



SOUL CAKES

Mia Dalia

The boy had never been much of a singer, but tonight, it didn't matter. This Samhain Eve, his voice would mingle with his friends' voices, singing familiar songs. And if their singing did not please, they could always offer prayers for the dead. Who couldn't use an extra prayer?

He and his friends had gone souling before, but never this far from home. It had gotten dark early, and the wind, soft at first, had acquired a piercing quality, digging straight past the worn fabric of his clothes. The houses and faces here looked unfamiliar. Candles flickered behind cloudy windows, and turnip lanterns scowled on the stoops, their grins malevolent enough to send shivers down the boys' spines. But still, doors were opened, and soul cakes were offered. Never ale or coin, only this.

The people were dark-eyed and taciturn, and their baked offerings were oddly fashioned, hardly keeping to their traditional round shape. The crosses on the top didn't look quite right either, but the cakes were warm in the boys' freezing hands and carried that warmth all the way to their empty bellies.

It was only on their way home that the boys began to feel it.

The presence.

The shadows at their backs thickening, as if something was there now and following them.

They walked on with thundering hearts, not daring to turn around, for they feared that to acknowledge the moving darkness that trailed them would be a sin greater than their souls could hold.