

When Al Came to Stay

by James D. McIntosh Jr.

With age comes memory loss, and with memory loss comes confusion. I came here to write something, but I cannot remember what. And they say writing your thoughts down is supposed to help. There is no help for an aging mind.

I suppose I should at least introduce myself.

My name is Joshua McIntyre, but most people call me Josh. I can usually still remember the good old days of my youth, but they have long passed me by. I am now seventy-five I believe.

And that reminds me of why I am here. I'm writing a story about age and about *him*. You know him. Everyone does in one way or another. He gets around.

Back in my aforementioned youthful days, I had a grandfather named Walter. He was a strict but loving man. Whenever I went over for a visit, he always put me on some sort of chore and wanted it done his way. And he did not tolerate goofing off on the job.

But he was also kind and funny. He's where I get my odd sense of humor from. Much of our quality time was spent either sitting on the porch with Grandma Joan or going fishing at some nearby pond.

Those were the good old days, but they were not to last.

It all started with a bit of absentmindedness. He would forget where he was or what he was doing. His temperament got even worse and his reasoning became impaired. We grandchildren would often get disciplined for little to no reason, and the punishments could be as unhealthy as being locked outside in the heat and being restricted from making any noise whatsoever. Grandma Joan would do what she could to help us.

It all came in spells, but that was only the beginning. These things were merely the signs of *his* arrival. He soon made himself known.

Oh, who am I talking about again? Give me a moment. I have to check on my dog.

I could not find him.

He is gone. But he often returns. He keeps himself very busy possessing person after person. I hate that son of a bitch for what he did to my grandfather.

We did all we could to get rid of him, but nothing really helped. Al does not go away until he has sucked all of the life out of his victim. And then he may come back for someone else later.

He first made himself known on a day I was visiting my grandparents from far away. I was just a boy, not seventy-three like I am now, and I did not fully understand what was happening.

I walked into the dining room. Grandpa Walter was sitting at the table. Sunlight shone through the window and glistened off of his bald head at the top of his tall, slender body.

“Hey, grandpa!” I greeted him. “Do you want to play Rummy with me and Grandma? We are going to play.”

“Eh, sure,” he replied. “But first get me another bottle of RC from the back room.”

He lifted and shook his freshly emptied glass with his skinny, wrinkly hand, causing the remaining ice to clank against the sides.

“Okay,” I said.

I went into the back room, grabbed a bottle from the cupboard, and came back. Something was different. Something was wrong.

The light was much dimmer, almost as if a thick cloud covered the sun. Grandpa seemed shrouded in shadows, and no light glistened off his head.

He was hunched over the table, facing away from me. Frequent shivers ran up and down his spine, which was protruding more than usual. His head kept twitching.

I stood still for a few moments, taken aback by the sight. Eventually, I spoke.

“Grandpa? Are you okay?”

His head spun around at an inhuman speed and he looked at me through eyes of pure blackness. They were accompanied by an evil, twisted grin.

I jumped back, then stood frozen in place. It felt as if my mind and soul were captured by this man, and that nothing was hidden from him.

But he was not a man. He was not my grandfather.

“Hello, Joshua,” he said.

It was almost Grandpa Walter’s voice, but not quite. It was deeper and more contorted. It made me shiver and put a bad feeling in my stomach. I was scared witless and felt like I was going to puke, but I couldn’t move.

“Now, now,” he said. “Don’t be rude. Come say hello. It’s time for you to meet me. I may be a guest, but I’ll be sticking around for some time. I’ve got some work to do, and I want to tell you all about it. After all, I’m about to shake your pretty little world.”

I remained where I was, staring wide eyed and opened jawed at this thing before me.

“Very well,” he said. “I will come to you.”

He shot up from the chair and was immediately leering over me. I don’t even remember seeing a blur of movement.

At that moment, Grandma Joan rushed into the room.

“What’s going on?” she cried.

And then she saw that sickening, grinning face looking back at her.

“Good,” he said. “Now I can introduce myself to both of you. Hello.” He put his right hand out towards Grandma Joan as she walked around him to stand with me. “I’m a demon. Nice to meet you.”

He paused and grinned wider, causing the room to seem even darker. He looked down at me and, with that same hand he had been holding out towards Grandma, stroked my hair.

Then he looked back at Grandma, who was now holding me close to her side, and continued, “Let’s get to know one another. My name is Altshaimon, but you can call me Al. I am possessing this man, Walter Goodin, and destroying his mind. After a while, he will be dead.” He looked directly into my eyes. “And someday, it may be you, too. Now that I’ve told you a bit about me, let’s hear about you.”

Moving his gaze between us, he acted as if he were waiting for us to say something, but we just stared back at him in shock and fear.

“Still too shy, huh?” he said. “That’s okay. We’ll warm up to each other soon enough. You’ll be seeing a lot more of me than you will of Walter from here on out. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I must return to my office and continue my degenerative work. Have a nice day.”

With that, Grandpa Walter went back to normal and collapsed onto the floor. Grandma hurried to his side, but I just stood in place and continued staring.

“What...what happened?” Grandpa asked.

Tears filled Grandma’s eyes as she looked into his and her lip trembled.

Fear then filled Grandpa’s eyes and he asked, “What’s wrong?”

It was some time before Grandma and I could speak again. Grandma held Grandpa close to her, but I crawled into the back room and began to cry. I didn’t understand what was happening.

Grandma soon called a family meeting to figure out what should be done about Al. Motivated by fear and concern, all of the children and some of the grandchildren came.

Grandma and I told them what had happened as best as we could, and they were all mortified. They felt completely defenseless against Al, but they had to try to do something.

One of the best pastors around, Pastor Moss, was called in. The children begged him, pleaded with him, and tried to bribe him to cast the demon out of Grandpa, but the good pastor needed no such persuasions. He had experience with this sort of thing, and he wanted to help. If anybody could do it, he could.

Pastor Moss was a balding man in his 60's of average height. He wore wire rimmed glasses that set on a kind face that brought forth a deep, friendly voice to match it.

He walked into the house like he knew exactly what to do. I vaguely remember seeing a halo of light surrounding him as he came through the door. I believed that Pastor Moss could help my Grandpa.

As the pastor was walking through the house, Grandpa was sitting in his rocking chair watching *Bonanza*. I jumped into a hiding spot behind the couch and looked at Grandpa. As best as I could tell from where I was, he looked pretty normal. For a moment, I doubted anything was wrong with him anymore.

Then the pastor walked into the room.

Immediately, Grandpa's eyes went dark, and so did the room. In a blur, his head turned to look at Pastor Moss.

"I've been expecting you, Moss," Al said sinisterly. "I know what you have come to do, and it won't work. Trust me, I have been doing this for a very, very long time." The twisted grin returned.

"And so have I, demon," the pastor said confidently. "And I have the power of the Lord Jesus Christ on my side!"

Al frowned and hissed at the mention of that name.

"That may be," Al replied, "but you are still not yet ready to face me. No one is. No one can stop me."

"In all my years, He has not failed me yet."

"'Yet' being the key word." The grin came back, wider than before. "But you misunderstand me. It is not 'He' I am talking about. It is you. *You* are not ready. All your schooling, all your studying, and all your preaching and experience still have not brought you to where you need to be to cast me out. You may be in service to your Master and belong to Him, but you are still an imperfect little stain in the massive rug that is the universe. Trust me, I've seen the universe."

“Enough of this! It’s time to end your control over this poor man.”

Without further delay, Pastor Moss began reciting Scripture, calling out Altshaimon by his name, and doing whatever it was he was supposed to do.

Al did not let that go on for long. He scowled and began trembling and hissing.

“Silence!” he screamed, making my eardrums feel as if they would burst.

The darkness in the room became thicker. And when Pastor Moss would not stop, Al, in an instant, got up from the chair, slid over to where the pastor was, and grabbed him by the throat. Pastor Moss choked and could not continue speaking.

“When I tell you to do something, you damn well better do it!” the demon threatened, staring straight into the pastor’s eyes.

For the first time, Pastor Moss seemed afraid. Yet he managed to hold the demon’s gaze.

After a few moments, Al let go of Pastor Moss and said, “Now, let’s try this again. Your task is impossible, so you are going to leave. You will never meet me again. Understood?”

I really admire that pastor, for even after all that, he picked right up where he had left off before Al grabbed him. Pastor Moss did not look as confident as before, but he did not look like he was going to give up either. He still had faith.

Anger and hatred dominated the demon’s expression and the room became dark as night. The atmosphere in the room became almost unbearable. I wanted to run far, far away, but I was too scared to try to run past the demon.

“I’m going to count to six,” the demon said, his voice hard. “If by that time you have not shut up, I will kill you. One!”

The pastor continued.

“Two!”

Still he continued.

“Three!”

He got louder.

“Four!”

They both go louder.

“Five!”

The pastor sped up, great fear apparent on his face.

“Six!”

The pastor stopped, closed his eyes, and lifted his face. His expression suddenly changed, as if he were at peace. He opened his arms and waited for a strike.

And a strike came swiftly. The pastor flew through the doorway and landed on the floor in the next room, where he remained motionless.

All was silent as Al stared at Pastor Moss' body.

After a few moments, he said, "Now that's better."

He walked back to the rocking chair and sat down. Then all traces of him, darkness and all, vanished. Grandpa's body went limp and he looked exhausted as he stared at the TV, but he had no knowledge of what had just taken place.

Those poor men. Grandpa possessed by a homicidal demon, and Pastor Moss with several broken ribs and a potentially shaken confidence. Unlike Grandfather, the pastor survived an encounter with Al.

Where's my dog? I got him when I was just a boy. He's always been a friend and a nuisance. I know he's got to be around here somewhere. He doesn't run away anymore.

I'm going to go call for him. I'll be right back.

I'm back. I forgot what I was doing. Sorry. I'll get back to the story.

Over the next few years, Grandpa's reasoning and temperament got steadily worse. His requests and punishments made less and less sense. His mind declined dramatically.

He would often forget where he was and who his family was. He would wake up in the mornings thinking he had to go to a wedding and did not feel prepared. Or he would think he had a baby and would worry because he thought he lost it.

But most of the time, I did not even see Grandpa. Al himself would show up and treat us terribly. What little control Grandpa had left prevented Al from abusing us, but it was still very difficult to deal with.

I did not fully understand the situation at the time. I was young and stupid. I became angry at Grandpa for letting Al take over his mind and do such ridiculous and mean things. Why didn't he fight back? I would yell at Grandpa and rebel against him, which I am sure amused Al very much. I even went so far as to say I hated Grandpa and would call him things no boy should ever call his grandfather.

I was so stupid!

Grandpa still loved me, but I did not see it then. And I did not love him back. At least, not like I should have.

In the end, Al damaged Grandpa's brain to such a degree that his body and mind practically ceased to function. He was thin as a twig, and his skin was as pale as the moon. All he could do was lie on his death bed and appear as if he had already died.

This is almost the only way I can remember him anymore. It's all I can do to remember the fun we had fishing and the way he used to scold me out of love and not insanity. Basically, his ways of saying, "I love you, Josh. Grow up strong and respectful."

The day Grandpa died was a silent, mournful day. Everyone cried.

It was so odd knowing he just wasn't here anymore. He was gone from the only world I have ever known.

It didn't help that my dog had also died the day before. It was a difficult time for me.

I remember clearly the moment before Grandpa died. I was leaning close, looking intently with all hope to find some life. Someone, I'm not sure if it was Grandpa or Al, whispered in my ear, "And someday, it may be you, too."