

Hello Cheryl

by William Morris

"Hello Cheryl," Allison said, as she opened the front door. "How are you this evening."

"Good," she said. "How 'bout you?"

"I'm just fine, looking forward to a night out with Edward."

He was Susan's current boyfriend. They had been together since her divorce six months ago. Ally and Daniel's divorce had come in summer. It was a clean break and there hadn't been any problems, except for the kids. Emily and Andy. She was 12 and he was 10. The divorce had been hard on them. It upset Ally to see them like that, but over time they came to accept that mommy and daddy didn't love each other and didn't want to live together anymore.

Edward came around just after the divorce. Daniel always accused her of cheating, but she suspected that he was just trying to justify his own cheating throughout the marriage. She hadn't cheated, but she hadn't felt bad either for getting involved with another man directly after the divorce.

Although Emily and Andy had had a rough time with the divorce, they knew where they wanted to be, with Ally. She had been a stay at home mom before the divorce. She liked spending time with the kids and thought it motherly to keep the house up. Emily and Andy weren't messy children.

She got a nice little house and a job as a housekeeper in town. She got to keep the mini-van from the divorce and of course, she was allotted a child support of four hundred and fifty dollars a month. It sounds like a lot, but for a high-class attorney like Daniel, it wasn't that big of a deal.

He never paid much interest in what his children wanted or liked. It was, take what you can get or get nothing at all. He had planned once to take them all to Disneyland, but just like always he backed out at the last minute. It seemed that Daniel was the king of making promises that he couldn't keep. He knew he couldn't keep them, but he didn't want them to think that he wasn't a good father. There

wasn't any way of getting around it. He was failing.

Cheryl asked, "Where are you going tonight, Ms. Dawson?"

"Oh, just out for dinner and a movie. We're going to see the late show. It's that new film, just been released, about that boy who can change his appearance and make himself look like anything."

"Oh, yeah, I heard about that flick." She said casually. "I think me and Jason might go see it sometime this weekend."

"Well, that's nice. I think you and Jason make a great couple." Ally said, and continued on with her instructions. "Just put the kids to bed around eleven or eleven thirty. We're gonna let them sleep in tomorrow. The only things they'll miss are the Saturday morning cartoons." She said with a giggle.

They continued to say their goodbyes as Edward waited in the car. Cheryl assured her that everything would be fine and that she'd take good care of Ally's two little munchkins. "I got it Ms. Dawson. Eleven or eleven thirty, bed. Make sure they get a snack. No scary movies. Keep all the doors locked until you get back. And no visitors."

"I'm sure you'll do fine." Ally said, pulling Cheryl next to her for a hug. "But there is just one more thing. Andy has been having bad dreams about a monster in his closet, so just make sure you check on him every so often, or else he'll stay up all night."

"Okay," Cheryl replied

Cheryl was the eighteen year old from down the street. She babysat for all the neighbors with kids. She had earned herself quite a reputation as a reliable babysitter and Ally felt like she was one of her own.

In small towns, like Rosedale, it seemed that everyone raised everyone else's kids. At least in the big neighborhoods like the one just off county road no. 3 that they lived on.

The night crept by as it always did, slowly. It's a good thing I get paid by the hour, she told herself. She let them watch all their favorite shows on Disney and Nickelodeon. After, *The Spastic Life of Jake and Tyler* or something, she decided that it was time to put the children to bed.

She clicked off the tube and told the children that it was time for bed. They made a little sigh, but didn't argue. Mom had told them to be good.

She walked them to their rooms and put them in their beds. "What about the monster in my closet?" Andy asked, wondering how she'd handle the situation.

"There's no monster in there." She said.

"Yes there is and as soon as I go to sleep he is going to come out of there and eat me. Then he's going to vomit me up and eat me again. You know, like the flies."

Andy was a big fan of the Discovery channel and had recently watched a special, *The Life of the Fly*.

"There's no monster in there. Even if there was, all you'd have to do to make him go away is to tell him Jesus protects you."

"He's in there." Andy continued.

"Fine." She exclaimed. "I'll show you." She walked over to the closet door and opened it quickly. "See," She said mocking him. "No monster. No nothing. Just your clothes and some toys."

Andy was not persuaded. "He's in there, he is just hiding." Cheryl pulled the clothes back to reveal the open closet. The closet was fully illuminated and almost every possible shadow had been removed. "See, still nothing." She repeated. "I'll leave your door open and turn on your night light, how about that?"

"Okay," Andy said, feeling a little silly.

"Now, I've got to go tuck your sister into bed, so, I'll be in the living room just down stairs if you need anything. But I don't want to hear any of this mess about closet monsters, or monsters under your bed or anything else because I've shown you that they aren't hiding. They just aren't here."

"Okay," Andy replied quietly. Cheryl had made it almost out the door before Andy called out to her. "Cheryl?"

"What?" She said as she turned in the doorway.

"I need to pee."

"Well, I've got to get your sister into bed," she said. "So, if you can go by yourself, go ahead."

Cheryl moved on down the hall to Emily's room. Andy followed close behind her, turning left on the door before Emily's room.

"Closet monsters again, huh?" she asked as Cheryl entered the room.

"How'd you know?"

"He's had them since my mom got the divorce. Mom thinks that it's because of the move. He had to move into that new bedroom, so, he has to go through the whole closet monster thing again."

"Maybe, he's just afraid of the dark."

"No, he really thinks that something is in there, and that it's going to get him."

"Well, either way I've still gotta get you tucked in."

"That's okay. I can do it myself."

"Alright, but if you need anything I'll be just downstairs in the living room."

She was gone, out of the room and on her way back downstairs. Andy had already come out of the bathroom and since she saw no sign of him suspected that he was already back in bed. He'll be gone in no time, she told herself, off to sleep.

Andy came out of the bathroom in a stumble. It was later than his usual bedtime and he felt special because he'd gotten to stay up as late as he had. Even though he was excited about getting to stay up late his eyes were heavy. If only it weren't for that tricky closet monster he'd be able to get some sleep.

The walk down the hall seemed long and treacherous, but he finally made it to his bedroom. He felt a breeze as he stepped in and

noticed his window was up. He thought nothing of it. It was the closet monster that was on his mind. "Jesus protects me." He said under his breath. Then he said it again, this time louder. "Jesus protects me."

He turned and looked at the closed closet door. He had a spider-man poster draped across it. The dwelling place of a monster, he thought to himself. "Jesus protects me." He said again.

He opened the closet door to check one last time before getting into bed. The closet stood empty, just as it had before. This Jesus protects me stuff really works, he thought to himself. He went back to the bed and climbed in. He closed his eyes and lay there in the bed quiet for a moment.

There was a crackling noise from across the room. Andy sat up in bed immediately. Surely it was the closet monster out to get him. He noticed the closet door was still standing open. Come on in closet monster, he thought, feeling foolish.

He put his feet on the floor, feeling the carpet tickle his bare feet and toes. He walked slowly to closet door, careful to inspect the area, ready to run at any moment. Upon reaching the door, he found the closet once again empty. You're tricky Mr. Closet Monster. He closed the closet door and ran back to his bed in fear. Knowing at any moment the closet monster would come out and get him.

He reached the bed and to his surprise, there was no monster after him. He was alone in his room, "Jesus protects me." He repeated again and climbed into bed. Lying there quiet and still wasn't easy. But it was a good trap. He'd lie there till the monster thought he was asleep. When the monster came out he'd get up and run out of his bedroom and down to Cheryl in the living room.

He closed his eyes and lay quiet and still. The creak from across the room came again. Echoes from an old house were transformed into the steps of an evil closet monster. He didn't falter. He lay quiet and still.

More echoes...more footsteps, creeping across his floor.

Andy began to chant, as quietly as he could but loud enough so the monster might hear. "Jesus protects me. Jesus protects me.

Jesus protects me. Jesus protects me..." over and over.

The closet monster was standing over him. He could feel the breath of it beating down on him in the dark. He had waited too long. It was too late to run away. He opened his eyes to see the face of his closet monster, the face of his enemy.

Andy opened his eyes and there wasn't a furry monster with horrid, pointy teeth just waiting for the right moment to smash his skull and drink his blood. There was only a man. His eyes were the only things visible through the black ski mask. "Where's your Jesus, now?" he asked.

His monster was absent, replaced by this man in black, but Andy found he was more scared by the man than he could ever have been of the monster. He opened his mouth to scream, but only air came out. Before Andy could find his voice, or even begin to fight the man with dark blue eyes, the man covered his mouth and scooped him out of the bed.

Cheryl made it down the stairs in little time at all. She immediately flipped the TV over to MTV to watch her favorite show. She had become a regular TV Guide since she started babysitting, memorizing all the channels and the shows they played.

It was fifteen after twelve when the phone rang. She was deep into her show by this point and almost didn't answer the phone. It wasn't her house, who would be calling for her? The phone rang and rang. It seemed endless. To keep from waking up the children, she answered it. "Hello," she said as she picked up the phone.

"Hello, Cheryl" the voice on the other end of the phone replied. It was strong but raspy, yet quiet and controlled. The fellow sounded like he had a frog in his throat.

"How do you know my name?" she asked.

"I know a lot of things about you, Cheryl. For example, I know you haven't done your job very well tonight."

"What are you talking about, mister?" she asked, a tremble

coming over her voice.

"Well, I know other things, too. You live at 115 Fable St. and your father has been dead for 5 years."

"How do you know all this?" Fear was ever present in her voice.

"Oh, I could go on for days." He continued. "But that isn't why we're here. You're being paid to do a job and if Ms. Dawson knew of the job you've done, she wouldn't be very pleased."

"You must be out of your head," she said, but doubt was there. "The children are upstairs in bed."

"Can you be so sure?" His raspy voice taunted her, begging her to see for herself. "Why don't you go upstairs and take a look? You're on a cordless phone."

"How do you know that?" she asked, making her way to the stairs.

"Because I'm watching you." he said.

There was silence for a moment as she looked around. There were four windows in the living room, two in the kitchen, one in the upstairs hall and one in each bedroom. There was no way to tell if he was really watching her. If he were, it would be near impossible to tell from where.

The mystery man on the other end of the phone waited quietly for her to inspect the perimeter. She was unable to locate him and frozen in fear of what he'd said. She sprinted up the stairs and into Sarah's bedroom. She flipped the light switch and saw Sarah roll over in bed and yell out "Turn off the light!"

Cheryl flipped the light back off and exited the bedroom, apologizing the whole way out. As she closed the door, she was greeted with laughter at the end of the phone. "See," she said. "Just like I said, in bed asleep. Now, who the fuck are you?"

"Now, that's no way to treat a guest in the house. I come for a visit and that's how you talk to me. That's terrible. Ms. Dawson wouldn't be very happy." More laughter. Deep and hearty, but with that raspy twist, the laughter cut like a knife. "What about dear old Andy? You haven't checked on him yet."

"Listen asshole, I'm not getting paid enough for this kind of

bullshit. So, go prank call someone else and give them your bullshit story about watching them. Cause I'm not putting up with it." And she hung up.

She started back down the stairs, but decided to checkup on Andy anyways. That laugh, she thought. Gives me the creeps. She shivered as she walked.

Andy's door was closed. He must've closed it, she thought. He did go to the bathroom. She cracked open the door. The night light had been turned off and the room was dark. A breeze grazed her face as she flipped on the light. Illumination revealed the pulled back sheets and the missing Andy. The phone rang in her hand.

"Where's Andy?" She screamed, answering the phone. "What have you done with him, you bastard?" She was staring out the window, but the voice on the other end of the phone wasn't the mystery man.

"Cheryl," Daniel said. "What are you talking about? Are you babysitting again? Is everything all right?"

"Mr. Dawson," she said, now fear crept up her spine. "I need to tell you some--"

The mystery man revealed his position in the house by placing his 9mm at the base of her neck. "Hello, Cheryl." He said. "Wouldn't want to do anything hasty would we?"

Daniel continued, "Cheryl, what did you say? I'm not getting good reception on my cell phone."

"I said, Andy's having closet monster dreams again, Mr. Dawson."

"Oh, yes, that's normal." He said. "Tell you what, when my ex gets in tell her to call me ASAP, okay?"

"I'll tell her." She said, trembling.

With a click Mr. Dawson was gone and so were her chances of using him as a savior. The mystery man repeated. "Hello, Cheryl. How are we this evening?"

"What have you done with him?"

"Oh, he's in a safe place. With Jesus protecting him, I'm sure he'll be fine." Then he chuckled.

"What do you want?" she asked, scared of what he might say.

"I'm here to make Daniel Dawson pay." He said. "Simple as that, I will kill his son, write his name on the wall and be on my way. I'd hate to have to kill you, too." He said calmly. "I just couldn't risk the temptation of scaring the shit out of you." Then he spurted out a laugh. "Worked too didn't it."

"I can't let you do tha-" she started.

He hit her with the butt of his gun knocking her unconscious before she could finish her sentence.

"Well, that is that." He said as he stepped over her and opened the closet door. Andy lay bound and gagged in the floor of the closet. "Come here little man," he said and sprayed a little substance in his face.

Ally returned home at ten to one. The house was silent as she opened the door. The TV was off. Cheryl must've left, she thought, but didn't mind because the kids were sleeping quietly. Motherly instinct told her to check on the kids, at least to make sure everything was like it should be.

She opened the door to Emily's room. Emily lay in her bed sleeping.

On to Andy's room. She opened the door. Paused a moment to let her eyes adjust to the darkness of the room. There was no night light on.

After a moment, her eyes adjusted and she saw Andy lying in his bed in a deep sleep. Cheryl had done her job well. Even Emily still slept with a light. She had to know this secret, how she got him to sleep without it.

At ease from the night out being over and her children sleeping softly in bed, Ally went on to bed as well. She turned on the lamp beside her bed, undressed, and climbed into bed. She turned it off and went to sleep.

She woke up at 8:30. There was no alarm. No noises throughout the house. Only silence. The children were still in bed. She would've bet her life that Cheryl had let them stay up later than she had told her too, but what was the harm in that? They would only sleep longer this morning. She wasn't mad, but the silence of the house brought unrest in her. She felt like she should make sure they were sleeping.

They were. Andy was lying still in his bed, just as she had seen him the night before, and Emily was the same as well. They appeared untouched, unmoved in every way.

Ally didn't want to disturb them so she made her way back down the stairs and into the living room. The phone rang. The cordless was missing; apparently Cheryl had been doing some calling last night, too. So, she ran into the kitchen and grabbed the mounted wall phone. "Ally," Daniel asked.

"Yeah?" she said, "What do you want?"

"I want you to get the hell out of town. Get the kids, pack up and go to your mother's for awhile."

"Why should I go anywhere?" she said, anger boiling in her voice.

"I called last night. Didn't Cheryl tell you I called?"

"No, she was gone when I got here."

"Yesterday, I had a case against a mob member, put him away for life. He swore to me that my family and all the people I care about would suffer for it."

"I thought you said you put him away for life?" she said.

"Aren't you listening? Ally," A pause. "I said, the mob. I didn't put the mob in prison. Just one man."

"So, you think something might happen to us?" she said, curiosity growing.

"Well, the kids. Maybe you. All I'm saying is that if you went to stay with your mother for a few days then you might be a little safer."

"Well, I think we are plenty safe right here. Cheryl was here last night and everything went fine."

She was pacing. He always did that to her. He made her nervous.

That was part of the reason for the divorce, other than his affair.

"Please just do this for me. Before they do anything. Please. When the kids get up, pack a bag, and go to your mother's for three days. Please."

"Fine." She said. She had no intention of going. Ally was the epitome of stubborn when it came to Daniel and his requests. She had only agreed to get him off her back.

He was scared and it was obvious. Maybe he cared for them after all. What a fine time to show it.

"Thank you." Daniel said and hung up.

She hung up the phone with a hard click. He had ruined her morning. Someone's going to come to her house and kill her kids just because her ex husband and they're terrible dad, put some criminal away for the rest of his days. Maybe she should have cared, but for some reason she didn't. She thought it was just another of his tricks to get her to take him back. It's not happening Daniel. You can forget it.

The coffee pot was whistling, signifying that the coffee was done. "A little coffee, sugar, and some milk, that's how you start the day off right." She said. "Not by packing your things and going to your mother's house." She opened the refrigerator after some milk.

Inside the refrigerator, beside the milk was a small object about the size of a mini carrot, but it was a very pale white with a red tip. At the end of the red tip was a small pool of red liquid. Susan picked up the finger and dropped it in the floor just as soon as she saw the nail at the end of it.

"HOLY SHIT!" she screamed and almost passed out. That had been in there all night. Something had happened last night. That was Cheryl's finger.

Cheryl wasn't a concern anymore. If this had happened to her, then what about Emily and Andy. She sprinted upstairs to Emily's room.

She shook her, gently. "Baby, wake up. Momma's here." No

response. She began to shake her more and more until she was thrashing her back and fourth. "Emily, wake up!" she shouted.

She ran to Andy's room to repeat the process. Her efforts were fruitless. Neither child responded to her in any way. Ally shook them as hard as she could, but they were mannequins, dead to the world. Dead.

Ally slid to the floor, weeping. Daniel had been right. The mob had come and taken her children in the night. She pulled herself up from the floor and over to the closet where the monster sleeps. The door knob was crusted with a crimson substance. It appeared quite similar to blood, but it was crusty and seemed thicker than any blood she had ever seen. She opened it.

Cheryl was bound at her hands and feet. A finger missing from her right hand and the cordless phone in her left. She was pale, paler than normal and completely naked. She was dead. Ally didn't have to look very hard to see that. It was the markings and cuts on her that made her drag Cheryl out of the closet.

Ally stretched Cheryl out on the floor in Andy's room. She untied the knots around her wrists. Her stiff, naked body was already starting to have an odor.

Across her arms, she had been cut, with probably a razor or a thin knife. "JESUS PROTECTS ME" had been sketched over them. On her stomach, had been carved "HELLO CHERYL".

The sight of Cheryl's stiff, twisted body made Ally sick. She could no longer hold back the vomit that had been building up inside her. She grabbed the small trashcan beside Andy's desk and lurched. She felt her stomach tighten up and release as it forced the orange and yellow liquid past her lips and into the can. She couldn't fight it anymore. Her eyes rolled back and she passed out.

The cops arrived somewhere between nine thirty and quarter to ten. Ally had called them when she made it back down stairs. They came and took Cheryl, Andy, and Emily away.

Their autopsies revealed that it was poison that had killed them. It was taken in through the lungs. There seemed to have been a substance breathed in by the victims. The poison affected the lungs first. Then it entered the bloodstream making the blood more thick than it normally would've been. The gas had worked so quick that it took only seconds to kill them.

The cuts on Cheryl had been made after her death. She didn't bleed much because of the poison, but it was her blood on the doorknob.

The police followed up on the murders. Although the mob was accused, no evidence was found that might link them to the murders. No one was prosecuted for the murders, up to now.

