

It is that time of year when those of us who are storytellers are in demand. Why? Because when people think of Halloween, they think of ghosts, goblins, witches and scary stories.

Flying with Witches

While living in one of their various log cabin residences along the Pennsylvania-West Virginia border, the Bayles family discovered that certain hardships which they were experiencing were due to the witchcraft of a neighbor. She troubled them at first by causing their rest to be disturbed by a number of cats, who would suddenly appear in the room, frolic over the beds, and then disappear just as mysteriously as they had come, since the house was shut up for the night and there was no opening through which animals of their size could enter or leave. Following this, the Bayleses were visited by a sudden shaking of the whole house, which was repeated night after night, sometimes throwing them out of their beds. To his wife's questions about these doings, Bayles would make no reply except that

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"the Devil was about; but he knew who was doing it; he'd fix them." His opportunity apparently came when the witch paid them a visit, during which Bayles kept a close watch on her, and finally thought he had detected her in an effort to burn the house down by inserting a live coal between the log wall and the inner board wall of the cabin. He immediately accused her. She, of course, appeared shocked by the charge, but he persisted in it; told her that he knew of her evil doings: that she had come at first "with cats," then "with trying to shake the house down"; and finally, heaping invectives on her, he ordered her to go and never return. She fled hastily, and they neither saw her nor were troubled by her magic again.



Halloween traditions of trick-or-treating and jack-o-lanterns were brought to America in the 1840s by Irish escaping the Great Potato Famine. On Halloween, Irish peasants begged the rich for food and played practical jokes on those who refused.

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At one time Bayles was called to Bellaire, Ohio (about forty miles away from where he was then living), to help a girl who had fallen into a witch's power and was wasting away, no local practitioner being able to free her from the enchantment. Upon arriving at the victim's home, he straightway set about his spells, and took up his quarters in another house near at hand—apparently in order to practice his magic

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in greater seclusion. However, he gave the girl certain explicit directions: not to give anything to the witch or to any outsider; not to admit the witch, or any other person outside the family, into the house; and if she saw the witch coming, to close and fasten the doors and windows, and try to find a place in the house where she could not be seen. But if the witch spoke to her, then she should reply by cursing the intruder and ordering her away.

The girl promised to fulfill her instructions, of course; but three times after that she let the sorceress enter the house, and each time excused herself to Bayles by saying that she had been deceived: she had thought the visitor was her sweetheart. On the last of these occasions, Bayles himself met the witch as he was approaching the house and she was leaving it. She stopped and looked steadfastly at him, and he suddenly realized that a strange feeling was coming over him. If he "hadn't thought what he was about," she would have cast a spell over him also. But he stopped in his tracks and "threw the spell away from off'n him"; whereupon the witch departed, and he went on to the house. This time he told the girl that if she did not follow his orders in every detail, he could do nothing for her—he was wasting his time, and might better go home. This threat frightened her into strict obedience, and the

next time her enemy came, every door and window was fastened and the girl was nowhere in sight. Round the house went the witch, trying each door and window; and finally, looking through a small aperture, she spied her victim. Immediately she called to the girl, asking why she was shut out, and if this were the way to treat a friend.

The girl answered that the witch was no friend of hers, but had done her much harm, and would do more if she could. Then, cursing her enemy, the girl commanded her to depart. When the witch heard this, she took to flight, screaming "so that you could have heard her a mile away," and shortly afterward died.

Mrs. Rogers, who believes as firmly as Mrs. Sayre in the efficacy of flyting, told me this anecdote: As she was going by the house of an old woman who was reputed a witch (and whose dwelling she never passed without muttering a few precautionary curses), the woman suddenly ran out of doors and came straight toward her, crying

"Chicken guts, chicken feathers, chicken guts, chicken feathers!" This scared Mrs. Rogers so badly that she: Bed at full speed, screaming out oaths and invectives as she ran. She attributed her safety then and afterward to the curses she had leveled at the old woman; for she was sure that the above words carried a malign spell.