

Lost And Found

By Scribblesinink

Dean didn't notice that it was gone until he stepped under the lukewarm spray in the shower. That was when it suddenly hit him: something was... not right. He lifted a hand to his throat, already half-knowing what he'd find, but in need of confirmation regardless.

His fears were realized as soon as he found his neck bare: the amulet wasn't there.

Abruptly, he felt naked and vulnerable. Well, *more* naked, 'cause only a moron would take a shower in his boxers, right? He decided he didn't like the sensation one bit.

The water had only managed to wash away some of the dirt and blood of the bug creature he'd been hunting, leaving his bruised body streaked with grime, but Dean didn't care. He turned off the shower and reached for the towel, using it, stiff from too many washings, to scrub himself clean the rest of the way. It left his skin red, and he winced when the rough material brushed over some of the fresh scrapes.

Discarding the towel on the floor, he bent to snatch up the clothes he'd dropped in a careless pile in his haste to get in the shower. A matchbox fell from his jeans' pocket; a paper napkin with the phone number of some chick he couldn't remember fluttered from his shirt as he shook it out. But the amulet wasn't among his clothes.

He swore under his breath, and quickly let go of the shirt again, grimacing at the sticky gunk now smeared on his fingers. The damned critter was dead; he'd made sure of that, but sheesh, there was no way the local laundromat would get those stains out.

Scooting back into the room, Dean made a beeline for his duffel, casting a longing glance at the bed. It looked inviting despite the lumpy mattress or dingy sheets, and he'd been looking forward to crashing out in it for ten or twelve hours straight. He'd figured the downtime was well-deserved after he'd spent a day and a half of researching, scouting and tracking the friggin' bug.

The bed would have to wait, though.

Finding a pair of clean jeans and a shirt, he dressed quickly and laced up his boots. Snatching the car keys from the dresser, he headed outside, to where his baby sat waiting patiently in the parking lot.

But no matter how much he searched under the seat, through the glove box, or among the collection of fake IDs and credit cards stashed in the cigar box on the dash, he found

nothing. He even dug a hand down into the crease between the back seat and the backrest—although he had no clue how the amulet might've ended up there; he hadn't been in the back seat since bangin' that Vassar girl in Poughkeepsie, a week ago.

Starting to feel a little desperate, he turned his attention to the trunk. He rummaged through his collection of shotguns and pistols, raked through boxes filled with silver bullets and bottles of holy water, and dug underneath the assortment of consecrated iron knives.

Still no amulet.

At last, forced to face reality, Dean slammed the lid of the trunk shut. The amulet was gone. And he knew for sure he'd had it on before setting out to kill the damned critter that had been snacking on the town's kids. If it wasn't in his motel room, and it wasn't in the car... there was only one place it could be: the bug's lair.

He rubbed the back of his neck with a tired hand. There was no question about it: he'd have to go back. Back to the abandoned, ramshackle bungalow at the edge of town that the bug had used as its base, the place littered with the bones of its victims.

It hadn't gone quietly. Far from it: it had fought Dean claw and tooth and nail, using all its six legs to full advantage, throwing Dean around like he'd been nothing but a bouncing ball provided for its entertainment.

He'd ended up sore and bruised all over, before he'd finally managed to get close enough to plunge his knife into its soft underbelly, slicing it open so the smelly black goo that passed for its blood spurted out all over him. At least after that, it had died quickly, the claws that had once snatched up little children waving feebly in the air for a moment before they stilled.

Despite his strong aversion to going back, the thought of giving up on the amulet never crossed Dean's mind. As he crawled behind the wheel, he recalled how Sam had given the talisman to him one Christmas, years ago. It'd been one of many holidays spent in a no-name motel in a no-name town. Just him and Sam, Dad gone on another job. As such, it was another Christmas that didn't stand out particularly in his memory—except for two things: Sam had revealed how he'd read Dad's journal, and given him the gift he'd originally intended for Dad.

The interior of the car reeked of bug goo, and Dean cranked down all the windows, grateful for the fresh evening air streaming in. The cool breeze also helped him stay awake when his eyes threatened to flutter shut with exhaustion and post-hunt comedown.

Once he'd put the amulet on, Dean had never taken it off. Not in the shower, not when having sex, even though he'd decided a long time ago that the stuff Bobby had told Sammy was a lot of crock. There was nothing special about the amulet; it had never shown itself to have any warding or protective properties, which was about the only thing Dean might've had use for. Still, even though Sam had decided to run away to California and chase a life of *normal*—Dean scoffed again at the thought of a Winchester pretending to be a regular Joe, though his heart wasn't in it enough to work up a proper amount of scorn—it seemed that as long as he wore the amulet, Sam was still part of his family. No matter that Dad'd told Sam, in a fit of fury, that if he went, he'd better stay gone, and Dean feared Sam was stubborn enough to obey that particular order. Even if he resisted just about anything else John Winchester told him to do.

After fifteen minutes, Dean reached the decrepit building that had become the bug's final resting place. He got out of the car, gazing up at the house, unwilling to go straight in. The prospect of searching through the rubble and debris and kid bones for his amulet wasn't very appealing.

Suck it up, Dean. His father's voice rang in his ears, and he gathered up his courage. He grabbed a flashlight from the trunk, stashed a knife and a gun in his belt—one could never be too careful—and trudged up the porch steps, feet scuffing the faded paint with reluctance.

The stink was even worse than he'd expected, and he gagged, swallowing hard so as not to chuck up. Pulling the collar of his T-shirt up over his nose and mouth—it didn't do any damned good but it made him feel better anyway—he switched on the flashlight and tried to remember all the places where he'd made closer acquaintance with the walls or floor than he'd've liked.

He eventually found the amulet in the basement, at the bottom of a stairwell that he recalled had been hard, with too many sharp edges, and which had felt far longer than it looked. He made a grab for the amulet as it sparkled dully in the thin beam of the flashlight, and dashed back up the steps and out the door as fast as his feet could carry him.

Outside, he inspected the amulet closely. It was as he'd suspected: the thong had snapped during one of his tumbles. He tied the loose ends back together in a careful knot, before slipping the amulet over his head, making a mental note to replace the string at the earliest opportunity. For now, however, the bed at room twelve of the Sunset Motel a block over from Main Street beckoned, and he quickly navigated the Impala back the way he'd come.

The glow of red and blue lights flashing against the sky alerted him before he reached the motel. Fire fighters and cops milled about among fire trucks and squad cars drawn up in the parking lot. Dean blinked at the charred beams and blackened rubble that was all that was left of the rundown motel. The sharp smell of smoke made his eyes water and caused a tickle in his throat.

A state trooper stood in the road, making sure traffic kept moving and people didn't stop to gawp. Dean rolled down the window. "What happened?"

The man twisted his way, looking at him sharply for a moment. Dean gave him an innocently curious smile. The trooper shrugged. "They're not sure yet. Fire chief thinks it might've been a gas leak."

Dean nodded his thanks and rolled by, absently regretting the loss of his duffel and the brand-new issue of *Busty Asian Beauties* he'd hadn't even had a chance to look at, but grateful nevertheless. Almost without thinking, he raised his right hand to fold his fingers around the amulet. If he hadn't gone back for it... if he hadn't lost it... he'd have been fast asleep in bed. Might never even have known what had hit him when the building blew.

He wondered if perhaps Bobby had been right after all. Perhaps he *had* told Sam the truth: the amulet was special. Dean glanced at the cell phone he'd put within easy reach in the shot gun seat. Perhaps he should try and call Sam. See how his brother was doing. Maybe even head over to Palo Alto: hang out for a bit, shoot some pool, have a couple beers.

He let go of the amulet and put both hands on the wheel again.

Yeah, that'd be nice.

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