

Halloween Tradition

It started by accident, the first Halloween. I let a couple of pieces of candy fall out of the bowl and into a cup on the porch. The next day, they were gone. No wrappers, no leftovers; just, you know, gone. I figured somebody came by and got them, right?

Next year, I thought it'd be funny to do it again, so I did. And the candy was gone, again. So, it got to be a habit. Every year at Halloween, I'd leave out some candy, at the end of the night. I wondered, after about ten years or so, when the kid who was taking it would grow up and go off to college, but I decided that she had a younger brother, or something. But by then it was a tradition. Traditions are good. Reason for the season, sure.

Well. Last year, I got busy. And I forgot. But as I was getting ready to bed, I remembered that the garbage needed to go out -- and, oh, crap, the candy! Of course, the kid was probably gone by now, all disappointed; this was midnight, the witching hour. But what the heck. Tradition was tradition. So I grabbed a handful of leftover candy, and went out to the front porch. I'd been using a

special bowl for this for the last twenty years, and I could see it in the moonlight as I opened the door --

But the moon wasn't out that night.

The glow came from, I don't know. Five or six shapes, half-translucent in the wind and the dark. The shapes hovered up and down, and when I opened the door, they started to fade away -- but when they saw the candy in my hands, they stopped, and got very, very still. I closed my eyes. And then, when I opened them, they were still there. Waiting.

So what did I do? I put the candy in the bowl. And I stepped back. One by one, they all moved over the bowl, and then the candy just sunk into the bowl, maybe? I was careful not to look. All of them got a piece or two, except for the last shape. It wasn't like they were jostling it away; more like it was in charge, and needed to make sure that everybody else got a chance. But it didn't get one.

Before it could go, I said "Wait." And I went back in, got some more candy, and put it in the bowl. When the other shapes looked like they wanted to move back towards it, I cleared my throat -- like I've cleared my throat towards thousands of good, but mercenary little kids trying to

muscle past their siblings over the years -- and they let that last shape get its turn. It looked like it needed it, too.

The shapes I guess 'looked' at me, then. I looked back at them, and clearly enunciated 'Happy Halloween.' Just like I'd enunciated to any number of living kids, over the years.

And bless 'em, but the shapes took the hint, also. I heard a chorus of faint whispers of "Thank you" and "Thank you, sir," and "Thanks!" and then I heard one voice of "Thank you, Mr. Lane" that made me half-stagger, because, God help me, I knew that voice. Neighborhood kid, got hit by a car a few years ago. It was a damned shame. People need to watch where they go.

But he was a good kid, that one. Always looking out for the other kids. And I guess he was still doing that now.

You gotta put up a good front for the young ones, of course. So I gave them all a good smile and said "See you next year. Tell your **friends**." I put an emphasis on that word, so they'd know not to bring along the mean ones, hopefully. And then I closed the door, decided that the garbage could wait, and got extremely drunk. It seemed a really smart thing to do, getting drunk. It still does. You don't want to be surprised when you meet

ghosts. If you are surprised, it's just messed up all around.

But that was last year. This year, I'm prepared. I've got all the candy; not much of any, but all the different stuff. Some of the stuff that I remember from my own childhood, too. I don't know how long some of these kids have been stuck here. Just because I don't like malted milk balls doesn't mean that a ghost doesn't, either.

The shock may be a problem, of course. But I figure that with a shot of whiskey beforehand, and the knowledge that I'm going to be facing a bunch of ghosts, I should do all right. But even if I don't, well. It's Halloween, man. Can't send away a kid empty-handed on Halloween, even if she doesn't have any hands.

- © Moe Lane. All rights reserved.
- <http://www.moelane.com>
- <https://www.patreon.com/MoeLane?ty=h>