

Sam began to get dressed as soon as he woke up to the Sunday morning's light. While his mother and father were not quite sure what had made him lively enough to skip breakfast and head outside with a wave, the reason was plenty obvious in Sam's mind.

He was thirteen years and a day old.

The day part was important, because his birthday itself was nothing spectacular. Well, granted, it was certainly quite an investment on his parents' part, equal parts glad and nervous to welcome him into adolescence. But Sam did not care (much) for a nice dinner and awkward puberty gifts. Instead, Sam was interested in the one gift that his parents hadn't thought to get him. This was the reason why Sam was practically jogging down the sidewalk.

After a meandering trail past houses, intersections, and less important shops, Sam finally reached a larger convenience store. It was important more for the pharmacy that it contained, one which could no longer legally prevent him from buying a certain over-the-counter medicine.

Sam had followed the political discourse regarding the new psi-drug ever since he was 10. The legal shenanigans went on for a while, but like all other psi-drugs, it had no seriously deleterious effects. That plus the fact that paranormal powers were an important part of some religions prevented the FDA from age-restricting Vilazine from all minors; even secular people generally thought it wasn't good to keep a kid from their soul. Eventually they just settled at 13 years for the sale of such a "performance-enhancing substance." Vilazine was probably the most potent means for the average person to actually access their psychic powers, apart from long-term, intensive chemical therapies and training routines. Provided, of course, that there was enough talent to be enhanced properly in the first place. That was why Sam and Mark had conducted ESP tests of their own beforehand. After getting some failures and a few substantial successes, they figured that they fell into the range to get some good performance out of it.

"That'll be \$50." the pharmacist said after Sam had brought the blue-tinted inhaling unit to the counter.

"Here you go, sir." Sam said, forking over his birthday money. He hoped that their home tests were accurate enough.

"Alright...and, here is your receipt, young man." the pharmacist said, handing both the Vilazine container and the receipt to Sam. His eyes lingered onto the boy for a little while after he started to walk back towards the front doors.

Sam returned to his pseudo-jogging as soon as he was out of the store. If he calculated things correctly, Mark would be arriving at the house soon, as planned. Like many people his age, he did not want his parents to be the ones to lead his friend into the house.

His friend.

Sam let the thought stew in his head for a while as he returned home.

It was, it was true, ultimately. It was just that it, well, *did* it feel right? On one hand yes, but, there was something else. But to really think about that alternative just seemed more, well weird. Sam wasn't repressed in any respect, but he still thought it would be, odd. When you're friends with someone since your diaper days, he thought, it must make any feelings beyond the platonic seem rather unnatural.

But, as Sam neared the last block before his house, he allowed the thought to return. After all, they had known each other so long, perhaps it would pay to be a bit more honest about his feelings for his friend. Hell, Mark had been giving some...well, he had at least been giving some *potential* signs of his own. Nothing conclusive, admittedly, but there were still times when Mark would open his mouth as if to say something, before going silent. Times when he would look on at Sam himself in a hard to define way. Or times when he would hide a journal or shut a drawer before Sam could notice *something*, presumably.

Sam's thought train was interrupted as he crested the corner and saw Mark before the door to his house. By the time he started to break into a sprint, he saw the door open and his father usher his friend in. Sighing, Sam counted his losses and meandered awkwardly towards his house. He clutched the Vilazine capsule tightly, especially when he actually reached the house and his parents welcomed him embarrassingly and told him what he already knew. So Sam deftly went through the filial pleasantries and hastened to make his way upstairs to his bedroom. When he finally reached his abode, he found his friend waiting.

“Uh, sorry if I'm a bit early...you've got the goods, I guess?” Mark scratched his head a little.

“Not your fault, I was probably just slow.” Sam sighed. “They didn't, like, say anything right?”

“No? I would say that's a bit of a paranoid question, but some parents really don't know boundaries...” Mark responded.

“I guess that's part and parcel of being a parent, then. At least it certainly doesn't seem like anyone's broken that cycle, yet.” Sam said, shaking his head a little and smiling.

“Well there's always another try there...” Mark said as a similar smirk crept onto his mouth.

The two boys' relaxation deepened and Mark hopped onto Sam's bed to sit. Sam himself had set the Vilazine capsule on his desk, reading out the instructions with a decent amount of attention paid.

“Kinda hard to believe we even have this, man...” Sam muttered.

“Dude, I think it'd be hard to not already feel like a wizard after those hits we got last time. Remember that marble monument you got right on the third trial?” Mark said.

“Heh, yeah.” Sam smiled a bit at the recollection. “Guess it's just the difference between knowing a shadow of your Transcendence and really knowing It.”

“Well let's see how good this stuff is before you wax poetic...” Mark smirked.

“Oh trust me, I hate poetry.” Sam grinned.

The two boys gathered in the center of Sam's bedroom, on the rug. All around was an atmosphere. Normally it would be nothing, but with the capsule before them, it seemed as though everything was transmuted. Lacquered wood and blue paint and books and a window was no longer indicative of a boy's room, or maybe it was, but either way it was also a herald of something more. Being the purchaser, Sam gingerly picked up the inhaler, slowly bringing it over to his mouth. His eyes caught on

his, friend, Mark. He looked happy and eager for him, and Sam did truly appreciate what they were doing together. But there was a little something in the eyes. They almost passed through him. Not for a lack of love, but really just...no, *hell*, how could he even think there could be “too much of it?” Sam pushed away the thought and readied the inhaler but he couldn't shake off the feeling that he had almost squashed a beautiful flower out of petty lust. Mark only saw him as a friend and there was nothing wrong with that.

Sam depressed the inhaler button with almost spasmic force. In the first moment he felt a fine spray coat his mouth. In the second moment he felt it pass down some bodily cavities, and in the third moment he felt like a light breeze had begun to caress his very world. He hadn't expected the drug's effects to kick in so fast, or for it to so palpably feel like a drug, but now that it was here he figured he should speak.

“Okay, uh, I think it's working, should we start?” Sam asked. He blinked at the now half-full canister of Vilazine and absentmindedly set the capsule back down on the ground.

“Oh, sure.” Mark nodded. He closed his eyes, beginning to engage in what they had planned prior to the meeting.

Sam nodded and closed his eyes as well. As the seconds passed the state seemed to shift, intensify, fading in and wending out at strange angles. After some practice, Sam was able to exert some control over his shifting psyche. Breathing in, Sam concentrated on his friend.

Huh.

A dancing, low-grade CGI moose on a grey cliff greeted him. Really specific. Funny enough to be worthy of becoming an in-joke. Sam began to open his mouth to inform Mark thusly, before the image wavered.

The moose disappeared. Then a house, Mark's house appeared. Then a bunch of feelings, the sensation of wetness, grades from school? Sam opened his eyes, but he still kept getting these *knowings*. The perceptions were getting dizzying, flashing by the mind in consecutive instants, but he couldn't feel, or know, how to stop. It almost felt like a subtle part of himself was stuck, or as though he had ended up in a position where some minute muscle was straining itself.

“Uh, give me a second, Mark.” Sam made out, still mostly concentrating on his breathing.

“Uh, what?” Sam asked. His eyes opened and head went cocked.

Most of the stimuli was just random, so Sam just silently accepted it as he worked on undoing the unpleasant state of mind. He took his time in intuiting the correct way to break the connection, or in calming his overstimulated extrasensory functioning.

Sam started to feel trepidation when images of himself began to float through his mind.

They were fast, clearly point-of-view shots of some sort. And, well, they must have been coming from the perspective of Mark. He could remember some of the incidents, like when they had gotten lunch by the museum. But in each of these there was a certain way in which Mark had framed him. In the way he had looked at him. And beyond that, in the feeling that he had for him.

Sam felt trepidation because these were not the kinds of feelings that he had for Mark.

Some more images flashed by. Toys, a memory of daycare stitched into some, fantasy? There would be some park that Mark wanted to visit with him. A few diapers that he did not recognize from babyhood.

"I'll be right back Mark, I'm going to head to the bathroom." Sam said, opening his eyes and beginning to turn towards the door. He barely made out the fevered expression of Mark.

"W-Wait! Dude, are you alright?" Mark began to stand up, almost reaching out. "Was there a side-effect or something?"

"Nah, it's working perfectly fine." Sam said. "I'm just a bit light-headed." he lied.

Sam left the room before Mark could respond and stumbled down the hall to the upstairs bathroom. He entered the room, locked the door behind him, and began to lay down on the fluffy carpet before the toilet and shower. He breathed a lot.

The perceptions were not slowing down in any capacity, but they were becoming far clearer. Sam's head was buzzy and alight. A lot of the time now the information didn't come in images anymore. He knew, for example, that Mark didn't like girls in *that* sense. And that Mark didn't like boys in *that* sense. And that Mark liked a certain *thing*. Fetish wouldn't be quite the right term, at least in the strictest sense, for this was something that encompassed the very way he perceived the world. And Sam would have really been okay with this had Mark personally revealed it, for a fantasy of being a toddler or wearing diapers or whatever was really rather tame compared to all of the other desires that were out there in the world. But Mark had paired this Thing with Sam in such a way that the two were forever intertwined, and Sam could NOT accept that that was how his friend, his true friend, looked upon him.

Sam finally broke the telepathic connection and shivered on the mat. He laid there for a minute, then got up and carefully wiped away his tears. He formulated a story of how he got food poisoning from yesterday's dinner, and a plan for how to best send Mark away so he could continue his nervous breakdown in peace. He left the bathroom once his breathing had steadied sufficiently.

"Hey man, sorry about that..." Sam spoke as soon as he entered the bedroom. Mark was just staring at him.

"...I just felt a bit sick, pretty sure that the fish from Moriarty's yesterday wasn't cooked ful-" Sam was broken off.

"That's not true. Your tone isn't right." Mark said.

"That's because I'm out of sorts." Sam said, head moving unsteadily as his eyes attempted to focus on his friend despite the pain. "I, I'm not feeling too good right now, I think we should do this another day." Sam eked out.

Silence held in the room for a while. Sam tried to keep himself calm, but could have predicted the next few words even without Vilazine.

"You're lying." Mark muttered after a pause.

“I.” Sam said. His eyes kept blinking and an awkward smile grew.

“Look.” Sam focused on Mark and gave the firmest expression he could muster. “We both know that we’re both, guys. And that we have our own predilections.”

“You were able to muster a deep probe.” Mark said. In a moment it was as if the life faded away from both his tone and his expression.

Sam breathed in deeply.

“Yes.”

Both were silent for a while. The room briefly became twilit, unreal, even as Sam eventually continued to speak.

“Mark.” Sam said formally, with a faltering voice. “I don’t like the way you look at me. I’m not judging, but I’m never going to do any of the things that you really want me to do with you.”

Mark’s expression faded in an instant. The breathing staggered and eyes watered. Most importantly, the composure, the core that both knew was gone in a blink. Mark rubbed his eyes and started to get off of the bed.

“Hey, w-wait-” Sam started.

“I’ll never be your boyfriend.” Mark said simply and breezed past Sam.

Sam stopped dead. Even as he heard the door open and close, he could barely think, let alone respond. The only thing that really registered for him after Mark’s words was the empty canister of Vilazine on the rug.