

John loitered around in the train station's terminal. It was empty, predictably, and given the fact that afternoon light was already seeping in, he wondered if the arrival was coming after all. A pair of shoes kept clattering on the floor.

This circle was getting repetitive.

A glance at the phone. 5 o' clock.

Maybe hitting the snack bar could be worth it?

No, temperance for the working.

Stilling idle thoughts would be for the best, sitting down would help...what was that glint?

John's awareness came back to the world and he saw the glass doors to the tracks opening. There was a train in the background, but more important was the man coming in.

"Christ, Dale." John shook his head there in the atrium.

"Patience, grasshopper." Dale's maw widened lightly. He languidly strolled toward his friend, who by now was tapping his foot.

"Says the man whose personal timezone has just been offset by an additional two hours." John rolled his orbs. "I'm going to have to ask you to come in at 9:00 next time."

Dale arrived by John a good few seconds later. His eyes were finally settling.

"Says the man..." Dale affected the tone. "...who made me wait over two decades for our first X-Files episode." he finished, smirking.

"You never watched that." John replied instantly.

"Neither did you." Dale did the same.

The two stared off for a good minute, until Dale noticed the corner of John's mouth curl upward.

"Got you."

"God...damn." John broke into a smile. "Hope you're happy with those mortal pleasures."

"Sometimes I am." Dale's expression went back into exploratory mode. He looked around the terminal from top to bottom, made a face, then looked towards the back.

"We going? I don't look forward to lugging around 10 pounds all day."

"Let me help." John reached toward an outstretched arm of Dale's, picking up a briefcase a moment later.

"Thanks." Dale nodded toward his friend, before beginning to walk toward the entrance. Their exit.

"So, figured out anything else about the site? Been checking sales in the area? You sure it's derelict?" Dale asked while his eyes kept straight ahead.

"I, yes? Nothing much more has come up since the preliminary research. Just more signs." John blinked a little. "Why, why the concern? You just got here." John spoke, opening the doors for the two as they filtered out into the parking lot outside.

"I have a career. If there are renovations I don't want to be anywhere near that place." Dale spoke plainly. He gazed a little at the sky, expression hard.

"As do I? Trust me, if you're worried about losing your spot at the psi lab, then you should think about how I feel when tenure is coming up..." John mumbled, snaking through concrete pathways with his friend. The two eventually arrived at a small sedan. John fished for his keys and pressed a button and heard the thing unlock. John entered and started up the engine while Dale went around to take shotgun.

"A real academic salary." Dale quipped.

"A real academic salary, coming on that train of yours." John flashed a look at Dale.

"Point taken."

John finished starting up the car and eased it out of the lot. He hit normal roads a little while after and found his attention slipping away to the task at hand, though he tended to spy Dale looking out of the windows in the corner of his eye.

"I know. Back home." John commented.

"You know how it is. Come back every other year for something, but never really come back in truth. I trust we don't need to go on a feels quest over this." Dale responded, still peering out through glass at a hazy city beyond.

"We don't, but we can. In any case, how have things been?" John asked.

"More of the usual. Not that it's a bad thing. I'm sort of glad to be going back to meat and potatoes ganzfeld protocols, frankly. I think people forget how volitional clairvoyance can integrate just as well with the PMIR as can presentiment studies. Hacking the system, and all." Dale rambled on a bit.

"Amen to our agreement on that front, brother." John smiled a little, wending the car down familiar roads. Dale looked back at the driver.

"Indeed so. And I trust my favorite magician has been maintaining the scholarly world as well?" Dale talked in that faux-medieval tone both of them knew they loved too much.

"It doesn't take much work to advise a museum and "teach" freshmen." John quickly responded.

"I don't envy you on that front, at least." Dale whistled.

"It is what it is I suppose." John shrugged. The car was hitting residences now.

"Well, aside from this 'shooting of the shit,' where exactly is this place I've been hearing so much about? Have you actually, you know, stepped onto the property yet?" Dale asked.

"No, which is exactly why we're heading there right now. Just a preliminary scouting, I'd prefer to have my tools on hand before we do anything...interesting." John focused more on the road, they were bending out of the homes back onto a light commercial street. A bit prettied up, but what wasn't, nowadays?

"I really think you should realize what having a sword on hand looks like to the average person, chief." Dale remarked.

"Eh, everything will be hidden from the, 'latents,' friend." John shrugged while driving.

"A man after my own power level." Dale shook his head, smiling.

The two arrived at the place a minute later, car idling by the sidewalk. It had obviously been unoccupied for a while, but still, the elongated building looked decently maintained. The plants around the front were wild but still vibrant, and the paint hadn't lost much of its luster. A sign, probably only a decade old, stood affixed above the porch-like entrance.

"Gardner Nursery School."

"Yeah, in other circumstances this whole affair would have been pretty weird." Dale spoke first, eyes still taking in the surrounding details. "How exactly did you plan o-" Dale was interrupted by a raised hand of John's.

"I'll park the car in one of the nearby residential streets; I know it won't be towed. This street sees only mild traffic for coffee shops and the like, as long as we quickly loop around towards the back, all the overgrowth and oddly angled construction should conceal us. Things might get more complicated once I bring my ritual equipment, but we'll cross that bridge when it comes." John spoke decisively, eyes still on the road. Dale just sort of looked on.

"I don't exactly know *what* you could do here...but..." Dale slipped off. John looked at him.

"I know."

Their eyes both steadied on one another.

"We've waited long enough." Dale sighed.

"Ready to adventure?" John finally asked.

Dale thought for a long while. Eventually, he just went with the first thing off the top of his head.

"I was born to."

Getting the car parked was quick affair, all things considered. John took the sedan down the way and to the left, leaving it still next to the home-shadowed sidewalk. Dale could've sworn John had paused then; to stare into what seemed to be empty space, before he blinked and got out and shut the door. Dale followed soon after.

It was only a few minutes until they had reached the haunt.

"Coast is clear." Dale was gazing off in the directions away from the derelict. There were no cars.

John just nodded, quickly hopping over the decorative picket fence and towards the cover of vegetation in the back. There were a few other things behind here he realized, ones that you wouldn't see from the street. It was, of course, the expected fare; sandboxes, lunchtables, and the like. With all the vines, though, it felt a bit different, he thought. Cozy, perhaps? John let the thoughts stew in his head a little while he made his way through the tiny cement path around the back. It was "true" to an extent, he knew, but his magic was not that of little girls' secret gardens. There was an aim to its transcendence, a sobriety and solemnity that his second sight had borne out. He could hear his friend walking behind him, for crying out loud. His divinations did not reveal mortal desires.

"Might want to speed up a little if you want us to get out before nightfall." Dale commented as a grey-green blur sped past John. "That sun won't hang forever." he shot a glance back. It was a bit soft.

"Right." John said.

The magician could see some sort of orange overtake the sky as he approached what looked like the main back door, but the building itself obscured the horizon. Dale was already testing the handle with a spare hand, and after a few brief shoves, set down a briefcase that he had brought along. It took him a little while to open it up and pull out a rake from his set of lockpicks, but eventually he started to play with the tumblers.

"Any clue on the interior?" Dale asked, face still oriented on his work.

"Not really?" John scratched his head leaves a little. "I realize how baseless that makes this whole endeavour seem, but I really can't say why this place popped up so often in my dreams. At the very least my magical mind found *something* of interest in the place, which should be good enough for our purposes. I would guess that some intelligence is involved, simply due to the ambiance, though I already know how you feel about that matter." John eyed Dale. The man just kept working.

"Eh, it's not so how much how I feel about the matter rather than what I know. Honestly getting the suspicion that this is a precognitive loop with the "other" being a temporally-displaced brain state, but spontaneous cases are wild jungles in any case. Don't sell yourself short, at least; you are just as much of an intelligence as any ghosts and ghouls you might see." Dale's eyes briefly shot back toward John with a curled smile. "Speaking of which, found out anything about...the usual suspects, I suppose?"

"No murders." John shrugged. "This place was, well, obviously rather clean, though the typical suppositions regarding ghosts are clearly already questionable."

“Just glad we weren't going to find skeletons.” Dale talked while he fiddled a little more with the mechanism. That rake was going to get them all in a little bit, he just knew. For the moment, though, he turned towards John. “Alright, I want my psi-high. Gimme something specific from your visions.”

“Ah right, just, hold on...” John closed his eyes in recollection. It was dark, but when he had walked down the corridor, dreaming, there was a bend and a playroom on the left but more importantly there was a door to the outside and...

Oh shit.

That was a good one.

“Right behind the door. Wooden peg on a base. Lots of little disks around it that you can take off and throw. Like a kid's version of playing horseshoe.” John's eyes opened right as Dale finally felt all the tumblers click. A solid grin crept along his face as he looked toward his friend.

“You want to do the honors, then?” Dale opened the door and gestured towards the gloam. His leaves were disheveled and his eyes wild.

“Given that I'm practically looking at a ghost already, yes.” John just chuckled a little as he stepped forward onto the concrete step and up into the door. His heart was pounding; mostly from excitement and not fear, he thought, though arguably the former was still juvenile and in some sense...

Alas, he was not examining the soul's mirror correctly. That paranoia could be damning.

“...You going to move out of the doorway, dude?” Dale spoke from behind. John could hear and started to inch forward.

“Yeah, sorry about that.” John let his mouth run while he took in the environs. The whole place was rather grayscale, but he could spy a corridor-the same corridor with the bend from his dream. And to the left, or rather his current right, there was an archway that led into some dusty room with a few toys still stacked into the corner, and if he turned around a little he could see Dale huddling over the tiny corner that doors hide.

“Damn, yes! Ah...God...oh, sorry man, you probably want to see this as much as me...” Dale slowly stood up, cradling something in his hands. As John's sight adjusted, he could see the last feature of the room come into view.

“Yeah, that's the pseudo-horseshoe set.” John, nodded, affirmed. Dale was smiling and lost in a happy haze. John could not blame him.

“Seriously...favorite wizard, dude.” Dale kept staring at the toy in amazement. John let a smirk come over himself.

“Glad to be of service. And I hope our parapsychologist will provide his expertise in the rest of this investigation?” John began to edge further out into the hall.

“Ah, right...I'll get myself ready.” Dale's smile lightly wore down into a cooler, more confident one, and he placed back the toy before walking over towards his comrade.

The two ventured further down the way, following the bend in the path. John had briefly considered the playroom, but it had already been revealed to him and a few assorted fears kept him away. Dale was getting rather bold in his pace, all things considered, though John supposed that cinematic dangers were unlikely anyways. Coming up on their left was a kitchen, by now quite obviously disused. It didn't look like it was connected to any other rooms and so the two continued onwards, finding another hallway on their right. It led to what they could only assume was the front door and some small, nearby room that must have been the office, so they too left that path fallow.

“I don't quite feel anything.” Dale broke the silence. His gaze was steady and expression blank.

“Are you supposed to feel anything?” John, briefly cocked his head, face a little hard as he went back to the search.

“Psi phenomena can be associated with physiological responses. I still believe that the precognitive hypothesis of your intimations is the strongest. It would be rather archaic to associate such events with inorganic spaces rather than organisms, after all.” Dale said.

“Except for poltergeists.” John quipped.

“Or RSPK and a living agent; ala you.” Dale shot back.

“Point taken, but we should probably get back to an impartial investigation rather than a cock fight, right?” John spoke, attention mostly focused on an upcoming turn in the hallway.

“You'd be right.” Dale nodded, amber eyes now trying to get an angle on the new development.

It was just another hallway, at the end of the day. The pair's vision had by now adjusted, and before them was another light grey-plastered thoroughfare with a few archways on either side. What immediately caught John's attention though was the one at the far end of the hall, barely illuminated by a window to the backyard.

“Come.” John began to walk forward.

“It's returning, eh? Now this should be interesting...” a smirk grew on Dale's face as he followed behind his friend.

Soon John had reached the end of the hall and turned toward the source of a growing intuition. The room had an assortment of old cots and he couldn't help recoiling, but he knew that something else lay just under the surface. He stepped forward; willfully, he liked to imagine.

“Are you seeing anything that I am not?” Dale asked. By now he had started to wander into the room more leisurely.

“No, I am feeling something that you do not.” John responded, walking forward. Though slightly rusted, there was still a sheen to the frame of the cots. There was another window at the end of the room, this

time to one of the vine-hidden sandboxes.

“Surprised they never bothered to clean up.” Dale began to enter the lanes, weaving past each little bed. “At least they appeared to do so elsewhere.”

“In hindsight, it probably would have been beneficial to investigate the lot's history more than just a few years back.” John idly commented. There was something more to the back, it seemed, so he joined Dale in the excursion further in. He was getting no clearer signs at the moment and it was clear that this was somehow the location to be in, so he let his eyes wander around the room.

“It's still sort of surreal. The fibers that these things are made out of. Scratchy plastic.” Dale let a foot clank against the frame of a nearby cot, as if for emphasis. “Hopefully they got good nights.”

“You put blankets over the bedding, Dale.” John rolled his eyes, though Dale didn't see. He was pacing a little bit now, just by the window. The light outside was rapidly fading, and even the glow in the sky had shifted to the red of late dusk.

“Yeah, just, well you see what I meant, at least?” Dale sighed, poking the cot with his foot a little more.

John kept looking outside. The clouds were thin and loosely spread, but still looked soft. Like pillows, almost.

“Yes, I...yes.” John spoke to the air. His head was beginning to bob, ever so slightly.

“Well, thanks for agreeing.” Dale cocked a brow, beginning to look toward John's turning head.

“No, I mean *yes*, you put blankets over the bedding...” John spoke, walking towards Dale in peculiarly consistent movements.

“Y-Yes?” Dale half-asked, mostly just staring at John's hands now. “I take it you mean something more than just agreement, so care to explain?” Dale continued, emerald face paled to spearmint.

“We will need any spare sets of clothes you happen to have in there. Sheets would be even better.” John talked while he reached for Dale's briefcase.

“The hell?! I mean, we're not actually, how'd you get this idea in your head?” Dale jerked the briefcase back, looking into the hungry eyes of John.

“Dale.” John sighed. “You came all this way on a hunch. I find it doubtful that this is your tipping point.” John spoke with remarkable clarity for one who looked possessed.

“I...okay fine, don't get your ego swelling over this...” Dale sighed this time, awkwardly crouching down and let the case pop open on the ground. “I'm still skeptical of the conception that we have to sleep here. Even if we do somehow meet a ghost or something through that, we may not be able to differentiate it from a mundane dream.” Dale looked away as he talked, gaze alternating between fear and embarrassment.

“Our pairing. Cross-examine dreams for veridical elements. Child's play, really.” John didn't bother to

look up as he fished through the briefcase, quickly procuring a smattering of fuzzy jackets and spare shirts. He then scanned the room for a moment before identifying a small clear space right beneath the window. He lay out the clothing in mimicry of a cot's bedding as best as he could, reserving the jackets for pillows. The "beds" were done quickly, at which point he looked back toward Dale.

"I can't believe this." Dale stared vacantly.

"Unless you want to try your luck with a little kid's bunk, this is where you're journeying tonight. I trust you to clear your mind as you fall into slumber, this isn't a time for nocturnal fantasies." John spoke confidently, the high noticeably beginning to wear off.

"Again, don't get carried away just because I capitulated. Let's just see how your maneuver here works." Dale shook his head a little, walking over to the end of the room. He sat down and shuffled into place in a short while, though it was clear when he would stop angling his body for a more comfortable position. John made his way into his own spot soon after, beginning a light breathing routine. The light was almost gone, now, and a certain mystery was beginning to creep into the room. At least, when Dale wasn't talking.

"I'm not even really tired yet, just my body." Dale mumbled, though John didn't angle his head to look at him.

"Body? I'm guessing you walked a lot today?" John responded. It didn't really take him out of the mindset too much.

"Well, not really, just to the station. It was enough to exercise my muscles and then let them simmer for hours just sitting on a train. Like a worse version of when you get exhausted by doing nothing." Dale talked. He sounded a little upset. And John felt like that was a really weird word to characterize it as.

"That sucks." John talked. His eyelids were getting a bit harder to hold up. Though he guessed that was sort of what he was aiming for.

"Yeah. I dunno, just, man." Dale mumbled, but the tone got the message across for John. The two felt each other for a little bit, there. The room was darkening and both were feeling more tired, but Dale felt like he was forgetting something so he asked John.

"Uh, John?" Dale asked.

"Oh, yeah?" John opened an eye again.

"Um, we're going to like look for whatever's here in our dreams, right?" Dale strung the words along, though they felt a bit off.

"Yeah, I think. I just felt like this is the best path to uncovering what's going on. It might provide a moment of inspiration or something, or like maybe we can hit the astral...though we really should have used projection for that..." John yawned mid-sentence.

"So...this is what we're supposed to do?" Dale remembered to ask.

"I think so...yeah." John nodded to himself. Dale couldn't see.

"Okay...cool." Dale yawned too.

Light began to hit the room again, this time of the moon. Both were asleep not long after that.

Warm and nice

Parts covered

Last memory bedtime

Now light and sheets weird

John's consciousness wended through many branches. Fragments became thoughts, and as enough of them reflected off one another, his sun crystallized. In the aftermath of birth, this mind began to anchor the world as it always had.

Alive? Yes.

On Earth? No, but not likely past the Moon.

Awake? Now this was a funny one.

John lifted the kingdom, and with a gradually alighting crown, took in the Universe. There around him was a well-painted room, visible from the influx of morning light behind him. All around were objects the little man remembered, though he could not discern much beyond the fact that they were strong and shining. There was a strangeness to it, as if the room was holding its breath for a joke, but he could not for the life of him tell what it was. He kept at this vantage point, low on the plains, until he saw something move. The crown followed, and on one of these half-recalled objects he spied a shifting in some finery, a rich fabric barrier against some unknown obstacle. There was a stirring beneath it, and before he could hazard a guess as to its nature, said nature became visible.

First some fine leaves jutting out, then a tiny grasper, then a lithe leg. When the face finally came out, John's trance broke.

"Mmph..." Dale's voice came out squeaky, and even more than that it came from a vaguely rounded, soft face that...

"Am dreaming a-gain..." John whined, finding his voice much the same as that of his friend.

"Ugh...gonna have wakey, or change dream an' find ghost an' even *moore* stuff!" John's voice started to shade into an annoyed scream, though it came out more as a yip.

"Aaah, oww..." Dale started to form proper words, at least from what John could hear. "Quiet...John? Oh, we inna magic place or...W-WHAT?!" Dale's quivering voice crescendoed in an instant. John could guess that he had finally gotten up and saw how little they were. This was gonna be annoying, so

he'd probably have to get around to wishing dream-Dale away and trying to...wait!

"Dale!" John popped his head out from the cot, form still largely obscured by the blankets. "You're, you're up and remembered!"

"John?! This, there's a thing going on!" Dale spoke, sheets wrapped around himself like a gnome. His fangs were practically nubs at this point, neck a lighter tone of mint.

"Um, yeah...but we can fix it, we need start finding the thing!" John started to scoot himself off the cot, until he realized something. The sheets were rubbing up against bare skin.

"Thing?! I dunno what we're looking for and am naked and you're a baby and you wanna *go*?" Dale struggled to make in breaths. His vision couldn't focus on anything.

"Is, is probably an effect of the location, remember? C'mon, we need to find out!" John started to creep along the floor, pulling his blankets alongside. He didn't quite now where to go, but the doorway without a door called.

"E-ffect?" Dale took a moment to puzzle, before his irises became pinpricks. He took a moment to look down at himself. He hovered on his soft, lime skin for a moment, before looking back at John as if he had seen a ghost.

"You have cure right." Dale's voice was deadened.

"I, I dunno?" John eked out a response.

Dale's orbs suddenly became very watery. Then he started to cry.

John stared for a little while. His friend was curled up on the cot, dampening the blankets with low wails and breathing in the way that tells that he's hurt. John was half-believing and disbelieving and almost hoping it was a normal dream but the tainted sun within remained.

"...Dale?" John slowly crept along closer. "It's, am sorry but we have to go..."

"No we don't! Am not a baby!" Dale's face briefly flashed at John. It had little rivulets, angry and pathetic in roughly equal measure.

"Well, duh." John barely smiled, but Dale looked away. "Really though, it just seems like that." John's voice went a bit quieter as he reached Dale's cot. He was turned away.

"It's weird and not supposed to be." Dale made out a line mostly free of sniffles.

"I know." John nodded by himself for a decent while. "We're not going to change it by sitting 'round here though. 'Member what you said?" John started to snake his head closer towards Dale.

"I said lots of things." Dale huffed.

"Yeah but everyone means some thing. And you wanted to adventure." John said.

"But...ugh...I know the thing I said but it just sounds weird here!" Dale spoke with half-hearted anger.

"But is true." a smile started to make its way across John's maw.

"I was born to adventure, not this!" Dale couldn't cover his mouth before he shouted, not that it stopped him from doing so afterwards. His friend's face developed a grin as soon as the play was completed.

"Then let's go adventure, kay?" John chirped with feigned and actual innocence.

Dale rolled back over. His face was still wet, but the streams had disappeared. His eyes were little orbs; penetrating, probing, but bright. He blinked for a few moments.

"...K-Kay." Dale muttered a response after a little while. The blinking was done and there was a world around him. He looked back at his friend, a little embarrassed. "Um, where though?"

"Gotta look outside first, figure out where we are...soooo, front?" John shrugged.

"How'd that...well, wallpaper looks same." Dale started to sit up in his cot, gaze criss-crossing the room. "Jus' a bit. Brighter." he spoke. There *was* vibrancy, physically and, well, almost behind it, in a way.

"Uhuh. That's why we need to make sure." John nodded, beginning to move back toward the archway. Little hands still clutched at a sheet for dignity's sake.

"This, this is still really weird." Dale exaggeratedly sighed, pulling a thin, opaque sheet from the cot and sort of weaving it around himself. He still had to hold it funny.

"Yeeah..." John's voice drifted off as much as his legs did.

The two made their way out of the nap room, slowly. John looked back every few seconds to keep an eye on Dale, though his spirits were less of a concern when compared to his tendency to trip, now. The walls were still gray, but almost like the way the coast is, stark yet soft. There were a few weird shadowed areas that John scouted first, but he knew it was just the way morning light reflected and consistently reassured Dale of it. The two quickly approached the bend, and with Dale's blanket as a ward, successfully made the acrossing. The front door was back again, though this time it looked like it had not gone a single day without oiling. There was another open archway that lead to a room with...business papers and stuff, but aside from a colored calendar it didn't look too interesting so the two took a right towards sunlight.

"Ooh, front room!" Dale's pace started to quicken at the first hint of the outside world, suddenly overtaking the party's designated scout. He almost pressed his face to the wall-sized glass window before a certain remembrance stopped him, opting instead to hover right beside it as soberly as he could.

The street was still outside. There were the businesses and front yard and other accoutrements that rang in memory but most importantly the street was still outside. It was paved black and adorned with the pretty little yellow lines that streets have when they're new. Looking around, some of the other buildings seemed different in much the same way. Granted, some of them were still really old, and not

all of them were conventionally pretty. Yet all had a certain ring to them, a perfection for Plato to fawn over.

Dale squinted a little. He could feel John right beside him now.

The streets were there and they were empty. Quite primally, in fact. Dale couldn't see anyone, true, but he also knew that in a sense they could *never* be occupied. Like the background of a video game's skybox, or when he was really little and there was somehow a world behind the doctor's office or city. There was a certain sacredness, the kind of seeing a minor something pass by in the car and having it remain an eternal, depthless unknown. Dale wanted to know, but he pulled himself back once he felt the abyss yawning.

"I, think your plan works." Dale's head swiveled towards John. He was dizzy.

"I, I think so too." John spoke. Dale could see his face withdraw from the window now. The brow was furrowed; affected, thinking, and resolute.

"Is, sort of like the astral stuff..." Dale meandered. Other thoughts still filled his head. "...but, could also be tele, tele-path, ei." Dale concentrated a little. "Sharing dreams."

"That's, that's okay thinking." John nodded, still looking off at some other. "But I'm still feeling things."

Dale looked back at John, actually beginning to leave the reverie.

"Err, what feelings? That's not specific." Dale's face scrunched slightly.

"It's...someone." John spoke.

John and Dale both turned to one another. Mostly they just stared into each other's eyes. Both were small, strange sprouts to the other's eyes, expression vague, primordial. In a way it was almost like when they had first become friends, all those years ago. They hung there in that mystery for a little while, but knew that it couldn't last long.

Thump.

Dale suddenly quivered, stepping back a little as he raised his blanket more. John looked over toward him, blinking, before turning toward the hallway.

"W-What's that?!" Dale stilled his vocal chords long enough to speak.

John's mouth quickly moved in response. "I dunno?! Maybe, maybe something fell down? There are other roo-"

Thump.

"Nooo...it's, it's..." Dale pushed up against the window, squealing a little.

"I know, footsteps..." John started to walk back slowly. His voice stayed the same but his gaze was

shaky.

“What're, what do we do?!” Dale's muffled voice escaped the sheet.

“I, banishing maybe? I dunno!” John was right next to Dale now, albeit not against the wall-window.

Thump.

“Do it!” Dale exclaimed.

“Err, k-kay...” John mumbled, beginning to reorder his mind into familiar patterns. The pentagrams, presence of arch-angels, err...which was first again? Exasperated, he made a few preliminary gestures. The Tree was still there, of course, but it was hard to feel and even more so to remember all the pieces. That. That was frightening.

“Aaa...teh?” John almost whispered a vibration.

Thump.

“Quickly pleaseee!” Dale was almost whimpering now, clenching onto the blanket as if for life.

“I am but there's lots of parts!” John briefly shouted before trying to recapture his magical mindset.

“Why does God have so many names...” Dale finally whimpered.

John kept up with the motions but it was hard to keep the heart. He had a desire, he knew, but the way in which it was directed was unfocused and that would be the working's end. It was aching to hear, now. *Something* against wood, against the floor, the floor that was close and the sound that was just around the corner...

No. It wouldn't be thus here.

John stood his ground. The gestures were difficult to perform, but he was able to twist his arms in just the right half-remembered angles. The sheets that previously hampered his efforts were not at all sheets now, but a robe, a garment of divinity. There were still words he remembered, and in this case, they would complete his magic.

Thump.

John's mind went alight. A shadow was creeping along the wall and...

“Yoad, ey, vaaa-HEY!”

Emerging from the cover of the front hall was the figure of a person. Quite a normal one, in fact, and if they hadn't appeared in the midst of a supernatural sojourn John would have almost felt embarrassed right now. Their skin was a middling olive, and their choice of shirt and pants only somewhat outdated. The head leaves were deep in color, mature, the waxen coating twinkling in the noontime glow. They

looked rather plain, adult face and fangs and all, but there was something about the green eyes that you could fall into. John wanted to do something; look elsewhere, talk, banish, anything, but instead he just stood transfixed.

Before either of the two finished processing the one who lay before them, she spoke.

“It looks like we have visitors.”