

**Hal**

Present day

The plan was simple enough--bring the girls to the ancient Victorian, that Addams Family knock-off, scare the pants off them, be all "there, there" when the time was right, and then literally take the pants off them.

To set the mood, George freaked everyone out at the pizza joint telling the story he'd concocted about the brutal and bloody murder that was supposed to have happened in the basement crawl-space, and how the owners had walled it up along with the body. As far as George's brother Hal was concerned, the story was so cheesy, he half expected it to end with a hook on a car door handle.

Much to Hal's surprise, the girls bought it. Sheila actually trembled as she locked her arm with Hal's and cozied up against his shoulder. Hal grinned. He and Sheila had been talking about going all the way for months. Maybe George's plan wasn't as half-baked as it sounded and tonight would be the night.

George and Hal and the girls arrived at the house just before midnight. George propped open a basement window and slid in. The girls were next, each of them helped down by Hal and ushered to safety by George once inside. Hal was last to descend. Dank must clouded his nose and he sneezed. "There's mould down here somewhere," he said to no one in particular.

George clapped him on the shoulder. Hard. "Don't be a wuss," he said. Hal turned to punch him back but he'd already gone.

"C'mon, Hal," Sheila said. She grabbed his arm and led him deeper into the darkened heart of the house.

"Looky looky," George said. He slid a box out of his backpack.

"Ooh! A Ouija board," Lisa squealed.

"Let's play," said Sheila.

"Does anyone have any silver on them?" George asked.

One of the girls asked why.

"It is a well-known fact that silver wards away the evil spirits." Go figure. George: warlock wannabe.

No one had any silver jewellery, but Sheila offered up a toonie. "Will this work?" she said? She passed it to Hal who flipped it onto the board. "It's partially silver-coloured."

"In the absence of anything else..." George said. He centred the coin on the board. They sat cross-legged, knees forming a small circle around it. "What should we ask?"

"Ask about the murder, George," Lisa said. "Ask if the victim is still here."

"Forget that!" Sheila said. "Ask if the *murderer* is still here."

"I don't know, George," Hal said.

"Everybody stop," George said. "I got it. Is there anybody here tonight with us?" he asked.

"We just want to talk to you. We don't want to hurt you.

"Is there an evil entity here?" he asked.

"George!" Lisa said, sounding every bit as horrified as Hal felt.

"What? If we're here, we might as well make it interesting.

"Okay," George said. "If there is anybody here, anybody at all, we ask that you come forward and speak with us."

The pointer on the board began to move. "Cut that out, George," Lisa said.

"Yeah," Hal confirmed. "That's not funny."

"I'm not moving it, I swear," George said.

“I swear, Hal,” said Sheila, “if it’s you...”

“It’s not me.” Hal's voice quivered.

The pointer moved until the small window at its middle was centred around the word “hello” on the corner of the board.

“Hello,” George responded. “Thank you for speaking with us tonight.”

“I don’t like this, George,” Hal said.

“Yeah,” Sheila said, “not at all.”

“Anyone too chickenshit to stick around is free to leave.” George shone his penlight on each person around the circle in turn. They stared back like deer in headlights, but no one made a move.

“All right then. We all agree to stay, so let’s shut up and get on with the program.

“What is your name?”

The pointer jerked its way hither and thither across the board, everyone chanting the letters as they centred in its window: M...A...L...C...H...U...S

“What the...” George said.

“Quit it, guys,” said Sheila.

The boys protested any involvement in a hoax.

“Malchus?” Hal said. “Who the fuck is Malchus?”

The pointer began to move again. It centred on Z, then Y then X and so on, working its way backward through the alphabet.

“What gives, George?” one of the girls said.

George snickered and said, “It’s not me.”

...P...O...N...

“I’m taking my fingers off the thing,” Sheila said, and she did, but the pointer continued to move.

“Not me,” George said. “I want to see what happens.”

...C...B...A

The pointer paused and then centred on the nine, then the eight, then the seven.

“It’s counting down,” Sheila said.

“Counting down to what?” asked Hal.

...two...one...zero.

There was another pause. The boys laughed nervously. A beam of light blazed from the window in the pointer and then everything changed.

Shelia was the first to notice the change. She heard flailing on the dusty cement. She reached out to Hal who was writhing in convulsions on the ground.

“I need some light,” she yelled as she laid her hands on Hal’s prostrate body. Someone complied.

Hal lay on the floor board-stiff. His body spasmed periodically, as if in the throes of taser-fire. Perhaps more horrific, to the girls especially, was that he appeared to be foaming at the mouth.

“Call 911!” Sheila yelled.

Lisa unlocked her cell, but George stayed her hand.

“What the fuck is wrong with you? Call 911!” Shelia said again.

“We can’t call 911. We’re trespassing. We’re not supposed to be here,” George told them.

“It’s okay, Hal,” Sheila whispered, stroking his hair. “It’s okay.”

Hal’s body stopped jerking.

“What happened?” Shelia said with a sniffle. “What’s wrong?”

“He stopped,” said Lisa.

George felt for a pulse, and then for his breath by placing his cheek to Hal's mouth. "He's still breathing. Maybe he'll wake up soon."

Sheila nodded. She manoeuvred herself until Hal's head rested on her lap. She continued to stroke his hair while Lisa used the flashlight app on her cell phone to keep Hal's face and upper body lit.

Suddenly, Hal opened his eyes. Sheila would later swear they glowed.