

Presently, Vincent was walking down one of the many halls of his home. Half-an-hour ago, the man had woken up, and had began his morning routine. Showering, combing his head's leaves, and getting dressed had taken ten minutes. The dailies took fifteen. Finally, Vincent was using the last five to take a leisurely stroll to his friend's room. He should have been waking up right about now.

Vincent reached the upstairs bedrooms quickly. He walked until he reached a white door, the one right beside the powder-blue one. The man opened the door, and greeted his friend.

“Time to wake up, Daryl.” Vincent said softly.

Inside, a little bundle of leaves stirred restlessly from beneath the covers of a small wooden bed. The walls were painted a forest-green, and shelves with toys stood stoically. Vincent heard a yawn, and then saw a familiar face poke out from beneath the covers, eyes still blinking lazily. Vincent waited, and his friend spoke soon after.

“Alright...” the boy mumbled.

And thus Vincent began his day, much like he had many before. It was strange to think that he was in this position of all things, almost like a layman, but the man could not quite say that he minded it. Years ago, it had been all fire and thunder, of course. Back when his soul has soared across the Abyss and changed his life forever. It had been like waking up from a dream, back then, even despite the magics and mystical states he had already attained. He had realized that hidden nature of man, that secret self that was a worker of miracles. He had become a mage.

To live and breathe in the Supernals, just on the cusp of Negative Existence, had already been the greatest fulfillment for the man thus far, of course. But the wake affected even that little golem on Earth. Vincent had become one of the miracle-workers of legend, after all, and it was practically just a matter of time before he began to exercise his transcendent powers.

He did so many things back then. Investigated mysteries in his home city. Entered into the ranks of an order filled with others like himself. And found Silas, that beautiful damned bastard...

Even given what he had already seen, meeting the man had been a surprise. At first, Vincent thought that the psychic was just like himself, and even though he still theorized a fundamental connection between sorcery and psi, Vincent soon learned of a whole other world. Silas' psychic functioning had been augmented close to the time Vincent had attained his enlightenment, back when he was still in the Zenith Group. Before that group splintered, and before Silas had escaped the grasp of his corporate handlers. Together, the two did so many things. They fought psychics, infiltrated black ops installations, and visited sacred sites across the world. They built bridges between the orders of mages and the unions of free psychics. They conducted research with some of the brightest minds around the world, both mortal and enhanced. They explored the astral and hunted demons and manifested many, many explosions. God, they were young and foolish and great...

Things wound down slowly. Really, they could have kept going at it for a long while. Vincent wanted to suppose that the luster had started to fade right about then, but it really, half of it felt like it had been due to circumstance.

For before he had become one of the enlightened, Vincent had been a man, and he had had a friend. A mortal friend. Not even trained in the magic of mortals like Vincent had been, or proficient in the weak

psychic powers that mortals could manifest. He had just been a guy, Vincent supposed. But he was so much.

Vincent and Daryl had known each other since childhood. Really, even after he had met Silas, Vincent would really say that Daryl was still his best friend. There was nothing particularly notable about it in the grand scheme of things, Vincent thought. He just enjoyed his company. But one could say that about any group of friends, really. To Vincent, Daryl was special.

Compared to the other two, Daryl was not exactly spectacular. Hell, even by the standards of most mortals, Daryl was rather mediocre. He got an Associate's and a retail position, and didn't really move up much. The man had little ambition or drive. Even his entanglements in the glory days were pretty minor.

To the rest of the world, Daryl might have just been a vaguely unnerving lowlife. But Vincent knew more, of things that would be even less flattering. Of an affinity to days past that Daryl retained. Of a meaningless little dream that occupied his mind. Perhaps Daryl was not even like that which he sought, but to Vincent, that was irrelevant. Even despite how ridiculous his desires were, there was something there, Vincent thought.

That was something that came to the mind ever more as the glory days faded. Vincent had attained magical mastery over the body long before he had started to slow down his adventures, of course, but Vincent only really recalled Daryl's fantasy when he began to wonder about what to do next. The journeys had been fun, obviously. And admittedly, of some magical value. But there were diminishing returns. At some point, he stopped learning more of the universe, and really just engaged in the kinds of distractions that mortals were prone to, just with magic sprinkled on top. Vincent really felt like a fool when he actually considered it. After all, settling down was a trap that the common man fell prey to. It would be absurd for one of the enlightened to fall for it. But no matter what he told himself, Vincent knew that he was not really an ascetic at heart. Despite the sublime rapture that he had attained, Vincent was still given to the passions of men.

Vincent had just reached his thirties when he finally confronted the matter. One day, he spoke with Silas over the course of a good, long evening. About how he would withdraw from the dangerous life of adventure and retire to his studies. About how he would...settle down. Vincent had not mentioned of another plan that had been taking root in his mind at that time, and he wondered if it would have influenced Silas' decision. But still Silas surprised him. For he agreed to join Vincent in the life of calm.

Daryl, of course, was also invited. And more than just that, Vincent finally saw it fit to give his friend a gift beyond comparison. After all the dangers and boredom, all the excitement and jealousy, all of the yearning and disappointment, Daryl was offered something that many never see: a childhood.

Daryl wished that he had thought over the matter more thoroughly then. After all, worldliness was a sin. But really, Daryl had accepted it without thought.

And so, Vincent found himself in a position he would have never imagined. Without marriage or reproduction, he found himself with a family of his own.

Daryl trundled up from bed after a little while. Vincent picked out his clothes for the day while the child walked over to a structure that often greeted him these mornings. Vincent ultimately decided on a

pair of brown shorts and a blue short-sleeved shirt. When Daryl finally arrived, still sleepy, Vincent picked him up carefully and carefully placed him upon the changing table.

“Just wet today?” Vincent asked. He could already see the discoloration on the front of Daryl's diaper.

“Mhm.” the boy lazily nodded. He was long used to such things.

Vincent began to change Daryl's diaper in earnest. Surprisingly, this was one of the things that he had gotten used to the quickest. No matter what age he assumed, Daryl was always incontinent, thanks to Vincent's magic. Daryl liked being incontinent, and it made him feel safe.

Vincent got Daryl changed into another medical diaper quickly. After that, he started to help the eight-year-old get his clothes on. Strictly speaking, Daryl was old enough to do this on his own. But Vincent knew how sleepy Daryl could be in the mornings. Frankly, he wanted to speed things along.

Once Daryl was dressed, Vincent helped him to the floor. The boy started to walk out of his room, almost bumping into one of the walls of the hallway at one point, but he seemed to come to awareness fast. Vincent simply followed along, waiting for Daryl to reach the stairs. By the time he reached them, he seemed pretty wakeful.

“Mmm...Vincent?” Daryl looked back at his friend.

“Yes?” Vincent responded.

“What's for breakfast today?” Daryl asked. His eyes were inquisitive.

“I was thinking of heading to the coffee shop today. It would be nice to switch things up.” Vincent said.

Daryl just smiled, excitedly nodded, and began to head down the stairs. Vincent followed along in pursuit. Below, the sounds of footsteps echoed.

“Looks who's up.” a voice came from down the stairs.

Daryl just smiled at Silas and rubbed the back of his head. Vincent made his way down the stairs quickly, spying Silas and Daryl standing there next to the bottom of the stairs. The man joined them quickly.

“So, what's the plan for today?” Silas asked. The man was wearing long-sleeved shirt and had a scarf on. Casual today, it seemed.

“I was thinking of heading to the coffee shop for breakfast. We can take Daryl for his appointment after.” Vincent spoke.

“That sounds fair.” Silas shrugged. The man looked back down on Daryl then, shooting him a keen look. “Well then, let's head off.” he grinned.

Silas was already ready, and so he went out with Daryl towards the car. Vincent remained in the house for a little while, searching for something. Soon enough enough, he found the drawstring backpack that he kept as a diaper bag. Vincent used this one when Daryl was old enough that lugging around a

normal diaper bag would be embarrassing.

Prepared, Vincent stepped outside. The morning was cool, the sky still tinged grey-blue. Vincent walked toward the parked car and got in the driver's seat. Silas already sat shotgun, and Daryl was buckled into the back. No car seat, this time.

Vincent started up the car.

“So, had any other plans for today?” Silas asked. The psychic was placing his hands behind his head.

“Can't say I have much. Are you busy or something?” Vincent asked. He looked toward Silas once he had pulled out of the driveway.

“Nah, I've mostly just been screwing around in the lab.” Silas shrugged.

“Hmm. Well maybe we can get to a joint project one of these days. It feels like it's been ages since the last one.” Vincent spoke.

Silas shook his head, smiling.

“I would say that that is a good idea, except I cannot exactly think of what we would tackle next.” Silas said.

“Eh, given enough time we can think of something.” Vincent shrugged.

Just then, Daryl piped up in the back.

“Maybe we can check out that haunted house later? If nothing else is going on...” Daryl spoke quietly.

“Heh. Maybe.” Silas nodded to himself. “Though we still need to take you somewhere before we do anything else, kiddo.” Silas grinned, peeking back at Daryl.

The child just blushed and held still in his seat.

The three arrived at the coffee shop after around five minutes. Silas and Daryl got out first, while Vincent took his time to lock up the car. Inside, the place was what one would expect. Brown-black walls, semi-dim lighting. It was kind of impressive that the look had been maintained for so many years, Vincent thought to himself. The mage looked back at his companions, eyes flitting up and down between Silas and Vincent, respectively.

“Alright. What are we getting?” Vincent asked.

“Oooh, can I get hot chocolate and a cookie?” Daryl asked, looking up at Vincent expectantly.

“Sure, Daryl.” Vincent nodded. Really, he had expected nothing else.

“And you, Silas?” Vincent looked toward the psychic.

“Eh, just a cup of black coffee. No milk, no cream.” Silas said.

“Nothing to eat?” Vincent inquired, a brow raising.

“Nope.” Silas said simply. A faint smile crossed his face.

“Alright then.” Vincent spoke, beginning to turn towards the counter.

“You two find a table. I'll be right back.” the mage said.

The other two nodded, and all got to work.

Vincent walked up to the counter and began to order. In the corner of his eye, he could already notice his two friends sitting down at a table in the corner. Vincent completed the order and waited around the counter. He picked up the drinks and the pastries as soon as they were ready.

“Nah, that's not how it works. You can't experimentally differentiate between a sort of Akashic Record model and telepathy with the dead beca-” Silas stopped talking to Daryl once Vincent arrived. The boy turned toward Vincent, eagerly eyeing his goodies.

“Did I, interrupt something?” Vincent asked.

“I can go over it later.” Silas shrugged.

Daryl eagerly grabbed his hot chocolate and cookie as soon as Vincent set them down. Silas, for his part, scooted the black coffee closer towards himself. Vincent got his own, normal coffee and took out the croissant. While Daryl looked like he was in heaven, munching down on a sugary snack, Vincent struck up conversation with Silas.

“So, what have you been up to, lately?” Vincent asked.

“Eh, the usual I suppose. I've just been keeping up with the PA, and the SPR, to a lesser extent. I must say, you would be surprised by how many collaborative kids sleep on mortal parapsychologists.” Silas shook his head, sighing.

“That seems like a huge oversight on their part. Parapsychologists are already rare. You would think psychic ones could be counted on one hand.” Vincent spoke.

“To be fair, you usually only see some of the younger ones falling for that trap. Typically guys who got activated this decade. Oftentimes they think that just because psi-enhancement is underground, that mortals must be completely clueless about the matter. They forget that the science is the same, either way.” Silas spoke, sipping at his coffee.

“I can see that. You sometimes get the same in the orders, when they hadn't been into magic before crossing the Abyss. Most are quickly disabused of the notion, however.” Vincent said. He ate some of his croissant.

“Well you're right, though saying it out loud like that really makes this sound like a circlejerk.” Silas looked off. “Ah, whatever. In any case, has anything caught your mind, recently?”

"I don't think it is anything you would be too interested in, really." Vincent shrugged. "While my practicum is still sharp, I've been skimping on the theoretics. Really, I think the world has been capturing my mind more than magic, lately." Vincent's brow furrowed.

"Well, that does suck. Though I must admit, I am kind of curious as to what exactly you've been thinking of, lately." Silas nodded lightly to himself.

"Religious demographics." Vincent shrugged. "Though by that you already know that I mean Mormons."

"They have been growing lately, haven't they?" Silas scratched at his head's leaves a little.

"Yeah. Though it doesn't seem like their theology has been unveiled more because of it. At the end of the day, most of them are just normal people." Vincent shook his head.

"It is to be expected at least." Silas sighed. "I hate to say it, but mortals can be exhausting."

Vincent just quietly nodded.

"Well while we're in the secular sphere, has anything else crossed your mind?" Silas asked.

"Eh. Some things. Mostly the land grabs of China and the rumors going around regarding the military. I'm starting to wonder if some of the tech is going to leak out soon." Vincent said.

"God, I hope so." Silas smiled. "As long as it's psi-augments. I must say, it does get pretty isolating as it stands."

"I suppose we'll just have to see." Vincent said. A faint smile crossed his face.

As Vincent came back to an awareness of his surroundings, he noticed that Daryl was looking toward him, with an expression somewhere between exasperation and boredom. The hot chocolate was long since drained and the only remains of the cookie were crumbs. Vincent just ruffled his head leaves a little and made quiet apologies. Silas just smirked, shaking his head as he exited the shop. Vincent and Daryl followed soon after, with all three soon making their way to the car. Daryl was buckled up by Vincent this time, though it was hardly necessary at his age. Silas, for his part, sat back down in his prior seat. Vincent once again took the driver's seat, starting up the car and beginning to back out of the parking space. It was about time for their next stop.

The drive to the sanctum was not too long, all things considered. Nestled in an area of the city close to the base of the mountains, the air was vibrant, and green abounded everywhere. It was somewhat higher class, as trimmed hedges and unmarred streets could attest to, but it was not too much different from the rest of the city. Daryl just kicked his legs a little bit as he looked outside. He was used to this trip.

Eventually, Vincent began to drive down a small street. There were no structures on either side of him, but at the end of the path stood a large metal gate, and a small mansion beyond. Vincent drove up to the keypad and inputted the code. After only a few moments, the gate began to open.

Vincent parked the car next to all of the other ones, on dirt and under shade. Once the car was shut off,

Vincent got out. Daryl had already gotten out of his seat, but Vincent opened the door in time for him to help the boy down. Silas simply enjoyed the air outside.

The three leisurely made their way to the mansion's entrance. It was small, all things considered, but still impressive. As the three approached the patio, the door opened. Two men exited, quieting down as they noticed the group. Vincent recognized Connor immediately. A smile grew on the man's face as he examined the group, and he extended out a hand as Vincent approached.

“Good to see you, Vincent.” Connor said. “Were you planning on sticking around today?” he asked.

“I am afraid not.” Vincent said.

“Fair enough.” Connor shrugged. “We were leaving, in any case.”

Connor's attention turned then toward the child that stood at Vincent's side. He smiled softly and waved toward the boy. Connor's friend, for his part, almost awkwardly held back.

“Good to see you too, Daryl.” Connor said.

“Oh, and you too, Silas.” Connor spoke, his head turning towards the psychic.

“In any case, we should be heading out right about now. Well wishes.” Connor nodded, before he and his friend started to move once more.

Silas looked back on at the two for a little while. Vincent and Daryl simply walked up towards the door.

“They're leaving early, are they not?” Silas asked.

“Indeed. I'm guessing they have work to do.” Vincent shrugged.

“For your type, that could mean many things...” Silas shook his head, smiling.

The three walked through the front door and entered the sanctum proper. The design was about what one would expect. Lacquered wood floors and walls branched out into many hallways. Glass windows let in the light of a world that was coming close to noon. There was that faint, musty smell that accompanies old buildings, though it was not of the objectionable kind. The place almost seemed Victorian, but Vincent thought it might have been Edwardian. Faintly, from all around, the three could hear out snippets of conversation.

Vincent just headed straight for Simon's office. He was the mage who managed mortal affairs. Vincent and Daryl were long accustomed to embarking on these monthly visits. It really almost surprised Vincent that even here, there was bureaucracy.

Once Vincent arrived at the office, in a hallway towards the back of the manor, he nodded at Silas. Silas took the signal and began to lean on one of the walls of the hallway. After that, Vincent and Daryl entered the office together.

Simon was seated at his desk. The man was old, but still impeccably dressed. Not that the suit was even

that expensive, really. It was just that he was always so good at being clean. The man looked at them with eyes whose fire belied his age. Simon gestured for the two to sit and the two sat down, as they always did. The elder mage spoke soon after.

“What could I do for you?” Simon asked, though everyone present knew why they were gathered.

“I am simply here to update the registry of Daryl's enchantments.” Vincent said.

“Very well.” Simon said as he would on any other day.

Simon looked on at Daryl, and his eyes pierced more than just the boy's composure. After a few seconds, the mage spoke up once more.

“It would appear as though Daryl has retained his current age regression enchantment, set to eight years...”

“Indeed.” Vincent nodded.

“Daryl, do you consent to having this enchantment continued upon your person? Speak of your own free will.” Simon spoke. He still tried to maintain the gravity to his tone.

“I do.” Daryl nodded his head. He tried to keep his face expressionless, but there was still a bit of a smile.

“Such is duly noted.” Simon said. His gaze had not quite wavered.

“It would also appear as though the incontinence enchantment remains in effect...” Simon spoke. He eyed Daryl keenly.

Daryl just blushed and looked away. He still found this part really embarrassing.

“Indeed.” Vincent nodded again, just as he had before.

“Mhm.” Simon's eyes slightly narrowed. “Daryl, do you consent to having this enchantment remain in effect upon your person? Speak of your own free will.” Simon spoke. Even more than the other one, this was just a formality. Daryl never had that effect removed.

“I do.” Daryl made out quickly and quietly, nodding his head.

“Very well then.” Simon released an almost imperceptible sigh. “As I do not detect the presence of any mind-affecting enchantments, this meeting can be concluded. I will update the records for this month.” Simon said.

“Thank you, magister.” Vincent inclined his head forward a little.

Daryl just nodded a little, a faint smile across his face.

Simon dismissed the two with a wave of his hand before his face softened too much. The two left without further ado.



Silas' head shot up as soon as he heard the door open. The psychic just smiled, walking up towards the two as they exited the room. Once the door was closed, he began to speak.

“Well then, I take it everything is settled?” Silas asked. He smirked a little when he saw Daryl.

“You would be correct.” Vincent said. He smirked too, though for a different reason.

“Right then. Well in that case, I take it we're heading out? Unless you have something to do or so-” Silas was cut off.

“Wait...is that Vincent?” a voice from down the hall resounded.

“Ah, I think it is!” another voice rang out.

“We're over here in the parlor, Vincent!” yet another person exclaimed.

Vincent recognized the three voices immediately, as well as the three figures that rested through the entranceway to the parlor at the end of the hall. William, Domingo, and Julian each sat on leather-bound armchairs, waving lightly towards Vincent. The three had been allies and teammates back in the old days. And, well. Vincent supposed they were probably still up to such adventures. Vincent thought for a moment, before he came to a decision. The man looked toward Silas.

“We will be here for a little while longer.” Vincent said.

“Indeed.” Silas responded. He was positively grinning now. “We'll be right behind you.”

Vincent walked toward the parlor, the other two following closely behind him. As he approached the entranceway to the parlor, the three began to get up from their seats, clearly ready to greet the man. It was then that Vincent felt a tug on his right pant leg.

Vincent immediately looked down. He saw Daryl, looking around a bit oddly.

“Yes, Daryl?” Vincent spoke quietly to his friend.

“Umm...Vincent? Could I, um...” Daryl's voice drifted off.

Vincent picked up a faint smell then. He immediately knew what Daryl was looking for.

Before he could respond, Silas spoke up.

“Don't worry Vincent, I'll handle it.” Silas said, shooting the mage a confident smile. “Go and catch up with your friends.”

Vincent did not say anything, but his face betrayed his gratitude. While Silas and Daryl walked off to the bathroom, Vincent entered the parlor, and greeted old comrades.

“Vincent, my good man! We haven't see you in quite a while.” William said, shaking hands with Vincent.

“Really? I do come here once a month...” Vincent replied.

“Hah, right, right. Well, we just meant in terms of substantive interactions.” William said, laughing a little to himself. Domingo was now approaching, the man beginning a handshake with Vincent as well.

“Old William here has a point. We haven't exactly had a good old discourse going on in the parlor for a while. One that included you, that is.” Domingo said.

“Well we can get to that now, then.” Vincent shook his head, smiling.

“Glad to hear.” Julian smirked.

William pointed toward an empty armchair and Vincent swiftly took his seat. Sitting down, Vincent felt like he was entering another world. And not the past. It was strange, to be here again. But Vincent could say little else beyond that. And so, he held there, as conversation began, and a bunch of mages began their occulted discussions.

“So, Vincent? Have you been up to anything ever since your, well, retirement?” William asked.

“I cannot say I have.” Vincent said.

“Really? I still remember when we practiced together years ago. You always seemed to be pushing at the boundaries of your spellcraft.” Domingo said.

“I mean, I could see him hitting a certain ceiling. Do you remember how good his healing spells were back in the hidden operations? Ah, damn...” Julian spoke, lost somewhere else.

“Well I have still practiced my magic, of course. Just in different areas than before.” Vincent said.

“Fair, fair.” William nodded.

“In any case, what has been up with you three? You seem to still be quite busy these days.” Vincent spoke.

“Eh, just more of the usual, really.” Domingo shrugged. “Granted, the usual is still pretty fun.”

“Mystical striving.” Julian said simply.

There was a brief silence, one that Vincent found a bit odd. After a moment, though, it had vanished.

“Say, Vincent.” Domingo was looking up now bright. “Are you still into magical revitalization, by any chance?”

“In ideal, yes. In practice, I cannot say I've done much more than help mortal magicians.” Vincent said honestly.

“Fair enough.” Domingo nodded. “In any case, I was thinking of researching the transmutation of gasses. I've been thinking about it, and at a sufficient enough scale, there might just be a way to offset

pollution through the transformation of carbon dioxide to other gasses, say, nitrogen or oxyg-

“To be frank, Domingo, I still think that that won't work logistically. There simply aren't enough mages.” Julian spoke.

“Perhaps it could work.” William spoke up. “But we still need to think of how mortals might react.”

“Fair, I had not considered that point, William.” Domingo nodded lowly.

“That's not to say the the issue couldn't be tackled from another angle, frankly.” William said. “Fusion power would ease things greatly, and I imagine the Powers that Are will have to release that stuff eventually.”

“You think highly of them, don't you?” Julian shot William a look. And then both men laughed.

Vincent remembered the old operations. The technology had been almost as striking as the magic.

“It would be nice to see the wonders be able to flourish before the eyes of mortals.” Vincent nodded. “I am just afraid that I have not been seeking that proactively, lately.”

“Isn't that the damn truth...” Julian shook his head, sighing.

“...I'm pretty sure he meant that in reference to himself, Vincent.” Domingo noted, looking at Julian with a bit of concern.

“I understood.” Vincent said.

“I would not blame yourself too much, Vincent.” William said. “After all, sharing the Mysteries with the world is a difficult task for any mage.”

Vincent just nodded, but he still felt a twinge of guilt.

The room was silent for a few moments. Each of the men sitting looked off. After around a minute, William spoke up.

“Well, I suppose we should not be holding you up any longer. It was good to see you, Vincent.” William nodded.

“Likewise.” Vincent also nodded.

Vincent shook hands with each of the men and gave his goodbyes before leaving the room. As he left, he noticed two familiar figures coming back down the hallway.

“Ah, done already?” Silas asked.

“I could ask the same of you.” Vincent said, a faint smirk making its way across his face.

Silas just shook his head and smiled. Daryl, for his part, was only blushing somewhat.

The three made their way out of the sanctum and went back into the car. Daryl got himself seated this time, with the mage and the psychic taking their usual places in the car. As Vincent exited the estate and started to drive down the road towards the rest of the city, Daryl spoke up.

“Do you think we could check out that haunted house now?” Daryl asked. His legs were bouncing a little bit.

“I do not see why not.” Vincent shrugged.

Daryl just smiled, and soon the three were off on another journey.

The destination appeared much as their prior one had, albeit on a smaller scale. Set aside as a historic building, the structure clearly hailed back to the late nineteenth century. As a historical site, it was open to the public, and so the group did not have to worry about magical and psychical means of stealth, not to mention ethical qualms. The group parked their car on the side of the street and got out, one by one. Daryl was the most excited, plainly, though he held back for Vincent and Silas. Finally, all of the group had arrived at the antiquated estate.

“Kind of surprised we have so many of these.” Silas said, arms held behind head.

“Really? I can't say I am.” Vincent shrugged.

“What's up with this place, anyway? I can't say I've heard much of it.” Silas spoke.

“It is rumored to have a haunting, I think. Not very high profile.” Vincent said.

“Yeah. It's more of a local thing.” Daryl added.

“Hmm. You sure there is something or someone here?” Silas spoke.

“I do not know. That is why we are checking.” Vincent said.

Vincent opened the door and ushered the other two inside. Even if the place was haunted, which was a fair possibility, it still was not that big of a thing to the mage. He had seen many ghosts in his time, and this really only seemed like one of the lesser wonders of the world to him. Though of course, he couldn't think of wonders like that. While Vincent focused on something else, Silas and Daryl got to work actually exploring the house.

It was a cool old house, Daryl had to admit. The child also had to admit that the place wasn't really scary at noon. Granted, haunted houses didn't *need* to be scary, he knew. It just added to the flavor of the place.

Silas inspected an old iron furnace. It had certainly seen better days. Little plaques and information pamphlets abounded in the living room, to the point where the entrance area felt like it was under the auspices of a guided tour. Daryl and Silas gradually made their way towards the halls of the house, with Vincent belatedly following along after. The three inspected the kitchen, and the dining room, and the lounge, and didn't really find anything interesting. The three landed in a back room of some sort, next to a flight of stairs and a door that led to the backyard. If the place could even be said to still have a backyard, at this point.

“I am heading upstairs. I will be there if you need me.” Daryl said. By the time the other two looked back at him, he had already started to head up the steps.

Vincent just kind of let him go, though it almost perturbed him in a way. Daryl really did feel like a kid at times.

“Well, with nothing better to do, I suppose I'll join the little guy.” Silas said, walking past Vincent with his hands in his pockets.

With a sigh, Vincent followed along behind the others.

It was halfway up the flight of stairs when Vincent heard the scream.

“Holy...look over there!” Daryl exclaimed.

Vincent rushed up the stairs, almost pushing Silas out of the way as he did so. His eyes immediately shot towards Daryl, who was standing there in the hallway, but he looked safe. After the adrenaline rush vanished, Vincent actually looked toward where Daryl was fixated at. It...looked to be the end of a hallway.

“Daryl?” Vincent began to speak with a composure that surprised himself. “I...don't see anything.”

“What do you mean?! There's a woman in an old outfit standing over...there!” Daryl just kept pointing at the same location.

It was then that Vincent looked back at the location where Daryl was pointing, and focused on the area with more than just his eyes. In an instant it was though his perceptions were replaced by a web of golden filaments. Vincent could see the world beyond matter, in all of its unadulterated glory. But he still could not see a figure of any sort. Vincent looked back at Daryl then, subduing his transcendent vision. His eyes narrowed, but then they widened.

“Hold on, Daryl, give me a moment.” Vincent said.

Vincent lightly pushed Daryl out of his previous spot, and began to stand where Daryl once stood.

“H-Hey?! W-Wait...she's not there anymore...” Daryl mumbled.

Standing there, Vincent finally saw it. A faintly translucent woman in a Victorian outfit. Standing calmly. Still.

Very still.

Many things immediately came to Vincent's mind. First of all, ghosts only rarely appeared transparent. Typically, they appeared just as the living did. Secondly, the image was still. Too still. There was no movement, no changing of the expression. Something else was afoot, Vincent knew.

“What exactly is going on?” Silas asked. He seemed genuinely confused.

"I have my suspicions, but I would like to get confirmation from you, Silas." Vincent said without looking at the man. Vincent stepped out of his position, the ghostly woman vanishing from view. Silas looked toward Vincent for a little bit, before he stepped into the position where Vincent once stood. Once there, the man looked on where both Daryl and Vincent had once looked. He started nodding slowly after the first few seconds.

"Yep. Definitely electromagnetic stimulation of the brain." Silas shook his head to himself, eyes closed.

"...What?" Daryl spoke blankly.

"You know, the stimulation of the brain by focused electromagnetic waves, designed to perfectly manifest the appearance of a given image." Silas said concisely.

"I...knew what you meant." Daryl said. "It's just that...that's kind of insane? We don't have that kind of technology." Daryl said.

"What are you talking about?" Silas looked down toward Daryl. "We've had this tech since the '80s. This mundane variety, at least. Perception-altering machines utilizing truly paranormal processes were only released in the 2000s."

Daryl just looked on at Silas for a while.

"You know, sometimes I feel like you guys still don't fill me in on enough..." Daryl sighed.

"Well maybe you should come down to the lab sometime, squirt." Silas smirked, scratching Daryl's head leaves a little. The boy only gave off a stare.

"Do you think you could find it, Silas? The machine, that is." Vincent spoke.

"Perhaps. Even back in the 1980s, these things could have a pretty long range. There is a good chance that it's somewhere in the building though. A little clairvoyance should help to confirm..." Silas said, closing his eyes as he entered a meditative state with unprecedented ease.

After a few seconds, he started to smile.

"Yeah. In the attic. This actually looks like a contemporary model. They still produce these sometimes, just because they're relatively cheap." Silas said. His eyes were open but his perceptions were still elsewhere.

"So...do you know why this thing might be here?" Daryl asked.

"No clue. I could probably figure out the answer given enough time, but I am afraid that it probably wouldn't be too interesting." Vincent said. "I also get the feeling that we could get entangled in some spook's operation, which would be rather counterproductive to the sort of lifestyle we lead now, wouldn't it?" Silas looked back at the two with a smirk.

Vincent wanted to say something, but instead he just forced himself to not roll his eyes.

“Alright then.” Vincent sighed, beginning to look down at Daryl. “Was there anything else you wanted to look at here, Daryl?” Vincent asked.

“Well...not really.” Daryl shrugged. He was not quite sure how to feel.

“I guess we could head back then.” Vincent spoke.

The three walked back down the stairs and began to make their way for the entrance. After only a little while, they had successfully reached the front room. As the group started to walk out, though, Daryl turned back. Then came another scream.

“W-What was that?!” Daryl pointed down a hallway.

Vincent immediately awakened his astral vision. He looked toward where Daryl was pointing, and there, for the tiniest of instants, he could see the unmistakable outline of a spirit.

“A ghost.” Vincent replied, smiling.

Daryl looked up towards Vincent. Something was happening to his expression.

“So...it is haunted?” Daryl asked.

“Yes.” Vincent said plainly.

The boy's eyes lit up, and he looked back toward the hallway, even though the sight was gone.

“Ah. Well that's good to hear!” Silas spoke.

After a good few minutes, the three left the house and walked back towards the car. They all got in quickly, back in their usual positions. It was the afternoon, now.

“Hmm. It is getting a bit late.” Vincent said. “I can't say that we've gotten lunch yet.”

“True.” Silas nodded.

Vincent looked back at Daryl, who was lightly kicking his legs.

“What would you like for lunch, Daryl?” Vincent asked.

Daryl only thought for one moment, before the answer came.

“Burger place!” Daryl exclaimed.

“You already knew what he was going to say...” Silas sighed.

Vincent did not say anything, but just smiled.

The trip to the fast food restaurant was short. Daryl's excited kicking increased as they pulled into the parking lot. Silas got out with Daryl while Vincent tried to find a parking slot. He was able to secure

one after a minute, locking up the car and heading inside to meet his friends afterward. The place was really just like what one would expect. It was the cheap, franchise kind. Not like some of the more gourmet places that had been opening in the state for a while now. Not that Daryl cared, in all likelihood. Vincent thought it likely that it was somehow more delicious to the child.

Silas was already ordering food by the time Vincent walked up toward the counter. Vincent added in his order. Daryl's food had been ordered first, of course. He was getting chicken nuggets, as he always did.

Vincent paid for the order while Silas went with Daryl to go find a seat. The cashier was being unusually courteous with him. He thought of whether or not Daryl's presence influenced that, and Vincent guessed that it probably had. It was sort of awkward to think about, but the three tended to get...interesting reactions from others. A lot of the time, it seemed like people thought that he and Silas were a couple. Typically, Vincent sort of just went along with people's expectations. It would be far more awkward to explain that they were just friends who had adopted a regressed friend, after all. Vincent was rather glad that they were in California.

Vincent found the table that his friends were sitting at and took his seat with them. Daryl was talking excitedly with Silas about...something, at least. Daryl was really into it, at least. After a few minutes, their orders were ready, and Vincent returned to the counter to pick up the bags. When he returned he arrayed out the meals on the table, starting with Daryl and ending with himself. Daryl eagerly started in on his chicken nuggets, fries, and soda, while Silas and Vincent began to consume their burgers more soberly. The three started to talk then, going on about recent developments and neighborhood gossip and old jokes and more. It was small, but Vincent found something in those moments. There was something that just felt right.

Lunch was finished after the course of about ten minutes. Daryl had finished his meal around halfway through that time, of course, leaving the two men to finish eating their burgers while he got to work playing with his toy. Once everyone had finished, the group threw away their trash, before they started to head back out through the double doors at the entrance.

Daryl kept playing with his toy even once everyone got back into the car. Vincent was rather glad about this; it would keep him occupied, at least. Vincent began the middling drive back to the house. Commercial districts gradually faded, in favor of houses and the suburbs. After around ten minutes, the trio arrived once more at their home. Standing there in the afternoon light, it was something else.

Daryl got himself down this time. Vincent and Silas just got out from the car and began to walk toward the entrance to their house. Vincent opened the door and the other two friend went in first. Once they were in, Vincent entered and closed the door behind himself. While the other two walked into the rest of the house, Vincent just stood in the entranceway, thinking.

There was still some time, he figured.

“Hey, Silas?” Vincent asked.

“Oh, yeah Vincent?” the psychic responded, turning back toward the man.

“Would you come with me to the hardware store? I figure we can get that squared away now while we have the time.” Vincent spoke.



“Oh shoot, right...” Silas rubbed the back of his head.

Daryl turned back then. A smile was growing on his face. He knew what this meant.

“We'll be heading out for a little while, Daryl. We're just getting the stuff to fix up the house.” Vincent said, looking down towards the boy.

“Mmm...kay!” Daryl chirped.

Vincent and Silas just left the house after that. Daryl could easily take care of himself, they knew. If worst came to worst, he would probably just be desperate for a change when they came back...

The mage and the psychic got in the car and began the trip to the hardware store. It was short, only taking about five minutes. What took longer was actually navigating the damn place. Despite memories of walking through these places, Vincent could hardly fathom where anything was supposed to be located. Silas had an easier time, mainly because he used clairvoyance to find out where each item was. After around a half hour, the two men had bought everything and loaded the items into the back seat of the car. It was only another five minutes then for them to reach the house once more.

When the two opened the door to the house, beginning to unload their purchases, they noticed a silence.

Vincent's brow furrowed then.

Daryl was rarely silent.

“Alright, we're back...Daryl?” Silas spoke, the man still more occupied by the items they were unloading.

“Daryl?” Vincent asked loudly. Vincent knew that Daryl would respond to himself.

A few more seconds passed, and no response arrived.

“Huh. Do you think he could be in the backya-” Silas was cut off.

“I'll go check his room.” Vincent said soberly.

The mage walked up to the second floor and went towards Daryl's bedroom. He opened the door quickly and entered just as fast. Daryl was not present, he immediately recognized.

Something else was, though.

Upon Daryl's bed rested a sheet of paper. Vincent had not remembered one from this morning.

Vincent immediately picked up the piece of paper and brought it up to his eyes. After several seconds, he was done reading.

Vincent said nothing, face blank. He walked outside of the room, heading down the stairs and toward Silas as though he was on autopilot. Vincent spied the psychic on the first floor, still unloading things

from the car. He said nothing, but showed him the printed sheet of paper immediately.

“...Shit.” Silas said without thought.

Vincent could feel something well up within him, but he kept his composure. He looked toward Silas with piercing eyes.

“Where.” he asked simply.

“I...don't know, but I can figure it out soon enough.” Silas shook his head, still shocked. “I'm sorry about this, Vincent. I hadn't thought Zenith Group splinters would still b-”

“Apologies can't help. Where is he being kept?” Vincent spoke with a calm that Silas almost found disturbing.

“Give me a second.” Silas said. He snatched the paper from Vincent's hand and began to measure his breathing. After only a few moments, images began to flash in his mind, and nameless *knowings* came into his consciousness. There was a printer and there was a building and there was the wh-

“Mountains to the south. They have a compound.” Silas said simply.

“Where.” Vincent asked.

Silas said nothing, but telepathically transmitted the location to Vincent.

Vincent just nodded.

“As for getting to the place...” Vincent began.

“I'll apport in.” Silas said. His tone was now coming to approximate Vincent's.

“You know I'm limited in that. It will take me more time to reach you.” Vincent said.

“What were you planning on?” Silas asked.

“Invisibility and flight.” Vincent said simply.

“Hmm. With your potency, that would take around five minutes. Not too big of a difference. This is sort of a situation where every second counts, in any case.” Silas said.

“Can you hold your own for five minutes, Silas?” Vincent asked.

Silas just laughed for a little while, before something dark edged into him.

“If they want me, they'll get me.” Silas said simply.

Silas apported in an instant. Vincent wasted no time, beginning to cast his enchantments. The invisibility was the first to be established, the effect of flight following not long after. Vincent exited the house and took to the sky on mercurial wings.

Vincent reached the mountains after four minutes. After five minutes, he spied his prize. Several hundred feet below him rested a complex, the kind that he remembered from the bygone days. It was just surprising to see it so close to the city.

Vincent just landed on the ground. His invisibility was about to run out, but it looked like all of the guards on the ground had been neutralized. Several men rested, splayed out on the ground. Some were unconscious, while some just looked like they had the wind knocked out of them. Vincent doubted they would be a danger, in any case.

Vincent walked up toward the front of the main building. It was composed of a stark, dark grey metal. The doors at the front lay torn asunder, having obviously suffered the full strength of some great force. Vincent just walked in. Silas tended to manifest entrances in a very specific manner.

Inside was a classic old sight. Really, Vincent had to give them props for maintaining the décor. The pale flooring and doors of the Zenith Group were present, along with the sharp grey metal that outlined everything. He could spy an interior balcony above, something that was part of the second floor of this main chamber. Glass panes seemed to rest in many places, from the central atrium to the walls of the location. To either side, Vincent could spy relatively large hallways. Vincent walked toward the right one, for several incapacitated men lay on the ground there.

Vincent walked past many bodies before he could begin to hear noise. There were screams and gunfire and the shattering of glass. Vincent jogged toward the sound. It sounded like Silas was holding his own.

Vincent turned a corner and finally spied his friend. The psychic was psychokinetically deflecting the blows of a combatant who had turned to melee, whilst simultaneously psychokinetically knocking back men who still wielded rifles. Vincent assessed the threat level rather quickly, all things considered. He did not want to denigrate these guys *too* much, but they didn't exactly seem like too much of a threat. They wore woven body armor and wielded high-end gear, but their tech seemed limited to that of the mundane world, and they were unmistakably mortal. Guns were still guns – they could probably kill an inexperienced mage or psychic with a lucky shot – but Vincent had seen far worse.

“Fall back!” one operative shouted. Radio chatter filled the air. Another body went flying as Silas manifested yet another wave of psychokinetic force. Once the psychic was done with others, he turned toward the man who was attacking him with a knife. He focused so that the blows kept swerving, and then focused on the man's brain. With just the right amount of psychokinetic influence, he rendered him unconscious. The soldier fell to the ground immediately.

“Do you know where Daryl is yet?” Vincent shouted.

“Nope.” Silas said loudly, still concentrating on combat. “Going through their minds as we speak.”

Vincent just sighed. He figured he should get to work helping him.

Vincent started to run forward just as another squad of operatives began to turn the corner at the far end of the hall. They immediately released a rain of suppressive fire. Without hesitation, Vincent immediately manifested a force of equal magnitude to that which propelled the rounds, in the opposite direction. They fell to the ground harmlessly.

Vincent went through a variety of strategies. He charmed some of them, cast sleeping spells upon others, and utilized psychokinesis much as Silas did. Strictly speaking, he did have some more...lethal alternatives in reserve, but things did not seem too serious. Silas, for his part, kept things simple. The psychic would alternately knock down combatants with psychokinetic force until they were too battered to continue, or he would just knock them unconscious through psychokinetic manipulation of the brain. Between these attacks, he would also just hold enemies still for a while, while he read their minds.

While the rest of the facility was in shambles, a man in full body armor stood with an assault rifle before him, standing in the corner of an office room which currently housed a certain child. Daryl was presently playing on his Nintendo DS, something which rendered the operative very disturbed. He could plainly hear the sounds of violence through the radio, and yet this kid just kept playing on a device a few decades out of date. This operation was a weird one, that much was certain.

The sounds of some inane game just filled the room, while the guard could hear his friends being knocked out through his earpiece. The man stood...awkwardly, frankly. His training had not prepared him for this.

“Hey...um, guard guy, do you know what the time is?” Daryl asked, only partially looking up from his DS.

The man kept silent for several seconds, given how he was not supposed to talk to the captive, but eventually he responded.

“Around five.” he said.

“Ah, okay.” Daryl nodded, returning to his game once more. “Still have time.”

While Daryl enjoyed himself, Vincent and Silas kept fighting through soldiers. Vincent thought that they must be almost done with them, at this point, because collectively they had knocked out around fifty.

“Got anything yet?” Vincent asked as they finished up another corridor. Silas currently held an operative pinned to the wall, staring at him intently.

“No luck.” Silas said, shaking his head. The man fell to the ground and he did not even try to get up.

Vincent breathed out. He was growing more impatient.

The two exited the corridor, beginning to enter another wide atrium. The room had the shape of a dome, with a great tree in the center and glass windows above. In the air, around ten feet off of the ground, a man floated. His eyes fell on Silas like those of a predator.

“Welcome, Silas. It is good to see you.” the man grinned.

“I am afraid that I cannot say the same of you, Percival.” Silas said. He did not even narrow his eyes.

“Hmph. I need not the same from you, though I would prefer is you were a little more invested in this.”

Percival said. The psychic floated down a little more, so as to better peer at the faces of those present.

“So. Are you going to take the offer, Silas?” Percival asked. The grin was mad.

“If I were, I doubt I would have manifested such a loud entrance.” Silas said. His eyes did narrow that time, and Percival considered it a victory.

“You only faced mortals. Perhaps facing one of your own caliber will have you reconsidering your decision.” Percival said, shaking his head.

“I mean, this is hardly a fair fight. I've got a mage on my side.” Silas said. The smirk was subtle.

“That will only make this more fun.” Percival just grinned wider.

In the office, the guard still held with Daryl. By this point the child had switched games, though the operative could barely tell that he had. The radio chatter had at least gone silent by this point, so perhaps the situation was actually being resolved, the guard thought.

While the guard thought to himself, something happened. A few seconds later, a smell began to fill the air. The guard picked up on it almost immediately.

“Ah, what the...” the guard looked around, eyes eventually fixating on Daryl.

“Did...did you just crap your pants?”

“...Yes? I'm incontinent...” Daryl just gave him a weird look and returned to his game.

“Oh.” the guard mumbled. Somehow, he held even more still. Damn, this was an awkward job...

“...so are you actually offering anything more this time? Not that I will actually acquiesce, it is just difficult to comprehend that you guys think any of these offers will actually be enticing.” Silas spoke. He still held with Vincent and Percival.

“Not really, actually.” Percival shrugged. “Which is why we got the collateral ahead of time. Again, if you join with us again, Silas, the kid will be free to go.”

“You know, I would not really be joining *again*, all things considered...” Silas shook his head. “You guys are hardly the most legitimate splinter of the Zenith Group. I really thought you of all people would know that, Percival.”

“It matters not.” Percival stated. His tone was tinged with impatience. “What matters is that you come into our fold. Willingly or not.”

“I cannot.” Silas said simply.

“Then I will just have to take you by force...” Percival grinned.

Percival immediately released the psychokinetic field centered upon himself and took the two men by surprise. Forcefully, he extended out a wave of psychokinetically-manifested force toward Silas. The

man was knocked towards the wall in the back.

While Silas screamed in pain, Vincent focused his gaze on the enemy psychic. He tried to pinion the man's limbs with psychokinesis, but Percival had already prepared. He counteracted Vincent's attempt and began to catch the man with a force of his own. It felt like his limbs were caving in on themselves...

Silas came to after a few moments and looked back toward Percival. He could see the psychic attacking his friend, and so he concentrated briefly for a few moments. Soon, Percival's attack was interrupted, and he found himself careening toward a wall.

Vincent took advantage of the opportunity. With his right hand – the one that had not been damaged so much – he flung forth a bolt of white, scintillating fire. It hit the right edge of the man's form and he screamed in pain.

Percival shook his head, immediately turning toward Vincent. He flicked his wrist once, and Vincent suddenly found himself tripped over. Before Silas could react, Percival flew forth, heading forwards and into the air. Straining, he caught onto Silas with his invisible grip. Several objects floated up into the air with the man...and fell down with him, as Percival intentionally released his psychokinesis.

Silas hit the ground hard. He was pretty sure *something* was broken. Really, he thought himself rather lucky that he had not been rendered unconscious right then and there. The psychic came to awareness fast enough to notice Percival careening toward him. He rolled out of the way just in time to avoid the man's punch.

“...Really? A *fist* Percival?” Silas said. He could not quite stifle the laugh.

“Huh. You make a good point.” Percival said. He drew his sidearm.

Before the man could fire, Silas psychokinetically jammed the gun. After the first click bereft of a shot, Percival threw the pistol aside.

“You complain only to ruin the fix...” Percival shook his head.

“No need to LARP.” Silas said simply.

Vincent sighed. He had no patience for the psychodrama. Swiftly, the man bound Percival's limbs while he was still distracted. The man looked quickly down at this body, only to find that he could not move his arms.

“Silas.” Vincent said with tiredness. “Read his mind.”

“Right on it.” Silas nodded toward the man.

Silas looked on at Percival and began to peer into his psyche. There was more resistance than usual, but he was able to get in quickly, all things considered. Daryl was being held in...oh damn, it was in the other wing...

“You got it?” Vincent asked.

“Indeed.” Silas said.

“Hmph. You want to do the honors?” Vincent spoke.

“Oh, right.” Silas said. The psychic looked back toward the bound Percival. He concentrated his mind for a moment, and psychokinetically perturbed Percival's brain. The man went out right after.

The guard gripped tightly onto his gun when he heard the door being opened. He had gotten no call on the radio. His legs and arms were shaky, but he was still able to aim his rifle towards the figures who were walking in. The target and...some other guy?

Vincent and Silas did not even bother trying to protect themselves. Vincent walked up toward Daryl, whom he picked up and hugged deeply. Vincent kept the boy in his arms, and after a few moments of breathing, began to walk out of the room with Silas. Looking back, Daryl waved at the guard.

“My ride is here...take care!” he exclaimed.

Vincent, Silas, and Daryl exited the building in silence. Once they were out, they could spy the orange-red sky. It was evening.

Vincent turned toward Silas. He spoke after a few moments.

“How should we handle this place?” he asked. He was tired.

“I already notified the collaborative. In all likelihood, they'll have the place cleared out within a few days.” Silas said simply, slipping something away into his pocket.

Vincent said nothing more, and began the journey home.

Silas just apported back immediately. He was not quite as good at invisibility as Vincent, and so it was safer. Vincent cast spells of invisibility upon himself and Daryl. After another spell to renew the effect of flight, Vincent took to the air. The two arrived at home five minutes later.

Vincent walked through the front door and carefully let Daryl down. Silas was already inside, and waved to them from further in the house. Vincent just walked with Daryl to the couch and held with him there for a while. He scratched the boy's head leaves gently for a few minutes. Eventually, his voice came. He apologized very quietly, but Daryl did not seem too disturbed. Even then, Vincent still held him close for a long while.

Eventually, Silas entered the room.

“Hey.” he said quietly. “It's almost dinnertime.”

Vincent took a little while to respond.

“What do you want, Daryl?” he turned toward the boy. His eyes sparkled.

“Mmm...steak and rice!” Daryl said confidently.

“Alright then...getting to work right now...” Silas just shook his head and sighed.

Vincent took Daryl upstairs while dinner was being prepared and changed him into a fresh diaper. Once the boy was clean, Vincent let him go. The child returned to the first floor, and mostly just lounged around for a bit while he waited for dinner to be ready. He could get really hungry, Vincent had noticed.

After half-an-hour, dinner was done. The cut and preparation was not the greatest, but it was not like a kid would notice that, anyway. Daryl took his seat at the dinner table whilst the other two friends brought over the plates. Daryl was served first, and started to eat almost immediately after he got his plate. Vincent got his plate next, and Silas prepared his last. The three ate together, like they always did. It was nice, as the sun sank below the horizon and night took its place outside.

After dinner was done, Vincent moved to the living room and turned on the TV. He brought Daryl over to the room, who immediately started to burst into excitement once he saw that the TV was on. Vincent asked him what movie he wanted to watch, and Silas already began to start up the popcorn while Daryl decided. Given the circumstances, Vincent did not fear indulging the child tonight.

After putting the DVD into the DVD player, Vincent picked up Daryl and set him down on the couch, beginning to slide off his shorts. They weren't going to be heading anywhere else for today, and Vincent liked to be able to check Daryl's diaper at a glance. The boy just excitedly looked at the screen.

Once popcorn was ready and Silas began to bring back the bowls, Vincent started the movie. The film was well...alright he supposed. It was not mature, but neither was it overly kiddish. He could get invested in it, he thought. This was for Daryl, anyways.

Before the movie proper began, Daryl jumped off from the couch and ran off towards the kitchen. He returned several seconds later, having recovered sour gummy worms and other bags of candy from the pantry. Vincent let him have the sweets, and waited for the child to jump back onto his position on the couch. Daryl sat on the middle of the couch, with Silas on his left and Vincent on his right. The two men kept him squeezed in comfortably. Daryl sank into the couch a little. It was soft and warm and the movie was playing.

Daryl was quickly captivated by the film. He kept his eyes fixed on the screen, even as his hands swiftly delivered popcorn and candy to his mouth. Vincent and Silas, for their part, also went through the popcorn pretty fast. After the plot had thickened around a quarter of the way into the movie, Silas went back to the kitchen to get some more popcorn.

Vincent judged his assessment of the film as fairly accurate once they reached the middle. He thought he could predict the rest by now. Daryl, of course, was still hooked, even though Vincent was pretty sure he had seen this film dozens of times before.

As the night deepened and the movie progressed, Daryl just grew ever more engrossed in the film. Not that his friends had, really. Silas almost found himself nodding off at moments, his eyes straining against the light of the screen. Vincent on the other hand was wakeful, but he was not very interested in the movie. Really, Daryl was the larger source of entertainment.

During the second half of the movie, Silas began to come to more. Blinking his eyes a little bit, the man



noticed that Daryl was now facing his body towards the screen, with his head supported by his hands and his butt towards the couch. Silas looked on briefly at Vincent, he seemed to be quite wakeful. It was then that Silas noticed something else.

There was a certain smell in the room...

Silas looked toward Vincent almost immediately. Quietly, he whispered.

“He's...” Silas trailed off.

“I know.” Vincent said simply.

Silas looked back at Daryl then. The kid was absolutely glued to the screen. There was no way they were going to get him to acquiesce to a change.

Resigning himself to the situation, Silas just sighed and smiled. He *was* a cute little kid.

Silas returned to watching the movie with the others. After around a half hour, it had concluded. Daryl stuck around for the credits, of course, for he knew that was how he could stay up longer. Once those were done though, and Vincent popped out the disk, Daryl took Vincent's hand once the man had extended it.

Vincent took Daryl to the bathroom and brushed his teeth. He was really sleepy by now. He didn't really try to object.

Once Daryl's teeth were clean, Vincent guided him upstairs. He led the boy to his bedroom and opened up the door. Beyond lay the bedroom itself, standing in the strange splendour of its own. Outside the window, the moon hung in the sky. Vincent walked into the room with Daryl, before picking him up once they were inside. Vincent brought Daryl to the changing table first, and got to work changing his diaper. Once he was all clean, Vincent placed Daryl down onto his bed. He pulled the covers over the child, and he could see Daryl blinking intermittently.

Daryl spoke up.

“Vincent...”

“Yes?” Vincent spoke.

“Do you...ever feel like this is weird?” Daryl spoke. The words came out slowly.

“I cannot say that it does not feel like that.” Vincent smiled lightly.

“Heh, right...” Daryl looked off for a second. “But seriously. I have been...feeling things lately.”

“What concerns you?” Vincent asked. He was a friend, after all.

“I dunno...probably not a lot compared to your mystical standards...” Daryl laughed a little.

Daryl was silent for a decent while. Vincent found it hard to see in the darkness, but he could recognize

that Daryl's expression was pained.

"I'm not really a kid." Daryl said quietly. "We both know that."

"There are no such things as kids." Vincent said. He was straight and calm. "All beings are uncreated and eternal."

"You are right about that Vincent..." Daryl smiled lightly. His eyes drifted off.

"I guess I am just talking about the feelings. Sometimes, everything seems very strange." Daryl said.

"It does seem like that much of the time." Vincent said.

He did not have anything to add. He only gave acknowledgement.

Daryl just sort of went silent and eventually fell asleep. Once Daryl had fallen asleep, Vincent left the room and shut the door quietly.

He thought there in the hall, as he retired for the night.

He would have to move on from this too one day, he knew. Just like how he had moved on from his days of adventure and vainglory.

Vincent accepted that, and with an unpressured heart, went to bed.