

Season Three
Episode Eight: Under My Skin
By SnSam

Miami, Florida
X-Austed Nightclub

It was another typical Friday night in the thriving beach city as people ducked in and out of the various clubs, shops, and restaurants lining the beach, going wherever the night took them. Perhaps no place was more alive and pumping than the X-Austed Nightclub, a small party joint nestled in the back of one of the alleys dotting the Miami streets. It was where anyone who was anyone hung out and its popularity was made obvious by the procession of people lining up at least two blocks, coming up with any excuse they could to get in.

Inside the club, Chloe Saunders glanced up from her drink as Kylie Minogue's *Can't Get You Outta My Head* blasted through the speakers to the delight of the clubbers. The young blonde had to admit the constant thumping of the bass was beginning to get on her nerves and she could feel a headache starting to blossom.

"Hey, Chloe—you okay?" Sophie Dawson yelled as she plopped in a seat next to her, two shots in her hands. The contents spilled over the rims, but the brunette paid them no mind.

Chloe took a long sip from her martini and shook her head. "I don't think I'm feeling too well. I think I should head home!"

"We haven't even been here for an hour! You're seriously going to quit on me now?" She threw back one of her shots.

"We have an early casting with Stella in the morning. She'll kill us if we're late and she'll kill you if you drag ass!"

"Crap! I forgot all about the casting call!"

"How could you forget? Stella's been ramming it down our throats for the past week!"

Chloe and Sophie, not to mention a good portion of the patrons in the club, were models with the DeLisle Modeling Agency, a relatively small yet thriving agency run by Stella DeLisle. For the most part, Stella was a great agent to work with, pretty easygoing, except when it came to a major casting. Then she was a bitch along the lines of Janice Dickinson and Naomi Campbell, especially when it came to those she felt were her star models, which happened to include Chloe and Sophie.

Sophie slammed back her last shot and smiled at Chloe as a hiccup escaped her lips. "Chloe, since when do I remember anything that happened five minutes ago, much less the past week?"

Chloe smiled. "You're impossible, you know that?"

Sophie flashed another smile. "Yeah, I know." She reached over and grabbed her purse. "Okay, let's get out of here."

"I didn't say you had to come with me," Chloe said as she got up from the table just as Justin Timberlake's *Senorita* emanated through the speakers.

"Two things," Sophie said as they cut a path through the mass of partiers. "One, I'm not going to sit here and get wasted by myself and two, no way am I going to let you get cast over me. Gotta keep my A-game on, bitch."

Chloe laughed as they finally pushed out of the door, Sophie stumbling onto the sidewalk. Luckily, Chloe was able to catch her before she face-planted onto the sidewalk. "So, this right here isn't you wasted?"

Sophie shook her head and covered her mouth to keep the bile down. "I'm barely even buzzed, chick."

Chloe rolled her eyes as she hailed a cab. No way in hell was she about to let Sophie walk the few blocks to their apartment complex. "Tell me that when you wake up in the morning."

Opening the door as a cab finally came to a stop, Chloe pushed Sophie in and followed right behind her. Giving their destination to the cabbie, she sat back and glanced at her friend who was trying in vain not to get sick all over the interior.

"Hey, is she gonna puke in my cab?" the cabbie demanded, glancing at the two of them in his rearview mirror.

If you continue to drive like my dead grandmother. "No, she'll be okay."

"She better if you don't wanna have to pay to have this car cleaned."

I honestly don't see how that would be an improvement, Chloe thought as she took in the torn upholstery, dirty floorboards, and grimy windows. Finally the cabbie pulled up at the Sunshine Apartments and Chloe pressed a twenty into his gloved hand. "Keep the change," she muttered as she helped Sophie out of the car.

Anything to stop your bitching.

Just as she closed the door, Sophie retched all over Chloe's shoes. "Sorry, Chloe."

This cannot possibly get any worse... "Don't worry about it." Chloe cringed as she walked Sophie up to her apartment. After making sure the sick girl was settled in, she went up one level to her own apartment. It wasn't much to wink at, but it was still cozy in a way that made it hers. Not to mention the good deal she was able to get on it. Sure, it had its fair share of problems, what with the hot water being unpredictable and the air going out from time to time, but Evelyn, the landlady, was always quick to respond.

Unlocking her door, she quickly punched in her alarm code while kicking her ruined Jimmy Choos off at the same time. *There goes the best three hundred dollars I've ever spent...* Gathering her mail from the floor, she ignored the blinking light on her answering machine and made a beeline for the shower.

Emerging twenty minutes later, she slipped into her pajamas and turned in for the night.

The soft breeze didn't carry so much as a whisper as the wispy figure slipped between the crack of the window and sill. It floated through the air, barely detectable, seeking out its prize in the form of a young woman sleeping peacefully in her bed, blissfully unaware of anything around her.

With luck, she would never even wake up as the figure set out to fulfill its desire.

"Thanks a lot for the help, jackass," Sophie muttered to the retreating man's back as he descended down the stairs and onto the sidewalk.

Precariously balancing the two lattes in her left hand, she used her other to push open the door to the lobby of the apartment complex. "I swear to God, this is the last time I go out of my way to be nice."

Truth be told, she felt like crap after last night with the after-effects of the hangover ringing clear in her head. She wasn't sure how she made it out of her apartment and to the local Starbuck's without falling flat on her face, but she did. Sophie figured it was the least she could do after vomiting all over Chloe's shoes. Of course, a four dollar coffee didn't even come close to what she knew Chloe paid for the heels, but then again maybe it would teach her not to wear them when they went out to the clubs.

Oh well...let bygones be bygones and let's go kick some ass in the casting today. Stepping out of the elevator at the third floor, Sophie walked to 312 and knocked while trying to balance the drinks again.

"Open up, Chloe, it's me."

No answer.

“Come on, I know you’re not asleep in there. Get your ass to the door.”

Still no answer.

Sophie pounded harder on the door. “Chloe!”

“Will you hold it down out here?” A woman with pink curlers in her silver hair holding a Yorkie opened the door across from Chloe’s apartment. “Some people are trying to sleep around here.”

Sophie turned around and flashed her million-watt smile. “Sure thing, Mrs. Turner.” The woman gave her a final hard stare before shutting the door. “Bitch.”

Sophie knocked on Chloe’s door again, but there was still no answer. Placing the frothy drinks on the floor, she dug her cell phone from her pocket and dialed her friend’s number. After three rings, it went straight to voicemail.

“Hey, this is Chloe...leave me a message.”

Sophie hung up the phone at the same time she remembered she had a key to Chloe’s apartment in her purse. Fishing it out, she unlocked the door and pushed it open, grabbing the coffees off the floor. She quickly darted in before Mrs. Turner could make another appearance.

“Chloe? You here?”

Not seeing any activity in the living room, Sophie walked towards the bedroom where a coppery, iron-like smell assailed her nostrils. “God, Chloe—what the hell are you doing in here?”

Slowing her gait, Sophie cautiously walked into the bedroom. She barely had to get into the room to see the carnage, the coffees dropping from her hands and spilling, adding to the bloody mess. She let out a bloodcurdling scream as she stumbled out of the door.

For the life of her, Sophie didn’t know if she would ever get the image of Chloe, sprawled out on the bed, her skin flayed from her body, her blood-tinged blonde hair framing her mutilated face, out of her head.

Two Days Later...

“Dude, I am telling you, this is so much better than the last time we were here,” Dean Winchester said as he flashed a smile at his brother.

Sam rolled his eyes as an amused grin lit up his own face. “Dean, we weren’t here all that long ago.”

“I know, but the last time there weren’t any hot women in some *very* revealing bikinis...” Dean’s voice trailed off and he held up his hand in a wave as a couple of said-clad beauties walked in front of the Impala, their eyes lingering on Dean and the car. “Besides, the weather sucked out loud.”

“Oh, dear God, shoot me now,” Sam muttered, taking in Dean’s reaction to the “sights” Miami had to offer. His mind immediately went to a cartoon wolf, howling and panting, all the while dressed in a zoot suit.

The brothers had only arrived in Miami an hour before and Dean immediately set out for the beaches, even though they were supposed to be on a case. Sam was willing to give Dean some free time, figuring they both could use it considering the hard time Dean had had letting Mia go. He knew it was difficult for his brother to say good-bye to the girl but there just wasn’t any other way around it. She was only being put more at risk by accompanying them on hunts and it was hard for Dean to cope with that. He never liked to see an innocent get hurt so if it meant leaving her with Joe for a while, then it needed to be done.

Dean tried to hide the pain from him, but Sam could see it clear as day. It was a shame Dean had to leave her behind just as their relationship was beginning to blossom. Sam couldn’t blame Dean for how he felt, considering how hard it was for him to get close to a woman in the first place. And then have to let her go...

"Should you really be checking out these women considering you left Mia with Bearwalker? I thought you two were still an item."

Dean slowed to a stop at a streetlight and looked at Sam. "Dude, it's not like I pinned her or anything. I am free to do some sight-seeing."

"As long as Mia doesn't know about it, right?"

Dean sighed. "You know what? I'm not having this conversation with you right now." He nodded at Sam's messenger bag on the floorboard. "Fill me in on the hunt again."

"Would it kill you to pay attention the first time I tell you?"

Dean smiled. "It's called selective hearing, Sammy. I only tune in when I want."

"Yeah, I've noticed that." Sam dug into his bag, pulling out a few printed sheets he'd gotten from the Internet before they headed down to Florida. "So far there have been five murders within the past two weeks."

"What are the cops saying?"

"They're blaming it on a serial killer, but they don't have the evidence to back it up, besides the fact all of the victims were found in their beds, their skin gone."

"Could it be a shapeshifter?"

"Nah—or at least, I don't think so."

"The vics—do they have anything in common besides, you know, the flaying?"

"Uh..." Sam shuffled through his papers until he came to one with a few notes written in his hasty scribble. "Looks like they were all models from the DeLisle Modeling Agency."

Dean quirked a brow at Sam. "Seriously?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Dude, do you know what this means?"

Sam frowned as he tried to come up with an answer. Knowing Dean, it would be something completely ridiculous. "No, what?"

"My God, you really didn't get into the whole college experience when you were at Stanford, did you?" Dean shook his head. "This means we'll have to get into the agency to talk to them, seeing as they may know something. That means we'll be up close and personal with some very hot chicks."

Oh, yeah...completely ridiculous. "Does your mind ever stay out of the gutter?"

"Nope, it's in permanent residence down there twenty-four seven." Dean smiled. "You should drop in sometime."

"And risk drowning?" Sam asked. "I think I'll take a raincheck, thanks."

"I'm telling you, Sammy, this is the kind of hunt we should always be on the lookout for."

"If we did that, you'd never get anything finished, Dean. You'd be too busy gawking and drooling like a dog in heat." He looked over to see Dean's attention was no longer on him, instead focused on a busty blonde rollerblading down the sidewalk.

"Point proven."

"What?" Dean asked distractedly.

"We need to—Dean, are you listening?"

"Yeah, I'm listening..."

"Dean, I'm sitting in here, not out there."

Dean finally turned his head back to Sam. "What were you saying?"

Sam let out an irritated sigh. "I was saying we need to decide how we're going to go about this. We have a couple of options."

"Which are what?"

"We can either go to the police station or go to DeLisle and see what they know."

"Well, you know what I'm going to suggest."

"Yeah, and I think we should talk to the police." He let out another sigh as he returned the papers to his bag. "First, we need to see if we can find a motel."

"You read my mind, Sammy." Dean focused his attention once more on the beach.

"It's gotta be out of town, Dean, unless you've all of a sudden come into some money I don't know about."

Dean pouted. "You mean we can't have a beachfront view?"

"The only view we're going to get is of the distant city lights if we're lucky."

"Man..." Dean grumbled as he drove the Impala out of the city limits. "Now the only view I'll get is looking at your freakishly tall ass."

"Dude, if you're checking out my ass, you've got some serious problems."

"Ha friggin' ha," Dean growled. "Bitch."

Dean figured he either had to be very stupid or off his rocker to agree to allow his brother to drive the Impala unsupervised. It wasn't that Dean didn't trust Sam with the car—well, not entirely anyway—it was the fear of being separated from his baby. An entirely irrational reaction, yes, but one he could live with.

Of course, he found solace in the fact he would be surrounded by hot models within a few minutes.

"Dean, you will remember to get something accomplished while you're here, right?" Sam asked as he pulled up to the entrance of the DeLisle Modeling Agency. The bright white stucco building stood out in contrast to all of the other red brick ones surrounding it.

"Sam, I'm a professional. I think I know how to do my job."

Sam smirked. "Exactly. You *think* you know how." He ducked when Dean tried to slap his head. "I'll check in with you later."

"Oh, please, take your time." Dean pushed out of the car and leaned inside the window to glare at his brother. "If I see one scratch on this car, I will brain you."

"You worry way too much, Dean." Sam pulled away with a squeal of tires, leaving Dean behind to seethe at the horrible treatment of his cherished baby.

"I swear, I'm going to end up killing that kid..." Dean muttered, closing his eyes. Taking a deep, calming breath, he regained his composure enough before turning and striding into the looming building.

The inside of the agency was tastefully decorated in a modern décor. The stark white walls stood out in contrast against the bright, lime-colored sofas and chairs which were set off by the dark mahogany furniture. Chrome glinted brightly in the fluorescent lighting, its dazzling glare almost blinding as Dean walked in through the double doors.

Sauntering up to the large reception desk, Dean put his best smile forward for the snobbish-looking woman wearing a telephone headset. "Excuse me, I—"

"DeLisle Modeling Agency...please hold." She pressed a button on the switchboard.

Dean smiled and arched a brow. "Hi, I—"

The woman didn't fall for his charm as she held up a finger as the phone rang again. "DeLisle Modeling Agency...please hold."

"Busy day, huh?"

Again, the phone rang and she repeated her earlier gesture.

Okay, this is getting old really fast. "Excuse me, I just—"

The phone rang yet again and before the receptionist could finish her greeting, Dean reached across the desk and disconnected the headset. "Do you mind?" she demanded, icy blue eyes blazing.

"Actually, I don't." Dean smiled, but it was now full of displeasure.

She rolled her eyes. "I swear to God, you models behave the same way, thinking you're a gift to us all."

She thinks I'm a model...awesome! Wait till Sammy hears this one... "Actually, I was wondering if you could point me in the direction of Stella DeLisle." *Thank God Sammy told me her name on the way here...*

“So, if you’re not a model, then you must be here for the assistant’s job?” she asked impatiently.

Dean frowned. “The assistant’s job?”

The receptionist let out an irritated sigh, her stance clearly stating she didn’t have the time or patience for this.

“Yeah, the assistant’s job.” Dean’s smile became bigger. “Right—I am Stella DeLisle’s new assistant.”

The bottle blonde looked him up and down, causing Dean to do the same. Okay, so he didn’t look like the typical assistant with his torn jeans, black t-shirt, green button-down, and CAT boots, but if it got him in, then he would go with it.

The receptionist held out her well-manicured hand for her headset connection and nodded towards the bank of elevators. “Ms. DeLisle’s been expecting you—fourth floor. It opens right into her office.”

Dean handed the connection back with an impish grin. “Thank you so much for your time. I’ll be sure to let Stella know what an incredible help you’ve been.”

The receptionist glared at him before connecting her headset and returning her attention to the ringing phone. “DeLisle Modeling Agency...”

Whistling, Dean walked over and stood with a group waiting for one of the elevator cars to come down and take them to their destination. As he waited, he caught the eye of a cute redhead and smiled to himself as she blushed when he raised a suggestive brow. *I definitely haven’t lost my touch...*

Finally, the doors opened and Dean followed to group inside. He pressed the button for the fourth floor and stood back, exchanging pleasantries with the redhead.

“Going to the fourth floor, huh?” she asked, slightly impressed.

“Yeah, I have a meeting with Ms. DeLisle.” Dean smiled at her. “I’m Dean.”

The girl smiled back. “Gabby.” The doors closed, leaving Dean alone with another man as the car continued its ascent. The doors finally opened to the fourth floor and Dean got out, a little caught off-guard by the circus before him.

Chaos was the only way to describe it, plain and simple. People rushed to and fro like chickens with their heads cut off and it made Dean laugh a little. He wasn’t used to this fast-paced activity and he began to wonder if he had been a little stupid saying he was the new assistant.

Well, you wanted to get up close and personal, Winchester. It’s a little too late to tuck tail and run now so suck it up.

Stopping one of the “chickens,” Dean asked for Stella’s office and was pointed to a large room tucked in the middle of the chaos. Passing a cluster of models, he offered them a flirtatious smile as he strode for the open doorway.

Knocking softly, he startled the woman bustling around inside. “I didn’t mean to scare you. Are you Stella DeLisle, by any chance?” As she turned to look at him, he was instantly taken with her beauty—with long, raven hair and piercing green eyes that stood out in stark contrast to the ivory skin of her face.

She frowned in confusion. “Who are you? A new model?”

Dean chuckled. “Uh, no, but you’re the second person to ask me that.” He cleared his throat. “I’m here about the assistant’s job.”

“Oh.” She sounded surprised. “I’m sorry, but...you’re supposed to be a woman. At least, I think that’s what the hiring agency told me.”

Dean shrugged casually, silently hoping the actual hire wasn’t about to walk through the door. “I guess they made a mistake.” He hitched a thumb over his shoulder. “I can show myself out if you’d rather have a woman in here.”

Stella waved him away, offering him an apologetic smile. “No, please stay. I’m sorry—I just have a lot going on right now.” She pointed at a plush seat. “Please, sit down.”

Dean took the offered seat and she took one behind her large Plexiglas desk. “It seems pretty crazy out there.”

Stella barked out a laugh. "That's actually par for the course around here." Then she frowned. "But, yeah, it's a little crazier than normal."

"Why is that?"

Stella looked up at him narrowing her eyes.

"I'm sorry," Dean said quickly. "I was just curious."

Stella shook her head. "No, I'm sorry. I shouldn't be trying to scare you off...Um, I didn't manage to catch your name."

"Dean Walsh." He held out his hand and she shook it.

"Dean—that's a nice, strong name." She smiled. "Well, like I said, things are a little weird around here. In fact, you may want to get out while you still can."

"I don't scare easily."

"That's good because in this business, they will chew you up and spit you out if they even sense weakness. Not to mention scrape you off their fancy shoes like you're dog crap." She glanced out her door and became thoughtful. "I've just lost a few models recently and it's been a little hard."

"I'm sorry to hear that. What happened, if you don't mind me asking?"

"I don't mind. Hell, it's been in all the papers and gossip rags around here." She returned her gaze to Dean. "They were murdered."

"That's terrible."

"Tell me about it." She reached into her desk and palmed a couple of pills into her hand. Popping them in her mouth, she chased them down with some water. "I've got the police here constantly because they somehow think I'm involved, so business has been a little strained."

"I would imagine so." Dean frowned. "Why would the police think you're involved?"

"Hell if I know. I guess because all of the victims came from here."

"How many have you lost?"

"Five."

"Wow, I'm really sorry to hear that. I hope it gets better for you."

"Thanks." She fingered the chain around her neck and Dean took notice of the charm hanging from it. It was a simple heart design, alternating between white and pink diamonds in a white gold setting. She stood up from her desk. "Well, let's see about getting you to work."

Dean followed her out of the office to another part of the floor where a photo shoot was underway. *Oh, this day just keeps getting better and better*, he thought as he found himself in the midst of a lingerie shoot. Two women were dressed scantily in lace underwear and bras, posing for the photographer.

"Excellent, ladies! Keep up the energy for me!" He snapped another shot.

"Excellent work—it's beautiful!"

"Marco!"

The photographer stopped at the mention of his name and let out a long sigh as he turned to look at her. He was a man of average height with close-cropped dark hair with black rimmed glasses framing hazel eyes. "I told you about interrupting my photo shoots, Stella."

"And yet, I refuse to listen." She smirked. "Imagine that."

Marco turned and addressed his staff. "Everyone take five!" Handing his camera off to a passing girl, he focused on Stella. "What do you want, Stella?"

Stella pointed at Dean. "This is Dean Walsh—he's my new assistant."

Marco looked Dean up and down. "Am I supposed to be impressed?"

Dean frowned. *What the hell was it with these people?* To say that Stella and Marco didn't get along with each other would be a major understatement. There was definitely something going on between the two of them.

"I'd like you to give him some things to do," Stella said, clearly irritated.

"I thought he was *your* assistant?"

"He is, but I have to step out of the office for a bit."

“That sounds like your problem, not mine.” He waved a hand around the room. “In case you failed to notice, I’m in the middle of a shoot.”

“Look, will you just do this or not?”

“Fine.” He took a bottle of water from the girl who’d taken his camera earlier. “But I don’t get paid to baby-sit.”

“Now, you wait just—” Dean began but Stella cut him off.

“I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Whatever,” Marco muttered.

Dean watched her go and for a fleeting moment, he was tempted to chase her down. Instead, he cleared his throat and looked at Marco. “So, what do you need me to do?”

Marco rolled his eyes. “Just stay out of my way, pretty boy.”

Miami Police Department

Pulling up to the police station, Sam still couldn’t believe the audacity of his brother. Give Dean a group of hot women, especially if they happened to tie into a hunt, and he was a happy camper. Dean acted as if he’d never seen a woman before, knowing full well he had one waiting for him back at Joe’s. Maybe it was Dean’s way of coping with the loss, Sam couldn’t be sure.

Reaching into the glove compartment, he pulled out the small box containing their trove of aliases. Choosing one, he was about to put the box back when a sudden, weird thought told him to grab another one. He wasn’t sure what made him do it, but he’d learned long ago to go with his feelings. Placing the box back, he got out of the Impala and made his way across the busy street to the steps of police headquarters.

Pushing through the double doors, he was instantly bombarded with pandemonium. Officers darted this way and that, taking statements, booking criminals and dealing with hysterical citizens. Quite a few sat at their desks, filling out paperwork and answering phones while others tried in vain to keep the mess organized.

Sam tried his best to appear as if he belonged there and attempted to flag down a couple of officers for help. They either didn’t notice him or chose to act as if he wasn’t there.

“Do you need some help, sir?”

Sam had to look down to see a short, pudgy man with thinning brown hair who was peering up at him through black rimmed glasses. “I was wondering if I could speak to someone in charge of the DeLisle murders?”

“Then you’re looking for Lieutenant Mason.” He nodded to an open doorway nestled behind the myriad of desks. “If you’re lucky, she’s in her office.”

Sorry, Officer, but luck has never been on my side. “Thanks,” Sam said smiling.

The little officer returned the gesture. “No problem, kid. Just don’t come looking for me if she tears you a new one.”

Frowning, but not having the chance to ask the officer what he meant before he scurried away, Sam walked through the maze of desks towards the lieutenant’s office. Coming to the open door, he rapped softly on the frame.

Turning in her chair, a very attractive woman with long, wavy brown hair and brown eyes held up a waiting finger to Sam as she continued to talk on the phone.

“Janet, I told you I would give you the story as soon as I get it...No, I am not BS’ing you...You think you could do any better? I didn’t think so...I’ll call a press conference as soon as I find out anything new...Yes, you’ll be the first one I call.” Slamming down the phone, she put her head on her desk. “Damn reporters—I swear they were vultures in another life.”

Sam swallowed nervously and cleared his throat to remind her he was standing there. Her head shot up instantly and she narrowed her eyes. "Who the hell are you?"

"Um...my name is Sam Walsh."

"You're not a reporter, are you? Because if you are, I swear to God I will toss you out on your ass so hard you won't be able to sit on it for weeks."

Thank God I grabbed that other badge before coming in here. I guess maybe my luck is changing for once. "No, actually I'm a behaviorist with the FBI." He pulled out his phony badge and flashed it at her. "May I sit down?"

"That depends—are you here to take my case from me?"

"No, nothing like that," Sam assured her. "We've been giving it a gander and they thought I might be able to help you out and give you some idea of what kind of killer you could be dealing with."

"Oh." Mason's face finally softened and she pointed at the chair across from her desk. "Have a seat then."

"Thanks." Sam sat down and pulled a small notepad and pen from his pocket. "I'm sorry about not calling first."

"No, it's okay. I'm afraid I've been a little uptight lately, what with the murders and the fact my higher-ups are just looking for a reason to demote me."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

Mason shrugged. "It's not your fault. It's just the way it is being a woman in a power position on the police force. But you didn't come to hear me complain, did you, Agent Walsh?"

"It's Sam, and believe me, the last thing I want to do is get you canned," Sam said and found himself meaning it. He didn't know what it was about the lieutenant, but he found himself liking her, not to mention being attracted to her.

"I appreciate that, Agent Walsh." As Sam opened his mouth to protest his name, she cut him off. "Sorry, but I've got to keep some professional decorum. So, what did you need to know?"

"What exactly can you tell me about the murders?"

Mason sighed. "I'm afraid there's not much—there's no sign of forced entry, no witnesses, no evidence of any kind left behind."

"So, you're pretty much at a loss?"

Mason nodded. "It looks like it. The only thing we know for sure is that there's been five murders already and I don't see any signs of it slowing down."

"What about the victims?"

"What about them?"

"Have you found any connection between them?"

Mason arched a brow. "You mean, besides the fact they were all models with the DeLisle Modeling Agency?"

Sam nodded.

"No, there's nothing else to connect them. We figure this wacko just has it in for models."

Sam frowned. "You don't seem too surprised by that motive."

Mason shrugged a shoulder. "Miami is a city full of beautiful people. Someone's bound to resent that. I've seen far more people around here kill for less."

"Can't argue with you there. The world is full of crazy people."

"You're telling me." She leaned forward in her chair. "So, what do you think we're dealing with here?"

Something supernatural... "Uh, well, it could be like you said—someone killing because they're jealous. It's hard to live in a place like this and feel like you don't fit in. This offender's M.O., it's brutal, like he wants to punish his victims. It's like he's working out some kind of frustration and taking it out on the vics."

Mason nodded. "I'll agree with you there."

“Do you have the autopsy report on the latest victim...” He consulted his pad. “Chloe Saunders?”

Mason stood up and grabbed her suit jacket from the back of her chair. “I was actually on my way to get it. Come with me and you can talk to the doc yourself.”

DeLisle Modeling Agency

Dean really hated the feeling of being used. Never mind he did it to the female population on a regular basis; it wasn't the same as being someone's “go-fer,” completing mundane tasks he was more than sure they could handle themselves. Yet another reason Dean was thankful for hunting and the simple life it gave him.

After doing pretty much nothing but sitting around as Marco ignored him, he was now carting around lunch and delivering it to the appropriate people. As the aromas wafted through the air, teasing his nostrils, he wanted nothing more than to find a closet and pig-out on the food, healthy or not. *Why the hell did I talk myself into this?*

As two models sauntered by, waving flirtatiously, he knew exactly why he was doing this. The tiny voice in the back of his head wouldn't stop chiding him about Mia, that essentially what he was doing was cheating on her. Then again, it was like he told Sammy earlier: He wasn't pinned to her or anything—he was only sticking his toes in the water while he was down here.

Delivering the too-healthy food to everyone—*God, have these people ever heard of grease?*—he walked towards Stella's office to drop off her grilled chicken salad. The door was standing slightly ajar and as he lifted his hand to knock, he heard her angry voice.

“I don't care what you think you're doing! No, I will not sit here and continue to be made a fool of...No, I don't think you're listening to me...”

Dean thought about stepping away, allowing Stella to have her privacy, but what she said next had him reconsidering that.

“I'm not going to let my business—my life—be run into the ground and I don't care what it takes, I'm putting a stop to this once and for all!”

Miami-Dade County Coroner's Office

Walking the block or so to the Miami-Dade County Coroner's Office, Sam and Mason pushed through the doors and were instantly blasted by the cool breeze of the air conditioner. It was a welcome respite from the heat and Sam felt a shiver run down his spine. Following Mason to the back of the building in the direction of the morgue, Sam gave a small wave to the female attendant. When they stepped through the large steel doors, Sam thought he'd stepped into another era.

The Grateful Dead's [*Dark Star*](#) blared through the speakers of a worn stereo sitting on the desk in the corner. A man in a white lab coat with long silver hair pulled back into a ponytail bobbed his head in perfect timing to the beat, humming along as he worked on a corpse.

“Hey, Doc, you think you got that radio turned up loud enough?” Mason yelled to be heard over the radio.

The doctor turned around and Sam bit back a smile as he took in the doctor's baggy khakis teamed up with a bright tie-dyed tee. Large rimmed glasses barely managed to stay on his nose, taking up a good portion of his white-bearded face. A lone gold stud stuck out from his ear.

The doc smiled easily at Mason. “This is the Dead, Lieutenant. You either crank it up or don't bother with it at all.” He looked over at Sam. “You know what I'm saying, right?”

Sam shook his head. “Sorry, this music never did it for me.”

The hippie doc clutched his chest as if Sam had stabbed him. "Such is the travesty of the younger generation. You kids wouldn't know good music if it bit you in the ass. Now all you care about is that bubblegum pop and emo rock." He shook his head sadly. "The whole lot of you are being brainwashed."

Sam chuckled as he found himself liking the eccentric doctor.

Mason glanced over at Sam. "Don't pay Doctor Jarvik any mind. He tries to get anyone who steps through his doors to listen to this hippie crap."

"'Crap' she says." He pulled his gloves off and reached over to turn the radio down before extending a hand to Sam. "The name's Phil Jarvik."

Sam shook his hand, not surprised by the man's firm grip. "Sam Walsh."

"He's a behaviorist with the FBI," Mason supplied. "Thought he might be able to give us an idea of who we're dealing with here."

Jarvik grimaced. "The DeLisle murders, right?"

Sam nodded.

"We can use all the help we can get with those," Jarvik admitted.

"Well, I'm here to see what I can do."

"Can you show Agent Walsh what you found?" Mason asked.

"Sure thing. Come with me—can I call you Sam?"

"Please do."

"Good. I was never one to bother with pleasantries. We were given first names for a reason, right?"

Sam smiled. "Can't argue with you there."

Jarvik smiled over at Mason as he led them to one of the multitude of stainless steel drawers. "I like this guy."

"He's not so bad," Mason admitted.

Sam ducked his head before anyone could see the blush creeping up in his cheeks. Neither paid him any mind as Jarvik scooped up a folder from a nearby tray, handing it off to Sam before opening the drawer.

"You might want to brace yourself for this," he warned before unwrapping the body from its plastic covering.

The warning didn't do anything to stop Sam's stomach from going up. Even after all he'd seen and faced as a hunter, it still did nothing to prepare him for the sight before him. While the basic outline of the corpse showed it was very much human, the missing skin would say otherwise. It was as if someone took a scraper and removed the skin, almost as if they were peeling paint from a wall.

Putting a hand up to his mouth to try to keep back the bile threatening to come up, Sam cleared his throat as he opened the manila folder. "This was how she was found?"

Jarvik nodded. "Poor girl—for someone to come along and take the time to remove every inch of her skin precisely is beyond me."

Sam willed himself to look more closely at the girl and indeed saw not a trace of skin was left on her body. *It can't be a shapeshifter—if they want someone's skin all they have to do is kill a person and assume their form.*

"Even after all this, it wasn't what killed her," Jarvik said.

Sam frowned. "What did?"

Jarvik looked up at him. "She was drained."

"You mean of her blood?"

Jarvik shook his head.

"What do you mean then?"

"Now, before I tell you this, I want you to understand I have been drug-free for the last thirty years or so. I mean, it was a different time back then. Everyone was doing it."

"Just tell him already, Doc," Mason said impatiently, as if she'd heard this spiel before.

Jarvik exchanged a grin with Sam. "Mason likes to get to business. She doesn't take the time to have some fun." When Mason glared at him, he became serious. "If I didn't know any better, I would say her soul was drained."

"Really? And this is the same with all the vics?" Sam tried to sound shocked, but judging from the look Mason gave him, he failed miserably. *Sorry, but in my line of work, you don't tend to be shocked by anything anymore.* "Do you have anything to back that up?"

Jarvik shook his head, grinning ruefully. "You think I'm crazy, don't you, Sam?" Sam opened his mouth to protest, but Jarvik stopped him. "It's okay. Honestly, I think I may be crazy too, but I have seen nearly every death imaginable come through these doors, but I have never seen anything like this. The skinning was done post-mortem."

"Can you tell how they were skinned?"

"It looks like the skin was just peeled right off. Whoever did it was damn good."

Sam closed the folder and handed it back to Jarvik. "Thank you for your time, Doc."

Jarvik held out his hand and shook Sam's again. "It was my pleasure, Sam. I always enjoy entertaining an audience." He looked over at Mason and smiled. "You know, if there were more agents in the FBI like this young man, we could really get some work done."

Sam smiled, wishing he wasn't lying to the doctor about who he really was. Jarvik seemed like a great guy and Sam felt guilty for stringing him along. *Just one of the hazards of being a hunter...*

"Call me if you find anything more, Doc," Mason said as she walked with Sam to the doors.

Jarvik was pulling on another pair of latex gloves, reaching for his radio. "Will do."

As soon as they stepped out into the bright Florida sunshine, Mason whirled on Sam. "What was that in there?"

Sam frowned. "What was what?"

"When the doc told you about what killed the vics, you didn't act the least bit fazed by it."

Sam shrugged. "I've heard crazier things in my line of work." Before she could argue further, Sam pulled out his notepad and scribbled his number on it. "Listen, I've got to go check out some things. Call me if you find out anything new."

Mason took the slip of paper. "What about if you find anything?"

Sam smiled as he walked away. "I know where to find you."

DeLisle Modeling Agency

Things were definitely shaping up for the better for Dean. He realized if the gates of Hell chose to open up and swallow him then and there, he would be okay with that. After all, how many guys could ever say they got the chance to help models—by "help" meaning rubbing lotion on their backs, helping them zip up outfits and tie off bikinis, and giving them massages. Last time Dean did that, he was pretty sure he was quite inebriated and attempting his latest conquest.

This is an actual friggin' job? How in the world did the guidance counselors at school not tell me about this? Hell, if they did, I may have given Dad the same fight Sammy gave him when he wanted to go to college...

"Dean, can you be a sweetie and zip this up for me?"

Dean smiled at the girl standing before him. "Sure thing, Sophie."

Sophie smiled as she turned around, her back facing Dean. "You have been nothing but an absolute doll." After he zipped her up, she turned to face him once more. "How is it that you're here for a lowly assistant's job?" She brought a finger up and traced along his jaw line. "With a face like this, you could do so much more," she cooed.

Dean's smile turned cocky. "Really?"

Sophie smiled, practically eating up the attention she was getting from Dean. "Definitely."

Dean paid no heed as the elevator dinged, signaling someone was getting off. He only had eyes for Sophie. "Any ideas on what I could do with it?"

Sophie's smile turned seductive. "I can think of a few..."

I bet you could... Before Dean could voice that opinion, the sound of a clearing throat stopped him dead in his tracks. He saw Sophie's eyes light up at the newest arrival and he prayed it wasn't a jealous boyfriend with the strong urge to redecorate the fourth floor with his blood.

"Dean?"

Dean visibly sagged with relief at the sound of his brother's voice. If they weren't in such a public place, he would have scooped Sam up and given him a bear hug.

"Sammy!" He turned around, beaming. "What brings you over here?"

"I was in the area." Sam nodded towards Sophie. "Who's your friend?"

"Oh, Sammy, this is Sophie." Dean smiled at the girl. "Sophie, this is my brother Sam."

Sophie arched a brow in approval. "Brother, huh?" She held out a well-manicured hand to Sam. "The genes certainly run deep in your family. Nice to meet you, Sam. Dean's told me quite a bit about you."

"I'm sure he did." Sam smiled tightly as he shook her hand before releasing it and turning to Dean. "Is there somewhere we can talk?"

"Sure." Dean winked at Sophie. "I'll be right back."

Sophie pouted. "Don't be too long. We have to leave soon or we'll never get in."

Sam frowned as he followed Dean to a small alcove. "What is she talking about?"

Dean waved a dismissive hand. "Nothing."

"Nothing?" Sam scoffed. "Dean, if I didn't arrive when I did, you two would have thrown down in the middle of the room."

"I think that's taking it a little bit too far, Sammy." Dean grinned. "We would have at least made it to the elevators."

Sam rolled his eyes. "Great, I'm going to have to take the stairs now."

"But seriously though, I'm going undercover trying to see what I can find out from in here."

Sam nodded. "Uh-huh. And how has that been going for you?"

Dean shrugged. "It's a little...slow."

Sam feigned shock. "Really?"

"They've got me running around like a damn gopher. I can't get anything done."

Sam looked towards Sophie who was pretending not to watch them and smirked at Dean. "Yeah, I can see where that would be taxing."

"Whatever, dude. Besides, I did manage to learn two things."

"Oh, this ought to be good."

Dean went on as if he didn't hear Sam. "One, everyone here thinks I could cut it as a model."

"Oh, dear God..."

"And two, I overheard a conversation Stella was having."

Sam frowned. "What kind of conversation?"

"Looks like someone's curious now," Dean said, arching a brow. "She was talking to someone over the phone. Basically, she was gearing up to tear someone a new one. She said she wasn't going to let her business be run into the ground."

"What to you think that means?"

"You tell me, College Boy."

Sam ignored the comment. "We may still need to keep an eye on her."

"That's the brilliant plan," Dean said, nodding. "So, what did you find out, Nancy Drew?"

"I met up with Lieutenant Mason—she's in charge of the investigation."

"Is she hot?"

"Dean..." Sam couldn't stop the small smile forming on his lips and Dean didn't miss it.

"Looks like someone has a first-grade crush," he teased.

"No, I don't!" Sam said a little too quickly.

"Oh, you so do." Dean grinned. "You shouldn't even try to hide it, Sammy. Big brother sees all and knows all."

"Big brother is also an annoying ass," Sam muttered.

"Is that your face I see turning an interesting shade of red, Sammy?"

"Would you just shut up?" Sam hissed.

"Okay, fine. What did you find out from the hot police chick you clearly don't have a crush on?"

Sam sighed in frustration. "Nothing we don't already know except for the fact the victims were dead before they were filleted."

"What do you mean?"

Sam chuckled as he scratched the back of his head. "Well, if you believe the hippie coroner, their souls were drained."

Shock didn't even register on Dean's face. "We've heard and seen crazier things."

"Yep."

"So, what do you think we're dealing with?"

"I'm not too sure yet since it could be several things. I figure if I can get in and do some research, I can narrow it down."

Dean glanced down at his watch. "I don't see where you're going to get much research done today."

"Yeah, me either. The library will be closing soon so I'll just have to start on it tomorrow unless I can find something on the internet tonight."

Dean clapped Sam on the shoulder. "Well, that works out great because it turns out Sophie has a friend. I told her we could use a nice little tour of Miami."

Sam rolled his eyes. "And I'm sure she could offer so much more to you."

"If she's offering, who am I to refuse?"

"Dude, you do remember Mia, don't you? Petite woman, long brown hair, brown eyes, demons possessing her like crazy?"

"Don't start doing that, Sam."

"Doing what?"

"You know damn well what—trying to make me feel guilty. I remember Mia—very well, in fact. I haven't stopped thinking about her since I dumped her with Joe."

"So, this is you coping?"

Dean shrugged.

"I'm not going to argue about it then."

"Good. Besides, Sophie was the last person to see Chloe alive so I'm hoping she can tell me something."

"You mean besides her bra size?"

"Dude..."

Sam held up his hands in surrender. "I'm not saying anything else. I'll be at the motel if you need anything."

"Oh, if I need something, Sammy, I will not be calling you."

Sam grinned. "Don't wake me when you manage to crawl in." He crossed his fingers as he started to edge back towards the elevator. "Here's hoping you find out something enlightening. Oh, and by the way, you may want to explain that Chicken of the Sea is actually tuna and not chicken."

Flamingo Inn

Sam let out a deep sigh as he unlocked the door to his room and threw his jacket on his bed. He knew it was a bad idea to let Dean go into the modeling agency. Sure,

he'd managed to overhear the conversation Stella was having over the phone, but that could easily be attributed to anything. She was in a cutthroat business after all—it was either be eaten or do the eating yourself. Besides, she wouldn't have much to gain by killing off her models—it would hinder more than help and not to mention that it was something supernatural behind the killings.

Still, the younger Winchester knew they couldn't discredit her yet. After all, they hadn't managed to stay alive this long in the hunting world by giving people the benefit of the doubt. They'd dealt with crazy humans before, so it wouldn't come as much of a surprise if Stella was behind all the deaths.

Now, on top of everything else, Sam just had to let Dean see he may be interested in Mason. It wasn't like he was gaga over her—she was an attractive, strong, professional woman. There was nothing wrong with being attracted to her; she was his type. It was these same qualities that attracted him to Jess and Sarah.

Sam couldn't dwell on that though. He was here in Miami for a reason; he couldn't afford to goof off, mostly because Dean was managing to do it enough for the both of them. Plus, he didn't really want to get excited about starting something with Mason, then have to leave her in a few days.

"Quit talking like there's something there, Sam. You don't even know if she's single or not."

Well, I didn't see a ring...

"Yeah, and you weren't exactly seeking one out, either."

How could you not notice she didn't have a huge ass stone on her finger?

"Okay, I am now going to stop arguing with myself. I'm going to go take a nice, long, hot—"

Sam's cell phone rang and he cursed the tiny silver device. Plucking it from his jacket pocket, he frowned at the unfamiliar number on the screen. "Hello?"

"Agent Walsh?"

Sam nearly dropped his phone in surprise at Mason's voice, but caught it before it could hit the floor. "Uh, yes...Lieutenant. What can I do for you?"

"Are you busy?"

"Not at the moment, but—"

"Good, then you can meet me at Danny's Diner." If Sam didn't know any better, he would say she was annoyed with something.

"Uh, sure...just give me some time to change."

"I'll see you in twenty minutes." She hung up before he could say anything else.

Did I say annoyed? I think she's downright pissed off. This is so not going to be good...

X-Austed Night Club

Kill me...kill me...kill me...kill me...

Dean couldn't stop those two words from playing in his head.
Vampire...ghost...zombie...hell, give me a demon—anything to get me out of this godforsaken place.

The one good thing to come out of this little excursion was that it helped him remember why he preferred little hole-in-the-wall bars over thumping, overcrowded nightclubs. Sure, bars had their fill of rowdy patrons on any given Friday or Saturday night, but that was a drunk rowdy where he could easily swindle them out of their weekly paychecks. He couldn't do that here—instead, he got lap dances from liquored-up broads, a pounding headache for the techno drivel they called music, and suicidal tendencies. Add to that, it was damn near impossible to talk to Sophie.

"Dean, what's wrong, sweetie?" Sophie yelled as she practically plopped down on top of him, a little of her martini spilling onto his shirt.

Son of a bitch... "I didn't know it was so noisy in here!"

"You're in Miami, baby! We always do it loud!" She laughed as she took a sip of her drink.

"I was wondering if you and I could talk?"

"In here?"

"Is there someplace quieter in here?"

Sophie glanced around the room before standing up and pulling Dean to his feet, all the while maintaining her grip on her martini. She led him to a semi-secluded spot underneath the staircase. "Is this better?"

Dean nodded. "Much. Listen, I was wondering if you could tell me about Chloe?"

Sophie looked confused. "What about her?"

"You were the last person to see her before she died, right?"

Sophie quickly sobered up long enough for fear to cloud her features. "Who are you? Why are you interested in Chloe?"

Dean sighed. *This is why you don't try to talk to a drunk chick.* "So you remember my brother you met earlier?"

Sophie frowned as she tried to recall the last couple of hours. Finally, she broke out into a grin. "The really tall one?"

Dean nodded. "Yeah. He's actually investigating all of the DeLisle murders and I offered to help him out."

The model slapped his chest. "Why didn't you say so?"

Because you never would have remembered... "It slipped my mind, I guess." He turned her head back towards him as she lost interest. "Sophie, what can you tell me about Chloe?"

"She was a model."

"Yeah, I know that. What else?"

Sophie shrugged. "There's not much else to tell. We came here that night, we went home, and I found her dead the next morning."

"Anything else?"

"Um..." She lost focus once again as she began to move her body to the music. "Oh! I do remember something!"

Finally! "What is it?"

"I puked on her Jimmy Choos."

"Her what?"

"Jimmy Choos! Only one of the best shoes out there." She frowned. "You know, she acted like she wasn't pissed but I know she was totally pissed. Those shoes cost *mucho dinero.*"

Any time a vamp wants to bust through the doors would be great... "So, you saw nothing?"

Sophie downed the last of her drink and shook her head. "Sorry."

Dean smiled tightly, wishing he could say he was sorry, too, but for a completely different reason. Tonight had been nothing but a total waste and he was actually glad and jealous Sam didn't come along. A person shouldn't have to go through this misery alone if at all.

"Well, listen, I really think I should be going," Dean said.

"You can't leave yet! The fun is just beginning!" Sophie yelled as another song began thumping over the speakers. "Let's dance!"

Before Dean could even let the words register in his brain, the wasted model was dragging him onto the crowded dance floor.

Danny's Diner

Fortunately for Sam, the diner was only about a five minute drive from the motel. Unfortunately for him, when he walked through the doors, he immediately spotted Mason with a less-than-pleased look on her face. He only thought she sounded

pissed on the phone, but seeing her expression in person, he was sure she could kill a man by looking at him.

Looks like I'm going to be the one in the line of fire...

He momentarily played with the idea that he still had time to bail since he was sure he hadn't been spotted yet. Sam even went so far as to take a step back towards the door, but just as he did that, it was as if she sensed his intentions. Her gaze finally landed on him and if anything, it seemed her anger intensified by three levels.

Oh, crap...

As Sam slowly made his way to the back of the diner, he started to come up with excuses as to why she could be angry. Maybe she found out something new about the case that didn't sit well with her. Maybe her superiors finally came down on her and she was about to be pulled from the case. Maybe...well, he was running out of "maybes." The one thing he did know was that he didn't like a woman being pissed at him; that was more of Dean's forte.

"Lieutenant Mason..." he began but she cut him off.

"Have a seat, *Agent*."

Crapcrapcrap...

Sam hesitantly slid in the booth, trying in vain to keep the apprehension off his face.

"Do FBI agents normally wear street clothes?"

"Oh..." Sam looked down at his faded blue jeans, white tee covered with a blue plaid button-down shirt and work boots. "I'm off duty now."

Mason smiled tightly. "Or it could be you're not really an FBI agent, are you?" she demanded, her arms folded across her chest.

"Oh, well, I—"

"Save it—I checked into you since it's customary when we accept help from an outside agency. There is no Agent Sam Walsh listed. There's a Tom, Michael, Jane, hell even a Lincoln Walsh, but you are nowhere to be found."

"I can explain that—"

"Don't bother. You know, I can arrest your ass right now—impersonating a federal agent, interfering with a police investigation, and any other charge I feel like sticking to you. For all I know, you're the one behind all the murders."

Sam stared her in the eyes. "Do you really believe that?" he asked softly.

"It doesn't matter what I believe. What does matter is that you could have seriously screwed up my case. And honestly, that doesn't bother me as much as you seriously jeopardizing the career I have fought tooth and nail to build for myself."

"That was never my intention, Lieutenant."

"Then you had better start telling me your intentions." She pulled out a pair of handcuffs and slammed them on the table, causing the few patrons in the diner to look their way. She ignored them as she continued to glare at Sam. "If you don't start telling me the truth, so help me God, I will arrest your ass and make a public scene about it. I actually pray that you resist arrest so I can slap another charge on you."

Sam ducked his head as he absently began to play with the corner of his worn laminated menu. A waitress came over to try to take their orders, but Mason sent her away with a clipped, "Not now."

"You'll never believe me so you may as well arrest me now," Sam said quietly.

"I can believe a lot. I've heard every story known to man."

Sam lifted his eyes and grinned faintly. "I bet you anything you haven't heard mine."

Mason sighed as she began to rise from the table. "If this is another one of your games—"

Sam held up a hand to stop her and she lowered back to her seat. "I promise you it's not. It's just something that's hard to explain to a normal person."

"If you look up 'normal' in a dictionary, I can guarantee you're not going to find my picture there."

"Okay." Sam let out a deep breath, trying to think of a way to explain it without having her freak out and arrest him out of spite. "I'm a hunter."

Mason rolled her eyes. "So is every other male in the southern region."

"Not that kind of hunter."

"What other kind is there?"

"Do you remember all those stories from when you were a kid: the monster under the bed, the Boogeyman, or any other terrifying creature that came from your imagination just to get a scare out of you?"

Mason nodded slowly.

"They're real—every single one of them, not to mention ghosts, vampires, demons, and countless others you've seen in movies."

"Is this your lame attempt at a joke?"

Sam arched a brow. "Do you see me laughing?"

"But those things aren't real. Like you said, they were just made up to scare us when we were kids."

"I wish I could tell you I was wrong, that they *did* just live in your imagination. But I'm not. That's what we're doing down here in Florida, my brother and I."

"But I—"

"All those deaths that have been plaguing the city? They're not down to some crazed psychopath. There's something supernatural behind those deaths."

"That can't be..."

"You heard what Doctor Jarvik said—the souls were drained from the victims' bodies. Now, what kind of human being can do that?"

"But the doc was just saying things, trying to come up with the most insane idea out there."

"Do you really believe that?"

"No..."

"Neither do I." Sam sighed. "Look, I can see you're having a hard time with this and I can't say that I blame you. It was hard for me to believe when I first learned about this, years ago."

Mason didn't say anything, though Sam could see she was trying in vain to come up with something.

"I'll make it easier for you." Sam picked up the handcuffs and slapped one on his left wrist, while holding out his right one to her. "You can either arrest me or we can part ways now and you can just chalk this up to the ramblings of a crazy man."

Mason looked up at him, studying his expression for the longest time and for a second Sam really thought she was going to throw his ass in the slammer or local sanitarium. Instead, she reached into her pocket and pulled out a key. Inserting it into the lock, she released his hand and stowed the cuffs away. "You forgot about option three."

"What is that?"

"I may be crazy for even going along with this, but you could stick around and try to explain this to me a little more."

"Are you saying that you believe me?"

Mason shook her head. "I'm not saying anything for sure right now, but I'm also not saying you're wrong about this."

Sam nodded, flashing her a relieved grin. "That's something, I guess."

"So...can I start off with an easy question?"

"Sure."

"Is your name really Sam?"

Sam chuckled. "It's Samuel actually, but I go by Sam."

"Okay, Sam...so, how exactly did you get into this life, anyway?"

"I didn't choose it..." he said, not really caring to elaborate any further on it.

Mason got the hint. “No, I can’t imagine anyone would. Can I ask what exactly is it we’re dealing with here?”

“You can ask, but I’m not sure I can really give you an answer. I’m still doing some research on it.”

“You said you had a brother down here with you?”

“Yeah, an older brother—Dean.”

“Why isn’t he here with you now?”

“Am I being interrogated here?” Sam teased.

Mason ducked her head bashfully. “Sorry, I sometimes forget I’m a cop.”

“It’s okay. Actually, Dean’s working on a different angle right now.”

“Oh.”

Sam was about to say something to ease her from her embarrassment when a flash of movement from outside the large picture window caught his eye. At first, he thought his eyes were playing tricks on him, but he knew he wasn’t imagining this.

“Sam, what is it?”

Sam didn’t look at her. “Mason, did Chloe Saunders have a twin sister?”

“No, she was an only child. Why?”

Sam nodded towards the blonde outside the diner. “Because if she doesn’t, then I’d say she looks pretty good for a dead girl.”

Sam darted from the small eatery, adrenaline fueling him on as he heard Mason following closely behind. He wasn’t one who bought into coincidence, even if it was entirely plausible. Mason told him Chloe was an only child, so that could only mean the girl he saw was possibly the killer—or creature—they were looking for.

The girl turned around to look at him, terror written all over her pretty face. She quickly put on a burst of speed, pushing people aside and into Sam and Mason in her haste to get away. Sam offered speedy apologies to the startled pedestrians, trying in vain not to lose sight of the Chloe lookalike in the throng of people. *Why the hell did these people decide to have a life tonight?*

Ducking his head for just a second, Sam came to a stop, scanning the crowd in search of the girl, but she was nowhere to be found. Everywhere he looked he saw another blonde head, but not the one he was searching for. He barely glanced up as Mason came to a stop beside him.

“Do you see her?” Mason asked breathlessly.

Sam shook his head as he tried to catch his own breath and calm his beating heart. “I lost her, dammit. I’m beginning to wonder if I imagined the entire thing.”

“Not unless you and I share the same imagination.”

Sam chuckled. “That could be scary.”

A small smile tugged at Mason’s lips. “I’ll put out an APB for her,” she said, reaching for her cell phone.

The young hunter stopped her. “It won’t help, believe me.”

Mason frowned in confusion as she returned her cell phone to her pocket.

“I’ll explain in a little bit.” He turned her around and started to steer her back towards the diner. “Do you have your car here with you?”

“No, I took a cab here.”

“You can ride back with me to my motel. I need to check something out because I may have an idea of what we’re dealing with here.” He glanced down at her. “Unless you have something else to do?”

She looked down at her watch. “I’m off duty now, so I guess that makes me all yours.”

Sam cringed as he opened her car door, really wishing she hadn’t said that.

Unlocking the door to her apartment, “Chloe” bustled in, locking it behind her with shaking hands. Of all the stupid, hare-brained things she could have done, she

managed to get spotted by a hunter. She thought she'd been so careful—and she had been up until this point; no one was the wiser and the cops were okay blaming it on a human perpetrator.

Just because I had to go out and try out this new skin...Just goes to show that maybe I should start listening to big sister. She always said my antics would get me caught one of these days.

Then again, since when had anything good every come out of listening to *her*? It's not like she knew everything just because she happened to be older. You didn't come this far along by playing everything safe; you had to take risks every now and then.

"I'm not about to let him stop me. I guess I'll just have to stop the hunter before he gets the chance." "Chloe" felt a warm, tingling sensation as her body slowly began to take on another form—her true persona.

Looking into the full length mirror on the back of the door, Marco smiled cruelly at the reflection looking back. While he felt the most comfortable in this skin, it still did nothing to quell the frustration radiating throughout his body.

But he knew how he could work on it. He knew the therapy that always soothed the irritation. Scooping up his keys, he left his apartment, looking forward to what he was about to do.

Flamingo Inn

"Okay, if I didn't know for sure before, this now confirms you're not an FBI agent," Mason said as Sam guided the Impala into the parking lot.

Sam looked over at her as he shifted into park. "What makes you say that?"

"Well, you're only staying in one of the top dumps in Miami. I can't tell you how many times our guys are called over this way."

Sam shrugged. "Well, the life of a hunter isn't exactly in the top bracket of the pay scale."

"How much does a job like this pay, anyway?"

Sam pushed out of the car and leaned down to look at her. "Nothing."

"Nothing?" Mason asked as she followed him. "Then how do you afford to stay anywhere besides your car?"

"You really don't want to know that."

Mason grinned. "Yeah, probably not." She nodded back to the Impala. "At least you have a nice car—did you steal it?"

Sam turned back to look at her, his hand on the doorknob. "No, we didn't steal it and my brother will now love you for complimenting his pride and joy."

Mason smirked. "Maybe I'm flirting with the wrong brother then."

"Um..." Sam shook himself as he opened the door to his room, never expecting Mason to say something like that. *Good thing Dean wasn't out here to hear that...* Entering, he found Dean propped up against his headboard, absently flipping through channels on the television.

"Dude, there is absolutely nothing on this damn thing," the older man grumbled, tossing the remote away.

"What are you doing back? I thought you were getting a personal tour of the city," Sam said.

Dean opened his mouth to say something, but Sam saw him tense up when Mason came into the room. Dean quickly got up from the bed, ready to defend if need be, but Sam held up a hand to stop him.

"Dude, calm down the Rambo act," Sam said as he tilted his head back at Mason. "This is Lieutenant Mason from the Miami P.D."

Dean slightly relaxed as he broke out into a sheepish grin. "Dean."

"Nice to meet you, Dean," Mason said with an amused grin of her own.

Dean sent Sam a look that said he quite approved of the woman and Sam rolled his eyes. “Seriously, Dean—I thought you were out with Sophie?”

“I was,” Dean grumbled as he sat back down on his bed. “All she knows how to do is talk about herself.”

“That sounds like right up your alley,” Sam said, smirking.

“Bite me,” Dean grumbled as he laid back and put an arm over his eyes. “Why did you ever let me do that? I feel like my IQ plummeted into single digits.”

“First, it’s not my job to keep you from doing stupid things, and second, I think she may have actually improved your IQ for you.”

“Friggin’ hilarious,” Dean muttered. “That chick wouldn’t know anything if it hit her between the eyes.”

“Are you talking about Sophie Dawson?” Mason asked.

“Yeah,” came Dean’s muffled reply.

Mason nodded. “I’ve actually had the pleasure and you’re right—she couldn’t tell you anything even if you supplied her with the answers.”

Sam grabbed up his laptop and booted it up. “So, did you manage to accomplish anything?”

Dean shivered as he glanced over at his sibling. “Dancing...”

Sam burst out laughing and when Dean glared daggers at him, tried covering it up as a coughing fit. “Dude, seriously?”

“I’m not about to talk about it,” Dean said coldly.

“So, what are we talking about here? A samba...tango...salsa? Or did you go old school and break out the Sprinkler and the Running Man?”

“Sammy, you’d really hate for Mason to find out anything embarrassing about you, wouldn’t you?” Dean asked, his voice dripping sickening sweetness.

“You wouldn’t...would you?”

“Do you really have to ask that?”

Sam knew he didn’t because he also knew what his brother was capable of if provoked enough. Dean had a lot in his arsenal, didn’t really matter if it was true or not. It was amazing the yarn he could spin if given the right motivation. “So, Sophie couldn’t tell you anything then?”

“That’s the problem: she told me too much but nothing about Chloe. Oh, except that she yakked all over Chloe’s Timmy Hoos or something ridiculous like that.”

Mason chuckled. “Jimmy Choos.”

“Yeah, those. Why women would ever wear anything that sounds like that is beyond me,” he said, glancing over at Mason.

She shook her head. “Don’t look at me. Those things are way beyond the boundaries of my salary.”

Dean got up from the bed and walked over to where Sam was typing away on his laptop. “So, what about you two? Anything exciting happen?” Dean glanced down at his brother. “And before you answer that, I thought you were staying in?”

“I was, but...” Sam glanced over at Mason sheepishly.

“I called and asked him to meet me,” Mason supplied.

“A friendly little date?” Dean asked, his brow lifting suggestively.

“More like I was five seconds away from throwing your brother in jail,” Mason said.

Dean frowned in confusion. “What do you mean?” He shot a reproachful look towards Sam. “Was he caught flashing people again? Dammit, Sammy, I told you about doing that after you were caught the first time.”

Mason looked over at Sam, surprised, but he quickly waved a dismissive hand. “That never happened—Dean’s just being an ass.” Sam glared at his brother. “She found out I wasn’t FBI so our cover’s blown. I told her what we were really doing here.”

Dean’s expression turned to one of shock as he glanced over at Mason. “And you’re still sticking around?”

Mason shrugged. "I can't find anything else that makes sense to explain these murders, so why the hell not? I'm just hoping you can give me something."

"And if we do, how are you going to explain it?"

"I'll work that out when we get to it," Mason said, smiling at the both of them. "You're not the only ones who can come up with a story. But I'll worry about it when you give me something."

"Maybe I can give you something now," Sam said, glancing up from the computer screen.

"What do you mean?" Dean asked, leaning down to peer over Sam's shoulder.

"What is it?" Mason asked as the same time as Dean, coming to stand behind both Winchesters.

Sam sighed as he addressed his captive audience, feeling slightly claustrophobic as they surrounded him. "Well, the more I've been thinking about it and after what we saw tonight, I would say we're dealing with a Boo Hag."

Dean snorted. "A Boo Hag? What the hell is a Boo Hag?"

Sam smirked as he looked up at his brother. "You mean besides a pretty good description of some of the women you've hooked up with?"

Dean flipped him off before cuffing him on the back of his head. "Nice one, smartass."

"Dean, do you really think you should behave like that in front of a woman?" Sam scolded as he rubbed the back of his head.

"You do remember I'm involved in a profession where I'm surrounded by men on a daily basis, don't you?" Mason asked. "Besides, I grew up with two older brothers so I've pretty much seen, heard and dealt with anything you can throw at me."

Dean grinned at her. "I am definitely liking you more and more, considering you're a cop and all."

Mason arched a brow. "You say that like it's a bad thing."

Dean shrugged. "Let's just say the law and I don't exactly see things on the same level."

"She likes your car, too, if that's anything, Dean," Sam said absently as he read over an article on the screen.

It was Dean's turn to arch a brow. "Really?"

Mason gave a casual shrug. "What? I've always had a soft spot for classics."

"She certainly is a timeless classic," Dean agreed.

"Do you want to know what a Boo Hag is or not?" Sam asked, desperate to change the subject before Dean managed to whisk Mason away. *I thought I was the one she was interested in...*

"Sorry," came the double reply.

"So, anyway, the Boo Hag—"

Dean chuckled, interrupting Sam. "Sorry, dude, but how can you not laugh at that name?"

"Because I'm not five years old," Sam answered. "Anyway, it's a legend out of South Carolina."

"South Carolina?" Dean frowned in confusion. "South Carolina isn't exactly a stone's throw from Miami."

"Yeah, I know, which is what threw me at first."

Mason held up a hand almost as if she was a student in a classroom. "I don't mean to interrupt you guys, but what the hell are you talking about?"

Sam exchanged a look with Dean and his brother merely shrugged. There really was no point in holding back and Sam figured if he did, it would only provoke Mason to throw him and Dean in jail. "You remember when I told you all those creatures really existed?"

Mason nodded.

"This is one of those creatures. The Boo Hag—"

Dean chuckled once again.

“Dude!”

“Sorry!”

Sam shot a glare at Dean before focusing on the cop once more. “It’s a creature from South Carolina’s Gullah culture. It’s almost like a vampire, only instead of sucking your blood, it steals your breath—or your soul.”

“Sounds nasty,” Mason said, shivering slightly.

“Yeah, well, that’s not the worst of it.”

“Of course it’s not.”

Sam smiled grimly. “Most of the time, a victim never knows they’re being attacked since it happens as they sleep. They just wake up with something akin to a hangover. But those who do happen to wake up and fight it, the Boo Hag kills them and assumes their skin.”

“Wow,” Mason said, astonished.

“Welcome to our world,” Dean commented.

“So, this skinning that’s been going on—this thing just basically rips it off its victims?” Mason asked.

Sam nodded. “Pretty much and since it resembles a human, they’re hard to detect.”

Mason cringed. “Nice.”

“Feel free to call us crazy at any time,” Dean said, glancing over at her.

Mason shook her head. “You may be that, but this whole thing is sounding a whole hell of a lot more plausible than anything we’ve managed to come up with.”

“Wow, you must really be coming up with some head-scratchers then,” Dean said.

“You really don’t want to know,” Mason admitted. “So, what happens now?”

“Well, maybe you can help me with that,” Sam said as he shut down the computer.

“Sure.”

“Is there anyone around who may know about Southern folklore and the Gullah culture?”

Mason pursed her lips in thought. “Uh, yeah—there’s a Professor Anthony Markum at the University of Miami. I can give him a call and set up an appointment for you—he’s a family friend.”

Sam smiled. “That would be great. Thanks.”

Mason smiled back. “It’s no problem at all.”

Dean huffed. “Great, while you get to do that, I get to report back to the agency. Oh, what fun.”

The corner of Sam’s mouth quirked up into a grin. “You’re the one who wanted to be in on the ‘inside.’”

Mason tilted her head to stare at Dean in incredulity. “Like you’re not enjoying living out every man’s fantasy?”

Dean shrugged. “Well, some of it isn’t so bad…”

“Sorry, dude. You’re barking up the wrong tree if you’re expecting sympathy out of us,” Sam said.

Mason glanced down at her watch and sighed. “I really should get going. I have an early meeting with the mayor and chief of police tomorrow morning.” She looked at the brothers hopefully. “I don’t imagine either one of you would want to trade with me?”

“Nope.”

“Sorry.”

Mason frowned. “Well, you can’t blame a girl for trying.”

“Do you want a ride back?” Sam asked as he stood up.

“Nah, I’ll just grab a cab.”

“I’ll walk out with you,” Sam said as he led her to the door.

“Wow, you volunteered a little too eagerly for that one, Sammy,” Dean said, smirking at Sam.

Sam flipped his brother off for his troubles and closed the door behind him as he followed Mason. They walked in companionable silence as she set about hailing one of the yellow cabs.

"So, call me and let me know if you find out anything more," Mason said as a taxi came to a stop beside them.

"I will." Sam opened the door for her and she eased herself inside. "Have fun at your meeting," he teased.

Mason crossed her fingers. "Here's hoping a freak storm comes along and washes them away."

Sam laughed as he closed the door. "Good night, Mason."

Mason smiled. "Good night, Sam."

There was only so much of Sam's laughter Dean could take this early in the morning and his younger brother was about to reach that limit.

"Oh, God, Dean..." Sam once again became immersed in his laughter.

Okay, scratch that—Sam was way past the limit now...

"Sam, if I hear one more chuckle come from your freakishly tall ass..." Dean said through clenched teeth, letting the threat remain unfinished. Letting Sam wonder was so much better than telling him outright.

"Dean, I'm sorry, but it's not everyday I see you dressed as a Hamptons elite wannabe," Sam explained, still chuckling.

Dean looked down at his outfit and cringed. Sam was so right in his description—he was wearing a pair of expensive blue jeans, topped with a cashmere black turtleneck, along with Italian loafers Dean was sure were expensive enough to feed an entire country. He felt so awkward and self-conscious and Sam was only making it worse.

"There are three reasons I am dressed like this: one, Stella says it's the dress code; two, she assured me it was in fashion; and three, she gave it to me. Stella said all employees are required to set an example for others, no matter how low they were on the totem pole and apparently, what I was wearing wasn't doing that."

Sam shook his head as he brushed away a stray tear running down his cheek. "You can give me all the reasons and excuses you want, man."

Dean sighed, glancing over at Sam as the younger man pulled into the DeLisle parking lot. "You're never going to let me live this down, are you?"

"Nope—I think I may even bring this up in your eulogy when you die."

"Dude, no way in hell are you going to get the chance to mention it," Dean said as he pushed out of the car.

"How are you going to stop me?"

"Easy—you keep laughing at me, I'll kill you right now." Dean closed the door and turned to walk away. *There, we'll see if that shows him.*

"Hey, Dean!"

Dean halted, closing his eyes in frustration. Slowly turning around, he saw Sam's camera phone pointed in his direction. Before he even had time to completely react, Sam snapped the picture.

"Awesome!" Aiming a bright smile at Dean, Sam pulled out of the parking lot.

"Bitch!" Dean yelled in frustration, not paying any mind to the few employees and clients scattered throughout the parking lot. *Like they haven't heard language like that before...*

Stalking into the building, he paid no attention to the uptight receptionist as he made his way to the bank of elevators. The entire ride up, he thought of different ways he could kill his brother while making it look like an accident. On the top of the list was throwing Sam into the ocean and letting the sharks do his bidding.

By the time the doors opened to the fourth floor, Dean had simmered down somewhat, but once again he was greeted by chaos. Some of the models were crying and clutching onto each other for dear life. Hushed whispering met his ears every direction he turned and he noticed the door to Stella's office was closed.

"Hey, what's going on?" he asked a fellow assistant who was carrying a stack of portfolios.

"You mean, you haven't heard?" she asked, genuinely shocked.

Well if I did, Einstein, I wouldn't be asking, now would I? "Heard about what?"

"Another model was found murdered this morning."

Dean's brows lifted in surprise. "Really? Who?"

"Sophie Dawson."

Dean felt as if someone hit him in the gut. Sure, the girl was annoying as hell, but she didn't deserve to be slaughtered like that. No one did.

"Where's Stella?"

"She's not here—she hasn't been here all morning," the girl explained. "Most of us think everything's finally getting to her. She's too ashamed to show up anymore."

"Yeah," Dean said absently, barely hearing her.

"Well, I need to get these delivered before Marco has my head," she said indicating the stack of portfolios.

"Yeah, I got some things to do, too. Thanks," Dean said, backing up towards the elevators. He wasn't about to sit here and do nothing. He was going to put a stop to these murders once and for all.

And he knew exactly where to start...

University of Miami Professor Markum's Office

"Professor Markum will see you now."

Sam glanced up from his magazine as the kindly receptionist addressed him. "Oh, thank you."

She smiled as she nodded towards the hallway. "He's right down the hall, second door to your right."

Sam smiled his appreciation, and, placing the magazine back in the rack, he made his way toward the indicated direction. Coming to the office, he tapped lightly on the door.

"Come in," said a deep voice.

Easing the door open, Sam smiled politely at the older man with thick, silver hair and a round face framed by rimless glasses who was wearing a tweed jacket. He was the picture definition of a tenured college professor and it made Sam long slightly to be back in the college environment.

"Sam Walsh?" the man asked.

"Yes sir."

The professor stood up and held out a hand. "Professor Anthony Markum—it's nice to meet you."

"Likewise," Sam said, returning the handshake.

"Please, have a seat."

"Thank you." Sam sat down on one of the plush chairs sitting in front of the large oak desk.

"Now, the lieutenant told me you could use some help about the Gullah culture. She said you were writing an article or something?"

"Uh, yes sir," Sam answered, slightly surprised that Mason came up with a cover story and one she apparently despised if his meeting with her said anything. "I'm actually interested in writing a book about different cultures throughout the United States." *Okay, that was a total lie, but one that can get me as far as I need to go.*

"So, may I ask how you came to know Mason?"

Here I go lying my ass off again... “Oh, um, actually...she arrested me for trespassing not too long ago. I guess she felt sorry for me and was tired of seeing me wander around aimlessly for information for my book.”

“That girl always did have a good heart. So, was there anything in particular you wanted to know?”

“Well, I’m pretty much willing to take anything you can give me.”

“I don’t know what I could tell you that you couldn’t find out on the internet these days.”

“Yes sir, but I would rather hear it from an expert in the field.”

Markum smiled. “You’re just lucky I love to entertain an audience.”

Sam smiled as he found himself liking the man before him. Grabbing a notepad from his jacket pocket, Sam flipped it open, pen poised eagerly above it.

Markum let out a throaty chuckle. “I always love a young person who is eager to learn.”

Sam shrugged sheepishly. “I’ve always been interested in learning new things.”

“Well then, let’s begin shall we?” Markum let out a sigh as he worked out where he wanted to start. “The Gullah are African Americans who reside in the Low Country region of South Carolina and Georgia, extending to the coastal plain and the Sea Islands. A long time ago, their population extended north to Cape Fear in North Carolina and as far south as Jacksonville. They were a race that was brought over to be slaves in the Colonial South.”

“What happened to them?”

“When the Civil War came, many of them were eager to be free and joined the Union Army’s First South Carolina Volunteers. The Sea Islands happened to be the first place in the South where slaves were freed. Even before the war ended, Quaker missionaries set up schools to teach the newly freed slaves and integrate them into civilization. The Gullah eventually ventured that way so they could have a chance at a life other than that of a slave. Soon after, they became even more isolated and the rice planters on the mainland ultimately abandoned their fields in order to get away from diseases and hurricanes.”

“But some stayed?”

Markum nodded. “Those who survived did. It’s why they’re so isolated today. They refuse to leave behind their customs. For some, it’s the only way of life they’ve ever known. They’ve been fighting for years to maintain control of their traditional lands.”

Sam grinned as he took in all the information. “You really seem to enjoy talking about them.”

Markum shrugged. “They are a fascinating culture—one that has fascinated historians, linguists, folklorists, and anthropologists alike for many years. They’ve become a symbol of cultural pride for the African American race.”

Sam leaned forward in his chair. “You said folklorists are interested in them. What kind of folklore did they bring over?”

“A good bit, actually. Hags, haunts, and plat-eyes are similar to African beliefs about malevolent ancestors, witches, and devils or forest spirits. They have root doctors who protect their clients from dangerous spiritual forces and they have stories of a Bruh Rabbit—a trickster of sorts that uses the clever and cunning rabbit, spider, and tortoise.”

“What about the Boo Hag?”

Markum nodded and his face broke into a bright smile. “You’ve heard of that one?”

Sam shrugged casually. “Bits and pieces.”

“The Boo Hag is something the Gullah take very seriously. They even have a saying for it—‘Don’t let de hag ride ya.’”

“What does that mean?”

“It was thought that when the Boo Hag attacks a person, they ride their victims—meaning they float above a person in order to steal their life source or soul. There’s

even a legend that states if a person places a broom by his bed, the Boo Hag will get distracted because they will have to count the straws. Since it takes a long time to do that, by the time morning comes the Boo Hag goes away empty-handed.”

“And this legend still holds true to this day?”

Markum nodded. “It sure does.” He frowned. “I thought you were just interested in the Gullah culture?”

“I am, but I also like the folklore to be included. I like to be thorough in my research.”

“Apparently so,” the professor remarked, clearly impressed.

A cell phone rang, breaking up the conversation and Sam frowned when he realized it was his. “Sorry, I thought I had it turned off.”

“No problem at all, young man.”

Pulling it out of his pocket, Sam glanced down at the screen and saw Dean’s number. “Can you excuse me for just a minute?” he asked as he rose from his seat.

“Sure.”

Sam smiled apologetically as he quickly exited the office and stepped into the hallway, shutting the door behind him. “Dean?”

“Dude, what took you so long to answer?”

“I was talking to the professor at the university Mason put me in touch with. What’s wrong?”

“Does there have to be something wrong for me to call you?”

“Dean...”

“Alright, fine. I thought I would give you a heads-up—another model was found murdered this morning.”

“Dammit!” Sam hit the wall in frustration, cringing as it seemed to reverberate throughout the narrow hallway. He held his breath, expecting Markum to come out, but the door remained closed.

“That’s not the worst of it, Sammy. It was Sophie.”

“The one you went out with last night?”

“Yeah.” He heard Dean let out a sigh. *“Listen, I’m heading out to her apartment right now to see if I can find anything.”*

“I’m almost finished here. I can meet you over there.”

“No, I want you to find a way to kill this thing, Sam. I don’t want it killing any more people, you hear me?”

“Yeah...me either, Dean.”

“I’ll check in with you later,” Dean said, hanging up.

Sam leaned his head against the wall, trying to ease away the headache beginning to form. He was getting so tired of hearing about more deaths and he could sense Dean was too. *Well, you’re not doing any good standing here, feeling sorry for yourself, Sam.*

Taking a deep breath, Sam knocked on the professor’s door and let himself back in. “Sorry about that.”

Markum held up a hand. “No harm done.” He frowned as he took in Sam’s expression. “Is everything okay? You seem bothered.”

“Oh, um...it’s just a problem brewing at work that I need to attend to.” *Well, that’s not entirely a lie.* “I really appreciate all your help, Professor Markum.”

“Honestly, it was no trouble at all, Sam.” He stood up and walked with Sam to the door. “Good luck with everything and please let me know when your book comes out. I would really love to read it.”

Yeah, me too... “I sure will. Thank you.”

Walking out of the brick building, Sam made a beeline for the Impala. He was now completely sure they were dealing with a Boo Hag and now that he knew that, he knew where he could start looking to find a way to kill it.

Sam was so intent on his mission he never noticed the pair of eyes following his every move.

Sophie's Apartment

Luckily, the murdered model's apartment was within walking distance of the agency so Dean didn't have to hail a cab. It was something he'd never had the pleasure experiencing and he wasn't about to begin today. No way was he going to let some guy in desperate need of a shower drive him around a city he wasn't all that familiar with. Dean watched *The Bone Collector*—he knew what happened when a lone person got into cab; he wasn't ready to kiss his ass goodbye.

Unfortunately for Dean, he still had to wait around for the police to leave. He couldn't risk getting caught and a little part of him didn't want Mason to land in trouble. Dean could tell Sam had a little thing for the cop and he didn't want to jeopardize that, especially after Sam had been so patient with him and Mia. No matter what Sam said and argued that Dean didn't take time for himself, the same went for his little brother as well.

A hedge provided Dean with the perfect cover as he waited for the last squad car to leave. *God, I can't feel the lower half of my body...* His leg still wasn't feeling entirely one hundred percent after his horse riding accident in Texas and squatting was only making it throb as a painful reminder.

"Don't worry about me, guys," Dean muttered. "I'll just sit out here, killing myself, while you take your sweet, precious time."

Finally, after ten more grueling minutes of fidgeting in order to try to get comfortable, the squad car finally left, allowing Dean to come out of hiding. Making sure no one was watching, Dean darted across the quiet street and into the alcove of the units. To his disappointment, or maybe it was that charming Winchester luck, he found the double doors locked.

Great, now I gotta find someone willing to let a complete stranger inside. That ought to be easy with a killer on the loose... Figuring it couldn't hurt to try, he began buzzing random people, hoping someone would answer.

"Who the hell's out there buzzing like a lunatic?" asked a disgruntled, old voice.

"Uh, sorry—I forgot my key. Could you let me in?" Dean asked.

"Damn young kids—you're always forgetting your keys. It's a wonder the lot of you know how to wipe your own ass."

Do you even know how to do that without making a mess, Grandpa? "Sir, I promise this will be the last time I do this." *Well, that part was true anyway.*

"Damn right it is. I ain't doing this anymore. This is the last time I answer this damn intercom..." His voice trailed off as let out a line of expletives and complaints.

Dean rolled his eyes as the door finally buzzed. Before slipping inside, he found Sophie's room number on the registry. Taking the stairs to the second level, he found her unit easily, considering it was the only one cordoned off by yellow police tape.

Pulling out his lock pick set and making sure no one was spying on him, Dean made quick work of the door and snuck inside. Seeing the living room appeared to be in perfect condition aside from the usual mess, he went straight for Sophie's bedroom and hit pay dirt.

A large mass of blood covered the stripped mattress, along with several damp puddles of blood staining the cream colored carpet below it. Dean could only imagine what it looked like when the police first arrived because if this was any indication, then it had to be straight out of a horror movie.

"Looks like the police actually cleaned this place out pretty good," he commented.

Fingerprint dust littered every surface but Dean knew nothing would turn up when they ran them through their system. "Sorry guys, but I highly doubt supernatural beings will be in your database."

As he kept scanning the room, Dean honestly didn't know what he was hoping to find. Sam told him he pretty much knew what they were dealing with, so really there was no point in Dean even being there at the apartment. But something was tickling

the back of his mind, telling him there had to be something here that could help the brothers catch this monster.

Letting his eyes roam around every surface of the room one last time, attuned to every single detail, Dean willed himself to find something—anything. *Come on, there has to be something around here...*

And that's when a flash of silver caught his attention. At first, he thought he was imagining things, but as he slowly approached the bed, he saw there was a necklace lying on the floor between the bed and small nightstand. Frowning, he swiped a tissue from a Kleenex box on the table and picked it up.

"Son of a bitch..." he muttered as he held it up to the light. *There is no way this is a coincidence. She's been playing us like a damn fiddle from the very beginning,* he thought as he pocketed the tiny trinket.

It was the same unique charm he'd seen around Stella DeLisle's neck yesterday.

Flamingo Inn

Walking into the motel room, Sam instantly went for his dad's journal tucked neatly into his travel bag. With the Gullah culture being so prevalent and the Boo Hag an integral part of their folklore, Sam knew John had to have some mention of it in the leather-bound tome. *And with luck, he has a way to kill the bastard, too.*

Sam was really hoping for that luck to shine through as he skimmed the hastily handwritten pages. "One of these days I really should work on deciphering this mess in here."

Yeah, and when I get the time to take on that feat, I'll see about stopping global warming as well...

The shaggy-haired hunter broke into a grin as he finally came to the entry he was seeking towards the middle of the journal. His grin only increased in size as he found the exact information he was looking for: *"The sure fire way to kill a Boo Hag is by plunging a silver dagger through its heart."*

"It's a good thing we keep a steady supply of silver daggers in the Impala for little occasions like these, then."

Placing the worn journal on the small table, Sam pulled out his cell phone, eager to tell Dean what he found. Just as he was reaching in his jacket to retrieve it, he heard a faint shuffle behind him as if someone was trying their best to be quiet. Slowly moving his hand away from his pocket, Sam turned around, only to be met by the hate-filled eyes of Sophie Dawson.

"What the—" Sam didn't get the chance to finish the question before the supposedly-dead model grabbed him up like he weighed next to nothing and hurled him into a wall across the room. Sam felt the wall crack from the impact but he had little time to worry as he crashed to the floor, pain making its presence known.

The young hunter tried to pull himself up off the floor but Sam barely got to his knees before Sophie grabbed him again, tossing him to the opposite side of the small room. Thankfully, he had Dean's bed to cushion his fall, but the pressure put upon the flimsy thing caused it to buckle and collapse underneath him.

We are so going to get charged for this, Sam thought as he looked up to see the girl flying through the air towards him. He tried to twist away from her incoming trajectory, but the supernatural speed worked to her advantage as she landed atop him, causing the breath to whoosh out of his lungs.

"If you wanted a date, all you had to do was ask," Sam ground out between clenched teeth. *There ya go, Sam—channel Dean.*

Sophie leaned down so she could whisper in his ear. "Why, when this way is so much more fun?" She brought her small, delicate hands to his throat and began to squeeze.

Sam tried to pry her hands away from his often-abused throat, but it was almost as if they were super glued to him. Instead, he made a frantic grab for the Bowie

Dean kept under his pillow, needing anything at this point to stop her deadly intentions. As a tingling, searing sensation raced underneath his skin, Sam abandoned his attempts, instead focusing on the pain threatening to overcome him.

It felt as if someone was using a red hot coil and slowly peeling off his skin, layer by layer. No matter what he tried, he couldn't ease it away and he desperately tried to push down the scream wanting to tear out of his tortured body. Finally, it became too much for him and he let it out.

"There you go, hunter — scream real loud," Sophie's voice cooed as she chuckled maniacally.

Sam's vision began to darken as the pain increased and he actually felt like he was about to die. *Dean is going to be so pissed when he finds out about this...*

Don't let this bitch win, Sam! Fight, dammit! You're a Winchester, for God's sake! Dean's voice screamed inside his head.

It hurts, Dean...I'm sorry...

Faintly, Sam thought he heard the door burst open and the staccato sound of gunfire, but he put that off to his imagination. *Dean...No, I couldn't be that lucky...*

A horrified screech filled the air and the pain was eased as Sam dimly felt the pressure released from his chest. Sam turned on his side, curling in on himself and through blurry vision, he saw Sophie bolt from the room as another figure jumped out of the way.

"Dean..." Sam muttered before breaking out into a coughing fit.

"Sam, are you okay?"

When did Dean start sounding like a woman? "Dean?"

"No, it's me — Mason."

"Mason?"

Mason tucked her gun into her holster as she raced to Sam's side to check the fallen hunter for injuries. "Sam, you never answered me: are you okay?"

"Hurts."

"What hurts?" she demanded, trying to turn Sam towards her.

"Everything..." Gritting his teeth in pain, Sam somehow managed to sit up with her help. "Stupid bitch..."

"Hey!"

Sam smiled weakly. "Not you."

"Are you okay?" she asked again.

Sam nodded. "Yeah, the pain's starting to lessen up a little."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, Sam, but a dead woman just tried to kill you."

Sam shook his head. "That was the Boo Hag."

"Seriously?"

"Definitely."

Mason walked into the bathroom and filled a glass with water. Returning to the bedroom, she handed it to Sam. "I guess you weren't lying about it shedding its skin so fast, then."

"Nope." Sam took the offered glass and drank heartily, letting the cool liquid soothe his aching throat. "Listen, don't think I'm not grateful and everything, but what are you doing here?"

Mason shrugged as she sat down beside him. "My meeting ended earlier than I expected. I figured I'd drop by and see how your meeting with Professor Markum went and let you know there was another murder last night."

Sam nodded solemnly. "Yeah, Dean called me not too long ago. It was Sophie Dawson."

"Yeah." Mason turned her head away so she was looking at the worn carpet. "You know, if anyone found out Dean was the last person with Sophie, he'd be a suspect right now."

Sam felt fear grip him at her words. That couldn't happen. It would only spell trouble for the Winchesters, especially Dean since he was a wanted man after the

shapeshifter incident back in Missouri. “Look, Mason — Dean was here all night. He’s not responsible for what happened to Sophie.”

Mason held up a calming hand. “Don’t worry, Sam — they’re not going to find out anything from me.”

Sam smiled gratefully. “Thank you.” Then he frowned. “But, wait...won’t that get you in trouble, though?”

Mason shrugged. “Maybe I don’t care so much right now. Maybe there’s something else I’m focused on.” She turned her brown eyes on him and Sam found himself desperately wanting to get lost in their depths.

The hunter swallowed thickly as he felt his heart pounding but not out of fear this time. It was excitement. “Like what?”

Again the brunette shrugged. “Maybe...you.”

Sam felt himself pulling closer to Mason, almost as if they were magnetized and he didn’t bother to fight it. Brushing away a stray hair, he gently cupped her face in his hands and closed his eyes as their lips drew closer.

“Sammy!”

The couple instantly broke apart at the sound of Dean’s voice, looking up guiltily as the elder Winchester burst into the room, his Desert Eagle drawn. Dean took in the scene around him, his eyes lingering on his broken bed and then the red faces of the cop and his little brother.

“Damn, I thought I was wild when I brought a girl back,” Dean said with a roguish smile.

Sam glared at his brother as he slowly stood up, wanting nothing more than to wipe that smirk off of Dean’s face. “Do you always have to think with your downstairs brain, Dean?”

“Do I? No — but it sure makes life a lot more enjoyable.”

Mason got up to stand next to Sam. “I just came to...uh...see if Sam found out anything from his talk with the professor,” she supplied, unable to keep the blush from her cheeks.

“Hey, I’m not criticizing — you two are adults.” Dean’s mood became serious. “So, if you two weren’t doing the deed, what did happen here?”

“I got a friendly little visit from the Boo Hag,” Sam answered, gingerly rubbing his neck at the memory. “Only this time, it was dressed up as Sophie.”

Dean was at Sam’s side, checking his neck before the younger man could even blink. He grabbed Sam’s face, rotating it as he took in the bruising forming there. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah.” Sam glanced at the woman beside him and smiled. “Luckily, Mason got here in time.”

Dean raised a teasing brow as he finally let go of Sam’s face. “Getting a little rusty there, Sammy, if you’re having a woman swoop in and save your ass now.”

“Bite me.” Sam winced as he picked up one of the overturned chairs and sank down on it. “So, what did you find at Sophie’s apartment?”

Mason’s eyes widened. “Wait — you were at a sealed crime scene?” she demanded, her eyes boring into Dean.

“Uh...” Dean bit his lip. “No?”

Mason huffed and Sam again felt bad for what they were doing to her. It’s not like they were intentionally trying to jeopardize her career. Then again, toes needed to be stepped on in order for them to get what they wanted, and right now that was answers since they had no clue who the Boo Hag really was.

“I swear, the two of you are going to end up putting me in the loony bin...” she said as she plopped down on the bed once again.

“Sorry,” Sam quietly said, glancing at her.

“Yeah, sorry,” Dean chimed in, but his eyes twinkled with delight. “Would you at least like to see what I found that your guys missed?”

Mason looked up at him expectantly but remained silent.

Taking that as a cue to proceed, Dean reached into his pocket and pulled out the tissue-wrapped trinket he got from Sophie's. Unfolding it, he held it out for Sam and Mason to see.

"Congratulations, Dean — you found a necklace," Sam said dryly.

"Dude..." Dean shot his brother a look of contempt.

"Why would my guys be looking for a necklace?" Mason asked, confused.

"Because it's not Sophie's," Dean answered proudly.

"Then whose is it?"

Dean's face broke out into a triumphant smile. "It belongs to Stella DeLisle."

"I still don't see where we're supposed to be impressed, Dean," Sam said. "She could have easily let Sophie borrow it."

"You mean, while she was wearing it all day yesterday?" Dean challenged.

"Or after."

Dean shook his head. "Wrong, little bro. Did you forget I was with Sophie all afternoon and last night? Besides, Stella left before you got to the agency yesterday and she was still wearing it."

"So, what are you saying?" Mason asked.

"I'm saying Stella DeLisle and our mysterious Boo Hag are one and the same."

Folding the necklace back up, Dean replaced it in his pocket before turning his attention to Sam. "So, College Boy, did you find a way to kill the bitch?"

Sam nodded as he retrieved their father's leather journal. "Yeah — Dad says the best way to kill it is with a silver dagger to the heart."

Dean took the journal from Sam and read over the entry. Closing it with a snap, he smiled at Sam and Mason before looking down at his wardrobe. "After I get out of these God awful clothes, what do you say about hunting us down a Boo Hag?"

DeLisle Modeling Agency

Stella DeLisle ran an agitated hand through her long hair, wishing her pounding head would just ease up already. She wasn't sure how much more she could possibly take before she went certifiably crazy—how much more of *him* she could take. The only thing Stella succeeded in doing so far was cleaning up his messes and she couldn't do it anymore. Not after this.

A knock at her door had her lifting her head and the agent narrowed her green eyes as the newcomer popped his head in. "Go away, Marco."

"Aw, Stella...is that any way to talk to your baby brother?" the photographer asked as he sauntered into the office. Not waiting for an answer, he took a seat and smiled at her. "Business doesn't seem to be going so well for you, does it?"

Stella glared. "No thanks to you."

Marco held up his hands in mock innocence. "Now, what is it you think I've been doing?"

"Don't you dare pull that crap on me. You know damn well what you've been doing." Stella shook her head in frustration. "It's been the same exact thing since we were kids, Marco."

"And what would that be?"

"Me cleaning up your messes just like always. I know you're the one killing my models and I have fought hard to keep the suspicion off of you. It seems like every time I turn around, you're doing something else. I'm tired of it and I'm not doing it anymore."

Marco rolled his eyes. "Please — you don't give a damn about protecting me. All you care about is this business, so get off your soapbox already."

"This business is my life, Marco."

Marco sat up in his chair and leaned forward so his elbows rested on his knees. "And what do you think will happen if everyone found out, sis? Do you think you will

have a business if they learned the truth and found out what a monster you really were?”

“I didn’t kill those people, Marco. That was you — that makes you the monster.”

Marco shrugged. “Semantics.” He narrowed his eyes. “Do you think those hunters will believe that? I’ve been watching them, Stella—I almost had one in the bag, actually. Do you really think they’ll give two shakes about you?”

Stella paled as she tried to swallow the lump in her throat. “I did what I had to in order to survive. What about you, Marco? Huh? Why did you have to kill them?”

“I wanted to shake things up a bit. What’s the point of living if you can’t have a little fun on the side?”

“I’ve really tried to help you, Marco.”

Marco got up from his chair and slowly made his way to his sister. Propping himself on the corner of the desk, he looked down at her, grinning. “There’s good news on that front, sis. I don’t need your help anymore. Pretty soon, you won’t be able to help me at all.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“Let’s just say I left the police a nice little present back at Sophie’s. They’re already looking for you or at least, they will be soon enough.”

“What did you do, Marco?”

Marco smiled cruelly. “I ensured my survival.”

“How could you betray me like that, Marco? I thought we were supposed to be a family.”

“We are a family, Stella. But there comes a time when you have to sever your ties and go your own way.” He eyes darkened. “Besides, I’m tired of growing up in my big sister’s shadow.”

Stella shook her head in disgust. “I don’t see why I wasted so much time and effort on you, Marco. You are nothing but a waste and a weasel. Do you honestly think I’m going to sit here and let you ruin everything I have worked for?”

Marco smiled sadly, but his gaze was withering. “That’s where you’re wrong, sis.” In a flash, he pulled out a silver dagger from behind his back. Before Stella could fully comprehend what was happening, he plunged it in her chest.

Stella gasped and her eyes widened as she spotted the knife protruding from her chest. “Marco?”

Marco stood up and kissed her on the forehead. “Rest in peace, Stella.”

“Why in the world are we taking the stairs instead of the elevator?” Mason asked as she and the hunters began their ascent to the fourth floor. “There’s a reason I avoid the gym.”

“Because the elevator would have alerted Stella, giving her a chance to bolt before we could stop her,” Dean answered.

Mason rolled her eyes. “Oh, and bursting into her office with weapons drawn won’t do that?”

Dean shrugged. “She won’t have as much time to get away.” He eyed her gun. “What are you doing with that pea shooter, anyway? Not like it’s going to do you much good besides pissing her off.”

Mason eyed Dean. “Hey, you and Sam have your little knives — I have this. It’s my security blanket.”

“Don’t mind Dean, Mason,” Sam said as they stopped at the fourth floor landing. “He’s just giving you a hard time because he doesn’t get to use his. He’s having separation anxiety.”

Dean reached behind his back and pulled out his trusty Desert Eagle. “I don’t leave home without it,” he said with a smile.

Sam sighed. “Are we going to do this or not?”

“So damned impatient,” Dean mumbled as he replaced his gun. Gripping his knife, he glanced back at the other two. “Mason, you stay next to Sam.”

“I think I know how to handle myself, Dean,” she protested.

Dean arched a brow. “Just humor me here.”

“You better listen to him, Mason. He’s not against leaving you tied up out here,” Sam said.

“He wouldn’t dare...”

Dean glanced at Mason and smiled.

“Fine, I’ll stay with Sam.” She quirked a brow at the youngest Winchester. “He’s a control freak, isn’t he?”

Sam chuckled. “You have no idea.”

Dean ignored them as he quietly opened the heavy metal door, holding it open while Sam and Mason slipped inside. Closing it gently, he once again took the lead as they headed to Stella’s office. He and Sam got on either side of the slightly ajar door and when Sam gave the nod that he was ready, Dean burst in.

“What the—” Dean stopped just inside the doorway, causing Sam and Mason to bump into him.

“Dude, what the hell?” Sam asked, but then he saw.

Stella DeLisle was sprawled on the floor, blood staining her white blouse and the plush carpet underneath. Dean cautiously made his way towards her, not trusting the sight for even a second.

“Dean, is she—”

Dean held up his knife in a defensive position as he reached to feel for a pulse. He reeled back in surprise and fell on his ass as the agent’s eyes snapped open and she let out a strangled gasp.

“Sonofabitch!”

“Dean!”

“Please...” Stella whimpered.

Dean pulled himself up, trying to calm his pounding heart. He glanced at Stella, taking in the knife sticking out of her chest before looking up at Sam. “Looks like someone beat us to the punch.”

“You have...to...help me,” she begged.

“Sorry, sister, but I don’t have to do a damn thing for you.”

“No...not me. I—It wasn’t...me...I swear.”

Dean reached into his pocket and pulled out the necklace. “Then how the hell do you explain me finding this at Sophie’s apartment?”

Stella pulled in a ragged breath. “That’s...what...talking about.”

“Huh?”

“He...told me.”

“Told you? Who told you what?” Dean demanded.

“Dean...” Sam warned.

Dean ignored his brother as he glared at the dying woman. “We know what you are. I’m not interested in whatever cock and bull story you want to give me.”

“No...”

“You murdered all those innocent people and for what? Huh? Was it for kicks?”

“Dean, let her talk,” Sam said softly, his eyes riveted on Stella.

Dean glanced at his sibling in disbelief, again marveling at Sam’s ability to believe the best in everyone. “Sam, she attacked you not even an hour ago and now you want to hear what she has to say?”

“Wasn’t me...” Stella feebly argued.

Dean turned his attention to her once again. “Do what?”

“I fed...but haven’t...killed in...years. There’s...another...one out...there...” She coughed, blood pooling out of her mouth.

“What do you mean there’s another one out there?” Dean yelled. “Who is it?”

“Not...me...”

"Yeah, I got that the first five times you told me. Who is it, Stella?"

Stella turned glazed over eyes to Dean and opened her mouth to answer. Instead, she let out one last shuddering breath before going still. Dean slowly stood up, his eyes not leaving her body.

"Do you think she was telling the truth, Dean?"

Dean turned his head to look at Sam. "No, I think she was still trying to save her ass until the very end."

Sam frowned. "But it doesn't make sense, Dean. I mean, what did she do? Kill herself? Or was there really someone else involved who got the drop on her?"

"She probably did kill herself, Sammy. After what happened to you, she had to know we'd come gunning for her ass. She saved us the trouble."

Sam bit his lip. "Maybe..."

Dean sighed. "Look, I'm not going to stand here and argue the logistics of it. The way I see it, she did us a favor."

"I better call this in," Mason spoke up. "And you two better shag ass before my guys get here."

"That's one thing I'll agree with," Dean said as he started towards the door. "Come on, Sammy."

Sam made to follow, but stopped before reaching the doorway. "What are you going to tell them?" he asked Mason.

Mason smiled. "Don't worry about me, Sam." She nodded towards the door as she tugged out her cell phone. "Now get out of here."

Flamingo Inn

The next morning

Sam still couldn't stop thinking about the previous night's events as he and Dean packed their bags. Dean had told him not to worry about it and not to look a gift horse in the mouth, but he just couldn't help it. It was just too easy to blame Stella's death on a suicide and it seemed a little too convenient.

Sam tried arguing about it with Dean, but his brother didn't want to hear any of it. Maybe it was better that way considering they got an easy hunt for once. If Dean was content to accept things the way they were, well then so was Sam. He had other things on his mind — more like someone.

Sam hated that he was going to leave Mason behind without a word. He'd really grown to like her these past couple of days and wished there was a chance more could happen between the two of them, but he also knew he couldn't do that to her.

"Are you okay over there?" Dean asked, breaking through Sam's thoughts.

"What?" Sam glanced over at Dean, who was watching him intently. "Yeah, I'm fine."

"Liar." Dean rolled up some clothes and shoved them into his duffle. "What is it? Mason?"

Sam shrugged, hating how his brother could read him like an open book. "It's just better this way, Dean."

"You could still call, you know? We have time."

Sam zipped up his bag and grabbed his laptop. "Why, so I can tell her that even though I felt something between us, I have to leave now?"

"Or you could just tell her bye," Dean offered.

"Forget it, man. Like I said, it's better this way." Sam shoved his laptop into his messenger bag and placed it on his duffle as a knock sounded at the door. He turned to Dean as if his brother would know who was there.

"Don't look at me," Dean said with a shrug.

Sighing, Sam walked to the door and gaped in surprise. "Mason — what are you doing here?"

Mason stepped into the room and smiled at the brothers. "Just thought I'd drop in and fill you in on what's happening with the case." Her smile faded when she spotted their packed bags. "Are you on your way out?"

"So, what happened with your case?" Sam asked, pointedly ignoring her question as he shut the door.

Mason's eyes lingered on the bags a moment longer before she looked over at Sam. "Well, it looks like Dean was right about the suicide."

"Hey, score one for me," Dean smirked. "Looks like Sammy's not the only brains around here."

Sam ignored Dean's ribbing. "How do you know?"

"We found a suicide note at her home," Mason answered.

"Doesn't that seem a little strange?" Sam asked, frowning. "Leaving a note in one place and offing yourself in another?"

"Not really. I've seen it happen quite a bit around here."

"I told you she was just trying to save her own ass in the end, Sammy."

"You don't have to sound so happy about it, Dean," Sam said moodily.

"I'm not happy about it, Sam, but any way you look at it, she was going to die. She was supernatural, she was killing people, which means automatic death sentence in my book."

Mason stepped in before a full-blown fight could commence. "You'll also both be happy to know I left the two of you out of everything."

Sam flashed Mason a grateful, relieved smile. "Thanks a lot, Mason."

"Yeah, you've really gone out of your way to help us," Dean added.

Mason gave a casual shrug. "Maybe I would rather have you two out there where you can make a difference, even though I'm sure bringing in the elusive Dean Winchester would secure me a permanent position on the force."

Dean started. "How did you—"

Mason smiled. "I'm a cop who happens to be pretty competent at her job. But don't worry — your secret's safe with me."

"But didn't you have to run his prints through a lab?" Sam asked.

Mason nodded. "I did, but I also have a lot of people who owe me favors. The tech pretended she didn't see anything." Her eyes drifted back to their bags. "Now, how about you answer my question: Are you leaving?"

Sam looked down as she turned inquisitive eyes his way. "Our job kind of takes us all over."

"I see. Were you just going to bail without telling me?"

"Okay, well...I'm just going to go pack up the Impala," Dean said, grabbing their gear before Sam could protest. "I'll be outside when you're ready, Sammy."

"But—" Sam began, but Dean was already out the door. Sam turned his head to see Mason was still staring at him.

"Your silence tells me everything I need to know, Sam," she said quietly.

"It's not like that, Mason. I never wanted you to feel this way."

"And what way would that be?"

"Hurt...angry that I was leaving."

Mason shrugged as she kicked at the tattered carpet. "Why would I be angry?"

Sam's brows shot up in surprise. "You mean, you haven't been feeling it?"

"Feeling what?" Mason asked with a blank stare.

Sam huffed as his cheeks grew warm. "My mistake. I guess I'm the only one who felt something between us." Grabbing up his jacket, he headed for the door. "I'll see you around some time, Mason."

"Sam, wait!" she said as his hand reached for the doorknob. He stopped, but didn't turn to look at her. "I felt it, too."

Sam glanced at her. "Yeah?"

"Yeah." Mason sighed. "I just figured if I pretended not to, it would be easier when you left."

"Is it?"

Mason shook her head. "Not even a little." She walked up to him. "It's been a good long while since I've allowed myself to feel something for a guy. It seems that every time I do, he has to bail."

"It's not that I want to, Mason."

"You just have to," Mason answered for him.

"Yeah," Sam said softly. "Dean and I — we have to keep on with our work."

Mason nodded. "Will I ever see you again?"

Sam sighed. "I could lie to you and tell you yes, but I'm not going to do that. Honestly, with what we do...we're rarely in the same place twice."

Mason shrugged a shoulder as she looked up at him. "A girl can hope though, right?"

Sam nodded. "Right."

They remained standing there, rooted to the spot as they continued to stare at each other. Finally, unable to resist any longer, Sam dropped his jacket and cupped her face, their lips meeting in a passionate kiss. They remained that way for a few more moments, lost in each other, until Sam broke away, smiling down at her.

"That was...wow," Mason said breathlessly.

"I agree." Reaching down, Sam picked up his discarded jacket and kissed her one more time. "You take care of yourself, Lieutenant."

Mason smiled. "You too, Sam."

Sam reached for the doorknob again, but stopped as a thought hit him. "You know..." he said turning around slowly. "You never did tell me your first name."

"You never asked," Mason shot back teasingly.

"Touché." Sam opened the door and stepped out.

"It's Claudia, if you're still wondering," she said before he could completely get out.

"Claudia." Sam smiled back at her. "Maybe I'll see you around sometime, Claudia."

"I sure hope so, Sam," she said to his retreating back. "I really hope so."

Interstate 95

"I've got you under my skin.

I've got you deep in the heart of me.

So deep in my heart that you're really a part of me.

I've got you under my skin."

The radio blared the familiar Frank Sinatra tune as the cherry red Ford Mustang Convertible cruised down the interstate, its lone occupant belting out the lyrics.

"I'd sacrifice anything come what might

For the sake of havin' you near

In spite of a warnin' voice that comes in the night

And repeats, repeats in my ear..."

Marco DeLisle bobbed his head to the song, dark shades pulled over his eyes. He hated to leave sunny Miami behind, but it was time to look for greener pastures elsewhere.

It shouldn't be too hard for a photographer to find a new job, he thought smiling. Maybe New York. What better place to set up shop than at the fashion capital of the world?

Marco revved the engine as his destination became crystal clear.

"But each time I do just the thought of you

Makes me stop just before I begin

'Cause I've got you under my skin.

Yes, I've got you under my skin."

The End