

Episode Nineteen: Last Call
By Kittsbud & Thru Terry's Eyes

Hotdog Stand – Four Corners Monument, noonish

Dean rubbed his hands in anticipation of the deep and meaningful relationship he was about to form with the smoked sausage being prepared for him by the lunch cart vendor in the park.

Watching as the steaming link was caressed by a fluffy bun and then dressed with everything Dean could think of including the prerequisite extra onions was almost, but not quite, as absorbing as a good pole dance. The resultant pleasure, while different, was, however, just as satisfying.

And he was *starving*.

Taking the luscious creation in his hands he passed over his money and winked a thank you at the vendor, cramming the hot dog in his mouth for a huge bite.

Talking through the bite he addressed Sam. "Dude, you sure you don't want one of these? This is awesome!" he gestured with the remaining hot dog.

Sam, standing a short distance away with the phone to his ear, gave Dean a look of abject disgust and shook his head.

Dean shrugged, "Your loss, man." He reveled momentarily in the glory of his hot dog, happy to be enjoying a simple pleasure.

He drifted closer to hear Sam's side of the conversation with Bobby. Bobby had called, apparently with news about a new hunt and judging from the look on Sam's face it must be a good one. Sam wore a strange smile and kept nodding his head, looking over at Dean from time to time. At one point he laughed.

Dean frowned and was about to ask what the hell when he was distracted by the arrival of a candy apple red Miata and it's driver, a tall young woman with a mane of blonde hair and a chest of epic proportions.

He stared, Sam and hot dog forgotten, as he watched her teeter across the pavement on black stiletto sandals, her body encased in a white tank shirt and turquoise Capri's so tight they had to have been airbrushed on. Bending forward slightly, revealing décolletage that almost brought tears to Dean's eyes, she gave the hot dog vendor an order. She glanced up and caught Dean's unabashed stare, a tiny smile crooking her red lips.

Just as he began to move toward her Sam's hand descended on his arm.

Dean twisted back to look at his brother in irritation. "*What?*" he actually whined, watching the girl accept her order and move back toward her car, sending Dean a lingering look.

Sam spared the girl a brief glance and rolled his eyes. "Focus, Dean," he said holding his phone out and waving it in front of Dean to gain his attention.

Dean reluctantly tore his eyes away as the girl jumped in her car and gunned away from the curb.

"Bobby found us a job, Dean. Remember? Our job? What we do? Hunting evil? Any of this ringing a bell for you?"

"I know, Sam!" Dean snapped. "I just wanted to smell the roses along the way, is that so bad?"

Sam laughed. "Smell 'em? Two more minutes and you would have thrown yourself right into the garden."

Dean couldn't help the smirk. "She had a nice car," he justified with a grin. "So what's this job? Ghouls in an old septic tank factory? Black dogs in a dump?"

Sam shook his head, just stood there grinning.

Dean squinted at him. "What's so damned funny?"

"It's at a haunted bar," Sam replied.

Dean shrugged, "Cool, but I repeat, what's so funny?"

"In Vegas," Sam replied, eyes twinkling suspiciously but Dean didn't notice.

"Vegas?" Dean repeated stupidly. Then his eyes popped open. "Las Vegas? Seriously? A haunted bar in *Las Vegas*?" *Finally!!!* He thought, *beer, scantily clad women, gambling AND kicking spook ass?!!* It just didn't get better than that!

He grinned and clapped Sam on the shoulder, "Well, hot damn then, let's get going!" He glanced at his half-eaten hot dog and then tossed it in the trash. What the hell was a hot dog compared to the strip in Vegas?

He jerked the keys out of his pocket and jumped back into the Impala.

Sam shook his head, not even trying to hide his own smirk regarding this new job. He couldn't wait to see the look on Dean's face.

Dean was so hyped about Vegas in general he never caught the amusement in Sam's eyes.

He honked the horn and yelled at Sam to get his ass in gear, thumping the steering wheel happily.

Look out Las Vegas! Here come the Winchesters!

Carluccio's Tivoli Gardens

1775 E. Tropicana

Las Vegas

Night time

Dean pulled the Impala into the spacious parking lot and looked around, acutely aware that he was not anywhere near the parts of Vegas he'd hoped for. In fact, the parking area seemed stuck between what looked like an oversized, Mexican-styled coffee shop and a giant piano-shaped structure that was apparently some kind of museum.

There were fancy neon signs everywhere, but from the angle he'd parked the Chevy, even if he squinted, Dean couldn't make out the lettering. "Dude, this so ain't the part of Vegas I was hoping for. C'mon, man, let's hit the strip. I always wanted to do Cesear's."

"Gambling requires money, Dean. You know, that thing we rarely get even though we work our asses off spook busting?" Sam cocked his brow and tapped the laptop on his knee. The reaction earned him a scowl of disapproval.

"Sheesh, one day you're gonna learn to lighten up a little and roll with the punches. The first chance we get to have a little fun before a gig and you go all serious on me as usual." Dean shook his head. "It's a haunted bar, can't it wait one night?"

Sammy had lured him here with the bright lights and promise of a plethora of casinos and scantily clad women. He really should have known this hunt was too good to be true.

"I don't think we should wait, Dean. And besides, this is a paying gig. You get to gamble after, not before." Sam smiled a little, hoping the promise of blackjack, poker and a whole sea of slot machines would tempt his brother into having something resembling patience.

Of course, once Dean found out the actual details, things would get more than tricky.

"Apparently," Sam continued, not giving his sibling time to argue. "Carluccio's has allegedly been haunted for some time, but it's always been more of a crowd draw than anything - so the management haven't done anything about it. Until now, that is."

"So, Raymond, if this is a paying gig, why the hell aren't we talking to the guy with the dollars right about now? I mean, shouldn't we be asking our employer questions, not skulking in some lot looking at the laptop?" Dean's frustration at being held back from the lure of a lifetime was showing clearly from the sarcasm in his voice.

Sam reddened, his face blushing without any apparent reason. "I err...guess you're right," he stammered, keeping the laptop under his arm as he tugged his lanky form from the car. Pausing to make sure his brother was following, he raised a brow questioningly. "And - ugh - Raymond?"

Dean winked, an ear to ear grin spreading across his features. As he joined his brother, he slapped Sam squarely between the shoulders. "Hell yeah, you're the Winchester savant, gonna take you down the strip and let you win me some money when this gig is done. You did just kinda promise..." With that, he winked and strode towards the nearest flashing blue neon, leaving Sam with his mouth open wondering just what that particular "Deanism" was all about.

Once Dean was halfway across the lot and several cars' width in front of Sam, he stopped dead, his own mouth mimicking his brother's – except this time the elder hunter managed something akin to a horrified shriek. "You gotta be friggin' kidding me, Sammy! Bobby been chugging back that homemade brew again, or what? Man, I'm telling you, I'll take a shotgun to him for this, never mind Dad!"

Sam's mouth wanted to twist into out-and-out laughter so hard it ticked at the corners, but to his credit he held the straight face – at least for about two seconds. "Dean, this is a serious gig. I'm not kidding..." He placed a hand over his mouth, almost dropping the precious laptop as Dean's face contorted into unimaginable mental agony the likes of which Sam had never seen.

"Serious?" Dean yelled. "We're at the freakin' Liberace Museum and you tell me it's serious? Damn straight it's serious. You need mental friggin' help!" He spun around, heading right back to the raven black car they'd just departed. "Dude, the guy was a piano playing wuss who wore sequined suits! I am so outta here!"

Further mumblings intermingled with several profanities Sam was glad he didn't quite catch followed in quick succession, and he had trouble keeping up with his brother as Dean almost began a panic run back to the Chevy.

"Dean, we can't just leave," he begged, balancing the laptop under one arm and stopping Dean entering the Impala with the other. "There have been two supernatural-style disappearances at Carluccio's Tivoli Gardens. It's part of the complex." He ticked his head back towards the museum. "We can't just walk, these people need our kind of help. And besides," he added with a grin, "I would have thought you'd want to play George Clooney around here first."

"Yeah, well, I'd rather haul ass than have some funky-dressed spook try grabbing at it with kinky intentions." Dean took down a breath, composure finally settling on his features, even though the thought of Vegas was no longer quite so appealing. "And dude, I'm way better looking than Clooney..."

Sam smiled. "In your dreams, man." He slipped the laptop on the Chevy's rear seat. "So, now that you've calmed down, are we gonna go inside and find out what's going on?"

Dean glanced across the lot, obviously squirming inside. He'd heard all about the fact that Liberace was supposed to haunt some restaurant or bar out here, but that didn't mean he wanted to tangle with that particular spirit. *Gimme a freakin' Wendigo. Hell, no, gimme a whole barn full of 'em. Hungry ones.*

And if this freak sings, I'm so gonna kill Sammy...

"I guess we can check it out," the hunter finally relented. "I mean, this kinda entertainer is way more your style than mine. More than likely it'll be your ass he's grabbing. You do got a thing for chick music, Raymond."

"The Fray is not chick music!" Sam retorted. "And will you stop with the Raymond crap already?"

Dean smirked. It wasn't very often Sammy had no clue what he was talking about, but this time the penny clearly hadn't dropped, even though it really should have. For now, he was content to keep it that way. "Next thing you know, you'll be listening to Barry Manilow. I'm telling you, Sasquatch, Dad really shoulda named you Samantha..."

Sam huffed, but knew he should have expected the joke to be turned on him. Still, it had been fun while it lasted. “Whatever.” He rolled his eyes and pointed to the more sensibly-shaped building of the two that bordered the lot. “C’mon, just remember, no gambling, no hot women until we’ve solved this and have a little cash in our pockets for our next motel. ’Cause really, Dean, I’d like not to have to spend another night in the Impala-”

“Yeah, those long girly legs don’t fit too well against the dash-” Dean dived just in time to avoid a mock punch from his slightly irked sibling. “Okay, okay.” He held up his hands in surrender. “Let’s go find your sequined spook and kick his ass.”

Sam cringed.

“You’re right,” Dean admitted with a grimace. “Old piano fingers might actually like that. But, hey, maybe they’ll at least provide free food and beer if we’re lucky...”

Inside Carluccio’s

Sam looked around the establishment and almost – *almost* wanted to agree with his brother. Even though Liberace was very dead, Carluccio’s décor still oozed the entertainer’s rather bizarre style.

One area consisted of white wicker chairs and an elaborate, and very ornate wooden service bar that definitely wasn’t on any modern art list. Beyond that lay an even stranger room rather aptly named the English Lounge Bar.

“Dude...” Dean whistled, looking at the huge crowds that seemed to have congregated in the very unusual restaurant. “Are these people nuts? I mean, this place is very...Liberace...”

Sam nodded, taking in the flock wallpaper and huge crystal chandeliers that adorned the ceilings. “Dean, he was a legend, what do you expect?”

Dean shrugged, his eyes locking on a brunette behind the bar who apparently had noticed him too. “Yeah, well, don’t all the women in here know the dude didn’t swing their way?”

Sam sighed, following his brother’s long gait up to the old world style bar. “It’s not about that.” He hopped on a stool. “And shouldn’t we be talking about the case, not Liberace’s fan base?”

Dean smiled roguishly at the brunette but satisfied himself – for now, at least – by ordering a double shot of tequila. As the girl sauntered off to pour his drink, the hunter’s eyes never strayed from her tight fitting tee. “Huh?” He finally turned to his sibling. “Oh yeah, the gig. So, aren’t we supposed to be meeting the owner or something?”

“No,” Sam looked at his watch. “We’re meeting Mike Bentkover, one of the managers. He agreed to meet us here at ten. In the meantime I can fill you in on what I’ve dug up.”

Dean scooped up his tequila, chugged it back and then winked at the bar girl. Maybe if Liberace’s spook kept his hands to himself this wouldn’t be such a bad gig after all. “Fire away, Raymond.”

Sam considered ordering a double for himself, but then thought better of it. Dean was more likely to get carried away here than anywhere. As a rule, his brother never drank much while they were on a gig, but Las Vegas was definitely going to be an exception. Not to mention, with the amount of beautiful women sashaying around, Dean’s eyes would probably pop out of his head before midnight.

No, Dean would definitely not be thinking with his upstairs brain – and that meant Sam was going to have to do the thinking for both of them.

Ignoring the new name he seemed to have acquired, he began to recite what he’d discovered on the laptop or via Bobby. “Apparently, Carluccio’s got a reputation for being haunted in the early nineties when several patrons reported seeing Liberace’s ghost in the piano lounge. A waiter who had worked here fourteen years saw and heard glasses and silverware moving too. In fact, one night the same man even saw

one of Liberace's capes in one of the piano lounge mirrors. When he looked again there was nothing there."

Dean huffed, knocking back another shot glass full of tequila. "Maybe the guy just had too much to drink? I'm telling you, man, it's just a publicity thing. Hell, half the people in here probably came to see the damn ghost. It's all hype."

"I don't know, Dean," Sam responded, uncertainty filling his voice. "One time, a few years after Liberace's death, glasses toppled from the bar and the power went out. Someone casually remarked that it was, or would have been, Liberace's birthday. Everyone at the bar wished him a Happy Birthday and the power came back on—"

"Forgetting his birthday? Yeah, I can see the dude getting pissed, but why the hell would he suddenly start making people vanish?" Dean finally paid the case more attention than his now empty glass, or the brunette and her scant attire. "Maybe his music was so damn bad he had to kidnap people to the other side to get a friggin' audience. Now that, I can believe!"

"Yeah, well paranormal investigators already visited the bar once, but they only found high EMF readings in the back hallway and the women's bathroom area. Not exactly the place you'd expect to find our guy." Sam raised a brow.

"Paranormal investigators," Dean mimicked his brother in a somewhat mocking voice. "Dude, who'd they call before us, the freakin' Hellhounds?"

Sam focused on the gaudy flock wallpaper. Anything rather than look Dean in the eye. As much as he hated to admit it, the whole case did sound like something off of a kid's cartoon – all except for the part where people had gone missing – permanently.

"The readings they took match reports of toilets flushing on their own and faucets turning on and off in the bathrooms."

"Great," Dean toyed with his glass with his thumb and forefinger. "'Liberace and the Haunted John.' What is this, freakin' Scooby Doo Does Vegas?"

Sam opened his mouth to retort, but snapped it shut again. Dean had just vocalized his own earlier thought. This was one weird gig. *So where the heck were Shaggy and Scrappy?*

"I wish it were that simple gentlemen, but I can assure you there are no fake ghosts here, only mischievous ones."

Dean pushed away from the bar, spinning his stool around to face a rather short looking man with beady eyes. He was more than well dressed, and he obviously considered his position to be one well above most of the staff or patrons of the bar and restaurant.

"I'm Michael Bentkover, and from your attire and rather..." he glanced at Dean, "...distasteful vocal manner, I assume you're the Winchesters?"

Sam swiftly stepped between his brother and the little man, smiling affably, even though deep down he was just as offended as Dean. They may not have money, or have the smartest garb in town, but they were here to do a job, and Bentkover should have appreciated that fact.

"I'm Sam, this is my brother Dean." Sam bobbed his head towards his sibling, and heard a low growl in response.

Dean was pissed at Bentkover already.

"So," Sam slid back on his stool and sighed with relief when Dean didn't immediately jump from his perch and slug their employer. "What makes you think the disappearances are related to a haunting?"

Bentkover straightened his tie in what looked like a nervous habit, Dean's seething gaze unsettling him. "Two high class patrons simply vanished from the premises. One was at the English Bar with friends when he disappeared. All the security cameras show he never left any of the establishment's exits. The other businessman – a friend of the first – vanished after telling colleagues he was going to the toilet. Again, footage showed the man entering the rest rooms but not leaving."

"Sounds like someone has a serious toilet fetish to me," Dean snarked. "You sure this is ghost-related? I mean c'mon, this place's previous owner kinda had a rep ..."

Bentkover ignored the remark, focusing on Sam, who he considered at least half-human. "On both nights bartenders and waiters reported strange activity at the bars and in the bathrooms." He coughed, taking a moment to compose himself. "The police can find no trace of either of the missing men and are convinced there must be an error in our surveillance camera system. I'm not so convinced. I can't afford any more disappearances – the establishment can't or we'll lose customers."

"So, a suit like you really thinks ol' Liberace's spirit has gone ape and has started causing more than a few chinking glasses?" Dean raised a brow impishly. "Maybe he's pissed at the kinda service you guys have given since he went to the big music hall in the sky, huh? Sheesh, have you checked if the grand piano is stuffed with any bodies recently?"

Sam groaned in embarrassment, elbowing his brother until Dean winced at the bony appendage being jabbed into his ribs. "We'll need to check out each room with our equipment," he addressed Bentkover. "The best time will probably be after closing tonight when everywhere is empty and quiet."

"You want the run of the building? Alone?" The suit's nose twitched and he considered the plan. It was obvious he didn't like the brothers, let alone the idea that they be given free rein in all the rooms. Still, he'd already been told they were the best in the business for his particular kind of problem. "Very well," he eventually caved. "But any damages or shall we say, 'missing' items will be noted and duly paid for out of your earnings."

Dean rolled his eyes. "Jeez, I guess that means no free beer either, huh, Mr. Tightwad?" He looked to Sam, slapping him on the back so hard he almost slipped off his stool. "And no stealing the sequins, Raymond."

Later that evening...

Sam fingered the small brass key looking up at the closed but still garishly-lit building.

Dean gazed longingly in the opposite direction where a multi-colored glow filled the night sky, broken by spotlights that swept the clouds, and he just knew if he listened closely enough he would be able to hear the clink of coins spilling out of slot machines, rapturous cries of joy and the swish of stockings as long legged showgirls pranced around a stage, beads rattling, spangles sparkling and each one wearing a smile that was just for him.

Sam poked him, jerking him roughly from his thoughts.

"*What?!!*" he yelped.

Sam gestured at the open door. "You planning on joining me or just standing out here slack jawed for the rest of the night?" he demanded impatiently.

Dean glared at him. "Admit it, Sam," he accused. "In your previous existence you were a wet blanket weren't you?"

Sam shoved him through the door. "For God's sake...."

Sam locked the door behind them and stuffed the key in his pocket, looking around. Even with just a few lights on, the multiple reflective surfaces provided by the endless mirrors, crystal, glassware and glossy finishes bounced the small amount of light around until it was almost hard to see.

"Man," Dean said, squinting, "I haven't seen this much sparkle so close up since that stripper in-"

"So where do you want to start?" Sam almost yelled to drown out Dean's trip down memory lane. "I think we need to split up and each take half of the restaurant. Which half do you want?"

Dean had definitely turned glaring into an art form. "Gee, I don't know, Sam," he growled. "You pick for me, I just can't decide."

"Look, Dean, I know you're not thrilled about this job but it's a job, a paying job, I might add. And I swear when we're done you can do whatever the hell you want to after we get paid, just, please, give this your attention for now." Sam turned on the puppy eyes and Dean cursed and rolled his eyes.

"Alright, fine." Dean grumbled, giving in as gracefully as he was capable. "Where in Barbie Princess Land do you want to start?" He made a face and sighed impatiently, crossing his arms and staring at Sam.

Sam realized this was the best he was going to get and glanced at his notes. "Why don't you take the half in the English Bar, that's where the first victim supposedly vanished." He glanced around, getting his bearings. "I can take the area where the bathrooms are, where victim number two disappeared. Does that meet with your approval?"

Dean nodded. "Yeah, you go do the bathrooms 'cause as far as I can see this whole job needs to go in the toilet."

"Dean."

Dean held up his hands. "Sorry, Raymond. Didn't mean to upset you. Don't start counting or anything."

Sam stared at him uncomprehendingly, "What?"

Dean rolled his eyes again. "Never mind. Let's check in in fifteen minutes. I figure I got at least that long before all this...*bling*...makes me go blind." He turned and headed back toward the piano lounge, leaving Sam in the lobby, shaking his head.

Looking up at the massive chandeliers overhead, the red ceilings, red velvet seats and the deep red and gold swirly carpet Dean curled his lips in utter distaste. God, he'd seen better décor in warehouses, laughing to himself as he realized he actually had.

Filmy curtains hung everywhere and there wasn't a foot of wall that wasn't covered with huge gilt framed mirrors, like some carnival attraction, each with the legend, "I'll Be Seeing You," written on them in scarlet edged in gold. He knew it was Liberace's theme song from some brochures they had taken from their earlier visit.

Not that he had actually allowed his eyes to be contaminated by reading any of them...

Above him the crystals tinkled as they bumped gently together in whatever air currents were present, sounding a little like water trickling over rocks. Or teasing laughter.

Dean shuddered suddenly. The atmosphere in the place was so *bright* it was downright creepy. Passing another huge, spotless mirror as he walked up to the large white grand piano, he reached out and deliberately dragged his fingers over the surface, painting it with finger and palm prints.

"There," he said in an unconsciously hushed voice. "Sparkle your ass off now." It was childish but it made him feel better.

He turned suddenly as he caught a glimpse of movement in the mirror next to him, a flashing swirl, like flowing fabric.

Like a cape.

He backed into the piano as he looked around at the other mirrors, his hand hitting the exposed keyboard with a discordant clash. Jerking back with a curse, one of the ornate candelabras was knocked to the ground by his movement.

"Shit!" he snarled, grabbing the silver and gold candleholder and slamming it back into position on the piano, his heart racing. "Damn you, Sam!" he snapped. "And damn you, your freaky restaurant, your freaky music and your freaky..." he paused, at a loss for words as he gestured at the large smiling portrait of Liberace (*Jesus, the guy must have had sixty teeth*) in full performance regalia that hung behind the piano. "...freakiness!!!" he finished lamely, stomping out of the room angrily and toward the English Bar Lounge.

He was pissed at the job, pissed at Sam and pissed at himself that he was so jangled by being in this place. What the hell was it about a guy who played pansy

music and liked to run around looking like he'd gone way the hell over the rainbow...?

"Gotta be the music..." he muttered, not even slightly amused.

He stood inside the bar for a moment, eyeing the glittering array of glasses and bottles.

Glancing around furtively, he walked around the baroque bar and snagged a bottle of Pasion Azteca Tequila from behind the bar. The name meant nothing to him but tequila was tequila and he damn sure needed a drink.

Glancing around once more to make sure he wasn't being watched by non-existent patrons or worse, by Sam, he quickly opened the bottle and poured a shot in a scarlet glass embellished with a large scrolled "L".

He knocked back the drink and hissed at the burn of it as it ran down his throat and settled in his stomach with a warm glow. That was more like it.

Lifting the bottle to pour another he stopped in surprise to see the glass was already full.

Frowning he lifted the glass and studied it. Had he refilled it and forgotten that quickly?

Shrugging, he tossed that drink down as well, setting the glass back down with his fingers still curled around it.

It was full again.

"What the..."

A smile suddenly crooked the corner of his mouth. Damn. Maybe he'd been wrong about this place. He lifted the glass again.

This is my kind of haunted bar after all!

* * * *

Sam ambled slowly down the corridor, a static EMF meter in his hand and a slight grin still playing across his features. Pissed Dean was one thing, but pissed childish Dean was just totally hilarious.

It was just so easy to see his big brother's eyes wandering to the outside world and to the glare from the downtown neon. Once this gig was over, Sam was pretty sure he'd need to pry Dean from the strip with a crowbar and promises of untold wealth and girly flesh. How the hell he could provide more of either than Vegas could would be the test, but hell, his gifts ought to help him out at least once, oughtn't they?

Sam shook his head and chuckled. If nothing else, this gig had allowed the Winchesters to breathe again, to feel human, to laugh even.

A shrill whine began to emanate from the device in his hand and the hunter stopped. He was directly outside the men's bathroom – the very block of toilets where victim number two had vanished.

Dude probably got flushed away with the rest of the crap that hangs around here, Sam could hear his brother's voice in his head, mocking what he didn't really understand. Typical Dean.

Edging sideways, Sam pushed lightly at the door and it swung inwards to reveal a totally normal men's room.

The place was lavish, yes, but not unduly over the top considering its surroundings.

Sam moved inside, noting the wail from the EMF increased along with a rapid decrease in room temperature. It wasn't just cold in here, it was icy.

"Hello?" Sam didn't know why, but he was compelled to yell out. It wasn't usual gig procedure, but heck, could he be in a toilet with a legend? So better not tell Dean that thought if I don't want lewd comments for a month...

There was no answer to his call, but the cold tendrils seemed to wrap around his body even more, enveloping him in its strange blanket. There was a presence here, and he didn't know how, but Sam was sure it was malevolent.

It wanted pain.

It wanted his pain.

Sam let his huge frame spin on his heels, and forgetting the screaming meter in his palm, he took two long strides towards the doorway. Sensing his need to escape, the invisible entity that was with him lashed out, using its ethereal strength to slam the door closed just as he reached it.

The entrapped hunter grabbed at the brass fitted handle, desperately trying to turn it, but it felt like the metal had somehow fused solid into the jamb. Finally sliding the useless meter into his pocket, he realized there was a new sound in the room.

A hissing sound...

Sam turned back to face the sinks, knowing before his eyes locked on them what he would see. All the hot water faucets had miraculously turned to the "on" position of their own volition. Steam oozed from the sinks, rising to mask over the mirrors above them like some mystery smog appearing from the ether.

As the hunter watched, the water-veiled mirrors began to change. Someone, something was scrawling in the condensation with their finger. The text was spidery, like a child was writing it or perhaps someone not in full control of their muscles – not that spirits had muscles.

"*Bara?*" Sam squinted, reading the strange word out loud even though it meant nothing to him. "Are you trying to communicate?"

Sam's lips moved to say the word again, but before his vocal cords could form any sound, his legs were abruptly torn from under him and he hit the tiled floor with a grunt.

I'll take that as a no thanks, I'd rather kick your ass than chat, he thought randomly as his lanky frame was heaved boots first across the floor. *Gee, I hope this doesn't mean I'm our guy's type...*

In the cubicles in front of him, Sam heard the distinct sound of toilets being haphazardly flushed and his heart began to pick up pace. Maybe this wasn't so funny after all.

Arms flailing on the slippery floor, the hunter tried in vain to grab onto something – anything – to stop his forward motion. Long fingers latched for a moment on a cubicle door and Sam took down a breath. Then, the force pulling him seemed to gain momentum, yanking at his legs until his tentative hold was quickly broken.

Shit! It's dragging me in the crapper! Dean was right, this thing does have a toilet fetish!

Before he could lament on his brother's jokes, or their unfortunate accuracy, something slammed into Sam's back like a pro-boxer punching him in the kidneys. In a knee-jerk reaction he tumbled forward, trying desperately to suck down a lungful of air after being so viciously winded.

He blinked repeatedly, eyes smarting as he fell, and only when he refocused did he realize exactly where his face was heading. To add to its impetus, the same force from before returned, grabbing the hunter by the back of his skull and propelling him into a quicker downward spiral – straight into the toilet bowl and its un-alluring waters.

Shit! After all I've fought I'm gonna get drowned in a toilet by the ghost of a pissed off pianist with a hairdo that looks like he's wearing a poodle.

Sam couldn't escape the irony anymore than he could escape the bubbling water as his head was held beneath its surface. He grabbed at the floor, the tank, anything to use as leverage, his long arms searching for a way out as he brain couldn't help but mock his predicament.

I hope the last guy pulled the damn chain...

Dean is so never gonna let me live this down...

But then, Dean probably had problems of his own.

* * * *

"One tequila, two tequila, three tequila, floor..." Dean recited to himself as he downed his fourth from the never-ending-glass-of-joy, as he had named his new-found scarlet friend. He twirled the shot glass in his fingers, still fast but not quite as nimble as they had been a short while before.

He wasn't drunk, his vast experience in that area told him that, but he wanted to avoid a major league ass-chewing from Sam. While docile enough under normal circumstances, Sam was capable of tearing mighty chunks indeed from Dean's butt if he so desired. Dean decided, reluctantly replacing the cap on the bottle, that he'd best quit while he was ahead.

Abruptly remembering Bentkover's threat about recompense for missing items, Dean unscrewed the cap and refilled the bottle back to its original level with water from the small sink behind the bar, taking great care to place the bottle back exactly where he'd found it.

He patted the bottle in a comradely fashion, "Thanks, at least you know how to show a guy a good time—"

His head jerked up, eyes cutting to the left as the tinkling sound of a piano came clearly to his ears. He listened intently, slowly turning to look toward the direction of the piano lounge. The music sounded empty and tinny, like the bass was turned all the way off.

He moved from behind the bar, reaching into his jacket for the sawed-off. He stiffened as over the broad flourishes of the keyboard, a voice began to sing, the words far away with a hollow echo.

I'll be seeing you, in all the old familiar places...

He'd seen and heard a lot of creepy things in his life but damn if this one wasn't about to take the cake.

That this heart of mine embraces...

He stumbled into one of the velvet-covered chairs as his balance suddenly wavered, almost falling into the table, causing him to regret at least two of the tequilas he had imbibed, but it was too late now.

All day through...

The voice became stronger as Dean approached the entrance to the piano lounge. Quavering, but definitely louder, he had no idea what Liberace sounded like, but this song Dean knew.

In that small café, the park across the way...

It was suddenly very cold in the glitzy room and Dean felt his skin prickling as he pushed aside one of the filmy curtains with the barrel of the shotgun. His breath formed clouds of vapor in front of his face. It suddenly seemed very hard to keep his grip on the gun.

The children's carousel...the chestnut tree...

The chandeliers overhead began to dance gently in a non-existent breeze, sending flashes of light leaping about the room, making him dizzy and disorienting him.

The wishing well...

The singing voice filled his head, he could feel the keys being struck on his skin.

What the hell was going on here? He thought, shaking his head. He moved unsteadily to the large white piano and raised his gun, grimacing as the voice began the next stanza.

I'll be seeing you...

"Not if I have anything to say about it," Dean growled out loud, pulling back on the trigger.

"Cause this freaking music is *killin'* me!"

Finger tightening on the trigger, Dean watched in morbid fascination as the keys on the piano rolled through the motions of being played. The lilting bars of "I'll Be

Seeing You" still filling the air, the hollow voice accompanying it seemed to be coming from overhead, but the sound was filling Dean's head so much that dizziness was creeping over him, either from the situation or the tequila. Although he couldn't really tell which at this point.

Realizing he really had nothing to aim at and all-too aware of what would happen if rock salt blasted from the gun struck all the mirrors surrounding him, not to mention the damage it would do to the piano which Bentkover would no doubt expect them to pay for, Dean made a face and reluctantly relaxed the pressure on the trigger.

Moving closer he stretched out one hand and held it over the keys, jerking back as he felt the ones under his fingers being depressed, notes ringing out. Stepping to the side he used the muzzle of the gun to push up the lid on the piano, shining his flash around the interior as the strings vibrated, trying to see if some mechanism might be responsible, but his knowledge about such things was too negligible to bear even commenting on.

He grimaced, letting the lid drop as the music began to play more loudly and off key, the voice becoming even more tinny and grating.

The crystal chandeliers overhead began to sway, the multitude of glittering crystals striking each other in the crescendo of a thousand glass wind chimes, flashing lights filling the room with sparks. He cupped a hand over his ear, the cacophony of sounds beginning to cause him actual pain.

He twisted to the right as a fleeting figure, in a swirl of flashing cape, suddenly shot past the mirrors Dean was facing, as though moving in a run from glass to glass. Patience at an end he yelled, "Stop it!!"

Silence reigned instantly.

The lounge went dark and even the chandeliers ceased their clinks and tinkling.

Rubbing a hand across his lips, wishing he had that damned shot glass, Dean raised the shotgun again and began a cautious sweep of the room, the faint reflection of light from the adjoining bar giving the lounge a dim glow.

His eyes went to another flash of sparkling cape in the corridor leading to the bathrooms, the only area that remained lighted.

Great, he thought, rolling his eyes with a grieved huff. *He was chasing friggin' tinkerbell.*

Alarms went off in his body, sending adrenaline pumping into his veins as he realized the corridor led to the bathrooms where Sam was supposed to be.

Gripping the gun more tightly he ran out of the lounge and down the hall. Skidding to a halt, he tried the door and found it was locked.

Hearing crashing and thumps from inside, water running and toilets being flushed, Dean hit the door with the flat of his hand.

"Sam!!! Sammy, what's going on?"

Not waiting for an answer, Dean took a step back and kicked the door inward with one blow, cracking the tiles as the door slammed into the inside wall.

He slipped in the water covering the floor and almost fell, saving himself by grabbing the counter, the gun flying from his surprised grip.

He could see Sam's legs thrashing through the open door in one of the stalls as something tried to hold his head down in the toilet. Water flew everywhere as he thrashed, struggling to break free.

Dean threw himself at the gun, sweeping it up from the puddle it lay in and braced himself, pumping both rounds into the air over Sam's heaving body. Rock salt pinged around the room and stung Dean's exposed skin but Sam, released, fell backwards, coughing and gasping.

Dean rushed over to him and pulled him out of the stall and back onto the floor. "Are you okay? Sam?" Dean demanded, trying to check Sam for injuries. "What the hell happened?"

"I'm okay!" Sam spluttered, wiping his hands over his face, "Something tried to drown me in the toilet!" He gagged, as much from the concept as the action itself.

Relieved that Sam appeared to be relatively unhurt, Dean got to his feet, pulling his sopping wet brother up with him. "For a minute there, I thought you tried to wash your hair in the toilet like you did when you were a kid," he said with a crooked grin.

"I did not!" Sam cried in embarrassed outrage, grabbing hand towels to dry his face.

Dean laughed, recalling Sam's four year old antics, "You so did, and you figured the fresh water coming in after you flushed would do a kick ass job of rinsing it!!"

"DEAN!!!" Sam bellowed, throwing the wadded up towels at Dean. "I think we have more serious issues to discuss!" He shook his hair like a wet dog, scattering droplets around the room and Dean. The truth or lie of Dean's statement notwithstanding, Sam sure as hell wanted to wash his hair now.

Sam suddenly leaned toward Dean, eyes narrowing suspiciously and sniffed. "Have you been drinking?"

Dean's face straightened so suddenly he may as well have carried the bottle in with a straw in the neck to proclaim his guilt.

"Dude," he said, suddenly anxious to divert the conversation, "Let's get outta here and let me tell you what happened to me. You sure you're alright?" he asked with an over abundance of concern. He reached out to Sam but couldn't quite bring himself to touch Sam's dripping form.

Sam glared at Dean but nodded and pushed his way out of the bathroom and walked back toward the bar.

The lights in the corridor were still on but the bar and the lounge beyond remained dark. Dean clicked on his flash and guided them back to the carved wooden bar. He set it on end so that the light bounced off the mirrored ceiling and gave some weak illumination.

Sam grabbed a handful of bar towels and went back to trying to dry himself off, taking a seat at the polished mahogany bar.

Dean grabbed the Pasion Azteca Tequila and the shot glass and put them down in front of Sam.

"I don't want a drink," Sam snapped, ruffling his hair. He paused and took a second look at the bottle, squinting at the label in the thin light. "Dean, this is one of the most expensive tequilas in the world!" he exclaimed in horror.

"Really?" Dean replied, taking another somewhat bleary look. "How do you know? Tasted like regular old tequila to me." He glanced around under the bar. "Maybe if we had some limes and salt..."

"One of the guys in my class got a bottle for his birthday. You didn't drink any of this did you?" Sam said, eyeing the broken seal. "Dean-"

"No!" Dean protested, "I mean, well...yeah, I had a couple-"

"Dean!"

"Will you stop saying my name like it's a swear word!" Dean yelled, "and let me finish! Dude, you gotta see this."

Wearing a bitchface so perfect he must have been practicing in private, Sam crossed his arms and stared at Dean.

Unable to meet Sam's accusing stare, Dean uncapped the tequila and filled the shot glass. "I came in here to check out the bar and, yeah, I figured the least that... Bendover guy could do was spring for a drink, so I had one." Dean tossed the drink back as a demonstration, despite the look of protest that crossed Sam's face. He realized a trifle belatedly that five tequilas in an hour might have put him a tad over his limit, but he went gamely on, blinking.

"Anyway, when I went to pour another the glass was already full. By itself. I didn't pour it." He raised the shot glass which remained woefully empty. Dean peered into it, puzzled. "Sam, swear to God! It was like someone was giving me the drinks! And then I heard this music playing from the piano, and someone singing that stupid, "Seeing You" shong—song!" Dean went on hurriedly.

Sam cocked an eyebrow and peered at Dean skeptically. "Filled by itself, huh? Sounds like Liberace's after your ass if he's trying to ply you with liquor."

Dean went on doggedly, "I went in there to see what the hell and the piano was playing by itself. I even checked under the..." he stopped and gestured trying to think of what he wanted to describe with no help from Sam. "The hood thing...to make sure there wasn't some machine playing it, then I saw this figure in the mirrors-"

"Was it pink with a long trunk?" Sam asked, dryly very much not amused.

"I'm ser-serious!" Dean hiccupped, which pretty much destroyed his claim of veracity. "It had on this sparkly cape and moved across the mirrors, the music stopped and the lights went out except for the ones in the hallway going to the bathrooms. That's how I ended up there...in time to save you from drowning...*toiletboy!*!"

He hiccupped again, making a face at the still-empty glass. "And I gotta tell you, Flushie the Kid, you're damned lucky you didn't drown, 'cause there's no friggin' way I was gonna do CPR on you after I pulled you out of a toilet!" Dean punctuated his remark by dropping the shot glass, which bounced off the bar top, hit Sam's chest and rolled across the counter back to Dean.

Sam ground his teeth into his cheek to keep from laughing at Dean's ludicrously injured air, his pupils so dilated Sam wondered that he could see at all.

He frowned at Dean instead. "When I was in the bathroom," he began in a more serious tone, although watching as Dean blinked at him in a rather slow, lizard-like manner, Sam wasn't sure he really even had Dean's wavering tequila soaked attention. "I felt like someone was watching me, it was this weird sensation. All I wanted to do was get the hell out of there." He shifted uncomfortably, cold from his soaking in the toilet but also from remembering how desperately he wanted to leave that room and the feeling as he was dragged helplessly along the floor. "Next thing I know, something grabs me and tries to drown me. Then you showed up."

"Sorry it took so long to get to you," Dean said contritely, fumbling with the red shot glass.

Sam shrugged, "Sounds like you had stuff to deal with too, anyway you got there in time."

Dean nodded. "Yeah, woulda been a crappy way to find you." His face split into a grin and he snorted at his inadvertent joke. "A crappy way...you get it?" He poked Sam's arm.

Try as he might Sam couldn't stop the answering grin on his own face. "Yeah, Dean, I get it," he rolled his eyes. "Can we try focusing here? This thing started to write a word on the mirrors in the bathroom. *BARA.*"

Dean scrunched up his face. "Bra...ah? What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Not bra!" Sam snapped, exasperated, "Bara! I got grabbed before it was finished, I think. I dunno. I want the laptop but it's in Bentkover's office. Gimme your flashlight and I'll see if I can find my way back in the dark."

At his words the lights suddenly flickered back on.

Dean looked around. "See? When I was checkin' out the piano, just as I saw that figure the lights went out except for the ones in the hall. That's what made me go...that way."

He gestured loosely toward the hallway with one hand and rubbed his eyes with the other, starting to seriously feel the tequila now.

Sam made a face. "It's almost like there's two different things going on. One trying to hurt people and one trying to help." He pushed away from the bar and sent a glare at Dean.

"I'm gonna go get the computer and our bag, see if I can figure out what that word means. Can you just stay here and try not to get in any trouble? I'll be back in a few minutes."

He snagged the bottle of tequila and replaced the cap, screwing it down as tightly as he could. "And no more free drinks from your invisible friend!"

Dean jerked the bottle out of Sam's grip and pushed it back into its place on the shelf, looking offended. "Hey, I was okay enough to pull your ass out of the crapper!" He snapped, then paused to think about what he had just said. "Fine, I'll wait here," he replied. "I'll check the EMF...or something."

Sam nodded. "Good."

Sam grabbed the flash just in case and headed back toward Bentkover's office.

Dean, very buzzed but still annoyed, tapped his fingers on the bar. He pulled the EMF out of his pocket and gave the room a perfunctory sweep with it. The needle quivered slightly but he wrote that off to the lights.

He glanced in the direction Sam had gone, a little concerned about splitting up again, but the only thing more boring than watching Sam do research was...come to think of it, nothing was more boring than watching Sam do research.

He sighed and rubbed his face again. His eyes strayed back to the bottle on the shelf. He was definitely riding a tequila high, much more and he would be officially drunk so it was probably just as well-

He jerked as the EMF suddenly gave off its buzzing whine and the needle jumped to the end of the red mark then fell back.

"Shit..." he muttered, moving it back and forth. As it passed the doorway to the piano lounge the needle jumped again. *Great*, he thought, eyes flicking back the way Sam had gone. He moved slowly from around the bar, grabbing the shotgun and advanced toward the piano lounge, alternately watching the bouncing needle and glancing up to make sure he didn't blunder into...anything.

Walking through the filmy curtains hanging everywhere was skin crawlingly like walking through spiderwebs and Dean sent several of them to the floor as he wove through them, the EMF held in front of him, screeching annoyingly, the needle holding steady at the high end of the red mark.

He stumbled as his foot caught on another of the damned chairs, but not because he'd had too much to drink!

He dropped the EMF and broke his fall against one of the tables which tipped over with his weight and he crashed to the floor in a clumsy heap, swearing.

"Hello, Dean..."

His flailing stopped instantly and eyes shot up at the sound of that, oh-so-familiar, slightly sneering voice.

He scrambled hurriedly to his feet, grabbing the same chair that had tripped him to keep his balance. "Meg!" he coughed out in shock.

He shook his head, grinding his fingers into his eyes. Okay no more tequila for him - *ever*.

She stepped out of the shadows, the same short blonde hair, brown eyes, tan leather jacket and the same smirk twisting her pretty lips.

She rolled her eyes. "Dean, Dean, Dean," she chanted softly, dragging one of the filmy curtains through her hands. "You were never one to let the obvious escape you. It's nice to know old friends don't change." She laughed softly and watched him from the corner of her eyes.

Dean felt his heart start to beat faster. "You can't be here," he asserted, straightening. "We sent you back to hell. The girl you possessed died in my arms, you bitch!"

She ran her fingertips over a gilt-edged chair with distaste. Her head swiveled up to fix him with a cold stare as she undulated closer to him. "Yes, you did, on both counts. And yet another innocent dies at your hands." She smiled, sharing a secret between friends. "Admit it, Dean, I know you get off on killing demons, but wasn't the thrill of killing a human being, knowing you held their life in your hands, that you could crush it out with no more thought than you'd give to stepping on a bug, just that much more...*fun*?"

Dean felt himself giving ground as she advanced. "You aren't here," he said firmly, feeling the wall behind him. Saying it apparently didn't make it so as she kept coming.

He fumbled for the shotgun and raised it but her resultant laugh made him wonder if it would do any good to fire it.

Bentkover's Office

Sam tapped gently on the door out of courtesy even though he was pretty sure their boss was no longer in the building. It was just a guess, but the hunter suspected Bentkover was pretty much a coward when it came to anything supernatural. Anything the man couldn't understand he seemed to fear – which was probably why he'd taken an instant dislike to Dean.

Plus, Dean never really seemed to get along with members of his own sex. Maybe it was the inherent air of threat that followed Dean around and was sensed by other males like some bizarre anti-pheromone.

When no sound came from within the office, Sam twisted the door knob, half expecting it to be locked. Water dripped from his cuff and trickled along his hand onto the metal, reminding him that bathrooms really should be "no go" areas for this particular Winchester.

"Great, Dean will be calling me 'Soggy Sam' next," he muttered to himself as he entered the office, fumbling again until he found the brass light switch by the side of the door frame.

Flicking it on, Sam entered, smiling as he left damp footmarks on Bentkover's plush carpet. It was funny just how soaked he'd gotten from the overflowing sinks and "terror toilet." *That'll teach Bentkover to diss hunters...*

Spying their trusty laptop on Bentkover's desk where they'd left it earlier, Sam sat in the plush chair, taking care to press his damp body into as much of it as possible in a gesture that would have made Dean proud.

As polite as Sam was by nature he was well aware that Bentkover was a total jerk, but he was also their current meal ticket and if Dean wanted to play with the big boy toys that Las Vegas had to offer, they needed to smile and be relatively servile so they could collect their pay.

He twisted the sleek silver computer around and quickly booted it, careful not to get any of the dripping water from his clothes and hair into the machine.

Toilet hair – I'll start a new fashion, Sam thought with a grimace, pushing his shaggy, sopping mop back with one hand while he worked on Google with the other. *Forget José Eber, just stick your head down the john...*

Sam winced at his own humor and continued his search for the mystery word he'd seen scrawled in the restroom mirror.

"Bara" was apparently a name in some countries, a place, and even an association of some sort in the U.K. The problem was, none of the definitions exactly jumped out at the hunter as being something a ghost would write. A pissed ghost with a toilet fetish at that.

"I'm hitting a brick wall, and I bet Dean is down there having fun with that damn ever-full glass of tequila. How the hell did I get to be research boy?" Sam shook his head, knowing full well he'd made his own fate by being the only family member to actually go to college. Not that Dean was dumb – frighteningly far from it - he just played it sometimes when he wanted no part in the "boring side" of the family business.

Still, that didn't mean Sam had to like it when he got stuck with the investigating while Dean got drunk. Sam smiled. Then again, sitting tapping at a laptop was way better than getting hit on by the King of Bling's singing spirit.

Did I really think this gig would ever be fun?

In a way, it was amusing to see his brother squirm, but on the other hand the actual case was going nowhere. They hadn't even exactly proved they were dealing with Liberace, let alone the "why" the spirit was back. And even if this was Liberace – which was looking like a big "if" right now – salting and burning a beloved Hollywood icon's remains that were entombed in an above ground concrete crypt in the middle of the most famous cemetery in the world wasn't going to be any party.

Sam sighed, wishing the bar towels had absorbed more of the sweet smelling water from his clothing.

Who the hell puts scented water in a toilet? I smell like a damn girl...

Of course, if he didn't get to a shower and soon, he'd get called more than that by Dean – especially when his sibling sobered enough to dredge through his seemingly endless supply of insulting names for every occasion.

Sam would have considered anything better than "Raymond" at this point. For a second, he even considered forgetting the word "Bara" in search of the elusive moniker's origins, but after a quick shrug he pushed away the idea. He had to remember who "Raymond" was without the aid of Google, if only for his own sanity.

Focusing back on the word at hand, Sam tapped more keys, hitting the more obscure sites on the search engine's pages until something made him pause. "Bara" was apparently a word belonging to the Taino culture – a pre-Colombian people who believed the word meant "death."

"Okay, after being half-drowned in a toilet bowl I'd say this is the word I'm looking for..." Sam's eyes danced across the writing on the screen, trying to miss out anything that seemed irrelevant to his search. "Now what the hell is an ancient word from an ancient culture doing being scrawled in the bathroom from hell?"

The page ended with no other reference to what he was investigating and Sam pushed back in Bentkover's chair, annoyed that he was probably getting no further than his half-inebriated brother.

At least when someone is after Dean's ass in this place it's literally. It's not trying to show him one hundred and one new ways to shower head first down a crapper.

Sam looked up as he heard a shuffle outside the door. *Speak of the devil.* He wasn't surprised, Dean bored easily and after the earlier incident, even half in the bag, Dean would not be happy about them separating again.

"Hey, Dean, you need a hand finding which door is the real one? Go for the one in the middle," He called out. Smiling, he closed the laptop to stride across the room into the outer corridor. Despite Sam's admonitions, Dean had no doubt given in to temptation and had partaken of more tequila and would probably need to puke or pass out somewhere pretty soon.

And let's face it I doubt he's going to want to visit the john in this joint ever again, and I'm sure as hell with him in that...

Sam stopped the minute he stepped into the corridor.

It was darker than when he'd entered the office and it was *wrong* all over again, just like in the bathrooms.

In the shadows, the lanky hunter could see a figure, but it wasn't Dean's form in the deeper darkness. From the lithe shape and height he guessed it was a woman – certainly not what he was expecting at this time in a haunted bar's offices. Not that Dean would complain if he were here right now.

"Hey, the place is closed. Did you get locked in?" He asked, nerve endings prickling as he cautiously moved forward a step.

The woman didn't answer, and Sam stopped dead as she came smoothly toward him, floating over the ground. Sam glanced downwards at the end of the long fluttering skirts where no feet were visible. The effect was better than any Hollywood movie, but the best was yet to come.

As Sam watched in morbid fascination the girl's features came into view. So young, so beautiful, so *familiar*.

"You...you..." Sam's spine hit the doorjamb to Bentkover's office even though he didn't recall sending the signal from his brain to back up. His breathing sped up along with his heart and he seemed to stall, caught between the urge to run and the desire to crumple to the ground in shock as Jess's lips curved into a smile.

"What, Sam?" she asked in feigned surprise. Her arms stretched outwards, beckoning, calling him to her, but something told him the embrace from this abomination that wore Jess's face would not be affectionate.

"You can't be here." Sam's Adam's apple bobbed and he swallowed convulsively. It had to be a nightmare. He was asleep, remembering, imagining. "This isn't real. You aren't Jess."

The Jess thing shook her head, long hair billowing backwards even though there was no breeze in the passageway. "You're not asleep, Sam. I'm real. Just as real as your pathetic, drunken, brother—"

Sam tried to compose himself, fighting the part of him that wanted - needed - this to be real because he still loved Jess - still missed her even though he had accepted he needed to move on. Whoever, whatever this was enjoyed his pain, perhaps even fed on it like the Alp that had once attacked Dean.

"Jess is dead." Trying his damndest to keep the question out of the statement. "I don't know what you are, but you're not my girlfriend." Sam pried his back from the doorframe and ducked back into the office, desperate to retrieve the bag the brothers had left behind earlier along with the laptop. His eyes flashed quickly across the room, but there was no sign of the elusive holdall or its contents.

Shit!

"You can't run from me, Sam."

Sam spun around, facing the entity that had joined him in the office, unsure whether it really was the specter of his girlfriend, warped by her time stuck in the ether, or whether the thing was something more - something that enjoyed extra-toiletry activities.

The voice took on an ethereal sound. One he almost *felt* more than he heard. "You can't run from your past or what you did that night..." Jess held her head at an odd angle, the meager lighting somehow reflecting some strange glow in her eyes that made her look almost like a mannequin.

"What I did?" Sam asked, then cursed himself for responding to the bait. "Was it you in the bathroom?"

Jess's smile widened and she reached out again, fingers spreading this time, the motion of her arms sending a gust of wind through the room that almost left icicles hanging from Sam's soaked locks - almost.

"Hey!" Sam complained suddenly, pulling a burst of bravado and wit from somewhere inside him that nearly rivaled his brother's, even without the tequila. "Next time make it warm. I kinda need a blow dry after your bathroom foreplay." He stuffed a hand in his pocket while he talked, hitting on the right buttons from memory to speed dial Dean.

You so better not have passed out on the bar, bro...

The cell chimed, indicating it was calling someone, but Sam had no real way of knowing if his brother had picked up or not. He really didn't want this *Jessting*, or whatever the hell it was, knowing he'd called for reinforcements - reinforcements that he hoped were sober enough to know the right end of a rocksalt-filled shotgun.

I hope you're hearing this, Dean...c'mon, c'mon.c'mon!!!

Jess's brow suddenly creased and she stopped her forward motion, her head cocking slightly as it tipped towards Sam's pocket. "You shouldn't have done that, Sam," she murmured, disappointment in him plain on her lovely face. "He can't help you anyway..."

"What have you done?" Sam's voice cracked as the abrupt thought hit him that Dean may be in worse danger. They had already speculated there might be two spirits. What if they were both evil playing off each other?

"Nothing that I'm not going to do to you next—" The Jessting lifted her left arm until it was level with the young hunter, opening her palm as it came in line with his chest.

In an instant, Sam felt something slam into him like one of Rocky Balboa's best. *Sheesh, whatever the hell this thing was it may have looked like a girl but it sure didn't hit like one...*

The power of the punch was so unexpected he seemed to absorb it more, his body spinning backwards and over Bentkover's oak desk before he could gain any semblance of balance.

Hey, Dean's the one who's supposed to get tossed into something hard at least once per gig, not me!

Sam grunted loudly as his ribs glanced off the arm of Bentkover's outrageously large chair, winding him as he landed in a crumpled mess on the other side. "Why?" He managed to gasp, grimacing, one hand covering his ribs. "Why hurt people here? Why now?"

The hunter shakily used the back edge of the desk to pull himself up, leaning heavily on the worktop as he sucked down several breaths in quick succession.

Jess's doppelganger didn't answer. She simply stared at him with those cold, doll-like eyes until he could take no more. Sam looked away, wanting, needing to remember his girlfriend the way she had been not this macabre facsimile.

This wasn't the woman who he'd made love to, worshipped, hell, intended to marry. No matter how long Jess was trapped in limbo, she wouldn't be this way. He couldn't believe it.

Not now.

Not ever.

"You killed me, Sam." Her voice grew hard, angry. "The night you left me behind to go with your brother, just like that. You walked away and left me behind at the mercy of that yellow-eyed *thing*. A toy for it to torment. I didn't deserve that. Now you have to pay, just like the others..."

* * * *

Screw it, Dean thought, lifting the gun suddenly and firing. The explosion of sound and the pings and whistles of ricocheting rock salt forced Dean's arm up to cover his face at the tiny fragments pelted him.

When he dropped it, Meg was gone.

The shotgun dropped back to his side and Dean rubbed his rapidly blurring eyes. *A demon wouldn't have just disappeared*, he stated to himself.

So what the hell was that? he demanded of himself in return.

He glared around the room, pissed at himself for being lulled by the Shot Glass of Tequila Infinity. It just hadn't seemed possible that this dorky sequin-spangled situation held any real threat, and at the time diving headfirst into some free tequila hadn't seemed like a bad idea. Now, reflexes undeniably slowed, he was ass deep in a no-crap serious situation and—

Holy crap!

SAM!

Swearing, he whipped around and tore out of the room, knocking chairs over in his wake, his exit punctuated by the melodic tinkle of the chandeliers swaying overhead as he passed beneath them.

He almost skidded past the hall that led to Bent-whomever's office, managing to stumble to a halt as his eyes fell on a figure in white with long curly blonde hair standing in the doorway. Moving forward as quietly as he could, he raised the gun to empty the other barrel but froze as the figure suddenly turned and faced him.

Jess...?

The gun wavered, his gaze going past her to Sam's frozen form pressed against the wall behind the desk.

No friggin' way!

The look in Sam's eyes brought the gun back up to ready but as his finger tightened on the trigger, the spirit wearing Jess's face suddenly made a sweeping gesture at Sam and he went flying through the air toward Dean.

Dean dropped the gun as Sam's body slammed into him and they went down in a tangle of arms, legs and curses.

By the time they had sorted themselves out, "Jess" was gone.

Sam rubbed where his head had struck the stock of Dean's gun and got shakily to his feet, looking up and down the hall, for what, he wasn't quite sure, but they appeared to be alone.

Seeing Jess, even if it wasn't Jess, had rattled him more than he cared to admit. And even knowing it wasn't Jess didn't ease the resurgence of guilt he thought he had put behind him over her death.

"Dude, gimme a hand," Dean wheezed from the floor, holding out a none-too-steady hand.

Sam turned back to help Dean up, steadying him as his balance failed. "Thanks, man," Sam said gripping Dean's arm as he swayed. "I saw her and...I just..."

Dean shook his head, regretting it instantly as everything went triplicate. "You know that wasn't Jess?" He said, pressing his hands into his eyes. "Any more than that was Meg I saw downstairs."

Sam stiffened, "You saw Meg?"

Dean nodded delicately and moved toward Bentkover's office in search of a chair, Sam trailing along behind him.

"You just left and the EMF freaked out." Dean sank into a chair and told himself the dizziness he was feeling was from the crash with Sam, not five shots of tequila, one right after the other. Being somewhat biased in his own favor he didn't have to much trouble convincing himself.

"I followed the signal into the piano lounge and there she was. Same hair, same jacket, same bitchy attitude, same everything, but when I fired at her she just vanished."

Dean sat back in a boneless slump and stared blearily at Sam who had seated himself behind Bentkover's desk and was obviously still trying to get himself back under control.

Dean felt sympathy wash over him, enhanced undoubtedly by his *mild* inebriation, but that didn't make it any less real. If seeing Meg had unnerved Dean, seeing Jess must have done a real number on Sam, judging from the way his throat worked and that he hadn't said anything.

"It wuzzin Jess, Sam..." he said, hearing the slur but not caring. "Don't do this..."

Sam glanced up at him, distractedly pushing the laptop back and forth. "I know," he replied. "It just...threw me for a minute. I'm okay." His eyes said he was liar but Dean let it go.

"What made you come back here?" Sam asked, starting to punch the keys on the laptop.

Dean pushed himself upright, leaning his elbows on his knees and rubbing his face to try to wake himself up. "Well, after I blasted Meg, or whatever the hell it was, it hit me it might go after you and dude..." Dean glanced around so intently Sam couldn't resist doing the same, "I got to thinking if this Bendystraw guy had a bathroom in his office you might be in some serious shit--" he stopped dead as the words left his mouth, his eyes meeting Sam's before breaking into an explosive snorting laugh.

Sam stared as Dean giggled helplessly, finally getting himself under control and wiping his eyes. "Are you through?" Sam asked dryly, tapping the end of a pencil on the desk pad.

"I'm sorry, Sammy..." Dean gasped. God, all he wanted to do was sleep now. He tried to compose himself as he felt Sam's glare begin to burn a hole in the center of his forehead.

"Okay," Dean said, clearing his throat, "So, it looks like we may have three spirits to deal with then, right." His all-business demeanor was somewhat spoiled by a hiccup but at least he looked like he was paying attention.

Sam rolled his eyes and wondered if they made leashes for humans. He shook his head. "I'm not so sure," he replied. "Before...what just happened...I found this about the word Bara." He started to turn the screen for Dean to see but realized Dean was incapable of focusing on the print and began to read instead, hitting the highlights.

"The Taino culture refers to certain spirits that have moved on as *Hupias* or *Op'as*. They can assume many shapes and most often that of a loved one." He glanced up at Dean who was frowning slightly. "Maybe that's why I saw Jess. It picked her form out of my mind."

Dean shifted in his chair. "Well, I can understand that, but that sure doesn't explain me seeing Meg. I mean be honest here, I kinda killed her. Makes it hard to form a warm relationship in that kind of situation, seems to me." Humor gone he was back to wanting sleep and a warning headache was forming behind his right eye.

"Hell, Sam, why would something like that just start for no reason? And why here, on Planet Sugarplum Fairy? Liberace sure as hell ain't no Taino or hoopla or whatever the hell."

Sam stared past Dean, thinking. "Both spirits mentioned a girl dying for no reason and that we had to pay for it, like the others." He bit the inside of his lip as he tried to make sense of it. "Did she mean 'like the others' as in the two men that are missing? Maybe they hurt someone and brought the *Hupia* down on themselves." He started tapping on the keyboard again.

"Dude," Dean said tiredly, "If that was the case, half the people in LA would be gone. What the hell do some ancient cave dwellers have to do with Mr. *I'll be seeing you* friggin' Liberace?" He was getting crankier by the minute, the tequila buzz having worn off.

"They weren't cave dwellers, Dean," Sam replied, "They were a tribe."

"I don't give a damn if they were aliens from Mars!" Dean snapped. "It doesn't make any sense."

"It says that over the years the Taino people were assimilated into a lot of other cultures or relocated to other places like Costa Rica and Cuba."

"That still doesn't explain what it's doing *here*," Dean replied.

"I know," Sam said with asperity. "But it's a place to start. I think maybe we're looking for the spirit of a woman who maybe died or was killed recently that was of Cuban origin or something like. Maybe something happened to her here or close by."

"Okay, smart guy," Dean growled, leaning forward. "So tell me, then, what could that possibly have to do with Liberace?"

Sam shrugged, smirking. "Dude, he gave you the free drinks, not me. Probably has nothing to do with the Hupia, he may have had nothing to do with it at all 'til you showed up. Maybe he senses a kindred spirit, a common bond, maybe he just appreciates your ass—"

"Stop right there!" Dean yelled.

"—ets" Sam concluded.

Library

The Next Day

Sam let his fingers slowly caress the keyboard's keys, eyes darting across the aging screen from one missing persons article to the next. Searching out a dead girl was never going to be easy in a town like Vegas, but he wanted to make sure in his haste to read through every report that he didn't miss anything vital.

A girl had been killed, possibly murdered, of that much he was sure now.

"Find anything?" Sam's gaze slid from the computer monitor to his brother. The tequila Dean had consumed the previous evening didn't appear to have dampened his party spirit one iota – although the actual fact he'd been forced into a library was doing little for his mood.

Dean shrugged, secretly happy in the knowledge that Sam could in no way see what was on his screen from the angle at which he was sitting. "Nothing that's going to explain why we got a visit from Meg the Merciless *and* Mr. Bling last night." He stifled a smirk as "Casino Tools" popped up on his favorite online gambling site. Sometimes what Sammy didn't know couldn't hurt him, and surfing for better poker techniques was way more interesting than sifting through death columns. "I mean, I swear that friggin' spook has more glitter than a *Star Trek* transporter on overdrive."

Sam watched his brother suspiciously, not missing the glint in Dean's eyes as he scrolled through whatever was on his computer screen. *Do library websites actually let you access porn?* He shook the idea off. Not even Dean was that crass. *Yeah, right...*

"I can't figure out where Liberace might fit into all this," Sam admitted, returning his attention to his search. "But we pretty much know about the Meg and Jess appearances. Maybe Liberace just wants to help. *You* being his favorite and all." He smirked. "Maybe he's after a date?"

Dean cringed. "Dude, the only date he's getting is with two cartridges of rock salt. I'm telling you, I wouldn't date him, even if he was a girl. He's way too much your type. And," the hunter added with a grin, "it was your ass he got attached to in the john..."

"That wasn't him," Sam scowled. "I think we pretty much know that was our second spirit."

"Oh yeah?" Dean teased. "You sure ol' piano fingers wasn't just looking for a good time, Raymond?"

"Dean-" The scowl grew until Sam's eyebrows were almost meeting and the creases on his forehead signaled he was not appreciating this particular distraction. "I wasn't the one he plied with tequila..."

Dean huffed, unsure whether to continue harassing his brother or reading the gambling site. The latter was the safer option, because the pair were fast spiraling into sibling warfare – and while Dean usually came out the winner – Sammy had his moments when he was pissed.

Right now, Dean was pretty sure he was pissed.

If there was one thing Sam still held onto, it was Jess's memory. The spook they were after had rekindled that memory just enough for Sam to remember his girlfriend burning on a ceiling, and it had all been *his* fault. It didn't matter that the Jess he'd just met was tainted – just a bad copy of something far more beautiful – all that Sam could now see was blame, and no amount of bad jokes from Dean would absolve him.

"Hey, take a look at this-" Sam's brooding expression vanished as he leaned forward, latching onto a recent newspaper report as if it was something from the top shelf of a magazine store.

"Naked, semi-naked or just plain seductive?" Dean dodged back on his seat, unsure if a mock punch would head his way. When Sam simply exhaled and shook his head, Dean raised his hands in surrender. "Okay, so you're not viewing the Skin Channel's finest. So what else can put a look like that on your face?"

"Yelina Famosa." Sam concentrated on what he'd discovered as if his life depended on it. After the toilet incident, maybe it did. "She was visiting her aunt from Cuba when she vanished. And take a look at the dates. Yelina's disappearance was only a week or so before the men began to vanish from the bar..."

"So, Mr. Glitterball really isn't kidnapping guys to be his sex kittens, huh?"

"I think he's reserving that job for you," Sam muttered under his breath before continuing, "Yelina was just twenty-six when she vanished. Pretty girl, too." He twisted the bulky monitor just enough for his brother to see the picture on-screen. "It says she borrowed her aunt's car and went out for the night to see all the famous Vegas landmarks. She never came home."

"Sammy, if this is our spirit, how the hell do we find out what happened to her? I mean, c'mon, dude, her bones could be coyote chow by now." Dean finally gave up the gambling site to join his brother, looking over Sam's shoulder at the young girl who he considered way too attractive to be dead. Life out here sucked way more than the TV let on – unless you happened to be a *C.S.I.* fan – and Dean seriously didn't subscribe to that kind of viewing.

"The clue has to be with the two missing guys." Sam suggested, changing his search pattern as his brother watched on in awe. Finding poker sites and porn was easy, but the real research was way too drawn out for Dean's liking. "Here," Sam finally offered. "Gerard Collins and Peter Muni both worked together. They were also both good friends of Michael Bentcover..."

Dean made a noise that suggested he wanted to be sick. "You gotta be half-dead to be friends with that jerk. He's so stiff, I swear I saw him in *Night of the Living Dead* as one of the freakin' zombies. Given who his boss used to be, maybe I should start calling the freak Bendover...wa-yyyy creepy, I'm telling ya."

"Dean!" Sam chided. "The point is why didn't he tell us he was buddies with the victims? There has to be a connection, right?"

Dean pulled away from the screen and tugged out the Impala's keys from his pocket. "Hey, you're the one who is good with the figures there, Raymond. Why don't you calculate the odds that 'Bendover' called us in to help because he's part of this damn mess."

Sam bit his lip, but it was no use. The whole Raymond deal was just starting to eat at him. Coming to Vegas had been such a mistake. *Wait till I get my hands on Bobby.* "Dean," he yelled like a spoiled kid. "What is it with this *Raymond* crap?"

Dean's face lit up into an ear-to-ear grin but he didn't answer. Finally, he'd found something to bug the crap outta Sammy. And let's face it Sam deserved it after bringing them to the lair of the freakiest spook in showbiz.

Scooting through the library door he didn't even hear his younger brother cussing, or indeed see Sam quickly searching for any "famous Raymonds" before powering down the computer and following him to the car.

Carluccio's Tivoli Gardens

The lavish bar bristled with activity as both brothers ambled through the main doors. The odd patron paused, taking in the Winchesters and their out of place attire, but for the most part, they remained unnoticed amongst the throngs of Liberace fans and Las Vegas tourists.

"Man, I still think this is the creepiest joint we've ever visited." Dean glanced at the shining mirrors, remembering his earlier encounter and praying it had been down to the tequila.

"Worse than Roosevelt?"

"Way worse." He grimaced.

"Worse than Rapture's Climb?"

"Way..." Dean opened his mouth, began to spout a reply and then thought better of it. "Okay, so maybe not *that* bad, but still, I hate it when there's something out there after *my* ass I can't friggin' see."

"Maybe you can see him." Sam bobbed his head towards a huge painting on the wall that's eyes seemed to follow them everywhere they walked. Liberace was smiling down at the crowds, and Sam was pretty sure the "stalker" effect was just a

trick of the light, but it was enough to make his brother squirm. *That'll teach him to keep on with this Raymond crap.*

Dean's face wrinkled into a "screw you" expression he was pretty much famed for perfecting. "Hey, Samantha, can you play the piano?"

Sam paused mid-stride, suddenly caught off guard by the question. "No."

"Pity, dude." Dean slapped his brother right between the shoulders, his grin ever-widening. "I thought maybe I could stick your ass in a sequin suit and pimp you out to this crowd. We could make a fortune."

"Ha freakin' ha," Sam feigned laughter as he walked to the bar. "Maybe you could do stand up on the strip – permanently, if you catch my drift."

Dean shrugged. "Nah, you'd miss my ass, Ray."

"You boys back again?"

Sam just managed to clamp his mouth shut and look up at the pretty brunette behind the counter. "We're looking for Mr. Bentkover. Have you any idea where we can find him?"

"Sure." The girl nodded. "Today's his poker day. He's downtown at the 'Storm Front' with friends. They have a private weekly game."

Dean's eyes glistened. "Poker, huh? Can't fault the guy..." *Well, apart from his looks, attitude, dress sense, career choice...and the fact that he's basically a total dick.*

"Thanks, we'll catch up with him later." Sam smiled affably, quickly dragging his brother by the arm towards Bentkover's office before he decided to try on his wily charms with yet another unsuspecting victim. "C'mon, this is our chance to look around while the guy's not here."

"I was enjoying the view I had, thanks." Dean shook his arm free and looked longingly back at the girl. "Seriously, do you even *know* what 'good time' means, dude?"

"It means not having to see some disembodied version of Jess in some restaurant corridor," Sam snapped back. "It means not having to wonder *who* and *what* the hell I am half my life. It means being *normal*." He paused as they reached the manager's door, quickly sliding a lock pick into the opening after trying the handle to no avail. "And it means *not being called Raymond!*"

Dean hunched his shoulders as the door swung open without so much as a groan. "Hey, if the cap fits," he teased.

Sam closed the door behind them and breathed a sigh of relief when he noted the blinds were closed. No one outside would have seen them enter. "So, you named me after Alex Raymond right? Comic book creator and the guy behind *Flash Gordon*? I mean, only you would think of something so childish..."

Sam waited. He hadn't had long at the library to do any kind of search, but Dean had always been into reading comics rather than informative literature. It just fit somehow. Of course, that didn't really explain why he'd been given the moniker suddenly.

"Oh, you're so not *Flash*, not even if he did have a *ray* gun." Dean wiggled his eyebrows and Sam had to wonder if he'd been partaking of the magic tequila glass again. "So, I'm not finding anything on the desk here." Dean expertly deflected further questioning on the subject, flicking through paperwork that was obviously part and parcel of the business's everyday dealings.

"Me either," Sam admitted. "I'm guessing if the guy has anything sinister to hide it'll be in the safe."

"Which I'll lay odds is behind that big ass picture of the Sequin God over here." Dean tapped the gold frame of the oil painting, thinking he much preferred it to the portrait it held. "Ten bucks says I'm in the thing in less than two minutes?" He pulled at the painting, unsurprised when it came away from the wall on two hinges to reveal a small safe.

“Gamble with you? In this town?” Sam shook his head. “No way, dude. I’ve seen the way you cheat-”

Dean let his fingers feel the dial on the somewhat out of date safe, twisting it slowly so that he could hear the motion of the tumblers inside. “That’s not cheating, Ray. That’s called skill – you know? That thing you never had when it came to gambling or getting laid.”

“Yeah, ‘cause you’re so getting pounced on by all the hot chicks out here,” Sam countered, grimacing when his brother teased open the safe door in less than a minute. *Is that a new Winchester record?*

Dean didn’t acknowledge the retort and began rifling through the safe’s contents instead. After tossing aside numerous wads of cash he whirled, the huge grin he’d sported earlier returning with a vengeance. Between his thumb and forefinger he held a pair of red lace panties so gaudy they’d make the most hardened pole dancer blush. “Ten to one these are Bendover’s,” he suggested lewdly. “I always knew that guy was weird...”

Sam joined his brother, more interested in the cash and other contents of the safe than the girly underwear. “I hate to disappoint that perverted mind of yours, bro, but those belong to the brunette behind the bar. I saw her climbing into Bentkover’s Dodge Viper last night. Pretty cool shade of red-”

Dean flicked the panties onto Bentkover’s desk. “That they are,” he murmured distractedly.

“I meant the car, Dean!” Sam shook his head and focused on the mound of paperwork in the safe. There seemed to be almost as many wads of cash as there were receipts for some undisclosed transactions. “Hey, take a look at this. Bentkover’s been getting payments, source unknown, and they started just around the time Yelina vanished.”

“Yeah, and get a load of this.” Dean plucked a larger receipt from the back of the metal safe and bent it back so it was easier to read in the dull light. “It’s a receipt for a repair to a late model Mercedes SLK. Also dated around the time the girl disappeared. And, dude, if you say our guy drives a Dodge...”

“He could have more than one car. It’s not a crime.” Sam pointed out.

“Yeah, or Bendover might have been helping his two buddies after they had a fender bender that got outta hand. I’m betting the missing guys hit Yelina’s car. Maybe they were drunk, or high, or just plain assholes. Whatever, I’m thinking they were also pretty much wusses with more cash than upstairs brains.” Dean dropped the receipt in disgust, as if merely touching it meant he’d been tainted.

He had hated Bentkover to begin with and this new information added "loathe" and "despise" to the list.

“So, the two missing guys come over here all panicked and scared, and Bentkover promises to make it all go away – for a price.” Sam voiced his brother’s theory. “Bentkover has been taking bribes to keep quiet ever since. At least until Collins and Muni vanished. Then maybe he got scared himself and called us in.”

“Because he’s a wuss-assed coward who can’t finish what he starts,” Dean suggested helpfully, if somewhat brusquely.

“Dean, if we’re right, Yelina won’t stop until she’s finished the job. Bentkover is probably her next victim!”

Dean cocked his head. “You promise? ‘Cause I’m telling you, if she don’t stick *his* head down a toilet, I probably will.”

“*Dean!*” Sam slapped the receipt book in his hand to try and gain his sibling’s somewhat jaded attention. “We have to find Bentkover and get the information about Yelina’s remains. She won’t stop at vengeance for her death, not anymore. She attacked us too, remember? What if every time some guy comes in the bar who’s jilted his girlfriend she gets all fired up?”

Dean ran a hand through his short-cropped hair, a thought abruptly dawning on him. "Dude, if this chick ever finds out half of my past I'm number one on her freakin' hit list!"

Sam couldn't stop his mouth from creasing into a small smile. At least Dean admitted he hopped into more than his fair share of beds, and then hopped out again just as quickly – mostly not even gracing the girl with a goodbye.

"Spirits don't see things the way the living do. We already know that. Yelina could target just about anyone – especially after the way her death was covered up." Sam chewed unconsciously on his lower lip. "So now what? We can't go to the cops, we don't have enough evidence. And we can't salt and burn Yelina's body, because we still have no clue where Bentkover hid it."

"We need Grissom, not Liberace to fix this mess." Dean rubbed a hand over his face in contemplation, and when his eyes began to sparkle anew, Sam realized his brother had a plan as good as any Hannibal Smith had ever contrived. "Dude," Dean clapped his hands together. "It's time to play some poker..."

Storm Front Casino, North Strip

Dean entered the casino like he owned the place. It was the usual wash of lights, noise and glitter. The cries of both winners and losers ringing through the air along with the crash of falling coins as the sound of one-armed bandits running through their clatter of rolling cylinders bestowed either poverty or riches.

Dean had been in a lot of casinos but was always fascinated by the mix of splashy evening dresses, jewelry and coiffed hair standing alongside jeans, t-shirts and sandals, both parties staring anxiously at screens waiting for the big payoff. Off to the side he even saw a wedding party, the bride in her long white gown running happily up to her tuxedo-clad groom with a handful of markers.

Dean's gaze settled on the tables in the back where groups of men gathered around poker tables and played their skills against one another, the raise and call determined by the cock of an eyebrow or the twitch of a lip. There was a small group watching but the players at the tables seemed oblivious to their presence.

Squinting against the glare Dean spotted Bentkover huddled over large stacks of neatly piled chips.

Dean moved toward the table, softly whispering. "You son of a bitch, I'm gonna screw you into the ground." He winked and strode up through the crowd to the roped off area of tables.

It was much quieter back here. The cocktail waitresses were a little classier, the drinks a little more full. This was obviously high roller territory.

Without pausing Dean unhooked a rope and stepped through.

Instantly, two security people with tiny coiled wires behind their ears stopped him.

"I'm sorry, sir, these are private games by invitation only. If you want to play poker we have tables in the front." They moved forward subtly, trying to edge Dean back.

Dean grinned, "Yeah, I saw 'em. Amateur night in hell. I wanta play with the big boys."

Dean refused to move back, so he and the security man stood toe to toe and almost touched noses.

"As I said, *sir*, these are private games by invitation-"

"I heard you," Dean replied, twisting to see around the man, catching Bentkover's eye and waving with a big smile. "That's my pal over there and he's asked me to play. Hiya, Mike!!" he called loudly, turning several heads at the other tables, who looked up in irritated recognition.

Bentkover's face looked like he just tasted something sour as he glared at Dean, who was waving like a fool and calling his name in a voice just short of a shout.

The casino security was trying to muscle Dean out but he resisted, suddenly calling out, "Yelina said you wanted to play a hand with men, Mr. Bentkover. I guess she was wrong."

"Wait!" Bentkover stood and held out a hand, his fellow players threw their cards down in disgust. "I remember now, gentlemen, please, he's right, I did invite him, I had forgotten."

A man choking on broken glass would have had a warmer smile but Dean grinned at the guard and clapped the man on the shoulder. "Better luck next time." He shoved the frowning guard aside and walked to the table with a large smile.

Dean slid into the seat across the table from Bentkover. They became engaged in a staring contest, Dean with an easy smile on his face, Bentkover with a twist of his lips and a narrowing of his eyes.

"What are you playing at?" Bentkover growled, as if the other men at the table didn't exist.

Dean winked again. "Playing poker, Mike. How about you? I heard you play for pretty high stakes"

Bentkover squinted at Dean's smiling lips and cold green eyes.

He knew, Bentkover thought. *Somehow he knew...*

"Sometimes you have a lot to lose," Bentkover replied. "How much are *you* willing to lose?"

Dean reached into his jacket and pulled out a wad of bills, tossing them on the table.

"Nothing that matters," he replied, not smiling now. "I think Yelina lost more to you."

Dean never broke eye contact with Bentkover nor altered his mocking smile.

The other players stared at each other in confusion, sensing something was up between their slick regular game partner and this scrounging newcomer, but unable to figure out what.

Bentkover cast an eye over the other men at the table then nodded to the chip holder who picked up Dean's money and quickly counted it replacing it with a tray of chips.

The cards were dealt and the hand began. Bentkover was good, Dean could see that. The other three men obviously had more money than skill. Their tells were out in the open plain to see and Dean picked up on them instantly, playing to lose a hand or two then win the one that counted.

Sam could play poker with skill and he was good at it, but Dean was an artist and he was giving it all he had but doing it with such casual arrogance it seemed effortless.

In no time flat the other players had dropped out as they folded their cards and got out while they still had something to take with them.

The piles of chips in front of Dean and Bentkover were fairly equal, Bentkover's, meticulously stacked as he continuously fidgeted with them, Dean's in a pile that kept allowing a chips to slide to the floor forcing the chip guy to keep picking them up as Dean never gave them a glance.

The game played on, Dean throwing in comments from time to time regarding what they knew about Bentkover's dealings without actually saying anything.

The running comments caused the other players to begin casting nervous glances between Bentkover and Dean and it definitely didn't help their game.

Other than the constant chip stacking, Bentkover appeared unmoved by Dean's increasingly pointed remarks but Dean sensed he was getting rattled.

As the last player folded, Bentkover watched as Dean raked in chips as a reward for his bluffed full house featuring 8's over 5's.

"You're quite the player, Mr. Winchester," Bentkover said.

Dean cocked an eyebrow and smiled broadly. "What can I say?" he replied. "It's a gift, the result of clean living and righteous thoughts. Unlike some people I know."

Without taking his eyes off Dean, Bentkover gestured at the chip guy. "I think we'd like to move this game to a private room."

"Certainly, Mr. Bentkover," the man replied, silently thanking God. Whatever the hell was going on here he wanted no part of it. "Suite 5 is open."

Bentkover rose. "Come with me." He walked away without bothering to see if Dean followed to the bank of upholstered doors with large brass numbers on them.

Bentkover opened the door to five and walked into the luxuriously appointed room. Once Dean had entered he whirled, putting his back against the door.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" he demanded. "You were hired to find out what the hell is going on at my museum, not re-enact *The Sting!* Where did you get that money? I would of bet my life you couldn't come up with fifty bucks between you and your brother."

"I think you *are* betting your life, Mikey," Dean snapped, shoving forward. "We know about Yelina Famosa, we know about the connection between you and the two missing men and we think she's behind all this and you're next on the hit list."

"That's too ridiculous to respond to," Bentkover exclaimed, pushing Dean, who didn't move. "I don't know what you're talking about. I never heard of a Yelina Famosa!"

"You're lying," Dean said, sneering. "We know what happened, we know where the body's buried--."

"And what?" Bentkover laughed. "You're gonna go to the police? With what? Speculation from two drifters who hunt ghosts? That'll hold a lot of water with the police. If you're looking for me to break down and admit I know what you're talking about and confess all, I promise you, you will grow old and die waiting for that."

"She's going to kill you," Dean insisted. "She killed your two friends, she's in your museum and she's not gonna stop until she gets you."

"You and your brother are nuts!"

"We can stop her," Dean growled. "Although, I'm all for letting her drag your ass into whatever abyss she took the other two guys. But you're gonna go to the police and tell 'em what happened."

"The hell I am!"

"She'll kill you, you can't stop her—"

Bentkover reached into his jacket and pulled out a gun in an unexpected movement far faster than Dean would have given him credit for.

Dean stopping moving when the barrel of the gun dug into his chest.

"I can't believe this," Bentkover stated, "Some dumb immigrant no one will ever miss has an accident and the *Ghostbusters* think they can bring me down over it."

He shoved the gun harder into Dean's chest. "It's funny once you've killed someone how much easier it is the second time..."

There was a loud click as the hammer pulled back on the gun.

Dean braced himself when Bentkover was suddenly shoved into him from behind as the door opened.

The gun went off as Dean twisted away, the bullet pulling the fabric of his jacket as it flew past. He hit the ground on his hands and knees, Bentkover stumbling forward.

The chip guy paused in the doorway as the shot rang out, took in Bentkover with the gun and Dean on the floor and actually shrieked, dropping the trays of chips and running back into to main casino, where amid the other noises the sound of the shot went unnoticed.

Dean leapt from the ground, throwing himself at Bentkover, knocking the gun from his hand.

It wasn't that large of a room but they managed to crash through almost every inch of it as they battled through it, punching and swearing.

Slipping in the scattered chips Dean and Bentkover hit the felt-topped poker table, sending it to the floor.

Dean was holding his own, but Bentkover obviously spent a lot of time at the gym. There were muscles under that sport coat and a certain amount of fighting skill. Added to that Bentkover was fighting for everything that mattered to him as opposed to Dean, who was getting as good as he gave but putting Bentkover out wasn't gonna get he and Sam what they needed.

"She's gonna hunt your ass down and fry it!" he grunted as they rolled. "Jail can't be as bad as what's gonna happen to you if we don't stop her!"

Four security guards burst through the door and fell on Dean and Bentkover, who instantly stopped struggling and yelled for help.

Unsurprisingly, Dean was grabbed, dragged up and held by two of the guards as Bentkover was aided to his feet by the other two, swiping at a bloody nose and lip, trying to brush his hair back into place and straighten his tie.

"Are you alright, Mr. Bentkover? Would you like us to call the police?"

Bentkover sniffed, dabbing at his nose with a handkerchief, smirking at Dean over it.

"No, just get rid of him. That's what happens when you let the trash in with decent people."

Dean stiffened in the guards' grasp and tried to break loose but they held tight.

Bentkover walked over to Dean and leaned down to hiss in his ear as he passed. "You've got nothing without a body, smart guy." He gave his tie a final jerk and pushed through the crowd of onlookers.

Dean's angry look faded slightly as a smile put a small curve in his lips, watching Bentkover stride away.

He was then bum-rushed through the casino and heaved onto the sidewalk where he managed to keep from sprawling among the people on the sidewalk.

He wiped his own bloody nose on his sleeve and grinned, waving gaily at the guards.

"Thanks guys!!! Had a great time, let's do lunch!"

One of them gave him the finger.

Dean sobered and sprinted for where the Impala was parked, jerking open the door and sliding under the wheel. Cell phone open before the door shut, he had Sam on the line as he cranked the engine.

So, where's he headed, Sasquatch?"

Red Rock Canyon Old Anasazi Burial Ground Dusk

The last vestiges of the day's sun were creeping slowly from the horizon, leaving the moon already on view through unbroken cloud. It was the perfect evening to sit and watch the light give way to darkness – at least, it would have been if Dean Winchester had ever given in to stealing such guilty pleasure.

Once, just once, he'd partaken of the beauty of the scenery around him at the Four Corners monument. A moment like that might never occur again for a man like him.

"I guess Bentkover is pretty much the predictable jackass we pegged him for, huh?" Dean slammed the Impala's door and strode confidently over to his brother who was leaning on the hood of a late model Ford courtesy of Hertz rental.

Sam nodded, fixing his gaze not on his brother, but on the still-suited manager who was now below them, digging with a fold-up spade as if his life depended on it. "Yeah, guess he fled straight to Yelina's remains." He arched a brow, noticing Dean's already swelling lip. "You okay?"

"Nothing a certain magic tequila glass won't cure once we get this gig over." Dean touched the abrasion, wincing a little at the sore spot that would definitely make any

nighttime partying far less fun. “I guess this place was perfect. Who the hell would ever look for fresh bones in a friggin’ burial ground?”

As they watched, Bentkover continued his frenzied excavations. The sandy earth wasn’t hard to dig, but the manager had to be careful it was the right body he was digging up.

The rich red and orange hues of the dying sun made a strange backlight to the occasion, reflecting off the ground and making the scene somehow appear awash with the color of blood. It was a trick of the light, but even as a ghost hunter, Sam found it both poetic and alien.

“Maybe this is where we should just call the cops and let them catch him red-handed with Yelina’s body?” The hunter watched on in morbid fascination as Bentkover’s shovel seemed to hit something soft – something that yielded to the sharp blade of his spade.

“No way.” Dean leaned forward, noticing their quarry’s sudden discovery too. “This guy’s ass is mine. I owe him from back at the casino-” He paused, hand instinctively feeling for his .45 as Bentkover abruptly stopped digging and moved back from the mass grave site.

As the businessman stumbled backwards, his trembling body revealed the hole in the earth he’d so desperately been burrowing. It wasn’t a large hollow, but the thing that protruded from it was definitely not female.

A light gray material that had once obviously belonged to an extremely expensive tailored suit poked from the ground, loosely still attached to a human appendage Dean would now only vaguely describe as an arm.

The flesh was blackened and rotted, squirming with grubs and other desert creatures and bacteria - making it seem alive – but not by any human standard. Pieces of necrotic tissue dangled from bone where the spade had bitten into the cadaver.

“One of our missing guys...” Sam mouthed without taking his eyes from the mesa where Bentkover was perched.

“Yeah, I guess Yelina decided an eye for an eye worked for her, huh? I’m just glad she didn’t get to finish her little revenge act on us. ‘Death by Toilet’ just doesn’t seem a fitting epitaph for ya, dude.”

“Looks like Mr. Blackmail can’t take his medicine.” Sam nodded back towards their target as the business man grabbed at his stomach, rapidly losing the remains of breakfast and lunch.

Bentkover coughed, grabbing a tissue from his jacket pocket to wipe around his mouth. Finally he was realizing the extent of his victim’s power now that she was on the other side.

Glancing again at the open grave he made a decision and quickly seized his spade. He couldn’t stay here to find the right body. It was too dangerous – it was too sickening. He had money in several accounts no one knew about. It would be easy to drive into Mexico before the Winchesters even had time to expose him.

And a ghost couldn’t follow him to another country, could it?

Bentkover wasn’t really sure. He wasn’t even sure if he believed in spirits. He’d seen things, yes, but could Yelina Famosa really have killed two men *after* her own demise?

His legs felt like they didn’t want to obey him, his mind felt like he’d been drunk for a week, but Bentkover made a dash for his Dodge anyway. Tired muscles screamed, and he was forced to remember the casino brawl all too well.

Damned if the elder brother wasn’t good. Hundreds of dollars of martial arts tuition and gym work, and he’d only just been able to hold off the scruffy little hunter.

The businessman looked up, pressing the button on his keychain to deactivate the Viper’s alarm. A bleep signaled the security system had been disabled, and he reached out for the driver’s door, relief washing over him.

There was still time to make all this work. Still time to use the money he'd blackmailed his two friends out of to make a better life.

"Nooooooooooooo."

The sound was almost not a word – more of an odd warning borne in the howling wind that instantly seemed to whip around the Dodge, blowing Bentkover's hair and making his body sway with its power.

The squall increased, something forming at its epicenter that was faceless, featureless, but had the attributes of human form.

Yelina was here in some disembodied silhouette, and she was angry.

"It wasn't me that hurt you," Bentkover pleaded as the ungodly wind raged on. "I know I helped them, but it was an accident. They never meant to hit your car. Don't you see?"

The businessman felt the coarse sand in the raging torrents of air around him begin cut into his skin, and he dropped the Viper's keys. The minute they left his grasp he began to panic. The car was his only way out of this spirit-induced mini-storm. It was his refuge. His haven.

Bentkover let his knees give way and he slumped to the ground, instantly sifting for the missing key chain like he was panning for gold. "PLEASE!" He begged.

The opaque shape of the op'a moved towards Bentkover, seemingly maddened by his pathetic excuses. In less than a second, it appeared as if the spirit had actually enveloped the businessman, smothering him with its vaporous presence.

Bentkover screamed, and at his guttural cry he was propelled across the desert, his muscular frame thrown by an ethereal force gone mad.

"Dean-" Sam knew how badly his brother wanted Bentkover to pay, but watching the man get torn to pieces by some dead thing wasn't the Winchester way. Bentkover needed to go to jail for his crimes.

Dean nodded and jogged back over to the Impala, tossing his brother a Mossberg from the trunk and selecting a sawed off for himself. "Let's go show this chick she can't have it all her own way."

Sam caught the pump action and whirled, dodging around the rental car to scramble down a steep, crumbling gradient that lead to the mesa below.

It was almost dark now, only a faint rosy illumination filtering from the horizon. Sam squinted in the dull light, caught off guard by the sudden gloom after the somewhat brighter precipice he'd been positioned on.

"No!" Bentkover yelled again, this time in agony, and the sound made Sam turn to search him out.

As the younger hunter turned, he sensed his brother arrive at his side, several expletives assuring Sam that Dean had had just as rough a trip down the jutting slope as he had.

"I swear I got spiked in the ass by the world's biggest friggin' cactus..."

"Can you see anything?" Sam held the Mossberg to his shoulder, spinning in an arc so that he was scanning the burial ground as far as the eye could see.

"I got noth..." Dean stopped as Bentkover abruptly came into view.

The blackmailing manager had crawled behind a group of boulders, foolishly thinking the aging rocks would give him cover from Yelina. Now, he was paying for that foolishness as the op'a grabbed him by the throat.

"Let her have it, Sammy!" Dean brought up his own weapon, relishing the kick as he discharged both barrels at Yelina's form. At his side, he heard his brother let off a similar two shots, but none of them hit home.

Before any of the biting rock salt could touch her spirit, Yelina had vanished, somehow dragging the still screaming Bentkover with her. She had found a way to kidnap her victims to the very netherworld she inhabited, and perhaps that was the greatest punishment of all.

Before she killed them, she showed them a brief taste of what to expect on the other side. A form of mental torture that mere physical torment alone couldn't give.

“What the..?” Dean breathlessly rushed forward, sliding in two new shells as he scoured the outcrop for signs of Bentkover’s body. There was no blood, no trace he’d ever been there. “You ever seen a spirit do that before, Sasquatch?” He cocked his head.

“No,” Sam admitted. “But it could make things interesting if she decides to come back for our butts.”

“Arrrrrrrrghhhhhhhhhhh.....” The cry was hollow, it was pitiful.

It was death.

“Over here-” Sam gestured with the barrel of his weapon towards the edge of the mesa, where another sheer drop onto the canyon floor below made it dangerous to walk around without a light at this hour.

Dean followed, cradling his gun with one arm while he delivered a small flashlight from his pocket with the other. Flicking on the switch, he played the beam across the floor and then over the crumbling edge to the rocks beneath.

“Guess I won’t have to worry about him beating me at poker ever again, huh?” The hunter raised a brow, keeping the ray from his light steady on the crushed, bleeding body on the canyon floor.

Yelina had returned, bringing Bentkover with her to exact her final revenge. Tossing the businessman over the precipice probably hadn’t been her ideal version of payback, but looking at Bentkover’s weirdly twisted body, Dean was pretty sure it had served its purpose.

“Do you think it’s over, Dean? Now that the last of the conspirators are dead?” Sam shook his head, the sight of protruding sinew and bone from Bentkover’s remains making him grimace.

“It’s never over, Sam. You of all people should know that...”

Both brothers turned to face the voice, but only one remembered it – only one was old enough to remember the gentle tones of his mother.

Mary smiled at her sons, her long white dress billowing, but her eyes strayed consciously to Dean. He would be harder to convince, harder to sway not to destroy her. “Hello, Dean...it’s been awhile...I didn’t think I could ever come back after...”

Dean’s throat bobbed, and he felt sweat begin to form on the palms of his hands as he held the shotgun. This was the thing he’d seen take Meg’s form. It was Yelina, trying to trick them into letting her go – but still the very thought of shooting at his mother swayed him – and that was what Yelina wanted.

Dean dared to glance at Sam, but his brother was more uncertain than ever. There was moisture in his eyes and a rare sadness that almost broke Dean every time he bore witness to it. He’d seen that look on Sam the day they’d buried Jessica. He’d seen it back in Lawrence when Mary’s spirit had spoken to them both, and made her strange apology to Sam.

If seeing the *Jessthing* had rekindled bad memories, what then, must this be doing?

“You’re not our mom!” Dean raised his shortened Remington and emptied both shells at the op’a, realizing that only he could spare Sam and, indeed, himself further torment.

The *Marything* once again anticipated his move, however, and its strange glowing shape vanished in a ball of light before even one particle of salt had left the Remington’s barrels.

“Your father didn’t teach you to be such hot shots after all, did he?” Yelina in Mary’s guise reappeared behind the brothers. “Maybe it’s time you had a little expert advice from your mother instead?”

The *Marything* reached Sam first, grabbing his Mossberg before he could even fire off one shell. She twisted the gun in his grasp, tearing it from his hands so roughly she left chafe marks on the flesh of his palms.

“I’m betting *you’re* the one who *likes* to fly? Right, Sam?” Mary grabbed a handful of her son’s thick mop and yanked him backwards, dragging his writhing body

towards the precipice Bentkover had already succumbed to. "Maybe we can earn you some frequent flyer miles-"

"You let go of him you bitch, or I swear-"

"You swear what, Dean? You can't shoot me, not with Sammy so close. Even rock salt at this range could do some serious damage." Mary's smile had never seemed so alien – so *wrong* – as her lips curled mockingly at her eldest.

"Burn her, Dean! Just DO IT!" Sam pushed away the thought that he was close to the edge of the mesa. Yelina had to be destroyed and his safety just wasn't the paramount issue. He continued to squirm in her grasp, but with the newfound powers that death brought, she was just too strong.

Dean wavered, the shotgun in his hands dipping slightly as he worked out just how far away the hole Bentkover had dug was. If Yelina's body was in there along with her victims, he could maybe salt and burn the opening in less than a minute.

Leaving Sammy for that minute, though, would mean his certain death. *Sorry, Sammy, but risking serious injury is way better odds than hitting the bottom of the canyon Wile. E Coyote style...*

Dean pulled back on his trigger twice, hoping the shells would mostly miss his brother but vanquish the fuming spirit that held him captive. The risk was worth taking, but it was still too much of a gamble.

Yelina shrieked as the salt at last bit into her form, forcing it back into some other realm, and yet, she still held just enough dominion in this world to try and take Sam with her. The op'a snatched at his hair, causing the young hunter to lose his balance just enough to topple over the crumbling lip of the crag.

As Sam dropped from view, Yelina shrieked once more before vanishing to some unseen place to lick her wounds.

"NO!" Time froze for Dean as Sam disappeared over the edge, his scream cutting off like it had been hacked by a machete. He glanced around wildly, tossing his gun to the ground as he scrambled back to the site where Bentkover had been digging.

There were three sets of remains and by God he was gonna burn them all.

He clawed a small canister of salt out of his pocket and a tin of lighter fluid and began to desperately scatter the salt over the bodies. The wind rose and tore at his clothes, blowing sand into his eyes and he could hear the shriek of Yelina's spirit rising over the din.

Trying to shield his eyes he managed to empty the rest of the salt before he was suddenly lifted bodily and thrown across the burial ground. He slammed into a sharp boulder and convulsed into a ball as he was battered by driving sand and loose debris from all around him.

Yelina's writhing form swept up to him and hung there, shifting from one familiar form to another, first Jess, then Mary, now even John, like some bizarre kaleidoscope of people in Dean's life.

"No!" he yelled, squinting his eyes against the barrage. If Sam was gone what the hell did it matter what happened to him? If he was going down this bitch was going with him!

Hands clawing into the dirt, Dean dragged himself forward against the onslaught of Yelina's fury, losing a foot for every two he gained.

He had just managed to make it back to the makeshift grave when she struck him again, rolling him like a stick across the ground. He managed to grab a small handful of salt from the nearest body as she grabbed him and he threw it at her twisted face.

Screaming she fell back and he took the opportunity to speed crawl back to the burial spots, grabbing his can of lighter fluid from the ground and squirting it as soon as he got within decent range.

"Back off, bitch!" he shouted as she screamed by, knocking him sideways. He pulled out a lighter and flicked it into life tossing it into the mounds of bodies where it ignited with a *whoompf*.

Dean threw himself on his face covering his head as the graves burst outward in a putrid explosion, then rained down on him in a shower of fleshy particles.

The wind ceased instantly and silence fell over the area.

Dean heaved for breath and then almost heaved for real as the rotted miasma was sucked into his lungs.

He frantically got up and beat as much of it off as possible, stumbling to the cliff edge as he did so.

Behind him the fire burned down and he stared at the precipice with watering eyes. He couldn't accept that after all they had been through, Haris, Ferinacci, friggin' tornadoes, poison bullets, every kind of unimaginable horror there could be and Sam had been put down by a plain old Goddamned spook?

Dean sank to his knees and stared into the darkness with swimming eyes. *It couldn't have ended like this....*

"Hey..."

Dean's head jerked up as a hoarse voice came out of the darkness. He rose up slightly and gazed around him at the empty air, the softly glowing pyre behind him.

This had to be a trick, he hadn't destroyed Yelina after all...

"Dude...the view of the canyon is really great from here, but when you're done prayin' can I get a hand up or shall I just hang here all night?"

Dean clawed his way to the edge and looked over into Sam straining face, one large hand grasping a short stump projecting from the side about three feet down, the other grasping an outcropping of rock. His sneakers were jammed into crevices.

Dean's face lit up and he automatically stretched out a hand, then stopped short, suddenly concerned this, too, might be a trick, that the hupia would pull him over if he reached out.

Sam's eyes widened and then narrowed with sudden understanding, but before he could speak, Dean was leaning over the edge reaching out to firmly grasp Sam's wrists and help haul him up.

As Sam dragged his body back over the edge with Dean's aid, he lay gasping next to him. "What made you so sure it was me?"

Dean stopped and looked at Sam, the look in his eyes one Sam recognized and hated at the same time he loved it.

No one knew Sam like Dean did, in a room filled with a thousand clones, Dean would have been able to find the real Sam with just that one look.

"Sam, you give off wussy ass geek like skunks give off stink. How could I *not* know it was the real you?" Dean replied with a sneering grin.

Sam rolled his eyes. "Jerk."

Dean's smile softened ever so slightly. "Bitch."

Sam looked down at the sleeve of his jacket where some of the rock salt had caught him and he was bleeding slightly. "Dude, you shot me. *Again!*"

Dean shrugged and gestured at the small tears in the fabric. "First rule in a hostage situation..."

"Shoot the hostage," they echoed each other.

Sam stared at Dean who shrugged again, spreading his hands.

"Hey, it worked for Keanu Reeves...."

Carluccio's Tivoli Gardens

Las Vegas

The Next Day

Dean leaned on the bar, letting its huge oak surface take his weight. As he relaxed, he watched the girl behind the wooden counter saunter to and fro serving other customers. She may have been Bentkover's, but she sure was pretty – not that

Dean would ever consider a night with anyone who had found Mr. Bendystraw even remotely attractive.

"Still taking in the Las Vegas sights, I see," Sam chuckled, taking a slug of his beer.

Dean shrugged. "Hey, nothing wrong with admiring the view, dude. Just as long as it doesn't get my ass chased by some hupla, op'a, Umpa-Lumpa, or whatever she friggin' was." He fumbled with his shot glass, staring at the empty bottom as he became more serious. "One thing I don't get, though, Sammy. Why is Yelina the only one we've ever encountered? I mean, if that kinda spirit is so easily created by murder in her culture?"

Sam shook his head. "Maybe the fact that her remains had been buried on sacred, spiritual ground gave her more power to return as a hupia?" He guessed. "Maybe we'll never really know-"

"Huh, Raymond is actually saying there's something he doesn't know? Dude, I think I need a drink!" Dean grinned roguishly, eyes sparking with mirth as he gestured for the bar girl to bring over "his" bottle of tequila.

Sam set his beer glass down, a small smile of his own creeping onto his features. "You know, Yelina did make me remember one thing back there when she was tossing me all over the canyon like a human albatross." He waited for his brother to turn, giving him an uncertain scowl. "Yeah, she made me remember that *Raymond* is actually the brother that's afraid to fly." He quirked a brow, savoring the moment as he took another gulp of his beer wearing a grin that would rival Dean's. Finally, he'd recalled the damn movie he was being tormented with was *Rain Man*.

Dean pretended not to hear and instead focused on the girl, or rather her extremely tight tee as she hovered in front of him.

"Better watch out there, bro, better not flirt too much or Liberace will get jealous..." Sam struggled to keep hold of his drink for chuckling, but Dean simply shot him a smile that read "asshole" and chugged back his glassful of liquor, hoping the joke would soon be forgotten.

To his mortification, this was one pun that wasn't going *anywhere*, fast.

The keys of the huge white piano in the corner began to depress of their own accord, spinning a tune that was familiar enough for every patron to stop what they were doing and stare at the Grande in awe.

I'll be seeing you in all those old familiar places...

Even though there was no vocal this time, Dean could hear the words over and over in his head until he could feel his cheeks begin to burn red with a rare bout of embarrassment. It had been easy to shrug it off before as the tequila, but maybe Liberace's ghost really was part and parcel of the Tivoli Gardens experience. After all, something had guided him to Sam as he was being drowned in the toilets, and it sure as hell hadn't been Yelina.

No, the second spirit had definitely meant to save not harm, even if it did have a kind of cheeky flair to it. *Guess we should leave the old fart to haunt his own place. Just as long as he keeps his spooky-assed hands to himself tonight...*

Dean twisted the glass in his fingers, about to pick up the bottle and pour another shot. Before his hand could touch the vessel and decant the fiery liquid, however, the tiny glass magically refilled as if someone was standing at his side playing tender.

As the tequila spilled over the edges of the glass a little, the piano music grew to a crescendo that made the elder hunter physically cringe. "For crying out loud! *Enough already!*"

The song continued unabashed, causing another unusual fit of laughter from Sam. "Dude, I'd so watch your ass tonight if I was you-"

Dean gazed at the tequila warily, wondering if the free drink was worth daring to stay in the Gardens any longer. Sequined spooks didn't know about roofies, did they? He scowled at his brother, eyebrows dipping. Sammy was never gonna let him live this gig down.

But then, two could play that game.

“Yeah, well,” he smirked. “At least I didn’t get *my head* stuck down a toilet bowl...”

The End