

Read the given story and do the activities given below.

1 The Beekeeper and the Bewitched Hare

Sorche Nic Leodhas

Fairy tales, folklores and legends have the power to captivate the imagination of the readers. Read the story of the boy who took care of a blue-eyed hare only to discover that reality was different from his expectations!

Across from a **moor** in Scotland there once lived a lad who earned his living as a beekeeper. Though he lived by himself in a cottage he wasn't at all lonely, maybe because he felt a connection with his bees. In warm weather when heather blooms covered the moor, the bees buzzed about with a satisfied kind of hum, sipping nectar wherever they liked, and he felt happy for them. In late fall when wildflowers became scarce, their buzzing became more **erratic** and he understood their anxiety. Sometimes the lad complimented his bees on an especially large batch of honey, and they seemed to buzz about in pleasure and pride. Folks in town said the lad could talk to the bees. Of course that couldn't be true, but in a way he felt they knew each other very well.



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One evening as he was checking his beehives, two hounds suddenly appeared from across the moor, barking wildly, and dashing directly toward him. The object of their chase soon became apparent when a white hare leapt out of the heather into his arms. Quickly the lad tucked the terrified animal under his jacket. The two hounds circled his legs, barking angrily. He picked up a stick and swung it around; eventually the dogs gave up and bounded away.

When the dogs disappeared from view, the lad set the hare back on the ground and returned to work. But instead of hopping into the thicket, the hare followed him, twitching its nose and eyeing him steadily. He went inside his cottage and the hare ambled in behind him.

"Well now, you act like you want to be my pet," he said. "It looks like you expect dinner. I suppose I might have a carrot for you." He let the hare nibble on a carrot while he scooped some stew into a bowl for his own dinner.

When they had both finished, the hare jumped onto his lap and he stroked its head and ears. "Ooch!" he said with surprise. "I've seen black or pink eyes on a white hare, but how did you get those blue eyes?" The hare responded by stretching its back for more petting.

The next morning, he took the hare to the hives to introduce her to his bees. He knew that changes in their environment can alarm bees, and he didn't want the presence of the hare to unsettle them. So, he held out the hare for them to inspect, then set her down close to his feet. The bees dipped down and spun around her face but she didn't seem to mind. After they satisfied their curiosity and returned to their hive, he took the hare to the next beehive for another round of introductions.

One afternoon a few weeks later, the lad noticed an old woman ambling along the track across the moor. Thinking he might sell her a fine comb of honey, he met her at the gate. Before he could speak, however, she pointed to the hare, who was peering out from behind a heather shrub.

"You don't see that every day," said she with a crooked smile. "A blue-eyed hare."

"Indeed," said the lad, turning to admire his pet.

"What do you want for her?" said the old woman said.

"She's not for sale."

"Surely you have your price. Now look at this bonnie piece of gold. It's not every day a lad is offered a piece of gold for a common hare, is it?"

apparent	<i>clear</i>	ambled	<i>wandered</i>
heather	<i>a plant</i>	alarm	<i>distress</i>
thicket	<i>thick bush</i>	unsettle	<i>disturb</i>
twitching	<i>jerking</i>		



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"She's not common, and she's not for sale," frowned the beekeeper.

At once the old woman, whom the lad had thought much too old for such friskiness, sprung over to grab her. A bee hovering nearby gave a loud shrill, a sound that surprised the old woman and apparently alerted other bees. In moments, a dark swarm had gathered and rushed to attack the old woman.



"Eek!" she cried, spinning around and running away. "You'll be sorry you didn't hand over the worthless hare when you could!"

The next day at the marketplace, when he was selling his honey, the beekeeper shared what had happened with the baker who tended the stall next to his.

"Surely the woman was a witch," said the baker, arranging his bread potato scones and meat pies into neat rows. "Take my word for it, you'd better be careful."

"Aye," agreed the seller of sweaters and kilts on his other side.

"She's a witch, no doubt about it."

But the lad thought, "Then again, these two often think people are witches, and it could have been just a strange happenstance." Still,

just in case, that night he **barred** his windows and locked his doors. From then on, he kept a close eye on his hare at all times.

The summer passed. By the time frost lay on the ground in the morning, few flowers, and very few bees, remained out in the cold air. Most of the bees had already **retreated** to the hives where they began their cold weather work of keeping the hive warm enough for their queen to lay her eggs.

One chilly October morning the lad was setting trays of sugar water inside the beehives when a gypsy caravan rolled by on its way southward. He waved to the driver and a young gypsy man waved back. Much later, the lad noticed a sack of grain lying on the road just past the gate.

"Ooch, it must have dropped from the gypsy van! They'll never know it's missing till they set up camp tonight, and by then it'll be too dark to come back looking for it." So the lad **hoisted** the sack onto his cart and took off, following the tracks that the gypsy van had dug behind in the earth.

In an hour or so he caught up with them. He hailed them and when they stopped, he handed the young gypsy driver the sack of grain.

friskiness	<i>playfulness</i>
hovering	<i>floating</i>
kilts	<i>traditional knee-length skirts worn by Scottish men</i>
happenstance	<i>coincidence</i>
barred	<i>excluded</i>
retreated	<i>moved back</i>
hoisted	<i>raised</i>

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“Do you mean to tell me you followed us all this way to return a sack of grain? Most folks are more than glad for us to go, and to never see us again.”

“Why shouldn’t I bring it back to you?” said he. “Else I’d have to think about your poor horses missing their dinner tonight.”

Just then the hare poked its head out from under the beekeeper’s jacket.

“And what is that?” said the gypsy lad. “A blue-eyed hare?”

“Yes,” he said with pride. “She’s a special one, she is.”

“More than special, I’d say,” said the gypsy fellow. “Grandma!” he called inside the van. “I want to show you something.”

An old woman with a bright headscarf, long pleated skirt and puffed white blouse stepped out of the van. “Now what do you think of that?” said the gypsy man, nodding toward the hare.

“Oh my!” said the grandmother.

“It’s only a hare,” said the beekeeper.

“Not at all.” The old woman shook her head.


“What else could she be?”

“’Tis a lassie,” the grandmother whispered. “A lassie who’s been bewitched!”



lassie

a girl or a young woman



The beekeeper gasped. Then he spilled out his story. He told them both about the two dogs who chased the hare across his moor, the strange old woman who had tried to grab her, the bees who forced the witch away, and what his friends at the marketplace had said about the old woman.

"Your friends are right," said the grandmother firmly. "That woman was a witch and no doubt the very one who bewitched the lassie. One thing you can count on, she will come back for the lassie. She's biding her time, that she is."

"What is she waiting for?"

"All Hallow's Eve, I suspect," said the grandmother. "She knows the bees will all be back in their hives by then. But most important to her, that's the one day of the year when the magic of witches is the strongest."

"What can I do?" he said, alarmed.

"Tell me, did you say you can talk to the bees?"

"Not exactly talk..."

"Hmmm, however you talk to them, you may need their help. When you go home, explain to them that the witch may return. Before the sun sets on All Hallow's Eve, tie a good strong cord around the hare's neck and keep her on your lap till past midnight. Do you think this will be easy? When she's under the power of the witch's spell, she may pull and jump with a power that will shock you, but you must hold her tight. If the bees can help, all the better." The old woman took a deep breath and looked at him with her old watery eyes. "That's all I can tell you. Other than this, what will be, will be."

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When the lad returned to his cottage, he carried the hare from hive to hive, repeating what the old gypsy woman had said. On the one hand, he felt a bit silly explaining all of this to a mass of bees. Yet by their collective sounds they seemed to murmur in understanding as a person would do who was listening to someone else. And when the lad stepped away he sensed a building excitement from within the hive.

On All Hallow's Eve, the beekeeper tied a strong cord around the hare's neck and set her on his lap. There she stayed contentedly until the darkness settled so thickly that he could only see the profile of her white fur. Then suddenly the hare lurched so powerfully that he could barely contain her. She twisted with such might it was all he could do to keep her from sliding out of his hands. Just as she started to wriggle free, he heard a hum that meant his bees were encircling them. Closer and thicker came the bees, forming a tall and deep surround. The hare jerked her ears and twitched her nose. She flitted on his lap and hopped about but no longer tried to escape. Finally, the hare settled down once more.

And then—the marvel of it! No longer was a white, blue-eyed hare on his lap, but a bonnie blue-eyed lassie! Quickly he removed the cord from around her neck. They laughed at the wonder of it, they did not know what to think! But as morning dawned, the bees were back in their hives, the geese were winging over the moor, and the lad and his lassie were in the cottage, making plans to marry.



profile	outline
lurched	staggered
wriggle	squirm
flitted	fluttered

About the Author

LeClaire Gowans Alger (1898 – 1969) was an American author better known under her pseudonym Sorche Nic Leodhas, or simply, Sorche Leodhas. Born in Youngstown, Ohio, she was a sickly child who was eventually homeschooled. Alger was a known librarian, working from 1915 to 1966, while the imaginary Sorche was a storyteller. She sought out traditional Scottish tales that had never been written down before. She won a Lewis Carroll Shelf Award in 1962 and a Newbery Honor for *Thistle and Thyme: Tales and Legends from Scotland* in 1963. Her book *Always Room for One More*, illustrated by Nonny Hogrogian, won the 1966 Caldecott Medal.

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Think and Answer

1. Why was the old woman trying to get the hare from the boy?
2. Do you think compassion can be a solution to many problems? Quote instances from the text to justify your answer.
3. Why did the gypsy woman extend her help to the boy?



Using Words

Fill in the blanks with the words given in the box.

entire normalcy emitting meeting glowing
surrounded alien correspondent visibility
evacuate unidentified exceedingly

Breaking news! Aliens are invading!

Good evening! Tonight's breaking news. _____ flying objects have been sighted at the Pacific Airport this evening. The first one was seen at 6 p.m. Now the airport has been _____ by a fleet of UFOs. The _____ airport has been shut down and people have been asked to _____ the building as soon as possible. Let me take you to the site of action. As you can see, our _____ is trying her best to capture the scene on camera but it's getting _____ difficult as the UFOs are _____ a strange blue gas. This is a _____ gas which is making _____ difficult. The Prime Minister has called for a _____ and hopes to restore _____ as soon as possible. So far no _____ has stepped out of the UFOs.



Appreciation

The story is engrossing because of its vivid imagery and the literary devices used. The author takes the reader on a flight of fancy and imagination in the retelling of this folklore with elements of magic and the supernatural.

Magic is one of the commonest elements in folklores. This story has an element of fantasy and imagination that creates a vivid picture in the mind of the readers. As you read the story, images are created in the mind. The literary device termed as **imagery** means the use of figurative language to represent objects, actions and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our physical senses. Imagery makes use of particular words that create a visual representation of ideas in our minds. The word **imagery** is associated with mental pictures. However, imagery can be more complex than just a picture. Read the following examples of imagery carefully:

- In warm weather when heather blooms covered the moor, the bees buzzed about with a satisfied kind of hum...(Warm weather and heather blooms are visual images. The bees buzzed is an auditory image.)
- Closer and thicker came the bees, forming a tall and deep surround. (The words closer and thicker evoke a sense of being fortified in a secure deep surround. One can imagine a strong protective wall around the hare and the lad created by the bees.)

Onomatopoeia is defined as a word which imitates the sound of a thing. It creates a sound effect that mimics the thing described, making the description more expressive and interesting. This figurative device helps

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the readers to hear the sounds of the things being spoken about. This helps the reader enter the world created by the writer. Some examples of onomatopoeia from the text are as follows:

- The bees **buzzed** about with a satisfied kind of **hum**.
- A bee hovering nearby gave a loud **shrill**.
- "Tis a lassie," the grandmother **whispered**.
- The beekeeper **gasped**.

Can you think of more examples?



Writing

Toby is an alien from Mars. Toby has a square face. He has one big eye in the centre of his face, two small noses above the eye and one mouth below the nose. He has two antennae above the head. Can you draw his picture?

Now write a letter to Toby asking him about his planet and inviting him to come to Earth in his spaceship.



Discussion

"There are painters who transform the sun to a yellow spot but there are others who with the help of their art and their intelligence transform a yellow spot into the sun."

Discuss this quote with your classmates.