

Season Three
Episode Thirteen: Nine Lives
By Kittsbud

RMS Titanic
11.38p.m. April 14th 1912
Orlap Deck – Cargo Hold 3

Dermot McGarry took a step over the metal plating at his feet, ever mindful not to trip on the lip of the open watertight door. He didn't normally mind wandering around in the bowels of sea-going vessels – in fact, in his younger days he had spent many a month at sea aboard the older wooden clipper ships.

The Titanic wasn't anything like those sea horses. To the Irishman, she felt like a huge metal coffin that had no business afloat. The stuffy, damp cargo hold did little to quell his fears.

It was dark in the belly of this beast, and with the darkness came a strange foreboding that reminded him why his grandmother went to church every Sunday.

"There are things we don't understand, Dermot. Things we should be mindful not to mess with."

That was what Old Ma McGarry had warned him, and tonight, Dermot Andrew McGarry was wishing he had listened to her.

Instead, he and his companion, Patrick Dooley had decided to sneak into the cargo hold on what could only be a wild goose chase. But still, men in their position could hardly turn away the chance of easy money.

McGarry and Dooley both wore ragged wool jackets that were worn and tattered at the cuffs, and from the smell, hadn't been washed in months. Their appearance and lack of cleanliness gave away their need for cash.

Even their fare on the Titanic had been subsidized by ill-gotten gains at a poker game in a local pub before boarding.

"I tell ya, we're just chasin' our tails, Dooley." McGarry had no sooner entered the hold than he was glancing over his shoulder, eyes darting back into the corridor he'd just departed in fear of being caught by some eager White Star Line employee. "And even if it's not, you heard what Stead was saying..."

Dooley ignored his companion's pleas, his beady, rat-like eyes scrutinizing crate after crate in his search for wealth. If there was a complete opposite to McGarry, then Dooley was it.

Like his friend, he too was an Irishman, but he had never done one single honest day's work in his life. Today would be no different.

"He said there were rare and valuable artifacts down here, that's what he said!" There was aggravation in Dooley's voice as he rubbed at the abundance of white whiskers protruding from his chin.

McGarry wasn't certain if the annoyance was aimed at him for being so afraid, or because Dooley couldn't find his prized chest in the plethora secured to the Titanic's decking.

Eventually, Dooley's piercing orbs locked onto a large chest and his mouth curled into a toothless grin. "Egyptian gold, man! Imagine the life we could have in the New World with just a little of it."

"*Cursed* is the word I heard," McGarry pointed out, his ears detecting a slight change in the Titanic's roaring motors from too many years at sea. "And I don't recall anyone actually mentioning the word *gold*."

Dooley ignored both the warning and the correction. In fact, to McGarry it looked like his companion had succumbed to Klondike gold fever in the space of two seconds.

The wiry little Irishman was scurrying around the hold with little thought of capture, pulling away tarps and other coverings in search of something with which to pry open the crate he had found.

Eventually, Dooley discovered a tire iron that probably belonged to one of the newfangled motor cars littering the ship's various holds.

Dooley held up the metal rod triumphantly and quickly scurried back to his "find," the grin on his face spreading ever-wider until his last few rotting teeth were on view.

Using the thinner end of the iron, Dooley began to pry at the metal spikes holding the chest lid closed, not caring as the wood began to splinter and groan in protest.

McGarry's expression began to change, his grandmother's warning becoming louder and louder in his head the closer Dooley got to opening the crate. He took a step backwards, dread suddenly chilling ever limb in his body.

Dooley noticed his friend's look of fear and spat on the floor at McGarry's feet in disgust. "Leave ya coward, then it'll be *all* mine." He cursed several expletives under his breath then began to pry anew.

At last, as the nails in the wood finally succumbed, the top of the crate jarred away with an unearthly grating wail.

In unison with the screech of wood on metal came another, louder yowl that began to fill both men's ears as well as the entire hold.

A judder seemed to course through the metal plating around them, and within seconds, rivets popped from their positions as the Titanic's hull began to breach.

McGarry's mouth opened and his jaw became slack as the metal skin protecting him from the ocean began to rupture before his eyes, the double-thick plating seeming to buckle inwards as some unseen, unearthly pressure crushed it from without.

More rivets burst from the hull and were replaced by icy Atlantic water spewing from the holes they had vacated. The liquid seemed to find every tiny crack and orifice, pushing through until the hold was awash with white frothing brine.

"Look what you've done...will ya look what you've done..." McGarry watched mesmerized as water swelled around his ankles, stinging his flesh with a cold that seemed to wrap around his entire body.

He should never have come here.

Stumbling blindly backwards, he could still see Dooley peering inside the crate like a madman, oblivious to the fact that he had probably brought the "unsinkable" Titanic to her doom – *their* doom.

Cursed...

That was what Stead had said about the cargo they had so greedily sought.

Dooley reached into the chest he had opened, not even sensing the water pooling around his lower limbs. He moved a tatty piece of hessian and his eyes grew even wider than before until the whites seemed to glow in the dull light.

"No...no...where's the gold? Stead said there were treasures..."

The babbling continued as if Dooley had suddenly gone insane. From the wild expression on his features, McGarry feared that he had. *What in God's name is in that crate..?*

But it didn't matter what heathen Egyptian artifacts they had disturbed. All that really mattered was that they were going to die for them.

McGarry took another blind, panicked step backwards just as the Titanic seemed to lurch sideways, a nearby steam pipe rupturing as it tried to cope with a build up in pressure.

The sudden list knocked the Irishman off balance, and his footing was lost as a floating piece of luggage drifted into his path. Arms thrashing wildly, McGarry was unable to stop his backwards momentum and his body was instantly skewered by the hissing steam section that had been exposed only seconds earlier.

McGarry screamed, but in the hold, there was no one save a madman to hear him.

“Dooley, for God’s sake, man...” Blood bubbled from McGarry’s lips as he held an outstretched hand to his companion, begging to be pulled free of the metal tubing, but Dooley wouldn’t take his eyes from inside the crate.

McGarry screamed again – this time at the knowledge that his injury wouldn’t kill him. No, he would remain impaled, bleeding, in agony until the Atlantic rose high enough around him to force the oxygen from his lungs.

Whatever curse the crate had imprisoned – it was now free, and had already begun its vendetta against mankind.

Present Day
University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology
Philadelphia

Dean Winchester took one look at the building in front of him and instantly knew why his brother wanted this gig.

The place had “Geek Shrine” written all over it in capital letters.

It was so Sammy it was unhealthy.

“Dude, you really think the deaths are some creepy ass curse? I mean, c’mon, everyone has them pegged as accidents or natural causes.” Dean paused in the doorway, watching his brother squirm the way he always did when he was focusing too hard on something.

“Dean, the items in this exhibit haven’t been together since the seventies. As soon as the display went up, a security guard on night watch and a curator on the administration team were killed. I just don’t think it’s a coincidence.”

Sam pushed through the glass doorway a little too forcefully and almost barged into a girl exiting the museum. His face reddened just a touch as he quickly offered an apology.

Dean’s brow quirked upwards and he smiled as he watched the failed attempt at contrition from his brother. “You’re just eager to work this thing because Sarah Blake asked you to dig around,” Dean teased. “You still got the hots for that chick, don’t ya, Sasquatch?” He slapped Sam on the back a little too heartily and then headed for a vending machine he’d spotted in the corner.

Chocolate was good any time of day, and he was already building up an appetite ribbing his brother. Sliding a coin in the slot, he waited for a scarlet-cheeked Sam to join him.

The guard who had died had been an old friend and employee of the Blakes, and Sarah had liked the old-timer a lot. When the news of his death had reached her and she’d read what was in one of the displays he was guarding, it hadn’t taken her long to piece together that this might be “a Winchester thing.”

“Dean, in 1976 this very display, item for item, was at the Metropolitan Museum in New York – at least, until it was deemed too unlucky to have on show. All told, there were nine deaths surrounding the museum or the items in the exhibit,” Sam pushed. “Are you going to tell me that’s coincidence too?”

Dean cocked his head as a pack of Milk Duds plopped from the machine. Not exactly M&M’s but they’d do. “Bad luck?” He offered half-heartedly, knowing Sam had already won the fight.

Sam glowered. “I think it’s a curse. I think Sarah is right, and that something among those relics is causing the deaths every time it’s brought out of storage.”

Dean opened the packet and stuffed in a mouthful of chocolate. “So we torch a few antiques and all is well in the world. Yeah, I can see why the museum here will go along with that...especially as we’ll probably have to fry the whole wing ‘cause Geekboy doesn’t know what it is we’re even looking for...”

Sam’s shoulders dropped and he sighed. “I only got the call from Sarah last night. It’s not like I’ve had time to sit in the library doing research. Can we just check out the

display? Then we can go find a motel and I'll do my 'geek' thing, while you fill your face some more."

"Well, the motel and food sound good," Dean conceded, screwing up the empty chocolate wrapper and tossing it into a nearby bin. "I mean, it's not like I can survive on Milk Duds alone, dude."

Sam rolled his eyes but gestured towards a doorway at the end of the lobby area. Waiting patiently by a desk was a small man whose mustache twitched as he glanced over his glasses at the brothers.

Dean guessed his interest wasn't pure curiosity. "You called ahead, didn't you? You sneaky sonofa..."

Sam's face grew into a wide smile. "Sometimes it does pay to actually *plan* something in advance."

"Yeah, right, 'cause that *so always* works." Dean scrutinized the wiry museum employee as they approached him, only taking his eyes from the bony little man when a pretty young woman in a red suit paused to chat with their contact. "Whoa, now why couldn't you have been dealing with the hot chick with the long and very fine legs instead of Professor Moriarty?"

Sam's smile didn't falter, but he shook his head. "Maybe because I knew you'd be thinking with your downstairs brain as usual, and you know where *that* gets us..."

Dean faltered a second thinking of Mia. While Sam's comment hadn't been directed at his very big mistake with her, it hurt all the same.

After that blunder it was a wonder he could even look at anything in a skirt ever again – except, or course, Mia hadn't been much for skirts anyway.

And Dean was Dean.

He could *never* resist someone of the female persuasion for too long.

As they finally reached the end of the lobby, the young woman, who Dean noted talked with a slight southern drawl, moved away, sashaying towards a small office to their left as if she owned the building.

Maybe she did.

Dean's impious eyes followed her until she vanished from sight and then he refocused on the less interesting man they'd come to meet. At first glance, he seemed like a typical museum worker who had little time for real people and plenty of time for stale-smelling books.

"You must be Professor Daniels?" Sam extended a hand. "We're the history students you're expecting from Kansas U."

Daniels' beady gaze looked both brothers over from head to toe and then back again, giving them a somewhat bemused smile as he took Sam's offered hand and shook it. "Ah, yes, the brothers working on the Egyptian burial methods paper." He looked briefly over his shoulder towards the small office. "Sorry about the interruption. That was my new boss introducing herself. Unfortunately, the previous administrator met with an accident recently."

Dean looked to Sam, sharing an unspoken "Okay, so you were probably right" before extending a hand of his own to the professor. "We're sorry to hear about that, sir. Thank you for still taking the time out to give us a tour."

Daniels bobbed his head rapidly up and down like a meerkat and then held a hand out towards the exhibit rooms. "Oh, I've always time for *students*."

Somehow, the inflection in his voice seemed to infer the complete opposite, but he strode brusquely through the doorway anyway, and both brothers soon found they were having a hard time keeping up with his rapid gait.

"I believe this display should be of particular interest," Daniels oozed with far too much enthusiasm. "We have both human and animal variants of the mummification process here..."

Dean visibly squirmed when he realized several of the carefully wrapped items in front of him were in fact the preserved remains of cats and other small creatures.

When Daniels turned away, the elder hunter mouthed “gross” along with his best scowl before prodding one of the mummies just to check if it was real.

The “cat” felt hard and almost oily to the touch, but the thing that “squicked” the hunter the most was the coolness of its exterior. Did all mummies feel like they’d just been taken out of a freezer?

“This mummy board is all the way from England,” Daniels continued. “And to my left, we have an inner coffin from Cairo, along with granite statues of some of the more influential gods and goddesses. I’m sure you recognize Bastet and Ra?”

Sam nodded, and to Dean’s mortification rolled several other Egyptian deity names off the tip of his tongue as if he actually *was* a student of the subject. Every few steps, Sam stopped to peer closer through some of the cases, his eyes alive with genuine interest.

Okay, so my little brother turned into friggin’ Indiana Jones when I wasn’t looking...

Dean nudged Sam in the ribs with the point of his elbow. “Do I gotta start callin’ you Dr. Jackson anytime soon?”

Sam’s eyebrows almost met in the middle as they wrinkled downwards. “Huh?”

“I think your brother – if he really is your brother – is referring to the *Stargate* character and your similarly over-eager approach to the subject matter.” Daniels took a handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed at his face, wiping away beads of perspiration that had begun to form.

He was uneasy – perhaps even a little scared.

Eventually, the little man looked over his glasses expectantly. “So why are you really here? You’re certainly not students...” Daniels folded his arms. “It’s about those deaths, isn’t it? I knew that stupid rumor from New York would surface again after the guard was killed.”

“I guess we don’t exactly fit the regular student stereotype too well, huh?” Dean smirked awkwardly and slid a hand under his jacket. When he retrieved it, he held a fake P.I. badge that he quickly flashed at the professor.

“You don’t fit the stereotype,” Daniels huffed with an air of sarcasm. “Your brother I will say is a little more...um...”

“Geek.” Dean finished for him. “He’s one hundred percent, full-on geek of the week.”

“Which still doesn’t explain why you’re here, detectives or not.”

Sam moved between Daniels and his brother, hoping to keep the conversation on track rather than focusing on his academic abilities and Dean’s lack of finesse. He cleared his throat and shot his sibling a look that said *shut up*, but probably far less politely. “We’re being paid by a friend of one of the deceased to find out what’s really happening here. Can I ask what you meant by ‘the rumors from New York?’”

“Just some nonsense about a curse.” Daniels took down a long, drawn out breath. “The items on display are just artifacts, nothing more. People believe far too much hocus pocus when they should look to science for the answers!”

“Is there any reason people *should* believe in a curse? I mean, are there any myths about any of the items here being cursed or unlucky?” Sam let his eyes fall across the exhibits around them, but nothing screamed out to his finely tuned senses.

Daniels’ pupils seemed to narrow at the question, but then he suddenly began to laugh so hard Dean’s earlier conclusion that he was a stuffy little ass who had no sense of humor was shattered.

“Almost all Egyptian relics become branded with some kind of myth or curse. Back in those days it was common practice to use scare tactics. The pharaohs invented all this hokum to stop grave robbing, nothing more.”

“So, can you give us any details on the stuff you have here?” Dean gestured to the exhibit with his thumb. “Any rumors, curses, that kinda thing? I mean, if we can prove there really is no curse it has to be good for the museum, right?”

Daniels fidgeted with the small bow tie around his neck, and for a second Dean thought it was going to start spinning like something out of a Charlie Chaplin movie.

It didn't, but the professor seemed to gain some comfort from the reflex action. If he hadn't believed them before, he at least appeared to be more settled with their new cover story.

"I have another appointment in ten minutes, but I can gather all the information I have together for you later this afternoon and e-mail it over." The professor eyed Dean. "That is, if you know how to work a computer?"

Dean smirked sarcastically back at the little man. "Nah, I'm still working on my cave painting technique, doc, but my brother just might be able to manage it."

The mocking sentence seemed lost on Daniels as he walked with them back towards the university lot. Either he could be very naïve, or he was just as good as Dean when it came down to caustic sarcasm.

As Sam hastily scribbled down an e-mail address for the professor, the little man offered one last cryptic piece of information just to tease the brothers further. "You know, there is at least one item in the collection that should prove to be light entertainment for you boys..."

Dean's mouth opened and he was about to ask if they should expect the lost Ark of the Covenant, but instead his features creased into an expression of deep annoyance. "Dude, there's a *freakin' cat* snoozing on my hood!"

Forgetting the curse and any thought of work, the elder hunter scurried over to the Impala with every intention of shooing the furry feline off his paintwork. "Freaky *claw-ball* is gonna ruin the finish! Dammit, Sammy, you know how long it took to get that shine?"

Just as a hand was about to bat the sleeping cat politely off the car, Sam came to its rescue, scooping it up into his arms as if he was cradling a baby.

The black cat purred appreciatively and snuggled in closer, its paws stretching out to touch Sam's chin as if it was toying with a ball of wool. Within seconds, the friendly feline began to purr like a panther, its tiny pink tongue taking a moment to wash its savior approvingly.

Dean grimaced until his nose puckered. "Man, that is *so the best* offer you've had all year."

"We call him Ra," Daniels explained, as if the brothers were about to adopt the feline. "Ra was an Egyptian cat god, so we thought it appropriate. I'm afraid he's just a stray. I really had meant to call the Animal Control Center to pick him up, but I just haven't had the heart."

"Oh no you don't, bucko! No way is furball riding shotgun on my upholstery!" Dean caught the glint in Sam's eyes at the mention the cat was a stray, and he *fully* intended to extinguish that glint before they left the lot. "Last time you had a pet it ended badly and you know it..."

Sam tickled the cat's ears and its golden orbs glistened with pleasure. "That was NOT a pet," he snorted, watching as Ra began to purr again.

"Yeah, well, you knew we couldn't have a *real* dog being on the road and all. You were a kid. Dad thought it would shut your whining up..."

Sam glowered. "Dude, come on, a *Sad Sam* plushie for a six-year-old?"

Dean cocked his head and smiled as he climbed into the Impala. Sometimes he just had to really appreciate his dad's choice in toys – especially when it came down to Sam. "Well, you did kinda adopt the look, Samantha. Now put down *Garfield* before I use him to wipe my dash!"

Sam petted the cat on the head one last time and then gently sat it down at the professor's feet. It meowed softly and then intertwined itself around Daniels' leg, long tail swishing with contentment.

Climbing into the Impala, Sam took one last, longing glance at Ra and then slammed the door, waiting for the insults he knew would fly his way for actually liking an animal.

Instead, Dean sneezed as he cranked the ignition.
And then he sneezed again.
“Dammit, Sam, I think I’m allergic to the damn flea-ball!”
Sam grinned as his brother pulled out of the lot, sneezing all the way onto the highway.

McDonald’s Drive-Thru Later...

Sam waited patiently as his brother reeled off an order big enough to feed an entire football team. Sometimes, Sam was convinced Dean simply ate out of habit. He was a human eating machine that just didn’t know when to stop.

Right now, the young girl handing over their order was even looking into the back of the Impala to see where the rest of their group was.

Dean took the paper bags and smiled – not at the girl, but at the thought of the bags’ contents. “Not exactly steak and eggs, but it’ll do,” the hunter offered, passing the fare to his brother while he pulled the Chevy over.

Sam picked at the edge of the first bag, almost afraid to look what was inside. To his relief, it was the chicken club sandwich he’d ordered and not the “coronary” burgers Dean tended to eat. “I don’t know which is worse,” he noted. “The disgusting décor of our latest motel room, or the greasy excuse for a burger you’re munching on.”

Dean paused, glanced at the Big Mac and then shrugged, taking another huge bite. “Aww c’mon, Sammy, the room is what you call *retro*, dude.”

Sam examined his own sandwich, taking a much smaller bite as he considered it. “Retro? It looks like a leftover set from a bad seventies skin flick!”

“You mean you don’t find the mirrors on the ceiling kinda kinky?” Dean teased back, sucking down a stray piece of onion as it tried to escape his mouth. “Man, and those blow up dolls you found in the bedside table...”

“And you said the cat was the best offer I’ve had all year? Dean, your standards are slipping.” Sam screwed up his empty wrapper and was about to take a slug of Coke when his cell began to warble.

As Coldplay’s *Viva La Vida* filled the car, Dean grimaced. Sam ignored the derisory expression and flipped open his phone.

“Professor Daniels?” His brow scrunched in concern. “Slow down, Professor...”

The breathless voice and indiscernible ranting was almost unrecognizable, but in the background, Sam could hear something that sounded like tearing.

Flesh, tearing.

“No time to mail it...need to tell you...” Daniels was stuttering, and to Sam it sounded like the elder man was speaking through clenched teeth until enamel was grinding on enamel.

Was he just scared, or was there indescribable pain in his voice?

“...need your help...need to tell you in person before...” The line hissed as if something was interfering with the signal, and then suddenly Daniels’ voice was back, twice as loud, and twice as terrified. “Before it’s too late...”

Sam glanced quickly to Dean, who had already tossed down his burger, sensing something was “off.” “Professor Daniels, just calm down, we’re on our way. If you can just tell me what’s wrong maybe we can help..?”

The line crackled again, and when the volume finally returned, all that Sam could hear was a weak stammer through the veil of electrical interference. “The mummy...it’s *the mummy*...”

And then the connection was gone, lost to whatever entity had invaded Daniels’ home. As the line buzzed, Sam pulled it away from his ear and slammed it closed.

“Dean, we need to get to Daniels’ house, NOW! There’s something in there with him!”

Dean looked longingly at the second Big Mac waiting patiently in his lap and then tossed the burger and bun swiftly through the open driver's window. Cranking the engine, he yanked the gearshift into "drive" and rammed his foot down on the gas, bringing the car around full circle.

The Impala's tires bit into the gravel surface of the lot, kicking up a cloud as it sped back out onto the highway. "You know, being a Winchester is worse than Starsky and friggin' Hutch," Dean muttered as he gripped the wheel.

"Huh?" Sam remembered the retro cop show, but he didn't see the connection – well, apart from the same crappy period décor that now adorned their motel.

Dean rolled his eyes, obviously ashamed at his brother's lack of TV knowledge. "Dude, they never got to finish their food, either!"

Sam opened his mouth to suggest he didn't exactly watch the show for the characters' eating habits, but as the Chevy's rear end fishtailed dangerously across the road, tossing him rapidly sideways, he suddenly forgot what he was arguing about.

Dean *never* lost control of his baby.

And yet, as Sam watched mesmerized, the elder hunter frantically began to tear at the steering wheel, desperate to pull the car back into position before it slammed into several parked vehicles along the highway.

Sam wasn't sure if the problem was the car, Dean or something worse.

"Dude, what was *in* that Big Mac you munched on?"

"Bite me!" Dean ground out the retort but his eyes never veered from the blacktop. "Sammy, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but my foot has been on the brake pedal for the last half mile..."

Sam blinked then grabbed at the dash as the Impala swerved again, this time with such a violent lurching motion that the hunter thought the Chevy would roll.

It didn't, but for the briefest of seconds the tires left the road, giving an almost weightless sensation until the wheels slammed back down again.

Dean grunted as every bone in his body seemed to jar together. "Man, you might have something with that clown fear of yours. I'm telling you, Ronald back there sure hasn't done anything for our luck..."

The Chevy groaned as Dean guided it deftly around a sharp bend, leaving two streaks of rubber in its wake as it seemed to gain even more momentum.

"Maybe if you killed the ignition?" Sam ventured, almost biting through the tip of his tongue as the car mounted the sidewalk and then bounced back off again.

"Tried that," Dean grumbled back. "Hell, I tried everything except putting my freakin' boot through the floor and braking *Flintstone* style."

To demonstrate, the hunter yanked at the column gearshift, but even in neutral, the car's revs didn't drop.

In fact, as Sam watched, the engine's revolutions increased until the dash gauge was in the red warning section.

Dean saw the needle and barely managed to stifle a choking fit. "Crap!"

Sam's long fingers found the edge of his seat and he implanted them there, wishing that his brother drove something with airbags and side impact bars instead of ancient metal panels that afforded no modern day protection. "Tell me again why you love this bucket of bolts?"

"No way is this happening," Dean countered, pulling at the parking brake even though he knew it could roll the car at their current speed.

It didn't – the handle simply came loose in his sweating palm and he had to force himself not to stare at it. Placing his gaze back on the road, he began to curse anew under his breath. "I'm telling you, Sammy, some sonofabitch messed with my baby while we were back in the museum."

"Like who, Dean? Next you'll be blaming *the cat!*" Sam winced as the Chevy barely shaved past a Durango and then ran two sets of lights at an intersection.

Horns blared and drivers angrily shook fists through their windows, but so far they'd averted a major disaster thanks to Dean's driving skills.

So far...

"Maybe it's the curse," Dean suggested, tiny rivulets of sweat beginning to form across his brow. "Maybe it's some kind of presence."

Sam wasn't impressed. "Great! Just great! Possessed Chevy in the family..." He dared to take a hand from the base of his seat and checked the door handle, but as he suspected the mechanism appeared to be abruptly jammed. Grabbing the window lever, he quickly wound down the glass before it too decided to rebel. He wasn't particularly the right size to dive out of the car, but he preferred the option to being *highway hamburger*. "Can we rock salt a car?"

"Over my dead body, Sasquatch!"

Sam's face puckered at his brother's choice of words – especially considering what was looming ahead through the windshield. "Well, yeah, pretty soon, dude..."

Dean blinked and realized all that was missing was the tinny sound of Creedence through the car's speakers to complete the scene.

The Peterbuilt was on the right side of the road. It wasn't speeding, it wasn't veering over the center line or causing any kind of risk.

But *they* were.

The Impala was heading right for the semi, and no matter how much Dean tugged at the wheel it stayed on course, motor roaring and tires screaming.

The Winchesters seemed doomed to die by truck, and third time usually paid for all.

Missouri.

Butte County.

And now here....

The idea seemed to reach each brother's thought processes at the same time, and like two robots from the future they autonomously mouthed the same speech together.

Perhaps, together for the last time.

"Aww crap, not again..."

But fate wouldn't have it any other way.

Not for the Winchesters.

* * * *

Dean didn't hear the Latin his brother began to mumble under his breath. He didn't see Sam close his eyes and suddenly become serener than the Dalai Lama.

All that Dean Winchester saw was the semi, and the fact that his baby's steering wheel was once again obeying him.

It didn't matter how, it didn't matter why. Dean was in control of his own fate again – and that was the *only* way he liked it.

Using all of the strength his upper arms would give him, the elder hunter tore at the Chevy's wheel until it finally let him pull the car hard over.

There was a small side street that probably wasn't even wide enough for the huge vehicle, but scrunching a fender was always going to be better than going head to head with a truck and its load.

Tires screamed on asphalt and the rank odor of rubber filled the air, but the Chevy at least complied with its master.

The suspension jolted as something snagged on brickwork and was torn free, and somewhere inside, a part of Dean was torn with it. The car was an extension of him, and whoever was responsible for this attack would pay dearly.

"Sonofa..."

Dean edged the steering a little to the right, willing himself to keep the bodywork between the two narrow walls he was passing between rather than scraping against them.

In his mind, he conjured images of Luke Skywalker navigating down the Death Star's exhaust port, and somehow the bizarre mental imagery helped him nudge the car through the tight passage and out the other side.

"Are we dead yet..?"

Dean huffed. "I dunno, dude, does Hell look like downtown Philadelphia?"

Sam opened one scrunched eyelid to consider it, and when he realized the semi had vanished from sight, he sucked down a beleaguered breath. "You missed the truck..."

"Yeah, but we're not out of the woods yet. This puppy still isn't slowing." Dean bit into his bottom lip as the speedo hit fifty, even after their little altercation with the wall. He had to find a hill and fast to slow them down or they'd be Roadkill with a capital 'R' in minutes.

Taking another right far too fast, the Chevy skidded, knocking into a fire hydrant as it slewed across the road. Water erupted from the sidewalk like the town had just sprung its very own Old Faithful, but Dean didn't even notice the spray in his rearview.

Up ahead there was a hill. Not the kind of incline he'd hoped for, but *a hill* nonetheless. "Hold onto your pantyhose, Samantha, much as I hate to say it, its Demolition Derby time."

Sam opened his mouth and then closed it again as his brother headed straight up the edge of the sidewalk, bouncing the car on and off the paving slabs in an attempt to lessen its momentum.

Gradually as he watched, the needle on the dash began to drop until they were doing less than twenty miles per hour.

The only problem was, they were about to run out of hill, and out of sidewalk that didn't have pedestrians on it. "Dean, you might want to avoid hitting the kid with the puppy..." Sam grabbed at the dash again as the Chevy smashed back onto the asphalt at the last minute.

"I swear, when I find out who did this they are so wendigo chow. No wait, not painful enough...maybe I'll find me an Alp like that freak in Harrisburg. Let it mess with their head some..." Dean continued to gripe as he tussled with the car's controls like a rodeo rider on a bucking bronco.

And this was one horse he'd broken in a long time ago.

"Dude, you're heading for a *wall!*" Sam seemed to notice the small brick barrier at the last minute – which was possibly a Godsend. At least in Dean's book. There was nothing worse than Whining Sammy on top of getting your wheels trashed.

Well, maybe apart from having to trash *your own* wheels to get them to stop.

The Impala sideswiped the ornamental wall at just ten miles an hour, but even that was enough to make the brothers feel like they were about to lose their Happy Meal.

The jarring sensation was like riding a Disney attraction without the knowledge that you were secure in your seat.

It wasn't the impact or the danger that nauseated Dean, though; it was the sickening crunch of metal that meant his pride and joy had been broken.

Again.

If any *car* was jinxed, it was the Impala.

Leaning over the steering wheel he found himself short of breath, but relatively uninjured – as long as his dignity didn't factor into the equation. "Sammy, you in one piece?"

Sam bobbed his head and blinked as if he wasn't quite sure. "Man, we just hit a *wall...*"

"Yeah, well at least I didn't drive into a semi like *you* did." Dean flinched at the amount of damage *that* little fender bender had caused.

"It was a tree, not a truck," Sam corrected meekly, his features expressing the "Sad Sam" look he'd been accused of adopting earlier.

"Tree, truck – you still squished my baby..." Dean patted the dash affectionately. "It's okay baby, I'm gonna fix you up as good as new just as soon as I've kicked some ass."

"Dean..." Sam's voice trailed off and he swallowed hard until his throat bobbed. "What about Daniels?"

"*Crap!*" Dean pushed on the Impala's door, his face scrunching when the metal screeched as if in pain as it jarred open. "You thinking our little joy ride was to get us outta the way?" He asked, rapidly moving to the car's trunk. "I mean the nutty Professor was about to spill the goods on *some*thin'."

Sam shakily clambered from the battered Chevy to join his brother, eyes watching as Dean grabbed a sawed-off, shells, holy water, and an assortment of other gear. "Maybe," he conceded, taking a Remington and more cartridges for himself. "And maybe we're already too late."

Dean shot him an annoyed look. "Well don't just stand there, Sasquatch! Did that cat literally get your tongue or what?" When Sam raised a brow, he fumbled for his own cellphone and then realized he didn't have Daniels' number. "Call the dude!"

Sam jumped a little, still dazed enough from the impact not to have registered what his brother had said to him. Mentally shaking himself, he let go of his shotgun in favor of his phone.

After a minute of nothing but the dial tone, he hung up, a frown dimpling his features. "Nothing," he offered, retaking his weapon and concealing it under his jacket.

Dean nodded. He'd expected as much. "Time to shag ass, little brother."

Sam eyed the Impala warily, shifting from foot to foot as if the idea of using the car again was right up there with walking on hot coals.

"Not in *my* car," Dean reassured him. "In *that*." He pointed to a rusting Honda Civic that had probably never been polished in its life. Luckily, it was red anyway, so the corrosion didn't show too much through the paintwork.

"You're stooping so low as to hotwire a *Honda*?" Sam asked, his favorite cheeky smirk filtering through the bewildered look he'd been wearing.

"Yeah, well, I got this brother who is such a girl he actually *likes* the things," Dean snarked back as he began jimmying the car's door lock. "And besides, you gotta love the bumper sticker..."

Sam hunkered down and craned his neck to see a Def Leppard decal the size of a house plastered across the back of the car. Definitely not a good omen for what might wait for him within.

"I think I suddenly went off this model," he replied, as Dean finally dropped inside and tested the battered CD player before he bothered with the ignition.

When *Nine Lives* began to thrum through the tiny, metallic speakers, Dean began to work on shredding the dash wiring, twisting it together with his fingers as he sang along with Joe Elliott.

Are you tough enough

Is your stuff enough

Can you start it up...

Nine lives, nine times to die

I've been bitten once

But I won't be twice shy

Nine lives, nine times to die...

"Dean-" Sam ground through clenched teeth. "That is so not funny..."

The Honda whimpered into life with a pathetic cough and Dean grinned back at his brother, both proud of his handiwork and his less-than-stellar vocals. "Oh come on, Sammy, it was a *little* funny..."

“So *not*,” Sam responded as he pressed redial on his cell and prayed Daniels would pick up.

Professor Daniels’ Residence Fourteen Minutes Later...

Daniels’ house was quite the opposite of what Sam had expected. Not only was it *not* a small, conservative home, but it was in the upper class region of the city usually reserved for people in high positions on corporate payrolls.

To look at the lavish, oversized building, it was hard to believe the man lived alone.

“Lights are on in the study,” Dean noted as they left the decrepit Honda behind and climbed up a small flight of ornate steps. “Think maybe Daniels was jerking our chain? I mean, the dude was kinda hinky.”

Sam shook his head, using his longer stride to jump two steps at a time. “He wasn’t messing around. Trust me, he was in trouble.” To show his utter conviction, he slid out the Remington from under his jacket and cracked the barrel, double-checking his load. “Whatever was going on in there wasn’t pretty...”

Dean cocked his head and pressed the gold-plated buzzer on the front of the house. Inside, they could hear the bell ringing ominously, but after five minutes, there was still no reply.

Only their own reflections stared back at them from the brilliant white coating of the door.

Sam moved past his brother, slipping his hand into his jeans pocket for his favorite lock-pick tool. Before he could fully retrieve it, Dean had wafted him away from the entrance.

“Forget it,” Dean hissed, taking a step backwards to weigh up the strength of the door. “There are quicker ways.” He sucked down a breath and then lunged at the coated wooden entry with the sole of his CAT boot.

The door groaned, but didn’t give way until the second angry kick from the hunter.

Wood splintered and disintegrated, leaving behind large shards of sharp timber, but the main mid-section of the door caved inwards, leaving Daniels’ home accessible to the brothers.

“Guess I had my Weeties this morning, huh?” Dean winked as he climbed inside, ever-mindful of the spikes of wood that still projected from the door and its frame.

Sam followed, glancing around as if he expected something, anything, to jump out of the darkness at them. In his head, he could still hear Daniels’ screams, pleading, begging them for help.

And somehow, Sam already knew they were too late.

“Professor Daniels?” Dean flicked a brass light switch to the “on” position as he passed it in the hallway, but either the bulb had blown, or there were *other* forces at work in the house. “*Professor?*”

Sam bobbed his head towards a door that lay half-ajar. From its position, it probably led to the study they’d spotted from outside. Raising the shotgun in his grip, he took point, somehow feeling that whatever had happened here was his responsibility.

He’d brought them on this gig.

He’d not done his research fast enough.

Lightly pressing the Remington against the polished wood, he slid the door fully open with its barrel until they had a clear view of the room.

A huge oak bookcase lined one wall, and to the left of the window sat a desk complete with a huge green leather office chair.

The seat was turned towards the wall, and given Daniels’ height, even if he was sitting in it, they probably wouldn’t see him from this angle.

Sam cleared his throat, aiming the shotgun at the back of the chair as he tentatively took small, cautious steps into the room. Behind him, Dean adopted a similar approach, .45 in the defensive position as he slid into the study.

"Professor Daniels?"

The room remained silent, save for the portentous ticking of a cuckoo clock that was perched above the open window.

"Man, what I'd give to ventilate that freaky timepiece," Dean ventured as he swept the room like a marine, only breaking his search to scowl at the antique Hubert Herr as it began to strike the hour.

"That clock," Sam explained, "is worth more than we'll ever make in a lifetime." He spun around to the chair and quickly lowered his weapon. "Not that Daniels is going to care anymore if you decide to use the pendulum for target practice..."

Dean flicked the safety on his Colt and stuffed it into his waistband. In two quick strides, he was across the study and staring at the same dead corpse as his brother.

The remains were *probably* Daniels, but if the Winchesters hadn't met him a few short hours earlier, it would have been hard to tell.

The man's features had been gnawed and fed upon until only raw, bleeding sinew remained.

Cheek bones protruded from shredded segments of tissue that oozed blood, and two terrified eyes seemed to bulge from their sockets as if the last thing they had looked upon had been Medusa herself.

To complete the horrific scene, half a tongue jutted from a sickening, pulpy maw that had once had lips, but that could never again plead for mercy.

As the brothers examined their find, something black began to move inside the open orifice that was no longer a mouth. The thing scuttled across the pink stub of a tongue and then paused, apparently distracted by the light in the room.

"Whoa, looks like we got ourselves a real live flesh-eating scarab." Dean leaned over, eyes narrowing as the thing caught his morbid attention.

"And you'd know this because you're an expert on bugs?"

"Nah," Dean straightened, cocking his head as he shrugged. "But I saw *The Mummy*, dude. Those freakin' things were chowing down on anything that moved. 'Course there was a whole bunch of those creepy critters in the movie..." To test a theory, he retook his silver automatic and gently prodded the garish remains in its stomach.

Daniels' body abruptly moved, the bloodied white shirt bulging and squirming until for one brief second it looked like there might be signs of life in the professor.

As suddenly as it began, the writhing stopped, only to be replaced by a strange clicking sound that emanated from the crimson mouth of the cadaver. Seconds later, more of the black-shelled creatures emerged, scuttling over the body and vanishing somewhere beyond.

"That's impossible." Sam shook his head, perplexed at what his eyes were seeing but not believing. "Scarabs are basically just big dung beetles. They don't eat flesh – *human* flesh – that way."

"Yeah, well tell that to what's left of Indiana here, 'cause he don't look too hot, Sammy."

Sam paused to look around the room. Books had been pulled from the case on the wall and tossed haphazardly on Daniels' desk. Likewise, notes and official papers were strewn across the carpet and desktop.

It wasn't the kind of behavior Sam would have attributed to the dead man. Daniels was too "old school" to be so messy.

In the far corner, another table held a small PC, and that too was booted up, a university logo screensaver bouncing from the edges of its monitor as it ran in idle mode.

"I don't know what killed the professor, but I think it's pretty obvious *why*. He was gathering information on the exhibit for us, Dean, and he just paid for it with his life."

Sam picked up a handful of printouts and began to read through the data Daniels had correlated before his untimely demise.

Halfway down the third sheet of paper, the hunter stopped mid-sentence, his mouth opening as if what he had read was a bombshell of national importance.

Ignoring the document, Dean leaned in close, took a fleeting look at his gaping brother's open mouth and grinned. "Nope, don't see Jonah anywhere..."

Sam realized he was being ridiculed and quickly snapped his mouth closed, stuffing the paper he'd been reading under his brother's nose as if it would vindicate his lapse. "*Dean*, there's a mummy board in the display! And its history is pretty freaky, not to mention *deadly*. At least if you believe the legends." There was a hint of excitement in his voice as he tapped the middle of the page his brother was now holding.

Dean's eyes narrowed and he began to read, his lips mouthing the words silently until he came to one particular paragraph. At the end of the last sentence, he whistled. "Whoa, dude! *Titanic*? I'm telling you, man, you start singing Celine Dion, I'll end you myself..."

Sam expected more barbs, but instead Dean lowered into the seat by Daniels' PC and wiggled the mouse to bring up the desktop. What he saw made his face contort into a lecherous grin that Sam knew only too well.

Dean tapped at the monitor with his forefinger, pointing to a small icon in the top left hand corner. "Hey, looks like professor Moriarty had some pretty *hot* porn subscriptions going on..." The hunter hovered the mouse over the symbol and then reluctantly hit Internet Explorer instead. "I wonder what else he has locked away on here..."

Sam stuffed his hands in his pockets and was tempted to pull the plug on the machine. Trust Dean to be thinking about sex when he should be concentrating on what they'd just found. But then, after Mia, maybe Dean deserved some "no ties" fun.

He'd earned it – almost with his life.

They both had.

"Can you just stop thinking with your *downstairs brain* and do some actual research?" Sam eventually pleaded.

"Aww, c'mon Sammy, you're just antsy 'cause all you got hit on by was *a cat*. A *boy cat* at that..." Dean wiggled his eyebrows as he brought up Google on the screen. "You sure there's nothing you wanna tell me, *Samantha*?"

Sam brushed off the jibe and sat on the edge of the desk, his mind already immersing in the data scrolling across the screen. As he absorbed more, he began to read aloud.

"In the late 1890's, four Englishmen visiting Egypt were offered the chance to buy a mummy case in Luxor that supposedly contained the remains of the Princess of Amen Ra. They drew lots, and the winner paid several thousand pounds for the coffin. The man took the case to his hotel, but was later seen walking towards the desert, never to be seen again..."

Dean huffed. "Dude, you've been there, done that and lived to tell the tale already..."

"Barely," Sam pointed out, only half-listening to his brother's voice as he continued. "The next day, one of the three remaining Englishmen was shot accidentally and had to have his arm amputated. The third man returned home to find his bank had failed, and all his money had been lost, and the fourth man of the group lost his job and was reduced to selling matches on the street."

"This kinda crap happens every damn day, though. It doesn't mean we're dealing with a curse." Dean's eyes moved to Daniels' body and then back to the monitor. "I hate freakin' curses," he mumbled under his breath.

Sam felt his brother's pain. If they were dealing with a curse, it would be almost impossible to stop. Just like the one in Oasis Plains that had also involved bugs,

there was rarely any real way to stop them. They ran their course, and all you could do was get out of the way.

Sam read more, abruptly hoping they could find another reason for all the bizarre deaths surrounding the exhibit. “The coffin eventually reached England where it was bought by a businessman. After three members of his family were injured in a road accident, and his house was damaged by fire, he donated it to the British Museum. Once the Princess was put on display, the night watchmen frequently heard hammering and sobbing from her casket. Other items on display with the mummy were often hurled around the room. And eventually, a watchman died on duty...”

Dean looked up from the screen, his gaze meeting Sam’s in defeat and sudden respect for Egyptian heirlooms. “Okay, so it sounds pretty familiar, I’ll give you that, but if this is a curse, we’re so screwed.”

“But it doesn’t end there, Dean,” Sam ventured. “The museum had the mummy taken to the basement, but within a week, one of the men who carried her had died at his desk, and another was seriously ill. This report says the press got word of the curse and things got out of hand. The museum sold the mummy to a private collector, who suffered even more misfortune.”

“And Madame Blavatsky, a renowned spiritualist said there was evil in his house.” Dean wiggled his fingers in the air sarcastically. “So it must be true, huh? Yeah, I *can* read, Sammy.” He puckered his lips, this time taking the role of narrator. “So, some American yahoo bought the mummy and had her shipped on the White Star Line’s newest super boat, from there she took a swan dive with fifteen hundred other passengers aboard the Titanic – end of curse.”

“Until now,” Sam pointed out. “Even though the actual mummy was lost, the mummy board is still right here. It fits the legend, Dean.”

“So why would this thing wait all these years to start ganking some fresh white meat?” Dean tapped a finger on the computer desk impatiently. “C’mon, this thing is just *wrong*.” He started to type erratically again until the Wikipedia logo slowly formed on the monitor. “See what I mean, dude? Even this whacked out site thinks the legend is full of crap, and usually they take anything as gospel...”

Sam hunched his shoulders and flicked a chunk of unruly bangs out of his eyes as if it would suddenly bring everything into clarity. “So explain to me what’s happening here?”

Dean rubbed his thumb and forefinger over his stubble-covered upper lip, but the usual spark had vanished from his eyes. Any clue they had discovered hadn’t lead to a decent conclusion.

They were baffled.

“Dean, I think we should burn the mummy board,” Sam offered decisively. “We have nothing to lose, and everything to gain. If this story is just a myth, we’ve destroyed a rare antique. If we’re right, we could save countless lives.”

Dean pushed back in his chair, letting it tilt at an angle. “And what if torching this sucker doesn’t work?”

Sam turned and looked at the ravaged remains of Professor Daniels, wondering just where the unearthly scarabs had vanished to. Were they watching and waiting for their next command? Was someone or something controlling them from beyond the grave, just like in Oklahoma?

“Then we’re screwed,” he answered, far more casually than he actually felt. “As in big time, *titanically* screwed...”

**University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology
Philadelphia**

The little Honda wasn't proving a half bad ride. It rattled and groaned like the neighbors' lawnmower, but it wasn't half as conspicuous as the Impala and was way easier to park.

Sam almost suggested Dean do a trade for one of the cars, but as he saw the frown on his brother's face becoming ever deeper, he decided against the joke.

Dean was pissed.

The elder hunter had been mad at the world ever since Mia, but the idea of a curse he couldn't break was adding to that weight, and Sam knew it. Dean shouldered *everything*. Every damn little thing. And as far as Sam could see, one day it would be the death of his brother.

"This place is tied up tighter than your wallet, dude," Dean observed as he pulled the Honda into the same spot the Impala had previously occupied. "Security has really clamped down around here after dusk, huh?"

"After all the deaths, can you blame them?"

Dean shrugged and leaned across, hand outstretched to open the glove box before he remembered he wasn't in his beloved Chevy.

Despite their need, there would be no fake IDs tonight.

"Crap, and I had a new one all made out as Detective Olsen."

Dean loved to forge badges, but usually chose names of famous rock stars just for kicks. Sam frowned at the new pseudonym. "Olsen for Olsen twins?" He guessed.

"Nah, dude, Richard E. Olsen, get the initials..." Dean smirked at the thought of his latest creation and then pushed the Honda's door open, the familiar antique groan that usually accompanied the move eerily missing.

Sam followed, coming to the conclusion as he bumped his head on the way out, that maybe small cars weren't such a great idea after all. "I think I can get us in," he offered, rubbing at his temple as a small bump began to appear. "Just no smart comments, okay?"

"What, you mean I can't tell them you're Allan Quatermain and I'm Rick O'Connell?" Dean hopped back up the steps and waited patiently at the University's double doors.

Sam smiled playfully. "You're so not Brendan Fraser..." He reached to tug at the door, but found the glass swung inwards before he had the chance to make contact.

Awaiting them the other side was a lanky security guard who didn't seem to have one single hair on his body. His gaunt features and sunken eye sockets immediately reminded Sam of Pluto from *The Hills Have Eyes*.

From the look on Dean's face, he'd also noticed the unnerving similarity.

"You guys can't come through here," the guard hissed in a dull monotone voice. "After hours..."

"We're here to see Professor Daniels," Sam lied. "We're working with him, looking into the recent deaths."

The guard took an unconscious step backwards, his already pale skin turning almost translucent. His vivid blue eyes bulged as he spoke, making his strange appearance seem even more unnatural. "Guardin' against humans is one thing, but messing with Egyptian curses is another. I told Daniels as much, but he never listens..."

"Would you mind telling us what's got you so spooked?" Sam moved forward, taking up the space the guard had occupied.

"Maybe *Pluto* looked in the mirror this morning," Dean mumbled under his breath, only just hiding the statement with a cough as Sam elbowed him lightly in the stomach.

The guard picked up on the wisecrack anyway and huffed gruffly as if he'd heard the comment one too many times. "Lots of things," he spat back, his enormous orbs falling to the floor as something brushed loosely past him. "Like that thing, for a start." He pointed downwards, fingertips shaking as he singled out Ra the cat. "Black cats are bad luck..."

Sam leaned low, gently scooping up the purring feline. It instantly sank into his chest, snuggling down as if it belonged there. As he petted the top of its head, the cat's purr intensified until it sounded like a small motorcycle had entered the room.

"Well I'll be damned." "Pluto" scratched the top of his bare skull with a spidery finger. "That cat pretty much hates everyone around here. Guess you must be dang special, huh?"

Dean coughed again, this time partially to hide his next jibe, and partially because his throat suddenly felt like he had a huge furball stuck in it. "Oh, he's *special* alright..." A fit of undignified sneezing followed until the hunter began to redden.

The guard started to chuckle, the wall of caution he'd initially thrown up crumbling as he found great amusement in Dean's allergies. "So, I got work to do here. You pair of misfits gonna tell me what you want? Time's wasting and I got rounds to make."

"We need to get into the exhibit room," Sam nodded his head past the guard towards the darkened halls of the museum. "Professor Daniels wanted us to check something on one of the pieces."

"Pluto's" eyes narrowed and his right hand inched towards the holster on his belt. "You two don't exactly look the types to be messin' with no antiques. Maybe I should go call the professor myself."

"Yeah, well you look like a reject from a Craven movie, dude, and you work here, go figure!"

"Hey! We're both working for the same thing here." Sam pulled out a small business card and offered it to the guard. "Feel free to go talk to Professor Daniels, just be sure to get our names right." He tapped the card and then handed it over.

"Private *detectives* huh?" The guard rolled his tongue around the word "detective" as if it had a whole new meaning to him. After a moment's debate, he grinned, focusing on Dean. "Might have known you and the word 'Dick' were related..."

"Takes one to know one, *cueball*...and hey, at least I got hair..."

For the briefest of moments, Sam expected the guard to either lunge forward or go for his weapon. Instead, he settled back on his heels and began to laugh, wagging a finger at Dean like he was still in kindergarten. "Man, you got sarcasm coming outta your ass. I like that." He whirled, straightening his belt as he moved into the shadows. "C'mon *Dick*, we ain't got all night here..."

Sam leaned over a little, looking up at his brother as he set Ra down next to a huge planter. "I think he means you." He flashed a brief smile and then followed the guard into the gloom before Dean had a chance to start swinging punches.

"Ha *friggin' ha*, you're just mad 'cause I didn't let you keep the cat..."

Dean sneezed again, furiously searching his leather jacket's pockets for a tissue he knew he didn't have before the next onslaught took hold.

* * * *

Sam listened to the sounds inside the museum as they walked, noting their footfalls were the only distinct noises in the whole building. It was cold and unnerving somehow, despite the plethora of hunts he'd rode shotgun on.

It reminded him of being in the basement of the Hamilton house in Plano.

It reminded him of a *trap*.

And with the guard playing tag, there was very little he could do about it.

Burning the mummy board was probably going to be difficult enough, if there really was some supernatural force at work in here, but the security man added a whole new level of difficulty to their mission.

"Pluto" paused and flicked a set of switches at waist height on the nearest wall. Above them, two rows of fluorescent tubes began to sputter and then illuminate the area through their pearlescent casings.

“Here ya go. Don’t know what there is here to get off on, boys, but knock yourselves out...”

Dean turned and opened his mouth to wisecrack right on back, but suddenly there was nothing to come out of his throat. He swallowed, then looked to Sam for some kind of explanation for what was in front of him. “Sammy, *where the hell* is the mummy board?”

Sam’s own features contorted into a mask of incredulity and he looked to the guard for clarification. “Has there been a break in?”

“Pluto” scratched at his ear. “Um...nope,” he eventually offered. “Mrs. Chaus, the big boss lady, had it removed to storage ready to be shipped back across the pond. I guess all these rumors got the bitc...boss freaked too. But if you’re buddies with Daniels shouldn’t you know that?”

Sam ignored the guard’s question, pressing for more answers. “The crate the board was placed in, where is it being stored before shipment?” He furrowed his brow, face contorting as he became totally focused on finding the artifact before it killed again. “*Where?*”

The security man glanced at the brothers and then switched on his flashlight with the tip of his thumb. Watching the Winchesters as he walked into the nearby shadows, he retrieved a clipboard from a wall-mounted bracket and returned.

Thumbing under the two top sheets, he eventually found the invoice he was searching for. He looked up again, as if uncertainty was making him pause. “Okaaay,” he eventually drawled. “Looks like the item you’re after was packed and shipped to the Packer Avenue terminal this afternoon. No way you’re getting in there tonight, though. May as well go get yourselves a beer and wait until morning.”

“Ya think?”

Sam heard his brother start to bicker with “Pluto” again, but the words seemed to fade away in the back of his mind. It was as if he was in the museum, but his subconscious had begun to take him to another plane – just as it had in Cibola.

He glanced at the other exhibits on display through clouded vision.

They were all innocent.

They hadn’t taken hundreds of souls to a very watery grave.

He closed his eyes and suddenly he could feel the icy water at his ankles. He could hear the screams as people tried desperately to get out from the lower decks but couldn’t because the gates had been locked.

And he was afraid, just like the panic-stricken passengers he could feel pushing at him, mauling him to get free of their cast iron prison.

There was a smell in the air, but it wasn’t the aroma of fresh salt water. No, it was the scent of death.

And now that the curse was free again, more deaths would follow.

Sam opened his eyes blearily to stare the guard in the face. “We may not have that long...”

Packer Avenue Marine Terminal Sometime Later...

The darkness seemed to make the claustrophobic terminal area seem even more closed in to Dean. Container after container appeared to fill the horizon and beyond, only a glimpse of moonlight illuminating the narrow walkways between each steel box.

The hunter brought his flashlight up, allowing the beam to pan out over the insignia on the nearest container. “Man, I’m telling you this thing could be staring us in the face and we wouldn’t know it. These coffins all look the same...”

Dean's tone suggested he was pissed, and he was. He didn't like confined spaces after being buried alive one too many times, and he didn't like the feeling he was being played like a bad Bon Jovi track.

And yet, that's exactly how he felt.

Maybe it was the recent deal with Mia that was still eating at him. Maybe he just wasn't ready to take on a normal hunt ever again when he knew deep down there were worse evils in the world.

Mia's still out there...

Lucifer's still out there...

Why the hell do we do this if we can't stop freaks like that?

Was one little Egyptian curse worth all this when the Devil himself could be making war plans back in his gaudy mansion in New Jersey? Was one mummy board so important when Mia, or should that be *Emma*, was out there, probably taking out people who looked at her the wrong damn way?

Dean huffed as his boot caught on a stray piece of wire and he almost dropped his flashlight. "Crap! I friggin' hate playin' hide and seek with a piece of wood..."

"Will you just stop bitching and look where you're going?" Sam pointed his own light down the next row of containers and paused when the beam illuminated a faded serial number. "According to that, the one we're after is in the next row." He tapped an invoice he'd "acquired," waiting for Dean to move forward and pick up the pace.

"You said that twice already, Sasquatch, and all we've gotten are tin cans full of panties even your granny wouldn't wear."

"We don't have a granny," Sam offered helpfully. "But if we did I'm pretty sure she'd disown you..."

"Yeah, well, I'm an acquired taste and trust me..."

Sam chuckled, cutting off his brother's response. "Yeah, yeah, and you taste good, I know, I know." He stopped at a somewhat dented container and rubbed dust from the white-painted serial number. "This is it," he observed. "The board should be inside."

Dean swiveled the light in his hand to illuminate the container's double doors. In the muted glow, it was still easily apparent that security had done their job. There were three locks, equally spaced, and none of them looked like they were going to be easy to pick.

Dean pulled out his tools with one hand and dropped his Maglite to the ground with the other as he assessed which was going to be the easiest lock to work on. "Man, this thing has more security than Fort Knox. What are they guarding in here, the friggin' Liberty Bell?"

"They might not have great monetary value, Dean, but these things are considered priceless because they can't be replaced." Sam watched as Dean cursed under his breath as he struggled to gain access to the container.

Just when it appeared the elder hunter had been defeated by the container's defenses, the double doors creaked open an inch with a grating echo that filled the entire marine yard.

"About time, dude, you're losing your touch!"

Dean backed up, staring at the metal doors warily. While his skills had been honed over the years until he could deal with most locks, he didn't think he could take credit for this break in. "Sammy...I'm not sure I did anything..."

"Well, somebody sure did." Sam's right brow arched and he stepped forward until his flashlight beam danced off the metal walls of the container, making strange shadow creatures that flickered and bobbed like a glowing candle's reflection.

Dean followed, watching the strange lighting effects as if their flashlight-induced tango meant something.

Maybe it did.

"This place officially gives me the creeps." Dean's gaze flicked from carefully wrapped animal mummies to ornately carved statues of the gods, and every last relic seemed to mock him.

It was like having a thousand ancient spirits laughing in his ear, taunting him to come closer and dare to take a bite of the forbidden fruit. "You know, I once told a chick, 'when someone says a place is haunted, don't go in.' So why don't I ever follow my own advice?"

"Because you're too stupid?" Sam suggested, face dimpling slightly as he zeroed in on the crate they were after.

Dean pulled a small brown paper bag from under his coat and smirked back. "Or too stubborn," he corrected, emptying the bag to reveal his favorite Zippo, salt, and a small can of lighter fluid. "So what say we burn this sucker and blow this overgrown sardine can?"

"Sounds good," Sam agreed, setting down his flashlight to pry at the top of the crate. When Dean frowned at his clawing fingers pulling at the wood, he explained. "Better burn the right thing, right?"

"Dude, if we fried the whole container I'd still not be a happy honcho..." Dean began to lean over to peer through the gap Sam had made, but as the crate lid came further away in Sam's hands, the light from their flashlight sputtered and died without warning. "Well that can't be good..."

As if to confirm his statement, the container's metal doors swung ominously inwards, effectively sealing the brothers inside its shell. The metallic "clang" of steel on steel was like the tolling of some ancient funeral bell.

Dean flinched as he realized he was trapped, sealed, *buried* inside a tomb that now had no exit. "Guess you were right all along, Sammy. If we were on the Titanic right now, her ass would be sinking."

The hunter let his fingers search out his Zippo and quickly began to flick at the lighter with his thumb. After several failed attempts, it eventually illuminated the container with its dancing orange flame.

Grabbing the lighter fluid, he began to squirt a thin stream of the flammable liquid into the crate, dousing the mummy board with one hand, while he emptied the bag of salt in with the other. "Freaky curse, freaky boats..." The grumbling continued as he worked, the confined space of the container making his nerves jangle like a Navajo dreamcatcher.

"I'm pretty sure the Titanic didn't want to get cursed-

Dean didn't appear to hear his brother and he rambled further, his palms becoming sticky with sweat as the walls around him seemed to inexplicably close in. *It's in my head. Just in my head after Ellicott City...* "Dude, didn't you just wanna ventilate DiCaprio in that movie?" He eventually responded, glancing up to see Sam roll his eyes.

"Dean, maybe that's enough with the lighter fluid?" Sam reached out, taking hold of the can before his brother could empty all the contents out into the crate. "Burning fuel tends to use oxygen, dude, and we kinda might be in short supply soon." He nodded towards the closed container doors and arched a brow.

Dean thought about it.

He thought about the flames radiating from the Zippo as it began to overheat in his hand.

Burning the mummy board would probably be the death of them from asphyxiation, or whatever the stupid word was for lack of air.

"Aww shi..." Dean spun on his heels and stared at the same metal doors his brother was looking at. They stared coldly back, devoid of compassion.

Devoid of emotion because they were simple inanimate objects.

"Maybe if we burn the bitch the doors will open back up?"

Sam shook his head, eyes watching the Zippo's flame flicker and bob as if it were their only lifeline. "It doesn't work that way, and you know it."

Dean flipped the Zippo closed, allowing it to cool a moment. Much longer alight and he'd be out of fuel and have a gorgeous burn on his palm to show for it. He could stand the pain of the burn, but he didn't know how long he could stand being in the pitch black container without even a glimmer of light. *It's not a coffin...*

But it sure as hell felt like one.

It felt like one just about as much as being shut in the Impala's trunk by the woman who had betrayed him.

Bitch...

The mental image of Mia broke him from the apprehension that had been building in his gut and Dean pushed the top back off the lighter, quickly re-igniting the flame. As the darkness succumbed to the light, his eyes took a moment to adjust.

When they did, the hunter found he had to do a double take just to convince himself his irrational fear of the dark hadn't pushed him over the edge.

Crawling from the crate that held the mummy board was something the likes of which Dean had never seen before. Long, spindly legs that seemed to have knuckle joints protruded from a body that appeared half-scorpion, half-spider.

And there was more than one.

In fact, as the hunter watched open mouthed, more and more of the things began to scuttle from the crate, their legs tapping on the wood and then louder as they dropped, hitting the metallic surface of the container floor.

"Sammy, I ain't likin' what I'm seeing here..." Dean took a step backwards, eyes wide with uncertainty. Ghosts he could hack, but bugs were best left to pest control.

He pulled his best sawed-off from under his jacket and took aim, not caring if he got splattered with the creatures' flesh at such close range. Holding the shotgun with just one hand, he pulled back on the trigger, the recoil forcing his arm back as two rock salt shells blasted the crawling monsters.

Even point-blank, the ammunition had no effect save for filling the container with a deafening cacophony of booming sound waves.

"Dean, just take it easy!" Sam held out a hand, worried about firing weapons of any kind inside the confines of their metal prison.

"*Easy!* Dude, those things are way too much like those creepy-assed xenomorph critters in *Aliens* for me to want to even be on the same planet with them!" Dean couldn't take his gaze from the clambering creatures as they scurried closer to his position. "I'm telling you, Sammy, no way are those freaky things sucking on my face!"

Dean's hand jolted across to his brother, offering up the Zippo while he grabbed two more shells from his pocket and rammed them into the shotgun.

"Dean, it's okay. I know what these things are. I've seen them on Discovery. They're harmless camel spiders." Sam moved in front of his brother to try and calm him, but the elder Winchester wasn't going to be easily placated.

In his world, things rarely played by the rules, so why would these creatures be any different?

"Harmless huh?" Dean scoffed, sucking down a breath of air that tasted of gunpowder and lighter fluid fumes. "Well freakin' dung beetles don't eat humans either, but Philadelphia is now less one professor because of their bug asses!"

Dean fired again as one of the larger-than-life spiders dared to poke a leg from the crate. As the biting rock salt showered its limb, the thing retreated, only to be replaced by several more of its irked brethren seconds later.

It was like the evil arachnids were multiplying every time Dean dared to blink.

"You're just scared," Sam taunted, hoping the jibe would shake his brother enough for Dean to see sense.

Dean tossed the useless and very empty shotgun onto a packing case and huffed. "Damn *straight!* And you should be too unless you're planning on using your funky Jedi mind control on them anytime soon?" As Sam's face changed to one of insecurity, Dean seized his Zippo back.

If he couldn't shoot the spiders, then maybe he could burn them to death.

Maybe it was the rapid snatching of the lighter that caused the flame to go out.

Maybe, just maybe, it was the curse playing out its next kill.

Dean wasn't sure which choice he liked better, but as the container was plunged into a raven black darkness where no shadows fell, he knew without a doubt what would come next.

"Dude, can you see anything? Can you see those freaky things? 'Cause from where I'm standing I can't see jack."

Somewhere to his side, Sam moved. "I can't see them, but I can *hear* them..."

The camel spiders were on the move.

Not just one spider, but from the ear-filling sound of scratching on metal, it appeared there were hundreds of the things.

Scurrying.

Attacking.

And if Daniels' house was anything to go by, they wouldn't stop until their mission was complete.

Sam spun around in the black void. "Just don't panic... they won't hurt is if we don't panic..."

Something brushed Sam's arm and he instantly recoiled from its cold, unearthly touch.

A clattering sound as Dean's shotgun was suddenly knocked to the floor reverberated through the container, but Dean didn't bitch.

In fact, he didn't say anything at all.

Sweat trickled down Sam's face and he gulped, taking down excess and very precious air. "Dean," he whispered. "Dean!" The plea grew louder with every thud of his heart. "DEAN!"

And somewhere in the cramped limits of the container, Dean screamed.

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology Philadelphia

Elmer Clark took a right into the museum's main exhibit hall and stopped. It was a night like any other night, but the two guys who'd visited earlier had somehow made him jittery.

There were some mysteries between heaven and earth that just shouldn't be messed with, and Elmer was thinking he might just be stuck right in the middle of one.

He hadn't always been a security guard, but the job had just suited his freakish appearance. The sarcasm he'd gotten from the young detective earlier in the day happened all of the time, and eventually he'd decided to use it to his own advantage.

Elmer knew he looked like Pluto, he knew it because he suffered from the same screwed up condition as the actor who played him.

Hypohidrotic Ectodermal Dysplasia they called it, but all that Elmer knew was that it had gotten him bullied at school. People were afraid of what they didn't understand, and that was why he'd taken up being a guard.

In this job, fear was a good thing – as long as it was the outside world that was afraid and not Elmer.

The problem was, tonight, Elmer wasn't sure anymore.

He wasn't sure his bizarre appearance would afford him any kind of protection from what was hiding within the museum's walls.

Elmer clicked on his flashlight and wafted the beam along the display cases until a sound from one of the antechambers made him pause.

The noise had come from the exhibit room the detectives had been interested in.

The exhibit that was supposed to be cursed.

Sucking down a breath until the cool intake of air made the nerves in his teeth jangle, Elmer moved towards the display. If something was in there, he'd be ready for it. It had to be a student messing around.

There were no such things as curses.

No such things as ghosts or spirits.

The false bravado carried the guard as far as the exhibit room door and he realized the light in his hand was shaking. The beam that had so carefully carved out his path trembled so violently he couldn't see anything in the room clearly.

"Come on out of there before I report your scrawny asses to my superiors!" Elmer's voice cracked as he tried to stay calm. It *had* to be kids.

The sound came again, like a scratching sound on wood, but still there was no real sign of movement save for the guard's tentative footfalls as he forced himself further into the room.

The sound intensified as he grew closer to the objects on display, as if his presence was the catalyst for the strange anthem.

"I'm gonna so cream your asses..."

Elmer stopped. There was a new sound behind him like someone dragging a piece of furniture. He whirled, just in time to see a mock sarcophagus that should have been secured to the wall dancing on its front edges.

There was no way something that heavy could be moving on its own.

No way its strange tango across the museum could be happening, except it was.

Elmer dropped the light in his hand, his fingers flexing to draw his weapon. The sidearm seemed to stick in its holster, and it took both hands to retrieve it.

The sarcophagus wasn't afraid of human tools of destruction and continued on its path, bullets bouncing from it harmlessly as if it had been covered in a double thick layer of Kevlar.

Elmer screamed in terror just once – just one last use of his vocal cords before the thing knocked him to the ground, crushing his bones like a salvage yard's metal compactor.

Blood pooled from the guard's nose, mouth, and lips, his wild, dead eyes still eerily illuminated by his discarded flashlight.

Packer Avenue Marine Terminal

Dean could feel the long spindly legs sticking to hidden flesh until he felt totally covered by the creatures. It was like a blanket of bugs, crushing him, smothering him, *biting* him.

Harmless camel spiders, Sam had said.

Didn't hurt humans, Sam had said...

Yeah, right, then why are the friggin' things chowing down on me like I'm the main course?

Two more of the spiders latched on, tearing at his flesh – or at least that was what it felt like – until Dean couldn't help but yelp in pain.

The hunter could usually tolerate *a lot*, but this was so undignified, it was *so wrong* to go out like this, "death by bugs."

"Dean!"

Sam's voice was frantic, and somewhere on the floor, Dean could hear his brother searching for something. Maybe he was rooting for the shotgun.

"Sammy, burn these bitches!"

Sam didn't reply, but a thin beam of light signaled that he'd found their lost flashlight and somehow managed to tease it back to life. The beam was muted, as if the newly replaced batteries were being drained of their power, but the meager illumination it offered was still better than the raven black nothingness they'd had before.

Dean brushed off two of the spiders that had attached themselves to his flesh, leaving angry red gouges behind. Ignoring the stinging sensation, he kneeled, retrieving his shotgun.

Taking a quick aim, he fired off both barrels at a slew of the creatures that had now focused on Sam. "Dude, these are some fugly-assed critters!"

Sam didn't respond, but used the can of lighter fluid he'd taken from his brother earlier and began to squirt the flammable liquid on every spider he could see.

The creatures seemed to sense impending doom, and any stragglers that had still been attacking Dean refocused on the younger brother.

One of the larger spiders appeared to jump from the container floor, even though the move was technically impossible for it to make. Landing on Sam's shoulder, it poised itself to bite, but was yanked away at the last minute as Dean joined his brother in the fray, intent on burning their enemy.

Holding the creature for just one moment by one of its long, arachnid appendages, Dean grimaced. "And you think *clowns* are bad? Dude, you're weird...." He tossed the spider across the container, letting off two barrels at it as it landed by the doorway.

Sam shrugged. "Hey, you were the one always dragging me in for a Big Mac when I was a kid. Too much of Ronald at an impressionable age, dude." Lighting up Dean's Zippo, he let the flame lick against the floor just long enough for the dispersed lighter fluid to ignite.

A small flaming path erupted across the container, tendrils shooting off toward the doused camel spiders until the area was alight with their burning bodies.

The odor of searing flesh intermingled with gunpowder and lighter fluid until the air was thick and almost too harsh to breath. If it had been bad before, it was almost intolerable now.

Dean sucked down a lungful anyway, relieved that the "xenomorphs" had been defeated without Sigourney Weaver's intervention.

Wiping a grimy, sweat covered hand across his mouth, Dean turned to look at the open crate that had caused their imprisonment. "We should finish the job and fry this freaky thing before it shoots us anymore surprises."

"We'd be burning more air, Dean, and I think we're in pretty short supply of that already..."

"Dude, we won't need air if Miss Egypt B.C. decides to send more creepy critters our way." Dean held a hand over an already swollen bite on his forearm, and when his fingers came away bloody he huffed.

"Okay, I'll take care of the board, you start looking for a way out. Sound good?" Sam handed his brother the flashlight, using the bobbing flame of the Zippo to do his work.

Dean took the waning light and nodded. "Best plan I've heard all day – second to finding food." He winked, heading for the container's double doors.

As he walked, he could feel the scorched bodies of the spiders crunching under his CAT boots, and he cringed.

At the far end of the container, the huge metal gates awaited him. From inside, there really was no way to release them – especially when they were locked by a curse, not a standard security system. "Life's a bitch, then you get suffocated by one," Dean mumbled as he turned in time to see the mummy board's crate engulfed by flames.

"We're not gonna die, Dean," Sam consoled as if he was privy to more information than most.

Dean's upper lip quirked in that sarcastic way that meant he wasn't convinced. "Oh yeah? Well, these two doors here say otherwise, unless you happen to have a hunk of C4 tucked in those girly panties of yours?"

“Not exactly, but we could maybe make some...” Sam’s loose bangs bobbed, his head nodding towards an open crate to Dean’s right. “That thing is packed with Styrofoam...”

Dean’s lopsided, almost evil smirk appeared. “Oh Sammy, you *do* watch *MacGyver* after all...” The elder hunter skirted an unopened box, ignoring the stinging in his thigh as its sharp edge caught one of the spider bites.

Tugging at the open crate’s contents, he began throwing priceless artifacts across the container as if they were items in a garage sale. Tonight, the only precious commodity in this place was the one that could set them free.

“Can you do it?” Sam held the ebbing Zippo flame above the packing case as his brother pulled out sections of white foam. “I mean, do we have everything in here to make this thing um...go bang?”

Dean nodded, eyes fixed on the Styrofoam as if he was an Al-Qaeda bomber. “Trust me, this thing will go boom, boom, boom, better than *The Yardbirds*.”

“Huh?”

Dean continued to work on his impromptu bomb, fingers weaving so quickly he could have been an expert at needlepoint had he been born a girl. “Dude, *The Yardbirds*?” The look of disgust on his face said it all. “Eric Clapton? Sammy, the man is a friggin’ guitar legend right up there with Hendrix, Page...”

Sam wasn’t impressed. “Can *he* get me out of here any quicker?” The Zippo hissed, its flame dying slowly in the hunter’s hand as the fluid within finally ran dry. “And don’t forget,” he pointed out a little too knowingly, “even if your ‘bomb’ works, we’re in a closed environment. We could go up with it too...”

“Sammy, you’re just so negative-“ Dean finished his makeshift explosive, eyeing it with pride as if it was a cake ready to put in the oven and bake. “We just stick this thing by the door, light it up before my Zippo goes AWOL and we’re home and dry.”

“Or home and extra crispy...”

Dean ignored the remark and carefully carried his “device” over to the center of the double door. Placing it where he expected the best effect, he took the waning Zippo from Sam’s hand and winked. “Better to burn out than fade away, dude.”

“I’m so gonna regret this...” Sam scrunched his eyes closed and dived behind the nearest set of packing cases.

Within seconds, Dean had joined him as the container lit up in a crescendo of light and heat.

“*Sonofabitch!*”

It was like being napalmed.

No, it was like being napalmed in the confines of a metal coffin without one single place to hide that wasn’t flammable.

And yet, somehow, it worked.

As the heat from the explosion slowly dissipated, Dean realized that his skin actually hadn’t been flayed from his bones by the intensity of the blast, and he was, in fact, very much alive.

Removing the palm that had covered his eyes, the hunter finally saw what his disorientated pupils thought was light.

Moonlight, to be precise.

Moonlight through two container doors that had been wrenched open by his jury-rigged bomb.

“I’m so never going in a sauna again, not ever, not even if Lindsay Lohan was in there naked,” Sam grouched as he pulled away from the sizzling crate that had once been his cover.

“*Naked?*” Dean pushed away from the container, brushing away red hot cinders from his clothes as he made a beeline for the exit. “Man, you’re *such* a liar...” He stopped at the buckled metal container doors, eyeing his handiwork. “C’mon, Sasquatch, what say we go sink a beer and some chow. Those freaky things gave me an appetite the size of a house.”

"A beer sounds good," Sam conceded, turning just long enough to see the last remains of the camel spiders disintegrate into ashes as if they'd never existed.

* * * *

The Honda was pretty much turning into Dean's worst nightmare – at least, that was the way he saw it. The more places they needed to go, the more the car seemed to come into its own.

He'd wanted to ditch it after the professor's house. He'd wanted to ditch it after the marine terminal fiasco, but still the damn thing came back like a restless spirit.

Maybe if the Impala could be possessed, then this thing could be haunting his ass?

Dean shook his head as he let the wheel slide through his fingers, gently guiding the little car into a small diner's lot. "Next time I want to hotwire a Honda, shoot me, okay?" His eyes slid to Sam, who patted the car's dash affectionately.

"Aww, and I thought you two were bonding..."

"Sammy, do you really like those pretty boy teeth of yours?" Dean cut the ignition and raised a brow. "So, you want your usual wuss-assed veggie crap or you gonna partake of some real food?"

"Veggie crap," Sam chuckled. "And a Diet Coke."

"Course," Dean drawled as he climbed from the Chevy. "Can't put any sugar in there, too much of the stuff already floating around in that soft head of yours..."

Sam flipped his brother the bird and smiled, tuning in the Impala's radio to an "indie" station as he brother crossed the lot and entered the diner.

Dean noted the finger and decided payback for the "hand signal" would come later. Right now, his stomach was ready for whatever "May's Marvels" could deliver.

He let both elbows rest on the counter and smiled at the fifty-something-year-old who seemed to have resided there forever as she sidled up to meet him.

"What can I get you, honey?"

"I'd like a double cheeseburger with extra onions and..." Dean's gaze met the menu on the counter, but then flicked upwards as he heard a news bulletin on the TV perched above the register.

"We can now confirm that there has been yet another mysterious death at the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Unconfirmed reports are saying a security guard was crushed to death when a display exhibit came loose..."

"Given the fact that there have already been two unusual deaths at the museum, could there be a serial killer at work, or are rumors of a curse really something to be afraid of...?"

"Is that guy for real?" Dean scoffed at the reporter's attitude. Maybe he was after promotion, maybe he was just a total jerk. The problem was, a death at the museum was a death that shouldn't have happened, not after they'd fried the mummy board.

Tossing some loose change on the counter, he didn't wait for the food order for which his stomach was in such dire need.

Within a heartbeat, he was back at the Honda, yanking on the tinny little door so hard it almost sprained the hinges.

"Sammy, I just knew this whole Titanic thing was way too friggin' easy!" Dean bounced behind the wheel, his face a mask of annoyance. To prove it, he slammed a palm against the dash so hard it physically hurt. "Pluto just bit dust, dude, and despite being a jerk I don't think he deserved to be part of this mess."

"I heard," Sam acknowledged, head dropping as if he were in mourning. "It was just on the local radio station. Maybe he was dead before we finished the job?"

Dean sucked down a breath and stared his brother in the eye. "Are you willing to take that risk?"

The car's interior was filled with silence save for the muted crackling sounds coming from the radio.

Eventually, Sam rubbed his temple, brushing away the hair that hung in abundance there. "I guess not," he admitted. "We need to find out more about that exhibit before anyone else dies..."

Motel

Sam wasn't sure which was worse, the apparent lack of new clues, or his brother's frustrating behavior.

Dean meant well, he always did, but after Sam had been seated at their laptop for about five minutes, Dean *always* began to fidget, call Sam names, and eventually mess around.

Tonight was no exception.

"I'm telling you, Sammy, something has been off about this gig from the get go. The whole Amen Ra legend is right out of a Spielberg movie, dude!" Dean flicked a peanut M & M across the table and grinned when it landed in his brother's half-full coffee mug.

"Dean, I'm *trying* to work on this."

"You've been sat on your butt for three hours and you got squat. Admit it." Dean stuffed a handful of his favorite chocolate in his mouth and then crumpled up the empty bag in the palms of his hands. His eyes narrowed as if he was considering lobbing the ball at Sam, but he apparently reconsidered when Sam's scowl indicated *little brother* was pissed.

"Aww c'mon, Sammy, give it a break. Go grab another coffee while I take a look." Tossing the scrunched bag in a nearby trash can he snagged the laptop from Sam's knee before the younger sibling had time to protest.

"Dean, if I catch you surfing that porn site you found on Professor Daniels' computer..." Sam's voice oozed a warning tone, but in truth, he was glad to get away from the glaring screen for awhile.

Three hours in front of the small monitor had made his eyes tired and gritty, and he rubbed at them absently as he moved across the room to the coffee pot under the window.

With his back to Dean, he'd poured only half a fresh mug out when his brother began to curse excitedly.

"Well I'll be damned..."

Sam whirled back around and was at his brother's side in less than two seconds. Was it possible he'd been so weary he'd overlooked the obvious and Dean had found it already?

Leaning over Dean's shoulder, Sam let out a sigh of frustration when he realized his brother was looking at a web site about cats. "Man, you're just not gonna let me liking that cat go are you..?"

Dean glanced backwards at Sam and clicked his tongue reprovingly. "Oh Sammy, you're lookin' but you ain't reading!" He tapped the screen with the back of his hand, the metal of his ring clattering again the glass unexpectedly. "Says here, cats can be evil little suckers in some cultures, or revered gods in others. You do the math, Geekboy..."

Sam latched onto the feline mythology page's contents and started to read out the most important sections, even though Dean had already scanned the site. "During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a widely held belief in central Europe that cats could possess a corpse and turn a dead human into a vampire..."

"Guess I hit the mark when I called them suckers..."

"People kept cats out of rooms where a dead body was laid out, and if a cat managed to wander into the room accidentally, it was chased and killed because in the original vampire legends the vampire not only sucked the blood of its victim, but then injected it into a recently dead body, thus reviving it and claiming possession."

Then the revived body could do the bidding of the devil..." Sam's eyes widened. He'd never really associated cats with evil before.

Sure, he knew all about them supposedly being witches' familiars, but mostly that was just the stuff of fairy tales.

"And you wanted one of these freaky things riding shotgun in the Impala, dude," Dean chided. "And it gets worse. In Egyptian mythology, cats were worshipped big time. Gods and all that crap." He looked almost pained as he had to make the next revelation. "No wonder you couldn't find our bad guy, Sammy, you were searching in the wrong place..."

Sam dropped down hard onto the edge of the bed and ruffled a hand through the front of his hair. Had he so easily been blinded? Hadn't they learned their lesson with Mia never to take anything at face value?

But a cat?

"We were looking for the mummy of a person, when we should have been looking at those animal mummies," he sighed. "I think I read some of the cat remains came from the ruins at Bubastis – the most holy place where Bastet, daughter of Ra was worshipped."

"Yeah, Ra ringing any bells in that hunk of wood you call a head, Sherlock?" Both Dean's eyebrows arched upwards.

"It can't be the cat. It's just a cat..."

"I knew that friggin' thing was creepy. Man, look what that little bitch did to my car!" Dean shuddered and shook his head. "You think we're dealing with a simple feline spirit here, or something more?"

Sam retook the laptop from his brother's knee and scrolled down further, clicking the touchpad to move onto the next page. "Maybe something more," he offered, eyes flicking from paragraph to paragraph as he power read the next section. "It says here that Bastet was considered the nicer of two female cat goddesses. Sekhmet also took cat form, and some of the mummies also came from Memphis where she was worshiped."

"Oh great," Dean rolled off the bed and slipped a hand to his .45, checking the clip as if it somehow comforted him. When it didn't, he began to nervously pace in front of the still researching Sam. "So we gotta find one cat stiff among many before it tries ganking our asses."

"It gets worse," Sam grimaced. "Sekhmet was also known as 'Mistress of Dread' and 'Lady of Slaughter.' If those cat remains came from Bubastis and Memphis, it's most likely her we're dealing with." He looked up from the monitor in time to see Dean's face pale just a little.

Maybe it was Sam's imagination, maybe it was a trick of the light as the moon reflected through the window. Or maybe Dean was thinking that gigs involving anything of the female persuasion usually ended badly for the Winchesters.

Dean didn't seem to notice his brother staring at him and nodded distractedly as he stuffed his automatic back in his waistband. "Slaughter sounds about right for this bitch. How many more would she have offed if we hadn't found her?"

"A lot, Dean." Sam turned the laptop around so the screen was facing away from him and Dean had a full view. "Sekhmet almost destroyed mankind once, and was only thwarted after falling for a carefully planned ruse. Maybe she's been trying to finish off the job ever since..."

"Sheesh, we gotta put up with hybrid demon chicks, a new age Lucifer who thinks he's the friggin' Godfather to boot, and now we got ourselves a rabid goddess who likes to chase mice in her spare time..."

Sam's head dropped and he realized he didn't have an answer to Dean's little tirade. Maybe if he hadn't made the wrong call and blamed the mummy board, then lives could have been saved.

How long had Sekhmet been killing over the ages like this?

How many more Titanics had there been throughout history because one evil creature ran free among men?

A creature I held in my arms and actually felt sorry for...

Sam shuddered, not even realizing that Dean had stopped pacing and was now staring at him intently.

In fact, Sam didn't see anything in the room anymore, because in his mind he wasn't in it. Wherever his subconscious had led him, it was a much darker, scarier place...

RMS Titanic

02.18a.m. April 15th 1912

Dooley didn't remember how he'd gotten out of the cargo hold. There had been so much water, such cold, *icy* seawater.

And *blood*.

The blood hadn't been his, but as the scarlet liquid had filled the frothing sea at his feet, he had been afraid of it. Afraid he would be next.

And yet, he had remained in the cargo bay until he'd gotten the thing that was now tucked under his arm. The thing McGarry had unwittingly given his life for.

Maybe it wasn't worth anything. It certainly wasn't what Dooley had been expecting. But still, treasure was treasure. Surely someone would pay when they found out Patrick Stewart Dooley had risked life and limb to save it from the sinking hulk of the Titanic?

As if to disagree, the White Star liner groaned beneath the Irishman's feet, her decking becoming harder and harder to keep a footing on as her aft section rose further and further from the water.

Dooley felt his throat bob reflexively, and he grabbed a handrail just as the ship moved again, this time lurching downwards as more and more of her decks were sucked under the freezing Atlantic.

A crewman yelled out for people not to crowd the few lifeboats that were left, but as the Titanic's lights flickered and then grew dim, there was little chance his words would be paid any heed.

The Titanic was sinking, and fast. Dooley was going to die here if he didn't come up with one of his wily plans, and soon. He shifted the weight of the package under his arm and dared to pull his body forward over the handrail.

Churning beneath him, totally free of the ocean were the Titanic's mammoth screws. They still turned as if the ship was moving at full steam, but there was no chance they could save her now.

The noise from the props seemed to fill Dooley's ears like a mantra telling him over and over again that his greed had gotten him killed, but his mind fought back. *No, I'm goin' to get outta this mess, and I'm goin' to the New World. I'll show them all...*

The Irishman sucked down a breath, feeling the frigid nighttime air seep into his lungs. If breathing in caused such a chill inside his body, then what would it be like in the water?

Dooley didn't really need to look beyond the swirling screws to the Atlantic to know. If he stayed on the ship, he would be dragged down to Davy Jones' Locker along with the her, but if he jumped, he would more than likely die from hypothermia within minutes.

The ocean was already awash with people who had taken the plunge, their listless bodies bobbing as the sea's current pushed them. If they weren't already dead, they were dying.

In the distance, Dooley could see the few lifeboats that had made it off the Titanic. Why hadn't there been more? Why had a ship hailed as unsinkable been taken so easily by Mother Nature?

He felt his breathing begin to quicken, not from the icy temperatures, but from McGarry's words. His old friend had said they had caused this by opening the crate. *They* had brought death to hundreds.

Dooley shook himself, perilously trying to keep his grip as the decks beneath him became almost vertical. No, this wasn't his fault, this was all because the captain had been going too fast and the crew hadn't been diligent enough.

Hell, maybe even the stupid designers had got their math wrong, because it was way easier to believe than some stupid hokum McGarry had thought up.

Dooley laughed then, several other passengers looking at him as if he truly were insane as he began to sing along with music that still played from somewhere aboard the ship. "There let the way appear steps unto heav'n; All that Thou sendest me in mercy giv'n; Angels to beckon me nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!"

In the nearest chimney, metal began to groan as too much stress was placed upon it, and as Dooley continued to sing the hymn, rivets exploded from their positions, shooting across the decks like deadly projectiles, strafing all that stood in their way.

Anytime soon, the chimney was going to snap, and when it did, the Titanic would go with it.

Dooley's mind took in the picture before him. The mayhem, the death. He had worked at the Harland and Wolff shipyard, and he knew what would happen next – and that even more death would follow.

Taking another terrified look over the railing, he knew there really was no choice now. He had to jump or drown anyway.

Closing his eyes, Dooley took hold of his package with both hands and let his body tip over the guard rail.

It was strange really, but for a few brief seconds he felt like he was totally at peace – like he had died already and was floating somewhere above the earth on angels' wings.

The euphoria was short lived, and as his scrawny body hit the Atlantic he gasped in surprise and shock. It was colder than he'd expected, so much colder. He opened his eyes, gasping down air and taking in icy salt water with it.

The salt made him gag, and the freezing tendrils licking at his body made him want to kick out, to try and swim anywhere to keep his limbs moving and alive.

And still, as he flailed helplessly in the ocean, he refused to let go of the water-logged parcel. It would be his savior. It would bring him wealth.

Something sprung up in front of him, bouncing in the water, and Dooley realized it was the lifeless body of the man he had overheard talking. The man who had said there was treasure.

The Irishman pushed the corpse away, its frozen-open eyes staring at him like a garish mannequin. He had to swim faster, harder, until he reached one of the elusive lifeboats. He had to make his tiring arms work, no matter how hard his muscles said it was impossible.

A piece of debris floated in front of him, and Dooley exhaled in relief. It was a wooden partition door from the ship, and if he was careful he could use it as a raft.

Heart beating like a madman, Dooley tossed his all-important package onto the door and then tried to join it. Long, starvation-ravaged fingers slipped time and time again as he attempted to get a grip on the slippery timber surface.

Maybe it was the newly lacquered sheen that was making it awkward. Maybe it was the swelling ocean – or maybe he wasn't supposed to be saved.

Dooley heard the last dying breath of the Titanic behind him, and he whirled in the water in time to see her gracefully slide under the surf to her last resting place.

My last resting place...

He turned back again, numb finger ends never really having a chance at latching onto the raft he had prayed for. His arms began to join his hands as they slowly began to lose all sensation.

There would be no treasure, and no New World – at least not for Dooley.

Dooley's wild eyes strayed to the package. He was too weak to try and save himself anymore, but the thing within the parcel had made sure it had been rescued.

McGarry had been right after all.

They had brought this curse upon the Titanic, upon its passengers and crew – and maybe now the world too.

Now that this thing was free, he had served his purpose, and it would consume him too.

* * * *

The crewman manning the lifeboat had never been part of a real maritime disaster before, but he'd known from friends who had that he couldn't take his little wooden boat anywhere near the Titanic while she was in her last death throes, for fear it would be sucked down with her.

Now that the White Star liner was gone, it was another thing.

Swinging around the light in his hand he paused on a fleeting form in the water. A figure holding onto a piece of debris.

A survivor.

"Over here!" He pointed to the men manning the oars and then to the beam of his light. "We need to move this way!"

The half-empty boat nudged slowly across the ocean until it was level with Dooley's makeshift raft.

The door and its small package bobbed next to the lifeboat, but as the crewman nudged Dooley he didn't move. There was no way he could.

The little, rat-like Irishman was frozen solid to the door, fingers still outstretched as if he'd been trying to clamber up right until his last breath was taken.

The crewman looked away, momentarily blaming himself. Then, his eyes strayed back to the package. If the dead man had saved it first, it must have meant a great deal to him.

Leaning carefully over the side, the sailor grabbed the small parcel and brought it aboard the lifeboat. It felt cold – almost too cold – even in these conditions.

Taking a loose edge, the crewman removed the outer wrappings to reveal the damp, but not damaged remains of a mummified cat...

"Sammy? Sam?"

Sam blinked, hearing his brother's concerned voice as the vision in his head began to lose focus, the clarity of the picture blurring as the last ancient reel of memory came to an end.

"Sammy, will you *talk* to me here?"

Sam snapped back to reality, back to the warmth and relative safety of the hotel room.

He shivered nonetheless, still feeling the sharp Atlantic breeze biting into his flesh. "I saw it." He swallowed. "I saw what happened to the Titanic."

"Yeah, well you scared the crap outta me." Dean had been hunkered over, and at the sight of Sam rejoining him in the real world, he straightened up and shook his head as if things were just getting too much. "And what do you mean, you saw what happened. Big ship hits iceberg, big ship sinks, right?" At Sam's lack of response he

turned and huffed. “Unless you’re gonna tell me the friggin’ cat led a mutiny and scuttled her...”

“Someone found the mummy somehow. I’m betting once it was free from its confines the curse took hold and...” Sam scrunched his nose as he recalled the screams of women and children as they either froze to death or drowned, right before his eyes.

Damn the visions.

Damn his stupid, freaky gifts.

Maybe Dean had been right to dub them *demonic*. Even if the original source wasn’t tainted, it sure as heck felt like the powers only ever brought him heartache.

Dean seemed to sense his brother’s pain and laid a palm on Sam’s shoulder reassuringly. “I know it’s hard, Sammy. I know how much seeing all this crap takes out of you, but it happens for a reason.”

“Seeing the DiCaprio version was enough for me, Dean. I really didn’t need to know just how sugar-coated that was...”

Dean bit into his bottom lip and then picked up the Impala’s spare keys from a side table. He grunted when he remembered the car had been towed to a local garage and he’d need to make do with the “evil Honda” instead. “You gotta think, Sam, because whatever you saw might help us put this bitch down. We gotta kill your friend Scratchy before he, she or whatever the damn thing is, offs a few more mortals...”

Sam nodded.

Maybe the Titanic’s final seconds had been shared with him for a reason after all.

He just hoped the Winchesters weren’t about to join the final death toll because of something he might have missed in that vision.

* * * *

Dean let the security pass slide through the reader and then smirked with pride when the small set of LEDs on the front turned from red to green. The reader chirped pleasantly and then the museum’s rear delivery entrance clicked open.

“Told you my plan would work,” the elder hunter said self-assuredly, slipping the stolen card back into his jacket pocket as he stepped lithely inside. “Good ol’ Pluto never knew it was gone...”

Sam cocked his head, agreeing that slipping in the back way was infinitely better than trying to pass the cop the local precinct had left on duty. “You’re archaic, you know that? You belong in a Dickens novel or something.” He flicked on his flashlight with his thumb, only to have its beam swatted downwards by his brother.

“Sammy, can’t you make do without that thing?” Dean scowled, not attempting to illuminate his own light. “Freakin’ cats are way better than humans in the dark. That bitch is probably sneaking around this joint right now listening to us.”

“Or maybe you’re getting paranoid in your old age?” Sam suggested, switching out the light just in case his brother was right.

“No, unlike you, I just intend to *reach* old age, Sasquatch. Now can we get on with the gig? This whole place is starting to give me the creeps. I mean, what kind of culture *pickles* its dead and then wraps ’em up like a tortilla, anyhow?” Dean bobbed his head towards the exhibit that seemed to be haunting them and began to walk warily over to it.

He’d only made it about halfway, when someone screamed.

It wasn’t the best scream he’d ever heard: They were usually reserved for Hollywood movies and overpaid actresses. But on a scale of one to ten, the hunter would definitely have given the screamer a seven.

The terrified yelp seemed to come from the adjoining corridor, and forgetting the display for a second, both brothers launched into a sprint towards the darkened passageway.

Dean hit the entrance first, almost barreling into the woman he'd seen Professor Daniels talking to earlier. She still wore red, but was looking far less like an intimidating bitch, and much more like someone about to scream – *again*.

"He's dead! He's *dead* and I can't get out. Not even the main door..."

Dean let a small list of expletives make it to his tongue, and then bit them back. There was only one thing worse than a panicked woman, and that was a panicked, *babbling* woman.

"Hey, *hey*..." Dean took the administrator firmly by the forearms and tightened his grip just enough for her to feel more secure. Somehow, he pushed away the underlying urge to shake her just a little, and instead tried to look her in the eyes enough for her to calm down. "Listen to me, just slow down. Take a few breaths..."

Jeez, the face and figure of a model and jumpier than a friggin' jack rabbit...

The soothing approach had little effect and the normally ice-cool executive began to tremble, her words becoming more and more incoherent. "He's dead, blood everywhere, can't call home, can't call anywhere..."

The woman's pupils seemed to grow wider and she tried to pull away from the hunter's grasp, obviously realizing he didn't belong on her museum's payroll.

Oh for crying out loud, Dean chided the woman in his head, knowing that subtle just wasn't going to work. He took down a long breath and then lightly shook her arms. "Listen lady will you just calm the hell down and tell us what happened here?"

The hunter's voice was raised enough to earn a scowl of disapproval from his brother and a look of suspended disbelief from the woman.

She blinked several times in quick succession and then rubbed a shaking palm over her forehead as if it would help her make sense of what was going on.

"Please, we're here to help you," Sam soothed. "But we can't do anything if you don't tell us what's going on." He raised a brow, pulling away his brother's hands so that the woman stood on her own, shaking and still very afraid.

"My name is Selfi," she offered quietly. "Selfi Chaus. I'm the new administrator here. I was working late – catching up on all the paperwork that had been left since my predecessor's demise." She locked both hands together, wringing them nervously until her knuckles whitened. "I'm not a superstitious woman, I didn't believe the curse. Not until tonight..."

"What happened tonight?" Sam pushed, concern flushing his features as he shot a glance to Dean.

"The police," Selfi explained. "They left a man behind after the guard was found. Something about stopping the whackos coming to look at the cursed museum and such. But now, now he's dead too...just like the guard."

"So you're telling us there's a dead cop to add to the body count?" Dean's hand itched to draw his .45 but he resisted. Things weren't exactly going down as he'd hoped, but he doubted his weapon would be any more help than it would have been against the "xenomorphs." Add to that, he was wanted by the cops, and was now involved in a case with a dead officer, and he was getting jittery to say the least.

Selfi seemed to pick up on his nervousness and her own fear appeared to feed on it. "Very dead cop," she reaffirmed. "And that's not all. The main doors – any door – won't open. The phones are all down too. All I get is a buzzing noise. It's horrible, like a million locusts are trying to squeeze down the line. And then there's the alarm system..."

Dean's face changed from an expression of uncertainty to one of confidence and he pulled out the security card he'd taken from the guard while he'd still been in the land of the living. "Well, sweetheart, I think maybe I can explain the alarm..."

"But the rest?" Tears began to fill Selfi's eyes and she stepped closer to Dean, perhaps feeling the need just to be close to someone, anyone, even a total stranger. "Can you explain the cop decapitated by a wire too? His head is back there on the floor." The administrator glanced into the darkness of the corridor and then looked away as if the memory of the dead man was too much to bear.

"A wire?" Sam's brow scrunched. "How does a wire fit into the curse?" He tapped his flashlight back on and let the beam play across the open passageway, but the cop's body was apparently beyond its reach.

Selfi rubbed moisture from her face, streaking the makeup she'd obviously painstakingly applied that morning. "Head wires," she clarified, "were sometimes used in Egyptian tombs to catch and kill grave robbers. It is – or rather was – the done thing back then, right along with curses, releasing toxins into the tombs, snakes, and all the other colorful traps you see in the movies."

"So now *you're* believing in the curse too?" Dean's voice cracked with annoyance at the thing he was hunting, and if punching the wall would have done anything but break his hand, he'd probably have shot his best right hook at the painted plaster boards that surrounded him. "Sammy, it's time we burned Sylvester at the stake, dude, before Tweety Pie here loses a few feathers." He turned to Selfi. "Listen, some of the cat mummies you have cooped up in this joint are from the ruins at..?" He looked to Sam for clarification.

"Memphis." Sam filled in the blank. "We're looking for any remains from Memphis."

The girl thought a moment, her pale features draining more and more until she appeared almost translucent in the dim light. "There are two cat mummies from there actually in the display, and one out back in the preparation room." She stammered a little. "How...how can an ancient dead animal have anything to do with this?"

"Trust me, sister, this thing was never just an animal, dead or alive." Dean scratched at his head in concentration. Three mummies and only two hunters. It was as if the damn thing wanted to split them up. *Just like Mia did...*

"Sounds like we'd be quicker to split up to get the job done. 'Course, that could just be what this furry critter wants..."

"Job? What job?" Selfi seemed calmer now, more alert – which also meant she was more suspicious. "You never did introduce yourselves. And you're obviously *not* cops." She looked them up and down with a sudden air of superiority that almost sent a shiver down Dean's spine. Damn if he didn't hate it when women pulled that holier than thou crap with him.

"We're working for Professor Daniels," Sam stepped in, a warning glance telling his brother to keep quiet. "Or, rather, we were until his demise. Call this unfinished business." He flashed her the fake IDs he'd used before.

"And you think it's a curse? A *real* curse?" The administrator didn't seem to know whether to laugh, cry or curl into a ball until the first hints of morning light appeared, assuring her it was all a bad nightmare.

"Something like that," Dean answered without committing himself to any further lies. "Let's just say the world will be a lot better off without a few stuffed kitties."

Selfi blinked again, and for an instant Dean thought she would protest at them burning museum pieces. It was her job, after all, to protect the artifacts, not destroy them.

Instead, the woman simply stood in the center of the corridor in silence. Her eyes seemed to stare into nothing, as if they had seen too much already to last her for all eternity.

Sam tapped his brother's arm, pulling him to one side, and again the girl didn't seem to notice. "Dean, she's in shock. It's not every day you get to see someone's head come off like that...and now everything else. It's just too much for her..."

"So what do you suggest we do with her while we go fry the kitties? It's not like we can escort her outta the building first, dude." Dean glanced over his towering brother's shoulder, but Selfi wasn't listening to them.

She was afraid.

She was the typical woman in distress that Dean hated dealing with.

"We'll have to take her with us, Dean. We can't leave her alone. Look what this thing does to anyone who gets in its way." Sam turned too, following his brother's

gaze. "By telling us where the cat mummies are, she just unwittingly signed her own death warrant."

"No way, Sam, I'm so not taking a chick with me..."

Gigs with girls always go wrong, Dean's mind was screaming at him, begging him not to give in to his sibling.

Sam ignored Dean's plea and launched into the first throes of their usual rock, paper, scissors routine. It had been the easiest way to sort out sibling disputes since they'd been kids and usually worked out better than throwing punches.

Although given the result, Dean would have preferred the punches. "Best of three?" He asked desperately, but Sam just shook his head and laughed. *I so don't want that chick dragging her tail behind me...even if it is a pretty damn fine tail...*

"I'll take the main display. You two lovebirds can go play *happy families* in the preparation room." Sam wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, and then turned his back to Dean and Selfi, quickly padding back towards the exhibit room before his brother really did start throwing a right hook his way.

"Wise ass!" Dean frowned at the fleeing form of his brother and then looked to the museum administrator.

Selfi was looking at him as if he was something that normally resided under the heel of her best Stiletto. "I don't play happy families with anyone, Mister...?" She puckered her nose until wrinkles formed across its bridge, realizing in her fear she hadn't even paid any attention the two men's names.

"Just call me Dean," the hunter offered, tapping his tiny Maglite into life. "And don't worry," he added caustically. "I don't *do* families, period. At least not happy ones. Now c'mon, show me this freaky dead critter so we can both have some peace."

Selfi's face briefly twisted into something akin to a smile. "Families *scare* you, Dean? Or is it the relationship side you just can't handle."

Moving forward into the corridor, Dean gestured with his light, ushering the girl ahead to show him the way. "Love 'em and leave 'em always works best in my profession," he smirked, and then added under his breath. "Kids, now *they* scare me..."

* * * *

Sam knew Dean was edgy, and he knew why.

This was their first real gig since Mia had torn his brother's heart to shreds. Sure, Dean was playing the perfect brother and hunter, but he was far from over what had happened.

In fact, he was far from over Mia.

Mia shouldn't have been able to play him the way she had. He shouldn't have let his defenses down, and yet, he had.

Now, and maybe for a long time to come, Dean was going to be second guessing every decision he made, wondering if he was doing the right thing.

Sam could understand the logic behind it, because to an extent, he felt the same way.

Mia had played him too, just like a harp, and he had let her.

But that doesn't mean we have to think every choice we make is the wrong one. Dean needs to trust the instincts that brought him this far. I need to trust the instincts he taught me...

The light in Sam's hand began to flicker, just as it had in the container at the port. Before he could even tap the switch, its beam fizzled to nothing, dropping him into a darkness that seemed almost unnatural.

There were no shadows, no stray shafts of light from the intersecting passageways.

There was only a swathing blackness that conjured fear – this darkness was the bringer of death – and Sam didn't need his gifts to know it.

“Dean?”

The word bounced off the corridor walls but was instantly muted by a louder, stranger noise.

Sam craned his neck, willing his ears to identify the new sound, but it was like nothing he'd ever heard before. The closest he could think of was from a documentary on TV he'd watched about car design.

But that cacophonous barrage had been inside a wind tunnel.

Still, the roaring grew in power until it was almost deafening.

It's like standing on a runway next to a jet engine, Sam fathomed. Except jet engines didn't find themselves in museums of archaeology.

Sam tried to turn back. Maybe Dean's light was still working. But whatever was making the noise was now also pulling at him, tugging at his limbs and forcing his legs to sway as if he had no mental control over them.

It was impossible, and yet somehow Sam realized he was being pelted by a storm-strength wind. And this wind was hot – like he was standing in a desert.

The word “desert” stung the back of his mind like the scorpion sting that had once stranded him in the Sonora. Sam *knew* what it felt like to be stuck in a wasteland of sand and dunes. He *knew* what a sandstorm could feel like.

And remarkably, this was it.

Even though he couldn't see one tiny pinpoint of light, Sam still closed his eyes, conjuring the reports he'd read on Sekhmet back up into the forefront of his mind.

The Goddess' breath is said to be like a hot desert wind...

So she was here, and she knew the Winchesters were here too.

Sam spun around, fighting the debilitating gale to attempt to return to the relative safety of Selfi Chaus' office. Maybe he could regroup with Dean there. Maybe Dean would burn the cat any second and it would all be over.

He forced one foot forward, followed by the other, but it felt like he was wearing a space suit, and the heavy weighted boots were sucking him back, gluing his shoes to the floor tiles.

That was the pleasant part.

While his body refused to move more than a few inches at a time, his skin was being lashed at by something – and it was more than just hot air. Sam had felt the burning sensation of rock salt cutting into flesh before. It was par for the course in his job, and if he hadn't known better, that was what this felt like.

Someone was hitting him with a constant stream of the stuff until it was taking off the upper layer of his skin better than any Boo Hag could. Except that was as impossible as the wind now tearing at him.

We shouldn't have split up.

It was an obvious statement, but one Sam continued to scold himself over as he banged his flashlight into the palm of his hand, begging it to offer assistance.

For a second, the beam guttered, and the hunter could at last see what was hitting him.

The bizarre current of air gushing through the corridor was so intense it was breaking up the sandstone floor tiles beneath his feet, reducing them to their raw state. While this might not be Egypt, Sam was nevertheless stuck in the middle of a sandstorm with no respite.

There was no source for the wind, no beginning, no end.

To confirm the hopelessness of the situation, Sam's waning flashlight sputtered and then died again. There could be no light in this place of darkness.

This scene mimicked the eternal gloom of a goddess' final resting place.

This was what it was like forever, inside the inner chambers of an ancient pyramid.

Except Sekhmet had defied it, defied her fellow gods to once again torment the living.

I need to cover my face and hands. Cover anything that's exposed, Sam's brain kicked into survival mode, the most basic instincts surfacing and pushing all other thoughts into submission.

He had to survive. He had to stop his skin being lashed from his body until only raw, weeping flesh remained

Sam pulled the hood he normally never used over his head, wrapping it carefully over his features. Stuffing his peeling hands into his pockets, he launched his body forward, diving rather than trying to walk towards the end of the corridor.

The door was so close. So close, and yet so far away as the sand at his feet began to grow, deepening, swelling like the Sahara was being emptied into an hourglass, and that hourglass was the museum.

Sam landed just a few steps from the doorway, but it felt like a mile. His legs were sinking into the sand, his outstretched hands were burning as the coarse particles lanced into the exposed skin, and worse still, his eyes were stinging until he was forced to close them or be blinded forever.

The irony of his predicament wasn't lost on the hunter and he laughed, the wild zephyrs of sand filling his mouth as he accepted his downfall had been due to the simple human frailty of showing a helpless animal his affection.

The cat hadn't been the helpless one after all.

It had been the hunter on this gig. And a damn fine hunter it was too.

Sam's bleeding fingers dug into the sand and he tried to crawl forwards despite the forces lashing at him.

And somewhere in the blackness, he could have sworn he heard the deep, pleasure-filled purring of a cat.

* * * *

Dean watched as the museum administrator sashayed in front of him. It was weird, but she seemed to have lost all her fear once she'd begun the walk back to the prep room.

Of course, Dean would have liked to have thought that being in his presence had boosted her morale, but he knew women too well for that. No, Selfi was pretty much an over-confident bitch who treated her employees badly. He could tell that much from her attitude with Daniels.

She was the kind of person that once over the initial shock, wouldn't give a rat's ass about the dead cop, or anyone else for that matter, as long as she didn't break a fingernail or ruin her favorite skirt.

The hunter considered telling the admin as much as they paused outside the storeroom, but just as he opened his mouth to comment, he felt his nasal passages start to tingle.

It was a human alarm bell that he couldn't stifle, and within seconds, Dean was creased over, sneezing so hard anyone would have thought he'd been showered with pepper.

The fit lasted for over thirty seconds before he was able to straighten up, eyes bleary with tears and face redder than Selfi's attire. "Friggin' cat..." Dean winced and glanced at the girl. "Better watch out for a black furball with attitude, sister – and I don't mean the stuffed kind – at least, not until I've finished with it."

Selfi's returning confidence seemed to falter and her nose puckered again. It was a tendency Dean was starting to notice more and more. *And they say I have bad habits...*

"The mummy is being worked on through here," Selfi assured. "It should be in the storage locker at the back." She pointed to the door and then let a hand slide to the brass handle, twisting it to slip inside.

Dean followed, eyes darting along the wall for signs of the obligatory light switch that had to be around somewhere. “Man, don’t you just hate it when the bad guy can see better in the dark than you?” he muttered as he moved behind the girl.

Selfi shrugged, unaware that the shadows she was walking towards could hide a multitude of sins. “I’ve never really been afraid of the dark...”

Dean forgot the lights, watching the girl as she took petite steps across the room. She wasn’t bothered by the lack of light, or the fact that the place she was heading was the perfect place for someone, or something to be hiding.

The hunter’s head cocked and he paused mid-step, allowing the beam from his Maglite to cut in front of Selfi’s path.

She flinched as the shaft of light illuminated her route unexpectedly.

“Don’t go any further back there...”

Selfi turned and Dean was waiting for her, the sawed-off he’d had hidden under his jacket now pointing straight at her chest.

“Did you really think I’d be fooled by another skank bitch like you?” Dean’s lips furrowed in disgust. “Been there done that. Recently. Once bitten, catgirl...”

Selfi’s mouth opened, and for a moment it looked like she was going to feign shock. Then, she smiled, the almost translucent skin texture from earlier returning until Dean thought he could actually see the bones beneath.

“There never was a cat mummy back here, was there?”

The flesh around Selfi’s lips stretched, and she smirked. “I wouldn’t take a hunter to the last vestiges of my mortal form, now would I..?” She shrugged. “How did you know?”

Dean studied her, his gaze never faltering. She was like Mia. *Just* like Mia, only maybe worse because she was actually a deity – albeit an evil one.

Selfi didn’t want to talk, not really.

All she wanted to do was buy time so she could try something.

And I doubt the rock salt shells I have are gonna do squat against this freak.

“Let’s just say I’m allergic to the feline version of *The Evil Dead*, sister.” To prove his point, Dean’s nose began to prickle again and he launched into yet more sneezing.

The respite was all the goddess needed, and as the twelve gauge shook in the hunter’s hand, she dodged into the awaiting shadows, using them for cover.

Dean fired anyway, hoping that some of the salt would hit its mark and at least buy him time. Both shells’ contents were wide, however, and the salt simply dissipated, leaving only a white frosting across a nearby workbench.

“Shit!” Dean tucked and rolled, deciding to use the bench for cover until he could locate the girl. As he dived behind the relative safety of the wood, he cracked his shotgun’s barrel and stuffed in two more shells. “Daniels, you so shoulda gotten Animal Control in here...”

As if in answer, something struck the bench hard, its sharp tip digging into the wood and partially exiting next to the hunter’s left ear.

He jolted away from the arrowhead in a knee-jerk reaction and then gaped as he realized the goddess was somehow firing flaming arrows at his location.

Sammy said something about this bitch destroying her enemies with arrows of fire, Dean recalled as he pulled away from the bench and let off another two barrels of salt at thin air. Great, Sasquatch gets to play burn the cat while I go head to friggin’ head with William Tell...

Dean bobbed back behind his cover just as another burning arrow sliced through the air, narrowly missing his head. He winced, convinced he could smell some of his hairs actually singeing from the near miss.

Shoving in yet more shells, he took down a long breath and waited.

Thunk!

The next arrowhead hit home, gouging a hole in the plasterboard behind him.

Dean took the impact as his cue and rolled across the floor on his stomach, hoping Selfi was expecting any attack to come from a higher position.

Using the extra few seconds his position afforded, he was able to actually *look* where he was aiming and not fire blind.

Dean's finger tensed on the trigger as he saw a shape move among the shadows. A shape more feline now than human. He pulled back, feeling the recoil as the shotgun slammed back against his shoulder.

And then, she screamed – not a woman's scream – but a cat-like screech that would probably have been more at home in the jungles of Africa.

With the yelp came movement, and the strange silhouette seemed to ripple and reform until it was almost invisible.

Dean watched in fascination as the cat-woman's elusive profile made a spurt for the doorway and had vanished into the ether of the outer corridor before he had chance to reload.

"Well I'll be...furball made a dash for the kitty litter..." Pushing up on his elbows, Dean dodged towards the fleeing figure, snapping open his weapon to stuff in more rock salt as he moved.

Thunk!

Another burning projectile tore into the room, and this time it didn't miss its target.

Dean felt the shaft of wood penetrate his right shoulder, entering just under his collarbone and jerking him backwards with its momentum. At first, there was no pain, only the realization that he'd let a cat get the better of him.

He hissed through gritted teeth as the tip slammed into the wall behind him, effectively holding him in place like a corkboard pin.

The sensation of being literally skewered angered the hunter more, and Dean began to squirm, dropping the shotgun as the injury made his hand begin to tremble.

As the weapon clattered uselessly to the floor, Selfi magically reappeared in her human form, a soft burble that was probably a purr rolling from her tongue. "You underestimated me, hunter," she cooed. "I am a *goddess*, after all..."

Dean scoffed, the agony from his wound seeping through his bones as he ground out the flippant sneer. "Lady, I don't believe in *your* kind. You're just another form of supernatural trash for me to take out..." He snapped his left hand up, grabbing at the protruding quill and snapping it off before the goddess had time to blink.

With the obstructive feathers removed, Dean dragged the weight of his body forwards, feeling his flesh tear as he pulled free of the arrow's shaft. The movement was fast but agonizing, and he slumped to the ground with a grunt.

Selfi laughed then, savoring her enemy's pain as he was splayed out across the floor tiles, leaving a sheen of scarlet as he writhed.

The goddess was too confident, enjoying her victory before she had truly won the war.

Dean had expected as much. He wanted to be on the floor. No, *needed* to be on the floor.

Grabbing the lost shotgun with his good hand, he rolled onto his back and aimed the weapon point-blank at the still-mocking goddess.

Selfi's sneer turned to a look of complete disbelief and she instantly began to shimmer, her body contorting and shrinking instantaneously until she was once again the simple cat that Sam had fallen for.

The black feline's hairs prickled and its golden orbs glowed like shimmering fireflies.

Then, she was gone, vanishing into the museum like the wraith she truly was.

Dean let his quivering forefinger release from the trigger. If the cat or her human form returned, he may need the shells to hold her off. And in his condition, reloading wasn't exactly going to be easy.

Using his elbow for support and his legs for drive, he managed to drag his back up against the wall. As he sat panting, blood had begun to pool beneath him in a deep

ruby hue that told the hunter his injury was far more serious than just a simple shoulder wound.

He slid a hand under his jacket anyway, pressing against the oozing opening to try and staunch the flow.

Sammy was out there somewhere, and maybe if he burned the mummified remains of the cat quickly enough, there would still be enough time to get help.

Maybe...

* * * *

Sam didn't know how he'd crawled away from the sandstorm. He hadn't recited any life-saving Latin rituals, or used any of his uncanny abilities, and yet for some reason the vicious squall had abated enough for him to escape.

Perhaps the thing instigating the mini-tempest had been distracted, or maybe Dean had gotten to the other mummy and it had been the right one, but whatever the reason, Sam was thankful for it.

Brushing away coarse sand from his clothes with raw, weeping palms, Sam padded towards the display with a new sense of purpose. He looked from mummy to mummy until he found what he was looking for.

Two carefully swathed kitty corpses.

Leaning over the guard rope, Sam read the plaques on each mummy and nodded to himself. Only one of the pair came from Memphis after all – so this was most likely the one he was after. Scooping the feline under his arm, the hunter turned tail, deciding with a sudden sense of foreboding that he needed to find Dean before he torched the cat's remains.

Carefully avoiding the corridor still filled with sand, Sam took a second hallway that led behind the preparation room and up to its other entrance from the main exhibit area.

As he turned the corner leading to the doorway, the hunter stalled, coming to a halt as his gut did a double somersault of Olympic standards.

Ra, or rather Sekhmet in cat form, had just darted from the prep room and almost passed under his feet.

Sam nearly dropped the mummy he was carrying in both surprise and trepidation. Dean had been heading for this room with the girl.

Dean wouldn't let Sekhmet just make a run for it unless...

Forgetting the fleeing feline, Sam picked up the pace, his conscious thoughts telling him everything was okay, but his subconscious warning him otherwise.

Skidding into the preparation room doorway, Sam had to bite back the urge not to gag at the amount of blood on the floor.

His *brother's* blood.

"Dean!" Letting his legs crumple beneath him, Sam dropped to the floor on his knees until he was level with his brother.

Dean's wary eyes rolled to his and then to the swathed parcel beneath Sam's arm. "Sammy, burn her..."

Sam ignored the plea and gently pulled back his brother's jacket, assessing the damage the goddess had inflicted. Even though Dean's hand was still loosely pressed against the wound, blood was literally spurting from between his fingers in a deep scarlet that could only mean one thing.

I can't deal with this. I can't... Sam looked away, not wanting Dean to see the hurt in his eyes, the hopelessness in his expression. *The way he's bleeding...*

But Dean saw it anyway. Had always seen what was lost in his baby brother's eyes. "Will you just kill the friggin' thing? I'd like the bitch to at least go out before I do."

Sam pushed away the plea, fumbling in his pocket to find the cellphone that had suddenly become so elusive. Perhaps it was panic making his fingers refuse to work,

perhaps it was the knowledge that no matter how quickly he called an ambulance, and no matter how soon it arrived, it wouldn't be soon enough.

Eventually, Dean's eyes boring into him, begging for one last thing, made Sam give up on the call.

Dean was bleeding to death, and if he was going to die here, then Sam would see to it that his brother got his last wish. *Why can't the damn amulet work against any evil? Why can't I fix this like I fixed myself back in Plano?*

It wasn't fair.

Nothing was fair, and Sam didn't like that.

Maybe that's what his gifts were ultimately for? Evening the odds?

So why the hell couldn't he ever even them up for his family?

Sticking a hand in Dean's jacket, he retrieved the Zippo his brother held so dear. It was smeared with his brother's blood – a reminder that this was way more personal than any other salt and burn they'd been on.

"I'll be back, Dean, I swear." Sam shook his paling brother's good shoulder, trying to rouse him. "Just stay awake."

Dean's lips moved to respond, but he obviously didn't have the energy to force a reply. Instead, he blinked, the ever-soulful eyes saying a thousand words his throat couldn't.

Sam nodded an acknowledgment and then scooped up the cat mummy from where it had rested on the carpet. It felt cold again – dead – just like Dean would be no matter how quickly Sam dealt with Sekhmet.

And for that, the goddess would pay.

Heading back out into the corridor, Sam's head twisted left and then right in uncertainty. The creature was still within the museum walls, and if it wasn't aware he held its remains, then maybe it would return to the display where they'd been on show?

Jogging to the end of the corridor, he paused in the doorway, scanning the exhibit room for his enemy.

"Shouldn't you be with your brother, Sam?" Selfi was waiting for him, the red material of her clothing pulsing with a color not born of man. She was pure energy – pure evil. "I hear dying from blood loss isn't the nicest of deaths. Of course, it's way better than I gave Daniels. Such an old fool. He was so pathetic he couldn't even tell the sex of a cat..."

Sam stepped further into the room, avoiding the shadows that seemed to dance around him a little too unnaturally.

Just how much could a goddess control?

Sliding the cat mummy from behind his back, Sam held it outstretched, allowing Selfi to see that he'd doused her remains with lighter fluid. In his other palm, he held the still-bloody Zippo he'd taken from Dean.

"Cats might have nine lives, but unless you fix what you did to Dean? You just used up your last one..." Sam flicked open the lighter and used his thumb to strike up a flame. He smiled, hovering the dancing orange fire under the soaked mummy.

The heat from the Zippo began to singe the swathing, almost catching light on its lower surface. Tiny wisps of grey smoke began to curl away into the air, but Sam held fast, eyes locked with the Egyptian deity's.

Selfi hissed as she felt the warmth from the lighter on her illusory body and she backed away as if the movement alone would save her. "What makes you think I can do anything for your brother now? Or that I would let a mere human like you blackmail me?"

Sam's smile tightened. "You can undo what you've done. It's one of your gifts, just like all the other magic you're capable of." He held the Zippo closer to the mummy. "Fix Dean, or burn. Your choice..."

"How do I know you won't burn me anyway, once your brother is healed?" Selfi began to pace around Sam, like a tiger stalking her prey. Her eyes glowed, pupils

shaped in the more ovoid form of a cat's. "Give me my mortal remains and I will do as you ask." Her voice became indistinct as the words slurred until she was almost purring. "Or Dean dies."

"Heal Dean, or you both die together." Sam let the bottom edge of the mummy ignite, just for a second, before snuffing out the tiny spark of a flame with his hand.

The heat seared into his already raw flesh, but he ignored it. He ignored it all *for Dean*.

Somewhere inside, he felt a familiar burning, an inner strength beginning to awaken. It tingled, the sensation filling his skull until he wanted to grip both sides of his head to relieve the pressure building there.

If Selfi was aware of his internal struggle, she didn't show it.

All she cared about was the mummy, and as just one tiny part of it had burned, one tiny part of her had too. She hissed again, teeth baring to reveal sharp fangs that definitely didn't belong in a human mouth.

Sam stepped back as the cat-woman roared, a small portion of her cheek blackening where he had burnt her carcass. "Fix Dean," he ground out, the overheating lighter scorching his flesh as he still brandished it under the mummy.

Selfi growled again, anger literally burned into her feline features, and then, in a blink of scarlet light she vanished.

There was no warning.

No way to track her.

Sam's shoulder muscles relaxed and he realized he may have blown his one chance to save his brother and send Sekhmet back to the dark side. Playing a bluff was all well and good – but sometimes it didn't work.

He looked over his shoulder, uncertain whether he dare go back to Dean. What if he was already too late?

Before he could move or make a decision, however, Selfi returned in a second explosion of scarlet light.

The goddess let out a slow feline growl, nails that had taken on the appearance of claws scratching at the air as if she wished it were Sam's flesh. "It is done..."

Sam blinked. Could it be that easy?

The hunter doubted it. While Selfi obviously didn't trust him – he trusted her even less. He hesitated, wondering what the girl would do if he refused to hand over the mummy.

Selfi sensed the indecision and held out a paw-like appendage, flexing the muscles so that her claws once again sprang wide. "Hand over the remains..."

I can't let her get away with this, Sam's mind screamed at him, begging him to burn the mummy before all of mankind suffered its evil curse. But could he really be sure Dean was safe? Could he burn the remains not knowing what horrors the prep room may hold for him?

She could have finished Dean off. Done even more hideous things...

But somehow, it didn't matter.

Sam was a hunter, and this was what Dean had wanted.

Sam let the lighter's tapered flame lick onto the wet swathing, igniting the mummy in a ball of flame so bright he was forced to drop it or burn along with the ancient cloth strips.

Before the fireball hit the ground, Selfi was upon him, pouncing, claws outstretched in an attempt to kill her enemy.

Sam felt the talons dig into the flesh on his back and rip downwards as the cat-woman tried to maul him. He pushed away, trying to roll from beneath her, but simply succeeding in making the tears to his back even deeper.

"You'll die with me, hunter!" Selfi/Sekhmet spat wildly, arms repeatedly attacking Sam until he could only throw up his own forearms to protect his face.

Selfi was a goddess, and no matter how strong he was, he was no match for her powers.

Or was he?

Sam's mind flicked back to the sensation he'd felt when he'd first approached the creature. The inner burning, the inner struggle. He closed his eyes, willing that energy to return.

Every gift Selfi held, he could have too.

Every supernatural power within her reach was within his too.

I can save Dean!

The hunter's eyes flicked open with the realization that he needed Selfi to be able to mirror her healing powers. Without something to reflect from, Sam was nothing more than a psychic kid who had bad dreams.

And now he was too late.

As her body burned, Selfi had given up her attack on the hunter and had backed away, feline eyes locked on the smoldering heap that had once been her mortal form.

The more blackened and charred the mummy became, the more Selfi's physical shape deteriorated. Flesh became ash and bones became dust until the Egyptian deity simply crumbled to the carpet and then vanished into the ether.

Sam bolted upright, right hand extended as if he could somehow pull her back from the netherworld to which he had just banished her, but it was too late.

Selfi was gone, and maybe Dean with her.

Sam pushed up on his elbow, pushing away the soreness of his exposed flesh. He had to get back to the preparation room. Maybe it still wasn't too late to call 911.

The hunter knew differently, but he clambered to his feet anyway, sprinting across the museum with only one thought on his mind.

Reaching the doorway, he stopped, taking a deep breath before entering.

Dean was just as Sam had left him, his limp body leaning against the wall in a pool of his own blood. There was no movement, no snappy comment or sarcastic dig.

Just blood.

Sam knelt anyway, his heart's pounding seemingly coming from his throat instead of his chest.

Perhaps if the legends were true, Sekhmet could heal the people she had harmed, but faced with her own destruction, would she have done so..? To Sam, as he took in his brother's motionless form, it didn't look like it.

"Dean..?" Sam's voice was but a whisper as he slowly reached out to touch Dean's neck. *"Dean?"*

"What the..." Dean's eyes snapped wide open and his body jolted so hard Sam could have sworn someone had run an electric current through his brother.

The reaction was contagious, and as Dean jumped in surprise, Sam jarred backwards, almost pulling a muscle. "I thought..."

Dean heaved down air and then let his tired gaze fall to the drying blood he was sitting in. Following the trail to his jacket, he lifted the soaked material and blinked in disbelief when the hole that had been there minutes before was now nothing more than a patch of opaque scar tissue. "Dude...*how?*"

Sam shrugged. "Maybe it was time for her to give back a little of what she's taken over the years."

Except that wasn't it, was it?

There was a chance Sekhmet really had held true to her deal and healed Dean. Perhaps the blackmail had really worked.

Or perhaps the queasy feeling Sam was getting in his stomach was because he had healed Dean using the goddess' powers as his own. It wouldn't be the first time, and it scared the hunter to think about it.

If he had fixed Dean, that meant his gift was growing in strength. It was happening more frequently, and would keep happening until...

...Until maybe I actually turn into the thing Haris wanted me to be all along..?

Dean didn't seem to notice the distant look in his brother's eyes and patted a scorched section of Sam's coat approvingly. "Please tell me that means you killed Nermal...?"

Sam nodded, letting his deepening fears wash away for a moment as he gave his shaken sibling a hand up.

Dean staggered to his feet, swaying a little from the blood loss that still afflicted him. Taking hold of the wall for support, his slightly bleary eyes looked his brother up and down and he grimaced.

"Dude, you look like a bad make-up guy's version of Freddy Krueger..."

Sam followed Dean's critical gaze, realizing that his body suddenly felt raw enough for him to have been an extra in *Jeepers Creepers*. How he looked was anyone's guess. He smiled anyway, because the curse was broken, and Dean was still very much alive.

Cuts would heal, flesh would knit as long as the Winchesters had each other.

"Yeah, well maybe I feel like Freddy Krueger," he admitted. "So, how about that burger and a beer, huh?"

Dean cocked his head. "Just as long as we eat in, little brother." He patted Sam on the back. "Cause lemme tell ya, you'd freak out Ronald McDonald himself if you went in looking like that..."

Sam's smile turned into a grin. "McDonald's it is then," he beamed, thinking of the clown that had freaked him as a child. "Payback's a bitch, huh?"

Billy Ray's Hotdog Stand...

Dean stood beside the Impala, arms resting on her roof, hands interlocked in contemplation. He should have died back in the museum and there were only two possible reasons why he hadn't.

One of those reasons was now ambling back from Billy Ray's stand with two hotdogs in his hands and a pretty goofy expression on his face.

Maybe they'd never know if Sam had channeled the goddesses' powers like he had Mia's.

Maybe.

Or maybe one day Sam would understand his hinky gifts enough to know when he was using them.

Until then, Dean would just be thankful that they were there, just like the amulet hanging around his neck.

Watching.

Protecting.

"Now there's something you don't see every day." Sam's grin widened as he approached, one hand outstretched to offer a huge hotdog drowning in a sea of onions.

"Huh?" Dean blinked, eventually realizing he was the one being spoken to. Whatever he'd been thinking, he pushed it away. It tended to freak Sam when he knew big brother was mulling over his abilities.

"Dean Winchester *thinking*," Sam explained, handing over the dog and taking a bite of his own. "So what's up?" He asked, munching lightly as he watched Dean's expression.

"Just thinking how pussycat girl used us both, dude." Dean expertly avoided the truth without really telling a lie. He *would* have been thinking about the cat-woman, *eventually*. "I mean, she duped you with her 'Jeez, I'm a cute little furry kitty' routine, and she got me with...well..."

"Yeah, her charming feminine side." Sam sighed. "If it makes you feel any better, she's been fooling people and then killing them for years. It's what she does. I've

been doing some digging.” He raised a brow dejectedly. “It wasn’t just the Titanic, Dean. I think the cat had been shipped to Europe during the 1300’s...”

Dean stuffed an overly-large piece of dog in his mouth but somehow still managed to get out a sentence – *just*. “Dude, unless it’s the history of US muscle cars, you got me.”

“The Plague.” Sam shook his head. “The Black Death killed thousands. The Irish potato famine, Mount St. Helens, more air crashes than you can even name...earthquakes...I can pretty much place that cat mummy near almost half the natural disasters in history. And that’s just as far back as I can trace it!”

Dean whistled, tossing the wrapper from his already eaten food in a nearby trashcan. “And because it was the mummy of an animal, not a person, nobody thought about the word ‘curse’ huh?”

Sam nodded, his tale still not at an end. “Even her name was part of the riddle. Selfi Chaus is an anagram of Felis Chaus, a popular wildcat species at the time of the pharaohs, and Sekhmet’s favorite color was red...” He turned away from the car, looking at the horizon. “That sexy southern drawl was a nice touch too. Her personal file shows she’s from Memphis, Tennessee, but really it was Memphis, Egypt – the home of her temple.”

Dean watched his brother’s head drop to the ground as he finished the story.

Sam was wondering the exact same thing he had been.

Just who had saved his ass back in the museum? Would someone as evil as Sekhmet give in to a hunter? Dean doubted it. She’d caused too much death and destruction in her time.

So many lives, so many souls.

Dean walked around the car, joining his brother, and this time it was his gaze that strayed to the open sea.

A story known by many, but not the whole story.

A ship whose name would be remembered forever in history.

A ship that had been destroyed by the cargo she unwittingly carried.

Sam seemed to sense his brother’s thoughts, because he probably shared them. “All that,” he exhaled. “All that, and the world will never really know it. They’ll never know what really sank the Titanic or how close they...we all came to destruction...” He stuffed his hands in his jacket pockets.

Dean shrugged, the corners of his mouth ticking just a little as a familiar glint appeared in his eyes. “Dude, I’d have liked to see Cameron make *that* version of events, though...”

“Oh, you mean get DiCaprio to play *your* part in it?” Sam’s melancholy look turned to a small grin and he stepped back a little, appraising his brother. “I think he’s about the right height too...” The grin grew even further and he only just ducked in time to evade a right hook that had been headed his way.

If Dean had still been eating his hotdog, he would probably have choked on it.

“Yeah well,” Dean retorted, pulling open the driver’s door of his newly-repaired wheels with a grunt. “You’d have been pretty safe on the Titanic, dude...”

“Huh?”

“Yeah, they put the women and children in the lifeboats first, Samantha...”

Sam bounced into the passenger seat of the Chevy with a thud, but before he had a chance to reply with a snappy comeback, Alice in Chains’ *‘Brother’* began to pound from the CD player.

Dean smirked and cranked the ignition, hitting the gas so hard the car’s rear wheels spun in the gravel of the lot before lurching forwards.

“You know,” Sam looked out of the window and muttered off-handedly. “I think I preferred the Honda...”

Dean nodded as he headed for the highway. “And so endeth another day of fighting the dead and eating junk food, little brother...” He winked, some part of the hunter just wishing that life for the Winchesters was really that simple.

The End