

A photograph of a long, brightly lit laundry room. The room is filled with rows of industrial-grade washing machines and dryers. The machines are arranged in a long line, receding into the distance. The lighting is warm and yellowish, creating a clean but somewhat sterile atmosphere. The floor is made of light-colored tiles. The text 'LAUNDRY DAY' is overlaid in large, bold, red letters across the center of the image.

# **LAUNDRY DAY**

***BY  
CAFFIENEKITTY***

**Characters:** Sam, Dean, assorted plot-relevant OC's

**Classification:** Humour, multi-part, GEN

**Rating:** PG13? K+? Nothing that couldn't have been televised.

**Warnings:** None. Smatterings of spoilers for Season 1 episodes up to and including "Nightmare"

**Word Count:** 17152-ish words

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**A/N:** There's a little bit of a shout-out here and there (if you blink you may miss them) to BigPink's "Snuggle Bitch" which if you haven't read yet, go read it!

**Timeline:** Set between the Season 1 episodes "Nightmare" and "Benders"

**Summary:** The Winchester boys do their laundry. Sounds boring, doesn't it... Sam and Dean can only wish it was.

*Translation Available - Russian. Linked at bottom of [LiveJournal Fanfic Index Page](#)*

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## Part 1

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"It's 'coz of your stupid oatmeal."

"Just drop it, okay?"

"No, you and your stupid oatmeal delayed my coffee. What the hell were you thinking, Sam?"

Sam sighed, pulling his wet clothes from the laundromat washer and stuffing them into one of the last two available dryers. "I thought it would be more like real food for a change."

"Oatmeal made in a coffee machine?"

"Oatmeal made *with* a coffee machine," Sam said, closing the dryer and feeding in four quarters. "There's a difference. It's a student res thing. You boil the water in the coffee pot, pour it on the oatmeal..."

"I don't care, Martha Stewart!" Dean's washer spun to a stop, door lock clicking open. He pulled out a mangle of grey t-shirts and white boxers and pitched them into the lower dryer, landing with a wet 'splack'. "The bottom line is you took over the motel room coffee machine to make oatmeal, and I haven't had any coffee yet!"

"Neither have I!"

"But you've had oatmeal!"

"You said you didn't want any!"

"I didn't, I hate oatmeal. Healthy crap, who needs it!" Dean shoved the last of his clothes into the bottom dryer and shut the door.

"You know, if you hadn't been so busy tearing my head off about oatmeal for the past twenty minutes, one of us could have gone and gotten coffee."

"That's not the point."

"Really." Sam grinned, sensing a logical flaw. "So what *is* the point?"

Dean glanced over at his brother, then back at the dryer, feeding quarters into the slot. "Just want to get back on the road. Get in and out of Minnesota before the snow flies."

"Dean, it's May."

"Yeah, well, it'll be December by the time you get your ass in gear, Grandma," Dean stood. "I'm gonna go gas up." He grabbed keys and wallet from his almost-empty duffel bag and headed for the exit. "All I'm saying is next time, make the damn coffee first, or better yet, *just* make coffee, and pour that on your friggin' oatmeal." The laundromat door coasted shut behind him.

Dean gone, Sam noticed the patrons of the busy laundromat had been watching the brothers with varying degrees of alarm and amusement. He grimaced and shrugged apologetically at them, then sat to wait while his laundry cavorted in the dryer.

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When Dean returned with two coffees and a bag of gas station donuts, the last of the morning rush had left and the laundromat was empty except for Sam and a dejected looking attendant pushing a mop around. Sam had his laundry out on a table, sorting his socks and looked up as Dean came around the bank of washing machines. "What took you so long, I thought you were in a rush or something?"

"All set to go." Dean set a coffee next to Sam and put the other cup and the bag of donuts at the other end. "Gassed up, cleaned out, fluids checked, even fixed that loose wire on the headlight." Dean crouched and opened the bottom dryer door.

Sam folded another pair of socks to the sound of the attendant's mop in the far corner.

"Hey... Sam...?" Dean's voice was low and challenging.

"What?"

Dean stood up, expression inscrutable, holding a pair of boxer shorts,

Sam snorted and grinned widely. "Ooo. Very nice. Love the color. Cherry blossom pink is it?"

"Dude, seriously," said Dean, dropping the tinted underwear on the sorting table and hauling the rest of the load out of the dryer, "if you want to start a prank war, you should start smaller, 'coz it'll only get nasty from here."

"I keep telling you I'm not twelve, Dean. You think I'd deliberately do something like that?"

"...maybe," he said, sorting through the pile.

Sam grinned again. "I mean, not that it isn't funny as hell... but it wasn't me. You must've

got something red mixed in."

"I don't *have* anything red, except maybe this," Dean plucked at the collar of the rust-brown shirt he was wearing. "Besides, looks like it's not the whole load, just my damn drawers."

"Well, that's good then, at least it's not something you have to worry about people seeing."

"You're thinking of *your* underwear, Sammy. Trust me, my underwear has a very select and appreciative audience."

Sam rolled his eyes. "Spare me."

Dean pulled a grey t-shirt out of the pile and scrutinized it for hints of offending pinkness. "Look, if this is about me ragging your damn oatmeal..."

"Would you just shut up about the oatmeal already? I didn't touch your laundry."

Dean stared intently at Sam for a moment.

"What?"

"Nothing." Dean went back to rooting through his clothes. "I woulda swore nothing was pink when it went in the dryer."

"You probably couldn't tell on most of your clothes." Sam stuffed the last of his clothes into his duffel bag. "Ninety percent of your stuff is dark grey, brown and-"

"-Aw, no!" Dean said in dismay holding up a black tour t-shirt from some rock band.

"-and that looks like melted crayon," said Sam, grinning again.

"Son of a bitch!" Dean glared at the offending brightly coloured lines of waxy goop.

"There must've been kids in here earlier, they left crayons in the dryer, you didn't check it because you were in a hurry, and there you are." Sam gestured at the pile of clothes. "Pink underwear and a wrecked t-shirt."

"But nothing else is wrecked. Crayon would've been all over everything. It's only on one side of this one shirt," he said, shaking the article in question at Sam. "It's either you or the damned fabric softener bear," his voice dropped to a mutter, "and I'm pretty sure I shot that furry little bitch."

"What?"

"Nothing, never mind. It has to have been you."

"How could it be me?" Sam said, starting to get annoyed at the way Dean kept waving the shirt like it was a bullfighter's flag. Then he frowned and squinted at the shirt for a second.

"I don't know , maybe you-"

"-Hold on." Sam grabbed the shirt from Dean and laid it on the sorting table, pulling and folding to match up the crayon lines, streak to streak, color to color, and took a step back from the table to examine the result.

The melted crayon on the shirt clearly spelled out, in big childish block capital letters, "HELP ME"

Barely audible over the squishing of the attendant's mop on the other side of the laundromat, a quiet sob came from the machine, easily mistaken for a dryer gusting to a halt, but none of the machines were running.

Dean looked from his laundry to the empty lower dryer. "You have *got* to be frigging kidding me..."

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## Part 2

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A quick trip to the car later, Dean crouched in front of the dryer, looking at the squeaking, flashing former Walkman in his hand. "More than just background interference from the motors and stuff in this place, but not a lot more... three lights..."

"So that's a definite maybe then?" Sam said, arms crossed, watching the attendant. The small, balding man was pushing a mop around the floor on the other side of the laundromat. He glanced up at the two of them, looked back down quickly when he saw Sam watching him, and moved another six inches further away, dragging the mop around near the door. *Much more of that and he'll end up outside, mopping the sidewalk.*

"It's a definite something, and if nothing else, it gets you off the hook for wrecking my clothes," said Dean, stowing the EMF reader and looking up at Sam. "Whaddaya think?"

"I think that patch of floor over there is getting way too much attention."

"Hm." Dean stood. "Time to grill the help?"

"Uh huh." Sam said, uncrossing his arms and ambling over. Dean grabbed his crayoned t-shirt and followed.

The attendant seemed to be trying to rub a hole through the tiles near the door, perhaps to disappear into.

"Excuse me..." began Sam, tapping the ardent mopper on the shoulder.

The attendant jumped and turned to face Sam. "Machines-are-used-at-the-customers-risk-staff-is-not-responsible-for-damage-to-clothing-from-use-of-the-machines!" the man said all in one breath, looking up at Sam with a tense panicky smile and backing away a step. He gripped the mop like he was prepared to defend himself with extreme incompetence.

Sam and Dean exchanged a glance. "I'm gonna take a wild guess here and say you get a lot of complaints?" Dean ventured.

"There's some that do, uh, take extreme exception to these things when they happen. Like the bikers last month..." He looked from Dean to Sam and back to Dean again. "You used dryer seven B, right? It's, uh... not as reliable as the rest."

"Didn't see any out of order sign."

"We-ell..." the attendant drew the word out, "we put them up but they just don't stay on. There's a lot of traffic, lots of kids running around. And it only does this every so often,

about once every ten loads or so. Locals know not to use it unless they're desperate or feeling lucky."

Dean held up the shirt in one hand. "And us non-locals can play laundry roulette?"

Still holding the mop between himself and the brothers, the attendant looked at them guardedly. "Most non-locals are coming from camping or fishing at one of the parks by the lake. They don't usually care what colour their laundry comes out as long as it's got the mud and fish guts off."

"Why don't you just get it repaired then?" Sam said, doing a bit of fishing himself by asking the obvious.

"You think we haven't tried? Management won't put anymore money into trying to fix it when all the repair guys say there's nothing wrong with it, and they won't remove it all together because..." The man shrugged, still keeping a grip on his mop. "It's fine most of the time, still makes money. They already replaced the whole thing back in 2001."

"Hold on, lemme get this straight," said Dean, frowning. "The thing's been replaced and the new one is messing up people's clothes the same way as the old one did?"

"Not always the same way. Weird colours, waxy deposits, rips and tears, oily spots... It's just..." he shrugged, "...quirky."

"Quirky." Dean repeated sourly, looking at Sam.

"Yep," said the attendant, almost cheerfully.

"And no one has any theories on why it's doing this?"

"Nope, all the repair guys say it's all perfectly fine, just like the one it replaced." The attendant laughed. "Though I guess some of the locals say it's cursed or haunted or something."

"Really," said Sam, fishing again. "Why's that?"

"We-ell... Some kid died in the laundromat back in the eighties, before the chain bought it out. Dunno much about it, but some people say the kid's ghost is still around..."

"Hunh."

"... but they're usually the same people that leave their annotated copies of the 'Weekly World News' behind."

"Heh. Yeah. Look, um..."

"Carl."

"Carl, me and my brother are..." Sam tried not to let a slight mental wince show on his face, "...appliance repair technicians. Mind if we take a look at the dryer for you?"

"I told you, management won't pay for-"

"No charge." Dean added, backing Sam's play. "Sort of a public service. Keep other people from having the same problem we did. You want to keep your customers happy?" He gave the attendant a grin with lots of teeth.

"Sure, I guess... as long as management doesn't find out," Carl shrugged, "but every repair service in Alger County has had a look at that thing, so I don't know what you'll be able to do."

"Oh, you'd be surprised," said Dean.

"We just need to go get our tools and, ah, technical data," said Sam, "Probably be back in an hour or so."

"Okay, whatever makes you happy, but don't worry too much about it if you find nothing wrong with the dryer. And you're doing this entirely at your own risk." He pointed to the large sign on the wall that re-iterated in two inch tall Arial Black the laundromat policy of not being responsible for anything that might happen to customers or their clothing on the premises, then walked away, rolling the mop and bucket and mumbling about tourists.

"Nice to see customer service isn't a lost art," Dean muttered sarcastically as they went back to the folding table to gather up their gear.

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The local library turned out to be a two room storefront less than a block away, and relatively noisy thanks to a story-time circle of preschoolers. Sam flicked through pages of the local paper on the library's only microfiche reader, wishing, not for the first time, for a context-sensitive search function.

Sam glanced over at Dean, "Thought you were in a rush to get to Minnesota?"

"There's something we have to do here now. Minnesota can wait a day," said Dean, leaning back in a chair, feet up on the table. "Got anything yet?"

"People's laundry getting screwed with doesn't exactly make the front page, even in a place this size."

"I thought you checked this town out, Sam?"

"I did. No unusual deaths, strange animal sightings or cases of sudden insanity recently anywhere here or within the next three counties we're passing through, and Dad never flagged the area for anything." Sam looked over at Dean from the fiche reader. "Wouldn't hurt you to do some research once in a while."

"Hey, I was checking stuff out at the library in Iowa!"

"Yeah, mostly that junior librarian."

Dean grinned. "I tell you, if all librarians were that hot..."

"I repeat, spare me." Light from the fiche reader flickered across Sam's face "Here we are... April 18th, 1983. Seven-year old Michael Hussman found dead inside a dryer... According to witness reports he was left unattended in the laundromat... Playing in a dryer, someone started it up without checking... Ruled an accidental death by authorities... Laundromat owners will pay for burial in Pine Grove Cemetery."

"Ah, there's that great customer service again." Dean brought his feet down off the table. "Gotta love a laundromat that'll pay for a kid's funeral."

"That looks like all there is," Sam scrolled forward. "Small funeral announcement the following week, laundromat up for sale the week after that. Nothing else."

"So, it's like the guy said, a kid died in the dryer?"

"Back in 1983."

"One kid. On his own, nobody murdered him, dead by stupidity?"

"Sounds like."

"So what's he doing still hanging around turning my underwear pink?"

Sam leaned back and studied the screen. "I don't know, maybe he just hasn't figured out he's dead yet."

The story-time circle broke out in raucous shrieking at some part of the book being read. Both the Winchesters looked toward the double handful of giggling children sitting around the librarian.

"You're sure no one else died in the laundromat, Sam? No one hurt or gone insane?"

"Nothing in the papers."

Dean looked down at the floor for a second before he looked back at his brother. "Okay then. Where's the kid buried?"

Sam twiddled the knob on the fiche reader. "Maybe we don't need to take this one out. He's not hurting anyone."

"So far. What if the kid gets bored, decides to do something else, start a fire, maybe take a couple little playmates..."

"It's just... I dunno, Dean. The usual salt and burn treatment seems a bit... harsh."

"You're only saying that cause he didn't mess with your underwear."

"Come on Dean, you have to admit, so far this is probably the nicest ghost we've run across."

Dean rolled his eyes.

"What?" Sam said, "I mean it's not killing people, it's not driving anyone crazy-"

"Cept me."

"-And now me by association. It's just pulling some relatively harmless pranks."

"Ya know, I'd agree with you, Sam, except for what he wrote on my shirt." Dean leaned forward slightly and met Sam's eyes. "The kid wants help, and if you and me don't help him, who the hell else will?"

"Hm," said Sam, falling silent. "What about something else, to just put the kid to rest?"

"What do you mean, some kind of ritual maybe?"

"Yeah. Since he's asking for help, he won't be fighting to hang around."

"Neither would I if I'd spent the first twenty-three years of my afterlife stuck in a dryer." Dean rubbed at a scuff on the table, thinking. "He's kinda poltergeisty... what about that stuff we used in Lawrence?"

"Hm. I don't think it's the same thing here, but it could probably be adapted."

"Call Missouri, see what she thinks?"

Light flickered on Sam's face as he watched the fiche re-spool into its case. "Maybe." He took the spool from the machine and put it back in its box. "I took notes though, they're

probably good enough to start from. I know it used angelica root and van van oil for sure."

"Sounds like a shopping trip," said Dean, standing.

"You go ahead, I'll see what else I can find that might work and text you," said Sam, turning around and putting the laptop on the table, frowning.

"What is it?" said Dean, noting Sam's expression.

"I just..." Sam shook his head. "Nothing. Just seems... Nothing." He looked up at Dean. "Best bet in this area would be a health food store."

"No, really? I was just gonna stop by the Seven-Eleven on the corner. I heard Van-Van Oil is the slushie flavour of the month. You sure you're okay?"

"Bite me."

"Fair enough," Dean smirked, "Want me to pick you up some wheat-grass and pomegranate juice at the health food store? Maybe a tofu smoothie?"

In deference to being in a library, Sam did not throw anything at the departing Dean.

"Just feels like we're missing something..." Sam murmured as the laptop booted.

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### Part 3

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About half an hour later, Sam's phone rang. He shifted his backpack around to retrieve it, but kept walking.

"Hey Dean."

"Hey. I got your list. I take it you talked to Missouri?"

"Kind of."

"What do you mean kind of?"

"I called her, the phone rang once, she picked up, said 'Hi Sam, use this, this and that' and then hung up."

There was a brief gaping pit of silence in the conversation. "...Really?"

"No," Sam grinned, "I found the notes from before and dug up the rest on my own."

"Ass."

"Whatever. Did you get everything?"

"I got what they had, but we're pretty much S. O. L. on the Van Van oil."

"I figured. I looked it up and I don't think we'll need it for this kid's ghost. It's more for heavy duty evil. You've got the rest of it, though?"

"Got it all. Angelica root I got by the pound. But uh... I dunno about some of the rest of this stuff, Sam."

"Like what?"

"St. John's Wort. You figure Mikey's depressed?"

"Historically, St. John's Wort was used to ward off evil and banish ghosts, long before it was used as an anti-depressant."

"Okay, sure..." Shopping bag rustling. "... but what about lavender and vanilla leaf?"

"Both are known to calm spirits on both sides of the fence... Maybe it will help ease him along rather than kick him out."

"What, better ghost-busting through aromatherapy?"

"You wanna do the research next time, Dean?"

"Whatever. So we go back to the laundromat with this stuff, or out to where the kid's buried?"

"The graveyard first. It'll be pretty deserted this time of day. We'll go back and do the dryer after that."

"Alright, I'll be back in ten. Pick you up at the library?"

"Naw, I'm walking. I'm already halfway to the cemetery."

"What?" The sound of the Impala's trunk slamming carried over the cell phone. "Why'd you start walking?"

"It's not that far. I had to leave the library anyway to find a decent wi-fi node, so I thought I'd get a start on locating the grave-site. *And* I figured you'd be at least another half an hour flirting with the health food store staff."

"Yeah, well," that was the driver's door shutting, "it's kinda hard to get anywhere with environmentalist chicks when they keep staring at my jacket and telling me I'm wearing a dead cow."

Sam smirked. "Yeah, that could be kind of awkward."

"So how do I find this graveyard?"

"It's one and a half miles north of the M-94 on Samuelson road, Pine Grove Cemetery, you probably passed it on your way to the store."

Couldn't miss the Impala's engine starting. "Okay, I'll meet you there."

"Hey Dean?"

"What?"

"While you were out shopping, did you remember to buy yourself some new underwear?"

*Click.*

Sam stowed his phone and re-settled his backpack, grinning. He'd learned years ago that it was usually safer to taunt Dean from well out of arm's reach. Sam almost felt cheerful

for a moment.

The walk in the bright spring day was helping everything but the persistent nagging feeling that had made Sam re-check all the papers in the county. It still felt like there was something wrong. Well, not *wrong*, just something more than what he'd found. Walking hadn't brought any new theories to him based on what data he'd been able to find at the public library. Without further contacts in the area to get at archived police records of the incident, the info available at the library was all they had to go on. He certainly wasn't about to use the ID and badge number for Detective McCreedy again so soon after using it to identify the license plate of Jim Miller. And right now he was trying very hard not to think about what had happened at the Miller's. Later. Preferably much later.

What was missing though? Sam ran over the facts available at the library. The kid had been left unattended, got into a dryer and died by accident. The laundromat had paid for the funeral. The owners, Clive and Nancy Bernoit, sold the laundromat very shortly afterward.

A quick check of the library's phone book had told him that if the former owners of the laundromat or the family of Michael Hussman still lived in the area, they had unlisted numbers. No Bernoits or Hussmans at all. It wouldn't surprise him if the Hussmans had an unlisted number, they had only been identified as 'does not wish their name to be published' in the story on their boy's death. Kind of odd, but people did all kinds of odd things in a state of fresh and sudden grief. Take the Winchester family history for one example.

The article in the paper had been a staff-written piece, and the paper itself had stopped publishing in the early nineties. There was no reporter to track down and query for even the vaguest unpublished snippets. For an article on the death of a child, it was small and inobtrusive.

The difference between the dates of Michael's death and the publication of the article declaring it to be an accident were only a few days. Not a long time for an investigation to have taken place, but if events were clear, it might have only taken that long. The laundromat's covering the funeral expenses and the subsequent sale of the business may have indicated an out of court settlement of some kind.

Without more data, there was no way to tell. But he still had the same feeling that something was missing.

*What's missing, Sam thought, is a point to get a grip on and pull.*

The breeze off Lake Superior stirred the leaves on trees lining the road. Sam kept walking towards the graveyard.

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"Is it just me, or is this plan exceptionally half-assed?" Dean said, methodically chopping angelica root.

They had arrived at the graveyard within minutes of each other, and Dean had parked next to a concrete bench by the front gate. There weren't any houses near the graveyard, but the car would block the view of any passers-by as the Winchesters assembled their concoction.

Sam glanced up from prying apart gel caps of St. John's Wort and pouring the powder over the dried lavender, vanilla leaves, and other flora in a dented and scorched metal bowl. "It probably just seems like that because it's not the way we usually operate. No shovels, no salt and the only thing we're burning is a bunch of plants."

"Maybe. How much of this stuff do we need anyways?"

Sam looked over at the mound of chopped root. "That should be enough."

"Should be?" said Dean as Sam scooped up the moist root bits and added them to the bowl. "Do you mean like 'go play chicken with the killer racist truck' should be? 'Coz I still owe you an ass-kicking for that one."

"Hey, it worked, didn't it?"

Dean grumbled and bagged the rest of the root, stowing it in the trunk, then started cleaning off his knife.

Sam rested the bowl on the cement bench and began grinding the contents together with the broken ball joint from an '82 Corolla that served remarkably well as a pestle. "Besides, this is an entirely different situation. It's a non-violent ghost, it's broad daylight, and..." Sam trailed off, frowning slightly.

"...and what?"

"And we've got research done. It's not a last second desperation plan." Sam looked up from the grinding bowl at Dean. "It'll be fine."

"Why am I not convinced by your ringing endorsement?"

"What are you worried about? This ghost doesn't hurt anyone. And like you said, it *wants* help." Sam frowned into the mushed up mess of herbs and roots. The combination of smells was mildly nauseating. Sort of a piney, flowery, musky and rotten cheesy odour with a hint of vanilla that just made things worse. "This stuff should work."

"Should?"

"It'll work."

Dean leaned over and peered into the bowl, wrinkling his nose at the smell. "It's a little clumpy," he observed. "That wet root stuff's gonna smoke like a hot damn."

"It's a good thing there's no one around then." Sam poked around the mush with the ball joint end. "We need to save about half of this to do the dryer."

"People will probly notice the smoke from that, Sam. The laundromat's in the middle of town, and open for business."

"I don't think we need to set it on fire there, just run some in the dryer for a while." He poked at the mush again. "It'll have to be inside something though, or it will catch fire if it oozes down into the dryer vents."

Dean looked around. "Something like what?"

"I dunno, maybe a cloth bag of some sort?"

"Got it. Hand over the mush." Dean opened the back door of the Impala and snagged a neatly folded pair of socks from one of the duffel bags with the slightest hint of a smirk. He peeled one of the pair off and tossed the other one back on top of the bag as Sam passed him the bowl.

"Hey, wait-"

"What? A sock's a cloth bag, kinda." Dean scooped a generous glob of mush into the sock with the pestle.

"But that's *my* sock!"

"I get pink underwear, you get a sock full of ghost repellent. Po-tay-to, Po-tah-to. Quit bitching." He loaded another mush glob into the sock and tied a knot in it at the ankle. "Smells better than your feet any day."

Dean's grin forcibly reminded Sam that it was only *usually* safe to taunt Dean from out of arm's reach. Not always, *usually*. Sam sighed. "Let's go."

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The grave took a few minutes to find, but they eventually found it all the way in the back near the fence separating the graveyard from its eponymous pine grove. "In the cheap seats," as one of dad's hunter friends put it once. The markers were all set flush with the ground, and the grass was tidy, but the area had a neglected air to it that no amount of

lawn mowing and edging would cover. Michael's marker was plain and only had the boy's name and dates of birth and death.

They set up a little trivet of stones scrounged from under the fence line. Dean had surprised Sam when he'd pulled out a tiny sampler bottle of 151 proof rum to use for an accelerant to get the mush in the bowl burning. Dean had shrugged enigmatically, saying only that it would probably work better and burn cleaner than lighter fluid.

As predicted, there had been a lot of smoke, but the breeze dissipated it quickly into a funky smelling haze. Once the fire was out, Sam stirred the ashes and distributed them over the grave area.

"Think that'll do it?" said Dean when they returned to the Impala.

"Maybe, yeah. A quick trip back to the laundromat and that should be that."

Dean got in the driver's side and rolled down the window before closing the door. "So how come you're still all shoulds and maybes?"

Sam ducked into the Impala, wrinkling his nose and trying not to step on the 100 percent recycled paper bag from the health food store that now contained his muck-filled sock. "It just feels we're missing something."

"Like what?"

Sam rolled down his window. "I don't know exactly."

"Well that's useful." Dean started the car and the tape deck came on with a screeching guitar solo at sub-conversational level. "So the smoke show down at the grave was for nothing?"

"No, no," Sam frowned, "With what Missouri gave us in Lawrence and the research I did, this stuff should work. Based on what we know about Michael and the way he died, and assuming... It's just we don't know a whole lot."

"So you're saying now the whole dryer thing might not have been an accident?"

"No. Not exactly. I'm saying, with what it said in the paper and what he wrote on your t-shirt, it probably was accidental. I just have this feeling there's something more to it. That we're missing something."

"Oh yeah, based on what?"

"Just this feeling."

Sam realized he'd probably left himself wide open for another 'Haley Joel/Patricia Arquette' crack and braced himself, because after Max, he really didn't feel like talking about the whole psychic thing. Or even thinking about it. Sam looked out the window and waited for the inevitable. Three telephone poles passed but the snarky comment was not made. Sam frowned and looked over at Dean.

Dean was humming to the music, tapping the steering wheel, paying an inordinate amount of attention to a singularly boring stretch of road, and wearing a faint version of the 'this doesn't freak me out' face that Sam caught looking his way every so often.

There was the oddest sensation of a conversational vacuum where a smart-ass remark would have gone. Sam looked down at the paper bag by his feet and rolled over their conversations since Max, noting other vacuums. There was no crack about 'The Psychic Hotline' after Sam's joke about having called Missouri. Dean hadn't even accused Sam of using telekinesis to mess with his laundry this morning, though that explained the look Sam had gotten. The last time Dean had mentioned anything was the quip about going to Vegas. 'Psychic-Sammy', apparently, had been dropped off Dean's smart-ass remark topic list like a ten-ton penny. At least for now. Sam wasn't sure if it was because Dean was freaked about it, or because Dean knew Sam was freaked about it, but in either case, Sam really didn't want to think about it for a long while anyways, so it suited him fine.

"What the hell-?" said Dean as they turned the corner onto the main street. Sam looked up.

A small crowd of people with laundry baskets and bundles in various states of disarray was exiting the laundromat. Not exiting so much as stampeding. A stream of soapy water ran out the door along with the customers, and the windows were darkened except for the occasional actinic flash.

Dean looked over at Sam. "Ya know Sammy? I think we might have missed something."

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## Part 4

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By the time Dean parked, avoiding a mini-van more interested in rubbernecking than watching the road, the laundromat patrons had scattered.

"Somehow I don't think throwing some potpourri in the dryer is gonna help anymore, Sam."

Sam frowned at the darkened laundromat as they piled out of the car. "I think this is something different than Michael."

"What, you think it's got nothing to do with the kid now? Ooo, I know, maybe it's the old dryer haunting the new dryer they put in five years ago?"

"Be serious." Sam started across the street, checking for traffic.

Dean, with a backward glance at the trunk of the Impala, headed toward the laundromat after Sam. "I am serious. The kid's haunting the dryer, we tried calming him down, and now all hell's breaking loose. Kind of a direct connection there. Remind me to thank Missouri for the recipe for pissing off poltergeists, it's been *so* much help."

"We probably should have called her anyways to check, not just gone from the notes," Sam admitted reluctantly. "Maybe it's not good for situations like this."

"Oh, ya think? Why *didn't* you call her, Sam?" Dean fixed a tight-lipped stare on the back of Sam's head.

Sam glanced down at his feet as he stepped up onto the sidewalk. "I... uh-" he pointed at the laundromat window. "Hey, something's still moving in there."

There was a quick motion past the laundromat window and Carl the laundry attendant stumbled out the door. Something hit the door's blinds with a thump as he pushed the door shut and locked it behind him.

"Hey! Carl!" shouted Sam as they approached.

"Sorry, the laundromat is, uh, closed," said Carl, panting and stepping back from the door.

"What happened?" asked Sam.

Carl looked up. "Oh, it's you guys. Uh, I really don't know what happened. One second everything's fine, the next..." he looked from the brothers to the door and back. "It got, uh... weird in there."

"Weird being worse than quirky?" asked Dean.

"Oh yeah," Carl nodded jerkily. "Some kind of freak electrical fault or something. And something wrong with the pipes. And the washers. And uh-"

"Carl." Sam interrupted the panicky attendant. "When exactly did it start?"

"I, uh, a couple minutes ago maybe? Some of the washers opened in mid-cycle, and there was... uh... kind of a noise..."

"What kind of noise?"

"Kind of a scre- uh, squeal. And some banging. And then the lights went out. Then the customers were all shouting and running. One of them kept saying 'I've lost him' in a really strange voice."

Sam and Dean exchanged a glance. "Strange how?"

"Strange like it wasn't a shout, but I could still hear it over all the ruckus."

"You sure it was one of the customers?" Dean asked.

"It must've been. It wasn't me. Then everything kind of went..." he waved his hands around as though conducting an orchestra, "... weird."

"Hm," said Dean. "Anyone left inside there?"

"No."

"Then what hit the door while you were closing it?"

"I dunno. I don't want to know."

"Do you know anything about a family named Hussman?" asked Sam.

"What?" said Carl, confused at the sudden shift of topic. "No, never heard of them."

"What about the family that used to own the place, the Bernoits?"

"No! No, wait...", said Carl, "There was an Amanda Bernoit that killed herself."

"What? When?" said Dean.

"We-ell, I don't know exactly, sometime in the 80's, back when I was in high school."

"Can you narrow it down at all?"

"It was my first year in high school, so that'd make it... '83? Sometime in the spring." He shrugged. "I only remember because the school had some big suicide prevention thing for the rest of the year. She was a senior who'd moved away shortly before. She killed herself in another county."

"Why didn't you say anything about this before?" asked Sam.

"We-ell," Carl said, looking at them oddly, "you were asking about the dryer before... Wait. You two seriously think there's a ghost haunting the laundromat?"

"You were in there just now," said Dean, "What do you think?"

"I, uh, I think, uh-"

There was sudden clatter. Sam and Dean spun towards the sound and motion. The metal security blinds rolled down over the plate glass windows of the laundromat and locked themselves.

"Gnah!" gasped Carl from behind the brothers. "I think I don't get paid enough to deal with this crap!"

"We could-" began Sam.

"Here!" Carl pushed the keys at Sam, who grabbed them by reflex. "All yours. Do whatever you want. I'm going to a bar. In Wisconsin. If the area manager calls, tell her I quit." Carl took off, not quite running.

"Well that simplifies things," said Dean, snatching the keys from Sam and striding back across the street to the Impala.

Sam jogged after him. "Wait, Dean, we're in the middle of town and it's nowhere near dark. If we-"

"What, you think I'm an idiot?" Dean opened the trunk and glanced at Sam. "Don't answer that. I'm not getting guns. Here." He handed Sam the salt can.

Sam nodded. "Doors and windows."

"Yep." Dean pulled out a tool box and loaded electronic gear into it, "I'll check the stores that share walls with it for EMF variations and cold spots. And establish our cover as repair guys."

"If nothing's spreading, and it's encapsulated inside the laundromat, we have a bit of time to-"

"-yeah, yeah, plan, research, write poetry, whatever. Hey, I forgot this was in here!" He pulled out a battered black and orange 'Closed for Repairs by Order of Management' sign out of the trunk. He wibbled the sign at Sam and grinned. "It's even almost true for once."

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The neighbouring stores showed no signs of otherworldly interference, so Sam had gone back to the library fiche reader to look up Amanda Bernoit, and keep an eye on the laundromat. Dean had returned to the graveyard on the pretext of checking for signs in case Mikey was the one that was annoyed. A quick sweep around the graveyard with the EMF detector turned up nothing but background levels, as expected, leaving Dean to grumble in peace on the way to the boy's grave again.

Since when did Sam dive head first into experimenting with herbology, especially when there was an available information source to tap. It wasn't like Sam not to use every source of information he could get his grubby mitts on. This new schtick of his has Sam freaked, but to the point of it getting in the way of research? That was just... wrong. Why didn't Sam just call-

"Hunh," Dean said to the empty graveyard, stopping still for half a second, then continuing to walk.

*Why didn't I just call Missouri? Sam's not the be-all and end-all of data-mining in the family. I coulda called her. Why didn't I?*

Dean scuffed his feet on the pathway.

*Well, mainly 'coz she hates me and keeps threatening to whack me with a spoon. But also I guess because I wanted Sam to talk to her and work through some of his 'Shining' crap so we don't have this friggin' bugbear with halitosis sitting between us in the car for the next five hundred miles. So instead we now have a minor annoyance ghost that's turned into a not-so-minor problem ghost. All because I was a stubborn dumb-ass. Hell, we're both stubborn dumb-asses. Nobody's got the corner on that market in the Winchester family.*

Dean reached Michael's grave again just as his cell phone rang. Little bits of the stuff they'd burnt earlier flecked the grass.

"You got anything, Sam? It's looking pretty calm out here."

"Not much. Amanda Bernoit killed herself with an overdose of sleeping pills in Menominee county two weeks after Michael died, one week after her parents sold the

laundromat and moved."

"Pulled up stakes in a hurry for business owners."

"Yeah. There's not a lot in the Menominee papers, just an obit and an in memorium. Only child of Clive and Nancy Bernoit, sixteen years old when she died. I went back to the Alger county papers and found a mention of the suicide prevention thing at her old school that Carl mentioned. Five lines on page seven, below an ad for a shoe sale."

"No wonder the paper went under."

"Hm. I'm thinking this isn't just crappy journalism. There's almost nothing in the papers about either death, and in small towns like these, either one would be the biggest story of the year."

"Respect for the dead?"

"I doubt it. Pay-off, maybe?"

"Maybe. How's the laundromat doing?"

"I went back and checked. It's still dark inside and the water running out the front door is down to a trickle, but the salt line in front of the door was nearly washed away."

"Oh, that's not good."

"I put more salt down, and the rest of the doors and windows were okay. I re-salted the dryer vents too, but the spirit doesn't seem to be even trying to extend beyond the laundromat. Whatever its goal is must be tied up with the building."

Dean brushed at the grass with his foot, watching grass blades flick the black ashy chunks around. "This Amanda girl was the daughter of the original owners. Think she probably worked there?"

"...and she was on shift when Michael died? Could be. Police reports would be handy on determining that, since the Bernoits have apparently moved again."

"We don't have time to go dig up archived police records, Sam. We can't let this go too long, if she's this active in daylight, she'll be a real handful after dark."

"Hm. There's got to be some reason she's doing this though. There's no obvious connection between Michael Hussman and Amanda Bernoit besides this. It's like her ghost had his ghost trapped. But why would Amanda hijack Michael?"

Dean crouched and ran his fingers over the trimmed lawn picking up burnt bits. "Could

be vice versa, maybe Michael thinks Amanda killed him and hijacked her."

"Why would he be asking for help then? And why would either of them still be around? You know how these things work. A ghost sticks around because it has something it needs to do. If getting Amanda was what Michael wanted, he'd have moved on. If Amanda was after Michael, same deal, she gets him, she's done. There has to be something else involved."

"Which leaves us back at the start." Dean stood and looked around. A few small white fragments near Michael's headstone caught his eye. "Well, when we lit off your ghost-repellent, the laundromat went nuts."

"If it worked, even partly, it would have reduced Michael's presence."

"So... what if Michael was keeping Amanda calm?"

"Venting off destructive outbursts with the occasional wrecking of laundry?"

"Yeah, maybe she was getting too tough for him and that's what he was asking for help with." He bent down and picked up a white fragment. Flower petal? "Though he could've been more specific, I mean he had the whole other side of my friggin' shirt to write on."

Sam made a rude noise. "So anyway, when Michael mostly disappears, she comes roaring out looking for him. Hence the whole 'I've lost him' thing."

"Dude, did you just say 'hence' in normal conversation?"

"Focus, Dean. It still doesn't explain how they got mixed up together."

"They're both waiting for something." Dean held the mulched flower petal up and scrutinized it. *That's interesting.*

"Maybe it's the same thing?"

"Maybe. Hey, Sam, that ghost-goop of yours. It didn't have daisies in it, right?"

"What? No. Why?"

"What are you doing to my son's grave?" Dean looked up to see a stern middle-aged woman approaching, holding a bundle of wildflowers like she was about to hit someone with them.

"I'll get back to you on that, Sam." He flipped the phone shut, plastered on a big friendly smile and stood up.

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## Part 5

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*Daisies?* thought Sam, looking at his cell phone outside the laundromat. *Dean hung up on me for daisies? What the hell...?* He hit redial.

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Dean had taken one step towards the woman storming towards him when his phone rang again. *Dammit, Sam!* He flicked open his phone and at the last minute decided to set up some authenticity for whatever line of bull he was going to try to feed this woman. "Central," he said in his best voice of authority, "I'm on a ten-fifty four. Off radio for fifteen." He flicked the phone shut again and switched the ring to 'mute', because a confused Sam was a persistent Sam. Sure as anything he'd be phoning back again because he'd think Dean actually meant something besides 'bugger off for a while' with all the codes.

"I asked you a question young man," said the woman who was suddenly within bouquet-whapping range, "Who are you, and what are you doing to my son's grave?"

"I'm-" Dean quickly trolled his memory for what ID he had in his wallet at the moment. Nothing useful. He went with the name on the driver's license, "-Officer Mark Evans. I'm with the Alger County Sheriff's Department," he said, hoping she wouldn't ask for ID.

"You expect me to believe you? I want to see ID."

*Aw, hell.* He dug out his wallet, flashed his driver's license and a shiny yet meaningless badge quickly, and tried to distract her from looking too close. "We had a report of smoke in the area, and it seems someone's set fire to something at your son's grave." What the hell, it was true.

"What?" She pushed past Dean to look at the black ashy chunks strewn around her son's grave.

"Could be vandals, but we wanted to ask you a few questions in case this was some kind of attack directed at your family." *Pen and notepad, cops always have a pen and notepad.* Dean rummaged through his pockets while her back was turned.

"I don't have a family," she said, brushing at the ash chunks in the grass. "Not since Michael died."

*Pen and notepad, where the hell did I, whoops, that's the EMF reader.* "An attack directed against you then?"

She looked up at him narrow-eyed. "Who did you say you were again?"

"Officer Evans. Sheriff's Department." *There's the notepad.* He pulled it out suavely and flipped it open. "Look, Mrs. Hussman-

"It's Kopecky. Ms. Kopecky. I haven't been Mrs. Hussman since before Michael died."

"Ms. Kopecky," Dean wrote the name down, "I'm just trying to help you out here." He tried for that puppy-dog look Sam always uses to talk to people that don't want to talk, but Dean felt like he was leering so he stopped. "If there's anyone that might have a grudge against you we need to know."

She frowned. "Michael's father, perhaps, but I... haven't actually seen him since Michael turned five."

Two years before Michael died. "You were divorced?"

"Not exactly. Not officially in any case." She brushed some ash from Michael's grave marker and placed the bundle of daisies and lupins across the stone. "Things were bad. I left and took Michael, to keep us both safe. I thought..." She shut her mouth with a snap and glared up at Dean. "I really don't see why you need to know any of this."

"Just trying to be thorough." Dean grimaced inwardly. This was going to be like pulling teeth. "What about your son's death?"

"What *about* my son's death, Officer?" She stood and crossed her arms.

"Of course we have all the old records in the County archives, but if you could give your account of it..."

"I've given my account more than enough times."

"We know he died twenty three years ago in the laundromat and that it was an accident."

"Accident," the woman hissed. "I left him in a public place for ten minutes, I told that useless girl working there to watch him, and when I came back, he was dead."

*There's a sore spot.* "Ah," said Dean, "so you don't think it was an accident?"

"It was all that girl's fault. The owner's daughter. I took their money when they offered it because I had none, and I needed to stay near Michael. I would have thrown it back in their faces. They kept her name out of the paper, made it seem like no one was to blame because they didn't want one mistake to ruin her life. Even though her one mistake *ended* my son's life."

Potential wrongful death, and the laundromat owners had covered it up? That'd annoy a spirit. "So, you think she killed him?" he prodded again.

"She may as well have, she certainly didn't save him. Ten minutes I was gone. I asked her to watch Michael until I came back, I even told her Michael's father might come and try to take him or hurt him. When I came back, the ambulance was pulling in." Ms. Kopecky shook her head.

"Michael's father was chasing you?"

She pressed her lips together. "I thought he was following us for a while, I'd seen him..." She shook her head again. "Legally, I suppose I had kidnapped Michael. It doesn't matter now." She looked over at the bundle of flowers on the grave marker. "Michael and I were staying in campgrounds during the off season, heading north. We were running to Canada, to get a fresh start. We came into town to do laundry. We never planned to stay."

"So, if you thought you were being chased by your ex, why'd you leave your son with a total stranger at the laundromat?"

Her eyes flashed. "What are you implying, Officer?"

That sounded like a wall going up. With spikes on top. Better backpedal. "Nothing, I'm sure there's a good reason, just seems kind of strange."

Her back straightened and she crossed her arms again. "I thought I'd seen his father's car go by. I had to go check, and I couldn't take Michael with me in case it was him. I told him to hide, as usual, if he felt scared or saw his father, and not come out until I came for him."

"Ah," said Dean. "Have you been back to the laundromat since then? At all?"

"Never. Not since I left Michael there. I don't even walk on the same side of the street. I'm never going back to the place my son was taken from me."

"Ah." *So that's why Mikey's still waiting.* Dean thought about Lawrence, and added awkwardly, "Ya know, sometimes it's worth going back to a place like that, 'coz sometimes... you don't realize what you left behind."

"Never." The woman glared, arms securely folded. "I don't see what this has to do with someone setting fires on my son's grave."

Dean cleared his throat. "It's all background, ma'am. Helps to have the whole picture. Now, about the girl, what exactly did you say to her?"

"I said a whole lot of things I don't care to have taken down as evidence." The woman

curled her lip and sniffed. "The careless cow had the nerve to show up at Michael's funeral. I told her exactly what I thought of her then. I'd asked her to watch Michael until I came back, and he died. Stupid little bitch. Because of her, my son is dead. I can never forgive that. Her parents took her away, crying her crocodile tears. They knew it was her fault. They didn't even try to defend her."

Dean's jaw clenched. "Did you know Amanda killed herself two weeks later?"

Breeze rustled the leaves in the ensuing silence. "Yes. I'd heard. Though I'd be *really* interested to know how you know her name, considering you were just asking me about her."

*Crap. Crapcrapcrap.* "Her name came up when we ran the name from the tombstone..."

"I'd like to see that ID again," she paused, "Officer."

"Ah. Sorry to have disturbed you, ma'am. I'll be on my way." Dean scrawled his cell number on a blank page from the notebook and held it out. "If you think of anything else..."

Ms. Kopecky looked at the paper in Dean's hand as though it was a dead rat, then snatched it and crumpled it in her fist. "I'd appreciate it if you would leave. Now."

*Okay. That went well.* Dean thought as he headed down the path to the cemetery gate. Once he was clear of her glare and inside the Impala, Dean turned the ringer back on on his cell and called Sam.

"Livestock on the highway?" Sam answered incomprehensibly.

"Hunh?"

"That's what a ten-fifty four is in Michigan. I looked it up."

"Whatever, brainiac. Michael's mom showed up at the graveyard."

"What?"

"I'll explain in a minute, I'm on my way back." Dean flicked the phone shut and started the Impala.

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## Part 6

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"So," said Sam, "Michael's mom told him to hide and not come out until she came and got him."

"Yep."

"He hid in the dryer, died, and she never came back for him. So he's still waiting there for his mom to come back?"

"That's what I figure," Dean re-evaluated the contents of the toolbox, taking out the thermal scanner and putting it back in the trunk. "She also asked Amanda to watch Michael."

"From what you said, it sounds like Amanda took the majority of the blame for Michael's death, even from her own family. The way they covered it up, it doesn't matter if she was at fault or not, she still looks guilty."

"Amanda comes back after her death to protect Michael, and prove herself innocent after the fact. Or defend her honour 'coz no one else did." Dean frowned into the trunk. "Something. Same result."

"Basically, Amanda is now haunting Michael, who's haunting the dryer he died in, and is protecting him, also until his mom comes back?"

"Yep. Like you said, both waiting for the same thing, which in this case is Michael's mom. And short of us grabbing her and dragging her into the place, that ain't happening." He pulled the EMF reader out of his coat pocket and put it in the trunk as well.

"Because you pissed her off."

"Dude," Dean said flatly, "you didn't see her. I'm pretty sure she came pre-pissed. Besides, you weren't there to use your puppy-dog charm on her."

"I do not have puppy-dog charm, Dean!"

"Right. Sorry, Benji. Must be the hair." He flashed a grin. "But honestly, I don't think it would really have helped. She's not going there unless she's dragged kicking and screaming, and I don't think the townsfolk would take kindly to that."

"Well. Great. So now what."

"Back to plan A." He picked up the slightly damp and very smelly paper sack and tossed

it to Sam. "Sock of wonder sludge."

Sam rolled up the moist bag and stuffed it into the toolbox. "Thanks for the vote of confidence, Dean, but this won't help Amanda's ghost."

Dean lingered over the rock-salt-loaded shotguns, grimacing. "Her, we're probably going to have to do the old fashioned way, after we deal with Michael."

Sam frowned. "If we're right, then Amanda's not evil either. She's just trying to keep Michael safe. She's probably come to the fore now because of what we did at the graveyard. Michael's hold on his spectral presence here weakened enough that to her it seemed like he'd disappeared."

"And she figured she'd failed to protect him, like she was accused of before she died and whammo. Enraged spirit. The whole unjust accusation thing all over again. But now she's a ghost so she does something about it."

"Tearing the laundromat apart."

"And Mikey isn't there to put on the brakes. Well, not all there, anyway."

"I'm beginning to think we haven't done this town any favours, Dean."

"We aren't doing the town a favour, we're trying to help one dead kid that asked to be helped. Only it's actually two dead kids and one of them has an understandable chip on her shoulder. We aren't done yet." Dean put in a canister of salt next to the sock bag and closed the otherwise empty toolbox. "But, uh... when Michael's completely gone, things with Amanda could go south real fast."

"And this makes things better how?"

"It doesn't, I'm just sayin' to watch out."

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Dean unlocked the front door, and the Winchesters went inside. The lights in the laundromat were off, and with the security blinds shut it was gloomy, but there was still enough light to see by. The floor was wet, and powdered laundry soap was strewn around in slowly moistening drifts. Wet clothing drooled from a couple open washing machines. The air was warm, muggy and a hint of ozone overlay the pervascent smell of cleaning products. Something dripped irregularly towards the back of the laundromat. Nothing moved except the two brothers.

Dean turned from locking the door behind them. "Definitely poltergeisty."

"It could be worse," Sam ventured, "No screaming, nothing's on fire."

"Yet." Dean put the toolbox on the floor. "Come on. Let's get this over with."

Sam pulled the sock full of ghost-repellent out the toolbox and out of the paper bag. He headed over to the bank of dryers slowly, watching for sudden apparitions or movement. Dean looked sourly at the cardboard salt canister for a second. "Remind me to start bringing a slingshot for these gun-free, broad daylight, middle of town gigs."

Sam grinned over his shoulder, "Yeah, sure, and packets of salt from resta-"

"Duck!"

Years of reflex dropped Sam below the fast-swinging dryer door. The air displacement ruffled his hair and the door hit the dryer next to it with a crack. Sam fell backwards as the lower dryer door flung open, narrowly missing whacking him in the knees. A washer door directly opposite clacked open and flung wide, missing his nose by inches. Soapy water and wet laundry vomited out of the full washer and onto the floor.

"Sam?" Dean clambered up onto the island of washing machines in the center of the laundromat, looking down into the dryer aisle. Washer and dryer doors whipped back and forth above Sam, lying flat on his back on the soapy wet floor, keeping the ghost-repellent sock out of the water, and looking bemused.

"I'm fine."

"Taking a nap there, Sammy? Or maybe a bath?"

"Sam. And shut up." Sam began worming his way squishily backwards underneath the swinging doors.

Dean grinned and shook some salt down into the aisle from his perch on the washing machines, but the renewed rush of water from the opened washer sluiced it away as fast as it landed. He looked across at the dryers as Sam squirmed along the aisle.

"Hey, if-" was as far as Dean got. A geyser of water erupted from the machine he stood on, through the hole on top for adding detergent, straight up Dean's chest and into his face. He staggered back a half step, coughing and spluttering, as the salt canister hit the ceiling next to a light fixture in a spray of foaming water. The geyser cut off and the remains of the falling cardboard container was whapped by one of the flinging dryer doors. It hit the back wall with a sodden splut.

"You okay there?" Sam said, wriggling clear of dryer door range and getting to his feet.

"Great." Dean said from the top of the washer, shaking off water and suds. "Just friggin'

peachy."

One by one the dryers fired up, heating the air in the already warm room. The squeaking rumble of dryer drums turning became a soft female voice, repeating, *You can't have him, you can't have him*. The waving doors gusted hot air at Dean.

Dean dripped and looked quizzically at the dryers. "I think we've just been mooned, Sam."

Sam tilted his head to the side, listening. "The attendant, he said he heard 'I've lost him', right?"

"So, she found Mikey again."

"He's not slowing her down much, though."

"Doesn't look like."

"Can you see dryer 7B from there?"

Dean scanned down the row of bottom dryers for the dryer Michael had died in. It wasn't difficult to spot, it was the only one with the drum not rolling, and its door wasn't moving. Even with the erratic motion of the dryer doors surrounding it, the door of 7B remained completely motionless, open about a handspan.

"It's not running and it's open about that far." Dean held his hands about six inches apart, then clapped them together. "Toss me the sock, I'll chuck it in."

Sam pitched the muck-filled sock at Dean, who caught it easily. "Throw me the keys, I'll go get the big salt can out of the car. I don't know why you didn't bring it in the first place."

"'Coz *somebody* wanted to play 'Maytag Repairman' for the locals, and the big can doesn't fit inside the toolbox," Dean tossed the keys to Sam.

"Yeah, yeah," Sam headed for the door while Dean roamed around the top of the washing machines, trying to find an angle on dryer 7B relatively clear of interference from the other doors swinging and not standing over a potential geyser.

Sam was a yard away from the door when he caught the motion out of the corner of his eye. He spun and blocked with a forearm... *Good Housekeeping?* The magazine didn't quite hit the floor before it flapped up in front of Sam again. Three Reader's Digests, a Vogue, and a Field and Stream flurried in from tables in the waiting area. He swatted at the attacking magazines, feeling more than a bit like King Kong.

Dean looked back at Sam's struggle with the storm of wayward reading material with a hint of a grin, then glanced up as the dripping overhead lights flickered and flared with a fat snap of electrical arc. That wasn't just an ordinary short circuit. Electrical energy crackled along the fixtures, arcing between them. Dean realized he was soaking wet, currently the highest point in the room, and standing on a row of large metal objects. He spun to jump down, but his foot caught a soapy wet patch and he went down with a thud on top of the washing machines.

"Dean!" shouted Sam, whacking a Reader's Digest into a wall, "Get off there!"

Dean felt a horrible sense of deja vu as the light fixtures arced brightly above him.

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## Part 7

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Dean scabbled backwards, trying to stay low and get off the washers, electricity crackling in the lights above, his eyes wide and white in the flare.

Over the crackling of the lights and rumbling of the dryers, a melancholy little voice from dryer 7B said *Nooo...*

The lights flared and crackled for another fraction of a second before arcing in a massive discharge into the sign on the wall that declared the laundromat not responsible for damages. The smell of burnt plastic overlay the soapy, floral scent of the room as the coroplast sign melted and dripped down the wall.

*Don't cry, don't cry*, the other dryers whispered.

Sam swatted the Good Housekeeping into a puddle, taking a paper cut across the cheek from the Field and Stream and managed two steps closer to the washers before being blind-sided by the Upstate Michigan phone book and a well-thumbed copy of 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' that joined the fray from behind the front counter. "Dean! You okay?"

The whites of Dean's eyes were nearly luminous in the gloom as he glanced over at Sam. "I'm fine. Sounds like Mikey doesn't want Amanda to play rough." Looking up at the quiescent light fixtures and over at the melted sign oozing down the wall, Dean stood up, muck-filled sock still in hand.

Sam blocked the incoming phone book and deflected it into a puddle on the floor. It struggled feebly before it became water-logged and stopped moving. "Dean!"

"What?" he said, turning back to look at Sam.

"Don't throw the sock!"

"What-" Dean began. A *ka-chunk* noise came from behind Dean, and he half-turned towards it. The unidentified missile struck his leg, stinging as much as a hard slap, exploding in a puff of white powder that stuck to his recently soaked jeans. "-the hell?" Dean glared at the coin-operated laundry soap dispenser on the wall as it *ka-chunked* again and shot another box of detergent. Dean turned to the side so it skimmed off his back. "Oh, now that's just annoying."

*Kachunkachunkachunkachunk-*. Little boxes of laundry soap began shooting across the room. Three more hit Dean in the legs and chest as he jumped down off the washers, and he batted two more away. Several more flew past him and were hit by the still-flapping

dryer doors, exploding over the dryer aisle or ricocheting in random directions. Dean ducked under the folding table bolted to the back end of the row of washers. "Really, *really* frigging annoying."

At the other end of the room, Sam was gaining on the magazines. He slapped the Vogue into the Field and Stream, knocking both down onto the wet floor, stepped on one of the Reader's Digest's that had flapped too low and was watching for a sneak attack from the self-help paperback. Just then, something hit the back of his head with a wet *splut* and the force of a good solid sucker-punch, knocking him to his hands and knees on the slick floor. He turned and rolled under the bolted-down folding table at the entrance end of the row of washing machines as further unidentified objects flew over him.

"You alright?" Sam shouted down the row of washers at Dean

"I'm fine, Sam! What the hell knocked you down?"

Sam touched the back of his head. Wet, sticky and not warm... He brought his hand around and examined the substance on his fingers. Blue. Floral-smelling. "Uh. Fabric softener. Or liquid detergent." He looked up at the second dispenser on the wall, which was launching single-load sized plastic bottles of laundry additive across the room.

"Damn bear."

Sam judiciously chose to ignore Dean's comment.

"This is nuts, Sam!" Dean continued as laundry additives launched intermittently across the room, and the dryers roared and rumbled. "Amanda's got the whole friggin' place working against us. There's no way she'll just let us chuck the sock in the dryer."

"We can't," said Sam, "If we did, things would get a lot worse. Michael kept an attack from becoming lethal. If he's cut right off, there'll be nothing to hold Amanda back. We have to find another way."

"How? Light this goop on fire like we did at the cemetery, get 'em both with the smoke?" Dean examined the sock, which was oozing liberally, having soaked up more water.

Sam ruffled his hands through his hair to stop the fabric softener from drizzling slowly down the back of his neck which was driving him insane. "Well, that could work, but Amanda would fight it."

"And she's not fighting already?" Dean grimaced as the sock dripped. "Anyway, never mind, there's no way this crap will light now without some serious jet fuel."

"Where's the lighter fluid?"

"Left it in the car." Dean fished out and shook his Zippo.

"Great."

"Hey, you said we weren't lighting it up, so I didn't put it in the toolbox. We really need to get a bigger toolbox for when you get these blue-collar urges." He grimaced as he flicked the lighter with no result. "Doesn't matter, my damn flint's wet too."

"Could go out to the car and get the lighter fluid and some match-" The one waiting area bench that wasn't bolted to the floor suddenly grated across the linoleum to block the doorway.

"Hunh. What do you think about that?" Sam said with a nod towards the door.

Dean stuffed the wet lighter back in his pocket. "I think somebody's seen too many Disney movies."

The rumble of the dryers distinctly giggled.

"I think she's listening, Dean." Sam turned around under the table. "We aren't trying to hurt Michael," Sam spoke loudly, addressing the flapping, rumbling dryers. "We're trying to help you both."

*You can't have him*, the voice of the dryers said, resuming the refrain. A renewed burst of fabric softener and detergent grenades launched across the room, pelting the tops of the folding tables. Otherwise, no change.

"Since when do ghosts listen to reason, Sam?" said Dean.

Sam shrugged and turned back. "It was worth a shot."

"Right. Lawyer."

Sam glared down the row of washers at his brother, who ignored him and stuck the now essentially useless sock full of sodden ghost-muck into a corner underneath the folding table.

"I hate to say it," said Sam, "but the only way to get them out is to give them what they want, get Michael's mom here."

"How? I told you, Sam, she won't come near the place."

"What if we call her."

"What?"

"You got her name, right? Get her number from information, or look it up in the phone book, call her up, get the phone to where Michael is. Maybe he can talk to her, talk her into coming for him or something?"

Dean looked disdainfully down the row of washers at Sam.

"It's all I got, man. You want to try it or what?"

Dean rolled his eyes and dug out his cell phone. "Mine's waterlogged, you got yours?" he said, stowing it again.

Sam tossed his phone down the row of washers below the detergent shooting gallery and Dean caught it. "I'll get the phone book, you can start 411-ing just in case. What was her name?"

"Kopecky."

"With a C or a K?"

"...both?"

Sam gave Dean a look.

"I dunno, Sam, I didn't ask her to spell it. I wrote it down starting with a K." He looked at the low reception bars on Sam's phone and got out from under the folding table, staying low and avoiding the arc of the soap dispensers while dialing 411. "Just look it up both ways. It's a small town, if she's in there she'll turn up."

Sam glanced around for the room, spotted the phone book on the floor in the puddle it had landed in. "You realize if she's unlisted we've got to move on to plan C?" Sam dodged across the floor, snagged the phone book and ran in behind the front counter, folding himself into the small space underneath.

"We have a plan C?" said Dean, swatting down a ricocheting box of laundry detergent with the cell to his ear. "Uh, Alger County, Michigan" he said into the cellphone at the automated prompt.

"I don't think we really had a plan B," muttered Sam, sitting on the floor behind the counter, peeling apart sodden pages of the phone book.

"Residential," Dean said into the cellphone, ducking low and getting closer to the front of the store for better reception. Only a few boxes and bottles flew overhead as he picked his way down the aisle between piles of wet laundry. *Amanda must be conserving ammo*, he thought.

Sam peeled sections of the phone book apart from each other, looking for the K's. Something small flapped around the corner of the counter. Sam snatched the battered copy of 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' out of the air, wedged it into a support bracket under the counter and kept looking through the phone book. "Maybe she's getting tired, things seem to be slowing down," Sam observed optimistically.

Dean pursed his lips, wishing his brother wouldn't tempt fate like that. Or tempt the ghost that was apparently occasionally listening to what they said. "Kopecky," Dean said into the phone, plugging his free ear, then louder and slower as the automated system failed to understand. "Ko. Peck. Ee. Gah! What the-!" he shouted as something flew up in front of his face, flapping. He swatted away the stray Reader's Digest that had escaped Sam's earlier magazine massacre, listening to the automated voice giving him the number for a completely wrong name. "What? No! Kopeck- Dammit!" He growled and hit the disconnect key. "Friggin' automated system."

Sam popped his fabric softener slicked head around the corner of the counter. "I've got the number."

"Great, 'coz I am done trying to deal with machines that don't know how to cooperate. What's the num- dammit!" The lone remaining magazine whipped towards Dean's eyes, but he blocked and slapped it down, stepping on it for good measure. A sudden clash and rattle behind Dean spun him around, but not in time to avoid the charging laundry cart. Between the soap on the floor and having one foot on the magazine, Dean's footing was a lost cause. He landed in the cart which then sped towards the front wall of the store.

Sam came out from behind the counter as his brother flew past in the cart. "Dean?"

"Here!" Dean shouted, tossing the phone at Sam, who caught it. The cart hit the edge of the carpeted waiting area and tipped over in a tangle of legs, arms and aluminum tubing. Dean cursed, legs thrashing in the air, trying to disentangle himself from the laundry cart. Sam dialed the phone, barely resisting the sudden urge to take a picture.

"Yes, what?" An annoyed female voice answered.

"Ms. Kopecky?" Sam peered down the row of flapping dryer and washer doors to 7B. Smacking down a bottle of detergent with it first, he dropped the battered, soaked phone book and took a couple steps backwards into the carpeted waiting area. Dean, still awkwardly intertwined with the laundry cart, looked up with a raised eyebrow at Sam walking backwards nearby.

"Yes! Who is this!"

"There's someone here that wants to talk to you." Sam had never actually been on a Slip 'N Slide, but he'd seen commercials. He ran forward on the carpeted section and dove

onto the linoleum, sliding belly-down under the agitated dryer doors on the slick layer of moistened soap that had built up from the bursting detergent boxes, ending up against a pile of wet laundry a few feet short of dryer 7B. He skidded the phone along the wall the rest of the way to stop underneath Michael's dryer.

A wisp of steam trickled out of the open door of 7B, puddled briefly over the squawking phone, then pulled it inside.

There was a clatter as Dean stood up and shoved the laundry cart aside. "Is it working?" he called to the soles of Sam's shoes, watching the room for other moving objects.

"He's got the phone," Sam called back, "we'll see. Either way, he must be using up a lot of whatever energy he has available to do this..."

The phone dropped out of the dryer with a clatter and slid back into Sam's reach. Sam picked it up the phone from the floor and didn't even need to hold it close to his head to heard the enraged tinny voice on the other end. "You better run... what kind of sick joke... I'm coming down to that laundromat right now, you twisted..."

Sam hit the disconnect and stuffed the soap-slimy phone into a pocket. "I think she's on her way, Dean," Sam shouted over his shoulder and started wriggling backwards out from under the swinging doors, which turned out to be trickier than he'd thought, because although the soap accumulated in the aisle had made for an easy slide in, getting a grip to push backwards from was nearly impossible. While figuring out the logistics of the maneuver, Sam missed the slightest of wiggles that the formerly rock-motionless door of 7B began to show.

The rumble of the dryers all around and above Sam howled up into a scream. *Noooo! I've lost him!*

"Oh, great, here we go," muttered Dean.

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## Part 8

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*I've lost him! I've lost him!* shrieked the dryers, and bottles of fabric softener flew across the room at full force, making fist-sized dents in the drywall above Dean's head.

Dean crouched down lower, reaching under the doors that were now whipping back and forth so hard the glass in them was spidering with cracks when they hit each other. One of the doors shattered, showering Sam with broken glass. Dean lunged, grabbed one of Sam's feet, and yanked him out of the dryer aisle.

Sam slid out, rolled over and propped himself up on his elbows, shards of glass falling off his back. "Michael's mom better get here quick."

"You're sure he's still here?"

"He has to be conserving energy for when his mom comes. He's just so weak Amanda just can't find him."

Dean raised his head a little to peer around the room, but got back down fast when four small somethings embedded themselves deeply in the drywall above his head. That wasn't laundry detergent. He looked across the room at the vending machine wall.

*Oh, right. The change machine,* thought Dean. *Joy.*

It rattled and fired in bursts of four quarters, shooting across the room at as close to ballistic speeds as Amanda could probably manage. A round of quarters hit one of the already cracked dryer doors, bursting the glass like confetti and ricocheting around inside the dryer drum.

"She's dangerous with that thing," said Sam. "It's like rounds of buckshot."

"Yeah. Mikey probably wasn't letting her use it before." Another volley embedded itself in the wall above Dean. "Stay low, we can get underneath it, she'll lose her arc of fire on us."

Sam nodded and they ducked under the folding table, quarters impacting the table's surface and embedding there. Another bottle of fabric softener hit the table with a splutch.

Dean peered out from under the table, judging the limits of the arc. "Straight across and up against the wall."

"Didn't I already say I'm not twelve once today? Just go."

Dean scooted out and set his back to the wall between the change machine and the fabric softener dispenser, Sam following close behind. Quarters dented the top edge of the row of washers facing them and ricocheted. The washer doors on their side of the washing machine island clacked open and began whipping back and forth like the ones along the dryer aisle. A few machines spilling contents not already spilled onto the floor. Where Sam and Dean crouched against the wall, though, nothing could hit them.

"As long as we stay right here, we should be good until Mikey's mom shows up."

Why, why, *why*, was Sam so determined to tempt fate like that?

Something rattled towards them from the back end of the aisle. Two laundry carts charged up the aisle side by side, bumping over piles of wet clothing, led by the mop and bucket, scraping along the wall the Winchesters sat against. The flinging washer doors were doing a horizontal version of a stadium 'wave', each door shutting to let the carts past at full speed, then re-opening behind them.

Dean ducked around the speeding mop bucket to the other side of the change machine and faced the onrushing carts. Sam hopped back against the folding table, out of the way of the mop and bucket, ducking the mop handle as it swung around past his nose. The change machine fired another volley, grazing Sam's ear as he dodged out into the open front area under a barrage of fabric softener bottles. The mop and bucket were waiting for him.

Dean kicked one cart in the basket and hooked an elbow around the upright pole of the second. The kicked cart rattled backwards into the wall. The second cart jerked to a sudden halt like a dog coming to the end of a too-short leash, wheels flying out from under it, landing on its side. The downed cart's wheels spun in annoyance as the kicked cart rallied for another charge.

Sam dodged clear of flying fabric softener bottles, holding his stinging left ear, the mop and bucket whizzed past him again, mop handle swinging around in an attempt to clock him in the head. Sam sidestepped and booted the bucket as it went past, sending it hurtling and sloshing in behind the front counter. He grimaced at the bench barricading the front door. "Gonna have to clear the doorway if Michael's mom's going to get in." He called to Dean.

"Oh, ya think?" Dean spun the supine cart around sideways and shoved it into the other one, whacking washer doors on the way past and interlocking the carts up against the back wall. "Ha!" Dean said as the carts struggled together before the powdered detergent machine he was now next to *ka-chunked* and pegged him in the side of the head. The box exploded in a cloud of eye-stinging white granules and Dean hit the floor again to get out of its range as more boxes whipped overhead.

Sam wedged himself between the front counter and the bench, and tried pushing the

obstacle out of the way, but it wouldn't budge. Typical. "It'll probably move when Michael's mom shows..." The persistent mop and bucket shot out from behind the counter and charged at Sam again.

"It better." Dean rubbed soap powder from his eyes with a relatively un-soapy corner of his t-shirt and spotted the ghost-repellent sock under the folding table. On the wall above him, the powdered soap dispenser shot two more boxes and then *ka-chunked* without shooting. Dean looked up at it. It paused, *ka-chunked* a few more times without issue then stopped. "Small mercies." Dean muttered, ducking under the table for the sock as quarters ricocheted around the aisle

Sam kicked the mop and bucket out of the way again and got out from between the bench and counter in case Amanda got any ideas about pinning him there. The mop and bucket swung in a wide loop and raced back at Sam. As it sped towards him, the mop tumbled forward out of the bucket, hit the floor on the tip of its handle and sprang head-first towards Sam's face, dirty cotton tendrils trailing mucky water. Sam blocked the inbound mop with a forearm, knocking the head aside, only to have the handle whip up and glance off his right temple. Sam grabbed the handle and flung the mop into the waiting area. It hit the wall head first, bounced on its handle off the carpet and launched at Sam again.

Meanwhile, Dean, pressed up against the wall the change machine was on, counted the time between the shots the machine was making. It was still firing steadily at the top edge of the row of washers, trying for ricochet hits on Dean since Sam was out of range. Dean got right beside the machine with the sock, stepping over a pile of wet clothes. The machine rattled and shot a round at the washer right in front of it, bouncing the ricocheting quarters off Dean's boot as he swung around with the sock and jammed it in the drop chute the quarters had been firing out of. *Rattle-splck. Rattle-splck.* No more quarters. Whether Sam's concoction was doing anything besides being a mass of sticky goo jamming up the machine didn't matter. It was effective. Dean grinned, considering himself temporarily ahead of the insanity and looked over to check on Sam, then stopped and stared, bemused for a second at the sight of his baby brother in hand to, uh, handle combat with a mop.

Sam jumped over the handle of the mop swinging at his ankles, skidding a little on the landing. The mop planted its handle on the soapy linoleum and hopped spinning into the air. Sam ducked and took a step back only to find the mop bucket had snuck in behind him. He tripped, slipped and landed on the floor. The mop landed head first between Sam's feet, bounced back up, rotating in a blur and nailed Sam hard in the solar plexus with its handle. Sam emitted an ugly grunt as the mop flipped around and landed head first on Sam's face in a creditable imitation of a face-hugger from the *Aliens* movies.

"Sam?" Dean said, a little strangled out that he was about to step in to save his brother from a frigging mop when something wrapped around Dean's ankles and yanked. He lost his footing on the slick floor, landing on his side, turning over immediately to see what had tripped him. A soggy pastel-checked bathrobe was wrapped snugly around both his

feet. He swore, kicked and grabbed for his jackknife as the robe rapidly entwined itself further up his legs.

Sam pried the mop off his face and flung it aside, coughing and gasping. He caught a movement down near his toes and kicked out at the lurking mop bucket with both feet. It sloshed away across the floor towards the folding table, caught a wheel on a downed magazine and tipped over, dumping dirty water everywhere. Sam was halfway to his feet before the mop cartwheeled in for another attack.

Dean pulled the jackknife out of his pocket, just as a pair of pink and aquamarine paisley yoga pants ambushed him, whipping around his torso and pinning his right arm awkwardly across his chest before tying themselves in an inaccessible knot behind his back. The knife, coated with soap like most of the rest of Dean, squirted out of his grasp. "Son of a bitch!" he swore. With his free left hand, Dean twisted and snagged the folded knife, flicking it open with a thumb. He had just begun sawing awkwardly at the paisley pants when a crocheted blanket slapped itself around Dean's midsection and reared threateningly in front of his face. Well, as threatening as a hand-crocheted wet granny square afghan made of the ends of about a hundred different colours of yarn could be.

Sam blocked the inbound mop again, getting to his feet only long enough for the mop to shoot between his feet and twist, landing him on the floor. Again. He tried to keep the mop pinned under his knees, but it shot off into the shadows. "This is ludicrous," growled Sam, getting back to his feet and watching for the mop. And Dean. Where exactly was Dean, anyway? Sam could hear his brother cursing, but didn't see him. "Dean?"

Dean slashed at the blanket with the jackknife in his left hand, keeping it away from his face and making a few large unravelling holes. "Little busy, Sammy!"

"You okay?"

"I'm doin' just fine, you watch out for yourself!" He might be okay saving Sam from a mop, but there was no way he'd let Sam rescue him from a bunch of wet laundry, no matter what a pain in the ass it was being. The loose crochet weave of the blanket hooked around his fingers and wrapped the hand holding the knife, pinning it to Dean's right shoulder, constricting tightly. Thrashing and wriggling and cursing as the blanket covered his head, Dean heard the sinuous slurping noises of other piles of wet clothing moving across the floor towards him.

Sam frowned as Dean's cursing became oddly muffled. "Dean?" The mop, which had been lurking in the shadows against the front wall, cartwheeled in behind Sam while he was distracted and nailed him in the kidney, knocking him stumbling and slipping off balance into the range of the fabric softener machine. Sam dodged a flying white bottle, but the mop was there again, in his face and jabbing him in the adam's apple with the wet mucky end. It shoved him up against the dented wall and wedged him there by jamming its handle up against the edge of the folding table. On the opposite wall, the fabric

softener dispenser thunked... and emitted nothing. The fabric softener firing squad was out of ammo too.

The dryers howled in frustration, and the light fixtures began sparking and snapping again. Sam gaped up at them in alarm. On the other side of the washer island, Dean thrashed harder.

Just then a badly muffled four-cylinder engine roared outside the laundromat, and tires squealed on the pavement. A car door slammed and a woman's voice said several nasty things.

The overhead lights stopped arcing. The dryer doors stopped swinging. There was a rumble as the blockade cleared away from the door, and a click as the front door unlocked and swung ajar. Dean peered over at the door through the holes in the crocheted blanket and watched Michael's mother storm in.

"Come out! Come out here where I can tell you what I think of you people! How dare..." Her rant trailed off as her eyes adjusted to the gloom and the condition of the store dawned on her. She skidded a little on the soapy floor coming to a halt. "What-" She spotted Sam in the gloom, still wedged against the wall and grappling the mop with both hands. "What's happening here?" She demanded, walking over and planting her fists on her hips, glaring at Sam. "I demand an explanation for this!"

Out of the corner of his eye, Sam saw the door of dryer 7B swing fully open, spilling steam onto the floor. The cloud coalesced into a small child shape. The woman looked slowly over and took a step back. Another, taller, pale form appeared, a plain young woman. She knelt down and ruffled the top of the little cloud of steam and gave it a quick hug. *Goodbye Michael*, the dryers whispered.

"Tricks! This is nothing but cruelty, tricks and lies." Michael's mother ranted shakily, staring at the small shape. "Do you think I'm an idiot to believe-" The steam child, Michael, went forward, rolling, billowing and wisping along the floor toward the woman. The tall pale shape of Amanda stood at the end of the dryer aisle and watched as the little cloud of steam impacted the woman around the legs.

*You finally came back for me*, the steam-child breathed and dissipated. Michael's mother fell to her knees on the soapy linoleum with a gasp.

The mop holding Sam against the wall clattered to the floor, and the laundry around Dean loosened. Sam rubbed his throat and got out of the way, peering around the washers to where he'd last heard Dean cursing. Sam raised his eyebrows at the sight of his brother encased in bright sodden laundry. Dean shook the folds of the afghan away from his face and, after seeing Sam was okay, growled, "Say *anything* right now and you'll regret it 'til you're ninety."

Amanda stood and glared at the woman kneeling on the floor. Michael's mother looked up at the ghost of the girl. "I... I am so sor-" but the ghost girl just glared and spun on her translucent heel, refusing the apology. *For his sake. Not yours,* the dryers whispered. *Get out.* The middle-aged woman squawked and slid backwards on her knees across the slick floor, landing against the wall next to the door with a quiet thump. The dryers turned off one by one as Amanda passed them, stalking away from Michael's gaping mother down the aisle, and the dryer doors slammed shut. By the time Amanda reached the back of the laundromat, she had faded into nothing and disappeared.

The middle-aged woman looked around the laundromat with her mouth hanging open, got to her feet and ran out of the laundromat. A car door slammed and tires peeled out.

"Hunh." said Sam, looking over his shoulder at the door as Dean thrashed around, still tangled in the loosening afghan. "That was interesting."

"Whatever. Get this crap offa me."

Sam pulled out his knife and cut apart the slashed crocheted blanket. "She tries to kill us, but just glares at Michael's mom, shoves her to the door and walks away?"

Clear of the afghan, Dean sawed off the knotted paisley yoga pants. "Amanda was protecting the kid," he said, matter-of-factly, "We were a threat to him, so she gets mean with us. Her thing with Michael's mom, that was her personal axe to grind, and since it *was* Michael's mom, hurting her would have made him unhappy, even though he was already gone. So..." he kicked free of the pastel-checked bathrobe, "Momma gets a glare and a shove."

Sam looked at Dean like he'd grown antlers.

"What? It got whatever Amanda needed to do done so why worry about it?" Dean stood up and looked around the room. Couple doors with broken glass on the dryers, crashed and entangled laundry carts, melted sign. Soap and quarters everywhere. "Uh, let's go."

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The street outside was thankfully empty, and the lack of onlookers from neighbouring businesses seemed to indicate that the chaos inside the laundromat hadn't disturbed anyone outside it.

Sam leaned over the Impala, writing on a sheet of Motel 6 stationery from Idaho, using the roof as a writing surface. He felt like he was coated in drying detergent, which he pretty much was. Soap stung his paper cuts and the slash on his ear. He was itchy. "The sooner we can hit a place with a shower the better."

"What's the matter Sammy, don't like smelling 'spring-time fresh' for a change?" Dean

said, quickly covering the front seats with towels from a Best Western outside of Tulsa.

Sam looked up. "Dude. You're so covered in soap, you're foamy."

"Yeah, well you should see your hair," said Dean, pointing to Sam's head. His hair was slicked around in random spikes and sticking out at all angles, and slightly blueish from the fabric softener. "You look like one of those freaky little trollie dolls."

"I do not want to know how you know things about trollie dolls." Sam grinned, figuring Dean was fair game now. "My hair is nothing. You were nearly mummified by the world's ugliest pants."

"I wasn't nearly mummified by a pair of frigging pants!"

"Right, the bathrobe and the afghan helped. And I'm not even gonna say what it looked like you were doing to that laundry cart."

"Shut up. You got your ass kicked by a mop."

"Did not."

"Did too."

"Whatever. How's this?" Sam held up the sheet of motel letterhead. *Your dryer is fixed. Sorry about the mess*, it read.

"What about what's his name. Carl."

"Right. I doubt he'll be back for his book." Sam added, *Carl said to say he quit*, at the bottom, wrapped the keys up in the note and shoved the wad through the mail slot of the locked door. "Let's get out of here."

They both got in the car, sitting on the purloined towels.

"This is the *last* time I let you pick a frigging laundromat." Dean said, starting the Impala.

"It was the only one in town, Dean."

"I don't care," said Dean, pulling out and away from the laundromat at a fast, yet nonchalant 'no reason to think we're up to something' speed. "If I'd've picked it, I'd have checked it out."

Sam rolled his eyes. "This was a total fluke. We are not dragging the EMF into every laundromat we go into."

"Why not? Worst that'll happen is we'll go through batteries like crazy. I'll take that over pink underwear and psycho haunted laundromats any day."

Sam made a rude noise and grinned out the window.

"I would've thought of it sooner but your stupid oatmeal maneuver dropped the caffeine levels in my bloodstream to dangerously low levels."

"I'm never going to hear the end of this am I?"

"Nope." Dean grinned, turning towards the interstate.

Sam sighed and shook his head.

"Dude, do that again, your hair didn't even *move*."

"Bite me." It was going to be a long drive to Minnesota.

- - -  
(that's it!)