

**Season Three**  
**Episode Twelve: Retribution**  
**By irismay42 & Tree**

**Sulphur Springs, TX**

“Sammy! Dammit, son!”

John Winchester pressed the cellphone against his ear, willing his youngest son to respond to the authoritative tone in his voice. It would have worked on Dean. Not so much on Sam.

“Dad, Dean’s here.” Sam spoke as if he hadn’t even registered the entreaty in his father’s voice, his relief at his older brother’s imminent arrival clearly audible.

Something twisted in John’s gut, something born of twenty-some years of experience; something telling him his boys were in danger.

“Sam? SAM!”

John gritted his teeth as static assaulted his ear, pulling the phone away as he realized Sam’s voice was no longer on the other end of the line. He was gone. He was alone.

His youngest was alone.

And *she* was coming.

“Sam!” He yelled for his son again even though he knew it was futile, the call having already crapped out before he even thought to hit the phone’s disconnect button. His hands balling into fists at his sides as he squeezed hard on the offending piece of plastic, he set his jaw and tried to concentrate enough to clear the cloud of panic beginning to fog his brain.

Plano. Sam had said they were in Plano.

Lucky break – Plano wasn’t that far, maybe sixty-five miles as the crow flies. It’d be a longer drive though – an hour and half, maybe an hour if he broke every speed limit from where he was to where he needed to be.

He glanced at his watch as he tried to force his thought processes back into some kind of order: Get to Plano. Find his boys. Get them the hell away from that half-demonic bitch.

Because he had no doubt she had them.

He’d thought it merely a coincidence at first when he’d realized how close he was to his boys. He’d been in Texas for a while, figuring she’d turn up here sooner or later, like the proverbial bad penny. But with Winchester luck running true to form, he’d scoured almost every inch of this mammoth state – followed every lead, every dead end – and repeatedly come up empty. No one had been able to tell him what had become of Emma Collins; what had become of her *after*.

He’d found out about the fire; about the murders. But after that, the girl had pretty much disappeared off the face of the planet, and if anyone knew where she was, they sure as hell weren’t talking.

Not to John Winchester anyway.

If his boys had been with him – Sam with his sincere expression and sympathetic eyes, Dean with his easy charm and quick wit – he had little doubt he’d have stood a better chance of shaking something loose.

Maybe he should have told them.

Maybe he should have *warned* them.

*Dad, we’re stronger as a family*, Dean had once told him, and even though he recognized the truth in that statement, he just couldn’t bear the thought of intentionally putting his boys in the path of this.

In the path of *her*.

They say ignorance is bliss, after all...and the road to Hell is paved with good intentions.

He should have told them. He should have trusted them. He'd left them vulnerable; unaware; unprepared.

And now she had them, he knew it.

Even before Sammy had mentioned the birthmark on her shoulder, he'd known. Deep down, he'd known. Her just showing up out of the blue; the possessions and the deaths; Dean falling for her so damned hard.

Emma had found his boys before he had found Emma.

*Mia.*

What a fool he'd been. He should have *known* to ask after a girl named Cameron. So obvious she wouldn't be going by the name Collins anymore. He should have known. He should have figured it out.

Still, mentally berating his own shortcomings wasn't going to get him anywhere. And right now he needed to get to Plano, to his boys. No matter how old, how big, how tough they got, they'd always be his children. And he'd be damned if he'd let that Hellspawn do a damn thing to them to punish him for what he'd done to her.

This was *his* fight, not theirs.

*Hold on, boys....*

John wrenched open the driver's side door of his truck, the graveyard he'd been investigating all but forgotten as he leaped in behind the wheel.

He didn't even seem to notice the piles of paper littering his usually orderly vehicle. Handwritten notes, photographs and internet printouts were strewn haphazardly over the front and back seats, and as he started the engine his hand brushed the bottle of holy water and the crucifix nestled next to him on the seat, a loaded shotgun and a bowie knife within easy reach in the passenger foot well.

John wasn't taking any chances on this hunt.

Glancing briefly in the rearview, ignoring the dark circles under his eyes and the few days' stubble on his chin that spoke of sleepless nights and days filled with worry and with guilt, he shifted the truck into gear and sped away from the sidewalk, trying not to think about the hell he'd gone through this past couple of months.

Since the phone call.

*"I found you, Johnny. Wanna come out and play?"*

He'd ignored her the first time. Some random chick raving about revenge and retribution, about having his head on a pole. She could have been any one of a dozen demons or monsters he had tussled with over the years. He'd never for a minute thought....

Until the second time.

In Bobby's rebuilt house in South Dakota, his boys safe and smiling, sipping beer with his old friend, just four guys together and relaxed, talking, laughing... His phone ringing. A familiar number. A familiar voice...

*"You're trying to ignore me, Johnny. I don't like to be ignored."*

"Cryptic" didn't begin to cover her end of the conversation, and at first John couldn't work out who the hell she was. Not until she casually dropped Fort Worth into the conversation. Exorcism. Screaming and blood. Then he knew.

*"You made me, John. Now it's time for you to suffer the consequences.*

*Retribution, Johnny. One family for another. Better find me before I find them. Your boys are fair game."*

He'd hung up on her, spine turning to ice water, fingers gripping the phone so hard he was amazed he didn't crush the thing.

He'd never *thought*... He'd never thought....

He'd taken off immediately, explaining nothing to the boys, less to Bobby. *Something's just come up and I need to take off...A friend of mine needs some help....*

The lies he'd told his sons haunted him as he put Sulphur Springs in his rearview and drove doggedly into the night...or the early morning. Time had lost all meaning to him as those fears and those doubts, the resignation and the terror he'd felt as he'd

left Bobby's, settled into a tight hard knot in his stomach, a dull reminder of why he'd taken off in the first place: He needed to protect his boys.

He'd had no idea what she was capable of – still had no idea – but the more he'd found out about the last few recorded deeds of Emma Collins the more he'd begun to fear for the lives of his sons. If she meant to harm them to get to him, then he needed to find her. To end her. Fast. Even if it meant sacrificing his own life to do it.

But it had been months since that day in South Dakota, since he'd walked out on his boys yet again; as he always seemed to be walking out on them. Dean, still looking like that scared four-year-old sitting on the hood of the Impala, while Sam fought back the inevitable petulant scowl, the "You're leaving *again*?" that he had perfected so well as a kid.

And in all that time, he'd still found no trace of the girl who was threatening his family. Every time he thought he had a concrete lead, he hit a brick wall; every piece of confirmed intel nothing more than a red herring. He was starting to despair he'd ever track her down.

And she hadn't called him again, not after Bobby's, almost as if she'd found a far more entertaining way of drawing him to her: something more ingenious, more despicable, more *fun* than merely bating him over the phone.

His boys.

She'd found his boys.

And now he had to find her. He *had* to.

But his boys first. They were in trouble. He just knew it. Deep down inside, he just knew it.

And if she had them, if she had his boys? If she hurt them, if she so much as *touched* them? Then she'd rue the day she ever crossed John Winchester.

## **Plano, TX**

### **Sometime later**

John had no real clue where he was looking. He'd screeched into Plano a little over an hour ago, as if the Devil himself was on his tail.

And in John Winchester's case? That might actually be the truth.

Forcing down the panic gripping his insides, he'd fallen back on his military training, quickly identifying a search grid and methodically checking every street, every nook, every cranny. His boys were here. Or they had been. He just had to be patient. He just had to be thorough. He'd find them.

He *would* find them.

He'd search every damn street in this town if he had to. Every house. Every room. Every square inch.

He almost knocked the holy water off the seat as he snatched his phone up from the place where he'd abandoned it after the last twenty times he'd tried calling Sam. Pulling it to his ear, he hit redial, not really expecting an answer and not really surprised when he didn't get one.

"Damn it, Sammy, where the hell *are* you?"

He rolled down the window, needing the cold early morning air to keep him sharp, keep him focused, sucking in a breath as he prepared to disconnect the call...just as he heard music.

He didn't recognize the song – anything later than 1983 and he didn't have the first idea – but it was music. And he was driving at twenty miles per hour down a road on the outskirts of the town, the nearest house a mile away, the nearest car probably in the next town over.

He disconnected the call with his thumb, and the music stopped.

Slamming on the brakes, his headlights illuminated something dark and viscous in the middle of the road, and as he jumped out of the truck his insides lurched when he realized he was looking at a pool of blood congealing on the blacktop.

Hitting Sam's number once again on his cellular, he pulled a flashlight out of his jacket pocket and began to shine it around the deserted road, distant music again drifting toward him on the early morning air.

"Sammy?"

John played the flashlight away from the pool of blood in the center of the road, following a trail that led to a ditch running alongside the blacktop. He sucked in a breath, knees almost buckling out from under him as he took one shaky step toward the gully.

*Don't be there. Don't be there.*

As much as he needed to find his boys, he didn't want to find them like this. Not like this.

He swallowed. *Suck it up, Corporal!* a voice in his head barked at him. *Get your ass over there, right now, soldier!*

One foot in front of the other, he made his way hesitantly to the side of the road, the flashlight finally illuminating a dark shape lying in the ditch, unmoving, twisted into an odd position.

He swallowed down bile, trying to keep it together, trying to be strong.

The flashlight played across something small, something glinting on top of the dark silhouette, and John frowned, almost glad of the distraction from the images his mind was creating of its own accord.

Struggling down the slope, his boots sliding a little on the damp ground as he hoped to hell he wasn't skidding on blood, he came to an abrupt halt inches away from what was clearly a body. John had seen enough corpses in his time to know.

He took another breath before crouching down next to it, his flashlight slowly moving up the broken, bloodied torso to the face.

His son's face.

"Sammy."

His youngest was a mess, blood all over, limbs twisted in odd directions, his face a patchwork of bruises and cuts, the skin beneath tinged blue with cold. With...with....

*No.* His boy wasn't dead. He just *wasn't*.

But he was scared to touch him, scared to check for a pulse. Scared to confirm that worst case scenario making kaleidoscope pictures of white dots in front of his eyes.

He lost what little he'd eaten then, vomiting bile when there was nothing else left in his stomach; throat, eyes, lungs, *heart* burning.

"Sammy?"

He'd never seen his hand shake so much as it did when he reached out two fingers and gingerly placed them against his youngest's neck.

*Please, please, please... I'll do anything. Anything. Just please, please...*

Any strength remaining in his legs left him when he felt the weak, thready pulse beneath his fingers, and he collapsed to the cold ground with a noise somewhere between a choked sob and the keening wail of a dying animal.

"God, Sammy..."

Somehow, he crawled toward him, still scared to touch him, scared to move him, scared to think, scared to act. There was so much blood and...silver.

The thing he'd seen in the flashlight beam, the thing he'd seen glinting from the road. Bending further over his son's prone form, John squinted in the darkness, fingers running carefully over his son's chest until they closed on something cold, something silver; something ring-shaped.

He raised the object up for closer inspection, fearful he might puke again when he realized what he was looking at: Dean's ring. And it was covered in blood. Sam's blood? Dean's blood? John didn't know, couldn't tell, and somehow that made things worse.

"Mmmm..."

Sam's low moan somehow snapped John out of his paralysis, and he snatched up his cell once more, hitting 911 with trembling fingers.

"It's okay, Sammy," he whispered, one hand ghosting in his boy's hair. "It's gonna be okay."

### **Abandoned house, unknown location**

Floorboards.

Old and dusty. Splintered in places. Moldy in others. Old carpet fibers stuck to protruding rusty nails.

Walls. Crumbling and dirty. Peeling paper and flaking plaster. Cobwebs all over.

Boarded up window.

Two exits. No door on either, just crooked frames.

Single pool of light from a bare bulb dangling from the cracked ceiling.

Light.

No more darkness.

No more Impala.

No more trunk.

He blinked, finishing his inventory of his surroundings as he turned his attention to himself.

Pain.

Everything hurt.

But he was breathing. And he was in a house. And he was seated. And his wrists and ankles hurt.

There was blood on his jeans. A new hole just above the knee where his leg had snagged on the trunk catch as she'd shoved him in.

No more trunk.

No more *Sammy*.

He almost choked on that thought, forcing it away, forcing it down.

*Not true not true not true....*

Paralysis.

Burnt by the amulet.

*It knows what she is....*

Pulling his ring from his finger.

*"Be grateful I didn't take the whole finger, lover."*

Unconsciousness.

*"Go to sleep, baby. It'll all be better when you wake up."*

He blinked.

This sure as hell didn't look better.

*Get a hold of yourself, Dean!*

First things first.

He took another breath.

Okay, he was tied to a chair. Great. Never a good start to the day.

He struggled a little, the white hot pain suddenly shooting up his arms strangely making him grin like a loon. Yeah, it hurt like hell, but he could move. He could *move*. Not much, especially considering he was trussed up like a Christmas turkey. But at least he wasn't paralyzed anymore.

He continued his self-assessment, flinching at the agony he felt in his fingers as he was assaulted by vivid images of his hands, bloody and raw, clawing at the lid of the Impala's trunk. Desperate to get out, desperate to get to his brother.

His brother....

*Not true not true....*

At least that explained why his fingers stung like they were being gnawed on by a ravenous wendigo.

He tugged at his wrists again, barely stifling a whimper as new agony radiated up his arms. He couldn't see behind him to where his hands had been twisted at his back, but judging by the copious amounts of baling twine twisted around his torso and his ankles, he was pretty sure that this was what he could feel biting into the already abused flesh at his wrists.

Bitch, he thought to himself, thoughts suddenly returning to Mia and stopping abruptly.

*Don't think. Don't think.*

Okay, rundown house, boards up at the window, filthy curtains, broken furniture... *I've lived in worse places.*

He sniffed cautiously. The place stank. Not just of *old and abandoned* but of something else. Blood. And death.

He shuddered involuntarily, hunter's senses instantly on alert as he continued to assess his immediate surroundings. He'd been in a lot of haunted houses in his time. And this place? Well, there was certainly something not *right* about it, even if it wasn't haunted. Couldn't quite put his finger on it. He wasn't sure if it was the smell or...something else.

Maybe it was the psychopathic half-demon shimmying through the open doorway toward him, a huge self-satisfied smile on her face.

"Glad someone's having a good time," he muttered, not quite making eye contact with her.

"Home sweet home, Dean!" Mia burst out, arms wide to indicate their surroundings. "Welcome to my homecoming party!"

Dean grimaced. "Figures a skank like you would live in a craphole like this."

Mia giggled. She actually *giggled*. "I didn't live here long, honey," she told him. "Your daddy saw to that."

Dean looked up at her sharply. "What the hell are you talking about, you skanky demon Bitch Queen from Bitchville —"

He narrowly avoided flinching when Mia's fingers were suddenly pressed to his lips. And a knife was pressed to his throat.

She leaned down toward him, soft chestnut tresses brushing against his cheek. "That's *half-demon*," she reminded him, looking long into his eyes before abruptly straightening and pulling away again, the knife leaving a thin trail of blood across his neck as she withdrew it.

Dean gritted his teeth. "Well excuse me," he ground out. "I'll be sure they write that on your gravestone."

Mia laughed sardonically. "Oh, I don't think you'll be around to see me buried, lover," she told him. "But if you've got an epitaph in mind for yourself? Y'know, something punchy like 'Here's lies Dean Winchester: Sap.'"

Dean didn't reply, merely plastered his most winning smile across his face and tried his best to pretend she wasn't getting to him even a little bit. "So where the hell are we — no pun intended?" he asked at length. "You know, I'd have thought you might have brought me somewhere a little more classy for our first real date."

"Don't worry, baby, there'll be candles and roaring firelight soon enough," Mia told him. "Of course," she added, running her fingers playfully across his chest, "it's gonna be your flesh that's burning." She sighed dramatically. "It'll be such a shame when I have to incinerate those adorable freckles of yours."

She ran the back of her hand across his cheekbone, and Dean jerked away sharply. "Didn't answer my question," he pressed on.

"Why's the sky blue? Where do bees go in the winter? Did little Sammy go *splat* when he got slammed by that huge frickin' truck?"

Dean strained at his bindings, despite already suspecting the damage they were doing to his wrists. "Where. The hell. Are. We?" he demanded for the second time, lip curling at the half-demon in something approaching a snarl.

“Never figured you for the control freak type, Dean,” Mia snarked. “Thought that was more your brother’s thing. Still.” She shrugged. “It’s kinda poetic. This is where I was born. And it’s where you’re going to die.”

Dean raised an eyebrow. “You were born here?”

“Fort Worth, Texas,” Mia confirmed. “Of course, the house was a little less –” she paused, searching for the right word, “– shabby back then. It’s been abandoned for years. Ever since...” She trailed off, a thoughtful expression flitting momentarily across her face. “Well. You know how it is. When something *bad* happens in a place. Upsets the karma or the chi or whatever. No one wants to live here. Bad vibes. People keep *seeing* things. Hearing screams in the middle of the night. You know, your kinda deal.”

“What happened here?” Dean asked slowly.

Mia wagged her finger at him. “Naughty naughty. Wouldn’t want to blow the ending for ya. Let’s just say this was my parents’ house.” She laughed hollowly. “Well, *Emma’s* parents’ house.”

Dean frowned. “Who the hell is Emma?”

Mia’s smile slipped and she drew one slender finger along the blade of the knife she still held. “Maybe we’ll ask your daddy when he gets here.”

### **Plano Medical Center, Plano, TX**

John rolled Dean’s silver ring between thick fingers, dried blood still clearly visible both inside and out. He sighed long and hard, the fingers of his other hand clutching at Sam’s wrist as the machines surrounding his youngest beeped out the symphony that indicated his boy continued to live.

He turned his attention to Sam’s pale face, relieved that he’d not required the ventilator, but a little confused as to how he could be breathing by himself when his chest had looked like it had been run over by a tank.

There were still tubes and wires attached to various parts of his son’s body, their presence perhaps more frightening to John than the bruising to the boy’s face and all over his bare torso and arms. He looked like he’d lost a fight with a wrecking ball.

John liked to think not much scared him, but he was never as scared as he was when one of his boys was hurt. He’d never forget the first time either of them got injured on a hunt – that sick feeling that welled up in his stomach, that voice in his head chiding him, “*This is all your fault. You didn’t protect them!*”

He certainly hadn’t protected Sammy, he reflected, his thumb rubbing gently over his son’s pale skin while his hand balled into a fist around Dean’s ring. Hadn’t protected Dean so good either, he told himself.

He forced back the tears prickling at his eyes as Sam suddenly groaned.

“Sammy?”

He straightened, fingers tightening unconsciously around his son’s wrist as reddened eyelids parted to reveal unfocused blue-green eyes.

“Dad?”

“I’m here. I’m here, son.” The relief was obvious in John’s voice as he leaned forward, further into his boy’s still limited field of vision.

“What...?” Sam slurred groggily, trying to raise a hand to his face, but only succeeding in lifting it half an inch off the hospital bed.

“It’s okay, Sam,” John told him confidently, despite his insides fluttering wildly. “You were...hurt. But you’re okay.”

Sam stared at him for a second before his eyes drifted shut...and then suddenly opened wide. “Dean!” he yelled, his shoulders lifting a good few inches off the bed before his father’s firm hands pushed him back down again. “Dad!” Sam continued to protest. “Dad, Dean – he was – and Mia – she –”

"I know, son, I know," John said soothingly, not releasing his grip on Sam's shoulders.

"But Dad she's gonna kill him!" Sam continued frantically, eyes wild as he struggled against his father's hands. "Dad, she's gonna kill him! We gotta find him! We gotta —"

"Sam!" John interjected firmly. "Sammy, I know. I know. Okay? But we need to take care of you first, son."

Sam blinked at him. "How — how can you know? Dad, she — she's some kind of demon! And she's got Dean! And she wouldn't tell me what she'd done with him and — and...She — she paralyzed me somehow — I couldn't move — and this truck — this truck just kept coming and —"

"I know, son."

Sam took a breath. "How am I not dead?" he asked suddenly. "I should be dead."

"You're a miracle boy, Samuel James Winchester," John told him, a tiny smile flickering at the corners of his mouth. "Or that's what one of the nurses said."

Sam frowned at him. "Dad. What's goin' on?"

John shrugged, a sigh parting his lips. "I don't know, kiddo," he said at length. "The docs don't get it either. I mean — there was so much blood..." He trailed off, shaking his head, not insensible to Sam averting his gaze at his father's uncharacteristic show of emotion. "Sammy, the ER doc who admitted you — swears up and down that when he performed his initial exam, you had a broken left leg, six broken ribs, a punctured lung and a fractured collarbone."

Sam glanced down at his obviously uncast limb and wiggled his toes, before checking he could move his arms and shoulders and take a deep breath without any discomfort. "Then how...?"

John looked distinctly uncomfortable. "Maybe it's a miracle," he commented, shrugging his shoulders.

Sam snorted. "Yeah, because we Winchesters are *always* on the receiving end of miracles, right?" He shook his head, trying to figure another explanation... "Dean called me *demonic*," he muttered suddenly, and John looked up at him, the frown deepening on his dark features.

"He what?"

"We were fighting — it was stupid. We both said some things..."

"You're not demonic, Sam," John assured him. "That's not what this is."

Sam met his father's level gaze. "Then what is it?" he asked, his eyes almost pleading John to have an answer.

John didn't reply, just turned his attention back to the ring still clutched in his hand.

Sam's eyes widened when he caught sight of it. "Dad! Is that —?"

"She left it on you, Sam," John confirmed, nodding. "The bitch left it on you. For me. So that I'd be able to see what she'd done, what she was capable of doing."

"Dad," Sam huffed as he tried to sit up a little, and John immediately moved to help him, catching him beneath the shoulder and propping him up on a hastily assembled stack of pillows at his back, all the while trying to ignore the fact that the bruises on his son's chest seemed to be fading right in front of his eyes. "Dad, tell me what's going on. Why's she doing this? Mia. Why's she after us? Why's she after *you*?"

John sighed heavily. "It's a long story, son."

"Then I think I better get comfortable."

John held Sam's stubborn gaze a while before finally shaking his head in resignation. He couldn't protect his son from the truth any longer.

"It was 1985," he began slowly, a sigh in every word. "Two years since we lost your mother. I was still a rookie as far as hunting went, didn't really know what the hell I was doing..."

**Fort Worth, TX  
November 2nd, 1985**

He was glad, in a way, that he wasn't around his boys today. Today of all days. It had hit him hard last year, too hard, so hard he hadn't even been able to look at Dean for most of the day. Couldn't bear to see Mary's eyes looking back at him. It wasn't fair on the kid, he knew that, and he also knew that Dean might still have been a little kid this time last year, but he knew. He knew what day it was when November 2nd rolled around. Just as John knew he should have been there for him last year. But he wasn't. He couldn't be. Just as he hadn't been there for Mary a year earlier.

This year, he'd abandoned Dean altogether. Him and Sammy both. He knew the boys were safer with Pastor Jim than they would be with him here, but that didn't really make him feel any better about leaving them. Not today. Of all days.

Still, he reminded himself, it was better for all concerned that he was here lost in a hunt than there lost in a bottle of Jim Beam. Better for him, better for Sammy. And, he tried to convince himself, infinitely better for Dean. Dean didn't need to see him that way, the way he'd seen him last year. He didn't need to see that again. Not ever.

He sighed, readjusting his coat as he scrunched lower in the Impala's front seat.

Better for all concerned that he was here, hunting.

Although he wasn't entirely sure *what* he was hunting.

All Jefferson had been able to tell him was that he'd heard some noise about demonic activity in Fort Worth – electrical storms, cattle mutilations – typical signs of the presence of demons, just as Bobby had explained to him as part of the Demon 101 course the older hunter had insisted he take before he let him anywhere near a book of exorcisms.

At this point in his hunting career, John was pretty much tracking down *anything* that might be the bastard that killed Mary.

He glanced up through the windshield at the ordinary suburban house that would have looked right at home on their street back in Lawrence.

It had been an odd trail of strange happenings and whispered rumors that led John to the home of the Collins family.

They were the epitome of "normal," completely ordinary in every way as far as John could tell. Dad worked security at the mall; Mom was a dental hygienist; and they had two small boys about Dean and Sam's age.

Completely normal.

Problem was, demons seem to prey on "normal," and it hadn't taken much in the way of surveillance for John to figure out Mom was possessed. Two nights running she'd snuck out of the house just after midnight and disappeared into a building in a less than salubrious part of town.

John had tried to follow her inside on both occasions, but even though his lock picking skills were improving under the patient tutelage of Jefferson and Caleb, his knowledge of electronic security systems still left a lot to be desired.

Still, the oily film of black he'd seen ripple across Mom Collins' eyes as she exited the building was all he really needed to know about her.

She was possessed. She had to be exorcised.

She was also heavily pregnant. Which was a problem.

Bobby had offered to come help him out if it turned out there was a demon stalking the suburbs of Fort Worth. But John had stubbornly declined the assist, informing his friend that he had to perform his first solo exorcism some time. Why not now?

Of course, that was before he knew about the baby.

He knew he should have called Bobby the second he found out, gotten some advice. Sure, he'd seen the grizzly hunter and Jim Murphy both perform exorcisms a

whole bunch of times, but watching and doing were two completely different things, and he knew there was a hell of a lot more to it than just reading Latin from a book.

And he'd never seen a pregnant woman exorcised before.

Could he really banish the evil entity within her without hurting her or her baby? Could he risk destroying another family, leaving two little boys motherless? Today, of all days?

The light snapped off in the upstairs window, and John glanced at the time: 11.20pm. He pulled his coat tighter around him, wondering if he could squeeze in half an hour's shuteye before Mrs. Collins went for another nocturnal wander.

Maybe that would be the best time to take her out – when she was away from the house and the boys – take her someplace quiet and get that damn evil thing out of her.

His eyes drooped shut before he was aware of it, his head lolling forward tiredly.

He came awake with a start as the Texas night was ripped asunder by the sound of a terrified scream.

A man's scream.

John wasn't sure why, but for some reason he glanced at the clock on the dash: 11.27pm. The exact time Mary's scream had ripped him from his slumber in front of the TV, two years ago tonight.

No....

He leapt out of the car, sprinting across the road and hurdling the Collins' garden gate, feet pounding up the pathway as another scream tore through the night.

"Daddy! No! Mommy please – please stop!"

It was the oldest boy. The one Dean's age.

As John reached the front door, the boy's screams stopped abruptly. And then the man stopped screaming too.

John paused for just an instant, the blood pounding in his ears.

No sound could be heard from inside the house.

Not until he heard...laughing.

Rearing up on one leg, he kicked hard at the door, the wood splintering beneath his boot as the smell of blood and death assaulted his nostrils.

He almost gagged, almost turned and ran away, but the thought of those two little boys – same age as Sam and Dean – made him muster the courage to hold firm and enter the house.

Two years of hunting hadn't even remotely prepared him for what he saw.

There was blood everywhere, blood and lumps of flesh; muscle, sinew. Bone. Internal organs. Strewn everywhere, all around the room. The eviscerated remains of what had once been Vincent Collins were a bloody heap in the center of the family room, and the little boys...the little boys....

John blinked hard, trying not to picture the faces of his own sons on the broken little bodies lying amidst the scattered remains of their father; two broken shells lain at their mother's feet.

And it was she who was laughing.

Emmaline Collins surveyed the devastation wrought by her own two hands with something akin to glee, black eyes flashing joyously as bloodstained fingers smeared pieces of her family across her face.

She laughed maniacally, obsidian eyes coming to rest on John Winchester, who stood frozen in horror, silhouetted by the moonlight streaming in through the broken doorway.

"You've been following me," Emmaline – no, John reminded himself, the thing *inside* Emmaline – commented. "What can I do for you, John Winchester?"

John baulked. It knew him. The thing *knew* him.

"Why?" was all he managed to ask, even as his fingers fumbled for the bottle of holy water in his coat pocket.

Emmaline shrugged. "Why not? Family only ties you down. Doesn't it John?" She took a step toward him, casually licking blood from her index finger. "Where are your little boys tonight, John? How safe do you think *they* are?"

The blood in John's veins turned to ice water, and for a second he was completely incapable of any rational thought.

Then the fury hit him, and before he really knew what he was doing, he was dousing the screaming woman with holy water and shoving her backwards into a dining chair positioned further into the room.

Emmaline didn't fight him, and the demon within her barely protested as he pulled a coil of rope from his duffle and proceeded to tie the woman to the chair.

He'd expected more of a struggle, remembering Bobby's talk about protective circles and devil's traps and other tricks of the hunter's trade usually necessary to subdue a demon.

But whether it was the holy water, or the simple fact of the host's pregnancy, or something else entirely, this particular demon seemed to offer little resistance, the smile still dancing across Emmaline Collins' bloodied face as John fumbled for the well-worn book in his pocket, trembling fingers hastily searching for the Latin ritual inside.

*"Exorcizámus te, omnis immúnde spíritus, omni satánica potéstas..."*

"Go ahead, Johnny," the demon encouraged him. "Do your worst. I already got what I came for."

John paused, momentarily distracted from the Latin. "What do you –?"

*"...Omnis incúrsio infernális adversárii, omnis légio, omnis congregátio et secta diabólica..."* the demon continued for him. "Come on, Johnny. Don't keep a demon waiting!"

John wiped sweat from his brow, resuming his chant uncertainly. *"...In – in nómini et virtúte Dómini nostri Jesu Christi, eradicáre et effugáre a Dei Ecclésia, ab animábus ad imáginem Dei cónditis ac pretióso divíni Agni sánguini redéptis..."*

The woman – or was it the demon inside her? – groaned, her head thrown back in obvious agony as John continued to chant the Latin from the pages of the little book, glancing up at her between sentences as she writhed and bucked against the ropes binding her to the chair.

*"Ab insídiis diáboli, libera nos, Dómine,"* he continued, trying to remember to breathe. *"Ut Ecclésiam tuam secúra tibi fácias libertáte servire, te rogámus, audi nos..."*

He glanced at the woman, swallowing hard as he swore he saw the shape of a baby's foot kicking out from its mother's stomach.

*"Ut inimícus sanctæ Ecclésiae humiliáre dignéris, te rogámus, audi nos."*

Emmaline Collins threw back her head and screamed black smoke, screamed until her throat was raw and she could scream no more, her stomach jumping as the baby kicked harder against her.

And then she stopped. Everything stopped.

John drew in a breath, barely daring to move.

The woman had slumped against her bindings, eyes closed, a single trail of blood running down her chin from her mouth.

The demon was expelled.

John rushed to her side, anxiously checking for a pulse and blowing out a long-held breath when he found one.

He'd saved her. He'd *saved* her. And he'd saved her baby.

It was then that she started to moan, bloodied hands clutching at her stomach, breath coming in short hard pants. "Coming..." she breathed. "She's coming..."

No. *No!* Not now! Not when he was so close to saving them!

"She's coming!" The woman turned dark brown eyes up to his, pleading, begging. "Help me. Please help me!"

Scanning the room around him, he spotted a phone on the wall in the adjoining kitchen, rushing over to it and dialing 911 urgently.

“Yes. Ambulance. Right now!”

Reciting the street address before hanging up even as the dispatcher was still talking to him, John rushed back to Emmaline’s side, pulling out his pocket knife and slicing through the ropes. She collapsed forward and he caught her awkwardly, lowering her gently to the floor even as he grimaced at the blood everywhere beneath her.

She caught hold of his hand, smearing her children’s blood onto his skin. “Please. My daughter. Please, save my daughter!” There was horror in her eyes, horror and revulsion and John knew that she’d been aware of what was happening, of what her own hands had done to her husband, her boys.

“I’m going to help you,” he promised, stroking her hair gently. “The paramedics are on they’re way. You’re going to be fine. Your baby’s going to be fine.”

“Please! Please – it’s – my daughter – if she – if she...” She broke off, tears streaming down her face as she closed her eyes tightly and shook her head.

“Monster,” she whispered. “Monster.”

She screamed anew as contractions hit her, and John looked around himself helplessly – at the blood and the remnants of the bodies, and this woman, this pregnant woman, lying here at his feet, blood on her face and her hands and in her hair.

He’d never be able to explain all this.

When the paramedics arrived – and the cops. When the cops arrived. How was he going to explain this? He’d left Lawrence under a cloud – CPS on his tail and the cops still wary of his involvement in Mary’s death. How the hell was he going to explain showing up two years later to the day in Fort Worth Texas, the bodies of a father and his two sons in pieces all around him?

He’d be arrested in a heartbeat. He’d be arrested, and charged with triple homicide and thrown in jail forever and his boys... What would happen to his boys? They’d be alone. They’d be defenseless. He couldn’t let that happen. He *couldn’t*. He *had* to put them first. He had to.

“I’m sorry,” he muttered to the young woman lying in front of him. “I’m sorry.”

He let go of her hand and it fell limply to the blood-soaked floor. Her face had drained of all color, her eyes squeezed shut. She didn’t see him anymore.

“I’m sorry.”

He rose to his feet, backing away from her even as he heard the distant wail of sirens, finally turning and running for the Impala, only stopping when he was inside, the engine running.

He got four blocks before he turned the car around and drove back.

There were two ambulances and three cop cars parked outside the Collins house, boys and girls in blue erecting sawhorses across the street, stringing them with yellow police tape.

After a few minutes of waiting, a young paramedic brought a bundle out of the house wrapped up in silver blankets.

The paramedic was trembling, his face as white as Emmaline Collins’ had been.

But John heard the sound of a baby’s wailing and a part of him almost cried with relief.

He’d save her. He’d saved the baby.

He watched as she was carried into one of the waiting ambulances, the sirens sounding and the lights flashing as the vehicle sped away down the street.

He sat there a long time after, watching, waiting. More marked patrol cruisers showed up; a couple of unmarked detectives’ cars.

And the County Coroner’s van.

He bit his lip as he counted four body bags being carried from the house.

He'd saved her baby. But he hadn't saved Emmaline. He hadn't saved her husband. And he hadn't saved her boys.

**Blue Earth, MN**  
**November 3rd, 1985**

John pulled the Impala to a gradual stop in front of Pastor Jim Murphy's house, shutting off the engine and for a second just staring up at one of the darkened second story windows.

His boys were behind that curtain. Safe and whole and alive. All he had to do was get out of the car and go upstairs to them.

But he couldn't move.

He could barely even breathe.

"That bad, huh?"

John started at the insistent rap on the window, rolling it down hurriedly as Jim Murphy leaned in toward him.

"How are they?" he asked, always his first question when he'd been gone any length of time.

Jim sighed. "They missed you. They always miss you. You should come inside."

"They'll be sleeping."

"You should come inside, John."

John recognized the steely tone in his friend's voice, and he sat up a little straighter. "I shouldn't..." He looked up into Jim's sympathetic blue eyes. "Maybe I shouldn't bring this home to them. It's not fair on them. This life. They deserve more. They – they could get hurt. I could get them hurt. I could hurt them –"

"Whatever happened in Texas wasn't your fault, John."

John blinked up at him. "How did you...?"

The pastor shrugged. "Don't have to be psychic to know that story didn't have a happy ending."

John shook his head, gripping the steering wheel tightly. "I could have saved them, Jim. I *should* have saved them. That little girl – she's an orphan now. If I'd done something differently, if I'd moved on them sooner, if I'd –"

"Did you do your best?"

"What I thought was best, yes."

"Then that's all anyone can ask of you."

John didn't reply, just rested his forehead against the steering wheel.

"Go see your boys, John."

\* \* \* \*

Sammy was snoring softly as John entered the boys' bedroom. He figured the kid would probably snore like a freight train by the time he was ten. Dean would probably never sleep again.

Bending over his youngest, he ran gentle fingers through his mass of curls, softly kissing him on the forehead before straightening. "Night, Sammy," he muttered quietly, gaze lingering a little longer on the toddler. "You have sweet dreams now."

"Daddy?" Dean's voice sounded across the darkened room, still half asleep, obviously unsure whether he was dreaming.

The boy sat up, rubbing sleep out of his eyes, and as John approached his bed he must have realized he wasn't dreaming and his dad really was there, because his face lit up with an incandescent smile. "Daddy – you're home!"

John perched himself on the edge of Dean's bed, running his thumb along the boy's cheek before pulling him in for a hug. "Yeah, kiddo. Told you I wouldn't be gone long."

Dean pulled away a little, squinting up at him as his expression altered slightly. "You okay, Daddy?" he asked. "Nothing hurt you, right? The bad things? The bad things didn't hurt you?"

"No, no," John assured him, gently planting a kiss on the top of his boy's head. "I'm fine, little man. Nothing for you to worry about. Now go back to sleep."

Dean pulled away again, looking up into his dad's eyes, and John knew the boy could sense something was wrong. "Daddy?"

John drew in a breath. "Long day is all, kiddo. Long day."

"Did you kill the bad thing?"

John nodded. "Yeah. Sort of. I think so."

"And you saved some people from the bad thing?"

John considered that for a long moment, looking away from his son and lowering his eyes. "I saved a little girl," he said at length. "She was the only one I could save."

He felt a small hand clutching at his shoulder, and glanced back up to see his boy looking at him with Mary's eyes. "Then it's okay, Dad," he said firmly. "If you saved someone. It's okay."

**Plano Medical Center,  
Plano, TX  
Present day**

"The baby," Sam said slowly, a look of horror creeping across his face. "The baby you saved. That was *Mia*?"

John couldn't look at him as he nodded in the affirmative. "I thought – I thought I saved her, Sam. I thought I saved a life that night."

Sam swallowed, placing a gentle hand on his father's shoulder. "You did, Dad. You did the best you could for her."

John looked up at him, expression pinched and eyes dark. "My best wasn't enough, Sammy. I thought she was okay. I mean, a couple years later, next time I was passing through Fort Worth, I tracked her down to her grandparents' house – her mom's parents. She – she seemed like a normal, happy little kid. I watched her playing on their front lawn – she was giving her dolls a tea party or some dumb little girl thing. Laughing, singing. I – I saw the birthmark on her shoulder. That's how I knew – when you were describing her..." He trailed off, and Sam nodded.

"I wondered if it meant something. Like – like she'd been marked by something – maybe one of the demons trying to possess her." Sam stopped. "Except, they weren't actually trying to possess her, were they?"

John shook his head. "I don't know what it means, Sam. At the time, I didn't think anything of it. I spoke to a couple of the neighbors. She was an ordinary kid, they were an ordinary family. I figured she'd dodged a bullet and was fine." He sighed heavily, running thick fingers through his hair and down his beard. "But now..." He met Sam's questioning gaze with a look of distressed anguish that aged his features by about twenty years, shoulders sagging under the weight of his little portion of the world. "Sam, I thought I was saving her but – but I think – I think I brought something bad into this world, Sammy. Something worse than bad. Something demonic. A hybrid. I don't think I exorcised that demon. I don't think it ever left her mother."

"Dad –"

"I caused it, Sam. I created her. The demon – it fused with her somehow. She was what it wanted all along. And it's my fault. It's my fault she hurt you – it's my fault she has Dean. And if she hurts him, if she – if she..." He trailed off, unable to finish the sentence. "Sam, if she hurts your brother, it'll be my fault. It'll be my fault and I'll never forgive myself."

## Abandoned house, Fort Worth, TX

"I don't get it," Dean said, squinting up at Mia as she hovered over him, the knife still clutched menacingly in her hand.

"Bet that happens a lot, don't it?" Mia commented, running the tip of the blade along his scalp as if she were running her fingers through his hair. "Huh, Barbie?"

Dean scowled at her but didn't rise to the bait. "Why my dad?" he demanded instead. "What'd he ever do to you?"

Mia's face was suddenly inches from his own and he jerked back instinctively.

"You want me to tell you a story, Dean?" she breathed into his ear, the tip of her tongue grazing his earlobe. "Well let's start at the *end*, shall we?"

She pulled away from him, straightening, fingers toying with the blade in her hands as Dean's eyes followed the movement warily.

"You know your precious baby brother's dead, right?" she told him, obvious glee radiating from her voice.

Dean somehow managed to fix her with a steely glare, barely any emotion showing on his face even as his blood pounded loud in his ears and the room began to swim a little before his eyes.

Mia's smile twitched. "Pretty stoic, Dean. I'm impressed. Not so impressed by little Sammy, though. Those craptastic 'powers' of his? Wow, what a letdown! Couldn't even move outta the way of that truck with I whammied him! Lemme tell ya, that was one helluva mess he made on that guy's windshield. Worse than a whole swarm o' bugs! Guy'll be scraping bits o' Sammy off o' there for months."

Dean continued to gaze at her levelly, wrists straining at the twine which continued to bite into his flesh, his own blood making an insistent drip-drip-dripping noise as it hit the floorboards behind him.

Mia's grin widened. "You know what I did then, baby?" she asked, bending forward and running the tip of the knife from his knee up along his thigh until his mask of controlled indifference finally slipped a little. "I left him there. All alone. To bleed to death." Smiling at him, she pushed the blade through the denim of his jeans and he had to force himself not to flinch as the tip found first skin then muscle. He sucked in a breath and gritted his teeth, refusing to take his eyes off her as she pulled the knife back out. "Just a little love bite, honey," she told him. "Nothing compared to what I'm going to do to you. What I did to little Sammy –"

"Goddammit, you *bitch* –!" Dean hissed, and Mia just smiled at him serenely.

"Poor little Sammy. All messed up and bloody by the side of the road. Left him in a ditch, miles away from anywhere. I doubt anyone'll find his rotting, putrid corpse for *weeks* –"

"I'm gonna *kill* you –" Dean swore menacingly, all pretence at calm stoicism evaporating.

"Be sure to let me know how that works out for ya," Mia taunted. "'Cause from where I'm standing, I'd say the odds are pretty much on my side, babe." She pressed the tip of the knife just below his eye, relishing the way his whole body stiffened in response. "Oh, Dean," she sighed, running the blade down the side of his face. "Don't you get it? It's *you* who's going to die here, sugar. Just like Sam. All alone. Bleeding to death in a ditch. Your story's gonna end just like his, Dean. I'm only keeping you around till Daddy shows up."

"He's not gonna fall for this," Dean snapped.

"Oh, 'cause he's the uber-hunter, right?" Mia hazarded. "So very, very smart."

Dean smirked at her. "You bet your slutty ass he is."

"Ooh, pot, kettle, Dean. Better take a good look at yourself before you go calling anyone a slut. That's probably the real reason you don't think Daddy's gonna come charging in on his white horse to save you, right? 'Cause you're not worth saving?"

When Dean didn't respond, she continued, "You know, in hindsight, you're probably right. Johnny might have made more of an effort to save Sam. But he's not half as much fun to play with as you are, baby. I only needed one of you after all. One down, two to go. As soon as John gets here, you're history. Just like Sammy. This is where your story ends, Dean. Right here where mine began. Poetic justice. Time for me to get a little revenge, a little retribution." She bent down close to him, a hand on each of his knees as she gazed deep into his eyes. "This is it, Dean. This is the place where your family dies. Just like mine. Because you know what's gonna happen next, Dean? I'm going to wipe the Winchesters off the face of the earth..."

### **Abandoned house, Fort Worth, TX**

Dean thrashed like a shark caught on a fisherman's hook, pulling against the restraints that held him lashed to the chair in a futile attempt to get free. He couldn't believe Mia, *refused* to believe her, forcing his mind to banish any thought of accepting that his brother might be dead.

It didn't work...

Ghastly images flashed through his mind, reinforced by the sounds he'd heard while trapped in the Impala's trunk. Sam, exchanging barbs with Mia... the demon, in turn, taunting Sam with Dean's death. The sounds of the fight between the two of them, bodies grunting with abuse... then finally the loud blast of the truck's horn followed by the sickening thud of something solid impacting the vehicle.

Sam's dead... left bleeding and alone on some deserted road... left alone because of *me!*

*"Am I next? Don't I deserve to be?"* Dean's guilt-ridden conscience demanded. *"My family will be destroyed by this bitch and it's all my fault!"*

*That's probably the real reason you don't think Daddy's gonna come charging in on his white horse to save you, right? 'Cause you're not worth saving?* Mia's words echoed in his head, adding to the recrimination he was already feeling.

Closing his eyes, Dean sucked in a shuddering breath and focused on trying to get free of his bonds. He had to get loose, his dad's life depended on it. If nothing else, he refused to go down like some trapped animal. If he had any say, he was going to do his damndest to get away and give Mia some serious payback.

Or die trying...

Twisting his arms, he felt the thin twine bite further into his flesh, refusing to give way despite Dean's vigorous attempts to pull his hands out of the bindings. Teeth clenched, his lower lip bleeding from having gnawed on it to prevent any vocalization of the pain his battered extremities were enduring, he bunched the muscles in his upper arms and strained against the roping.

His effort resulted in nothing more than burying the twine even deeper into the lacerated skin on his wrists. Blood was flowing freely now from the wounds, coating his hands in a warm stickiness and adding to the spreading pool beneath him on the floor.

He strained even more, hoping that the added flow might lubricate his hands enough to perhaps wiggle them out from the tight ropes. But even as he tugged, Dean knew the action was futile. Mia had wound several layers of the thin cord around his wrists, pulling them taut with the expertise of a Boy Scout before tying off several knots to the back post of the chair.

"Are you done yet?" Mia snarked, looking down at him from her perch atop the counter.

The hunter loosed an acquiescing sigh, not willing to let the woman see just how much pain he had caused himself or how devastated every fiber of his being was at

her news of Sam's death. She might think she had the upper hand, but he wouldn't give her the satisfaction of admitting defeat.

"I'm just getting started sweetheart," Dean snapped back, flashing her the best sardonic grin he could muster.

"Ha! I can see that. How long are you gonna sit there and try to get free before you realize that there's no point? Besides, what's your hurry? Like I said, Sam's gone and Daddy will be here soon. You might as well hang out a while," she reminded him.

"Yeah, sure. Why don't we just get comfortable and get acquainted? Have a glass of wine and tell each other a little about ourselves?" Dean suggested sarcastically. "Oh wait, I forgot, we already met; I'm Dean and you're a lying skank of a demon."

He watched her as she dropped down off the countertop, landing on the floor like a cat. She slowly crossed over toward him, still laughing her mocking sort of snicker, even while her eyes and body reminded him more of a predator stalking him, testing the air as she prepared for the kill.

*"Kill me, bitch. I dare you!"* Dean silently taunted. *"I'll meet you in Hell and then we'll play 'who's the bigger badass?'"*

"Such nasty name-calling from a man that just a short while ago couldn't live without me. I seem to recall all those times you defended me to Sam. Why, you even picked me over him. Wasn't that what drove you apart?" she goaded him.

Dean glared back at her, silently praying for the power to break free even for a second so he could pummel the smug smile from Mia's face. He knew what she was doing and while he knew she couldn't possibly say anything that could condemn him more than the blame he'd already heaped on himself, her poisonous barbs stung just the same.

"Sam paid for my mistake. I have to live with that. But what about you Mia? Are you ready to pay for all the innocent lives you've destroyed?"

Her face froze before him, a momentary loss of her cockiness made her look almost sad in the dim light of the ramshackle house.

Almost...

She was still a demon, half or otherwise, and Dean still planned on stopping her before she hurt anyone else.

"Innocent lives destroyed?" she snarled. "You want to talk about innocent lives being destroyed hunter? You wanna hear the rest of the story, Dean? What really happened? Then you tell me who the bigger bastard is? Who destroyed more lives?"

Dean shrugged noncommittally. "You've got a captive audience."

She whirled around and dropped to the dirty floor, pressing her back against the fading blue paint on the wall and drawing her knees up before wrapping her arms around them. Her brown hair cascaded down around her face and as she sighed long and pronounced, her eyes changed over to their usual freckled sienna.

"All that crap about me being an orphan, well that's not completely untrue, but it wasn't like I didn't have any family. After your dad wiped out my parents and brothers, I was left to be raised by my grandparents outside of Fort Worth," she began.

"Well, lucky you..." Dean mumbled, becoming silent when she threw him a dirty look, her eyes briefly glazing over black before returning to their normal, *normal?*, color.

"Everything was actually pretty normal, typical childhood sorta stuff. Grandma and Grandpa Cameron were halfway decent. I went to school, played with my friends, hell, I even went to church on Sunday. But then I turned thirteen..."

"And what? The church caved in on you one day?"

"No, smartass. I turned thirteen and suddenly, along with a developing body, I started to develop *other* things. Then a couple of years later, I'm in school one day and this Barbie Doll, Bethany Michelson, beats me out of the last position on the cheerleading squad..."

"The bitch..."

“Exactly. It wouldn’t have been so bad, but Bethany was an absolute cow about it, throwing it in my face while she’s sitting next to Jimmy Morrison in the cafeteria. I guess I just got really pissed, and then all of a sudden, Bethany is flying across the lunch room, smashing into a wall and breaking her leg, bones sticking out and everything. She’s screaming, Jimmy is freaking, and all I can think is... ‘Wow, look at what I just did.’”

“Such a proud moment,” Dean snarked. “Lemme guess, you conveniently made it onto the cheerleading squad after that?”

“A few months after that, it’s the night of the junior prom, Kevin Larkin and I are sitting in his car and things start to get a little hot and heavy,” she continued, ignoring Dean’s constant interjections.

“Did you try to light his car on fire too?” the young hunter asked.

“No, but the car made it out better that night than Kevin did. I kept telling him to stop, begged him to stop, but he kept pushing. He was all over me, hands everywhere. I just kinda froze. I thought I even blacked out while he was on top of me, but all of a sudden he’s off, slamming into the roof of the car over and over,” Mia paused, becoming quiet as she toyed with a loose strand of hair.

Dean remained silent. He hated her, that was for sure, but she was describing an act that he despised only slightly less than people that abused kids. Whatever she’d done, in Dean’s opinion, the Larkin kid deserved it.

“Anyway, I sort of woke up and Kevin was lying on top of me again, but now he’s unconscious, bloody and broken. It was pretty hard explaining that to everyone, so he made up this story about being mugged and I never talked. But I gotta tell you, it was pretty cool, knowing I could do something like that if I needed to,” the brunette admitted.

“So when did you go from using your power to defend yourself to randomly killing innocent people?” Dean queried.

“I never hurt anyone that didn’t deserve it,” she insisted defensively.

“Yeah, whatever helps you sleep at night, sweetheart.”

“It’s true. Believe what you want. But other than Kevin and Bethany, I never used my powers like that on anyone for a long time. I graduated, went to college for a while, and then got a job working for the County in the Recorder’s office. Things were pretty dull there, so to pass the time I used to surf through some of the records,” Mia continued.

Dean feigned a yawn, smiling inwardly when she glared at his sarcastic response. He knew she had some purpose in telling him her story, he just really couldn’t find himself giving a damn about whatever awful things had happened to her as a child. Not when he thought about all the deaths she had caused... not when he thought about Sam.

“My grandparents had always told me that my mom and dad had died in a car accident right after I was born. I believed them, why not? But I was curious, morbidly curious, and I wanted to see some pictures of the wreck or something. I don’t know, anything to fill in the gaps I guess,” she droned on.

“That’s pretty sick ya’ know, but I’ll try not to act surprised,” Dean interjected.

“Give me a break! Like you and your dad weren’t completely obsessed with your mom’s death?” Mia retorted.

“I didn’t take pictures, hell, I never wanted to see that house or think about that night ever again. Losing her once was bad enough,” the young hunter admitted, not caring that the demon knew how painful that particular wound still was for him.

“At least you got to know her. I wasn’t that lucky, thanks to your dad.”

“Whatever! Get on with the Lifetime Movie, Mia, ’cause its only slightly more painful listening to you than these ropes are right now,” Dean threw back, rolling his eyes.

“Fine! So, I dig and dig, but I don’t turn up anything on my folks. Not a single

picture, not even a mention of any accident. Only their death certificates along with something else, my brothers. Brothers I never knew I had, brothers that my grandparents conveniently neglected to tell me about. Still, I couldn't find a damn thing about how any of them died, only that all of their death certificates were dated for the same day, the same day I was born."

Dean laughed, shaking his head. "There's a joke in there, I just know it!" he taunted.

Enraged, Mia flew up from her seat on the floor and grabbed Dean by the throat, her fingernails digging into the soft flesh at his neck while her thumbs pressed unmercifully against his trachea. Gasping, he tried to pull away from her, but her strength, enhanced by her demonic powers, was more than he could combat. Tiny rivulets of blood began to seep from his skin as her nails dug deeper and for a moment he thought she was sure to finish him as she increased the pressure on his windpipe, the sound of cartilage popping underneath the skin.

As darkness hedged at the corners of his vision, Dean saw her smile, evidence of the demented satisfaction she was taking from inflicting pain. As quickly as her attack began, her grip relented and allowed precious oxygen to flow back into his lungs. He was still coughing, between greedily sucking in huge gasps of air, as she nonchalantly walked away.

"So, as I was saying," she continued casually, ignoring Dean's noisy breathing. "It didn't add up. I went back to my grandparents and asked them again, telling them what I had found. But they stuck to their story, insisting that the records were wrong and that my parents had simply died in a wreck. I begged for answers from them, but they just acted like I was crazy or something. So I guessed I sorta snapped... and well... so did Grandma and Grandpa Cameron's necks."

"Real... sweet...of you," Dean struggled.

"I was actually pretty devastated about it after it happened. It was like Kevin all over, but worse. I never knew I could *do* something like that. I was so scared, I ran to the church. I didn't know what else to do. But the priest, the same damn priest that I had listened to and trusted every Sunday for over eighteen years, he listens to my confession and after he prayed for me, he goes to call the police."

"And let me guess what you did next?" Dean asked, his voice still raspy from her attack.

"I'm sitting there, he's headed for the phone, and all I can think of is to protect myself. My vision blurs, like I'm staring through this black film or something and Father Roberson yells 'Christo' at me. It was like he had hit me with a two by four with that single word. While I'm trying to figure out what the hell he's done, he starts spouting off Latin at me, this crazy sort of speech, like he's gonna talk me to death," Mia recounted.

"It's called an exorcism you dumb bitch," the elder Winchester snapped.

She jerked in his direction, feigning another assault and laughed when he flinched.

"I know that now, but then, I was scared. Before I knew it, the huge crucifix on the wall behind the altar starts to shake, the plaster around it crumbling and falling down on top of us. It fell, bringing down most of the wall with it, right on top of the bastard. I ran outside and never looked back. That was the end of Emma Collins that day," the brunette admitted.

"Lucky us. I'm sure the world is a much better place for you being in it," Dean groused. He knew he was risking her wrath, but he just didn't care. Whether she killed him now or later, he knew he deserved it for having betrayed Sam.

"I moved on, changed my name, got a new I.D. and started looking for answers. I had this *friend* that worked for the Fort Worth P.D. and after a few weeks of going out to dinner and convincing him that I loved him, I got him to get me access to the files and evidence box from my parents' case. Seems their *murders* were never solved,

their killer never apprehended. But interestingly enough, there was this one odd piece of evidence left behind. A book..."

"A book?" Dean repeated curiously.

"Just a small one, full of Latin and a bunch of strange side notes. One section in particular was still marked; the *Rituale Romanum*. At first I thought it was just some odd kind of church book, but then I found a name written inside... Tanner Marks," Mia stated cryptically, cocking her head to the side as she watched for Dean's reaction.

"Is that supposed to mean anything to me?" he asked after a moment.

"It should. You see, I tracked down Tanner Marks and using my talents, he was only too happy to tell me everything I wanted to know."

"You tortured and killed him."

"You better believe I did. Gotta give the guy credit, he held out for a long time before he cracked. But really, you can't blame the guy. I have to admit, I'd probably talk too if someone had crushed every single bone in my hands and feet and was working their way up my body," Mia laughed.

"You sick bitch!" Dean grumbled.

"Hey, I get into my work. Luckily, Marks lived long enough to tell me about this guy that he'd met back in Blue Earth, Minnesota, a fellow hunter, although at the time, neither of them had been hunting long. Seems this guy had just lost his wife to some demon and was determined to learn everything he could about them. Marks and this guy become friends while they're there and Marks ends up giving this dude the small book as a gift before the guy takes off on some hunt."

Dean held his breath. He'd heard his dad mention Tanner Marks before, the two having hunted together a few times when the boys were still young. The novice hunters had parted ways, like so many that his dad had partnered with, simply because Marks couldn't tolerate John's obsession with finding and killing Haris.

"Marks also told me that he hadn't worked with this man for quite some time, but he'd heard that the guy was still out there hunting. He also told me that the man had two young sons the last he'd seen him. The sons would be older now, but you can imagine my surprise when I realized how absolutely perfect my revenge would be," Mia taunted him.

Dean snorted derisively. "Are you done with your little sob story Mia, or Emma or whoever the hell you are? 'Cause I'm pretty tired of listening to you go on and on and I basically don't give a damn how awful your life was or how you were so unfortunate to have lost your folks," Dean sneered back.

He shuddered when she began laughing again, the same sadistic, maniacal cackle that made his skin crawl when he'd been forced to listen to her exchange with Sam outside the Impala's trunk.

"Oh you should give a damn, Dean. I'm talking about your dad. Tanner Marks told me the man he gave the book to was none other than John Winchester," she informed him.

"My dad knows a lot of people. He's killed plenty of your kind. He's gonna find you and put you down like all the other demonic trash he's sent packing back to Hell over the years."

"I'm counting on that. And just like Marks, just like Sammy, I'm gonna tear your father to tiny little shreds and feed his organs to you through a straw," Mia hissed. "I'm gonna take his family from him just like he took mine."

Dean cringed, her description playing out vividly within his mind.

"And then Dean, and only then, I'm going finish you off too..."

**Plano Medical Center,  
Plano, TX**

Sam finished signing the AMA papers with a frantic scribble of the pen. He tossed them back onto the bedside table, ignoring the glaring scrutiny of his father from across the room.

They had argued about Sam leaving the hospital, his father determined to make sure that the young hunter was well on the way to recuperating before he was willing to see him discharged. But Sam had countered, insisting that he was nearly one hundred percent, and that delaying would only cost them time, precious time that Dean might not have.

If he was totally honest, Sam wasn't one hundred percent. In fact, he wouldn't even go so far as to claim fifty percent at this point. But after languishing in a hospital bed in Plano for the past couple of days, he knew the few minor contusions and such that still showed were a far cry from the injuries he'd sustained in his battle with Mia and subsequent collision with the speeding truck.

"Sam, just give it a couple more days. Please?" John pleaded. "You were busted up pretty bad no matter how miraculous your recovery is now."

Sam looked at his father, noting the concern in those dark eyes but also something more.

*...no matter how miraculous your recovery is now.*

That was it! His dad was spooked by how he had managed to heal so quickly. He didn't understand and in that confusion hid underlying suspicion.

*Who could blame him really? Sam thought to himself. I don't understand it either. I don't know why I got better so fast. Or how!*

"I'm good, Dad. Really I am. And I can't just sit here eating Jello and watching soaps while Dean is out there at the mercy of that psychotic bitch," Sam adamantly replied.

The recuperating hunter dropped to the nearby chair and began to tug on his shoes, but he could feel John's watchful stare on him the entire time. Sam finished and stood up as strongly as he could manage, trying to hide the generalized stiffness and lingering pain that was still haunting his body.

"Sam, I know you want to help find Dean, but honestly, I would feel a lot better if I knew you were out of harm's way. I could move a lot faster if I wasn't worried about you," John insisted.

"What you mean is that you could be more reckless," Sam interjected.

"That's not true!" the elder Winchester refuted. "Dammit, Sam! Mia already has one of my sons, do you think I want to risk serving up another to her?"

"Hmm? Wasn't that the same logic you used when you left Salvation? Better still, you left Bobby's in secret, not telling us anything, supposedly protecting us. That didn't exactly work out very well either."

Sam watched his father scrub his face with a scarred hand, sighing deeply as the accusation struck home. He wasn't trying to pick a fight or lay more blame on his dad, but there was no way he was going to stay behind while Dean was in trouble. John might be shouldering the guilt for creating the hybrid demon, but Sam was also feeling a certain amount of culpability for not speaking his suspicions about Mia before it was too late.

"Sam, look, I'm sorry about all that. But you can't blame me for wanting to protect you," John maintained.

"You're always trying to protect us, Dad. When are you going to admit that Dean and I have been taking care of ourselves for a while on our own? We're not kids, we haven't been for a long time."

"You'll always be my son. I'll always worry about you and do whatever I think is best to protect you," John stalwartly replied.

"I get that, I do. But face it, Dad, I can either go with you and we can fight Mia together or you can leave and I'll just track her down on my own. After all, I did learn tracking from the best," Sam stated resolutely, his own eyes locking with John's.

The older hunter smiled warmly as he shook his head. Sam took the chance and went in for “the kill.”

“Come on, Dad. Dean said it best before, we’re stronger as a family. And besides, I think you might need me.”

“To fight her?” John asked warily.

*To fight her? Like I faired so well the last time?*

“Maybe... I mean, I was kinda holding my own until she iced me in place and I played hood ornament to that truck,” Sam said with a chuckle.

The laughter cost him, jolting still bruised ribs and robbing his breath for a moment. His arm closed around his side as he steeled himself to the pain, but he knew his father had seen the action.

“Sammy, your psychic thing... do you think that’s how you healed so fast?” John asked tentatively.

*And there it was...*

Sam paused, reflecting inwardly as he considered his answer.

“I don’t know. I mean I sure couldn’t fix myself when Eli pulverized my hand back in Wyoming. But...”

“What?” John pushed, stepping closer as Sam pulled on an outer shirt.

“Well, it’s just that I saw Mia heal herself out there on the road when we were fighting. Maybe that’s how I managed to do it too,” he suggested.

“You think you copied her powers?” his father queried.

“I’m not really certain. She’s not exactly one of Haris’ kids as far as we know. I’ve only ever been able to mirror the powers of other psychics.” Sam replied.

“Does it really matter?” John asked.

Sam cast him a questioning look. Was his dad suddenly accepting his strange talents when only moments before he had seemed freaked out about it?

“There’s just so much I don’t know about my abilities, things I can’t control,” he admitted.

“I’m only saying that maybe it doesn’t matter whose powers you can imitate...”

“It does matter, Dad. What if it’s all just the beginning of me becoming evil too?” Sam asked worriedly. “After all, most of the other kids I’ve met have all gone off the deep end.”

*Somethin’ up with those demonic Spidey Senses of yours, huh Sammy?*

Dean had insinuated that Sam’s powers were demonic. Maybe they were? Just because he hadn’t used them for anything evil didn’t mean that the potential to do so wasn’t just lying within him... dormant... waiting.

“Sam, I don’t think that’s what’s happening here.”

“No?”

*Dean called me demonic...*

“No... and besides, I know what happened between you and Lucifer. I’m willing to bet that your powers don’t discriminate. Haris’ kids, demons, hybrid demons even... You do what you do for good reasons,” John tried to console, coming to Sam’s side and placing a large hand soothingly on his shoulder.

Good reasons? Maybe his dad was right. Hadn’t he always managed to kick his psychic gifts into action whenever it seemed that Dean might be threatened? Hadn’t that been the impetus with Mia? Finding out that Dean was still alive and in danger was what had given him the push to fight the girl back on the side of the road.

He felt his father’s gentle squeeze, appreciating that the skeptical hunter was trying hard to fight down his own instincts that shouted to distrust anything supernatural in origin, even if it related to his own flesh and blood. Yet deep inside, his father’s comforting words couldn’t silence the nagging voices within his own head.

“Sammy, trust yourself. Whatever the source of your abilities, you’re the one that decides how to use them. No one can make you become evil,” John insisted.

Yet, deep inside, his own fears continued to nag at Sam.

*Demonic powers?*

*So be it... He thought to himself. If that what it takes to save Dean, then I'll gladly fight fire with fire.*

## **Collins House Ft. Worth, Texas**

"Do you know what the first thing I killed was, Dean?" Mia taunted as she paced around the cluttered old living room.

"Lemme guess? You slaughtered some poor slob for leaving off the pickles on your Quarter Pounder?" the trapped hunter snarked back.

"Funny! Good to see that you still have that sharp sense of humor," she returned. "But seriously, it was this stray cat, some pathetic looking tabby that just wandered in to the yard one day. Grandma let me keep it after we cleaned it up. It was a really sweet cat for the most part."

"Of course! Sweet cat, had to kill it, makes perfect sense to me, considering your track record."

"I hadn't really meant to hurt it, not at first. But the damn thing clawed me and I just sorta snapped. Before I knew it, I had crushed the poor little thing to death. Blood was oozing out of its mouth and ears and when I picked it up, it was like all of its bones had just turned to dust," she recounted.

"Well there's a proud moment for you. Let me ask you something, Mia. How did you explain your freaky little talents to good ole' Ma and Pa Clampett?"

Mia whirled around on him, her eyes blazing with hatred.

She didn't move, didn't make a sound, but nonetheless, Dean felt a sudden pressure on his upper body. It was though a massive vice was wrapped around his chest, constricting like a python as the force continued to increase. He struggled against the rope holding him to the chair, panic rising as the air was forced from his lungs.

She was crushing him, just like her grandparents, just like all the buildings she'd managed to reduce to rubble, just like the cat...

"What's wrong Dean? Cat got your tongue?" she mocked.

Cartilage popped as his ribcage protested the abuse. Within his chest, his lungs fought to expand and draw in air even as his other organs threatened to rupture.

"I've gotten a lot stronger at this since that cat. I can control it more now than when I was younger," Mia promised.

Something in his hand gave way to the unseen force with an audible crack and Dean forced himself to hold back the cry of pain as his thumb fractured and dislocated. He hissed through his teeth, crimping his eyes shut tightly as his index finger followed suit.

"See? Aren't you impressed? There was a time when that could have easily been your spine or your sternum," Mia threatened. "But I'm much better at directing it now."

"Lucky... me..." Dean croaked.

"Of course, I can easily rectify that. Maybe you'd like to see how much one of your ribs could take before it snapped and rammed into your lungs? Ooh, and come to think of it, I've never tried a skull. That would be a real neat trick don't you think?" she asked gleefully.

"You're a sick, twisted bitch, Mia," Dean answered.

"Aw honey, don't be that way. Don't you know that love hurts sometimes?" she sneered.

"Love? Ha! You don't know the meaning of the word."

"And you do?" Mia snapped back. "You supposedly loved your brother, but you didn't think twice about believing me over him. I wonder what Sam must have thought about that? Going to his grave knowing that he wasn't as important to you as your most recent piece of ass?" Mia threw in his face.

Dean became silent. He had no snappy retort for her, no sarcastic comment that he could lob back to defend himself. He didn't reply simply because his own conscience was battling those exact same accusations.

*"You're jealous because you think I care more about her than I do about you?" he had implied.*

Those words, like all the others he'd spat out in anger, ate away at him now. Consumed by his guilt and devastated by the loss of Sam, Dean couldn't stop the hitched breath that belied the underlying emotion. Worse yet, he knew she saw it.

"What? No smart-ass comment, Dean? And I was so enjoying our friendly banter," she said mockingly.

"Go screw yourself..."

"I don't think so, Dean. Besides, after all we had together, what about one last little romp in the sack?"

"Cut it out, Mia. If you want to beat the crap out of me, then bring it on. Otherwise, just leave me alone," Dean pleaded, sagging down in the chair and turning away from her.

He knew he might as well have told her to keep taunting him as to have shown the weakness he just had, giving the demon the prompting she needed to torment him more. He just didn't care. Nothing really mattered, not pain, not blood, not the gnawing hunger in his gut. The young hunter slowly closed his eyes and shut out the world.

*"You're gonna wait till she kills us both?" Sam had challenged*

And apparently he had done just that...

"Sam... I'm so sorry," he silently apologized.

"No no no," Mia snarled, coming over to his side and grabbing a handful of Dean's short hair, pulling his face up toward her own. "No fading out for you, lover. You paid for the whole show, now you get to stay and watch."

He felt her backhand his cheek, the skin splitting open from contact with the ring on her hand. It dazed him for a second, but ironically brought him clarity born of anger a moment later. He couldn't fall into the trap of self-pity, self-recrimination. He just wouldn't give her the satisfaction.

"What if I don't like what's playing?"

"Ah, but you have a front row seat and a guest starring role," she answered. "But I'm getting ahead of myself. We haven't finished the early scenes yet."

"Can we just skip to the highlights?" Dean whined.

"I'm getting to some of the best parts. Aren't you curious about all the other little tricks I can do?" Mia tempted.

"You're a demon, er... well, you're some sort of demon I guess. So, I'm pretty sure you can do all sorts of freakish things," he answered blandly.

She chuckled, "So funny you chose that particular word... freak that is! You know, after the cat, I thought I was a freak. I had these strange feelings, these even stranger abilities, but I was afraid to tell anyone 'cause they would think I was a freak too."

*What's going on in that freakish head of yours, Sammy?*

How many times had he teased his brother with that particular name? How many times had Sam worried about his own peculiar powers?

"You *are* a freak, Mia," Dean snapped back. "You're not a true demon and you're not even a real woman."

Mia glared at him, obviously angered by the insult. It was a small victory. Dean chanced pushing further.

"Hell, you're even a freak to the real demons out there. Do you know what Malphas called you the night we summoned him? Of course, it didn't make sense then, but when I accused him of possessing you, he said he wouldn't have anything to do with 'filth like you.'"

"So? Do you think that bothers me one bit?" she retorted. "All my life, people thought I was weird, different. The kids at school, the guys I dated, even my grandparents. But I showed them... I showed them all!"

"Yeah, you killed them. Is that why you ganked all those people back in Warner? 'Cause they called you names?"

"No! They died because of you, because of your dad," Mia stated.

"Oh? How's that? I don't seem to remember putting a drillbit through Greg's skull or dropping a jail on top of Karen Aldridge after you gutted her."

"They died so I could draw you two in. Sacrificial lambs if you will, but their blood is on your dad's hands."

"You can keep saying that till you're convinced, 'cause honey, I ain't buying that load of bull. This whole sob story of yours might play out well for a soap opera, but to me, you're just another heartless, spineless, piece of demon crap. You're all the same... mindless, evil, sick animals. And guess what? You're going down when my dad gets here," he promised.

"Do you think for one minute that I care about your name calling? Do you think for one minute I care about the blood I've spilled or the lives I've taken? Casualties of war, Dean. Collateral damage," she replied dispassionately.

"Like your grandparents? Is that why you took their name? Because you didn't give a damn?"

He watched her go silent, her face suddenly devoid of the wild smile she'd been displaying since he'd come to in the rundown house. Despite her obstinate denial that she cared about anyone, it was all too apparent that at some level, she had cared about the old couple that had raised her.

"I took their name out of respect. I owed them that much. The night I killed them, it was an accident. I was young, I couldn't control myself like now. After the deal with the priest, I went back to the house and I burned it to the ground. But you know what? I didn't shed a single tear."

She was yelling at him now. Her hands waving about wildly as she continued with her animated explanation. Inwardly, Dean smiled. He'd gotten to her. She wasn't showing any control now. He pressed harder.

"Well, too bad you burned them. There's a couple of angry spirits I would like to have seen come back and exact a little vengeance," he commented wistfully.

"Oh and you're so perfect? Let me ask you this Dean, how well have you fit in all your life? You're a freak too in your own right. You forget, you've told me all about that pathetic childhood you endured."

"Yeah, it wasn't sunshine and lollipops, but at least I never offed my own flesh and blood."

"I bet Sam would beg to differ with you on that one. If he were alive, that is. Seems to me, you have plenty of blood on your hands, Dean, most of it belonging to that equally freakish brother of yours."

"Nah, you're not gonna pull that on me. You killed Sammy. Just like all the others. I have my own guilt to shoulder, but I didn't kill him," Dean steadfastly maintained, inwardly trying to convince himself of that statement.

She was enraged now. Pacing frantically about the small space until Dean thought he'd get dizzy watching her.

"So, Mia or Emma. Ya know, I gotta tell you, neither of those names fits you worth a damn. You're more like a Squeaky or maybe an Aileen. Something more appropriate for a serial killer," he taunted.

"Shows how much you know. I chose Mia for a reason. It means 'bitter'. Ironic, don't you think?"

"Bitter? That's an understatement, you stupid bitch. Women that get dumped by their boyfriends are bitter. People that lose the lottery by one number are bitter. But you... I think you left the realm of bitter about the time old Bethany got dropped-kicked off the cheerleading squad."

She was laughing again, stopping her frantic movement to stand directly in front of the young hunter. "Mia also means 'mine' too." She informed him.

"Mine? As though you belong to someone? What demon is hitching a ride underneath that skin of yours?" Dean asked casually. "Maybe the better question is what piece of trash from the pit would be so desperate to shack up in your meatsuit for so many years?"

She backhanded him again, catching Dean on the side of his face and laying open a cut near the corner of his eye. The blow was hard enough to rock him in the chair, the seat teetering precariously but luckily remaining upright.

"I'm nobody's puppet," she shouted, before licking the small splatter of his blood from the back of her hand.

Momentarily blinded by the haze of red seeping into his right eye, he squinted to see her, determined to maintain his defiant stare.

"Oh you are, sweetheart. You might want to insist that you're on a mission of revenge, but somewhere deep down in there, some demon is pulling the strings. Probably has been all along. You're just too stupid to know that," he sneered.

"You still don't get it do you?" Mia lashed back. "You still don't get what happened to me the day I was born?"

"Lady, I'm pretty much ruing the day right now," Dean jibed with a soft snicker. She was about to answer when there was a loud creak from the rickety boards on the steps leading to the porch. Both of them froze, becoming silent as they waited for subsequent sounds.

Dean felt his heart begin to beat wildly in his chest. Was it his dad? Had he managed to track them down and was now here to face the hybrid demon? But no, it couldn't be. John Winchester wasn't careless enough to make such a simple mistake as alerting his prey.

He watched as Mia ducked quietly to the edge of a boarded up window. She peeked through a gap in the boards, shrinking back against the wall once she had seen outside.

The knock at the door that came next startled both of them. Dean considered shouting for help, but fear of what Mia might do to whoever was on the other side of the door caused him to refrain from calling out.

There was another loud rap on the door followed by someone trying the handle to gain entry.

"Fort Worth P.D.. I know someone's in there. This house is condemned. You need to come out right now!"

Dean looked up at Mia, seeing her eyes narrow at him in warning. Unspoken, he understood the threat. One sound from him and she'd turn the cop into hamburger.

"Come out now or I'm coming in. This is your one and only warning!" the officer advised.

Mia suddenly smiled, the sadistic glee from earlier returning to her face. "Watch and learn, Dean," she whispered intently.

Without touching the front door, the entry opened on its own, allowing light to spill inside and silhouette the tall officer standing in the doorway. His gun drawn, the young cop took a cautious step forward and over the threshold.

"NO!" Dean yelled at the top of his lungs. "Get back!"

But his desperate cry only served to draw the lawman in further. Once he spotted the young hunter, restrained and bloody, he rushed toward Dean. He only made it three feet before he pulled up short, his hands flashing up to his throat even as his weapon clattered uselessly to the floor.

Blood began to cascade from the officer's nose, even his eyes and ears were seeping precious life fluid. Dean cringed as a sickening gurgle filled the quiet of the old house. He watched helplessly as the cop dropped to his knees, his breathing ragged as more blood fell in globs from his mouth.

"Stop it!" Dean pleaded.

If Mia heard him, she didn't react. The brunette merely stood there, her face an odd mixture of dispassionate fascination and the cruel smile of excitement.

The young policeman writhed on the floor as blood continued to flow unabated. Unable to beg for his own life, he locked his eyes on Dean, beseeching the hunter to help him as he stretched out a beckoning hand.

"Please," Dean implored. "Mia, please don't do this. He's innocent. He doesn't have anything to do with this."

She walked over to the elder Winchester brother, squatting down so her mouth was next to his ear. "Do I look like I give a damn?" she hissed.

"Mia, I'll do whatever you want. Just don't kill him..."

"Ah, Dean. You don't have anything to bargain with. I already have everything I need," she replied coldly, rising back up and nodding at the dying cop. "But I'll give you this. I'll put him out of his misery."

"Mia! NO!" Dean shouted, straining desperately against his bonds as the man was lifted upward off the floor, his feet dangling several inches from the ground.

There was a stomach-churning sound of flesh ripping apart as the young officer's body exploded outward in a torrent of blood, tissue and gore. Bits of skin and bone sprayed throughout the room, coating the nearby walls and splattering across Dean's upper body. Fighting back the rising bile, he turned his head away, unable to look at the nearly unidentifiable remains of the cop.

Mia left his side, walking over to where the husk of the lawman lay silently on the floor. She toed his body, her nose wrinkling in disgust as a piece of intestine flopped onto her boot. She kicked it free, much to Dean's utter revulsion, and turned back to face him, dusting her hands off as though she had just completed some menial task, looking pleased with her accomplishment.

"Why?" Dean groaned, unable to hide the horror from his face or voice.

If he'd ever thought she had any humanity left in her, Dean knew she was well beyond sane now.

*Insane or demonic... did it even make a difference?*

She reached out and flicked a piece of congealing gore from the front of his shirt, her eyes dancing when he shivered away from her touch.

"Don't worry, baby. You'll get your turn..."

## **Dory's Diner, Plano, TX**

"So where d'you suggest we start looking, Sam?" John asked, downing his third cup of black coffee as he pushed away his barely-touched burger.

Sam snagged a cold fry from his father's plate and popped it into his mouth, unaware he'd done it until he glanced up from his computer screen and noticed John's raised eyebrow. "Uh—" he stammered. "Sorry. Kinda reflex."

John's tired features softened into something approaching a smile. "You two always did have a thing for each other's leftovers."

Sam smiled awkwardly, shifting a little on the hot sticky plastic of the uncomfortable diner seat. "Yeah," he agreed solemnly, averting his gaze back to his laptop, which was resting on a couple of napkins to protect it from the unidentifiable pools of goo splattered across the garish Formica tabletop. "Not that Dean ever left that much." He stabbed at a couple of buttons on the keyboard, silently berating himself for talking about Dean in the past tense while keenly aware of his father's eyes on him, a wistful smile on his lips.

"Thank God for free wi-fi, huh?" John said quietly. "Always a good distraction from an awkward conversation."

Sam glanced back up at him, a trace of anger in his voice. "Dad, this isn't a distraction," he protested. "I'm trying to find Dean here."

"On Face Space?"

Sam rolled his eyes. "It's Facebook, Dad –" he began, before finally noticing the smile creeping across his father's lips. For a second he contemplated whether John was being serious or attempting to lighten his son's sour mood a little. Figuring the latter, he took a breath before adding, "I was thinking of trying to track the GPS in Dean's phone –"

"That's possible?" John queried.

Sam shrugged. "If you know the right buttons to push; the right websites to access..."

John nodded skeptically. "But Dean's cell battery crapped out, right? When Mia messed with his phone?"

Far from seeming disheartened by the reminder, Sam grinned brightly. "Yes it did," he agreed. "But as far as I know *Mia's* phone is still working."

John almost matched Sam's grin. "So you're gonna track Mia's phone?"

Sam nodded, looking back up at his father triumphantly. "Already did it."

If Sam didn't know better, he might have thought he detected a note of pride in his father's voice. "You found her?"

"Uh-huh."

John nodded sagely. "She's in Fort Worth, right?"

### **Collins house, Fort Worth, TX**

This right here? This was messed up. Way messed up. This was so messed up, even Dean didn't have a word for how messed up this was, and he had words for *everything*. And not all of them contained four letters or began with an "f."

So here he sat in silence, no words to describe it and no one to describe it to.

She'd done it on purpose of course. Left him here by himself.

He'd only ever come completely clean with one other girl before Mia. He'd told her everything: the Big Family Secret, what happened to his mom, his part in the "family business." Who he really was. And boy, he'd thought *that* had gone sideways.

But this? Yeah, this was even more messed up than that had been. Because at least Cassie had just freaked out and told him to get the hell away from her.

Mia? Mia's reasons for lulling Dean into a false sense of security? For cozying up to him until he revealed to her some of his deepest, darkest secrets? For telling him she *loved* him? Well that had nothing to do with wanting to know *him* and everything to do with wanting to know *his weaknesses*: which buttons to push and when to push them. And she knew all right. She knew because he'd been dumb enough to frickin' *tell* her.

Which, he figured, was precisely why she'd done it.

Left him here all by himself.

Because she knew he didn't like to be alone.

So here he was, tied to a chair in a house that reeked of death and despair, his own blood soaking nicely into the floorboards beneath him with only his own thoughts for company.

And his own thoughts were not that much fun to be around right now.

He was so goddamn *stupid*. To allow himself to be used as bait like this – bait to trap his dad. It was Meg all over again. Jesus, didn't he ever learn from past mistakes?

God, what if the second Dad busted through that door Mia liquefied him, like she had that poor sap from the Fort Worth P.D.? Because Dean had no doubt his dad *would* come busting through that door sooner or later.

Dean couldn't let it happen. He couldn't. He *wouldn't*. He'd already failed Sammy. Already lost too much....

He shook his head. No way. Self pity wasn't the way to go and he knew, he *knew* that Sam wasn't dead. Dean might have been an idiot to let Mia worm her way into his affections the way she had, but he wasn't stupid. He'd heard what she'd said to Sam by the roadside back in Plano – taunting him, telling him Dean was dead. She was pulling the same crap here, he knew it. No way was Sam dead. He'd know. He'd *know*.

But that still left him with the lingering image of the cop splattering all over the floorboards and his dad doing the same thing the second he busted through the door.

*No*, he told himself. Mia wasn't going to let Dad die so easy. She wanted to torture John Winchester nice and slow. Dean could see it in her eyes. And he knew he had to stop her somehow. He couldn't let this happen to his dad just because Dean was stupid enough to believe Mia loved him; stupid enough to *want* to believe Mia loved him. Like any girl could ever....

*Suck it up, soldier!* He heard his dad's voice ringing in his head. *Get with the program, boy!*

What was he doing, sitting here getting all emo-brained because his girl had turned out to be a half-demon, possibly murdered his brother and was out to torture his father to death? What was he, a frickin' *girl*? He had to get out of this, that's what he had to do. Quit his bellyaching and figure a way to get himself free. Before his dad could show up and get himself splattered all over the floorboards. This was his chance. Maybe his *only* chance.

Problem was, he had no idea where Mia was right now. And *she* wasn't stupid either. No way she'd just leave him here, alone and unguarded, if there was any possibility of escape. Not when she was so close to completing her endgame; getting her stupid retribution.

God, he hated her so much right now he just wanted to... Then he remembered the scrape of the shovel as she scooped up the sticky, smoldering remains of the cop. That was the last he'd seen of her. A cheery grin and an instruction to "Sit tight. I'm just gonna bury this loser out back in the family plot." And Dean didn't have the first idea what that meant but all he could hear was the sound of the shovel scraping against the floorboards.

He swallowed, eyeing the patch of dark wetness still spread across the floor not more than six feet away from him.

After Mia was done doing whatever she was doing out back, she'd moved the police cruiser – he'd heard the engine and recognized it as the same one the cop had pulled up in – and then the last thing Dean heard was the sound of the Impala's engine revving throatily – *over*-revving – before the skanky half-demon had driven off in *his* car. His car! And didn't that just make him crazy? The thought of her touching his baby infuriated him almost as much as the thought of her touching *him*.

So if he was going to get the hell out of this before his dad could step *into* it, he knew he had to do it now. He might not get another chance.

God, he so needed to get to Dad. Needed to make sure he was okay. Make sure that bitch didn't get to lay a skanky half-demon finger on him before he could send her skinny ass to Hell where it belonged.

But maybe even more than that, he needed to get to Sam. Because even though in some part of his brain he knew Sam was okay, he had to see his little brother – whole and well – with his own two eyes before he'd be able to do much in the way of calm, rational strategizing. Before he'd be able to do much of anything.

Hell, right now he could barely remember his own name.

Everything would be okay once he saw Sam; once he saw Sam was okay and in one piece.

But then he remembered the sound of a horn blaring, the heavy thud of something big and fast hitting immobile flesh and bone and he was back to thinking about the sound of the shovel as Mia scraped the cop up off the floor.

*"Guy'll be scraping bits o' Sammy off o' there for months."*

No.

That hadn't happened to Sam.

Dammit, he so needed to get out of here.

He began to struggle anew against the twine binding him to the chair, but it felt as if the more he fought, the tighter it got, and his wrists were already starting to go numb from the damage he'd inflicted on them.

The damage *she'd* inflicted.

Skanky half-demon Wicked Witch of East Texas.

Dammit, Sammy had even been right about her not having an Oklahoma accent.

Somehow, he couldn't bring himself to be annoyed about that. He just hoped Sam got another opportunity to embarrass his big brother by demonstrating the power of his planet-sized brain.

*Don't think about that*, he ordered himself, ceasing his struggles and once again performing an inventory of the place – although this time he wasn't on the lookout for potential threats, rather for potential escape routes.

But the bare, bleak room hadn't changed any in the interminable hours he'd been sat here, useless and – and *hungry. Damn it, concentrate, Dean!*

There *had* to be a way out of this.

He took a breath, shuddering slightly as a chill breeze blew across him, seeming to circle him before dissipating around his ankles. He frowned, unsure where the sudden current of air could have come from, exhaling only to see his own breath mist in front of his face.

*Crap.*

"Not now, Casper!" he muttered, as the temperature in the room plummeted still further. "Unless you got a knife on ya?" he revised, glancing about himself hopefully. "Cause that I could use."

But nothing materialized in front of him, and for a second he convinced himself he was imagining things.

Which was when the few remaining pieces of glass in the windows began to rattle in time with his chattering teeth.

"Mommy?"

Dean froze. Almost literally.

He couldn't see a damn thing, twisting against his bindings, trying to see behind him or into the little kitchen through the doorway to his left. But no matter how much he shook it, the chair didn't budge, and Dean figured Mia must have done something to it, secured it to the floor somehow. *Figures.* Yeah, Mia wasn't stupid.

Sure didn't help his escape plan any, though. Nor did it enable him to see where the child's voice had come from.

"Mommy, where are you?"

Dean's head twisted to the right, in the direction of the little voice, before another voice chimed in to his left.

"Mommy, I can't see you! Mommy, where are you?"

"Daddy's hurt, Mommy –"

"Don't hurt Daddy, Mommy –"

"The baby! Don't hurt the baby –"

"Save the baby, Mommy –"

"You gotta save the baby –"

"The baby –"

*Mine.*

Dean started at the sudden addition of a third voice, abruptly silencing the two children.

*Mine.*

Like the chiming of a bell. Maybe it was a woman...but somehow it didn't sound right, not like a woman should sound. Almost like...

*Mine.*

...Two voices, one over the top of the other, one female, one...

*Mine.*

...Not.

*Mine.*

Dean suddenly remembered the conversation he's had with Mia earlier – when she'd said her name meant "mine" and he'd asked her who she belonged to.

*Mine.*

Was this it? Was this who she belonged to? This *other* voice? This bassy thrum vibrating beneath the almost-female treble?

*MINE.*

"No!" A little boy's voice suddenly rang out loudly. "You're *not* my mommy! And you can't have the baby!"

"You're *not* going to hurt the baby!"

There was a pause, a complete absence of sound, and Dean suddenly realized what he was listening to: a single moment frozen forever in time – in the memories of the two little boys who had died here all those years ago.

"You're *not* going to hurt the baby!"

And then a sound like breaking glass and a single word vibrating throughout the entire house:

*MINE!*

### **Outside the Collins house, Fort Worth, TX**

John sighed heavily as he gazed out of the truck window at the broken-down house across the street. "This isn't how I remember it, Sam," he said quietly, eyes never straying from what had once been a normal, suburban family home.

Sam glanced sideways at him, fidgeting a little in the truck's passenger seat as if uncomfortable with his father's uncharacteristically reflective demeanor.

"Before I came here," John continued, eyes still never leaving the house. "They were just an ordinary family: Mom, Dad, two little boys. Baby on the way –"

As if reading the regretful cadence in his father's voice, Sam put in, "This wasn't your fault, Dad."

John knew that. Or, at least, he *thought* he knew that. Until now. Until this moment. Sitting here. Waiting. Again. Waiting for someone to die.... He looked back at his youngest son, eyes heavy, mouth tensed into a hard line. "The way the guy screamed..." he trailed off, shaking his head. "And those little boys... The family who died here..." His eyes glistened, and he had to blink rapidly to stop tears leaking down his cheeks. He couldn't lose it in front of Sam. Never in front of Sam. "It – it could have been you and Dean, Sammy."

Sam put a gentle hand on his forearm, squeezing slightly, and John wondered when his baby boy's hands got so big. "But it wasn't, Dad," Sam said softly. "You saved us, remember?"

John nodded, turning his attention back to the house. "But not them."

"Dad, nothing you could have done –"

John's attention snapped instantly back to his son, voice low, his anger and frustration clearly evident. "I could have gone in sooner," he insisted. "Instead of sitting out here with my thumb up my butt wondering what to do about some poor possessed pregnant woman."

"You were a rookie, you said so yourself," Sam tried to soothe him, and when the hell did Sam ever try to soothe him?

"It's no excuse, Sammy," he said. "I shouldn't have waited." Suddenly his hand flew to the door handle. "Maybe I shouldn't wait *now* –"

“Dad, no!” Sam grabbed onto John’s sleeve like John remembered Dean doing so many times when he was a little kid. *Don’t go, Dad!* And John was oddly compliant, despite the firm set of his shoulders and the grimace of determination on his face.

“We don’t know what’s going on in there,” Sam reminded him, throwing his own words back at him. “We don’t know if Mia or – or Dean are even *in* there –”

“But if my boy’s in there, Sam. If she’s hurt him –”

“Dad, think about it! You see the Impala anywhere? You said it yourself, we need to stake the place out a little before we go charging in, guns blazing. She’s got to know you’d come here eventually – this could just be one big booby trap and she and Dean could be miles from here!”

John stilled a little, letting his breathing even out. “Never had you down as the level-headed one, Sammy,” he said, gently patting his son’s hand where it rested on his arm.

Sam shrugged awkwardly. “Yeah, well. Just don’t want to see you making another rookie mistake...”

John just stared at him for a second before snorting. “Yeah,” he agreed. “I made enough of those already.” He turned his gaze back to the ramshackle building across the street, expression becoming pensive. “But if Dean’s in there –”

“Dad.”

“I know, Sam,” John agreed reluctantly. “You know, after all the times I watched Jim Murphy or Bobby Singer performing exorcisms – all the hunts they took me on – and believe me, I was taught by the best, Sam – Jim, Bobby, Jefferson, Tanner – I still don’t understand how this job got away from me so bad.”

Sam’s brow crinkled. “Tanner?” he queried.

“Tanner Marks,” John explained. “Met him at Jim’s place. He was in a similar place to me back then. Lost his family to something out there in the dark. I guess we kinda bonded over whiskey and weaponry. He taught me a lot, even though he wasn’t much more than a rookie himself back then. Showed me the ropes. You’d be too young to remember him – he got out of hunting a while ago.” His eyes slid back to the Collins house wistfully. “Maybe I should have done the same.”

“Dad,” Sam’s hand was on his shoulder. “You’ve saved a hell of a lot of lives over the years. That’s not something to take lightly.”

“But not this family.”

“No, not this family,” Sam agreed. “But you’ve said it before – we can’t save everyone. And at least you tried. It’s not your fault.”

There is was again, that little get out clause. *Not your fault*. Like Mia wasn’t his fault. Like *Mary* wasn’t his fault....

“I wasn’t prepared,” he said shortly. “I wasn’t ready. I didn’t know what I was doing and I didn’t take the time to do the research. I could have called Bobby. Or Jim. Or Tanner. But that would have been admitting I wasn’t up to the game – wasn’t ready to fly solo. I was too damn proud to pick up the phone and *ask* someone, Sam. And this is what happened. I should have stuck around after, instead of – instead of just wanting...” He trailed off, and Sam quirked an eyebrow at him.

“Just wanting what?” he asked.

John couldn’t bring himself to meet his boy’s earnest gaze. “Needed to get home,” he said thickly, his tongue suddenly feeling too big for his mouth. “After those little boys – after what I saw...what it did to them... I just needed to get home. To you boys.”

Sam swallowed hard. “Dad –”

“But I should have stayed. Or – or I should have come back more often, checked on the baby more regularly. Once wasn’t enough. But there was never the time. I was so damn busy fighting this private little war of mine that I forgot her.” Slowly he met Sam’s concerned gaze. “I forgot her, Sam.”

“You didn’t forget her, Dad. You figured she’d be okay, right?”

“But she wasn’t, and I should have checked.”

"And what would you have done?" Sam squeezed his father's shoulder firmly as he tried to avert his gaze back to the house. "Huh, Dad? If you'd found out she was a monster? What would you have done? Put a bullet in her brain? Ventilated a defenseless little kid? Dad, you couldn't have killed her any more than you could have killed me."

John's eyes shot back to his son. "Sam —"

"Some people think I'm just as much a monster as she is, Dad," Sam continued, his voice strangely neutral. "And I know you've known a helluva lot longer than you ever let on. About Haris. About his plans for me."

John didn't reply to that, just looked away, looked across the street, looked anywhere but at Sam.

"But you didn't kill *me*, Dad. Even when you must have been wondering. Wondering what I was going to become..."

"Sam, I *never* thought you'd let Haris win. I *never* thought you'd follow the path he'd laid out for you. *Never*."

Sam nodded. "And I appreciate that," he said. "I do. But you see my point, right? Even if you'd known Mia was a half-demon back in 1985, when her mom was giving birth to her right in that house across the street, you could never have brought yourself to end her. You couldn't. Even if you'd come back here every year to check up on her, even if you'd seen her setting fire to her grandparents' house, you wouldn't have just killed her without trying to save her first."

John stared at his son appraisingly for a second, considering his words, turning them over in his head and wondering whether Sam was right. Could he have killed a little girl? Just killed her because he was afraid of what she *might* become?

"I don't think we can save her now, Sam," he said at length.

Sam shook his head. "No," he agreed. "She's a half-demon, Dad. I'm not sure anything could have saved her."

John nodded, turning back toward the house and losing himself for a few minutes as his mind pondered *what if* and what could have been....

"Dad," Sam suddenly tensed on the seat next to him, and John ripped himself abruptly back to the present. His son pointed up the street just as the sound of a familiar engine rumbled toward them. "She's here."

John's whole body stiffened as the Impala drew to a smooth halt across the street. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Sam scooch lower in his seat, trying to disguise his massive frame a little in an effort to avoid blowing their advantage and revealing to Mia that he wasn't quite as dead as she might have previously thought.

John, however, didn't move, just fixed his gaze on the young woman pulling herself lithely from Dean's car.

She glanced about herself slowly, and John wondered fleetingly whether she somehow sensed she was being watched. If she did, she seemed to dismiss the idea, tossing long brown tresses over her shoulder before walking purposefully around to the back of the Impala and popping the trunk.

Sam's breath caught in his throat before he heaved a long, low sigh as Mia merely removed a couple of brown paper grocery bags as casually as if she'd been shopping for dinner. Who knew, maybe she had?

"You think she had Dean in there?" John asked suddenly, picking up on the way Sam's color had only just started to bleed back into his face.

Sam shrugged. "Maybe," he said. "When she and I were fighting back in Plano I — I kinda felt like he was nearby somehow..."

John didn't question it, just turned his attention back to the half-demon, who had closed the trunk and was heading on up the path John remembered sprinting up so many years earlier.

"Doesn't look like she's got him in there now."

"No," Sam sounded relieved. "And at least now we know she's here for sure."

John nodded. "Let's just hope Dean's with her."

**Collins house,  
Forth Worth, TX**

Dean tried his best not to flinch when Mia kicked open the door, but he was pretty sure she caught the involuntary muscle spasm regardless.

She glanced over at him, a self-satisfied smirk on her face, as she dumped grocery bags onto the rickety-looking table by the boarded-up window before turning back to rake her eyes over him appraisingly.

"You look pale, baby," she purred. "What happened, you see a ghost while I was gone?"

Dean considered that for a second. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you," he informed her.

Mia paused for a moment, nodding as she pulled something from one of the grocery bags and headed over in his direction. He tensed as she suddenly grabbed his chin and turned his face up toward her. "You're not wrong, sweetheart," she said. "Right now I don't think I'd believe a word that came out of those pretty lips of yours."

Her grip tightened on his jaw and she forced open his mouth, upending a bottle of Southern Comfort into it before he could do much to stop her. He choked as the liquid burnt its way down his throat, a good deal of it ending up on his shirt as he spluttered in an attempt to swallow and catch his breath at the same time.

Mia grinned at his discomfort, taking a swig from the bottle herself before leaning down toward him and casually licking the spilled alcohol from his chin. She pulled away from him slowly, eyes never leaving his, before turning back toward the table and the grocery bags. "Wouldn't want you to get dehydrated, Dean," she told him. "Need you to keep your strength up after all."

Dean spat the last of the alcohol onto the floor next to him where it mingled with the pool of his own blood drying beneath his chair. "More of a Jack Daniels man myself," he choked out. "Southern Comfort's a girl's drink."

Mia raised the bottle in his direction. "Cheers," she agreed, taking another swig.

"Shouldn't you be drinking baby's blood out of a sheep's skull or something?"

Mia slammed the bottle down on the table, and Dean smiled at her sweetly before she regained her equilibrium and began removing items from the grocery bags without sparing him another glance.

He watched as she piled candy bars, bags of chips and bottles of water on the table, and as she opened a bag of peanut M&Ms and shoved a handful into her mouth, she finally turned back to him, chewing slowly before opening one of the bottles of water and taking a long drink.

His mouth began to water as he wondered how long it had been since he'd eaten anything, while the forced alcohol had only made his burgeoning thirst even worse.

"Oh, you want some, honey?" Mia asked him, holding the bottle of water out toward him as his eyes followed it reflexively. "Seriously, where are my manners?" She took a step toward him, the bottle still held out in front of her as if she was going to offer him some, before she suddenly pulled it back in toward her and spun on her heel. "Nah," she said with a smirk. "But maybe I'll let you drink your Daddy's blood after I've eviscerated him." She heaved herself up onto the table, which wobbled under her weight.

Dean found himself wishing it would just collapse right out from under her and break her neck.

But no such luck.

She opened a bag of Lays, switching between the chips and the chocolate as she ate noisily, and Dean turned away from her, clenching his jaw and refusing to be baited. She was just trying to mess with his head. He wasn't going to beg. And no way was he going to make himself any more of her bitch than he already had.

"Always did love the strong, silent type, Dean," Mia said around a mouthful of M&Ms. "Shoulda followed my first instincts and shacked up with your brother. You've hardly shut up since the day we met."

"Hope you choke on your chips," Dean returned, before adding, "Or develop a sudden inexplicable peanut allergy. Or both."

"Good comeback, Dean. Obviously that little brain of yours don't function so good without the calories, huh?"

"You know I heard your little brothers while you were out," Dean burst out suddenly, and for a second Mia actually did look like she might choke on one of her snacks. Dean smirked, reveling over any little victories he was still able to win over her.

She jumped down off the table, food and drink forgotten. "What the hell are you talking about?" she demanded, striding over to him as he looked up at her, batting his long eyelashes innocently.

"What, you didn't know they were still here?" he said, feigning concerned surprise. "Spirits are often born of violent death, sweetheart. Or didn't you learn anything from tagging along with me n' Sam?"

"You're lying," she spat, suddenly once more in his face with a hand wrapped around his throat.

"Why would I lie?" he croaked. "I heard them. They were right here." He paused, trying to catch his breath as Mia squeezed a little harder. "This is where they died, right? Your brothers? Your mom and dad?"

Mia let go of him, pushing his head back roughly as she did so. "You wanna know the whole story, Dean?" she asked him, turning away and heading back for the table. "Fine. This is where your dad destroyed my family, okay?"

"Yeah, you told me that already," Dean said, affecting a tone of utter boredom.

Mia whirled back toward him. "You think it's funny?" she said, suddenly thrusting out her hand as if it was still gripped about his throat, and for a second it felt as if it actually was.

Dean choked as Mia released him.

"Apology accepted, Captain Needa," she hissed.

Dean laughed hollowly. "Just my luck, I finally hook up with a chick who can quote *Star Wars* and she's demon hellspawn."

"Not hellspawn," Mia corrected him. "That's not how I came to be."

"Oh no?" Dean asked casually. "Then your mom wasn't doing the horizontal hula with one of Hell's finest?"

Mia turned on him, eyes for a second completely black. "Watch your mouth, boy," she spat, voice all wrong, like the one Dean had heard echoing around the house earlier. Her lip curled ever-so-slightly, and Dean actually tensed in his chair, steeling himself for another physical assault.

But it never came.

Mia seemed to regain her composure just as her irises regained their usual chocolate-colored hue. "Don't talk about my mom like that," she said, voice sounding completely normal again. "She was an innocent. Just like yours."

Dean had no response for that, just tensed his jaw and swallowed hard. "So if that's not how it happened," he asked, consciously changing the subject, "if your mom *wasn't* getting it on with some demon, then how *did* you come to be – y'know – the half-demonic bitch we all know and hate so much?"

"Aw Dean," Mia sighed. "It was only a couple of days ago you told me you loved me."

"Things change."

"And men are so fickle." She stood looking at him for a second, as if appraising him. "You really want to know?"

Dean nodded. "Sure. Why not. Nothing better to do."

Mia continued to look at him, as if trying to decide whether he was genuinely interested or whether he just wanted to use any information he might glean against her. "My mom was already pregnant when the demon possessed her," she eventually began at length, and Dean figured she'd decided telling him was no biggie considering she was planning on killing him in the very near future.

"And it was your mom who killed your father and your brothers?"

"No," Mia corrected him shortly. "It was the demon *inside* of her. When your dad tried to exorcise it – after he let my family die –"

"No way he *let* your family die, Mia," Dean interjected testily.

Mia ignored him. "After your dad *let* my family die and tried to exorcise my mom, the demon decided it didn't want to go back to Hell. Best I can figure it, the stress of the exorcism sent my mom into labor, and as that was happening, rather than trying to possess me, which would still have led to its being exorcised, the demon somehow fused itself with me while I was still in my mother's womb. His essence and my – soul, I guess – became parts of the same whole."

"So while you're busy blaming my dad for losing your family, the thing that actually killed them is now a part of you?" He snorted. "Honey, you might wanna take another look at who you're actually pissed at here. 'Cause I was wrong. You're more than just a bitch; you're the thing that destroyed your family's bitch."

Again, he readied himself for some kind of attack, but again it never came.

"Is that who I heard earlier?" he pressed on, figuring while Mia was busy internalizing her anger he might stand a chance of getting a little more information out of her. *Know your enemy*. One of Dad's favorite sayings. "That voice I heard when your brothers were here. It kept saying 'Mine,' liked it owned you or something. Does it own you? The demon part of you? Can you hear it? Can you *feel* it? Is that who orders you to do this crap?"

"It's not possession, Dean," Mia said quietly, subdued, studiously looking away from him. "It doesn't order me to do anything. It's a part of me."

"But it owns you."

"I don't belong to anyone."

"Then why did it keep repeating that word, Mia? 'Mine.' Why did it keep saying that if you're *not* just its meatsuit?"

Mia finally spun in his direction, face suddenly so close to his he could count her eyelashes. She didn't touch him, didn't put one hand on him, but he could feel – *something* – something almost vibrating in her. Something like – like when Sam had kicked the crap out of Lucifer back in Leicester, or Alyssa in Phoenix. Something prickling his skin. Energy. *Power*.

"I don't *belong* to anyone, Dean," she hissed, eyes glazing over coal-black. "No one owns me, boy." Her voice had taken on that same cadence, the voice beneath the voice, and Dean had the weirdest sensation that suddenly he wasn't talking to Mia at all. "You still want to make excuses for me, don't you? Like you do your little brother? Not his fault. Big family curse. Sins of the fathers." He blinked at her, and she grinned broadly. "Thought I didn't know about that, huh? The Winchester family curse? The other brats Haris latched on to whose families shared the same fate? Ever wonder why him and not you? Huh? Eldest son and all that. But no. You're left with a little bauble to play with while Sammy wins the Freaky Psychic Lottery."

"How...?" Dean snapped his jaw shut abruptly. Mia hadn't known about the amulet. When she'd leaned over him in the car and it had burned her, she'd been surprised. Where the hell was all this information coming from? How was she accessing it? Unless the demon part of her already knew...?

"Come on, Dean. I'm no different to Sammy. I do what I do because I want to do it. Destiny? Your brother might believe in that crap but you and I both know it's a load of old hooley. There's no such thing as Fate, Dean. Fate's what we make of it. No one's directing us, no one's telling us what to do. Not Haris. Not God. Not Lucifer. There's no Big Plan, no Powers That Be. Just us. Just *me* and what I decide to make of my

life. My mother didn't give birth to a possessed baby. I'm a single entity, Dean. A single creation. I'm something entirely different. Something that's never been seen before in the whole of Creation – Heaven, Earth or Hell."

Dean sighed. "Well don't we have a high opinion of ourselves?"

She did hit him that time, not using any weird psychic telekinesis or Darth Vader death grip. Just backhanded him because she wanted to. Because she wanted to *feel* it. He could see it in her smoldering black eyes.

She moved in close to him again, breathing hard, gripping his chin and licking at the blood oozing from the split in his lower lip.

"Everyone's going to know who I am someday, Dean," she told him, still holding his face so he couldn't pull away from her. "Everyone's going to fear me. Everyone's going to tremble at the sound of my name." She blinked, and her eyes cleared of their blackness. "I'm the Angel of Death, baby," she told him, her voice having returned to normal again, and without warning she pressed her lips hard against his. He tried his best to twist his head away, but she'd been right earlier. She was damned strong. "Don't worry, sugar," she whispered, mouth still hovering close to his own. "Daddy's coming. It'll all be over soon."

She stood, releasing his chin roughly as she pulled away from him, her hand digging in her jeans pocket as she straightened.

"See this?" she asked him, pulling his cellphone out and holding it up in front of him.

He raised a questioning eyebrow, trying desperately to regain some kind of composure as his heart rate failed abysmally to return to normal. "My phone?" he asked casually. "Yeah, so?"

The half-demon held the little cellular in the flat of her left hand. "Your brother's not the only one with a few parlor tricks up his sleeve," she told him, bringing her right hand up so her palm was hovering half an inch above the phone. She closed her eyes for a second, taking a deep breath, as a bolt of blue-white electricity arced straight out of her hand and into the cell, the air around her seeming to crackle with it as Dean's nostrils filled with the distinctive smell of ozone.

Mia smiled triumphantly as the front of the phone lit up, even though Dean knew the battery was dead. "Something else Little Brother was right about," she told him, grinning.

"Yeah," Dean agreed, schooling his features carefully so that he didn't look too freaked out. "You're a regular Miss Dynamo. If I were the Duracell Bunny, I'd be worried."

"Funny," Mia commented humorlessly, opening the phone and scrolling lazily through the phone book. "Not as funny as the fact that you and your dad are about to die right where I was born though. Now that's frickin' hilarious. Don't you think, Dean?"

## **Outside the Collins house, Fort Worth, TX**

"What we need is a plan."

"What we need is a *miracle*."

"That's not helping, Sammy."

Sam sighed, dragging a tired hand through his hair. "So what do you suggest we do, Dad? We already know we can't go rushing in there. We need to do this smart! Even if Mia *doesn't* have Dean, we don't know what the hell we might be up against –

"And if she *does* have Dean, then I'm not leaving him in there with her a second longer than I need to. I'm not making the same mistake again, Sam. This is *my* son."

I'm not gonna go getting him killed because I underestimated what the hell I'm dealing with –"

"What *we're* dealing with, Dad," Sam reminded him stubbornly. "There are two of us in this cavalry, remember?"

"I know that, Sam –"

"Do you?" Sam straightened. "Dad, this isn't just about you or the mistakes you think you made twenty years ago! Dean might be your son, but he's my *brother*, too! I want to get the hell in there just as badly as you do – I mean, she could be doing *anything* to him in there – but we gotta *think* about this! Think this through! We go in there all guns blazing, someone's gonna get caught in the crossfire and I'm sure as hell not gonna let it be Dean!"

John took a deep breath. "So what do *you* suggest we do?"

Sam's eyes skittered to the floorboards, and he scratched the back of his neck uncomfortably. "These powers of mine," he began slowly, trying to pretend he didn't notice his father's posture suddenly stiffen. "I'm not gonna pretend to know how the hell they work, and I certainly don't have much of a handle on controlling them. But so far they seem to kick in when – when Dean's in trouble."

John looked up at him a little incredulously. "You're kidding, right?"

Sam shook his head. "No. First time I ever did anything but have a death vision? We were at this kid's house – Max Miller. He was like me, mom died on fire on the ceiling." John shuddered. "He locked me in a closet and I had a vision of his blowing the back of Dean's head off. Next thing I know, the dresser he's got pressed up against the closet door goes flying across the room."

John continued to gaze at his son steadily, and Sam finally managed to meet his gaze, almost relieved to see no judgment in his dark eyes.

"Max Miller was telekinetic, Dad," Sam continued to explain. "That was the first time I felt something like that. Happened again with Alyssa Medina – another of Haris' 'kids.' She could steal memories. Wipe people's minds. When she tried to do it to Dean, I – I did it to her instead."

"Sam –"

"Dad, it even worked with Lucifer. With *Lucifer*, Dad! He tried to push Dean through a Hellgate – I pushed him back. That's how it works, I think."

John nodded, his face carefully neutral. "You think you could take this chick?" he asked slowly.

Sam shrugged. "I don't know," he admitted. "But if I can control it – if I can somehow use whatever this is I can do to turn her own powers back onto her, then that might be all we need. Even if I can't waste her ass, it might be enough to subdue her enough to get Dean the hell away from her."

"These 'powers' of yours didn't seem much help when she was kicking your ass all over Plano, son," John pointed out.

"No," Sam agreed. "Not until she let slip Dean was still alive. As soon as that happened, I was back in the game. Well, for a little while anyway..."

John considered his son for a long moment, breathing slow and controlled. "No," he said at length, shaking his head. "I'm not risking it. Not risking *you*, son. I already did that – tried to sacrifice one son to save the other – and look what happened? I almost lost *both* of you. I can't do that again. I can't, Sam. I won't."

Sam sighed. "Dad, it's the only way. We have an advantage, here. A small one, granted, but it's the only one I can see –"

John seemed about to reply when a sudden buzzing from his pocket announced his cell was ringing. Tugging the phone from his jeans, he glanced at the caller ID, a frown forming a line between his dark eyebrows. "Dean," he said quietly, and Sam straightened.

John took a breath before cautiously answering the call.

"Hey, Johnny. Been a while. You don't know how much I've been looking forward to seeing you again."

He closed his eyes for a second, head swimming. "Where's my son?" he demanded, wiping his hand across his forehead before flicking the phone onto speaker so that Sam could hear what was going on.

"Dead by the side of the road, last time I saw."

John's eyes flicked to Sam. "I meant Dean."

Mia laughed. "Oh, him. I thought you meant tall, dark and splattered for a second. My condolences, by the way. So much to live for. Life's a bitch, right?"

"Where's Dean?" John continued frostily, noting Mia's ignorance of Sam's miraculous recovery with a degree of satisfaction.

"Dean's fine, John," Mia replied. "Little hungry. Little thirsty. Little scared, although he'd never admit that. Just keeps lookin' at the door like he's expecting Daddy to come bustin' through at any minute to save his worthless little ass. Although it's a nice ass. Would kinda be a shame if you *didn't* save it."

"What makes you think I *won't* save him?" John demanded coolly.

"Well you're not exactly holding all the cards, honey," Mia sneered. "One boy dead, the other –"

John heard a crackle of static down the phone, then the unmistakable sound of Dean crying out in pain. "Mia –"

"Dad!" Dean's voice cut him off, screaming out of the cell. "Dad, don't! Don't give her the satisfaction –"

Anything else Dean might have said was choked off harshly, Mia's calm, sadistic tone returning to the phone line smoothly.

"You wanna try me, John?" she asked. "Wanna see how many pieces I can tear him into before I run out of flesh?"

"Don't you touch him," John growled menacingly. "This is between you and me. He has *nothing* to do with this –"

"Oh, but he has *everything* to do with it, John. Don't you get it? I'm gonna take your family apart piece by piece until you have nothing left; slaughter them like my family was slaughtered. I already got Sammy. Dean's just next in line. When I'm done with him, I start on your friends. Bobby Singer. That asshat Bearwalker. Jefferson. Shame someone already took out Jim Murphy and that Caleb guy. They would have been fun. Probably as much fun as Tanner Marks was..."

John ground his teeth together in a silent scream. "Tanner?"

"How d'you think I found out about your little boys, John?" Mia taunted. "Tanner was –" she paused, "– not particularly easily persuaded, but he gave you all up eventually. Pretty high threshold for pain though. Gotta say, I was impressed."

John fumed silently, trying not to think about another death he'd been indirectly responsible for. "What do you want?" he demanded through gritted teeth.

"Isn't it obvious? I want *you*, John. I want retribution. You surrender yourself to me, and all this can stop. Maybe I'll even let your friends carry on breathing."

"When and where?"

Sam cut his eyes to his father's in alarm, and John held up a hand to silence him.

Mia chuckled. "Come on, Johnny. I know you're not far away. And you sure as hell know where I am, right? Come play with me. You know you want to. And if ya don't? Well I'm gonna start slicing and dicing your little boy here pretty damn soon. Wouldn't want me to peel the skin of his pretty face would you?"

"Mia –"

The call disconnected abruptly, and John hesitated for a second, frozen in place, before suddenly launching the phone at the back seat where it slammed into the headrest, slid down onto the seat and finally bounced off onto the floorboards.

John looked up at Sam, hands clawing angrily at his thighs in impotent frustration. "I have to go," he told his youngest flatly. "I have to go or she's gonna kill him, Sam."

"Dad, no!" Sam caught John's jacket in a vivid action replay of their earlier exchange. "You *can't*! It's *suicide*! She'll *kill* you, Dad!

"Sam." John put a calming hand against Sam's cheek, the sudden unexpected contact causing Sam's breath to catch in his throat as he read the look of resignation in his father's eyes. "It's the only way, son. And she still thinks you're dead. Maybe there's still time to use our secret weapon."

"Dad —"

"Sam, it's gonna be okay. We can do this. We can save your brother."

"But at what cost?" Sam pulled away from him furiously. "At what cost, Dad?" He slammed his fist against the dashboard, and a crackle of energy arced from his palm, sparks scattering into the radio, which abruptly blared into life despite the truck's engine and electrics being switched off.

John pulled back a little, and Sam didn't fail to notice the look of surprised shock on his father's face. "Sam...?"

The younger Winchester grimaced coldly, sparks still jumping from his fingers. "I'm gonna *kill* that bitch!"

### **Collins house, Forth Worth, TX**

"You're gonna die, Dean. I'm going to tear you apart piece by piece, slowly, deliciously..." Mia sneered as she pulled items from the paper bag she'd just carried in to the house.

"You know, I've really learned a lot about inflicting pain over the past few months. You could say that I've perfected my technique when it comes to using some rather unconventional tools."

She broke in to an almost girlish giggle, tossing her head backwards as she continued her work. Pulling out several knives, she systematically held each upward, examining its edge with the side of her thumb.

"First you, then your dad. Did you know, Dean that certain Native American tribes could keep a prisoner alive for days while they tortured them? They were quite good at prolonging death, never letting their victims lose too much blood, knowing exactly what organs could be damaged without it being fatal," she taunted.

"Great! So you spent some time in the library, just my luck you found the 'How-To' section for serial killers instead of something more productive like old copies of *Vogue*," Dean snapped in reply.

Mia pulled out a long screwdriver next, spinning around so he could see its shining stainless steel tip. She waved it back and forth, taunting him as his mind conjured up the possible injuries the tool could inflict.

"You know, flat-blade screwdrivers are so handy for getting in those nooks and crannies. I used a drill on Greg's eyes, but I'm wondering if this wouldn't just 'pop' them out a little easier. The last time was just sooo messy," she complained. "Maybe we'll give that a try on John. Oh, but only after he's seen what I do to you."

"He's gonna mess you up, Mia. You'll never get your hands on him," the trapped hunter steadfastly insisted.

"You just keep saying that till you believe it, sweetheart. Matter of fact, you can scream it out with your last breath, but it won't change what's gonna happen here. I'm going to introduce you to a whole new world of pain, Dean. And if you're lucky, I'll let you off quick like I did Sam."

"Pain? Hell Mia, I've been living in pain ever since you came into my life. We've already had sex, so there's nothing else you can do to me that would violate me more," he threw back with a caustic grin.

"Nice comeback, lover, but I don't exactly recall you screaming when I was on top. Admit it, Dean... even now, you're still attracted to me," Mia leered suggestively.

"Oh you're right about that. I'd love nothing more than for you to be underneath me again... so long as I was updated on all my shots and had a loaded .45 against your temple."

She dismissed his idle threat with a wave of her hand and a casual toss of her long brown hair. Turning away from Dean, she went back to her unpacking.

Dean watched the brunette continue to unload the bag with morbid fascination, straining against the bonds to see the objects she removed. He regretted the movement almost instantly as the thin twine burrowed even further into the mangled flesh at his wrists, restarting the bleeding again.

He didn't care about pain, if anything his hands had been numb for so long he was worried the lack of circulation might have already caused irreparable damage. His broken thumb and index finger had long since ceased the agonizing throb that had set his jaw to clenching.

*What does any of that matter? My dad's gonna storm in here and that bitch is gonna kill him if I don't do something...*

Yanking his shoulder upward with a hard jerk, Dean held back the groan of pain that rose up out of his throat as more of his flesh was torn away. He felt his hand slide slightly, the blood covering his damaged hands and saturating the rope also allowing some minute movement.

Encouraged, he twisted again, feeling his dislocated thumb inch underneath the tight bonds. The grind of the misplaced bone ends being forced to move awkwardly against each other was like nails on a chalkboard, but Dean steadfastly ignored it.

*"Just a little more..."* he silently begged.

From the corner of his eye, he carefully watched Mia resume pulling items from the grocery bag, placing each out in a line across the kitchen counter. More concerned with his effort to free himself, Dean hadn't paid much attention to the objects she had removed, but as she hefted a large power drill, a sudden chill coursed over him.

Dean swallowed hard, feeling as though the same heart that was wildly beating in his chest had now jammed up in his throat. Images of Mia's former boyfriend lying in his own pool of blood flashed through his mind, vacant orbits stared upward while the man's mouth remained open in a silent scream.

He watched her add the drill to the line of other implements, his heart betraying him as it pounded beneath his ribcage. Dean's eyes widened as he then saw Mia pull out a short blue cylinder.

*A blowtorch? What the hell?*

The young hunter knew he was in trouble, fully recognized that Mia had threatened to kill him right in front of his dad. But he hadn't really counted on her using drills and blowtorches to carry out the psychotic deed. Still, he wasn't totally surprised, considering the lengths she had gone to snare him and the methods she'd employed to kill her former *friends*.

"What's wrong, lover?" Mia purred, turning to catch Dean staring at her activity. "Nothing here but a few of your basic home repair and torturing tools."

Dean watched as she lifted the drill again, brandishing it as though it were a handgun, the sadistic smile and narrowed glint in her eyes never leaving her face as she waved the tool in the air. She turned back to the counter and dropped the drill, running her hands along the assembled tools as if she were perusing a selection of fine jewels.

"Yeah, well don't get too excited. I don't imagine they'll have any openings on *Extreme Home Makeover* for a psychotic bitch like you..." Dean snarled.

Her laughter assaulted him, echoing throughout the empty house like some ghostly cackle. By now, it didn't faze him. He'd already made his mind up as to how much he despised her, how evil she was and how far she'd go to get her revenge.

Dean's only focus was on escaping. Somehow, someway, he was determined to get away from this woman and warn his father.

Waiting till her attention was back on her peculiar weapons, Dean returned to working his hand out from the coils of twine that were wrapped around him. He had

to give it to Mia, she'd known what she was doing when she chose the coarse twine to tie him up.

Twisting his wrists back and forth, he was hopeful that his previous efforts hadn't been lost during the distraction.

Tugging again, Dean felt his dislocated thumb move once more, the blood-slicked binding giving slightly and allowing the digit to slide underneath the knots. It was excruciating, the torsion exerted on the already injured thumb was nearly more than Dean could stand. Setting his jaw, he tugged again, the urgency outweighing the agony.

*Close... so close... come on dammit, just pull free...*

He urged himself on, gritting his teeth and holding his breath against the pain as he felt his tortured thumb creep further underneath the wire-like lengths that held him securely to the chair.

*For Dad...*

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Dean's head popped up and he found himself staring into Mia's dark eyes. In the dim light of the deserted house, he couldn't tell if her irises were the rich brown or partially glazed over black. It hardly mattered as she pounced into his lap like an overgrown cat.

*"A psychotic, demonic, overgrown cat..."* Dean thought to himself as he recoiled from her contact.

She scooted closer to him, her lithe body snuggling in against him as she had once done back at Dix's. The movement repulsed him and he pulled away again shifting his hips in an effort to dislodge her.

"Get the hell off me, bitch," he hissed.

Her hands reached out and stroked the side of his face, continuing down his neck and resting on his chest. It was meant to be sensual, but to Dean, it was as though the skin on her palms was acid, her touch burning his flesh with searing heat.

"Ah honey... you used to like it when I touched you. What's the matter? Have you lost that lovin' feeling?" Mia cooed, her breath pouring hotly against his ear.

"Yeah, hard to have that warm fuzzy when you have a black-eyed skank crawling all over you. Gotta tell you darlin', as turn-offs go, this ranks pretty much at the top of my list."

She didn't verbally respond to his bait and Dean cringed as her hands continued down his sides, around his hips and behind his back to where his hands were firmly bound. Groaning, he tried to ignore the pain her touch caused as her fingers reached the raw flesh of his wrists. Biting down on his lip, he barely managed to keep from crying out when she dug her nails into the tattered skin, yanking harshly against the thin rope to make sure it was still secured.

"Trying to get free? Gee sweetheart, aren't you enjoying our time together?"

"It's been a blast. Let's promise not to do it again anytime soon, okay?" he gasped back.

Her face turned to worry, her eyebrows arching upward with concern. "Aw, Dean, look what you've done to yourself. So much blood, and your poor hands, if you're not careful, you could permanently damage them. Oh wait, you won't be needing your hands anymore now will you? Well, unless it's to cram your intestines back inside when I get done ripping you open."

He glared at her, doing his best to remain strong and defiant despite her repetitive threats. "Just get off me, Mia. Kill me or get off me, 'cause whatever you're planning to do to me is nothing compared to having you this close."

She tsk'd her chagrin, pulling away from him slightly but remaining firmly planted on his lap. Bringing her hands back up to his face, she smiled sweetly as she reached to touch him.

"You really should be careful what you wish for," she warned.

Even before her fingers contacted his skin, white-blue sparks began to dance off of the tips. The small bolts of electricity struck the side of his face, making Dean jolt reflexively.

Beginning with a tingle, the sensation grew in intensity as her hands ran through his short hair, increasing as if she were turning up the dial on the energy surging out of her and into him. The tingle turned to burning as Dean tried to pull away, his entire body starting to feel the current as it surged down nerve endings from his scalp to his toes.

He bucked convulsively underneath her, struggling to pull away from her touch, but she twined her fingers through the short strands of his hair, holding him firmly in place as the electricity rushed throughout him. The pain was excruciating, every muscle beginning to contract in seizure-like spasms.

She was killing him, right here, right now.

"No... Dad..." Dean called out weakly.

"Daddy's not here yet, Dean. But he will be soon. He will be soon..." she hissed.

"He's... gonna... kill you!" Dean spat back.

Muscles taut to the point of rupturing, bones threatening to snap under the pressure of the electrically induced contractures, Dean strained to remain conscious. He jerked one last time as the current began to ebb away, his body slowly relaxing as the sparks ceased jumping from Mia's fingers to his head.

Through barely opened eyes, Dean watched her pull her hands away, licking her fingertips as the last of the tiny flashes disappeared.

"Like I said, Dean. Slowly and deliciously," she murmured.

Exhausted and lacking the strength to resist, Dean could only sit there limply as she leaned in closer, her lips mere inches from his own.

"You've some blood on you lip. Let me kiss it away for you," Mia offered seductively.

The young hunter pulled away, but she bent in nearer, her own chest pressing in on his laboring lungs. Closing his eyes, Dean refused to make eye contact with the female demon as she moved toward him.

With nothing but his own pounding heart and gasping breath echoing in his ears, Dean's eyes flew open with Mia's sudden yelp of pain. Her weight on his lap just as quickly disappeared as the young woman vaulted from atop him. She stumbled backwards, her hands clasped to her chest as she sputtered in shock.

"You bastard..." she snarled breathlessly as a small coil of smoke rose from between her breasts.

Dean looked down his body, spotting the amulet that was slowly fading back to its golden hue, its edges still coal-black from where it had come in contact with Mia.

"I told you to get off me you dumb bitch!" he snidely repeated, silently gloating that the ancient talisman had saved him once more.

She shrieked like a banshee, lunging toward the counter and grabbing one of the knives from the line of implements. Whirling back around, she was on top of him again almost instantly, the edge of the blade inches from the center of his chest.

"You think that's funny? See how hilarious you think it is when I cut out your heart and feed it to you," she snarled, pressing the tip closer.

Dean leaned forward purposely, feeling the sharp point bite into his skin. "DO IT!" he sneered.

"I will," she countered, her eyes blacker than the Impala as she drew her arm back in an arc above his head.

Dean stared at her defiantly, his head held firmly as he waited for her to plunge in blade.

Both demon and hunter startled simultaneously as the loud crash of the front door swinging open and slamming into the interior wall broke the intensity of the moment. Dean tore his glance away from Mia to focus on the abrupt commotion.

Standing silhouetted in the opening, he saw his father, the elder Winchester towering as he stepped over the piece of doorjamb that lay where he'd kicked in the door.

Restrained, Dean felt the air sucked out of his lungs as fear filled him seeing his dad standing in the same spot where the police officer had met his grotesque demise.

"Dad!" he exclaimed, his voice a mixture of relief and warning.

"You're early," Mia growled, standing between Dean and John, the blade held overtly in front of her.

"I'm here aren't I? I came like you demanded, now let my son go," John calmly answered.

Dean watched his father take a cautious step forward, raising his hands in the air in submission.

"Let Dean go. You can do whatever you want to me. Hell, I probably deserve it," the elder hunter acquiesced.

"NO!" Dean shouted. "Dad, what are you doing?"

"Dean," John spoke softly. "I'm doing this for you. I can't stand by knowing that you might pay the price for what I've caused. I just won't!"

"No, Dad, you can't. Kill her now, she killed Sammy. She's planning on killing us both," Dean pleaded.

Ignoring his appeal, John coolly stepped inside further, reaching for the door and shutting it behind him. Across the room, Dean strained against his bonds as he watched his father seal their fate. He couldn't stand seeing his dad giving in, deep-down condemning himself for getting tangled up with Mia in the first place.

"No, please," he groaned, pulling against the twine and feeling the thin line grate against the bone in his wrist.

"Aw, John, isn't that so sweet, hearing your son beg?" Mia taunted as she casually stepped closer to the Winchester patriarch.

"Let him go, Mia. I came like you asked. None of this is his fault, it never was."

She laughed, shaking her head as she stalked him, the knife twirling in her hand.

"Ah, it's not gonna be so easy, Johnny. You owe me, you owe me big time and I'm going to collect... in blood," Mia hissed.

"I know you don't believe me, but what happened to your family back in eighty-five, I was only trying to help," he explained.

"Help?" she screeched, "Your idea of *helping* destroyed my entire family. They're all dead because of you, you sonofabitch!"

"It wasn't like that, you don't know what happened back then. It was your mother that killed your father and brothers. She was possessed. I tried to save her but I got here too late, that's my only crime. I tried everything I could to save your mother. I did my best to save you," John explained.

"Save me? Ha! You helped me out just fine, John. You made me what I am."

"I'm sorry..." the elder hunter offered.

"I'm not," she sneered, her irises instantly reverting to black. "I like what I am. I love the power I have."

"This isn't what your mother wanted for you, Mia. She fought hard to save you, to protect you from the thing that was possessing her," John explained.

"Quit trying to blame it all on my mom, you bastard. I know what happened here, I know their blood is on your hands. Just like Sam's, just like Dean's will be. You're responsible for my brothers deaths, it's only fitting that you repay with the lives of your sons."

"I won't let you kill Dean," John insisted.

"You can't stop me," Mia snapped back.

"Kill her, Dad, just kill her now. Don't worry about me," Dean begged.

As his father and Mia continued their verbal dance, Dean fervently worked on the ropes around his wrists. He'd managed earlier to slip the base of his thumb

underneath the tight bindings, struggling again now, he nearly had the digit completely free.

*Gotta get free! Gotta help Dad before that bitch kills him...*

The words repeated in his head, even as he listened to the exchange between his father and the demon-hybrid, Dean focused only on that single mantra.

"Take her out, Dad," Dean repeated fearfully, watching as Mia moved closer to his father.

"Shut up!" Mia yelled, spinning around on him even as Dean pulled his right hand free with an agonized grimace, blood from his lacerated wrist splattering across the floor as the bindings fell off.

Seeing that her captive was now released, Mia jerked her head in Dean's direction, smiling with satisfaction as he was lifted, chair and all, and forcefully thrown through the nearby wall. The resulting crash of flesh and bone through wood and drywall radiated throughout the rundown house, dust and debris filling the empty living room with a cloying haze.

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"DEAN!" John screamed, lunging forward as his eldest disappeared into the rubble.

Before he could race to his downed son, Mia stepped in front of him, the huge blade raised threateningly.

"Where do you think you're going?" she demanded. "I'm not done with you yet.

John ignored her, so focused on looking for Dean. He wanted some sign, any movement, that might indicate his eldest had survived the brutal collision. But even as he struggled to look past her, past the debris that lay strewn between the two rooms, Mia sauntered up closer, lightly running the edge of the knife across his back.

He felt the sting of the metal slice through his shirt, biting into his flesh as it left a red-hot trail of blood and pain across his lower back. John held firm, refusing to show the pain, refusing to give her the satisfaction. Still worried about Dean, he didn't even look at the young woman as she continued to circle him like a shark.

"I knew you'd come for your sons," Mia smirked. "I knew they'd be the perfect bait."

"Please, just let me check on Dean. I swear I won't try anything, just please let him go," John pleaded.

"Beg for me, John. Beg me for Dean's life and just maybe, I'll put him out of his misery quick."

"Mia, I'm sorry. Please! I never meant for any of this to happen. I never meant for things to turn out the way they did. You have to believe me, I was trying to save your family, but I was young and green. My only crime is that I didn't know enough," the hunter argued.

"Beg me," she repeated. "Beg me or so help me I'll drag his body back out here and skin him like a dead deer."

"I won't beg you to kill my son," John adamantly refused.

"I'll feed his flesh to you while his guts are still warm..."

"No! You won't," he yelled back, lunging for her.

She recoiled slightly, stepping to the side even as she waved her hand at him, instantly freezing him in place.

"Nice try, Johnny, but I think those hunter reflexes are getting just a tad slow with age," she said mockingly.

He struggled futilely, his limbs paralyzed in place, his feet cemented to the floor. Powerless, John couldn't resist as Mia crossed in front of him, running the knife down the front of his chest and smiling with glee as a thin line of blood appeared in its wake.

"I hate you, John Winchester," she growled, crimping her eyes tightly as she focused her power on the helpless hunter.

John felt himself elevated off the floor, his feet dangling limply several inches off the threadbare carpeting.

"Kill me, just let Dean go," he begged.

"Is that your last request?" Mia asked. "It sounds like it to me."

An invisible hand clamped around his neck and John felt the air to his lungs cut off as she began to suffocate him. Twisting against the unseen force that held him, he could do little more than gag and gasp as his throat was crushed.

"Is the air a little thin? You're not looking so good old man," Mia taunted as she watched from behind jet-black eyes.

Blood seeped from the corners of John's mouth, vessels within his trachea rupturing and filling his already constricted throat with a thick sanguineous mixture. His eyes began to roll back in his head as he succumbed to asphyxia.

Mia watched him struggle then begin to quiet, a sadistic smile crossing her face as her lifelong nemesis was defeated before her. Yet as John faded into unconsciousness, her expression changed to concern.

"Nah, this is too easy, too quick. You don't deserve quick and easy, John Winchester," she said scornfully.

With another casual nod of her head, John's body was catapulted across to the opposite side of the room, smashing into the fireplace and the unyielding brick. Around him, the dry plaster cracked and crumbled from the impact, showering down on him like a thick, arid rain.

Dazed, but now able to suck in a life-sustaining lungful of air, John lay still on the floor, Blood ran unabated from a large gash on his scalp, running down and mixing with the steady flow from another on his cheek. The side of his face was already bruising from striking the rough mantle and he could feel his right eye swelling as it threatened to shut.

He managed to get his right arm underneath his battered body, pressing down against the hard floor to help push himself to his feet. But the arm wouldn't cooperate, collapsing under him as first numbness then pain shouted out to him from his shoulder down to his fingertips.

John rolled to his side, desperate to get to his knees, even more frantic to check on Dean. He didn't care what she did to him, but he had to know that his eldest was alright.

"Where ya going, John?" Mia taunted, reaching down and pulling his head back with a rough jerk of his hair. "The party is just starting, you can't leave now."

Without being touched, John was dragged back to the center of the room, his damaged arm flopping limply as he moved across the floor. On his back, he stared up, panting heavily as he listened to Mia's soft footfalls moving away from him. He couldn't force his body to follow her, but as she continued her rant, he tracked the sound of her voice.

"Retribution, John. Do you understand the meaning of that word?"

The hunter listened as the clinking of metal on metal echoed across the room. He blinked against the pain that was ravaging his body, trying to see what she was doing, yet still focused on finding Dean.

"Revenge, payback, such base emotions, but hey, what can I say? You've made me what I am," Mia called out from behind him.

John twisted his head, straining to see the hybrid demon as he listened to her hateful diatribe. In the dim light of the house, he saw something reflect a brilliant beam of light, watching as the flashes bounced from the ceiling to the nearby walls like light from a disco ball.

Another knife!

But this one was huge, larger even than the Ka-bar he'd carried in the Marines, even longer and more lethal looking than the massive Bowie he'd given to Dean several years back.

His eyes wide as he lay frozen in place on the floor, John watched as Mia sauntered back over and knelt down by his side. She dangled the long blade above his abdomen, waving it back and forth as though she were contemplating where to make her first plunge.

"They say payback's a bitch, John, but sometimes she's a demon too..." Mia snarled as she raised the knife above her head.

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Dean drowned in a sea of blackness, unconsciousness dragging him under even as pain washed over him in one wave after another. He struggled to the surface, regretting it almost instantly as alertness brought even more acknowledgement of the damage that had been done to him.

Everything hurt. From the top of his head down to his feet, Dean could catalogue nearly every muscle, joint and square inch of flesh by how much that particular area hurt. Still, pain meant life and considering his last coherent thought had been how much the wall was going to hurt when he hit it, Dean was fairly happy that he was alive, albeit cloaked in darkness.

The lack of vision scared the young hunter as he fought to become alert, his heart banging like a bass drum as thoughts of blindness teased at the edge of his mind. Scrubbing furiously at his eyes, the fine grit and dust from the wall debris clung tenaciously to his face. It mixed with blood that was streaming down from a cut above his forehead, matting his long lashes and cementing his lids shut as effectively as glue.

Frantic to see, even more desperate to get back to his father, Dean rubbed furiously at his eyes, ignoring the agony as his wrists flexed back and forth. Briefly robbed of his sight, the hunter's other well-trained senses took over for the deficit.

"Dean..."

His name teased his ears like a soft breeze. The voice behind the call had a hint of familiarity, but Dean was so focused on getting back to his feet that he ignored it.

"Dean..."

More urgent this time but still barely more than an intense whisper, Dean heard his name once more. Yet now, the tone and the timbre stole his attention.

*Sam?*

It couldn't be... his brother was dead.

Unable to see, Dean struggled to track the voice. His heart was screaming for him to look up and see his younger sibling standing there, but his mind reinforced that it was probably just Mia.

*"Demons lie, Dean..."* his brain reminded him.

"Dean... come on dude, I need you to open your eyes."

Rolling onto his back, the young hunter's eyes flew open at the command. Wetness glistened as he stared up at his brother and for a moment he still wasn't convinced that Sam was real.

"Is this Hell?"

"No, it's Texas," Sam returned with a slight grin as he knelt down.

Dean was silenced with emotion and pinned by the remaining rubble of the destroyed wall. Fighting to rise up, he was hampered by the remnants of the chair that were still tied to his ankles by way of the obstinate twine.

Vaguely, he felt Sam tugging near his feet as his sibling flipped open his pocketknife and snapped through the remaining bindings. A second later, Sam's strong arm was behind his shoulders, gently but firmly lifting him up until Dean was standing, even if it was with a distinct list to one side.

"Sammy..." he began. "I thought... she said..."

Dean's head went down, unable to voice the same dreaded fear he'd endured for the past couple of days while listening to Mia's unending assurance that Sam was dead. He wobbled briefly and Sam's hand was instantly there to steady him.

"What happened to you? Mia said she... well, I heard that truck..., why - how are you here?" Dean stammered.

"It doesn't matter right now, just suffice it to say that I was tougher than Mia thought," Sam answered.

*Mia!*

Memory rushed back to the injured hunter and Dean bolted erect as he looked about the destroyed kitchen, seeking some sign of his father.

"Dad... she's got Dad," Dean warned, panic tingeing his voice.

Side by side, the brothers charged back into the decrepit living room, both nearly skidding to a stop as they came upon the hybrid demon kneeling over their downed father. Dean shouted out her name as he saw her hand held high in the air, the enormous knife glinting in her hand as it hovered over John's chest.

"NO!" Sam yelled, his hand whipping up with a .45 cocked and ready to fire.

Mia looked up as the siblings abruptly entered the room, spotting Sam first and the pistol he had trained on her. She laughed loudly, her hand dropping slowly to her side as she lowered her weapon and backed away.

"You just don't know how to die like a good little victim, do you?" she sneered.

"You just underestimate Winchester determination," Sam threw back.

As they traded insults, Dean moved to John's side, offering his own blood-coated hand down to lift his dad to his feet. Once standing, John pulled the worn silver flask from the inside pocket of his jacket, unscrewing the cap as he prepared to douse the demon with Holy Water.

"Now John," Mia warned, her attention still focused on Sam as she held her ground. "Do you really think that's gonna hurt me at all?"

"Seems like you could use a good bath in something, bitch. I've had to sit here smelling your stink for the past two days," Dean snarked.

"Funny, Dean! Too bad I don't have the time to laugh at your little jibe," she answered.

With a casual nod of her head, John and Dean were flung across the living room once more, crashing into opposite walls and sliding limply to the floor.

Sam cast a quick glance over first to his brother then his dad, making sure that both were relatively all right before he took a determined step toward Mia.

"You're done with your little game of revenge, Mia," he growled. "It's ending here, tonight."

"And who's gonna stop me? Them? You? I don't think so. This is all working out perfectly. Now I get to kill both of John's boys right before his very eyes, starting with you!" she screamed.

Waving her hand in Sam's direction, the younger hunter waited for the impact but it never came. Instead, when he looked back up, he saw the confused look on the brunette's face as she narrowed her eyes and tried once more to launch him across the room.

Sam laughed deeply. Looking back at the young woman, he cleared his mind and focused all his concentration into one mental action.

Mia hissed like angry snake, her feet kicking furiously in mid-air as she was raised several feet off the ground. Pinned by an invisible force and elevated, she could manage nothing more than to rage like a demented marionette.

"You bastard! Do you think this little trick is going to stop me?" she shouted.

"No, but I bet this is gonna hurt like hell," Sam replied, his own head nodding first toward Mia and then the front wall.

The demon was flung effortlessly across the dimly lit space, colliding with the remains of the front door and impacting the jamb with a resounding thud.

From the corner of his eye, Sam saw John and Dean rise up from the floor, the elder hunter reaching again for the flask of precious fluid as he made his way toward the downed woman. Dean trailed just behind his father, retrieving another knife from the line of tools Mia had placed on the counter earlier.

"Sammy, you okay?" he called out, glancing back over his shoulder.

"Yeah, I'm good. Watch her!" he warned.

But the warning came a fraction too late as the ceiling above their heads began to crack, large chunks of plaster and flooring beginning to rain down on the threesome.

"Sam, look out!" Dean shouted as a larger piece split away and fell toward his brother.

He dove toward his younger sibling in an effort to protect him from the collapsing ceiling, but too many days without food and the subsequent abuse suffered at the demon's hands made him a fraction slow. Dean could only watch as the huge piece of plaster plummeted toward Sam.

The young psychic looked upward at his brother's warning, spotting the falling debris and lunging off to the side. He almost managed to avoid the heavy material... almost, as a chunk of rubble caught his left shoulder, glancing off but managing to knock the automatic from Sam's hand.

Worse than losing the handgun, the distraction broke Sam's concentration as he dove to stay clear of the breaking ceiling. In that moment, Mia was free, dropping to the floor and landing like a cat as Sam's hold on her was broken.

Dean charged for his brother's lost 9mm, his undamaged hand closing around the grip even as Mia screamed in defiance at the hunters. He sprang to his feet, his finger rapidly pulling on the trigger even as the brunette was dodging clear of the oncoming bullets.

"Missed me!" she sneered, rolling off her shoulder and back to her knees.

John took the opportunity to move in from behind, his arm sweeping in an arc as he threw the contents of the flask at the demon.

Mia screeched as the Holy Water soaked her back, the liquid hissing as smoke rose from her body. She whirled around to face the elder Winchester, her eyes flashing black even as she laughed.

"Is that the best you've got?" she taunted, using her demonic power to drop John to the floor.

"We're just getting started," Dean returned from across the room. He dropped the empty weapon and rushed to the counter where Mia's earlier-placed knives were lying silently. Grabbing the largest of them, he advanced on the woman.

"Oh, I don't think so..." Mia challenged him.

Like the night in the cabin, Dean felt himself thrown against the nearby wall, the knife clattering to the floor as his body was pinned rigidly against the plaster. The pressure on his body was incredible, his head and chest feeling as though he'd been caught in some gigantic invisible vise.

Blood began to flow from Dean's nose, trickling down the side of his face to meet the stream that had started from the corner of his mouth. As the force holding him increased, the hunter gasped in agony, suddenly remembering the young officer and the man's horrifying death.

He struggled against her hold, fighting to survive even as the sound of a rib cracking within his chest signaled that she was well on her way to crushing him.

"Take a look, John," she called over her shoulder to the downed father. "Say goodbye to Dean."

"I don't think so!" another voice interrupted.

Through blurred vision, Dean saw Sam rise up from the floor, bits of debris dropping from his brother's six foot four frame. Standing there, bruised and bloody, his sibling looked strong and defiant, his posture firm as he challenged the hybrid.

From his vantage point, Dean couldn't see if Sam so much as blinked, but instantly Mia was propelled backwards, pinned in a similar fashion to the opposite

wall. Her control broken, Dean dropped to the floor, greedily sucking in huge gulps of air as the force on his body abruptly ceased.

"How's it feel, Mia?" Sam posed sarcastically even as the blood began to flow from her mouth and nose as it had Dean's moments before.

The female demon thrashed, her head tossing wildly back and forth as she fought against the unseen energy being used against her. She snarled like a trapped animal, her eyes glowing with fury as she glared at Sam.

As Mia was held, caught in Sam's psychic snare, John advanced on her again. From across the shambles of the living room, Dean pulled himself to his knees, eager to help his father and brother put an end to the woman.

Sam remained still, his face an expressionless mask as he concentrated on holding Mia in place. From the corner of his eye, he saw John cast him a wary look even as his father moved in on Mia.

He knew he was freaking the hell out of his dad. For that matter, Sam was pretty sure he was freaking the hell out of himself. But whatever the source or cause of his power, right now all that mattered was that he was keeping Mia at bay.

*Somethin' up with those demonic Spidey Senses of yours, huh Sammy?*

Dean's words haunted him, but still Sam focused.

*"Accept you're a freak..."* his subconscious whispered.

*"So what if I am... if I can save my family, then what difference does it make?"* he answered silently.

Mia's scream brought Sam back to the task at hand. Looking back at the brunette, he saw that she was now bleeding profusely from nearly every orifice on her head, blood covering her face in a macabre mask.

"Hold her, Sam," John yelled, as he hurried to complete the Devil's Trap he was drawing on the floor beneath Mia's elevated feet.

"Finish her off," Dean called from behind him.

*KILL HER... kill her...killher...killer...*

The harsh voice shouted in the back of Sam's head, tempting him to avenge all the pain and suffering that Mia had inflicted not only on him and Dean, but all the other innocent people she'd killed throughout her bloody quest for revenge. He was pretty sure he hated her, despised her for what she had done to them, knowing that the damage she'd inflicted on his older brother was far more than physical. But still, he wasn't a killer... was he?

He blinked rapidly, pulling in a cleansing breath to settle himself. Seeing that his Dad was nearly finished, Sam strained to maintain his focus.

Mia screamed again in fury then went ominously silent. All three hunters looked on her, startled by the sudden lack of resistance.

As they watched, her eyes shaded over black. Unlike before, the oily hue covered not just her irises but the entire white conjunctivae. She reared back her head, a long low laugh seeping from between her blood-tinged lips.

Pulling away from the wall, her feet slowly settling on the floor as John drew back from his work, Mia looked from one Winchester to the next. If a moment before she had seemed fearful, now that look was replaced by determined evil.

Silence bathed the room as hunters and hunted waited for the next move.

It came in the form of brilliant light, emanating from Mia as though she were the epicenter of some star about to go supernova. Father and sons simultaneously lifted arms to shield their faces from the harshly cast glare.

Another heartbeat and the silence was broken by the deep rumble that echoed from the joists and trusses that framed the house. Shaking as though an earthquake were striking, the condemned building tore from its foundations, the ceiling cracking above their heads even as the walls bulged inward. Drywall began to crumble as the house screamed in its death throes, boards splitting as aged nails popped out and flew like missiles about the room.

Dean yelled out a warning, finally rising to his feet even as debris from the faltering structure began to rain down on him. Through the haze of dust, he could barely make out Mia, the light spilling out from her still blindingly bright.

Memories of the jail roared through the elder brother's head. He knew firsthand what the demon could do having barely escaped the collapse of the Warner lockup.

"Sam! Dad!" he shouted above the din. "We gotta get outta here before she brings the place down on top of us."

Despite Dean's warning, Sam didn't budge. As more of the house fell down around them, the psychic poured all his effort into counteracting Mia's power. Determined to reflect the demon's building-crushing force back on her, he barely registered his brother's frantic call.

Sweat beading on his forehead, Sam strained to push back on the deranged woman's demonic force. Single-minded in his action, he knew that his family was in danger if he couldn't stop Mia. With a deep breath, he tensed his body and closed his eyes.

"Sammy!" Dean shouted again. He could barely see his brother through the cloud of dust and plaster, yet beyond him, Dean saw Mia jerked backwards, the self-assured smile on her face giving way to a worried frown.

She looked weakened. Either by the amount of energy she was expending to attack them or by whatever Sam was doing to her, Dean could see that the hybrid was faltering.

"SAM... NOW!" he yelled once more. Lunging for his brother, Dean just missed Sam's muscular arm as a strong wind pushed him back.

Dimly, Dean could hear his father yelling for both his sons, but all around him the house was crumbling inward, obscuring his view of either Sam or John. He covered his head as a large piece of wood collided with his upraised arm, gouging out a chunk of flesh as it continued its path.

Trying to stand, desperate to reach Sam, Dean could barely draw a knee underneath him as both the debris and the growing wind assaulted him. Ready to make one more attempt at grabbing his baby brother, he looked up to see a wall of circulating dust spinning around his sibling's body.

It was like a mini-tornado, the peculiar wind gaining speed and intensity as it rose upward, collecting falling rubble in its cylindrical rotation. It reminded him of California and Nathan Cole... except...

As Dean stared, the twister rose above Sam, his sibling looking upward as he watched the strange zephyr gaining strength.

*Sammy's doing this?*

The thought had barely entered Dean's mind when everything around him exploded.

The loud blast pierced his eardrums as the wind climaxed and the old house surrendered to the demonic onslaught. The last of the roof collapsed in even as the walls blew outward, burying the occupants in the remnants of wood, drywall, and wires.

And then everything went silent...

Seconds passed as dust settled like fine snowflakes. Nothing moved, no other noise rose from the debris.

Eventually, Dean lifted his head, carefully running the back of his arm across his face as he silently feared what he would see among the ruins. His eyes open, he could hardly conceive the sight that greeted him.

The house was gone. The walls, the windows, everything that defined the former residence now lay in a smoking heap all around him.

*Around him...* and around his father and brother. Not on top... not burying them in a bone-crushing tomb.

It didn't seem possible, yet Dean was forced to gratefully admit that they were all still alive as first Sam and then John slowly rose from beneath the last pieces of building materials.

"Sammy?" he called out tentatively. "You okay?"

He watched as his brother stood, dusting off his clothes as he seemed to be taking stock of his body.

"Yeah... I guess I am," Sam eventually admitted.

"Dad?" Dean called out, twisting slightly from his seat among the rubble.

His dad stood wavering, blood mixing with dirt and covering most of his face and upper body from the dozens of cuts that crisscrossed his form. He smiled wanly as he looked back to Dean, nodding to convey his "okay-ness."

The three managed to meet together in what had been the center of the living room, Winchester blood and sweat covering them as they stood and gaped at the battlefield that had been the former Collins home. No one spoke, each of them still processing what had just happened.

"Mia? Where's Mia?" Dean asked finally.

But as they each fervently looked for signs of the female demon, a soft voice whispered among the destroyed house.

"*Mine...*"

Dean twitched, looking to see if either his brother or father had heard the single word.

"She's gone," Sam announced.

They stood there a moment longer, quietly taking in the scene until the distant sound of sirens tore them from their silent introspection.

"We gotta get out of here. Right now," John instructed with a groan.

Dean moved to his father's side, gently placing an arm underneath John's armpit as he draped the older man's arm across his shoulder. Between the two of them, father and son staggered through the remains of the front door and out onto the remaining porch.

"The truck and Impala are still here," Sam informed as he looked down the street in both directions. "I don't know where she went, how she got away."

"Who gives a damn? The bitch is gone for now and we're alive. Let's not look a gift horse in the mouth," Dean answered with derision.

They slowly made their way to the waiting vehicles, John conceding his ability to drive and tossing his youngest the keys to the dark truck. Dean coerced his father into riding with him in the Chevy, determined not to take "no" for an answer. He would rather have had them all together in the same vehicle, the threat of Mia coming after them ever present in his mind... but for right now this would have to do and at least they were all together again, if not separated by a couple of car lengths.

Once inside, Dean turned the key and exhaled a sigh of relief as the engine came to life and the comforting familiarity of the Impala warmed him. He could still smell Mia's perfume wafting throughout the classic car, the odor reminding him of the woman and every one of her dark deeds.

"Gonna need to fumigate the car," he mumbled.

"Huh?" John returned as he slumped against the passenger's side door.

"Nothing. Are you good? Do we need to go to a hospital?" Dean asked, concerned by the pale look of his father's face underneath the mask of drying blood and rising bruises.

John remained silent for a short time, his gaze fixed through the windshield and his truck that was peeling away just ahead of them.

"Nah, I'm fine," he softly answered. "I got my sons back. I got you... and Sam,"

Dean heard the delayed response, saw the worried look that crossed his father's face as he stared at Sam in the truck out in front.

*He knows...he saw... and he's worried. About Sam...about his powers.*

“Dad...” Dean began. “He’s not a freak, ya know. What he did back there...he saved our lives.”

It took a moment more before John replied. “I know,” he admitted ruefully. “I know.”

## **Motel 6, Benbrook, TX**

Dean stretched, hating the increase in pain as muscles and flesh protested the movement. Still, he was feeling better overall. A full meal, a couple of cold beers and his wounds cleaned and freshly bandaged had combined with a hot shower to make the elder brother as comfortably numb as his recent experiences would allow.

Across the room, Sam had slid down in the overstuffed chair, his long legs extended out beyond the limits of the ottoman. He quietly sipped the beer in his hand, cautiously watching as his brother squirmed gingerly on the full-sized bed.

They normally didn’t enjoy accommodations quite like these. Not that the motel was the Hilton, but compared to the brothers’ usual choices, it was definitely plush, if not at least relatively clean. John had insisted, handing Sam a small roll of cash to pay for the rooms as he and Dean waited in the Impala.

It took them a couple hours to get clean and patched up, Sam doing most of the repairs as he first stitched the myriads of lacerations covering his father and brother, then splinting and taping Dean’s fractured hand into place after checking on John’s bruised but not broken arm. All the while, Dean watched his brother. Looking for some sign that his silent sibling was coping with everything that had happened, Dean struggled to find the necessary words to apologize to Sam for nearly getting him killed.

*I thought you were dead... what would I have done if you had been?*

“Should we check on Dad?” Sam now asked, breaking the silence that had settled over the motel room.

Dean looked up, still lost in the miasma of his guilt-ridden mind. “Nah. I’m sure he’s okay. He just wanted to sleep. You did salt the door and windows in his room didn’t ya?”

“Yeah, first thing when I got here,” Sam replied. “Do you think she’ll come after us again?”

The older hunter considered the question as he twisted the beer bottle absently in his hand. He glanced nervously at the .45 lying on the nightstand next to him and the lines of salt that bordered the entrances to the room.

“I dunno. I’m sure she will, she hates us that much,” he replied. “She certainly isn’t the type of person to give up easily.”

“She’s not a *person* at all,” Sam reminded.

Dean nodded, “Yeah...”

“I know Dad feels responsible for her, for everything, but it really isn’t his fault. I don’t think anything would have changed what Mia became,” Sam stated thoughtfully.

“No, it wasn’t his fault at all. He told me what happened back in eighty-five and after listening to her go on about how she grew up, there’s no denying that she or whatever created her was nothing but evil,” Dean admitted. “Still...”

“Still what? You feel sorry for her?” Sam cried out.

“NO! That’s not what I meant,” the older brother insisted.

“Then what, Dean?” Sam demanded.

Dean sucked in a deep breath. Deciding that there was never going to be a “good time” to clear the air about everything that had happened, he rubbed his forehead and forced himself to meet his brother’s insistent gaze.

"Sam, I'm... well... I'm sorry. I know that doesn't nearly cover everything that went down between us, but you gotta know I *never* meant for any of this to happen," he began.

"Dean..."

"No, Sammy, let me finish okay. I'm sorry that I didn't listen to you... I'm sorry that we fought and for all the things I said. I'm so sorry for leaving you behind that night..." Dean swallowed hard, unable to continue as memories of the roadside battle between Mia and Sam echoed through his mind.

"I never, *never*, meant for it to come down to picking her over you. You gotta know that you're my brother and there's nothing I wouldn't do for you. I was just... well, I thought I loved her. I thought she really loved me..." he admitted as his voice quieted.

"I should have known better," Dean continued. "I mean, come on...the life I lead... the things I do... I should have known it couldn't have been real."

"Dean... listen to me, really listen to what I'm about to say to you," Sam interrupted.

Hazel eyes barely glance up from beneath downcast lids as the older sibling acquiesced.

"I wanted this to work out for you... I wanted you to be happy and I'm sorry that it turned out the way it did. Hell, I basically pushed you two together back there in Tennessee because I thought that Mia might really be the one. Dammit, you deserved to be happy. But Dean, she wasn't what either of us thought. It wasn't your fault that she lied to you, that she used you to bait in Dad," Sam offered.

Dean shook his head. "No Sam, it *is* my fault. All of it! I should have known better and it almost cost your life and Dad's."

"Our job nearly kills us on any given day, Dean. You can't be responsible for the fact that she was out for revenge, determined to do whatever it took to get back at Dad. I mean, come on, it's not like you were brainwashed or anything. She lied and she was a damn good actress."

"I wish to hell that she had whammied me or something. At least then I could blame it on that and not just my own stupidity," Dean admitted. "You're right when you said I spend too much time thinking with the downstairs brain," he added with a wry grin.

"I mean it, Dean. You can't shoulder this all alone. Maybe I should have spoken up sooner, maybe I should have checked her out more. Hell, blame Dad too. He should have clued us in on what was going on when he got that call back at Bobby's. Maybe then all of this could have been avoided," Sam insisted.

Dean frowned, looking away as his chest hitched.

"Dude, I thought you were dead..." he choked.

"But I wasn't..." Sam replied.

"I almost got us all killed..."

"We're still alive..."

"I betrayed you..."

"I'm still your brother, Dean. Nothing changes that. Not some stupid fight, not some demon hybrid, nothing. Do you get that?"

Dean looked back at his brother, noticing that Sam had sat up straight and was leaning forward in the chair. His brother's face was firmly serious, Sam's blue-green eyes peeking out from under his shaggy hair as he sought to make eye contact with Dean.

"Sam, I..."

"No Dean. I won't accept your apology because you don't owe me one, pure and simple. After all the times you've stood by my side, picked me up after Jess, helped me deal with this freakish power of mine..."

"You're not a freak, Sam. And I never meant to say that your powers or whatever they are, were demonic," Dean apologized.

"Yeah, well that remains to be seen," Sam answered quietly.

"You saved our asses, dude. I don't know how you did that bit at the end and I don't care. If it weren't for you, we'd be toast."

"It scares the crap out of me sometimes. What I can do, what I *might* do," the younger brother admitted.

"Now it's your turn to listen, Sammy. You are not evil! Sure, who knows where your powers might have come from, but you've never used them for anything but good. You are not Mia. You're not like any of them." Dean assured him.

"I know that, I guess."

A soft knock at the door startled both of them, Dean instantly reaching for his Colt as a .45 appeared in Sam's hand.

Covering his brother, Dean watched as Sam carefully cracked the door open letting light from the motel walkway sneak into the room.

"Demons don't generally knock," John's voice advised from behind the door.

Sam laughed and Dean released the breath he'd been holding as their father slowly and stiffly entered the room. He took the seat Sam had vacated while the youngest Winchester dropped onto the bed next to Dean's.

"A little nervous, eh boys?" John snarked.

"You taught us to be cautious," Sam threw back.

"That I did," the sage hunter agreed. "So why the serious looks?"

Dean laughed nervously. He'd been waiting for the lecture from his dad about getting involved with Mia. He'd let the woman use him and that nearly got them all killed. He was sure his dad would have something to say about the near-fatal slip.

"Sam and I were just talking..." Dean began.

"No doubt apologizing to each other I s'pose?"

"Something like that," Sam answered.

"Yeah, well, that's why I came over here," John explained.

"What? To tell us how we screwed up?" Sam asked defensively.

Dean tensed, waiting for either his father's condemning criticism or his brother to launch into an argument.

Neither happened.

"I just wanted you both to know that all of the blame for this lies with me. I know you're both sitting there trying to shoulder responsibility for what happened with Mia, but the truth is, ultimately, it's my fault," John stated straightforwardly, his hands clasped together as he looked back and forth between both his sons.

"I know I should have told you about that phone call a few months ago. I know if I would have told you about Mia then maybe you would have been on the look-out for her. Let's face it, if I'd known what I was doing back in eighty-five, maybe she would never have existed."

"You did the best you could, Dad. You didn't make Mia what she is," Sam assured his father.

"And it wasn't anyone's fault but mine that she got so close. You taught me better and I screwed up," Dean admitted, looking away as he fumbled with the edge of the tape that splinted his damaged fingers together.

John shook his head as he rose up from his seat. He crossed over to stand between the two beds, holding out his own bandaged arms toward his sons.

"That's enough!" he ordered gently. "None of this really matters. I nearly lost both of you... again. I swore I'd never go through what I did in Wyoming and then it almost happened again now in Fort Worth. There's too much at stake now, too much evil out there hunting for us. We're a family, if we can't count on each other, trust each other, then we've lost."

"Dad... about trusting each other..." Sam slowly added.

"Sam," John interrupted. "I trust you."

"But the things I did back there..."

"Son, didn't you hear what I just said? The things that are out there, the dark evil things that are trying to tear humanity apart, they don't play fair. We don't have many advantages, so maybe this is how things balance out in our favor," John suggested.

"But what if I become one of those things?" Sam questioned.

"No way, Sammy," Dean interjected, steadfastly sticking up for his baby brother.

With a wave of his hand John silenced both of his sons. "I trust you, Sam. I trust what you're doing, both of you. We have to stick together, now more than ever," he advised, the vivid image of Lucifer staring down on his lifeless sons intertwining with Mia's sadistic laugh as she threatened Dean.

"Mia's out there somewhere," Dean quietly added, staving off the cold shiver that set the hair on the back of his neck on end.

*"A psychotic bitch of a demon that can destroy a building with the flick of her hand or kill a person with a nod is out there somewhere gunning for us... yeah, just what we need,"* he added silently.

"We beat her once, we'll be ready for her the next time," Sam replied confidently.

"But if she's not truly possessed, how do we stop her?" Dean asked, looking between his father and brother.

"We'll find a way," John promised. "But until then, we seriously have to watch our backs."

The room grew silent, each man considering the implications of John's warning. Outside a brilliant flash of lightning signaled the beginning of a late spring storm. Yet as the responding thunder shook the motel causing the window and door to rattle, none of the hunters could mask the startled shudder that overtook them.

"It's just a thunderstorm," Sam assured with a nervous laugh.

Dean joined him with a wan grin, but in the back of his mind, the image of a beautiful brunette with sparkling brown eyes gave way to Mia's sadistic laughter and demonic black orbs.

She was out there...

Sooner or later, she would come back...

The End