

# WHAT IS REAL

by Southofoz

## Part One

*“What is Real?” asked the rabbit one day.*

*Real isn't how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It's a thing that happens to you. When someone loves you for a long, long time, REALLY loves you. Then you become Real. And once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand. Once you are real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always.”*

As Bach's music floated throughout the chamber, Vincent held Catherine close. The fragrance of her hair, the warmth of her body, so close to his, was intoxicating. He nuzzled the top of her head and placed a kiss there. Catherine leaned closer to him, her head on his chest, a hand resting on his thigh. This intimate touch was tantalizing proof of how close they had become and he sighed with complete contentment.

Vincent found it difficult to believe what had finally occurred between them, was it a dream? Or had they finally been swept away – by the night – and the stars – and each other. This new dimension to their relationship, this deeper and more complete joining, had enhanced the peace in his soul and sang throughout his body assuring him that he had not dreamed it. Like any other man in love, he had at last joined with the woman he adored – with no fear of the uncontrollable outbursts, or loss of self, that he had been afraid of for so long. Now this last barrier had been crossed. After what had happened a few weeks ago, Vincent had finally made a decision to let go of the restraints that had been instilled in him for so long, and this would be a decision that in time would change both their lives.

“How do you feel?” Catherine asked.

Vincent lifted his head, closing his eyes, trying to find words to express how he felt, but none came. “There are no words” he murmured into her hair, as his hand possessively stroked her shoulder, in a gesture that expressed how he reveled in this new intimacy.

“Try one.” Catherine commanded, gently, unwilling to allow him to retreat into his own private thoughts. Even now that they had shared everything she would not, could not, let him withdraw again. He drew Catherine closer, his breath in her ear causing ecstatic chills to run down her spine.

“Blessed,” he breathed

Catherine closed her eyes, savoring this moment and the bliss that she felt with the man she loved more than life itself. Content in the knowledge that at last Vincent knew what joys could be found in a lover's arms...

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Mouse hurried through the tunnels in search of Vincent. “Gotta tell Vincent, he'll know what to do.” He muttered to himself.

He went to Father's study and stood at the top of the stairs "Mouse, is something wrong?" Father asked, looking up from the book he was reading.

"Need Vincent," Mouse mumbled. He looked around Father's study, realized Vincent wasn't there, and turned and left the chamber.

"It's Halloween Mouse, Vincent is ..." but Mouse had already disappeared. "Above with Catherine," Father finished, to an empty room.

Mouse hurried to the entrance of Catherine's Apartment, and waited impatiently, pacing and muttering to himself. "Vincent better now. Getting stronger every day, can help Mouse, must help. Not just Mouse but everyone."

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Vincent and Catherine walked slowly through the tunnels, unwilling to let this evening end. Catherine had her arm through Vincent's and they were both smiling. This last year had been a difficult one for them both, and so they had decided that this night of costumes and fun was just what they needed.

Catherine had chosen a costume for Vincent this year that suited him perfectly, and he had even agreed to wear it just to please her. He was dressed as a Cavalier, and looked very handsome and much like a musketeer. He had even agreed to wear the feathered hat that came with the outfit that set off his cloak so well.

Catherine was dressed as a wealthy lady of the French court. Her gown was emerald green, with cream lace on the sleeves and across the bodice. When Vincent had first seen her he had remarked how the color made her eyes glow. Her golden-brown hair was arranged in tight ringlets about her face, and decorated with pearls. She looked beautiful and radiant on the arm of her companion.

They had left the Brennan party, which they had attended every year since having first met Brigit O'Donnell. The rest of the evening, they had spent walking through the city streets, and then finally, as always on this night they ended the evening by strolling through the park, holding hands and talking softly together. They both looked forward to this night every year and now that Vincent was fully recovered from his illness, they had made the most of every moment.

When Vincent escorted her to her basement, they found a sleeping Mouse curled up in the doorway. Vincent bent over and shook him gently.

"Mouse, Mouse, is something wrong?"

Mouse woke suddenly. When he saw Vincent, he smiled, still sleep drugged. "Vincent, you look different. Like ... like..."

"Like a Musketeer?" Catherine suggested,

Mouse smiled sleepily, "No, like a picture in that book."

"What book Mouse?" Vincent asked,

A puzzled frown creased Mouse's brow, and suddenly he declared with triumph, "*Puss in Boots!*"

Vincent laughed tolerantly, as Mouse got to his feet and pointed to the top of Vincent's head, "Nice hat," he remarked offhandedly as he dusted himself off.

Catherine giggled, "The idea was a Musketeer, Mouse."

"Don't know that story; only know 'Puss in Boots' and Vincent looks like him." Mouse asserted. Then suddenly Mouse remembered why he had come looking for Vincent, "Where you been? Was looking for you!"

"What is it Mouse?" Vincent asked, concerned by Mouse's fear. If Mouse was afraid then it must be truly something to be worried about.

"Something very, very bad in the tunnels."

"Something bad?" Vincent asked.

"Yes, Vincent, come now," as he spoke Mouse pulled on Vincent's arm.

"What do you mean bad, Mouse?" Vincent asked reluctant to leave Catherine.

"Bad. Really, *really* bad! *c'mon!*" Mouse was tugging on Vincent's cloak now.

Vincent turned to Catherine with an apologetic grin. "I must go Catherine I'm sorry..."

"I know," she smiled up at him, her eyes shining with love. "It was a wonderful evening."

"Yes, it was." Vincent murmured his eyes unable to leave hers. "I will come to you later." And there was an unspoken promise in his words and Catherine's heart skipped a beat. He removed the hat, gave it to her, and squeezed her hand. She knew he wanted to kiss her but he was still not comfortable showing affection when someone else was near.

"I'll be awake." Catherine promised with a secret smile. And for a moment it was as though the world only existed for them alone.

Mouse looked from one to the other, shook his head, unable to comprehend the meaning of the moment and demanded, "Yeah, yeah nice time. Fun dress-up, *Vincent come, now!*"

With an apologetic smile and another gentle squeeze of her hand, Vincent followed Mouse, leaving Catherine to watch as his cloaked figure disappeared into the darkness.

With a sigh and a smile, remembering the night just passed and with hopes of Vincent's swift return, Catherine went up the iron ladder to her apartment, to wait in anticipation.

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Mouse was hurrying ahead of Vincent, and it wasn't until he realized they were going toward the subway, that he asked. "Mouse what is down here?"

Looking back quickly, Mouse murmured. "Something very bad – worse than bad – worse than worst ..."

"But what is it Mouse?"

"Dunno," Mouse answered, but kept going.

Realizing he wouldn't get any more out of his friend, Vincent kept silent until Mouse came to one of the entrances to the subways. It was a hub of sorts, where all the subway lines converged, and

Vincent began to feel a sense of *something* nearby that he couldn't recognize.

"They're there." Mouse pointed through a gap in the wall.

"This is beneath the old orphanage, just above the old reservoir." Vincent mused looking around.

"Yeah, and they're in there." Mouse was still pointing, but kept his face averted.

"Who?"

The young man looked up at his friend with revulsion. "Not who, *what*. Things bad things,"

Vincent then began to sense something that could only be described as pure evil approaching from the darkness and he couldn't help emitting a low growl from deep within his throat.

"Yeah, worse than bad," Mouse agreed.

Vincent felt Mouse's fear rising, but he turned to the youth and asked. "Can you tell me what these bad things are Mouse, and how you knew they were here?"

"Was looking for stuff in the subway last night and heard a big noise. When Mouse looked ... A big 'thing' came out of there," he pointed at the dark gap in the wall, "and it fought with another big thing. Looked like a man but *red* – but was not a man."

"Go on Mouse." Vincent urged gently.

"Watched the fight, the red man killed the 'thing' and then went away. Then more 'things' started moving around in there." And Mouse's finger shook as it still pointed toward the dark recess.

Vincent placed a hand on his friend's shoulder and felt Mouse trembling. "I will stay here, you go back Mouse."

Strangely there was no argument from Mouse, who looked at the hole in the wall and then at Vincent. With a nod, he turned and scurried away. He did not look back, content in the knowledge that Vincent would handle the situation and keep these intruders away from their home.

Vincent stayed and watched the area for almost an hour until finally his enhanced sight picked up a group of five men making their way toward him along the railway line. It was clear to him that three were ordinary men but two of the group was not. They climbed through the entrance and continued on into another chamber. Vincent slipped across the tracks, just after a train passed and put his back against the wall just outside of the chamber and listened. He heard water dripping and then snatches of conversations.

"Over here," a soft voice said.

Another man's voice spoke sarcastically. "You said those eggs needed dark and humid, well they hit the jackpot."

Then the soft voice again, "There's a pulse – there, a cistern on the other side," then a pause, "all the eggs are there."

The same man again, in an official tone. "We should go back and request a special permit. A type two..." but his comment was interrupted by the sound of pounding and the very stones at Vincent's

back shook.

Vincent was puzzled. Eggs, what eggs? What was happening here?

When the pounding stopped a deep voice rumbled. "You guys coming or what?"

Vincent heard the men enter yet another chamber and he followed, staying just out of sight, the two strange 'men' puzzled him but he heard them being referred to as Red and Blue. The large man 'Red' lifted a heavy grate from the floor with little effort. Vincent knew that even he would have trouble with something that size. Then with a grunt it was cast aside, while the other man 'Blue' removed all but his lower garments and Vincent saw him clearly in the light from above. He was indeed blue with markings all over his body which was hairless, and his eyes were large round black orbs. Red cracked two chemical lights across his arm and when they glowed he dropped them into the cistern.

"Here you go, Doctor. This should cover your tail fin – it's a bone from Saint Dionysus, on loan from the Vatican. Looks like a pinkie." The deep voice rumbled.

Blue sighed and took the offering and wrapped it around his wrist as he murmured. "Remind me why I keep doing this."

"Rotten eggs and the safety of mankind," Red replied simply.

Strange, Vincent thought, these people were helping mankind? They are not the evil he constantly sensed in the chamber, like an ache at the back of his head.

As he thought this, Blue dove into the cistern, unafraid and unfazed by what might be lurking just beneath the surface.

The group then began to search the area, laying down more of the strange lights and Vincent slipped back out of the chamber so he would not be detected.

Then Vincent heard a man's voice yelling, "Red's on the move I'll cover him." and the sound of feet echoing into the distance.

What happened next disturbed Vincent more than he could ever express, mostly because he could not have saved the men who were horribly mutilated by two grotesque creatures. Vincent had taken a swift peek around the wall at a strange sound, just as one of the creatures attacked the men left behind to protect Blue, and what he saw made his blood run cold.

They were large dog-like creatures, larger than a man, grey in color and appeared reptilian. There were long tendrils protruding from their ugly heads that writhed like snakes, and they had three eyes on each side of their faces above a vicious, many fanged maw. They were the stuff of nightmares and they attacked without warning or mercy.

Vincent couldn't move, the stench of blood and evil made him feel physically ill, but he knew he couldn't help the men who were being attacked, and survive. His instincts told him that he would lose against these creatures, and even though it went against everything he believed in, he knew he must stay out of this conflict. He also had an almost uncontrollable urge to flee this place and never look back, but he overcame it. The smaller of the two strangers, the one called Blue was down in the murky waters of the cistern alone, and he could need Vincent's help.

After the terrible screams ceased, and he felt the creatures leave the vicinity, Vincent went through the opening in the wall. He watched from the shadows as Blue emerged from the cistern, gasping

and injured, and very frightened.

Vincent watched from the deep shadows as Blue pressed a button on his belt, but the fear coming from this gentle creature was more than Vincent could bear. So he made a decision to approach him.

The fish-man was gasping and obviously in pain, when Vincent made his way to him quietly, making sure his hood was in place. He tore strips from his white shirt as he whispered. "Please don't be afraid ..."

Large black eyes turned to him, and a gasp escaped the liplless mouth. "Who are you?" the soft, gentle voice asked.

"Vincent,"

"I'm Abe, Abraham Sapien, Where did you come from? You are not evil," and Abe lifted a hand palm outward toward Vincent.

"No, I live here in these tunnels." Vincent murmured, as he bandaged the gaping wound across Abraham's bare chest.

"You must be very careful, Vincent, There is great evil here."

"I know." Vincent's deep voice was filled with revulsion, his teeth clenched against the inner turmoil this experience was causing in him.

"You can sense it too," it wasn't a question,

"Yes."

Abraham put a hand on Vincent's arm and suddenly all of Vincent's memories seemed to rush through his mind. He began to feel dizzy. He looked down at Abraham, whose eyes were closed and in that instant Vincent realized that Abraham must be gifted with telepathy and was quickly learning everything about Vincent's entire life. Then finally Abraham opened his eyes.

Black eyes fixed on blue, "I will keep your secret Vincent. But you must know you are not alone, not anymore." He placed Vincent's hand between both of his own webbed ones and sights and sounds began to flood Vincent's mind. A lonely life of a creature living in a water tank, long years of solitude, and then a small and gentle man wearing glasses appeared. A child with skin as red as blood, horns protruding from his head and a hand much too large for his body, entered into the memories. Then years of companionship as the demon child grew to the man he now was.

The visions faded and then Abraham said. "There is something more you must know." Vincent felt as though he was on the top of a train that had suddenly turned onto another line and his perspective changed and he saw what had been going on here tonight. An evil had risen from antiquity, and after escaping its confinement was now wreaking havoc in the New York subways. The eggs that were mentioned had been laid by the creature known as Sammael and it was this 'Hound of Resurrection' that had killed the men so cruelly and had made Vincent fear for his own life.

The link between them was broken suddenly as the sound of a deep voice calling "Man down! Do you read! Do you read? Quarry! Moss! Do you read me?" echoed throughout the tunnels. Then "Abe can you hear me!"

"Unless you want to meet my large friend, I suggest you leave." Abe said softly with pain in his voice.

Vincent lifted his head and said. “The large red man?”

“Yes, he will be here soon.”

With a nod Vincent, totally overwhelmed by what he had seen tonight murmured, “It was an – unexpected pleasure to meet you Abraham.”

“You too Vincent,” Abraham’s black eyes blinked sideways and he smiled weakly.

With a last nod to his new friend, Vincent quickly melted back into the shadows, still reluctant to leave Abraham alone. But when Abraham was joined by the man he called Red, Vincent slipped away into the tunnels wondering how he was going to explain to Catherine how he had torn his shirt.

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A young woman approached the culvert in Central Park, and when she came to the Iron Gate, she flipped the release and the iron door slid open. She paused at the entrance, unsure. Then with a deep sigh, she began to walk toward the central hub of the community, shining a torch before her. She stopped at the first pipe she came to and tapped out the code she had been given with the torch, and waited.

It wasn’t long before she saw the light of what at first she thought was a torch but as the large shadowed figure came closer she realized it was a crude lantern. He came toward her, walking with lithe grace. A dark cloak covered him from head to toe, swaying as he moved. About ten paces away he stopped, and simply stood waiting.

“You’re Vincent.” The young woman asserted.

“Yes.”

“I’m Liz.”

“Where did you get the code to call for me Liz? You are not a Helper.”

“Abe gave it to me.”

Vincent came a few steps closer, his concern for his new friend overcoming his caution, “Abraham, is he well?”

“Recovering, but he has to stay in his tank until he’s stronger.”

Vincent nodded; it had been over a week since he had seen the battle above the reservoir, and he had wondered a great deal about this odd group. He also sensed something strange within this young woman. Although unlike Vincent and the other two men, she was perfectly normal on the surface.

Liz was relieved and yet amazed. This man seemed exactly as Abe had described him. Although his face was still hidden in the shadows of his hood, she was well aware of what was concealed. However she was more concerned that he might not help her, than with his appearance. But if anyone could help Red, it was Vincent.

“I have this friend,” she stated without preamble. “He just lost his father, and well ... it’s hit him pretty hard. Abe ... well Abe said you might be able to help.”

“How can I help?” Vincent asked, unsure, but willing to do what he could to help this unusual group of people. He had thought he was alone and now suddenly, there were others, not exactly like him, but with the same disadvantages. And he felt akin to them in ways he couldn’t fathom.

Liz looked around at the walls, the floor and down the tunnels, “I don’t think he’d have any trouble coming here.”

“Who?” Vincent asked

“My friend, HB.”

“HB?”

“Hellboy, we call him Red or HB.”

Vincent fell silent. The tunnel world had heard rumors concerning someone by that name for many years, but everyone Vincent included had thought he was a myth. But now so much was falling into place.

Unfamiliar with Vincent’s perpetual pauses, Liz took his silence as disapproval. “Look I came here because Abe said you and HB might have something in common, and that you might be able to help him. If you’re gonna go all self-righteous on me ...”

Vincent raised his hand and stepped forward. “No please, you misunderstand. I like so many others thought your friend only a myth and I was just wondering why someone would be called such a thing.”

“Hellboy is – what he’s called – well because that’s where he comes from.” Liz said bluntly.

“I see,” Vincent murmured, his mind trying to understand.

“So, will you talk to him?”

“Of course,” Vincent was not one to discount the possibility of any kind of life or the origin of such a life. He wondered however how he would explain this new development to Catherine who was not quite as accepting of such things as he.

Without another word, Liz turned and began to walk back down the tunnel and Vincent heard her say softly to herself, “Now all I have to do is convince him to come here.”

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Liz walked passed the conference room where Manning the new leader of their group was briefing the agents who would be going to Moscow to walk into a trap laid for them. Just as she passed the door she heard Manning say. “Hellboy’s coming.” And she knew that before that happened she had to talk to him. She found Hellboy standing in front of the desk of his adopted father, Professor Broom, staring down at a book.

She knew he needed comforting after the cruel murder of the man he had always known as his father, but didn’t know what to say or do to help him, all she could offer was, “Hi.”

“Hi.” His deep voice rumbled, as he turned to face her.



“I’ve...changed my mind.” She said softly, “I’ll come to Moscow, if you’re still going.”

“I am ...” he said softly, then he paused before going on, as though what he had to say was difficult to voice, “but I have something to say,” He faced her as though he was bracing himself, putting his hands on his hips in an endearing, telling gesture.

Liz had never seen him this way, no ready quip or sarcastic comment – so unsure of himself and her heart ached. He was born – or brought here from wherever – in 1944 and that made him old enough to be her grandfather, but she had grown up with him and sometimes he seemed even younger than she was. And although he fought monsters for a living there was an innate innocence about him that was totally endearing. “I understand what you don’t like about me,” he said, watching her face, but he wouldn’t listen when she tried to disagree. “I do. What I am makes you feel a little out of place, out *there*...”

“Red, I don’t...”

“Listen,” he cut in softly, and stepped down closer to her, “I’m not like Myers. He makes you feel like you belong out there, which is good, really.”

Liz knew that the new Agent sent to baby-sit Red was making him feel threatened but there was nothing she could do about that. She didn’t know what to say to ease Red’s pain as he continued.

Moving his hand in front of his face he spoke with a pain in his voice that she had never heard there before. “I wish I could do something about *this*, but I can’t.” then his usual wit emerging, even in his grief and he grinned. “But I can promise you two things – one, I’ll always look this good,” and Liz had to laugh softly at that. Then he lifted her chin with his, warmer than human, hand as he finished with, “and two, I’ll never give up on you – *ever*.”

There was such an intense look in his golden eyes that she could not take her gaze from his. “I like that,” she replied pleased, and never having been good with words, she put a hand on his arm.

“Good,” he murmured with a smile.

She looked up at him then and added, “Red I need you to meet someone before we go; someone I think will help you understand some things.”

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Catherine was late meeting him and Vincent was concerned. But then he heard her footsteps hurrying toward him, and she was in his arms in moments.

“What is it, Catherine?” Vincent asked as he saw the concern on her face, again reminded of the loss of their bond. Even though their new intimacy gave him certain hints to her state of mind, it did not show him as much as he had once seen. Perhaps with this new aspect of their relationship the loss was inconsequential compared to what they had gained.

“Joe was in an accident. He’s in critical condition.”

“Oh, Catherine, I’m so sorry. I know how much you care for Joe Maxwell.”

“Yes,” she agreed and laid her head on his shoulder. She couldn’t decide how to tell him the other reason for her worry. She was glad that he would only believe it was simply for Joe that she was so preoccupied. She hadn’t even overcome her own shock about her pregnancy yet. That Vincent was still not recovered and could be disturbed by the thought of a baby was more than she could deal

with at the moment. So she changed the subject. "What's this about?" she asked looking up at his face.

"I'm not sure what to expect, but I want you to meet a young woman Catherine. I think you can help her. She seems very troubled."

From the end of the tunnel only moments later, two people emerged from the darkness, coming into view and instantly Vincent sensed the same dampened evil he had felt some nights ago, yet there was no threat. It was as though, just as he must always suppress his primal side, so this man kept the evil hidden behind a locked door of which he alone had the key.

As the two approached – one large bulk and the other a slight yet tall figure, he felt Catherine's hand slide into his. "Vincent?"

"It's all right, Catherine," he squeezed her hand in reassurance and began to make his way toward them, and Catherine stayed close at his side.

Vincent walked slowly, taking in the stranger's appearance, from the top of his head and the stubs of what appeared to be horns that had been sawn off or filed down, to an over large right hand, which looked like red stone down to the black leather pants and heavy black boots. This was the being he had seen in Abraham's memories, and he felt an instant kinship with him. The other man seemed to be doing the same, his strange golden eyes moving from the top of Vincent's golden mane, down to his thick sheepskin boots.

In the middle of the tunnel they came face to face. Two figures, both the same height and build – one, wearing a leather coat and with skin the color of blood, the other with long golden hair and wearing a black cloak – two very different men, but both so very much alike beneath the surface.

There was a moment of silence, as these two faced each other, "I guess you're Vincent." Hellboy's deep voice rumbled and the oversized stone hand was thrust toward Vincent. Golden eyes looked down at Liz, "I thought Liz was playin' a joke on me, but you're real."

"Yes," Vincent replied taking the hand that was offered to him. He grasped it firmly, unafraid to cause any damage, realizing that it would take more than his sharp claws to pierce this hand. Although it looked capable of crushing anything it held. Vincent felt only a normal pressure on his flesh.

"Just call me Red, that's what my friends call me." Hellboy asserted with a friendly smile.

"Welcome Red, this is Catherine," Vincent smiled down at her with love and pride on his face.

"Call me Cathy." Catherine suggested, stretching out her hand to have it taken by a large red one. It felt like stone, but it was surprisingly warmer than a human hand, almost hot in fact.

Hellboy nodded, and before he could say anything by way of introduction, Liz declared, "I'm Liz," and grasped Catherine's hand and shook it once.

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Liz." Catherine said, with a welcoming smile, noticing that even Liz's flesh was hotter than normal.

"Please come with us," Vincent asked and turned, beckoning the newcomers to follow.

As they walked through the tunnels, Hellboy positioned himself beside Vincent, as Catherine slowed to walk behind and next to Liz.

“So what’s your story?” Hellboy asked as he walked next to Vincent.

With a tolerant smile and a nod toward his new friend, Vincent answered simply, “I was found as a baby, and brought here. I have lived here all my life. I have no idea where I was born, or who my parents were.”

“Gee, no idea where ya came from, or why you are like you are?”

“No,” Vincent responded softly.

“Yeah, well, I was brought from some Hell Dimension as a baby.”

Vincent turned to his new friend. “We all have evil within us. It is how well we control it that makes us the men we are, good or evil. I think you have more than your fair share of evil to control, my friend.”

Hellboy laughed, “You sound like you know that *real* well.”

“Yes,” Vincent answered his recent illness uppermost in his mind.

After walking through the tunnels for some time making small talk, they came to Vincent’s chamber. The table had been set for four, a steaming pot of tea, and some of William’s best cakes had been arranged in the middle of it.

“Gee, a tea party!” Hellboy declared, pleasantly surprised, as he walked into the room and around the table. Liz followed him while Vincent and Catherine stood by the entrance.

“Please, make yourselves comfortable,” Vincent said, coming into the room and indicating the laden table.

Vincent removed Catherine’s cream coat and then his cloak, laying them over the back of one of the chairs.

Hellboy watched this and took his coat off, and then put his hands on Liz’s shoulders to remove her dark coat. She turned to him with a questioning look, and without a word removed her own coat, but handed it to him. Looking around the room for a place to put the coats, Hellboy simply threw them on the bed and then sat in one of the large chairs at the table.

What followed was a very unusual tea party. Catherine and Vincent tried to make polite conversation. While completely out of his depth, Hellboy broke first one of the china cups, and then the teapot. Until finally Liz groaned, jumped up from the table, grabbed her coat, and fled the room.

Hellboy got to his feet to follow her, “Liz!” But a gentle, yet firm hand came to his arm stopping him. He stared into Vincent’s expressive sad eyes.

Catherine picked up her cream coat and murmured. “I’ll talk to her,” And she left the chamber.

Hellboy slumped down on Vincent’s bed, his head down and his elbows on his thighs, his large hand covering his normal one. “I can’t even have a simple tea party with friends without makin’ a mess n’ breakin’ things,” he moaned.

Vincent came over to the bed and sat beside the distraught young demon.

“What is troubling you my friend?”

Hellboy lifted his hands in surrender. “*Everything!*” he declared with a helpless shrug.

“You love her very much don’t you?” Vincent murmured softly.

“Yeah, I’d go into hell itself for her.”

“I understand.” Vincent’s voice was soft and full of compassion.

“Y’know, before I saw you and Cathy t’gether, I had no hope about Liz and me but now ...”

“Catherine is a very special woman, and so is Liz,”

Hellboy grinned ironically “I guess they have to be, to be a part of our lives don’t they?”

“Yes,” Vincent agreed with an answering smile.

There was silence between them for a few moments. Finally Hellboy looked up at Vincent and said. “I don’t usually scare easy ... well never really. I can face soul eating monsters and giant beasties without a second thought and I know exactly what to do, and I’ve fought my share, but with Liz – I get all confused...”

“Hmm,” Vincent agreed.

“Abe said you’d be able to help me understand some things, so shoot ...” He turned his golden gaze on his companion and waited patiently for the answers he so desperately needed.

“Your friend gives me a great deal of credit.” Vincent murmured.

“You and Catherine seem – really good together.”

“Yes,” Vincent looked down at his own hands. “But it has not been easy.”

“Huh,” Hellboy grunted. “When is it with chicks?”

Vincent looked up, and realized that this man was more like a brother to him than anyone he had ever met. Unlike Charles, this young man had a very similar inner struggle to fight, as Vincent did himself.

“All I can tell you is to love with all that is within you, and you will be able to overcome whatever comes. I have found that we choose to be who we are. What we are or where we came from has no bearing on that.”

Hellboy was staring at the floor. “Father would’ve said something like that he’d have been able to help me. He knew everything ...”

Vincent smiled thinking of his own father, and the mistakes he had made concerning Vincent and Catherine’s relationship, but in the end Father had learned to accept them. “Fathers can only guide us so far. Then we must make our own choices and our own mistakes.”

Golden eyes met blue. “So you think there’s a chance for someone like me with Liz?”

Vincent looked away, remembering his own difficult beginnings with Catherine. "I believe that Liz cares for you deeply, and she knows you care for her." Vincent turned to face his companion and finished with. "That is the best place to begin."

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Catherine hurried after Liz, worried that she would make the wrong turn and become lost. "Liz please, wait!"

Liz stopped in the middle of the tunnel, and turned to face Catherine, her face stricken and tears in her eyes.

Catherine came up to her and said. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Liz sighed and brushed the tears away angrily. "I have known him all my life. He never changes. He's always so good at killing things. Some very scary things, but when it comes to everyday stuff, he just doesn't seem to get it, ya know? I know he cares for me, maybe too much, but I don't know how I feel about him, except sometimes he just drives me crazy."

Catherine put an arm around the distraught young woman and said. "Let's take a walk, and you can tell me all about it."

Some time later as they sat by the beauty of the falls, Liz had told Catherine everything about her life, and that they were going to Moscow to face an evil supernatural villain. They didn't know what to expect there, except that it had something to do with Red and only he could stop it but she was worried. There was silence between them, as Catherine digested it all.

Catherine felt it a moot point to mention how she didn't believe in half of what Liz had told her, so she kept her mind on the things she could understand. "You are going into a dangerous situation Liz, and you and Hellboy need each other, now more than ever. Now is not the time to be making decisions about the future. You can only think of now. You know how he feels about you, but you need to let him know how you feel about him."

"But that's just it, I don't *know* how I feel about him. I love him; of course I do, but is it as a brother or ... something else?"

Catherine sighed deeply. "Maybe one day soon you will know."

"Yeah, maybe one day, if I live that long."

Catherine embraced the young woman, and just at that moment Hellboy and Vincent came through the cavern entrance.

"C'mon Liz we leave for Moscow in the morning." Hellboy declared, reaching out a hand to help Liz to her feet, and this time she took it and allowed him to help her up.

Vincent and Catherine accompanied their new friends back to the tunnel entrance. Catherine embraced Liz, while Vincent took the large red stone hand, of the man he now considered his brother, in his own equally different hands, in farewell.

They watched as these two new friends made their way out of the tunnels, both wondering if they would ever see them again.

Some nights later there was an eclipse, where the moon turned red, accompanied by an earthquake with an epicenter just outside of Moscow. As suddenly as it began however, it ceased and the moon returned to its usual color and the earth settled back to its gentle rotation around the sun.

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Catherine and Vincent were taking a walk through the park arm in arm when a garbage truck came down the road.

“Vincent!” Catherine warned, as it came in their directions and then pulled to a stop only a few feet away.

Vincent stood his ground. “It’s all right Catherine,” and watched as the back of the truck opened and three people came out. Two Catherine knew; the third was a slight figure, wearing a strange apparatus around his neck and his body was covered in a black wetsuit.

Catherine was pleased to see that Liz had her hand in that of Hellboy, and there was a smile on her face. Hellboy seemed very pleased with himself and Catherine didn’t need to ask to know why.

When they met and greetings were exchanged, Catherine was introduced to the third member of the group, Abraham Sapien. When he took her hand in one of his webbed ones, Catherine felt a strange tingling sensation along the back of her neck and he gasped, his dark eyes going first to her and then to Vincent.

When he shook Vincent’s hand he looked back at Catherine and she felt guilty, but didn’t know why. It had been two weeks since she found out about the baby, and she still couldn’t find a way to tell Vincent or know how he would react. Vincent had told her about Abe’s strange ability and she had a very strong suspicion that the knowledge was no longer hers alone. As she thought this Vincent and Hellboy were talking about something to do with Moscow and a choice and Liz. Who held tightly on to Hellboy’s left arm, her expression full of the first bloom of love.

“So between you and Myers I was able to stick that creep Rasputin good and get us out of there, and we wanted to invite you to New Jersey to the Bureau for a celebration.” Hellboy said with a bright smile.

“A celebration?” Vincent asked.

“Yeah, saving the world from being sucked into some Hell dimension, and more important Liz and me getting together – finally.” Hellboy declared proudly, squeezing Liz’s hand.

Vincent smiled, pleased for his friends and answered. “We would be glad to come.”

“Great, and if you don’t mind traveling ala garbage truck, we’ll pick you up and bring you back.” Hellboy remarked glibly.

Vincent grinned and looked down at Catherine, but her attention was on Abe. “What is it, Catherine?”

“Tell him. “ Abe said to Catherine.

Vincent turned a quizzical look at Catherine, who looked away guiltily.

“Come on Red, Liz, we have a celebration to organize and these two young people have to talk.”

Hellboy looked at Catherine and then Vincent, and then shrugged – it was none of his business. He slapped Vincent on the shoulder and said. “See ya later, buddy.”

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When the garbage truck had gone, Catherine took Vincent’s hand and they walked back toward the tunnels. She had wanted the right time and place to tell Vincent, but as they went through the Iron Gate she knew just the place and led the way.

The Music chamber was quiet. There was no performance tonight but the cushions and blankets were there, and Catherine sat and drew Vincent down beside her.

“Vincent, I have been trying to find the right time to tell you something, but so many things kept getting in the way.”

“Just tell me, Catherine.” Vincent replied quietly, hoping to ease her concerns.

She looked up into his blue eyes, so open and concerned and she spoke softly, watching his every mannerism. “When Joe was in the explosion, I went to the hospital and they asked me to give blood...”

“Catherine, are you ill?” Vincent asked, taking her hand, his manner obviously deeply concerned.

“No Vincent, I’m not ill. I ... I’m ... having a child.” Catherine declared, watching his eyes, as they searched her face, his mind obviously trying to come to terms with what she had just said.

“A child?” he echoed, the concern turning to shock, then wonder.

Now that the words were out, Catherine could let some of her joy escape “Yes, isn’t it wonderful? I have wanted to tell you for weeks, but well, with you still recovering. I didn’t know how. But your new friend made it impossible to hide anymore.”

Vincent looked away, then up at the grate above his head and repeated, “A child ...”

She smiled, watching the emotions play on his face. “Your child, Vincent.”

“My ... child ...” he breathed, his face flushing and bearing an expression Catherine couldn’t interpret.

“Vincent?” She asked concerned.

“A child ...” he repeated in an awed voice, and then his expression changed to concern. “Catherine, I should have protected you. This was not your choice. “He jumped to his feet and began to pace. “Oh I am a fool, a selfish fool!”

Catherine stood and put a hand on his arm to stop him. “But Vincent, I was protected. I’ve been taking contraceptives for years.” He turned to face her, and there were tears in his eyes. “Vincent this child, our child, overcame all the odds.”

He took her hands. “I am dreaming I must be.”

“No, Vincent you are not dreaming.” She squeezed his hand hard and he looked into her eyes with

such love, that she felt her heart pounding in her chest.

Before she knew it, she was in his arms, his chin on top of her head, as he murmured. "Catherine ... oh Catherine ..."over and over again.

Catherine took Vincent's face in her hands and spoke with determination. "And Vincent, as soon as I can, I am leaving my job and I'm coming to live below with you."

Vincent gazed down at her, all his dreams coming true at once, almost too hard to accept." Catherine, are you sure?"

"Yes, I have never been more certain of anything in my life. I want to live with you and our child in your world."

"Then dare I ask you to marry me Catherine?"

In answer, Catherine lifted her head and placed her lips gently on his in a kiss that made the answer brilliantly clear. Vincent's arms came around her firmly, thrilled that all his dreams were coming true and he returned the kiss with equal passion. It was some time before they walked into Father's study.

Father was both shocked and elated as they broke the news that they were to be married, but he sat heavily back into his chair when they made the announcement about the baby, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

Vincent watched as his father embraced Catherine, his heart full. So much had happened in the past weeks. He had escaped from Hell, just as his new brother Hellboy had done, and had emerged into Heaven. His life could not be any more fulfilling.

Part two

*This is Part Two of a Hellboy/BatB crossover, SND rated PG. It begins four months after Part One and is set in the interim between the two HB movies. (No copyright infringement intended) The Poem, 'To the Evening Star' by William Blake.*

*'Thou fair-hair'd angel of the evening  
Now, when the sun rests on the mountains,  
Light thy bright torch of love; thy radiant crown  
Put on, and smile on our evening bed'*

Catherine and Vincent sat close together on a padded bench in one corner of the specially outfitted garbage truck Hellboy had sent for them. At a glance, it seemed to be more of a mobile laboratory, filled with special equipment, computer screens and other strange apparatus. Transparent shelves against the walls were filled with what appeared to be vials of liquid of all colors, and some ancient looking figurines and devices. Neither Catherine nor Vincent could guess what they might be used for. Vincent cradled Catherine against him protectively. His right arm was around her shoulders. He looked down at his new wife and murmured into her hair. "You could have gone to this event in a much more comfortable fashion Catherine."

Catherine looked up at him as she rested comfortably against his side. "I go where you go, husband. 'Never to be parted' that was my contribution to our wedding vows remember?" She lifted up slightly to place her lips on his in a gentle kiss. They had been married now for three months two weeks and five days and they were blissfully happy.

"But are you comfortable, Catherine? You have not been well and our growing child tires you quickly.



This bench must be very uncomfortable for you.” As he spoke his breath lifted the light wisps of hair around her face. The remainder for tonight had been arranged by Mary and was swept up in very soft curls.

Catherine had dressed formally for this special occasion, ‘the celebration’ that their new friends, Hellboy and Liz had been planning for months now. It was to celebrate their realization that they were meant to be together – a cause for a celebration all on its own, since it had taken so many years and of course the small matter of having saved the world. Catherine had wanted to make a good impression on the other members of Hellboy’s unusual family. The dark blue velvet gown she wore had been the one she was wearing when Vincent became ill. She loved it so much and had bought it with Vincent in mind. But that night in the Music Chamber, Vincent had been so disoriented and preoccupied that he hadn’t noticed it. So she had put it away that night, when she had hurriedly taken time to change. She had kept it to wear for a happier occasion. It was also loose and gathered from the bodice and flowed gently over her now, well-rounded abdomen. Vincent’s reaction when she had emerged from the newly-carved antechamber this evening had erased every sad memory from that time. This new chamber would soon be the baby’s room. It was connected to Vincent’s chamber – their chamber – by a roughly hewn doorway at the moment, but like so many things in their new life together, it would soon be made right.

“I’m fine, Vincent, and I am quite comfortable.” She wriggled a little closer to him taking his left hand and placing it on her stomach, and murmured. “Feel. He’s excited to be meeting new people too.”

“You are quite sure it’s a boy, aren’t you?” Vincent murmured, placing a kiss upon her hair.

“Yes,” she said with a dreamy smile.

Vincent gazed down at her lovingly, taking in her smile and splaying his hand possessively over her stomach. He suddenly gasped in surprise and wonder. “Catherine, I felt him move!” It was the first time this had happened. Although Catherine had tried to give Vincent an idea of what she felt, often putting his hand on her stomach as she felt the baby move. But their son had not cooperated before now.

Catherine giggled. “See, I told you it’s a boy. I’m so glad you felt him, finally.” And she turned and gave her husband another light kiss on the lips.

“And I can *feel him* as well Catherine.” Vincent murmured amazed. “I have been sensing something these past few weeks, but I wasn’t sure what it was until now. It was so sporadic and vague. But now...”

“I told you your gift would return in another form.”

Their lives had been one new experience after another since meeting Hellboy and his friends. It all seemed to coincide with Catherine finding out she was pregnant and, as is often the case, the dark time they had lived through together had preceded a time of wonder.

It wasn’t long afterward that the truck came to a stop, to the sound of hissing brakes. Vincent helped Catherine to her feet. A few moments later, the door opened and they saw a pair of iron gates closing automatically behind the truck. In front of them, standing at the bottom of the ramp were Hellboy and Liz, their arms around each other. Both seemed to prefer to wear black, causing Catherine to feel a little overdressed. Hellboy was wearing his perennial leather pants and boots and a black sweater and Liz was no longer shrouded in loose heavy clothing, she now wore tight pants and top also in black which showed off her figure.

With a lit cigar at the corner of his mouth, Hellboy declared. "Welcome to Demon Central. Now you know how to travel in style." And laughing at his own joke, Hellboy put out his large stone hand to grasp Vincent's as he and Catherine stepped off the ramp. They shook hands as Liz hugged Catherine and then cooed over Catherine's obvious condition, placing a hand on her stomach. "Oh my God, look at you?"

With a tolerant smile Catherine replied "Yes, the doctor says it'll be in about two months."

"Wow, so soon?"

"Apparently it's an unusually short pregnancy." Catherine replied her eyes going to Vincent.

Liz turned in Vincent's direction and her expression was one of understanding. There was suddenly a look of uncertainty on her face as her gaze turned to Hellboy. But it lasted only a moment before she turned back to Catherine with excitement, smiling and asking. "Is it kicking yet? Can I feel? What do you think it is...?" Before she could answer, Liz drew Catherine away from the two men and they started walking toward a large building, talking excitedly about babies.

Vincent and Hellboy were left to watch them go. Hellboy took the cigar out of his mouth, holding it between thumb and forefinger, his attention on the two young women. "Chicks and babies." Then he shook his head in confusion and turned to Vincent and added. "Sorry we couldn't make it to the wedding but you know how it is. There's always a monster to kill. It also made us put off *our* little celebration." Then as they turned to follow Liz and Catherine, Hellboy said. "Ya know maybe *you* can help us, we've been lookin' for this place called the 'Troll Market'. Ever heard of it? They say it's somewhere in the city, under one o' the bridges, but we just can't seem to find it. We've been getting weird reports of some strange stuff goin' on ..." Vincent shook his head as they followed the two women, his cloak flowing smoothly as he walked, his hood still concealing his face from the guards on patrol. Hellboy commenced to describe a world that Vincent had never thought existed. A world of strange and mythological creatures of which Hellboy himself was undeniable proof.

Once in the interior of the large 'Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense' building in Newark, New Jersey, the four companions chatted comfortably as they walked through several check points. Finally Hellboy and Liz stopped in the middle of a large bare room, and stood on a strange symbol marked on the floor.

"Ya better stand close. It could get a bit bumpy," Hellboy said as Liz slipped into his arms. So Catherine did the same, putting her arms around Vincent's waist beneath the cloak. Hellboy waved to a uniformed guard standing behind a desk who seemed totally unfazed by Vincent. "Hey, Frank, these are the friends I told ya about. They're okay." The man, a sour-faced older man, peered over his narrow spectacles unimpressed. "Ok, Frank," Hellboy said lifting his huge thumb in a signal. He looked back at Vincent and Catherine. "You guys are gonna love this." And suddenly the floor began to move. Catherine clutched at Vincent reflexively, as the large section of the floor they were standing on began to descend.

A short time later, the unusual elevator came to a stop in a huge cavern with a large number 51 on the wall. Hellboy and Liz stepped off easily with an air of familiarity with the process that declared they had done this so many times it was second nature. With only a short moment to gain their equilibrium, Vincent and Catherine did the same.

Hellboy strode into a long corridor pushing doors open as he came to them, and he was talking excitedly about Occult Wars and Hitler and mystical weapons most of which Vincent and Catherine could hardly keep up with. He spoke with such animation and in the manner of a little boy showing off his collection of toys. Vincent smiled at the thought of how child-like his new friend was. Liz had

mentioned however that he had been born, or brought here as a baby, in 1944. Which made him much older than Vincent but he seemed more like a teenager. It was an endearing quality that offset his gruff almost care-free attitude.

There were men in black suits going about tasks in glass-enclosed rooms, who took no notice of them. It was then that Vincent felt comfortable enough to lower his hood.

They were led into a comfortable room at the end of this hall with two large doors, not unlike Father's study with bookshelves against three walls and even a winding staircase, and again Vincent was reminded of how similar his and Hellboy's lives were.

"Good evening, Vincent, good evening, Catherine, welcome to the Freaks Playhouse," a strangely amplified voice echoed from a speaker attached to one wall.

"Hey Abe," Hellboy said offhandedly, as he threw himself into an old well-worn leather chair that creaked under his weight. It was then that Vincent and Catherine realized that one wall of the room was a glass tank. And behind that glass, floating in the blue light was the other member of this unusual trio, Abraham Sapien.

Vincent walked over to the glass and put his hand upon it. Abraham swam closer and did the same. Vincent felt a strange duality within his mind and knew that again this amphibious creature was seeing into his very thoughts. Vincent didn't feel this was an intrusion, since he was also given access to Abraham's thoughts.

The thin blue lips smiled and Abraham said. "You have untapped depths to your mind, that you have never even explored my friend. Only someone with a latent psychic talent can use the link both ways."

Finally something within Vincent relaxed and a gusty sigh escaped his lips. Having lived all his life with people who didn't understand his prophetic and psychic abilities had been very difficult. So to finally have them validated was unlike anything he had ever known and it comforted him greatly. In a strange way it gave him a feeling of *normality* for the first time in his life.

Vincent noticed then that these two men referred to themselves as 'Freaks' with pride and in such an offhand and light-hearted manner that clearly proclaimed they embraced their differences. He had always shunned his differences, and in recent years had even hated them. He placed his hand back on the glass and let Abraham 'see' this observation.

After a moment Abe smiled, his black eyes blinking once, as he thought a reply, knowing that Vincent wanted to keep his observations to himself. *"Face it my friend you're a Freak, just like the rest of us. The sooner you admit it to yourself the happier you'll be because us Freaks need to stick together. You've been denying a vital part of yourself for too long embrace your 'differences' my friend. Trying to be something you're not will only cause you pain."*

Abraham's words touched Vincent deeply. To finally come to terms with his lot and accept himself was not an easy thing to do. These two men were akin to him in ways he had only ever dreamed of. He smiled broadly in return. For the first time in his life, he was unafraid of showing all his teeth. Abe nodded and the moment was broken by Hellboy who called, "Hey, Abe! Get out here and meet our new friends like a civilized Freak!"

"See." Abe thought, and Vincent nodded.

When Vincent turned from Abe's tank, Liz was now seated on Hellboy's lap and Catherine was sitting

comfortably in another chair at a large table. "Myers'll be here soon with the party favors." Hellboy announced happily. "Hmm, munchies." he declared excitedly.

"And Manning will want to meet Vincent too, remember?" Liz added as her fingers stroked Hellboy's thick black topknot affectionately.

Hellboy scowled "Oh yeah, Manning."

Vincent stood next to Catherine's chair and she took his hand as he asked "Manning?"

Hellboy swiped the air with a dismissive gesture of his large stone hand "Oh, he's nobody."

Liz pushed his shoulder. "Red...Manning is kind of our boss ..."

"He's not *my* boss!" Hellboy declared, getting up out of the chair, carrying Liz with him, and, with no apparent effort, placed her gently back in it "I need a beer." he grunted as he walked over to a cupboard and pulling the door open roughly, he said. "You want one V?"

Vincent tilted his head to the side, at this form of address. The casual manner of these people was at once strange and yet comforting. The informality of the nickname was more acceptable, coming from Hellboy, than someone without their differences in common. He shook his head with a smile. "No, thank you."

At that moment the doors to the room opened and a young man wheeled in a trolley laden with food. Red turned to him and demanded, "Where you been Myers? It's about time." Hellboy turned to Vincent and Catherine and continued, "This is Myers. He's my keeper." He said this with a very satisfied grin as though being Red's keeper was a very important position.

Myers, a young dark-haired man with a quiet disposition, simply nodded to Hellboy's guests as unaffected by their presence as the other black-suited men in the rest of the complex had been. He began to place all sorts of different foods on the large wooden table. There was a huge amount of it, but Vincent realized there must be a reason. The most obvious was that with Hellboy's larger size and different metabolism, he ate more than most people.

Myers began pushing the trolley out of the room as he said in a soft voice, "There's more food coming. It'll be here soon."

Before Myers could say anything more, a bald man stormed in. "What's this I hear about you bringing strangers – not cleared by me – into this Top Security Facility?" the man demanded as he walked past Vincent and Catherine, not even noticing them, his attention firmly on his nemesis.

Hellboy was just popping a can of beer as he turned and the man's face and expensive suit was sprayed with foam. "Gee, sorry." Hellboy said without any real remorse. Then he walked past the sputtering man, and thrusting the ever present, lit cigar into his mouth, he murmured to Vincent and Catherine. "That's Manning."

Manning turned to face the room, wiping at the beer stains down his jacket front. "Do you know how much this suit cost? I'm gonna take the cost of dry cleaning this suit – if it can be saved – out of your pay, young man!"

Hellboy stopped in the middle of the room and turned to face Manning. Lifting both hands, spilling half the beer onto the carpet, and clenching the cigar in his teeth he declared. "Pay, what pay? All I get here is room and board, for what? Saving your ass a dozen times, and I have to go out in a

Garbage Truck or escape if I want some fun. ...” The two men faced each other about three feet apart, ready for battle. Liz got out of the chair and rolled her eyes. Vincent realized then that this was an ongoing argument. Liz put herself in front of Hellboy and faced Manning. “This is no time for this old argument. We have guests.” And she gestured toward Vincent and Catherine, then turned a stern look behind her to Hellboy.

With feigned nonchalance, Hellboy turned his back on Manning and said. “Oh yeah I forgot Manning meet Vincent and Catherine. Vincent and Catherine, this is *Manning*.” The last was spoken with unconcealed contempt.

Manning’s manner suddenly changed, as he noticed the strangers for the first time. Wiping his face, and then stuffing the now stained handkerchief into his top pocket, he thrust out a hand at the same time, before he looked at Vincent’s face. “How do you do I’m...” And when their eyes met Manning began to sputter again. “How ...who ...I ...I ...”

Vincent didn’t move, still very aware of his effect on strangers— even in this unusual company, didn’t take his hand, but nodded politely saying. “I’m pleased to meet you Mr. Manning. I’m sorry if we startled you. This is my wife, Catherine.” And Vincent looked lovingly down to Catherine who returned his gaze with a radiant smile.

“Wife,” was all Manning could manage

Hellboy declared with heavy sarcasm “Yeah Manning, ‘Wife’ and that there bump is their future son or daughter, so get over it. Leave us to have our own version of Halloween, since I missed the last one because of monsters in the museum.” then turning his back on Manning and taking a swig of the beer, Hellboy said to his guests. “Its okay ‘V’ he ain’t afraid o’ you. He’s just pissed that he didn’t get an invite and that he didn’t find you first.” He grinned back at Vincent, ignoring Manning.

Manning came angrily around to face Hellboy. “How long have you known about him?”

Taking a long draw on his cigar, Hellboy blew the smoke into Manning’s face. He thought about it for a moment and then said. “ Oh about four months. Right V?”

“Yes,” Vincent said softly not at all happy to be the subject of this argument.

“It was just before old Raspy got his desserts.” Red declared turning back to Vincent for an affirmation.

Vincent said nothing. He knew that this argument had been going on for so long now, that these two had come to know no other way to talk to each other.

Shaking a finger at Hellboy, Manning ordered “Well you should have cleared him with *me* before bringing him here. And I should have known every detail about your involvement with him and any secrets you let slip...”

Hellboy had had enough. He began to walk toward Manning who tried to stand his ground but stepped back at the last moment. As Hellboy’s voice began getting louder, the closer he got, until he was nose to nose with the other man. “*You are not my father!*” Hellboy bellowed loudly and then continued in a slightly softer tone. “And I am not your *pet*, Manning. Neither is Abe and I won’t let you tie Vincent up in this circus. He’s got it nice and simple with his wife and family so you just *LEAVE HIM ALONE!*” Hellboy roared, and it was loud enough to rival Vincent’s own.

In the stunned silence that followed, a calming hand touched Hellboy’s large red stone one and

another came to Manning's shoulder.

"Please," Vincent said softly, the gentle timber of his voice carrying peace, and his touch warmth and love.

Both men turned to him and then back to each other. As Vincent broke contact, the two parted without another word, Hellboy went for another beer and Manning left the room muttering to himself as he made his way down the corridor that led out of Professor Broom's library.

From behind Catherine, Abe's voice seemed to come out of nowhere. But obviously while everyone's attention was on the two combatants, he had emerged from his tank and had seen the whole thing as he said softly. "Good, he's learning."

Catherine looked up into the strange black eyes, confused. "Learning, who is learning?"

"Your husband, dear lady, he is learning what his gifts can do. Haven't you noticed how he brings peace into a difficult situation?" Abe said as both he and Catherine watched Vincent go and talk softly to Red.

Soon afterward, Hellboy lost his solemn attitude, slapped Vincent on the shoulder and with a grin, declared. "Okay, you're here, the food's here. Grab yourself a drink, and let's party!"

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In the garbage truck on the way home Catherine said. "You know, all in all it was a very special evening."

Vincent, again cradling Catherine protectively against him chuckled softly, "Yes, very special and somewhat bizarre."

Catherine joined him in a soft giggle. "I know what you mean. They are truly a very unusual group, but meeting them has been a pleasure nonetheless, and now you have two families."

"Hmm, but like all families, they have their problems."

"And like Abe said, you will always be there to bring them peace." And Catherine laid her head back on Vincent's shoulder and closed her eyes. It had also been a tiring evening for her, and her sides ached from laughing so much. With Red, nothing ever stayed serious for long. He could always see the funny side of a situation. The highlight of the evening had been his stories about some of their many missions and his somewhat warped way of looking at them.

"Abraham said that?" Vincent asked as he truly felt at peace with himself.

"Mm hmm." Catherine murmured almost asleep.

Vincent put his lips to the top of her golden head and whispered. "Rest now, we'll be home soon."

Catherine made herself more comfortable. "Mmm." Vincent heard her murmur, knowing as he did at night in their bed, as they spoke of the days events, she was no longer thinking. She was now *'in that wonderful place where everything shimmers and floats'*

As the heavy truck pulled into Central Park, Vincent thought of Abraham's words. They had given him more hope and he was truly looking forward to the future for the first time in his life. He had a beautiful wife a precious child on the way and he had discovered that he was not entirely alone. He

hoped that with Abraham's help he might also be able to understand his unusual gifts, and make the best use of them. He could ask for nothing more and he was content.

*"Smile on our loves; and, while thou drawest  
The blue curtain of the sky, scatter thy silver dew  
On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes in timely sleep"*

### Part Three

*This is the final part of the HB/BatB crossover SND rated PG.  
(no copyright infringement intended) It begins 2 years after part two.*

*Apedemek is an Ancient Nubian Lion god from 100BC. His likeness is depicted on the walls of temples of Naqa in present day Sudan.*

*The Poem 'In Memoriam' by Alfred Lord Tennyson.*

*The path by which we twain did go  
Which led by tracts that pleased us well,  
Thro' four sweet years arose and fell,  
From flower to flower, from snow to snow:*

*And we with singing cheer'd the way,  
And crown'd with all the seasons lent,  
From April on to April went,  
And glad at heart from May to May:*

\*\*\*\*

"Jacob, come back here!" Mary called, as she passed Father in the passageway. Father smiled, as his two-year-old grandson took no notice of Mary, and kept on down the tunnel, giggling so hard he almost fell. Behind him was a trail of brown wool which Mary was trying to gather as she followed.

Mary turned back to Father, with an apologetic, worn expression. "Oh, sorry Father, but he has taken my knitting again and it will be harder to fix the longer he has it." She stopped for a moment catching her breath, lifting a stray lock of her usually immaculate hair back in place. "I am getting too old for all this." She said with a gusty sigh, but then she grinned, "But he is such a dear child." Mary's eyes misted over and her face had a dreamy expression. Then as the tension on the ball of wool she held tightened, she declared "I don't remember his father being this mischievous though."

"Nor I, Mary. Perhaps his little sister will be less of a burden." Father replied.

Mary turned a disbelieving look on Father. "Burden, oh Father, he could never be a burden. He's just a challenge. And his sister could never be a burden to anyone, least of all me. Charlotte is an angel." Then at the end of the tunnel a child's exuberant chuckle was heard, and Mary remembered her knitting. "Jacob Charles Wells, you come back here this instant!" she demanded, hurrying down the passage after the boy rolling up the unraveled wool.

Father smiled happily to himself, as the music of his grandson's laughter drifted down the tunnel. Jacob Charles was the apple of his grandfather's eye and a joy to the entire community, but he was also the most precocious child Father had ever met, even more so than Devin.

When he made his way back to his Study, which had now become more of a Family room for Vincent and his growing family, Father came to the top of the stairs to the sight of Catherine feeding her three month old daughter.

This sight brought a lump to his throat, he had never expected to have Jacob, least of all this sweet angel and he counted himself the most fortunate of men.

Catherine looked up and smiled as she lifted the baby to her shoulder. "Father, come and sit down. There's a fresh pot of tea." Catherine said as Father limped to his favorite chair.

"Is Vincent back yet?" He asked. It was early evening in the world Above and Vincent had been gone since just after breakfast.

"No, Father, but Pascal received a message from him about an hour ago. He is well and says he will return as soon as he can. So what is happening in the tunnels?"

"Well, your son is keeping Mary on her toes." Father remarked with a chuckle.

"Oh dear, not Mary's knitting again."

"I'm afraid so ..." and they both shared a smile

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Vincent watched from the deep shadows. Before him was a recently discovered chamber, in the old sewer connecting the subways, far below Manhattan. It had been sealed by a thick and ancient wall, until recently, and it looked as though this wall had been opened from the inside. The bricks were all scattered around the opening on the outside, as though they had been pushed out from within.

Dustin, one of the Subway Children, had told Vincent this morning that he had found it a few days ago. He said that there had been no sign of anything one day, only an old rock wall. The next day it was just *there* and something about it had scared the boy.

"It looks like a treasure cave, Vincent," The boy said excitedly. "It was full of all sorts of shiny things, but it felt creepy. And there was a strange man there. So I came to tell you as soon as I could."

Vincent warned him to tell all of the other Subway Children to stay away until he had investigated it and that he would see to it immediately. It was imperative that he investigate it alone, before telling Father or any of the community. He had arrived here in the mid morning and had found the chamber empty. When he had peered into the chamber it looked very old. It had strange markings on the walls, much like those in ancient tombs. Torches burnt in sconces and on a long stone table, at one end of the chamber, stood strange chalices and transparent containers with unrecognizable items within them. Dustin was right; it did look like a treasure cave.

This, on its own, was cause for concern. Ever since the incident with Abraham and meeting Hellboy and Liz two years ago, life Below had progressed as usual, but Vincent had stayed in touch with his new friends. They were like Narcissa, in touch with a world that the everyday folk of the tunnels and Above hardly understood, let alone believed in. But as this world's link to these strange people, and self appointed protector, Vincent accepted every piece of information he could, to aid him in this task.

Just over an hour ago a man, of strange appearance, had emerged from an upper room at the top of a flight of stone steps. Vincent had been watching this 'man' and his abilities were phenomenal, as



he practiced with amazing athletic techniques and weaponry of unusual design. His appearance was very strange also; he had long hair that seemed to change in color as it flowed past his shoulders, from white to the shade of autumn leaves. His bare skin glowed with a kind of iridescence and he had the aura of something unworldly and very old. Although rainwater seeped from high above him and the chamber was cold and drafty, he seemed unaffected. He had qualities, reflexes and strength, well above any human and seemed to defy gravity with his leaps and summersaults.

Vincent was mesmerized, this creature was like no one he had ever seen before in life or in books, and he knew that he must inform the B.P.R.D. as soon as possible. But first he must see if this stranger posed a threat to the world Below.

The man stopped his training suddenly, "How long have you been there my friend?" the man asked, with a soft voice and a precise accent.

Vincent stopped breathing, sure that he had been discovered, and the man was speaking to him. But this proved to be unfounded, as a huge creature came out of the darkness. The man pointed his weapon toward two boxes and said "Our little friends haven't been fed yet. I bought them today." The creature grunted in reply. "I'll go up first. You'll follow – and remember, Mr. Wink. Don't be shy."

The creature lifted the two boxes, and with a lumbering gait made his way slowly away. The man stood for some time, beneath a manhole cover high above his head, in the roof of the chamber. His face lifted to the ambient light, allowing the rainwater to wash over him. Then suddenly he stood before Vincent, facing him a mere breath away. He had moved so fast that Vincent hadn't seen or sensed any movement or threat.

"Why have you been watching me, Son of Apedemek?" The strange man asked.

Registering the strange address, but at a loss to know why he would be called such a thing, Vincent answered truthfully. Instinctively knowing he could hide nothing from this man. "These tunnels and caverns are my home."

"And are you friend or foe?" The point of the weapon was aimed down at the stone floor, but Vincent knew that it would be aimed at his throat in an instant if he answered incorrectly and he could be dead before he could move.

"I am Vincent. I mean harm only to those who threaten my home and loved ones."

"Well said, Son of Apedemek. I am Nuada Silverlance, son of king Balor." And Nuada put out a bare arm to take Vincent's right forearm in a strong grip of friendship.

Assured of his survival for the moment, Vincent returned the grip and asked, "Why are you here?"

"To reclaim my birthright, I have been in exile from this world for millennia. I have fought in wars and freed kingdoms, and when I returned here I sealed myself and my servant within these walls. But the time is now ripe for war." Nuada declared this, with strongly contained emotion. He turned away from Vincent and swung his weapon in circles at his side, in a sure sign of his agitation.

"And does that war threaten my world?" Vincent knew that he was but one man, but Nuada seemed very confident. It was certain that someone with his skills and heritage was not likely to announce a war unless he had the means to carry it out.

Nuada turned, "It threatens only the human world. Of which you are only a part, Son of Apedemek. Therefore, I mean *you* no harm, and, as your world is also separate from their world, it too shall be

safe, as long as you do not oppose me.”

“You know of my world?” Vincent had hoped he could make Nuada think he was alone down here.

“I know much of your world, my friend. But be at ease. I will not threaten them.”

The word ‘yet’ hovered in the back of Vincent’s mind. His family and community must be kept safe but he kept silent, merely nodding.

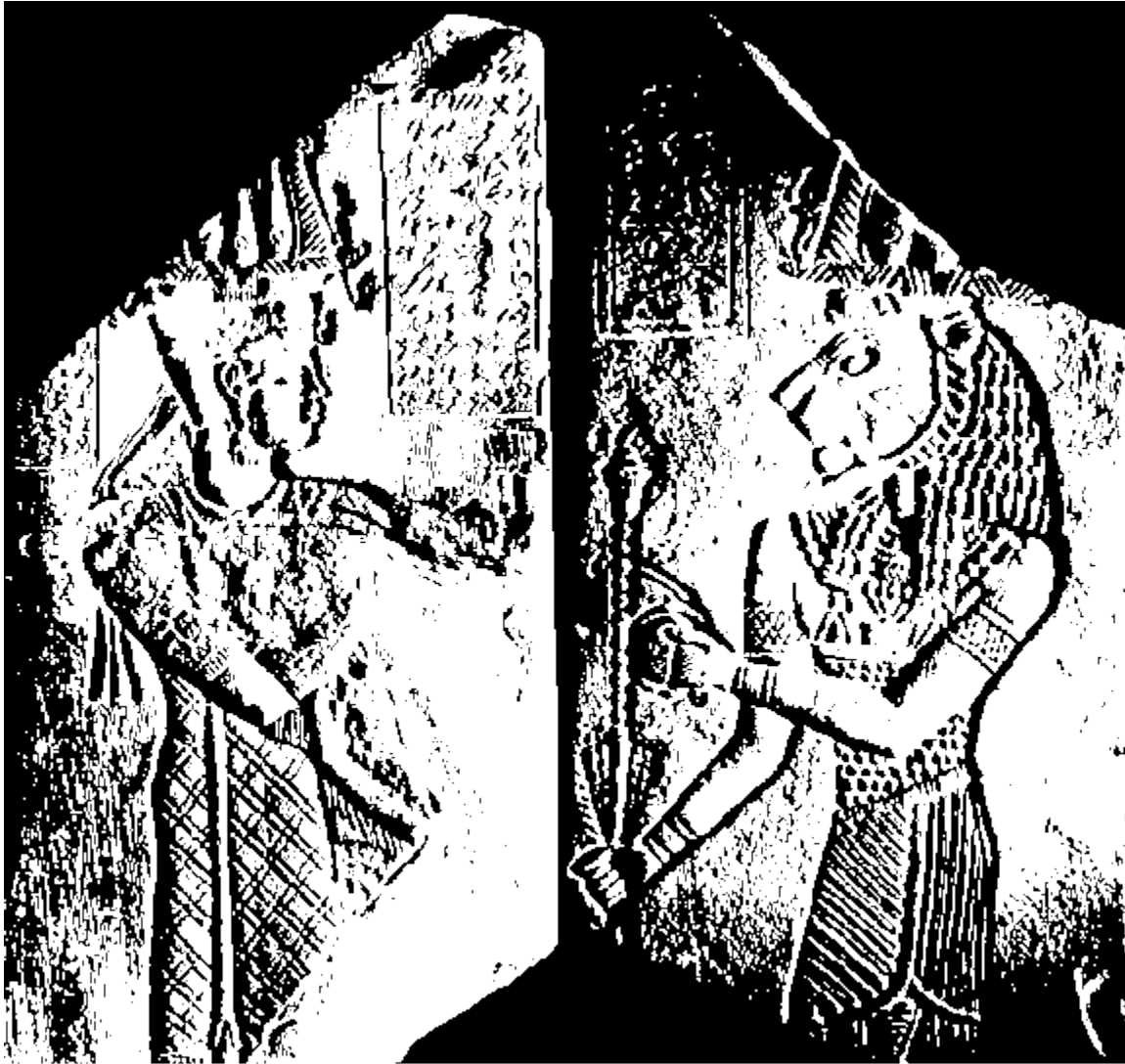
“I have come to take back what is mine by right but you and your world need not fear me Son of Apedemek.” Nuada said in the silence.

“Why do you call me by that name?” Vincent asked, curious.

Nuada turned back to him and lifted his hand to Vincent’s face, but did not touch it. Vincent didn’t move. “This proclaims you a king in *my* world, and to the lowly humans, a god.” He lowered his hand and turned his head on the side, as he added, “Come, I will show you.”

Vincent followed Nuada into the chamber. He walked to one of the walls, which was covered with hieroglyphs and depictions of all manner of creatures. “In my time of solitude I made these markings of my travels in many worlds. These walls hold the likenesses of many of the old gods. Look up there, do you see?” Nuada said pointing his spear high on the wall.

Vincent’s night-sight, saw clearly what was there. A carved interpretation of a man, dressed in Egyptian style clothing, with the head of a lion.



“That is Apedemek, god of Light, Truth and Regeneration.” Nuada declared.

“How can this be?”

“Apedemek was worshiped by kings. Clearly you are an heir to his throne. Have you never wondered where such a being as yourself came from, my friend?”

“I have wondered.”

“Wonder no longer. You are of the fairy folk, an ancient being of Lore. You could be a king in my world, and your own.” Nuada suggested.

“I have no wish to be a king.” Vincent replied with distaste.

“Then you seek only to serve, not to rule.” Vincent knew that he need not answer “So be it” Nuada murmured as he turned and walked away without looking back. “I needs must be elsewhere. Farewell, Son of Apedemek. We will meet again.”

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Father and Catherine were enjoying their tea. Still concerned for Vincent, Father said. "I worry about how much time Vincent spends doing work for this Bureau for ... what was it again?"

"Paranormal Research and Defense," Vincent's voice echoed in the chamber as he came down the stairs. He walked over to Catherine, bent, and kissed her in greeting. Then took his daughter into his arms, as he continued, turning to his father "There is no need to worry Father. What I do for them is purely voluntary, and they know nothing of our world."

Standing and placing a hand on Vincent's arm Catherine asked. "Did you see anything?"

"Yes," Vincent answered with concern, his meeting with Nuada had disturbed him greatly.

"What did you see?" Father asked.

"A man, or perhaps more than a man."

"Where was this man?" The concern in Father's was unmistakable.

"In the old sewer, leading from part of the subway tunnels, under Manhattan."

"Have you let the Bureau know?" Catherine asked.

"Yes."

"I don't like this, Vincent. That those people know about us, concerns me, greatly," Father declared worriedly.

"Only Abraham and two other people know where we live Father, and I trust them to keep our secret." He smiled and kissed Charlotte on her golden forehead, before he handed her back to her mother. "In fact, Hellboy is more likely to defend us from discovery. He is quite protective."

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Vincent, woke suddenly and sat up. "What is it?" Catherine asked sleepily, placing a hand on his shoulder. To Vincent's finely attuned senses it was midnight in the world Above.

"I don't know," he murmured, staring into the darkened chamber, the single candle reflecting grotesque shadows on the walls. "I heard someone call."

"Did you have a dream?" Catherine was very aware that sometimes Vincent's dreams must be heeded.

He turned to her, as she lay with her head on the pillow next to him. "Not a dream exactly." Then he froze.

"*Son of Apedemek ...*" It was a whisper, an echo, but this time Vincent knew who it was.

He swung his legs out of bed, and began to pull on his clothes. "What are you doing?" Catherine asked, her voice concerned.

"I must go Catherine. I will return as soon as I can." And he threw on his cloak and left the chamber.

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He made his way to the old West Side Rail-yard where Nuada was waiting.

“Son of Apedemek,” Nuada said in greeting, as though to an equal. His long white hair fell over his face as he nodded. He was dressed in robes of black and red and strapped to his back were weapons. Beside him stood the huge creature from the chamber below Manhattan and he could see it clearly in the streetlamp. Its skin had the appearance of an elephant, a muscular body and a bulbous head with tusks protruding from his mouth. It had lost a hand at some time and it had been replaced by a vicious looking metal appendage with nuts and bolts protruding from it, a deadly weapon on its own. There were scars all over him and one of his amber eyes was missing. He looked as though he, too, could kill Vincent with one blow

“Why did you summon me, Nuada?” Vincent asked angrily.

Nuada pointed to the ground at his feet. “Here is where the door to my world stands. I invite you to join me. I intend to shake the remnants of my people from their apathy and demand they join me to take back this world.”

“I will not enmesh myself and *my world* in your war, Nuada.”

“Then you choose to stand against me?”

“I choose to stand apart, unless you give me no choice,” Vincent declared.

“You are like me, Son of Apedemek, alone with your ideals,” Nuada countered with true sadness.

“I will not join you.”

Nuada’s golden eyes closed once. “When I rule the world of men you, will serve me.”

“I serve only those I love. If you threaten them I will fight against you!” Vincent almost growled.

“You will lose,” Nuada answered calmly.

“So be it,” Vincent accepted.

Nuada’s strange black-gold eyes searched Vincent’s face, and Vincent saw sadness and disappointment in them. Vincent pitied this strange vengeful creature, there seemed to be no love in him at all, only vengeance and a warped kind of honor. Nuada turned from him then, and walked toward an abandoned building, his large servant lumbering behind him. They were both soon swallowed up by the night.

On his way back to the home tunnels, Vincent could not help but wonder why he was still alive.

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Vincent sat in his chamber, his elbows on the arms of his large chair and his hands folded before his chin, thinking. What should he do? It was 3am in the world Above. He had sent a message to the B.P.R.D. the moment he had neared the first pipe. There was a pipe that led right into the underground facility and he would have heard back by now if they had received his message.

Catherine and the children were still sleeping and Vincent had taken this moment to concentrate. He could hear the sleeping minds of all three of those in the chamber with him and it was immensely comforting. His dilemma however was not. He had to do something. He wasn’t sure if it would work but as Mouse would say ‘no time to waste’.

Vincent closed his eyes and cleared his mind and thought. *“Abraham...”*

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Abraham was on the east end of the Brooklyn Bridge with their team and the new B.P.R.D. Agent Dr Johann Krause. Krause was a strange man who looked more like a deep sea diver from a hundred years ago in the strange suit he wore, than a man of the present. Abe’s mind was filled with the implications of recent events; the massacre of 70 people at Blackwood’s Auction House by tiny man-eating Tooth Fairies, Manning’s constant need to bring all of his problems to him and then there’s Liz’s pregnancy. Red would be overjoyed and would make a wonderful father. If Liz would just tell Red, everything would be all right. But they have been having problems lately and he knew that it would all be fine, if they could at least talk to each other.

Abe comforted himself by playing with Dr Kraus’s new toy. The Schufftein glasses, were an amazing invention that aided people to see fairy folk and revealed the true nature of things. Abe had just seen Red as he truly was and he was a little disturbed. He had seen Hellboy as he must have looked in that vault in Moscow. He hadn’t been there, but had heard all about it when Myers had returned. Red’s eyes were glowing with a red-gold fire, his horns, fully grown, curled over his head, and cradled between them was a small flaming orb, in which a golden crown could be seen. Abe had to remove the goggle-like helmet to make sure his friend had not suddenly become the Demon/Angel with the key to Heaven and Hell.

“Oh!” Abe said quietly to himself with relief. *“Abraham...”* He heard his name echoing in his mind. “Hmm I must teach that boy not to shout.” Abe murmured as Vincent’s attempt to reach him, was more powerful than he must realize.

*“Vincent?”*

*“Abraham, there is someone of great power threatening the city,”* Vincent thought to him.

*“Who?”*

*“His name is Nuada.”*

*“Prince Nuada?”* Abraham asked surprised.

*“Yes.”*

*“What can you tell me my friend?”*

Vincent relayed everything that had happened, and Abraham assured him he would tell Liz and Hellboy as soon as possible.

*“Be careful Abraham. He has superior fighting skills.”* Vincent finished,

*“I will relay your warning and as usual will keep you and your world out of it. “*

*“Thank you, Abraham and be well my friend.”*

*“And you, Vincent.”* Abe replaced his Schufftein helmet back in the box and made his way over to Hellboy.

Hellboy was still smarting from being told by Liz that she thought Johann intimidated him. This new

guy was more of a freak than him or Abe. A man made up of smoke, kept inside a suit. What was that all about?

“Red.”

“Yeah,” Red grumbled, with a sour look over the wall, to the street where Liz was standing by the garbage truck. “Intimidated ...” he repeated with sarcasm and disbelief.

“I’ve heard from our friend.”

“Friend, what friend?” Red asked absently, still watching Liz.

“*Our friend*, the one who wears the black cloak,” Abe whispered through clenched teeth, so the nearby men in suits couldn’t hear.

Red’s golden eyes fixed on Abe, his head turned to one side. Abe knew his mind was unwilling to move in another direction. There was a moment of silence and then Red said, “Oh, *that friend*.”

“Yes.” And Abe told Red what Vincent had told him.

“Hmm,” Red said “Sounds serious. Well, once we get into the Troll Market and find out who bought them Tooth Fairies, then we can look for this guy V saw.”

Abe was worried, “What if this Prince is the one behind the Auction House business. It seems logical. Legend says that Prince Nuada went into exile millennia ago and would return when his people needed him.”

Red lit a cigar and spoke through his teeth, “Listen Abe, V takes things too seriously. And this Prince *Nuadoodoo*, if he ever existed, is dead already.”

“But the Royal seal and the Auction House ...”

Liz’s voice came over the radio, “We have a suspect!”

“Ah, you worry too much too.” Red said, striding off the roof to meet Liz.

“Well one of us has to ...” Abe complained as he followed Red and what followed answered many of Abe’s questions. They found the Troll Market, a beautiful Princess and finally Prince Nuada, who unleashed a destructive yet beautiful monster on the city.

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Vincent left a note for Catherine, telling her he didn’t know when he’d return, but not to worry, He would send regular messages on the pipes. Scooping up his cloak he left the chamber. He could not sit still and as he made his way out of the tunnels he tried to understand this situation with Prince Nuada. Why would this being from another world want his help and then intend to wage war on this world? There was much Vincent didn’t know and to protect his family he must find out as much as possible.

Suddenly the ground at his feet shook and he was thrown against the wall of the tunnel. Instinctively he knew that the source of the disturbance was near the east end of the Brooklyn Bridge,

He ran back to his chamber, and although shaken Catherine and the children were well. So as soon as he could he made his way to the area.

Standing in a darkened alley some time later, Vincent watched as the entire area was transformed into a green carpet, while an enormous tree-like creature lay against one of the buildings, spilling a green liquid from its body, where Hellboy had shot it. Wherever the liquid touched, something green grew. In the air tiny white pollen floated, in the centre of all this beauty, stood Hellboy, Liz and Abe.

“The last of its kind,” Nuada said from beside him.

Vincent turned. He hadn’t sensed Nuada’s approach, “Tell me. Why do you wage this war?”

Nuada’s unusual eyes watched the scene for a few moments, and then turned to Vincent and answered. “This world was once green and peaceful. Man, Beast and Magical Beings lived together under Aiglin, the Father Tree.” He lifted his arm to the large creature in the middle of the street. “Creatures such as this, made the world beautiful. But Man would not live in peace, and so we of the woodland went to war with Man. Balor, my Father ordered the building of an army, a Golden Army that could not be defeated. And when Man could not defeat us he made a truce. The Army was hidden and now sleeps, but I intend to awaken it. I, alone, knew that Man would not keep his part, and this world is proof of it. You, of all people know how this world treats its treasures, son of Apedemek.”

Vincent was silent.

A loud cry was heard from the distance, and when they turned, Liz was standing in front of Hellboy.

“He was trying to help, don’t you see!” She berated the crowd of onlookers. “He was just trying to help. That’s all we do. That’s all we’ve ever done, all these years – help you – you!”

A stone flew from the crowd and hit Hellboy on the cheek. He flinched in pain and Liz was suddenly surrounded in flames. Hellboy put a hand on her shoulder, unaffected by the heat or fire and murmured, “No, Liz. Let’s go home.” And he took her hand, turned his back on the crowd, and they walked away. Abe and a beautiful young woman with long hair, the same as Nuada’s, and dressed in a blue flowing gown, in the style of long ago, followed.

Nuada turned to Vincent. “You see, even their heroes are treated with contempt. The world of Man deserves no mercy.”

“All creatures deserve mercy,” Vincent replied.

“You, like the Demon, choose to serve, when you could rule. If you will not, then someone must.”

“Why, Nuada? Why must you do this?” Vincent asked saddened by this noble creature’s determination.

“Unlike you my friend, I *have* no choice. I am set upon a course, which will end only when I win or I am dead. I cannot stop. I will not stop.”

“Then I cannot wish you well, my friend. For such a course means many innocent people will die.” Vincent stretched out his right hand and added, “But I do wish you peace.”

Nuada smiled sadly, as he took Vincent’s arm in friendship. “In another time, we would have fought on the side of right, and we would have won. I am glad to have met you but I will not see you again, Son of Apedemek.” And Nuada was gone in the blink of an eye.

Vincent made his way back to his chamber slowly, greatly saddened. In another time he would have



been honored to have Nuada as a friend, but now Nuada threatened the world Above. Even though he had said his plans would not affect his world, Vincent knew that if Nuada gained what he sought, everything that Vincent held dear would be put at risk. And nothing he could do would stop it. He hoped that in some way Hellboy and his friends would make the difference.

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Red was lying on a surgical table in the medical bay, his chest bare, the silver tip of a spear imbedded, just above his heart. A heart monitor nearby revealed his heartbeat was very weak. Abe bent over the spearhead and touched the metal with a surgical instrument. Red cried out in pain and his heartbeat quickened dangerously. An alarm on another monitor chimed repeatedly, as an ultrasound of Red's heart showed the spear-point moving deeper into his chest, closer to his heart.

Nuada had infiltrated the underground facility in his search for the final piece of the crown of Bethmoora. He had pierced Hellboy with his silver spearhead when Red had challenged him, and as Hellboy gasped in pain Nuada had said. "You may have mused in the past 'Am I mortal?' ...Well, now you are..." and with a cruel twist of the lance, Nuada had broken off the point of his spear deeply imbedded in Red's chest. Taking his sister, the beautiful Nuala with him Nuada had disappeared, just as Hellboy lost consciousness.

"Damn it Abe! Pull it out!" Liz commanded

Abe looked up at her, his blue face showing fear. "I cannot. Every time I come close, it moves closer to his heart. I don't know what else to do ..."

"Then, we go after the Prince." Liz declared angry and desperate, "Get him to take it out!"

Hellboy opened his eyes and looked up at Liz. "Liz you were asking ..."

"Shh – don't talk ..."

"No – no. Let me talk," His usual glib tone gone, and his voice a soft gentle, pleading murmur, Hellboy continued. "I know what's important. It's you... I can turn my back on the world. All of it – as long as you stay with me ..."

Liz was weeping as she said, "I'll stay with you ... You're the best man I know."

Hellboy laid his head back on the bed and closed his eyes. "Man..." he murmured. Liz laid her head on his chest and wept.

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In the depths of the earth far from New York, Hellboy, Liz and Abe discovered what love meant. Liz gave Red the will to live with news of his impending Fatherhood. Through sacrifice and dedication to one another and Hellboy's cunning and strength, they overcame Nuada and the Golden Army. And Abe learned the price of love...

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Vincent heard his name on the pipes as he was making his way through the tunnels, on his self appointed rounds. Since he had spoken to Nuada, last he had been expecting anything, but it had been quiet now for a week.

He made his way to the iron door, and when it opened, Hellboy, Liz and Abe were waiting there.

Embracing each in turn, Vincent said with a relieved smile, "I thought never to see you again."

Liz and Hellboy looked at each other and smiled in return, as Red answered, "You almost didn't, but you know me V. I am very hard to kill. And besides it was not really me who won in the end."

Vincent turned his head on the side. "That is not like you, my friend."

Hellboy grinned. "Sometimes ya gotta let the chips fall where they can V."

"How are Cathy and the kids?" Liz asked.

"They are well. Come and see for yourself." Vincent invited and began walking back toward the home tunnels.

Liz and Hellboy positioned themselves on either side of Vincent, and Abe walked silently at the rear. They talked about their newest adventure on the way back.

"And Prince Nuada?" Vincent asked.

Both turned back toward Abe, and Liz said softly, "He's gone." Vincent simply nodded. "It was pretty bad there for a while. Red was in pretty bad shape." Liz continued. "But we took him to someone who was able to help..." Vincent sensed something more to what Liz said but he didn't want to pry.

"Then I kicked Nuadoodoo's butt." Red said with pride in a job well done.

Vincent was saddened but knew that Nuada would not have stopped unless he was killed. "And this Golden Army he spoke of?" Vincent asked.

"Buried, with no way to bring them back to life," Liz replied with a smile.

Vincent nodded.

When they reached Father's study, Catherine was playing on the floor with Jacob, and the baby was in her day-crib in a quiet corner of the room, sleeping. Father was nowhere to be seen. When Catherine saw Liz and Hellboy, she immediately hurried to embrace them both. For a time there was happy conversation, while tea was brought. And the entire story of how Hellboy and his friends saved the world was told yet again.

"Oh and guess what? I'm gonna be a Daddy!" Hellboy declared in a lull in the conversation. "And it's two," Hellboy added holding up two fingers on his huge stone hand, in emphasis.

"Oh!" Catherine exclaimed hugging Liz and then the conversation turned to babies. At which time Hellboy sat back in his chair, Leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs at the ankles, simply soaking up the euphoria of the moment.

Vincent, however, noticing Abraham's silence, went to where he was seated against Father's book shelves, his black eyes staring into the distance and extreme sadness came from him in waves.

"Abraham. What troubles you so?" Vincent asked as he sat beside him.

Abraham was silent for so long that Vincent wondered whether he had heard his question. The answer came in true Abe fashion. "*She was so beautiful, Vincent. And she loved me ... me...and she gave her life for us all.*" Abe thought to his friend.

“Come,” Vincent thought, and standing walked from the room, and slowly Abraham followed.

When they were in Vincent and Catherine’s chamber, Vincent motioned for Abe to sit in one of the large chairs, and sat beside him. “Tell me...”

“We instantly had a ... connection, as though we had always known each other...”

“I understand.” Vincent murmured looking down at his hands. His experiences with Catherine clear in his mind, and giving his already empathic understanding more poignancy...

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When Vincent returned to Father’s study he was alone, and Father was now in the room talking with the still very excited pair of lovers.

“Where’s Abe?” Liz asked.

“There is a place we call the Chamber of the Falls. Abraham needed to immerse himself, so I took him there. He won’t be joining us for some time I think,” Vincent took Catherine’s hand in his. Abraham’s heartbreaking loss touching him deeply ... if he ever lost Catherine ... the thought was more than he could bear.

Catherine could sense that Vincent was very disturbed, but knew that he would tell her when he was ready.

“Well, now you’re back, and Father is here, too we have somethin’ to ask you guys.” Hellboy said. When everyone’s attention was on him, he continued, taking Liz’s hand. “Well ya see we’ve quit the Bureau and would like to stay here for a while. We’ve found this other place that we can go to, but we need to check it out a bit more first.” He turned to Vincent. “You remember that place I asked you about V? The Troll Market? It’s amazing. We could live there forever if we wanted to. Abe’s okay in those Falls, right?”

“Yes, he said the waters are quite suitable for his needs.” Vincent replied.

“Good. So if you can let us have a hole in the ground where we won’t be in the way...” Hellboy finished.

“I’m sure that should not be a problem,” Vincent murmured when Father said nothing. Vincent knew there would be a meeting of the council later and that Hellboy and his family would be accepted, but for now the young Demon did not need to know the intricacies of Tunnel Politics. He deserved so much more than anyone could give him and his friends after what they had just accomplished.

“It won’t be for long.” Liz said, “We just want to let the Bureau know that we can do without them, and that we want somewhere better to live and bring up our family,”

“Yeah once Washington hears we’re missing, and Johann gets in their ear, we’ll be outa your hair,” Hellboy confirmed.

Catherine came over and hugged Liz. “You could never be a bother, besides it will be like a holiday with family.”

Vincent came over to Hellboy and Liz and hugged them both. “Yes, a family and one like no other.”

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The sound of the falls lulled Abe, but his heart ached with loneliness and loss. Then he heard a voice...

*“Be near me when my light is low  
When the blood creeps, and the nerves prick  
And tingle; and the heart is sick,  
And all the wheels of being slow*

*Be near me when the sensuous frame  
Is rack'd with pangs that conquer trust,  
And time, a maniac scattered dust,  
And life a fury slinging flame*

*Be near me when I fade away  
To point the term of human strife  
And on the low dark verge of life  
The twilight of eternal day ...*

*“Princess?”*

*“Abraham...”*

And while Hellboy and Liz bathed in the love of their new family, Abe discovered the magic of the world Below.

The End