

Episode Twenty: Unfinished by Irismay42 & Thru Terry's Eyes

Mansfield, OH Present Day

“...And now ladies and gentlemen, the man of the hour, Mansfield’s famous son, our most welcome and generous supporter, some applause please for this graduate and former school track star, the man without whom the completion of the last stages of this renovation of our beloved school would not have occurred for another two years, Mr. Dale Corrigan!”

Steven Entwhistle, former Vice-Principal and now the new Principal of the Mansfield Public School upon its grand reopening, stepped sideways from the microphone applauding as a tall man in a perfectly cut suit that cost more than Entwhistle made in three months, rose from the chairs lined up at the back of the stage and came forward.

Applause welcomed Corrigan. His body was gymnasium-honed and his skin wore a purchased tan. He moved with the easy grace of a man who has made it, knows it, and flaunts it to great effect.

He flashed white teeth in a politician’s canned smile and waved to the people gathered in the new auditorium.

“Thank you for that warm welcome...” he said nodding and gathering them all in the embrace of his sparkling blue eyes, a lock of longish blond hair falling across his forehead.

God, I’d sell my soul for a drink... he thought, regarding the assembled group with a contempt he would never have allowed his eyes to project. *Mansfield, Ohio, I can’t believe I let my lawyer talk me into doing this as a tax write off. Good publicity, my ass! Holy shit, is that Ruth Harpool...?*

He reluctantly dragged his eyes from the barely held-in-check bosoms of the bouncy blonde in the front row.

“I can’t tell you what a pleasure it is to be back in my home town among the people I grew up with. It gives me even greater pleasure to, in some modest way, be able to help you reach the goal you’ve all worked so hard for, the completion of the last wing of the school which will, after fifteen years with no library facilities on the school grounds, contain the new state of the art media center and computer access stations for the students of Mansfield school to enjoy and be enriched by.”

Applause broke out again as he spoke and he raised his hands. “Please, after all I got from my years at Mansfield, I’m just grateful I’m fortunate enough to be in a position to give a little something back.” He looked up as Entwhistle and another man carried an easel onstage with a large sign and artist’s renditions of the new school wing, with the new computers and shiny rows of research materials. The lettering over the photos read: “The Corrigan Learning Center.”

A large red bow was tied loosely across the photo and to applause and amusement from the audience, Corrigan accepted a large pair of scissors and cut the ribbon in half with a flourish, stepping back as it fluttered to the ground in a large pool of red.

Thank God, he said to himself, professional smile firmly in place as he accepted handshakes and kudos from the people surrounding him. *Where the hell’s the booze?*

A short time later, sipping distastefully on a paper cup of (unspiked) peach sherbet punch, Corrigan listened with one ear, in abject boredom as Lorena Gale, the head of the school board, clutched his arm and babbled enthusiastically about his generous gift to the school.

He fought a grimace as her claw-like nails dug into the muscles of his upper arm, her fleshy body, smelling heavily of magnolia that would take three cleanings to get off his suit, pressing insistently against him.

“—after all, this is your home town and keeping a second home is so stylish nowadays. A place where your *children* would have roots—”

Reaching over with his free hand, he carefully extricated himself from her grasp with a strained smile. “Well, I already have a second home in Aspen and I don’t have any kids, but I will give your suggestion some thought.”

Actually LIVE in Mansfield? I’d burn first, he thought, horrified at the very concept.

She made a disappointed face as he moved away. “Can I show you around the school? The changes are quite amazing—”

“You know, Louise—”

“Lorena.”

“Sorry, Lorena, I’m actually feeling a little nostalgic but I’d really like to do a little wandering on my own. I appreciate the offer though!” her voice rose as he backed into the crowd, trailing after him like gum stuck on the bottom of his shoe.

“If I can do anything for you just let me know!”

As soon as Hell freezes over you’ll be the first one I call...

He managed to make it through the people clamoring for his attention and escaped into the hallway where he leaned against the bank of lockers with grateful relief. He glanced at his Rolex, the diamonds around the dial bouncing the overhead lights around the hall.

Cripes, it was only nine p.m. The festivities ended at ten, thank God. He could escape back to his “suite” at Holiday Hell, alone, from the looks of things, then get on the first plane out of this berg and get back to REAL LIFE, not Mayberry R Friggin’ D.

He reached into his jacket and withdrew a silver flask. Popping the top he started to pour it into his punch but instead set the cup on the floor and took a large drink straight from the flask. That was more like it!

He began to move idly down the hall, laughing inwardly at the signs pointing in the direction of the Corrigan Learning Center, memories of his years at this school hitting him despite himself. He’d really been the BMOC the years he had spent here. The biggest fish in the friggin’ pond. Rich old man, fancy car, any hot cheerleader he set eyes on, hangers on waiting to do his bidding just to bask in his reflected importance.

With the exception of the end of one semester when a brooding kid with haunted green eyes, a screw you attitude and a geeky kid brother had hit town. Dean something. It had been hate at first sight even though the guy had been two years younger than Corrigan. The older guy had every girl in school watching his every move, he, in turn watched everyone who so much as looked at his kid brother cockeyed and came down on them like an attack dog. A truly weird pair, there had been rumors about their father—

He looked up as a figure crossed the hall in front of him. A shapely figure with long hair.

Taking another quick slug from the flask he recapped it and started down the hall after the attractive figure.

* * * *

“Well, hi there!”

Helen Jensen gasped loudly and swung around at the unexpected voice behind her. “My God!” she exclaimed, recognizing him. “You scared me!” She pressed a hand to her chest, noting how his eyes followed and stayed there.

“I’m sorry,” Corrigan replied. “I’m not in the habit of scaring lovely women. Have we met?” he held out his hand. “I’m Dale Corrigan.”

Helen smiled and took his hand. “I know, we met earlier. I’m Helen Jensen, the new Media Center Manager.”

"You mean the librarian? What a waste to shut someone like you up with a bunch of dusty old books. And may I say librarians have certainly changed since I went to school here." Corrigan eased up next to her.

Helen mentally rolled her eyes. *Why couldn't anyone take her seriously? Maybe if she had glasses and wore her hair in a bun. And a wart, a big one. With a long hair growing out of---* Play nice Helen, she scolded herself. *You have a job because of this man.*

"Maybe you need to spend more time in libraries, Mr. Corrigan." She pushed the door open and stepped inside, followed closely by Corrigan whose prospects for the evening had certainly taken a turn for the better.

"You may have a point there," he said, looking around as she moved toward a round desk in the center of the plush room. "My main experience with librarians was old man Withers and you and he are definitely not in the same class."

She turned, "You knew Mr. Withers?"

Corrigan laughed. "Hell, yes." He dragged a finger down a desktop and glanced at it for non-existent dust. "Back in the day dust covered everything in here and it was thickest on Carlyle Withers. This is very impressive," he commented, waving a hand at the room in general.

"Your money paid for it, Mr. Corrigan. Hadn't you seen what you were buying?" She walked into the center of the desk, not accidentally putting its polished surface between herself and Corrigan.

"That's what I have accountants for, Ms. Jensen. Call me Dale." He reached out and cupped a hand over hers.

She withdrew her hand on the pretense of straightening some random papers. "You didn't care for Mr. Withers?"

"Choosing between him and a poke in the eye with a sharp stick? Gimme the sharp stick. That old bastard made our lives miserable. Not to mention trying to do research for some stupid paper with books so old the encyclopedia didn't even have Israel in it. Couldn't talk in here, scratch your ass or breathe without the old fool coming down on you." Corrigan snorted. "Hell, he'd have had us sitting in the corner wearing dunce caps if he thought he could have gotten away with it. Weird old guy. He'd have students working in the library and spend all his time holed up in his office, going through this stack of smelly old books. When he did come out there was hell to pay if everything wasn't just the way it was supposed to be. Even the teachers were terrified of him."

Corrigan laughed again, leaning back on his elbows on the desk. "Hell, my old man offered to buy a couple of computers for the library and budget some new books when I almost flunk—" he stopped and rubbed a hand over his mouth. "The school board was tickled but Withers was adamant you learned from books not machines and told him where he could put his computers. My old man was furious. The school board was furious."

Helen frowned. "Why didn't they just fire him?"

Corrigan turned to face Helen again. "What's the big interest in that old coot? There's better stuff to talk about." His hand crept toward Helen's again.

"I'm just curious about my predecessor. After all, he was librarian here from the day the school opened and then when he died the school closed the library for fifteen years. Wouldn't you be curious?" She leaned forward slightly, offering the open neck of her shirt as an enticement that his dancing eyes didn't miss.

"His family's money paid for the original school. Part of the deal was that it guaranteed Withers a job as librarian for life. Story had it that he couldn't hack it in 'real life' and just wanted to be surrounded by books so his family set him up here. I think he was librarian for fifty years or something. Then one Tuesday the janitor found him dead in his office. They think he died the Friday before and laid there over the holiday weekend."

Helen made a face. "Oh, my God..." She straightened back up, a hand over her mouth.

Corrigan straightened also, disappointed at his loss of view but happy he had finally caught her attention. "Yeah. I remember when it happened. Cops said he died of natural causes but everyone else said he was murdered. They found all these really strange old books about all kinds of magic and crap in his office. Rumors started that the library was haunted, Withers come back to exact revenge on anyone who didn't treat the library with proper respect."

"Now you're making this up," Helen accused. "That's just stupid." She picked up a box of computer manuals and started toward the back of the room.

He hot footed after her, taking the box from her, "I'll get that. I'm telling the truth, swear to God. They shut the library down at the end of the semester and the students were given access to the town library during the day. And then people started getting computers and it wasn't such a big deal." He paused while she opened the door with a key.

"Where am I going with this?"

"Back here, they sent the wrong manuals." She flipped on a switch but the light flickered before coming on at about half strength. "Darn it. We've been having trouble with the lights. I think the electricians screwed something up. I hope they get it fixed before school opens."

"Wow," Corrigan said, putting the box down near a similar pile of boxes. The room was filled with crates of books, some open with the tomes stacked next to them, many boxes were marked with the words *sell* or *destroy*. "What the hell is all this?" Helen sighed, looking around. "All the old books from the library. I've been going through the crates, sorting them. Some of them are actually valuable collector pieces. Once I've catalogued them the valuable ones will be sold and the rest given away or destroyed. A lot of them are in really bad condition. They've been in storage but they weren't stored properly. It's like they were just dumped in the boxes and closed up as fast as possible. It's a shame really and a dirty mess to go through."

She suddenly glanced up at him, a slightly mischievous look in her eyes. "You mentioned the books, Mr. Withers had in his office..."

Corrigan cocked an eyebrow at her change in attitude and smiled. "Yeah?"

She glanced around as though someone might see or hear. "There's a crate back here with his name on it. I can't get it open and I've been dying to get inside. Would you mind giving me a hand?"

His smile broadened. "Honey, I'd love to get inside your crate."

She rolled her eyes again. "Is that your idea of a great pick up line?"

"Work with what you got, I always say."

She grabbed a crowbar off the crate next to her and handed it to him. "C'mon."

She led him to a dirty wooden crate big enough for him to have gotten comfortably inside of. *Carlyle Withers* was stenciled crudely all over the box along with the words *Keep Out*.

Corrigan licked his lips nervously, slowly twirling the crowbar. "You sure you should open this?"

"I have to. It's part of the collection. If you can't, I'll get a janitor to do it for me tomorrow, they're just so busy." She crossed her arms and watched him, a slight challenge.

"Okay." He took off his expensive jacket and laid it over a slightly cleaner pile of boxes. Grasping the crowbar he shoved the straight slotted end under the lid of the crate and began to pry.

After a few abortive attempts and some sweat starting to pop out on his forehead, the lid finally began to creak open.

It gave suddenly with a loud crack and flew off, dust flying out in a huge cloud. Corrigan stumbled forward, his hand slipping along the rough top edge of the box, a long jagged splinter sliding sickeningly into the palm of his hand.

He yelled and jerked back, the splinter breaking free of the box with a crack, leaving the jagged end sticking out of his hand. "Holy shit!!!" he cried, grasping his injured hand with its mate and staring in horror at the sliver embedded in his hand.

"Oh, my God!" Helen gasped, catching his hands as he writhed in pain. "Oh, Mr. Corrigan I'm so sorry! My God...hold still please, let me pull it out!"

She grasped the end of the wood and started to withdraw it. He jerked back reflexively as it hurt and the splinter came free but blood instantly replaced it and started to drip from his hand.

"Crap! Son of a bitch!" he swore as red soaked his shirt sleeve.

Helen grabbed a roll of paper towels lying on a box with some cleaner and ripped off a handful of sheets. "Here, put that over it and I'll go find the first aid kit. I think it's in the front desk!" She scampered off as he grimaced and pressed the wad of towels against his hand.

God that hurt, he thought, his skin prickling. This was not how he imagined this moment going but maybe he could still turn it to his advantage, using both guilt and her appreciation of his efforts.

Hand throbbing, he glanced into the box to distract himself. Books were just crammed in every which way, dust covered and torn.

Curiosity won out over pain as he reached in with his undamaged hand and picked up the book on top. It was very heavy and he balanced it on the edge of the crate. The cover was some kind of black tooled leather, the pages, as he thumbed it open, were stiff and crumbly and covered with scrawled writing and odd hand-drawn pictures.

"What kind of a sick old bastard were you?" he wondered as he looked over the ancient text.

The lights went off.

And he began to cough.

* * * *

Helen rummaged frantically for the first aid kit, finally locating it under yet another pile of manuals. She grabbed the handle and hurried back to the storeroom.

Wonderful, great job, Helen, the guy who gives us the money for the library is standing in my storeroom bleeding 'cause I asked him to open a stupid crate! God knows what's on that wood, what if he gets tetanus, what if it gets infected? Can he sue the school? Can he sue me—?

She opened the door and was immediately pissed when the lights were off again. She fumbled for the switch, finding it as her foot caught on something and she pitched headlong to the floor, the lights coming on with midday brilliance.

She screamed as she found herself face to face with Corrigan on the floor. She screamed again and threw herself backwards away from him, coming up against another crate.

His hands clutched at his throat, blood ran down his face, soaked his upper body and pooled on the floor in a growing circle. The corners of his mouth were ripped open almost back to his ears, teeth and gums blood-covered and exposed, his jaw totally unhinged to accommodate the huge rolled wad of crumpled paper, no doubt torn from the computer manuals now strewn about the floor, that was protruding from his mouth and from the looks of it crammed halfway down his bulging throat.

His eyes rolled toward her as the light in them faded and he stretched out a clawed hand, scratching across the floor, making an inarticulate whine of sound.

He was dead by the time they were found a short time later.

And she was still screaming.

Mansfield, OH
Present day

“So remind me why we’re here again?”

Dean glanced around himself as the Impala rumbled through the outskirts of downtown Mansfield Ohio, a strange feeling of déjà vu assaulting him as they passed a local movie theater that looked oddly familiar.

Sam shuffled the paperwork nestling on his lap, his own attention also caught by the unassuming little cinema, an enigmatic smile crinkling the corners of his mouth. “Mansfield Public School,” he informed his brother, waving a page printed off the internet in Dean’s general direction. “Mysterious death, remember?”

Dean cast him an awkward sideways glance. “Let’s just say I do, but I wanna check the facts again.”

Sam smothered a grin. “You know, anyone who didn’t know you would think you had the memory of a goldfish and the attention span of a gnat.” Dean opened his mouth to protest, but Sam continued swiftly. “But I know different. Like, I know you can recite the entire script to the original *Star Wars* trilogy verbatim.” Again Dean began to protest, but again Sam shot him down. “And you know every single lyric to every single song Led Zeppelin ever recorded. And don’t tell me you don’t remember the phone number of every girl you ever slept with, because I know you do.” Sam shook his head, cheeks dimpling. “And you call *me* ‘Raymond!’”

Dean affected his most affronted tone. “Yeah well at least I make ‘unrecognized genius’ look cool, Oh Great King of Geekdom,” he sniffed. “And you still haven’t told me what we’re doing here.”

“Dale Corrigan,” Sam explained.

“Who?”

“Local bigshot. Small town boy made good. Of course, it helps that he also came from the wealthiest family in town to begin with.”

“‘Came’ as in ‘no longer comes’?” Dean queried.

“He is most definitely an ex-bigshot,” Sam confirmed. “They found him dead at the opening ceremony of Mansfield Public School’s new library, which he bankrolled, incidentally.”

“Dead how?”

“Asphyxiation. His mouth and throat were crammed full of paper.”

Dean shot a glance at his brother. “Paper?”

“Paper,” Sam confirmed. “Ripped out of the nice new books his company had just purchased for the library.”

Dean whistled. “Ouch. Talk about biting the hand that feeds you.” He shuddered slightly, an old half-forgotten wisp of memory tickling at the edges of his mind. “So why’s this our kinda problem?” he asked, shaking the non-remembrance off as maybe yet another after-effect of his little run-in with Alyssa Medina, the memory-stealing freakazoid who’d tried to lobotomize him a few weeks earlier. He shrugged. “Death by library book ain’t usually our kinda thing, Sammy. Even if Mr. Bigshot was offed by a psycho homicidal librarian I don’t see how –” Dean stopped short, vaguely unnerved by the oddly uncomfortable expression on Sam’s face. He shifted in his seat, fingers suddenly tightening on the steering wheel. “Why does that sound familiar?” he asked slowly, flicking another glance in Sam’s direction.

“Ghost of psycho homicidal librarian,” Sam explained. “Mansfield Public School. Remember?”

Dean shifted again. “Not really.”

“We attended that school for a few months when we were kids,” Sam reminded him. “You were maybe fourteen? It was just after my tenth birthday? Dude, we went to *school* with Dale Corrigan!”

Dean thought back hard, expression suddenly clearing. “Track star moron with a silver spoon shoved so far up his ass he walked with a permanent swagger, right? This is the school where they thought you were some kind of boy genius! Or the closest they’d ever gotten to one. Bumped you up a grade.”

Sam suddenly seemed to find his fingernails of great interest. "Yeah, well –"
"Bouncing Baby Winchester," Dean recalled with a snigger. "Right?"
Sam made a face at him, and Dean half expected him to stick out his tongue.
"Hilarious. Thanks so much for bringing that up –"
"Don't give me that!" Dean continued gleefully. "You were like a dog with two tails!
Smartest and youngest in the class –"
"For which I was bullied unmercifully, remember?"
Dean nodded. "What was that one kid's name? Kept picking on you. Calling you
W–"
"I don't remember," Sam snapped quickly, just as quickly adding, "Jared Macklin."
"Macklin!" Dean agreed. "What an asshole *he* was. Probably washing lettuce in a
McDonalds by now."
"We can hope," Sam concurred.
"Wait." Dean's eyes widened suddenly. "Homicidal librarian! Dude, this was the
school where we..." He trailed off, complexion paling considerably.
Sam nodded grimly. "Yeah," he agreed. "This was that school..."

Mansfield Public School Library May 1993

Sam breathed in.
Sam breathed out.
There was something comforting about it, that smell; comforting and familiar.
Paper and ink, decrepit old wooden desks recently scrubbed with generic, non-
branded disinfectant, sweaty kids in old sneakers.
Sam had had few constants in his ten years on this earth, but the library was one
of them. Sure, there had been a lot of different libraries over the years; different
schools, different towns. But they all had one thing in common: sanctuary.
Hallowed place of knowledge and research, work and study. Life and death. Dad
had taught him that. Be Prepared. Know what you're dealing with. It could save your
life someday.
Dean always said Dad was really just a boy scout with a big gun. Which would
have been funny, except Dean never dared say it to Dad's face. There was only so
far Sam's older brother was willing to take teenage rebellion, and mostly it was
limited to bitching, when Dad was out of earshot of course, about never being
allowed on hunts, never being treated like a grown-up, never being trusted as
anything other than Sam's babysitter while all the time Dean treated Sam like he was
four.
Dean didn't *do* irony.
Sam sighed.
Sam knew Dean wasn't stupid. And it wasn't that he was ashamed of him. It was
just... sometimes Dean embarrassed him. On purpose. Like when he called him
"shrimp" or "shortstuff" in front of his friends. Sure, Sam was a little small for his age,
but, as Dad kept telling him, he hadn't really hit a growth spurt yet. He'd show them
all when he was seven feet ten.
"Yeah, like that's gonna happen, runt," Dean would scoff.
Despite all of this, however, Dean, much like the library, was one of the few other
constants in Sam's life. And also much like the library – *any* library – and Sam had
been in a *lot* of libraries over the years – Dean also had his own particularly
comforting scent. "Danger," Dean called it, although it smelled more like grease,
motor oil and occasionally gunpowder to Sam. And somehow it always reminded him
of "home."
"That's what gets the chicks, Sammy," Dean would say. "The Bad Boy thing. They
can't get enough of it." Like he was Casa-friggin'-nova or something.

Not that, even at fourteen, Dean didn't turn female heads pretty much wherever he went. He did, and Sam was pretty sure it actually *did* have something to do with that "Bad Boy" reputation his brother tried so hard to maintain – keep everyone at arm's length, never let anyone see the *real* Dean Winchester. "Love 'em and leave 'em, Sammy," Dean would advise him with a rakish smile. "Love 'em and leave 'em."

Sam knew Dean was just lonely.

Never making friends, never forming attachments. Like Dad and Sam were all he needed in this world.

Or maybe he was just too scared of losing anyone else to try and find them in the first place.

At least Sam tried to be sociable. Tried to make friends. Tried to fit in. Tried to be *normal*. But normal wasn't easy with a family like his.

"You still here, Winchester? Oh right. You live in a motel don't you? Not a helluva lot to go home to, huh?"

He got that a lot. Never was sure how every school he and Dean attended the kids seemed to know their life story before they even really knew their names. Or at least, they knew what they *thought* was their life story. He doubted anyone had ever discovered what *really* went on in the Winchester household.

Bullies Sam had mostly been able to deal with since he was eight, since he started to get tired of Dean threatening to beat the crap out of anyone who even looked at his kid brother funny.

See, the "Bad Boy" rep was one thing; "Psycho Bad Boy" was something else entirely.

But Sam could take care of himself. He'd been trained by a *marine* for God's sake...

But then, of course, Jared Macklin was almost fifteen and was twice *Dean's* size, let alone Sam's, so when he suddenly loomed over Sam's desk, all pre-pubescent baby fat mutating into solid muscle, this was one of those rare occasions when Sam suddenly felt deeply guilty for ignoring Dean in the hallway or telling his new friends he was adopted.

He would have given *anything* to see his big brother come sauntering through the library door right then.

"Poor Bouncing Baby *Weirdchester*," Macklin drawled, picking up one of Sam's history books and tossing it carelessly onto the floor. "Daddy forget to pick you up from school again?"

Sam glanced over at the clock on the way-off-white wall, fingers tightening around his pencil. He knew just where to jab it to cause the most pain with the least damage. Dean had shown him. Repeatedly. He called it "Study Hall Defense Class 101." He gritted his teeth and looked up slowly from his homework.

"You're still here too, assface," he ground out, before he realized Macklin's two henchman, Marty Roscoe and Tony Gianelli, were hovering at either of the bully's considerably broad shoulders.

"*What* did you call me, geekazoid?" Macklin demanded with a growl, fist pounding the table an inch from where Sam's fingers were calmly collecting up his belongings, causing various items of stationery to bounce precariously on the heavily graffiti-covered tabletop. *Time to go...*

"You heard me." Sam stood, squaring up to Macklin with his chin raised defiantly, as if that would compensate for his being about a foot shorter than the older boy.

Macklin snorted. "Lotta spunk for someone barely outta kindergarten."

Sam scowled at him. He'd been so naive to think getting bumped up a grade would actually be *fun*.

"So, what?" Macklin continued, advancing a step so that he was looming even more in Sam's face. "Your dad out of town again? Choosing his next victim? I hear he's a serial killer or something –"

Sam didn't even flinch. *Heard it all before...*

“String of victims up and down the country –”

Yeah, yeah, whatever freak...

“And that crazy-ass brother of yours is learning the ropes, right? Apprentice serial killer in training?”

“You wouldn’t dare say that to his face,” Sam spat.

“I ain’t scared o’ no Weirdo Winchester, runt,” Macklin hissed. “Even if it’s true your brother’s just out of Juvie –”

Dean and his damn Bad Boy reputation again...

“In fact, *I* heard –” Macklin leaned down so his pudgy face was level with Sam’s, “the reason you ain’t got no mommy is because *she* was your dad’s first victim –”

Sam had never punched another kid in the face before. He’d seen Dean do it lots of times, and knew the mechanics of it, the physics of it. He hadn’t expected his knuckles to hurt so much though. Or that spurt of blood that suddenly gushed from Macklin’s nose.

“Don’t. Talk. About. My. Mom.”

It didn’t even sound like Sam’s voice. All strangled, forced out between tight shallow breaths and clenched teeth.

Macklin just blinked at him in surprise, for a second completely thrown as to what had just happened. Roscoe and Gianelli glanced at each other uncertainly, as if awaiting orders, and Macklin just cradled his bloody nose in one shaking hand as he tried to downplay his astonishment that anyone – especially Little Sammy Weirchester – would *dare* stand up to him.

Sam managed to keep breathing, eyes darting to the exit as he tried to gauge how fast he’d have to run to get there before Macklin recovered from his stupor.

Unfortunately, he wasn’t quite quick enough, the fist not holding Macklin’s nose as if he thought it might fall off his face suddenly bunching in the front of Sam’s t-shirt, almost yanking him off his feet as the bigger boy dragged him forward.

“You little piece of trailer trash *crap!*” Macklin growled. “You’re gonna pay for that, Weirchester! You think those Salvation Army threads of yours looked bad before, just wait till I’m finished with you, geek!”

“Shhhhhh...”

Sam blinked and Macklin glanced over his shoulder to where his henchman lurked stupidly. “What did you say?” he demanded, ignoring Sam’s struggles as he glared at his two cronies who exchanged a nervous glance.

“Didn’t say nuthin’, Mack,” Roscoe assured him, just as his untidy hair was suddenly ruffled by a gust of warm air that seemed to come out of nowhere.

Macklin snapped his attention back to Sam, actually tugging him off his feet so that their noses were almost touching and the smaller boy got an up-close-and-personal with the mess he’d made of the jock’s face.

“What are you doing?” Macklin demanded, the unbloodied portion of his visage beginning to turn an angry shade of purple just as the bookshelf behind him started to tremble of its own accord, the books juddering forward towards the edge as the rattling intensified.

“I’m not doing anything!” Sam protested, calmly eyeing the books with an air of detached professional disinterest as the breeze whipping at the boys’ hair and clothes started to gain strength and increase in temperature until something akin to a hot mini tornado appeared to be attempting to form in the middle of the fiction section.

Several girls sitting at a nearby table started to squeal as the wind caught at their hair and blew their homework all over the place, hurriedly attempting to grab their stuff before running for the exit, one of them tossing a backward glance in Sam’s direction and yelling, “Weirdo Winchester!” over the steadily rising tumult.

A rather hefty tome on the Vikings chose that moment to launch itself off the shuddering bookshelf, slamming squarely between Macklin’s shoulder blades

causing him to yelp more in surprise than pain, fist tightening in the front of Sam's shirt.

"Quit it, Winchester!" he growled. "Whatever you and that psycho brother of yours are doing, it's *not* funny –"

Sam shrugged innocently as several more books flew from their shelves, their trajectory clearly indicating they were aiming for his assailants.

Gianelli squealed worse than the girls had as a set of junior encyclopedias headed in his direction, and he immediately turned tail and dashed for the exit, closely followed by Roscoe who was flailing his hands ineffectually at a battered copy of *Gray's Anatomy* that had zoomed all the way from the Health and Medicine section and was busy snapping its pages at him as it chased him from the library.

Macklin's purple cheeks were now a waxy shade of white. "Tell you brother I *still* don't believe in that ghost crap he was trying to scare the kiddies with at recess," he growled, teeth clenched more now in fear than anger. "He's full of bull –"

"Tell him yourself," Sam returned calmly, the screams and general reports of a tornado in the school library having attracted the attention of the only student left in the building who *hadn't* chosen to run in the opposite direction.

Macklin glanced behind him to where the other Weirdo Winchester had finally decided to put in an appearance, immediately dropping Sam the second Dean's oddly calm gaze lit on his little brother.

Macklin grimaced, turned back to Sam and swatted him none-too-gently on the cheek before hissing, "This ain't over you little freak! Next time I'll find you when your brother ain't around to entertain us with his freakshow parlor tricks –"

At that moment a copy of Webster's Dictionary decided to slam into the small of Mackin's back, causing the rest of his threat to be choked off in a sudden exhalation of surprised air, the bully merely scowling ferociously at Sam before turning tail and running for the exit, purposely shoving Dean with his shoulder as barreled past.

Dean matched Macklin's scowl with added interest, pivoting to yell, "Yeah, you *better* run, asswipe!" after him, before turning back to assess the melee currently occurring in the library. "Seriously, what the *hell*, Sammy?" he demanded, gaze turning upwards as he considered the odd funnel of torn book leaves currently swirling up towards the big skylight in the ceiling.

"I didn't do anything!" Sam insisted plaintively. "I swear, this all just started on its own...!"

Then, as suddenly as it had started, the would-be tornado stopped abruptly, almost as if someone had just switched off an out-of-control ceiling fan, and all of the books still flying around between the stacks fell back to the earth with a concerted *whump*, leaving Sam and Dean just looking at each other in mild surprise.

The silence that followed was a little too eerie, even for a library, and then Sam swore he heard that same disembodied voice hiss, "Shhhhhhh...!"

For a stunned moment, Dean looked at Sam and Sam looked at Dean, but neither of them moved.

"Well," Dean managed eventually, stepping carefully over pages torn haphazardly from Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Kerouac's *On the Road* and a bright yellow copy of *The Dummies Guide to PCs*. "That's something you don't see every day." Navigating around a collapsed display of brand new hardback fiction as he carefully made his way toward Sam's position in the World History section, he added, "So when I heard there was something freaky going on in the library I guess I really shouldn't have been surprised to find my freaky geeky kid brother right there in the middle of it."

"Did you see it?" Sam exclaimed, bouncing excitedly on the balls of his feet as Dean approached him warily. "Angry spirit! I'm *sure* of it!"

Dean raised an eyebrow as he picked his way through a landslide of *Sweet Valley High* softbacks that appeared to have spun right off one of the carousels. "Spirit of

Mark Twain come to save us all from bad kids' literature?" he asked as he finally made it to Sam's side.

"Dean!" the younger brother protested, doing his best impersonation of a demented Pez dispenser. "Don't be stupid! It's the librarian! It's the ghost of the old librarian, I just *know* it!"

"Whoa, hey, hold your horses there, Doctor Venkman," Dean said, one hand on Sam's shoulder attempting to hold him still for five whole seconds while the other drew a thumb across the red mark Macklin's slap had left on Sam's cheekbone. Dean's expression changed instantly from patient concern to potentially homicidal fury, an indignant scowl on his face that would have sent lesser men running for the hills. "That Neanderthal jock *hit* you?" he demanded, posture stiffening to his default factory setting of Sammy Protection Mode.

Sam had seen it a hundred times, but really hadn't the time to watch Dean try to rip Macklin's head off right now. However entertaining that might have been.

"Dean, listen to me," he said excitedly, grabbing Dean's wrists and hanging on in an effort to prevent his big brother charging off after Macklin like a dipshit-seeking missile. "It's the librarian – the one who died a couple of months back! I know it!"

"Sam, we've only been here five weeks –"

"I know that," Sam huffed. "But I heard the other kids talking –"

"About Paula Abdul or Debbie Gibson?"

"Dean, I'm *serious!*"

"You're *always* serious, Sammy –"

"And you never take me seriously, Dean!"

"That's because you're a geek," Dean told him lightly, although Sam was at least relieved to have gotten his brother's attention if nothing else. Having completed his cursory physical examination and satisfied himself his kid brother had been left largely undamaged by the indoor tornado and the asshole jock, Dean continued, "So you gonna tell me about Conan the Librarian or do I gotta read your mind, shortstuff?"

"His name was Mr. Withers," Sam said with a huff, choosing to ignore another in Dean's long list of irritating little brother nicknames. "And he died right here in the library."

Dean looked down at the carpet. "Right here?"

Sam rolled his eyes. "No, dumbass! In his office! Right there!" He gestured to a door marked "Carlyle Withers. Absolutely no admittance" in faded red lettering, the glass panel having been covered by brown packing paper inexpertly taped over the inside.

Dean glanced over at the little office before turning back to Sam and asking, "Did you just call me 'dumbass' you little nerf herder?"

Sam sighed his much-practiced sigh of long-suffering resignation. "Dean, when are you going to believe me that *Star Wars* just isn't cool anymore? And quoting it even less so." He shook his head in exasperation. "And you call me a geek."

"That was from *The Empire Strikes Back*," Dean corrected him, completely unruffled. "And *Star Wars* will always be cool. You're just pissed 'cause you're never gonna be any taller than Yoda."

"Am too!" Sam protested, instantly cursing himself for allowing Dean to bait him like a dumb pre-schooler. Again.

Dean grinned knowingly. "Yeah, you just keep telling yourself that, shorty," he crowed. "You never know, one day Dad might run into a genie who'll grant your dearest wish to be as tall and handsome as your awesome big brother."

"You're an ass," Sam told him shortly.

"It's a nice ass though," Dean returned with another infuriating grin.

"Who told you that?" Sam demanded, arms folded across his chest. "Mrs. Spinnaker?"

Mrs. Spinnaker was the rather creepy alleged lady janitor who kept looking at Dean in a way that was probably illegal in most states.

Dean shuddered. "Midget."

"Jailbait."

"Like you even know what that means."

"You want the Webster's definition or the Oxford English Dictionary?"

"Nerd."

"Dumbass."

"You used that already."

"Jerk."

"Bitch."

"Dad said you're not allowed to call me that anymore!"

"Yeah, well Dad ain't here, is he? And while he's away, *I'm* in charge."

"Nazi."

Dean snorted, grinning broadly. "That's a new one! Okay Sammy, you win this round. Where were we? Oh yeah, pissed off spirit of creepy-ass librarian in creepy-ass library, right?" Dean glanced around him, finally taking in his surroundings for the first time since he'd got here. "And as libraries go, this place is *way* creepy."

"You say that about *every* library."

"And it's always true!"

"Wait." Sam stopped suddenly, the full horror of his sudden realization hitting him like a wrecking ball the size of Jupiter. "We've been at this school *five weeks* and this is the first time you've been in the library?" The notion was truly inconceivable.

Dean shrugged. "What do I need to come in here for?" he asked. "No textbooks on hunting evil in the Careers section as far as I'm aware. If you hadn't needed rescuing from an indoor tornado and a pansy-ass bully after I'd been waiting for you in the parking lot for *twenty minutes* I'd have gone the rest of the semester without setting foot in the place."

"I didn't need rescuing," Sam protested, drawing himself up to his full height before immediately deflating again. "And I think I broke Jared Macklin's nose." He shrugged a little apologetically.

Dean positively beamed at him. "That's my boy, Sammy! I knew there was some Winchester blood in there somewhere!"

"Weirdchester," Sam muttered, eyes averted to the carpet.

"Huh?"

"They keep calling us 'Weirdchester'."

"Yeah, well," Dean's jaw tensed almost imperceptibly, before suddenly splitting into a grin. "It's nice to be famous. What the hell do we care what they think of us —"

"They think Dad's a serial killer."

Dean actually laughed at that. "Niiiiice! Anyone tries to mess with us we'll threaten to chop 'em up and hide 'em under our floorboards —"

"And they keep calling you a psycho and telling everyone you've been in Juvie."

Dean considered that. "Actually, I think *I* might have started that rumor."

Sam all but stamped his foot. "Dean, why would you *do* that? I have to come to this stupid school too y'know!"

"And if everyone thinks your big brother's a homicidal delinquent then they're gonna think twice before messing with you. Right?"

Sam blinked at him, voice suddenly regaining a little of the hero worship he seemed to have outgrown over the last couple of years. "You spread that rumor for *me*?"

Dean shrugged dismissively. "Didn't work on Jared Macklin though, did it? Big dumb jerk. Don't worry, squirt. I'll squash him for ya as soon as we've worked out what the hell tried to drop a library on his head. And thank it."

"I wouldn't be so eager," Sam warned him. "I heard old man Withers had some – uh – off-curriculum books in his office. Some of the other kids say he was a devil worshipper; that his books were all Black Magic and Satanism and stuff."

Dean inclined his head. "Interesting."

"Some people even think he was murdered –"

"Really interesting. That'd certainly piss him off enough to make him come back and haunt his own library."

"– By Satan."

Dean shook his head. "Gotta love kids with active imaginations." He took a breath before suddenly heading off toward the office, leaving Sam standing for a second before trailing after him uncertainly.

"Dean, what are you doing?"

Dean pulled out his lock pick and set to work on the door.

"I think it's called Breaking and Entering."

"Dean!" Sam's eyes widened in alarm. "Miss McKenzie's gonna be back to lock up as soon as she's done with Detention! What if she comes back to see what all the noise was about? Bad enough she should come in and see us here in the middle of this mess! Guess who's gonna get the blame?"

"Relax, Sammy," Dean said, glancing at his watch. "We got tons of time. If she was gonna come back to investigate the tornado she'd be here already. No way she's gonna leave twenty juvenile delinquents all by themselves in Detention. Plus, y'know – serves the school right for not hiring another librarian and making the teachers take double duty."

"But – but maybe we should just tell Dad –"

Dean nodded. "Yeah, maybe. But Dad's gonna be out of town for at least another week. Least we can do is look –" The lock clicked and the door swung open, Dean's grin broadening. "C'mon Sammy. We're just gonna look."

With that, Dean disappeared into the office without another word, the light snapping on inside just as Sam suddenly heard the words, "Oh my God!" issue from his brother's mouth.

Concerned Dean might be in trouble and trying to ignore the "absolutely no admittance" sign, Sam ducked into the room after his brother, finding the older boy staring at a tiny room packed virtually floor to ceiling with musty old books of every size, shape and color, a thick layer of dust covering nearly every surface and a variety of cobwebs giving the whole tableau a distinctly Gothic vibe.

"Jeez," Dean muttered, coughing. "Looks like the maid's century off."

"I heard Mr. Withers never let anyone in here to clean," Sam offered, nervously glancing over his shoulder just in case Miss McKenzie had inexplicably materialized behind him in the library. "He had the only key. The cleaning staff still refuse to come in here on account of – y'know..." He inclined his head toward the creaky wooden desk in the center of the room.

Dean followed his gaze. "This is where he bit the big one?"

"Um-hmm," Sam confirmed, gingerly moving toward the nearest pile of books and examining the top few. "You know, I've seen books like this before. At Bobby's."

Dean nodded, his own cursory examination of the scene raising enough question marks to have his spidey-senses tingling. There was definitely something not right going on here. But if the old librarian was a pissed off spook out to avenge his own murder... Well, ghosts were one thing. Homicide was something else entirely.

"You were right, Sam," he pronounced finally, Sam looking up at him with a quizzical expression on his face. "We need to tell Dad about this."

"What happened to 'least we can do is look'?" Sam asked.

Dean shrugged. "We looked."

"And we're not gonna do anything about it?"

"What d'you think we should do, Sammy? Go tell Principal Reeve his library's haunted by the spirit of his possibly-murdered former librarian? Or maybe we should

go to the cops with that theory? And you think they're calling us *weird* now! Just wait till they get a load of that!"

"But –"

"Sam, you're the one who wanted to wait and tell Dad in the first place!"

"I know, but what if someone gets hurt in the meantime?"

"By a collapsing Judy Blume exhibition?"

"Dean, I'm *serious*–"

"Again with the serious –"

"*Dean*–"

"Look," Dean sighed heavily. "Dad'll be back in a week. We'll tell him what's going on and he'll deal with it."

"But Dean –"

"Sam, Dad left me in charge while he was gone, okay? My ass would be grass if we got in any trouble while he was away! Remember when you broke your arm in gym class that time, and the Principal went all Child Protective Services on us when she figured out Dad had left us on our own?"

"You were eleven, Dean."

"I know that," Dean conceded. "But just 'cause we're older now doesn't mean we have to keep any less of a low profile when Dad's away."

"I broke Jared Macklin's nose."

"And who's he gonna admit that to?" Dean put a hand on Sam's shoulder. "Look, we dodged a bullet there, but I'm not taking any more chances. I gotta prove to Dad he can trust me to be responsible. Especially after..." He trailed off for a second, before mentally shaking himself and continuing. "If I can prove that to him, then maybe he'll finally let me go on some of the bigger hunts with him, not the penny ante stuff he's let us help out with up to now."

Sam straightened, a thought suddenly occurring to him. "Look, I know you're pissed off that you got stuck with babysitting detail again –"

"Sam –"

"But people could get *hurt*, Dean! What better way to prove to Dad that you're ready to hunt with him than by showing him some initiative? Huh? It's a simple salt n' burn. We've done them lots of times."

"Never on our own."

"No. But how hard could it be? We find Mr. Withers' grave, we dig him up, we burn his bones. Simple. End of story. We could do it blindfolded."

"Whatever floats your boat, Sammy."

Sam just looked at him. "Dean."

"I know, you're serious." Dean regarded his little brother for a second. "What happened to 'maybe we should tell Dad' anyway?"

"Maybe I want to prove something to Dad too," Sam said slowly. "Dean, please? What could possibly go wrong...?"

Mansfield Public School Present Day

Dean rolled the Impala into a parking space at the school and sat looking up at the refurbished brick building with distaste. To him it was just another school in a long line of schools he had never wasted brain space trying to remember.

Always being the new kid, always on the lookout, always the outsider. Not like Sam, who had tried to fit in at every school they had attended, with more or less success depending on the length of time they had remained. Being the youngest, the smartest, the geekiest, wearing his own labels of judgment just as Dean had.

Only Sam had earned his labels unwittingly, always trying to just be someone's friend, one of the guys, whereas Dean had accepted his, worn them and grown used

to them, reveling in being the perennial bad boy because it was a role he knew well and could play without effort. Sam had never given up trying to be like everyone else.

In the brief seconds before Sam opened the car door, Dean flashed through anger, frustration, humiliation, regret and that sinking feeling of knowing you'd done something wrong and it had come back to haunt you in the form of a dead librarian you'd never even met.

He ground his teeth together and pushed out of the car, going to stand by Sam who was regarding the building with the same uneasy gaze.

Around them other cars were pulling into and leaving the parking lot, people milling around the grounds and wandering in and out of the building in response, no doubt, to the School Open House signs posted about.

"It sure looks different," Sam commented, brushing hair out of his eyes.

Dean stared at him then rolled his eyes. "C'mon, Gigantor," he said, giving Sam a shove. "You can trip down memory lane later. Jeez, we were here for a few months, you act like it was something special."

Sam obediently began walking, but grinned suddenly, "It was special, Dean. First time I ever punched a guy in the nose."

Dean laughed abruptly. "My God, I forgot! You did! That guy's eyes would have been purple for a month. If we'd stuck around that long to find out." Dean chuckled as they mounted the steps. "He was a total jerk. What the hell was his name again?"

"Macklin," Sam replied, "Jared Macklin."

Dean grunted. "Hopefully, if he's not working in a McDonald's he's in prison somewhere picking up soap for someone."

He stopped and studied the various signs and displays. Teachers were acting as guides and information points. "Who're we looking for again?" he asked, trying to make sense out of the *You Are Here* poster. The layout looked like a crazy house of circular hallways and bizarre angles. What the hell happened to straight halls? This one led to regular classes and that one led to the "Special Classes" where he had spent time at more than one school, not this arty architectural crap with *flow*. "Helen Jensen, she's the media coordinator. She was with Corrigan when he died."

"The media *what*?"

"The librarian, Dean," Sam replied with a sigh. He gestured at Dean to follow and went up to a thirty-something heavyset woman with a handful of leaflets and a harried expression. Her name tag read *Camille Spencer, Mathematics Dept.*

She brightened perceptibly at Sam's approach. "Can I help you?"

Sam offered her a warm smile. "We're looking for the media center and we're having a little trouble following the directions on the sign."

She laughed, "You mean the Mansfield Maze? I work here and I can't find my way around. My guess is the kids will get lost for weeks before they ever find their classrooms. We'll have to shoot off flares."

Sam's laugh this time was genuine. "It is kind of confusing." Next to him Dean made an impatient sound and nudged him.

"Just follow the rainbow," she said gesturing behind them.

"I'm sorry...?" Sam said, puzzled, glancing back at a series of colored stripes on the wall.

"Each color represents a different section. The third hallway down, they converge. That's the library—I mean the media center—there are other teachers to help if you get lost. We should have had a check-in sheet for guests to make sure they all find their way out." She leaned close and whispered, "I have it on good authority that at the center of the building, if you can find it, there's a minotaur. Or a pot of gold." She clasped Sam's hand and laughed merrily.

It had obviously been a long day already.

"Thanks," Sam said, catching Dean's arm and pulling him along to get his attention away from the group of high school girls who had just giggled their way in.

Dean actually stumbled as Sam yanked him along, his eyes still trailing on long legs and short skirts. "Hey!"

"Jailbait, Dean. Don't look at 'em." Sam growled, dragging them down the indicated hall. "We're working."

"I was working!" Dean protested. "They might be potential witnesses." He jerked his arm free and made a fuss over smoothing his sleeve.

"The only thing those girls are potential witnesses for is a shoe sale at the mall."

Sam made a left, a right, watching the colored lines and then Dean was sure they doubled back at least twice before a pair of glass double doors presented themselves with "Corrigan Media Center" painted on them. On an easel to one side was a large photo of Dale Corrigan with a black ribbon draped over it and a small sign that read: *In memory of Dale Corrigan, without whose generous donation this facility would not exist. 1977-2008.*

Dean stopped dead. "Now I remember that son of a bitch!" he exclaimed.

Sam hit him. "Dean! Be quiet for God's sake," he hissed, as the people passing by turned to stare.

Dean gave him a dirty look. "Well, I do!" he shoved the doors open and went in.

This time Sam stopped dead, staring around at the brightly lit, expansive room, filled with banks of computers and shelves of new books. The smell of new was overwhelming. Large desks with comfortable-looking chairs filled the empty areas and the entire room was so up to date and modern-looking that Sam was momentarily stunned. He could still remember the dark, dusty room with the messy stacks of books and towering shelves.

"Wow," he intoned.

Dean looked around blankly, then shook his head, allowing Sam his moment of awe. A large round desk was centered in the room and a young woman with dark hair pulled back into a bun was industriously stamping inside book covers.

"Hey, c'mon!" Dean said, flicking Sam with his fingers, "I bet that's her."

Sam followed, still admiring, letting his fingers trail over the desks as he walked by, a brief, sharp pang for what he had at Stanford hit him but was immediately buried under what he had lost there and he put it out of his mind in a rush, joining Dean at the desk.

The woman looked up with a subdued smile. "Can I help you, gentlemen?"

Dean smiled broadly as he took in her lovely features, the soft mouth, pointed nose and sad brown eyes. *She should wear her hair down*, he thought.

"Actually we're sort of looking around," he replied. "Checking out the school for our sister, she's moving here in a few weeks and her kid'll be going here. We heard the library was something else." He turned, gesturing, "They weren't kidding."

"Yes, it's quite impressive, isn't it?" Her smile warmed slightly as she looked at the brothers, enjoying the taller one's obvious amazement.

Dean held out his hand, "I'm Dean Winters, this is my brother Sam." He smacked Sam in the chest with the back of his hand, bringing him back to earth.

She extended a slender hand and allowed Dean to shake it, then to Sam whose huge hand engulfed hers. "Helen Jensen. I'm the media coordinator—" She rolled her eyes. "God, that sounds so pretentious. I'm the new librarian."

"This is beautiful," Sam said with total honesty. "It was nothing like this when we went here."

Helen's interest took a noticeable jump. "You went to school here? Then you knew Mr. Withers, the old librarian?"

Sam and Dean looked at each other.

"Uh, no actually, we only went for part of a semester and he died about a month before we started." Dean replied, watching Helen's face as disappointment washed over it. "I'm sorry, did I say something wrong?"

"What? Oh, no...I just...I can't find anyone who has anything positive to say about the man. I mean, he may have been a little hidebound but he stood up for what he

believed in and I admire that.” She suddenly reached up and wiped at her eyes. “I’m sorry. With everything that’s happened, poor Mr. Corrigan...”

Sam kicked Dean in the ankle at Dean’s sudden noise of disgust. “Yeah, we heard about that. That must have been awful for you.” His voice took on the deep tones of compassion that never failed to have people spilling their guts to him.

She nodded, wiping at another errant tear that spilled down her cheek. “I can’t help but feel responsible somehow. I mean, I know it wasn’t my fault, how could it be? But still, he was there opening that crate because I asked him to help me.” She shook her head. “He got this big splinter in his hand when the crate broke open and I just went to get the first aid kit and when I came back...”

To Sam’s horror she burst into full-blown tears and covered her face with her hands.

Dean looked around to make sure they were unobserved: reducing the librarian to tears would definitely not win them friends.

“I’m sorry,” she sniveled, grasping a Kleenex from the box Sam pushed at her. “You didn’t come here to hear all this. It’s just been so *hard*. I’ve had nightmares every night since it happened. The way he died—how could that happen?” She raised swimming eyes at Sam.

“No, it’s okay. We understand,” he said, sympathetically.

“What was in this crate if you don’t mind me asking?” Dean chimed in.

Helen shrugged. “All the old books from the original library were crated up and I’ve been going through them, sorting them. This box was from Mr. Withers’ private collection, I guess.” She sniffed and dabbed at her eyes. “I left the party for the opening and came here to do some work. I guess Mr. Corrigan was wandering around. He came here and we were talking about Mr. Withers and I mentioned the crate. I couldn’t get it open and asked Mr. Corrigan to help me with it...” She dissolved into tears again to Dean’s chagrin.

“What kind of books were they?” he asked, trying to distract her.

“I don’t know, I haven’t really looked at them since that night.” She straightened, pulling herself together. “Why?”

Dean blinked, “Oh, no reason really. I remember hearing about these crazy books he had on...some stuff...I just wondered if they were for sale...” He floundered, prevaricating wildly with no help from Sam. “They might be valuable, you could sell ‘em...or something.”

“Oh. Well a lot of them are valuable but so many of them are in bad condition all you can do is destroy them. I’ll have a look at them later and be able to tell more.”

“Do you want some help? We have some time if you need some stuff carried or... whatever...” Dean glanced at Sam who instantly nodded.

Helen looked doubtful. “Really, that’s very nice of you but I just don’t think I can go through them right—”

She broke off, looking up as a heavysset man suddenly pushed through the door calling her name loudly. Helen wiped the look of distaste off her face as the shorts-clad individual spotted her, Dean and Sam and strode up to the table.

He wore a ball cap and a whistle, sneakers and a yellow polo shirt with *Mansfield Athletic Department* embroidered over the chest. He looked to be about their age but time was not being kind to him. The promising beginnings of a beer gut pulled the fabric over his belly and while he retained a still-handsome face, lines and sags of flesh were gradually giving in to gravity.

Dean and Sam stepped forward as he approached, almost protectively.

He came to a halt, looking them both over. Sam towered over him by about seven inches and he was just below Dean’s eye level. He took in Helen’s reddened eyes and the wadded tissues but made no comment: whatever was bugging her he knew he wasn’t responsible for it so it didn’t matter.

“I came by to see if you were ready to go to lunch?” he said, speaking around the guys as if they weren’t there.

"I told you, Mr. Macklin, I have too much to do to go to lunch with you. Someone has to be here to talk to the students and parents when they come through."

Macklin looked around the otherwise empty room. "Doesn't look like you're too overrun."

"Still—"

Macklin looked over at Sam and Dean who had stiffened at hearing his name. He stuck out his hand. "Coach Jared Macklin, head of the athletic department." He eyed the boys speculatively. "You have kids going here? You look familiar."

Dean stepped forward, a glint in his eye, and held out his hand. "Dean Winters, my brother Sam," indicating said brother who made no effort to shake hands. "We're checking out the school for our sister. Wanted to see the library we've been hearing so much about."

Macklin snorted. "No offense," he said, nodding at Helen. "But you ask me, these kids would get more out of running laps and sweating it out on a football field than they'll ever get out of a bunch of pansy-ass books. Real life is a battle, and they need to learn how to fight it." He grinned, a man with a simple life philosophy and proud to share.

Helen's own tight smile would have cut glass. "You are, of course, entitled to your opinion."

Macklin snapped his fingers. "I remember now! When I was a sophomore there was this psycho kid with a geeky little brother that went here for a little while. Their names were Sam and Dean. The older kid, Dean, was some kind of juvenile offender, so I heard. Dad was in prison off and on and the younger one was just strange. Crazy stuff happened around him all the time. We were in the library one time having some fun with him and all these books started flying off the shelves. Crazy as hell. Little shit punched me in the nose once and then his brother attacked me later. Let's see, their last name was...Wind...Winchell...Winchester!!! That's it! We called 'em Weirdchester! Talk about a pair of oddballs." He laughed, slapping his leg, recalling the fun of younger days.

Sam heard Dean suck in a breath and immediately insinuated himself between Dean and Macklin.

"So what do you guys do for a living?" Macklin asked.

Dean pushed ineffectually at Sam. "We're exterminators," he replied, giving Sam a hip shove that moved him clumsily to one side. "We get rid of annoying pests."

Macklin laughed again. "Well, someone has to do those jobs. Can't all be college men. You sure about lunch?" he asked, directing his attention back to Helen.

Dean felt Sam grab his arm to stop his forward progress, fists balling at his sides.

"Maybe another time, Mr. Macklin."

He shrugged. "Suit yourself." He glanced back at Sam and Dean and flipped them a salute. "Happy hunting." He turned and left, whistling.

"Asshole," Dean spat after him.

"That's for sure," Helen agreed, startling both men, who turned to stare at her. She blushed. "It's no sin to state a fact. I'm sorry, he's a real jerk. I heard he was a jerk when he went to school here and turned it into a profession." She shuffled some of the books on the desk. "I'm really sorry, but I do have a lot to do, if there are any questions about the library you want to ask...?"

Sam shook his head. "No, I think we found out everything we need to know. I hope we didn't upset you too much."

"No, it's just gonna take some time to get over. I hope your sister's kids like going to school here." She smiled and passed over some brochures. "Give her these to read, it covers all the rules and information about the center." She glanced up as a couple with two children in tow came through the door. "If you'll excuse me," she said with a smile. "It was nice to meet you."

As they walked back down the steps Sam was making plans in his head about returning to check out the crate of books after the building closed while Dean fumed

about Macklin, his forgotten anger over long ago injustices back full force as the former bully had laid it all out again to see and relive.

“Let it go, Dean, it was a long time ago. We were kids.”

“Let it go, hell,” Dean snarled. “That jack son of a bitch made our lives miserable. If anyone oughta have their ass kicked by that crazy librarian it’s him.”

They reached the Impala and climbed in, tearing off with the throaty grumble of the engine not quite drowning out Dean’s continued ranting about the unfairness of life while Sam kept repeating to forget it.

Mansfield Public School May 1993

Usually, it was the worst sound in the world.

Sam hated it with a passion and had begun to think of it as a death knell. *The bell tolls for thee, Samuel Winchester! Leave this place of normality and return post haste to that dark world inhabited by others of your kind. Return not again until 8 a.m. sharp upon the morrow...*

But today, the end of school bell couldn’t ring fast enough.

Sam didn’t ever remember being this jazzed about a potential hunt. Not ever. But this wasn’t the usual “stay in the car with the books and keep the doors locked until we get back, Sammy” hunt. This was different. This was [i]his[/i] hunt. Well, his and Dean’s anyway. And as for Dean being pissed off about only being allowed on the penny ante hunts – well at least he was allowed on those, not left in the car like the family dog!

If Dean had something to prove then Sam had double. But he’d show Dean. *And Dad*. Carlyle Withers didn’t know what was about to hit his moldy old bones: The Winchester boys, hunting solo!

Sam had it all laid out in his head like one of Dean’s comic books: find the grave, dig the old geezer up, salt, lighter fluid, matches. Problem solved. No more haunted library.

What would Dad say to *that*, huh?

It had been all Dean could do to persuade Sam to wait an extra night while they did a little research. *Be Prepared*. Well who was the Boy Scout now, Dean?

Finally, *finally* the bell rang, and Sam was up from his desk so fast he never even heard Miss Cohen dole out their homework assignment – five hundred words on How the Railroads Conquered America – so intent was he on finding Dean and imparting his “research.”

In fact, he was so distracted that he never even noticed Jared Macklin blocking his path as he jumped down the school’s front steps three at a time until he was almost standing on the bigger kid’s two hundred dollar sneakers.

“Weirdchester.”

The jock’s nose was swathed in bandages, dark purple smudges lurking beneath his piggy eyes, hands curled into fists of fury at his sides as he gritted his teeth and fairly snarled down at the younger boy.

Sam stopped dead in his tracks before instinctively backing up a few paces, all thoughts of the ghost of Carlyle Withers driven from his mind as Macklin began to advance on him very, very slowly, his two henchmen bringing up the rear like a testosterone-fueled rolling roadblock.

“You broke my nose, Weirdchester,” Macklin growled nasally, only four feet away and closing. “So now I’m gonna see how easy it is to break an egghead’s head, egghead –”

“Need the bathroom, Macklin? ‘Cause I swear you just used the word ‘head’ three times in that sentence.”

Sam wasn't entirely sure how Dean had magically materialized in the space between himself and Macklin, but it was at times like these that Sam could vividly imagine his big brother standing with his hands on his hips and a cape billowing behind him softly in the breeze.

Except there was no cape and no breeze and Dean would kick his ass from here to Outer Mongolia if he even dared to mention him in the same breath as "tights."

Macklin's forward momentum halted immediately, bright red cheeks blanching slightly as he too wondered where the hell Dean had come from.

If Dean had a superpower, then this was it.

Sam knew Dean referred to it as his "Sammy Sense" and he'd seen it in action too many times to doubt its existence.

"Uh – I was – I wanted to talk to your brother," Macklin mumbled barely coherently, eyes suddenly averted to his expensive footwear.

"Yeah, he's a popular kid," Dean said, smiling brightly and not moving one iota.

A weird nasal snort emanated from Macklin's bandages, and it was as if he suddenly realized that his reputation may not be the size of Dean Winchester's, but his body exceeded his by seven inches and about forty pounds. Shoulders straightening, he stepped forward, inclining his head down until what was left of his nose was a fraction of an inch from Dean's.

Dean didn't even flinch.

"Something I can help you with, Sneezy?" Dean asked calmly. "Or is it Dopey? Always get those two mixed up."

Macklin positively snarled at him, giving him the appearance of a very hungry pot-bellied pig. "Get outta my way, *Weirdchester* –"

Dean sighed melodramatically. "Jeez, is that the best you can come up with, Jaclyn? 'Cause honestly, I never heard that one before."

If Macklin was intimidating before, now he was positively looming. "What if I break *your* nose, huh pretty boy? You gonna go running home to *Mommy*–?"

Dean's jaw tensed and his eyes narrowed, a little muscle beginning to bounce in his cheek.

"Oh, wait," Macklin continued, getting even more in Dean's face. "You don't *have* a mommy, do you? Not much of a daddy either from what I hear –"

Macklin's head made an interestingly hollow thud as it hit the sidewalk, Sam noted, Dean stepping forward to stand over him, casually admiring the pattern the blood oozing from his split lip was creating on his brand new Cleveland Indians shirt.

"Aw, I'm sorry," Dean drawled insincerely. "These sidewalks can be pretty treacherous, can't they?" He leaned down towards Macklin, who was blinking up at him stupidly. "I'd stay down there if I were you, Jaclyn," he advised, voice lowered. "I'd hate to see you have another sidewalk-related accident if you even think about getting within six feet of my little brother again." He straightened, first assessing any danger Macklin's quite frankly totally unimposing henchmen might pose to himself or his brother, before turning back to Sam and casually asking, "You comin' or are we waiting for the encore?"

Yeah, so there were some days Sam didn't feel even slightly embarrassed to be Dean Winchester's kid brother.

"I'm coming," he agreed readily, for once not in the slightest bit pissed off at his brother for babying him, stealing his thunder or a combination of both, grinning from ear to ear at the assembled throng of students all gazing at his big brother with a mixture of awe, gratitude, and in some cases, barely disguised adoration.

"That was *awesome!*" he declared after they'd stepped over Macklin's bloody face and were well out of earshot of the admiring onlookers.

"Well one of us has got to be," Dean chided him lightly as they headed in the general direction of the latest scuzzy motel they called "home." "What were you thinking letting Macklin sneak up on you like that?"

“He didn’t exactly ‘sneak,’ Dean,” Sam protested. “I was just kinda – preoccupied is all.”

“Cause that never usually happens –”

“Thinking about Carlyle Withers and how we’re gonna torch him later!”

Dean raised an eyebrow, noting how Sam was virtually bouncing along at his side. “*You*, distracted from *school* by a *hunt*?” he burst out. “Jeez, Sam, if I’d known this was all it took to get your head into the family business I’d have had you digging up moldy librarians years ago!”

Sam stuck out his bottom lip sullenly. “This is different,” he insisted. “This is *personal*. This is our school – people we know could get hurt, not just random strangers –”

“Like the ‘random strangers’ Dad usually puts his ass on the line to save, you mean?”

Sam cast a sidelong glance in his brother’s direction, but didn’t comment.

“Anyway,” Dean continued, deftly altering the direction of the conversation.

“You’re right about one thing: People we know *are* getting hurt.”

Sam stopped bouncing for a second. “They are?”

“Remember Summer Soames?”

“That airhead cheerleader who you said had fake –”

“Yeah, she’s the one,” Dean confirmed. “Well get this, apparently she got busted putting her girly scrawl all over one of the library’s oh-so-exciting Roman history books – she likes to draw these really sickening love hearts over all the ‘i’s in place of the dots, right –”

“So that’s who wrote ‘Dean Winchester, I love you’ all over your Math textbook?”

“Shut up, Sherlock,” Dean muttered, before continuing as if Sam hadn’t even spoken. “So Mr. Roper hands her a bill to take home to her parents right, to pay for the book she’s messed up, *and* he gives her a detention on top of that, but just as she’s leaving the library a whole bookshelf just tips over on top of her, snapping her leg like a stale Twinkie!”

Sam’s eyes widened. “Guess she won’t be cheerleading for a while then.”

Dean shrugged. “She’d have been okay if the thing had fallen on her chest – would have bounced right off of all that silicone...”

Sam’s face screwed up in disgust. “Can we say ‘ew?’ Dean, you are way too obsessed by that girl’s –”

“Rack?”

“You shouldn’t use that word,” Sam chided him. “It’s degrading to women.”

“Who died and made you Eleanor Roosevelt?”

Sam performed his patented long-suffering little brother eye roll before continuing. “You know, you’re not fooling anyone with this ‘I only pay attention to hot teachers’ routine –”

“Miss Reynolds was hot –”

“She was Geography, not History, Dean. You had Mr. O’Rourke for that class.”

Dean frowned. “Huh.”

Sam rolled his eyes again, this time adding the long-suffering little brother sigh for good measure. “Listen, I have intel too,” he said excitedly. “Last night, one of the janitors – Mr. Rehman? He drew the short straw when the cleaning staff decided it was time to reclaim Mr. Withers’ office. So, he’s standing on Mr. Withers’ desk, right, trying to clean the strip light above it when he accidentally kicked over his bucket of soapy water and –”

“Kicked the bucket,” Dean sniggered, before sobering almost immediately and adding, “Uh, he didn’t, did he? Kick the bucket?”

Sam shook his head. “No, but Mr. Withers’ books and papers – the things he had out on his desk when he died – they were all ruined, soaked through. And then all of a sudden the strip light kind of explodes – glass and bits of plastic everywhere, most

of it seeming to make a beeline for Mr. Rehman's face. He got rushed to hospital to get himself stitched up, but I heard he might lose an eye!"

Dean considered Sam's little narration as he fished in his pocket for the room key while they crossed the Motel Paradiso's half-empty parking lot. "That's one seriously pissed off librarian," he commented finally, producing the key and shoving it into the lock of room thirteen. "Who knew bookworms could get so worked up, huh? I better keep a closer eye on you, squirt!" Sam scowled at him as he shoved a hand under the door handle, ramming it upward as he rattled the key until the lock eventually ground open and he was able to shoulder the door in on the second attempt.

"You're getting better at that," Sam observed casually, following Dean into the musty-smelling room and dumping his bookbag onto the nearest bed.

"Yeah well, by the sounds of things, so is Carlyle Withers."

"So we're agreed?" Sam pushed eagerly. "He's the spook responsible for what's going on in the library?"

Dean raised an eyebrow and made his customary "I can't believe we're related" face. "Yeah, we're *agreed*, Rupert," he said, sarcastically mimicking Sam's inflection. "The ex-librarian's stamped his last book as far as I'm concerned."

Sam grinned broadly, producing a map from his back pocket and flattening it out on the bed before pointing at a large red "X." "And I know just where to find him."

Mansfield Memorial Park
May 1993
1.00 a.m.

"This one," Sam stated confidently, pointing at a non-descript granite headstone that listed slightly to the left, the bright moonlight clearly illuminating the name "Carlyle Withers" despite the rest of the inscription being obscured by several clumps of overgrown grass and wildly-growing weeds, the grave clearly not having been well-tended in the months since the old librarian's demise.

Dean shifted the shovel from off his shoulder, taking a breath as if he were savoring the moment, before plunging the blade into the uneven turf. "First solo salt n' burn, Sammy," he observed with a grin. "Maybe we ought to start our own hunter's journal from now on, huh?"

Dean's enthusiasm was infectious, and Sam found himself bringing his own shovel down into the hard earth, excited breaths misting the air in front of his mouth giving him the appearance of a serial chain-smoker. "Can't wait to tell Dad!" he said. "We took down a dangerous spirit all by ourselves!"

A little smile of anticipation lit up Dean's face. "So much for 'you're too young for the big hunts, kiddo!'" he said, affecting his father's smooth baritone. "Maybe he might actually let us hunt something *interesting* with him when he's sees we're up to it!"

"No more waiting in the car for us, huh?" Sam offered hopefully, and Dean glanced up at him from the small hole he'd already made in the dirt, face for a second unreadable in the bright moonlight.

"You, me and Dad," he said eventually. "Nothin's gonna be able to stand up to us! Nothin', Sammy."

Dean's conviction and Sam's excitement saw them both through two hours' solid digging, but after realizing he had blisters on his hands and they were still only three feet closer to Carlyle Withers' casket, Sam's enthusiasm eventually began to wane.

"Dean, I need a break," the younger boy declared finally, heaving himself up onto the edge of the uneven hole they'd so far excavated, feet dangling below as he flung his shovel behind him onto the damp grass and began to examine the mess he'd already made of his hands.

Dean glanced up briefly but carried on digging, t-shirt soaked through with sweat despite his outer clothing having been discarded an hour earlier. "Lightweight," he

commented through gritted teeth, readjusting his grip on his shovel in order, Sam was pretty sure, to disguise the discomfort his own blisters were causing him.

"How does Dad make this look so easy?" Sam wondered, rolling his aching shoulders.

"The man's a walking earthmover, Sammy," Dean explained, himself pausing for a second to look up at his brother. "C'mon, squirt. This grave ain't gonna dig itself and it'll be starting to get light in a few hours."

Sam screwed up his face, exaggerating his fatigue in the hope of garnering some sympathy from his brother. "I can't dig anymore, Dean!" he whined, doing his best to play on Dean's finely-honed Big Brother Protection Instinct. "Can I just take a little break?" He knew it was a low blow, but he blinked the puppy dog eyes plaintively. "Please?"

From the expression on Dean's face, Sam was pretty sure his big brother knew full well he was being played, but that didn't stop him caving with minimal resistance. "Five minutes," he pronounced. "And don't you go wandering off. You don't wanna wind up locked in a crypt all night or something, do ya?"

Sam shook his head vigorously, for a second vividly reminded of the time that very thing had happened, he and Dean finding themselves shut inside a creepy crypt for several hours until Dad finally realized they weren't where he'd left them and went looking for them. Although Sam was pretty sure Dad had left them locked in there a while just to teach them not to go poking their noses in where they didn't belong.

Pulling himself up onto his feet, he felt a slight twinge of guilt when he caught Dean wince as he resumed digging, but managed to put it out of his head as he turned to examine the tumbledown array of gravestones stretching out all around him, each one looking slightly less cared for than the last. "Emilia Jane Withers. Beloved mother." "Harriman William Withers. Rest in peace." "Constance Harriman-Withers. Sleeping with the angels."

Sam frowned slightly as each inscription he read revealed another deceased member of the Withers family. That wasn't entirely unusual – this was obviously the family plot. But what *did* concern him, however, was the slightly crumbling marble cross clearly marking the grave of one Carlyle Withers...

Sam did a double-take, glancing back over his shoulder at Dean, still diligently excavating the first grave they'd found attributed to Carlyle Withers. He shook his head uncertainly, biting his lip as he considered calling out to his brother, but deciding against it and instead kneeling down in front of the crucifix and gingerly pushing away several years' worth of accumulated weeds and undergrowth to reveal the rest of the inscription: "Carlyle Withers II. Faithful son, beloved father."

Oh crap.

There was more than one Carlyle Withers...

Fairly jumping to his feet, Sam spun on his heel and made to sprint back towards his brother, but instead suddenly found himself sprawled headlong in the overgrown grass, his foot caught in a tangle of weeds and brambles that seemed intent on pulling the tombstone of Carlyle Withers II into the earth along with its namesake's yellowing bones.

Cursing silently to himself as he extricated his foot from the weeds and raised himself up onto his knees, Sam's stomach almost slid right down into his sneakers when his eyes lit on the fairly recent marble slab now right in front of him: "Carlyle Withers III, 19th July 1929 – 1st March 1993. Let knowledge be your guide."

Crap.

Double crap.

"Dean?"

Sam backed away from the headstone very slowly, eyes still riveted to the glaring inscription, insensible to the dewy wetness soaking through the knees of his jeans or the suddenly freezing air causing his teeth to chatter loudly.

"D – Dean?"

He turned, at first stumbling hesitantly back toward his brother until the true gravity of the situation finally hit him and he found himself sprinting over to the open grave where Dean's head and shoulders were barely visible, skidding to a halt in the piled up dirt and fairly screaming, "Dean!" at the top of his lungs.

"What?" Dean snapped, straightening, exasperation plain in the impatience of his tone. "I heard you the first time, Sammy!"

"D – Dean –" Sam stammered awkwardly. "I – er – think we might have a problem..."

"Damn right we got a problem!" Dean concurred testily. "This whole salt n' burn was *your* idea, Sam, yet I seem to be the only one doing the digging! Break's over, Samantha! Get your ass down here and help me!"

Sam took a breath, steeling himself for the inevitable explosion. "Dean – I – I think maybe – maybe you should stop digging –"

"What?" Dean stared at him incredulously. "Are you *mental*? I got two feet to go and three hours to sun-up. No way in hell I'm giving up now!"

"Dean," Sam swallowed. "I think we're digging up the wrong grave."

Dean stopped dead, just looking at him, expression completely blank. "We're *what*?" he managed to choke out finally.

"I – I think we're digging up the wrong Carlyle Withers."

"Sam," Dean was clearly losing his patience. "I distinctly remember you pointing to this grave and saying 'This one.' You're telling me what now? Your map reading skills aren't quite as good as you originally lead me to believe, huh Mr. Columbus?"

Sam looked down at his feet and scuffed his shoe in the dirt. "There's more than one Carlyle Withers," he mumbled sheepishly.

"How that hell is that possible?" Dean demanded. "And if you tell me the guy cloned himself I might have to hit you with this shovel."

Sam reached down and tore away some of the undergrowth creeping up the tombstone. He swallowed again. Hard. "Because this Carlyle Withers died in 1937," he said quietly.

Had Dean not been dirty, sweaty and half dead on his feet, his reaction, Sam mused, could have been much, much worse.

"We're digging up the librarian's dad?" he asked, ominously calm.

Sam shrugged apologetically. "Granddad I think. There are three of them." He waited patiently while Dean digested that bit of information.

"Sam," the older boy said very slowly through gritted teeth. "We have to be at school in, like, five hours. The sun's gonna be up in three. And now you're telling me for the last couple of hours I've been wrecking my hands digging up the wrong corpse?"

Sam nodded mutely.

Dean took a breath, glancing about himself helplessly, raking a mud-encrusted hand through his sweaty hair before rounding on his brother. "Help me fill this back in," he ordered, voice steely, sounding so much like Dad right then Sam actually shuddered in the chilly early morning air.

He nodded silently again, immediately picking up his discarded shovel as Dean hauled himself up out of the hole, deliberately not looking at his little brother, jaw so tense Sam was pretty sure he could have taken a right hook from Mike Tyson right then and never felt a thing.

They worked in complete silence for several minutes, Sam's eyes occasionally flicking to his brother, whose ears had turned an odd shade of scarlet.

"You can yell at me if you want to," Sam offered eventually. "If it'd make you feel better."

Dean sighed, for a moment just leaning on his shovel and looking appraisingly at Sam. "Like that ever works when Dad tries it," he said with a soft chuckle. Finally, he added, "Sam, it's not like you did this on purpose. Contrary to popular belief I *do*

actually have a mind of my own, you know. I shoulda checked the date on the tombstone. 'S my fault as much as yours."

Sam glanced up at him through lowered eyelashes. "Really?" he asked hesitantly. "You're not mad?"

Dean shrugged. "Sure I'm mad," he admitted. "But not at you. We got overconfident and sloppy. We were stupid and in too much of a hurry to prove ourselves to Dad and we wound up wasting a night. But it won't happen again. Because we're coming back tomorrow night to finish the job. Right?"

It wasn't really a question.

Sam nodded eagerly. "Right. We'll get it right tomorrow."

"You bet your ass we will. Winchesters don't leave a job unfinished, right? Not ever." Dean reached out a sore hand and nudged Sam lightly on the chin. "Now help me fill in this grave. We don't want some nosy gravedigger getting all suspicious and thinking someone's digging up his stiffs before we've had time to dig up the *right* stiff, now do we?"

Sam shook his head, ignoring his blisters as he resumed shoveling dirt back into the grave. "We'll get it right tomorrow," he repeated under his breath. "Because Winchesters don't leave a job unfinished..."

Mansfield Public School Coach's Office Present Day

One of the perks of being head of the athletic department was having access to the school after hours. Having nothing waiting for him at home but a refrigerator full of beer and a decent porn collection, Jared Macklin tended to linger in his office or return there for quality time. Tonight, quality time was going to be a quick swim in the school's new pool, work on the team schedules and then back home to take advantage of both the beer and the plain wrapper DVDs.

Dressed in gray trunks, towel draped around his neck, he paused as he passed his Wall of Fame on the way out through the glass doors that faced the calm shimmer of the water in the pool.

Crammed with trophies and awards from his high school and college days, he liked to stand and study them, not unhappy with where he was but still enjoying the thought of where he might have been.

He enjoyed showing off his glory days. On prominent display was his college diploma, always bringing a smile to his lips as he recalled how the coaches and alumni had forced the issue of passing him from one grade to the next despite his limp academic performance so that they didn't lose him as the most valuable player on the team. Passing him had meant winning games and a winning team, and winning teams meant generous alumni donations. It had been a win-win situation.

God bless the American way.

His first summer after college, a badly torn ligament in his knee had put an end to his dreams of gridiron glory and he had been forced to seek alternative means of providing for himself.

Mansfield had opened its arms to him, welcoming back their high school champion, knowing his presence would add appeal to their efforts at attracting new residents to the town as an attractive suburb of the larger cities around them.

He enjoyed taking the losers, geeks and wimps he saw coming through the classes and running them through their paces, seeing them sweat and strain and agonize because he told them to do so.

Surprisingly, despite his scoffing at books as a useful learning tool, the remaining shelves were crammed with dozens of them. He had never actually read any of them, didn't even really know what they were. They were as untouched, pristine and

virginal as they had been when he had purchased them from the bookstore five years ago, going straight to the shelves from their boxes. People entering his office were impressed by them, and so they served a purpose.

He jerked in surprise as a book suddenly fell from the shelf and thudded to the floor.

Grunting he reached down and retrieved it, shoving it back in its slot.

Three more books tumbled to the floor.

Frowning, he moved close to the shelf and peered into the empty spots to see if there was a mouse or something.

A book slammed into the back of his head.

"What the hell?" he yelled, rubbing where the book had struck, turning to see if someone was behind him.

More books slammed into him from behind, piling around him on the floor.

Heart suddenly thudding, he gaped in disbelief as yet more books spilled from the shelves, their covers bursting open and the pages exploding from them and flying into the air.

"Oh, my God!" he cried as a wind began to move the air, faster and faster, the stiff, unused pages beginning to spin around him with a sound like an angry hive of bees.

Hundreds of papers whipped around him in a miniature tornado, pushing at him. He threw out his hands to protect his face but jerked them back slashed and bloody as the sharp edges of the stiff pages sliced into his skin, crying out.

The pressure became too much to keep his feet as the funnel of papers whistled and screamed around him, forcing him back. Still trying to fend off the incomprehensible, he stumbled away, hitting the glass doors that led to the pool with a mighty crash, sending shards of the tempered glass everywhere. An alarm began to scream adding to the din. The jagged bits of glass tore into his flesh, sucked up by and joining the column that spun around him as he landed on his side, curling into a ball to try to keep the razors of paper and glass from continuing to bite into him.

The sheer power of the wind forced him to his feet and he staggered across the concrete leaving a bloody trail in his wake, sobbing and screaming as now slices and chunks of flesh were ripped from his body sending blood splattering that became part of the whirling tower that surrounded him.

At the edge of the pool he fell to his hands and knees, red handprints marking his path as he began to crawl, his screams becoming inarticulate gasps and grunts. He tumbled into the water and vanished beneath the surface, tendrils of red drifting slowly upwards.

The spinning tower at the edge of the pool paused there for a few seconds and then shot into the water, winding itself around Macklin's thrashing body like a bizarre snake.

The water began to bubble and boil, rolling waves of ever-reddening water churning the surface. After a moment the water stilled and within seconds assumed the aspect of an unbroken sheet of scarlet glass.

Here and there, sheets of paper began to float upwards, slowly covering the water.

Jared Macklin's shredded body bobbed languidly to the surface after a bit, rolling lazily like a log until his glassy eyes stared up through the skylight and into the starlit sky beyond, arm outstretched, legs dangling limply into the depths. Floating gently, like a cork.

The alarm continued to shriek from the building, echoing now to the sound of sirens in the distance.

**Outside Mansfield Public School
May 1993**

"What's goin' on?"

Missy Monaghan turned slightly, almost choking on her day-glo pink bubblegum when she realized who it was that had just addressed her.

"Oh, hey Dean," she said casually, fluttering eyelashes clumped together with so much mascara Sam was surprised she didn't collapse under the weight.

He glanced up at Dean, who he wasn't entirely sure had noticed the way Missy's airhead girlfriends were giggling hysterically behind perfectly-manicured fingers, his attention for once not on any female drawing breath nearby but instead on the big handwritten sign taped lopsidedly to the school's closed front doors:

"School closed due to unforeseen circumstances. Principal Reeve apologizes for any inconvenience caused."

"Well," Missy glanced back at her giggling gaggle of girlfriends before ensuring her attention was all on Dean. "I heard somebody *died*—"

"Someone *died*?"

Sam stepped forward abruptly, dragging Missy's rapt attention away from his brother for all of three seconds.

"That's what I heard," she confirmed, raking her gaze over Sam as if he were a particularly disgusting insect, before turning her dazzling white smile back on to Dean. "But at least we get a day off school, right?" she simpered, batting her eyelashes. "Maybe we could go to the mall? I'll let you buy me a smoothie..."

The invitation was far from subtle, but Dean unaccountably seemed to miss it completely, brows drawn together in obvious concern. "Who died?" he asked, making no move to respond to Missy's advances.

Maybe he was sick, Sam mused.

"Heard it was a teacher," Harmony Bishop piped up, garnering an over-the-shoulder scowl from Missy which she promptly ignored. "Slipped and fell down the stairs. Broke his neck or something."

Dean exchanged a suspicious glance with Sam, before turning back to Missy with an evil glimmer of a smile flickering briefly on his lips. "Oh God, please let it be Mr. Entwhistle —"

"Dean!" Sam chided him, shocked.

"What?" Dean looked down at his brother, all innocent self-justification. "The guy's a dick, Sam," he pronounced, Missy and her flunkies giggling in sycophantic agreement.

Sam frowned at them. "No need to wish him dead."

"Treats me like I'm an idiot," Dean continued. "How was I supposed to know 'mastication' meant 'chewing' and not —"

"Dean!"

"What?"

Sam sighed heavily. "We should go."

Missy reached out a tentative hand, gently running her fingers over Dean's upper arm and looking up at him suggestively through her considerable lashes. "Are you *sure* you don't want to come to the mall with me?" she wheedled, squeezing slightly and barely suppressing a sigh as she felt the unexpected firmness of Dean's bicep. "We could maybe sneak in to a movie — I hear they're previewing that Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks movie this week. *Sleepless in San Francisco* or something."

Dean's gaze drifted to Missy as if only just realizing she was there. He looked at her appraisingly for a second, parts of him considering things his brain really knew he shouldn't be considering while he weighed up the relative pros and cons of enduring some girlie chick flick with her.

"Hey, Missy!" A voice suddenly emanated from the direction of the parking lot. "If Weirdchester's too cheap to buy you a crappy smoothie, least I can do is spring for a chocolate sundae, huh?"

Missy's attention shifted to the athletic junior making his way across the parking lot from where he'd left the engine of his brand new Mercedes convertible running idly. She glanced back at Dean, who affected his best air of detached indifference, still

smiling at him hopefully as she murmured, "Oh, hi Dale," with a distinct lack of enthusiasm, not even bothering to turn around.

The school track star pulled up next to her, draping one long, cashmere-clad arm possessively over her shoulder but never taking his eyes off Dean. "Something I can help you with, freakshow?" he asked pointedly.

Dean merely shrugged. "Not looking for pointers in being an asshole right now, Corrigan, but thanks for the offer," he replied calmly, unconsciously reaching behind him for Sam. "You got that down to a science, though, I gotta admit."

Corrigan bared his perfect white teeth at him for a second, but was prevented from trading further insults with the annoying little upstart by Missy suddenly shrugging off his arm and almost desperately asking Dean one last time, "Are you *sure* you can't come to the mall, Dean?"

Corrigan blanched, obviously affronted by Missy's unfathomable lack of taste, and Dean grinned, tilting his head slightly in what Sam immediately recognized as his patented "James Dean" moody-gaze-off-into-the-distance. "Maybe another time, babe," he drawled. "Got things to do and places to be."

Missy's disappointment was palpable, and Dean cast her an enigmatic smile as he turned away, pointedly ignoring Corrigan's growled, "Weirdo Winchester," as he made to steer Sam back in the direction of the motel.

Sam cast one disapproving scowl over his shoulder in Corrigan's direction before turning his attention back to his brother. "Just exactly where do you have to be?" he asked, frowning. "And what happened to 'love 'em and leave 'em, Sammy'?"

Dean shuddered. "Dude. Seriously. You think I'm letting Missy Monaghan stick her tongue down my throat after it's been anywhere near Dale Corrigan? I got *some* standards, y'know." He shrugged. "Besides, I'd probably end up choking on her bubblegum and that's the kind of mastication I can do without."

"Gross!" Sam burst out, as close as he ever got to speechless. "And – and – gross!"

Dean snickered, ruffling Sam's hair. "Out of the mouths of babes..."

Sam shoved his brother's hand away testily. "Am *not* a 'babe!'" he protested.

"No you're not," Dean agreed. "You're my trusty sidekick research nerd and you're gonna spend the day making sure we hit the *right* grave tonight –"

"You said that wasn't my fault!"

Dean shrugged. "I changed my mind."

Sam sniffed. "Woman's prerogative, I guess," he snarked, ducking to avoid the hand about to come into sharp contact with the back of his head.

"Smartass."

"Dumbass."

"Geek."

"Airhead."

Mansfield Memorial Park

May 1993

12.25 a.m.

"So you're sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure!"

"Really sure?"

"*Dean!*"

"Alright, keep your pantyhose on there, Gertrude! Just don't want to waste another night digging up the rest of the nutjob librarian's entire family."

"It was *one* grave, Dean," Sam observed as the blade of his shovel cut into the recently-laid turf covering the remains of Carlyle Withers III.

Dean grinned, his own shovel having already excavated a good couple of inches of dirt over near the gravestone. "Don't worry, Sammy," he snickered. "When the time

comes for your funeral, I'll make sure to bury a map with you. Wouldn't want you to get lost trying to find your own grave, now would we?"

Sam narrowed his eyes. "Don't worry Dean," he ground out through clenched teeth. "You keep watching *Sesame Street* and hopefully when the time comes you'll actually be able to *read* your gravestone."

The two of them glared at each other over their shovels for a second, before both suddenly started to snigger in unison.

Dean shook his head. "Jeez, Sammy. We better make sure Dad never finds out about this or the scariest thing he'll ever let us near will be that shopping mall Santa we ran into in Oklahoma City that time!"

Sam shuddered. "Dude, don't. I *still* have nightmares about that guy..."

They continued digging in silence for several minutes, until Sam finally stole a look at his brother and hesitantly asked, "We're doing the right thing aren't we?" causing Dean to pause before meeting his uncertain gaze.

"Sure we are," Dean assured him, although his confidence of the previous day seemed to have waned somewhat. "Someone *died* today, Sam. And if Dad were here, he'd do something about it. But he's not. And that's why he trained us – to take care of this kind of stuff when he's not around. To make sure that we know what we have to do to stop it from happening again."

Sam nodded. "Yeah," he agreed reluctantly. "This is what Dad would *want* us to do –" He bit off the rest of his sentence at the sudden sound of a dog barking nearby.

Really nearby.

"Over here!" a gruff voice suddenly yelled. "I heard voices!"

Sam's panicked gaze tore instantly to Dean, who stared back at him, eyes deer-in-the-headlights big.

"This way!"

A different voice, and suddenly there were flashlight beams playing across several crumbling gravestones under a nearby stand of trees.

"Crap."

Dean grabbed his shovel at the same time as he grabbed Sam's shoulder, tugging at the younger boy's jacket as he tried to urge him in the opposite direction to the rapidly approaching flashlights.

"C'mon, Sammy!" he barked urgently, his kid brother seemingly rooted to the spot in abject horror. "Sam, *now!*"

It was an order, and for once Sam obeyed, feet suddenly responding to commands again as he began to tear after his brother, the two of them running flat out down the grassy grave-strewn hillside until they finally reached the little gap in the cemetery railings through which they'd entered, Dean shoving Sam through first and following straight after, ashen-faced and breathing hard.

"Dean, what do we do?" Sam was asking, still clutching the shovel as Dean rearranged the canvas bag containing salt, lighter fluid and several boxes of matches on his shoulder.

Dean shook his head, glancing back the way they'd come, to where the figures of two men could be seen silhouetted against the dancing flashlights up on the brow of the hill. "Nothing we *can* do, Sammy –" he began, turning back to his brother with a defeated slump in his shoulders, just as another growling voice suddenly barked,

"Hey! You boys! Whaddya think you're doing?"

Both boys' eyes shot to the pickup truck parked a few feet away at the cemetery entrance, a burly man in mud-caked jeans beginning to clamber out of the driver's seat.

"– Except maybe *run!*" Dean finished his sentence by reaffirming his grip on Sam's shoulder and pulling hard, the two of them hightailing it as fast as they could down the street in the opposite direction to the pickup truck, feet pounding on concrete in perfect time to their hammering hearts.

They didn't stop running until they were back in the motel room, backs jammed against the door as they stood shoulder to shoulder, panting hard and trying not to lose their dinner on the interestingly multi-hued carpet.

"Crap," Dean said again once he'd regained his breath. "Crap."

"Dean?" Sam panted. "You think they'll recognize us? We could get thrown in kid jail for digging someone up, right?"

Dean glanced down at him, trying for "calmly reassuring" but missing by a mile. "No way," he said tightly. "It's the middle of the night and it was dark as hell back there. No way they saw us."

"They had flashlights."

"Which they were pointing at each other, not at us," Dean returned. "It's gonna be fine."

"But we still didn't salt n' burn Mr. Withers!" Sam pointed out plaintively. "He could still hurt someone else!"

Dean swallowed. "Yeah," he grunted by way of agreement. "Yeah he could."

Sam paused for a beat, before slowly looking up at his brother. "We need to call Dad."

Dean's eyes slid to the phone perched on the nightstand between the beds, his father's words, "Don't call me unless you're dead. I mean it. I'll check in when I can," still ringing in his ears.

"No," he said firmly, straightening. "Dad said we weren't to keep calling him. And there's probably no cell reception where he is anyway. We can handle this. We can finish the job."

Sam raised a nervous eyebrow. "How?"

Mansfield Public School Present Day

Sam and Dean jerked awake as their police scanner blared to life at 5.45 a.m. proclaiming a 10-32 at the Mansfield Public School.

Rubbing his eyes, Dean frowned. "What the hell's a 10-32?" he asked thickly, unable to pull the information from his sleep-fogged brain.

Sam sat up, listening. "Drowning," he replied. He glanced at the clock. "It's not even 6 a.m., how could there be a drowning at the school?" He brushed his hair out of his eyes and leaned closer to the scanner as the dispatcher gave the responding unit information.

Dean struggled out of his blankets and put his feet on the floor. "Maybe we should check it out." He stretched and scratched a hand through his hair.

Sam nodded. "It'll just take a minute to get there." He reached out and grabbed his jeans.

It didn't take long to throw on some clothes and Dean was just coming out of the bathroom when the scanner came back on, making them look at each other in anticipatory disgust.

"Carla...this is Barkley, Unit ten...Jesus God..." The voice broke off but they could still hear gasps and the sound of choking. "We've got a possible homicide here...my God...Christ I've never...seen anything...like this..."

Dean grabbed his jacket. "Let's go."

* * * *

It was obvious from the confusion reigning at the scene that Mansfield's finest were a little overwhelmed with two bizarre deaths in such a short expanse of time. The sudden influx of people moving into the relatively small town was taxing their small police force, used to dealing with the occasional drunk, car wreck, or minor domestic violence.

Judging from the frantic efforts of the few officers available trying to get the police tape up to keep the gathering onlookers out of the way they were rattled to the core.

Sam and Dean had little difficulty getting into the building unseen and made their way to the gymnasium with its adjoining pool. An official-looking name tag hung from each of their shirts and Dean had great faith in the concept that if you acted like you belonged somewhere people took it for granted you did.

The door to the office with Jared Macklin's name on it stood open and they stepped in, looking around at the chaos in the room.

Trophies, pictures and books were strewn about the room, smashed, torn and broken. Pages that had obviously been ripped from the various books lying around were scattered everywhere, creating a trail that led right through the smashed out glass doors that faced the pool. More papers littered the concrete decking and floated on the water's surface. Drops of blood peppered the tan carpet and most of the other surfaces.

Sam looked at Dean. "What the hell happened here?"

Dean shook his head, toeing a book. "Someone was sure pissed," he commented. He sighed and led the way out through the glass doors, glass crunching under their boots as they stepped outside and squinted at the scene before them.

Sam made a gagging noise and looked away for a moment, getting himself together.

Dean closed his eyes briefly, cupping a hand over his mouth, then opened them again, surveying the bits and pieces of flesh that littered the concrete among the papers that were everywhere, nestling in drying pools of blood: a pathway of carnage that ended at the edge of the pool where the water was red and a police officer and two paramedics were trying to pull the ragged remains of Jared Macklin to the edge of the pool with a rescue hook.

Dean closed his eyes again as he saw thin strips of flesh trailing along in the body's wake, soaked papers bunching up against the body as it was dragged in. The face was torn almost beyond recognition, but it was undeniably Jared Macklin.

"This is our fault," Sam hissed in Dean's ear. "If we hadn't screwed up none of this would be happening."

Dean glared at him, grabbing his arm and dragging him back to the side of the building. "You don't know that, Sam! It's been over fifteen years! We were a couple of dumb kids."

Staring into Sam's angry face Dean finally gave in. "Fine, you're right! If we'd burned the son of a bitch like we should have, *that* son of a bitch," Dean nodded at the pool, "might still be alive. Are you happy?" Dean glanced back out at the pool, where more people were gathering, the paramedics struggling to get Macklin's body over the edge onto the concrete. One of his arms dangled by a few shreds of flesh and only a quick grab by one of the medics kept it from falling away, back into the water.

"We gotta get to those books!" Sam insisted. "There's got to be a reason why Carlyle Withers' spirit would vanish for fifteen years and then suddenly show up again. Something had to trigger it. Maybe all the remodeling."

He leaned out to check the area and watched in horror as one of the paramedics gestured for a skimmer and leaning out scooped some small object out of the pool and brought it closer to examine. He lifted it from the mesh screen, a thin tendril dangling from it and carefully put it on Jared Macklin's chest.

Sam swallowed as he realized it was an eyeball.

"Well, we can't do anything right now," Dean spat. "This place is crawling with people. We'll have to come back tonight and take a look at those books, see what the hell that idiot was into." He jerked Sam's arm as he saw one of the older policemen suddenly catch sight of them, yelling at one of the other younger officers to get these gawkers the hell out of here.

Sam and Dean were only too happy to oblige, allowing themselves to be herded out and reprimanded along with several others who had managed to get into the building as well.

* * * *

Dean kept watch as Sam quickly gained them entrance via the rear door by the cafeteria. It was the closest section of the building to the library. Defeating the alarm system was no big deal and he was in within a few minutes.

They padded swiftly through the dark hallways, dim security lights the only infrequent illumination. Dean made a frustrated noise and an enigmatic statement about architects in general as he tried to make sense of the tangle of hallways.

"This way," Sam murmured, giving him a push to the right. The media center doors were at the end of the hall.

Dean smacked him. "How the hell do you do that?"

Sam rolled his eyes. "C'mon." He made short work of the lock on the door and pushed it open, slipping inside, followed by Dean.

They moved quickly to the back of the room where the media coordinator's personal office was. Sam crouched down to pick the lock and was surprised to discover the door was open. Trading a look with Dean he slowly turned the knob and pulled the door open enough to get in.

They both stiffened as they heard someone talking loudly and from the sound of it, the someone was drunk. Helen's office was empty, but the door in the back that led to the store room was half open and a shifting light glowed in the opening.

Dean stole carefully up to the door and peered into the next room.

Sam followed on his heels, glancing at Helen's desk as he passed, it was piled with books, computer manuals, office supplies. On the top of one pile was a large black book that looked oddly familiar but as he reached for it Dean hissed at him and gestured him to the open door.

Sam joined him and had a look of his own.

A tall, skinny man in a white shirt and an askew tie, balding with an undershot chin, was angrily digging through a large crate of books. He would dig among the contents, pull a book out, glance at it then drop it and go back to digging. He muttered to himself, occasionally barking the words he was saying for emphasis, seeming to favor the term "crazy old bastard."

Sam pulled Dean back out of earshot. "Do you know who that is?"

Dean glanced back into the room as the gawky man inside pulled another book from the crate that was clearly labeled "Carlyle Withers" and dementedly began ripping pages out of it, scattering them on the floor.

"Some guy trying to win the Barney Fife on crack award?"

Sam hit him. "No! That's Steven Entwhistle!"

Dean couldn't have looked more blank.

"He was a teacher when we were here." Sam whispered hoarsely, trying to jog Dean's convenient memory. "He taught Civics and American Government. I can't believe you don't remember him. He sent you to Detention every day – I don't think you were in his class more than ten minutes at a time. He hated you."

"It's *that* guy?" Dean exclaimed indignantly, clapping a hand over his mouth as the words came out louder than he intended. They both paused as the sounds in the room stopped momentarily then began again with even more enthusiasm. "How was I supposed to know his name? Like you said, I was barely in his class!"

"Well he's the new Principal," Sam supplied, watching again as Entwhistle pulled a stack of books out and read off the titles in an angry, slurred voice.

"Grim...grimorium Verum, Natural Magick, Heptameron!" he made a disgusted noise and dropped all but the largest book. "This is all your doing you...crazy old...fool!"

Sam clutched at Dean's arm as Entwhistle tore a handful of pages out of the book. "Dean those books are priceless!" he gasped. "We can't let him destroy them!"

Before he was through speaking, Entwhistle, swaying now, was holding aloft a handful of yellowed parchment pages and a lighter which he flicked into life.

"Aw, hell!" Dean snarled pushing through the door.

Before they made it two steps a hot wind roared through the room and the burning pages were blown into Entwhistle's body, fire exploding outward in a heart stopping display of instant combustion. The wind swirled around Entwhistle, engulfing him from head to toe as he screamed and staggered toward Sam and Dean who instinctively fell back.

The heat was appalling as flames rolled from the man's body. He fell into a stack of books, shrieking and beating at himself but the flames spread to nothing else.

Looking around frantically for anything to help put the roaring flames out, Sam grabbed a canvas moving pad and tried to get close enough to Entwhistle's raging form to throw it over him but the flames belched outward every time he or Dean came near.

The room filled with smoke and the smell of burning flesh. Entwhistle stopped screaming as his body was finally eaten away too much to hold itself up and he collapsed on top of the pile of books on Helen's desk in a twitching, fiery heap.

Standing with their mouths open they both stared as the body continued to burn.

"Holy crap..." Dean breathed.

Sam grabbed his phone but Dean caught his arm.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm calling 911," Sam replied, jerking his arm away.

"What for? He's dead. We need to check out these books, see what the hell Withers was up to."

"But..."

Dean rolled his eyes; he admired Sam's sense of fair play but there was time and a place and this wasn't it. "Trust me, Sam, he's dead, a few more minutes isn't gonna make him any deader than he already is."

As if to punctuate the need for speed, the fire alarm belatedly went off.

Sam made a face but Dean had a point. He nodded, pocketing the phone and hurried after Dean back to the storeroom.

As he tore through the pile, fire alarm buzzing overhead, he had to admit it was an impressive collection. Bobby would have been slaving over them. Medieval magic books, spell casters, half a dozen grimoires Sam had never even heard of, most of them in Latin, some in Italian and French and one Spanish book with woodcuts so horrific Sam wasn't sure he would have wanted to read the text even if he could have.

Whatever the hell Withers had been into, it wasn't nice stuff.

He grabbed an armful of likely prospects and looked at Dean who was standing by the door looking anxious.

"C'mon, Sam we gotta go! I hear fire truck sirens!"

The instant his arms closed over the books, heat blasted his face as the same wind suddenly tore through the still room, fanning the flames on Entwhistle's body back to life.

Oh shit...

He felt Dean hit him from the side as the glass windows suddenly exploded inwards, showering them both with jagged bits of glass. Wind roared around the room as he and Dean snatched up the books that had fallen from his grasp as Dean knocked him down and bolted across the main library floor. Books and equipment began to fly around the room, striking them despite their best efforts to dodge the objects. As a finale, computer screens began to explode in their wake, following them like bombs as they ran out the door.

Behind them the sprinklers kicked on and began to rain down into the room.

Sirens began to scream from outside and they raced back down the hallway to the cafeteria and out the back door.

Mansfield Memorial Park
May 1993
12.48 a.m.

"I can't believe they closed the library."

Sam's plaintive whine cut through the chilly midnight air and Dean glanced up at him from his position in the half-dug grave of Carlyle Withers III, sitting on the edge of the grave, legs dangling below him much as they had the night before last, his cheek smeared with dirt and his hair clumped together in sweaty curls.

"Put your jacket back on," Dean told him, noting that, despite being soaked with sweat, Sam was shivering.

"I'm not six, Dean," Sam groused, nonetheless tugging his discarded jacket back on and pulling it tightly about himself.

"No, if you were six you'd still be trying to help me dig," Dean observed, returning to his steady excavation of the grave.

"I'm tired," Sam whined defensively. "We've been out three nights in a row now!"

"And with the library being closed you've had nowhere to sleep in the daytime," Dean observed with a wry grin. "I get it."

Sam favored him with his most affronted scowl. "I do not sleep in the library!" he burst out, cheeks coloring. "Not – not ever!"

Dean inclined his head to one side and shrugged. "You're right. I was getting you confused with me there for a second."

Sam huffed. "It's not funny," he chided his brother. "Three kids got really badly cut up when they tried to bust in to Mr. Withers' office this morning –"

Dean whistled. "Yep. Gotta watch them paper cuts. They can be nasty suckers."

"Dean," Sam continued to scold his brother. "They had to take Elijah Roberts to hospital he got cut up so bad! They reckon Mr. Withers' books just flew at them and started attacking them when they tried to take a look!"

"They're obviously not as good at breaking and entering as we are, Sammy," Dean commented, heaving another shovelful of dirt out of the grave and narrowly avoiding dumping it in his little brother's lap. He straightened, a thought occurring. "Why were the kids trying to look at Mr. Withers' books anyway?" he asked.

Sam sighed. "Jared Macklin," he began. "He said that – he said that..." he trailed off, suddenly more interested in minutely examining the holes in the knees of his jeans than continuing his explanation.

"Sam?"

Sam looked up, embarrassed. "He's telling everyone you're a Satan worshipper," he managed eventually. "That you used Mr. Withers' books on Black Magic to cause all the accidents in the library. He dared Elijah and his friends to go check out the books if they didn't believe him."

Dean just blinked at him for a second, expression unreadable.

"Dale Corrigan's saying you put a spell on Missy Monaghan to try and make her go out with you," Sam continued, looking away again. "And he's telling everyone Dad's a psycho killer who sacrifices his victims to the Devil."

Dean surprised Sam by actually laughing at that. "Man! Is that loser desperate for a date or what?" he commented, shaking his head and resuming his digging.

Sam jumped down into the grave with him, causing him to pause again. "Doesn't it bother you?" he asked. "The things they say about us? The things they say about Dad?"

Dean shrugged again, wiping sweat from his forehead with a muddy hand and leaving a smear of dirt across his brow. "Nope," he said shortly. When Sam just frowned at him, he added, "Sammy, what do we care what they think? They're never gonna *know*. About *anything*. They just go on living their stupid lives without ever once opening their eyes to see what's really going on around them. They call us 'weird' and treat us like crap and make up stupid stories about us because they're never gonna understand us, never gonna *know*. But that's okay because we know, Sammy. We know, and we do something about it. We save lives. We save *their* lives. And it doesn't matter whether they treat us like crap while we're doing it, because as soon as we're done they won't see us for dust and we'll be on to the next town. We're not trying to make a life here, Sammy, so what does it matter what these people think of us? In a few weeks they won't even remember us and we won't remember them."

Sam scuffed his foot against a mound of dirt beneath him. "What if we *want* to make a life someday, Dean?" he asked, meeting his brother's uncomprehending gaze. "What if we *want* to stop moving around? What if we *want* to be normal like they are someday?"

Dean rammed his shovel into the earth, looking away uncomfortably. "Never gonna happen, Sam," he said quietly. "And why would we want it to? This is it for us. And we should be grateful. At least we've got a purpose, a reason to be here. More than most of them can say."

Sam didn't respond to that, merely reaching for his shovel and resuming his digging alongside his brother, trying not to think about whether Dean was right or not. Whether this was always going to be their life.

They carried on digging for another hour or so, hands still raw from the two previous nights' aborted attempts at excavating Carlyle Withers, until Sam decided that he'd really had enough.

"How much further?"

Dean looked up at the stars twinkling out of the patch of early morning sky visible above their heads, gauging how far they'd dug and how far they still had to go. "Another foot, maybe," he estimated, turning his attention to Sam, who looked like he might just collapse right there and then.

Sam groaned. "Dean, maybe we should just call Dad?" he said, leaning heavily against the side of the grave. "Please? I don't think I can dig anymore!"

"No," Dean said firmly. "We can't tell Dad. He'll go nuts if he finds out the mess we made of this gig! We started this, we need to finish it." His expression softened as Sam turned tired eyes up at him. "Look, there's not far to go now, squirt. Tellya what, you go up top and take five. I'll finish."

Sam looked at him for a long moment, the stiffness in his arms and shoulders, the ache in his back and his legs and the soreness in his hands convincing him that he really couldn't dig anymore. Not even if his life depended on it.

But from the way Dean was favoring his left hand and the way he seemed to be struggling to straighten up, Sam wasn't sure his big brother was faring much better than he was.

"You sure?" Sam asked, reluctant to admit defeat and abandon his brother to finish the task they'd both set out to do.

Dean set his shovel aside and intertwined his fingers, making a sling for Sam to step into. "C'mon, kiddo," he said with a tired smile. "Past your bedtime anyway."

Sam accepted Dean's boost gratefully, pulling himself up out of the hole and collapsing on the cold, damp turf in fatigued relief.

"I'll get this done as quick as I can, Sam," Dean assured him, his voice sounding oddly distant from five feet below the earth.

Sam might have responded, but he wasn't sure, things becoming hazy as his head hit the turf and he immediately began to descend into an exhausted sleep.

The next thing he was aware of, he was convinced he was having a nightmare about the previous evening's efforts to salt and burn the irascible librarian, the same

shouts and barking dogs assaulting his eardrums as he turned over onto his back, his shoulder, arm and one leg of his jeans damp from the falling dew.

There were lights flickering behind his closed eyelids.

Eyes snapping open, Sam looked immediately in the direction of the distant stand of trees, from where the men and their dogs had approached the night before.

"Dean," he whispered, raising his upper half off the ground in alarm, blinking sleep out of his eyes as he tried to determine whether or not he was dreaming. "Dean?" His voice was a little louder, the sounds of barking dogs a lot closer than they had been a few seconds ago, flashlights illuminating a white marble angel only three or four rows of graves away as they swept down the hill in their direction, like searchlights in a black and white war movie. "Dean!"

Sam jumped to his feet, grabbing the canvas bag and almost falling in headfirst as he skidded to a stop at the edge of the nearly-dug grave. "Dean, we gotta go!" he yelled, playing his own flashlight down into the hole, where Dean blinked up at him from a mud-smeared face, the whites of his eyes unnaturally illuminated by the beam of Sam's flashlight.

"Sam, I'm nearly there –" Dean began to protest, but Sam cut him off.

"Too late!" he snapped. "We gotta go!"

"Over there! It's the Withers grave again!" A man's voice cut through the night air, and Dean's eyes widened even further.

Hesitating for only a microsecond, he tossed the shovel up out of the grave, holding his hand up for Sam to grab hold of.

"Help me up, Sammy!" he yelled, trying to find purchase in the slick mud of the grave wall with his other hand. "Quickly!"

Sam dropped to his knees, glancing back over his shoulder towards the approaching flashlights, barking dogs and thudding boots of angry men as he grabbed hold of Dean's hand with his own, blisters screaming as he tried to haul his brother up out of Carlyle Withers' not-so-final resting place.

"Dean, I can't!" he burst out, panicking, looking down into the hole at his brother's frantic face. "You're too heavy!"

"Bull!" Dean snapped. "Too many Gummi Bears and not enough push-ups for you, Sammy! You can do this!" He blinked up at his brother. "Sam, you gotta do this." He laughed nervously. "You don't want me to wind up in Juvie for real, do you?"

Sam shook his head fervently, glancing back as one of the dogs, a slavering Rottweiler, became clearly visible only a couple of rows of gravestones away. "I can do this," he told himself. "I can do this."

Gritting his teeth and wrapping his left hand around Dean's wrist, Sam pulled with every bit of strength he had left in him and more besides, Dean grabbing for the edge of the grave with his left hand as he scabbled at the wall of the grave with his feet.

"That's it, Sam!" Dean encouraged his brother, managing to get his left elbow up onto the grave's edge and wedging one foot against a large rock sticking out of the grave wall just as a flashlight beam backlit Sam and a man's voice ordered,

"You over there! Don't move!"

Dean pointedly ignored that order, swinging one leg up out of the grave and hauling the rest of him up in its wake, scrambling to his feet, Sam's hand still clutched in his own. "Run, Sam!" he ordered, fairly dragging Sam behind him as they charged back down the hill, the dogs having reached the open grave and the men not far behind.

"You there!"

Dean skidded to an abrupt halt as another man appeared not twenty feet below them at the bottom of the hill, a dark silhouette raised to his shoulder that might very well have been a shotgun. "Crapola," he muttered, casting about himself for an alternative escape route and, finding none, his eyes latching on to the next best thing. "This way, Sam!"

Running for a large granite crucifix, Dean tugged Sam down behind it before dodging back into some nearby bushes, thorns snagging his clothes as he shoved his way through, coming out at the entrance to a squat black marble crypt that had probably cost the “Mayberry” family a ton of cash back in the day.

“No.” Sam dug his heels in and wouldn’t move.

“Sam?” Dean grit out. “This is no time to get squeamish!”

Sam shook his head vehemently. “I’m not going in there. Not again. Not after last time!”

Dean knew Sam still had nightmares about their previous adventure in crypt-breaking, but he really didn’t see an alternative, the barking dogs sniffing at the other side of the bushes and blue and white lights clearly visible up on the pathway beyond the trees covering the back of the crypt. A police radio crackled, and an authoritative voice cut through the shrubbery behind them.

“Come out right now! Mansfield Police!”

Sam looked up at Dean with an expression that at any other time would have turned his resolve to jelly. But this time, there was no alternative.

“I’m sorry, Sammy,” he said, putting one firm hand on Sam’s shoulder and bending slightly to look him in the eye. “We get caught, you know what’ll happen, right? CPS’ll have a field day. You think Dad’ll ever get us back?”

Sam yielded slightly, the tension in his body relaxing visibly as he reluctantly allowed Dean to pull him towards the crypt. “You promised me we’d never have to go in one of these places again,” he grouched, nevertheless following his brother in through a tiny gap between the crypt door and the slightly crumbling door jamb.

Dean nodded, pulling Sam down into a crouch next to him as he shoved his shoulder up against the door, ensuring the place would look undisturbed to any curious passersby. “I know, Sammy,” he whispered. “And I’m sorry. We’ll just hang here for a little bit, and when the cops get tired of not finding us and head back to the station house or the donut shop or wherever the hell cops go when they’re not hassling kids trying to burn the remains of an undead school librarian, we’ll book, okay?” He put a reassuring hand on the back of Sam’s neck and ducked down towards him. “Okay?”

Sam nodded reluctantly. “Okay,” he agreed, eyes skittering nervously about him as a single beam of moonlight speared through a crack in the roof and illuminated the pitch black interior of the crypt in which he found himself.

From what he could see, there were three coffins all raised on marble plinths, tarnished brass name plates unreadable in the half-light and copious cobwebs hanging from the vaguely unstable-looking ceiling. Several empty sconces were arranged at intervals around the walls, and Sam wasn’t sure whether they were for illumination or for flowers. Either way, they didn’t look like they’d been used in a very long time.

He felt Dean’s arm tighten around his shoulder as his breathing had begun to quicken, and he took some comfort in knowing that at least he wasn’t alone and they weren’t locked in this time.

“They came this way!” A voice suddenly broke the silence outside, more police radios audible as footsteps approached their position.

“Dean —” Sam began to whisper, but his brother clapped a hand over the younger boy’s mouth, raising a finger to his own lips and not letting go of his brother until Sam nodded his understanding.

“Damn kids,” a different voice said, and Dean was pretty sure it was the same guy who’d been in the pickup truck at the cemetery’s entrance the night before. “Three nights they’ve been back, trying to dig up the poor old Withers family.”

“You think it’s the same kids, Wayne?” the first voice said, clearly one of the police officers.

“I didn’t see ’em too good last night,” the second voice — Wayne — said. “Definitely a coupla kids though. Couldn’t have been more than eleven or twelve.” Dean

scowled at that. "But my boss said I oughta call the cops if there was any sign of 'em tonight."

"We lost 'em," a third voice, slightly out of breath, joined the first two. "Dogs can't find 'em anywhere. Swear to God, these two are about as much use as Lassie with no nose, no legs and a doggie hearing aid."

"You get a look at them, Ned?" the cop asked.

"Not really," Ned replied. "Skinny kid and a chubby smaller one..."

Sam opened his mouth to protest, but Dean replaced his hand over it quickly.

"...Don't know what beef they got with the Withers family though."

"I blame that goddamn movie," Wayne put in with a grunt. "That cheerleader vampire thing. [i]Bunny the Vampire Slayer[/i] or some such nonsense. Kids think it's 'cool' to hang out in cemeteries waiting for monsters to show up. Swear to God..."

"I loved that movie!" Ned burst out, in perfect time with Dean whispering exactly the same words to Sam.

"That is so lame," Sam whispered back.

"Kristy Swanson though..." Dean muttered, gaze going distant for a second. "She could stake me any day of the week..."

"That's just sick," Sam commented. "And Dad says vampires don't exist anyway."

"You always did have crappy taste in movies, Neddy boy," Wayne sniggered.

"Well," the cop put in, "whatever their motive, I don't think they came this way. C'mon, we'll head back up to the squad car. Maybe keep a lookout from there."

Sam crumpled visibly. "Aw, man..." he whispered, leaning his head against the crypt door.

Dean patted him on the shoulder. "Don't worry, *chubby*," he muttered. "Cops have short attention spans. Soon as he wants a cup of coffee, he'll be outta here, I promise."

* * * *

It was five a.m. before Dean finally heard the sound of an engine turning over and the crunch of gravel under tires.

The chink of moonlight peeking through the hole in the roof was beginning to turn an early morning gray and he couldn't help thinking that they had to be at school in three hours and really couldn't show up covered in grave dirt.

Sam was snoring softly against his shoulder, still trembling a little bit, even with Dean's arm wrapped tightly around him. Dean himself had nearly succumbed to sleep several times while the cops maintained their stubborn stakeout, jerking himself awake every time his head started to droop for fear of the lawmen or the groundsmen sneaking up on them when they weren't expecting it.

He listened intently for several minutes, the sound of birdsong the only thing to reach his ears apart from Sam's regular breathing.

"Wake up, Sammy," he said softly, gently nudging his brother until his eyes slitted open.

"Mmmmm?" he murmured sleepily.

"C'mon, Sleeping Beauty," Dean said. "Time to go."

"The cops have gone?" Sam still sounded distant and only half awake, eyes blinking in the muted light.

"Uh-huh," Dean confirmed.

"We still got to finish digging up Mr. Withers?"

Dean thought about that one for a second. "Not today," he said eventually. "We've got to get to school. And right now you look like the Creature from the Black Lagoon, squirt."

Sam blinked again, eyes becoming more focused. "But we didn't finish the job," he said quietly. "Mr. Withers could still hurt people."

Dean barely covered a wince. "I know, Sammy," he said softly, gently helping his brother to his feet. "I know."

Mansfield Memorial Park

Present Day

2.48 a.m.

Dean stared six feet down into the earth, the decayed remains of Carlyle Withers III staring sightlessly back up at him from beneath the remnants of his splintered coffin lid.

"Ugly old bastard," he murmured, leaning on his shovel. "Took me fifteen years to dig up your moldy old bones, you sonofabitch."

Sam began to shake copious amounts of rock salt into the grave, glancing briefly up at his brother. "Get the lighter fluid, will ya?" he urged. "Got some serious *excavatus interruptus* flashbacks goin' on here."

Dean looked up at him, grinning. "How many times did we try to dig this sucker up?"

"Three," Sam replied. "Nearly got caught the last time." He glanced over his shoulder, up the hill to where he vividly recalled the sound of barking dogs and the beams of approaching flashlights.

"Oh yeah," Dean agreed, "I remember. Ended up in that crypt for the whole night with the cops outside waiting to bust us!" He shook his head as he dug a can of lighter fluid out of the canvas bag at Sam's feet.

"I'll never know how the hell we avoided Child Protective Services that time," Sam muttered. "Especially when Miss McKenzie noticed I had graveyard dirt in my hair the next day!"

Dean sniggered as he squirted lighter fluid into the open grave. "Can't believe she even saw that – I always thought you could hide a bird's nest in that mop of yours and no one would find it."

Sam cast him a "screw you" scowl. "You know, we were lucky," he said at length. "Things could have gone a whole lot worse than they did. If Old Man Withers' spirit hadn't been dormant these last fifteen years, the body count could have been a helluva lot higher."

Dean nodded his agreement. "We screwed this up royally when we were kids, Sammy," he said. "Dale Corrigan and Mr. Entwhistle were both assholes, but they shouldn't have died like that. Not if we'd done this right the first time around."

"And Jared Macklin?"

Dean shrugged. "Meh. Jury's still out on that one."

Sam sighed. "Look, it wasn't our fault, Dean," he said, moving over to stand at his brother's shoulder. "We were kids."

They both looked down into the grave, for a second lost in their own memories.

"It's no excuse," Dean said finally. "When we realized we couldn't finish the job, we should have told Dad. He would have fixed it. He would have put this sucker down."

"And kicked our asses in the process..."

Mansfield, OH

May 1993

"Dean, get your ass in gear right *now*, I'm not kidding, boy!"

Dean opened one eye wearily, fixed it on the half-open bathroom door and tried to pretend this was all a bad dream. He'd not slept in three nights, hurt all over as if he'd

been kicked from here to Iowa by the entire school football team, and added to that, Dad had come back from his hunt pissed off and grouchy.

He and Sam had only come home for a catnap after school and a quick visit to the local burger bar, another attempt at Carlyle Withers' grave already planned for that night. But glancing at the clock on the nightstand, Dean saw that it was already nine p.m. and explaining they needed to go salt and burn the school librarian to their dad in his current mood wasn't going to be an easy task.

Sam was sitting on the other bed watching him, hair tousled and dark circles under his eyes as if he'd not slept in a month. The bruise on his cheek where Jared Macklin had slapped him was fading, but Dean knew there'd still be hell to pay when Dad saw it.

"Sammy, you spoken to Dad yet?"

Sam shook his head. "He was already in the bathroom when I woke up," he said, looking down at his bare feet. "I've not seen him yet. I was – I was waiting for you to get up."

Dean groaned, levering himself up onto his elbows before finally managing to sit. He rubbed at his eyes as the sound of the bathroom cabinet opening and the contents being hastily shoved into a duffel bag caused Sam to ask,

"We're moving again, aren't we?"

Dean didn't answer, instead swinging his legs off the bed and dragging a hand through his hair tiredly. "We better go talk to him," he said, standing and making a move toward the bathroom door, Sam close by at his heels.

Taking a breath, he plastered on his best fake smile and opened the door, only to be greeted by the sight of his father glaring at him over a half-packed duffel balanced precariously on the side of the bathtub.

"Hey, Dad," he said brightly. "You made it back in one piece. Good hunt?"

John squinted at him, as if gauging his sincerity level. "Don't be a smartass, son," he grunted. "It doesn't suit you."

Dean raised his chin a little and smirked lopsidedly. "C'mon, Dad, it *totally* suits me!" he protested.

A tiny smile began to flicker across John's lips but faded rapidly into a grimace when he caught sight of Sam cautiously emerging from behind his eldest son. "Dean, what the hell happened to your brother?" he demanded instantly, pushing Dean aside and crossing the short distance between himself and his youngest so fast Sam barely had time to blink before his father's hand was gripping his chin and forcing his bruised cheek up to the light.

"Got in a fight," Sam said in a small voice, trying to look away.

Dean stepped in front of him slightly. "My fault," he said quickly, calmly meeting John's heated gaze. "Shoulda been there and I got caught up with something else."

"Female something else?" John hazarded.

Dean forced his cockiest grin. "Is there any other kind?" he asked, casually putting an arm around Sam's shoulders and easing him away from the probing hands of their father.

"Well," John pronounced, straightening. "I hope she was worth it 'cause as soon as we're settled you'll be pulling kitchen duty for the next month."

Dean could feel Sam's eyes on him, even though the younger boy was standing behind him. He swallowed. "Settled'?" he echoed a little uncertainly.

John resumed his obvious packing, retrieving the emergency shotgun from its position under the sink in the murky kitchenette and adding it to the duffel he'd slung on the table. "Hunt two states over," he said. "Could be a succubus. Won't know till I get there."

"You – you said we could finish up the school year here," Sam piped up suddenly, a trace of defiance in his voice.

"We only have a few weeks left," Dean added quickly, trying to soften his brother's protest. "Couldn't we –"

"Hunt won't wait a few weeks, Dean, and you know that," John said, tone clipped and brooking no argument. "Get yourself and your brother packed. We're leaving tonight. I wanna be in Tennessee by tomorrow morning."

Sam shoved Dean insistently in the ribs, the older brother casting him a warning glance before John suddenly asked, "Cat got your tongue, Sammy?"

Sam froze, fingers curling in the back of Dean's t-shirt. "No sir," he said quietly. He nudged Dean again.

John raised an eyebrow. "Dean? Something you boys want to tell me?"

The brothers exchanged a guilty look before Dean shook his head slightly. "No sir," he said at length. "We'll go pack."

He turned, spinning Sam with him and nudging him insistently in the small of his back until Sam reluctantly complied, allowing Dean to push him toward the walk-in closet in the corner of the room. Sam glanced back at their father, who was hefting the duffel and a canvas bag containing the shotgun out of the room toward the waiting Impala.

"Dean, we can't just *leave*...!" Sam burst out as soon as Dad was out of earshot, desperate anxiety written all over his face. "We didn't finish... We didn't..."

"I know, Sammy," Dean said with a sigh, shuffling into the closet and retrieving the duffel bags they always kept half-packed at the bottom. "But there's nothing we can do. We gotta go, you heard Dad."

"We should tell him."

"The mood he's in right now? Thanks, Sammy, but I'd like to live to see fifteen."

"But what about 'Winchesters don't leave a job unfinished'?"

Dean looked at him as he hefted the duffel bags onto the nearest bed. "This time they have to, Sam," he said, wearily. "Even if we tell Dad, he's not gonna let us stay to fix this. You heard him. He wants to be in Tennessee tomorrow." His shoulders slumped as he began mechanically stuffing Sam's clothes into one of the bags. "At least we tried, Sammy."

Sam bit his lip. "But what if someone else gets hurt?"

Dean glanced back up at him, a guilty sigh on his lips. "I don't know, Sammy," he said truthfully. "But there's nothing else we can do about it right now."

Mansfield Memorial Park Present Day

"Why didn't we ever tell Dad?" Sam finally asked, eyes still locked on the remains of Withers, dirt crumbling into the open grave as his boot strayed too close to the edge.

Dean snapped himself out of the dragging silence as Sam spoke, lost in his own thoughts. He shrugged. "I dunno. So much stuff was always happening and we never came back this way." He shrugged again, uncomfortable in the face of their obvious failure. "Hell, Sam, we were kids, we did something we shouldn't have, tried to prove something that didn't matter."

"People have died that shouldn't have," Sam replied, getting that hitch in his voice that Dean hated, gave him that crawly feeling that he should have been able to stop this and now here they were.

"I know that, Sam!" he snapped, rubbing a hand over his face and raking it back through his hair, snorting in angry bad humor. "I guess the fact that they were total jerks doesn't matter."

Sam sighed, knowing Dean didn't mean it the way it sounded. "Dean..."

"Okay, okay...I get it. We can't change what's happened. It's done. All we can do is burn this mother and hope it ends here." He flicked on a lighter and tossed it in the box below, drawing back with a slight squint as flames shot upwards.

"You know the attacks stopped after the library was closed," Sam remarked, watching the corpse burn. "They didn't start again until all this new stuff started going on. After the crate was opened."

Dean reached down and grabbed up the items scattered on the ground next to his feet and wearily stuffed them into the rucksack. "So?"

"I want to take a look at the books we got away with. Something about this is still bugging me." He accepted the duffel Dean handed him.

Dean snagged the two shovels and the pick. He sighed, looking up at Sam. "You don't think this is over, do you?"

Sam looked at him. "Do you?"

They stared at each other for a moment, then Dean shook his head. "No. I don't, dammitall. Something still feels wrong."

They walked slowly back to the Impala and loaded their equipment in the trunk. It was a silent ride to the motel.

Motel Paradiso, Mansfield, OH Present Day

"I can't believe you picked the same crummy motel, Sammy," Dean said, shoving the door closed with one elbow while dropping an aromatic white paper bag on the table in front of his brother along with a copy of the Mansfield Morning News. "I mean – like this place wasn't a dump fifteen years ago!"

Sam held out a hand without looking up from the dusty old book in which he was currently engrossed, and Dean shoved a Styrofoam cup into it with a grunt.

"They were all out of green tea, Samantha," he said. "You'll have to make do with a good old cup o' Joe like the rest of us workin' stiffs."

"You never worked a day in your life, Dean," Sam commented, still not looking up, sniffing cautiously at the coffee before taking a sip. "You forgot the sugar –" he began, finally meeting his brother's gaze just as twenty sugar packets landed on the book in front of him.

"Don't say I never give you anything."

"Besides Chicken Pox when I was seven?"

"I'm an awesome big brother."

Dean slumped down in the chair opposite Sam, taking a sip of his own coffee and pulling something vaguely resembling an egg McMuffin from the paper bag. He took a bite, grimaced, and pulled the newspaper towards himself, idly scanning the front page.

"You know, these books of Old Man Withers'?" Sam was saying, barely looking up at his brother as he tidied the sugar packets into a neat little pile before emptying several into his coffee. "There's some seriously dark stuff in here. Can't believe he kept them in a school library. *Anyone* could have found them."

"Mmm, like we did," Dean mumbled through a mouthful of muffin. "Good thing we weren't looking to turn anyone into a horny toad or anything..." He swallowed, grinning to himself at his own turn of phrase before his eyes narrowed as they scanned the column toward the bottom of the newspaper's front page. "They're calling it 'an unfortunate accident,'" he said, shaking his head as he read further down the page. "Mr. Entwistle. Electrical short in the newly-refurbished library's wiring."

"Oh yeah?" Sam cocked a brow. "So how are they explaining Jared Macklin? Piranhas accidentally left in the pool by the construction company?"

"Slipped and fell through a plate glass door –"

"Before crawling eight feet to throw himself into the swimming pool?"

"Hey man, people don't like loose ends. Especially where their kids are concerned. Easier to blame an electrical short than face the fact that your kids' school is being terrorized by the ghost of a homicidal librarian –"

“Ghost of a Black Magic-practicing homicidal librarian,” Sam amended, tapping the page in front of him with the tip of his pencil. “Dean, seriously. The kind of rituals in these books? I think even Bobby would be shocked.”

Dean frowned, pulling the open book across the table toward himself. “I dunno, it takes a helluva lot to shock Bobby.”

Sam indicated the page Dean was looking at with his pencil. “That ritual there?” he said. “Describes how a person can transfer their soul into an inanimate object – a receptacle to hold their consciousness – until a suitable corporeal host is found who they can then possess.”

Dean frowned. “Like a demon possessing a person?”

“Pretty much.”

Dean whistled, eyes suddenly widening. “So I could possess the Impala?”

Sam sighed. “Yes, Dean. In theory you could possess the Impala.”

“Or Angelina Jolie’s underwear? ‘Cause *man*–”

“Dean.”

“Huh?”

“Focus.”

“I’m focused.”

“On the homicidal ghost librarian.”

“*Former* homicidal ghost librarian.”

Sam bit his lip uncertainly. “Maybe...”

Dean’s gaze shot to his brother. “Aw man!” he burst out. “Don’t say that! I *hate* it when you say that –!”

“I’m just thinking,” Sam began.

“Never a good sign.”

“That maybe burning Withers’ bones might not have been enough.”

Dean’s eyebrows nearly disappeared into the stratosphere. “*What?*” he growled, low and quiet, deceptively calm. “It took us *fifteen years* to dig up that sonofabitch, Sammy –”

“I know that,” Sam agreed. “But look at this book, Dean. Look at the page.”

Dean followed the direction of Sam’s stabbing finger.

“This book opens straight to this page,” Sam continued. “As if this page has been read *a lot* more than the rest of the book. And look at the notes in the margins –”

Dean could just about make out a tiny, spidery scrawl if he squinted. “Withers read this ritual, Dean. He *studied* it. He made *notes* on it –”

“To transfer his soul into an inanimate object? Like in those kid wizard books?”

Sam frowned, for a second wondering how the *hell* Dean would know about that, barely having read a book in his life unless it had pictures. “Ye-ah,” he said slowly. “Exactly like that. Y’know, I’m thinking angry spirits are usually attached to their own remains, right, but often attach themselves to an object or a location, like the house where they lived? Well what if this is something else? What if this isn’t a case of Mr. Withers haunting his old library because he was murdered there? What if he wasn’t murdered at all, but didn’t die of natural causes either? What if he used this ritual to transfer his soul into something? Into something he loved above everything else –”

“A book?” Dean hazarded.

“Exactly,” Sam agreed. “So the school board wanted him out, right? Wanted to modernize? He doesn’t want to let go, but the writing’s on the wall for him. So he finds a way to transfer his soul into one of his precious books so that he can bide his time until he finds a suitable vessel to possess from which he can continue his study and his research –”

“– But then the book he’s attached himself to gets crated up and doesn’t see the light of day again for fifteen years, trapping him in limbo and causing him to get even crazier than he already was?”

Sam nodded. “Tell me it doesn’t fit.”

"It fits," Dean confirmed, his gaze falling on the piles of Withers' books they'd boosted from the library the night before. "But in that case," he said slowly, "the bastard could be in any one of these books."

"Or any of those that didn't burn in the library last night."

Dean recognized the suggestive cadence in Sam's voice immediately. "You got a particular book in mind, Sherlock?" he asked.

Sam nodded. "There was a grimoire," he confirmed. "I saw it last night – it was on Helen Jensen's desk on top of a pile of Withers' other books. I thought it looked kinda familiar, but it was only this morning I remembered where I'd seen it before."

Dean raised an eyebrow. "Where?"

"Old Man Withers' office. When we broke in. Fifteen years ago."

Dean blinked. "You remember a *book* you saw for, like, five seconds *fifteen years ago*?"

Sam nodded again. "I said it looked similar to ones I'd seen at Bobby's."

"Okay, you are never to rag on me for remembering the script to *Star Wars* ever again, okay?"

Sam smiled wanly. "Point is, it's not here. The grimoire. It's not one of the books we brought with us – Mr. Entwhistle's little pyrotechnic display made it a little inaccessible."

"And it might not even be the right book?"

"No, it might not."

Dean sat bolt upright. "So we gotta burn them all," he said decisively. "Starting with these and moving on to the ones that are still at the library."

"Only way to be sure," Sam agreed.

Mansfield Public School Library Present day

It was eerily quiet in the deserted hallway outside the still-smoldering remains of the school's new library. They'd had no problems getting in – the custodial staff were already around at this time of the morning, so there were no alarms to be deactivated, and only one measly fire exit to work their way through.

They'd made it to the library undetected and ducked quickly inside, careful not to disturb the plentiful police crime scene tape adorning the entrance but not in any way put off by its presence.

Looking around, Sam was oddly relieved that the new media center had largely escaped the fire unscathed, only the carpeting and the shelving units directly surrounding the area where Mr. Entwhistle did his whole human Roman Candle thing showing any signs of serious damage.

The floor was littered with various piles of soggy, charred library books, bought new only a few days earlier but now doomed to the trash before they'd ever had the opportunity to edify the enquiring mind of a youngster. Sam found that oddly depressing, and looked away, beyond the tape outline pressed into the incinerated flooring and over toward the charred door that now hung open in front of the store room that had once been Mr. Withers' office.

"I'm surprised the fire investigators aren't back on scene yet," he commented, trying not to look down as he picked his way around the outline on the floor.

"It's early," Dean replied, following Sam's lead. "They're probably still off eating donuts somewhere with their cop buddies."

Sam glanced back at him, shaking his head. "That's such a stereotype," he said. "Have you ever actually seen a cop eating a donut?"

Dean thought about that for a second. "Sure," he said with a bright smile. "Chief Wiggum on *The Simpsons*. Eats them all the time."

"And that's so true to life," Sam muttered, easing the barely-hung door aside as he stepped into Withers' old office.

"Anything?" Dean called as he made his way past the office and over to the desk where they'd last seen the current librarian.

"Yeah," Sam said. "There are a few books left here. We better take 'em and burn 'em. No point risking another fire here."

Dean nodded, glancing around Helen Jensen's desk but finding nothing resembling an ancient grimoire. "You find the book?" he asked. "'Cause I sure as hell can't see it out here."

Sam emerged from the office, arms full of crumbling old tomes. "No," he said, shaking his head as he approached Dean's position. "It's not in there. It was out here, on the desk. I saw it last night, I swear..." He examined the small pile of old books balanced precariously on the desk, but reluctantly had to admit that Dean was right: the grimoire wasn't here.

"Dammit," Sam muttered, dumping the books he was carrying onto the desk, and hunting around for a dry and undamaged packing carton. Retrieving a likely candidate from under the desk, he started packing the books into it while Dean continued to hunt around some of the nearby shelves of books just in case the grimoire had found its way onto any of them.

When Sam was done packing, Dean turned back to him, arms spread wide. "It ain't here, man," he said, defeatedly.

Sam nodded. "Yeah," he said. "Getting that idea myself. But where else could it be? None of Withers' books got burned when Entwhistle died –"

"Obviously," Dean said. "Psycho nutjob librarian don't care about torching a person, but he ain't gonna damage his precious Satanic book collection."

"– And no one else could have been in here after the fire," Sam continued. "Only the fire service and the cops. Who else would have had access?"

He stopped suddenly, both boys' eyes meeting as they simultaneously uttered the words, "Helen Jensen."

"Ah, man..." Dean ran a hand through his hair and began to pace. "She wouldn't..."

"She was really interested in Withers, Dean," Sam said. "Really *really* interested in him. Admired the crazy old coot. Remember? For standing up for what he believed in?"

"You don't think –" Dean began, paling considerably.

"If Withers *is* looking for a new vessel – someone who he can use to continue his studies and his research –"

"Then who better than the person now running his library?"

Sam nodded grimly. "We gotta find Helen Jensen."

Helen Jensen's House Present Day

Helen stared at her reflection in the mirror as she carefully brushed her dark hair until it fell in rich brown waves about her shoulders. She had slipped on a long white shirt, the one with the lacy ruffles at the ends of the sleeves and down the throat that she had bought in a moment of frivolous want. Normally after putting it on she would shake her head and return it to the padded hanger, uncomfortable with the image the mirror showed her, and pull out one of the tailored, mannish blouses she normally wore.

Looking at her reflection in the soft glow of a small lamp, somehow the shirt just seemed *right*. In a further display of abandonment she had only bothered to button two of the pearl buttons, allowing the shirt to hang open as it willed, enjoying the feel of her bare legs and feet moving unencumbered.

She felt...decadent. Expectant. As though she were waiting for something unknown to occur.

Considering the fact that three people had died under bizarre circumstances where she worked and that her office had been set on fire, she couldn't quite grasp why she really didn't give a damn.

She laughed softly and picked up the long-stemmed wineglass she was drinking from, drifting back out to her small living room and settling herself cross-legged on the rug before the fire she had built earlier. Setting the wineglass down on the hearth, she pulled towards her the heavy black leather book she had brought from the library after the rescue people had dragged Entwhistle off her desk.

What an idiot he'd been, she thought.

She ran gentle fingers over the tooled cover, tracing the outlines with a touch that was almost sensuous. With reverent respect she opened the book and began to page slowly through it, the rough touch of the parchment dragging against her fingertips as she admired the intricate woodcuts of the illustrations, her lips moved gently as she murmured the Latin text, the words familiar to her in a way she didn't understand but also didn't question.

The room grew deliciously warm as she moved through the pages, a soft breeze beginning to stir her hair.

She took another sip of wine but didn't notice when the glass slipped as she set it back down, the scarlet contents spilling onto her white rug.

* * * *

Sam hurriedly finished dousing the pile of books with lighter fluid, battling his every instinct that burning books was a bad thing to do, especially when many of those books were damn near priceless one-of-a-kind antiques.

"C'mon, Sam!" Dean called from where he was watching by the car. "Set the damn things on fire and let's go!"

Sam thumbed the lighter into life and after a brief but major conscience battle tossed it on the stack. He jerked back as the dry old books went up with a greenish whoosh of flame that practically reduced them to ash in one go. Swallowing, he turned and ran back to the car, sliding in as Dean fired it up. They had to get to Helen's and get that last book since they had no way of knowing which book might be the winner of the Carlyle Withers Home Away From Home award.

The streetlights were burning by the time they slid to a stop in front of Helen's address. A fast search through her desk had produced the information they were looking for, including a phone number, but repeated efforts to call her had gone unanswered.

Oddly wavering light spilled out the front window and they could see the curtains moving on the *inside*.

A quick exchange of looks and they bailed out of the car, running up to the front door, ringing the bell, banging on the door itself and calling her name.

After a long four second wait, Dean said, "To hell with it," took one step back and kicked the door in.

The door slammed back into the wall and a hot wind blasted their faces, forcing them back a step, as they squinted into the howling rush of air.

The fire in the fireplace crackled and roared, flames sucking up the front of the bricks, scorching them; dozens of candles scattered about the room flickered madly but managed to stay lit.

Helen Jensen stood in the center of the room, a loose white shirt plastered to her body where it wasn't sliding off one bare shoulder, head back, arms outstretched, feet braced and apart, her hair swirling about her head. Words poured from her lips so fast that Sam couldn't have made them out even if they had been in English.

At her feet the black grimoire lay open, a small spinning cloud beginning to take shape over the pages, darting out as it grew to circle Helen's legs then pull back, testing the touch.

“Get the book!” Dean screamed over the roar of the wind tearing through the room, “I’ll get her!” He threw out his arm to deflect the bric-a-brac that was starting to fly around. Behind them the door slammed shut with a reverberating crash.

Sam nodded, mimicking Dean’s deflective action as a tray suddenly sliced toward him. He had memorized the words to stop the ritual but he had to have the book in hand to make it work.

Dean tried to throw himself at Helen’s rigid form but was knocked back by the swirling funnel beginning to encompass her. He slammed back into the fireplace as more flames exploded outward, the heat searing the back of his legs.

“Shit!” he gasped, shaking his head.

Sam fell back as he tried to get close enough to sweep the book away, a brass candlestick, still with flaming candle, smashing into his forehead, opening a gash that sent blood spilling down his face in a narrow trail.

“You okay?” Dean yelled, crouching.

“You gotta get her away from the book!” Sam yelled, wiping the blood out of his eye.

“What the hell do you think I’m trying to do!?!?” Dean shouted back. “If I shoot at it I might hit her!”

Dean grimaced, the room was becoming almost too hot to bear, sweat beginning to stream down his face. The funnel rising out of the book was now over their heads and Helen’s feet were no longer touching the ground as it began to suck her into the vortex.

Watching as Sam began to pull himself along the floor in the direction of the book, Dean likewise tried to get closer to Helen, her body vanishing in the tornado before them.

He stretched out his hands, swearing as the spinning winds bit into his skin like razors, forcing himself into the shifting mass.

His fingers closed on cloth, as his senses were assailed with flashing images of people he had never seen and emotions that almost overwhelmed him with anger: humiliation, triumph and *need*. It was almost too much and he had to fight not to succumb to it, drawing on his own fury and frustration to fend it off as he clawed Helen’s body into his arms.

Sam reached out long fingers to grip the edge of the book and try to drag it near, calling out the words to end this. He caught papers between his fingers that tore from the book, the book itself remaining in place as though welded there.

As the pages gave way, Dean felt the barest weakening of the hold on both his and Helen’s body. “*Keep going!!!*” he forced through stiff lips, pulling with all his might against the force holding them in place.

Helen began to jerk against him, struggling. She began to scream, fingers clawing into Dean. “*NOOOO!!!*”

Sam ripped handfuls of pages from the book and began to shout the invocations, throwing the pages into the fire as quickly as he could drag himself over to it and back.

Abruptly, both Helen and Dean crashed to the floor, her body writhing and kicking as she shrieked, beating at him with her fists, nails tearing at his face.

Dean rolled across the floor with her, trying to hold her hands, her legs and feet causing serious damage to his lower regions. “For God’s sake Sammy, *get on with it!*”

Sam threw himself on the book, fingers clawing at the edges of the cover. He ignored Dean and rained Latin incantations on the book as he managed to get his fingers under the edge and pry it loose. He slammed it shut and threw himself back to the roaring fire, heaving the book into the flames.

Fire poured suddenly from the opening, turning the room into a furnace as it roared over their prone bodies, sound like a sonic boom shaking the house.

And then it was gone, the sudden silence as loud as the noise had been before.

Hesitantly, both Sam and Dean lifted their heads slightly and looked around.

"Is that it?" Dean asked hoarsely, still lying atop Helen who lay unmoving.

Sam dropped his head back on his arms. "I think so," he wheezed.

Dean rolled slowly off Helen and shook out his hands, covered with dozens of tiny cuts that stung like a bitch, likewise his clothing was neatly shredded. So much for them, and thank God he hadn't been wearing anything he cared about.

"Took you long enough," he grunted, pushing himself to his knees. He felt like he'd been sandblasted.

"What?!" Sam barked in outrage, then shook his head and likewise climbed to his hands and knees, crawling closer.

"How's she?" he asked, as Dean gently patted Helen's face.

"She's alive," he replied, pausing to glance around at the destruction in her living room. "I don't know how the hell we're gonna explain all this though."

"It might help a little if you button her clothes back up," Sam said wryly as Helen began to move slowly, groaning, her shirt having pretty much come off during her struggle with Dean. He sat back and rubbed his still-bleeding forehead.

Dean ran his tongue over his teeth, tasting blood from where he had apparently bitten himself. "Ya know –" he began, unable to keep himself from admiring the view presented to him.

"Dean!"

"Okay! Fine! Don't have a hemorrhage, I'm buttoning!"

Rest Stop, outside of Winchester, KY May 1993

Usually, Dean got a kick out of driving through any town that shared his name. He wasn't sure whether Dad had done it on purpose tonight – it was pretty much on their way to Athens, Tennessee – and he always said he liked to take the scenic route. Maybe he sensed the unease between his sons. The air of something not quite right between them, something hanging over them. Something left unsaid or unfinished.

Maybe he just wanted to make them feel better.

Whatever his reasons, Dean appreciated it, although tonight he was pretty much too tired to care that he could see a sign for Winchester, Kentucky lit up bright yellow on the highway.

Dad was pumping gas and Sam had been sleeping fitfully, slumped against Dean's shoulder, the whole way from Mansfield.

Dean glanced at the clock on the dashboard and yawned: 2.45 a.m.

"Dean?"

Dean shifted slightly as Sam stirred awake, looking up at him with dazed dark eyes.

"Yeah, squirt?"

"We there yet?"

"Nah. Dad's gettin' gas."

"He mad?"

"Don't think so. Why?"

Sam shrugged. "You think he knows?"

"Knows what?"

"That we messed up."

"How could he know that?" Dean smiled dismissively, although the same thought had crossed his mind, too. "He's not psychic."

"I'm not so sure sometimes," Sam muttered, eyes following his father as he made his way to the twenty-four hour Stop n' Shop to pay for the gas.

Dean nodded, eyes following in the same direction. "Yeah," he said. "I know whatcha mean."

"We should have told him," Sam said bluntly. "We should have told him about Mr. Withers."

Dean sighed. "We've been over this, Sammy –"

"I know, but we still should have told him."

Dean nodded grudgingly. "Yeah well. Too late now."

Sam turned his wide eyes back up to his brother, not awake enough yet to have remembered to pull away and retreat to the opposite end of the bench seat, like the grown-up boy he was. "You think anyone else will get hurt because of us?" he asked.

Dean shrugged. "No more than would have gotten hurt if we'd never even tried to salt n' burn the old bastard," he said. "At least we tried, Sammy." Sam nodded, head drooping back against Dean's shoulder, and Dean just watched as his father approached the car. "At least we tried."

Rest Stop, I-75 outside Toledo, OH Present day

Sam could hear his father yelling even from this distance.

Dean was grimacing, elbows on his knees as he sat hunched forward on the wooden picnic table, his cell phone held a good couple of inches away from his ear as he stared down at his boots nervously scuffing the bench currently occupied by Sam, who was trying to feign interest in the remains of a chicken sandwich.

"Yeah, I know we should have told you, Dad –" Dean was saying, cheeks coloring considerably. "Yeah. I know. I know it was a long time ago. I – I don't know. I don't know why I decided to tell you today. I guess – I guess I just thought you ought to know, that's all."

Dean ran a hand over his face, the phone now pressed tight against his ear, as if he didn't want Sam to hear anymore. He sighed, heavily.

"Yeah, I know people died, Dad. But you – you wanted to get to Athens to take care of that succubus, and it was late and I –" He stopped again, John's voice once more loud in his ear. "I know," he said finally. "I'm sorry."

He shifted slightly, nodding even though he knew his dad couldn't see him.

"It's taken care of now, though, right?" John asked, voice slightly calmer as it emanated from the speaker of Dean's phone, and Dean nodded again.

"Yeah. He's toast. Or rather, the book he was haunting's toast. We saved the girl and everything."

"So his spirit was attached to the book, not to his remains or the library?" John asked, interest piquing in his voice.

"Yeah, this freaky-ass grimoire thing Sam remembered from when we were kids –"

"So it wouldn't have made a difference," John said shortly, sounding somehow relieved. "If you'd managed to salt n' burn Withers' remains back in the day."

Dean shook his head. "Guess not," he agreed.

"And I doubt we'd have been able to find that grimoire. Not if it was already crated up and put into storage."

"Are you trying to make me feel better?"

There was a pause. "You should have told me," John said.

"I know, Dad."

"People died who shouldn't have."

"I know."

"It was stupid, and careless, and irresponsible –" Dean's cheeks colored more and more with each word, but something in John's tone softened. "– And you were kids. Ultimately, Dean, you and Sammy were just kids."

Dean straightened, surprised. "That's not really an excuse, Dad," he began, exchanging a glance with Sam, who was looking up at him, trying to figure out John's end of the conversation.

“No,” John said. “It’s not. But at least you tried. At least you tried to do the right thing. And it’s finished now, right? It’s done. No one got hurt because of what you did.”

“No,” Dean agreed. “They just got hurt because of what we *didn’t* do.”

Dean could almost hear John shrug down the phone. “Well it’s over now. What happened before – it’s over. There’s nothing we can do about it now. The past’s the past. Let it go, son.”

Dean managed to cover a snort, imagining what Sam would think of Dad coming out with *that* particular platitude. “Yeah, Dad,” he agreed. “The past’s the past.”

Sam raised an eyebrow, just as Dean knew he would.

“So where are you and Sammy headed next?” John asked, deftly changing the subject.

“North Dakota,” Dean replied. “Somethin’ freaky goin’ on up there – maybe a Woman in White. What about you?”

John was silent for a good couple of seconds, and Sam reacted to the sudden tension in Dean’s shoulders by sitting up a little straighter himself.

“Got a lead to follow up,” John said eventually, his tone evasive. “Not sure where it’ll take me just yet. I’ll let you know as soon as I do.”

There was another pause, and this time Dean’s eyes met Sam’s.

“Dean? Just be careful, huh?”

“Yeah, Dad –”

“And take care of your brother.”

“Dad –?”

“I’ll talk to you soon.”

Dean shifted once more on the uncomfortable wooden table. “Dad, is something wrong?”

Another pause. “No son. I’ll see you both soon, okay? And – and I’m glad you told me. You boys did the right thing. You always do the right thing. You stay safe now.”

“Yeah, Dad,” Dean said quietly. “You stay safe too.” He closed the phone absently, still gazing at his boots.

“Dean?” Sam asked. “Is Dad okay?”

Dean looked up at him, considering the question. “I guess,” he said.

“He sounded pretty pissed,” Sam observed.

Dean smiled sadly. “Yeah. He was that alright. But he said we did our best. We were just kids. And even if we’d managed to dig up Old Man Withers it wouldn’t have made any difference.”

“No,” Sam agreed. “And at least it’s over now. At least we finished what we started.”

Dean regarded him for a second, the ghost of a smile on his lips. “Yeah,” he agreed slowly, stowing his phone in his jacket pocket. “It’s over. Winchester’s don’t leave a job unfinished.”

The End