

Hallow's Evening (Version 1)

By Jeff **Blechle**

WHY I LIKE IT: *Guest Editor JIM MEIROSE writes:*

Years back a fairly accomplished mentor of mine told me, "Structure Sells". That stuck with me ever since. I've not yet found it to be untrue. "Hallow's Evening" is one more proof that yes, in fact, structure does sell. Plus, structure brings every ounce of potential inherent in any story idea fully to life, as well. "Hallow's Evening" is a fine example of a well-structured fictional text. The action at the start instantly pulls the reader in. And, of course, the first lines lull us into a comfortable belief that we know exactly what kind of story to expect as we go on. For example;

"Who do you think you are, man?" Grasping a fistful of Mike's golden locks, Lucy yanked until his Adam's apple bulged. "Groping ape. Your wife will hear about this."

Most readers will feel they know what to expect next, but, a line or two further, they are yanked back—albeit smoothly—into having to throw out that first snap judgement and recalibrate—and will hungrily read on to see where it all goes, attentively seeking what the next plot revelation will be. This sort of thing goes on several more times, with the tension building by degrees, until finally, it's all over—with the dizzied reader having been thoroughly surprised—having just taken this very wild ride. "Hallow's Evening" is the literary equivalent of a series of bracing splashes in the face of ice-cold water. And this due to a unique plot and deft structure. Solid work, well done.

Five stars.

Senior Editor Charles writes: *After we accepted Hallow's Evening, Jeff sent us a revised version to replace it. We couldn't decide which cut we liked best so we took them both. It's a good way of seeing a writer at work from inside the garret, so to speak,—an opportunity we don't often have—but also reminds us that writing (all art) is process, always in flux, and any stopping point is a new beginning. Is there really such a thing as a finished story? Spacing and font size are author's own. Version 2 follows in the TOC.*

Hallows' Evening

“Who do you think you are, man?” Grasping a fistful of Mike’s golden locks, Lucy yanked until his Adam’s apple bulged. “Groping ape. Your wife will hear about this.”

Mike pulled free and dragged a janitorial catalog off the coffee table and slammed it across Lucy’s damp red head and she sprawled face down onto the living room floor. He grabbed the mallet he had come over to borrow from Mr. Montelli, placed the catalog over her back and hammered it violently, moving it along the backside of her body. Then he propped her up in the recliner, reclined it, fixed her clothing and hair, closed her legs. Construing her smirk, he cataloged her head again. Then— “Oh shit.”

Mr. Montelli threw open the front door and clamored in lamenting false alarms and idiot employees. When he saw Lucy in the recliner, his cigar ashed his chin. “What’s her problem?”

Mike relaxed his shrug and returned the catalog and explained what happened and Mr. Montelli expressed disgust, but not surprise, that Lucy had gone shot crazy and

ricocheted off an end table. Mr. Montelli slapped her lightly on the cheek and admitted that last night he had caught her painting a pentagram on his attic floor.

The men crossed the room and sat on octagon stools at the bar, watching the woman's pale damp head protruding into the beveled edge of the mirror. Mr. Montelli poured two double vodkas on the rocks and slid one to his right.

"Never get involved with a slob cleaning lady, Mike. Christ, look how big her nose is when her hair's slicked back."

Mike couldn't look at her reflection with his own staring him down. Over thirty years of ogling himself and he still couldn't get over how handsome—how flawless—he came across, and he was a modest critic. Even his thoughts continued to astound him, but why shouldn't they, coming from such a lovely head? Human beings worshipped him and women that didn't run up and kiss him on the mouth were no credit to the race. Out of this world he certainly was, but more importantly, he positively glowed, albeit with a negative charge.

"Yeah, as soon as you left, she started in. I couldn't tell if she was on the level—at first."

"She's ignor'nt. What'd she say?"

Mike claimed that what Lucy said was too humiliating to repeat.

Mr. Montelli turned around and glared at her as if the expansive mirror might be hiding something from him. "What'd that lying beak-nosed numskull say?"

"Well, um, she said you have an *eensy little dick*—emphasis hers—

that you couldn't use right even if it came with directions, and as far as she can tell, you're a corpse and pretending not to be, but not very well." Mike shook his grave expression. "Said she lost her ass bartering with you."

"I hear she has two sisters just like her," Mr. Montelli mumbled faintly and brokenly, a gargoyle crouching lower on his stool. He downed more vodka and stared into the mirror where a golden idol modeled to his right. "I'm just sorry I had to leave you with the sunken-eyed tramp for ten minutes."

Lucy hiccupped and a stream of blood trickled out of her ear and blended with her hair.

"You're so lucky to have a beautiful perfect wife like Crystal and not some dick-nosed goofy clown like I got. Let me see her picture again." Mr. Montelli poured, admiring the picture Mike held up. "All Lucy does is sit around all day and call those psychic hotlines for tips. What else'd she say?"

"Nothing."

"Bullshit."

"All right. She said she caught you playing with yourself the other day and all you could do was give her some startled moronic look while she filmed. And, oh yeah, you can't do anything well whatsoever, and she can prove it."

Mr. Montelli fell off his stool then sheepishly climbed back on.

"Then she— I tried to stop her but—"

Mr. Montelli's balding head beamed in a new layer of sweat. "But what? What'd she do? Well? What'd the cackling—pink-faced bullshitter do?"

"Look, I don't know you guys that well. I'm just here to borrow a mallet."

Mr. Montelli slurped from the bottle, then insisted that Mike shut up and dish.

“Okay, Tony “Anthony” Montelli,” Mike said, spinning a triangular coaster on the bar and staring at his host’s reflection. “She tried to fuck me right through my clothes, man. No shit. Telling me how she fucked all kinds of guys in the back of your bread store while you were kneading dough. Said she would gank you if I would just once let her suck my dick. Threatened a threesome with me and some voodoo priest she met at a yard sale. Then you pulled up as she was breaking acrobatic.” He sipped his vodka. “Can I still borrow your mallet?”

Mr. Montelli’s skin rivaled the color of a last drink of strawberry milk. He left his stool and rattled into another room, then returned with a leather belt folded in half and stood over Lucy, snapping it. Mike joined him.

They looked at each other, at Lucy, at each other.

“Let’s fuck her.” *Snap!*

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Okay.” Mike cleared his throat. “I mean— Right here?”

“Right here.”

They undressed.

“But first I’m giving her a goodly taste of leather.” Mr. Montelli, down to his black dress socks and glasses, lifted the looped belt under her chin. “Witch doctor at a rummage sale, huh?” He reared back. “You dirty miserable wart-nosed sleezy pink-orange—”

Lucy's eyes blasted him like black holes puking stars. She hiked back her knee and slammed the brakes on his bare crotch. He doubled hard. She bloodied his mouth with an ashtray. "Let's fuck her? You jackasses! I'm gonna eat you two raw!" She shouldered Mr. Montelli into a loveseat, thrashed him with the belt. Wheezing, she charged Mike, who was hopping into his chinos.

"Hey, it was your old man's idea!"

"Whose old man?" She wrapped the belt around his neck and with his head twice slammed the couch arm. She bridled his open mouth, whipping him up and down and to and fro. "Whose idea was it to beat me half to death? You sick fuck! Talking shit about me!" She dragged his crown into a faux marble pillar, and he was out. She rifled his wallet, scanned his driver's license. "Eleven sixty-four Morning Glory Circle. Figures."

She seized the mallet. Positioning herself in front of Mr. Montelli as if he were a goof ball on a tee, she reared back in a three-quarter twist. He writhed just enough. She sank his birdie.

Lucy showered her throbbing body, donned a flowing sable cowl, and then went for a limping stroll toward Mike's house with the mallet swinging in and out of dark folds, sidestepping frightful children and dried leaves that scratched along sidewalks and streets, stopping occasionally to smile up at streetlights and stars and, remembering her catechism, arrange them into homicidal portents. Soon she stood in the warm glow of Mike's porch light, imagining his perfect beautiful wife. She pushed the doorbell.

The door opened and a gray-haired woman holding a poodle appeared in light from another room.

Lucy leaned back and checked the house number. “Um, I’m looking for Mike’s wife.”

“Who? Ain’t nobody’s wife. You must have the wrong address.” The poodle barked. “Oh.” The woman reached into a corner of shadows and pulled out a fistful of butterscotch candies. “Well, where’s your bag?”

AUTHOR’S NOTE:

“Hallows’ Evening” is a scene from my old story, “God’s Totally Pissed” that I reworked into something a little less outrageous. I did that by changing all the words and punctuation. I also used fake coherence and, like the great masters, zero symbolism, save the em dashes. Imagine doing that and coming up with something readable. Some people think I’m clairvoyant or clever, and I dare not correct them, mostly because I don’t know where they are.

My theme in this story is the ineffectiveness of black magic when used alongside greed and against insults, irreverence, and misogyny. Lucy is a witch who didn’t do the necessary research to fool someone, and neither did I. She resorts to the physical violence of “Mike” and Montelli because it’s so much quicker than waiting for spells to take effect, and, sadly, you really must have faith for a good half of them to work, green candles notwithstanding. In the end, she almost gets what she most wants. But alas! Aha! The poodle knows her all too well and, changing the subject and protecting its owner, foils Lucy’s plan. Imagine Lucy, pushing forty, mallet between her knees, muttering excuses, patting down her scowl for something to carry her dark future in, then the door slams, lights go out.

If only Mike had come over to borrow a bazooka.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Jeff Blechle lives in Illinois. He has self-published short story collections on Amazon.com under the name Margaret C. Strunkel. My work has appeared in 13th Warrior, Frigg, Fleas on the Dog, Litro, The Jewish Magazine, Literally Stories, and Timber Creek Review, among others. His story **Pink Eye** was published in Issue 4.

EDITOR’S BIO: Jim Meirose's short work has appeared in numerous venues, and his published novels include "No and Maybe - Maybe and No" (Pski's Porch), 'Le Overgivers au Club de la Résurrection' (Mannequin Haus), 'Understanding Franklin Thompson' (JEF pubs), and 'Sunday Dinner with Father Dwyer' (Optional books). Info at www.jimmeirose.com His story **After Her Water’d Broke One Bitsy-Time Prior** appeared in Issue 5.

