

The Ghost in the **Darkness**

The Ghost Files Book Four

Holly Vane

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The Ghost Files recommended reading order

The Haunted Highway
The Manor of Darkness
The Deathly Depths

Other titles by Holly Vane

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Love vs. Lust (The Eternal War Series Book Two)
Life vs. Death (The Eternal War Series Book Three)
Reckoning (The Eternal War Series Book Four)
The Eternal War Box Set
The Devil's Bible

One

He was in hell. That was the only way to explain the pain ripping through every bit of him. His head felt as big as a melon and a colossal headache burned just behind his sensitive eyes.

A throaty groan escaped his dry mouth as he rolled onto his back. *That must have been one almighty bender*, he thought to himself. Above him a slight breeze rustled the canopy of leaves that masked the night sky.

Arching his stiff neck he took in his soiled appearance. Ripped jeans, torn shirt and his shoes were missing. Red and angry looking gashes covered his bare arms.

“What the...?” He asked out loud. Something rattled around his mouth and he spat teeth onto wet concrete. He was lying in an alley. Music boomed out of the door off to his right. Where was he?

As he fought to get vertical his vision swam. He fell back against the cool stone wall of the alleyway and gulped down some much needed air. He groped around for his wallet, keys, cellphone, all of which were missing. “Fuck.” He groaned with realization, *I’ve been mugged!*

When the world stopped spinning he stumbled through the door. Inside the music was even louder. The sports bar was packed to the rafters and every eye focused on him as he staggered past, still disorientated.

He thought about asking one of the patrons for help but thought better of it. Help was a thing of the past, his mugger were probably eye balling him right now with a smug smirk on their ugly face.

He made it outside not a clue where he was or how he was going to get back...wait a minute...where was home?

“You look like death warmed up.”

The voice cut through the man’s desperation and he turned his head. On the sidewalk, leaning against a car was a punk. The guy wasn’t dressed as a good-for-nothing-punk-ass-mugger but one never knew, did one? And besides he didn’t like the way this kid was looking at him.

The man staggered away wanting to get as far from this stink hole as he possibly could but the punk called his name.

“Sam.”

At least he could still remember his name, slowly Sam turned. “Have we met before...?” Was all he could muster, the ache splitting his head was making it hard to do anything.

The punk moved towards him. “No.” Opening the passenger side door he motioned to Sam. “Come on.”

Sam looked at the Mustang then at the driver, did he really expect him to just get in? Sam may have just woke up in a pool of his own vomit but he wasn’t naive. “Yeah, right.” He snorted.

“Star sent me.”

The mention of his sister made Sam reevaluate his position. The punk looked as serious as a mourner at a wake. Ash coloured hair cuddled pale cheeks. The kid looked haunted, looking in his blue eyes made Sam think of himself before he had en-listed.

The kid sighed and pulled out a cell. He dialed a number before throwing it to Sam. "Hello?" There was a pause on the other end.

"Hey." Sam physically relaxed at the sound of his sister's voice.

"What's going on? Whose the kid?" As he spoke a bad feeling formed in the pit of his stomach. Something just felt wrong.

"Just get in the car Sam." She hung up, leaving Sam to stare at the screen feeling like a lemon. Star sounded different, her voice had lost all its warmth.

"What the hell is happening..." he mumbled handing the cell back, with no where else to go Sam reluctantly got into the Mustang. The engine purred as the kid fired it up and glided it smoothly down the road.

Sam said nothing as dark shuttered stores rolled past. He glanced at the kid who had his eyes fixed on the road ahead. "How do you know my sister?"

"We went to school together." Came the measured reply. The kid's face gave nothing away as Sam studied it.

"I didn't catch your name."

"I didn't throw it." Sam's brows rose at the comment and the kid sighed. "My name's Thor."

Sam tried not to laugh. "Thor?"

Thor cringed, "my mother's a fan of Greek mythology."

"You have my sympathy. So are we gonna stop with the bullshit?" Sam added. Thor cast him a dumbfounded look. "My sister wasn't exactly popular at school. I knew all of her *three* friends, and with an unforgettable name like yours..." Sam let the accusation dangle silently between them.

The scenery out of the window had changed. Town gave way to countryside. Rolling dark fields bathed in moonlight spread out around them. "We're here." Thor said steering the car onto a dirt track.

Sam looked up at the old abandoned farmhouse that loomed over them in the darkness. It was falling to pieces. Bits of tile littered the overgrown yard. The window panes were broken and the frames rotting. From the downstairs window came a glimmer of light.

Thor killed the engine and his lean frame skipped up the porch steps. "Watch your step." He told Sam who followed close behind. Inside was as derelict as the exterior, broken floorboards poked out from masses of dead leaves, decaying wallpaper still cling to the walls in places and the stench of urine filled the air.

A woman looked up from a makeshift table in the parlour. Glasses perched on her slender nose emphasized intelligent brown eyes. "Thought you'd gotten lost." She smirked at Thor who crossed the room and opened a cooler sitting on the floor. He tossed Sam a Bud.

Sam glanced at it then at the woman. "Alright. I've been pretty patient up till now. What is going on? Where's my sister?"

“What’s the last thing you remember?”

“Thor!” The woman admonished giving him a stern glare.

The kid shrugged it off while opening the bud and took a swig. “He deserves to know mom.”

“Deserves to know what? Who are you people?” Sam demanded. “I swear if you’ve hurt...”

“Do you remember the lake?” Thor interrupted.

“What lake...” As he spoke memories came flooding back as did the cool, murky water of Sliver Lake. The pain in his head intensified as Sam felt the water all around him. He was choking, something was pulling him down...he was going to drown.

“Ryan...” He heard himself whisper right before the ground came up to meet him.

Two

“What happened?” Sam mumbled as his eyes opened.

“You fainted.” Thor smirked, “it was a pretty feminine swoon to...”

“Oh stop.” His mother came into view with a concerned look on her pretty face. “I told you he wasn’t ready.” Her hand on Sam’s forehead felt better than it should and Sam felt himself smile. The blinding pain in his head returning turned the smile into a frown.

“I want my sister...” he mumbled.

“I’m afraid you can’t see her...” The woman said, her voice full of anguish as she looked to her son.

Thor pulled on his arms and forced Sam into a sitting position. He pressed some pills into his palm. “Take these, they’ll help.” The kid practically forced the bottle of bud into Sam’s hand. Willing to do anything to get rid of the pounding in his temple Sam, without question, downed the pills. Within a few seconds heavy lids came down over his eyes.

Sam was going to die.

Water closed in on him, suffocating and cold. Sam tried to kick his legs but a weight dragged them down, beckoning him to the sandy bed that was to be his grave.

Sam thought of his sister and the promise he was breaking by dying here today. Since their parents had died, Sam was all Star had. She knew nothing of the world and how cruel it could be, not really. Sam swore to protect her, be the big brother she deserved instead of the one that had abandoned her all those years ago. Another thing he’d messed up, because of it, Star would be alone.

As his feet hit the bottom of the lake Sam found himself staring into the eyes of a boy. The image was more like a flickering flame of a candle, Ryan Small grinned at him then everything went dark.

Sam West jolted upright, upsetting the bowl of water in the woman’s hands. It banged across the loose floorboards as Sam struggled to remember where he was.

“Hey, it’s okay, it was just a dream.” She soothed picking up the bowl.

“What the hell did Thor give me?!” Sam demanded angrily. This woman didn’t deserve it but he was confused and, truth be told, scared.

“Some of my sleeping pills.” The woman confessed with a sheepish smile. “Your body needs rest after what it’s been through.”

Sam caught her wrist, “and just what is that exactly?” He probed.

“You’ve been missing for three months Sam.” Thor said entering the small and dingy bedroom of the farmhouse. Camping lanterns provided the only light but they might as well have been switched off. Sam’s world darkened at Thor’s words. That bad feeling dwelling in his stomach was starting to make sense. Something

really bad had happened. He could feel in his bones.

“What?” His voice came out as a whisper.

“Caspar the unfriendly ghost, the thing that’s been shadowing Star,” Thor started to explain, “it took you that night, once you reached shore.”

Sam swallowed hard. “Took me where? I thought it was Star it wanted..” he looked back and fourth, at Thor and his mother, with a dazed and confused expression. The thing in black had haunted Star West for years. Upon waking, after the car accident that had claimed their parents, and had nearly claimed them too, it had been there. A black devil showing his sister all sorts of sick and twisted things. Lately though it had upped its game. Back home, before Sam and Star had been forced to leave, it had came at Star. Sam knew it was the one thing he couldn’t save her from, unlike her, Sam couldn’t see it.

“..We don’t know where Sam.” Thor’s mother was saying, pulling him back to the present, “though I don’t think it was Hawaii.”

“Star was frantic.” Thor continued. “I’ve never seen her so...she tried everything to find you Sam. Nothing worked. It was like you’d vanished off the face of the earth.”

“So how did you find me tonight?”

Thor shared a look with his mum but it was her that answered. Thor seemed unable to talk all a sudden. “Star made a deal with it.” The room seemed to plummet into icy coldness.

“Your life for hers.”

Three

A blade plunged into his heart. That was what Sam felt right now. “She did what?”

“It was the only reason it took you in the first place.” Thor’s mother replied, “leverage Sam. I’m so sorry...”

“No!” Sam kicked off the covers and lurched out of bed. He slammed into the wall, his legs still wobbly and uncooperative. “We are going to get her back before...”

“Sam it’s too late.” Thor’s low voice said. It had been a while since he had spoke. His sad eyes glued to the floorboards. “Star didn’t die, death would have been a blessing in comparison to what that thing wanted,” he uttered bitterly before finally looking at Sam. “Star’s servitude for you. She’s its now.”

“How do you mean?” Sam asked wanting to get all the details so he could figure out how to get Star out of this. “What does it need her for?”

“Whatever this thing is,” Thor’s mother answered, “it predates the written word. There’s absolutely nothing anywhere about it.”

“So we know nothing!” Sam snapped angrily. The woman smiled patiently at him. Sam’s respect for her grew. “I’m sorry...”

“Don’t be.” She answered quickly, “I know what its like to lose a loved one.” Sadness invaded her bright eyes and the woman looked away.

Thor cleared his throat, “hate to break up this touching moment,” he said giving his mother a curious glance as she passed him, “but we do know something about it. I’m not just here for my good looks you know.” He mused.

“How do you mean?” Sam inquired.

Thor up-righted a crate and sat down. “From what we’ve gleamed from our sources this thing is called a Guardian.”

“Guardian of what exactly?”

“That we don’t know.” Thor grimaced leaning in, “apparently there used to be a whole race of them, that was thousands of years ago and its been e-eons since one has shown up.”

“Okay, what does it want with my sister?” Sam asked suddenly feeling drained.

“The Guardian is after souls.” Thor’s mother piped in from beside the door. “To be more precise, the souls of the dead.”

“Ghosts feed this thing.” Thor clarified.

“And that’s where Star comes in.” Sam finished as a light bulb went on in his head, “but surely something as powerful as this thing can get it’s own souls?” Nothing about this made much sense to him. Thor’s answers left him with only more questions.

“That’s all we know.” Thor sighed leaning away.

Sam West looked at the boy in front of him who rubbed at his puffy eyes and a stab of sympathy ripped through him. The boy’s messy hair and pale complexion made him look ill. With a snarl of frustration Sam started to pace the room. “I need

to see my sister. We need to stop beating around the bush and just ask her what's going on." The fact that she wasn't there to greet her brother, after spending three months of doing whatever to get him back, irked Sam.

Thor briefly closed his eyes, "I don't know where she is."

"But she called me at the bar, and I assume Star is where you've been getting this info from?" Who else could know anything about what they were up against. Thor was holding a lot back, Sam knew that much, and didn't like being left in the dark.

"Sam," the kid breathed tiredly, "I haven't seen her in weeks. She could be in flaming Malta for all I know."

"Then how...?"

"Star called me, told me where you'd be. That's all I know."

Sam gritted his teeth in annoyance. Why would Star rather confide in this messed up kid she barely knew then her own brother? "Fine." He barked, "give me your phone and I'll call her."

Without pause Thor retrieved the cell from his pocket and handed it to Sam. "You'll have to go outside, there's no reception inside."

Sam took the phone and stormed out the room. Outside the cool evening breeze whipped at his cheeks. He scrolled through Thor's contacts till he came to Star, which didn't take very long, the only other name in the kid's phone was his mother, and dialed. "Come on...pick up damn it!" He cursed as he was directed to her voice-mail for the seventh time.

"Not answering, huh?" Thor was hovering on the doorstep. "She does that a lot."

Sam handed the phone back. "I've been a saint up till now but if you don't spill what you're holding back, I'll paste your face all over this house."

To his credit Thor didn't try to deny it. "She's different from the girl you remember Sam." He finally admitted, "doing this, working for that...its changing her a piece at a time."

"How old are you kid?" Sam countered, "how are you mixed up in all this?"

"Not old enough." Thor replied bitterly, "you and Star aren't the only ones with...gifts. At least that's what my Mom calls it. I would say its more of a curse..."

"You can see the dead?" Sam demanded. He needed to trust these people but couldn't unless he knew their agenda and just what the hell dragged them into his and Star's fight.

"No." Thor leaned against the porch, "my father had a unique ability. He could see the future."

Sam regarded the kid a second before bringing his fist up, seconds before his knuckles collided with Thor's face, the kid shifted right and Sam stumbled, hitting nothing but air.

"You think that proves anything?" Thor scoffed, "you telegraphed it, man. Even a blind man could have ducked that."

"if you really can see the future, why would you need Star to tell you where I was?" Sam smiled slyly. He had come across his fair share of false clairvoyants, swindlers cashing in on people's pain. They were the lowest form of scum in his opinion

“Because the future isn't fixed in stone.” Thor explained, “it's a living, flowing energy that constantly changes with every breath you take. I can see a few minutes ahead, that's it.”

“And Star knows?”

Thor nodded. “We really did go to school together. In all my 24 years walking this earth, she's the only person I've ever told.”

“How'd it happen?” Sam inquired still on the fence. If Thor and Star was close enough for him to reveal a secret of this magnitude how come Sam had never heard his sister mention him?

“I wasn't in an accident like you and Star. I was born with it. Star turned to me when you disappeared because she thought I could help. She found me down in Ohio eight weeks ago,” a smile crossed his face, “I hadn't seen her in years.”

Sam took a deep breath, trying to process all this and figure their next step. “Okay, the thing wants ghosts and Star hunts them down for it, we work cases eventually we're bound to bump into her.”

Thor looked at him skeptically. “That could take months Sam, years even, but...” he trailed off, “I have an idea. The ghosts it's sending her after, the last one was from the 1800's or something...”

“So the older the better.” Sam finished picking up Thor's train of thought, “it narrows the field. The longer the ghost's been wandering around down here, the stronger it becomes. All that negative energy brewing, just waiting to explode...”

“It's time to get to work, kid.”

Four

“Gotcha!” Thor looked up from the big musty volume balancing in his lap at Sam’s exclamation.

“We have a winner.” He announced brightly. “Emily Brighton, died 1888. Get your coat.”

“Wait!” Thor called but Sam West was already down the porch steps, his wavy shoulder length hair bobbing around his broad shoulders.

“Where are you going?” Thor’s mother shuffling out onto the porch looking like she’d just woken up stopped the boys in their tracks. “Hold on till I get my coat...”

“No, mom.” Thor said quickly. He gave Sam a conspiratorial glance before continuing. “This could get dangerous. I want you to stay here.”

Thor’s mother gaped at her son. “I’ve had my share of danger Thor. I’m coming!”

“He’s right.” Sam jumped in, “we don’t don’t know what the hell we’re walking into, don’t worry about Thor, I’ll take good care of him Mrs...?” Thor glared at him but Sam chose to ignore it.

“Stevens,” Thor’s mother answered with a girly pitch, “but you can call me Hazel.”

“We’ll be back Hazel, I promise.” Sam flashed her his best smile and a disgusted noise escaped Thor’s throat.

“Just get in.”

Sam couldn’t stop the grin spreading across his face as the Mustang pulled away from the farmhouse.

“Where to?” Thor asked eager to steer the conversation away from his mother.

“Bakersfield.” Sam replied, “Emily Brighton was a sixteen year old maid. She worked at Ravens House until her untimely death.”

“And?” Thor prodded as the car lurched down the country roads.

“And she was raped and murdered by her boss. There’s hundreds of sightings of her ghost haunting the house, which was a hotel until a fire tore through the place.”

“So the plan is to...what? Talk to a ghost?”

Sam laughed despite himself. “You’ve never been around ghosts before, have you? They don’t really talk. More like reign down fiery vengeance on just about anyone that crosses their path.”

“We’re going to die.” Thor announced.

“Relax, its not my first rodeo. Hopefully Star will already be there when we show up.”

“How do you know she will?”

“Because this is the only ghost for miles that’s powerful enough to match her criteria, and I know my sister. I just have a feeling, trust me, she’ll show.”

It took three hours of Thor driving like a madman and Sam bitching about his borrowed clothes, before they reached the abandoned town of Bakersfield. “Thought the fire was in the hotel?” Thor murmured as the Mustang inched past the dark and gutted houses that loomed like silent sentinels.

The town consisted of a single street. Buildings that had long since been left hugged the pot-holed road. Black and charred wood and other debris littered the sidewalks. “What the hell happened here?” Sam wondered aloud, “all the book said was that a fire broke out in the hotel, nothing about the town burning as well.”

“Something bad happened here, that’s for sure.” Thor murmured. He urged the car faster. The atmosphere that hung over the town was dark and foreboding, like the devil itself had come to visit.

Sam pointed ahead. Dawn was breaking, bathing what looked to be a mansion in glorious orange flame. “That must be the hotel.”

The Mustang left the town and followed a winding slope of a road. Ravens House sat on a lonely hill, high above the town. Sam pushed open the gates that gave with a noise of fingernails down a blackboard. The Mustang purred up the drive and came to a stop outside the house.

Thor let out a low whistle. “Must have been impressive in its day.” He muttered. Ravens House was Victorian in style but most of the features that had made it beautiful had been marred by the fire. Retrieving a crowbar and two torches from the trunk, Thor forced the heavysset doors open with a splintering of wood. “Age before beauty.”

Sam threw an annoyed look his way before taking the offered torch and stepped over the threshold. As soon as he did a strong gust of wind, emanating from somewhere deep in the bowels of the house, nearly knocked him over.

“There must be a broken window or something.” Thor offered hopefully.

Sam, noting the kid’s reluctance to enter, gave him a sobering look, “there’s no wind.” He said simply. Head held high Sam walked into darkness.

Thor stood on the cracked stone steps looking after him. He had learned to trust the power he had inherited, and right now, it was screaming at him to get out of here.

“Well?” Sam’s voice beckoned from inside.

With a deep breath Thor Stevens entered Ravens House.

Five

The beams of the torches barely penetrated the gloom that lingered in the house. A thick layer of sooty dust clung to every surface. Sam forged the way ahead, out of the foyer with the scorched marble flooring, and along a narrow corridor with no windows.

Suddenly Thor grabbed his arm and yanked Sam back. "What are you...?" A tinkle of glass made him aim his torch up to the ceiling. Seconds later the chandelier crashed to the floor, glass shards flying everywhere. The sound deafening as it echoed around the dead mansion.

Sam stumbled backwards, gaping at the destruction and debris. "Thanks." He told Thor, staring at him with something like awe. "You would have been handy to have on the road." Sam added in a humorous tone to alleviate the tension that knotted Thor's body.

Thor gave him a tight smile and they continued down the abandoned corridor. Sam knew better than to try and put the kid at ease. Something felt different about this place. Sam had seen his fair share of things that went bump in the night, and the places they haunted, this was nothing like the rest. A shiver traveled down his spine as if to confirm his suspicions.

The corridor opened out into a square open space. Wooden stairs that were broken in the middle lay off to their right. But it was the doors in front of them that was calling to Sam. Going with his guts Sam tried to turn the handle but it held fast. "Thor, pass me the crowbar." The doors groaned as Sam tried brute force, yet still they remained sealed. Sam, breathing hard at the exhaustion, threw the crowbar down with frustration.

Thor eyed Sam as he gave in to a tantrum, kicking everything in sight. Choosing to let him get it out his system, Thor examined the doors. He might not have Sam and Star's abilities but he still felt the same pull as Sam did. The doors were wood like the last set and should have gave just as easily. "Do you hear that?" He asked Sam who didn't seem to hear him above the stomping and cursing. Thor pressed his ear to the door. "Sam! Knock it off!" He yelled then motioned to him. "There's music coming from inside."

"What?" Sam almost growled, "music?"

"Hear it for yourself."

Skeptically Sam pinned his ear to the door. Sure enough music drifted through the wood. "Impossible." He uttered. It sounded like a full blown orchestra was playing on the other side of the door. As they listened voices joined the music, like just beyond the door a party was in full sway. Glasses clinked together in toasts, high pitched giggles and heels against marble, all audio-able above the music.

"Is this normal for a ghost hunt?"

"No." Sam replied looking just as flabbergasted, "this is new. We need to get

in there.”

“How? Those doors aren’t going to open.”

“So this is how well you do without me.” Sam and Thor stared at each other, eyes widening at the feminine voice.

“Star.”

Six

It felt more than good to see Star West. She ran to Sam, wrapping her arms around his neck. Sam let relief untangle the anxious knot in his stomach. A slight smile parted Thor's lips over Star's shoulder.

Sam pulled back and felt the concern return. In the beam of his torch Sam could see all the changes his sister had gone through. Her usual raven hair now flowed red down her shoulders, Star's once youthful and pretty face was now graced with skin the colour of milk. His sister's once bright blue eyes were now dulled a deep rust and told the horrors of the past three months.

"Thor's told me everything." Sam's hard voice said accusingly. Star backed away, giving Thor a hard glance.

"This is why I stayed away." She admitted, "cause I knew you'd tare me a new one. I made a choice Sam."

"It was the wrong one."

"So I was supposed to let you rot?" Star asked heatedly.

"Yes!" Sam shouted back.

Star's face softened, "it was me it wanted Sam. I wasn't going to let you be collateral damage."

"So you made a deal with the devil."

"What did you expect me to do?"

"I expected you to save yourself. I made a promise Star..." his voice broke and ashamed, Sam looked away.

"To hell with your promise Sam." Star spat angrily to everyone's surprise. Fury flashed in her eyes. "I'm old enough to make my own decisions. I'm sick of living with all your baggage Sam! It was a car accident for God sake! There was nothing everyone could have done. Stop blaming yourself over it, you have nothing to feel guilty about." As she ranted a single tear fell down Sam's cheek. His father had been a proud policeman, and later on, a damn good private investigator. He had wanted to pass the company down to Sam, who had made his own plans. On his nineteenth birthday Sam ran away to join the army, and his father had never spoke to him since. He was compensating with Star, hoping that if he did right by her, his previous sins would be forgiven.

"You want to know the truth Sam?" Star asked unrelenting, "since mom and dad, its been all I could do to get up in the morning. I miss them so much..." now it was Star's cheek upon which tears fell, she slapped them away angrily, "and I've been walking on eggshells with you, never knowing when you're going to go off the reservation. I miss our home Sam, which we can never go back to since we're wanted fugitives. This life has brought us nothing but pain. Now, I feel nothing. He took all the pain and suffering away Sam."

"And what about the ghosts he has you hunt?"

"They've had their time Sam."

The siblings stared each other down and Thor cleared his throat, “maybe we should...”

“Shut up!” Sam barked.

“Don’t talk to him like that.” Star told her brother, “you wouldn’t be standing here if it wasn’t for him.”

“And that’s another thing you’ve been lying about.” Sam countered, “just who is he to you?” He studied his sister’s face as Star’s eyes met Thor’s, for a second something like tenderness mixed with fear spread on his sister’s face, and Sam had his answer.

“You never change.” Star muttered. She made to move past her brother but he blocked her way.

“I won’t let you do this Star. This inst who you are, you save the dead, not damn them.”

Star focused on Sam and Thor didn’t know whether to get in between them or try to lighten the situation. Star side stepped her brother, quick as a lightning bolt she moved past them and placed her palm on the unyielding doors.

They opened with a groan.

“You can’t stop me.” Star told Sam sadly. The ballroom was as vivid and alive as if the hotel was still open for business. Women in grand gowns gossiped around the cloth covered tables. Beyond, couples swooped over the dance floor. The huge elegant ballroom was a step into the past. An orchestra dominated the little stage at the far end of the room, blasting out a haunting waltz that commanded the dancers.

“What the...?” Thor breathed as the three took in the sight. At this slight interruption the music stopped, all eyes turned their way, malice glinted in their faces.

Malice that was directed at Star.

The beautiful ladies hissed like cats while the man continued to bore holes in her. The light started to fade, like a dream upon waking, the glistening marble columns returned to their burned state, one by one the party goers evaporated like soot on a breeze.

“That was crazy.” Thor said eyes wide, “what was that about?” He asked turning to Sam.

Star sprinted away from them, navigating through the debris. At first the boys stared after her, stunned, then Sam clocked the ghostly specter standing on the dance floor. “Emily.” Sam breathed. “Star, no!” He yelled taking off after her.

Bounding after, like a bull in a china shop, Sam gained on her. He tackled his sister to the ground but froze in his tracks when he saw her face. Star’s eyes were red and glowing with violence, her mouth formed an unpleasant snarl that sent ice down his spine.

This wasn’t his little sister anymore.

Sam’s hesitation gave Star an opening, bringing up a knee she catapulted Sam across the room. He hit the cracked marble with a whoop, as the air was knocked out of him. Star got to her feet and closed in on a spectating Emily.

Cold steel glinted in his sister's hand. Forcing himself up, Sam flung himself at Star. She ducked his failing arms and he rolled across the floor, getting to his feet. "Star, stop!" He pleaded but a clenched fist sent him sprawling. Sam spat blood onto the dirty floor of the ballroom, "a little help here Thor!"

Thor reached Star and grabbing her arms whirled her around so that his body was between Star and the ghost. "Stop this Star." he told her in a calm voice as Sam picked himself up. Sam expected his sister to clock Thor as she had with him, but to his surprise, Star seemed unwilling to raise a hand to Thor. She let Thor push her away, her murderous eyes still fixed on Emily. Sam picked up a bit of marble flooring and while Thor had Star distracted brought it down on his sister's skull.

Her body crumbled to the floor.

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