

HALLOWE'EN HUSBANDS

Hallowe'en, Hallowe'en,
Apples roasting in the heat,
Corn a-popping,
Pumpkins glowing,
Cider flowing full and sweet!
Thought I saw a witch or two
Pass the window—didn't you?

By ESTELLE M. KER R



TO enjoy Hallowe'en you must believe in fairies, ghosts and witches, and it seems reasonable that on the eve of All Saints' Day, the evil spirits should unite for a final orgie of mischief. If when a mysterious tap is heard at the window, or you find that your door mat has been spirited away, you immediately suspect the little boy next door, you had much better go to bed early, and try to forget that it is the last night in October. Hallowe'en was never meant to be celebrated in the incredulous city, for fairies, as everyone knows, much prefer the country. So must everyone in this season of the year when the leaves are turning from gold to russet-brown and the last apples are gathered and the corn shelled and put away for the winter. It is the very nicest time of the year, and the best place to spend it is at Aunt Mary's.

AUNT MARY has an open mind on the subject of fairies.

"Well, I don't know," she says, "but I'm telling you just what my mother told me, and she came from Ireland. It isn't every family in Ireland that has fairies, but there were two in ours. On my grandfather's side there was a little woman in red who used to appear before a death, and on my grandmother's side there was a leprechaun. I never saw either of them, but my brother once saw the leprechaun—a wee bit of a man not more than twelve inches high—he tripped him up one day when he was out riding."

Then would follow wondrous tales, till we children thoroughly believed in ghosts and witches, and would cuddle down very timorously that night into the feather beds and draw the gay patchwork quilts well above our ears. And dream! There are no nightmares quite so wild as those that gallop through young brains on Hallowe'en, and this is not wholly due to the shock of having small cousins in false faces spring suddenly from behind a curtain, the nuts, apples and Aunt Mary's wonderful Hallowe'en cake have something to do with it.

RAISINS, nuts and frosting were not the chief attractions of that cake. It was able to foretell, in some mysterious way, the future of everyone. A ring, a thimble, a five-cent piece, foretold marriage, celibacy or wealth. But such a meagre dole of fortunes would leave somebody out and Aunt Mary would not hear of our lacking anything, even a career or a possible husband, if she could provide it, and so there were little bits of rags scattered through the cake as well—a black rag for a doctor, white for a clergyman, brown for a lawyer, blue for a sailor, and red for a soldier. But one greedy little girl confused prophecy by obtaining both a thimble and a clergyman, so Aunt Mary had to settle the dispute which followed.

"It is whichever you got first, my dear."

"But that's the thimble—a clergyman would be better than nothing!"

"There are plenty worse things than being an old maid. Learn to be a useful woman and don't bother your head about husbands."

SHE is not a real aunt; she is not even a real mother, but her heart so overflows with kindness that she is Aunt Mary to everyone, and Uncle Dave shares her popularity with all the would-be nephews and nieces. He can carve a pumpkin lantern better than anyone, and his bushy whiskers look particularly fearsome beneath a false-face, though anything milder than Uncle Dave's real countenance is impossible to conceive. We were a healthy lot of youngsters, who cared nothing for matrimonial prospects, but, as all Hallowe'en games seemed to deal with that subject, the older girls became curiously interested. They would peel their apples carefully and throw the skin over their left shoulder. It was quite easy to decipher in it one of the initials of the boy they fancied for the moment. Barbara even started to walk backwards down the steep and tortuous cellar stairs, and had not the young man who was waiting to appear behind her shoulder held out a pair of strong young arms to catch her as she fell, there would have been a case of incendiarism, as well as of sudden death.

NAMING nuts is a very old custom, for Robert Burns tells about it:

"The auld guidwife's weel-hordet nits
Are round and round divided;
And mony lads and lasses' fates
Are there that night decided;
Some kindle, couthie, side by side,
And burn thegither trimly;
Some start awa' with saucy pride,
And jump out owre the chimley,
Fu' high that night."

In case you are sceptical, let me tell you that in Barbara's case, at least, the prophecies were realized. When we named nuts for her the one called Dick always burned and blazed beside hers, while the others jumped. If she ate an apple before a mirror at midnight she was sure to see his vision over her left shoulder. She even saw his likeness in the cabbage plucked blindfold from the field behind the barn, though the rest of us could see no resemblance in ours. We were materially interested, however, in the quantity of earth clinging to the stalk which showed the amount of our dowries. The old Scotch custom is to lay the stalk behind the outer door of the house and the first person to enter next morning will be your future husband—a most dangerous proceeding, unless you are in love with the milkman or the postman.

BARBARA was seventeen, and Dick was always on hand to see that everything pointed in his direction. Only the fortune cake spoke falsely, Barbara thought, for Dick was not a soldier, as the red rag said. Yet when they were married, not so very long ago, the groom wore khaki. Barbara even tried the hemp-seed test. Stealing out unexpectedly, she sowed a handful of hemp, harrowing it into the ground with a stick and repeating over and over the prescribed rite:

"Hemp-seed, I sow thee, hemp-seed, I sow thee;
he that is to be my true love come after me and pull thee."

Then she looked over her shoulder, and there was Dick, who did not take long to notice Barbara's absence from the company, diligently pulling the hemp.

IT is quiet now at Aunt Mary's, with all the boys away. Lucy, the adopted child, is now a big girl, the only one left to help Uncle Dave in the fields. Aunt Mary is knitting every spare moment, and she makes us knit, too.

"How can you sit there reading," she says, "when the boys in the trenches have their toes sticking through their socks! . . . Now, you see, girls, what I always told you: there is no use bothering your heads about husbands. If a good man comes

along, well and good, but the main thing is to be useful women. Who would want a husband now: a poor thing that couldn't go, or a bad thing that wouldn't go, or be like Barbara, white and anxious all the time? Better be strong and cheerful when there is so much work to do and so few to do it."

AS we sit around the log fire on Hallowe'en we roast chestnuts, but we do not name them aloud. War has not stilled all romance and, being young, we are hopeful. We look up at the photos along the mantel shelf of Aunt Mary's boys—all in khaki with little silk flags stuck in their frames. Aunt Mary is comparatively content now, for her dearest boys are safely wounded in England. They write to her constantly and she reads their letters aloud:

"The English girls are so good to the wounded boys," writes Tom, who enlisted at seventeen. "As soon as they are well enough to go out the girls take them to their homes and give them a real good time. I expect I'll soon be having my fun like the rest, and then back to Canada (minus a foot), and you and Uncle Dave and Lucy and all our good times again."

"Bless their little English hearts," says Aunt Mary. "Listen to that girl! You have lots of convalescent homes in the city. Do you try to make it nice for the boys who have done their part, and take them for walks and drives, or do you spend your time with the men of the fourth contingent. They are more attractive to look at, to be sure, but remember, we called them slackers a year ago!"

THERE is a ghost that haunts the road that leads to Devil's Creek, not far from Aunt Mary's. In the good old days we used to go there, but he never appeared, except for Barbara. Aunt Mary never saw it, nor Uncle Dave, but they know it is there, for Jack, the old white horse, usually, as gentle as a lamb, reared and plunged suddenly in the very spot where the murder took place years ago. Ever so many people have seen it, and we all know its movements, for it crawls across the road on its hands and knees, just as the murdered man did long before, and then haltingly along the fence and so vanishes. Barbara sees it sometimes now in her dreams.

BUT we aren't all gloom on Hallowe'en. The little boys from the neighbouring farm are up to all sorts of tricks with their tick-tacks and pumpkin lanterns, and Aunt Mary lets us lay aside our knitting long enough to have a taffy-pull. All the taffy, or nearly all, is to be sent to the boys.

"I wish we could send them the pumpkin pies, too," says Aunt Mary, "and a lantern or two to frighten the Germans."

The taffy sticks to our clothes and burns our fingers, just as it did in the good old days, it even gets caught in our hair, and we laugh and chatter till Aunt Mary says, "Hush!" for Barbara's baby is asleep upstairs. Then a silence falls and we gather around the sweet-smelling fire, piled high with corn cobs, while Uncle Dave tells us of a prank they played on the school-master when he was a boy.

The school-master was a poor man with a large family, but he put on a lot of style and always appeared at school nicely dressed. He had only one white shirt, which his wife had washed the night before and hung on the line, intending to get up early in the morning to iron it, but the boys found it and put it on the old cow, tying the sleeves under her chin. Then they took the wheels off the school-master's buggy and lifted it on top of the barn. Then they carried the wheels up and put them on the buggy. In the morning the wife got up and no shirt could be found, the school-master got up and his buggy was gone! Finally he started to walk to school in his night shirt with his coat buttoned up to his chin, and when he had gone a little way he looked back and there was his buggy astride the roof of the barn.

SUCH strenuous tasks are not for the boys that are left. A misplaced gate or two is all the damage.

"Not so in Ireland," says Aunt Mary. "War or no war, there are always the leprechauns! If the boys would only let the fairies mind their own business, we'd hear of some pranks worth talking about on Hallowe'en. Now-a-days, people only want to give parties. That's no way to celebrate Hallowe'en! Shucks!" says Aunt Mary.