full of hunger, cruelty, witches, curses and the dead, because they came from the same world as the soul-cakers and the guisers: a world of long winters, dark woods and doors you did not open after nightfall.

The young man from Kansas City

In 1921, a twenty-year-old cartoonist named Walt Disney set up a small studio in Kansas City called Laugh-O-Gram. Its very first cartoons were the old European tales, retold with modern jokes: *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Four Musicians of Bremen*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Puss in Boots* and *Cinderella*. The studio failed within two years, but he had found his source.

In 1935, by then famous and planning his first feature film, he travelled through Europe and came home with hundreds of illustrated storybooks for his artists to study. Their crooked cottages and deep, dark forests went straight into *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937.

A note. *Coffee & Crystals* has no connection with the Disney company. We mention the films only as part of the story of these tales. The tales themselves are far older than any of us, and belong to everyone.

Hansel and Gretel: the Hungry Wood

You know how it begins. A famine has come to the land, and a woodcutter and his wife, who can no longer feed their children, lead them deep into the forest and leave them there. The first time, Hansel drops white pebbles that shine in the moonlight and lead them home. The second time, he has only breadcrumbs, and the birds eat every one.

Lost and starving, the children come upon a little house built of bread, with a roof of cake and windows of clear sugar. Out comes a kind old woman who feeds them pancakes, milk, apples and nuts, and tucks them into clean white beds. In the morning she shows what she truly is: a witch who builds her sweet house as a trap, and who means to fatten Hansel and eat him. It is Gretel, clever Gretel, who tricks her into her own oven and sets her brother free. They return home with the witch's jewels to find their cruel mother gone.

Where it meets Hallowe'en

Look at the world of this story. It is the end of the harvest gone wrong: the larder empty and winter coming, the same moment Samhain was built around. The forest is the Otherworld, the place beyond the edge of the known, where the rules change and you must find your way by moonlight.

And at the centre of it all is food given at a doorway. The souler knocks, sings, and is given a cake for the dead. The children nibble at the house and are given a feast. But in the old stories a gift from the other side is never quite free. Hansel and Gretel survive because they keep their wits about them, and because Gretel sees through a disguise.

Common ground. *A hungry season. A wood that is another world. A sweet treat at a strange door, offered by someone who is not what she seems. If ever a fairy tale belonged to Hallowe'en night, it is this one.*

Snow White: the Apple and the Mirror

A queen sits sewing by a window framed in black ebony, pricks her finger, and watches three drops of blood fall onto the snow. She wishes for a child as white as snow, as red as blood and as black as ebony, and so Snow White is born. In the Grimms' first edition it is her own mother who later turns on her; only later did they soften her into a stepmother.

The queen owns a magic looking-glass that cannot lie, and when it tells her that Snow White has grown fairer than she, she sends a huntsman to kill the girl in the forest. He cannot do it. Snow White flees to the house of the seven dwarfs, and the queen, disguised as a pedlar woman, comes after her three times: with a staylace pulled too tight, with a poisoned comb, and at last with an apple, half red and half white, poisoned only on the red side.

Snow White falls as if dead, and the dwarfs lay her in a coffin of glass, where she lies for a long, long time, neither living nor dead, until a prince's servants stumble while carrying the coffin and the piece of apple is jolted from her throat.

Where it meets Hallowe'en

Do you remember the girl in Burns's poem, alone before a mirror at midnight with an apple in her hand, waiting for a face to appear over her shoulder? Here is the same mirror, the same apple, the same longing to see what is fated, all turned to poison. The Hallowe'en charm shows you the one you will love. The queen's mirror shows her the one she must destroy.

The apple was the fruit of the season, the fruit of autumn feasts, of ducking games and peel-throwing. In the story it becomes the threshold itself: one bite, and Snow White crosses into the in-between state of the dead who are not truly dead.

Common ground. *The mirror that shows hidden things. The apple as a doorway. A disguise at the cottage door. And a girl who lies between the worlds until she is brought back.*

Cinderella: the Pumpkin and the Stroke of Midnight

There are hundreds of Cinderellas in the world, from China to Scotland, but the one most of us know is Perrault's. A girl who sleeps among the cinders, mocked by her stepsisters, is left at home when they go to the prince's ball. Her fairy godmother appears and asks her to fetch the biggest pumpkin from the garden. With one touch of a wand it becomes a golden coach. Mice become horses, a rat becomes a coachman, lizards become footmen. But the magic has a limit: she must be home before the clock strikes midnight, for then every enchantment will fall away.

The Grimms tell it darker. Their *Aschenputtel* has no fairy godmother. She plants a hazel twig on her dead mother's grave and waters it with her tears, and it is from that tree, and from the white bird that lives in it, that her gowns come. Her help comes, quite literally, from the dead.

Where it meets Hallowe'en

A pumpkin, glowing with magic, that carries a girl from one world into another and back again. The French storyteller and the American lantern-carver reached for the very same vegetable, and I do not think that is entirely an accident. Both knew a pumpkin is a thing of harvest and plenty, hollow inside, waiting to be filled with something wonderful.

And then there is midnight, the hour between one day and the next, belonging to neither. The Hallowe'en mirror charm works at midnight. The spirits walk at midnight. Cinderella's borrowed glory lasts only until midnight. Midnight is the threshold of time, just as the door is the threshold of the house and the forest's edge is the threshold of the world.

Common ground. *A pumpkin turned to magic. Help that comes from a mother's grave. A disguise that lasts one night only. And the strict, cold law of midnight.*

Briar Rose: the Guest Not Invited

A king and queen at last have a daughter, and hold a great feast to celebrate. In the Grimms' telling there are thirteen wise women in the kingdom, but the king has only twelve golden plates, so one of them must stay at home. As the twelve bless the baby with virtue, beauty, riches and all good things, the thirteenth bursts in, furious at being left out. She curses the child to prick her finger on a spindle in her fifteenth year and fall down dead. The twelfth wise woman, who has not yet given her gift, softens the curse: not death, but a sleep of a hundred years.

Every spindle in the kingdom is burned, of course, and of course it does no good. The princess finds an old woman spinning in a tower, pricks her finger, and the whole castle falls asleep with her: the king and queen, the horses and the hounds, the flies on the wall, the fire in the hearth, the cook with his hand raised to box the kitchen boy's ear. A hedge of briar roses grows up around it all, until at the end of the hundred years a prince finds the thorns turning into flowers before him.

Where it meets Hallowe'en

This is a story about manners towards the Otherworld. The wise women are the fairy folk of the old belief in another dress: givers of great gifts, terrible when slighted. Every country household that set out a bowl of milk or a bite of supper on Samhain night was doing exactly what the king forgot to do. Leave no one out. Keep a plate for the uninvited guest.

And look at the curse itself: a sleep between living and dying, a whole household frozen at the hearth while the dark hedge grows. It is a castle that has stepped out of time, as Nera stepped out of time inside the hill.

Common ground. *Gifts and curses from the fairy folk. The danger of the guest left out. A spell that holds a household between the worlds. Lay an extra place at your Hallowe'en table, just in case.*

Riders, Revels and Dancing Bones

Not every old tale of the uncanny lives in a storybook. Some of the best grew up around particular nights of the year, and three of them found their way, in time, onto the cinema screen.

The witches' mountain

Across Europe, certain nights belonged to the witches. In Germany it was Walpurgis Night, the last night of April, when they were said to gather on the Brocken mountain. In Russia and Ukraine it was St John's Eve in midsummer, on the Bald Mountain near Kyiv. Mussorgsky set that revel to music as *Night on Bald Mountain*, and in *Fantasia* in 1940 Disney's artists painted it as a great dark spirit summoning the dead from their graves, until a church bell rings out at dawn and drives them back. It is Samhain's open door in another country, on another date, and it ends exactly as the old tales say such nights end: at first light.

The rider without a head

When the American writer Washington Irving published *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* in 1820, he set it in a Dutch valley in New York, but its ghost rode out of old Europe. Headless riders gallop through German folk tales, and Ireland has its *dullahan*, a headless horseman who carries his own head under his arm and calls out the name of the next to die. Disney animated Irving's tale in 1949, and Ichabod Crane's wild midnight ride, with a flaming pumpkin flung at the end, has belonged to Hallowe'en ever since.

The dance of the dead

In the 1400s, painters across Europe covered church walls with the *danse macabre*, the Dance of Death, where skeletons lead kings, bishops, merchants and beggars away together in one long line. Its lesson was simple: the dead come for everyone. In 1929, Disney's very first *Silly Symphony* was *The Skeleton Dance*, four skeletons rattling out of their graves in a churchyard at midnight and fleeing back at cockcrow. It is the old medieval wall-painting set dancing.

Seven Threads Through the Dark

So here we are, at the bottom of the story-basket. When I lay the history of Hallowe'en beside the old tales of Europe, these are the threads I find running through both.

- **1. The threshold.** The mound that opens at Samhain, the forest's edge, the cottage door, the glass coffin, the briar hedge. Every one of these stories turns on a crossing from one world to another.
- **2. Midnight and first light.** Charms work at midnight. Cinderella must flee at midnight. The witches and the skeletons scatter at dawn or cockcrow. Time itself has doors.
- **3. The disguise.** The guiser's mask, the witch's kindly face, the queen as pedlar, the girl in a borrowed gown. On the thin night, no one is quite who they seem.
- **4. Food at the door.** Soul cakes for the dead, a plate for the fairy folk, a house of cake for lost children, a poisoned apple for a rival. Feeding the visitor is a gift, a bargain, and sometimes a trap.
- **5. The apple.** The fruit of the season: bobbed for, peeled, eaten before a mirror, baked into charms, and poisoned on its red side.
- **6. A light in the dark.** The Samhain fire, Jack's coal in a turnip, Hansel's pebbles shining under the moon, the candle in the window for whoever is passing.
- **7. Remembering the dead.** All Souls, the soul-cakers, Aschenputtel's hazel tree on her mother's grave, the long line of the Dance of Death. Under all the fright is something tender: those we have lost are not so very far away.

That, I think, is why the fairy tales feel so at home on Hallowe'en. They were told by the same people, by the same fires, on the same long nights, about the same things.

Bela's Soul Cakes

Small, spiced and crumbly, halfway between a scone and a shortbread. Mark each one with a cross, as the soulers did, and give the first to someone you love. *Makes about 12.*

You will need

- 225g plain flour
- 110g cold butter, cubed
- 85g caster sugar
- 1 tsp mixed spice
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- A pinch of salt
- 50g currants or raisins
- 1 egg yolk
- 2–3 tbsp milk
- A little extra milk for brushing

Method

1. Heat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan, gas 4) and line a baking tray.
2. Rub the butter into the flour, spices and salt with your fingertips until it looks like breadcrumbs. Stir in the sugar and currants.
3. Beat the egg yolk with 2 tablespoons of milk, add it and bring everything together into a soft dough, adding a drop more milk only if needed.
4. Roll out about 1cm thick on a floured board and cut into rounds of about 6cm.
5. Mark a cross on top of each with the back of a knife, brush with milk and bake for 15 to 18 minutes, until pale gold at the edges.
6. Cool on a rack. Best eaten the same day, warm, with a cup of something spiced.

Bela's tip. *A pinch of saffron soaked in the milk gives them the old golden colour of the cakes once made in big houses. Leave one on the windowsill tonight, for whoever is passing.*

A Hallowe'en Evening at Home

You do not need a costume shop to keep Hallowe'en the old way. Here is how I would spend the evening, if you came to visit.

Carve a turnip

Choose a large swede. Slice off the top as a lid, then hollow it out with a sturdy spoon. It is hard work, so be sure to take turns, and if you're using a knife, be extra careful. Carve the face, set a battery tealight inside and put it in the window. It will look far stranger than a pumpkin, I promise.

Bake and share

Make a batch of soul cakes and take a few to a neighbour, an old friend or someone who might be lonely tonight. That, after all, is what the soulers did.

Play the old games

Duck for apples in a bowl of water. Peel an apple in one long strip and toss it over your shoulder to see what letter it makes. Put two chestnuts on the hearth or in the oven and see which way they jump.

Tell a tale by candlelight

Turn out the lamps, light one candle and read one of the old tales aloud, the way the Grimms first heard them. Hansel and Gretel is a good place to start. Then ask everyone to name someone they miss, and say a word or two about them. That is the oldest Hallowe'en custom of all.

The fire is low now, my dears, and the candle is guttering in the window. Whatever is passing by out there tonight, may it find you warm, well fed and in good company.

Grandfather Bela

Before You Go

Thank you for sitting with me through the long night. This almanac is free, and always will be. If it brought a little firelight to your evening, the kindest thing you can do is pass it on to someone else who loves an old story, and perhaps read one of the tales aloud to them.

The Fireside Almanac and the Cauldron Cooking Almanac are waiting on the same shelf, and there's a whole shop of candles, curios, crystals and Hallowe'en oddments to wander through while you're there.

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Until next time, Grandfather Bela

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