

MRS. IVEY'S HALLOWEEN SURPRISE

By Fred Hobbs

This is a true account of a singular event. Please pardon the partial and paraphrased use of a well-worn writer's cliché, but this event actually happened on a "dark and gloomy (though not stormy) night." No goblins, no witches, ghosts or other apparitions are involved in this tale. Yet, in a distinctly pungent manner, the characters depicted here could claim that a bit of horror and a couple of dashes of repugnance are involved.

Records are sketchy, but the year was believed to be 1937. For certain, though, it was a Halloween night sometime in that decade of the Great American Depression. The location was Englewood, Colorado. At the time most of the citizens of Englewood were essentially "blue collar" working folks. Sprinkled with pockets of poverty, the town was in transition from a community of modest homes and small acreages with chicken coops and vegetable gardens into a full-fledged suburb of Denver.

The heroine of our tale, Mrs. Ivey, was a longtime Englewood resident. She was an aged widow who lived alone in a tiny, three room bungalow with a wood-fired stove for heating and cooking. In season, she tended a postage stamp-sized lawn in the front of the house and a small garden in the rear. Her neighborhood could be described as "a little rough around the edges," not only in appearance, but concerning the behavior of some of the inhabitants, three of whom are part of this story...Tuffy, Butch and Spike. Not their real names. They enjoy anonymity because their ultimate fate is not known (maybe living as fine, decent citizens; or languishing behind bars in Canon City or Leavenworth.)

In that long ago time, teenagers Tuffy, Butch and Spike were serial bullies and makers of mischief. Frequently, they picked fights with neighborhood kids who were usually younger or weaker than they were. If something were stolen, a window mysteriously broken, or a hubcap missing chances are Tuffy or Butch or Spike or all three had a hand in the vandalism or petty crime.

The "terrible trio" seemed to take particular misguided pleasure in annoying or harassing Mrs. Ivey whom they derisively referred to as that "cranky old lady at the end of the block." Halloween was their special night to howl and prowl. And, Mrs. Ivey was a prime target for dirty tricks. Or rather, she possessed one...a somewhat dilapidated backyard wooden privy. The previous Halloween, the "Ruffians Three" had sneaked into Mrs. Ivey's yard and unceremoniously knocked over her "outdoor convenience".

Like almost all criminals, petty or perpetual, Tuffy, Butch and Spike had jointly or singularly bragged about this prank several times. Consequently, Mrs. Ivey had ample reason to believe it would be repeated. She consulted with some of her close friends and her adult son, who lived in Colorado Springs, on ways in which the vandalism could be handled this time. Post a guard? Place a search light at the scene? Borrow her son's shotgun? None seemed practical until Mrs. Ivey's son came up with the perfect solution.

So, at dusk on Halloween, her son and a friend entered Mrs. Ivey's backyard and carefully, very carefully, moved the outhouse, so that the door was just a couple of inches behind the pit over which it had been placed. This meant that the stone-lined path that led straight to where the entrance to the "facility" should be, now revealed an open four foot deep pit.

True to form, at about 10:30 p.m. Mrs. Ivey and her son sitting in her tiny living room, heard loud adolescent voices raised in disgust and disbelief, laced with unprintable curses and loud groans which rapidly dissolved into the dark of night.

The next morning, surveying the scene, Mrs. Ivey and son beheld a trail of distinctive footprints with ample visual and olfactory evidence of the dastardly deed.

The next Halloween, Tuffy, Butch and Spike were nowhere to be seen!