

Season Four
Episode Two: Time Won't Let Me Go
By SnSam

Enigma, Georgia
Gibson's Super Pawn

If it had been any big city, Mikey Wickham was sure he and his brother, Danny, would have been caught by now. It wasn't exactly as if they were being stealthy, having turned on a couple of lamps that were sitting on the counters. Danny had assured him they wouldn't get caught and Mikey wasn't about to argue with his big brother.

Luckily, they lived in a town of about 5,000 people and it wasn't unusual for a light to be on in a business after-hours. If anything, people would just think Mr. Gibson was working late, which he did from time to time.

Still, it didn't stop the Wickham brothers from working as quickly as they could. Danny had told him to grab anything of real value and Mikey was working feverishly, afraid that their luck would soon run out.

Looking down at their loot so far, they had done a pretty decent job of grabbing guns, small musical instruments, knives and jewelry. Mikey was more than ready to call it a night and get out of there.

"Come on, Danny...don't you think we have enough crap?" Mikey asked, glancing sideways at his sibling.

"Dude, if we're doing this, it's not gonna be some half-assed job," Danny said as he opened another jewelry case. "We're taking everything we can."

"What if someone calls the cops? I told you I don't want to go to jail."

"We won't if you hurry the hell up. This place doesn't have any cameras so we won't get caught." Danny frowned when he saw Mikey opening up the watch display case. "Dude, don't grab those—they ain't worth nothin'."

Mikey sighed and rolled his eyes at his brother's back. He didn't know why he put up with Danny's incessant orders. It wasn't like he was some lackey or something; he didn't have to take being ordered around. Yet, here he was with his delinquent sibling, throwing his life right down the toilet.

The young man was about to move away from the watches when one caught his eye. It was a gold pocket watch with floral etching, a faint film of tarnish in the grooves giving it an antique look.

It looks just like Paw-Paw Benny's old watch, Mikey thought as he reached into the case to pick up the old timepiece. Holding it in his hand, he turned it over, smiling slightly as he rubbed his thumb over the rough surface.

Glancing quickly over his shoulder to make sure Danny wasn't watching him, the red-headed man slipped it into his pocket. It felt oddly comforting having it there and Mikey had to shake himself as a chill raced up his spine.

A thump from the back caused the younger Wickham to jump, his heart hammering in his chest. *Dammit, the police are here to arrest us!*

"Danny, did you hear that?" Mikey whispered frantically.

"Man, would you calm down and quit freaking out over everything? It was probably just a stray dog diggin' in the trash or somethin'," Danny said, shaking his head, clearly annoyed. "I swear, this is the last time I ask you to help me."

Anger immediately overcame any fear Mikey was feeling. "I never wanted to come here in the first place!"

"Then why did you come?" Danny challenged.

"Because you told me if I didn't, you would tell Lindsay I went out with Gretchen!" Danny could make anyone believe any lie and when he'd threatened Mikey with that

one, the young man had had no choice but to go along with it, even if it was a complete fabrication. He didn't want to screw up anything with Lindsay, especially when they'd been going strong two years now.

"Believe me, it'll be the last time I ever do that," Danny said as he zipped up his bag. "I should have got Steve to help me."

"Didn't he stand you up to bang some chick he met in a bar?"

"Bite me, dumb ass."

Mikey smiled in satisfaction as he got a shot in at his sibling. Danny tended to think of himself as Enigma's greatest gift to women and he couldn't stand it when someone else got some action if it left him out in the cold.

Another thud had Mikey turning around towards the back of the store and he felt the blood literally drain from his face. Mr. Gibson, a balding stick of a man, was standing there, pointing a rifle at the both of them.

"Put it down and get out now or I start shooting," the older man warned, cocking the gun for emphasis. "I'm tired of you damn kids comin' in here and robbin' my place."

"Mind your blood pressure, Walter," Danny said with a smirk. "You don't want to get your old ticker kicking into high gear, do you?"

Walter shook his head sadly. "What is your mama gonna think when she hears about this?"

"Danny, maybe we should just go," Mikey said, a nervous tremor in his voice. "Mama will be pissed if she finds out what we've done."

"You should listen to your brother, Danny," Walter said. "At least one of you has a lick of common sense."

Danny ignored the pawn shop owner. "He won't shoot us, Mikey. Grab your stuff and let's get outta here."

"Danny—"

"Move it, Mikey." Danny turned his back on Mikey and Walter, reaching down to take hold of his large duffle.

Why does he have to be—

Mikey never got to finish his thought as they report of a shotgun blasted through the store. Everything seemed to slow down as, horrified, he watched the shot hit his sibling in the back. Danny's body jerked before falling to the ground, unmoving.

Time resumed its normal pace as Mikey fell to his knees beside Danny, pressing his hands to the wound, hoping to do something to staunch the flow of blood. Taking one of his hands, he pressed a couple of fingers to Danny's carotid, fear gripping him at the absence of a pulse.

Swallowing down the lump in his throat, Mikey looked up at the shop owner who was standing there watching them, his mouth agape. "We didn't mean anything by it, Mr. Gibson."

"I-I didn't mean to shoot him," Mr. Gibson said. "I just wanted you to leave me be."

Mikey said nothing, too afraid the shopkeeper would plug him. He let out a quiet sigh of relief as the older man put down the firearm and rubbed a hand over his face.

"I want you to leave, do you hear me, Mikey?" Walter asked. "You were never here tonight—I'll take care of it."

The young man just looked at the shop owner in shock. He didn't want to leave his brother alone—it would feel like he was betraying him or something.

"Go, Mikey!"

Mikey nodded numbly before turning around and darting out of the pawn shop.

Mikey didn't even bother turning on the light when he stepped into his tiny apartment a little later. Instead, he went straight for the refrigerator and grabbed a

beer before planting himself on his thrift store recliner. Finding the remote between the cushion and the chair, he turned it on to the local news.

He couldn't believe what had happened. His brother could be so stupid and his idiocy had finally caught up with him. Mikey knew he should have been mourning his sibling, but all he could feel was anger that was slowly bubbling into rage.

Glancing at the television, Mikey seethed as the scene changed to a shot of the pawn shop, Danny's body being wheeled out into the coroner's van. Letting out a guttural yell, he threw the bottle at the screen, feeling a little satisfied as it shattered.

Launching himself from the recliner, Mikey began to pace like a caged lion. *I should have tried harder to make Danny leave. I shouldn't have let him go through with it. Why didn't I do more? Why did I have to be a pushover once again? It's my fault that Danny's dead...*

Shoving his hands into his jacket pockets, wishing to rid himself of the guilt, Mikey was slightly surprised when his right hand touched something solid. Pulling it out, he saw that it was the pocket watch he'd lifted.

I forgot I even had this...

Squeezing it tightly, feeling completely drained, a sob escaped Mikey's lips.

"I wish we'd never robbed the damn place..."

Mikey jerked awake, gasping desperately for air. He felt disoriented, almost as if he'd just stepped off a carnival ride. Looking around, he was shocked to find himself sitting in the passenger seat of his brother's old Toyota Camry.

"Yo, Mikey—what's your deal?" Danny asked, staring at him strangely.

Mikey swung his head in the direction of Danny's voice, positive that he was hallucinating. Danny was dead—he was sure of it. He remembered the warmth of his brother's blood on his hands, the lack of a pulse, the way his eyes stared out at nothing. But yet, here Danny was—living, breathing and staring at him as if Mikey had lost his mind.

Maybe I have, he thought. Just to be sure, he reached out a hand and gave Danny's arm a gentle squeeze. *Oh, my God, he's really here! What the hell is happening?*

Danny jerked his arm out of Mikey's grasp. "Man, what have I told you about personal space?"

"You're alive," Mikey said in wonder. *Okay, clearly that beer I drank had something in it.*

Danny arched a brow, looking at him as if he'd grown an extra head. "Last I checked."

"I don't believe it." Without warning, Mikey reached over and enveloped his big brother in a hug. Just as quickly, Danny shoved him away, pushing him against the passenger door.

"Dude, what the hell is your problem? You off your meds or somethin'?"

Mikey flashed his sibling a goofy grin, not caring how ridiculous he looked. Danny was back and that was all that mattered right now.

"Now that you got your mental breakdown over, are you ready?"

"For what?"

Danny nodded at the darkened pawn shop. "You said you were gonna help me. We have to do this now."

He still wants to rob the store! Mikey could feel the panic start to rise in his chest. "I don't think we should do this, Danny. Let's just go home and watch a movie or somethin'."

"Tell me you're not gonna chicken out on me now, bro. I told you it would be a simple job—in and out. I need you to watch my back."

"I just have a bad feeling about this," Mikey continued, desperately willing Danny to listen to him. *Come on, Danny—just believe me and listen to me for once in your life.*

"I don't have time for this," Danny muttered before pulling the keys out of the ignition and getting out of the car.

"You stupid son of a bitch," Mikey griped before following Danny across the deserted two lane road. "Danny, you have to believe me when I say we can't go through with this. Something bad is gonna happen."

"God, you really are on somethin' tonight." Danny continued on his path, walking to the darkest side of the pawn shop. Luckily for them, old man Gibson didn't bother to invest in any bars for the windows. Mikey could only watch in mounting horror as his sibling pushed up on the window and it opened without a hitch.

"Please don't do this, Danny. I'm beggin' you here."

Danny turned to look at him. "Look, the way I see it, you have two options: be a man and help me or be a bitch and go cry home to Mama."

Without another word, Danny slipped inside the establishment. Sighing and seeing that he had no other choice, Mikey took one last look around the quiet town before going in after Danny.

"We need to hurry before Mr. Gibson gets back," Mikey said as soon as he was safely inside.

Grabbing his bag, Danny moved over to the nearest display case, which housed the guns and knives. "Don't worry—the old man is gone for the night. I've been watching this place all week—he leaves around ten and doesn't check in until he opens up the next morning."

"He'll be back in a few minutes," Mikey blurted out before he could stop himself. He was almost afraid to look at Danny but he willed himself to do it anyway.

"What, are you psychic or something?" Danny asked, clearly amused.

"Definitely something," the younger brother mumbled but Danny had lost interest in him, instead focusing on the jewelry and throwing it into his bag.

Sighing, Mikey turned his head and his eyes alighted upon the gold pocket watch. Sliding open the display case, he reached in and picked up the timepiece. Rising up to study it, a sudden thud had him dropping it to the floor and whirling around.

"D-Danny," he whispered frantically. *It's happening just like last time!*

Danny waved a hand at him, still grabbing as many things as he could.

Mikey swallowed hard as Walter Gibson stepped out of the back, cocking the rifle as he did so. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Danny drop the duffle he'd been stuffing.

"Drop everything and get out—or I start shooting," Walter warned.

"Don't waste your breath, old man. You won't shoot us," Danny said smirking as he reached down to grab his dropped bag.

"NO!" Mikey yelled as two shots rang out. He watched in horror as both the shop owner and his brother were hit in the chest, both falling to the ground in tandem.

"This wasn't supposed to happen," Mikey muttered as he dropped to the ground beside his fallen sibling. He knew it was useless, but he felt for a pulse anyway. He wasn't the least bit surprised when he didn't find one.

Looking around the quiet shop, frantically searching for nothing in particular, he spotted the pocket watch glinting harmlessly in the pale lamp light.

Tripping over himself, he snatched it up, rocking back and forth while holding it closely to his chest.

"I wish we'd never robbed the damn place. I wish we'd never robbed the damn place. I wish..."

END TEASER

Lawrence, Kansas
Emerald Motel
One week later...

Sam Winchester squinted at the computer screen, willing the words to make sense—or at the very least, form complete sentences instead of rambling run-ons. It was enough to make anyone dizzy, like stepping off the Tilt-A-Whirl at the county fair.

Maybe it would have helped if green didn't surround Sam everywhere he looked—green walls, green carpeting, green towels, green bedspreads. The only thing to break the green monotony was the wide yellow stripe on the carpet that ran from the middle of the two queen beds to the bathroom.

Follow the yellow brick road straight to the wizard.

Apparently, someone around here had a sense of humor and while it had been funny the first time he'd entered the room with Dean a week ago, it was now getting old. Sam still didn't understand why it seemed that everywhere in Kansas had to do their own little tribute to *The Wizard of Oz*—everyone got it by now; they didn't have to be constantly reminded that it took place there.

It also didn't help that the young hunter had been working non-stop, researching every possible way to get John out of Stull. It seemed as if every single time he found a viable lead, it only led to another dead-end. They all said the same thing—Stull wouldn't open again until the Spring Equinox—March twentieth to be exact.

Still, that didn't stop Sam from trying alternative ways to bust his dad out. After all, if anyone could find an off-the-wall solution to any problem, it was Sam Winchester.

I saved Dean when he was electrocuted a few years ago. Of course, the dude was using dark magic because of his crazy wife...

Whatever the case, Sam had been able to save Dean and that was all that mattered. And he would do the same for John, even if it meant driving himself way past the point of exhaustion.

And Sam was exhausted. For a second, it had him wondering how far he actually could push himself before he reached breaking point. If history was any indication of the Winchester resilience, then it wouldn't be until he was six feet under. But Sam had to do it—not only for himself, but for Dean as well.

Sam wasn't stupid; he saw what this last week had done to his brother. Dean was nothing but a walking, ticking time bomb and Sam honestly didn't know how much more Dean could take before he exploded.

Dean wouldn't listen to reason. Hell, he wouldn't listen to anything Sam had to say. He'd had tunnel vision since Stull—refused to do anything except stay in Lawrence and spend all hours of the day and night at the cemetery, trying to find some loophole. Sam had tried to budge him, even went so far as getting Bobby involved, but Dean remained as stubborn as ever.

When Dean wasn't at the cemetery, he was at some bar until all hours. After the first night of trying to get Dean to come back to the motel ended with a bruised jaw, Sam had left Dean to himself. He was used to Dean going down the same destructive path time and time again and he would be there to help Dean up and give him the swift kick in the ass when he was ready.

It pained Sam to see his brother this way. Dean had always been the pillar of strength when it came to the Winchester clan. But Sam had glimpsed those brief moments of weakness on Dean's face—he'd always been about family. It sometimes scared Sam the lengths Dean would go to in order to protect what was his.

While they'd been without John for long periods of time as they were growing up, this was different. John had never been completely inaccessible before. Unavailable, yes, but not like this. It was almost as if their dad was—*dead*.

"Don't do that, Sam. You can't go there," Sam berated himself. If he did that, then they may as well throw in the towel.

Pushing all those thoughts behind him, Sam focused on the task at hand. Pulling up a search engine, he typed in a few words and waited for the results. Spying a potentially interesting link, he clicked on it and pulled up the *Enigma Gazette*. Skimming the story, his interest began to perk up. It was an article about a guy who swore there was some magic watch that could turn back time. He said he'd done it and had watched his brother die twice as a result of it.

"That's weird," Sam muttered.

It was obvious the story was included in the paper to ridicule the man—Mikey Wickham. But Sam couldn't help but be intrigued by it and he also couldn't stop the little tingling in his head, almost as if his brain was trying to tell him it sounded familiar.

Maybe I saw something like it in Dad's journal.

Picking up the worn leather tome, Sam began to flip through it, his eyes glancing over the familiar scrawl. He knew exactly where everything was, having memorized every detail of his father's hunting career. Ever since it had come into their possession a few years ago, he'd spent countless sleepless nights reading it cover to cover, especially when the nightmares and visions had been so bad.

About halfway through, Sam stopped his flipping, eyes zeroing in on a sentence scribbled in the margins—"*Watch that can turn back time?*"

"Looks like Dad wasn't too sure about it," Sam commented as he sat back in thought. He'd never really paid much attention to it before. To him, it was simply a thought or something John had which he had just jotted it down.

It was the way his father worked—there were tons of notes he'd written down but they really had no meaning at all. But maybe John had actually been onto something in this one instance without ever knowing it.

Putting down the journal, the young hunter went back to his laptop, feeling as if his luck might finally be changing for the better. Typing in a few commands, he managed to crack into Mikey's record, finding out he was being held in a mental hospital in Tifton, Georgia. Writing down the address, Sam shut down the laptop and closed it up.

Smiling for the first time all week, Sam stood up and grabbed his duffle from the foot of the bed. Throwing his clothes inside, he knew the easy part was behind him. Now, he would have to somehow convince Dean to go along with his plan. As if he had realized Sam needed to talk to him, Dean chose that moment to walk into the room, slamming the door behind him. Sam barely glanced up at Dean as his brother tossed a greasy brown paper bag onto his bed.

"What are you doing?" Dean asked as he slipped off his jacket, his voice slightly defensive.

"You need to pack," Sam answered. "We've got to hit the road."

"We've had this argument before, Sammy." Dean plopped himself on the bed and looked over at him. "We're not going anywhere."

"Dean, would you just—"

"This isn't up for discussion. I told you, we can't leave until we find a way to get Dad out."

"We're not even—"

"Sam, just stop it. We both know this is only going to end with the both of us pissed at each other."

It took everything Sam had not to grab his brother by the shoulders and shake him. "If you'd just shut the hell up long enough for me to get a word out, Dean, I'm trying to tell you that I may have found something that can help Dad."

Whatever Dean was about to say was forgotten as he stared up at Sam, mouth slightly open.

"Well, dude, spit it out already," Dean said. "What is it?"

A brief smile flashed across Sam's face before he quickly pushed it away. "I found an article from a small town in Georgia. Some guy there swears he found a watch that turns back time."

Dean smirked. "It's probably some heavily medicated crackpot sitting in a padded room somewhere with a jacket to keep him warm at night."

Sam opened his mouth to say something but closed it just as quickly, refusing to look Dean in the eyes. There really was nothing he could say to refute Dean's claim.

Dean cocked his head. "He is some nutjob."

Sam shrugged. "Maybe he is but Dad mentioned something about it in his journal."

"What?"

"Well, it was just a sentence. More of question, actually—'watch that can turn back time.' But it's still something."

Dean shook his head. "You're gonna have to come up with something better than that, Sam."

Sam sighed. "I'm tired of sitting in this room bending over a computer the entire time. I'm tired of you driving yourself crazy with this notion that if we stay here, we'll find a way to get Dad out."

Dean gritted his teeth. "Sam—"

Sam cut him off. "We haven't found jack, Dean, and we're deluding ourselves if we think by sitting here the answer is going to fall into our laps."

Dean said nothing.

"Look, I miss Dad and more than anything, I want to get him back. But we can't keep doing this—Dad would be disappointed in us if he saw what we were doing."

"Don't do that, Sam. Don't you dare starting batting for Dad's team when you've spent almost every waking moment fighting with the man."

"I'm not trying to, Dean." Sam sat down on the bed opposite his sibling. "But I refuse to sit back and do nothing when we have a possible lead that could help."

Getting up, Sam shoved a few more items into his bag before zipping it shut. "If you don't wanna go, Dean, I'll find a way to get there myself."

Sam knew by saying that he'd just won the argument. There was no way in hell Dean was going to let him leave by himself. He'd just lost Dad and Sam knew his brother would do everything in his power not to lose him as well.

Sighing, Dean got up from the bed and began to pack. "Little brothers can be such a major pain in the ass."

Behavioral Health Services of South Georgia Tifton, Georgia The next day

Dean Winchester shifted uncomfortably in the hunter green plastic chair, his body complaining loudly about the painful position. He and Sam were sitting in the small atrium of the mental hospital, waiting for Mikey Wickham to be brought to them. The bright sunlight that filtered through did nothing to improve his sour mood.

They were both utterly exhausted after the excursion from Kansas, having only slept for about five hours after driving all day and most of the previous night. This was the last place Dean wanted to be but there was no backing out of it now, especially since it would mean him listening to Sam bitch the entire time if he did.

And I so don't want to go there.

It didn't mean Dean had to be happy to be there though. He honestly didn't think they would find anything useful here to help them. He truly believed they were dealing with some nutjob who just wanted some attention, no matter how he went about getting it. Why else would they have to talk to him here? If he'd had all his marbles, they could be chatting it up in some mom-and-pop diner.

God, I'm starving, Dean thought as his stomach grumbled loudly, sharing the sentiment. Don't get mad at me. Blame Sammy—he's the one who insisted we get here at the butt crack of dawn.

If it was up to Dean, they would still be in Lawrence. He felt sure that he was on the right path. Locals were just starting to open up to him, telling him secrets of the legendary cemetery that had been long forgotten. Dean was sure if they'd stayed there just a little longer, he would have gotten John out, once and for all.

Dean refused to look logically at it; he refused to accept he was doing nothing more than chasing his tail in the dark. If he admitted he was only kidding himself, then he was defeated and he wouldn't do that. It wasn't the way the Winchesters operated, especially when it concerned family.

Even more frustrating to the hunter would be for him to admit that he was helpless this time around. It was a feeling that didn't sit well with him and he wasn't going to just stand by without giving all of his effort to the cause. If that meant running himself ragged in order to accomplish that goal, then he would do just that.

Dean wasn't blind, either; he realized what his tireless crusade was doing to his little brother. Stress and worry were evident on Sam's face, though the kid did his best to try to mask it. He'd been making Sam work nonstop, snapping at him and shutting him down every time he came up with an idea. It wasn't that he wasn't grateful for what Sam was doing. It was that he was afraid he would lose it all if he acknowledged everything that had happened. He wouldn't allow Sam to see him that way—he had to be there for him and if that meant being an ass about it, then so be it.

Dean knew their missing dad wasn't the only thing that was bothering Sam either. Stull played with his sibling's head, much like it had done with his. Sam was still freaked about turning evil like his alternate double even though Dean assured him that would never happen. Even if Sam said he believed Dean, internally he would still be dwelling on it—that's just the way Sam was.

Sam turned his head to look at Dean strangely. "Dude, quit staring at me. What's wrong?"

Dean flinched, hating being caught. "I thought you were finished with puberty," he said thoughtfully.

"What are you talking about?"

"You have a huge ass pimple on the side of your face," Dean answered, smirking. "I would say I only thought girls usually got them like that, but..."

Sam reached up, touching both sides of his face in search of the blemish. When Dean only started to laugh, Sam glared daggers at the older man.

"My bad," Dean said, clearly amused.

Sam huffed. "You are such an ass, you know that?"

Dean smiled but didn't say anything as a young man entered the atrium. The brothers stood up as one, towering over him.

"Mikey Wickham?" Sam asked.

"Yeah," he answered apprehensively.

"We'd like to talk to you about what happened on the night of the robbery."

Mikey turned around to leave. "I don't need this crap, guys. The last thing I want right now is for another person to think I've lost my marbles."

"I promise, we're not here to ridicule you," Sam said with a pointed look at Dean. "I'm Sam and this is Dean. We kind of have experience with the strange and crazy. We just want to hear your side of the story."

"I don't know..."

"Just give us the benefit of the doubt," Sam pleaded. "All we need is a few minutes of your time."

Mikey studied them for a few seconds before slowly coming back into the room and sitting in the empty green chair across from them.

As the brothers retook their seats, Dean asked, "What happened that night?"

"Are you two brothers?" Mikey asked abruptly.

Sam nodded, slightly caught off-guard. "Why do you ask?"

"I'm guessing you're the younger one," Mikey said, a ghost of a grin flitting across his face. "Your brother ever convince you to do anything stupid?"

"All the damn time."

Dean glared at them, silently promising himself he'd get Sam back for that one later.

"That's what happened with me," Mikey continued, ignoring Dean's look. "Danny—my brother—made me go along with him to rob Gibson's Super Pawn. I didn't want to but it's kind of hard to tell Danny no."

"Well, sure that's stupid," Dean admitted. "But I'm still not convinced that's how you got a one-way ticket straight to the loony hut."

Mikey shot a look at Dean, slightly affronted.

"Dean didn't mean anything by it, Mikey," Sam said quickly, glaring at his sibling. "Tell us what happened next."

Mikey shook his head. "It was weird."

"Weird how?"

"I mean, I watched Danny die and I got the hell out of there. I went back home and I was so pissed at him. I felt the watch I'd swiped in my pocket and I just lost it." He looked at the Winchesters in turn. "I just made some offhand comment about wishing we'd never gone there and all of a sudden, I was back in Danny's car and he was sitting right beside me as if nothing ever happened."

"Was he...different?" Dean asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Did he look..." Dean trailed off, not sure how to ask it without freaking the kid out even more. Aw, screw it—he's already seen crazy. Why not add a little more to it? "Did he seem dead to you?"

"No," Mikey said, unnerved by the question. "He was normal. He was Danny."

"So, it was like you got a second chance with him?" Sam asked.

"Right."

"But I'm guessing it didn't work out for you like you wanted it to," Dean said.

"It got worse," Mikey admitted.

"How?"

"Everything happened exactly like the first time except Mr. Gibson was killed along with my brother." Mikey shook his head in bewilderment. "I didn't even know that Danny was packing heat. I swear to you, he didn't have it the first time."

Sam and Dean exchanged a look but neither said anything.

"Can you tell us what the watch looked like?" Sam asked, changing the subject.

"It was gold—had flowers etched all over the casing. It looked ancient, like something your grandfather or great-grandfather would carry around in his pocket."

"Do you know where the watch is now?" Dean inquired.

Mikey shrugged. "It should still be at the pawn shop. I dropped it after it wouldn't work again."

"You tried to use it again?" Sam asked.

"Yeah. When nothing happened, I thought for sure I had just imagined the entire thing."

The boys stood up, signaling the end of the conversation.

"Thanks for your time, Mikey," Sam said.

"Hey." Mikey stopped them before they could get out the door. "Do you think I'm crazy?"

Dean shook his head, slightly surprised at himself. "No, we don't."

Mikey flashed a genuine smile. "Thanks. I really needed to hear that."

Sam waited until they were walking towards the Impala before speaking. "So, do you really believe that?"

"Believe what?" Dean asked as he pulled the keys out of his jacket pocket.

"The kid's not crazy."

Dean shrugged as he opened the door. "We've heard crazier."

Sam nodded as they got into the car as a unit. Dean turned the ignition and put the old Chevy into gear, heading back towards Enigma. They drove in silence for a while, each lost in his own thoughts.

"What if it's real, Sammy?" Dean asked suddenly.

"The watch?"

"Yeah. This could be our way to get Dad back."

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves, Dean," Sam cautioned. "We don't know if this thing really works or if we're being duped."

"Yeah, I know. But it's something—more than we've had so far."

Sam nodded but didn't reply.

Dean couldn't help but be encouraged by the prospect of the watch. Sure, it seemed hokey but they'd seen and dealt with stranger things in their storied hunting career. But this offered more hope than anything else they'd come across lately.

A few minutes later, Dean pulled into the parking lot of the pawn shop. A neon "Open" sign was flashing in the window and a big black bow hung from the door, announcing it as a place of mourning.

"It didn't take them long to bounce back from a double homicide, did it?" Sam asked as they walked up to the door.

Dean shrugged. "It's the small town way of life. They can't afford to sit on their asses like they could in the big city."

A bell chimed overhead, announcing their arrival as the boys entered the shop. A kindly, silver-haired woman looked up from the counter she was standing behind, smiling at them invitingly.

"Do you boys need help with anything?"

Dean nudged Sam, indicating he should do the talking on this one. *Sammy always did have a way with the little old ladies.*

Sam stepped forward, flashing the woman a warm smile. "We were actually interested in your watches, uh..."

"Carol Gibson—this was my husband's shop," the woman supplied. She walked down the length of the counter before stopping at a display case near the end. "Is there a particular watch you were looking for?"

"Well, the one we're interested in is old," Sam began. "Um, it's gold with a floral etching—a pocket watch."

Carol nodded, looking thoughtful as Sam described the timepiece. "It does sound familiar." She then looked at them apologetically. "I'm sorry, but I believe I sold the watch you're describing late yesterday evening."

The brothers turned their heads towards each other, both mirroring the same look of disbelief. Their first real shot at getting John back had just slipped from their grasp before they'd even gotten their hands on it.

Part Two

Sam felt as if he'd been hit in the gut with a sledgehammer. Why was it that nothing could ever work out for them the way they wanted it to? Was it really too much to ask for a break every now and then? Hadn't they done enough to at least deserve that much?

Not only had they missed their chance to get their dad back but Sam was pretty sure that Dean would drag him straight back to Lawrence to sit in a motel room. Sam couldn't do that again. He couldn't go back to feeling like he was on house arrest for a crime he didn't commit.

Besides, too much bad stuff happened in Lawrence, especially where it concerned the Winchesters, as history had shown. If they went back there, something else was bound to happen—it was just inevitable.

"Are you two okay?" Carol asked, looking at the both of them strangely.

“What?” Sam asked, jumping slightly.

“It was just an old watch,” she continued. “I’ve got others from that era if you’re really wanting one.”

“We really wanted that one,” Dean explained. “A buddy of ours told us he saw it in here and we just had to have it.”

“What’s so special about it?” Carol asked, suspicion clouding her features. “Is it a family heirloom or something?”

Sam couldn’t stand to beat around the bush any longer. He was going to have to lie to the woman, whether he liked it or not. They had to find out where the watch was.

Reaching into his jacket pocket, he pulled out a badge and flashed it at Carol. “We’re with the State Police, ma’am. The watch is evidence in a case.”

Carol glanced over at Dean. “But you just said a friend told you about it. I don’t understand what is going on.” Then she narrowed her eyes. “Where’s your badge?”

Dean glanced sideways at his brother, frowning. Pulling out his own forged badge and showing it to her, he said, “We didn’t want to worry you if it wasn’t necessary.”

“Is the watch tied to Walter’s death?” she asked, worriedly.

“No, ma’am,” Sam said, pocketing his badge. “There was a case upstate—a robbery. We believe the watch you sold was one of the items stolen. We’ve been following a trail of loot across the state.”

“Oh, my goodness!” Carol brought up a hand to her mouth. “Please, tell me what I can do to help. I’ll do anything I can.”

“We really just need to find out who has the watch,” Sam replied.

“Oh, well, that shouldn’t be too hard.” Turning around, she grabbed a stack of receipts and placed them on the counter. Slipping on the pair of glasses hanging from her neck, she began to flip through the yellow papers. “Let’s see...I sold it to a woman—Jody Roberts.” She handed the receipt to the brothers so they could see.

Sam took out a small notepad and jotted down the buyer’s name and phone number. Closing it up, he tapped it on the counter and smiled at her. “Thank you, Carol. We really appreciate your cooperation on this matter.”

Carol removed her glasses and looked up at them, distressed. “I’m not going to be in trouble for selling stolen property, am I, Officers?”

“No, ma’am,” Dean promised her. “You had no idea about it. You were just trying to run your business and make a living.”

“Thank goodness,” she said, letting out a huge sigh of relief. “This week has been horrible enough as it is. I’m not sure if I could take anything else.”

“We heard about your husband,” Sam said gently. “We’re very sorry for your loss.”

Carol nodded, her gray eyes watering. “Thank you.”

Thanking the woman again, the boys walked out to the Impala. Sam’s door was barely shut before he whipped out his cell phone and began to dial the number he’d written down.

“You can’t at least wait until I get the car started before you start calling?” Dean teased, putting the classic into gear.

“You’re saying you wouldn’t do the same thing?” Sam asked, disbelief in his voice. When Dean didn’t say anything, he smiled in satisfaction. “Yeah, I thought so.”

Dean rolled his eyes in response.

“Hello?” asked a male voice, snapping Sam to attention.

“Uh, is Jody Roberts there?”

“Who is this?”

“My name is Sam. Um, I work at Tracy’s Boutique.” Sam could only imagine the look Dean was giving him. “I told her I would call when we got our new shipment of scarves in.”

Dean snorted, causing Sam to glare at him. “Shut. Up,” he mouthed.

“Oh, well, she’s got the day shift at the hospital,” the man replied. “I’ll make sure she gets the message.”

"Thanks." Sam hung up the phone and punched his brother in the arm as Dean struggled to keep the car on the road as he laughed.

"Dude, that's a new one, even for you," Dean said, trying to catch his breath.

"Kiss my ass."

"Good thing you were on the phone and not talking to him in person," Dean went on, ignoring him. "He never would have bought that for a second. Next time, you might want to make your voice a little more feminine."

"Are you finished?"

Dean narrowed his eyes in thought. "Yeah, I think so."

Sighing, Sam activated the GPS application on his phone and pulled up the nearest hospital to their location. "I'm guessing she works at Tifton County General. Turn back around and head back to where we talked to Mikey. The hospital is close to there."

"You can always call again and talk about the nice purses Tracy's offers."

"Dean..."

"What? I'm just trying to help."

"Well, you suck at it and no one asked for your input," Sam said.

"What's got your panties in a twist?"

"Nothing."

Dean nodded, not pushing the subject any further. "So, you want to tell me what that stunt was back at the pawn shop?"

"What do you mean?" Sam asked, acting completely clueless. He knew very well what Dean was talking about.

"Lying is usually my thing, though I have to admit, you were pretty damn convincing." Dean looked over at Sam but his brother continued looking out the front windshield. "I'm just trying to figure out why you're so fixated on this watch, considering you're not entirely sure it's going to work."

Sam shrugged. "The watch intrigues me. What's not interesting about a watch that can supposedly turn back time?"

"Look, I know you're a geek and things like this usually send your heart aflutter, but I'm not buying it," Dean said. "So, what's the real reason?"

Sam sighed, knowing he was most likely about to piss off his older sibling. "I have to believe we'll find it and that it'll work."

"Why?"

"Because..." Sam huffed. "Because I don't want to go back to Lawrence, Dean."

"What are you talking about?"

"If this doesn't work out, I know you'll want to go back," Sam explained. "And I can't do that, Dean. I can't go there just to sit around in a motel room, chained to my computer, hoping another answer falls into our laps."

Dean looked over at him, shock masking his features. "So, what are you saying, Sammy?"

"What?"

"Does this mean you're just going to give up on Dad? You just wanna leave him God-knows-where and do nothing about it? What happened to that whole spiel back in the motel? The one you gave me about not wanting to disappoint Dad?"

"Dean, I'm not looking to fight with you, okay? And I'm not about to give up on Dad. If this doesn't work, I'll look for other ways to help but I won't go back to Lawrence to do it." He looked at Dean. "There are other hunts we need to pursue."

Dean shook his head. "We have a hunt, Sammy. It's Dad—that's what we have to focus on."

"You know Dad wouldn't want that, Dean. He wouldn't want us to be selfish. He would want us to help everyone we could."

Dean said nothing as he stared at the road ahead.

“Besides, Lucifer is still out there somewhere, not to mention all his buddies that got out while Stull was open,” Sam continued. “We can’t just let them roam around, killing innocent people.”

Dean was silent for so long that Sam was worried he’d pushed his brother too far. Finally, Dean let out a resigned sigh.

“You’re right. We can’t keep throwing ourselves a pity party. But that doesn’t mean we’re going to drop what we’re doing,” Dean cautioned. “We have to find this watch—it’s all that matters right now. We’ll figure out the rest later.”

Sam nodded, smiling at his brother. It wasn’t much but he would take whatever win he could get.

Tifton County General Hospital

A cold blast of antiseptic air greeted the Winchesters as they entered through the sliding doors of the small hospital. It once again only served to remind Dean of his dislike for hospitals. He hated the smell and the somber mood they always projected. Sure, they did their part in saving people and brining about new life, but in Dean’s personal experience, they only brought about grief and angst.

Walking up to the reception desk that was situated to the left side of the lobby, they found a middle aged, mousy woman with huge glasses, her head lowered as she studiously filled out paperwork.

Sam cleared his throat, causing the woman to jerk her head up, clearly startled. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to frighten you.”

The clerk smiled shakily. “No, it was me. I have a bad habit of tuning out things around me. How may I help you?”

“We’d like to speak with Jody Roberts, if that’s possible.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Doctor Roberts is at lunch.”

“Can you tell us where the cafeteria is?”

“She doesn’t like to be disturbed during her lunch. It’s the only break she gets,” the woman explained. She picked up a pen and a slip of pink paper. “You can leave a number and I’ll make sure she gets the message to call you back.”

Seeing Sam reach into his pocket for his badge, Dean stepped forward, pushing his brother aside. Flashing her a dazzling smile, he saw her nametag read “Courtney.”

Courtney nervously patted her hair in place, a blush coloring her cheeks before Dean could even say a word.

That’s gotta be a new record, even for me, Dean thought proudly.

“You’ll have to excuse my brother, Courtney—he gets a little overeager sometimes,” Dean said, smirking at his sibling. *And there’s his bitch face—score one for me!* “It’s just that it’s really important we speak to Jody. We’re passing through and won’t be back in town for a while. We wanted to say hi to our cousin before we left.”

Courtney let out a high-pitched titter. “Why didn’t you say so?”

Dean shrugged with an easy smile.

“The cafeteria is through those double doors. Take the first left and you can’t miss it.”

“Thanks.”

“It will do Doctor Roberts good to see some family,” Courtney said, smiling sadly.

“We hope so,” Dean agreed, not knowing what she meant by the comment.

Courtney looked down shyly. “So, are you sure you’re just passing through? I was thinking maybe we could—”

Sam pulled Dean away before she could finish. “We’re kind of on a timeline.”

“Dude, what the hell was that?” Dean demanded as they pushed through the double doors. “You’re totally messing up my game.”

“We’re on a job,” Sam pointed out.

"I do it every time we're on a job," Dean argued.

Sam only scoffed as they entered the busy cafeteria. Doctors and nurses took up a good portion of the tables, seeming to congregate on the far side of the massive room, while a few patients' families occupied the area near the door.

Stopping a worker, Dean asked where Jody Roberts was sitting. Turning, the young man pointed to a lone woman with her blonde hair pulled up into a messy bun, sitting at a table in the corner. Thanking him, the brothers made their way over to her.

As they got closer, Dean couldn't help but wonder about Jody. She was slouched in her seat, her shoulders slumped as she picked distractedly at her salad. Her face wore a permanent frown, almost as if she hadn't smiled in ages. She barely wore any makeup, save for a faint smattering of blush on her cheeks.

Sam exchanged a look with Dean before clearing his throat to get Jody's attention.

The doctor scarcely glanced up at them. "The table's occupied. Find somewhere else to sit," she said with a dull voice.

Okay, someone didn't eat their Wheaties this morning, Dean thought. "We'd actually like to talk to you, if that's okay?"

"There's plenty of people in here for you to talk to. Go bother them." She speared a cherry tomato with her fork. "I'm on my lunch break."

The siblings traded another look before Sam gave a tiny nod of his head. Glancing around the cafeteria, Dean saw no one was paying attention to them. Reaching into his jacket, he pulled out his badge and slid it across the table so Jody could see it.

"Like I said, we'd really like to talk to you," Dean said quietly. "Now, we can make a scene about it or we can keep this quiet. I'm willing to go either way—the choice is yours."

Jody glared up at them, anger replacing the defeatist look from before. This was clearly a woman who didn't like to be pressured or bullied and for a second, it made Dean a little nervous. But just for a second—they had a job to do, after all. There was no time to worry about anyone's feelings.

"Have a seat," she said, ice practically dripping from every word. "What do you want?"

No point in easing her into it. Time to play hardball.

"We want to know where the watch is."

"I don't know what you're talking about," she lied.

Sorry lady. That won't work on me. "You may be blonde but we both know you ain't dumb."

Jody arched a brow. "I would take that as a compliment but I'm not entirely sure you meant it that way."

Dean just shrugged, his face expressionless.

"Look, Jody...we just talked to Carol at the pawn shop in Enigma and she showed us the receipt," Sam said. "Not only that, we saw the security tape from last night. We know you have it."

Dean glanced at his brother, impressed with how smoothly the lie left his lips. *Way to go, Sammy!*

"So, what if I do?" Jody asked, smugly. "What the hell are the State Police interested in it for?"

"It's evidence in a crime," Dean answered.

"What crime?"

"There was a string of robberies upstate," Sam replied. "We've been following the fenced loot all over the place."

Jody started laughing, startling the boys. They looked at her, confused and a little anxious.

"Do you guys think I'm an idiot?" she asked. "Your story is crap."

Dean chuckled uneasily. "What do you mean?"

"If there was a robbery, don't you think I would have heard about it?"

“Um...”

“My husband is on the State Police force,” she said, her tone bordering near condescending.

Oh, crap...this is not how this was supposed to go.

Jody pushed her tray away, resting her arms on the table as she leaned forward. “Now, why don’t you tell me who the hell you really are before I pick up the phone and report the both of you?”

Crap! Crap! Crap! Dean shot a desperate look at Sam, clearly telling his little brother to clean up this mess and quick. Sam let out a sigh, obviously not wanting to do it but Dean didn’t care. *This is your area of expertise, bro—just take one for the team already.*

Turning his gaze to Jody, Sam asked, “Why is the watch so important to you?”

Apparently, that was the wrong thing to ask as the doctor reached into her lab coat and pulled out her cell phone.

Sam put a hand on her arm. “Okay---wait, wait, wait!” Jody jerked away from him, her eyes blazing. “I’ll answer your question if you answer mine,” Sam promised.

“How about you tell me who you are and I’ll decide what happens next?”

Dean could see it was taking everything Sam had to control his patience. If Sam was about to lose it, then it had to be pretty bad. His kid brother was a saint when it came to that little virtue, unlike him.

“Dean and I—we’re brothers,” Sam answered calmly and truthfully. “We’re looking for the watch for something important.”

“What?”

Sam shook his head, not wanting to share the details just yet. “I promise you that we’re not as crazy as you may think. We’re only interested in the watch.”

Jody stared at him.

“Why is the watch so important to you?” Sam gently repeated his question from earlier.

The doctor continued to stare at him a moment longer before letting out a shaky breath. “I heard a story about it from a patient who came into the ER about a week ago. He was rambling about some watch that could turn back time. He kept saying he watched his brother die again.”

Sam and Dean glanced at each other, knowing the woman was talking about Mikey Wickham.

“Did you believe him?” Dean asked.

“Are you kidding? I thought the kid was a few fries short, if you know what I mean.” Jody took a sip from her water bottle. “It got me curious though. I’m pretty much open to anything and it had me wondering if something like that really existed and if it could work.”

The brothers looked at her, not saying anything.

Jody scoffed, rolling her eyes. “Great...you think I’m crazy. I mean, why the hell not? I’m listening to myself and I think I sound nuts.” She shook her head. “It’s just some stupid myth that I was dumb enough to buy into.”

“Did you try it out yet?” Dean asked, not sure if he wanted her to answer or not. The watch had already spelled bad news for one person that they knew of.

Jody shook her head. “Not yet. I haven’t found the courage to do it. Not entirely sure if I ever will.”

“What happened, Jody?” Sam asked softly, his eyes locking with hers. “What was so horrible that you would want to change it?”

Jody’s lower lip began to tremble as a tear trailed down her cheek. Brushing it away, she took a deep, shaky breath. “It was my son, Gabe—he died almost two weeks ago.”

“I’m sorry,” Sam offered.

“He was hit by a car as he was riding his bike,” Jody went on as if she didn’t hear him. “My husband said the car came out of nowhere and I—” she broke off as a sob hitched her body. “I tried to save him but I couldn’t.”

“That’s awful,” Dean said.

Jody nodded as she picked up a napkin and wiped her eyes. “That’s why I need the watch. I want my son back. I want a second chance to get it right. A mother deserves that much, doesn’t she? That’s not too much to ask, is it?”

“No, it isn’t,” Sam agreed, sympathetically.

Dean wasn’t so sure about that. After all, you couldn’t change death, no matter how hard you tried. It would throw the balance of the universe off and that would only lead to trouble as the world tried to right itself.

The hunter didn’t say any of this out loud to the grieving woman—she had enough on her mind as it was. Dean couldn’t bring himself to be so cruel.

“So, now that I told you why I want it, what about you?” Jody asked. “Why do you need it? Did you lose someone you loved?”

“It’s our dad,” Sam admitted.

“He’s dead?”

Dean shook his head. “No. He’s just...lost.”

“We just want another chance, like you,” Sam explained. “That’s why we need you to give us the watch, before it’s too late for him.”

Jody looked torn. “I want to help you guys, I really do. But I can’t give it up. I can’t let the chance of getting my son back slip away from me.”

Dean couldn’t take this anymore. He couldn’t just sit by and not speak his mind. “Look, lady—you’re messing with some pretty dangerous stuff. Things that you have no way of understanding or ever will.”

“How can you say that when you’re wanting to do the same thing as me?”

“Because we have experience with the strange and dangerous,” Dean answered. “We know what we’re doing. That’s why you need to give us the watch before you end up getting yourself killed.”

Jody shook her head. “I have to try—you have to at least understand that,” she said adamantly. “You have my word—I will give it up to you as soon as I finish using it.”

Dean opened his mouth to argue but Sam nudged him, indicating he should just let it drop. Dean didn’t agree but he also didn’t want to bring attention to themselves either.

Sam reached into his pocket and pulled out the small notepad he kept there. Tearing out a sheet of paper, he scribbled his cell phone number on it. “Call us as soon as you’re ready to hand it over,” he said, handing it to her.

Jody nodded, staring at the piece of paper as the boys stood up.

Dean could barely contain himself as they walked out of the hospital. He couldn’t believe Sam was willing to let Jody keep the watch when they didn’t know anything about it. He managed to contain himself until they got to the parking lot before whirling around to his brother.

“Dude, what the hell were you thinking letting Jody keep the watch?”

“Dean, we couldn’t exactly make a scene in the middle of a hospital,” Sam said. Then he smiled. “Besides, we’ll get it from her tonight.”

“Are you suggesting we do something illegal, Sammy?” Dean asked, intrigued.

“I’m not suggesting anything at all.”

Dean laughed as he walked around to the driver’s side. “Sammy is turning into quite the delinquent.”

Jody raised her eyes from the sheet of paper, watching as the boys left the cafeteria. She had to admit she was a little rattled by what they had said but also a

little fascinated. If they were so adamant about wanting the watch for themselves, then there had to be some validity to the story, right?

She knew she was right in saying she couldn't give it up, not yet anyway. She wanted Gabe back more than anything in the world and she was willing to do whatever it took, no matter the risk. Jody had to have her family back to the way it was. It was as simple as that simple.

Her husband, Shawn, had been distant since their son had died. He barely said a word to her anymore and when he did, it usually resulted in an argument. It left an ache in her heart so big that she was afraid of what would happen when it got to be too much.

Jody wanted it back to the way it was. She wanted those weekend camping trips, baseball games, and trips to the zoo. She wanted to come home from work and ask Gabe how his day had been at school. She wanted Shawn to come home and have that spark in his eye like he used to every time he saw her.

I have to do this, Jody thought. If I wasn't sure before, I am now.

Getting up from the table, she dumped her trash into a nearby waste receptacle, placing the plastic blue tray on top in the little slot. Spying one of her colleagues, she stopped him before he could sit down.

"Is something wrong, Jody?" he asked, concern in his eyes.

"I'm just having a really bad day," Jody answered. "Do you think you could cover my shift for me if I bailed now, Tom?"

Tom nodded, giving her shoulder a sympathetic squeeze. "You just do what you need to do to feel better. Don't try to force yourself to work if you're not ready, Jody. You know we're here for you if you need us."

Jody nodded with a ghost of a smile. "Thanks, Tom. I really appreciate it."

Grabbing her purse and jacket from her locker, Jody walked out of the hospital and to her car. The trip home passed by in a blur. Her mind was on one thing and one thing only. If she focused on anything else, she was afraid she would chicken out and not go through with it. She only hoped that Shawn wasn't at home right now.

Her hopes were dashed as she pulled into the driveway, spying her husband's pick-up outside the garage. She knew Shawn would never understand if she told him what she wanted to do. He would think she was insane and would probably divorce her on the spot.

There was only one thing that Jody could do and she hated herself for even going there. She would have to start a fight with Shawn, even though it was the last thing she wanted to do. It would just be a repeat of every night since Gabe's death but she knew what buttons she could push to get Shawn to leave.

Taking a deep breath, she got out of the car and walked inside the house. Shawn came out of the kitchen, looking at her, confused. "What are you doing home so early?" he asked.

Rolling her eyes, she threw her purse on the table, along with her keys. "I felt like it. Besides, it's probably for the same reason you refuse to go to work."

Shawn sighed. "Please, Jody. Let's not go there, okay? I don't want to talk about it."

Jody took a couple of steps closer to him. "That's just it, Shawn. You never want to talk—about anything. Do you think you're the only one who's hurting? Have you even thought about how I feel? I'm the one who couldn't save our son!"

"And I'm the one who let him get on the damn bike in the first place!" Shawn returned. "Don't you think the guilt is eating me up? If I had just said no, maybe Gabe would still be here with us!"

"I'm not going to fight you over this, Shawn," Jody said, turning the argument on him. "I refuse to do it."

Shawn reached into the hall closet and yanked out his jacket. "Then I'll make it easier for the both of us and leave."

Without another word, he grabbed his keys and stomped out of the house, slamming the door behind him.

Choking back a sob, Jody leaned against the wall. While a part of her was grateful for getting him out of the house, another part of her hated herself for starting the fight in the first place. And worst of all, she had twisted it and made him feel responsible for it. That was just wrong on so many levels and it made her feel cruel. She didn't want to bring back those memories and hurt him all over again.

But it had to be done.

Taking another moment or two to compose herself, Jody ran upstairs to her bedroom. Closing the door behind her and locking it, she wasted no time going to her dresser. Opening the top drawer, she moved around some items until she found a tissue-wrapped bundle in the back.

Walking over to her bed, she climbed up on it and scooted to the middle of the queen-sized mattress. Sitting cross-legged, she placed the package in front of her, just staring at it.

Do I really want to go through with this? Am I sure this is the right thing? Were the brothers right when they said it would be too dangerous? Did it really matter at this point?

Reaching out a shaking hand, she gingerly unwrapped the tissue, revealing a gleaming gold pocket watch. Picking it up, she turned it over in her hand, admiring the intricate etchings, entranced by the beauty of the old timepiece.

Taking a deep, nervous breath, Jody opened the watch and said, "I wish my son was still with me..."

A few hours later

It was times like these that Sam Winchester wished the Impala had a little more legroom. Stakeouts were the worst for him since it made him realize truly how tall he really was. He didn't like the cramped conditions and if he could sit outside the car without looking obvious and blowing his cover, he would. Then again, he could be sitting in some modern compact car so maybe the classic Chevy wasn't such a bad thing, after all.

At least they had had a good meal. One thing Enigma, Georgia had going for it was the little diner in the middle of town. It had advertised a good home-cooked meal that would make your grandma jealous and they hadn't lied. They'd both had the pot roast with potatoes, green beans, and cornbread and topped it off with a slice of apple pie.

Well, Dean had the pie anyway. His brother was a total sucker when it came to pie. It didn't matter what kind it was—as long as it resembled pie, it was good enough for him.

And now here they were, with full bellies, sitting in front of Jody Roberts' home. It was getting close to ten and the lights up and down the neighborhood were turning out for the night. All except the ones at the house they were watching. Every light was still on with no signs of going out anytime soon.

Sam could feel it in his gut—he knew that Jody was going to use the watch tonight, especially after talking with them about it. He couldn't help but think that they were the reason for it since they showed such eagerness to have it for themselves to use. If anything happened to Jody while using it, Sam wasn't sure if he could forgive himself, since he was the one who made Dean walk away.

Maybe Dean had been right about trying to talk her out of it. Maybe they should just go in and take it before she even had the chance to use it. The more Sam thought about it, the more that idea sounded like the right thing to do. After all, there hadn't been any evidence of it being used—no blinding light, no one running out, screaming.

Dean cut through the silence with a loud sigh. "Are we really doing the right thing here?" he asked, glancing over at Sam. "I mean, why in the world are we letting this chick play with something dangerous? Something that even we know nothing about?"

"Maybe it wasn't the right thing to do but we don't really have a choice, Dean. It's not like we can knock Jody out and swipe it from her."

Dean shrugged, pursing his lips as he thought about it.

"Dude, I'm not going to let you knock out a grieving woman just so you can get your hands on some magical watch."

"It would help us move on faster..."

Sam rolled his eyes, refusing to even answer that. Dean would steal candy from a baby if he was told to.

"You do know I'm right about this, don't you, Sam?" Dean asked. "I mean, this watch could be rooted in something very evil. We have no idea what it's capable of."

"Why else do you think I wanted to be here tonight?" Sam angled himself so he was looking at Dean. "If things go downhill, we can run in and stop it."

"What if we're not in time?"

"I don't want to think like that."

"You mean, you don't want the guilt added on to what you're already feeling for letting her keep it."

"Is that what you want me to admit?"

Dean didn't say anything for a few seconds. "I still don't like it," he admitted, changing the subject. "We're playing with death here and we know it usually ends bloody and sometimes in pieces."

"Well, there's a nice graphic for you."

"What would you do?" Dean asked.

"About what?"

"If the roles were reversed—if you were in Jody's place. What would you do?"

Sam just shrugged.

"You're telling me you haven't thought about it?"

Sam sighed. "Of course, I've thought about it, Dean, and it's not the first time, either. I would give anything to have another shot with Jessica. I would love to go back and be able to save her so we could have the life we dreamed about."

Dean nodded thoughtfully but didn't say anything.

"What about you?" Sam asked. "Would you do it to save Mom?"

Sam knew the answer to that already. He knew his brother would do anything to save their mother from that fateful night all those years ago.

"Wouldn't you like to have Mom in our lives?" Sam continued, not allowing Dean to answer. "Maybe if we could, then we wouldn't have to live this life anymore. Staying on the road, holing up in some no-name motel, constantly watching our backs for the next threat—we could have a normal life, Dean."

Before Dean could either agree or disagree, Sam's phone rang. Digging it out of his pocket, he clicked it on.

"Sam, is that you?" asked an excited female voice.

"Jody?"

"Yes!" she exclaimed in a loud voice before lowering it. "*I wanted to let you know that I'm ready to hand it over. Where are you guys?*"

"Um..." Sam stammered, caught off-guard. "Actually, we're sitting in front of your house."

"*Oh, that's great, then! Come on up to the door. I want you guys to see something!*"

Hanging up the phone, Sam looked over at his brother, his expression puzzled.

"Was that Jody?" Dean asked.

"Yeah, she seemed really happy. She said she wants us to come up to the door."

"Well, let's not keep the lady waiting." Dean pushed out of the car, Sam right behind him as they rushed up to the door.

Before they could even ring the doorbell, the door was opened and Jody was standing there with a boy of about seven or eight years of age.

What the hell? Sam thought, staring at the kid, not wanting to believe it. Jody smiled at them. “Sam...Dean...I'd like you to meet my son, Gabe.”

Part Three

Dean wasn't entirely sure how long he and Sam stood on the Roberts' front porch, mouths hanging wide open. It was a good thing it wasn't the middle of the day and the weather was cool or he was sure that a bug would have flown in by now. Mentally shaking himself, he ordered his brain to work and slowly he felt his mouth shut. Nudging Sam, he got his brother to snap out of his own trance as well.

There was no way in hell the kid standing in front of them was the same kid that had been killed two weeks ago. He looked like the picture of health—rosy cheeks, a radiant glow, and properly nourished. There was simply no denying it. For a second, it had Dean wondering if Jody was just playing some kind of joke on them, trying to have them believe that the watch really worked.

But the look on Jody's face said it all. There was love on that vibrant face as she looked down at her son and it poured out of her in waves. It was almost too sickly sweet for Dean's taste but no one could argue that Jody wasn't happy. It was a very different picture from what they'd seen earlier in the day, almost as if she'd had a double step in for her, like some Hollywood movie or something.

Gabe studied each of the brothers, a wide gap-toothed smile on his face before settling on Sam. “Are you a giant?” he asked with all the innocent wonder a child could possess.

“Um...no,” Sam stammered. He looked at Dean, confusion on his face like he didn't know what he could possibly say. Dean couldn't blame him—after all, what did you say to a kid who had been dead for the last two weeks?

After all, something like this wasn't supposed to be possible. In all the lore, there was nothing that said you could bring back a person from the dead without some form of dark magic. The dead usually meant spirits, or revenants, or some other supernatural creature. The boy in front of them didn't have a single scratch or blemish on him. There was nothing to suggest he had been hit by a car—no broken bones, no cuts, no bruises.

Dean didn't like this one bit—he didn't like not knowing what was truly going on. The hunter part of him was screaming to do something about this, do all the regular tests on the kid to see if he was supernatural or not. But the other part of him, the selfish part, told him to grab that watch and run. Get back to Stull and get their father out.

Thankfully, Dean was saved from saying or doing anything when a muscular man with close-cropped dark hair appeared from inside the house. “Honey, what's going on out here?”

Jody turned to smile at her husband. “Oh, Shawn...this is Sam and Dean. I treated Sam at the hospital a couple of days ago. They were just thanking me before they headed back home.” She gave the boys a pointed look, telling them they should just play along.

“Right,” Sam agreed, getting the hint immediately. “I had a bad case of food poisoning.”

Dean patted Sam on the back. “I warned him to stay away from the gas station burritos but he just wouldn't listen.”

“Okay...sure.” Shawn gave his wife a peck on the cheek. “Just don't stay out here too much longer. It's starting to get cooler.”

Jody nodded. “I'll be in in a couple of minutes.”

Shawn looked down at Gabe and smiled as he rubbed the young boy's tousled hair. "Come on, buddy. Let's go play some Wii before your mom makes us both go to bed."

"Awesome!" Gabe said, laughing merrily. Tossing a wave to the Winchesters, he followed his dad inside the house, closing the door behind him.

"Pretty crazy, huh?" Jody asked, grinning.

"That's one word for it," Dean agreed.

The woman moved away from the door, walking to the porch rail. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out the watch and pressed it into Sam's hand with a smile. "I hope you boys have the same luck I had and are able to help your father."

"How did you do it, Jody?" Sam asked softly as he looked down at the old timepiece.

Jody shrugged with a smile. "I went back and I made sure that Gabe didn't get back on his bike. I didn't go to work this time—we took him to the zoo."

"And that was it?" Dean asked. "By altering one thing, you were able to save your son's life? And nothing else happened?"

"Nothing," Jody said happily. "It's like it was a miracle or something."

"Definitely something..." the older Winchester mumbled.

"You're not worried about what could happen?" Sam inquired.

Jody's brows creased. "What do you mean?"

"Something different," Dean said. "You're throwing the balance off and usually when that happens, the universe does something to make up the difference."

"I'm happy, guys," Jody said. "It's all I want to think about right now. Nothing else matters at this point—I have my family back."

Sam nodded, holding up the watch. "Thanks for letting us have this."

Jody laid a hand on his arm and gave it a squeeze. "I really hope it works out for you and I truly mean that."

"Thanks."

Turning around, the woman went back into the house, laughter and squeals of delight being shut out as she closed the door behind her. The brothers walked back to the car in silence, neither knowing quite what to say. Dean was grateful for that—they both needed to wrap their heads around what just went on.

As he started the car, he saw Sam turning the watch over in his hands, staring at it as he rubbed his fingers over the floral etching. "So, what are you getting out of this whole thing now?"

Sam shook his head. "Not sure."

"Well, I'm definitely getting something," Dean answered. "Dude, I swear it's like we just walked into *Pet Sematary*—the chick even has a kid named Gabe."

"So?"

"It's creepy as hell, man!"

"At least we haven't seen any zombie animals yet," Sam pointed out.

"Not yet," Dean agreed, looking over at Sam. "But it'll come—just wait and see."

Sam grinned before turning serious once more. "When we get back to the motel, I'll try to do some research on this damn thing. Maybe call Bobby and see what he knows."

"Dude, it's closing in on midnight."

"And?"

"You're going to be stupid enough to call Bobby now?"

"You're right," Sam said quickly. "It can wait until morning."

The next morning

Sam figured he was running on nothing more than fumes at this point. If not that, then it had to be the coffee he kept downing like it was about to dry up all around him. He figured he was on at least his tenth cup by now but it was necessary if he

wanted to trudge ahead on the research. Sure, he'd only managed to sneak in three hours of sleep but the way he figured it, he could catch up on sleep when they got their dad back.

It hadn't been easy going—the Internet was coming up with nothing on the watch and the few books he had didn't mention anything valuable, except to say there may be items with the power to turn back time—if something powerful influenced them, that is.

Giving up on that avenue, Sam had called Bobby as soon as he'd deemed it safe to do so. The grizzled hunter had been grumpy, to put it nicely, but had promised to call Sam just as soon as he was able to find something for him.

In the meantime, Sam had taken a shower and was now sitting in an uncomfortable chair, trying to be as quiet as possible as his brother slept. Sam had to admit, it was nice to see Dean actually sleeping. Thinking back, Sam couldn't remember a night Dean had actually gotten to truly rest—at least, not since Stull. He wasn't about to take that away from his sibling—not for anything.

Picking up his coffee cup, Sam was about to take a sip when he saw it was once again empty. Walking to the carafe, he filled it up, adding cream and sugar until it was to his liking. Leaning against the counter, Sam looked out the tiny kitchenette window as he sipped at the brew.

He still couldn't get the events of the previous night out of his head, no matter how hard he tried. He couldn't help but be confused and intrigued by the shock they received. When they'd gotten back to the motel, Dean had confessed that it didn't make sense and that it bothered him and Sam couldn't help but agree. It screamed against everything they stood for as hunters and Sam was surprised that they were so willing to give the watch a try themselves.

Sam wasn't entirely sure that John would be happy with them when he found out what they did to get him back but the younger Winchester also didn't care. That's what family did—they went to any lengths necessary for their loved ones, no matter what the end price was. Family was all about sacrifice and Sam knew they were willing to sacrifice a lot—they'd done it before and they'd do it again.

It was just the Winchester way.

He also couldn't help but think that after they used it for their dad, maybe he could use it for himself. He wasn't lying to Dean when he said he'd consider using it to get Jess back. She had been taken from him way too soon and for some stupid agenda that he never agreed to be a part of. It wasn't fair to Jessica or him—they deserved to have that happy life they'd always dreamed about.

Sam wanted the chance to make it right. He'd tell her the truth this time, let her into his dark closet. He'd let her have the choice whether she wanted to stay with him or not and he knew he wouldn't blame her if she decided to run away as far as she could. It was one of the things that had always bothered him since her untimely death. He should have been honest with her from the start and maybe, just maybe, she could have protected herself.

Before he could think about it any further, his cell phone rang. Walking to the table, he hurried and picked it up, answering it before Dean woke up. "Bobby?"

The older man huffed down the receiver. "*You got someone else doing research for you first thing in the morning?*"

Sam ignored the barb. "Did you find out anything?"

"*I did.*"

"Okay...so, what is it?"

"*It's old—like over a century old.*" Bobby answered. "*It's known as the Rosenquist watch.*"

Sam frowned. "Why haven't I heard about it before?"

"*Two reasons: one, it was never supposed to get out and two, I have a hell of a lot more resources than you could ever dream of.*"

"That's why we keep you around," Sam answered as Dean crawled out of bed. Grabbing a t-shirt from the floor, Dean slipped it on and joined his brother at the small table. Sam pressed a button on his phone to enable the speaker so Dean could hear what Bobby was saying.

"Drew Rosenquist was a sorcerer back in the day," Bobby went on, ignoring Sam's jab. "He wasn't good at much but he could lay down some charms. In fact, there are rumored to be several items in existence, enchanted by his magic."

"Whatever happened to Rosenquist?" Dean asked.

"Oh, Sleeping Beauty decided to join us?"

Dean rolled his eyes, causing Sam to grin.

"Rosenquist was dumb enough to get killed by his own magic," Bobby explained. "The dumb ass tried to hex someone but it bounced back and hit him instead."

"Sounds like someone who didn't read the instruction manual to me," Dean commented.

"The guy was mostly a joke," Bobby agreed. "But when he got his ass in order, he could make some pretty bad things happen, though no one was willing to ever admit it."

"People never admit things they can't explain," Dean said.

Sam was ready to get things back on track. He knew if he didn't stop them, Dean and Bobby would talk all day about how illiterate people were when it came to the supernatural. "What did you find out about the watch?"

"The watch belonged to Drew's father, who died a week after the kid's thirteenth birthday," Bobby explained. "Word around town was that Drew took it pretty hard, became a recluse. In all of his alone time, he started playing around with some pretty dark crap, trying to find a way to bring papa back from the dead."

"Was he successful?"

"All of his attempts failed until he somehow managed to charm the watch. The kid actually managed to go back to save his father."

"Seriously?" Dean asked.

"Yeah, but it went wrong and instead of losing just his dad, his mom also kicked it."

Sam looked over at Dean. "That's the same thing that happened with Mikey. He tried to go back and save his brother, and the pawn shop owner died right along with Danny."

"That's usually how it works," Bobby said. "It's kind of a like a give-and-take deal."

Dean shook his head. "But nothing happened to Jody and her family when she got her son back. Wouldn't it have been pretty immediate if something was going to happen?"

"Not necessarily. That's the thing about magic—you never know when it will come back and bite you in the ass. So, either this woman is very lucky or the ball hasn't dropped yet."

"Hey, Bobby..." Sam began, hesitating. "Will the watch work on anything?"

Bobby sighed. *"You're wanting to use it for your daddy."*

The brothers just looked at each, letting their silence answer for them.

"I should've known something was up with the two of you," he grumbled. "There's two reasons you can't use this watch."

"What's that?" Sam asked.

"One, you're messing with some pretty dark magic—it takes a lot of juice to go back in time, much let alone death. You two should know how that usually ends, since history has a pretty annoying way of repeating itself."

"What's the second reason?" Dean asked.

"It only works in death."

"Meaning Dad would have to be dead in order for it to possibly work," Sam finished for Bobby.

"You got it."

“So, you’re telling us we still have no way of getting Dad out?” Dean demanded, standing up from the table and pacing the small space. “He’s still trapped God knows where until March twentieth?”

Bobby remained silent and the brother traded a fearful look. This was the last thing they wanted to hear. Sam really wanted to believe they had a way of helping their dad, but as usual, hope was being yanked away from them.

Once again we’re the cosmic joke.

Bobby cleared his throat. “*You boys need to destroy the watch as soon as possible. If you don’t wanna do it, bring it up here to me and I’ll take care of it. No one else needs to get their hands on it.*”

Dean absently scratched the back of his neck. “We’ll see what we can do about it. Thanks for your help, Bobby.”

“*You two be careful,*” Bobby said gruffly before hanging up.

Sam picked up the watch, staring at it thoughtfully, barely noticing as Dean began to throw clothes into his duffle bag. Just because they couldn’t use the watch on John didn’t mean they had to get rid of it. Why should they waste an opportunity when he could use it on Jess?

Why should Sam miss out on his only chance to reclaim his love?

Dean glanced up from his packing to see Sam staring at the old timepiece. “We’ll look for another way to get Dad out, Sammy.”

Sam shook his head, still staring at the trinket. “That’s not what’s bothering me.”

“What is it?”

One side of Sam’s lips curled into a sardonic smile. “You’re not going to like it.”

“Probably not,” Dean agreed. “But I wanna hear it anyway.”

“It would be a waste to destroy the watch,” Sam explained quietly. “Especially before we gave it a try ourselves.”

“No way, Sam. You heard what Bobby said.”

“I did. But Dean, it worked out for Jody and her family without any consequences,” Sam argued.

“We don’t know that for sure—a million different things could have happened after we left last night.”

Sam shook his head, willing his brother to listen to him. “You’re just being paranoid about the whole thing, Dean. You’re letting Bobby get to your head.”

“I’m being practical, Sammy. I’m not about to let you risk it all on some crazy-assed attempt to bring Jess back.”

“Am I being any different from you?” Sam countered. “Like I said before, I know you would use it for Mom in a heartbeat.”

“Maybe I would, but not like this,” Dean agreed. “What would happen if I used it and instead of just losing Mom, I would lose you or Dad? Or hell, all three of you?”

Sam didn’t say anything.

“It’s too dangerous, man, and I’m not about to let you do something so stupid,” Dean continued quietly. “I won’t let it happen.”

Sam nodded, letting Dean think he agreed with him. In reality, Sam knew he was going to give it a try, no matter what Dean said. Sure, the risk was huge but the reward would be better. Dean would just have to get over it and Sam knew, in time, his big brother would eventually forgive him.

Standing up from the table, Sam grabbed his jacket from the back of the chair he’d been occupying, surreptitiously slipping the pocket watch inside his pocket. “I’m gonna go grab some things we’ll need to destroy the watch.”

Dean sighed. “Come on, man...don’t—”

He didn’t get the chance to finish as Sam shut the door behind him.

* * * *

Dean felt slightly guilty as he watched his little brother leave the motel room. He knew Sam was still hurting from losing Jess a few years ago, even though he tried his best to hide it. Hell, it was the same way he felt about losing their mother—even after all these years, it still felt as if he'd lost her just yesterday.

But he knew he was right about what he'd said to Sam—he wouldn't risk it with the watch to get Mom back. That wasn't saying he wasn't willing to do it with John, considering he knew his dad wasn't dead. Right now, Dean was willing to go to any lengths to get him back, even if it meant making a deal with the Devil himself.

Dean had to draw a line somewhere and that line was when it crossed paths with death. He had done that a few years ago in Nebraska and he wasn't eager to repeat that performance. It had almost been too late for him and for some reason, the universe kept trying to rectify that little problem every chance it got.

Grabbing a couple of shirts from the floor, Dean shoved them into his large army green bag. A ringing cell phone interrupted him and he searched the room for his phone. Seeing it on the nightstand beside the bed, he checked it, but the cellular remained silent. Frowning, his gaze settled on the silver phone sitting on the table beside Sam's laptop.

"Dammit, Sammy..."

Picking it up, Dean answered. "Hello?"

"Sam?" asked a panicked female voice.

Dean frowned, thinking the voice sounded familiar. "Jody?"

"Sam?" she repeated.

"No, it's Dean." He could already feel a cold pit forming in his stomach, but he asked it anyway. "Jody, what's going on? What happened?"

"*He was... I just... He wanted... Oh, God...*" Jody said hysterically, sobs making her words complete gibberish.

"Jody, I need you to calm down and say it again," Dean said. "I can't understand you."

Jody took a deep, shuddering breath. "*It's Shawn—my husband. He—*" Jody broke down once more, her words drowned out by her wailing.

Dean closed his eyes in frustration. He was going to be on the phone with her all day if she kept breaking down like this. How did she expect him to help her if he couldn't understand a single word she was saying?

He didn't want to scare the distraught woman but he knew he had to get her under control if he wanted to get anything out of her. Taking a deep breath, he yelled, "Jody!"

The woman choked on a sob and immediately grew silent. "*Shawn was going out to get Gabe his favorite donuts from the local bakery. But he got into an accident.*"

The cold pit grew deeper in his stomach. "Is he okay?"

"No," Jody said, sobbing once again. "*He's gone—Shawn is gone.*"

"What about Gabe? Is he okay?"

"*He just lost his father,*" Jody answered, bitterly. "*How the hell do you think he's doing?*"

Dean said nothing, knowing the woman was lashing out at him because of grief.

Jody cleared her throat. "*I'm sorry... I shouldn't have snapped at you like that.*"

"Don't worry about it."

"*I should have listened to you, Dean. You tried to warn me about the watch and I just ignored you. I shouldn't have used it.*"

"You do realize what that means, right?" Dean asked. "If you hadn't used it, then you wouldn't have your son back."

Jody's response was the sound of the dial tone in Dean's ear. Hanging it up, he placed it back on the table. He hated that this had happened to her—he'd really wanted her to have the chance for the watch to work without having to pay a high price for it.

There was no doubt about it now—the watch had to be destroyed and Dean was more than happy to do the deed. He was tired of it screwing with everyone’s lives and making things worse. He wouldn’t allow another person to live through the grief that Jody was now experiencing.

Figuring he would find the watch and get things ready for when Sam returned, Dean searched the table for the gold timepiece. Moving things around, he was confused to find that it was nowhere in sight.

I could have sworn I saw Sammy looking at it after we talked to Bobby...

Thinking Sam may have placed in a safe hiding spot, Dean picked up his brother’s duffle bag and searched through it, spilling clothes out onto the bed. He grew more frantic as his search was turning up empty.

“There’s no way in hell a watch just disappears,” he muttered in frustration. Dean searched every nook and cranny in the motel room, but the pocket watch was simply nowhere to be found.

Sighing, Dean let his eyes slowly move around the room until they settled once again on the table and on Sam’s cell phone. Slowly, the wheels began to turn in his head and things started to make sense to him.

Sam had been too agreeable and quiet before he’d walked out. He’d left his cell phone here because he didn’t want Dean to find him and disrupt him. The watch wasn’t in the room because Sam had it with him.

“The stupid son of a bitch is going to use it,” Dean muttered angrily, pounding his fist against the wall. Grabbing his jacket from the chair, he stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

* * * *

Sam pulled his jacket tighter around his body, darting glances behind him, figuring Dean would be after him soon enough. It was only a matter of time before his brother realized what he’d done and Sam knew he’d be pissed at him. But it didn’t matter—Sam knew what he had to do and he couldn’t let anyone—not even his brother—stop him from doing what he believed was right.

The weather was fading fast, the overcast sky seeming to become darker with every passing minute. Sam was sure that rain was imminent and it didn’t help with it already being so chilly out. A slow fog was creeping in, giving the day an even more somber mood. Sam hoped it wasn’t an omen for what he was about to do.

Turning down an alley, he walked all the way to the end. When he got to the wide opening, he glanced around, making sure that he was really alone. Satisfied that he was, Sam pulled out the pocket watch, holding it in his hand as he stared at it.

Taking a deep, calming breath, he opened it up.

“I wish I could go back to before Jess died...”

Part Four

Sam was sure his mind was playing tricks him when he opened his eyes. It was the only explanation he could come up with for standing in the middle of a living room—in particular, the living room in the tiny apartment he used to share with Jess back in Palo Alto. Maybe he was dreaming. Maybe he’d fallen asleep back in the motel room and he was now in the middle of a very vivid dream.

After all, it wouldn’t be the first time he’d dreamed of the apartment. There had been so many times after the fire he’d dreamed of the place with different scenarios: getting there in time, saving Jess; getting there and the both of them dying that fateful night. The one that had haunted him the most was actually watching Jess die over and over again, knowing he could have prevented it if he’d just been honest with her all along.

Sam wasn't exactly sure how to take this if it wasn't a dream. As it was, the only thing he could do right now was to stare, open-mouthed at everything. It was exactly as he remembered it: the thrift store furniture, the multitude of pictures of him and Jess that she'd insisted on displaying, even the faint film of dust on the small coffee table.

Walking to the table, Sam wiped his finger over it, leaving a clear path on the wooden surface. Rubbing his finger against his thumb, he watched the dust particles fly off into the air. "It's not possible..."

The young hunter's brows knitted together as a sudden aroma filled the air. Sniffing, he detected the delicious scent of chocolate chip cookies and it made the situation seem even more real to him. They were his favorite cookies that Jess used to make for him all the time, especially when he was feeling stressed or he'd left her for any length of time. Every time he'd come into the apartment, they would be sitting there, waiting for him on the table.

"This can't possibly get any crazier," Sam muttered as he slowly walked towards the kitchen. Stopping in the doorway, he felt slightly lightheaded as he saw Jess standing there, taking a tray of cookies out of the oven.

It worked! Jess is actually here! I can really save her this time and we can live the life we wanted!

He could only stand there, watching as she went about her business without a care in the world. Placing the tray from the oven on the counter, she turned around to grab another tray to take its place. Looking up, she dropped the tray onto the counter, a huge smile on her face.

"Oh, my God! You're back!" she squealed as she ran into his arms.

For a second, Sam didn't know what to do. Slowly, his arms tightened around her and he held on for dear life, afraid that if he let go, it would turn out to be a dream. Lifting her up, he pressed his face to her head, taking in the wonderful aroma of her honeysuckle scented blonde hair. Reluctantly, Sam let her back onto the floor.

"You're early!" she said happily before stepping back and hitting him lightly on the chest. "Why didn't you call? I would have made you something to eat."

Sam swallowed down the lump in his throat, afraid his voice would betray the raw emotion hiding there. "I wanted it to be a surprise," he said, trying to fight back the tears threatening to fall.

Jessica frowned. "What's wrong?"

Sam shook his head. "It's nothing. I'm just really happy to be home."

"Are you sure?"

The young man didn't answer as he bent down, taking her face between his hands before he kissed her longingly and tenderly. *This feels right! I almost forgot what it felt like, it's been so long...*

A few moments later, Sam rose to his full height, gazing down at Jess with love and passion in his eyes.

The young woman grinned up at him, a little breathless. "I'm thinking you should go away more often, especially if you come home like this every time."

Sam laughed, shaking his head. "I never want to leave you again."

* * * *

Dean felt as if he could kill Sam, the young man was so angry.

How could Sam just up and leave like that? Why was he being so reckless? Why was he so willing to risk it all for something that would most likely turn around and bite him on the ass? Had it really gotten that bad for his little brother? Was Sam's grief still so deep for Jess? Had Dean caused Sam to run off like this after being so negative about the watch?

Dean honestly hasn't thought Sam would run off and do something like this. Sam was supposed to be the level-headed one, the rule follower when it came to the two

of them. If anything, it should be Dean running off on some wild goose chase. Sam was the one who should have been sitting in the motel room, weighing the pros and cons of the decision.

But then again, Dean knew that grief could make a person do some incredibly crazy things, even Sam. In both instances with the watch, the person had done what any normal person would have done—they'd used it to try to save their loved ones. If you asked anyone about something they would love to do all over again, nine times out of ten, it would most likely be to go back and try to save someone they loved and cared about.

So why should Sam be any different than them? Didn't he deserve his chance at happiness? Didn't he deserve to be happy, once and for all? Didn't Sam deserve to have the love he'd lost with Jess? Dean wanted Sam to have all of that and more—all he'd ever wanted was for his kid brother to be happy and safe.

Still, it didn't make this right. Sam just couldn't run off and do something rash that could possibly change everything they'd been through. It wasn't right and Dean wasn't about to sit back and do nothing.

Keeping one hand on the steering wheel as he navigated through the streets of Enigma, Dean used his other one to pull his cell phone out of his pocket. Hitting a button, he called up Bobby, praying that the old hunter could somehow help him get his brother back.

"Dean?"

"I can't find him, Bobby."

"Who?"

"Sam—he's gone."

"What the hell are you talking about? I just got off the phone with you boys not even an hour ago," Bobby said. *"How do you lose someone as big as Sam?"*

Dean rolled his eyes. "Magic, I guess."

"Are you being smart with me, boy?"

Dean pulled the Impala over to the side of the road, throwing it into "Park". Driving was getting him nowhere, since the town was so small and there were so many places to hide that a car couldn't get through. He'd have to go by foot if he wanted to find Sam.

"I'm sorry, Bobby," Dean relented, getting out of the car. Looking above, he saw gray clouds were pressing in, bringing with it the promise of rain. "We kind of had a small disagreement about the watch and he took off running."

"I thought you boys understood that you couldn't use it for your daddy?"

"We did—we still do. But that's not what Sammy wants to use it for."

"Then what the—" Bobby stopped speaking as realization dawned on him. *"His girlfriend?"*

"Yeah."

"Damn idjit..."

Dean sighed. "You can call him any name you want later but right now I need to know what the hell to do," he said in a gruff voice.

"What are you doing right now?" Bobby asked, letting Dean's attitude slide by.

"I'm searching the alleys in town," Dean explained as he darted into the first alley he came to. "I figure Sammy would wanna go somewhere that offered a little bit of privacy and where he could hide from me."

"You do realize he could have already used it, don't ya?"

Dean turned back towards the street when the alleyway came up empty. "That's even more reason for me to find Sam. I just got off the phone with Jody, that chick who used the watch last. Her husband is dead."

"Dammit!"

"Yeah, exactly," Dean agreed as he turned down the next alleyway. "This whole thing is jacked, Bobby. How can an old piece of crap cause so much damn trouble?"

"That's the beauty of a cursed object."

“Well, it’s—” Dean stopped as something golden on the ground caught his eye. Jogging up to it, he bent down and saw that it was the watch, the case opened up. Glancing around frantically, it was apparent that his little brother was nowhere to be found.

“Dean, what’s going on? What happened?” Bobby was asking in his ear.

Dean picked up the phone and stood up as thunder rumbled overhead. “I found the watch but I don’t see Sammy anywhere.”

“Meaning he had to have used it.”

The young man closed his eyes in frustration. “Yeah, Bobby, I kinda figured that one out for myself,” he growled. “What the hell am I supposed to do about it now?”

“I’m gonna let this little attitude of yours slide for now because I know you’re worried about your brother,” Bobby said, gruffly.

“That’s generous of you,” Dean said, irritated, knowing that Bobby would end up making him pay for it later.

Bobby sighed. *“You’re gonna have to destroy the watch in order to break the spell.”*

“That’ll get Sam back?”

“I’m not a hundred percent on that,” Bobby admitted, his voice a little unsure.

“I’m gonna need something a little more absolute than that,” Dean griped.

“Well, I’m sorry, but it’s the only thing I have right now,” Bobby barked, making Dean think he’d finally reached his limit with the grizzled man. *“Are you really willing to risk it by not giving it a try?”*

Dean sighed, knowing he wasn’t about to risk not doing anything in order to get Sam back. He just didn’t like it when people were right about him. “I’ll call you back when I’m finished and I have Sam back.”

Flipping his phone shut, he shoved it into his pocket, ignoring it as it began to ring. Holding the watch between his hands, Dean once again wondered how such an old heirloom could cause all the trouble it had.

“Well, it’s time to put a stop to all this craziness,” he said as thunder once again reverberated around him.

Lifting it up above his head, Dean closed his eyes. Please let this work and bring Sammy back.

Opening his eyes, Dean slammed the timepiece to the ground, shattering it into large pieces against the pavement.

* * * *

No matter how wrong it was, this felt right to Sam, sitting next to Jess on the small sofa in the living room. It felt natural for her to be leaning against his chest, holding his hand and caressing it softly as they just sat there in silence. Sam knew for Jess, this was like any other day. But for him, it was a dream come true.

It felt like it was the first day they had met—it felt new to Sam, yet it was so comfortable, so familiar to him. He couldn’t remember how many times he’d sat with Jess, just like this, holding each other’s hand and wanting nothing more than to be in each other’s company. Everything else he’d been through in the past few years simply vanished—he finally felt the sunlight coming into his life.

“So, how did it go with your brother?” Jess asked softly, breaking the contented silence.

He’s probably extremely pissed off now...

It took Sam a second to realize she was talking about four-years-ago-Dean and not current Dean. “It was good.”

“Did you find your dad?”

“Yeah,” Sam answered. *Only to lose him once again,* he added silently.

Sam really didn’t want to talk about that. He didn’t want to bring up his brother and father because it would only make him feel guilty for using the watch. He didn’t want

to feel that way—he didn't want it to tarnish the happiness he felt now with Jessica. Why shouldn't he have something good happen to him for once? Hadn't he paid enough with everything he'd been through?

But there was something he did need to talk to Jess about. He'd promised himself if he'd ever gotten the chance to do it over again, he would be honest with her. She deserved to know the truth about everything and maybe, just maybe, it would keep her safe the second time around.

At least, that's what Sam hoped.

Taking a deep breath, he said, "Jess...there's something you need to know."

Jess angled her body to look up at him. "What is it, Sam?"

"There's some things you need to know about me—things that I've never told anyone before."

"Sam, you're scaring me..." she said, frowning at him.

"Don't be scared, Jess. I don't know if I could stand it if you were scared of me," Sam said, pleading with her. He took a deep breath before continuing. "Jess, I'm a hunter."

Jess laughed. "What? You mean like Bambi or Thumper?"

Sam shook his head. "I hunt...other things."

"Okay, that's not cryptic at all."

"You remember all those ghost stories you would hear at slumber parties? Things you dreamed about but your parents told you it was nothing but your imagination?"

Jess shrugged. "Sure, but who doesn't?"

"They're what I hunt—what we hunt—my family and I," Sam explained. "All those things you feared the most in the dark, they're very real."

"Are you sure you're feeling okay, Sam?"

She's not believing a word I say. She thinks I have completely lost my mind. "Jess, I'm being honest with you—I wouldn't make something like this up. I have never lied to you and I'm not about to start now, especially with something like this."

Jess shook her head. "But Sam, this is crazy. I mean, are you listening to what you're saying?"

"Jess, you have always wondered why I never say anything about my family. This is why—because I didn't want you to know about the skeletons in my closet."

"You're telling the truth about this," Jess said, turning around to face Sam.

"Yes."

"Why now?"

"Because...because there are things out there—really bad things that are so much worse than anything you've ever heard," Sam explained. "And they'd do anything to get what they want. Kill anyone who stood in their way, like—"

Jess cupped Sam's cheek in her hand and made him look at her. "Like what, Sam?"

Sam cleared his throat. "My mom."

"But you said your mom died in a fire," Jess said, confused, letting her hand drop back to her side.

Sam nodded. "She did...but it was caused by a demon."

"Excuse me?"

"A demon," Sam repeated. "A demon killed my mom. This same demon, he's after me, too. And he'll do anything he can to get to me."

Realization seemed to dawn on Jess's face. "Even come after me."

Sam didn't say anything.

"That's why you're telling me this, isn't it, Sam?" Jess asked.

"Yes, because I need you to be safe. I need you to be with me for a very long time. I need to have a life that has you in it."

Jess studied him for a long while, making Sam nervous that he'd scared her too much, that she was going to take off and run away from him forever. Slowly, her hand moved up to cup his cheek and she leaned forward to kiss him.

"Tell me what I need to do," she said softly.

All of a sudden, Sam felt as if his body was being pulled in different directions before once again finding himself in the alley back in Enigma. He looked around frantically, his chest tight as Jess was nowhere in sight. Panic began to set in and a feeling of dread raced through his tall frame.

This isn't right! I'm supposed to be with Jess—I was just holding her in my arms, for God's sakes. I was going to tell her the truth about everything—she was going to be safe and with me!

"Sammy?"

Sam's head jerked around at the sound of his brother's voice. *Tell me you didn't do this, Dean! Tell me you wouldn't be so cruel to me, your own brother!*

"Are you okay?"

The younger Winchester didn't even think as he launched himself up from the ground and charged his brother, landing a solid right hook against Dean's jaw.

"Dude, what the hell?" Dean demanded as his head jerked back from the sudden impact. He barely had time to react before Sam was coming after him again.

"Why did you take her away from me again, Dean? Why couldn't you just leave me alone for once? Are you really that lonely that you have to make me feel the same way?"

Dean stepped out of Sam's way, shaking his head as he held up a placating hand. "Sam, you're not thinking about this logically here."

Sam swung another punch at Dean but his sibling ducked out of Sam's reach. "I could have been happy with her again, Dean! I was going to tell her everything!"

"Sam, you're not listening to yourself. You need to stop," Dean said, keeping Sam in his sightline as the younger Winchester circled him.

Sam could feel himself literally shaking with anger. "It wasn't your choice to make! This was my chance to make things right with Jessica."

"Sammy, I'm begging you to calm down here. If you can do that, then you'll see it was a mistake."

"No, Dean!" Sam yelled before going after Dean again.

Dean was ready for him this time. Before Sam could even get close enough to land another punch, Dean threw one of his own, hitting him square in the jaw. Sam dropped to the ground beside the shattered watch.

"It wasn't right, Sammy," Dean said, breathlessly as he looked down at Sam. "You wouldn't have been able to save her without a price to pay."

"You don't know that," Sam bit out as he rose to his feet. The glare he sent Dean could have melted iron.

"Jody called while you were out on your little adventure—her husband's dead, Sammy." Dean sadly shook his head. "It was the price she had to pay. Now tell me—do you think it was worth it?"

"I could have been different," Sam went on stubbornly. "It could have worked."

"No, Sam."

"Quit telling me no, Dean! Just quit talking to me!"

Pushing past his brother, Sam stormed down the alley. He had to get away from Dean before he ended up saying something he couldn't take back. He just needed time and space right now and hoped to hell Dean understood and respected that. Sam just couldn't let Dean see him crumble, not like this. He refused to let his brother have that little victory.

"Sam—"

Sam didn't even hear Dean as the thunder overhead drowned out his brother's voice. Feeling as if his body was finally zapped of all the anger and adrenaline he felt, the young man fell to his knees, not caring about the sudden pain to his knees as he did so.

Sam didn't even notice his brother standing in the background, watching him, allowing him to have this moment to himself.

There simply was no holding them back anymore as the tears began to fall down his cheeks in earnest. And as if the heavens were right there grieving with him, the gray storm clouds let out a drenching rain.

END