

What If . . . Your Past Came Back to Haunt You

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AS HALEY CONTINUES her junior year, choices abound. Until now, Haley's past life in California has been mostly a mystery—but that's about to change. Haley has some juicy secrets that are about to become public knowledge. Will they destroy her social standing—or will the faint whiff of scandal make her even more popular? It all depends on the choices *you* make in this popular interactive series.

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Editorial Review

About the Author
Liz Ruckdeschel was raised in Hillsdale, New Jersey, where *What If* . . . is set. She graduated from Brown University with a degree in religious studies and worked in set design in the film industry before turning her attention toward writing. She currently lives in Los Angeles.

Sara James has been an editor at *Men's Vogue,* has covered the media for *Women's Wear Daily,* has been a special projects producer for *The Charlie Rose Show,* and has written about fashion for *InStyle* magazine. Sara graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with a degree in English literature. She grew up in Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, where her parents have owned a surf shop since 1973. She lives in New York and Los Angeles.

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GOODNESS GRACIOUS

Sweetness comes in many forms, but it's usually best when mixed with spice.

"What's this?" Haley Miller gasped in an exaggerated tone, moving aside to let her next-door neighbors, the Highlands, into the house. Barbara Highland was carrying a foil-covered pie in each hand, and notes of cinnamon, toasted pecans and caramelized apples wafted through the air in her wake. "I can't believe my nose," Haley added with mock outrage. "Joan Miller allowing processed sugar to darken her doorway? I never thought I'd see the day!"

"Very funny." Joan smirked. "Don't worry, the sugar ban is lifted on holidays," she assured Mrs. Highland.

Barbara was followed closely by her doting husband, Oliver, and their very smart and very crushable son, Reese. A junior like Haley, Reese was captain of the soccer and track teams and was on the short list to be next year's class president, prom king and valedictorian. Haley suddenly remembered she was still wearing her long auburn hair in a messy ponytail and quickly yanked out the elastic. She then turned and gave Reese a not-too-eager hello that, while making it clear he was on her turf now, was still casual and welcoming.

Today was Thanksgiving, after all. That morning, Mrs. Highland had called in a panic to say that their oven was on the fritz and their turkey still raw and cold. Naturally, the Millers had invited the Highlands to share in their bounty. Joan and Perry Miller then roasted not one but two free-range turkeys and prepared a spread of organic vegetables; Barbara Highland would provide pies and other desserts, which, luckily, she had prepared the night before, pre–oven fiasco.

"Happy Thanksgiving!" Barbara said brightly. "It smells wonderful in here!"

Haley took a chilly cherry cobbler from Reese's hands and set it on the back of the stove to warm. Reese trailed her, looking over her shoulder somewhat suspiciously at the array of baked winter squash and pan-fried brussels sprouts. "Guess this means no candied yams with mini-marshmallows and canned whipped cream?" he asked.

Haley shook her head. "We do have gluten-free apple cake," she offered. "And Mom's special pumpkin

pudding. It's sweetened with cane juice instead of sugar and tastes . . . earthy."

"Mmmm, earthy," Reese replied, feigning enthusiasm.

"You should count yourself lucky," Haley warned. "One year, Mom decided to 'experiment' by serving a braised tofu mold in the shape of a bird."

"Youch." Reese grimaced, then laughed.

Haley was glad they were clicking. She'd known Reese for over a year now, and had felt very close to him at times, but still wasn't totally convinced he shared certain sentiments. Even during their most revealing exchanges, Reese always held a part of himself back. Sometimes it seemed as if Haley had to get to know him all over again each time they were together. She loved the idea of spending Thanksgiving with the Highlands, but at the same time, all this cozy intimacy made her nervous. How would Reese behave tomorrow? Or the following Monday back at school?

"Well, I for one am anti-tofu on Thanksgiving," Reese announced. "Could you imagine the pilgrims and Indians sitting down to a meal of seitan protein and green tea powder? Being vegan is not what this holiday is all about."

Haley sensed her opening. "So tell me, who brought the marshmallows and aerosol whipped cream to the first Thanksgiving—was it the pilgrims or the Indians?"

Reese smiled sheepishly as Haley handed him a stack of plates. "Come on, help me set the table," she said, locking eyes with him. "You can tell me all about how the Wampanoag invented spray cheese."

"You jest, Miller, but cans of that stuff appear in cave drawings not far from Plymouth Rock."

Haley could hardly believe she had been dreading Thanksgiving this year. Just yesterday, her best-case scenario had been a moderately moist pile of white and dark meat laden with unlumpy gravy, followed by the usual fuss over her seven-year-old brother, Mitchell, who would undoubtedly be sucking up all the attention in the room or robotically disassembling whatever piece of electronics he could get his pudgy little fingers on. Haley's grandmother Gam Polly had decided to skip the festivities this year in favor of a trip to Barbados with her new boyfriend, Harvey Pickleman, so not even Gam would be there to lift Haley's spirits.

But suddenly, things were looking up. Like, way up. In fact, this was quite possibly the most fun Haley had ever had setting the table.

"Dinner's almost ready," Joan called out as the Miller-Highland crew filed into the dining room. Mitchell buzzed down the stairs dressed in a smallish navy blazer and one of Perry's old wide flowered ties, picking up a serving spoon to use as his mike and proclaiming, "Welcome to a Very Miller Thanks- giving Feast. Tonight's guests are . . . Reese Highland! Mr. Highland! The lovely and talented Mrs. Highland! And your hosts, the Miller family, starring me, Mitchell Miller! Yay! Yay!" He ran around the table making his own crowd noises.

"Don't mind him. He's been on this talk-show-host trip lately," Haley explained to a bemused Reese. "His role models tend to be your Mervs and Mike Douglases, the nineteen seventies guys, but once in a while he'll go off on a Letterman kick."

“Thank you, Mitchell,” Barbara Highland said indulgently, “for the excellent introduction.”

Joan took her place at the table and grabbed a wooden serving spoon. “Mitchell, let’s try not to pester our guests.” She was about to dive into the mashed potatoes with olive oil and rosemary when Mr. Highland interrupted.

“Shall we say a holiday grace?” Oliver asked, and Barbara and Reese bowed their heads in unison. Joan frowned, her spoon in midair. Haley worried for a moment that her mother might object to this suggestion. Prayer was not common in the Miller household, even on holidays. It wasn’t that Haley’s parents had ruled out the existence of a higher power. But they had both been undergrad science majors, and they still saw enough beauty in Darwin and nature to feel spiritually satisfied. The Millers also shared a mutual distrust of organized religion’s collection plates, blind logic and shaming tactics. Nevertheless, Haley and Mitchell had been taught to respect their friends’ and neighbors’ and family members’ beliefs and never to stand in the way of anyone’s chosen traditions.

Users Review

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