

Season Four
Episode Four: Traces of Red

Manoir Rouge,
La Jolla, California

Sam looked at the looming wrought iron gates that confronted him and squirmed. The ornate twisted metal reminded him of the ridiculous Hammer horror flicks he used to watch with his dad and Dean as a child.

British movies filled with more clichés than a toddler could count.

The large foreboding house, the intimidating almost surreal entrance, and of course, the unnatural mist that always seemed to hang like a portent of evil a few feet from ground level.

He could laugh at such bizarre cinematic oddities now, knowing that the only horror they contained was probably going to be as a result of the scriptwriter's gaffs.

But this house, this *place* – there was nothing laughable here. His senses were screaming at him to turn, to run, to never come back.

And while that might be quite natural to an everyday guy on the street, it was the most atypical reaction possible for a hunter.

He shot a glance over to his brother who had scurried along the outer wall that connected with the gates and was now clambering over the ancient brickwork like a monkey.

Dean's intuition was apparently not sending out any alarm bells.

Sam told himself there was no time to worry about the strange feeling in his gut, and with a sigh of acceptance, he followed Dean over into the grounds of Manoir Rouge, his huge hands sinking into soft moss as he straddled the wall and then dropped down the other side.

"Dude, can you keep that giraffe-like head and neck of yours outta the light? We're not exactly auditioning for *America's Most Wanted* here!"

Dean was scowling at him. Sam could feel it through the rough thicket even though he couldn't actually see his brother's face.

There was a soft double click as Dean cracked open his sawed off, checked the rock salt load and then snapped it shut again.

"Okay, Sasquatch, you hit the security system and I'll fry our 'little problem's' stuff. No more miss hissy fit, period."

"Gotcha," Sam answered, but Dean was already scooting across an open grass area towards the house.

In a second, Sam knew his brother would vanish inside using the easily forcible basement doors to gain entry. Once he'd gotten access, he'd have the fun task of finding their spook's belongings and burning them while Sam was making sure the house's extensive CCTV system wasn't picking anything up but static.

Sam saw Dean's shadow disappear and knew he'd dropped down into the underground room. He glanced up at the turn of the century building, checking that no lights had suddenly come on in any of the bedrooms.

Nothing.

Following the same path across the lawn as Dean, he veered to the left at the last minute and dropped to his knees next to the back door. There was a small black control box fixed to the wall: An expensive but out of date alarm system he'd been "circumventing" for a good few years without any glitches.

Looking over his shoulder just once, Sam plucked out his pocket-sized tool pack and got to work.

Two minutes for the alarm, then a further five minutes inside jimmying the cameras and wiping any recording of Dean doing weird things in the basement.

Simple.

Sam stuffed a watchmaker's tiny screwdriver into his mouth for safekeeping and began pulling out a section of wiring.

What would the Denisons think if they knew he was breaking into their house only a few short days after the death of one of their children?

Alex and Penny Denison had bought the period home only four weeks previously, moving in with their twin daughters, Kerry and Kathy.

Up until that point, Manoir Rouge had been a perfectly normal house, in a perfectly normal town.

But then, somehow, the Denisons had disturbed something old that had wanted to rest forever, and little Kerry had paid the ultimate price.

It had taken very little research to discover just what and who they were fighting, and in the early hours of the previous day, Dean had burned the bones of their spook with enough lighter fluid to keep all of California's Fire Departments busy for a year, maybe two.

Now, the Winchesters were putting the final touches of their plan into place to make sure Ooljee Nascha could never hurt anyone again.

Sam pressed two sections of copper together and sucked down a breath. A small light on an interior panel turned from red to green and he dared exhale.

Making light work of the door lock now it had no backup, Sam edged into the rear entrance hall and up to the base of a large wooden flight of stairs.

"Hermann Munster was here," he muttered under his breath as he carefully pulled a short-barreled pump action from under his jacket. There was no reason for it, but he unexpectedly felt the urge for its reassuring presence in his hands.

The CCTV room was supposed to be a small closet under the stairwell. He slid the shotgun up to the half-sized wooden door there and paused. What was he afraid of?

The big bad wolf. Sammy is afraid of the big bad wolf, a tiny voice inside his head began to cackle and Sam spun around, abruptly feeling like he'd been violated.

At the top of the stairs, he thought he heard movement. Were the Denisons awake?

And then it came.

The soft, unmistakable whimper of a child.

He moved again, positioning himself with the shotgun so he could quickly let off a couple of shells if he needed to.

As his barrel lined up with the staircase, he found he was aiming at a small blonde six-year-old. It was Kathy Denison.

Sam felt his throat bob even though he didn't recall giving it permission.

The little girl seemed almost trance-like. Her pale blue eyes stared out into space as if there was nothing left on Earth to focus on. Either she was sleepwalking...

Or...

Kathy's mouth opened and a voice thick with a deep native accent spoke out. "I can still feel the knife —"

Around Kathy, the air grew thick with a strange charge that even at this distance made every hair on Sam's body stand to attention. He could feel the tiny follicles in his skin bristling as some unseen force tugged at them.

And then it began.

Sam noticed tiny whirls of dust on the wooden floor that appeared to grow and transform until they were spinning and gyrating in a larger mass. A tiny scrap of paper was sucked into the maelstrom, followed by any smaller items that weren't nailed down.

The thing continued to grow outwards, it's epicenter a dark and tumultuous place than burned with a hundred-year-old anger. An anger that now focused itself on a defenseless little girl.

The dust cloud settled around Kathy, encircling her, but as yet, not touching her precious pale skin.

Sam grasped the shotgun harder until his knuckles turned white. This was what the gut feeling had been warning him about. *This* was the one thing he dreaded on any hunt.

The involvement of an innocent child.

He assessed his chances of getting a shot off at the thing before it could do any harm. While the rock salt would sting Kathy this close, it shouldn't do any real damage. But could he take the chance?

The spinning whirlwind was playing with him, using the girl as bait. Kathy was a human shield for a creature that had lost all conscience a very long time ago.

Maybe I could shoot to her left. Wing the thing enough to get it away from her...

The dust devil screeched and the girl spoke again, in that same rasping voice. "I can still feel the knife –"

"I know," Sam agreed, taking the first step on the stairs. "I understand what you went through. I can help you...if you'll just let Kathy go..."

The dust devil appeared to slow, coalescing into a more solid shape that almost wrapped itself around the girl like a black funeral shroud.

If it once touched her actual flesh, then it would all be over. This entity held the power of death at its ethereal fingertips. It carried a form of ghost sickness Sam knew well, but not one he had ever wanted to encounter firsthand.

"Let me help you," he offered again, but Ooljee Nascha had other ideas. She didn't want help, she wanted cold, harsh revenge.

A human-shaped hand shot from the spinning bulk around the girl, just one fingertip tracing along the flesh of Kathy's right forearm.

Sam saw the indoor whirlwind's actions and pulled back on his pump action's trigger three times in quick succession, a white cloud of salt peppering the top of the stairs and blanketing an oak cabinet in its opaline patina.

As quickly as it had formed, the mini-tempest dissipated, its form disintegrating back into innocent particles of dust.

And as the dust specks settled, falling back onto the dark stained floor boards, Kathy fell with them, her blue eyes frozen like the heart that had once beat within her chest.

The sound of the young girl's body hitting the landing only half registered in Sam's brain. Somehow, he had known this would happen. His mind had screamed at him not to come here, and because he'd ignored that warning, Kathy Denison had perished.

Other noises began to erupt around him, but Sam didn't hear them. He simply stared at the empty staircase, reliving the lifeless, hollow look in Kathy's eyes.

"Sam, what the..?" Dean barged through a side door, a distinct smell of lighter fluid following in his wake. He paused as his gaze followed his brother's and landed on the girl's crumpled body. "Aww Sammy..."

"I wasn't fast enough, Dean. I could have stopped this."

A distant police siren began to warble somewhere in the suburbs. It would be at Manoir Rouge in ten minutes, maybe less.

Dean's head snapped upwards as the familiar sound of light switches being flicked filled the air.

"C'mon, Sam, we gotta shag ass. I figure one of us tripped a silent alarm sensor. The cops will be here any second." Dean pulled at his brother's arm, and eventually Sam relinquished, but inside, he didn't actually care if he got arrested.

He deserved it, didn't he?

* * *

Dean swung the Impala out onto the interstate and just let the big old bird glide. The Chevy was in her element on roads like this, and in a way, it was almost like being able to stick her on autopilot.

After a gig like their last, it was often a blessing.

Dean looked over to his brother, a mass of brooding muscle that hadn't spoken since they'd hastily vacated Manoir Rouge.

"Sam, you know sometimes this is gonna happen. You *do* know that right? After all we've been through?" He raised a brow and tried to sound like the kid's death hadn't affected him.

It had, but hunting was a kind of war, and inevitably, there were always going to be casualties. One day, Dean had no doubt he and Sam would be among them.

"She was just six, Dean. *Just six!* You didn't have to look into her eyes as that *thing* snuffed out her life with one touch." He banged a hand on the dashboard in frustration as if he'd never seen death before. "Don't give me that crap that I should accept this as part of the job, because I never will." Sam looked at his brother, brows furrowing and nostrils flaring in anger at the world. "Did you finish it?" He finally snapped, his eyes locking on something out of the side window rather than on his sibling.

Dean flipped his favorite Zippo over in his free hand. "Consider Ooljee Nascha's sorry butt officially ganked. I torched everything in that basement that could have belonged to her."

Sam nodded, but it was of little consolation.

Kathy Denison's death was just one to add to a long line that he felt responsible for.

"Dammit, Sam, this isn't about that kid, is it? It's about Mom, about Jess...hell, it's about leaving Dad in that church while we got a get outta jail for free card, right?"

Sam didn't answer, instead, he looked down at his palms. There were no traces of red there to show his guilt.

At least, no visible ones.

But deep down, Sam still knew there was blood on his hands that he would never be able to scrub clean.

Maybe that was the bane of the gifted children. And right now, he wasn't sure the ability was worth the consequences it brought with it.

"This isn't over, Dean. It's never over..."

Three weeks later...

Something was dripping. Not a fast drip, but more like an annoying faucet that required a new washer.

Sam tried to push the sound into the back of his mind so that he could sleep some more. But it wouldn't go. It just lingered, adding to the already pounding headache that was plaguing him.

Eventually, he gave in and forced his gritty eyes open.

It was hard to focus at first, and he tried to roll over, mumbling under his breath that they shouldn't use this motel again – the beds were way too hard and the plumbing sucked.

He only managed half a turn when his arm yanked back, nearly pulling his shoulder from the socket. Along with a sharp searing pain from his wrist up to his elbow, came a metallic ring that suggested something was definitely amiss.

Sam groaned. "Dean, if this is another one of your 'what can I handcuff Sammy to next' jokes, it's so not funny." He squinted in the darkness, trying to cajole his eyes to adjust to the gloom more quickly.

It appeared he was indeed chained to a rather grimy toilet. The problem was, this was most definitely not the Winchesters' bathroom. Even they had *some* standards, and this was just gross.

Sam rubbed the forefinger of his free hand across his temple, concern now centered on exactly why he had the throbbing headache. The last thing he recalled was going out to grab Dean a burger from a twenty-four hour diner near their room.

How many hours had passed since then?

He looked again at the toilet, an unpleasant memory from a hunt in Las Vegas making him at least thankful that he was chained to the thing rather than having his head stuffed down it.

Maybe that comes next. Or worse...

"Good evening."

The voice was so sudden and unexpected Sam actually jumped slightly as the two words echoed hollowly around the room. He squinted again, eager to see their point of origin.

Sitting opposite him, and also chained to a pipe, was a blond man of about forty. He had short, curly hair and appeared to be wearing a grey vest that hadn't been in vogue for several decades.

The shadows played cheekily across his features, making it hard to see his expression, but Sam could have sworn the newcomer was smiling despite their apparent predicament.

As Sam stared at him, the man's gaze dropped to the concrete floor of the room and fixed on something about halfway between them. He pointed at it helpfully, but never offered to speak.

Sam scrutinized the object. It was a hatchet – a recently sharpened hatchet from the way the blade glinted in the muted light from a bulb that hung overhead.

He groaned again, this time loud enough for his new friend to hear. This wasn't one of Dean's bad jokes, but it was still a joke. It had to be, didn't it? Someone was making a half-assed attempt at recreating the movie *Saw*, and he was smack bang in the middle of it.

Sam leaned as far forward as his cuffs would allow. "Dude, you got a name?" If they had any hope of finding out what was going on, or indeed escaping, they had to get to know one another. They had to join forces.

The blond man sat forward too, his eyes apparently appraising every move Sam made, reading his expression, his body language, perhaps even his unspoken thoughts. "More to the point," he eventually responded. "Do *you* have a name?"

Answering a question with a question. Wasn't that meant to mean something in psychologist land? The trouble was, Sam couldn't remember what. "My name's Sam...and you?"

The man flashed that quick, but disarming smile again and his eyes twinkled with something Sam could only describe as mirth. "Patrick. Patrick Jane."

The name tickled at the back of Sam's memory, but he couldn't think why. They'd definitely never met before, of that he was sure. This guy was just a little too off base to ever forget.

"Do you know how we got here?" Sam looked around the room again. It was cluttered with junk, and unfortunately for their sakes, had only one tiny window.

There were two exits. One door that probably led to stairs and into a house, and wooden trap doors that undoubtedly opened into a garden.

Patrick watched him assess their situation. "Why do *you* think we're here, Sam?"

"I'm more interested in how we get out of here than the why. I've been in a situation like this before, and trust me, we don't want to stick around long enough for the whacko behind this to get home." Sam nodded towards the hatchet with a slight scowl, a distinct flashback of the Benders' house unsettling him. "One thing's for sure, I'm not hacking off a limb with that thing."

Jane cocked his head, looking at the chopper with more curiosity than fear, and from his blank expression Sam guessed the man had never seen *Saw* – which, given the outcome of the movie, was probably a good thing.

Eventually, Jane smiled wanly. “It might be...*interesting*,” he offered without explaining more.

Sam scrunched up his face, not sure how to take his newfound friend. The guy was plain weird, but like it or not they were stuck together.

He glanced down at the shiny new cuffs attaching him to the toilet, shaking his hands in frustration until the metal jangled on porcelain. He could try dislocating his thumb to escape them, but he didn’t really have a great track record with that particular trick.

“Oh...how silly of me.”

Sam looked back to see Jane fumbling in his vest pocket, a strange sparkle in his eyes that could mean anything. This one was a wildcard, an unpredictable, but undeniably intelligent man who definitely shouldn’t be locked in a basement with a hunter.

So why the hell are we both here?

Jane seemed oblivious to Sam’s ponderings and had begun picking at the locks on his cuffs with a newly-found pin. As he worked, he began to quietly talk again, his carefully planned words reminding Sam of an expensive psychiatrist analyzing a patient. .

“You know what I think, Sam? I think we’ve both been brought here as a punishment.”

“Punishment for what?” He rattled the cuffs on the toilet again. “Not cleaning the john when I was a kid?”

Jane stopped poking around inside the lock on his wrist and looked up. This time, there was no smile, no cheeky flash in his eyes, there was only sadness. Sam couldn’t tell if it was genuine or not, but the face he was now seeing was that of a man who had lost everything.

Sam knew, because he’d seen that look in his dad’s eyes every time John mentioned Mary.

“Two people died because of my ego. How about you Sam?” Jane’s eyes locked with the young hunter’s and it was all Sam could do not to look away.

He helped people, he saved people, he would never intentionally hurt anyone, would he? But that hadn’t been the question, had it? Intentional or not, people died around him. *Kids* died around him.

Sam shuddered as Kathy Denison’s haunted eyes appeared on the back of his retinas, filling his vision for one split second. Then, the moment of hesitation was gone and he shook his head.

Jane nodded slowly, deliberately, apparently interpreting the pause before Sam answered for exactly what it was. Uncertainty.

If the hunter’s reaction meant anything to him, Jane didn’t show it. Instead, he tossed down the pin he’d been working on the cuffs with. “Superglue in the mechanism,” he explained, impassively. “I guess that means we have to go back to plan B.”

“We have a plan B?”

Jane shrugged, his inscrutable expression never faltering. “Well, there’s always the axe...”

***RJ’s Roadside Motel
Southern California***

Dean shifted on the bed, a small snort erupting from his lips as the TV remote fell from his hand and made a loud thump on the floor. The sound barely registered on his eardrums and he was about to drift back off into blissful slumber when Patrick Swayze yanked him back into consciousness.

"C'mon! We're all going to die, die standing up!"

Dean blinked and almost thought he heard his father shouting those same words at him. Instead, as he swiftly sat up, he realized it was simply the movie he'd been watching blaring out at almost full volume.

He fumbled for the lost remote and quickly turned Swayze's *Red Dawn* to a more tolerable level. "Sammy, why didn't you turn the TV down before I go deaf in my sleep?"

There was no answer, and Dean suddenly remembered he'd sent his younger sibling off for food. But that was halfway through the previous movie, wasn't it?

He rubbed at his eyes and checked his watch. It was three in the morning – which meant he'd been dozing for over two hours, and Sam had been gone just as long for a burger that should have taken ten minutes.

Dean swung his legs over the edge of the bed, pulled on his CAT boots and took in the motel room for any signs that his brother had been and gone again.

There were none.

Jeez, Samantha, this better not be about that gig in La Jolla again...

Ever since Kathy Denison had been killed, Sam had been distracted, depressed even, and Dean was having a hard time understanding why. They'd been hunting long enough to be able to deal with that kind of crap. And yet Sam was apparently forgetting everything he'd learned in favor of a few pent up emotions.

Maybe losing their father back at Stull had been the catalyst, but Dean refused to believe that that was a permanent situation, and Sam should too. Once the church became visible again they'd do their thing and free John.

"Fat lot of good that does me right now, though." Dean huffed and considered calling Bobby. Maybe Sam had confided in him in the absence of their father.

The problem was, the more Dean thought about it, the more he had to consider that Sam wasn't actually off sulking somewhere. Yeah, he'd been "off" but not to that extent.

So what if this is Lucifer's doing? Or maybe more pissed off hunters after our asses again?

Dean grabbed his silver Colt from the bedside table and automatically checked the clip. Satisfied, he tucked it safely out of sight under his jacket and jogged out towards the twenty-four hour diner Sam had been heading for.

Outside, the air was warm and there was a light breeze that Dean attributed to the Santa Anas. Save for the sound of the odd car on the adjacent highway, there wasn't a soul to be seen from the motel all the way up to the distant flashing neon of "Cherry Hills Diner."

He picked up the pace, checking for signs of a struggle in the dusty earth that served as a path. There was nothing. And there were no roadside cameras here like there had been the last time Sam had gone AWOL like this.

Dean's mouth began to grow dry with an inner panic he hadn't felt in a long time.

The diner's doorbell jangled annoyingly in his ear as he barged through the doorway. The place was empty except for a short and very round man in his fifties wearing a grease-stained apron.

As Dean approached, the chubby patron seemed to force himself into some semi semblance of awareness. "What can I get you?" The high-pitched nasal tone was almost as annoying as the door chime – almost.

Dean sauntered up to the counter anyway. He would put up with a hundred jerks if it meant finding his brother. "Coffee, black." He tossed a twenty down. "And maybe a little of your time."

"Sorry, if you want *that* kind of entertainment you better go into town." The half human, half hippo looked like he was actually being serious.

Dean stifled a choke, turning it into a gruff cough at the last minute. "I *meant* information, *Bubba*."

The man stuck a cup on the table and filled it with coffee that had been stewing for maybe a year. A fat pudgy hand snatched up the twenty and didn't offer any change. "What kind of information?" He asked warily.

"I'm lookin' for a tall dude, floppy hair, big puppy dog eyes. Might have come in earlier for a burger with extra onions to go?" Dean raised a brow, trying desperately to keep a straight face whilst looking the man in the eye.

"I think I know the guy you mean." Hippo Man nodded, his bottom lip pouting out as he thought harder. "I remember because there was a fuss out in the parking lot right after he left."

Dean flashed another note. "What kinda fuss?"

"Oh, voices arguing, upsetting my clients, you know? And then a dark Jeep Cherokee sped off out of the lot and almost took my sign right along with it! I nearly called the cops." The man shrugged and moved away to prod several dogs that had probably been on the hot plate since lunch.

Dean looked at the food, but he'd lost all appetite the minute Sam had gone missing. He rubbed a hand across his bottom lip and felt stubble there.

There was one slim chance, just one, and he really wasn't holding out any hope Hippo Man was going to come through for him.

He asked anyway. "Dude, I don't suppose you caught the license plate on the Jeep?"

The man tapped the counter gently, as if waiting for another note to magically appear. "Of course I did," he cooed. "Not much point in thinking of calling the cops without it now, was there?"

Dean dropped a twenty so fast Sam would have passed out in shock had he been present.

The pudgy hand snatched the note. "Was a California plate. 298 G35."

"Got it!" Dean yanked out his cell and dived back outside. Maybe Bobby could help find out who owned the Cherokee?

He paced a little, finger hovering over speed dial. Then it hit. There were two cops who might help him directly if he simply had the balls to ask.

Bringing up both numbers he tried to decide who might have the best intel. Kathleen in Minnesota, or Guevara in Baltimore. In the end, he plumped for Guevara, praying that someone, somewhere could figure out who had taken his brother, and why.

Unknown Location

Sam wasn't sure which was more frustrating, the way the cuffs were chafing at his wrists, or Patrick Jane's bizarre attitude. The man seemed pleasant enough, but all he wanted to do was ask questions, rarely giving out any answers himself.

"So, you think this is punishment for some kind of mistake you made?" Sam probed, having nothing better to do than stare at the ceiling.

Jane instantly became aloof, his eyes glassing over as if Sam had hit the jackpot. "Tell me, Sam, have you ever heard of a serial killer named Red John?"

Sam shrugged. He'd heard of many killers, but in his business, most of them turned out to be demons or lost spirits searching for resolution.

"I taunted him," Jane continued. "Just one mistake on national television was all it took. I boasted I could help catch him, and I paid the price with my family. I came home that night to find my wife and daughter dead, and Red John's mark on the wall. He even left me a note on the door."

Sam listened, and this time, he was the one reading body language. Until now, he hadn't really trusted anything Jane had said. But this, this was the truth – he could see it in the man's grief-stricken gaze.

And what if Jane was right? What if this was a kind of castigation for his crimes? Did that mean Sam was here for the same reason?

But I haven't hurt anyone! His mind twisted in a vortex of disjointed images and memories of long-forgotten hunts.

What about the girl, Sammy? The sentence screamed out until he wanted to put his hands over his ears, but it would do no good. The insinuation was in his mind, and in his mind alone.

What about Mom, Jess...what about Kathy, Sam?

Sam realized he was breathing hard as he tried to smother the thoughts – something Jane had apparently noticed – but then, he noticed everything.

"Maybe you should just kill me?"

The suggestion caught Sam off guard and all his other woes were hastily forgotten. "I should *what?*" his voice raised an octave.

"You've killed before, haven't you? Why should now be any different?"

"Are you nuts? Even if I could kill you, why would I want to?"

Jane smirked again – something that he appeared to do quite often for no apparent reason other than to unnerve Sam. Something, Sam noted, that would surely have gotten him punched out by now if Dean was around.

If anyone had ever threatened to swing at Jane, he didn't show it, his demeanor never changing. "Before you awakened, our captor made me swallow a key. To be precise, the key to this basement room. Even if we could get free from our restraints, the only way of escape is inside me."

Sam blinked in surprise, but then he should have been expecting something like this. *Remember the Saw movies*, he reminded himself. "Maybe we can just kick the damn door in if we can get free?" Sam suggested testily.

This was all getting too much.

"Our kidnapper implied there would be consequences should we attempt to open the door without the key," Jane looked at his watch. "Oh, and if we don't get out within say oh...fifty-two minutes, the room fills with cyanide gas."

"You gotta be kidding me?"

Jane shook his head as if the situation was all in a day's work. "You have a choice, Sam. We both die or you can kill me and live. It's nothing you haven't done before, is it?"

"What makes you say that?"

Jane tapped his fingers together in front of him in a steeple shape. "You have, haven't you?"

Sam didn't answer. He didn't owe this stranger a reply, especially not when his gut told him he was being baited. *The same gut that told you not to go into Manoir Rouge..?*

The very name of the house made him angry, angry at himself, angry at Jane for rekindling the feelings.

He snorted, yanking at the cuffs holding him to the piping. He didn't deserve to be here. He didn't *have* to be here.

Just how strong can a pipe connecting a decrepit old john be, anyway?

Sam tugged on the shackles again and again, his temper rising with every jerk of his wrist. He could sense the energy within him growing, the bitterness needing an outlet until he thought his muscles would come apart at any second.

Realizing the best way to use his straining sinew, he gave one last heave, wrenching the pipe away from the toilet in one quick movement.

Black filthy water oozed from the torn conduit, splashing over Sam as he pulled his cuffs free from its constraints. *Crap, almost worse than Vegas...*

He turned to check on his companion, but Jane simply sat staring at him again, a look of wonder on his features apparently caused by Sam's sudden surge of strength.

As Sam moved across the room, Jane's eyes moved with him, eventually locking on the axe that still sat innocently waiting on the floor.

Sam guessed what the other man was thinking. Would he use the hatchet to get the key Patrick had swallowed?

Smiling for the first time himself, Sam reached his long gangly frame down and grabbed the chopper, turning the handle over in his huge paws until he could see his reflection in the shimmering blade.

A moth hovered around the lone bulb above his head, reminding Sam there was work to be done. He moved forwards, reaching Jane in just three quick steps.

Jane's eyes locked with his, watching, waiting for the blow to come.

Eager not to disappoint, Sam swung the axe high, gaining maximum momentum before slamming it down on the chains that held his roommate.

The metal yielded easily to the blow, releasing Jane.

Sam scrutinized the man's face. Was that actual frustration that had passed over his eyes for a split second?

"What's the matter? Upset that you didn't read me right?" Sam offered Jane a hand up from the concrete floor and he took it, brushing down his vest to remove the dust he'd been forced to sit in. "I remember you now. You're the dude off the TV from a few years back. You used to read minds, talk to the dead, that kinda thing..."

"That would depend on your definition of the dead," Patrick said wanly. "If you mean I sweet talked gullible audiences, then yes."

Sam's eyes widened a little. If he'd expected anything from Jane, it hadn't been such blunt honesty. The man was a true enigma. A pompous, arrogant ass one minute, and an intelligent but sometimes childish clown the next. He may read others well, but there was no reading him.

"We have to figure out where we are, and how we get out of here before our kidnapper releases that gas." Sam trudged to the double wooden doors that led to the outside, but it was clear something heavy and unmovable had been placed against them to prevent any escape. "We're in a twelve by twelve room nobody but our captor's set foot in for years. It's not like anyone is gonna find us here..."

"Actually," Jane pointed out helpfully. "I'd say the room is twelve by fourteen at least." He gestured to the walls as if giving a lecture. "See, the chamber isn't square, it's rectangular. Our kidnapper isn't the only one to come down here, either. If you just look in the dust over there, you can see two distinct sets of shoe prints."

Sam whirled around. "You always think you're right, don't you?"

Jane cocked his head dismissively. "Only most of the time."

"Yeah, well you're wrong about us getting out of here. There has to be a way."

Sam began to carefully pat the outer edges of the door and its frame looking for sensors or anything that might trip a booby trap. He couldn't feel anything untoward, but that didn't mean it wasn't there. "Besides, we're not alone. Somewhere out there my brother will be looking for me..."

Jane nodded as if he knew just what Sam was talking about. "Ah yes, the elusive brother."

Sam didn't pick up on the comment. He was too focused on the doorway. If he could just use brute force like he had on the cuffs then maybe this would all be over.

"You're not thinking of..." Jane didn't get the chance to finish the sentence.

Sam backed up and then ran full tilt at the door, slamming into it with all his weight behind his right foot. The door shuddered, but didn't budge an inch.

"Wait, don't forget the threat!"

Sam kicked again, temper fuelling his moves.

This time, the room plunged into darkness, the only light bulb flickering and then dying as if their captor had a hidden switch.

Behind him, Sam could hear movement. A rough scuffling noise followed by a dull thud. He turned, trying to lock onto the sounds, but as quickly as it had come, the blackness receded, the light dimly returning to illuminate the scene.

And it wasn't pretty.

Apparently, their kidnapper was not a man of idle threats. Just feet away from Sam's sneakers was a body pooling in an ever-growing lagoon of blood.

Patrick Jane's body.

Sam turned away, unable to look upon the blond man's final pose. The psychic lay sprawled at an odd angle, the hatchet buried deep in his chest until the sharpened blade edge was barely visible.

His face wore the expression of a man whose last moments had been of shocked acceptance. He had known this was coming, and had eventually conceded it was inevitable.

I didn't listen to him. I could have stopped this, just like I could Kathy.

"How many more people have to die, Sam, before you confess your sins? You and Jane deserve to be punished."

Sam turned to face the crackling, disembodied voice. It was obviously coming from a hidden speaker somewhere, and right now, he wanted to rip it out and toss it across the room.

The bad guy was watching them – no, watching *him*. Jane wasn't likely to jump up and start talking anytime soon.

Just what was the freak behind the mike getting out of all this?

But you let him die, just like Kathy. Sam forced himself to look at Jane again. Maybe this really was all his fault. *Maybe I really did inadvertently cause the deaths of some of the people I've tried to help?*

Even so, did that give the mystery kidnapper the right to do this? Did it give him the right to hold them hostage, to kill Jane?

No, dammit, no one has that right!

On a whim, Sam kneeled beside the oozing body and pressed two fingers to Jane's neck. He couldn't be alive from such a horrific injury, but Sam had to be sure. He owed the TV psychic that much.

As he'd suspected, there was nothing.

"Confess, Sam...admit to the deaths..."

Sam pushed up from the floor and stared in the direction the voice was emanating from. No matter what, he'd be damned if he was going to bare his soul to this freak.

"Dude, bite me, 'cause I ain't telling you jack!" Sam smiled wanly at his retort. Dean would have been proud of him.

Then, fittingly for the weird situation, the solitary light bulb gave out again all but blinding Sam. He batted his eyelids, trying to readjust to the gloom.

But before he could even focus, three gunshots rang out in the darkness, perhaps heralding the conclusion of his captor's game and the end of another life.

Part Two

As the sound from the gun dissipated, the light bulb sputtered back to life better than the infamous street lamp in Lloyd Webber's *Cats*. Sam gawked at the three bullet holes surrounding the door lock in front of him – holes that had obliterated the mechanism, effectively opening his jail cell.

The door slowly opened, a familiar silver .45 nudging through to finally reveal Dean grasping its ivory grips. "Sammy, you okay?"

Sam bobbed his head, unsure if he was dreaming.

When he realized his brother's Colt was pointing past him, he followed the direction of the muzzle, turning to see Patrick Jane pulling himself up from the floor.

Sam squeezed his eyes together, reopening them with a start to see that the psychic hadn't vanished, and neither had Dean.

"Dean, do you remember that nightmare you had back in West Virginia? The one like a bad Romero movie with the zombies?" Sam gulped, never taking his gaze from Jane. "Well, it's happening to me, because, dude, I think I'm reliving *Saw* – and not a good version of it."

"Ain't no dream, Sam, just this freak messing with your head." Dean jerked his automatic to gesture towards Jane, who in turn frowned at him.

"I admit I might appear somewhat...grisly in this guise, but freak, *really?*" Jane tugged at a wafer thin section of latex that wrapped around his neck, explaining the earlier lack of a pulse. "I have a makeup artist friend over at Universal who couldn't wait to kill me when I told him about this little illusion. He's really very good."

Dean scoffed, still training his weapon on the blood covered mind reader. "Man I've known you for all of two seconds and I wanna kill you."

Sam took in the conversation, still not really registering what was happening. Hadn't he seen Jane die? He shook himself, trying not to focus on the "magic" hatchet the psychic was now yanking from the glop that was his chest.

Whatever Jane was up to, Dean obviously had the answers.

"Dude, do you mind telling me why the last thing I remember is buying a burger with extra onions?" Sam demanded.

"I got no freakin' clue why." Dean watched cautiously as Jane cleaned up the fake gore. "But I can tell you where you are and who these bozos playing zoo keepers are. I guess it all started with my wanting that midnight snack..."

Sam looked down at the cuffs still hanging from his wrists. "Guess so," he agreed, wondering how junk food could get him kidnapped as Dean quickly picked the locks.

"Anyway," Dean explained. "I woke up and a few hours had gone by, still no Sammy with my chow, so I started searching for your sorry butt. Hippo Man back at the diner remembered a fuss in the lot there and some shaggy haired giraffe. I figured the latter had to be you. He gave me a license number and our good friend Guevara was able to trace it. Hey presto, big brother saves your ass once again."

"Why would anyone want to kidnap me?" Sam's eyebrows melted downwards into a frown as he locked eyes with Jane.

"Turns out the car you got abducted in is registered to the California Bureau of Investigation. Guevara couldn't find out the details, except that something was going down here tonight. And, dude, you're so not gonna like where we're at."

Sam took in the basement again. It didn't seem familiar to him. It was just an ordinary, junk-filled cellar. Apart from Jane, the hatchet, and all the phony blood, it could have been Anywhere, USA.

Dean reluctantly filled in the blanks. "We're back in La Jolla. Manoir Rouge."

The name jolted Sam's insides like he'd been poked with a cattle prod. As if he hadn't witnessed enough there, hadn't *done* enough there.

He cringed, realizing Jane was dissecting his body language again. Was that somehow what this was all about? Kathy Denison?

The psychic seemed to take Sam's flinch as something more of a curiosity than shame and stepped forward, ignoring the .45 still being waved dangerously close to his face.

"I thought you might be more apt to a confession if we brought you back to where it all happened. Call it a replay of sorts. Or as my CBI friends like to call it, a chewing gum play."

He tossed another small piece of oozing sponge latex down and then peered at it inquisitively, stuffing his hands in his trouser pockets and watching as if the prosthetic would take on a life of its own. His expression was almost infantile, confirming the fact that he may be brilliant, but he was also more than a little eccentric.

"Where all *what* happened?" Sam's inner voice was mouthing the name "Kathy" over and over, but he refused to listen. "I didn't kill anyone..."

Jane disagreed. "Oh, but you did." One brow ticked up and he rolled up his shirt sleeves, beginning to pace slowly back and forth as he made his case. "The CCTV here can't lie. We have an image of you shooting at Kathy Denison with a twelve gauge. There's no one else in the frame."

"That's because spirits don't always show on film, you ass," Dean jumped in, nose puckering in distaste at the man accusing his brother of God only knew what. "And besides, it was only rock salt."

Jane paused, sizing up the second Winchester. "Hmmn, I'm guessing you're the type that gets a kick out of playing with guns. The bigger the better, because size matters?" His eyes flicked knowingly to the weapon in Dean's hand. "And women too. Quite the ladies man, aren't you? But really, it's all about that misplaced childhood and living the life your father wanted for you rather than your own. Am I right?"

There was a pause, a beat, and Sam was sure his brother was going to punch the psychic. Instead, though, he just stared intently, the speed of his breathing giving the only clue to his anger.

"Well, gee, I'm getting analyzed for free. Don't you guys normally charge a packet for that kinda crap?" Dean lowered his weapon a touch until he looked marginally less threatening. "Let me return the favor. I'm guessing you're the dick that drives that blue bucket of bolts outside, huh? Didn't anyone tell you Citroens are for girls? Or maybe they did? Oh, and let's not forget you like to come up with elaborate schemes to trap innocent taxpayers while the real bad guys are getting away."

Jane's brow scrunched upwards in feigned wonder. "Taxpayers? *Really?* You two don't exactly strike me as the type."

"Whatever..." Dean slid the .45 back into his waistband after snagging the safety back on with his thumb. Turning to appraise the room, possibly for hidden surveillance, he almost missed Jane reaching out to take his free palm.

"Can I shake your hand?" Not waiting for a response, Jane latched onto Dean's right hand and held it – a little too tightly.

Sam grinned as his brother snatched himself free, not realizing it was all an elaborate ploy to gauge his reaction.

"Dude, I so don't swing that way." An affronted expression crossed Dean's features and he looked Jane up and down warily.

Jane shrugged and smiled at Sam as if he'd expected the very result he was seeing. Eventually, he looked innocently back to Dean. "Oh, it has nothing to do with sexuality. It's simply a process I use to help determine guilt or innocence. Something I would have thought you'd be interested in?" He cocked his head expectantly. "May I?"

"Sure, if you want my fist impacting with your face, then go ahead..." Dean's incensed look didn't change, and he obviously hadn't picked up on the fact that he was being deliberately goaded.

Sam, on the other hand, was well aware of what was going on, and the pair's constant bickering was already becoming more than he could stand. Dean bitching was one thing, but Dean bitching at Patrick Jane and vice versa was way off the "tolerably annoying" scale.

Sam tried to push the conversation more his way. He looked Jane square in the face. It seemed to be the only way to deal with him. Straight, to the point, no bull crap – because this was a man who would know. "So, you're telling me you kidnapped me and made me think I was going to die here, just to get a confession out of me?"

"Well, your psychological profile suggested you wouldn't just crack under the pressure of my good friends Rigsby and Cho in the interrogation room. I had to think of something a little more...emotionally challenging to get you to talk." Jane's face creased in sudden concern and he turned to Dean. "Rigsby, Cho?"

Was that actual worry in his normally sparkling eyes, Sam wondered?

Dean's grim expression changed. "Locked up safe and sound in their car trunks," he explained, lips curling into a small smile.

"I see, and do I get to choose which trunk I get locked in?" Jane appeared genuinely inquisitive.

"Dude, trust me, there are plenty of places I'd like to lock you and leave you, *permanently*. First you gotta realize what really went down here three months ago."

"You mean the imaginary spirit you and your brother claim to have seen?" Jane asked helpfully.

"Did you find any buckshot in the kid's body?" Dean's recent smile faded out of existence and his eyes darkened.

"No, but your brother fired a shotgun at a child moments before her death. What else can you call that, other than intent, Mr. Winchester?"

Dean almost growled – almost. Then both his hands shot out, grabbing the psychic by the top of his vest. If he'd been angry before, he was full-on pissed now.

Leaning in so close that his nose was almost touching the other man's, he snarled through clenched teeth. "I call that a hunter doing his job, you sonofa..."

Jane gently pried himself free, unabashed as ever. "That's right, because you two really do believe in the afterlife, don't you?"

Sam stepped between his brother and the nervy blond. "*You* used to believe," he said softly.

Jane's eyes grew glassy again, like they had when he'd spoken of his nemesis, Red John. "Not really," he admitted. "That was more of a skill in misdirection than a belief."

Dean shook his head. "Yeah, well at least I know me and my brother aren't the con men in this trio of misfits."

"No, you simply see things that aren't there. It's really a treatable illness if you'll just accept you have a problem. That was why we brought Sam here, to confront his demons..."

Dean scoffed. "Aww man, you *have no idea*." He turned to his brother. "C'mon, Sammy, before the cavalry arrives. We don't have to take this crap, and I doubt Bud Westmore here is gonna try to arrest us."

Sam let his innocuous puppy dog look surface. He didn't want to leave until Jane knew the truth, but the psychic was definitely as pigheaded as Dean. And that meant if he didn't want to believe or trust in something, there would be no making him.

To Jane, there was black and white, guilt or innocence. He didn't see the supernatural underworld, just waiting in the grey areas to come bite someone in the butt.

Sam shot the psychic a look of apology, as if it would somehow satiate the man's desire for justice for little Kathy Denison.

Then, he tucked his hands in his jacket pockets and began to trudge silently after Dean.

If big brother said it was time to shag ass, then it was probably time to shag ass five minutes previously.

To his surprise, Sam noticed Jane following out of the corner of his eye. The strange TV celebrity had grabbed a jacket that had been tossed on a pile of sacks, and was slipping it on as he tailed the Winchesters towards the house's main entrance.

Dean didn't appear to notice him, but Sam glanced around every minute or so just to see if he was still there. He was, right up until the point they rounded the last corner and saw the oak doorway in all its macabre grandeur.

What had once been a focal point of the entryway was now a fixture of a very different kind. A man, if you could still call him that, had been pinned upside down and spread eagled across the four corners of the door frame.

The grey-suited individual appeared to have a scarlet rash all over his visible skin, and his eyes had turned blood red until he looked like a variety of demon.

Blood dripped regularly from his mouth, staining the Wilton rug below with its ruby glaze. To add to the picture, it seemed more blood had also trickled from his ears, nose, and any available orifice it could escape from.

Nothing, save the wooden stakes through his hands holding him in place, gave the indication of murder.

Dean shook his head and looked at Jane. "What, you're still trying to pull this crap now your cover is blown? Are you *real*?"

Jane overlooked the remark and walked up to the body. Any playfulness there might have been before was gone from his features as he carefully examined the evidence before him.

Kneeling, he almost dipped a finger in the drying blood, but then drew back. Whatever he was seeing, appeared to be confusing him, perhaps, even scaring him. "This isn't part of the ploy," he offered. "That's Eric Gent, one of our agents. But then you'd know that, wouldn't you?"

"Are you suggesting we killed him?" Sam asked, seeing a bitter anger in the psychic's eyes – a frightening display of how quickly the man could change.

"No, I'm suggesting your brother killed him." Jane glanced at Dean accusingly then back to Sam. "You were in the basement with me, therefore you have the perfect alibi."

Dean coughed, interrupting the two-way conversation. "Guys, I hate to break up the banter here, but this isn't about who killed Eric, it's about *what* killed him."

Jane crossed his arms over his chest. "Granted, the method is a little perplexing, but science tells us there has to be a rational answer for everything. This isn't the work of a spirit."

"Nope," Dean agreed. "It's the work of a virus controlled by a spirit. This —" He jerked a thumb towards the congealing blood still hanging from Gent's mouth. "This is the Ebola virus. Nasty thing..."

Sam balked. Ghosts they got, but medicine? What was Dean thinking? "No offense, Dean, but how could you know that?"

Dean bristled proudly, his chest sticking out like a peacock. "Didn't either of you geeks see *Outbreak*? Hoffman, that not-so-cute friggin' monkey..."

"I saw the movie." Jane turned to Gent looking him over. "But that wasn't about Ebola, the virus was called Motaba. And I doubt we'd actually find a fictitious pathogen floating around California."

Dean wasn't abashed. "Dude, trust me, there are ways."

The door behind the body seemed to agree, slamming shut so hard the three men actually felt the judder from the frame. Jane physically jolted, but the Winchesters were far more used to such surprises.

As the echo from the door abated, each and every window shutter began to slam shut like a house of cards falling. The noise around the house became deafening.

A wooden mausoleum sealing them all in to their fates.

Dean let a hand slide under his blue jacket and retrieved an extremely short sawed off. He looked ruefully to his brother, seemingly sorry for the lack of a second weapon. "I guess that answers who we need to blame for Agent Gent's premature illness, huh?"

"Moon Owl?" Sam's face contorted in anxiety as he said the name. It was a name he'd hoped never to have to utter again, either in his native language, or her own.

"The one and only," Dean confirmed as he silently counted the spare salt shells in his pockets. "I guess I didn't get rid of her sorry ass after all..."

"You have a female accomplice?" Jane asked unknowingly. "Interesting..."

"No, *Sherlock*," Dean corrected, pushing past the psychic. "We have a woman spirit in this house, and she's pissed. *Again*."

"The Chindi's still here," Sam agreed, whether he liked it or not.

Jane mimed the word, not saying the strange name out loud, but letting it roll over his tongue as if he could dissect it from the letters alone.

Neither Winchester appeared to even notice his presence anymore.

"I know its still here." Dean grimaced as he strode towards the next room looking for an escape route. "The question is, how? I torched all the old Native stuff in the basement she might have had a connection to. And, let's not forget, we already toasted her remains in the cemetery."

Sam bit his lip. "We must have missed something. There has to be some physical thing holding her here."

Jane winced. "Another one of your imaginary apparitions perhaps?"

Sam and Dean turned to him in unison, finally remembering they were not alone. "Shut the hell up," they both mouthed.

Jane did as he was told, his face turning into a comical "who me?" expression as he pointed to himself with a forefinger, mimicking a circus clown.

Dean made a sound that suggested he was not amused and he quickly paced over the threshold of the next room, obviously having better things on his mind than the psychic.

Sam was slower to react. He had that feeling again. The same desolate impression that a neon sign was hovering over his head saying "Stay Clear."

Maybe the Chindi was mad at him in particular? Although technically speaking, Dean had been the one to do the burning, both at the cemetery, and in the basement.

It wants revenge. It doesn't care who it gets it from.

Sam felt eyes burning into him, and as he looked up, he realized Dean was frowning at him for his lack of action.

"Are you gonna help me find a way outta this joint, or do I gotta ask our new clairvoyant buddy over there to call up Houdini?"

Sam nodded, accepting where his priorities lay. There would be time for conjecture later.

He moved to the wooden paneled walls beside Dean and began to pat them. Any obvious door or opening to the outside had been blocked, but that didn't mean there wasn't another, more obscure way out if they searched for it.

Many old movies suggested that houses like this had concealed passageways and corridors – and that information hadn't come from the screenwriter's handbook. Sometimes, these old buildings really were as mysterious as they looked.

"You got anything?" Dean was chewing his lip, which meant he hadn't found squat.

Sam shook his head. "Not yet, but that doesn't mean we should stop trying..." He picked up a paperweight from a desk a few feet from him and began using it to knock on the paneling, the extra weight giving him a clearer indication if there were any hollow sections.

There had to be a way out; but if there wasn't, Sam began to wonder as he worked what he might do if the trio became cornered by the spirit that had taken Kathy Denison.

* * *

Patrick Jane didn't like being wrong, nor did he like it when the laws of nature decided to play tricks on him. And yet, here in this house, he was being forced to accept that both were happening.

When the CBI had singled out Sam Winchester, it had seemed a simple enough game to get him to confess to his crimes, albeit using a somewhat unorthodox method. Now though, Patrick was finding himself drawn into the lies like he never had been before.

It was so simple to work with expressions, body language, moods, even eye contact. But these two men were messing with everything he knew, and he didn't like it.

What if there really are spirits? What if there really is an afterlife?

Patrick refused to entertain the thought, even though it had come from the inner depths of his own mind. There was no wraithlike existence. Hadn't Houdini said if there was any way back, then he would come? If an escapologist of his caliber couldn't escape death, then who could?

But what if they're out there, wandering through the ether, lost in a miasma of spirits and souls? What if they can see me, but we can never be reunited until...

He jolted as he tried to force images of his wife and daughter away. Not pleasant, jovial reflections of how they used to be, but much more dark pictures of how they had been the last time he had seen them.

After Red John had carved them up, making them the ultimate sacrifice of a man who was too vain to realize he had an intellectual equal. Even if that equal was insane.

"You got anything?"

Jane's head jarred up as he remembered where he was, in the here and now. Whether the Winchesters were guilty or not remained to be seen, but right now, they were all trapped in a maze that seemingly had no end.

And for once, Patrick couldn't explain why they were being held, or by whom.

"Not yet, but that doesn't mean we should stop trying..."

Sam was knocking on the walls with a paperweight as the psychic watched him.

Jane kept his focus on the younger man. While Sam came across as your everyday college boy, he was far from a regular student – far from *any* kind of student.

Jane saw depths in this man he hadn't seen in some of the country's most wanted killers. Sam had a burden on his shoulders that no CBI file could explain.

But did that make him a coldhearted murderer?

The more Jane interacted with him, the more he just couldn't see it.

Of course, there was always the chance that this Winchester was better at mind games than he was, but that was a rarity indeed, and he wasn't going to readily except it as a given.

Did he kill little Kathy Denison?

Every instinct, every morsel of Jane's being, said no. And he was never one to doubt his own talent.

That left the older Winchester.

He was maybe a tad cockier than Jane, even, but underneath his brave façade there was more self-doubt and derogation than the psychic had ever seen before.

This young man was scarred, but it wasn't the physical abrasions that ailed him, it was the soul destroying kind. The things he'd seen had eaten into his mind, smoldering there, waiting to be reignited by the smallest of sparks.

Jane knew that feeling well. It was a part of him as much as it was Dean Winchester.

As Dean had witnessed his mother die horribly, Jane had seen his wife and child's bodies mutilated at the hands of Red John.

And because of it, both bristled with hate sometimes, hidden beneath that sarcastic, cocky exterior, both men burned with thoughts of revenge, of taking away the vile creatures that used the night as their ally.

Are you saying you believe what they believe? Aren't you admitting by that one statement that there IS an afterlife?

Jane clenched a fist involuntarily at the very idea. He couldn't accept that. He couldn't agree with these two yahoos, or it would open whole new possibilities about his family he didn't want to acknowledge.

You're letting the Winchesters get under your skin. Focus on the here, on the now...

“Dude, what the...” Dean Winchester sprang back from the section of wall he was working on as it began to move under his touch. He turned to his brother accusingly. “You touched something, didn’t you?”

Sam recoiled from the wood as it slowly started to moved towards him – inwards. “I swear I never touched a thing. This has to be Moon Owl’s doing or...” He spun around to face the psychic. “Did your people set this up? Is it another trick to get me to confess?”

Jane only wished Rigsby or Cho had pressed some pre-set button before their capture that was making the walls close in on them, but the truth was, they hadn’t. And if they hadn’t, who had?

He twirled around doing a one eighty, checking out every surface, every contour of the room for signs there was some hidden mechanism controlling the walls, but there was nothing. No clue, no “tell” that what was happening was manmade.

Jane closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He had to get a handle on this. He had to be calm, to keep his emotions in check and deal with reality, not superstition.

“There are no such things as evil spirits,” he mouthed in an as laid-back tone as his racing heart would allow. “Therefore, the walls cannot be moving. Therefore, this has to be a psychological mind game, and we’re all letting it deceive us.”

Jane couldn’t see him, but he heard the disgruntled huff as Dean Winchester discounted his theory without any consideration. “Oh yeah? Well, we’re all about to get our butts compacted by a friggin’ magic act then. Great, write it on my tombstone along with ‘ass kicking hunter,’ will you?”

Jane snapped his eyes back open.

The walls were still moving inwards no matter how hard he tried to convince himself it wasn’t happening. There was no sound, no indication that wood, brick, stone, plaster were being moved or morphed. How was that possible?

If this was some architect’s trick, like those built into ancient Egyptian tombs, then why was there no evidence?

As he watched, transfixed and confused by the impossible, Dean and Sam continued to pound against the oak woodwork like two animals trapped in a supernatural cage.

“I swear I’m gonna ventilate this chick when we get out of here, Sasquatch!” Dean was futilely trying to hold the walls at bay as if he were claustrophobic. “Dude, I’m getting *serious* flashbacks of airplane and submarine interiors here...”

“Dean, there’s nothing left to ventilate, remember? We fried her bones. Unless you want to try and put a hole in what’s left of her crumbling skull...” Sam hastily stepped back as the walls jerked again on all four sides, their physical presence fading slightly and then returning to the present – as if the house was moving in and out of some temporal, supernatural flux. “This reminds me of Stull, of Dad...”

Jane watched as Dean stopped in his tracks. There was something wrong here, something about their father the psychic wasn’t privy to.

Dean let the moment go. “It reminds *me* never to underestimate a spook again just because it was an innocent chick in a past life...I mean, dammit, Sammy, we’re the good guys here. Doesn’t she realize we just want to help her?”

Sam shook his head, thoughts of his missing father still clouding his mind. “She wants revenge, Dean, not rest. Hasn’t our family seen enough of this kind of crap to know the feeling?”

Dean turned away and Jane assumed a nerve had been hit. They were talking about Mary, their mother, and wanting justice for her bizarre death.

Justice.

Something Jane understood, but didn’t always trust the US legal system to provide. Someday, if Red John was ever caught, he wasn’t sure he would entrust the cops and the judges to serve up a sufficient sentence.

No, maybe he would have to do that himself, just like the Winchesters had apparently decided.

You're like them. You're no better...

"Hey, Psychic Wonder from TV Land!" Dean was gesturing towards Jane with an expression that said he had gone from pissed to reckless and beyond. "Can't you and your smartass brain figure us a way out of here before we get torn up like a junkyard dog?"

For the first time it hit Jane that he might die here. That what was happening wasn't psychological entertainment.

Even so, he still wasn't quite ready to put their moving milieu down to an annoyed specter from the other side.

"This is an illusion. It has to be. Think about the Aboriginal bone pointing rituals," Jane offered uneasily, gesturing with his hands as he explained. "The victim believes so strongly in the curse that he actually dies of fear once the kundela has been pointed at him. We're merely experiencing a similar piece of trickery." He sighed. "Although why and by whom still eludes me..."

Dean apparently didn't find the anecdote very helpful. "Gee whiz, you mean because *I think* I'm going to get crushed it'll happen? How about some information that will actually save our butts here, G.I. Jane?"

There was raw emotion as he spoke, his arms fully outstretched and pressing on the walls as if the action would actually stop their progress.

Sam was doing much the same, although he had grown strangely silent.

Jane joined them at the far wall. If he couldn't deduce his way out of this, then he wasn't going to die without trying to stop the house compacting them. Even if any effort was likely to be futile.

"Dammit, I feel like Han Solo in *Star Wars*," Dean grumbled just loud enough for everyone to hear. When no one agreed, he suspected they hadn't a clue what he was referring to. "Trash compactor scene?" He suggested obligingly.

"Wasn't there some kind of sewage waste in there?" Jane pondered a moment. "And a creature too?"

"Oh great, give our spook a few more suggestions why don't you?" Dean rolled his eyes, his arms taut in front of him as he strained against the pressure of the shrinking room.

And then, without warning, the walls stopped moving.

Dean and Sam looked at one another, waiting for their enemy's next move.

It didn't take long.

Dust and other loose household particles began to be sucked up from the surface of the floor, coalescing into the familiar shape Sam had seen here before.

The indoor dust devil grew from a small, insignificant whirl as it twisted and writhed into something the height of a human being. And at its center, the silhouette of a woman's face began to form. She looked angry, her mouth shaping into a roar so fierce, tiny globules of dirt were thrown from her spinning mass at high speed.

The flying particles felt like glass cutting into their flesh, and Sam, Dean and Patrick found themselves trying to back away – except in this room, there was nowhere to hide. Moon Owl had made sure of that.

Dean tried to shield his face from the onslaught with the palm of his hand, his eyes smarting as some of the debris found its way through the small gaps in his fingers. "Now that," he informed Jane sarcastically, "*that* is a Chindi, or in this form, they're sometimes known as a Chiindii. And from her behavior, she ain't too happy to see us..."

Jane squirmed as he looked at the red welts appearing on his hands from the Chindi's scream. It was impossible. "This has to be in our heads. Some kind of hallucinogen or mass hypnotism..."

He still refused to accept he was standing in front of a ghost – at least outwardly. His face, however, told a different story. A look of fear, or was that open-mouthed awe had spread across his usually unreadable features.

"Trust us, she's real." Jane heard Sam's voice, even felt Sam's hand pulling him back against the wall, but as the thing started to slowly swirl towards them, he couldn't take his gaze from it.

She, it, the apparition, *the illusion*, he chided himself, was a thing of beauty as well as malevolence. The face in the miasma had obviously belonged to a very pretty girl.

Her eyes looked at him, at them, as if they somehow deserved what was happening. He'd seen that look on the faces of many humans, but never an entity like this.

"Jane, don't let that thing pull you into her spell. Don't let her touch one hair on your body or you're toast." The warning came from Dean as he frantically scoured the fireplace for something. "Crap, you'd think a joint like this would have a real freakin' fire..." He seemed disappointed that the logs in the hearth were phony and the fire iron was made of decorative brass, not pure iron.

"What's he doing?"

Sam tugged-pushed Jane hard into the corner of the room until the psychic felt his spine impact with the angled oak there.

"We have to stop her somehow. Chindi can cause lots of different illnesses, just like Gent had, and they all have the same result. If she touches you, you die. Horribly. Okay?"

Jane nodded numbly, wondering what Agent Lisbon, technically his boss, would make of all this, as the unstoppable whirlwind speeded up her assault.

It was funny really, because all Jane could think of as the Chindi approached, was how comical her/its laugh had actually sounded.

She was like a witch from a sixties TV show.

He wanted to laugh at the irony as Sam and Dean stepped between him and the creature. He had come here to trap at least one of them, and now, as they were all about to die, the brothers were still prepared to be his protectors right up until the end.

Which, he realized, with a whimsical smile, would be in about four or five seconds.

Part Three

Dean was pissed.

Not because he was about to have his butt churned up by a Chindi, but because he'd allowed it to happen. Getting embroiled in what "G.I. Jane" had to say instead of focusing their energy on escaping when they had the chance, well, that had been a huge "no no."

Moon Owl was one tough chick, and he and Sam had underestimated her survival instinct, big time.

I swear, never give a spook an even break. Hell, any break.

Dean stopped grumbling and gawked.

Stupid sonofa..!

Patrick Jane had originally followed Sam's advice and huddled into the farthest corner of the room. Now, though, he seemed to have finally lost all common sense and was pushing past the lanky Winchester, apparently hell bent on actually *approaching* the spirit.

As Dean watched, Sam reached out to grab the psychic, but Jane was just too fast, dodging the hunter's lunge as if he'd anticipated it.

"No!" Sam wasted his words.

Jane stopped in front of the whirlwind, apparently not because of the warning, but because he was exactly where he wanted to be. He cocked his head slightly, smiling at the evil features assessing him.

“Yá'át'ééh.... Há'ádéé naniná? Há'át'íish baa naniná?”

Dean's pupils widened. The clairvoyant freak was actually *talking* to the spirit. And in its *own language*. What was more amazing was the fact that Moon Owl was apparently listening.

The spinning dust cloud seemed to slow its gyrations, eventually halting its forward progress until it simply churned dust on the spot.

“You speak freakin' Navajo?” Dean shook his head in disbelief, but wasn't about to lose the moment Jane had created. Pulling his sawed off from under his jacket, he quickly let off both barrels without even aiming at the Chindi.

At this range, he didn't need to be accurate, he just needed to hit the thing with as much rock salt as his weapon allowed.

Moon Owl screamed again as she was blasted square in the face, her rasping cry dissipating along with her spinning form.

And as she vanished, so did the illusion around them.

The compacted room began to shimmer and morph, expanding until there was no evidence it had ever changed.

Dean let out a huge sigh and the shotgun in his hand dropped to his side in relief. “Now why didn't I think of that before?” He chided.

Jane smirked wryly, apparently ignoring Dean's actions with the rock salt. “Didn't I tell you it was all in the mind?”

“Yeah, well, you obviously have a lot of weird crap in that head of yours. No argument there.” Dean shot the psychic a cheeky smile of his own. After all, it wasn't as if the guy had a monopoly on sarcasm. “What I wanna know is what the hell you said to that thing?”

Jane shrugged as if everyone should know a Native American language. “I just said 'Hi,' and asked where she was from, what she was doing here and so on. Nothing special.”

Sam shook his head. “I think what Dean meant was *how* you did it? Not too many people just happen to speak Navajo. It's kinda too convenient,” he pointed out.

Jane smiled again, unnerving Dean with just how blasé he was about it all.

“Oh that,” Jane replied nonchalantly. “I once had a female Native American client who wanted to reach out to her husband on the other side. I simply had to learn a little of the language to be...shall we say, more convincing.”

Dean scoffed unappreciatively. Sometimes he had to act the conman to do his job, but to lie simply to fill a bank account? Maybe under other circumstances he would have hated Jane, but the man had just saved their lives with his strange knowledge.

And there was something else too – a vein of honesty in the man, an air of repentance Dean could see deep beneath the layers and multiple faces on the surface. Whatever Jane had been in the past, he had changed.

He had seen something that had rocked his safe, TV psychic world, just like the Winchesters had seen things that had forever changed theirs.

Not that any of that made Dean like him. No, Jane was still an ass-hat of the highest order. But, at this point, he was a bearable ass-hat.

As if reading Dean's mind, Jane looked to Sam for answers. “If this is real, which let's just say I'm still a little skeptical about, then how did you find out about it all in the first place?”

Dean rolled his eyes. Two geeks together and now Sammy got to spill all about his research. *Why aren't we just shagging ass while the room isn't turning into a doll's house?*

Sam carried on oblivious to his brother's concerns. “I read an internet report about a freak indoor dust devil that seemingly killed a girl from fright. The authorities weren't buying any of it, but we have connections that lead us to believe a Navajo Chindi might be our perp.”

“I see. *Connections*.” Jane steepled his fingers in front of him, thinking. “You do

realize a normal person would have taken the report as a joke or prank?"

"So we're not normal, sue us," Dean butted in.

Now it was Sam's turn to roll his eyes. "*Anyway,*" he shot both his companions the "Annoyed Chihuahua" look before focusing back on Jane. "We came out to California to check things out. Turns out a Navajo woman had been killed at the house where the girl died. Happened back at the turn of the century, but spirits have no concept of time..."

"And that house was Manoir Rouge, where we are now?" Jane nodded, and it was difficult to tell if he was taking all this seriously or just playing along.

"Right here," Sam agreed. "Ooljee Nascha, or Moon Owl as we'd call her, married a French businessman and settled down here. Of course, that thing was kinda frowned upon back then and the local version of the Ku Klux Klan burned the house down six months after the happy couple moved in."

"And Moon Owl was inside?"

"Burned alive," Dean nodded dourly. "Those KKK bastards didn't believe in anything less than extra crispy. Weird thing is, even though they built this whole new house over the basement and foundations of the old one, nothing strange ever occurred here until the first Denison kid was killed."

"We think the family may have disturbed something in the cellar that hadn't been touched since the fire, awakening Moon Owl's spirit," Sam concluded, stuffing his hands in his jacket pockets. "It's the most common reason for this kind of manifestation to suddenly occur."

"We found old Moonie's grave, torched her remains and then came here to destroy anything that might have belonged to her." Dean looked at his brother, knowing the next part wouldn't be pleasant for him. "That was when Sammy found the Chindi attacking Kathy Denison. You and your C.B.I. buddies pretty much know the rest."

Jane nodded slowly, methodically. "The Winchesters *thought* they killed a ghost..."

"Except we didn't," Dean grudgingly admitted. "Like it or not, there's something left here that's allowing Moon Owl to stay behind and kick butt. Piece of clothing, lock of hair, something we missed." He looked to Sam.

"Or," Jane prodded. "You two have had a psychotic break and I'm being drawn into your delusional world right along with you..."

Dean's face grew into a huge smirk. "Ain't it a cool delusion, though?"

"Will you two stop the snark war long enough to think?" Sam stepped between his brother and Jane, his brows knitting. "When I was here before? When the Chindi attacked Kathy? She mentioned something about still feeling the knife. If she burned to death, what's a knife got to do with anything?"

Dean rubbed a hand across his temple, the beginning of a headache starting to gnaw at his thought processes. "Does it matter? Dead is dead, and old Moonie ain't coming back, except in her current form – which just happens to be a ticked off, revenge-hunting dust devil who picks on innocent kids. Face it, Sam, she just *has* to go."

He turned to Patrick Jane, looking him up and down as if the psychic was the sole cause of the spook's anger. Maybe he'd "read" her a few too many times? The thought amused the hunter and he grinned at the psychic, knowing the expression would annoy the other man because he didn't understand the reasoning behind it.

Sometimes, you just had to do things for the hell of it.

"Okay," Dean glanced around the thankfully static room, just thinking. "So, we know the Chindi first appeared when something in the house got disturbed. Then after we toasted her remains she got quiet until now. Why?" He whirled to suddenly face Jane. "Did your people do anything that might have caused her to awaken again?"

"Not unless someone with my abilities being here counts," Jane pondered.

Well you're annoying enough to wake anyone from the grave, Dean silently reflected as he deliberated their next move. When no fresh ideas came, he looked to his brother for inspiration. If anyone could have a light bulb moment right now, it was Sam. "Any ideas, little brother? 'Cause right now I'm starting to think we should torch this whole place. It kinda gives me the creeps anyway."

Sam winced, obviously not keen on the idea of playing fire starter in a turn of the century mansion. "We should take one last look around, Dean." He moved back to the walls to prove his point, tapping on them for signs of a hidden storage area or room.

"Yeah, well just don't go starting anymore traps. I was having bad flashbacks of Ellicott City back there for awhile." The hunter closed his eyes and shuddered at the memory of a confined wooden tomb with very little air and even less light.

"Ellicott City?" Jane asked curiously as he joined in the search for Moon Owl's mystery possession.

Dean grunted, unsure if he wanted to share the flashback with the mind guru from hell. Eventually, he caved to Jane's disarming expression even though he didn't want to. *Damn, this guy's good.* "I got buried alive once," he explained as he pried up the end of a floorboard with the tip of his hunting knife. "It was so damn dark, so..."

"Alone," Jane finished for him as he kneeled to examine under an Edwardian style chair. "I had a similar experience once after I was temporarily blinded. The feeling of isolation was...*enlightening.*"

Dean looked at the psychic, about to chew him out for being derisive, but he realized the man was being deadly serious. Unsure how to react to an actual truth from Jane, he moved away, working on another section of the floor.

Over his shoulder, he could hear Jane continuing the banter with his brother. *Sammy, you talk about me, and I swear I'll tear you a new one when we get out of here.*

But as Dean listened, he realized Sam wasn't talking about his big brother, he was talking about himself. Or rather, Jane was talking about Sam, and for the most part Sam was agreeing.

"I sense you're a thinker at heart. You like to study, to explore every option. If you weren't a hunter, I'm sure you'd be a lawyer – not the corporate kind, either. I could see you in court, fighting for people less fortunate than yourself." Jane was in his element again. "And yet," he looked at Sam with a slight squint, as if he had some kind of x-ray vision into the younger man's mind. "And yet, there is a darker side to you. A part of yourself I think you might even be afraid of."

Sam looked away, but it was obvious Jane had touched on something from his body language.

Dean turned before the psychic could go further, breaking the moment. "Sammy, we're not gonna find squat in here. Heck, we'd have to tear this house down before we stand a chance of finding whatever's keeping Moon Owl around."

Jane's eyes sparkled as he folded his arms, leaning against the wall directly where Sam was standing. "Oh," he added absently. "And you hate to be called Sammy..."

If Sam was surprised at the last insight, he didn't show it. Instead, he walked over to his brother's side. "So, if we can't find any trace of her here, in the room she last manifested in, what next?"

"Maybe it has something to do with the chiming?" Jane asked, raising a brow as he stuck his head in what appeared to be some kind of cupboard reserved for housekeeping items.

"Chiming?" Only Sam bothered to answer.

"Yes, that rather annoying clock that seems to chime every half hour. Haven't you noticed every time it chimes the number of bells gets one less?"

Dean scratched at his head, then looked to his brother bemusedly. There wasn't a clock in the room. In fact, he hadn't seen one in this part of the house at all. "Dude,

and you call us delusional?”

Jane bobbed back out of the cupboard for a second. “Curious that you don’t hear it,” he mused, brow furrowing. “I’m sure I’ve seen it in a movie...” He vanished back into the storeroom and several clattering sounds followed.

Dean made a gesture suggesting he thought the psychic wasn’t running on all cylinders and was about to make a move for the nearest exit, when Jane reappeared looking slightly more excited than he had when he’d gone astray. “Find something?” the hunter asked tersely.

“Cylinder cleaner,” Jane offered, apparently talking to himself. “Do Native American spirits even vacuum?” he glanced up, realizing both Winchesters were staring at him. This time, what he had to say actually made more sense. “Agents Rigsby and Cho were in one of the dead girls’ bedrooms setting up surveillance equipment ready for Sam’s arrival. They were told quite clearly not to touch any personal items of the Denisons’...but, well, Rigsby does have a habit of being...meddlesome.”

“Kinda like you, huh?” Dean observed as he reaffirmed his grip on his sawed-off and headed for the nearest stairwell.

Jane appeared to think about it. “Well, maybe just a little,” he agreed, following both brothers as they jogged up two steps at a time making a mad dash for little Kathy’s room.

At least, a mad dash up to the second floor, because Moon Owl apparently had other ideas about them getting any further.

As Dean reached the top of the first flight, he felt something give beneath his CAT boots. Grabbing the carefully carved rail, he just managed to pull his tumbling frame onto the landing before the steps beneath him flattened, leaving a huge wooden slide both below and above.

The Chindi was messing with the very fabric of the house again, and that meant they were onto something.

Maybe what was holding her in this reality really was in Kathy’s room. But how?

Spinning around after regaining his balance, Dean just managed to grab his brother’s hand before Sam’s gangly body took a long, hard fall. “Whoa there, Sasquatch!”

Sam lurched forwards as Dean yanked on his arm, landing less gracefully than his brother on the upstairs hallway. He rolled over onto his back, looking wide-eyed and somewhat dazed at what had happened.

Less fortunate still was Patrick Jane, who was hanging onto the banister for dear life, his feet slipping further and further back down the slope of the reshaped stairs.

Dean considered leaving the psychic to slither his way back to the first floor, but then realized he just couldn’t do it. Leaning over, he grabbed the lapel of Jane’s jacket and roughly tugged him to the relative safety of the landing.

If, of course, anywhere was safe in Manoir Rouge right now.

“Thanks.” Jane brushed his clothes down without looking Dean in the eye.

What did that gesture mean coming from someone like him? Dean shrugged and offered Sam a hand up instead of trying to think about it. Sometimes, psychological logic hurt his head. “You okay, Sam?”

Sam nodded, licking his lips as he scanned the new level they found themselves on. “Great,” he offered ironically. “Although I can’t say as much for the walls...”

Dean’s gaze instantly shifted to each and every wall in turn, but they weren’t moving. He almost exhaled, and then realized that they may not be closing in, but they were *changing*.

Again.

“Aww crap, more Chindi morph magic.”

“It’s not moving, it’s *altering* – changing into something different like a chrysalis becoming a butterfly,” Sam observed as one painted wall suddenly became adorned in thick velvety paper.

"Except this ain't no cute little butterfly, this is Manoir Rogue back as it was before it burned down," Dean corrected, watching as modern furniture vanished and was replaced by several antique-looking items. At the end of the passageway, something tall and shiny seemed to shimmer into existence and he had to blink to be sure his eyes weren't deceiving him. "You gotta be freakin' kidding me..."

It was an actual suit of armor – straight out of a Hollywood swashbuckler. The Frenchman Moon Owl had married must have been very rich, and very vain to have prettied up his house with such relics.

Dean opened his mouth to say as much, but closed it again when he spotted Patrick Jane touching the scarlet wallpaper – no, not touching, caressing.

The psychic seemed to find a way to read everything, even inanimate things. What was this constantly changing structure telling him now?

As Dean watched, Jane's face changed from puzzled to annoyed. Okay, so *maybe he can't quite read everything*, Dean corrected himself.

"I guess we at least know where we should be looking now." Sam was peering up to the next level. "Moon Owl doesn't want us in Kathy's room, that's for sure."

As he spoke, the landing window's shutters juddered and then jerked spasmodically, eventually flying outwards until they smacked into the side of the house with a dull crack.

Sam edged to the window and looked out onto an open lawn. The lawn they had crossed the night Kathy died – except now it was full of people. "The outside's changed right along with the house," Sam grimaced. "And it looks like we have visitors."

Dean and Jane joined him at the window. Below them was a throng of people all dressed in white. Most wore matching white hoods, while some simply wore small Hessian sacks over their heads with slits for eyeholes.

A tall man at the front appeared to be their leader, and every few seconds screamed obscenities at the front of the house while waving a flaming torch towards the upper windows.

"I don't suppose this is a Halloween celebration?" Jane mused, only half seriously.

"If it is, somebody forgot to give that bunch a treat," Dean murmured, watching as red paint, or maybe something worse, was tossed at Manoir Rogue's entry.

"We're reliving what Moon Owl went through," Sam explained – not that his companions hadn't already grasped that fact for themselves.

"Yeah, well I didn't like how her story ended, Sammy. And let me tell you, I got no intention of burning to death without a fight." Dean shot Jane a glance. "What do you say, G.I. Jane, you going out swinging?" To make his point, he emptied two spent cartridges from his shotgun, replacing them with more rock salt shells.

Jane swallowed hard, scrutinizing the weapon as if it was harmful to even touch. "I don't have a gun," he explained. "I never really have use for them. Besides, our own imaginations can't kill us. Surely you see we can't really be in the past, so technically we can't burn?"

Dean snapped the Remington closed. "Tell that to the aboriginal guy with the bone pointing at him," he snarked. "Didn't you say the power of suggestion was enough, Sherlock?"

Sam agreed. "We've seen the work of a Tulpa, we know how this stuff can go down. Belief can sometimes..." His voice trailed as the mob's ringleader decided to throw his torch at the window.

Or was he actually tossing it at them?

The heavy wooden stick impacted with the lower two panes, shattering both sections of glass. Shards flew back into the room, making all three men flinch and instinctively step backwards.

Two seconds later, the hissing, sparking club was rolling across the floor, settling next to a heavy woven tapestry on the wall. Muted flames that had almost been extinguished licked out, taking a new hold on the drapery before either Patrick or the

Winchesters could stamp out its last breath.

One minute the torch was all but out, the next the tapestry was a flaming sash of material that threatened to engulf the whole room with its fiery tendrils.

This fire wasn't just fast, it was *unnatural*.

"Sam, the window!"

Sam dodged past the tapestry, careful to avoid the fire that lashed from its heart. Reaching the window in two long strides, he quickly kicked out the remaining six panes, allowing the smoke to be sucked out, and the cold night air in.

The tapestry crackled as it burned anew, its fiery soul thanking him for the extra oxygen it had been given.

Dean wasn't as sated as the fire as his joined his brother at the smashed window. "What's the matter? You gotta send your playmates here to finish us because you don't got what it takes, Moonie?"

He swung into the center of the now empty frame, aimed the Remington and fired, showering the horde below in a powdery white haze.

The pack tried to separate, to distance themselves from the oncoming storm of salt, but there was nowhere to run. Their outlines began to tremble and shimmer as if their ethereal forms were in a state of flux.

For the briefest moment, it reminded Dean of a *Star Trek* transporter beam. But were these people merely afterimages of something that had already happened? Or were they vengeful spirits, just like the Chindi?

"Dean, it's no use. They're not controlling this situation, Moon Owl is." Sam laid a hand on the shotgun's barrel, gently teasing it downwards.

"Yeah, well they're the ones trying to fry my butt. I deserve to get a little payback here." Dean looked around, somewhat aggravated by the fact that their foe wasn't showing herself. "Besides, it's not like I can gank the Chindi if she won't come out to play."

"No offence," Jane offered. "But why should she 'come out to play' when she holds all the cards? I mean, she can obviously burn us to death without showing herself." He coughed from the smoke that had started to fill the room, making his point.

"Because spirits are dumb that way," Dean responded, ducking as a piece of rock was lobbed from below, one of its rough edges narrowly missing his temple as it tumbled through the window. "Or at least, most of 'em are..." He frowned, noting that while he and Sam were all action, Jane was actually standing idly by as if he were waiting for a downtown bus.

The psychic seemed serenely calm, given that more and more of the room was filling with either flickering orange/yellow hues from the fire, or acrid black fumes.

I knew he was nuts. You gotta be a little whacked to be on those freaky spiritualist shows.

Patrick didn't appear to read the hunter's mind this time, instead, folding his arms, he looked to Sam for inspiration.

"Let's just say for a moment that I truly believe you two are actual spirit hunters. And of course, that all of this is really happening." He gestured nonchalantly to the fire and window. "Can you tell me if there is any way to actually hold a spirit?"

Dean huffed. "It's not exactly Genie in a Bottle, dude."

Sam was more helpful, rising to the question. "Yeah, you can use things like binding spells and curse boxes..."

Jane didn't let him finish. Grabbing Sam's arm, he tugged the hunter into a corner that was still flame free and began to talk so quickly, Dean couldn't make out what he was saying.

"No time for detail...make it fast..."

Dean squinted, then realized the automatic reaction wasn't likely to do anything for his ears. Either Jane was up to no good, or he thought Dean would make light of his hair-brained idea. *And let's face it, coming from him, it's gonna be a doozy.*

Slightly annoyed that Jane trusted Sam more than him – the one the C.B.I. were going frame for murder no less – Dean put his attention back on the outside world.

Below, the ghost crowd were back in full force, and he wasn't about to let them stay that way. If he couldn't be in on the "big plan," then he'd make his own dang plan.

After all, shooting was *always* better than chatting.

Dean fired both barrels into the mob, and as he felt the kick of the weapon, a warm, fuzzy, satisfied feeling swept through his body. This time, the salt did little to dispel the yelling rabble, but at least it made him feel better.

He glanced over his shoulder at his brother and the psychic; they were barely visible through the smoke, but, thankfully, the fire's spread had slowed. "Are you two sharing girlie secrets or are you gonna help me find a way to shag ass outta here?"

Rising to the challenge, and apparently oblivious to any danger, Jane bounded over to the window. Once at Dean's side he gestured through the opening with his hallmark smirk. "You should jump."

Dean balked as Sam joined him, looking equally confused. "Say *what?*"

"Oh, I meant to say, we should jump out the window. All these kinds of houses have ivy. Ivy means something to climb on – and if I'm not very mistaken, the bedroom we wanted to search is only the room above." He pointed to the ceiling with his forefinger. "Applied logic."

"What are you, *Spock* now?" Dean scrunched up his face and then dared to hang his head out of the opening to check out the psychic's wild idea. As he let his head and torso dangle over the edge, the jeering crowd grew louder. "Well I'll be..." He ducked back inside, looking to his brother. "Ivy all down this side of the house. Wasn't there on the newer building, I'm pretty sure of it..."

"So we climb down into the hands of the trick or treaters, or we go up and find the item keeping the spirit here," Jane suggested. "Somehow, I think we have little choice but to try out my ivy ladder."

Dean didn't give the psychic the satisfaction of agreeing. He simply tucked his shotgun back under his jacket and swung his body out onto the waiting ledge.

Taking a handful of the leafy plant, he tugged on it, testing the hidden vine's strength to see if it would take his weight.

It apparently would.

Without looking down, he took the plunge, sliding from the ledge until his whole body was supported by the ivy. Beneath him, for the briefest moment, he thought he felt something give and he suddenly had visions of falling into the masses below.

The plant held, however, and he took a breath before moving upwards, careful to check each new section of vine before letting it bear his full weight.

Daring to take his eyes from the green and white growth holding him, Dean looked up, searching for the next window. It was tantalizingly close, and yet it seemed he would never reach it.

He felt a hand slip as his fingers momentarily dug into moss instead of vine, but he quickly moved on, finding a new hold like a professional rock climber.

"So near, and yet so friggin' far," he grumbled.

And of course, somewhere, the Chindi must be watching.

* * * *

Sam waited in fear as his brother scrambled up the ivy, his CAT boots sliding every now and then as he failed to find a suitable perch. Dean would make it, of that he was sure – he *had* to be sure.

Down wasn't an option.

But then, Sam was here, and just lately his presence meant bad luck for anyone within a mile block radius. Even Patrick Jane wasn't safe tonight. Sam had brought

the Chindi down on the Denisons, who else would he fail?

He physically flinched back at the thought, just in time to avoid another flaming torch thrown by the hissing crowd.

This time, the lantern hit a curtain at his side, immediately engulfing it in yet more flames. And worse still, it was going to make it harder to climb through the smashed window.

Sam tried to grab at the drape, attempting to pull it down. If he could just roll the thing, he might be able to starve it of oxygen before it was too late.

The heat seared his fingers, and he could feel the tiny hairs on his skin scorching, but he wouldn't let go. This was his mess to clean up. They were always his messes.

Something, no *someone* tore Sam away from the velvet curtain just in time to save his hands from serious burns, but for a moment Sam wasn't grateful. He spun around, coughing from the smog the ancient less-than-fire retardant furniture was causing.

Jane simply stood there, looking at him. "You should go while there's still a way out."

All the fight, all the anger drained from Sam in a second. Why had he been mad, anyway? *Because you wanted someone to blame, and all along you're the one at fault here. You caused Kathy's death. You caused what's happening tonight...*

"No way," Sam yelled above the crackling, roaring intensity of the blaze. "You're the rookie here, you take point." He tried to drag the psychic to the window, but the man was far stronger than he looked.

Jane held fast, turning Sam's own momentum against him until the hunter almost rolled out of the window while trying to pull the psychic with him. He grabbed the side of the frame, steadying himself at the last minute.

Dean was right. Jane's nuts! Sam squinted as thick swirls of smog filled his smarting eyes. If they didn't both go soon, there would be no escape to the upper room.

And if they did escape, then what? Unless they stopped the Chindi, this version of Manoir Rouge would burn as it had in the past, and they would burn with it.

"Go!" Jane was shouting now, and some of the calm had ebbed away from his voice. "I'll be right behind you!"

Sam tried one last scuffle with the man, but Jane was as adroit with his moves as he was with his tongue. One second Sam was inside, the next, he felt hands shoving him hard until his back was perched precariously on the ledge.

Now, he either climbed or fell.

Jane was one wily individual, he'd give him that. The only other person that could run rings around Sam this way was Dean.

"Grab the ivy! *Climb!*" Jane was gesturing again in between bouts of hacking, but Sam couldn't help but think the man's eyes sparkled with something that suggested he had a plan.

Men like Patrick Jane always had a plan. He was like Hannibal Smith on *The A Team* – without the cigar and crass script.

Sam used one of his long arms to stretch out and grab a section of vine, just hoping that Jane had enough sense to be right behind him.

As he let the ivy take his weight and began to ascend, he looked up, eyes fearfully searching for signs of his brother.

A flash of a CAT emblem was all he saw as Dean slithered on his stomach into the bedroom above and vanished into safety.

Sam let out a breath of relief and shot a glance over his shoulder. All he needed now was for Jane to be following him and all would be well.

The psychic was poking his head out of the window frame, trying to avoid the fire to his left, but he hadn't started to climb. Sam was about to yell to him Dean style to haul his clairvoyant butt, but he felt something that made him swallow involuntarily in dread instead.

The ivy his fingers were tenuously holding onto had moved.

He was sure of it.

And not just moved because of the extra weight it was holding. The plant had shifted in true Triffid style, like it had sentience, motive – maybe even *hatred*.

Sam stared in disbelief as the vines in his left hand began to change, to alter their form better than any shapeshifter. The profuse green and white leaves were morphing, just like the house had.

To add to the spectacle, the ivy started to change color, the dense olives shifting, literally “bleeding” their natural shades until they were the dark crimson of arterial blood.

Blood...

Sam felt his palms turning slimy and unconsciously pulled his right hand away from the foliage.

It was wet, and sticky and... *warm*.

The ivy hadn't just changed color, it was literally oozing blood.

And that blood was making it harder and harder to keep any kind of secure hold on the vines.

Sam was slipping, and soon he would be falling.

“Crap!” The yelp was more surprise than panic. But then, Sam needed to panic.

Second by second he could feel his grip loosening until there was nothing left to hold onto. In his mind, he said a silent prayer to whatever god was listening, but the plea wasn't for himself.

Please, just let Dean get out of here.

A hand latched onto Sam's forearm, and he almost tried to brush it away, thinking that the ivy had changed its strategy, but it wasn't the rogue plant, it was Jane.

The psychic was hanging precariously from the smashed window, taking the majority of Sam's weight. And dammit, if he wasn't still smiling!

“It's okay, I've got you.”

Sam bobbed his head in thanks, wondering just how the other man was managing to hold onto him. *Yeah, but who's got you?*

“Oh, now that's... *fascinating*.”

Sam looked up, but Jane's gaze wasn't falling on him anymore. It was falling behind him.

Looking over his shoulder, Sam instantly regretted the move.

The ivy had changed again, this time not in shape, or color but in motivation.

The wily plant was attempting to wind itself around Sam's ankles and lower legs, and as he watched, he began to feel it gradually pulling him downwards.

If it couldn't make him slip from the side of Manoir Rouge, then the scarlet red ivy would drag him kicking and screaming from it.

And this time, there was nothing even the gifted Patrick Jane could do about it.

In fact, if the psychic didn't let go soon, he would probably be yanked to his death right along with Sam.

Part Four

Sam couldn't help but look pleadingly up into Patrick Jane's eyes. There was no Dean here to save him, and deep down he knew there was nothing the psychic could do either, but it was a knee-jerk reaction built into every human being on the planet.

Nobody wanted to die.

Not even people like Sam who sometimes felt they deserved it.

What was weird, though, was the expression Sam's panicked gaze caused on Jane's face.

As his grip was gradually torn at by the ivy, Sam realized Jane was becoming more and more determined not to let the hunter fall. Any trace of joviality, any semblance of curiosity or overconfidence had been stripped away to leave the bare bones shell behind.

Still fighting to keep what little hold he had, Sam finally understood Patrick Jane better than anyone. He was a man angry at the world for what he had lost, but he was also a man whose conscience pricked him every minute, every hour of every day.

He had to save someone, *anyone*. It was a kind of surrogate rescue for the one he had botched with his wife and child.

And today, the person he wanted, *needed* to save, was Sam.

In that moment, Sam finally understood that he wasn't alone in his self-derogation. He wasn't the only one who had been privy to too many deaths.

And maybe, just maybe, deep down, neither he nor the manic psychic could have changed things even if they'd tried harder.

"The pipe!" Jane was yelling, beads of sweat pooling on his forehead as he strained to keep a hold on his burden.

Sam dared to look across to where the psychic was looking, forgetting now what he'd seen in the other man's eyes in favor of more pressing matters.

There was an old and very rusted drainpipe running down the side of Manoir Rouge. Many of the screws that held it to the side of the house had long since rotted away, and whether it would hold any kind of weight was questionable.

But it was an option.

A dangerous, pretty distant option from where he was dangling, but much better than the alternative.

Sam reached out, stretching his arm until he thought muscles would snap. His spindly fingers flexed, but were still out of range of the conduit.

From below, he felt another familiar tug as the ivy yanked on him again. The vine was tenacious, but then, so was the spirit controlling it.

"Sam, I'm going to try and swing you over." Jane was trying to rock back and forth in the small space of the broken window, his face reddening until it looked like he would pop a blood vessel or two from the effort.

Sam didn't need telling twice and instantly began to sway his lanky frame until it tore free of the twisted shrubbery, taking several sections of ivy with it as he swung across Manoir Rouge's frontage like Tarzan.

How long Jane could keep up the metronomic motion under this kind of stress was anyone's guess, but even if the physical exertion didn't get him, the smoke and fumes soon would.

Sam didn't want that on his conscience, and as he lunged sideways like a huge human pendulum, he let go of the psychic's fragile grip and made a dive for the pipework. It was a make or break move, but then weren't they all when your last name was Winchester?

From somewhere above, Sam heard Dean scream out his name as he jumped/fell from the vines. It was a comforting thought as he felt gravity take hold of his body, but not quite as comforting as his fingers slithering down the metal duct and snagging on a metal brace that precariously held the pipe in place.

Sam's hands latched onto the bracket, and he quickly swung his legs around, trying to find some kind of niche to dig his toes into. He slid a little, before coming to rest a few feet down from Jane's position.

Finally, he dared to exhale, only to sense the pipe groan and creak under his weight. He had seen the rotted screws before he'd made the leap. Maybe he hadn't been so lucky after all?

"It's changing. Just like the ivy. Climb, Sam. *Hurry!*"

Sam realized it was Jane's croaking voice egging him on, urging him to move while he still had a chance. Examining the pipe, he saw a few more of the brackets

above him. If they held, he could use them as hand and foot holds.

But he had to hurry. The metal was becoming pliable, as if it were mercury, not iron.

How the hell can she be doing this with iron? But Sam knew that if the metal wasn't pure, anything was possible. And Moon Owl was exploiting that fact.

He reached up, pulling himself further and further before his hands actually sank into the pipe. It was so soft, so cotton candy-like already and he had several feet to go yet.

"Sam, forget the damn pipe, gimme your hand!"

Dean's callused fingers dangled like a miracle in front of Sam's face, and as the younger sibling glanced up, he saw his brother hanging from Kathy Denison's bedroom like a prize-winning acrobat.

Sam took the offered hand and felt the reassuring grip of his brother drag him upwards. "What circus did you escape from, Barnum?"

Dean scoffed as the pair fell onto the bedroom floor with a thump. "Yeah, well that must make you the clown. Oh wait, no, we left him downstairs."

They looked at one another.

Just *looked* – both with a growing sense of trepidation and guilt.

Sam might be safe from the Triffid ivy, but they had left Patrick Jane to his fate. And both brothers knew from experience with their mother that burning to death was not the best way to go.

Dean sprang to his feet first, poking his head back out the open window to see Jane waving from below, his hand barely visible through the pluming smoke.

And he was smiling again.

"And I say again, *crazy sonofa...*"

"Dean, we can't just leave him. He just saved my life!" Sam rubbed a hand through the front of his hair and bit into his bottom lip. His mind was in problem solving overload, and his body had yet to catch up.

Jane seemed less concerned by his predicament. "Find the item holding the girl here," he coughed, holding a handkerchief he'd magically produced over his mouth. "I have *other* plans..."

Before they could argue, the blond's head vanished back into the harsh smog, effectively shielding him like a mystical grey cloak.

"We can't leave him!" Sam pleaded, but Dean was already moving away from the window and further into Kathy's room.

"You heard the man, he has *plans*," Dean offered up the last word as if Jane was going to a party. "And besides, he's right. The only way we can stop this now is to find what's holding Moonie here, and fast."

Sam considered it. If they could just find the catalyst to all this then Jane might yet be saved – they all might. He took a moment to look around the room he'd fallen into.

It didn't look much like a young girl's bedroom, but then, it too had morphed, just like the rest of the house.

Gone was the surveillance equipment set up by the C.B.I. Everything was now just as it had been over a hundred years ago.

A huge four poster sat in the middle of the room atop a massive hand-woven rug. All around the bed, clothes lay scattered and a table sat on its side as if there had been some kind of fight.

"Sam, do those clothes look like something a Native girl might wear to you?" Dean raised a brow and dropped to one knee, carefully picking up a dress that appeared to be made of animal skin.

Sam nodded. "We're in Moon Owl's room."

"Okay, so let's find this thing, whatever it is. 'Cause I'm starting to have a real bad day here..."

Sam took a breath and quickly straightened the upturned side table, checking the three drawers it contained for anything that would still look at home in the Denison

household.

Whatever they were looking for in the past, had to still be in the future too and not look out of place.

He found more clothes, but no personal items.

Jane could be burning while we're jerking around...

But somehow, Sam knew the psychic wasn't. The blond seemed to have the same strange luck they did. He always lived, while others around him paid the price.

For a second, Sam almost fell into the trap of self-blame again, but then, glancing at Dean he finally realized the problem wasn't about bad luck, or him being some kind of pariah. The problem was he felt responsible for leaving their father behind.

And it had taken until now for him to finally admit it.

Little Kathy's death had been the mechanism that had triggered his inner feelings about his father, and he'd channeled them into something else.

Self hate, even?

All his woes, all his inner conflict of late – it was all about John, just like Jane's problem was about his wife and daughter.

At least Dean hadn't hidden it away. He'd gone on the offensive, even wanting to return to Kansas and Stull when there had been nothing they could do there. Dean had wanted to try and help their father, and Sam had been in denial, looking for hunts in places like Mungo when he should have been helping his brother.

Or worse still, there had been Georgia. He'd thought he could use that stupid dang watch to solve everything. Even he should have known there were no real miracles. It had been like the *X-Files* episode *Je Souhaite* all over again.

And they both had pretty much the same results...

"Sammy, has that shaggy hair of yours gotten in the way of your eyeballs or what, dude?" Dean was sifting through an ancient-looking ottoman, tossing out the odd item of male clothing that must have belonged to Manoir Rouge's original French owner.

Sam shook himself, realizing his brother was right. He'd let precious seconds tick away evaluating his past – something he couldn't change any more than he could Moon Owl's.

He pushed the table to one side and scanned the rest of the bedroom for possible Native items. Then it hit him.

What they were looking for was on the bed, staring at them cheekily through bright red button eyes.

"*Dean!*" Sam sprang forward, grabbing the dark black bear like he was going to choke it. The black fur looked almost real as his fingers sank into its wiry fuzz, and its paws had been carefully crafted to mimic those of its much larger counterparts.

"You're getting excited about a friggin' teddy bear? Man, I know you loved that mangy thing Caleb gave you when you were a kid, but Sasquatch, that thing is plain *fugly*."

"Dean, this *is it!*" Sam was ignoring his brother's sarcasm, instead turning the ten inch high stuffed animal over and over in his hands. "Think about it, lots of people have cuddly toys, yeah? But does this thing look all that cute to you? And it's old, Dean, even in this century."

"So because it's ugly and old you think it's Moonie's?"

Sam looked into the red soulless eyes of the bear. It had never been made as a plaything. No, this was something else entirely. "I think this is Moon Owl's animal guide. They're pretty common. And take a look at the stitching. It looks homemade..."

"So you think maybe Kathy or her sister found this critter in the basement and took it up to their room to play?" He clicked his fingers together. "Bingo, old Moonie is awakened and comes to the party all pissed at them for messing with her *bear necessities?*"

Sam nodded. "Suddenly Caleb's scruffy old bear looks like a saint compared to this thing."

Dean's face puckered and he snatched the black effigy from his brother's grasp. With one hand holding the bear, he reached to his waistband and slid out his Colt. "It's not exactly that creepy fabric softener bear, but hey, I've always wanted to ventilate one of these things!"

The elder hunter placed the barrel of his .45 to the bear's forehead, but was spared pulling the trigger by a sharp clattering noise behind them.

Both brothers whirled to see the Chindi waiting for them. This time, she had appeared so quickly they hadn't even heard the strange "whooping" noises her gyrations made as she grew to her crescendo.

"Ugh," Dean grunted. "I think she might want her bear back..."

* * * *

Patrick Jane wasn't sure he liked fires. In fact, given a recent experience with an arsonist who liked to fry people, he was positive he hated them.

People and animals could be so predictable it was easy to figure out what their next move would be. But fires? They were a whole new kind of living entity that didn't think in the conventional way.

Nope, as Patrick darted and dodged through the room towards the exit, he decided never to deal with anything that involved flames or smoke ever again.

Not even on the Fourth of July.

Not even for Agent Lisbon.

Of course, that was assuming that he lived through this fire, which at this point in the game was by no means a certainty.

He stopped in the doorway, glancing back over his shoulder with the hanky still covering his mouth. The room behind him was now one huge living flame, yellows and oranges lapping at the ceiling like an incoming tide that killed everything in its way.

Jane let out a small cough, and turned back, focusing on what was in front, rather than what had been left behind.

Where was the Chindi now? *Ha, you're acknowledging such a creature exists. Not very professional, Patrick*, he scolded himself.

But he couldn't really ignore that something existed here, could he?

Not now.

Jane disregarded the concept that spirits might be real. He was merely playing along, working through the delusional world he'd found himself in until it came to an end.

Wasn't he?

Then why are you about to turn into a hunter rather than a psychic?

He didn't have an answer, so he pushed away the question.

The room behind him had burned, was still burning, in fact. The stairs were impassable – at least to go upwards. But then, Patrick didn't want to go up, he wanted to go down.

Grabbing the stair rail, he considered being a complete child and sliding down the ornately carved banister. Sense told him he was in enough danger already, however, and he simply used the railing to keep him steady.

Climbing down a sharp slope was still precarious work for a man who was more used to card tricks, illusions and wordplay.

Worse still, as Jane struggled to keep his own weight from slipping, he realized that the incline was shiny for a reason.

Every step he took felt like he was walking on ice.

In the end, he succumbed to the inevitable and let his body slither down until he was sitting on his behind, skidding down the stairwell like a man who really ought to have a toboggan.

There was a loud thump as he hit the base of the steps and came to an ungraceful halt, his face grinning broadly at the childhood memory his impromptu trip had rekindled.

If only every memory he had could be so pleasant.

The psychic picked himself up, brushed down his vest and quickly made his way back to the cleaning cupboard he'd searched earlier.

Perhaps Native American women hadn't had a use for cylinder cleaners, but psychics most definitely did.

The only question now was, had this part of the house morphed, or was it just the sections the Chindi manifested in that changed? If it was the former, then Jane was wasting his time and they all might die here.

Unless, of course, the Winchesters came through in Kathy's room.

Jane looked at the cupboard door as he approached it. On the outside, at least, it was just the same dreary storeroom. He took hold of the handle, feeling a surge of trepidation seer through him.

For Jane, it wasn't a pleasant sensation. It was like reading Red John's words on the note left in his house and knowing what those words meant before he'd even found his family's bodies...

The psychic closed his eyes, cleared all the bad flashbacks from his mind and then reopened them. With one quick twist of his wrist, the closet door was open.

Inside looked just as it had earlier.

A broom. A plethora of cleaning liquids. A stack of clean cloths.

And the cylinder cleaner.

Jane's expression of apprehension transformed into a huge grin and he fiddled in his vest pocket to bring out a small marker pen.

Sometimes, his ingenuity in the face of adversity was amazing. At least, that was what he told himself as he scribbled so fast his wrist began to ache.

* * * *

Moon Owl was spinning faster and faster, her gyrations tearing up the rug on the floor and shredding it before spewing it back out in tiny fragments all over the bedroom.

Sam swallowed hard. If she grew much closer, the same fate awaited their limbs.

"Sammy, look after Boo Boo!"

Sam reacted to his brother's voice, quickly catching the stuffed bear as it was tossed to him.

Meanwhile, Dean had miraculously replaced his Colt with the shotgun from under his jacket. This time, though, the Chindi didn't like the idea of tasting rock salt again.

Moon Owl shrieked, and using one of the long spiraling tendrils of her form yanked the weapon from the hunter's hands.

The force from the blow sent Dean tumbling backwards, and he landed awkwardly on the four poster.

"Oh sweetheart, that's so not my kinda foreplay," he grunted, trying to pick himself back up for the fight. Rolling over the bed, he stumbled to his feet just in time to see the whirlwind send a blast of air at his brother.

Thankfully, she didn't physically touch Sam, but the gust alone was enough to splatter him against the wall in a fashion Haris would have been proud of.

Sam coughed, momentarily winded.

Crap!

He looked down into his right hand. His *empty* right hand.

The unremarkable bear was on the floor. He'd dropped it during his little "flying lesson" and unless Moon Owl let go her grip of him, there was no getting it back.

The Chindi slowed, her focus shifting from the bear now it was safe.

Sam's eyes widened as he realized the whirlwind had set its sights on him. She was going to touch him, just like she had Kathy. And then it would all be over. And there was nothing he could do because he couldn't move a muscle.

Some inner part of him screamed that maybe it was better that way. No more demons, no more End of Days. No more wondering which one of his friends or family would die next.

No!

Sam started to squirm, to fight the grip the spirit had on him. And while he struggled, he could see his brother behind the Chindi, edging towards where the animal guide effigy had fallen.

Do it! Burn it! Sam's mind pleaded.

Moon Owl paused in front of his face, the whistling of her motion sounding like one long, wheezing breath. "I can still feel the knife," she bemoaned. "Still feel my blood running from me..."

Sam shook his head, frowning as he tried to understand her. "But you burned. *Here*, in this house."

She didn't seem to understand, the distorted face within the maelstrom contorting and pulsing with a new kind of anger. "He will come again...and *again*..."

"Who?" Sam pleaded. "What are you telling me?"

"Forget what she's telling you. She's not friggin' Lassie. "Dean was behind the Chindi now, seemingly fearless of its power. In one hand he held the bear, and in the other, the infamous Zippo. "Looks like I've got your friendly little spirit guide ready for a barbecue, huh, bitch?"

Sam could smell the lighter fluid, he could feel his own heart racing as he waited for his brother to ignite the bear.

But it didn't happen.

Moon Owl suddenly engulfed him, swathing him in her form, and yet not actually touching his flesh with her presence. It was like standing in the epicenter of a tornado.

The Chindi was using him. Her actions a warning to Dean to let the bear be, or else.

Sam closed his eyes, fearing with every breath, he was actually risking inhaling some of Moon Owl's essence. He dare not move, he dare not blink in case it caused their physical paths to cross.

"Don't give in to her, Dean! She'll kill me anyway. It's what she does."

Dean didn't like to lose. But this was one game where neither side had the upper hand.

It was stalemate.

Except, Sam suspected Moon Owl wouldn't mind playing dirty to win this particular game. Even now, he could sense her getting closer and closer to his flesh, threatening his life to blackmail the little bear from Dean.

Either that, or she had decided to kill him anyway. In which case, Sam had about five seconds more to live.

"You touch him and I *swear*..."

Sam heard the hate in Dean's voice turn to incredulity, and he couldn't help but snap open his eyes.

Somehow, somehow, the Chindi had vanished.

Gone was the thrashing, hate-fueled spiral of dust that had surrounded him.

Sam blinked, pushing up and away from the wall. He took a breath, calming his nerves before speaking. "How..?"

Dean shrugged, heading straight for the window to check outside. The yelling mob

had disappeared from the lawn, along with the scarlet ivy from the walls. Manoir Rouge was slowly changing back.

While some parts seemed in flux, vibrating and pulsing with ethereal energy, other sections were already completely in their own time.

“There’s no fire, no crowd of KKK. It’s all changing back, Sasquatch.” Dean raised a brow, his tired expression turning to one of wonder. “You don’t think G.I. Jane actually came through with that candy ass crap he was spouting?”

Sam smiled before giving the bear still in his brother’s grasp a wary glance. “I guess maybe he did...”

* * * *

Jumping down the newly reformed stairs two at a time, Dean Winchester wasn’t sure he wanted to find Patrick Jane. The man would either be stone dead at the Chindi’s touch, burned to a crisp by a fire from another century, or he’d be smugly sitting waiting for their arrival so he could say he was right.

Again.

Barging through the door first, Dean was half-relieved, half-peeved to find it was the latter.

Jane was lounging in an antique chair looking like he was waiting for a newspaper and a spot of afternoon tea. As the brothers entered, he made a point of rubbing his thumb against his fingers as if he were checking his nails - obviously something more important than the Winchesters. Or at least, that was the way he made it look.

On the psychic’s lap, sat a small, grimy bag that had once lived inside a cylinder cleaner, but which was now adorned with various occult symbols Dean recognized as a crude binding spell.

Somehow, Jane had lured the Chindi to him, and then had used the cleaner to literally “suck up” the dust cloud that was her ethereal form.

“Are you whacked out of your gourd or what?” Dean snatched the bag, unconvinced even Jane could be so bold – or stupid. “What if your little party trick had gone south?”

Jane shrugged, sitting forward in his chair. “Well, then we’d all be dead, and it wouldn’t matter anyway.” He glanced at the dustbag as something inside it suddenly moved, making Dean flinch. “Besides, isn’t that what cylinder cleaners are for? To suck up old dust?”

Dean huffed, handing the bag gingerly to his brother. “Maybe,” he admitted. “But you sure as hell ain’t Venkman with a Hoover for a proton pack.”

Sam examined the signs Jane had quickly scrawled, admiring the psychic’s handiwork. Dean might be making jokes, but his sibling was obviously impressed. “How on earth did you lure Moon Owl away from us? I mean, we had the bear, you had nothing.”

Jane’s mirthful smile fanned briefly across his face, but it was clear he wasn’t going to give away any trade secrets. “Oh, it’s what I do,” he said coyly. “Talking to the dead, I mean...”

“Then why didn’t you just read the freakin’ spook’s mind in the first place and save us a whole bunch of rock salt and some bruises?”

Patrick wasn’t biting. His eyes sparkled cheekily and he stood up from the chair. “Have you ever tried reading a spirit’s mind? From your obvious lack of mental prowess, I would think not.” He began to walk away, and then spun back around adding, “Anyway, they would tend to be a little empty, I would think...a little like yo...”

Sam darted between the psychic and his brother before another word war, or worse, punches started to fly. “Can’t you pair of knuckleheads at least agree on one

thing? Can we just get out of Dodge and go burn the bear and dustbag, while the binding spell is still actually working?"

Dean sucked down a breath, and when he exhaled again, he slowly nodded. "Best damn advice I've heard all day..."

Cardinal Woods Manoir Rouge Grounds

Patrick followed the brothers at a distance, his hands stuffed into his jacket pockets as he walked. Every few moments, he glanced around him, evaluating, watching. Out here, he felt out of his comfort zone, out of his "world," although he would never admit it to the Winchesters.

Towns, cities, they were his playgrounds, and while he'd worked on the more "rustic" cases, he'd never been involved in anything quite like this.

Yes, he'd dealt with the occult before, but the supernatural world as a *real* force of nature, a real existing thing?

Ahead, the two brothers had stopped in a small copse and he silently joined them, unsure if he actually believed what they were about to do would work. He didn't speak, simply watching them carry out their strange ritual.

"You ready to gank your first real spirit, Jane?" Dean moved to hand the psychic a small can of lighter fluid and a Zippo, but Jane waved him off. "Suit yourself." The hunter shrugged and began squirting a steady stream of accelerant on the bear until it was soaked.

Lighting the Zippo up, he quickly let the tiny flame touch the wet effigy, instantly engulfing it in a bright, all-consuming fire.

Before the blaze could touch his skin, he let the mini-inferno drop to the ground and continue to burn. As it crackled and popped from the heat, Dean nudged it with the toe of his boot.

The bear hissed, but carried on burning.

He didn't know why, but Jane drew back from the event as if he were part of some ungodly rite.

Because spirits couldn't really exist or...

Before he could think of his family again, a sharp, resounding scream engulfed the woods. It wasn't for a moment the psychic actually realized the yell of pain was coming from the dustbag.

Burning the bear was dragging her back kicking and screaming to the world she should now be residing in.

Was that heaven, hell or something no one really knew about until they passed over themselves, he had to wonder?

"Guess old Moon Owl isn't so cocky now, huh?" Dean dropped the bag as it writhed and the screaming continued. There was no real need for the action, but just to be on the safe side, he squirted it with more fuel and then kicked it onto the still burning bear.

With one last defiant screech of pain, Ooljee Nascha was no more.

The Winchesters watched her animal guide burn in silence, not one single night creature daring to let out a cry and taint the scene.

But the silence wasn't for Jane.

Somewhere behind them, back towards the house, the psychic heard the last single chime from his "invisible" clock. A chime no other living thing appeared privy to.

Intuitively, he turned, hands still in pockets. Through the trees, he could just catch a glimpse of Manoir Rouge if he bobbed his head enough.

Taking two steps forward, he could see where the front of the house had been daubed with red paint by the local hate mob. There were the usual defamatory

remarks that he could only scowl at. But then, right over the top of the door itself was something that made the psychic's heart up its tempo twice fold.

Perhaps this symbol was paint like the others, or perhaps it was something more sinister.

Above the door, was a smiley red face in a circle.

The mark of his nemesis, Red John.

This scene isn't from now, I'm still seeing the past. It can't be here. It can't...

Except, it was.

Jane spun back around to the Winchesters, almost bumping into Sam. The younger man looked surprised at his flustered attitude, but Patrick didn't take time to compose himself. Where Red John was concerned, nothing else mattered.

"Tell me, Sam, do you believe in reincarnation? Genetic memory, perhaps?"

Sam's brows ticked up. "Genetic *what*?"

Jane continued at full throttle, ignoring the strange look Dean was giving him. "Theoretically, could a killer's offspring carry on his work through the generations? Carry out a task passed to them through their very genes? Or could a killer reincarnate somehow? Because how else could this be possible..."

He bobbed down again, pointing to the symbols and the smiley face, but as Manoir Rouge morphed back to its modern day self, the images had faded until they were nothing more than echoes from the past, soon to be totally absorbed by the present.

Sam shrugged, obviously unable to see what the psychic had. "I guess I've seen enough to know anything is possible, if that's what you mean?"

Jane's shoulders slouched in defeat at Sam's response. It was the one answer he hadn't really wanted to hear. Perhaps Red John's ancestors had been killers. Maybe one of them had even been here at Manoir Rouge when Moon Owl had died. But, after what he'd seen tonight, there was also another, more frightening option.

What if Red John was so hard to catch because he was something *more* than human? Something that had been at work for a very long time, and was taunting him with that fact even now?

Patrick clenched his fists inside his pockets and swiftly regained control of any outward show of emotion. Now wasn't the place or time for his anger, his insecurities, his need for revenge.

He decided to focus on the Winchesters instead. Now that the crisis was over, perhaps there was room for a little fun with his "captives."

"Ready to let Rigsby and Cho out of their trunks now?" He asked, his face a mask of sincerity. "I mean, I'm sure it will be hard for them to arrest you from in there."

"You think *you* can actually snag our asses?"

Jane slid a hand into his pocket and pulled out the Impala's keys. He dangled them in the air like an offering of his ingenuity. "Well, I imagine it might be quite difficult to make good an escape without these. Unless, of course, you plan on running. Although I doubt you'd get very far in those boots. Given your line of work, you might want to try something more like a tennis shoe," he suggested helpfully.

Dean's eyes latched onto the keys in the psychic's hand as he felt his empty pockets in frustration. "How the hell did you..?"

Patrick grinned. This was more gratifying than annoying Lisbon or their boss, Minelli. "Oh, simple misdirection, sleight of hand, that kind of thing." He cocked his head cheekily. "It's easy with the right subject."

"And after all you've seen tonight you're still gonna try and take us in?" Dean's face showed disbelief, and perhaps, even a little disappointment.

"I still don't believe in the afterlife, if that's what you mean..." Suddenly, the smile and the mirth on the psychic's features were gone, leaving only a haunted look behind. In truth, he didn't really know what he believed anymore, but he did understand that he and the Winchesters shared a common bond. The loss of their mother to one kind of monster, and the loss of his family to another kind. He focused

on Sam. "Go, while you still can..."

Dean shook his head. "Dude, I've been a wanted man before. Trust me, I ain't leaving here with another murder wrap to the Winchester name."

Jane shook his head as if the brothers should have had more faith in his abilities. "There won't be any repercussions. I can take care of it. Now just go."

"I don't think you have the authority to make that call." Agent Grace Van Pelt emerged from the trees with her automatic drawn. She aimed at Sam, the C.B.I.'s main suspect, but Jane put both hands up in sympathy anyway.

"Agent Van Pelt, there's been a misunderstanding. These two are with me," Jane smiled convincingly. "And besides, you really should..."

"You really should be with Agent Rigsby," Sam butted in unexpectedly. "I mean, don't you think you should be helping the man you obviously love out of the car trunk he's locked in?"

Van Pelt balked and then began to stammer as her emotions were caught off guard. "...I don't know what you mean..."

"You do have feelings for Rigsby, don't you?" Sam continued as Van Pelt began to blush, the gun wavering in her hands as she dared to glance towards the house. "You care for Wayne, admit it. Even though it's against C.B.I. policy to be involved in a relationship with a colleague."

Finally, Van Pelt caved. "Where is he?" She asked, the gun in her hand dropping without her even realizing it.

Dean jerked a thumb towards the three cars parked near Manoir Rouge's entrance, his wide-eyed expression suggesting he was even more freaked by Sam's all-knowing outburst than the agent had been. "Your buddy is in the trunk of the Cherokee out front."

Van Pelt nodded, wavered just a second to look at Jane, who waved back with a grin, suggesting all was well. Then she was gone, melting into the trees as she ran back towards the house and cars.

Dean pulled a face at his brother once the girl had vanished from sight. "What the hell was that? Suggestion, hypnotism, or just plain mind control?" He huffed, looking at Jane and then back to his sibling. "Were you mirroring *Svengali* over there or what, Sammy?"

Sam's cheeks dimpled in embarrassment. "C'mon, Dean, I didn't know that was going to happen. It was just..."

Dean spun around and began to trudge back to the house. "It was just plain creepy, that's what it was. If you're gonna mirror somebody, at least don't make it a jackass like him!"

Jane chuckled to himself as the brothers started the trek back through the woods and into the manor's gardens. Noting the night had begun to turn cold, he decided to slowly follow them when he caught sight of the ghost house's name plaque.

The thing was fixed to a huge wrought iron gate straight out of an old Universal horror movie. Unable to help himself, Jane paused to stare at the thing. After all that had happened here, how could he not find it ironic?

Manoir Rouge...

He slid a hand to a trouser pocket and pulled out his wallet, staring at some unseen item inside for the longest moment.

Then a voice broke the silence. A voice that understood his pain.

"Rouge is the French word for red, isn't it?" Sam asked sympathetically.

Jane simply nodded, his eyes as deep and soulful as the heart of a quantum singularity.

C.B.I. Headquarters
The next Day...

"You let two wanted men just walk?" Lisbon's voice gave the impression she wasn't just angry, she was probably ready to choke Patrick Jane. "You know you don't have the authority to release *anyone*! Oh, and nice work on Van Pelt by the way..."

Teresa Lisbon was pacing, exasperation filling her features as it usually did when she was dealing with the renegade psychic.

He liked it when she looked that way. "That wasn't me. I didn't say anything to Van Pelt about Rigsby...although Sam was very astute in his observations for a beginner." He smiled back as he sat on his favorite couch, taking a sip from his blue teacup like he was English aristocracy.

Lisbon fumed further, throwing her hands silently in the air, although Jane knew she'd already given in to him. She always did in the end.

"I had to let them go," he insisted, savoring another gulp of tea. "They were obviously innocent. I could easily tell once I'd spent time in their presence." He cocked his head at the agent. "And after all, when am I ever wrong?" The smile grew into a grin as Lisbon rolled her eyes.

"Alright, so you're pretty accurate at reading people, but how do you explain this Dean Winchester?" She tapped a manila folder on the nearby table before carrying on. "How do you explain him bursting into Manoir Rouge, locking up two agents and rescuing his brother if they don't have something to hide?"

"You have proof Dean Winchester locked up Rigsby and Cho and broke into the building? The way I heard it, Rigsby and Cho never actually saw their assailant."

"They didn't," Lisbon confessed. "But *someone*," she pointedly glared at Jane, "Someone conveniently wiped all the surveillance tapes so we won't ever know the truth. What I want to know is why? Why would you help two complete strangers escape?"

Jane set his cup down and crossed his legs, resting one arm on his knee to support his chin as he was pondering the matter. "You know, someone else may have entered the building. Perhaps the two girls' real killer? Murderers usually return to the scene of the crime. It's a known fact, isn't it? Simple, applied psychology..."

"The only simple thing about this whole fiasco is that we messed up," Lisbon conceded. "Without a confession from Sam Winchester and no surveillance footage, we have absolutely no hard evidence to bring the brothers in." She stared intently at Jane. "Are you sure there's nothing you want to tell me?"

Patrick glanced at his watch absently. "There's a Lakers game in, oh... about forty-five minutes," he suggested innocently.

Lisbon shook her head and stamped back to her office without giving Jane the pleasure of another response.

She was angry with him, but the anger would be short lived, as always.

He watched her close the door behind her and relaxed a little. Dean and Sam were safe from a murder charge, but where did that leave him?

Jane gently tugged out his wallet and looked at the crumpled and faded photograph he had stared at the night before. The edges were torn and creased, but the images of his wife and daughter laughing one last time never failed to bring moisture to his normally mirthful eyes.

The Winchesters had shown him there possibly was an afterlife, and that maybe even Red John was somehow part of it. Worse still, what if his family were somehow trapped in limbo where the very creature that had taken them was able to prowl?

The idea, the very possibility hurt like hell.

Why can't I, of all people talk to the ones I've lost..?

But just like Jane had always known, there was no one to answer his question.

Heaven, Hell, and everything in between were just a myth.

Weren't they..?

Roadside Diner

Just outside California...

Dean stared at the menu for the longest time, his mind deliberating just which kind of burger he wanted to opt for. Just one night in Manoir Rouge had left his stomach feeling like a black hole that could never be filled.

He lingered over the selection of various desserts, but apple pie was calling to him like a siren that he just couldn't say no to.

Slapping the menu down with satisfaction, he looked up at Debbie, the waitress, and opened his mouth to order.

Just in the nick of time, his lips snapped shut again and he coughed, pretending to need to clear his throat. This just wasn't right. No matter how much his brain wanted, needed to order a double cheeseburger, extra onions, and a double portion of fries, followed by the all-important pie, his mouth appeared to have other ideas.

For the first time in a very, very, very long time, Dean Winchester *almost*, emphasis on almost, ordered a chicken salad.

What the..?

He tried again.

"Double chick...I mean chees...I mean..." He banged a fist into the table in frustration and looked up to Debbie apologetically. "I might err, need another minute here, okay, sweetheart? But don't you be going anywhere too far away..." He gave her the slightly bawdy smile that he sometimes just couldn't help when he saw a pretty girl.

Debbie seemed to appreciate it. "No problem. You boys just give me a holler when you're ready."

She winked and sauntered over to the next table, her long legs swaying suggestively enough for Dean to mouth "oh baby, I'll have me some of that" before he remembered he was having problems making any kind of food order that wasn't the crap Sam usually ate.

Dean leaned over the table so other customers couldn't hear what he was saying. "Did you do something to me? I mean, c'mon here, man, I want a greasy burger and all my freakin' lips will ask for is that rabbit food you eat. You might wanna look like Bugs Bunny, but I got other plans here..."

Sam's face was struggling not to contort into a laugh. He couldn't hold the expression, though, and ended up bursting into full blown guffaw instead.

"Dammit, what did you and that sideshow freak do to me, Sasquatch?"

Sam managed to quell his chuckles long enough to try and be serious. "Dude, you eat too much junk food. You won't have to worry about Lucifer if you don't lay off all that crap." He shrugged and the chuckles began again in earnest. "Patrick just helped you see your inner self a little more..."

"You got that creep to hypnotize me? Man, that is so low, even for you! You know nobody comes between me and my stomach."

Sam nodded. "But don't you see, this is really what you want. You can't hypnotize a person to do something they don't want to. The inner you *really* wants that salad..." His face began to turn red with all the laughter, but Dean wasn't seeing the funny side.

"I'm so not laughing here, Sammy." Dean tossed a bill on the table for the two black coffees they'd consumed and stormed back outside into the Californian sunshine.

If he couldn't eat what he wanted, then he'd be damned if he was eating at all. Forever, if it meant eating lettuce leaves and wuss ass chicken. Real men ate beef, *and...pie.*

Feeling slightly betrayed, he glanced over his shoulder to see Sam following him out of the diner. And dammit, he was still finding all this amusing.

Annoyed, Dean leaned to unlock the Impala when he realized there was something inside.

Something on his side of the bench seat.

Opening up, he reached in and plucked out a carefully written note and a huge bag of peanut M&M's. The note simply read "enjoy," but to Dean, it was blatantly obvious who had left it.

Sam hadn't left his presence in the diner, and no one else knew about his newly acquired eating problem – except Patrick Jane.

As Sam joined his brother, Dean stuffed the bag of chocolate under his sibling's nose. "How the hell did Jane know where to find us?" He grumbled.

"Psychic?" Sam offered, only half-seriously.

Dean opened his mouth to spout a wisecrack back, but then realization dawned that there had been another transgression here. A far more serious one than being hunted by a dick that owned a Citroen.

"And just *HOW* did G.I. freakin' Jane get in my *CAR!*"

Sam put a hand over his mouth, but couldn't hide his stifled laughter for more than a few seconds. "Dude," he choked out. "I think you've finally met your match..."

For once, Dean couldn't think of one single argument to dispute the fact. "*Whatever,*" he groused, dropping in behind the Impala's wheel. "But you so owe me some pie...or maybe a nice juicy steak...or how about a plate of extra greasy pork chops...or..." He turned the car's ignition, continuing his tirade as they drove off down the interstate.

Sam groaned. Maybe asking Patrick to "educate" his brother's stomach hadn't been such a good idea after all.

The End