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# The true story of Jack O'Lantern



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Once upon a time the Devil paid a visit to a faraway village in search of souls. When he had looked around for a while, he decided to take possession of Jack's soul. This good, brave boy was dearly loved in the village and always cheerful despite being poor. The Devil transformed himself into a rich merchant and made Jack the following offer: "Sell me your soul and I'll give you a bag full of gold." "I can't" replied Jack, "for I care a lot about my soul, so much so that I keep it safe in a secret hideaway". Jack showed him a little bag tied up with a drawstring. "It's in here, right down at the bottom". "Not for much longer," said the Devil and with a laugh began to shrink himself smaller and smaller so that he could get inside the bag.

When he was in, Jack tightened the cord and fixed a cross on the top. "Let me out of here," screamed the captive. "I can't; you're trying to get hold of my soul". "I won't do that ever, now let me go!" Jack was a good person and did not wish to cause harm even to the Devil, so he let him out. The Demon in his fury fled towards the cliffs to the sound of the villagers' deafening laughter. It was a dark night with no moonlight and Jack suddenly saw the Devil once more standing right in front of him on the pathway. "Never trust to the Devil's promises; I'll spare you your life but your soul will be mine!" he said. "That's not enough," said the youth. "You'll have to give me something else in return." "Look around you and choose something," was the Devil's prompt reply, but there was nothing there at all except for a wild apple tree in a field of great big pumpkins. "I'd like that apple up there at the top," said Jack pointing to the uppermost tip of the tree. "An apple is an apple," stuttered the Devil, but Jack would not be persuaded. "The apple at the top or there's nothing doing!"

So the Devil had to give in. He climbed up with a struggle, panting and tugging for the outfit he'd chosen was not suitable for that sort of climb. When he got to the top, he picked the apple and came back down, now sure he had won. But just as he was about to set foot on the ground, he realised he could not get off the tree. Jack had cut a row of crosses into the trunk. "You've fooled me again," shouted the Devil and Jack replied: "You should have left me alone. Now you'll be a prisoner up that tree for ever." The Devil began to throw apples at Jack and when they hit his nails they turned into burning embers. One of them hit a pumpkin and its skin burst into flame. Jack picked it up and saw that embers were still glowing inside it. "This will be my lantern, Jack's lantern and its light will shine through the dark nights so that no-one will be fooled by demons like you again". Jack went back to the village with his lantern, leaving the Devil behind him, imprisoned up the wild apple tree. And he might even still be there, for thanks to Jack's lantern, nobody has ever run into the Devil on the Night of Hallowe'en.

