

**Episode Three: Stasis**  
**By Kittsbud**  
**Part One**

The warm Arizona breeze ruffled through the carefully sculptured bushes, invoking a gentle rustling, as if someone or something has brushed past them. It was nighttime, and not one single cloud stained the heavens above the institute. Silence filled the desert, just like the unholy silence from within the recently constructed building.

Its walls were stark gray, the perfectly tended greenery in its grounds contrasting totally with the structure's outer image. This was a place that gave away little as to what carried on behind its thick, concrete walls.

To a passer-by on the highway it could easily be mistaken for some big-shot corporation's office building, but it was more- much more.

A name plaque, carefully placed among the greenery may have given some clue as to what the institute really strived for, but few people ever visited or got close enough to read it.

This place was rarely visited, and those who were brought here, never left.

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Phil Garrett munched on a packet of his favorite chips and opened up his newspaper. He was on the night shift, and it was truly like being in a graveyard. Nothing ever happened here, not ever. He sometimes joked to his wife that he got paid for nothing, but in truth it was no joke. All he had to do to pick up his wages every week was sit in a small office and watch a few gauges.

Sure, he was supposed to walk the grounds a few times and check on his 'people,' but he rarely did. It wasn't like they were going anywhere.

Phil opened up his paper, ignoring the main headline to focus on more local gossip. He shook his head, 'no' as he read an article about some superstitious hocus pocus in the neighbouring town of Sedona. The headline clearly stated 'LOCALS TERRIFIED BY UNKNOWN ANIMAL.' "What is this world coming to?" He grumbled, munching on another chip with a chuckle.

He turned over the page, looking for something a little more down to earth, but today's issue didn't even have any good sports news. Annoyed, Phil screwed up the local and tossed it in the nearby waste bin. He was tempted to go ask for his money back, but instead he finally noticed a gauge flashing out of the corner of his eye.

Phil glanced at his watch and realized his mistake. He should have checked everything at least a half an hour ago and now he was going to get chewed out if this was a real emergency.

The light blinked at him, taunting him for his misjudgment. Then, another, and another began to flash in unison. Finally, an alarm klaxon began to blurt out, filling the whole structure and the surrounding desert with an eerie wail.

"Shit!" Phil clambered from his seat and double-checked every gauge. He tugged out a soiled keyboard, bringing up more detailed information, but it all clarified the same thing- there was a nitrogen leak and the emergency system had yet to kick in. Temperatures within the institute's containment system were rising.

Phil tapped at the keys, trying desperately to bring the emergency system back up, but it refused his every command. Breathing heavily, he took another look at the time before picking up a red phone on the desk. The wall clock read 12:05a.m.

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Jerry Devin slipped off his jacket and loosened his tie. It had been a hard day at the office, and now he just wanted to relax. He flicked the light switch, making the wall lamps dim to just the right ambience, and then placed more wood on the fire.

Flames danced and small embers rose from the blaze, lighting up the room just a little more.

Jerry nodded, satisfied, and moved to a small bar he kept fully stocked. It was time for a quick Scotch while he checked over some work files on his laptop. The Glenmorangie ebbed into his tumbler, and he sipped, savoring the single malt to its fullest.

Jerry was only twenty-six, but he was already at the top of the league in his field. Being the best meant he could afford many luxuries like this- the apartment, the lifestyle.

He sighed, clicking on his hi-tech music center to add a little more mood to the scene. In his teenage years he'd preferred rock, but now, just like everything else, his musical tastes had matured. Ravel ebbed from the multitude of well-placed speakers in the apartment, and Jerry finally took a seat on his leather sofa, opening his laptop and booting it up.

After a short pause the correct folder appeared, and he reached out a thumb to click on the touch pad. Without warning, a spike of cold shot down his spine as if a frozen finger had traced its way down his back.

Jerry shuddered, finding himself compelled to take another sip of Scotch just for the warmth it imbued. The drink, however, did little to restore heat to his body. In fact, he felt even colder, as if he'd been dunked in a bath full of ice.

He shivered again, this time finding it hard to prevent his cooling muscles from quivering. "What the?" Jerry quickly got to his feet, grabbing the nearby poker and prodded the flames to instill more warmth to the room.

Nothing. Instead of rising, the flames seemed to be getting smaller, like something was having a dampening effect on them. Worse still, the temperature in the room was continuing to drop.

Jerry reached to grab his jacket back, but before his hand could touch the expensive garment, a soft rapping noise signaled someone was at the door.

Jerry paused, unsure what to think. He wasn't expecting any visitors, and he was sure the room was getting unnaturally cool. A thought struck him, and he voiced it aloud. "Maybe the apartment block's climate control isn't working? Maybe they sent out an engineer." It was a silly assumption for someone with his intellect but easier to accept than the other possibility that something paranormal was going on.

Jerry swallowed hard and only then noticed that Ravel had somehow been replaced with another song- even though he hadn't touched the music system.

'You're as cold as ice....someday you'll pay the price...'

Jerry instantly recognized the song as a Foreigner track, but it was impossible that it could be playing right now. He didn't own one single Foreigner CD. Annoyed, he ignored the knocking at the door and picked up the remote for his system.

He clicked, forcing the CD player to skip to the next track.

*'Cold as ice, you know that you are  
Cold, cold, as, as, ice, as cold as ice to me'*

Jerry felt the cold tentacle weave down his spine again, and this time it scared him. Suddenly, he wanted to speak to the person at the door. He wanted contact with someone, anyone, because he was terrified.

As he crossed the room, he kept his gaze firmly fixed on the entrance to his home, afraid to look around for what he might see. Should he have turned, he would have noted a thin white sheen of ice forming on every window and glass surface in the apartment.

The ice grew thicker, until finally a layer formed on the CD player's lens and the music stopped.

"Thank God," Jerry mumbled as he fumbled to unlatch the door. The music had spooked him, and now that it had ceased he could deal with the engineer outside in a little more coherent manner.

He flicked the handle down and yanked back the wooden frame just a little too quickly. What awaited was not an engineer.

Jerry screamed, but his pitiful cry was somehow stifled by the thing that now enveloped his body like a blanket. He stumbled backwards, arms flailing, but there was no escape from the cold that now held him.

Seconds later, Jerry's stiff corpse fell to the plush carpet in his room, his eyes staring wildly, frozen solid. On the wall, a gold embellished clock stopped ticking at exactly his time of death- 12:05a.m.

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Dean Winchester twiddled his thumbs atop the Impala's steering wheel as he raced along the I-40 out of Arizona. He was heading the Chevy to California for a second break in as many months- mainly because Sam still thought they weren't ready for the real deal after the accident in Missouri.

*Right...* Dean scoffed to himself as he thought about what they had just fought.

The brothers had just finished a gig just south of Sedona, and to say it hadn't exactly gone to plan was pretty much an understatement.

The case had meant to have been their first real gig after Dean's recovery from some pretty horrific injuries, and according to Sam it should have been an easy one. Black Shuck he had said. Just a dog spirit he had said.

Dean rolled his eyes as he thought about the demon-eyed monster they had just sent back to hell, wondering how it could ever be considered any kind of dog. Still, it had given him the chance to prove he was back on form and back to his old self. The scars on his chest still ached, and sometimes if he caught a blow the wrong way he was easily winded, but Dean was still back in action. Back to killin' spook ass every chance he got.

Sam on the other hand, well, Sam was a different matter. Since leaving Bobby's, he'd done nothing but worry about his big brother getting back on track too soon and fret over their old friend Zack Murzak. They still hadn't heard from the cantankerous demon expert, and after about a hundred calls Sam was convinced Murzak was no longer in the land of the living.

In fact, Sam hadn't said much on the drive through the Mohave Valley as Dean poured on the gas, and to Dean that meant his brother was moping big time.

"Sammy, are you ever gonna stop playing with that phone and talk to me?" Dean shot his brother a look and then put his eyes back on the road. "Geez, I even turned off the rock and you still sulk."

Sam frowned. "I'm not sulking. I'm reading." He held up the cell phone that seconded as a PDA. "I've been getting e-mails..."

Dean wiggled his eyebrows suggestively and then grinned. "Right. Here's me thinking you're on a downer, and you're actually chatting with some hot chick, huh?"

"Nope," Sam countered, "Sarah is the only 'hot chick' I talk to after Meg, remember?" He gestured with his thumb to the roadside. "Pull over, this is weird."

Dean checked his mirror. There wasn't another vehicle in sight, so he pulled the Chevy over to the edge of the desert highway. Killing the ignition, he waited expectantly to hear what had gotten his brother so interested. When Sam continued to scroll through what was on the phone, he coughed. "Ahem, care to share your revelation, Geek boy?"

"The e-mails are from a random web mail address. Basically, they could be from anyone." Sam reached for the back seat of the Impala and quickly plucked their laptop from a hold all. He clicked a button, transferring the e-mails over so Dean

could see all the files they'd received more easily on a larger screen. "Our anonymous friend wants us to check out three deaths in Barstow, California."

"Our kinda deaths? You think Dad sent it?" Dean shook his head. "Sam, we've been through this before. The man can't manage an e-mail!"

"Right, you said that about a text message and..." He let the sentence trail a moment to get his point across. "Anyway, the gist of this is, the deaths are baffling the local cops. Take a look." He swiveled the laptop over so the screen was visible to Dean. "All three victims were found dead in their homes- frozen to death. It says here that the bodies looked like they'd been in a meat locker all night, although the coroner won't confirm anything yet."

Dean continued reading where his brother left off. He'd gone from mildly annoyed to interested in less than two seconds. People didn't just freeze to death in desert territory. "Look at this. It says the last victim even had a fire blazing in his hearth! The dude must have been whacked out in this heat..."

Sam shook his head. "People with his kind of money have open fires just for effect. They let the climate control do its job. The fire is to impress."

Dean's eyes widened slightly and he smiled. "Ah, I get it. Chicks dig an open fire..." He shook himself and continued reading. "According to this there were no signs of foul play, and the only lead the cops have is of a woman on CCTV footage outside the victim's door, shortly before his death."

"You thinking spirit?" Sam asked, reading the final report a third time.

Dean scowled. "Honestly, I don't know. I mean the freezing thing, I've never seen anything like it before, not even in Dad's journal. One thing we can be sure of is this is our kinda gig." He waited, hoping his brother would finally stop playing mother hen and let them get back into the game.

Sam didn't disappoint. "We need to find the girl. If she's the only lead she could be part of this."

Dean inhaled. "From the looks of these reports, finding her isn't going to be that easy. The cops aren't releasing the video footage of her until the local crime lab has finished analyzing it. That could take days."

"We could ignore the mails, but if they're from Dad..." Sam knew Dean wouldn't normally be able to resist an order from their father, but after the recent strain on their relationship it would be interesting to see his next move.

"Or," Dean offered, "we could get the video footage by other means." A smile grew on his face from ear to ear, and he restarted the Impala without explaining further. He didn't have to. They were headed for Barstow and the local crime lab.

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### **San Bernardino Crime Lab 11:54p.m.**

Dean pulled the Impala up to the curb a good distance from the building and cut the engine. He'd chosen a spot in the shadows where the car's dark color hid it to all except the keen-eyed observer. It was better this way, because just walking into the crime lab and masquerading as a C.S.I. or technician wasn't really viable. Neither he nor Sam had the relevant knowledge should they get questioned by other staff members.

"You sure this is going to work?" Sam didn't sound convinced as he watched his brother pull a satchel over from the rear seat. "I mean, breaking in is a little radical..." *I should go with him. He's not ready after the accident...*

Dean sighed. He knew damn well Sam was fretting again but he really couldn't see another option to get the video footage. And besides, he had no intention of being baby-minded by his little brother for the rest of his life. He'd managed to find out from one of his police 'girls' that the tape was in senior investigator Jack Worrell's office being worked on, and getting in there as an outside contractor just wasn't going

to be possible. Nope, Dean was going in solo. He'd made his mind up about it and Sammy wasn't going to convince him otherwise.

Worrell apparently had a reputation that made TV's Gil Grissom look like a pussycat. The man was meticulous to the point of insanity- even about security in his labs. That little fact made it even more of a challenge for Dean to prove himself.

"Trust me, I can do this," Dean offered with more confidence than he actually felt. "There's a fire exit I can get in through with just a little help." He wafted a few tools from inside the satchel. "I got the camera layout from dad's friend Mel while you were snoozing on the ride over," he explained. "There's only one camera in that corridor. It should be a breeze..."

Sam wasn't buying it. "Then why am I staying outside again?" He raised a brow when Dean didn't answer. "Oh right, so I can come play out the cavalry rescue when you get your butt busted in there."

Dean grinned. "Twenty bucks says I make it out with the tape." He pushed open the door and hopped out, taking the bag of tools with him.

"Yeah, you mean the twenty bucks you still owe me from last week, jerk!" Sam mouthed after his brother as Dean melted into the darkness. Then, just as a precaution he turned on the police scanner that was carefully mounted out of sight under the dash. It was better to be safe than sorry, and if he did need to play rescue, he'd at least know the cops were coming.

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Dean jogged across the crime lab's parking lot, dodging from shadow to shadow to keep out of sight. The lot had surveillance, just like inside the building, but he knew where the cameras were placed and kept well away from them. Mel had expert knowledge in all kinds of security systems and had informed him that any place had weak spots if you knew where to look.

"You better be right, Mel, or I'm gonna be paying Sammy boy his twenty back." Dean whispered to himself as he scooted down a side alley and came to the infamous fire exit. Now it was time to go to work with the tools. Like any lock, Dean had it cracked in under a couple of minutes.

He looked from left to right and then pulled back carefully with the hook he had placed through the hole he'd drilled. The exit gave way smoothly and he glanced inside. Worrell's office was just a few yards down the corridor he'd gained access to but then so was the camera.

"One wrong move and I get to be star for a day at the local police department," he quipped, waiting for the camera to swivel in the opposite direction.

It seemed painfully slow to turn, but once it had panned away, Dean took a dive for Worrell's office door, lock picking tools in one hand and a flashlight in the other.

He began to pant as exertion and adrenalin kicked in, and for a second he wondered if he really was fit enough. This was almost as exhilarating as a 'hunt,' and he was already breathless from running across the lot- not something that would have happened before the demon-inflicted injuries.

Two more seconds and he was shutting the office door behind him and flicking on his light. He kept the beam well away from the door, hoping it would help avoid detection from any passerby.

"Okay, Grissom wannabe, where do you keep the projects you're working on?" Dean noted a set up in the corner that was obviously for watching and editing video footage. It looked pretty technical, digital stuff.

Glancing over his shoulder, he headed for it and began to search around. There was apparently no place to insert a security video, but the bank did have several disc drives. Atop one sat several labeled jewel cases.

Dean quickly sifted through them until he found what he was looking for. "Right, Grissom wouldn't keep the master copy here. It's probably locked away somewhere

tight, but this will do just as good.” He flipped the disc into his top pocket. “Twenty bucks coming my way, Sammy boy!”

“Sammy boy may have to wait to pay that debt.” The lights suddenly flickered on, and Dean found he was looking straight down the barrel of a police issue revolver. “Do you realize the penalty for breaking in here and trying to steal evidence?” As he spoke, the man moved to a nearby desk and picked up the phone on it, calling for security.

“Hey, I wasn’t stealing it. I was just borrowing, honest.” Dean thought about bolting for the door, but he could tell the man he was dealing with was no pushover. In fact, he suspected it was Worrell.

“You won’t be so quick to joke when you’re locked up in the state pen, young man.” The investigator scrutinized his captive as if he was a specimen to be dissected. “What were you after, the Grissetti footage?” As he spoke, a security guard entered. Worrell nodded to him. “Search this piece of trash. I caught him red handed in here.”

The guard didn’t speak but quickly began to frisk Dean as he’d been ordered.

“Hey, keep your hands off the merchandise!” Dean gave in and offered up the disc with a frown. “Like I said, I was just borrowing it. Daytime TV sucks, so I thought I’d try something a little more action packed, ya know?” The quip earned him a dirty look from both the guard and Worrell, but he shrugged it off.

Worrell took the disc back, checking to see what files it held. He was surprised to see it was the Devin case and not Grissetti. “You broke in here for this? Are you nuts?”

Dean shrugged again, his eyes twinkling with mirth. “According to some of my friends that’s debatable, but I’m a nice kinda nuts, honest.”

Worrell sighed. He hated wise-asses, and he was obviously dealing with one. “I’ll let the police deal with you from here. An officer has already been dispatched to take you downtown, so you might want to think about telling us what you’re really here for. Why not start with your name?”

Another grin. “Houdini...that’s with an H...”

“Actually, your real name is Winchester. Dean Winchester to be precise. What’s more, you’re a wanted felon...”

Dean whirled to face the voice. As if things weren’t bad enough being caught, his past was now catching up with him too.

As he turned, Dean realized he should have owned the voice. Across the room, standing in the doorway, was Sam. He flashed a badge and introduced himself as Detective Sergeant Jagger from the Barstow police department.

Dean almost couldn’t keep a straight face and had to stifle a bout of laughter. It wasn’t that Sam’s façade was a bad one, it wasn’t even that he’d used the name Jagger after Mick Jagger from the Stones- it was the fact that Sam now sported a rather large moustache.

Worrell hadn’t picked up the fact that neither the name nor the moustache were genuine. “You got here pretty quickly. And I rang the San Bernardino police, not Barstow?”

Sam nodded. “Yes, Sir, but I’ve been tracking Winchester here and I was pretty close when your call came through. If you’d like to check me out, and check out Winchester’s record...” Sam pointed to Worrell’s desktop.

Worrell nodded and took a seat. He quickly pulled up police records and typed in the name Winchester. Various files appeared until he found the relevant one with Dean’s picture. “This says deceased...but it’s obviously our man here.”

Sam agreed. “We obviously got it wrong about his demise. You might want to check me out while you’re on there.” He reeled off a badge number which Worrell promptly typed in.

Dean leaned forward, amazed at his brother's audacity. To his amazement, a picture of a cop who looked pretty much like Sam appeared onscreen- complete with moustache. He shot his brother a look that said 'how the hell?' but remained silent.

Worrell seemed satisfied. He scratched his head. "Do you have jurisdiction to take this guy off my hands?"

"Yes, Sir," Sam nodded, producing a pair of cuffs. "I think eventually they'll want him back in St Louis, but for now I have a few charges of my own." He smirked at Dean, and as he tugged on the cuffs, leaned in and whispered, "Like twenty bucks for starters..."

Dean grimaced, but eyed the disc now sitting on the edge of Worrell's desk. They really couldn't leave without it, or the gig was over. He shot Sam a look and then glanced at their target.

Sam indicated he'd spotted it and then yanked at the cuffs for good effect. "Let's go, Winchester."

"Not really!" Dean pushed at Sam and made a dash for the door, hands still manacled behind his back. Sam gave chase, knocking Dean sideways right beside Worrell's desk. When the scuffle was over, the disc had found a new home in Sam's pocket.

"Need a hand to your car?" The guard asked, eager to join the fray. Sam shook his head. He really didn't need company.

"Guess you're not exactly Houdini after all, are you, Bucko?" Worrell sniggered as Sam yanked Dean roughly back to his feet, hoping desperately not to jar his scars.

"Don't bet on it, Grissom." Dean smirked back cheekily as Sam pushed him quickly through the door and out into the corridor.

A minute later, they were exiting the main entrance, and Sam was sweating like mad. So mad, his moustache was beginning to peel at one edge.

"Dude, you're fugly with that thing stuck on your face." Dean teased his brother. "You look like some perverted version of Groucho Marx."

Sam continued to push Dean as if he were a prisoner until they rounded the street corner and then quickly undid the handcuffs. "Yeah, well Groucho just saved your butt, so cut the crap and get in the car before the real cops arrive."

Dean's brow furrowed. "You came in there knowing a unit had been dispatched? Are you nuts? What if they'd arrived before we got out?"

Sam tugged off the extra facial hair and winced as the glue stuck on one corner. "I guess the cavalry would have bit dust too. Now will you get in!"

Dean hopped into the Impala just as a regular police cruiser turned the corner and stopped outside the area crime lab. As he started the engine he looked at Sam hopefully. "Just tell me you got the disc, Groucho?"

Sam waved the jewel case in the air. "Cavalry to the rescue," he beamed. "Oh, and by the way, you still owe me that twenty bucks."

"Yeah, bite me." Dean hit the gas, pulling a one-eighty to head back to their motel.

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### **Good Nite Inn, Barstow**

Dean bounced carefully onto the bottom of his bed and tugged open the brother's trusty laptop. It was time to check out the security footage and make some deductions. He clicked open the DVD drive and popped in the stolen disc, tapping his fingers impatiently on the side casing while he waited for it to load.

"So, just how the hell did you trick that cop back there? I mean, the whole I.D. thing was pretty freaky." Dean looked as his brother smirked back at him.

"C'mon, Dean, you're not the only one who can steal a cop's badge number. I just happen to check out the cop's photo first..."

Dean huffed. Sam was pointing out his mistake after he'd stolen a badge, only to find out later that the cop was in fact a black guy who weighed a whole lot more than he did. "Okay, so you're smart, but how did you get a Barstow cop's badge so fast?"

Sam laughed. "I didn't. The badge I flashed was one of our regular homemade jobs. Worrell never checked to see if the number I gave him matched. All I did was hack into Barstow P.D.'s personnel records and find someone who looked a little like me."

Dean nodded, watching as the DVD software finally kicked in and images began to appear onscreen. "Hence the appearance of Groucho Winchester," he grinned, then became more serious as what they had worked for finally made it onto the panel in front of them.

It was almost entrancing to watch.

At first, there was nothing outside Devin's apartment. Then, as they viewed the disc, a seemingly vaporous figure began to emerge from the shadows. It was clearly a woman, but she seemed to have no real substantial form. Her body, arms and legs seemed to fade in and out, glowing an eerie incandescent white as she began to rap on the door.

Her features were blank- cold almost, as she continued to tap, tap, tap outside the apartment.

"Man, no wonder the cops didn't release this to the press. They don't know what they're dealing with," Dean commented, checking the video's time stamp to see if anything appeared to have been tampered with.

"Do we know what we're dealing with?" Sam wasn't sure. He'd seen plenty of true spirits and demons in his time, but this girl somehow looked different. There was an aura about her that defied understanding.

Dean shrugged his shoulders as the apparition on screen abruptly vanished like a fog through Devin's open door. "She has to be some kind of spirit." He shook his head. "But there's something about this bitch..."

Sam agreed. "Yeah, that's how I feel too. We need to find out who she is. Why she's coming back..."

"I'm thinking maybe some kind of crime of passion, or maybe a murder and rape case. I mean, all three of her victims were guys, right?" Dean jerked his thumb towards a six-pack, indicating for Sam to toss him one over.

"That's just too easy." Sam shook his head, then pulled a bottle of Coors free and lobbed it across the room. "And why is she freezing these guys? There has to be some kind of significance to that."

Dean caught the bottle expertly and frowned. "We have to find her through the victims. They have to be connected somehow. He uncapped the beer and took a gulp. "Let's see what the news reports on all three deaths have to say." He tapped away with one hand, opening several windows simultaneously.

After several moments he patted the screen with his forefinger. "Take a look at this. Devin and Friedman both attended the same school. How much you betting if we check it out the third guy went there too?" Dean glanced up at his brother. "Sam, we need a yearbook."

Sam thought about it and gently slid the laptop around, clicking on the keys in rapid succession until he started getting the information he was looking for. "Sometimes high schools have yearbooks, or at least parts of their yearbooks online. I think it's worth checking." He continued to work as Dean watched, sipping his beer while his brother did the work.

"Gotcha!" Sam grinned and swiveled the laptop back just enough so Dean could see the image in the corner of the screen. The picture was obviously the girl in the video footage, although she looked younger, full of life.

"You got a name?" Dean leaned in, looking at the girl's innocent looking features. She didn't look like the kind of person who got picked on in high school- she wasn't model-beautiful exactly, but she was definitely pretty.

“Laura Mitchell. And take a look at this,” Sam hit another key, and this time a group photo appeared. “That’s Devin on the right, and the other two guys in the shot are our first and second victims.”

Dean whistled. “They were friends. That complicates things. Why would she kill her best buddies? Is there anything on there about what happened to Laura? I mean, she has to be dead, right?”

Sam shook his head. “Not on the high school website, but there are two more pictures. She had at least two other friends she always hung around with. Tammy Sheckley and Tina Bywater. Tammy still lives in town.”

Dean nodded, tossing his now empty Coors bottle into the waste bin. “So, we pay Tammy a visit first thing in the morning. For now, can we bring up any local news that might involve Laura? We still need a motive for her to be turning her buds into ice cubes.”

Sam agreed. “Shouldn’t be too hard...” He tapped away again bringing up obituaries and local articles that might be relevant. Eventually, Laura’s name appeared. “Okay, here we go,” Sam nodded to himself and then read aloud what he’d found. “Laura Mitchell died over eight years ago after suffering a heart attack after a Halloween outing with friends. Teachers at her local school said Laura was a well liked girl who did well in all her subjects.”

Dean’s brow creased. “Heart attack at that age? You know what the doc said about that back in Nebraska. Heart attacks so young are pretty rare...something’s not right here, Sam.”

“So,” Sam closed the laptop and grabbed two more beers. “I’m guessing we go visit Tammy Sheckley in the morning?”

Dean rubbed his tired eyes, took the beer and lay back on the bed. It was almost morning already. “Yeah, just not too early, Mister Rise and Shine, okay?”

Sam smiled. He did have a tendency to be an early riser, but when you rarely slept at all that wasn’t surprising.

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## **1255 Elm, Tammy Sheckley’s home**

Dean pulled the Impala up outside Tammy’s house and whistled. They’d been told at the local gas station that Elm Street was pretty much an upper class area, but they hadn’t been expecting what they saw now.

The house was like a mini-mansion, complete with extensive grounds and gardens. If Devin’s apartment had seemed luxurious, then this was fit for nothing less than a princess.

“Whoa, welcome to the money mountain.” Dean shook his head. People like this he usually struggled to deal with.

Sam stepped out of the Chevy and looked up at the pure white structure with trailing ivy vines. It reminded him of something from the south in plantation territory. “I guess Tammy isn’t short of cash, if she is short of friends lately.”

Dean slipped from behind the wheel and joined his brother on the driveway. In a way, he was surprised there wasn’t more security here. He tapped Sam on the back. “Come on, Detective Jagger. Time for the cops to pay Miss Sheckley a visit.” He continued up a set of steps as he spoke and quickly rang the doorbell.

After a second or two, a small, blonde maid appeared. “Can I help you, sir?”

Dean stepped forward, flashing a police badge. “I’m Detective Le Roth, and this is my partner, Sergeant Jagger. We were wondering if Miss Sheckley is at home? We have a few questions regarding a recent case.”

The maid appeared surprised but didn’t argue. She slid open the huge white door and ushered the brothers both into a side room. “I’ll let her know you’re here,” she offered politely, before vanishing into the bowels of the house.

Sam took a seat while he waited, but Dean couldn't resist nosing around the room first. "Jeez, this place is freakin' unreal," he noted, spotting a cabinet inset into the wall filled with ancient, antique weaponry.

"You'd like it if they had a suit of armor too," Sam laughed, realizing his brother had zeroed in on the military hardware, totally missing the genuine Turner on the wall above it.

Dean agreed. "Yeah, medieval times were simpler, and those dudes sure knew how to deal with witches and demons back then. It's almost a lost art nowadays."

"What's a lost art these days?" A young, dark haired girl sauntered through the doorway and stood with her hands on her hips peering at them. "Helen says you two are detectives?" She finally asked. "What can I possibly help you with? It's not that two year old speeding ticket again? I promise, I got rid of that car...Ferrari's always ran away with me..."

Sam waved a hand. "Actually, no, it's something a little more serious." He let Tammy take it in and then carried on. "We understand that you went to high school with Jerry Devin?"

Tammy nodded. "Yeah, I knew Jerry. I haven't seen him in years, though."

"And Carl Friedman and Will Jessop?" Dean prompted.

"Yes..." Tammy abruptly became startled. "Is something wrong? Are they alright?"

"I'm afraid all three died recently in rather unusual circumstances. My partner and I think it may be murder." Sam kept his voice soft and low. He had the ability to put anyone at ease with just one sentence.

Still, Tammy wasn't ready for the news. She stepped back quickly, almost stumbling over a chair as shock set in. Dean offered a steadying hand, settling her down on the seat before asking more questions. The best way to get truthful information was while she was upset and off guard.

"I'm sorry to have to push this," Dean offered Tammy a tissue but didn't let his gaze falter as the girl began to shed a tear. "But do you know of any reason why a killer would target your friends?" When Tammy shook her head sullenly he continued. "We think people from your school, your year in fact, are being purposefully targeted..."

Tammy looked up, even more startled than before. A new fear filled her eyes, but she remained silent.

"Can I ask about this photo?" Sam took the lead now, pulling out a crumpled color printout from the high school web site. It had Laura and the three dead men huddled in a group. They looked carefree, full of life and fun. "How well did you know Laura Mitchell?"

"I...we...we were best friends." Tammy stammered, struggling to find words at the sight of her old school pal. "Laura can't have anything to do with the deaths, though. She died a long time ago..." There was sadness to her voice, but an even deeper tinge of dread.

"What happened?" Sam probed gently.

"It was back in ninety-eight. We'd all been to a movie- it was Halloween you see. Laura seemed fine, but after we got back to our dorm she was sick. She died later in the hospital of a heart attack..." As she spoke, Tammy's words quivered, as if she'd struggled to even say them.

Dean shook his head. They were only getting half the picture, and that just wouldn't do. It was pressure time. "Look, Tammy, I hate to do the old good cop, bad cop routine, but what you just fed my partner wasn't exactly the truth now was it? We know Jerry and the other two guys deaths are connected to Laura, and if you want police protection you're going to have to cut the act and tell us the real story." He kept his tone authoritative. "Now what really happened that night?"

Sam gaped a little. He knew Dean usually went for the harsher tactics, but Tammy was in no shape to push around. He shot his brother a look that screamed 'that was

too much' and was amazed when instead of asking them to leave, Tammy cried harder and surrendered to Dean's questioning.

"I knew one day what we did would come back to haunt us," she sniffled using her tissue to wipe excess moisture from her cheeks.

Sam lay a hand on her arm comfortingly. "It's okay, you can tell us," he soothed.

Tammy nodded. She'd carried the burden too long, and now it was time to give it up. "It really was back in October ninety-eight," she explained. "Laura, me and the three guys in your picture were the best of friends. In fact, Laura used to date Jerry. We all decided to have a night out for Halloween, and our first stop was the movies. Laura loved a good horror and used to brag that nothing could ever scare her..."

"So, you went to the movies, then what? Laura didn't die of fright, so what killed her?" Dean was less tactful than his brother, although he was trying not to be out and out rude.

"Laura and I wanted to see Blade, I guess we both had a thing for Wesley Snipes as a sexy vampire slayer. I can still recall us both giggling at some of his lines..." Tammy's eyes seemed to go far away as she reminisced about the night that changed her life forever. "Vampire Anatomy 101, forget what you've seen in the movies. You use a stake, silver or sunlight." She quoted the now old movie and shook her head. "If only the guys had stayed and watched it all with us..."

"But they didn't?" Sam prompted again.

Tammy shook her head. "No, Jerry and Will made some excuse and left halfway through. You see, we'd all planned a little surprise for Laura. She bragged too much about being afraid of nothing, so the guys decided to pull a Michael Myers on her when we got back to the dorm. They had the whole mask and carving knife and everything..."

"A real carving knife?" Dean quizzed, already guessing what the answer would be.

"Yes," Tammy almost burst into tears again, but somehow held it together. "I pretended I'd left my purse in the car so Laura entered our room on her own in the dark. Jerry jumped out with the knife expecting her to scream, but instead she fought him. In the struggle the blade ...the blade got pushed into Laura's chest..."

Dean winced and mouthed the word 'ouch.' "I can understand why you wouldn't want to fess up to the cops back then, but how did you get away with turning a stabbing into a heart attack?"

"It was easy really." Shame appeared on Tammy's face, and she began to fidget with her hands. "In case you haven't noticed my family has money. All our families have- or rather had money. When our fathers arrived at the hospital it wasn't too hard for them to 'buy' the doctor on duty that night. Dear Daddy made a few calls, offered a few bribes, and Laura's parents never knew the truth. It helped our cause that there was no medical report filed with the police and no autopsy was done."

"Are they religious nuts or something?" Dean forgot he was supposed to be a politically correct cop, but Tammy didn't seem to notice.

She shook her head. "Not that I remember, but after that night my parents kept me well away from the Mitchells."

Sam glanced at his brother pensively. Now they had a motive for Laura's return, but why now, after all this time? There was still some kind of catalyst they'd missed. He was about to ask more questions. Perhaps the men involved had inadvertently done something to anger Laura's spirit, but he didn't get chance to probe.

The maid returned, looking worriedly at her boss after hearing the noise of her sobbing. "Is everything alright?" She peered around the door cautiously.

"Everything's fine here." Dean nodded. "Maybe you could get your boss-lady here a brandy, though. I think she needs one."

Helen looked at Tammy, and obviously agreed. She scooted from the room muttering, "I'll be right back with a double..."

"I suppose you're going to arrest me now?" Tammy looked expectantly at both brothers, and neither had an answer. After all, that wasn't really why they were here.

"We erm..." Sam began to quickly think up a suitable lie, but someone began to rap on the front door.

Tammy rose from her seat. "I should get that. I'm expecting someone from the pool maintenance company. I won't try to escape, I promise." She smiled half-heartedly and headed for the door.

As she exited, Dean couldn't help but smile to himself.

"Dean! Do you have to check out every girl we deal with?" Sam frowned, and Dean grinned.

"You're right," he shook his head, "Any girl who goes for Wesley Snipes isn't my type. I mean, the dude was half-vampire. I'd have staked his ass!"

"You mean his heart," Sam pointed out humorously.

Dean pulled a face. "Very funny, Groucho. By the way...didn't you forget...your..." He stopped mid-sentence. Something was wrong and he couldn't quite put his finger on it. Eventually, it hit him. "Sammy, it's getting cold in here..."

Instinctively, Sam looked to the large bay window first to check that none up the upper panels were open. They were not. However, as he watched, each single pane began to frost over. A thin white film formed in each left hand corner and then spread like cancer across the glass. He gulped, nodding for Dean to turn and look.

Dean spun around in his seat, realizing his brother's expression was one of both amazement and dread. By the time he'd moved, the whole bay window was white over, and the room was like sitting in a morgue. To add to the effect, the extremely expensive music system in the adjoining room switched itself on. From nowhere, the tones of Bon Jovi's 'Cold Hard Heart' began to resonate through the house.

"Tammy!" Dean realized in a heartbeat that the girl was walking into a trap.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

The rapping was suddenly all Dean could focus on. They had to stop Tammy from opening the front door, because he was certain the caller was no pool man.

"Tammy!" He yelled again, racing into the corridor like an Olympic sprinter.

Sam joined him. "Don't open the door!" His yell was heartfelt, but far too late.

Tammy slid back the latch, turning to see both Winchesters running towards her and not knowing why. She shook her head as if they were crazy and then pulled back on the lock.

The wooden frame yielded to her touch, and the door swung gracefully back on its hinges. The whole movement appeared to be in slow motion- at least to Dean and Sam.

"No!" Dean screamed and Tammy suddenly realized her mistake. She pushed frantically, but the door wouldn't reclose.

Instead, a huge, frigid current of air took hold of the door, tearing it from its hinges and blasting it down the passageway into the house.

Dean scooted to the side just in time, but Sam wasn't so lucky. The edge of the frame caught him, knocking him to the floor with its weight and momentum. He lay there, winded by the impact.

Tammy screamed. The door had missed her on purpose, and now, the reason floated before her like some terrifying masque of death. She shook her head, unable to accept what- or rather who she was seeing.

Laura smiled at her old friend as her freezing presence floated in the passageway, but it wasn't a smile of affection. As Dean watched, stunned, Laura ebbed forward, her ethereal form sending icy-cold tingles down his spine with the chill she exuded.

"I...I didn't do it, Laura...it wasn't my fault!" Tammy pleaded with the specter, but already she was beginning to shiver as Laura closed in. "Please!" She begged.

"Tammy, move away from her!" Dean knew what he had to do. Pulling his snub-nosed shotgun from under his blue jacket, he tried to aim. "Gimme a shot here!" He almost pleaded.

Tammy didn't understand. Somehow, Laura's spirit had her entranced. Either it was the cold, or simply the look on Laura's face, but Tammy couldn't move.

Laura knew it. She smiled again, this time her pallid features turning into some grotesque, toothy skull as she laughed and then enveloped her school friend in hazy white, freezing fog.

“Get off her you freak!” Dean knew exactly what would happen next. It was clear now what had happened to the male victims, and he had to stop it from occurring again. The problem was, if he fired rock salt at this close range he could easily hurt Tammy. He swore under his breath and decided to try and miss the girl, but clip the spirit.

Dean aimed just like his father John had taught him. With a quick tug, he pulled back on the trigger and exhaled. Both cartridges exploded, sending salt showering over Tammy, but not really impacting on either her or the spirit.

The move seemed to anger Laura, however, and her flowing form drifted away from her target. Now, her anger was pointed at the newcomer who would spoil her fun with his toys.

Laura’s face remained skull-like as she approached Dean. He blinked, shaking himself from the entrancing spell she was attempting to put over him until she could use her death-chill.

“Not so fast, Miss Ice cube!” Dean yanked the barrel of his weapon open and quickly placed a hand to his pocket for more shells. “Crap!”

Laura’s features changed. She was smiling- smiling as she engulfed her next victim in her freezing, colorless aura.

“Dean!” Sam’s yell brought his brother back to his senses and Dean grabbed two rock-salt shells from his pocket. For a moment, Laura’s spirit had almost mesmerized him and only Sam’s cry had halted her unwordly hold on his mind.

Dean rammed the shells into both barrels of his weapon as if his life depended on it- because it did.

Even as he slammed the shotgun closed he could feel icy tentacles gripping his body, but he ignored them. Instead, he focused his weapon on the squirming white mass that was almost upon him and yanked back on his trigger.

The rock salt showered the corridor, obliterating Laura’s angry form by tearing its ethereal presence to shreds. She vanished, wailing like a Banshee.

Dean gulped and realized his hands were shaking. No spirit had ever mesmerized him to the point where he’d almost dropped his defenses like that. “You okay?” He finally managed to ask Sam, while giving him a hand up.

Sam exhaled and nodded, taking a moment to check on Tammy.

The girl stood by the demolished doorway, her mouth slightly open. “What...what just happened? How could that have been...am I crazy?” She found herself shaking as what had transpired hit home.

“It was Laura. You’re not crazy.” Sam put an arm around Tammy and led her back into the room they had just exited. The chill had gone from the air, and Bon Jovi had stopped singing his love song, but still the feeling of foreboding remained.

Dean followed the pair in, glancing around every two seconds for signs that Laura might return. When it was clear the salt had done its job, he took a seat opposite Tammy and deposited his weapon back under his jacket. “Tammy, this may seem like a strange question, but do you know where Laura was buried?”

Tammy shook her head, her features still white with terror. “No, like I said before, my parents kept me away from the Mitchells. Even the funeral...”

“Do you know where the Mitchells live?” Sam looked to his brother. They needed to find Laura’s remains and burn them quickly, or she may return.

Tammy swallowed hard and nodded. It was the only information she could give them, but it might just save her life.

\* \* \* \*

## **The Mitchell Residence**

Dean pressed the security switch in the huge iron gate and waited. If Tammy's home had seemed 'upper class' then this place was definitely on par with the Rockefellers. The speaker on the gate buzzed and a metallic voice asked who was calling.

"Detective Le Roth to see Mr and Mrs. Mitchell. I called earlier," he informed the voice.

The gate whined and slowly swung open. Then, the voice of the unseen security guard instructed them to walk up to the main house.

Sam looked at his brother and wondered just who they were going to see. It was like something straight out of Hollywood. Had they been able to find any record of Laura's burial they wouldn't have come here at all, but for some reason everything had been kept quiet. Maybe Dean's remark about the Mitchells being 'religious nuts' hadn't been so off the mark after all.

"Just what are we going to say to these people, Dean? Where is your daughter buried, we need to go dig her up and set fire to her?" Sam trudged up the gravel driveway after his brother and thought about how they could be both tactful and get the information they needed.

Dean shrugged. "Might just work," he quipped, then jogged two steps at a time up to the double main doors of the mansion. "On the other hand, I'm thinking we play it as it goes along and hope for the best..."

"You mean wing it." Sam observed, pressing the gold plated bell knob and waiting for a maid or butler to appear.

The latter opened the left door in a rather stately manner and crisply asked. "Detectives Le Roth and Jagger, I presume?"

"That's us, Jeeves. We have an appointment." Dean smiled.

The butler scowled at the 'Jeeves' remark but quickly ushered the pair inside. He didn't speak further but directed them to an extensive library where the Mitchells awaited.

The couple sat quietly, hand in hand on a leather sofa and both looked up as the brothers entered. They were nothing like Dean had expected. He had somehow pictured Henry Mitchell to be a greying man dressed for business, but Mitchell wore no suit and instead looked like your average suburbanite. His wife was much the same, and her genuine smile quickly captivated Sam. He could see Laura in her and wondered how the girl's spirit could ever have become so bitter, twisted, and basically evil.

"How can we help you, officers?" Henry spoke first, looking at his wife after he'd addressed the would-be cops.

Dean licked his lips. "We're sorry to have to bother you, but we're working on a murder case that involves some of your daughter's old high school friends."

"How can Laura be involved?" Mrs. Mitchell looked confused and squeezed her husband's hand, needing his support. "She's been dead so long now...it seems like forever."

"We're not sure," Sam offered honestly. "But what we do know is that there is some kind of connection. A connection that goes all the way back to the night Laura died." He shot Dean a glance. Here came the big question. "We really are sorry to have to ask you this, but where did you have Laura buried?"

Henry Mitchell's eyes widened in surprise. "Sonny, Laura was never buried. We couldn't do that to our little girl."

If Dean could have sworn, he would have. No burial meant cremation, and cremation opened up a whole new can of worms for them to deal with. If they couldn't salt and burn the bones, Laura was going to be one tough nut to crack. "You had Laura cremated?" He asked, expecting to know the answer.

Mrs. Mitchell shook her head hurriedly. "No, no...we couldn't let our baby go like that. To us, Laura will never die." She looked at her husband again and he nodded, assuring her that they had done the right thing for their child.

Dean's brow furrowed. "You didn't have Laura buried or cremated? What's left?" An image of Laura being stuffed like some hunting trophy crossed his mind, but he didn't think even the Mitchells would go that far, would they?

Henry saw the expression on the brothers' faces and tried to explain. "We had Laura frozen. The technology isn't as crazy as it sounds. Trust me, I spent a long time researching into cryonics before paying to assure my family had places at the foundation."

Sam immediately shot Dean a look. The pieces were all here now. The reason the victims were being frozen was a simple one- Laura's body was frozen. Of course, it left them with one huge problem. Laura wasn't exactly classed as dead, at least not to some people. They couldn't just go in and burn her. Somehow, they had to find her spirit and exorcise it without touching her frozen remains.

Dean winced. "Can I ask where your daughter was um..." he struggled to find the right words. "Was frozen? I mean, where exactly is she now?"

Henry frowned. He didn't like cops asking so many questions about something they obviously didn't believe in. Still, eventually, he gave the brothers what they wanted. "Laura was taken to the CryoGen Institute. It's part of a cryonics foundation in the Mohave Valley."

"They don't allow visitors, though." Mrs. Mitchell hastily added. "Especially not after..."

Henry nudged his wife, but it was too late, Sam had picked up on what she was saying. "Especially not after what, ma'am?" He stared directly into the still mournful mother's eyes.

"There was an incident at the institute awhile ago. It didn't directly relate to outside visits, but the directors felt it best to restrict access to a bare minimum." She looked sadly to the floor. "One of the night workers didn't notice an alarm until it was almost too late. The cryo-chambers temperatures began to rise. We almost lost Laura all over again..."

"Exactly how long ago was this?" Dean was seeing a connection.

Henry pursed his lips as he thought about it. Then, without saying a word he stood and ambled to a desk on the right side of the library. He sifted through a pile of letters until he found the envelope he was looking for and then handed it to Dean.

Dean thumbed the torn edge open and plucked out a typed letter of apology. It was from the CryoGen facility, explaining what had gone wrong, and what procedures were being put into place to stop it from reoccurring. "This says the liquid nitrogen leak allowed the temperature to rise above -196 celcius for only a brief period starting at 12:05 a.m." He glanced at Henry who nodded.

"We were assured the temperature rise wouldn't have caused any kind of damage. It was too short a period..."

"Would you mind if we keep this for awhile?" Dean wafted the letter in the air. "I'll make sure it's returned once our investigation is over."

Henry nodded again, standing to walk Dean and Sam out. "Just one thing, officer? How does any of this relate to a murder case?"

"Right now," Dean lied. "We're really not sure, but we'll let you know if we come up with anything."

Henry was obviously not convinced but didn't argue his point. "I'd appreciate that," he sighed, opening the door rather than calling the butler back to do it.

Sam nodded and followed Dean out. As they jogged back down the steps, he glanced back up at the house and then asked, "Just what did you see in that letter?"

Dean grinned. "The catalyst we needed, Sammy. Ya know, why Laura waited so long to come back."

“And?” Sam felt the gravel drive crunch softly beneath his feet as he hurried to keep up with his brother.

“And, when the institute had the temperature problem is the exact time of death of our first victim. Somehow, when Laura’s chamber glitched, it released her spirit.”

Finally as they reached the Impala at the main gate, Sam got the picture. “So, Laura’s soul escapes its icy prison and decides to get a little frosty payback.” He tugged open the heavy car door. “The thing is, how do we stop her?”

Dean hopped behind the wheel and waited for Sam to take a seat beside him. “We could still burn the remains. If we could get through the security at this place, that is.”

Sam grimaced and shook his head. “Dean, that is just so...I don’t know, unethical. I mean what if in the future it was possible to revive her? Would that make us murderers?”

Dean pulled a face and slid the keys in the Chevy’s ignition. It was obvious even he was torn as to what was right. “Man,” he admitted, “this is freaking me out. I mean, she’s dead right? Isn’t she?”

“Technically, maybe but ethically? I just don’t know.” Sam put a finger to his temple in contemplation as they pulled off. “Whatever Laura is, we do know her spirit is now detached from her body. Just because she died senselessly doesn’t give her soul the right to murder people.”

Dean nodded as he took a left. “You got that right. So, how do we stop the big freeze, Sammy?”

Sam shook his head. “Well, we can’t burn her. Maybe we should talk to Missouri. She knew what to do back at the house with the poltergeist...”

Dean thought about it. “Okay. Call Missouri and see if she knows a way to put our girl to rest before she turns half of California into popsicles.”

### **Sometime Later That Evening**

The Mohave desert road was pitch black. The only source of light was the Impala’s headlights as it cut through the overbearing gloom with Dean Winchester at the wheel. His face looked stoic, but then this was a whole new type of situation, even for him. He glanced fleetingly over at his brother who was talking rapidly on his cell phone.

They’d been trying to reach Missouri Mosely in Kansas all afternoon, but it had taken until now to catch the psychic at home.

“Any luck?” Dean dared to ask Sam as his brother stopped his hasty banter.

Sam held a hand over the base of his cell. “We think so,” he looked only half-convinced. “Missouri thinks we need to do a similar ritual to back home only around Laura’s cryochamber. She’s talking me through it right now...”

Dean gulped. Thoughts of home never brought back good memories, not even now. Would this kind of exorcism work on a person, not a house? “Do we have the right stuff?” He eventually asked. “I know we have the gris gris, but that oily stuff..?”

Sam ignored his brother for a moment and jotted a few more instructions on a notepad before hanging up. “We have the Van Van oil. I made sure we carried some after Lawrence. Missouri says we have to do this just right...”

“She wasn’t sure, was she?” Dean’s eyes flashed with skepticism. “I mean, Missouri doesn’t really know if this is gonna work, does she?”

Sam admitted she didn’t. “It’s the first time she’s ever come across a situation like this, but it should work.”

“Should being the operative word. When it’s my ass on the line, I like the odds a little more in my favor.” Dean slowed, taking a right turn onto a sand-covered road. It obviously saw very little use. They were close to CryoGen now.

Sam smiled. "Missouri said you'd say that. She also said she still has her spoon handy..."

"Knowing her she'd use it too." Dean acknowledged grudgingly. "This is the road." He pointed a finger ahead to a huge silhouetted building on the edge of the horizon. "And that's our gig."

Sam took a deep breath. He wondered if they would even be able to see inside the chamber or if their cop guises would get them past the stringent security measures. He glanced out of the side window, looking up at the star-filled desert sky unsure about too many things.

Thoughts of previous hunts filled his mind, and when without warning the car radio began to blast out rock, he realized it was annoying to the extreme- even more so than usual. Sam huffed and turned to frown at his brother. "C'mon, Dean, do we have to have that right now?" he expected a retort saying it was calming, but instead Dean looked bewildered and began slapping the cassette deck.

No matter what he switched, AC/DC's 'If You Want Blood You Got It' continued to blast from every speaker. "What the?" Dean ejected the cassette and the unit automatically should have switched to radio. Still the same song filled the Chevy's interior, taunting the brothers with its obvious message.

Sam began to breath heavier. "Dean, it's getting cold in here..."

Dean agreed. "She knows we're coming..."

"If Laura's expecting us, this isn't going to be easy." Sam ignored the drop in temperature in the Impala and began gathering items from the back seat. Some of their 'tools' were still in the trunk, but that didn't stop him preparing the gris gris bags and making sure he had ample supply of rock salt shells from a box he'd prepared earlier that now sat on the rear seat.

"Better make sure we've got double supply of those suckers, because I don't think this gal is going back to hell without a fight." Dean eased off the gas and slid the Chevy into CryoGen's visitors' lot. There were only four bays, indicating outsiders were really not welcome.

"Looks like Frankenstein's castle to me," Sam suggested, peering at the stark layout of the structure.

Dean nodded, becoming increasingly annoyed that his blessed Impala had been violated. "So, do we do a full frontal attack here or try our cop I.D.s one last time?"

Sam thought about it as he opened the car door, thankful of the warming desert air- anything was better than the interior of the car right now. "Just don't ask me to stick that thing back on my face." He gestured to his upper lip, meaning the moustache. "It itches like crazy..."

Dean hopped from the car and, after glancing around headed for the trunk and the rest of their equipment. "Hey, it wasn't my idea for you to turn Groucho." He grabbed a shotgun, keeping it out of the view of CryoGen's security cameras while Sam gathered the precious van van oil.

As he finished up, a light from the nearby main entrance signaled they had company. A small, plump man appeared in a light gray uniform. He looked Sam and Dean over, letting the luminance from his flashlight cascade over them.

"Can I help you boys?" He squinted, trying to get a closer look at their features. "This is private property. No trespassing. No visitors."

Dean took the lead. "Oh, you're having visitors tonight." He slowly let a hand reach into his back pocket and flipped out his badge. "I'm Detective Le Roth and this is my partner. We're here on official police business."

The guard frowned and then edged closer. "Aren't you a little young for detectives? And what would the police want with a bunch of stiffs anyway?"

"We need to see where Laura Mitchell's body is stored." Sam took up the conversation, knowing his brother would likely not have a viable excuse. "We had word that someone may have caused the nitrogen leak you had here awhile back to purposely destroy her remains. It's possible that person may try again tonight."

"You're kidding me, right?" The sentry let his light drop a little and he scratched at his temple before tugging his cap down tighter. "Who would want to mess with a frozen body? I mean, it's not like these people can hurt anyone anymore..."

Sam winced. That wasn't exactly true, but he couldn't tell this old timer that. "We've information that it might be someone trying to cause the family unnessecary grief. In any case, if they've sabotaged this facility it's a crimminal offence and falls under our jurisdiction."

The guard nodded, glancing several times at the Impala as if it shouldn't belong to a cop. "I guess you fellas better come along with me and sign in. Then we can deal with this. Not that there's a whole lot to see." He turned, ambling back towards the main entrance.

The brothers followed. Neither had felt anything since they had exited their car, but it made sense that Laura, or rather her disembodied spirit, was watching them from somewhere unseen.

Dean picked up the pace a little, walking alongside their guide. "So, you haven't seen or heard anything unusual tonight? No scratching noises, fleeting figures in the shadows- anything like that?"

The guard flicked an electronic keycard through a digital reader and the main door buzzed open. "No, sir, nothing out of place at all. It's been deathly quiet around here, if you'll excuse the pun." He pointed with the flashlight. "The main storage area is this way. I'll have to call this in with the directors before I can make a move, though. At this time of night that area is strictly off-limits to anyone but a technician, and I mean anyone."

"And get those guys out of bed for something that is probably nothing?" Dean knew they were running out of excuses. Even if the old guy let them through, he was bound to come running once they started their little exorcism of sorts.

"It's my job on the line if I don't..." He reached for a telephone on the wall, and Dean gently placed a hand to stop him.

"You really don't want to do that." Dean pulled the shotgun from under his jacket and pointed it at the guard. He hated to do it, but it was safer for the old man to be locked up in some room or janitor's cupboard than it would be out in CryoGen soon. Laura wouldn't care who she hurt to stay 'alive.'

Sam carefully tugged the man's sidearm from its holster and a bunch of keys. He swiftly looked around until he spotted a door with a keyhole. "What's that?" He asked, careful not to scare the guard who had now turned white.

"It's...it's where family members are taken to discuss arrangements after...after..." he was shaking as he spoke.

Dean felt guilty, but they had to hurry. "Easy, we're not here to hurt anyone. We're here to save lives, not take them." He ushered the guard forward into the spacious, well furnished room. There was only one door, so it was perfect as a makeshift prison. "Who else is on duty here tonight? There has to be technicians for the cryo-units, right?"

The man nodded, taking a seat on one of the plush chairs while Sam tied him to it with a short length of twine. "There's only one person on duty. That's all it takes. He's up in the main control room monitoring the system. He won't come out unless there's a problem."

Dean nodded. He believed the old man. "So, how do we find Laura Mitchell?"

"She's in unit four. They're all clearly marked if you follow that corridor to the end." The guard sniffled a little, and then made a decision. "You'll need my keycard to get through the security door," he offered help but gave no reason.

Sam plucked the card from the man's breast pocket and nodded. "Thanks. Now, I hate to do this but..." Sam gently gagged the guard with a piece of cloth, making sure there was no way for him to choke.

“Ready for the big freeze?” Dean nodded for the door and Sam indicated he was as ready as he was ever going to be. “Getting a little chilly again...” The elder brother whispered as they exited, locking the door behind them.

“Think she’ll try her freezing trick on us?” Sam edged up to the metal security gate and peered through a small glass portal at eye level. The room beyond even ‘looked’ cold. An uncanny white mist floated just above floor level, giving the impression there was no ground to walk on beneath. He shivered instinctively. “Dean, this is weird even for us...”

Dean gently pushed his brother away and took a peek. The cryochambers were nothing like he had expected. For some reason, he’d imagined a unit per ‘patient.’ Perhaps some kind of metal tube with glass plate where the person’s head and face would be. Instead, what he saw were huge vat like structures covered in pipes. At a guess, they contained more than one body. “Geez, I’ve been watching too much Star Trek,” he whistled softly, and then slid the guard’s keycard into the slot provided.

The door hummed and then clicked as the latch released, allowing them access to the icy tombs beyond.

Dean pushed on the door, tugging out his rock salt-filled weapon and letting it trace around the edges of the room as he entered. Not a sound permeated the sub-zero chamber. “This is too easy, Sammy...”

Sam agreed. He tugged the holdall from his shoulder and began emptying out items that they would soon need. “Why isn’t she attacking us?” He asked, glancing around as his brother checked which cryochamber they needed to work around.

“Maybe she loves my ass?” Dean queried, cheekily. When Sam scowled back, he shrugged and rubbed a thin film of ice away from the nearest chamber’s serial number plate. “This is the one...”

Sam didn’t answer. Even though he had yet to turn, he suddenly sensed someone, or rather something behind him. As if to confirm his fears, an unbearably cold hand touch his shoulder and remained there.

The fingers dug into his flesh, the extreme temperature actually burning through his jacket and into his skin. Impulsively, he yanked away and felt some of his skin stay behind. “Dean!”

Dean whirled around, but almost too late. Laura watched as Sam rolled to the floor clutching his frostbitten shoulder and then advanced on the older brother.

“Not so fast, Miss Icecube!” Dean brought his shotgun up with just one hand and fired both barrels at the vengeful spook. The shells erupted, showering the room, but not Laura, with rock salt. “What the..?” Dean spun around several times, not believing his eyes.

Laura had vanished before the salt had even touched her and was now undoubtedly waiting to give them more of her frigid attention.

Sam struggled to his feet and dared to look at the damage. His shoulder looked raw, and the outline of a handprint was clearly visible on what skin he had left. He winced, but returned quickly to the task at hand. “We better hurry,” he didn’t say more but began carefully placing the gris gris bags at specific points around the cryochamber.

Dean continued his watchful vigil while his brother worked. “I hear ya...” he stopped, frowning as something hit him. “Sam, is it my imagination, or is that vapor getting higher?”

Sam paused, looking at the haze that had once been a few inches deep from the floor level. He gulped. Dean wasn’t imagining it. The mist was getting higher. In fact, it was almost knee high now. “Death from below could take on a whole new meaning right here and now.”

As if to confirm both brothers fears, a shape formed from the smog momentarily in front of them and then was gone. To add effect, a whispery, almost melodic voice reverberated through the room. It was hard to distinguish the words at first, but Sam eventually picked up on it.

“She won’t rest until all her friends join her...she wants Tammy.”

“Tammy...” The siren-like voice came again, and this time Laura’s spirit came with it. One second Dean was beside his brother, the next something had grabbed him by his calves and dragged him below the ethereal mist.

“Dean!” Sam screamed out his brother’s name and searched frantically with his eyes for signs of his brother under the smog. To his left, something thrashed beneath the mist, and he knew it was Dean desperately trying to fight the unfightable. *Dean’s not ready for this! He’s too weak!*

Sam ran forward, finally seeing what was going on with a sudden dread in his heart. Laura had Dean pinned to the floor and was trying to envelope him in her freezing aura. With his chest still healing from the demon’s attack, he wouldn’t be able to stand her grasp for very long.

Dean saw his brother’s approach, but he found he couldn’t take his gaze from Laura as she attempted to take him to a deathly tomb like her own. “Sammy, finish the exorcism!” He pleaded. “It’s the only way you can stop her!”

Sam shook his head. He couldn’t leave Dean to finish the job. He couldn’t risk letting his brother die, not again so soon after...

He looked fleetingly at the cryochamber and then Dean’s expression. Dean would never let him live it down if he didn’t ‘follow orders.’ It wouldn’t be right for Laura to be left around to kill just because Dean was weak. Weakness wasn’t allowed to be part of the equation on this job.

Sam reluctantly returned to the chamber and placed the last little sack of goodies where he’d been instructed. He waited, expecting the same flash of light they had seen in Lawrence, but nothing happened. Either Missouri was wrong, or they’d missed something.

Sam whirled back around to see Dean begin to lose consciousness from the cold surrounding him. It wouldn’t be long before he too was nothing more than a block of ice like the other victims. There was time left to think up another plan. No time to be sure of what was right. Dean needed him, and he wouldn’t falter.

“No!” Sam grabbed his own shotgun, but instead of trying to shoot Laura, he turned the weapon so that he was using it more like a bludgeon. If Laura couldn’t be stopped by traditional methods, maybe he could at least get her off his brother if she thought her earthly body was going to be destroyed. “You want to mess with my brother, you mess with me!” Sam all but screamed as he brought the gun down time and time again on the pipes that fed Laura’s chamber.

The conduits buckled under his attack but didn’t yield. He struck out harder, wanting, needing the metal to give way. Eventually, it had no choice, and a thin stream of nitrogen began to spurt from the breach. As it hit the air, it began to evaporate, slowly taking the oxygen in the room with it.

Sam didn’t think of the consequences of his actions. He didn’t think he could have just signed his own death warrant. All he cared was that Laura had gracefully floated away from his semi-conscious brother and was now hovering before him.

Her face was the same masque of death as before. In one instant it turned from the features of a once beautiful young woman to an almost gargoyle-like façade.

The vapor on the floor began to move, following Laura’s floating shape and coalescing with it in a column of white fog. The thicker it became, the more substance Laura gained until she had real form.

Sam coughed, feeling dizzy as she walked towards him, her figure now having a mass of its own. “It was an accident, Laura. Those people have had to live with your death all this time. Are you any better than they are now?” He backed up, careful not to let the flowing liquid touch him.

Laura didn’t answer. She continued forward until Sam had nowhere else to go. He felt his back touch the wall and gulped. The rock salt wouldn’t work. What was there left?

Laura smiled, and for once she looked almost human- almost. Then, before Sam could react she reached out, grabbing his cheek with her outstretched hand. Again, Sam felt the burning sensation of frostbite dig into his flesh, but he couldn't pull away. Suddenly he was too tired to fight, too weary to try to jerk away. For an instant, he thought that perhaps he would join his mother or Jess on the other side, but it was a momentary illusion.

Sam's knees buckled as the nitrogen ate away at the oxygen in the room, and he fell back against the concrete floor. Somewhere in the distance, he could have sworn he heard his brother yelling, but it too must have been an illusion. He fought for air, gasping, but lost the battle as Laura squeezed harder against his face. All that came next was darkness.

Dean didn't know how long he'd been out of it, but he came to with a start. The first thing that entered his mind was Sam. His brother had undoubtedly tried to lure the spook, and on his own Dean knew that was a very dangerous game to play. He tried to scramble to his feet, his lungs aching, and then stopped dead as he saw Laura stooped over Sam's prone body. She was clutching his face and causing obvious damage.

Something nearby was spilling from a battered pipe, and Dean rightly guessed what it was. He thought about dashing over and trying to pry the spirit from Sam, but something inside told him no. Some inner voice made him turn back to the cryochamber instead.

He shook his head, not understanding why their 'exorcism' hadn't worked, and then it hit him.

While the mist had floated a few inches off the floor, it had been impossible to see the gris gris bags once they were in place. Now that that the vapor was gone, Dean could see that somehow, probably when Laura had grabbed him, one of the bags had been pushed away from its target.

Without all the bags being in exactly the right position, nothing would work.

Dean didn't stop to think more. He dived forward, landing on the floor and skidding along to grab the bag and force it back into the right position. The move earned him some extra bruises and scrapes as his elbows chafed along the rough floor, but he didn't care. He would heal, he always healed.

"Back to hell, you freak!" Dean rolled as the tiny bag bounced on the side of the unit and fell into place. From his position he had a clear view of Sam and Laura. He held his breath, waiting a painstaking second to see if he had been right.

Time seemed to stand still as he watched. Then, in one massive implosion of light and energy, Laura vanished, her form dissipating as her spirit was expelled back to the 'other side.'

Dean panted, pushing up on his skinned elbows to see if his brother was moving.

Sam didn't stir, and as Dean hastened to his feet he realized why. He wasn't exactly the smartest of the two brothers, but he was far more intelligent than he sometimes got credit for. "The nitrogen..." he whispered to himself as he realized what was happening.

He shook his head and jogged over to Sam. "Sam...Sammy?" He prodded his brother's arm, but Sam didn't move and the ugly welt on his cheek stared back, almost glaringly.

Dean winced. A hand print was burned into his brother's flesh from the cold. Still, there was no time to think about that now. The room was having the oxygen sucked right out of it, and if they didn't leave they'd asphyxiate.

Dean grabbed one of Sam's arms and tugged hard, pulling his brother to his feet and then slinging him over his shoulder. It was no mean task to try and carry his dead weight in his own condition, but Dean didn't falter. He would never let Sam down- not even if it meant his life.

As he fought with Sam's weight to get to the door, a security klaxon began to blurt out through the complex. Dean wasn't sure if it was because of the coolant leak or because they had broken in, but he wasn't about to stick around to find out.

He slid the keycard in the slot and then lashed out at the door with his boot. The metal yielded to his aggression and then swung heavily back as he forced his way through, Sam still swinging lifelessly over his shoulder.

"Hey, what the hell's going on back there? Who are you guys?" A short, overalled man appeared with a security nametag that read 'Phil Garrett.' He looked scared, but it wasn't just the coolant leak he was afraid of. One more disaster like this could cost him his job.

Dean continued towards the main door unabashed. "There's a nitrogen leak in there. You might want to call the emergency services."

Garrett glanced at the closing chamber door and then to the stranger carrying a limp form towards the exit. Reluctantly, he nodded and made a hasty dash for the nearest phone. It was going to be another long night on the graveyard shift. The desert night air had never been so welcoming as Dean pushed through the main lobby doors out into the parking lot. He gulped fresh air hungrily, settling Sam down beside the Impala as gently as he could, and then pulling his brother's collar loose. "Come on, Sammy, gimme a sign here will you?" He looked at the welt across Sam's cheek. "I promise, no more rock music for a month if you just wake up, dude."

Sam hacked, and then winced as the movement jarred his already throbbing face. "Make that two months?" He tried to smile, but it hurt too much.

Dean exhaled, letting out a long breath with relief. "Don't push your luck, kiddo." He held out a hand, carefully pulling his brother to his feet. "Come on, we better haul ass before the cops arrive and find Groucho lost his moustache."

"Is she gone?" Sam leaned on the car as Dean opened the Impala's door for him and then resignedly fell inside.

"Yeah, she's gone." Dean climbed behind the wheel, looking uncertainly at his brother. "Ya know, that was pretty stupid what you did back there for me?"

Sam checked his face in the rear-view mirror. From what little expression he could manage, he wasn't impressed. "Yeah, right, now I look more like Freddy Krueger than Groucho. I guess now we're even for you saving my butt in Hibbing, huh?"

Dean flicked on the radio, relieved that the tormenting AC/DC track had finally vanished along with Laura. "That was different," he grinned. "You got suckered by humans, not an ice-maiden with attitude. You still owe me for that one."

Sam shook his head as Dean pulled the Chevy back out onto the highway. "Didn't you just promise no more rock for a month?"

Dean nodded, still smiling sarcastically. "Uh huh," he tapped the steering wheel along with the music from the radio. "I never did say what month, though..."

\* \* \* \*

### **Outskirts of Barstow- the following day**

Dean looked over at his brother as he steered the Impala out of Barstow. Sam had appeared to be in deep thought since the previous evening, and nothing Dean said seemed to make him feel any better. It was like he sensed something, but what was anyone's guess. Music played through the car's speakers, but strangely, this time it had been at Sam's request. All he'd asked was that they tune into local radio and not 'mullet rock' tapes.

"So, I'm thinking Laura's spirit was released when her cryochamber malfunctioned the first time. You know, the temperature rises, the spook is freed kinda thing." Dean attempted to draw some kind of conversation from his frowning sibling.

Sam shrugged. "I guess, but how do we know that she's gone? I mean, really gone?" He looked out of the window at the nothingness of sand for miles around.

“Back in Lawrence it took mom to stop the poltergeist. The gris gris bags didn’t exactly work...”

Dean cocked his head to one side in a bemused gesture. “Now who’s the cynic? Maybe I’m rubbing off on you just a little too...”

“Dean, shut up!” Sam leaned forward, turning up the radio’s volume.

“Hey, is that any way to...”

“Dean! Listen, the news guy is talking about last night...” Sam jerked a thumb at the speakers and finally his brother realized what he was talking about.

The signal strength was bad, but above the hissing and static they could hear enough to know they may have a problem. The newsreader sounded almost excited, but his oratory only instilled dread in the Winchesters- especially Sam.

*‘In late breaking news, three patients from the CryoGen facility in the Mohave desert have been taken to Barstow community hospital’s critical care unit. It’s understood that CryoGen suffered a catastrophic failure within its nitrogen cooling systems last night, and in a desperate bid to save some of the patients, doctors at the hospital are going to try the first human retrieval from a cryonic state. We have a spokesperson here from the hospital right now to tell us more about this historic medical attempt. Can you explain why doctors at Barstow feel they have a chance at reviving any of the patients?’*

Sam leaned in closer, as if being nearer the radio would somehow improve reception. He shook his head, somehow knowing what would come next. “Dean, pull over, we need to hear this.”

Dean did as he was asked, killing the engine to lessen the interference.

The hospital spokesperson continued. *‘Some of the CryoGen patients were the first to undergo a new trial procedure known as whole body vitrification. It’s similar to, but not as destructive on a cellular level as the normal freezing process. Basically, it gives us a better chance of reviving the patient without complications. Also, the patients we have chosen all had conditions that were fatal at the time of death, but that we feel we now have a chance of curing...’*

The radio crackled suddenly, distorting the sound until it was inaudible. “Son of a...” Dean whacked the unit with the base of his palm, restoring some clarity.

*‘For instance, one of the three patients suffered massive damage to her heart. At the time, there was no donor match for a transplant and little the hospital could do. Right now we have a compatible organ inbound from Boston. The families of these patients have nothing to lose, and everything to gain by letting us attempt retrieval...’*

“Dean,” Sam looked up, his aching face paling. “We banished Laura’s spirit from the real world. If the hospital does manage to revive her, won’t that mean she’ll have no soul?”

Dean bit his lip and glanced out into the desert, thinking. “What are the odds of it working and the hospital reviving her?”

“What if it does? What if it does, Dean?” Sam asked woefully.

Dean restarted the Impala and slipped back onto the highway. As Evanescence’s “Bring Me to Life” began to blurt from the radio, he looked over to his brother, puckering his brow. “Then we have an even bigger problem than we started with, Sammy...”

**The End**