In Due Time
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In Due Time
by Risayume

Summary

The Ultimate Enemy AU where Danny's parents and friends are killed in the Nastyburger explosion and he is forced to go to Vlad. While the two oppositional hybrids struggle to get along, Danny is determined not to turn into Dan. But it's easier said than done.

Also posted on my other account on FanFiction.net
Awakening

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

His family.

His friends.

Mr. Lancer.

The arrow on the meter quivered dangerously close to red. Obnoxious alarms faintly drilled into his head.

Spiderweb cracks broke through the glass and the gauge screamed hazardly.

Heat glowered at his skin as he watched his life begin to shatter. Numb adrenaline was surging from the ends of his hair to the tips of his toes.

In a last-ditch effort, he bolted to his loved ones (and teacher), white rings materializing at his waist, only to fail him.

Remaining traces of hope evaporated when he tripped and fell. His heart sank, replaced by the realization of what was to come.

Danny glanced at them helplessly from the ground. Their eyes met briefly, but it felt like an eternity.

Their expressions seemingly inquired, "Why?"

Then everything turned from red to black.

He awoke groggily to the steady drone of a heart monitor announcing his every heartbeat. Each reminder sent a dull throb to his skull, traveling down his spine and dispersing through his body. Pain twinged deep in his brain, an unreachable and unquenchable sensation, and it seemed everything would worsen it, from the cool breeze kissing his face to the sheets tangled around his body. Groaning, he tried to turn onto his stomach with the intent of shoving a fat pillow over his black locks to block out the annoyance, a seemingly last minute resort to the barely conscious child. But only having the strength to turn his head on its right side the teen shoved his ear into the cushion, feeling his neck strain to an unknown presence of gravity. He grunted, discomfort biting at him as a literal pain in the neck.

Eventually, the teenager forfeited to the peaceful ruckus, opening his eyes to find himself in an unfamiliar setting, fear and confusion lightly brushing his conscious. Danny had been propped up in a large hospital bed at an angle of 120 degrees, thus the culprit for the uncomfortable placement of his head; he was closer to being propped upright than lying down. But despite the pain, he felt too weak to prop his head back into a comfortable position, so the teen stared weakly ahead at the large, silver railings protruding from the heavy duty mattress. They partially obscured his vision but nevertheless, he caught a glimpse at the complex set of electronic monitors, computers, and wires perched above his hospital bed, taking note of the analog clock reading 3:11 AM.

Although the room was mainly white, it appeared a dull blue from the shadows. They danced with
the moonlight that shone through his hospital window, toying with Danny's eyes. A dizziness crept upon him, making the boy change the focus of his attention to his lap, a place of steady comfort he could always count on. With his head bowed the boy observed that his wrist was strapped to an arm-board accompanied by an IV and a bulky fingertip oximeter that had been gently clamped to his first digit. (Danny knew the names of numerous medical equipment thanks to his parents' occasional demands for his assistance in their zany experiments.) With great effort, he cautiously lifted his hand to confirm his assumptions. However, a much more urgent detail captured his attention, distracting him from thoughts and memories that had surfaced regarding the devices attached to his arm.

He frowned at his filthy hand and forearms where dirt, soot, and gravel stuck to his skin. It was most peculiar; he had no memory as to how they got there. Danny attempted to elbow himself into a sitting position to better examine his arm but yelped when pain sliced through his entire body. Steady blips issuing from the cardiac monitor grew faster in response to the sudden exertion of his muscles, which begged to be rested. Despite his body's protest to movement, he managed to sit up by pushing against the mattress quickly, letting momentum do the work for him. But his upper body swayed precariously upon achievement, the consequences of ignoring his body roaring back at him, even if the negligence had only lasted a sixteenth of a second. Black specks emerged from the corners of his vision and danced to his pupils, mocking his lack of strength. Danny blinked repeatedly in an effort to make them disappear, eventually clearing his sight and bringing his attention back to his grimy upper limbs. Without adequate lighting, it was difficult to determine exactly how filthy he was but too tired to procure light via his ghost powers, the boy estimated it would come off with the help of soap and a washcloth.

Or...he could go intangible (way easier than creating light) and make it fall off, which he did as soon as the thought crossed his half-awake conscious—alleviating the itchy sensation it left on the boy's skin.

Then instantly regretted.

The arm board, IV, oximeter, AND bandages, which Danny had failed to notice, fell off with the debris. And being unable to detect the halfla's heartbeat, the machine to Danny's right blared an alarm notifying the hospital staff of "heart failure." Danny froze and mumbled "Nice going, Fenton." to himself. "Such a stupid mistake," he thought. But was the blunder really his? The teenager usually had more of a handle on his powers, he should've been able to turn intangible with the equipment. Typically he could manipulate which items would respond...he cautiously glanced back to his forearms, which were still stained with dirt but at least gravel-free.

Interrupting his waking thoughts, the door to his room opened and a nurse strolled in on up to the contraption. She wore friendly-blue scrubs covered with little dinosaurs and hair messily pulled into half-bun. A new wave of cold air washed through the space and the hospitalized teenager grimaced.

"You're awake! How do you feel, honey?" Exclaimed the nurse seeing Danny sitting up, albeit groggy-eyed. Grinning friendlily, she tampered with the device in an attempt to silence the wretched machine.

"Really sore." Danny groaned, still half-awake.

"Any pain?"

"Just a headache."

"Give me your hand for a sec..." Having finally fixed the heart monitor, she turned her full
attention to the patient. Reaching for his right hand, she bent down to take off the device and paused, her polite smile sliding into a frown upon seeing his medical equipment and bandages scattered amongst him. The nurse's eyes darted back to the young teen, who according to the whiteboard by the door should've had burns adorned on his exposed skin.

"Huh...whoops...I must've...uh...taken them off in my sleep." He said with a meek smile, mentally facepalming. "Taken them off in my sleep? What kind of an excuse is that?!"

"T-That's quite alright sweetie." The nurse replied shakily, picking up the IV and oximeter. "But let's make sure not to do that again, okay? We're going to have to put in a new IV; I'll be right back, I need to grab some supplies." Thinking she didn't read the board correctly the first time, she decided she'd fix his IV before re-reading it. Disposing of the used needle, she turned on the overhead lights as she strode out of the room. If Danny weren't so disoriented he would've rolled his eyes at the woman's fake and cheery demeanor.

The lights were way too bright for the exhausted boy, immediately pulling him out of his half-awake status and temporarily blinding him. Bringing his hand up to cover his eyes, the 14-year-old realized how stiff he felt. He wanted to stretch, but his limbs felt utterly spent. So spent, that he refrained from attempting to move any further. Maybe that's why he couldn't execute his intangibility correctly—more often than not his powers got worse the more tired he was. Which brought the ghost boy to another question, why was he so tired? And why was he in the hospital?

Realizing he had been holding his neck above the pillow, he released the tension, letting his head fall back with a small moan. And squinting towards the other side of the room, (finally getting accustomed to the lights) the hybrid backtracked to yesterday's events.

He remembered being in the school auditorium while Mr. Lancer talked about the upcoming CAT and trying to study despite Jazz's hovering. Then being interrupted by the daughter of The Box Ghost and the Lunch Lady. Ew. What was her name again...Box Lunch?

He defeated her by making the Nasty Sauce explode...somehow getting ahold of the CAT scores...which he would've opened in his room if it weren't for SkulkTech showing up...shortly after that, meeting Clockwork...and his...

future evil self...

Danny's memories hit him one after the other, getting collectively worse as the past memories' consequences affected the next, snowballing faster and faster-

"Daniel?" The nurse asked, standing over the IV equipment she had set on his bed. "There's no need to be scared honey, it'll be quick." Assured she, seeing the patient frozen in fear as she described the process for applying his IV. Of course, he wasn't frozen in fear upon hearing about his IV—he hadn't even heard or seen her return to his hospital room. But it would be lying to say he wasn't frozen in fear, anyone would be after reliving that nightmare.

Not getting a response from the teen, the nurse gently put her hand on his shoulder and bent further over the bed so they were face-to-face. "Daniel?" She repeated.

Jolting out of his stupor, he blinked and muttered, "My family."

"What was that?"

"My family," Danny repeated, this time slightly louder. He looked her dead in the eyes, his own filled with numbing fear. "Where's my family."
The nurse peered down at where she had placed the IV equipment, staring at them for a few seconds before beginning to unwrap what appeared to be a plastic syringe. With a forced, reassuring smile, she replied, "I'm afraid I'm not in the position to tell you." As she gently lifted his right wrist several inches off the bed.

"What do you mean 'the right position'?" He pressed, raising his voice.

"Someone other than me must inform you of your current situation." She replied with that sickeningly sweet tone, one-handedly prepping the syringe. Holding the plastic device over his wrist, she explained, "This is a numbing liquid. You might hear a sound that resembles opening a can of pop, but it won't hurt you at all."

Before she could administer the liquid, Danny yanked his wrist away, making the woman jump slightly. "Who? I need to know what happened to my family and friends. **Now.**"

Used to working with difficult patients, the nurse was well aware that those hospitalized typically weren't in the dandiest of situations, whether it's their physical ailments, personal life, or both. Knowing it would be best to get all his questions out of the way or at least calm him down before proceeding to stab him with a needle, she gently lowered her dainty hands and answered, "Your primary nurse, your doctor, your—"

"My, Daniel, are you really this difficult with everyone?" A telltale voice drawled.

Danny knew that voice anywhere. The teen glimpsed past the nurse at the location the voice had originated from. And sure enough, there he was, haughtily leaning against the hospital door and holding a styrofoam cup.

"Plasmius," he spat out distastefully, not caring the nurse was present. She frowned slightly and looked over at the entity the boy had addressed.

Giving Danny a small smirk in response to hearing his alter ego's title, he sauntered up to the nurse, adjusting his red bolo tie. "I must apologize for his behavior, he has quite the temper." The billionaire gave a fake sigh, feigning parent-like worry. "It's best you step out. I can take it from here."

"Yes, Dr. Masters." Picking up the unused IV equipment, she set them down on Danny's bedside table and left the room, gently closing the door behind her. Before Danny could question why the nurse referred to his arch-enemy as 'Dr. Masters', Vlad seized the front of the 14-year-old's hospital gown and roughly brought him to eye-level, his eyes flashing red when he yelled, "**What the hell did you get yourself into?**"

Having been manhandled, the boy felt another dizzy spell overcome his vision and didn't acknowledge the older half ghost's interrogation, who proceeded to shake Danny shortly but violently in an attempt to gain some sort of response. "**ANSWER ME, BOY! What the hell did you get yourself into?!**"

"I-I don't know." Danny groaned, bringing his shaking hands up to his now pounding head.

"Blast! I didn't come to Colorado to wait in this wretched place for 3 days just to hear you say 'I don't know.'" Hissed Vlad.

"I've been here three days?! But I thoug-"

"Don't change the subject!" Tell me what happened!"
"Put me down, and then maybe I'll fill you in." The young hybrid responded through gritted teeth. As much as he wanted to scream insults, his body was in no condition for the roughhousing that would follow. Inevitable as it may be, the boy needed at least 2 seconds to recompose himself and think of something to tell Vlad before being thrown across the room. Something other than the truth, because Vlad would rejoice in hearing about Danny's evil self, and the boy really didn't want to go through that.

Masters contemplated for a moment, eventually dropping Danny back on the bed carelessly. He yelped as pain flooded through his sore limbs, especially his neck, which hadn't had the strength to hold up his head despite the presence of his hospital mattress to soften the fall.

"There. Enlighten me." He shot, taking a seat on the couch to Danny's left.

"Oh, did I say maybe?" The teenager prodded sarcastically, regaining his edge. "I meant never. You know how bad I am at English, too."

Vlad glared at Danny and suddenly stood back up, making Danny flinch. But didn't make a move towards the younger halfa, deciding he needed another tactic to get the teenager to talk.

"Three days ago...I was sitting down for breakfast when my maid brings me the Amity-Park-Angle newspa-"

"You live in Wisconsin. Why on earth do you read the Amity-Park-Angle?"

A devilish smile turned the corners of Vlad's manipulative lips as he answered, "Why it's imperative I keep up with the happenings of the town your silly excuse of a father resided in. How could I dispose of him and win over Maddie if I'm not aware of his surroundings?"

Danny's eyes flashed menacingly green and he opened his mouth to give another snide remark but was interrupted by his arch enemy's continued monologue.

"Anyways, imagine my surprise when I saw the front page." Plasmius's smirk grew into an eloquent grin. "Even I can't believe you had the audacity to kill your parents."

Did the older hybrid really think Daniel killed his parents? No. He knew the boy's love for his family (and friends) ran too deep to be described in words.

He also knew how to get right under the child's skin.

Along with Danny's anger, any remaining color in his face flushed away. No...this can't be...Vlad had to be playing with him. There was no way his parents...his parents...no...this had to be some sick dream! That's what it is...a sic-

"I must admit, Daniel, at first I was enraged. Your father was supposed to be mine for the taking." Plasmius went on. "I deserved to exact my revenge on the idiot who ruined my life. But then I realized it didn't matter who had the honors of destroying that fat oaf; the world is a much better place again thanks to you, little badger." Vlad mocked, pausing to wait for an angry response from Danny, but not receiving any sort of reply—not even a glare. The halfa's eyes were glazed over in the direction of his own lap, sorrow twinkling in their wake.

The billionaire took a short breath in to continue speaking. However, only air left his lips as he watched Danny lethargically lay back down and bring the bed covers over his disheveled dark hair, several stray strands refusing to hide and sticking up from underneath the sheets.

Vlad leaned forward over the younger hybrid and stared at the lump under the sheets. "What's
Wrong, little badger?" he teased, "Won't you talk with your dear Uncle Vlad?"

"Leave me alone." The lump said quietly, voice muffled.

"Not until you tell me what happened."

"Leave me alone." Danny repeated, "P...p-please.

Chapter End Notes

So, you've stumbled upon my fanfiction.

First of all, I'd like to thank you for taking time out of your day to read this, I heavily appreciate you giving this story a chance.

I don't consider myself much of a writer, to be frank. Being the reader is the most enjoyable position for me to be in. However, when I was searching for a fanfiction that illustrated the effects of Danny's family perishing in TUE I came across almost nothing, and the several fanfictions I did happen to find had been unfinished for several years. So, I took it onto myself to create the supposed "missing" story. Perhaps it was naive of me to have such a specific story in mind and expect it to be waiting for me on the internet. After all, each one of us is unique. Although contrary to that belief, I share this with the DP fandom in hopes of fulfilling your search for this particular alternate universe.

Through this fanfiction, I not only want to give you a riveting and complicated plot surrounding Danny and Vlad's interesting dynamic but I hope to explore themes of life, love (not pompous pep), and loss. I want to highlight each of their more subtle character attributes, especially Vlad, who may be selfish and use the wrong means to achieve his desires, but we see in TUE that he is capable of redemption and restoring his faith in humanity.

So with that, I give you the decision to either continue reading or give up. The choice is yours.
We're going to go back in time a little for some context on exactly how Vlad got caught up in all this. ;D I tried to keep this fairly short because I'd rather you not skip over it.

Without further ado, I give you chapter two! Oh geez, that rhymed.

Had Vlad been reading the Amity-Park-Angle when he first became aware of the Fenton and friends predicament?

No.

But he DID regularly read the Amity-Park-Angle. And he DID see Danny's somber picture plastered on the front page, underneath a picture of the ruins of a burger joint named the 'Nasty Burger'. Giant words stating, 'Nasty Accidents for Fentons and Friends.' A rather disgusting play on words that the billionaire hoped hadn't been intentional by the writers.

But that was after receiving the police at his doorstep.

Four days before Danny woke up in the hospital, Vlad had been in his secret lab working on the Ecto-Skeleton he had nabbed from Danny after the defeat of Pariah Dark. (We learn after TUE that Vlad had found a way to fix the Ecto-Skeleton's flaws since stealing it towards the end of 'Reign Storm'. So I figured he had to have been working on it BEFORE and while TUE happened.) Before being rudely interrupted by the ringing of his doorbell.

"Butter biscuits! Must people always bother me when I'm busy?" He muttered, stomping out of his lab, through the doors of his private study, and into the entrance hall. He cracked open the doors to his castle rather privately to see two policemen standing on his doorstep.

"May I help you, gentlemen?" The billionaire inquired in a slightly annoyed tone. At noticing they weren't from Wisconsin, he raised his eyebrows curiously and allowed his previously rigid arm to slacken. Causing the door to fall open a little more, along with his rigid attitude.

"We are with the Amity Park Police Department." The man on the left said, both of them holding up official badges sporting the bold letters 'APPD', "May we step in?"

It took a few seconds of contemplation before he decided and announced, "Absolutely, come on in." He stepped to the side, making way for the men to come in. Refusing to be hospitable would appear suspicious, whether or not they suspected Vlad of any wrongdoing. And in general, the officer only asked the question to be polite. It wouldn't matter what your answer was—they'd step in either way.

As soon as they had clambered into the entrance hall, Vlad shut the door and asked, "To what do I
owe this visit?" Ignoring the uncertainty that appeared on their faces when they noticed a large amount of green and gold inside the mansion. They didn't bother to hide the apprehension on their faces as they openly gawked at the surrounding area. It wasn't until Vlad cleared his throat that they brought their attention back to him."

"Oh! Erhm...ahem..." The seeming spokesperson of their officer duo quickly collected himself. "We regret to inform you there has been an accident resulting in the deaths of Jack, Madeline, and Jasmine Fenton. It has been stated on the will that you are to take custody of the lone survivor, their youngest son Daniel."

That single sentence struck Vlad harder than the prototype ghost portal that gave him Ecto-acne. Maddie!

"W-What happened?" He asked, unable to hide the horror in his voice. Had Vlad heard any other kind of news he wouldn't have let his walls down, but this...this was different.

"We're afraid we cannot disclose further information until we've fully investigated the situation." The man on the right, who held a large clipboard, flipped through several pages and spoke up for the first time in their visit. "It says here that you are the godfather of the Fenton children. Is that correct?"

Since when had he been a godfather? And why him, when the boy had Maddie's sister, Alicia? He didn't oppose to being Daniel's godfather, but he would've liked to have known if he were to be appointed such a position. He didn't remember-

Ohh...

He vaguely remembered Jack and him drunk at one of the many college parties they often hosted. At one particular party, Jack had slurred, "Vladdie...will you be the godfather of my kids?"

"Of course, J-mannn!" He had exclaimed back in his still pre-pubescent voice, before chugging his sixth beer to the sound of cheers around them. Vlad internally cringed at the flashback.

Oddly enough, the fat oaf had actually taken that exchange to heart and wrote it in his will. It surprised him that Jack had actually remembered it. Then again, ironic as it had been, Jack was more competent drunk than he was sober. A majority of his scientific breakthroughs had been made while he was under the influence. Not to say he was an alcoholic though, Jack hadn't even realized he'd been drinking alcohol in the first place - Vlad himself had been slipping him drinks.

"Correct." Masters replied.

"It is also stated on the will you are to take possession of their home and its contents until Daniel Fenton turns of age."

"...Understandable." He found it further intriguing that Jack and Maddie had trusted him with their home. Then again, Alicia never approved of their ghostly endeavors and wouldn't have respected the years of hard work and dedication Maddie (excluding Jack) had left in their lab. On top of that, Maddie didn't have any family heirlooms to be passed down to Daniel; her parents had given them all to Alicia in disapproval (and fear) of her pursuit in ecto-science. Vlad was the only person who understood their work.

"We've brought several legal documents with us... if you could please sit down and review them..."

"How long will it take?"
"Around an hour or two."

Vlad sighed, turning around and gesturing for the men to follow him. "I suppose so." Said he, leading them to his grand dining hall. They gave one last glance at the Packers-themed foyer before following, sharing an amused glance behind the billionaire's back.

A small amount of the legalities having been taken care of, Vlad curtly nodded at the policemen as they stepped out of his house. It wasn't until he closed the door that he let his perfect posture slide along with his guarded facial expression.

_Maddie._

His love. The love of his life. The very center of his many schemes and plots.

Gone. Dead. Swept off the face of the earth. Removed from the plane of existence.

The only proof of her life now was her son, Daniel.

That little _rat_! That reckless, little, _rat_. That boy was supposed to protect his wretched family. That child should've protected Maddie!

He wouldn't be surprised if their deaths had been caused by one of Danny's many, _many_, enemies.

If only Danny had accepted his offer, then none of this would have happened. Together, the teenager and he could've destroyed Jack and brought Maddie to his side. That boy had such potential. But no, as he had put it in their first true encounter, the boy chose to stumble through his adolescence desperately trying to get control of his powers.

And he had paid the price.

Vlad morphed into Plasmius and phased upstairs to the master bedroom, where he grabbed a pre-packed suitcase (he often had to make emergency business trips). He then swooped back on the main floor and to the aircraft garage, phasing into his private helicopter.

_You and I...have a lot to go over._

(Let's travel further back in time! *raises Clockwork's staff* I could've made this part longer for the sake of good pacing, but I didn't for the sake of your growing impatience. Also, I'm experimenting around with this part. Let's try first POV, shall we?)

"Vlad Masters?!!"

"Yeah!" My husband grinned goofily ear-to-ear as if he couldn't hear my disapproving tone, although to be honest he probably didn't. "Back in college, he told me he'd be the godfather of my kids."

"But Jack..." I protested exasperatedly, "That was college—twenty years ago!"

We got back from the reunion in Wisconsin two hours ago. It was now midnight and I had been climbing into bed next to my spouse, both of us having earlier finished cleaning up the Fenton Ghost Assault Vehicle and our nighttime routines. Clad in his pink pajamas, nightcap, and teddy bear, Jack already resumed his usual spot on the right side of our bed, adorably tucked in by me.
"I know, sweet-cheeks, but now he's back in our lives." Jack protested.

Frowning thoughtfully, I brought the sheets up to my stomach and leaned back on the pillow I had just fluffed up. My husband had a tendency to be naïve and distracted at times, especially when it came to social understandings and the law. But I didn't mind, I found it rather refreshing and cute. His ADHD was what made him Jack and I loved him for it. He won me over with it.

"Vlad may be back in our lives, dear," I started, reaching for my book on the nightstand. "And he may have agreed to be a godfather back then, however that doesn't mean he feels the same way now. People change, sweetie, and I hate to say it, but Vlad's changed."

Jack, unlike me, had been oblivious to his former best friend's underhanded comments and new debonair demeanor. The Vlad we knew was hardly there, changed by money and social standing. He'd become...a...a rich snob.

"Nonsense! He's still the same old Vladdy I knew." The bed whined in protest as Jack turned on his side, resting his head on the hand propped up by a thick pillow. "And I get it's been a while and we've just reconnected, but he's gotta be a better option than Alicia."

Well. I looked up from my book and half-closed it, sending him an expecting gaze. "Why? What's wrong with Alicia?"

"Nothing, it's just...oh you know how your family can be. They won't know what to do with our lab stuff."

Biting my lip, I put the bookmark back in the same place I'd removed it and set it down on my lap. Jack and I had this conversation a long time ago when we first decided on possible godparents and guardians. The only available option at the time was my sister. The rest of my family didn't approve of my pursue in spectral science, my sister included, although she didn't agree with me being disowned because of it. She's the only familial contact I have. Jack's family, on the other hand, was similarly opposite. And yes, I meant that to be an oxymoron. His family was so enamored by the supernatural that they hardly paid attention to each other. No doubt they'd pay more attention to monsters than our children. And I wouldn't have that.

"I suppose...but she doesn't need to know what to do with it. She just has to keep it safe."

"Vladdy understands our work, baby. He'll not only keep our findings and breakthroughs safe but also preserve it. People may not understand what we do now but in a hundred years they will, and I want us to be credited as the first world's leading ghost experts!" His eyes glazed over dreamily and a serene look replaced the previous excitement sparkling across his innocent face. "Just think how good the fudge will be one hundred years from now."

I raised my eyebrows at the realization, "You make a good point, dear." And I meant it. I too wanted to be credited for our hard work and scientific discoveries. The ghost portal, our biggest achievement, had yet to be recognized because every accredited person and media company we called didn't believe our "claims."

"And..." Jack added, "He's filthy rich! He can afford to spoil our kids rotten."

A smile curled up at the edge of my lips. Vlad may have changed and I may feel like I hardly know him anymore, but we had so many good memories and times back in college. And he was trying to get over the accident. Keyword: "trying." Vlad always had emotional issues, and I had a feeling that was because his parents died in a rather nasty situation. It made me proud that he was trying. He graciously hosted us in his mansion, (that still feels so foreign to say) and entertained the kids
As if they were his own, despite the occasional underhanded comment towards Jack. However, had there been another friend who'd respect our work, I'd immediately jumped to them instead. Although with our two choices...it was now clear which one was better.

"You're absolutely right." I acknowledged, much to my husband's glee, whose face lit up. He was so easy to make happy, I loved it. "But, don't get too excited yet. We should ask him for permission."

And Jack agreed, then we both went to bed. The next day he begged me to begin rewriting the will, which he would've done if he knew how. I told him we should call Vlad before making it official, but Jack said he'd already tried and our old friend didn't answer, which wasn't surprising; Vlad was probably a very busy man now. So I let my husband know that we could afford to wait. However, being as excited as he always is, he began to go through the "What ifs." What if we were killed right now, and all our hard work was wasted because our will had yet to be changed, and so on. With a sigh, I gave into his blatherings and wrote up the document, making sure that he wrote down "Call Vlad." on his long to-do list, and warning him to not forget because he had a tendency to forget even the things he wrote down.

To be honest, I'm not sure if he ever did call Vlad.

Vlad had arrived on the helipad of the Children's Hospital an hour following his discovery of the Fenton's deaths. He was glad he owned the hospital, or he would've been forced to drive instead, seeing that he wouldn't be permitted to land his helicopter there. As much as the man wanted, using his ghost powers, including teleportation, was out of the question because the distance was too large. In addition, people would notice and question why the billionaire had randomly shown up with no means of transportation; one of the few disadvantages of being a public figure.

Vlad not only owned the Children's Hospital but he owned the company it belonged to, which held a large branch of both regular hospitals and children's hospitals. He had taken over as CEO in hopes of Jack injuring himself enough to be hospitalized, where Vlad could then finish him off and make it appear as an accident.

As of right now, it was 9:41 PM and he sat in a private room at the emergency ward where Daniel had been temporarily stationed. Lying unconscious on a beige bed covered with thin paper, he breathed peacefully but raggedly amongst the orderly chaos that usually filled hospital halls.

To put it lightly, the boy looked as if he had been run over by hell.

A bandage, now bloodstained, had been wrapped around the hybrid's raven hair. According to a nurse who was tending to Danny when Vlad first stepped into the room, the 14-year-old had suffered a concussion and was unresponsive when they found him, wherever that was. Burns, cuts, and bruises contrasted with his pale but grime covered skin. And his t-shirt and jeans, left on the table next to him, were badly singed and torn apart.

The only people in the room were the two hybrids. Daniel should have been getting medical attention right now, but the majority of nurses and doctors had run off to assist someone in cardiac arrest. And since the child wasn't in any immediate danger of death, he was lower on the list of priority patients. Which was stupid because chances are, if you're in a hospital, you need some form of medical attention.

Impatience getting the best of him, Vlad huffed in annoyance and stood up, yanking a pair of medical gloves from the compartment box next to the door. As always, he had to take matters into his own hands. He stormed out of the room and into the supply room where he grabbed a basin,
setting it in the sink under the faucet. As Masters waited for the basin to fill with cold water, he searched the room for a rag and bandages, eventually finding some in a corner cupboard. He then strode to the room next door and grabbed two preheated blankets. Somehow managing to juggle all his supplies, he made his way back to the teenager's room, setting them on a cart the nurse had left.

Although he owned the hospital, he didn't know where everything was. He just happened to observe the nurses scurrying about as he was lead to Daniel's location. The older hybrid couldn't possibly remember the layout of this particular hospital when Vlad owned so many other businesses. It was times like these that he appreciated his nearly photographic memory and observational skills.

"Maybe I'm overdoing it with the preheated blankets." He thought, taking off his black suit jacket and rolling up the sleeves of his dress shirt. The burns seemed to be second degree, and they didn't cover large areas of his skin; just splotched unevenly over his front. Only victims with burns covering more than 10% of their total body surface were susceptible to hypothermia since burned skin is incapable of holding in body heat. But, it was better to play it safe anyways, hypothermia prone or not, Daniel had to be cold lying on that table in his boxers.

After washing his hands, he slipped on the medical gloves, dipped the rag into the basin holding cold water, and dabbed at the small burns decorating the boy's face.

Don't be mistaken in thinking Vlad had gotten over his anger at the child. He was still livid.

"Here we are." The billionaire remarked bitterly under his breath as he set down the rag and picked up bandages. "Wasting my time thanks to your foolishness."

With practiced finesse he bandaged up small areas of Daniel's face and picked up the rag again, repeating the process on the boy's collar and neck, a small sigh escaping the breach of his lips.

Despite the billionaire's angry exterior, he was currently fighting the unease that had settled in the pit of his stomach since landing the helicopter. Years of being alone in a hospital had scarred him for eternity, he couldn't so much as glance at one without feeling claustrophobic. He hated those unnaturally white walls, the stench of disinfectant that hung in the air...even the noise in the hospital halls. It was the reason he had separated himself from the science community and established himself as a businessman instead. He could've gained fame, fortune, and longevity in his name with his discoveries in paranormal science, but doing so would chain him to a lab (metaphorically speaking) working for the government for the rest of his life. Vlad heavily opposed this for three reasons; One being the government was obsessed with white and most likely had white labs. Two, a half-ghost scientist studying ghosts with other scientists did not bode well. And three, he preferred to work alone. Ecto-acne incident. Enough said.

However, apart from his hatred of hospitals, Vlad never hated anything pertaining to the study of the human body, including medical equipment. In fact, he had gotten his degree in genetics and had been working towards another in biomedical engineering when the incident occurred. The human body had always been a topic of deep fascination for him ever since his early childhood, and it's stayed that way for forty consecutive years.

Finishing bandaging Daniel's legs, he stepped back to assess his handiwork, nodding in approval as he took off his gloves. Maybe it was just a trick of the light or the knowledge of his newly developed situation, but he never realized how...frail the teenager looked before. Vlad was so used to seeing Danny coiled and hissing like a rattlesnake or a peeved cat, that the only time he could recall seeing his little badger so at ease was the night before the college reunion when they fatefuly crossed paths.
His ribs could be seen rising and lowering with the movements of his diaphragm, and his wrist sockets, metacarpals, and knees were wrapped tightly by dirty skin. Having only cleaned the area around the burns, Vlad didn't bother to remove the remaining grime sticking to his skin. It was the least the child deserved for letting his family perish.

Rolling down his sleeves and putting his suit jacket back on, Masters resumed sitting in the chair next to the boy's table, staring at the little anomaly who lay innocently unconscious. With no one around, Vlad needn't put on a show of power and confidence, so he let his true soberness seep through his outer appearance. He sat deep in thought for quite some time, until his sensitive ghost hearing picked up footsteps from outside. He quickly fixed his slouch and stiffened as the door to the room tentatively reopened and two nurses shuffled through, one grabbing the cart and the other standing in the doorway, clipboard in hand.

Vlad was the first to speak. "How was it?"

"We managed to get her heart going." The nurse with the cart replied, voice breathless and wavering slightly. Both looked at him with pure respect and admiration sparkling in their tired eyes.

"Ah, what a relief." Vlad's voice hardly supported his statement, disinterest seeping through. Uncrossing his arms, he nodded towards the cart. "While half of the hospital's staff were at that woman's dispense, I took the liberty of treating my Daniel's burns. Tell me, ladies, has it been short staffed lately?"

They nodded in unison, "It has. We've been working overtime to compensate."

Clucking his tongue, he replied, "Such a shame. I'll see what I can do."

Vlad was already aware of the hospital being understaffed, he had made budget cuts to support his private scientific endeavors. Not that he'd tell anyone though.

"There's also a few other issues to be addressed as well..." Piped in the nurse by the doorway. Immediately her co-worker glanced over wide-eyed and swiped her hand by the air in front of her throat while shaking her head.

"Hm." Ignoring the younger nurse, he gazed back at the hybrid, a stiff silence filling the room that Vlad was oblivious to. The man had an aura that demanded respect. Powerful and scrutinizing. Enough to make the most self-confident of people doubt themselves.

"Why hasn't Daniel been given an actual room yet?"

"Er..."

Vlad tore his eyes from Daniel and bore them against the nurse at the doorway. "What are you waiting for? Go assign him a room." He spat. She squeaked and ran off to the main desk on the current floor.

"And you..." He glanced at the remaining nurse's nametag, "Angela. Grab a gurney."

"Y-yes sir." Angela started to make her way to the doorway, only to be halted by the billionaire's voice.

"It's Doctor. Dr. Masters. I have a doctorate."

"S-sorry, Dr. Masters." (Don't kill me yet. I'll give my reasoning for that later.)
When both nurses returned with their tasks completed, Vlad and they strapped Daniel to the gurney and wheeled him up toward M2, the section of the hospital for children ages 4-16 with a variety of medical issues. The man did his best to suppress the nauseating panic beginning to permeate into his chest, hearing the wheels of the gurney squeaking combined with the chatters and telltale machine noises sent him back to those dark years in hospitalized isolation. He focused all his attention on the young hybrid's head lolling in time with his footsteps. When they reached his hospital room, Vlad took it onto himself to fill out the whiteboard by the door while his two escorts made Danny comfortable.

"You're taking over as his doctor?" Angela asked incredulously, noticing the boss of her boss had filled in his own name by the "primary doctor" slot as she hooked the young boy to the machines on his right.

"Is that a problem?" Although it was stated as a question, it was more a reinforcement of his authority. He owned the damn place. He'll do what he damn pleases.

"W-well no...it's just you don't have a team."

"I work alone."

"O-oh I see."

"Angela, I need you to get an IV and a 0.9% sodium chloride solution. And Elizabeth? Come over here."

Angela nodded and swept off, glancing nervously behind before turning the corner to the supply room, seeing the CEO of the hospital with his hands behind his back, looking down at her co-worker who cowered under his menacing stare. By the time she returned, Vlad dismissed Elizabeth and the two exchanged looks as they passed in the doorway, tears brimming in her co-worker's eyes. Obviously, he had put her in her place for speaking up when she wasn't supposed to.

Handing the man the equipment, she said, "I brought a new device, it's a palm vein scanner. What you do is pu-"

"Did I ask for a palm vein scanner?"

"Um...no, I-"

"Do you believe me incapable of keeping up with the latest advances in medical technology?"

"N-no Dr. Mast-"

"I know how one works, and I don't need it to find a mere vein. Now leave." He stated with finality, turning around to focus on preparing the IV.

The door clicked shut as Vlad applied a tourniquet to Danny's (very small) forearm and gently pressed on several veins with his first finger, eventually finding one to his liking. He then reached for the 22 gauge ONC (over-the-needle catheter), the smallest IV stocked, and straight up phased it into Danny's skin, adjusting its position before allowing it to regain tangibility. Being half ghost did have its perks, but hybrid or not, he was very skilled with needles. Back when he was in medical school he often practiced on himself. One might expect him to hate needles after the incident, but he had already been desensitized to needles long before that. However, even with his admirable skills, he wasn't in the mood to fiddle with the ONC to ensure it's prime position was achieved.
He finished the job by securing the IV with medical tape, pressing the infusion pump's 'on' button, and wrapping an arm board around the hybrid's wrist, which prevented the wearer from dislodging the IV. With nothing more to do, he sat at the foot of the boy's bed.

Vlad, by all means, would have preferred another doctor take care of Daniel. He wanted nothing more than to lie down and grieve in Maddie's departure. But heaven forbid that he be allowed to process everything that's been thrown at him in the past couple hours. He had to take charge as the boy's doctor to keep their blasted secrets intact. And even with him overseeing the hybrid's recovery, the surrounding staff would undoubtedly notice his unusually fast recovery rate. But the most important thing Vlad needed to hide was the different heart rate and temperature because a healthy human would be dead or bed-ridden by their physical normalities. The billionaire wished he could at least take Daniel back to the mansion—however, now the hospital was aware of the boy's current condition, doing so would appear neglectful.

He wondered how on earth the child managed with his bi-yearly checkups but then realized Maddie and Jack were probably too occupied with ghosts to worry about such things. That or Danny did a good job of making them forget. He wouldn't be surprised if the teen had already figured out the differences that came with their ghostly persona.

The billionaire stood up, stretched, and walked over to the window, where the view was thankfully not blocked by a neighboring building like when he had been hospitalized. He looked up at the darkened sky glittered with specks of silver and finally allowed himself to mourn for Maddie, staying there for quite some time.

Vlad stoically exchanged Daniel's now-room-temperature blankets with newly heated ones, eye bags prominent underneath his cold and calculating eyes. The man hadn't slept; he was required to monitor a concussion in its first 24 hours, even if the boy was unconscious. He had just scheduled a CAT scan that would take place in the afternoon because he needed to see if there had been any cranial swelling. Vlad didn't expect to see anything serious though, he was confident Danny only had linear fractures. But it was better to play it safe than sorry, and he was growing more restless with every minute the teen didn't wake. He needed answers!

If anything good came out of the man's inability to sleep, however, it was that he could finally reflect on his recent discoveries and what to do with this child. He already had a plan in the making. Thinking ahead and planning always helped Vlad cope, it forced him to think logically rather than emotionally. And he really needed that in order to keep himself together in this white prison, surrounded by a suddenly changed world. With this plan, the shock of Maddie's death was thankfully stifled. Those twenty years alone pining for her love still weren't wasted.

His stomach was grinding against itself, reminding him of how he hadn't eaten dinner or breakfast. He'd need to grab something to eat, something NOT from the hospital cafeteria. The billionaire shuddered involuntarily at the mere memory of that devil's spawn disguised as edible matter.

Careful to avoid being seen by the hospital cameras, Vlad, still in human form, invisibly made a duplicate of himself to watch Daniel and flew into a nearby alley, turning visible upon deeming the coast clear. He surveyed the downtown area, finding the most expensive looking coffee shop and set off in its direction, relieved to be temporarily freed of that white sickness-filled box. He soaked in as much of his surroundings as possible, trying to clear his mind of the now dead Fentons and focusing on his plans for Daniel.

Until he came across a newsstand.

Vlad paused, his normally steel poised expression crumbling into utter disbelief.
'Nasty Accidents for Fentons and Friends.'

Not even looking at the images beneath the heading, he grabbed the newspaper, threw money at the vendor (not caring how much), and took off.

Chapter End Notes

Something I’ve noticed in a majority of fanfictions featuring Vlad is that they point out his fear of needles, which I personally don't agree with. As a person with 6 severe food allergies, I end up in the hospital at least once a year. In addition, I was recently hospitalized with a blood issue. By now I'm basically a pin cushion. I used to hate needles (so much!), especially blood draws. But after getting poked 5 times a day for a straight week, I stopped caring about them. Someone who has long exposure to needles will eventually get used to them.

Apologies for my lack of knowledge in how the government handles orphaned children in hospitals who have godparents. And my lack of knowledge in neurotransmission *sweats* don't judge, I'm 16. Of course, I tried to google it but I could only come up with so much
The last and most crucial memory finally rejoined Danny when Vlad informed him that his parents were dead.

He remembered looking up at his family and friends from where he fell, he wanted to get up, he needed to get up, but it was too late. He wouldn't make it in time. He couldn't go ghost, his exhaustion was overpowering his will. Even if he could go ghost he wouldn't be able to make it in time. But he still had to try. Something still pushed him further, he needed to save them.

And as those thoughts flew through his head, there was an explosion.

Danny couldn't remember what happened after that.

Plasmius blabbered on, oblivious to the fact that Danny wasn't listening, "...I deserved to exact my revenge on the idiot who ruined my life. But then I realized it didn't matter who had the honors of destroying that fat..."

He paled as a humongous wall of thoughts attacked him all at once, his attention jumping from one to another faster than the speed of light. They're gone. His parents. His sister. His friends. Everyone that loved and supported him. Everyone that gave him the strength to persevere in the face of adversity.

Tucker and Sam. They may have been his only close friends, but they were the best close friends a freak could ask for. They stood with him through everything. From the stupidest issues at school to the serious ghostly predicaments he found himself thrown into. He shared everything with them. They were always there for him. How could he possibly survive without them anymore? There was nobody to confide in. Nobody to vent to about his personal issues. Nobody to help him.

And his family...He wished he hadn't pushed his family away. He should've told them his secret sooner. He would've told them sooner if he knew they were going to die. Well, he knew there was a chance of them dying, but he was so sure he could save them. He always won. He always came through. But no, fate cruelly shoved the truth in their faces during their last hour of existence.

He had been pushing them away as he made his descent into adolescence and puberty. Family bonding had stopped being a priority in his life; ghost hunting and social activities had replaced that.

Another slew of memories broke through his barrier of thoughts.

Mom comes up from the lab and sees Danny home from school with Tucker and Sam.

"Hiya honey! How was school today?"

Danny shrugs, "Meh, usual." turns around, and walks off to his room, his friends right at his heels.
and in a heated debate regarding whether chicken and vanilla could work as a flavor combination.

Jack is working on a new device when Danny comes running into the kitchen.

"Danny! Wanna have some good ol' father-son bonding over a new-"

"Can'tSorryDadI'mInAHurry!" He shouted as he darts out the door, a puff of icy smoke thinly trailed behind in the air, dissipating before his father looked up.

Danny is struggling over his homework in his room, forehead resting against his hand and pencil between teeth. Jazz barges into his room, "Danny, I just wanted to say goodnight- ooh! Is that algebra? Do you need any help?"

"Why do you care?" He grumbles, "Leave me alone, I'm busy."

They all meant well. They all wanted to support and love him. They all wanted to spend time with him.

And he took them for granted. He put all his efforts and time into his friends, social life, and ghost hunting. If only he took time out of his day just for them...

One only realizes what they've had when it's gone.

He felt a hole in his heart that ached for his family and friends. There was no pillow to fall back on anymore. His loving parents, sister, and friends were no more. Nobody to put a roof over his head. Nobody to feed and clothe him. Nobody to comfort him when he felt scared or depressed. He was alone. Alone in this world.

Danny felt an old pang rise from his heart into his throat and behind his eyes. Wow, he hadn't felt the need to cry in a long time. He was never someone to shed tears when sad, he tended to barricade himself instead.

Fuck Plasmius. Fuck everything. He wanted to be alone. He needed to be alone. Breaking down in front of his arch-enemy was the last thing he wanted to do.

Not wanting to open his mouth in fear of his frail emotions spilling out, he silently lay down and brought the covers over his face, turning his head so he could breathe. Danny gripped the sheets, squeezed his eyes shut, and held his breath, hoping if he 'played dead' Plasmius would get bored of him like a predator to it's prey.

Vlad's Salvatore Ferragamo dress shoes clicked over to Danny's bedside and the small amount of light that had filtered through the bedding was suddenly extinguished as the billionaire leaned over the hybrid.

"What's wrong, little badger?" He simpered, "Won't you talk with your dear Uncle Vlad?"

"Leave me alone." Danny demanded with a wavering voice. Augh. Don't let it show. Don't let your emotions show.

"Not until you tell me what happened." Godammit, this persistent helluva evil man.

"Leave me alone." Danny repeated, then paused, contemplating whether or not to say the next word, "P...p-please."
Yes, he was that desperate. During times of severe emotional distress, the teen preferred to keep to himself and away from his friends' empathy, despite their good intentions. Sometimes, all you ever need is time alone to mull things over. And if he preferred his friends be out of range while he attempts to cope, then you can imagine his feelings towards Vlad's presence right now. Saying the 'magic word' had to be a foolproof way of freaking him out. And for a moment, he thought it did, until Vlad ripped off his warm comfortable bedding, leaving Danny shivering on the bed in his thin hospital gown and undergarments. He gave the younger hybrid a look that could've shriveled roses as he let the sheets crash to the floor, his thick, elegant fingers turning into fists.

"I'm done playing games, Daniel. If you don't fess up in the next minute, I'll demolish Fentonworks." Raising his eyebrows, he added in a nicer tone, "It's not like your family will need their possessions now that they're dead, hmm?"

Danny's face contorted into an odd mixture of anger and fear. There was no question regarding whether or not Plasmius would do it. Those possessions were the only things left of his loved ones, they were now sacred, and Vlad was more than aware of that.

"Fine," he said, voice cracking slightly as he fought the lump in his throat. "An accident happened."

"And...?"

Biting his lip, he tried to come up with some way to tell the truth but also leave out the information Vlad didn't need to know. The billionaire was smart enough to figure out when Danny was making things up. Most of the time.

"He...I...I accidentally got my hands on the Career Aptitude Test answers-" Crud. I shouldn't have said that. Scratch that explanation.

His archenemy raised an amused eyebrow and gloated, "Sure, accidentally. Ah, Daniel, every time we cross paths you never fail to remind me of our similarities. But how that relates to the situation at hand is beyond me. Don't change the subject, boy. I have a right to know exactly what you did to eradicate the love of my life."

Danny ignored Plasmius's last comment and fell quiet again, trying to sort out which events were safe to expose. He could afford to tell Vlad a little bit about Dan, so he searched his mind for viable information—although he began to feel as if he was forgetting something about his evil future self as he backtracked.

_Dan...Dan Phantom...Dan...Evil future self..._  
_Wait a minute..._  
_The thermos!_  

Danny's eyes widened, darting around the room. There was a pair of folded clothes, a suitcase, which, yes, could've held the container but was too thin, and the styrofoam cup the billionaire had set on a cart in the room. That was it. No thermos in sight. Adrenaline began to pump through his tired body and his headache returned tenfold. "Vlad," he asked frantically, "Where did the Fenton Thermos go? What did you do with it?"

Slightly taken aback, Vlad responded. "What are you talking about? What thermos?"

"I had the thermos on me when the explosion happened."
"Hm. I didn't see a thermos on you when you arrived here. What does that blasted device have to do with the accident?"

Throwing aside his fatigue, Danny stiffly brought himself to sit on the edge of the bed, his toes curling from the cold linoleum floor. Blood pumped through his body with such force he could hear it in his ears and absolute fear carved into his face as he muttered, "Oh my gosh. Crap. Crap. Crap crap crap." What if someone found the thermos? And then opened it? Or what if the thermos was damaged in the explosion? Or what if Dan somehow escaped the thermos? The possibilities were endless; Danny needed to find that thermos! He needed to keep an eye on his evil future self. But if Dan wasn't in there, then at least he would be aware that that abomination was on the loose.

Immediately, he stood up, went ghost, and flew out of the hospital faster than you could say 'fizzling phantoms.'

"Daniel? DANIEL?! GET BACK HERE." Vlad snarled, morphing and pursuing the boy right on his tail.

It was still early morning, with dense dirty clouds hanging low over the seemingly dead city. Within several seconds (hey, Amity Park is a small town) he had flown into the crumbled remains of the Nastyburger and began throwing aside chunks of cement and debris, frantically scrabbling through the wreckage all the while muttering to himself. Plasmius soon followed, teleporting in front of the younger hybrid right as he located and picked up the thermos, utterly bent, battered, and...

Gripping Danny by his neck, Vlad electrocuted the boy, forcing him to turn back human. At least the young halfa was already weak, that made less work on Vlad's part. Despite being weakened though, the thermos remained in his tightened grasp.

"The thermos." Danny gasped, slightly squirming under Vlad's hold, "The thermos. It holds t...the...the ghosts I caught earlier that day."

"You and your stupid ghost hunting." He remarked in annoyed resignation before teleporting them back to his hospital room. The raven-haired boy winced upon the return; it had been his first time experiencing teleportation and it was the most unpleasant sensation he had ever felt. He would be crossing that off his list of 'powers to learn'.

Throwing Danny back on the bed, Plasmius turned back into Masters with his hands behind his back and nodded at the younger halfa shortly, "You were saying..?"

At this point, Danny was just going to wing it. "U-um...yeah...uh...so...everyone in Amity Park hangs out a-at the Nastyburger and...and...and I was fighting this ghost and I accidentally hit one of their vats of...erm...Nastysauce...which...blows up when overheated...and...yeah..." In a way he wasn't entirely lying, he was just being selective of what he said. He swallowed dryly and looked down at the sealed thermos to reaffirm it, in fact, was closed. The containment device definitely looked more fragile, however, by the little dents that could be seen from Dan attempting to break out. Shivers traveled down his spine at the sight, Yikes, I'm going to need a stronger thermos.

Vlad's hand slapped to his face and dragged down as he groaned. "Daniel, you absolute imbecile. That means idiot, by the way, since you're so bad at English." Eyes closed, he threw back his head and rubbed further at his face, his hands ending up on the top of his hair as he blinked. He stood like that for a few seconds, until he eventually plopped back down in the bedside chair and pinched the bridge of his nose, a pained expression plastered underneath his well-maintained fingernails and unraveling grey hair strands.
Danny remained silent, watching Vlad, who was clearly frustrated. Of course the teen had to take the blame for the greater good. And he'd get the brunt of the consequences, as always. Welcome to his life—wanna trade?

"Ah, well..." Masters spoke after a while, bringing his hand down from his face and adjusting his ruby cufflinks, "Guess it couldn't be helped considering you have no control over your powers. If only you had agreed to become my mentee, then we wouldn't be sitting here now would we?"

Woah, wait. Did Vlad just forgive him? In his own weird way? But, was it really forgiveness if he still brought up his grudge-holding?

Haha, what was Danny thinking? Vlad? Forgiveness? No way. Masters was trying to manipulate the teenager into going under his wing. He had to be. What other reason would he be here?

"You're one seriously crazed up Frootloop. You talk as if I'll become your evil apprentice now...now that..." He gulped again, not wanting to finish the sentence. Or this conversation.

Vlad took in a regal breath and dived close to the hybrid, his hands gripping the railing as he got up in Danny's face, "Now that you've managed to hurt those you love with your idiotic teenage arrogance? That you've lost everything holding meaning in your life? That your inexperience and youthfullness—your greatest attributes and weaknesses—have lead to your demise? Maybe it hasn't passed over that humongous head of yours; you have nothing, Daniel!"

The teenager faltered, choking on his comeback for this selfish man that stood before him. Vlad was right. Danny had nothing anymore. His life had been decimated in one costly mistake, transforming the world as he knows it and throwing him into a dizzying abyss, leaving him to fend for his own. There was no more overwhelming support, only emptiness. All the things Danny used to worry about before this seemed stupid compared to the grave situation he now stood in the center of. Grades and a need to be approved by his peers became replaced by a genuine fear of death and impending worldly destruction. Everything seemed serious and raw and scary. He gazed into the older hybrid's chilling eyes as if to stand his ground until it became too painful, moving his gaze back to his lap and biting his lip so hard that it began to bleed. Darkness hovered over his shoulders...clouding him in...his eyes watered and streaks of light sparkled off the thermos he held limply. The darkness hesitated to go further when the thermos vibrated slightly.

Danny didn't have nothing, he had his thermos. His purpose in life: to protect. Dan was in here, he was still possible, Danny couldn't give up yet, he still had a job to do. Vlad didn't know as much as Danny did about his situation, he only thought he did. And he was trying to twist Danny's mind, to pollute it with doubt and make Danny run to him in desperation. The boy collected his courage and held the device close to his heart, changing the subject to avoid having his beliefs and feelings twisted into Vlad's conniving hands. "Why did the nurse call you doctor?"

"Very well, we'll put that conversation off until a later time, you must be overwhelmed. But still incredibly naive hm? Thanks to your foolishness, I had to take over as your doctor to keep our secret intact. You're welcome, by the way."

"Oh..." Why didn't that occur to him earlier? "Well...what happened to me? Why am I here?"

"Second degree burns over the front of your body and a minor concussion."

Looking at his arms, he couldn't see any burns. He frowned and pulled the collar of the hospital gown away from his front to peek at his chest, which also looked burn-free.

"By now they've healed." Added Vlad. "Surely you've noticed our incredible regenerative properties?"
"Oh...I thought those were just for cuts and bruises..."

"No, my boy." He chuckled, "That's absurd. But what's more absurd is how you haven't even touched puberty yet."

"Hey! I have!" Offended, Danny reached down to his leg, searching for a few seconds until finding a hair, which he plucked and held up. "Does this not scream 'puberty'."

"More like whispers."

The teen fell quiet, not wanting to respond. This conversation was too similar to one he'd had with Tucker and Sam recently. Feeling the sadness consume his chest along with the sudden awareness of how cold the room was, he curled up into a ball and placed his head between his knees. Exhaling, he hoped his breath would warm him up, then realized it did the opposite. The joys of being half ghost.

Vlad, on the other hand, felt tense with the sudden silence (a silence Vlad did happen to notice) a small amount of guilt chipping away at his conscience. He was so used to regarding Danny as a smart, cheeky, teenager. Not a child with fears and issues. But he would need to start putting that into consideration with his plans, now.

Picking up the sheets he had ripped from the younger hybrid earlier, Vlad put them back on Daniel's bed, who looked up in surprise before slowly pulling the bedding closer to him and allowing it to encase his cold form. It was clear the boy didn't know what to think of the kind action but accepted it nevertheless in confusion of his swirling world.

The billionaire then grabbed the styrofoam cup that had sat forgotten on a cart. He had been working on paperwork earlier that night when he noticed the boy stirring, a sign that he'd wake up soon, and knowing the teenager would be parched and starving, he left to pick up ice. He might as well give it to the child now before it melted, even if he was currently cold. The ice would ease his stomach and his unused tastebuds. Willing his energy to heat the room, he handed the cup to the Danny with a stoic look and said, "I brought you ice. Figured you'd want it since you've been unconscious for three days." He hesitated before adding, "Are you hungry too?"

Not meeting Vlad's eyes, the teenager accepted the ice warily and picked up the spoon wedged in his cup, fighting the slippery morsels onto the utensil. "Sure."

The older hybrid nodded and left to what Danny assumed was the hospital cafeteria. Spooning the ice into his mouth he thought, "If Vlad thinks bringing me food will put aside our rivalry, he's horribly wrong. But that can't be all there is...right?" Was there something more the billionaire wanted from him? There had to be...Did he want all of his mom's stuff? Or to burn his dad's belongings? Or both his parents' equipment and inventions? Oh...but then he wouldn't have threatened to demolish Fentonworks.

What if instead...he didn't want anything...but did something to him while he was unconscious and was waiting for it to take effect? What if he put a microchip or something of the sort into him?! Or messed with his body?! Danny began to frantically search his body for signs of...well..he wasn't exactly sure what he was looking for but something suspicious.

Vlad laughed at the squirming teenager when he suddenly returned, a bag in his hand. "What on earth are you doing?"

"I know you did something to me while I was out!" He accused, turning around violently to look at his back.
"Now why would I do that?"

"Because...because you never go out of your way for the sake of other people. There's something you want, isn't there?"

"Is that so?" The billionaire cocked his head slightly, a relaxed yet playfully mature expression on his face.

"What's your real reason for being here, Plasmius?" Danny seethed, cutting to the chase.

Handing the black-haired boy a fresh croissant, he said, "Well, I wouldn't be a good godfather if I didn't take care of my godson now would I?"
Did I mention I love foreshadowing? :D

Did...did he hear that right? Did Vlad just call him his...godson?

Danny blinked, ignoring the croissant Vlad held in his outstretched hand, "What did you say?"

Vlad smiled almost sinisterly, maybe even suspiciously. "What did you think I said?"

Frowning, the teen warned, "I'm not in the mood for jokes, Plasmius."

"When did I say I was joking?"

Nobody in their right mind would appoint Vlad as a godfather. He was sure his mom wouldn't...she heavily disliked Vlad after the events with DALV. Even his dad who worshipped Vlad wouldn't...right? This had to be a ploy. Plasmius just wanted to trick him into becoming his evil son apprentice/mentee...

"That's not true." Danny glared at his arch-enemy spitefully, "You're not my godfather. What are you playing at?"

"I believe this..." He phased his hand into his suitcase, bringing out a piece of paper, "...says otherwise." Masters threw the document at Danny's feet, who angrily snatched it up. "Third paragraph."

*In the case of my husband and I's death, I appoint Vlad Masters of 666 Swiss Hills, Viroqua WI, 53188 to be the guardian of any of my children under the age of 18.*

The entire will had been written in his mom's handwriting, although it accounted for both her and dad. No surprise there, mom took charge of the legal and financial duties of the household. He recognized the stationary was the fancy parchment she usually reserved for sending to their college friends in the event of a wedding or something of the sort. At the bottom of the page was both of their scribbly signatures, and he turned the paper over to see the ink from the document had bled through. Danny's heart stopped.

This wasn't a fake will. This was real. This was very very real.

"No." He whispered, "No way."

Vlad took the document from him, placed the croissant in the hand that wasn't holding the styrofoam cup, and put the will back into his suitcase. "Eat, Daniel." He commanded as he picked up the IV equipment and threw it away. The teen wouldn't be needing it now that he had healed and woken up.

How could he eat with this information? He felt beyond nauseated. What kind of messed up nightmare is this?! Why couldn't he wake up?! Why would mom and dad make Vlad, of all people, his godfather?! It made absolutely no sense; whatever happened to Aunt Alicia? Even though he
didn't enjoy the prospect of living with his aunt, anything would be better than going to Vlad. Him going to Vlad was what lead to the incarnation of Dan in the alternate timeline! There was no way he could allow himself to go through with this, he needed to prevent Dan's emergence as much as possible. It didn't matter how alone he was, or if he had to live on the streets or in the ghost zone...And then there was the fact that Vlad was the exact opposite of nurturing and parent-like. Maybe in the other timeline, Vlad wholeheartedly accepted Danny because he had surrendered. Well, there was no way Danny was going to surrender in this timeline. The hero inside him would make sure of that.

"I'm not...you're not...no...jeeze...I...they...I refuse..."

"Not an option. As of now, I am your legal guardian, which means I have authority and rights over you." The expression on Vlad's face said it all. He enjoyed saying every letter in that sentence. And Danny so did not.

"I-I...you...what...Does that make me your property now?"

"Oh...property is such a negative word..but yes." He smirked darkly.

"Property or not, you can't make me do what you want me to do. I refuse to be your godson. I don't care what 'the law' says."

"It's a lost effort Daniel, come now, you're smarter than that. I'm the only one who can possibly understand your situation. I'm the only one willing to put a roof over your head, feed you, clothe you, educate you. I can finally show you what a real father is supposed to be like." Was it weird Danny took Vlad's insults about his dad with comfort? It was the only aspect of his previous life that remained constant. Well, that and their ghostly rivalry. But comfort aside, the insults always brushed Danny the wrong way.

"You're wrong. You're not the only person willing to take me in. My aunt would be more than willing to house me."

"Your aunt lives in less than desirable conditions. Farm work surrounded by...uncivilized hoodlums..." a grimace wormed it's way onto his evil face, "...Is no way to spend the rest of your adolescence."

How did Vlad know this much about Aunt Alicia anyways? No, wait, never mind, he didn't want to hear the answer to that. He was 99.9% sure what it already was.

"I don't care. I'd take her over you in a heartbeat."

"And I couldn't care less of your opinion. This isn't an option, you have no say in this."

Huffing, Danny placed the croissant, ice, and thermos on his bedside table. Standing up shakily but firmly, he steadied himself and went into a fighting stance proclaiming, "But I do have a fist in this."

Vlad raised a mocking eyebrow, watching with amusement as the teenager announced his (stupid) catchphrase, failing to morph a first, a second, and a third time. Each attempt ending with his blue-haloed rings fizzling out before they could even separate. Daniel looked down at himself with a murderous glare, frustrated at the current state of his physical health.

"I'm simply trembling." The billionaire sarcastically commented.

Shoving down his embarrassment, Danny swept aside plan A and jumped to plan B, charging at
Plasmius with readied fists. When he reached close proximity, Vlad grabbed Danny's head and held him at an arm's length, restraining him from coming any closer. The boy's wildly flying fists repeatedly pummeled at air inches from his stomach.

"Look at you, you're pathetic. You can't make it out there on your own as a...what do the other ghosts say...'halfa' was it? You need me, Daniel."

Danny continued to swing at the older hybrid, each punch diminishing in strength. Through gritted teeth he shot back, "I. Don't. Need. You."

"Ah, that stubbornness of yours." Vlad shifted his weight so he was leaning against Danny with his elbow resting on the boy's head, "You get that from your mother's end of the gene pool. A blessing and a curse."

Suddenly Danny swung his foot at the leg holding Vlad's center of balance and successfully floored him, ducking to make way for the older hybrid's trip to the ground. Who managed to catch himself before his head made contact, muttering, "You get wit from your mother too." He glanced briefly at Daniel, who stood hunched over his own knees with labored breath, obviously having used his stamina poorly. Noting the opening, Vlad willed his energy at the boy and knocked him back with an ectoblast, taking the teen out faster than a lightbulb.

Masters stood up, brushed the dust from his suit jacket, and slinked over to the boy that lay collapsed on the floor. He picked Daniel up with care and set him back on the bed, standing back to bask in his small victory.

He had hoped that Danny would have accepted his guardianship with open arms, but that may have been a bit of a stretch. After all, they had a rather ugly history with each other. Perhaps Danny was unable to see past that.

Not that it would matter, given the situation. The child would have to buck up and deal. And so would he.

Vlad smiled to himself as he looked down at the beaten half-ghost. The boy really did favor Maddie's side of the gene pool. Apart from his jet black hair and blue eyes, the teen's remaining facial features and physique were the spitting image of her, even his personality and intelligence. Here...on this bed...was what remained of Maddie. Her imprint on this earth.

There's that pang in his conscience again. Would he dare lay an unwanted hand on Maddie? Would Maddie like how he is treating her son? Not at all...but it was necessary. He never listened, words seemed to go straight through his head. A trait belonging to Jack. The only way to go was to beat some sense into him. A method that had yet to be proven, but will be. One way or another.

But wouldn't that be disrespecting to Maddie's memory?

Although...it just felt so good to lay his hands on Jack's son. It was almost as satisfying as beating up Jack himself, something Vlad couldn't partake in anymore, thanks to Danny.

Augh. Ever since he learned of their demise, the billionaire's thoughts and views of Danny had become mixed. He was even regarding Maddie with...compassion; a trait Vlad despised. Compassion never got anyone anywhere, it was a weight to be pulled around, holding you back from your potential.

Vlad looked away from the hybrid and found himself walking over to the window again, taking in the bright blue sky. The vast blue openness had a calming effect on him as if just looking at it
could clear his thoughts. The window was the only good place in this hospital.

Just like their ghost half was a part of their human half, Daniel's parentage would always be two sides of a coin. If only that wasn't so, then Vlad wouldn't feel conflicted about this child. If he didn't know exactly who Danny was, how should he treat him? Like his beloved Maddie? Or that wretched Jack?

*Maybe he's neither.* A little voice rang in the back of his head. *Maybe he's just Danny. Or maybe he's you. You said it yourself, the similarities are growing ever so larger.*

A tightness gripped at his throat. He should dwell on this later. He had things to do. Now that Danny has woken, he could finally arrange to have him discharged and they could both go back to the privacy of this mansion. There was no need to stay for a funeral, there wouldn't be one. Maddie had requested there be no funeral, and although the reason wasn't stated, Vlad knew it was because the turnout for the funeral would be incredibly low. The only family Maddie and Jack stayed in touch with was Alicia. Other than that, the rest of Maddie's family had been clear they didn't want anything to do with her anymore. As for Jack, who came from a long line of supernatural enthusiasts, the majority of his family had either mysteriously disappeared or been so obsessed with their work they never bothered to forge relationships with family members. Although, they occasionally visited from time-to-time, but mostly with the intent of getting help to capture a sasquatch or something.

And most, if not all the townspeople interviewed for the newspaper expressed their relief that the "incompetent" Fentons wouldn't be around to bother them anymore.

So, Vlad respected Maddie's wishes and had the family cremated, supplying the most beautiful of urns to hold their remains. Even Jack's was beautiful, although it cost considerably less than Jasmine and Maddie's. He had arranged for the containers to be shipped to his residence. By now they've probably arrived.

He tore himself from those unsettlingly white window panes and left Daniel's hospital room to schedule the boy's discharge. If all went well, they could be released before dinnertime.

**Masters** ran his hand along the fabric of a teal jumpsuit, feeling every small thread underneath his thick yet elegant fingers. It still smelled like Maddie, a heavenly mix of Ralph Lauren perfume and ectoplasm. Vlad had given her the perfume, but she wasn't aware of it; On Maddie's birthday, he had visited Fentonworks to find Jack in a frenzy over forgetting to purchase a gift, the blundering idiot. If she was *his* wife, he would never forget her birthday. Anyways, knowing she might not accept his gift (she pretended to dislike him since his confession, such a feisty woman), he handed it to Jack and told him that he could give her his gift instead. Jack, being a buffoon, took the gift happily, thinking Vlad was acting purely out of the good of his heart. Such innocence he had. How unfortunate.

Vlad looked up from Maddie's jumpsuit and around the Fenton's bedroom, which looked slightly untidy as if the owners had been in a rush to leave. Changing his mind, he brought his attention back to the dresser he had kneeled in front of. He'd deal with discerning Maddie's belongings from Jack's later, it was better to start with her clothing, he could easily tell which articles belonged to who. Packing all of her jumpsuits, pajamas, and underwear into a box, he transformed back into Plasmius and phased out of Fentonworks, setting the box in his helicopter before grabbing an empty one and flying back. He then took their pale green bedding and folded it neatly into the package, placing Maddie's pillow, the one on the left side of the bed, on top. Thankfully, Vlad could tell which side of the bed his love slept on by the strong odor Jack gave off. No doubt he would have the right side of the bedspread removed, he didn't want a trace of Jack contaminating
Maddie's possessions.

With room for one more item in the box, he picked up her makeup bag and closed the box with care, making another trip to his helicopter and back. He repeated these actions, taking things like her small collection of shoes and jewelry, finishing with all their legal documents, including Daniel's birth certificate and a handful of other papers.

After giving the bedroom a final look-over for any missing items, he phased down to the basement lab to see his duplicates had nearly finished packing away Fenton weapons, pieces of equipment, and journals. He'd need to hire someone to move the Specter Speeder and Ghost Assault Vehicle (GAV), he wasn't in the mood to have his duplicates steer them back to Wisconsin for several hours. He could feel the boredom it would bring just thinking about it.

Satisfied with his duplicates' work, he phased up to the final room he needed to check: Daniel's. He would have brought the boy himself to pack his belongings, but seeing that he was less than willing to go with him, Vlad decided he should just pack for the boy. If the billionaire forgot anything, then he can arrange for the movers to grab whatever it is.

He wrinkled his nose at the smell that hit him upon entry; a strange mixture of sweat and shampoo. As if Daniel was a clean person but was struggling to uphold that reputation. Half his room looked as if a tornado hit it, with his sheets partially twisted off the bed and clothing lying haphazardly. The other half appeared immaculate, his desk organized (minus the thin coating of dust) and bookshelf arranged alphabetically.

Thankful for his ability to float as to avoid stepping on such an unsightly mess, Vlad peeked into Daniel's already opened closet, removing a grey duffle bag. He had no suitcases, that would need to be fixed. Although he remembered seeing plenty of tan suitcases in Fenton bedroom. He retrieved said suitcases and spread them on Daniel's bed, placing the grey duffle bag next to them. Turning back to the mess next to the bed, he frowned disapprovingly as he picked up a dirty t-shirt, holding it with his utmost fingertips. "Thank god I wear gloves."

He placed all of the dirty clothing in one suitcase, and while he folded all of the boy's clean clothing, his duplicates slowly came up one by one to lend a hand in packing the rest of Daniel's possessions.

As they packed away, Vlad noticed a recurring theme: space. There had been NASA t-shirts, space magazines and books, space shuttle models, posters and canvases with illustrations of planets and stars, and a certificate claiming Danny a certified junior astronaut. Even his laptop, which Vlad had admitingly snuck on while his duplicates worked away, had space wallpaper and related bookmarked web pages. Obviously, the boy was fixated on astronomy. Something the billionaire had turned a blind eye to in the time they had been acquainted. Another item that caught Vlad's attention was a shoebox he found underneath his bed, next to a large array of ghost hunting weapons labeled with "mysteriously disappeared." Inside the box was a collection of first aid supplies, spotted with flecks of blood and ectoplasm. Vlad had grimaced and thought, how unsanitary.

Inside the boy's desk lay a pile of pictures containing memories of his family and friends, and on the back of each picture was a marked date. As Vlad looked through the pictures, he noticed there was a large date gap of around a month where no pictures had been taken. Interesting.

When the room was eventually emptied, Vlad's duplicates hauled the suitcases up to the helicopter while the real Vlad wrote a list of larger items that'd need to be moved by professionals. He decided he'd bring the entirety of Daniel's room back to the mansion in hopes that it would remind the boy of the life he once had, ruined with his stupidity. Otherwise he would've gifted the boy much better quality furniture.
After finishing the list he did one last check of Fentonworks. Feeling satisfied with his haul, he picked up the grey duffle bag, morphed back into Masters, and locked the front door, looking up wistfully at the lifeless building, complete with obsolete OP center and dead sign.

And with that, he turned around and made his way back to the hospital, his duplicates joining back with him while he made the short trip. In all honesty, he could've flown there, but he was in no rush to return to that hell-hole. Glancing at his watch, he deduced it was 5:47 P.M. and the boy wasn't due to be discharged until 6:00. He had time.

Vlad suppressed a yawn; he hadn't slept in all the time he was at the hospital, one reason being he couldn't bring himself to relax in there. But the majority of the blame pointed to the legal mess the Fenton's had left for him. Like most American families they had lived neck-deep in debt, putting loans on all of their scientific studies and equipment. They also owed money to just about every private and government-owned business in Amity Park for property damages, no doubt that Jack had been kicking walls down and blasting anywhere he pleased. Then there was the long and binding process of transferring all ownership to Vlad himself and closing all of their financial accounts, and to top it all off, he had yet to obtain their death certificates.

Making his promenade through downtown Amity Park, the older hybrid stiffened at the sight of large buildings and city life. Rush hour traffic was still at large, car horns honking in a repeatable fashion. Crowds of people waited impatiently at intersections and the air hinted of raw sewage and cigarettes. The sun had already begun its descent to the horizon, however, it couldn't be seen past the towering apartment complexes, hotels, and shops. (Sorry if this isn't accurate, I've only been to Tokyo. And I am not a city girl—I live in a wildlife reserve)

Vlad absolutely despised city life, it reminded him too much of his early years. Years he was anything but fond of. Thankfully, Amity Park wasn't nearly as hectic as San Fransisco. This he could handle.

Even with his slow strides, he found himself walking through the hospital entrance far sooner than he was mentally prepared. He nodded in response to hearing, "Welcome back, Dr. Masters." from the greeting desk and briskly made his way up toward M2, employees respectfully addressing him all the way. Vlad preferred to phase into Daniel's room rather than embarking the human way, but there were cameras everywhere. He'd managed to delete the footage of his and Daniel's little altercation earlier, although it took a good amount of manipulation to achieve it. He wasn't going to do it again, especially when he was so close to leaving this place for good. Nothing would delay him of his escape.

Opening the door to Danny's room quietly, he peeked in to see the younger hybrid still out cold. Good. He didn't need him making a scene while they left. Masters set down the duffle bag and placed the boy's thermos in it grudgingly. As much as he didn't want to encourage the hobby, the boy looked like he'd seen a ghost when he realized the device wasn't on him. Old habits die hard. Vlad was no stranger to that.

He picked up the neat stack of Daniel's clothing that lay by the door, items Vlad had taken from Daniel's room two days ago, just in case Danny woke up. Although he hadn't stayed long to get a good look, he was in a hurry. It wasn't until today he noticed the strangeness of his room. With rushed urgency, he set the attire next to the unconscious teen and phased off the hospital gown, replacing it with grey sweatpants and a red and white hoodie bearing his high school's logo. There was no way he'd be seen wheeling a half-naked teenager down the hall. And speaking of wheeling...

"Oh, fudge buckets!" Vlad stormed out into the hallway and had a nurse retrieve a wheelchair,
curtly thanking the young male before rushing back into his room. He hurriedly shoved Daniel into it, who by the way, is rather light, picked up his suitcase and the duffel bag, and made a beeline for the helipad.

*Goodbye and good riddance.*
Imprisonment

Chapter Notes

If your dreams aren't as random and weird as this, then what on earth is wrong with me?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tucker, Sam, Jazz, mom, dad, everyone. They crowded around Danny, all of them ghosts. Grabbing parts of his shirt, hair, and pant legs, they chanted in a chorus of, "Why Danny?" "Why did you let him do it?" "But you promised Danny!" "Aren't you supposed to be a hero, Danny?"

Danny sat in the midst of it, taking in everything. They all looked so forlorn, so...abandoned. Why did they keep repeating their questions?

Oh...he hadn't answered them yet. Why hadn't he answered? He really should.

Before he could open his mouth everything swirled, and he found himself on a city street, observing Dan walking a dog casually like a normal person. He wasn't sure why, but he assumed the man with flaming hair was a random passerby. The teen turned his attention to the Nastyburger but instead saw an enormous ticking time bomb with his family and friends strapped to it. A hand jerked Danny's chin from the horrifying sight and brought it to an even worse one; Dan, who grinned maniacally and stuck out his serpent-like tongue, the rough forks sliding around Danny's face. He leaned in close to Danny, his breath reeking of oppression and rasped, "I'm inevitable."

"Your name is Inevitable? I thought it was Larry. Dude, decide."

Danny gasped, eyes momentarily glowing green when he wrenched them open in the pitch black. His heart pounded in his chest and he felt so hot, so icky, so sweaty. The blankets rested on his body weirdly, almost uncomfortably, and Danny tore them off, still panting from his nightmare. He ran his sweaty hand through his sweaty scalp and hair, expecting it to somehow cool him off but only rising his body temperature.

Man, that was one terrifically deranged dream. What was that all about?

For several minutes he lay, gulping in air and recovering from his nightmare. The half-ghost tried to recall one of Jazz's many psychological rants, a particular one regarding dream interpretation but drew to a blank. Groaning and turning onto his side, he wished he had listened to it. To everything she had said when she was alive. Of course his overbearing sister wasn't around when he wanted her to be; the universe worked in ironic ways. Danny sighed and rolled over to a cooler section of the bed, ending up on his belly.

Woah. Hold the phone, the hospital bed isn't nearly this large. Nor does it smell like... Pine scented air freshener.

He immediately sat up, eyes as large as dinner plates. If his hunch was correct, then he was no longer in Amity Park.

Fumbling for the lamp on the side of the bed, he only managed to grasp onto a stone pillar. There
were no lamps, he'd have to stumble through the darkness trying to find a switch. He scooted to the edge of the mattress and cautiously brought himself down, limbs still shaky from disuse. Allowing himself to stabilize, he took a definitive step forward only to tumble down a half-foot high platform and faceplant on the cold stone floor.

That confirmed it. He hadn't even turned on the light and he already knew he was at Vlad's. What kind of psycho puts beds on a short platform like some princess movie? it was a legitimate hazard, he nearly broke his neck every time he crossed its threshold during the college reunion.

Clumsily picking himself up from the ground, he staggered to the nearest wall, hissing when his hip grazed against the sharp corner of a table. At least he could tell he was nearby those stupid electric candles perched on the surface of his assaulter.

Wait a minute, what am I doing? I have ghost powers! Danny reached into the weak warm spot near his heart, willing his energy to light up his hand for at least a few seconds so he could catch a glimpse of his surroundings. But before he could even draw it out, he was met with a dizzy sensation that increased the further he tried. The teen let go of his energy and groaned, grabbing his head and waiting for the feeling to pass. He was too weak.

Further avoiding contact with the table, the teen pressed himself against the wall, rubbing his hands against it until one hit a switch, immediately slamming it up.

An eerie glow illuminated the dark blue and indigo color scheme of Vlad's guest room. It hadn't changed since Danny last stayed at the mansion. A four poster bed stood as the main attraction of the room, with intricately embroidered purple canopies to match the covers and a masterly woodworked headboard. Windows that nearly reached the ceiling towered over, their beautiful stained glass design hidden by teal draperies. A peacock blue Persian rug lay at the foot of the bed right in front of the humongous doorway, which stood between another pair of magnificent pillars identical to the ones next to the bed. And beneath those pillars closer to the door lay what he recognized as mom and dad's travel suitcases and his grey duffel bag. He stiffened at the sight, having not expected their presence.

Vlad had been going through Fentonworks, no surprise there. He padded over to the duffel bag first and unzipped it to find a change of clothes, toiletries, his laptop, and the thermos holding Dan. Moving onto the nearest luggage, he found his clothing and shoes had been crammed in the first two, his models carefully packed into the third one, astrological books and NASA magazines in a fourth, and other respective items in the fifth. It wasn't everything that had been in his room, but it was a majority of it. It still held the smell of his residence.

Good god, Vlad not only went through Fentonworks, he went through his room. The room that held his utmost private and important possessions. And he brought those possessions all the way here. All the way to Wisconsin.

It angered Danny greatly—the nerve of this passive-aggressive man; he doesn't know when to quit. Now Danny was one step closer to achieving the fate bestowed upon him by this timeline. Not that it wasn't Vlad's fault since Danny didn't want to warn him what the future held. Such knowledge could make things worse. Nevertheless, he found Vlad's stubbornness annoying; a thorn in his side.

He needed to confront Plasmius, to somehow persuade him to let him go. What was it he wanted...? His mom wasn't an option, nor the denouncement of his father. Not like he'd seriously consider it anyway. Maybe information on the ghost zone? No...Vlad knew more than Danny when it came to all things ghostly.

Geez, what did this guy want? What was there to give? Danny had no money, no ghostly artifacts,
no family...

He was going about this all wrong. If he didn't know what Vlad wanted, and if Vlad never bothered to heed Danny's words in the past, then he needed to find another way.

He gazed around the room as if to look for some clue, some item that might lend him an idea. Unable to spark his imagination, the teen walked over to the windows and wrenched open the curtains, unleashing moonlight to fill the minimally lit room. Looking at the view that was the vast isolation of Vlad's property, he saw grass and forest for miles. And judging by the position of the moon in the sky, it was around 10:00. A grin slapped itself across his face. Danny didn't have to confront Vlad at all, he could just escape. Even without the use of his ghost powers he could totally make it...anyone can climb down a mansion, it can't be that hard...

With haste, he ran his hands along the panels of the window trying to find a handle to use. Not coming across anything of the sort, he stepped back to gain a better view of the frame. An intricately black stained glass illustration came into view with gigantic crisscrossed patterns spread throughout the aperture. And in the center of what appeared to be the Dairy King's crest was a small lock.

Wonderful.

Vlad locked him in. There goes that plan.

If the window was locked, was the door too? Danny ran back to the door and twisted the knob slowly and quietly. When it wouldn't twist any further, he pulled the door towards himself and the light from the hallway crept into his room. Bingo. He could look through the mansion for some sort of escape, and the possibility of crossing paths with its owner was slim. This place was too large for him to run into Vlad, and the billionaire was most likely sleeping anyways. Danny was certain he would try and keep him from leaving.

The young halfla grabbed a frame holding a picture of everyone in front of Fentonworks, placed it carefully next to Dan's portable prison, zipped up his belongings, and dragged the bag to the door. Carefully poking his head into the hallway, he checked for any looming arch-enemies. When he saw the course was clear, Danny slowly stepped into the hallway with his duffel bag slung over his shoulder.

Standing in the middle of the torch-lit Prussian blue corridor, he looked both ways trying to determine which direction to pursue. On his left was a huge line of guest rooms identical to his, eventually leading to a dead-end with another towering window. And on his right, more guest rooms that lead to an archway. Right it is then. He thought, starting to walk in said direction.

As he trod towards the archway, Danny noticed that between every couple of doors was a mirror with a console table underneath, and all the doorways were lined with intricate pattern-engraved marble. Two curved lines of tiles traveled across the ceiling symmetrically, occasionally joining to form a curved 'X' with a lantern that hung at the point of contact. The floor was a longer and larger version of the rug in his guest room, connecting the two far ends of the long passage.

He wasn't sure where he would go when he left the mansion. He knew it wasn't smart to go out into the world without being able to use his powers, but it was better if he were out there than in here where his fate awaited him. Walking through the dark halls of Vlad's manor, the shadows loomed over his shoulders tauntingly while his anxiety vibrated inside him like tidal waves, engulfing his whole body and washing away, only to return full-fledged seconds later. Gulping down his shuddering breaths, he tried to contain his dry fear. A part of him told him to stay, to at least bring up his strength before releasing himself to the cruel world. But he didn't want to take
any help from Vlad; the less he received from the older hybrid the better he'd feel about avoiding his fate. Danny already felt contaminated enough.

When he reached the cased opening, he came to a corner that forced him to continue left, bringing him to another long hallway. But this time, there was a large staircase in the center of more guest rooms leading down to who-knows-where.

Careful to make his descent quietly, he lightly pressed each step with his toe before putting all of his weight on it to avoid creaky stairs. After 10 minutes he finally reached the bottom which was in a large room that united the surrounding archways and halls. He immediately recognized this area and quickly walked towards his left, where he knew the foyer was. And from there he coul-

"Going somewhere?"

The teenager jumped and automatically looked at the archway he had passed on his right. Vlad leaned underneath it with a book slung in his arm and a smug expression plastered on his face. Contrary to his iron visage, his hair and suit appeared slightly tousled, and behind the billionaire, Danny saw what appeared to be a living room; one of many, most likely.

The boy quickly regained his composure and glared at the older hybrid, his grip on the duffel bag growing tighter. "Maybe."

"With the condition you're in? You can hardly defend yourself with your ghost powers. And without...well," he chuckled, "even I was surprised by your truly pathetic display earlier today."

Leave it to Vlad to throw the first insult. "You know what's pathetic? Living alone in a mansion as large as the Taj Mahal."

"Is that really? Last time I checked it was me and my...son." Vlad retorted, emphasizing the last word of his statement with mirth.

A low growl emitted from Danny's throat, and if he weren't so exhausted, his eyes would've shot lasers. "Don't you dare call me that."

"Oh, I shall dare." The billionaire narrowed his eyes challengingly although his statement suggested finality.

Danny stood scowling at Vlad, struggling to produce a comeback, and Vlad looked down on him; a knowing smile at the edge of his thin lips. The two gripped the other's pupils in a fierce deadlock, hatred and coolness crackling in the sticky atmosphere amongst them. Time seemed to stop, infatuated in their intensity.

Eventually, Danny tore his eyes from the clutches of Vlad's unforgiving oceanic blue ones and swung around angrily, continuing his initial course towards the foyer. Squeezing his unblinking eyes shut, he opened them to stinging air and a burned inverse image of his arch-enemy that reappeared as quickly as it went away whenever he blinked.

"Where will you stay?" Vlad inquired to Danny's retreating form, an air of superiority clinging to his deep voice.

"Anywhere but here."

"There's acres of forest surrounding this area."

"Forest it is, then."
"What will you eat?"

"Whatever I can get my hands on."

"And sleep?"

"I dunno."

"Daniel." Vlad gripped the boy's upper arm firmly. "You're acting as idiotic as your father."

"Like father, like son." Danny attempted to shrug off his grip, failing to slip away and nearly losing his balance.

The older hybrid scoffed quietly and began to drag him away, torchlight illuminating the tired angles of his face, temporarily lifting the mask he struggled to hold in place. Danny never noticed, he was too occupied with escaping; his heels dug into the rug to no avail, socks pulling painfully at his toes.

"Let...me...go." He grunted, twisting and turning every-which-way. He stretched in the direction of the foyer which grew smaller as he was pulled away from it, trying to close the distance.

Vlad stalked forward, indifferent to the struggling 14-year-old in his hand and ignoring his demands. They entered the foyer where tacky green and gold flashed at the two enemies. The more Danny tried to loosen his grip, the more the billionaire tightened it, his knuckles turning a brighter shade of white with every second that passed. Halfway across the entrance hall, Vlad grew tired of dragging Danny and morphed into Plasmius, the boy yelping at the hot sensation encasing the two. He flew into his private study with the teen in hand and phased into his private lab, not bothering with the long staircase.

Upon reaching the floor of the lab he held Danny's arm up to a bare wall next to the entrance just low enough for the boy to sit, and before the teen could comprehend his actions, he shot ectoplasmic goo onto his wrist as a makeshift handcuff. Turning back into Masters, he left the boy to his own devices and went to sit at his worktable, pulling up a large notepad.

Danny tried to wrench his hand from the goo but it wouldn't budge. Setting down his duffel bag next to him, he scratched and pulled at the sticky substance with his free hand, growing increasingly frustrated at his lack of headway. "Seriously, Plasmius?"

"Honestly, Daniel, it baffles me you can't see how weak you are right now. Insisting to go out and live like an animal when you can't even use your powers." He remarked, not looking up from his notepad. Sketches, messily scrawled notes, and equations littered the surface of the yellow paper. "Must I keep you on a leash to prevent you from hurting yourself?"

"Since when do you care about my welfare? You don't understand Vlad. I have to leave."

"And why is that?"

Danny raked his hand through his hair and licked his lips, struggling to come up with a vague yet understandable response. Huffing, the teen ceased his fight against the goo, slouching against the wall that held his wrist captive. The mystic green light of the ghost portal shimmered on him.

"It's not safe for you and I to be under the same roof."

"Because...?"
"We're arch-enemies! We can't-"

"I may be your arch-enemy, but you are no enemy of mine, dear boy. I hardly consider you a threat." Vlad chuckled, continuing to sketch out something.

Before the boy could respond, his stomach growled loudly, the sound echoing slightly in the large laboratory.

"Bet you wish you'd ate that croissant back at the hospital hmm? I did have a steak and a baked potato prepared for you, but since you were so fixated on running away I decided it's best to keep you weak until I devise a system that contains your rebellious fits. I can't have you running off after you regain your strength."

"Oh, I see," Danny replied in sarcastic understanding. "you must contain your property."

Vlad didn't bother to respond, infatuated in whatever he was working on. His fingers were pressed up to his temples and he sat hunched over his notepad muttering to himself. The younger hybrid exhaled, diverting his attention from the billionaire and taking in his surroundings, trying to memorize every detail of Vlad's lab for possible ways to escape.

It was incredibly minimalistic, with three pristine countertops in the center, one looking like a control center, the other two holding flasks, vials, beakers, and thermal cyclers. An eyewash station and shower were next to a large chamber similar to a tanning station. Everything else was incredibly high tech and expensive looking, items Danny, who only knew basic equipment, had no knowledge of. Large machines resembling refrigerators and copiers stood against the cylindrical perimeter of the lab, many of them connected to the wall by large conduits. A huge and indiscernible body suit that starkly resembled the ecto-skeleton stood in the shadows of the machines. Danny couldn't see it clearly enough to tell, but he was certain it was the same suit he fought Pariah Dark in.

The portal looked more big and modern than his parents'. It was twice the height of Danny's late father, and instead of a hexagonal lining, it had a diamond shaped one. There was also two lights on it instead of one, which acted as communicators between the portal and the computer system. Humongous pipes emerged from the device and splayed across the lab, pipes that Danny could walk through without crouching.

He gazed longingly into the swirling abyss of the dimensional doorway, realizing he had forgotten about the possibility of fleeing to the ghost zone. The region was mostly riddled with his ghostly enemies, but he had one ally named Frostbite who would've been more than willing to offer him hospitality. Now that he thought about it, the Far Frozen was a much better place to abscond to than the forest, although it was difficult to get places without working ghost powers. One needed to fly to get around.

As much as he hated to think about it, maybe he needed to stay in Vlad's mansion so he could have access to a ghost portal. Danny was certain the Fenton Portal was still in Amity Park since it wasn't portable, (the irony) and he had no idea how to get from Wisconsin to Colorado with only his two feet. Which meant Danny needed to rest and recover in Vlad's mansion until he was strong enough to venture into the Ghost Zone. He threw aside his precious plan of escaping to the forest. As tempting as it was to leave immediately, the forest didn't offer food and safety like the Far Frozen.

He looked back over at Vlad who was in the midst of creating some system that would "contain" Danny, remembering that the older hybrid wouldn't feed him until he finished whatever it was. If Danny wanted a chance to escape, then he had to convince Vlad he wouldn't run away so he couldn't implement whatever hinderance he was planning. Which would be difficult considering
the hole he had just dug himself into. He rubbed the back of his neck and silently said to himself, *this will require some serious thinking."

It was time for the manipulative to be manipulated.

*I should have let him go into the woods,* Vlad thought as he wrote a particular equation he knew like the back of his hand. *I should have let him figure out how much he needs me the hard way, as a consequence for rejecting my help.* Once the boy suffered enough, Vlad would swoop in and save him, and Danny would be so shaken and weak he would finally accept him in his feeble mental and physical state.

But he couldn't bring himself to do it. Something deep inside kept him from committing such a thing, and it bothered him that he couldn't quite put his finger on it. He would've been more than happy to give Daniel such treatment before his family's unfortunate death. So why did his stomach clench whenever he pictured the boy suffering to nature's wrath in the harsh outdoors? His sudden growth of a conscious baffled him greatly, if not bothered him.

Maybe he was scared that the boy would accidentally die out there, and then Vlad would have no son to love him. Or maybe he was scared that the boy would actually manage to survive and find the nearby town. Danny could be incredibly resourceful, more so than he knew. If the boy did fine in the wilderness then Vlad wouldn't be able to take him back in.

The billionaire hadn't been expecting Danny to outright reject his new fatherly status. What he had been expecting was to see a broken boy, turned into a shell of his formerly heroic and confident self, yet here he was, brazen and boldly snapping back at him like the little badger he was.

Masters glanced up briefly at Daniel, who was observing his lab with a desperate and scared look in his eyes, resembling that of a cornered animal. He was glad he didn't turn on all the lights, he didn't want to deal with Danny's questions about the ecto-skeleton. He was also thankful he had left the cloning project back at his chalet in the Rockies.

He had been trying his best to get over his deep affection for Maddie and turned his efforts to creating the perfect half-ghost son instead. Vlad had been so desperate for love, and not just love from anyone, but love from the son that was supposed to be *his.* The son that shared the burden and the gift of being part ghost.

So far the cloning has been unsuccessful, he'd had so many failures. But that was because half-ghosts were supposably biologically impossible, so cloning them would prove to be more tricky than a human. He'd had several subjects that he managed to give a physical form, but under physical exertion, they dissolved into ectoplasm. Although now that Daniel was with him, he could at least put the project on standby. If all went well, he'd gain the boy as a son and be able to throw the project away, or clone Maddie instead. He'd managed to receive the proper samples required to do so before she was cremated just in case he decided to go through with it.

Pushing his thoughts aside, he stood up and began organizing the materials he needed. His duplicate was heading towards the lab having just returned from an errand. He had been sent out to shoplift an electric dog collar that he would refurbish to act like the Plasmius Maximus. In all truth, an electric dog collar wasn't the best way to contain a half-ghost teenager but it was a good makeshift option that would give him time to work on a more reliable and stable system. As a businessman, Vlad was more than familiar with the term 'planned obsolescence' and preferred to create his own items and appliances, knowing he could control the quality and durability of the product.
Vlad felt his duplicate rejoin with him as he dropped the package on the table, and he immediately phased his hand into it to remove the contents. Danny never noticed, he was staring off into space, deep in thought, which urged Vlad to work faster. He didn't want to give the boy too much time to think.

Ripping off the back of the small machine connected to the collar, he set to work.

Chapter End Notes

Holy crap, this chapter was difficult to write. I'm not entirely sure if I'm happy with the outcomes of the character's actions and actually considered changing the paths they took but something held me back.

Although it may not seem like it, I actually have a LOT planned for this fanfiction, I know the general direction I want to go and have a lot of theories prepared. So bear with me while I set up the plot.
Shadows

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Whatever Vlad was doing, it was taking a long time. Two hours, to be exact.

Danny watched feverishly in his sitting position on the floor next to the entrance of the lab as the older hybrid tinkered around with some device. All he could see from his vantage point was Vlad's upper arms, which had shed his usual black jacket and wore rolled up sleeves. The white-hot sparks emitting from his project sprayed all over his front, but it didn't seem to hurt him; The only protective gear he wore was a high-tech pair of goggles that Danny could've mistaken for shades. The teenager found it odd how the billionaire could handle intensely hot temperatures.

Every so often Vlad would drop his work and phase through the ceiling of the lab for minutes at a time before returning to continue. Each time he left, Danny would muster up the courage to speak up, but when the billionaire came back, Danny would second-guess his plan and find himself back at square one.

But not this time.

"Uh...Uncle Vlad?" He forced out, ignoring the worries that sprang anew as he watched Vlad resume his position at the worktable.

The older hybrid spat "What." as he wrote something down, clearly annoyed to have his workflow interrupted.

"I've thought long and hard about this...and...I realize how stupid and pathetic I've been." He lied innocently.

"Oh please, I'm not going to fall for that stupid act again." The man retorted with boredom, removing his shades, he turned his back to the teen and put away his tools.

"No, really, I mean it! Nobody can replace my dad and take care of me better than you." Inwardly, Danny cringed and silently apologized to his father. It's for the greater good.

"Ah, then I guess this won't be much of a bother once I put it on you!" Vlad exclaimed proudly as he finally held up his now-finished device. With a sly grin, he phased through his worktable, striding towards Danny, whose mouth dropped when he caught sight of the object in the man's hands.

It was an entirely black strip of thick fabric with a piece of metal attached to it. On the inner side of the ringed fabric was two stubby prongs, and the accessory lacked any means of being put on, or taken off.

"I-is that a...a dog collar?!

"No, son, it's the new and improved version of the Plasmius Maximus." The billionaire knelt down in front of Danny, who pressed himself against the wall as much as possible, eyes locked on the collar with disbelief.

"Y-you aren't...no..you wouldn't..." His shoulders hunched up and he brought his hand to his neck in an attempt to cover the region, but it did little to hinder Vlad's intangible hands when he phased
the device onto the pale child. With a heartless laugh, he released his mental hold of the ectoplasm on the boy's wrist, allowing both of Danny's hands to come up to his neck and frantically feel around the new accessory. Hyperventilating slightly, he violently pulled at the device, only to strain his neck in the process. The thick slab of metal protruding from the ringed fabric made his neck feel slightly unbalanced, and it bothered him greatly that the small prongs poked into his throat.

"If you dare attempt to leave my home or enter a forbidden room, the Plasmius Maximus 2 will shock you and leave you powerless for not four, but five hours." He gloated, watching Danny's fingers scrabble helplessly against the fabric of the device. "Oh, and you have 15 seconds to leave my private lab unless you desire to be fried like an apple fritter."

Danny may not have access to his powers right now but, like anybody, he didn't enjoy the feeling of being electrocuted. Not even bothering to respond, he yanked open the door to the laboratory, running up the stairs and skipping 2 steps at a time until he reached the foyer and collapsed onto his knees, hands still attempting to keep the prongs in the collar from contacting his skin. He immediately closed his eyes and concentrated on pulling his energy from his core but Danny was met with another spell of dizziness and black stars that twinkled in his eyes.

Although he was a safe distance from the lab, the device still shocked him and a pained scream ripped from his throat as his body seized up. The older hybrid phased through the wall with an amused expression, grey duffel bag and remote in hand, flying in front of Danny as he waited for the attack to subside.

"I can also use it whenever I please, and it only responds to my ghost powers—you can't phase out of it." He added, waving the remote.

Hands still clasped to the collar, the teenager glared up at Vlad, and with a wavering but firm voice he said, "You've reached an all-new low, Plasmius."

Vlad gave him a look of disgust, "Don't pin this on me, Daniel. You're the one who made me resort to this. If you hadn't been so stubborn, all of this," he gestured to them and the surrounding area, "would have been so much easier for the both of us."

The younger hybrid rubbed his face in frustration, pulled his long bangs from his eyes, and shakily stood up, "If you'd only listen to me, then we wouldn't be in this mess in the first place."

"What mess? I have you as my son, the way it should've always been. You're right where you are meant to be, and it's all thanks to you, my boy."

"Augh! Why do I even bother?!" Danny yelled in frustration, throwing his hands up in the air. Vlad was impossible to get through to, it was like trying to dig a hole through diamonds using a toothpick. The fuming boy began to storm off in the direction of Vlad's private study doors, "I've had enough of this crap."

"Ah ah ah-" Plasmius materialized in front of the younger hybrid, forcing him to halt. "I said I'd give you dinner."

"I've lost my appetite." It was partly true; the pains in Danny's stomach nauseated him rather than made him hungry, and the collar rubbing against his throat made the simple act of swallowing uncomfortable. Had Vlad not pulled the sickening trick, he'd still force something down in preparation of fleeing to the Ghost Zone. But with Danny's plans obliterated, the teen wanted nothing more than to retreat to his guest room to regroup his thoughts.
"I don't care if you've lost your blasted appetite, you will eat something." He stated threateningly, grabbing the front of Danny's sweatshirt. "And if I have to shove it down your ungrateful throat, I won't hesitate to do so." Before Danny could throw back another quip, they phased together through several rooms and into the kitchen, where Vlad dropped the teenager on the cold tile and strode indifferently towards the refrigerator. Danny seethed and rubbed his sore bottom, which had been the first to contact the floor.

The kitchen shared the same color scheme as Vlad's private lab. State-of-the-art culinary appliances sat on a spotless countertop underneath sleek cupboards, most of which Danny had difficulty labeling apart from the Cuisinart blender and the microwave with no buttons or door handle. Next to the countertop was not one, but two electric ovens, and in the center of the kitchen resided a sparkling island with built-in marble placemats.

As Vlad rummaged around in the fridge, Danny stood up and took a seat at the island, observing the refrigerator door that bore a large control panel which regulated the temperature, humidity, and amount of oxygen inside. "Sheesh Vlad, why is your kitchen so decked out if you don't even use it?"

Removing a sleek plastic container from the cold storage box, the older hybrid ambled to the microwave where the shield that acted as a door disengaged after sensing his presence. He popped in the tupperware, tapped on a touchscreen, and the shield reappeared as a soft rumble emitted from the machine. "Whoever said I don't use it?" Vlad stated, crossing his arms and leaning against the countertop.

"Are you telling me you actually cook?" The halfa inquired with a tone of utter disbelief, still pulling at the uncomfortable collar chafing his neck.

"Of course I do, foolish boy."

Danny rolled his eyes, "Oh yeah, you're a single, lonely man in his forties. But seriously, you don't need all this crud. I bet you don't even know what half of these things do."

"I very well know the function of all of these." He snapped as he re-tied his hair which had been falling out of its usual ponytail. "I built them all."

"So that's what you're doing when you aren't spending time with your nonexistent wife!"

The microwave beeped and Vlad removed the steaming plastic container, slamming it down in front of the younger hybrid. "You seem to forget that your stupidity has placed you into a similar situation to mine." He prodded, removing an exquisite set of silverware from the drawer next to the sleek dishwasher.

"Vlad, I'm too young to get married."

"You know what I mean." He spat unappreciatively.

Ignoring Vlad's comment, the teenager averted his eyes down to his lap as Vlad set the silverware in front of him. Danny had been trying to push down the raw truth in a bad attempt to cope, and it was easy to do because he was still numb from shock. He couldn't bring himself to truly believe that his loved ones were dead. A part of him was waiting for the moment that they call Vlad, telling him they can't find their son, or the moment Danny woke from this never-ending nightmare to the sound of breakfast and inventing.

He also didn't have time to mourn with the impending disaster on his hands. In the grand scheme of
things, the prevention of world suffering inflicted by Dan came first on his list of priorities. Just because Danny was going through this didn't mean others had to too, and he felt it his duty to take full responsibility for the mess he had created.

"What do you want to drink?" Vlad asked with an irked tone, holding an intricately-cut crystal glass.

"I don't care," Danny responded lifelessly, wrestling down the grief of his dead family and friends. He stared at his untouched steak and baked potato; the mere smell of the food further nauseated him.

"Water it is, then." The sound of water filling a cup followed and the man placed said cup next to Danny's dinner, a small amount of the liquid spilling over onto the marble as it sloshed around from the force of Vlad's hand. "Eat, Daniel."

The boy shook his head, nose slightly wrinkled up. "Too nauseous."

Scoffing, Vlad responded, "Of course your stomach is upset, you haven't eaten for four days now. Just shove it down, the feeling will go away."

Indeed. What a loving and understanding parent-like figure. Thanks a lot, mom and dad.

Danny grumbled, picked up the fork, which was embellished with minuscule golden french curves, and stabbed at the baked potato, feeling most comfortable with the blandest morsel. He shakily and reluctantly brought it to his dry lips and chewed away as slowly as possible, eventually forcing himself to gulp. He warily eying Vlad in his peripheral vision, who wore an indistinguishable expression on his face as he watched the boy eat. Ignoring the older hybrid, he picked up another bite of potato. *Fruitloop.*

"While we're on the topic of your situation, I should probably let you know I had your family cremated," Vlad informed. "I placed their remains in the guest room you're staying in."

"Oh." Was all the teenager could manage to respond. He wrapped his arm around his stomach and held a blank expression towards the tupperware he had been eating from.

"After the moving company brings your bed and other furniture I'll have you move into your own bedroom, I figured you'd want the same setup you had at Amity Park, although it was tempting to throw it all in the junkyard—I could easily replace all of it with much nicer things."

Danny didn't want to respond, and for a moment he thought he'd have to with the silence that followed Vlad's words. But thankfully he didn't have to because he suddenly turned around in his chair and retched potato and bile onto the floor, his stomach and throat convulsing violently. He stopped, gasping for air, only to double over and suffer his body's wrath further as it forcefully spewed more contents through his mouth.

Vlad visibly cringed and his eye twitched in irritation, although it occurred to him he should've fed the boy something that would settle with his stomach easier. Unable to watch, he put his head in his hands and waited for the audible torture to end, daring to look up when sweet silence returned. Grimacing at the amount of vomit on the floor, the billionaire directed concentrated ecto-energy at the mass through his finger, disintegrating all but the lingering stench. "That was simply disgusting Daniel, you could've at least *warned* me."

Bringing his attention to the source of the vomit, he saw Danny sitting on the side edge of his chair, bent over so his chest touched his knees. The boy's back heaved and shook with the effort of
retrieving much-missed air, ignoring Vlad.

"Daniel...?" Vlad placed a hand on the teenager's shoulder, only to have it shrugged off.

"Don't." He spat menacingly between labored breaths.

"I'll do what I want, you little rat." Vlad retaliated, guiding the boy to stand up. Dizzy, the teenager wobbled against the man's sturdy frame as he was lead to the living room next to the kitchen. Sitting the boy down on the couch, Vlad threw a blanket at him and retreated to the kitchen. "The TV remote is right in front of you, do whatever it is you youngsters do while I utilize my kitchen like the single, lonely forty-year-old man I am." He quoted sarcastically, grabbing a pack of crackers and throwing them next to the blanket.

Danny groaned, recovering slowly from his dizzy spell and rubbed his face in his hands, grimacing. The back of his throat burned from stomach acid and a nasty aftertaste remained on his tongue. That had been humiliating. Although it was a natural function of the human body, he didn't want Vlad to see it—He didn't want Vlad to see any part of him except his hatred for him. Displaying humanity and other feelings such as discomfort in Vlad's presence was like opening up to him, allowing the man to view your weaknesses, and that was the last thing Danny wanted. He wanted the billionaire to view him as tough and strong; to wonder if Danny was susceptible to pain.

Yet Vlad had, on more than one occasion, observed Danny weak. He had gruesomely beat him up in their first encounter, watched Danny run screaming out of his mountain chalet, brought him unconsciously back to Amity Park after Pariah Dark, treated him in the hospital, and heck, Danny did not remember putting on the sweatshirt and sweatpants he was currently wearing. A dark anger swelled throughout his veins, he did not...didn't need to...dare he say it? Be dressed like one of his father's family action figures.

Not allowing himself to dwell on his last thought due to the extreme damage it brought his pride, he directed his thoughts towards a sudden realization: Danny somehow always ended up unconscious when they crossed paths.

As much as he hated to admit it, Plasmius was beyond him in strength, strategy, and experience. The only times Danny had a chance of besting him was through wit and manipulation, which was easily achieved (compared to strength) thanks to Vlad's obvious motivations. But just because he admitted Vlad was stronger didn't mean he was okay with always being beat into unconscious submission. He needed to somehow find a more effective approach towards his arch-enemy.

But shouldn't you focus on getting to the Far Frozen? A voice whispered in the back of his head.

Danny did...but at this point he could only see two choices. Either he needed to get past Vlad to reach the ghost zone, or override his infernal collar, since it would act as a barrier between himself and Vlad's private laboratory.

"DANIEL." Vlad exclaimed for the third time. "What are you, deaf?"

The younger hybrid turned around to see Vlad standing behind the couch with an cream-colored apron on and arms crossed impatiently.

"Whaddya want." Danny inquired uncaringly, turning back to face the blank TV.

"I made you soup."

He scoffed, "There's no point in eating if it's just going to exit the same way it came in."
"Does it sound like I care?" Vlad teleported in front of Danny and leaned in menacingly, putting his hands next to either side of him on the back of the sofa. His weight flattened the cushion considerably, causing Danny to lean back further.

"Oh, sorry, did that sound like a question? Let me rephrase: I'm not going to fucking eat." He shot back, glaring.

"Language, Daniel. It makes you appear more idiotic than you already are." Vlad began to add another insult relating Danny's idiocy with Jack but paused and exhaled in exasperation. "Must we always go into this blasted cycle of insults?"

"You always start it!" Danny yelled.

Vlad's eyes instantly lit up red. Before the young halfa could comprehend what was happening, Masters phased into Danny.

"Get...get...out of..." The young halfa gripped his head, hands curling onto tufts of his hair and fighting tooth and nail with what remained of his resolve. But his weakened body and mind didn't even have a chance after going through so much in the past couple days, and he soon succumbed to Vlad's control, allowing darkness to cloud him in.

The billionaire smirked through Danny and stood up from the couch, bringing the boy to the kitchen to sit him down at the island, where a bowl of soup awaited his consumption through the younger hybrid.

"I warned you." Vlad voiced through Daniel.

Danny stood lifelessly in the shower, eyes closed as he let the hot water pound gently at his face.

His stomach hurt from overeating and his mind felt scrambled from being overshadowed by Vlad. He would've been contemplating his remaining options for his escape to the Ghost Zone now that he was alone with his thoughts, but he couldn't think clearly or concentrate after going through so much today.

He wanted to go straight to sleep but Vlad insisted he take a shower before turning in for the night. Danny had initially outright refused, using his electronic collar as an excuse but Masters was already one step ahead of him; "For crying out—Of course I made it waterproof you degenerate!" However, Danny continued to disobey him until the billionaire threatened to overshadow him again, to which he turned tail and ran. The prospect of Vlad overshadowing him and taking a shower through him made Danny uncomfortable. The man already pointed out the young hybrid's prepubescent traits enough already. Drowsiness aside, Danny didn't regret taking a shower now that the deed was being done. He felt cleansed of his vomiting episode, and the grime from his fateful disaster at the Nastyburger had finally washed off to reveal his pale complexion. But no matter how hard Danny scrubbed, he still felt filthy with the guilt of his mistakes and bad choices. The more he shoved it away, the bigger it grew.

And that was why Danny was standing pointlessly in the shower despite having technically finished 40 minutes ago. Or at least why he had been, because he was starting to drift off into sleep from the gentle patter of water and steam that surrounded him. He swayed slowly underneath the stream, his soberness slipping from beneath his feet. Until he suddenly jolted awake at hearing the bathroom door slam open and Vlad stomp in, his blurry form only visible through the privacy of the sliding doors by the color of his black suit jacket as he walked straight to the toilet and flushed it. Instantly, the water turned scalding hot and Danny yelped, jumping
away from the line of fire and immediately yanking on the valve to turn the water off.

"What the actual hell, Plasmius!"

A towel suddenly flew over the doors of the walk-in shower and landed on Danny's head, who ripped it off angrily.

"I may be a billionaire, but I don't have unlimited hot water!" Vlad yelled back before leaving the bathroom, which shook from the force of the slamming door as he retreated.

Danny let out a scream of anger, his collar vibrating against his throat, before vigorously drying water off his body. Typically he'd just phase it off, and he should've been able to now that he had finally eaten something, but he still had one more hour before the effects of the Plasmius Maximus 2 wore off.

When he finished he put his clothes back on and left the bathroom, ignoring the new toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, and cup sitting on the side of the sink. He'd be going to sleep for the first time in a while.

Being knocked unconscious didn't count.

Chapter End Notes

Okay. Let's recap on some of the impending conflicts:

1) Vlad's inner conflict with his view of Danny.

2) Vlad's considering of cloning Maddie.

3) Danny's struggles to escape.

Can you catch any more? ;D I've hinted but I haven't made them too obvious yet...

Also be on the lookout for symbolism and foreshadowing! Literary elements are my jam. They might give you some interesting clues to think about. :) Also, I'd like you to think of what characteristics Vlad brings out in Danny. There are quite a few, actually, and I'm definitely incorporating them into this; they're the essence of Vlad and Danny's dynamic.

Haha, this sounds like homework, I'm sorry. You don't have to if you don't want to, but I hereby challenge those who dare.

As always thank you for your love and support!
"No! Don't—ugh." The billionaire ran a hand from his hairline to his ponytail as if the action would remove his headache. "Not that room." He pointed towards the door across from the movers, which was wide open, unlike the one they stood in front of. "The other room."

The workers nodded, readjusting the humongous box containing Daniel's disassembled bed frame and grunting as they moved across the hall and into the room Vlad had directed them in. "Where d'ya want us to put it, Mr. Masters?" Asked the particularly buff and handsome young mover. His baseball cap sporting the company logo seemed to add more to his good looks than take away.

"Just set it down against any wall—that goes for all of the boxes. I can handle what's inside."

"Yesiree." Him and the other mover, female, but also well-built, set down the heavy box and walked slowly back to the truck, knowing the longer they stayed the more they'd be paid. When they eventually left, Vlad rubbed the bridge of his nose with two fingers and groaned, feeling another pang from his headache attack him.

He had, for the first time since Daniel's act of stupidity, (the one that triggered this mess) finally been able to get some sleep in last night. However, he didn't wake up refreshed and raring to go, he arose groggily; mind plagued with fog. The man almost wished he didn't go to sleep and instead worked on his permanent plan for containing Daniel, but upon entering his bedroom he threw himself onto the bed with little self-control and gave in to his body's pleas for rest. As a consequence, he wrinkled his jacket (although it had already lost it's 'just dry-cleaned' look) and had quite the struggle removing all the tangles in his silvery hair. Nonetheless, he managed to pull himself together this morning, Vlad had hundreds of clothing ranging in every color from the blackest of blacks, the most blinding of whites, and everything in between.

Since he was leaning in front of the bathroom door, he swirled around to grab the handle and stepped in, opening the mirror to reveal a medicinal compartment. Removing the cap to the acetaminophen, he extracted two pills, which the billionaire then dry-swallowed desperately. After placing the bottle back into the mirror and closing it, he leaned against the counter and gazed into his reflection, dark, prominent crescents under his eyes and all. Small, short strands of his elegant, silvery hair, usually slicked back, strayed from their course, framing his high cheekbones.

Strangely enough, Vlad was too young to have silver hair. Sure, many people begin to grey at around forty, but his hair color wasn't related to age—rather the incident that ruined his life. Being struck with such highly concentrated ectoplasmic energy made the pigment in his hair follicles prematurely die at the age of 23, and when the pigment died, it died. It wouldn't be able to grow back. Vlad had considered dying his hair back to its original mouse-y shade, or an even darker black because people had enjoyed teasing him for it. However, when he tried, it refused to dye properly and only left streaks of dark black in his hair, heavily resembling that of a zebra or messed-up dalmation. The ectoplasm had ruined it beyond repair. At least his hair was a dark black when he was Plasmius.

Having completed what he came in the room for, Vlad made his way back into the hallway and waited for the movers to return with their second box. The older hybrid wanted to check up on Daniel even though it was 6:30 A.M to see if he was awake and wanted breakfast. People tended to wake up earlier in new places, although it was highly unlikely that Daniel would be up because Colorado was one hour behind Wisconsin. However, that didn't hinder Vlad's curiosity, but
what did was his distrust in the movers' ability to properly transport the packages from the truck to his mansion. Masters didn't care if it was their job, he had difficulties entrusting people other than himself and his ghostly allies.

Well, he had companies and humans that he did trust to complete certain tasks for him, but the movers he wanted for this job weren't available in Colorado, so he had to settle for this particular company after searching through the scarce amount of online reviews that displayed proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Vlad, having no experience with this group, refused to bring down his guard and felt it necessary to observe them in case they tried anything funny.

Leaning back against the bathroom door again, the older hybrid yawned, still sleep deprived, as the movers slowly clambered into the hallway with a second box. He stood with an expression of boredom until the movers were halfway through the doorway when his eyes suddenly widened as a hot sensation emitted from his core and flooded throughout his entire body. Instinctively, the billionaire turned his head to the end of the hall where he caught glimpse of a certain raven-haired boy peeking out from behind the corner. A smirk came upon Vlad's face before he duplicated, turned invisible, and teleported to the boy, leaving behind his duplicate to survey the movers'. The man had developed such control over his powers that he could utilize many tricks while remaining in human form.

Daniel started when Vlad appeared behind the halfa with his hands behind his back and asked, "Up so soon? You usually sleep in, no?"

"Where's the library?" The teen inquired curtly, dodging Vlad's question. His hands were curled up to the device on his neck and he too looked like he had endured a rough nights sleep, swaying slightly on his feet.

"You passed it, it's right in front of your guest room."

Morphing into Phantom, the boy turned around to leave only to pause when Vlad spoke up, "Do avoid making a scene, ghostly or human, while the movers are here."

"Mnhm." And with that, Danny flew off.

Vlad watched the boy fly away before regaining invisibility and returning to his duplicate, reveling in how they managed to hold a conversation without insulting each other. But apart from that, he found himself wondering why the teenager sought the library—in the billionaire's time studying him, he rarely read.

Danny had been unable to go back to sleep since 5 A.M. as a result of his nightmares. After 10 minutes of lying down with no luck, he got up and changed into his usual red and white t-shirt with blue jeans. The pair he wore during his recent confrontation with Dan was decimated, but luckily, he had more than one.

The only thing he planned to do today was to brainstorm and/or find ways to abscond to the Ghost Zone, and if it took all day, then so be it. The teen was prepared to put his nose to the grindstone and think outside the box. He had firstly ruled out the possibility of winning Vlad's trust in a short time-span after failing to trick his enemy. If he couldn't get to Vlad last night, he wouldn't anytime in the near future; Danny would have to rely on his wits to find some way to remove the collar, and he could only see it coming off two ways: The first being Danny manually removing the collar by somehow messing with the computer system on it, which was is the most simple of methods he had concocted.
The second had more to do with luck. He figured that since Vlad was the only one who could phase off the collar, then Danny could possibly get Vlad to touch the collar while the man intended to grab and phase him through something else, which happened often enough. There were issues that arose with that plan, however. Say for an instance that Vlad grabs onto him and turns his entire body intangible; he is willing his energy to transfer to Danny. In order for the collar to come off, Danny would have to stem the flow of energy specifically to the collar, and he would do that while Vlad tries to spread his energy into Danny's being, including the accessories he wore. It was highly unlikely the teen could beat Vlad in a mental ecto-energy standoff.

So the teenager had thought up another situation where Vlad reaches towards either Danny or an object with the intent of sharing intangibility, and instead of touching said thing(s) Danny would make him touch the collar instead by some stealthy miracle.

Many more similar ideas came to mind but Danny eventually came to realize that hacking into the collar's computerized system was his most probable option, currently. That being said, Danny held little knowledge of electronics as opposed to his now deceased friend Tucker, which meant he'd need to learn more about them. He shoved down his heartbreaking hurt that arose at the thought of his deceased friends—Danny had no time for mourning right now.

Asking Vlad was a no-go because the billionaire could easily put two-and-two together, and searching the internet was difficult without knowing any of Vlad's twenty-seven wifi passwords (his mansion was too large for just one). Danny had pulled out his smartphone, which lay forgotten at the bottom of his duffel bag, but there were no bars. So the teenager came to the conclusion that the library was his best bet. As much as Danny disliked books not related to astronomy, (he was more visually-oriented) the boy was more than willing to endure fine print and technological babble, assuming that Vlad also had a tech dictionary of some sort.

He didn't.

Frustrated, Phantom slammed down a large pile of promising books onto a table and huffed, looking around the library before plopping down in a large cushioned chair, exhausted. Searching the entire library took him three hours, that's how big the place was—horizontally and vertically. There were countless subjects ranging from every possible medical and technological profession known to man, although there were more general subjects such as human anatomy, genetic makeup, different diseases, disorders, whatnot, and psychological books. Danny had no idea what the other science-y books were about because the title contained some long, complicated word(s). Apart from the millions of textbooks were fine literature, some of them Danny had read for school before his life was turned upside down by becoming a ghost. Despite having difficulty reading books he tried hard nonetheless, he used to be a more hardworking and dedicated student with his sights set on becoming an astronaut; a profession that demanded through-the-roof grades and top 5% test scores.

Anyways, every piece of literature Vlad owned had one thing in common: strong villains. No doubt he took inspiration from them. And all of his books were in pristine condition, appearing as if they had never been opened by how stiff the spine was and the new-book-smell that sweetly rose off the pages.

Picking up a book from the small pile he had created, (half of the books wouldn't have made it into his collection if it weren't for the illustration on the front) he gruffly dropped it down with a large BAM. The boy was already in a bad mood after having to ask Plasmius how to get to the library, which turned out to be right in front of his current room. There was a possibility he made the man suspicious but for all Vlad knew, Danny could be a bookworm. But he wasn't in a bad
mood because of that; interacting with Vlad, in general, put him in a bad mood.

The boy found himself wishing he were a bookworm after wrestling the stiff book to open at a random page, revealing print at font two containing words Danny didn't even know existed apart from speech articles such as "a" and "the." Bracing himself, he squinted, leaned in, and began to read, although he did not understand a thing he saw. Nevertheless, he got halfway through the first page with suspicious pronunciations before being rudely interrupted.

"Is that a..." Vlad released a mocking gasp, "...book I see you reading? Why, I didn't know you could even read."

Danny had been so startled he knocked himself back in the chair and fell over, letting out a pained cry when he made impact with the floor, the hardwood of his chair digging into his bones. "Would you stop sneaking up on me?"

"It's not my fault you can't sense me, you clearly haven't honed your powers well enough."

"And would you die if you stopped insulting me?"

"Insulting? I'm merely speaking the truth, dear boy. Those who acknowledge their faults make the first step to destroying them." He watched with a wicked, humorous glint in his eyes as the boy stood up, rubbing at his aching skull.

"Oh, then I guess I should return the favor by telling you about your faults. You're-

"Your opinion is invalid, I don't have any faults. But if it helps your raging hormones you can get them out of your system over eggs benedict."

Much to Vlad's surprise, Danny picked up the fallen chair, set it upright, and grumbled, "K." Grudgingly accepting Vlad's invitation to breakfast. Daniel crossed his arms and averted his eyes to the floor. Obviously, the boy saw no need in further verbally fighting since he was working on figuring out his collar. The billionaire already noticed what subject the boy was reading but didn't think anything of it. Those books were meant for biomedical engineer post-graduates, even regular readers wouldn't be able to comprehend them. The older hybrid would bet his money that Daniel couldn't understand the table of contents. So, he saw no need to go through the trouble of confiscating them and scolding the boy. Although Daniel was incredibly headstrong, he was smart enough to know when to give up.

Nevertheless his actions were slightly out of character and left the billionaire with an unsettling feeling that dropped in his stomach like a cold, hard stone, but he still grinned at Danny's obedience; It was incredibly satisfying, no matter how fake. He had to give props to the boy for configuring an escape plan on his first day at his estate, what with only recently regaining consciousness and learning his entire life had fallen apart. Vlad found himself reassessing whether he made the right decision not sending the teen into the woods.

Together the billionaire led them out of the library and down the hall, the teenager trailing several feet behind him with uncertainty. Danny hoped Masters didn't notice the subject he was struggling to study. This was, in some respects, his only reasonable chance of escape currently. He mentally berated himself for letting his guard down and not bringing the books into his guest room instead.

"You know, I can make myself breakfast." Danny suddenly spoke up out of nervousness as they closed the distance between them and the kitchen.

"I was under the impression you didn't eat breakfast." The older hybrid responded slyly.
The boy made a sound of disbelief, "How would you know that? Have you been spying on me?"

"And if I have?" He turned his head to peek behind his shoulder with an amused expression, which Danny returned with a glare.

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"You know, Daniel, you shouldn't be eating so much fast food and pre-packaged frozen meals."

Masters reprimanded, confirming he had, in fact, been spying on the Fentons. "But I guess it's difficult when your ghost-obsessed parents don't bother to care for their children, hmm?"

Danny dropped his gaze to the ground and watched his awkward teenage feet with eyes shielded underneath his bright white hair, "Don't bring them up."

"Very well." Vlad turned into the kitchen and opened a cabinet, taking out two dishes that he set down on the marble placemats of the island. Danny took a seat as the man slid two English muffins topped with Canadian ham and eggs onto the plate in front of him, adding a creamy, pale yellow sauce on top. The boy squinted and bent to eye-level at his meal, having never seen or heard of it before.

"This is eggs benedict? What's wrong with toast?" He inquired as Vlad slid two more of the English muffins on the place next to Daniel's.

"Not nearly enough nutrients, my boy." Masters answered, setting the pan in the sink before sitting down next to Danny. "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day."

"Eh, they all say that. I get by just fine without." Daniel replied, poking the egg with his fork timidly before plunging it into the entirety of the dish.

"Well, you won't be doing without anymore. Here, we will have breakfast every day at 9:00 A.M, lunch at precisely noon, and dinner at 7:00 P.M. Normal families eat together at set times. Do I make myself clear, Daniel?"

"Uh, we're not a family." Danny managed to say with a full mouth of eggs, bacon, and English muffin. He hated to admit it, but the billionaire was one hell of a cook.

"Mmhm, well, if it makes you feel any better by saying that, then, by all means, do so." Retorted Vlad, popping a bite of his meal into his mouth with elegance.

"Don't you have things to do? Or are you really that lonely?" The boy prodded, continuing to eat as fast as a vacuum.

Vlad paused, fork midway to his face and faltered, bringing the utensil down slightly. The man actually had a lot to do. He needed to work on Danny's home containment system, the exoskeletons power converter and nanobots while waiting for Skulker to return with the lightning rod (he finally found an endless fuel source during his time at the hospital), his online classes, (I'll explain that later C;) and supposedly his business, although the only thing he needed to do for that was call in with a 'family emergency' and have someone take his place for a little while. Despite having so much on his plate though, Vlad was determined to focus on young Daniel in hopes of winning him over in what he assumed was the boy's hidden and devastated mental state. He had to be coming out of shock soon, and by the way he didn't want to talk about his family, Vlad knew he only had a little while to wait before the boy broke.

"Of course I have things to do. After breakfast, you and I need to set up your bedroom." The older
hybrid finally responded, completing the action he had halted before.

Danny grumbled, setting down his fork next to his now-empty plate. There was no need to set up "his" bedroom if he wasn't going to stay here, but he'd have to anyways if he wanted to bring Vlad's guard down. On the bright side, he could at least use his ghost powers.

"Don't you have any table manners?" Danny's enemy added, out of the blue.

"Huh?"

"When you're finished eating, you place your knife and fork side-by-side on the right end of the plate."

"Gee, sorry." Mocked the teenager, setting his utensils perpendicular to the edge of the table on the right side of his plate.

Vlad exhaled loudly, putting down his own knife and fork on his plate and reached over to Danny's plate, readjusting his utensils. "No, no, no. You place them in a four o’ clock position. The fork goes to the left of the knife, tines up, and the knife on the right, blade in." After completing his demonstration, the billionaire picked up his own silverware and continued cutting his eggs benedict, nearly finished with his first English muffin. "Also, it's bad manners to put your elbow on the table." Scolded he, glaring at Danny's elbow until he made a show of removing it from the surface. "And you eat way too fast. Your brain won't be able to send the proper signals to your body at that pace."

The younger hybrid rolled his eyes and stood up, only to be verbally stopped by Vlad, "Where do you think you're going? Put your dishes in the dishwasher and sit your nonexistent butt back in that chair. You will wait until I'm finished."

"You're not my dad, so stop trying to act like one." Danny retorted, continuing to walk away.

The older hybrid removed a remote from his inner coat pocket and pressed one of two buttons on it, shocking Danny. The boy had remained in his ghost form all throughout breakfast, so he was surprised to find he didn't revert back after falling to the floor in pain.

"I have two settings on this, isn't that convenient?" Masters patted the cushion on Danny's seat welcomingly, although his dark eyes were anything but. "Now be a good pawn-" he paused slightly and corrected himself, "boy and sit."

Grudgingly, the teen complied, dragging his feet back to the island and plopping down into his chair, spine slumped. He had better things to do than be electrocuted.

While the teenager picked up his glass and took a long drink from it, Vlad continued, "Anyways, like I was going to say before your horrible display of manners, after we set up your bedroom I want to perform a physical exam on you. According to your medical record, you've never been to a doctor or a dentist."

Danny spat out his drink in surprise, and Vlad, having quick reflexes, groaned and evaporated the water by shooting an ectoplasmic energy beam from his eyes before it hit the island. "Can you please further refrain from shooting food and drink out your mouth?"

"Woah, hold up." Danny said angrily. "Criticizing my manners is one thing, but playing doctor? No way." The boy was absolutely horrified—the last thing he wanted was for Vlad to poke at him. Besides, didn't he already get to do that at the hospital?
"Playing doctor? I'll have you know I own three doctorates, one of which is in medicine; I'm also licensed to practice it." Vlad bragged.

"Not on me you aren't."

Masters popped the last bite of breakfast into his mouth, finally finishing his second portion, "I'll be the one to decide that." The man stood up and brought his plate to the dishwasher, where he picked his left foot up to a small, black screen on the center of the machine. A red dot appeared on the top left corner of the display, and when he dropped his foot back to his side, the door to the dishwasher sunk into the ground while two main tubs protruded outward from the inside. Vlad rinsed his dish in the sink next to the machine before turning to push the upper tub back in, making room for placing his dish and silverware in the lower rack. "Daniel, yours too." He demanded, walking back to the island and reaching into a drawer on the side.

Danny sighed and repeated Vlad's actions despairingly. When he finished, he turned around to ask the man how to close the dishwasher, but swallowed his words when a chuckle escaped his mouth. "Are those pills?"

"No," Vlad answered sarcastically, "they're miniature versions of your stupid thermos. What else do you think they are?!" He popped in the handful of capsules and took a swig of water.

A smile spread on Danny's face, ear-to-ear. "You're so old you have to take pills?"

"These are vitamins, not medication. And you'll be taking these too, after I determine exactly how much and what you require." Vlad stood up and removed the napkin from his lap, folding it in his hands.

"Oh please, I don't need vitamins, I get by just fine." Danny replied, frowning at his enemy.

"Well, we'll see about that now, won't we?"

Chapter End Notes

When I said I'd explain later...I didn't mean here, I meant later in the book.
MWHAHAHA
Danny grunted when he put down the last large piece of furniture and found himself changing back into human form against his own will. The teen turned around and leaned his back into the dresser, panting and collapsing next to it. Spending days unconscious in a hospital bed had done a number on the boy's stamina, and after doing so much heavy lifting, his weakened state was more apparent than ever, even with the help of his ghost powers.

Vlad smirked in the boy's direction from his seated place on the floor as he set up Danny's bed frame, his suit jacket removed and sleeves rolled up. "Don't need vitamins, do you?" He quoted from their conversation at breakfast, making light of the boy's presently proven hypocritical statement.

"I'm just taking a break. Sheesh."

The day became longer the more time he spent with Vlad—one could only spend so much time with their snotty, evil, billionaire arch-enemy. And it was doomed to become even longer with the events that lay ahead. He didn't understand how the billionaire himself could bear it; Danny was sure their hatred for each-other measured to an equal amount. In addition, setting up his furniture, which had never left Amity Park before, was proving to be slow torture. Every glance at it brought painful memories that became increasingly difficult to shove away. The teenager questioned his ability to focus on matters of true importance; He'd rather be studying for his collar instead of wasting time on setting up a room he'll never use.

"How about you go make yourself lunch." Masters suggested, although his tone implied more of a command. "That is if you can find the kitchen."

Danny had taken the liberty of remembering their path from the kitchen to his "new" room, deciding it was best to memorize as much of the mansion as possible for him to create an adequate escape route. Rejoicing in his chance to get some much-needed alone-time and rest from the eyesores that were his past, he darted from the room, knocking over one of the many tan suitcases that sat by the large, double-doors.

Left in silence, Vlad sighed in relief to himself as he worked away on the bed, which neared completion. It was difficult to be around Daniel when witty comebacks flew endlessly out of that mouth. Not one sentence the teen uttered wasn't a direct attack on Vlad. Yet the billionaire remained patient, knowing the more the boy shielded himself, the closer he was to reaching his breaking point. If the man wasn't aware of this, he would've snapped a while ago and released his pent-up wrath. He had, at one point, considered forcing Daniel into his mental demise—speed up the process, if you will. But shortly after, he realized that the teen would surely blame Vlad (more so) for his breakdown instead of himself, which was the opposite outcome Masters desired. He wanted the boy to seek help and love in his open arms, and to do that, the man would let Danny drown in himself. There's no doubt it would take time, but Vlad was a man of patience.

Maybe he was being stubborn, making the boy stay despite his objection towards adopting Vlad as a godfather. But the older hybrid couldn't help it; Here he was, trying to clone Danny so he could have a son to love and uphold his legacy as a half-ghost, when Daniel is suddenly handed over to him, legally, by the death of the Fentons (which, might he remind again, had been ironically induced by the boy himself.) He would take the real Danny over a clone any day. It definitely
would've been easier to create and meld a clone into loving Vlad like a father, at least it was before because Danny would've never left his family. But the boy no longer had a family to stand for. Masters had a chance, and he wasn't giving up without a fight; he was already so close to conquering his soon-to-be son; the billionaire could taste fatherhood.

After screwing the last bolt into the bed, Vlad stood up and stretched, admiring his handiwork before picking up the mattress leaning against the wall and placing it on the frame with little struggle. The billionaire then pointed his finger at the bundle of blankets next to the bed, zapped them with ectoplasmic energy, and they suddenly sprang to life and enveloped the mattress, making the bed. A smile quirked at the corner of his mouth—manipulating matter was yet another positive side-effect of being half-ghost.

Deciding to let Daniel put away his smaller and more personal belongings, Vlad strode out of the boy's new bedroom and walked to his regular laboratory just down the hall, not to be confused with his private one. He kept the more expensive and sensitive machinery down there.

It may have been too soon to do a check-up on the boy's first full day of being in Wisconsin, but he was excited. The billionaire's motives for giving him a physical were simple: Vlad wanted to know what was going on in the boy's body, ghost-wise and puberty-wise. Since the man received his ghost powers towards the end of puberty, he never really witnessed how it would fare in a teenager's body. It also appeared that Danny never contracted ecto-acne, or if he had, it possibly had yet to show up. So Vlad wanted to look for signs of ecto-acne or possible radiation. He also needed to bring Daniel up to date with vaccines, which he would concoct while the boy ate lunch. In the papers Vlad had taken from Fentonworks, he found that Maddie and Jack refused to take Danny to any medical professionals and insisted on doing everything themselves, including filling his cavities. It appeared that they never gave their son bi-yearly checkups, rather, applying medical attention as needed, which explained how Danny managed to keep his ghostly identity under wraps. And the man didn't need papers to know Danny hadn't been vaccinated in his lifetime; Jack believed the fib about vaccines giving children autism, and no matter what Maddie said, he refused to acknowledge it had been the result of a scientifically-incorrect experiment.

Because Jack had been involved, Vlad didn't trust the papers that gave very little information about Danny's medical background. He was going to start from scratch and determine himself the condition of his soon-to-be heir; using results from the physical, the older hybrid was planning on shaping the boy into a strong, healthy successor, mentally and physically speaking, that would uphold the power Masters and Plasmius had built; hopefully and eventually surpassing him in both the human and ghost realms. Vlad wanted to die knowing his name would be forever revered.

Of course, it was a farfetched idea. To move mountains one needed to start with small stones, and in Vlad's case, the small stones began with the checkup and his dependence on the teen's breakdown.

The automatic door slid open as soon as it sensed someone approaching, allowing Vlad to enter. He stepped in, allowing shadows to envelop his form while the door slid shut behind him.

Next to a large table in Vlad's regular laboratory, Danny stood awkwardly, his hands clasped onto the painful collar that chafed his neck with every movement, making the skin underneath red and raw. It didn't help that Vlad had grabbed the collar to drag Danny's protesting form out of the kitchen. The device bitterly reminded him of the one Walker had put on Wulf; he'd pitied the poor ghost back then, but now Danny was the one to be pitied. That is if he had anyone left to pity him—which he didn't.

The checkup hadn't even started yet and the teen already felt like he was being judged and
analyzed despite Vlad's back currently facing Danny, his elbows bouncing as he sifted through paperwork that probably regarded what was soon to come. The boy wasn't sure what to expect, he'd never had a physical with a normal physician before; his parents didn't trust doctors entirely. "Those good-for-nothing posers just want our money!" Instead, his family treated his injuries and sicknesses as they came, which Danny, after becoming half-ghost, grew to be thankful towards. As long as the teenager avoided serious wounds, his secret was safe, and it was an easy feat when one was half-ghost. However, as he was used to his parents, the idea of a stranger observing him made the boy extremely uncomfortable. And that fear increased tenfold since it wasn't just a stranger, but the man who enjoys using every bit of information about Danny against the teen. The fact that Vlad had already made fun of the younger hybrid's "prepubescent" body didn't help.

"Why did you want to do a physical? What does it matter to you?" The raven-haired boy questioned in an accusatory tone, glowering into Vlad's straight-as-a-ruler back.

"To ensure you aren't bringing anything into my house." The older hybrid responded matter-of-factly, his voice slightly muted by the direction he faced. "I will not tolerate disease under this roof."

"Too late." the boy thought to himself.

Masters finally turned around in his small office chair with a board in hand, documents stacked tightly underneath the clip and long legs crossed. Gesturing towards the work surface nearby the boy with a pen between his fingers, he announced, "Go ahead and sit on the table."

Danny glanced at the table he stood next to and wrung his hands, contemplating in silence before declining, "Uh, I'm fine with standing." Not understanding why he'd need to be on a table for a physical exam. His eyes darted to the clock above the entrance of the lab. 1:12 P.M.

"That wasn't a question," Vlad replied, allowing his eyes to flash a menacing red. Danny shoved down the urge to return the look and reluctantly complied, slowly and clumsily bringing himself up to the surface. When the boy eventually settled, Vlad continued, "Now I'll be asking you questions. How many hours of physical activity do you get in a day?"

That was it? Plasmius made him sit on a table to ask him questions?

"Er...None," Danny answered, being as laconic as possible and slightly taken aback, scratching the back of his head. Why on earth did Vlad care how much he exercised? How did it relate to disease?

"Including ghost-fighting." the billionaire pushed, his head dipping to write down the boy's answer and behaviors. Small clumps of grey hair fell from their slicked-back position and onto Vlad's face. Danny jutted his lower lip slightly outward and shrugged carelessly, not looking at his arch-enemy. His conscious, however, nudged at him to go along as he reminded himself why he even put up with Plasmius for the time being. If it weren't for Danny's current situation and his escape plan, he wouldn't have answered the man's questions and allowed Vlad to do this.

Masters frowned disapprovingly as he pushed back his rebellious hair with his hand, struggling to remain patient. "I need valid answers, my boy. Estimate."

"Three?" Danny guessed. The boy never documented the amount of time he spent defending Amity Park and it's citizens. He just...did it. Glancing at the clock a second time, he saw it had only been a minute since he last checked. The teenager breathed out in frustration, letting his bangs flutter as they caught air.

Scribble scribble. As Vlad's fountain pen flew across the page, Danny looked down at his lap and
lazily swung his legs in an alternating pattern, allowing his socked heels to thump quietly against the hard surface of the lab bench. Vlad's eye twitched slightly at the distracting movement and noise, but didn't address it.

When the scribbling stopped, Vlad went on to ask, "What is the average amount of sleep you get?"

Danny knew the answer to that one. "Four hours." How couldn't he? The teen couldn't seem to get enough of it these days.

Vlad gave Danny an incredulous look, to which the boy reiterated, "Ghost hunting."

*Scribble scribble.* The sound of the fountain pen scratching the surface of the clipboard also scratched at Danny's ears. "Have you ever done drugs?"

"No."

In the blink of an eye, Danny's arch-enemy removed his stupid remote from his pocket and jammed his thumb into one of two red buttons, this particular one on the right side of the remote—the one that gave innocent shocks. The movement was so quick the boy didn't recognize it until after being electrocuted.

"Ow! What gives?" Danny yelled, his muscles seizing painfully after being on the receiving end of the shock.

Giving Danny a look of annoyance, the billionaire pointed out, "You're bluffing. You once tried a cigarette at a party."

The party had been hosted by the ever-so-beautiful Paulina, who made habit of inviting Danny solely because the girl had noticed Danny Phantom showed up wherever Danny Fenton was. At some point, a kid offered a cigarette to Danny, who didn't necessarily want to try it but did anyway in hopes that Paulina would notice and think how cool he was, ignoring Sam's eye rolls and warnings. He later threw up, making himself the center of attention, and Sam had to pull a dazed Danny and protesting Tucker, who was in the middle of flirting, out the door. The young half-ghost's eyes widened with surprise. He wondered exactly how much spying Vlad had done, but quickly pushed his concern to the back of his mind when his outrage towards being spied on resurfaced. "Why'd you ask then?"

"To see if you'd lie." *Scribble scribble.* "Have you ever engaged in sexual intercourse?"

"What?! No!" Danny was taken aback. Did normal doctors even ask these kinds of questions?! The last thing Danny would have thought of when the older hybrid said, "disease," was STI's...

Vlad jammed the button, and the teenager jolted yet again. "Ack—Would you stop doing that?!" Danny protested with annoyance, rubbing at his neck. His tolerance towards being interrogated was growing short.

"Not even with the moody girl? You know, your girlfriend?" Pushed the billionaire smugly.

Danny glared at his sitting attacker and defiantly stated, "She's *not* my girlfriend." before bringing his attention back to his lap and allowing his thick black strands to shield the somber expression the teen's emotions forced upon his face at being reminded, yet again, of the recent past.

With a nuanced tone, Masters mused, "Hm. Is that really? I could've sworn..." before scribbling down more notes for a minute or two. Starting to become curious, Danny wished he could see exactly what his arch-enemy was jotting down.
There were actually several more questions on the sheet, but because Vlad knew their answer precisely, he need not to bother. In fact, he could discard several procedures as well, such as checking blood pressure since he already did it back in the hospital. Putting down his clipboard, the man reached for his stethoscope and hung it around his neck. He strode towards the moody teenager that occupied his table, removed a small pen with a flashlight from another pocket in his suit jacket, and with a click, the flashlight turned on. The billionaire grabbed the child's chin and made Danny's currently hanging head tilt back slightly, holding up the flashlight to Danny's eyes. "Stare straight ahead and don't follow the light." He instructed, briefly waving the light in the boy's left eye before moving it to the right and repeating the procedure. "Hm...good..." he lowered the flashlight slightly. "Now open your mouth and say 'ahh'."

Another glare. Danny was beginning to find this ridiculous. All of it. "Why should I?"

Vlad rolled his eyes, "Better visualization. Your pharynx and uvula arch up and your tongue depresses."

"My what and what?" Daniel's eyebrows furrowed together in both frustration and confusion, although the action didn't help to make sense of what his enemy had said.

The older hybrid huffed, "Just do it." and held the flashlight up, peering into Danny's now open but ahh-less throat. He dismissed the boy's refusal to make the noise because he could at least see what he needed to see.

Satisfied but still cross, Vlad released his hold of Daniel's chin and placed his flashlight/pen back into the pocket it had originated from. And picking up the stethoscope around his neck, he then ordered, "Take off your shirt." As he brought the earpieces to their intended placement.

"Why should I?" The younger hybrid inquired yet again, hesitant to expose his hairless chest. Truth be told, Danny was more than aware of how behind he was compared to other teens at school, and the subject was something he felt incredibly insecure and touchy about. The more he wished to sprout the more the process seemed to be hindered, and he eventually grew tired of wishing and obsessing and shoved the subject into the back of his head, bitterly accepting he'll always be a puny, skinny, string bean. At least for the time being. He had endured his friends' teasing about it before Sam whispered, "Tucker!" In warning and pushed his friend.

"Must you question everything?!" Masters breathed exasperatedly, gripping the end of the stethoscope's tubing with two fingers, chest-piece held tight to his palm. "The fabric will make noise and I won't be able to hear!"

The two stared at each other with dark hatred for a few seconds before Danny finally obeyed, ripping his shirt off his head and doing his best to hide his insecurities in fear of giving Vlad more to make fun of. He crumpled it into a ball as his arch-enemy connected his hand and the chest-piece to the left upper part of the boy's anger-driven heaving chest. Shivers traveled up Danny's spine when he felt the cold metal contact his skin, and he was reminded of the ghost gauntlets. God, this was really getting too close for comfort. Thankfully, the boy had nothing to worry about (yet) since the Vlad in the other timeline told him that the ghost gauntlets had been specifically created for removing Danny's humanity, so naturally one could infer that the Vlad in this timeline would not create it unless driven to do so by a suicidal teenager. Nevertheless, being reminded of something so dark and disturbing combined with the cold metal on his chest made the young hybrid begin to shake uncontrollably, but not enough to be noticed.

"For Christ's sake, can you breathe like a normal person?" Vlad blatantly muttered, adjusting the diaphragm (flat part of the chest-piece) to several areas in the same region before finding a good spot.
"I could before you began electrocuting me!" Danny spat protectively, doing his best to snuff the sudden dry fear that had previously surfaced.

"And I will again if you refuse to work with me!" Vlad barked back, the chest-piece digging into the boy a little too hard. Although his anger had taken over his good judgment, he quickly regained control of his emotions and reminded himself of his reasons for being patient with the child. "Deep breath in." He instructed.

The teen inhaled, but only a normal amount. "What part of deep do you not understand?!" Exclaimed Vlad.

In response, Danny gave a loud and extremely exaggerated breath in, his smooth chest puffing out like a rooster. When the boy sucked in as much air as his body allowed, he glowered up at Vlad as if to say, "Are you happy now?!"

"Much better. Exhale."

Danny gave seven breaths in the front and back before the billionaire was satisfied with his results. Removing the stethoscope from his ears and bringing it to once again rest on his neck, Vlad went on, "I'm going to test your spectral reflexes, now. Sit up straight, Daniel." At hearing the words "spectral reflexes," the boy did as he was told and corrected his slump.

The billionaire walked behind the boy to the other side of the lab bench, and without warning, painfully pinched the lowest part of Danny's spine. Immediately, a powerful shiver traveled throughout the young hybrid and he released a gasp as his currently human legs formed into spectral tail for a few seconds, before safely reverting back to normal.

Danny stared at his legs wide-eyed, his jaw dropping, "Woah! What the heck?"

"You find it interesting, hm?" The billionaire said with an amused tone, walking back to his desk. "Your ghostly body's defensive mechanism. The spinal chord and nervous system are partly accountable for dispersing your powers. If someone attempted to hurt your spine, the formation of your spectral tail would protect it and give you time to escape." He took a piece of paper from his lab desk and walked back to the teen, setting it in Danny's lab. "This time, hold the paper in front of your face at an arm's length."

Wanting to see another phenomenon, Danny did as he was told, and Vlad jammed his finger into the back of the boy's neck without warning. Unwillingly, Danny's eyes lit up green and lasers shot towards the paper, making it crumble to ashes in his hands.

Vlad couldn't help but smile slightly at the aghast boy, pleased at seeing such strong reflexes in his successor. "Alright, that's it for spectral reflexes. Now lay down on your back."

"We have a catastrophe on our hands!" Exclaimed one Observant. "You've failed to eliminate Danny Phantom's future, and in addition, have made him aware of you."

"We're more than doomed now that the boy knows too much." A second Observant pointed out. "This is all because of you! You made a direct violation of the protocol of temporal displacement."

Clockwork scowled at his distressed employers. "I know."

The Observants looked at time like they're watching a parade, one thing after another passing by in sequence right in front of them. They only knew of the past and present. Clockwork, on the other
hand, saw the parade from above, all the twists and turns it might or might not take. Therefore, he
could see alternatives to elimination that the Observants could not. In their eyes, or should he say,
eye, elimination was the best approach.

Because of his more widened perception of time, he felt superior to the ghosts. But that did not
change the fact that the Observants were instead superior to him, by law. They had taken to
secretly governing existence since the fall of Pariah Dark, having previously been the past empire's
council and advisors to the Ghost King. Because *someone* had to monitor all of existence and
suppress it's threats.

"If you know what's good for you, for us, you will eliminate him right now!" The first observant
demanded.

"No more of your manipulation and games—no more attempts to cheat." Added the second
observant.

"It is not over yet." Clockwork replied with a determined expression on his face, turning into his
elder form. "The boy is also aware of his future now. If he knows what's good for the human and
ghost realms, he will not allow it to happen."

"And if he does?" Both Observants asked in unison.

"*Then* I will eliminate him before he turns."

"You play a dangerous game, Clockwork." The first Observant reprimanded.

Ignoring the Observant's comment, the Time Master turned around to face a glowing ring set with
circular gears which displayed Vlad observing the younger hybrid in a laboratory. Clockwork
transformed into his child form and raised his staff, changing the image to one of Danny trapped in
the spectral energy neutralizer.

Clockwork had wanted to step in and save Danny's family and friends, but his employers restrained
him, scared that such a bold action would get the trio of apparent law-breakers into trouble with the
Observant Council. All members were sworn to watch and never act in matters of human conflicts,
sometimes ghost conflicts too. Clockwork may not be part of the Observant Council but he
was considered to be closely related because he had worked with them since before the fall of
Pariah Dark. In addition, the Observant Council felt it necessary to restrain and control any ghost
of large power, which the Time Ghost didn't mind too much because their motives were similar:
Keep the universe in order.

"Even if he does happen to avoid turning into an abomination," The second Observant brought up,
"He will be under Vlad Plasmius's custody. There's no telling what evil power will be unleashed
with the two ghost humans working hand-in-hand."

"Unless..." Clockwork intervened, "They don't end up working together."

Both Observants became quiet as they contemplated such a possibility, eventually speaking up.
"That seems highly unlikely. If the younger one does not join him, he turns evil! If he joins him, he
turns evil! There's no good end to this."

Father Time groaned, "Shortsighted as always. You two fail to observe that my abilities reach
beyond yours. I say we sit back, wait, and cease to tamper with this situation until necessary.
Besides, we've broken enough rules as is."

The Observants looked at each other before one of them stepped forward and responded, "Fine.
You are lucky we are bound to our oath, therefore there's only so much we can do. But if this hole you've dug becomes anymore deep, the consequences will be dire."

"Yes, yes." Clockwork waved his hand dismissively once, and the Observants, having had their say, turned and left his abode.

The ancient ghost turned into his adult form and gazed up at Danny on viewing screen, light licking the undistinguishable expression plastered on his face. What he said had been true: they must leave the situation to simmer in itself. Clockwork did not just pop in and out of time whenever he pleased, he waited until it was absolutely necessary.

For now, the fate of existence rested in a fourteen-year-old boy's hand. However, it wasn't clear which path the child would take yet. The boy had many forks in the road laid out for him and all he had to do was simply choose one. Clockwork wouldn't be able to manipulate the child for this, it was a decision that must be made by Danny alone; should he choose the right one, this imperative time of reflection will be added to the many experiences he needed to reach adulthood successfully.

"Lets see if you have what it takes." Clockwork said to the image of Danny on the screen.

"How many more tests do we have to do?" Danny whined, standing next to his arch-enemy and his desk, t-shirt back on and looking exhausted. "We must've done hundreds by now."

Vlad rolled his eyes, they had only done 63 tests regarding reflexes, body functions, and x-rays for both human and ghost sides. "One last test." He answered, picking up a tourniquet. He coaxed the teen to extend his arm slightly so the billionaire could wrap it tightly around his bicep. "I need a blood sample."

The older hybrid hadn't done it at the hospital because he'd need to use the hospital equipment, therefore risking the possibility of another doctor seeing Danny's blood. He also didn't have the proper means of storing it on the plane, which meant he wouldn't be able to draw it at the hospital and transport it back to Wisconsin.

Danny bit his lip nervously and glanced at the tourniquet around his arm, which was making the limbs below it feel funny. "I think this thing is too tight."

"If it feels like that, then it's just right." Masters explained, sitting up from his chair with a sterile wipe and ripping open the packaging. "You're going to want to sit for this."

The young hybrid hesitantly sat down, eyeing the man nervously. It had been a long time since he was last poked by a needle (consciously), and while it wasn't torturous, he remembered it being slightly painful. The fact that he had difficulties remembering the sensation made him more wary.

Vlad, standing in front of Danny, picked up the boy's arm and set it on his desk, cringing at the sight of his incredibly bony wrists. He kneeled down to get a closer look and commanded, "Make a fist with your palm facing upwards."

Wincing, Danny complied, the weird feeling in his arm flaring up at the movement. Seeing Danny complete the action he had asked, Vlad leaned in to inspect the soft flesh of the child's inner elbow, poking at veins that had surfaced thanks to the tourniquet. After giving a particular vein that caught his eye several pokes, he removed the moist towelette from its package and dabbed rather forcefully at the area. And when he set down the wipe to reach for a small needle, Danny knew the minutes of sweet preparation were drawing to a close, and his heart beginning to thump wildly in his chest.
"Okay..." Vlad began as he fiddled the small needle with his large fingers, "This should be obvious but I'll say it anyway: stay still until I remove the needle." He brought it to Danny's arm, hovering it over the area that was now cold after being sterilized. The boy braced himself for pain of any amount, but much to the teenager's surprise, Vlad instead turned the needle intangible and plunged it in before allowing it to regain tangibility. Pain wasn't avoidable, though, and Danny cringed at the small twinge that came from the device turning tangible.

At first he watched with curiosity, but then looked away from the needle, not enjoying the view of blood filling the little container. After what felt like forever, he felt the needle leave his arm and looked back at the area. A small bead of blood surfaced from where the skin had broken before being covered by a band-aid, and shortly after Vlad then removed the tourniquet. Danny sighed in relief at finally being done and began to turn in the direction of the laboratory door.

"Ah—I need one more sample," Vlad interrupted, putting a cap on the vile filled with fresh blood. "this time of your ectoplasm. Morph, Daniel."

Danny's heart dropped and he protested, "You said one more test—this is two!"

"They're the same thing. Morph, boy."

Wanting to finish quickly, Danny dropped his argument and morphed into Phantom, impatiently extending his arm for Vlad to take and suck more blood out of with a sober expression on his face.

Unpackaging another sterile wipe, the older hybrid corrected, "The other, if you will. I'm not going to draw blood from the same arm twice. Turn around so you can rest it on the table."

Phantom did as he was told without a scowl or a huff, and Masters walked around the boy so they were once again facing each other. He pulled up the sleeve to the hazmat suit, which hid underneath the glove to see the veins and reapplied the tourniquet to Danny's small bicep, repeating the blood draw process.

"Alright..." Vlad said as he placed a cap on both needles, "you're free to go."

And with that, Danny immediately flew and phased out of the lab in the direction of the library. At least, where he thought the library might be.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry, not much happened in this chapter, mostly characterization! But I wouldn't write it if it weren't needed.

I feel like I should explain why I included the "manipulating matter" part. You know the episode Prisoners of Love when Danny cleaned up the lab with his powers? He can't possibly just knock around items with ectoplasmic energy rays and have them land in perfectly neat piles. So I assumed it was another ghostly power of some sort.

On another note...eesh, Clockwork is hard to write. *sweats* I hope he stayed somewhat in character...anyways, for those of you wondering why Danny hasn't considered going to Clockwork for help...you've forgotten that since Clockwork never stepped in and saved Danny's family, Danny's last encounter with him was when the Time Master tried to "waste" him. So Danny's perception of him isn't of respect,
currently, and he does not know much of Clockwork's capabilities.

One last note: We now know more about Vlad's motives! I wonder...is he taking care of Danny to be fatherly and loving or is he doing it out of selfishness? C;
It had been a week since the explosion of the Nastyburger. A week since the Fentons had been killed. Since Sam and Tucker had been killed. Since Mr. Lancer had been killed.

Amity Park was devastated—deaths in small cities and communities were anything but taken lightly. Many people and families visited the funerals held for the teacher and two students, even people that had never met or known the deceased. Empathizing with the distraught parents and teacher's colleagues.

Most, if not all students at Casper High were shaken at having their fellow teenage classmates wiped from existence, no matter how weird or geeky the kids were. It was a wakeup call: "Hello! It's reality! Coming to remind that your youth does not make you invincible."

Among many affected was Valerie Gray, a girl acquainted with the departured. Like most teens, she didn't care much for the death of Mr. Lancer but she shared the similar feelings her fellow classmates held towards Sam and Tucker, visiting their funerals and offering her condolences to their families. She wasn't a big fan of the two but they had been her age and close to Danny, reason enough for her to mourn. She wouldn't have wished that explosion on anyone—apart from ghosts.

Danny.

He survived the explosion. In fact, he was the only survivor, miraculously. Apparently, he had been far enough from the center to live to tell the tale.

There was no funeral for his family and the community wouldn't have given a care if it weren't for the passing of Jazz mixed in. Many questioned the missing funerals for the sake of Jazz's memory, a bright and promising student that the community and schools had honored and rejoiced in. "A waste of brain and talent," they said. "A tragedy she couldn't have moved on to greater things." But that was all the sympathy the deceased Fentons would receive; the community found relief and peace in no longer having ghost hunters around...or so they thought since Valerie kept a low profile.

Danny had been flung out of the town gossip and the attention instead centered around the people that had left behind Amity Park. Even the ghost activity had died down completely after the incident. The ghost hunting girl's attention, however, lay focused on Danny. She saw on the news that her fellow classmate had been hospitalized, although it wasn't stated where. Nevertheless, she made her rounds to every hospital in Amity Park and finally found that he had been staying at the Children's Hospital...only to discover she wasn't allowed entry because she wasn't close family anymore. But her attempts were futile and Valerie had made the tread from the hospital back home feeling frustrated and worried. She may not have been the closest friends with Danny but they were close enough to have at least made a connection, however small it was. He was the first person to treat her nicely since her fall from popularity, and she felt obligated to return the favor, no matter how small.

Valerie couldn't even imagine what the boy was going through. Sure, it was only her dad and her at home, but she didn't know what it was like to lose a family member—her mother died when she was too young to remember. But the girl sure wouldn't know what to do without her father...losing him would be like losing her popularity not once, but five times. And that was a lot considering
how horrible it felt.

Danny didn't deserve this. None of it. He's sweet, caring, funny, carefree...she wished she could see how he was taking all of this; Valerie was truly and genuinely worried for him.

"Val! You've GOT to see this!"

The girl turned around from her locker, perplexed, and gazed towards the source of the noise; her friend Star was waving a newspaper over her head and running towards her, the girl's bright blonde hair waving behind her like a commercial. Valerie then noticed the rest of the school's students were huddled in groups, everyone holding a newspaper and talking with dark excitement, many appearing to be confused.

The blonde beauty stopped in front of her dark-skinned friend gasping for air and bent over her knees, holding up the Amity Park Times for Valerie to grab while she caught her breath. Taken off guard, the secret ghost hunter accepted the newspaper and unfolded it.

To reveal an image that nearly knocked the breath out of Valerie's own lungs.

It showed none other than Mr. Masters himself carrying an unconscious Danny into a helicopter. Her eyes immediately darted to the heading which proclaimed, "Vlad Masters Takes Custody of Orphaned Boy." And immediately began to skim the article.

"Amity Park's lone survivor of the recent explosion at the Nastyburger, Daniel Fenton, son of the infamous and recently departed ghost hunters Jack and Madeline Fenton...admitted to the hospital...owned by Mr. Masters...staff of the hospital claim Vlad Masters arrived the night of the boy's admission and remained with him for the entirety of his stay...many expressed the strangeness of this but inside sources reported that Vlad Masters was none other than the Fenton children's guardian...the currently bachelor billionaire removed his new son at...Amity Park's own to become the child of a celebrity..."

Valerie's jaw dropped to the floor, she read and re-read the article several times, unable to process what she held in her stone cold hands. Unknowingly she brought her left hand to her face with her fingers curled limply.

Star, who finally got her breath back, stood back up straight and removed her smartphone from her pocket, turning on the front-view camera to check her appearance as her friend took in the news. When she finished looking at her gorgeous face she brought her smartphone down, impatient that Valerie was still gawking at the paper with now glassy eyes, and said, "Can you believe it?"

Torn from her moment of suspension in the air, the curvy teenager blinked several times and stammered, "I-I really don't know." With her scratchy warm voice sounding more scratchy than warm.

Her blonde friend scoffed and snapped her gum, rolling her eyes as she jutted one hip out for her hand to rest on. "I know right? The billionaire Vlad Masters being Danny's guardian? I didn't even know you could make celebrities your guardian. I'm, like, soo changing mine to Brad Pitt!"

"Uh...I'm pretty sure it doesn't work that way," Valerie replied with a more focused expression on her face, finally becoming aware of her surroundings. She looked up from the image on the newspaper to her friend before her eyes pulled her back down to reaffirm the article's existence.

Star's teensy eyebrows furrowed together like little caterpillars as if processing the most simple of things was difficult for her little mind, "But, like, it'd mean that the Fentons were close to Vlad
Masters. And I doubt that—nobody would dare go within 10 feet of them."

"Yeah..." Valerie muttered hazily, unable to procure a proper answer without giving away sacred secrets. During the events of Pariah Dark, she had walked into Fentonworks with Danny and Sam only to find the billionaire sitting at a table playing chess with Mr. Fenton and being all chummy with them. Later when Mr. Masters had pulled her outside to reveal he had created and sent her suit, she asked why he seemed friendly with the Fentons, to which he replied that they were good old college friends with that glint in his deep-sea blue eyes. She did not push any further after that, it wouldn't have been polite for her to insult the Fentons in front of their friend, although she found it odd how such an accomplished and well-off man could be associated with...well...crackpots. Sure, Danny's parents did a wonderful job protecting Amity Park from the ghost invasion. But protecting and ghost hunting were two entirely different things, and the Fentons were more competent at protecting than ghost hunting.

"Anyways." Star continued, snapping her gum again and bringing her smartphone back up to her face. "Danny's now, like, a celebrity. How weird is that? I mean, now I have respect for him cus it's like, totally socially acceptable now. But still." She said with a flip of her limp little-bangled wrist and shallow gumdrop-shaped fingernails.

"You know, he's actually not that bad of a guy to begin with." Valerie defended with a raise of her own well-maintained eyebrows and warmer tone of voice, remembering her locker was still open and slamming it shut with her foot. Star surprisingly caught the cue and with a hug of their textbooks to their chests, they turned around to begin making their way down the hall to class, stray kids weaving around the two.

"Yah, mmhm. Sure, whatever." The blonde replied, shifting her books to her left arm and adjusting her doll-sized shirt on that little barbie waist of hers. She opened her thin lips to speak again but her words were drowned out by the large and overbearing quarterback passing by with his entourage.

"It's too soon!" Dash blubbered, tears flying out of his eyes like a cartoon, "Such a waste of perfect nerd-wailing material! He's not supposed to become a billionaire until we're like, thirty!" Kwan, a twin in appearance to Dash apart from being Asian, rubbed his back supportingly as they blundered down the hall amidst stares of intrigue. Before reaching the corner, the muscular blondie violently turned around to a group of band-geeks gawking at him and picked up one of the poor teens by his shirt, yelling, "WHADDYA LOOKIN' AT?! THIS IS A CRISIS!"

They all screamed and ran away, their straggling friend, who was dropped on his bottom, frantically fleeing after them. Like the rest of the kids in the hallway, they were perplexed by the emotional football player to the point of fear. Apparently, having your favorite punching bag turn into a real celebrity (not just a popular kid) overnight was a dilemma for a successful bully. Danny went from a nobody to a huge stinking deal, and Dash was most likely jealous, which was rare considering his usual position of "top-dog."

The duo of post-popular girls who were the center of this segment giggled slightly at the emotional jock and continued down the hall to their class, but for one of them the notion was rather forced. A small knot of worry and curiosity plagued the area between the African-American girl's eyebrows and forehead, and she grasped her backpack strap nervously, unbeknownst to her slightly selfish acquaintance who had huffed, "Ugh, he's so loud. Anyways, I was going to say..." Before Valerie's thoughts drowned her out.

If Danny was going to be taken in with Mr. Masters...would he be staying at Casper high or not? She also wondered how the raven-haired boy was taking all of this, because if she observed correctly, Danny didn't exactly appreciate Mr. Masters' apparently surprise appearance at
Fentonworks—It was almost like her friend despised him.

Many more questions followed until she realized that this could simply be solved by a call; She just had to find her confiscated ghost-hunting gear.

At his desk in his private laboratory sat Vlad, hunched over a large pile of papers. In front of him was a lightbox on the wall displaying x-ray and CAT scan images of a certain ghost boy. Next to his desk sat a hefty looking microscope about the same height as himself, which didn't nearly resemble your stereotypical school microscope—it was an incredibly complex and sensitive piece of machinery.

The billionaire was glad he performed the physical on Daniel as early as he did, he had to wait a week for some of the test results to show up, although it wasn't necessarily bad because it gave him time to complete the new home security system that would contain the boy. Since he added his finishing touches this morning the billionaire decided to implement the device at midnight, when he can finally remove Daniel's collar without having to interact with him. Vlad preferred to avoid a conflict or complications at all costs because his temper was on the edge with the lack of sleep he'd been getting. The man thought that by now he would've eased back into his usual schedule, but he couldn't keep himself from extracting every possible fragment of information out of Danny's blood.

"Maddie!" He suddenly called out.

A hologram of Danny's late mother appeared next to the older hybrid with a series of glitches and answered, "Yes, sweetums?" In a slightly robotic voice somehow thicker than frosting. She crossed her arms like Real Maddie would've done—Vlad had programmed the now-dead woman's habits and characteristics into his artificial creation.

(I personally think that making Hologram Maddie glitch often is out of character for Vlad, but I'm guessing the animators did it as a reminder/indicator that she wasn't the real Maddie.)

He gathered the scattered papers with his scrawled handwriting and placed them in the hologram's hands, which had somehow predicted his action half-way to completion and held them out. It was beyond the writer how Vlad managed to make a hologram handle physical objects. (as seen in Kindred Spirits)

"Add this information to Daniel's file." He demanded, bringing his pen to his ear and sitting back to stretch momentarily, the shoulders of his tux tightening and riding up from excessive movement.

"Jack Fenton is an idiot, I am glad I serve you." Holographic Maddie replied with a glitch and pageant-winning smile before turning towards the computer mainframe to feed the papers into a slot. Immediately, images of the papers appeared on the large screen in Vlad's private laboratory and began highlighting portions of handwriting as it read and transferred them into computer text. Meanwhile, the man rolled over to his microscope and began adjusting a small slide holding a sample of Danny's blood and millions of other instruments with a series of responsive clicks. His hand movements clear, controlled, and concise, rhythmically matching the sounds emitting from the machine immediately after tampering. When he adjusting all the settings to his precise liking he pulled his trusty notepad towards the microscope at the end of his desk and removed the pen propped behind his ear, several stray hair strands falling out of place with it. Vlad then brought a large viewing piece, connected with the device to his face and peered in, his hands fussing slightly with the controls of the eyepiece before he truly looked at the sample. After several minutes of staring, he glanced back down at the notepad, pen hovering over the surface, frowning. Until a smirk slapped itself onto his face, signaling the billionaire changed his mind, "Analyze sample and place under Daniel's file."
"Alright, dearest!" The hologram responded, her voice becoming disgustingly sweeter with every sentence she spoke. The older hybrid set down the pen and swiveled around, crossing his legs and arms when he faced his main monitor.

The billionaire could've been doing all the work himself but he knew even with his expertise that having his AI computer system, specially designed by him for him, could compute and conclude data much faster than any human.

Vlad really did have the brains and the breakthroughs to revolutionize science as everyone knew it. But apart from his fear of being socially chained to work for a government laboratory he also wanted to keep his findings and technology to himself. After all, owning such incredible equipment and knowledge proved to be a great asset against others, making their annihilation much easier. The man laughed darkly at his musings and looked up to the laboratory screen, confirming that the conversions were now complete and all his handwriting had been placed into Daniel's file. The screen now displayed it's progress of analyzing Danny's blood and the microscope adjusted itself as it went along, whirring quietly in the background amongst the other white noise. This particular sample was the last blood test of Daniel's—throughout the week Vlad had done numerous tests including a blood culture, blood glucose, blood typing, coagulation, CRP, and many others. Because of the amount of testing he'd been doing he needed to collect a new sample every couple of days, which Danny was less than happy to provide but complied anyway.

"Report overview of Daniel's physiology." The man demanded. He already knew what he saw but he felt it necessary to confirm his computer system read and understood his findings; his handwriting was scribbly.

"Subject appears to be underweight and has a below average height, width, and BMI in comparison to other beings his age. Displays poor to mediocre coordination, balance, and stamina in addition to minimal muscular development without the use of spectral abilities. FVC and FEV1 are at 94%, indicating above-average lung capacity. Human reflexes are unexplainably fast and parallel to spectral reflexes with a reaction time of 0.05 seconds. Radiation tests resulted negative and spectral tests displayed a 35-50 week old ice-core, roughly 20% active. The subject is a level 7 ectoplasmic entity according to the Masters Ectoplasmic Energy Scale..."

The older hybrid nodded approvingly and interrupted, "Enough. Report overview of Daniel's bloodwork."

"Blood type cannot be determined as it does not match any existing human types. Human blood composed of 23% ectoplasm and ghostly fluids 17% human blood. White Blood Count above average and Hemocrit below average. Platelets are at the abnormally high amount of 800,000 but the subject is not susceptible to excessive blood clotting because ectoplasmic energy regulates rate of clotting. The CMP panel indicated a BMR of 3,000. Electrolyte and creatinine levels exceed the average human. Blood Lipid Panel concluded a high cholesterol..."

Vlad held up a hand to stop it's ranting and finalized, "That'll do for now. Your services aren't further required."

"See you soon, sugar!" The hologram replied, blowing her creator a kiss before glitching and disappearing with a buzzing click.

Still sitting in his office chair Vlad swiveled back around to face his desk with a tired yet content blanketed expression. This was information he'd been trying to obtain for months through his pawn, Valerie, and to think that he could extract samples and test whenever he pleased now with the boy merely a flight upstairs away...why, it was a dream come true. Of course, his motives for acquiring such information were quite different before Danny's stupid mistake, although it didn't matter...
anymore. What mattered was the present and future he had planned for this young adolescent boy, or would be planning, since Vlad now had everything he needed to begin constructing a lifetime schedule that would control every aspect of little Danny's existence and free-time expenditure.

His eyes went up to the ceiling of his laboratory as if he could see through it. Speaking of free-time expenditure, Danny had been doing nothing but struggle to read in that library for seven days straight. Sometimes Vlad wondered if the younger hybrid even left to go to sleep at night or if he just stayed there until the next day arrived, chipping away at a lost cause like a desperate prisoner.

It didn't seem right.

Danny's fists sprang into the air above his head in a winning gesture with a ginormous smile stretched from ear to ear on his joyous face and declared, "Eureka!" It took a week. 12 hours a day. A total 720 minutes of straining over complicated post-graduate textbooks for him to figure out the technology behind his damned collar.

He let his hands fall down to his sides and gazed happily at the battered and curled notebook that he had fished from his current...room of residence, sitting in front of him and now full of cursive-lettered information. Danny never managed to find a technology-related dictionary but he did find a fat thesaurus, a regular old dictionary, and the technology edition for a series that explained and informed of different careers in the medical field. The combination was definitely time-consuming, but nevertheless, it worked for the most part, and Danny couldn't be happier.

Transforming into Phantom with a glow much brighter than normal, the younger hybrid sped out of the library at top speed, his tail rippling and curving through the wind like smoke. He phased through walls and such in a hurry to get back to his "room." Now that Danny had the knowledge to override his collar he needed tools to do it, and he had just the right thing, thankfully.

The Fentons always took pride in building every possible household item and appliance by themselves. So when it came time for Jazz, and eventually Danny to own a smartphone, their parents took it upon themselves to build the devices and cellular data system despite their children's pleas to just buy one. Mom and dad dubbed it, "The Fentonphone," and while it acted like a normal smartphone, it also turned into a toolkit and ghost hunting weapons. There used to be a ghost tracker on it but it kept detecting Danny and going off during class, so the teenager had to ask Tucker to remove the feature. Not only was it annoying but it was unnecessary, since the Halfa came with his own built-in tracker.

Even though Danny had data on his phone, he found that it wasn't working when he ditched his attempts to guess Vlad's wifi passwords. The government or someone probably found out and eliminated the service now that no one occupied Fentonworks. Go figure. But the boy was confident the toolkit still worked since it wasn't part of a monthly service, and he would soon test to see if it did.

He was never able to confirm his beliefs, though, because an ectoplasmic energy beam blasted out of nowhere and threw the teenager into the wall with a nasty crack. Danny let out a pained gasp at contact, his back and shoulder smashing so hard against the surface that it buckled, displaying a considerably large crack when he crumpled to the floor in a series of coughing fits, struggling to suck in air and hand wrapping around his smarting neck.

"You little rat!" Plasmius roared, appearing in front of the hunched over younger hybrid, arms crossed with Danny's notebook rolled up in one of his gloved sharp hands. His eyes burned bright like blood and a furious energy surrounded his manner. "You think you can outsmart me? That you
have a choice and control over your own life? You don't know when to give up, do you? Why can't you act like the son you're supposed to be? Why can't you ACCEPT YOUR FATE?"

Plasmius was livid, not so much with Danny but actually himself. Sure, the boy's defiance was incredibly annoying, but it made the teen all the more worthwhile to be his successor. That stubbornness, strong will, and ability to hurdle enormous obstacles was invaluable. No, Vlad was not nearly as angry with Danny as he was himself for yet again underestimating the teenager. For letting his guard down and allowing his wants to make him accept the boy's obedience without questioning how odd it was. Vlad was partly at fault for letting the boy almost slip from his grasp, although it didn't change the fact that Danny would experience consequences as punishment and a way for the older hybrid to release his frustration and rage towards this entire situation.

"Where you and I are concerned..." Danny seethed, bringing up his head from it's cowering stance and rubbing his throbbing shoulder, rotating his arm to test for possible dislocation. "I am no good son, because I'm NOT. YOUR. SON." He paused, panting, still trying to regain his breath, but seeing Plasmius raise his arm he quickly continued. "Law may say otherwise, but in the end, it all goes back to blood. We don't share blood Plasmius, and even though I'm under your custody, I have every right to decide who's true family. And you will NEVER be a father to me so long as I live!"

Danny's little speech was responded to by another ecto-blast, this time breaking clean through the wall and shooting Danny through a guest room. Plasmius once again teleported in front of the fallen child, sneering and muscles bulging. "I see you picked up some vocabulary this week." He passively mocked, bringing Phantom off the floor by the collar of his hazmat suit. His demeanor quickly changed to threatening and he leaned in dangerously, baring his fangs as his other hand lit up with pink flames, decimating the notebook to ashes that fell tenderly to the floor. "Very well, boy. I have no other choice than to force some sense into you."

Before Danny could respond, Vlad quickly threw him to the ground with incredible force and set his foot on the boy's chest, allowing some of his weight to press the halfa into the floor, who cried out in pain and instinctively wrapped his hands around the boot in a weak attempt to pry it off. Not eager to give Danny time to recover, the billionaire raised his hand and sent a bolt of electricity towards his younger rival. The boy writhed and yelled, unable to squirm away by the weight on his chest as the jagged pulses coursed through his muscles. Plasmius smirked down, enjoying the show influenced by himself. "It hurts, yes? You deserve much more pain than this. I'll teach you not to disobey your father."

A second was all Danny needed; he phased into the floor beneath him and soon flew straight back up to connect his fist into Vlad's chin, making the man stumble back slightly. "STOP SAYING YOU'RE MY DAD!" But it was not enough; Masters quickly regained fighting stance and dodged another punch Danny had sent flying his way, returning it with a kick to the gut. The white-haired anomaly doubled over and wheezed, having had the air knocked out of him a second time. Danny still had incredibly low stamina, and he was already nearing the end of it, but he would fight with everything he had. For freedom and the sake of this world and timeline. He wouldn't give up now when he still had energy left, no matter how little.

Another series of electrical shocks ensued, followed by several energized punches to Danny's face. "No, I don't think I will," Plasmius said, blowing away ectoplasmic energy radiating from his fists like smoke from a gun. "You can't keep living a lie, Daniel, that's what's been keeping you going this week, isn't it? You haven't accepted the truth yet."

"Same can be said for you, Plasmius." Danny grunted, wiping away ectoplasm from the corner of his mouth. "Running after my mom again and again? Dude, it was never going to happen." He shot an ectoplasmic blast in Vlad's direction.
The billionaire caught the blast and spread it from the hand he absorbed it to his other. "Yes, just like your family will never rise back from the dead." He answered maliciously, shooting Daniel's attack back at him. It hit him square in the chest, blowing him back completely and making him fall to the ground. Plasmius flew over to the crumpled mess. "I'll end your suffering if you just say the word." He offered evilly, towering over the pained teenager whose face screwed in discomfort. "All you have to do is call me father."

Plasmius waited for Phantom to regain respiration, watching that little, sturdy chest heave with the effort. His stubborn hands curling in on themselves, the younger hybrid eventually choked out, "Ne'er." and threw his fist at his enemy with all his energy, fast as lightning.

Vlad's eyes flashed when he caught the fist, and noting how tense the boy was he threw the fist down, Danny's upper body going with it. "Wrong answer." He warned, then grabbed the teen by his electric collar and let him hang with his back facing the floor, careful to not actually kill the boy. "Let's try again, shall we? Second chance."

"Never!" Danny repeated, eyes screwed shut in pain and concentration as he tried but failed to make himself float. He dared not adjust his body by the collar digging into his already tender neck.

"One last try, Daniel, don't make me go to extreme measures." He stated darkly, shaking Danny vigorously, who yelled at the torture. "SAY IT!"

"NEVER!" Danny screamed, the noise becoming continually louder and louder, Danny's exclamation rippling away and melding with a ghostly wail that weaved in and out of the sonic waves exploding from his open mouth, vocal chords rumbling with the burden of the power. Everything in front of the boy was sent careening back by the pure magnitude of the attack, including Vlad, who hadn't even processed what was happening. The man smashed into the wall of the guest room and remained pinned in place, the waves pushing him further into the wall like there wasn't even a solid barrier blocking him from going through it. Blood pounded with the infernally ear-splitting and deafening waves that pushed through his eardrums with no mercy. He couldn't bring his hands up to protect himself, the air was thick with rounded drills, leaving him immobile and helpless against the attack. Danny sat on the floor, having been dropped by Vlad, his power channeling out of him with zero control. The boy hadn't meant for it to spill out like that, he would've used it as a last resort when he knew he couldn't go on anymore. But it couldn't be helped, his ultimate move had been released and it couldn't be taken back. The collar around his neck cracked, electricity shaking around it until it couldn't take any more pressure and fell off, revealing rubbed and raw skin underneath from the teenager's nightmare-filled sleep. The sound it made when it hit the floor was silent alongside the ruckus.

Just when Plasmius thought he couldn't take anymore and would be forced to change back, the wailing stopped—the echoing stopped. Everything lurched forward and Vlad's feet touched down to the ground. He leaned back against the wall to help support his weight, gasping for air that had smartly evaded the attack. Left behind was an obnoxiously silent ringing that overflowed the fallen walls of the guest room and those around it. Where on earth had that child learned to use an attack like that? How on earth did he even manage to do that? Vlad had never seen or heard of such a powerful counter.

Danny felt the tension leave his throat as white rings materialized from his waist, sweeping throughout his tired and beaten body. His head was spinning and he groaned, leaning forward to get on all fours so he could rid the feeling. He stayed like that for a few seconds, until he opened his eyes and his mouth dropped; right underneath him lay a battered electric collar. Anxiety pumped out from his underused and strained heart. He slowly raised his head and gazed over at Plasmius, who stood leaning against the wall with utter bafflement across his chiseled features,
gaping at Danny like he'd seen nothing of the sort before. Danny looked back down to the collar, reaffirming it really had fallen off and mentally facepalming. Of course! All this time he could've just used his ghostly wail to remove the collar, he had completely forgotten his bonds fell off when he first used it in the ghost zone.

Not wanting to wait any longer, he threw aside his discovery and made a break for it. The boy ran like never before; The teenager finally freed himself of his containment and had a chance—a chance to thwart his fate and save existence. He streaked down the hall, wind cutting his face and hair as he tried to transform back but couldn't. It didn't matter, Phantom or Fenton, Danny had to give it his all or he would never be able to forgive himself if he dared allowed room for mistake or hesitation, not while the world was at stake. Remembering how Vlad's private lab was in his study, The boy made a sharp turn, ignoring the stitch that rose in his side. He flew down the steps and threw open the door to the foyer, streaking across the entrance hall with everything he had and burst into the billionaire's private study. Frantically, he whipped his head around, looking for some sort of switch or entrance to the lab which he knew sat behind the fireplace. Danny was glad he somewhat paid attention to his surroundings the night he woke up in his enemy's mansion, otherwise he would have had no idea where the private lab is.

Desperate to try anything he rushed to the bookcase and began pulling books out by their corners like he'd seen on TV, staring at the fireplace for any hint towards opening up. Around fifteen books in he noticed there were fingerprints around the golden football on the right side of the hearth but not the left, so he ditched the books and tried twisting the miniature statue, which didn't budge. Growing frustrated, Danny's instead pushed down on the statue hard, and his hand shot down in surprise when the football lever tilted down and the entire wall began to rumble, splitting into two to reveal a dark staircase. Not waiting for the entryway to open completely he slid in and ran down the staircase so fast he tripped and tumbled to the bottom.

"Took you long enough." Vlad's deep voice rumbled from the shadows of the lab as a blue cube shot out and encased Danny's fallen form. Gasping, the boy looked up to see everything around him appeared blue through the opaque surface. Panic-stricken, he raised his hands and pounded against the surface in desperation and anger. "LET ME OUT!"

"I don't think so, my boy. You will stay in there until I deem you ready to leave—you need to be taught a lesson in obedience." Plasmius stated insinuatingly, stepping out from the shadows with his hands held behind his straight spine. He looked even more furious than before—there would be no jokes or witty banter to exchange. The man walked over to the cube and kicked it, making the prison shoot away from the staircase and smack against the wall, much to Danny's anger.

After watching the boy's pain, not caring about the prospect of whiplash, Plasmius turned and began making his way up the staircase transforming into Masters along the way. He wanted time to reflect on what just happened.

Danny continued banging against the wall of his trap, ignoring how his hands hurt and throbbed after each hit. "LET ME OUT OF HERE! LET ME THE HELL OUTTA HERE! YOU COWARD!"

Halfway up the staircase Masters shook with anger and ceased his trek upwards, looking back at him with a nasty scowl in response to being taunted. Nobody dare called him, Vlad Plasmius, a coward! His knuckles tensed as he made fists with his hands and almost completely turned around to go back down the staircase but he hesitated. Releasing the tension and letting his fists fall apart, the billionaire sobered up with the realization that the two were no longer half-ghost rivals. He couldn't beat up the boy without it being considered abuse. Not that it mattered to the older hybrid himself. However, Danny could use it against him.
"YOU GODAMN COWARD COME BACK DOWN HERE AND PUT UP A FUCKING FIGHT YOU FUCKING COWARD! I'LL TEACH YOU A FUCKING LESSON! LET ME THE FUCK OUT OF HERE!"

Vlad stared grimly at the wall from which the younger hybrid's voice emanated from, making note of the boy's excessive use of swear words. He turned back to face the entrance of the lab and resumed his ascendance into his private study.

"DON'T FUCKING BLAME ME WHEN YOUR DEMISE COMES FRUITLOOP! YOU'RE DOING THIS TO YOURSELF! YOU HEAR ME?! YOU'LL REGRET NOT LISTENING TO ME YOU FUCKING EGOTISTICAL GODAMN HELLUVA HYPOCRITE!"

Vlad continued, finally reaching the entrance to his lab and pressing a button on the side of the wall that reopened the fireplace, ignoring the nonsense spouting out of Danny's mouth. The boy was hysterical. He welcomed the closing of his secret door; On more than one occasion he thanked himself for making his lab soundproof. Before the walls became one, a final scream sounded out from the lab.

"I WISH YOU WERE FUCKING DEAD!"

With that, the entrance closed, and Vlad walked away muttering, "I already am."

Chapter End Notes

I probably over-exaggerated Star and I'm not even sure if she and Valerie were friends at the time. Oh well, haha.

Being gen Z, I was like, "pshht. How could Danny possibly emotionally survive at Vlad's without a smartphone?" So, despite acknowledging how stupid it was of me to think that, I gave Danny one anyways. Not sure if it was a good idea or if it would resonate well with everyone but if you don't or do like it, let me know! I want you guys to enjoy this and if changing the time the show takes place doesn't sit well with you, I will gladly remove the detail.

Finally, yes, if it hasn't been made clear before, I do plan on making this story for a more mature audience. I'll explain Danny's sudden out-of-character-ness in the next chapter.
Danny pounded and screamed in his prison until his voice refused to sound anymore and fists turned black and blue. By then Vlad was long gone, leaving the younger hybrid in the darkness of his laboratory with only the white-ish blue glow of the trap to keep him company. There was no shimmering green portal light, Masters somehow managed to stay one step ahead of the boy as usual and locked up the portal before Danny arrived. So if Danny somehow escaped he'd still have difficulties reaching his desired location. It was a complete mystery how that man seemed to read minds—almost creepy. Not that he already wasn't with his spying on the Fentons and love interest.

Physically forced to surrender his acts of defiance, Danny lay with his back on the floor of the cube and feet pressed against the top; arms crossed and glaring into empty space. His entire body ached of over-exhaustion, every pang serving as a reminder of the halfas' run-in. Freedom still lingered on the tips of his taste buds. After several hours of silent but intense anger, Danny finally calmed down from his outburst and adopted his usual reasonable mindset after realizing anger would only bring him closer to the future he'd been trying to avoid. Although his frustration towards Plasmius was still evident, he took the time to regroup his thoughts and observations with as much of a clear head he could muster. Danny had been so hyperfocused on overriding the collar this week that he didn't pay attention to Plasmius too much. He didn't think he needed to, but clearly Plasmius was more in his way then he realized.

"I just can't figure it out." Danny thought aloud, "What's going on with Plasmius?"

Something he noticed during this time of reflection was that the billionaire seemed to get over the death of Danny's mom extremely fast. Yet, Vlad had Danny convinced that he was head-over-heels for her before this entire ordeal, ruthless and willing to stop at nothing for her love. If that were true, Danny would've thought Vlad'd still be upset over her passing; that there'd be a funeral for her and everything. After all, he's obsessed over her for the past twenty years. When somebody loves another so dearly, especially for so long, it should devastate them. The boy couldn't help but wonder...were Vlad's feelings genuine towards Danny's mom and the man just happened to hide his pain? Or had he been lying to himself and idolizing a relationship that would prove to be dissatisfying once achieved?

Danny wasn't sure; He was at a loss for what to think, the billionaire did not let on much lately. He holed himself up in his lab while Danny did the same in the library, and during mealtimes, he didn't talk about what he was doing, he just asked Danny more random questions or extracted more blood. In the past Plasmius had been much more direct about his feelings and motives in relation to his scheming. Now, he suddenly became all secretive? It was odd. Part of the teen hoped that Vlad
now saw him as a formidable foe, but that was improbable.

If there was one thing the man had always been transparent about, though, it was his wish to have Danny as his half-ghost son. And Danny was certain that that was why the billionaire absolutely insisted he stay at his home. However, part of Danny thought that it was more like the older hybrid to take advantage of everything that happened. That he'd continue his villainous schemes while Danny was out of the way with his hands full of past bad decisions. That Vlad would focus on building a superweapon or world domination now that Danny's family was no longer a tangible goal.

Instead, Plasmius held Danny captive in his own home and demanded the boy call him father when they had only ever been arch-enemies for the entirety of their relationship. It was weird, even with Danny aware of his motives. Was Vlad really that lonely? Did he genuinely care for Danny? or was he just bent on getting an evil apprentice son?

The younger hybrid suspected the latter because so far Vlad showed no regards for Danny's happiness or wants. He seemed to enjoy proving his authority and power over the younger hybrid, threatening punishment over the smallest disobediences and putting a fucking collar on him. Like he was trying to dehumanize and objectify him. He oddly cared a lot about Danny's physical health too, like a relic to be maintained. Or the aforementioned property. But...because Vlad cared about him...it could also be seen as the older hybrid going out of his way to take care of Danny as if he was his own. To make sure Danny was okay after such a traumatic experience and tending him to avoid further discomfort. Was that even possible for the diabolical and hateful man Danny knew him for?

Having laid on his back for a while, Danny readjusted his position and brought his feet down from the ceiling of his small prison. Standing was impossible since the box was half the teen's height. He curled up silently in a fetal position and lay his head on the warm hard surface of the energized trap, itching at skin out of stress as opposed to need. His throat felt rough like sandpaper every time he swallowed.

Perhaps it was possible, like Alternate-Timeline Vlad. By the removal of his powers Vlad came to realize his morals and ways were twisted. He ceased to be a selfish man and became selfless. However...one could argue that Future-Vlad wasn't even Vlad anymore. The Vlad before—Present-Vlad—showed no sign of selflessness or enlightenment. Danny noticed that Present-Vlad did everything with one goal in mind: self-fulfillment. Nothing was done for the sake of others.

Or was it? He remembered from his conversation with Future-Vlad that Present-Vlad had agreed to remove Danny's ghost half because of the amount of suffering he'd been going through.

"All you wanted was to make the hurt go away." He had reminisced, the cold deep-sea-blue absent from his eyes, replaced with a more sad and gray tone of color. "I honored your wishes. No more painful human emotions to drag you down."

It...very well could be a possibility that Vlad isn't the demon Danny swore him to be. Maybe there was some empathy and kindness is that small black heart of his. And perhaps Vlad was showing it with his worrying and insisting on keeping Danny in perfect shape. He did not mention Danny's lack of maturity throughout the entire physical. Danny appreciated that.

Danny suddenly regretted telling the older hybrid that he wished he were dead—that sentence definitely didn't uphold Danny's morals. The boy wasn't sure what possessed him to say something so awful, something that he normally wouldn't have dared uttered to anyone; including his arch-nemesis. Yet he had. He dared uttered it. In fact, "screamed" was more the appropriate word. Danny had been so full of anger and hate at that particular moment that he stepped out of line and
wished death upon the one person who went out of his way to take care of him. The younger hybrid paled at the realization; such a reaction was not common for Danny but it was expected from Vlad or Dan. Could Danny be turning into them? Had his supposedly harmless week in Wisconsin already damned this timeline?

Suddenly, Danny's reflection in the trap appeared to have pointed ears, red eyes, and flaming hair when he gazed into himself. The boy let out a yelp and jumped to the other side of the box, shaking considerably. Anxiety coursing through him, he raised his hand and tried to shoot an ectoplasmic beam at his reflection, only to be electrocuted by his prison as punishment for daring to "escape." Reflexively, Danny brought his hand close to himself and looked at it to check if it was okay. When he brought his attention back to the reflection in front of him it was gone. He stared into his own blue human self, heart pumping wildly and near the brink of tears.

It was just a figment of his imagination. Phew. He wasn't turning into them. Yet.

Just because Danny regretted telling Vlad he wished he were dead didn't mean the teenager no longer harbored feelings of discontent towards his adversary. Vlad was still a man with more than questionable views on life and how it worked—hardly a role model or someone fit to take care of an orphaned child. The billionaire held unhealthy obsessions and coping methods to the obstacles Life brought by the doorstep. But someone could be like Vlad and still have the slighted inkling of empathy and goodness hiding under years of resentment..right?

Well...whether or not that was true...it didn't change that he couldn't stay with Vlad. In fact, such empathy on Vlad's part is what might've led to the incarnation of Dan. Ironic how the man's only good attribute could cause the world to crash and burn. But the real matter at hand here was whether Danny could manage to slip from Vlad's tight clutches. The older hybrid was doing everything in his power to keep Danny under his wing, and so far it worked. The halfa has tried three times by now—at the hospital, his first night here, and right now. He'd failed three times, too. But that was only because he was weak from staying in bed for three straight days...at least he hoped that was why.

Danny squeezed himself into the corner of the box and hid his head in his arm-wrapped knees.

Maybe this was the universe's way of telling Danny leaving Vlad wasn't possible...that the Greeks had the right idea about fate: it was unavoidable.

Shaking his head he whispered, "No...!" Leaving Vlad would be Danny's last heroic act. It was the only thing he had left of his past identity. Without his heroics...Danny truly had nothing; no purpose in life. His dreams to become an astronaut were likely shattered now that ghost hunting decimated his grades. And without the very people surrounding him, Danny had no backbone. The only reason he succeeded in his superhero career was that he had Sam and Tucker to help and support him, combined with his forever family's love and inventions.

Was it that without them he'd never be successful at thwarting his arch-nemesis? That he simply wasn't strong enough to take care of himself? Was Danny condemned the moment everything blew up?

Immediately after the thoughts crossed his mind a divider collapsed somewhere in Danny's heart. He'd shoved his loved one's memories and deaths to the back of his mind in fear of them interfering with the big picture, focusing on escape and trying to approach it like the other barriers he'd overcome. But if escape wasn't possible...if saving the world wasn't possible...

Long, overdue tears began to stream down a path not taken in a long time. They hesitated at first, silent in disbelief at being exposed to open air and freed after so long. Danny tried to hold them
back, however, he realized it didn't matter—nothing mattered anymore. And the tears soon streamed out, faster and faster like a broken dam run over by the pure power of water. Pressure built up behind his eyes like his body was trying to force his emotions to leave, sick of hiding them and being suppressed. He couldn't breathe, his lungs refused to listen and instead contracted air when they felt like it, carrying out the action with shallow, shuddering gasps; wanting and also not wanting sweet oxygen. The pain and the loss swelled up and overwhelmed every ounce of Danny's body and soul, creeping up from the dregs of his heavy heart to his damaged vocal chords. Pain screwed into him as his body demanded to let go of agonizing sobs—last resort but helpless cries as eager shadows rushed into the succumbing ex-hero.

He pressed his shaking and rigid back as far as it could go into the corner, curling up into the tightest possible ball. The walls of the trap were comforting but not nearly enough. Danny's fists turned white and his jaw tightened as teeth clenched against the other set. Collarbones strained against skin, visible underneath his bowed head.

"I miss them so much." Danny's thoughts rose above the ruckus of his meltdown. "I miss them so so so much. I want them back. My god, I want them back so badly."

Vlad stood as stiff as a statue, staring at the damage the two hybrids had inflicted on his home. He was thankful that he became suspicious and checked in on Daniel when he did, otherwise, the boy might've actually escaped.

Ah, the dangers of holding a smart person hostage. The billionaire would've smiled if he weren't so disappointed in his own ignorance. The things that boy could accomplish when he really applied himself were nothing short of incredible.

Even if Plasmius were given a heads up, Danny still could've escaped with the curveball he threw at the older hybrid. Vlad expected Danny to leave by the front door, in direction of the forest. However, he felt Danny's ecto-signature pass by the front doors and instead towards the direction of the private study. The older hybrid immediately figured out that Danny wanted to escape by means of the Ghost Portal instead since there was nothing else in that direction to offer the boy the freedom he obsessed over. Danny was as easy to read as an open book, thankfully. So Vlad, who had been flying invisibly in Danny's direction since he was too weak to teleport (can you believe it?) quickly changed course to the lab and locked the portal while he felt his subordinate run around above in what he could only assume as his figuring out the secret entrance. When Danny crashed to the bottom of the stairs Vlad had just finished the portal lock-down procedure. The billionaire only made it seem like he'd been waiting so he could appear in control, or else he would've praised Danny for thinking like a Masters.

But nevermind the boy's wit. Where on earth...or how on earth...did Danny manage to pick up a power of such magnitude and destruction? He stepped into the war zone that was previously a guest room. The wall looked unstable as if breathing on it would make it collapse. Everything in front of Danny had literally flown to the wall Plasmius was pinned against, and everything behind Danny pushed back. Had Vlad not witnessed the event he would've assumed a bomb or explosion occurred here.

Well, if anything, it certainly explained Danny's FVC and FEV1 scores. The tests combined several results into an overall percentage, which showed the efficiency and lung-capacity of the patient. A healthy human would range around 60% and a full-ghost 0%, for obvious reasons. Plasmius's score was 26%, which seemed normal considering the circumstances, so when he saw Daniel's was 94% he became absolutely appalled. Danny certainly did not need to take in that much air. But the billionaire now saw that Danny's lungs did not adapt so he could breathe more, rather, they adapted
in order to expel more. The fact that Danny managed to increase the capacity of his lungs with only a 35-50 week old core was fascinating. A pair of regular lungs could not possibly withstand the exertion of such an attack. Although, it appeared Danny still couldn't handle that power because he was forced to turn back human after releasing it. Perhaps he needed his lungs to be at 100% or more in order to take the burden. Still, it was astonishing how much damage could be done even if the attack wasn't at its full potential. There's no doubt Vlad would work to bring it to full power or higher, as he immediately recognized this could give himself the upper hand in more situations and open doors.

"Is this a bad time?" Skulker asked from behind, eyeing the destruction before his employer.

Used to having employees barge into his home and having sensed Skulker, Vlad turned around to address him, "I suppose not..." At noticing the objects in Skulker's metallic hands, he forgot his woes. "Excellent! Now, all that's left is the ecto-converter. You didn't happen to find anything like it, did you?"

"No." The robot-suited ghost replied, shaking his head as he handed his employer the bloodstream nanobots and Lightning Rod. Machine-like sounds emitted from the suit with the movement.

"Darn—" The slight expression of excitement left Vlad's face and he looked down to the floor as if the action would help him think. With a raise of his hand to his chin, he thought aloud, "I'll have to continue working on it myself then. At this rate, I don't know when the suit will be finished."

Skulker grinned at the thought of the perfected suit, "When it is can I try it?"

"No." The billionaire frowned sternly, "It is to be used for my interests. Not for your hunting. Besides, I'm certain you won't want to give the suit back to me after you wear it."

"Fine." Skulker grumbled with a cross of his arms. Masters was smart to refuse. Skulker, knowing the suit's capabilities, wanted to become an even more powerful ghost so he'd have a better chance at capturing the hybrids. One of which he only agreed to work for in hopes of taking advantage of his intelligence and, again, capturing one day.

Vlad dug into his pocket to remove a wallet with a secret compartment for ghost currency. "Here. Your payment." He rewarded, extending a large wad of bills similar to American currency.

The ghost greedily accepted his earnings and placed them into his suit. He gave their surroundings a second glance and hesitantly inquired, "Er...what happened?"

"Danny Phantom happened." The billionaire shortly explained with a pissed-off tone.

Skulker immediately perked up. "The whelp was here?"

"Is here, Skulker." Vlad corrected with a sinister grin. He held up his smartwatch and brought up the surveillance feed from his lab's security camera, which displayed Danny hunched in the corner of another trap Skulker had designed for the billionaire. "Has everyone heard of what happened in Amity?"

His beady green eyes widened in curiosity at the image. "So that's why your portal was locked? I had to use the one in your other lair." Answering Vlad's question, he added, "Somewhat. Rumor has it that a powerful fight destroyed part of the ghost child's territory."

"Indeed. His family got caught up in it and ended up dead, so I took him in."

"Really? About time. You've been wanting him for how long?" Skulker wasn't aware of how
families worked, so he didn't question Vlad's weird parenting techniques.

"Ten months." Vlad immediately answered.

Right after the gorilla incident, Skulker ran back to Plasmius to get another suit since he no longer had one. Plasmius, who only employed the more competent ghosts, was curious as to what gave the hunter a run for his money. Skulker intended on keeping his mouth shut so the ghost child could stay open for hunting but his employer easily extracted the truth: that there was another half-ghost in existence. Vlad ordered his employee that if he caught Phantom he was to bring the ghost boy to him; the billionaire wanted to make him his apprentice and open him past the limits of heroism. During the night Phantom and Plasmius crossed paths, their fight was an unplanned test of skills. It wasn't until Phantom passed out that Vlad learned the ghost child was Jack's son—an added bonus.

"Does this mean I can't hunt him?"

The billionaire rubbed his face in frustration. "For the umpteenth time, yes. What part of that can you not wrap around your metallic head?!"

His employee shrugged, "Just...making sure?" It wasn't safe to delve too far into the subject, so Skulker, having finished his business with Plasmius, turned around and announced, "I think I saw something interesting on my way here. Did you need anything else?"

"No, but if you could keep an eye out for an ecto-converter that'd be wonderful. Happy hunting."

Vlad finalized, looking back at the remains of the guest room while Skulker flew off. Their meeting was short and concise like always since Vlad used Skulker as a pawn and vice versa. Nothing more, nothing less.

Shortly after Skulker's leave, Masters ate what he liked to call linner, or as Jack had argued, lupper. Back in college, they tried to create a word for "lunch" and "dinner/supper," eventually ending up in a heavy debate over which combination of the two sounded more real. To this day, Vlad still thought linner was the better way to put it, not that he'd dare tell anyone now—it was embarrassing. Almost every memory Vlad had regarding college made him cringe.

His reason for eating was because his ghost-half's energy replenished faster whenever he consumed something. And rested, which was why he took a long-overdue nap.

Having just woken up, Vlad sat on his bed in his Packer's t-shirt and black sweatpants, scrolling through article upon article on his Iphone regarding, "Bachelor Billionaire" and "New Son."

Vlad rolled his eyes. Didn't these people have anything better to write about? Why did America care about this? Sure, he knew there were plenty of women out there who were interested in him. Either they were now more drawn to him for taking the role of father or turned off because they didn't like children. Not that it mattered to him. No better woman was fit for him than Maddie, therefore, other women did not interest him. But anyway, back to the matter at hand, the press should've been focusing on matters of political importance rather than the private lives of celebrities and successful business people. Obtaining Daniel was a private matter, although he was proud of it.

His eyes glanced up at the time on the top of the screen. Daniel had been stuck in his small trap for six hours. Perhaps it was about time he checked up on the little rascal. With his home surveillance system connected to an app on his phone, he could see not just his secret lab but every room of importance in his castle. That way, Vlad knew if his employees were snooping around in places
they shouldn't be. And now it'd be put to the much better use of spying on Danny without the need to stand up.

"How I love technology." Vlad remarked to himself as he opened up the app.

His eyes grew the size of saucers, his mouth dropped, and he froze at the feed he was getting. Not too long after he urgently dropped his phone and flew down to the lab to see if his beloved technology was truly deceiving him, discarding that he was still wearing pajamas. It couldn't possibly be...!

It was. Danny sat curled up into a tight little ball, rigid and tense as he rocked himself, despair dissecting him before Vlad's very eyes. His muffled sobs of agony could be heard from the breach of the containment chamber in short gasps of pain and he held onto himself like his life depended on it. Vlad almost did a double-take—it was the first time he'd ever seen Danny cry. The first time he'd ever seen him so open and exposed.

Masters held his smartwatch up and tapped a few times. In response to the commands, the cube around Danny disappeared, removing the muffled effect of his cries. The boy was in such distress that he did not notice the change of surroundings, even when Vlad gently sat down next to Danny like he was approaching a docile creature. He wrapped his arms around Danny's trembling form, whispering, "Shh..." in a comforting tone. And Danny, not caring about anything anymore while drowning in his emotions, actually allowed Vlad to pull him close. However, he remained curled up on himself and didn't grasp onto the billionaire.

Danny didn't want...didn't like...crying in front of anyone, more so with Vlad. But he couldn't get himself to stop, and he felt so broken that part of him couldn't give a care.

A wicked smile plastered on the billionaire's face when Danny hid his own near Vlad's heart. Finally. He broke. It was only a matter of time, Vlad understood too well what Danny was going through. He brought his hand up to Danny's ink-black locks and rubbed small circles into the child's trembling back with his thumb. Daniel continued to cry into the older hybrid's green and gold pajama shirt, which Vlad would've been annoyed about if it weren't for the discovery of his major victory.

"I-I...I want...th-them back." Danny softly croaked out between cries with his strained voice. Part of him warned it was stupid to say to Vlad, but he was so desperate. There was nobody else for Danny to go to at this point, and Vlad was right there, offering comfort like they were never enemies to begin with.

"I'd imagine so." Vlad replied with a somber and resigned voice to hide his glee. He rubbed Danny's back with gentle force, the boy's shoulder rising slightly with each upward motion. "Just let it all out, son. Let it all out."

"I w-want them back...I want them back...I miss t-them...so bad..." More shuddering breaths followed. "I can't...I can't..."

"Yes?" Vlad asked as he hugged Danny tighter, who shivered more violently at the action. A smile curved at the edge of the billionaire's lips.

"Can't...I-I don't know...I just..." more sobs stole the boy's breath, "I can't li...live without them."

"Yes...it does feel like that, doesn't it?" Vlad empathized, resting his chin atop Danny's head. "Deep breaths, my boy, come on, deep breaths...shh..."
"It...it," hiccup, "t's all my fault."

"Everyone makes mistakes Daniel."

He rubbed at his eyes vigorously. "W-wish I could've s-a...said goodbye...to everyone. To Amity."

"Mhm." Vlad tried to pull away slightly so he could see Danny's face, but because the boy was leaning against him his head went with the older hybrid's upper body. He sighed resignedly and sat back up, tightening his hug.

"I want t-them back...all my f-fault...I hate being...being half-ghost."

A half-ghost son that hated his existence? That wouldn't do.

"Our powers come with a price, you know what they say...an eye for an eye. But look on the bright side! You can do all these amazing things, my boy. I found that...screaming power of yours quite marvelous. Many people would do anything to just fly, and that's without the mention of other powers. Just think: those without our abilities are tied down by their humanity. But us...we've practically cheated mother nature. We don't have to live by the rules, we can do whatever we please. We're the outliers. The more superior."

Contrary to Vlad's intended effect, Daniel began to cry harder and unwittingly grabbed handfuls of the man's tear-dampened shirt.

The happiness in Vlad's eye was beginning to fade as memories resurfaced. The things Danny was saying and how shattered and small he appeared took the billionaire way back. Before wealth and half-ghosts and college. When his parents died. He stared distractedly at nothing in particular while Danny continued to sputter hysterically in circles. Eyes grew watery.

He blinked and bit the inside of his cheek. No. He didn't want to open that can of worms—he thought he put that behind him a long time ago. This was not going to turn into a sob-fest.

"I k-k-killed t-them...I...I...kill...killed them...I...I fucking k-killed t-t-them..." Danny was so lethargically tense he was beginning to slide towards the floor. Vlad raised him up slightly and put the child's head on his shoulder.

"Now, now, don't beat yourself up. But do refrain from using profanity."

"I-I fuh-fucking killed t-them...everything...I wish it n-never happened..."

"So do I. Everything happens for a reason."

"I n-need them..."

"I understand how you'd feel that way."

They sat in his lab until Danny had finally calmed down a little. The boy blinked and sniffled occasionally, letting out shaky sighs in attempt to bring his heart rate down. Occasionally losing his grip again and having to regain it. But it was a step forward in that he was no longer releasing tsunamis of tears. Danny wasn't feeling any better on the inside though, he was feeling worse. At this point no amount of tears could express the anguish that haunted his soul. He wanted it to go away...but he also didn't care...he felt so divided. With everything. To continue to fight or give in? Vlad and his sudden caring?

Getting stiff and sore from having to sit on the floor for so long, Vlad adjusted Danny so that he'd
Danny quietly obeyed, and with Vlad's hand on his shoulder, they walked up the stairs of the lab. His other hand flexed the sharp fingers that had successfully picked up ripped heartstrings, now knotted around the boy's own eyes and mouth.

Chapter End Notes

Oh man. That scene was weird to write. I'm taking a huge risk by posting it. And yes, the last sentence of this chapter was figurative.

So. Here's my reasoning for the info I gave about Vlad's discovery of another halfa before meeting Danny.

In Bitter Reunions, when Plasmius and Danny talked before fighting, he made it obvious that he knew who Phantom was and what he did. But one quote that stuck out to me was when Vlad yawns and says,

"So...year one. Tell me, child, can you do this yet?" Then makes four duplicates in a show of his powers and advanced abilities.

I always thought that was a weird sentence whenever I rewatched that ep (it's one of my favorites, no surprise there I bet.) Because it sounded like he already knew Phantom was a half-ghost. However...he was obviously surprised when he saw Phantom revert back to his old college friend's son.

Plasmius had to have been informed by someone about another halfa in existence (prior to learning the halfa's identity), and since Danny only met six other ghosts before the events of Bitter Reunions, it could be easily whittled down to Skulker because none of the other ghosts Danny met worked for Plasmius aside from the ecto-pusses (which, at the time, Danny didn't have a thermos and reputation among ghosts yet.)

Also, I do not like when Vlad calls Danny "son," in such creepy and dark circumstances. But I add it because his use of the word son is a foreshadowing device throughout the show that indicates what he's planning or his motives/wants. Because of that I'll also use it as a foreshadowing device in this fanfiction C;
Light tried to peek through the tapestries indicating morning's arrival. It pushed against thick fabric, seeping through the small area the drapes couldn't cover and striping the floor with thin golden lines that went as far as the doorway. Even in this inhabited room, the mansion felt empty. If its owner were awake he couldn't be heard. The only noise was the birds tweeting outside and the swish of Wisconsin trees, although their music was covered up by the sullen darkness of a teenager's room.

Despite containing the same furniture, it looked drastically different. Instead of blue, the walls were purple. And the floor, like most of Vlad's castle, stone, as opposed to the carpet and hardwood floors you usually find in most homes today. The furniture was also arranged differently too, apart from the bed which sat against the center of the wall like it had in Amity.

In it lay a budding boy deep in the doldrums. It's recommended that teenagers get 10-12 hours of sleep—he barely met that with a solid nine hours. But it was the longest amount he had in a long time, what with school, ghost hunting, and new this week: nightmares. He was still trying to sleep more, but his body begged him to get up despite his dour mood. If he weren't blinking every once in a while and his arms were crossed one might've assumed him dead. He never changed into his pajamas last night, he went to bed in his jeans and t-shirt as soon as Vlad bode him goodnight. And his once robin's egg blue eyes were now dull, his façade hovering somewhere between "sad" and "uncaring." He was tired. No, not that kind of tired. Tired of being awake. Tired of being aware of everything. He just wanted to go back to sleep, slip into the darkness, so he wouldn't have to think. Danny wanted that sweet, blissful hold of non-living existence that sleep had to offer with no risk or catch.

People say that crying made everything better. Well, that's not the case here. Danny felt much worse than before he broke down—crying brought out all the thoughts he'd been trying so hard to avoid acknowledging, and there was no stuffing them back in now they've been released. Sometimes it was better to live a lie, at least it gave him a will to live. It was like a switch was flipped and something broke; one thought that would change Danny forever, or so it felt like it; he never felt so useless before.

But at the same time, something hidden underneath urged him to care, to be confused. To be embarrassed by what happened last night when he cried in front of his sworn enemy. He didn't mean to of course, however, Vlad had a knack for showing up at the most inopportune moment, like the universe sits and waits for horrible coincidences to surface. And not only did he see Danny cry but he killed his dignity by comforting him. It was cruel how Vlad had gone from abuser to
loving guardian in one day, the quick switch on top of everything else left Danny dizzy. He didn't know what to think anymore, his gut said one thing and his heart another, then they contradict themselves and everything's thrown into the air. He wanted to think Vlad was Satan but he also wanted to think Vlad's a misunderstood angel. Didn't he only want Danny for his ghost half? Or did he just want love? He was getting tired of asking the same questions. Should Danny even care anymore? Everything's doomed anyway.

"I can't even be with my family in my last months." Danny choked out. His hand automatically went up to the collar on his neck in search of something to fiddle with to release his confusion and hurt, only to find irritated skin.

"Oh...t's right...the collar came off...yesterday." He mumbled and closed his eyes, letting his hand fall to his chest. The teen lay like that, his hand and his chest rising slowly until his eyes snapped back open and he sat up, stiff as a board.

*The collar came off yesterday!* Both of his hands flew up to his neck again and felt around frantically, sliding around and grasping. He ripped off the sheets and stumbled over to the mirror across the room, gazing at his reflection with his head tilted back.

*No collar.*

The marks from it chafing his neck were still prominent and itchy, but that was the least of Danny's worries. Vlad didn't put the collar back on. He rubbed his neck just to make sure there was nothing there. Did Vlad actually forget? Could this mean...

no...Vlad's too detailed oriented to forget. And he wanted Danny so badly as a son. But...what if just this once he did? What if Danny's breakdown played into his own escape and threw the billionaire off guard? Vlad never dealt well with being thrown off guard, especially with his intricately woven planning habits.

A fire reignited in the young halfa as hope pooled back into him, drop by drop, and his eyes seemed to fill with life as he stared at his naked neck. Weak with exhilaration, he leaned against the dresser, his heart pummeling repeatedly into his ribs. So this is what freedom felt like. In such little time he forgot the openness of the sensation. A little voice in the back of his head warned him not to get too excited, but it was too late. If the collar was off, that meant Danny could go to the forest and into Vlad's private lab without being electrocuted. It was luxurious how he actually had not one but two choices for escape now. Although one remained a better option than the other. He smirked determinedly at his reflection and transformed, his eager heartbeats changing into pulses of energy spiraling out of his core and into his veins.

Flying back to the bed, he reached underneath it and pulled out a packed duffel bag that had been waiting all week to be used. He'd even snuck snacks from the kitchen in it. Turning intangible and invisible, Danny slung the bag over his shoulder and phased through the floor. The bedrooms in Vlad's mansion were on the seventh floor, and the entrance to Vlad's private laboratory on the first. When Danny reached the correct floor, he flew through the seemingly asleep mansion's halls until he came across the doors of Vlad's private study, where he opened them and walked up to the fireplace looking slightly nervous. If Vlad were asleep, then Danny couldn't use the football to gain access to the lab because of the noise it'd make. It wasn't necessarily loud but it wasn't quiet either, especially with a half ghost's sensitive hearing. So he tentatively reached towards the solid entrance with his intangible hand, wincing and hoping Vlad hadn't put up a shield. Freedom was still taking some getting used to.

By the looks of it he didn't—Danny's hand went through easily and his body quickly followed after the discovery. The teen slowly made his descent down the long staircase floating, almost
overfilling with exhilaration and patriotic freedom as he descended the cold, stone pathway. This was it! His last moments on an earth that could be saved. People and ghosts wouldn't have to suffer at his evil older self's hands and other children wouldn't have to know what it's like to live without family. The world would go on not knowing of the sacrifice Danny was about to make, and he was fine with that. He'd go live with Frostbite and join the community they have there, and he'd be content as long as everyone else was safe. Helping others always kept Danny motivated and happy.

As he reached the end of the stairway, part of him wanted to do away with his ghostly tail so he could feel his feet stomping on the earth's surface one last time. But something said it was a bad idea, and Danny did well to listen because he froze when he reached the bottom to see Vlad doing paperwork. Vlad sitting at his desk, in his lab, doing paperwork. Then again, it was nine in the morning and the billionaire usually did who-knows-what here except for mealtimes. That's what happens when you make big decisions after waking up, you forget. Danny glanced down at his tail to check he was still invisible and after confirming it he brought his eyes back up to the man ten feet away, where an open portal sparkled mysteriously behind him. The swirling abyss beckoned him to come.

Could Vlad tell Danny was here? He certainly didn't act like it, he didn't move or look up from the pile of papers in front of him, engrossed with the work. And Jesus, did this man ever slouch?

The young halfa floated past the billionaire, careful to not show signs of a ghostly presence. He caught glimpse of the papers and almost stopped to yell at Vlad, though. It took every ounce of self-control to suppress his anger—the Frootloop updated Danny's papers to say 'Daniel MASTERS.'

As much as he wanted to protest it wasn't worth it. Where Danny was going didn't require government identification, so he cautiously continued to fly up to his new home with adrenaline pumping through his veins. Energy filled air wafted off it's bright green surface and kissed Danny's face even when he was several feet away. He glimpsed back at Vlad sitting at his desk; as unbelievable as it was to think this...he'd miss that man. He was the only remaining aspect of Danny's hero life, after all, what's a hero without a villain? And not only that but he seemed to care for Danny in his own twisted way. However, from here on out Danny would live the rest of his life or afterlife, whichever it was, in peace and exile away from all things earthly. It was the only way.

With a heavy but well-meaning heart, Danny took a deep quiet breath in and floated into the portal. Or more like tried. He screamed and lost invisibility as he hit something that electrocuted him upon contact. Danny fell to the ground twitching and seething in pain as Vlad smiled knowingly and turned around in his chair, casually resting his arm on the back.

"Hm. I was wondering why you were sneaking in here. Shame you still want to leave, especially after our endearing moment last night. You're as stubborn as a mule, Daniel, you know that?"

The boy cried out and curled in on himself as his bandaged hopes and dreams fell to shards.

"I've been meaning to get rid of that collar anyway because I was working on a new system to replace it. I set up human and ghost shields around the perimeter of my land and in front of the ghost portal yesterday. You're not going anywhere."

"I HAVE TO!" Danny screeched as he collected himself and jumped back up to charge into the portal again. All calmness and logical thinking became replaced with desperation and survival instincts. He raised a fist and punched at the shield that sent another string of electricity into the child's body. But this time he was prepared, he held his fist in place and kept pushing against it while his nerves begged him to give up in fear of being fried. Danny ignored the pain and the
warnings, only focusing on his goal; he couldn't let go of his hopes again, not after he built them back up and mentally prepared for a complete lifestyle change. There was no backing down now, Danny was ready for this.

His efforts were making no leeway, though, and Vlad jumped up a moment too late when he foresaw the horrible effects of Danny's actions. "Wait, no!"

*Crack.*

Another scream pushed up Danny's throat and he was finally forced to withdraw, gripping onto his own forearm. He staggered backward and fell to the ground writhing in agony a second time. Vlad immediately rushed to his subordinate and wrestled to hold still, somewhat achieving it by straddling the boy's previously thrashing legs. Ripping Danny's hand off the forearm he'd been gripping, Vlad held up the limb to eye level and gasped.

It was not pretty. Danny's hand was gruesomely mutilated. Each knuckle had split open and his fingers bent at an odd angle. It was a shame nothing had swelled up yet to cover the unsightly view, although it was beginning to. Masters gaped openly in shock at the horrific sight before he cringed and glared piercingly back down at the still writhing child he'd been poorly containing.

"Are you FUCKING INSANE? LAY STILL!"

The billionaire then slapped Danny across the face. Hard. With ectoplasmic energy mixed in. Danny's eyes widened and the side of his face slammed into cold tile, his cheekbone receiving the worst of the blow and every little piece of gravel piercing his skin. Vlad's tone immediately made him seize up, although he continued to twitch and shake uncontrollably in response to the unfathomable pain emanating from his broken hand. Unwillingly, white rings appeared around his waist.

"Oh no you don't. Don't you dare change back Daniel. You want permanent effects on that?!” Vlad spat, grabbing the collar of Danny's suit and bringing his limp head off the ground. The child heeded him only by the absolute terror Vlad was inflicting, and he mustered his fear together to force the rings to close and dissipate. When he felt them leave, Danny slowly looked up to come face to face with an absolutely incandescent man who further yelled. "What. The hell. IS WRONG WITH YOU?!!"

Too afraid to respond, the teen winced under the older hybrid's rage and the undulating throbs from his hand. He avoided direct eye contact and attempted to suppress sounds of pain and fear. Behind Vlad, objects became encased in pink energy and floated as the lights began to flicker and spark. "Are you stupid?!"

Danny's eyes flitted around at the random sparks and objects flying around and he shifted uncomfortably, although he tried not to show it, his face was contorted with pain. When Vlad saw the boy wasn't responding anytime soon because he was in shock, he took a shuddering deep breath and rubbed his temple with the hand not holding a mangled mess. It took all his willpower to not beat up the boy for his self-destructive behavior only because he feared to worsen the injury. That and beating Danny up could be seen as abusive, no matter how good the boy was at messing things up like Jack. But there wasn't enough self-control, Vlad was on the brink—Danny made him break his eighteen-year profanity-free streak. Another violent shiver forced itself on Danny's muscles and the notion reminded the billionaire he should do something before the damage worsened, lest his plans be pushed back. With a deep breath, lights ceased flickering and floating objects fell back down as the older hybrid stood and helped Danny do the same. Stooping to the child's height, he wrapped Danny's uninjured arm behind his neck and grudgingly helped him to one of the lab tables. The thought that Maddie would've hated to see her son in such horrible condition did
enough to contain his fury.

"Don't move your hand or arm in any way." Vlad cautioned shortly in a threatening tone as he retrieved a portable IV stand and kit from the cupboard underneath the lab table. "Be glad I regularly stock up on meds. I shouldn't be having to use them though." He hinted passive-aggressively.

Danny was surprised but relieved that Vlad wouldn't worsen the pain like he initially thought. When he noticed Vlad pick up a needle he wasn't about to protest or question what the older hybrid planned to do; he just wanted the pain to go away, although he couldn't tell if it was from his hand or his heart anymore. Even if it took only a minute for Vlad to prepare, it felt like thirty since 'waiting' and 'pain' didn't mix well. Shock still gnawed at Danny's brain and stomach.

After setting up an IV stand Vlad connected it to the teen's uninjured arm. In it were relaxation drugs so his body would stop shivering, and on Danny's injured arm's wrist Vlad injected regional anesthesia so he'd be able to treat the cuts on the knuckles and assess the damage before wrapping them up. As they waited for the medicine to kick in, Masters helped Danny fly to the x-ray room so he could see what really was broken. When that finished—it took forever to position his hand correctly—they flew back down to the lab where he began to treat the younger hybrid's cuts with antiseptic. Because of the numbing injection and the relaxing medication, Danny no longer felt pain in his hand, in fact, the drugs were working so well he became woozy. He just sat there swaying and bleary-eyed as Vlad worked away in his own silent anger. The billionaire needed Danny's body to be in good condition in order to begin intense training. With this injury now, there'd have to be a setback for it to properly heal. Granted, half-ghosts healed abnormally fast, but still. If Danny was desperate enough to break limbs then more injuries were at stake. He glanced at the boy he was treating; a large purple bruise was forming on his left cheekbone and he had begun to slip into unconsciousness. Not wanting Danny to change back, Vlad began speaking to keep him awake. And while he was at it he'd work away at the boy like another chessboard. Physical submission wasn't working on him, so maybe he needed to increase his manipulation tactics.

"You damned boy. I don't get how you can stand to hurt yourself like that. Of course it's going to take more than a fist to break my shields." He muttered, stitching away at the split skin between Danny's knuckles.

Silence followed when the boy didn't acknowledge being spoken to and just stared blankly at his messed up hand being patched up. A weak ago Danny couldn't stand to see his blood drawn, yet here he was, not caring that Vlad was using his hand like a patchwork quilt. It wasn't worth it anymore, caring. How could someone care when they knew exactly how and where they'd die? When they knew the gruesome fate of this world and it's inhabitants. At this point Danny was ready to throw in the towel; escape was futile. It truly wasn't meant to be.

"Why the sudden change of mind, hm? Wouldn't the ghost zone be a worse place to go with all the enemies you've made?"

"I dunno." Danny rasped back. "You tell me."

"Comrades, of course. Do you have to be so fuc...blasted stubborn? Why do you want to leave so badly? Daniel, everything and anything you'd ever want is right here. Out there, you won't find anyone with the money and resources to give you the opportunities and luxuries I can supply. You'll become a high school dropout, forced to work minimum wage jobs and struggling to make ends meet every month. Is that what you really want? Is continuing to live in our past worth that?" The billionaire insinuated, finishing the last stitch. Danny blinked and rubbed his eye with his free hand. In all honesty, if Vlad hadn't threatened to murder his father and marry his mother, he
would've taken up his offer of mentorship, because he *did* have not only the money and resources but the knowledge of their powers. And while Danny made do with training himself and copying the tricks he witnessed during ghost fights, he would've much rather preferred to be taught by the only other half-ghost in existence—if he had, he probably would've mastered all the abilities he currently struggled with and moved on to others. Because Danny's parents were gone and no longer a useful tool for Vlad to use, nothing except for the creation of Dan kept him from allowing Vlad to become his teacher. And if Dan couldn't be prevented then what was holding him back?

"It's time you grow up." Vlad continued. "Put this arch-enemy nonsense behind you like the responsible young man you are and open your eyes. This is your world. When life gives you lemons, make lemonade."

Hah. Vlad was one to talk. His bitterness rivaled that of a lemon. Danny tried, goddammit. He squeezed and he wrung and he twisted until all that was left was the dry rind. Attempt after attempt the lemonade failed to produce itself. He exhausted his options and openings—Vlad had him shut in and trapped. The only thing left was telling the billionaire about Dan, and that wasn't an option; with the man's immoral and selfish use for powers Danny wasn't sure what he'd do with the information. Possibly it'd disturb him and prevent it from happening, but what about the thermos Dan was trapped in? Would Vlad want to release Dan and try to persuade him into a deal or partnership of some sort? Could he twist the situation to meet his selfish desires?

Well, it's not like Danny could stay here and not turn into Dan.

Or could he? What if making lemonade was still possible? Vlad felt the need to use the ghost gauntlets because of Danny's depression. If Danny didn't become depressed and Vlad never noticed, the gauntlets would never surface.

Maybe he was grasping at straws at this point. Was it better to swallow his dignity and risk telling Vlad? Or just not be sad? To be honest Danny trusted himself more than Vlad. The man would always bend the situation to meet his wants. Telling him should be a last resort. Besides, avoiding sadness was easy. You just don't be sad...right?

Should he even bother with getting his hopes up? Wouldn't life just shoot it down again? But...what was a superhero without hope? What was a superhero that didn't do everything in their power to help others, even when hope seemed impossible?

He sighed and thought, "Oh, I'm so gonna regret this, I bet it'll just backfire anyways. But I won't be able to die in content if I don't do everything I can."

Audibly, Danny softly asked, "Vlad...do you really think I'm capable of making lemonade?"

Without pausing while wrapping the splint around Danny's hand and wrist he replied, "I wouldn't say it if I didn't think so. Look, I know what you're going through is difficult. And I'm trying my damnes-" he paused and corrected, "darnest...to help you. Just accept my help before I change my mind with all the attitude you've thrown at me this past week and let you tackle the world prematurely like you insist."

Silence followed the sentence again. Danny wasn't ready to just openly let Vlad into his life, not after their destructive history. However, he had misjudged the man. Vlad could be caring—he had some softness underneath that hard shell; a good side, a selfless side. He deserved a second chance, but it would take time.

The billionaire finally finished treating Danny's hand and stepped back. "There. You can transform back now. Make this the last and only time I ever treat your sorry ass for your own mistakes."
Danny turned back human with a sigh as if remaining in ghost form were like holding his breath. But when he did, his mind turned fuzzier than it had been before because the medication worked better on humans. The clouds were closing in and he struggled to maintain his thoughts. Unbeknownst to the boy, Vlad winced when his cuss slipped unintentionally.

"Whaddya think about destiny?" Danny blurted, struggling to keep his previous thoughts straight in his head.

The man gave him a perturbed look in response to the random question. "What? Are you alright? Do you feel dizzy or nauseous?"

"I'm fine! Just answer it."

He gazed at Danny incredulously as if trying to figure him out. The gears were cranking in that meticulous mind of his. "There is no such thing as destiny. Did you understand my saying about lemons?" Vlad watched Danny cautiously hop down from the table, or more like fall since he staggered back when his feet hit the ground. Grabbing onto the boy to stabilize him, the older hybrid said, "Never mind. I might've given you a little too much medication."

"I got it, I'm okay," Danny responded with a slight slur to his words. He wrestled Vlad's arms off himself and took several unbalanced steps forward in the direction of the stairway.

"No, you aren't. The billionaire pointed out as he put his hands on Danny's shoulders. "You're walking and acting like a drunkard."

The boy laughed strangely and failed to pull away from Masters' iron grip. "But I'm not drunk."

"I never said you were." Sighing, Vlad flew them up the stairs and into Danny's room. "Sleep it off. I can tell you slept in your clothes."

Several hours later Vlad returned to wake Danny for lunch.

"Noo..." the boy weakly protested, shrinking away from the hand that had shaken him awake. "Leave me alone."

Masters rolled his eyes and huffed, "I let you sleep in and skip breakfast. There's no way you're skipping lunch too. Get up."

"Noo..."

With that, the older hybrid grabbed the collar of the teen's pink pajamas and dragged him off the bed. Danny tried to grasp onto the sheets to stay put but yelped at the dull pain that arose from neglecting his broken hand's need for disuse. Because of the distraction, Vlad easily continued dragging him outside his room and into the hallway.

"Okay, okay!" Danny rasped, his throat still asleep. "You don't have to drag me like a sack of potatoes, I can walk you know." Clumsily standing up, he adjusted his pajama pants, which had been threatening to fall off from the friction of the rug on the hallway's floor. Vlad laughed.

"For someone that wears the same ratty t-shirt and jeans every day, you have incredibly formal pajamas." He mused. "It's nice to see you clean up a bit."

"Gee, thanks," Danny muttered sarcastically as they walked towards the kitchen, unable to produce
a wittier quip because of his grogginess. The medicine hadn't completely worn off yet. "So what if I always wear the same thing? You do too."

"What I wear is unbranded and socially acceptable to be seen more than once, not to mention it's formality. A man of my standing is expected to be seen in a suit at all times, otherwise, it's degrading to my image." Explained Vlad with an arrogant air as he adjusted his loose bowtie.

"And you're telling me all this because...?"

Instead of answering, Vlad gently ruffled Danny's hair, "It's complicated. I won't try to explain while you're still out of it."

The boy opened his mouth in protest but changed his mind and closed it as he trailed after the man into his kitchen. Danny had taken the billionaire's comment about his clothes as an insult but at second glance the man also slipped in somewhat of a compliment. It may not be considered a nice gesture from most but when it came to Vlad...

Swallowing his previous answer and pride, Danny whispered, "..by the way...thanks. For, uh..." and held up his bandaged hand as a means of finishing his sentence. The words tasted weird on his tongue. He sat down at his usual place on the kitchen island and looked at his lunch.

Masters appeared genuinely surprised for a few seconds until he regained control and put his masked expression back on. With a sparkle in his eye, he replied, "Think nothing of it, son."

"Don't call me that." Danny flinched, glaring at the food he was playing with. Since his dominant hand was broken he had to hold the utensils with his left hand. It felt odd and he kept having to readjust his grip. "I saw you changed my last name, too. I don't remember giving you permission."

"Might I remind that you're a child, I'm an adult, and you're under my custody. I don't need your permission." Vlad brushed off coolly as he sat down.

"Jesus Christ." Danny may have been ready to give into this man's traps, however, that didn't mean he was ready to become the perfect little son Vlad wanted. He'd never accept Vlad as a parent, only as a mentor and teacher. "But it's my name. It's what defines me—the only connection I have to...to them. I'm a Fenton through and through. I always will be."

Rolling his eyes, Vlad pointed out, "That's utter nonsense. Names don't define people, personality and appearance are what define an individual. The only thing your name says about you is your family. You weren't supposed to be a Fenton—you were meant to be a Masters, my boy. To have my blood running through your veins."

Holy devil's lettuce, this again. Says the man that just told Danny to get over their ghostly rivalry. Here comes the, 'Your mother should've married me' speech. They were venturing into dangerous and debatable territory, and he really wasn't in the mood to fight over this today with all the crap he'd already been through. Waking without a sense of purpose, breaking his hand, getting pumped with drugs, and rediscovering his purpose all before lunch. It was enough to make anyone beg for a break. Although since when did he ever have a choice for one? "Oh sure, the reason you dress up is too complicated to explain to my tired little teenage mind but fighting over who my mom should've married isn't?" Danny spat resentfully. He couldn't just let Vlad get away with insulting his heritage.

"It's not complicated, I was obviously the right choice. Your mother marrying that bumbling idiot was simply a mistake."
"Nope. I'm not gonna do this today." He set down his silverware next to his untouched plate and began trying to stand up, however, Vlad reached over to his uninjured wrist and held on to prevent him from going any further.

"You're not dismissed. You didn't even touch your lunch yet."

Struggling to remove the billionaire's tight grasp, Danny grunted, "Your talk of my mom and whatever you drugged me up with is ruining my appetite. I want to go back to sleep."

Vlad stared at him as if contemplating for a moment, and Danny glared back, silently standing his ground. When the older hybrid eventually let him go, he warned, "Fine. But your mother would've wanted you to take care of yourself, and you've been doing a pretty poor job of that lately."

Having immediately turned around and stormed off as soon as he was let go, Danny froze in his tracks at the sudden remorse that flooded through him with the reminder. Oh no, Vlad was not using his mom's memory as a means for guilt-tripping Danny into doing what he wants. That was so low. And it wasn't like his dad wouldn't want Danny to take care of himself either. He looked back at his adversary, who held that usual masked stoic expression on his face.

But there was no mistaking the sadness behind his eyes that the mask failed to hide, and it reminded Danny of his earlier realization; Vlad wasn't the evil villain he seemed, he was human. Could it be Vlad wasn't trying to get Danny to do what he wants for selfish reasons? That he was actually trying to respect his mom's memory?

With a sigh, Danny trudged back to this seat, plopped down, fumbled to correctly hold his fork, and stabbed his salad. He didn't want to be a pushover but Vlad had a point, mom and dad would've wanted him to take care of himself, and they wouldn't be happy if they could see the state he was in right now. A part of him wished they were here and could see his state so they could fuss over him and give him the love he'd been denied for the rest of his life, however, he was also glad they weren't here because they wouldn't like what they saw; that they left their child in the hands of a horrible man, one they thought they could trust. Danny may see humanity in the billionaire but that didn't excuse the number of evils Vlad had committed against him. He glanced over at his godfather who had turned his attention back to his own lunch and stared intensely into it as he ate.

That stupid poised rich man act was gone and replaced with reality.

Danny was about to ask Vlad if he also missed his mom in some attempt to be nice but the man's smartphone went off before he could find the courage. With a surprised expression, Vlad dropped his fork, swiped at his mouth with a napkin, and fished the device out of his suit jacket's inner pocket. With a quick glance at the caller ID, he brought it up to his ear. "Vlad Masters speaking."

"Why, if it isn't the young Ms. Gray! To what do I owe the pleasure?"

The raven-haired teenager immediately perked up, his mouth dropping. "Is that Valerie?!"

Vlad put a finger up to his own mouth in notion to be quiet as the caller talked away on the other end. "Uh-huh...yes, he's here...poor boy has been through a lot. He's having a difficult time adjusting...no, I'm afraid not, he still needs time to process...oh, I know...mhmm..."

"Is it? How does she have your number?" Danny pushed, "Gimme the phone!"

He reached out to swipe the phone away from Vlad but he ducked. Wanting to hear the conversation on the other side, Danny paused and listened intently.

"He'll be staying in Wisconsin with me so no...yes, well, when he's feeling better I'll be sure to let
"Why is she calling?" Danny piped in, "I'm well enough to talk to her, come on gimme the phone." He swiped again at Vlad, who turned intangible to avoid Danny's assault.

"Don't worry, your secret's safe." The man assured to the caller.

"VLAD!" Danny lunged, going intangible so when Vlad would he'd be able to touch him. Vlad did, but he quickly dodged Danny's outstretched hand and trapped him in a headlock, covering the boy's mouth with his arm. Danny writhed and fought to free himself to no avail, desperate to be in contact with someone from his old life.

(Quick explanation: I'm going with the theory that when Danny and Vlad turn intangible they can touch each other, because intangibility is like a plane. A better explanation might be given later.)

"Hm? Oh, nothing. I'm at work right now. No, no, you aren't interrupting anything. Like I was going to say, I do. Could you be on the lookout for an ecto-converter? Somebody stole mine and I'd like to have it back...What it looks like? Er...machinery. It looks like machinery...That's all for now. Well, I must get going, you know, important billionaire duties...mhmm...oh, it was no problem at all...Nice chatting too, ta!"

As soon as he hit the end call button Vlad released his death grip on Danny's head. Panting, Danny twisted around in his seat and pointed an accusing finger at the billionaire. "That was Valerie, wasn't it?"

Chapter End Notes

I'd hate to end on a cliffhanger but I feel bad it took me two weeks to update and I'm rushing to get this uploaded! It takes me about a week to write a chapter and I was working on another story, so if you do the math...yup. I might come back and edit this since I did rush through it.
"Yes, so?" Vlad answered indifferently.

Huffing, Danny pushed, "Don't play dumb. You were talking about me. How does she know I'm here? Why does she have your number?"

While he was upset that he didn't get a chance to talk with someone familiar he also found it incredibly suspicious how she was affiliated with Vlad. A knowing smirk landed on the billionaire's face as he began working on his lunch again, his fork pecking concisely at the plate like a vulture ripping shreds of meat from its prey. Danny watched his every move, impatiently waiting for an answer and wishing he could see just what goes through that coldly calculative brain. It wasn't until three bites later that Vlad gave a vague response.

"Honestly, Daniel, what do you expect? I'm a billionaire, the press follows my every move. Everybody knows you're my son, now."

Yelling, "WHAT?!" He shot up from his seat, only to have Vlad put a hand on his shoulder and roughly shove him back down. His bruised cheekbone throbbed from the force at which his mouth had moved.

"Keep eating, Daniel." Vlad reminded tersely.

The idea of being watched made Danny feel extremely violated. Yeah, Vlad had spied on him, but he wouldn't have reported his information to the public like the press does. You could say that Danny actually preferred Vlad spy on him rather than the public, but if he had a choice he wouldn't want anyone spying on him. Flabbergasted and getting more pissed by the second, Danny further asked, "How could they do that?! You and I haven't walked outside for a week! How would they possibly know? Are we being spied on?!"

Chuckling at Danny's naiveness the billionaire explained, "That's absurd, nobody's spying on us. Just watching closely—get used to it. When you're as well-known as me, which you now are, you sacrifice your freedom for the world's attention and praise. Personally, I find it rather glamorous."

In some respects this wasn't entirely true—Vlad was manipulative and cunning enough to avoid too much attention from the public; he kept an extremely low profile and only surfaced when need be. In some sense, one could argue that such self-control and filtering limited his freedom but it also enabled him to work on his private plots without judgment and persecution from the public, especially since some of his ventures were controversial like the cloning experiments. However, when he was first in such a big position, he made mistakes that could only be bandaged by his
"special circumstances." All because he didn't realize how much he was being watched. And while Danny also had "special circumstances", he felt obligated to warn the boy of the public's eye anyway because of his fatherly position to him.

"Of course you do." Spat Danny, losing his hold on his emotions. Vlad could be such a pill at times. "There's nobody else to give you attention."

"Touché." Vlad bounced back with narrowed eyes.

Danny looked down at his salad and began to roll his cherry tomatoes off to the side of the plate. Choosing to ignore the man's successful comeback, he muttered, "That's still bullshit though. I'm not even your son. Now Valerie and the world believe a lie."

Scoffing, Vlad rolled his eyes and stood up to put his plate in his stupidly fancy dishwasher, his designer shoes giving softly rounded clicks as they hit the surface of the kitchen tile with that billionaire-esque stride. Danny persisted, "And you never answered my second question, Vlad. Why does she have your number?"

"You don't think she got that ghost hunting equipment on her own, now, do you?" He passively implied with an amused raised eyebrow and casual turn of the head.

"Don't change the—wait a minute." Realization dawned on him. "You're the one who gave her those weapons?"

"That's right."

Danny knew that Vlad used her as a pawn to hide Pariah Dark's Ring of Rage, however, he hadn't known Vlad also gave her the means to become a ghost hunter. But then again, where else would a teenager acquire such pricey ghost equipment without the Fenton logo on it?

"Why the hell would you do that?!"

Reaching into the drawer beneath the island tabletop, Vlad answered, "To keep you busy. And ruin your father's reputation—she's much more competent." He wasn't about to mention the spying to create a clone part. Danny didn't need to know about that.

"You just love to make my life more difficult, don't you?" Accused Danny, giving him a despicable stare.

"Oh, you think?" He slyly replied, returning Danny's penetrating gaze with a dark grin before holding out a little plastic cup containing one too many pills in it. Changing the subject, he said, "If you're done with your griping and finished eating, take these."

The teenager glared at the little cup and made no notion to take it, so Vlad just set it in front of him. "Geez, you'd think I have cancer or something. I told you I don't need vitamins."

"Your blood tells me otherwise." The billionaire replied with a ruffle of the younger hybrid's hair. Danny was beginning to get annoyed with that, he wasn't some rag doll to be touched and tinkered with. He's fourteen, for Christ's sake! That's only four more years until he's an adult, and adults do not go around ruffling each other's hair. At feeling Vlad's large hand crush his bed-headed cowlick he winced and leaned away, swatting at the man's outstretched arm with his injured hand out of reflex. The slight amount of pressure accidentally applied to his broken bones made him do a sharp intake and bring it close to his chest in some attempt to cease the pain. Chuckling at the boy's defiance, Vlad added, "There are regular pain medications in there too."
Danny was about to reject the pills a second time but he stopped and remembered that Vlad was just trying to take care of him. Because it was so difficult to see, Danny would have to be patient and continue reminding himself about Vlad's soft side. Letting go of his stubborn wall, Danny resentfully picked up the container and turned it over to free the contents. Feeling uncomfortable with not knowing exactly what he was taking he asked, "What else is in here?"

Vlad pointed to the three small golden pills closest to him and informed, "This one is vitamin D, 6,000 IU." He was about to move on to the pills next to them but paused when Danny's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets.

"6,000?! Are you trying to poison me?"

"Yes, I am." He sarcastically commented with a roll of his eyes. "4,000 IU is the average dose for children your age. I added 2,000 more because you're extremely deficient. Most teens are, actually. But I also upped the dosage because you (and I) are half-ghosts and it's difficult for us to absorb it."

"It's not dangerous or anything? It's okay to take that much?" Inquired Danny.

"Trust me, my child, it's difficult to overdose on it. And I've been taking 6000 regularly. Now..." He moved on to explain all the human vitamins he wanted Danny to take, and then the spectral vitamins he'd developed himself; Danny wasn't so sure about those, but the man insisted and reminded that he had a doctorate and classification, or whatever. Certain that they'd covered all the capsules that were in the cup, Danny grudgingly began to swallow the pills, starting with the smallest in groups of two.

"Oh! I almost forgot—" The smile on his face seemed to counter his statement like he didn't actually forget, and he reached back into the drawer he kept the pills in. Danny choked on one of the bigger pills he'd been struggling to swallow when Vlad removed a large but small enough to be handheld contraption. It was blue and white with a screen on the lower half. "This is an HGH pen."

Not entirely sure where this was going but having a good hunch, Danny sputtered, "L-like...injection pens?"

"Bright boy." Vlad commended. "I'd like you to take one shot every day."

Oh geez. This screamed red flags. "Woah, woah, woah." Danny set down his now empty glass of water next to his remaining pills and gazed suspiciously at the older hybrid. "One shot of what, exactly?"

His eyes sparkled and he gave Danny that look. The look that said he knew Danny wouldn't like it but he would do it anyway because he can. Danny hated that look.

"Growth hormones."

"Oh HELL no!" Mouth dropping in disgust, the teen immediately protested, "You are NOT pumping steroids into me like some cow. No way. Nuh-uh. That isn't natural. That isn't right."

With a roll of his eyes Masters said, "Of course you'd relate hormones to cows." He casually held out the device and Danny leaned away from it as if it were poisonous. "Human hormones and cow hormones are completely different, Daniel, along with their intended usage. I just want to give you a little push in the right direction since you're behind."

Danny tensed up and fidgeted with a thread sticking out the bottom of his pajama shirt. He really did not feel comfortable discussing his supposed immaturity. "Can we not talk about this?"
"No, we're talking about this. Right here and right now. Do you know how much I had to go through to get these injections?"

"You shouldn't have bothered without my permission." He spat. "S-so what if I'm a little behind? Just let Nature do it's thing."

To be honest, Danny actually wanted those hormones. People, and even ghosts, always mentioned how small and scrawny he was, poking fun at the fact. At times he'd find himself wishing he were as toned as Dash or as tall as his dad, then others would begin to take him seriously at school and in ghost hunting. And his outfits didn't help either; he couldn't even find clothing his size outside of the kid's section, thus the reason everything he wore tended to be on the large side. The baggier his clothing was, the skinnier he looked. But the reason he so adamantly refused to accept the hormones was that it was just wrong. While Danny was small he wasn't that severe of a case, growth hormones were more for kids with hormone disorders and stuff. Danny was healthy and growing at a mediocre rate, nothing alarming. It didn't feel right, forcing puberty to come. And despite wanting to go through the rite of passage, the thought also made him extremely uncomfortable. No, he wasn't mentally ready for that kind of change, but at the same time he was. If his mom had suggested it then he might've gone along with it, but Vlad? Danny didn't trust him with something so life-altering and important.

"Oh, come on." Vlad flashed a smile and for a second Danny swore he caught a glimpse of his fangs. "I'm just giving you a small push. When puberty starts to kick in we'll stop the injections."

Biting his lip, Danny returned his gaze to his lap and let go of the thread. This was all so tempting. And awkward. Every time Vlad said the P-word it made Danny want to die of embarrassment, it sounded so weird coming from him. What kind of person wants to talk about their growing body with their sworn arch-enemy? Or more like ex-arch-enemy now. At least Danny was trying to work towards thinking that.

As if Vlad knew exactly what was going through his mind he teasingly added, "Don't look so uncomfortable. What was it you were telling me? Ah, yes, it's only...natural. Puberty and injections are nothing to get worked up about, calm down."

Danny took a few seconds to configure his response. Going with his gut rather than his heart he asserted, "The answer's still no."

"Are you sure?" His eyes seemed to drink in Danny's insecurity as he goaded, "It must not be fun, being so puny."

The teen's eyes snapped up to send a putrid and protective yellow-green glare at Vlad's smug face. He could see what Vlad was trying to do, that rich bastard was trying to pressure him. He was enjoying playing "father and son" and watching Danny squirm. Danny regretted taking those pills.

"I'm sure." He growled, hopping off his seat. He couldn't take any more of this, Vlad was so hard to be around. "I'm going back to sleep."

"Very well." Vlad said condescendingly as Danny stomped off. "Brush your teeth before you do."

The billionaire watched his "son" turn the corner, following him even after he was out of sight by the sound of his angry bare feet. It didn't matter whether or not Danny condoned taking HGH (human growth hormones). Vlad only asked because he'd prefer that the boy take it willingly so they don't run into issues. But since Danny refused, the billionaire planned to administer the injections while he slept. On the bright side, the hormones were supposed to be taken around bedtime because they worked better when one was asleep.
His reason for wanting Danny to take HGH was that tall people could instill fear better than short people, and he wanted his pawn to be as tall as humanly possible. In a way, Vlad did see Danny as a cow. Figuratively speaking, of course.

(This next part is a bit slow. I'm sorry but it's needed and important.)

Danny ended up sleeping the rest of the afternoon off until he woke up at 6:09 P.M, around an hour before Vlad comes to haul him off to dinner. Sleeping straight up to dinner time was more ideal but he wasn't in the mood, another nightmare had plagued his slumber and put his family and friends on his mind. After accepting he couldn't go back to sleep he got up and walked to the electric fireplace at the other side of the room. On the mantle above sat his family's remains in three beautiful urns.

It was unsettling how it still didn't feel like they were gone. But they were, they'd been gone for nearly a week now, and no matter how much he reminded himself of the facts it didn't change that it felt they were still waiting for him to return home. What he knew contradicted with what he felt, although it wavered, sometimes it felt like they were gone for good and other times it felt like they were watching him from high above. Was it possible for them to turn into ghosts?

Probably not. His family and friends had happy lives and nothing to really gain vengeance for. As much as he wanted to believe they were still alive Danny knew it would only bring more heartbreak. It was better to prepare for the worst, however, it was hard to when it felt they were there. He reached out to the urn inscribed with his sister's name and placed a tender hand on it; a small urge to open it and look at the ashes arose but he didn't want to.

This psychological anomaly reminded him of another babble of Jazz's. She'd rambled endlessly about her essay on the human grieving process during a Fenton family car trip. Danny particularly remembered how she argued that a funeral wasn't so much for the dead person's memory, it was more for those surrounding said person. Something about funerals giving people closure and the ability to move on.

Their deaths had happened so suddenly that Danny never got the chance to say goodbye properly. Maybe that's what Danny needed, a funeral, so he can finally bid goodbye and accept their passing. Funerals were so dreary, but this feeling he had, like he was being haunted by their memory, constantly bothered him. He needed to rid himself of it, perhaps then the empty feeling in his heart will come to pass. Now that Danny didn't have an escape to look forward to nothing would be able to keep his mind off of his family and friends. Not only was he physically trapped but also mentally.

Staring at the containers for a few more seconds, Danny made up his mind and began carefully moving one urn at a time to the floor, arranging them in a semi-circle. Adjusting each one until they were perfectly in place and careful to not use his broken arm. Then he retrieved his favorite picture of everyone, including Sam and Tucker, standing in front of Fentonworks, with Danny himself in the center—a big ear-to-ear grin stretched across his face. The air grew thick with melancholy and a silent tear slipped as he gently placed his framed memory in the center of the three urns.

"I wonder if Sam and Tucker had a funeral." He whispered to himself. "I wish I could've gone to it."

They probably had. If only Vlad would've let Danny go to them instead of immediately carting him off to Wisconsin. Had the thought even crossed the billionaire's mind? Well, it couldn't be helped anymore anyway, Danny was here and not in Amity Park, and there was nothing he could do to
change that, so he'd be having his own little funeral for them.

Finished with his modest set-up, he backed away to check that everything's perfectly in place and was glad to see so. He sat in front of the semi-circle and took a deep breath to stem any oncoming tears.

"Tucker..." Danny slowly started, unsure of how to turn his feelings into words, "Man, I'm gonna miss your big mouth and optimism. We've been best friends since...like...forever...and I don't know how I'm gonna live without you. You always had my back and, I mean, who else will fight ghosts and play doomed with me? Where's my sick buddy gonna be when I come down with the flu?"

Danny gave a wavering smile at the stationary picture of Tucker in front of him. It wouldn't be a proper goodbye if he didn't joke around a little. "I know how much you wanted to go to MIT..." He paused to take a shuddering breath. "I hope wherever you are you're surrounded by tons of tech, girls, and lactose-free dairy products. I want you to be happy, it's the least you deserve for my stupid actions."

He wanted to say more, but he didn't know how to put his thoughts into words, so he moved on.

"Sam...if I had to describe you in two words it'd be, 'Fucking Awesome.' You were always there to keep Tucker and me in check. You always encouraged us to be the best version of ourselves, there won't pass a day where I don't think of that. And you'll be happy to hear that I think you're the most unique girl in the world—there's nobody else I've met that's quite like you. You're pretty, smart, and passionate...I'm sorry you couldn't go on to be an animal rights activist, you'd have been a great one." Faltering, he gazed intensely at her picture. Danny would've thanked her for making him get ghost powers but he wasn't so sure he was thankful for them. So far they've only proved to be a burden. So he went to his sister next.

"And Jazz..." The tears he'd been holding back started to leak out as he removed her tattered hairband and note from his pocket. He'd taken them from his explosion-torn clothes before Vlad disposed of them. It was a miracle they were still intact. "I can't believe you knew...how long have you known?" Swiping at his eyes with the bottom of his pajama shirt, he went on, "I'm surprised you didn't tell mom and dad. But I'm glad you didn't, no offense, mom and dad. Still, though, why did you keep it to yourself? You were always so nosy and over-bearing..." He chuckled weakly. "I mean that in a good way, of course." Danny fell silent before collecting himself to go on. "I guess I'll never find out, won't I? Although I deserve it. I'm sorry you got caught up in all my freaky ghost stuff."

A small sob escaped his throat and he had to close his eyes for a few seconds more. His hands clenched tight on the worn blue fabric.

"Thank you for always being there for me Jazz, even when I didn't want you to be. For all your sisterly advice and watching over me when mom and dad were busy. I love you, sis, I wish I could've told you that before it happened. I'm sorry I kept you from becoming a brain surgeon and a child psychologist."

With nothing more to say he gently wrapped the headband around the urn and her note underneath. A steady stream of tears now dripped down his face.

"Mom...you were...are...the coolest Mom ever. Nobody else's mom was a ninth degree black belt and hunted ghosts for a living. You could kick butt and make an awesome batch of cookies at the same time. I really miss your meals, even when they turned out a little radioactive like that one Christmas." Danny was now wiping at his eyes constantly and his bottom lip quivered, "I guess I never got to tell you that the reason I acted so distant on our fake symposium visit was that the spector deflector shocked me every time I touched you. I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, you know
I love you right?...And I'm sorry I never told you I was half-ghost. I didn't want for you...or Dad...to find out that way."

"And Dad...crap...where do I even start? Don't ever think you're a screwup, don't ever let Vlad get to you. You're the best Dad a kid could ask for. You were always there to make time for me and give me fatherly talks, I appreciated it, I really did. And I'm gonna miss spending time with you." A couple sobs fell from his throat and he squeezed his eyes shut, more tears dripping away from between Danny's eyelashes. "I never said this but I always thought your inventions were really cool, I mean, nobody else's father could create half the things you did. You're a genius, dad. You and mom both. And the things you both taught me, my moral code, I always will hold it close to my heart. It's the greatest gift anyone has and will ever give to me. Thank you."

"Everyone, I'm really sorry that my stupid actions got you killed. No amount of sorry can fix what happened...it's all my fault and I'm gonna make it up to you guys if it's the last thing I do." At this point, he was shaking and struggling to maintain steady breaths. "I don't know how though. Back there I was so sure I wasn't going to turn into him but now I don't know anymore. Everywhere I turn I'm reminded of the evils I'm capable of and it scares me. It honest to god terrifies me, guys. I don't know if I can do it, but I'm gonna try hard. That's what matters right...? That I give it my all even if I don't succeed? Please forgive me if I can't...I know I don't deserve to...to be forgiven but please..." Danny broke off and finally allowed his cries to surface completely, having said everything he wanted to say. There was so much more he wanted to add but he didn't know how to express it. It hurt that he couldn't, he hated himself for it.

He wished he would've died with them, then Dan's existence wouldn't be a threat and he wouldn't be stuck with a Frootloop. Heck, he could just do the job now and prevent everything from happening. Clockwork had had the right idea, wasting him. But if Danny committed suicide he'd be cheating his way out. He wouldn't be able to stand behind his wrongs and turn them right in the name of his dead loved ones' unwilling sacrifice. He'd die tainted.

Sitting on the floor in front of his past he sobbed quietly to himself for what felt like an eternity. His back and bottom were sore from sitting on the floor for so long but he didn't care.

At some point, a pair of Salvatore Ferragamo dress shoes appeared in his peripheral vision. Sniffling, Danny wiped his eyes and lamely said, "Hey." All things considered, doing a funeral knowing Vlad would collect him for dinner wasn't the smartest choice. He wished he'd done it after dinner where he knew he'd have privacy for at least 10 hours.

The shoes slid away as a pair of knees replaced them and a hand held up a red handkerchief that Danny timidly took. As he blew into it Vlad embraced him and rubbed his back. He always smelled like cologne but up close it would've been slightly overpowering if Danny's nostrils weren't so clogged up. The scent was still faintly there though.

They remained silent aside from Vlad's supposably comforting shhs, which didn't actually help. Oh well, he was trying at least. Danny had to admit it was a nice gesture.

Eventually, the heartbroken boy managed to speak up because a question had been nagging at the back of his mind, "Why wasn't there a...f-funeral for Mom, Dad, and J-Jazz?"

Vlad contemplated Danny's question for a while before he answered, "Some things are better left unsaid," his deep voice rumbling in his throat against the teenager's head. Danny was reminded of future Vlad—he'd said the exact same thing—and some of the iciness he harbored towards the man dissipated. The billionaire reached into another of his suit jacket's pockets and took out a second red handkerchief that he handed to Danny; the first one was soaked. Laughing weakly, the boy accepted it and Vlad looked at him quizzically. "What?"
"What kind of person carries two handkerchiefs?" He asked, trying to hold up a joking tone but failing miserably. He unfolded the handkerchief and let the cloth cover his face entirely. His face felt like crap.

"A prepared person, that's who." Vlad removed the cloth from Danny's face and dropped it in the boy's shaking hands. "Don't do that, you could suffocate."

"T's not like I care if I do..." Danny mumbled to himself.

"Pardon?"

"...Nothing."

"Alright."

Danny weakly pushed himself away from Vlad and went back to his place on the floor, dabbing away at his stray tears. He may have been crying but he wasn't a baby, he didn't need to be held. As he settled on the cold stone he saw Masters had been staring at his modest memorial with a look he'd never seen before, something personal and raw behind that façade. The soulfulness of that man's gaze was like a black hole swallowing everything around it. Although no words or picture could rightfully describe it.

"I'm proud of you, Daniel. Addressing loss is extremely difficult. Maybe now you'll get closure, hm?" He whispered firmly, the statement holding an undertone of pure empathy. It sounded weird coming from a usually bold and hateful man. Danny didn't know how to respond, he was entranced by the expression on Vlad's face; It seemed to bring out wrinkles that had yet to surface.

Vlad looked away from the memories and turned to face Danny, the expression on his face gone and replaced with his mask. "Who's 'him'?"

"Huh?" Danny blinked and woke from his trance.

"You mentioned turning into someone." Vlad took Danny's chin and forced the boy to look up so he could see what's underneath those unruly bangs. "What was that about?"

Danny tried to look down but Vlad's hand refused to let him move, so his eyes flitted away instead. "It's nothing."

The older hybrid's eyes turned hard and seemed to drill into Danny's own. "There's something you're not telling me, isn't there?"

Danny's hard shell began to resurface as he sent the man's words back at him. Sober yet Hidden.

"Some things...are better left unsaid."

Chapter End Notes

Vitamin D deficiency is an actual epidemic amongst kids these days! Make sure you're getting enough, being vitamin D deficient can give you depression. I suffered with depression for two years until a doctor told me vitamin D was the cause. SO GO CHECK because it's not fun to suffer.
I'm sorry if my depiction of losing someone close isn't accurate. I've never had any family or friends die...yet. Feel free to correct me or share your own experiences with death (if you're comfortable with doing that)
Day Off

Chapter Notes

To be honest I forced the ending a bit in the last chapter. I may end up changing it/deleting it. For now, just assume Vlad thought Danny was being hysterical and didn't push the "who's him" questions any further. I have a whole story arc dedicated towards that later.

One more thing—sorry it took me forever to update! I scrapped three alternate versions of this chapter before writing this one. I was really struggling. Thankfully that's all over.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Paperwork. Tons of it.

The billionaire breathed out slowly and set down his golden fountain pen, eyeing the disorderly fine-printed work in front of him. Everything was scattered over the surface of his fine mahogany desk, a rare sight for the overly organized man. Although the papers laying atop his collection of finer stationery were the only damage. With a careful sweep of his hands, he rounded up the mess into a neat pile and flipped through the stack. Gentle air fluttered at his face. He paused, removing a misplaced paper to put it on its respective topic, a pile that had already been straightened up.

Vlad then set down the newly organized work next to the other orderly pile, appearing satisfied, and picked up a delicate china teacup that was decorated with intricate botanical paintings. Allowing himself to indulge in the fruity, floral, steaming contents of the cup; Fouchon, his favorite tea. He savored the drink before gently setting it down and standing up to stretch. He'd been sitting at his desk for several hours.

It had been a while since he sat down to work on his many companies. Vlad usually was on top of things, always getting his work done early. But it'd been an extremely crazy week, resulting in the upheaval of his previously rigid schedule and sending everything askew. Acquiring Danny had been the main culprit, as Vlad eagerly threw his work out the window and focused on determining the boy's physical state and needs. Goddammit, he'd been wanting this boy for months and a cure to loneliness for twenty years. Excuse you for judging his excitement. And in addition to his plans for Daniel, the boy's childish outbursts and plotting further contributed to the frenzy. Thankfully, in the two days that had passed since then, things died down considerably.

Vlad was somewhat grateful Daniel broke his hand. The boy was currently bed-ridden, hooked up to an IV that gave him pain medication. Tylenol and Advil ended up ineffective since half-ghosts tend to absorb medication slower. The effect would be released in small increments over time, enough to stem pain from a headache but not a broken hand. So Vlad was forced to go back to stronger analgesics. The dose had been lowered considerably from when Daniel first took them so it didn't affect him as bad, but nevertheless, it rendered him slightly lightheaded. And with him being unable to plot escapes or give Vlad anything other than verbal grief, it let the billionaire worry about other things, like his aforementioned work life.

A groan escaped him as he completed his last stretch. The last time he exercised was eight days ago—he really needed to do that sometime today. The man went back to his desk and pulled up
another pile of papers, removing three from the top of the stack and spreading them out. He no longer needed to work on the mess the Fentons left behind, he cleaned that up earlier and it was finally all taken care of. He'd also finished overviewing his companies and was now moving onto homework for his online psychology course.

One may wonder why a billionaire with three doctorates is still taking classes. Why would he need to continue learning? Doesn't he consider himself above that?

Well, Vlad enjoyed learning. Since a young age, he'd always been infatuated with the world around him. Although now he felt more disgust than wonderment towards life—nevertheless he continued to learn. Without a family to keep him company, he relied on work to take up his time and fill the empty void in his heart. In addition, Vlad had many experiments he wanted to work on but couldn't due to his "lack" of knowledge. Most experiments were conducted by teams of researchers, and Vlad hated to rely on others. He wouldn't need a team of people to help if he knew everything.

Vlad leaned back in his chair and rubbed his face. As much as he enjoyed learning he couldn't get himself to focus. Perhaps he'd been sitting down too long and needed a good break. The billionaire glanced at the ornate grandfather clock on the other side of the room.

Indeed, he could afford a break. And besides, it was about time he refilled Daniel's pain medication.

He stood up and walked out of his private study, choosing to embark from the first to the seventh floor the human way. He needed the exercise and enjoys looking at his mansion. The halls were filled with priceless artifacts he'd either bought or auctioned (with "special" help.) Each one held some sort of historical or emotional significance to him, otherwise, he wouldn't have spent money on it. The most memorable of his collection were the portraits of Vlad himself on each floor. Which reminded the older hybrid it was about time to update them, he wanted to replace the older portraits with newer ones of Daniel and him.

Vlad smiled at the thought that he was walking to his son's room. Everything was as it should be. Jack is dead, Danny is under his rightful custody...the only thing missing was Maddie as his beautiful wife. But that will eventually be fixed, of course. Ultimately, life has changed for the better since Daniel's fateful mistake, and Vlad was no longer angry about it. In little time he'd gone from desperately trying to clone a boy to being given everything he'd fought for since becoming half ghost. And he was basking in the glory, soaking up the unbelievable and wondrous reality. Heck, he goes to sleep happy, for the first time in his life.

When he eventually reached his "son's" room, he discarded knocking and opened the door without warning, as usual. Danny should have nothing to hide from Vlad—as the boy was his property—so knocking wasn't necessary. Picking up a bag of medication from the pile he left near the doorway, Vlad strode over to the lethargic mess lying underneath a pile of bedsheets.

"Heya, V-man." The boy welcomed light-heartedly, propped up on a pillow. Daniel always tried to come off as joking and teasing but Vlad could see right through his feeble veil. The medication was probably contributing to that too. "I'd appreciate it if you'd knock."

"Why should I?" Vlad asked as he removed an empty bag from the infusion pump, shooting Danny an all-knowing glance. His raven black hair was an absolute mess, sticking up in every-which-way. And his eyes were tinted red and puffy, signifying he'd been crying. Or suffering from allergies, but as far as Vlad's concerned, he didn't have any.

"Oh I dunno," Danny looked up at the ceiling and tapped his head to display fake thinking, "it's polite. That's funny, weren't you the one getting on my case about manners not too long ago?"
The man gave a small chuckle, continuing to tamper with the device in front of him. "I see Jack never utilized or taught you proper parent/child relationships. Parents don't need to knock."

"Dad," Danny raised his eyebrows as he emphasized the word to make it obvious who he was referring to. "Always knocked before coming into my room."

Okay. So maybe Danny was fibbing a bit about that. Dad sometimes knocked. At least he used the door as opposed to blasting down the wall.

"Well, your father was..." Vlad shot back, making sure to emphasize the past tense, "an idiot. He's not even close to a proper parenting example."

"You're wrong." The teenager retorted.

With a press of the power button on the infusion pump, Vlad challenged, "Is that really? Oh, yes, I'm certain every father owns a stockade. Every father lets their children handle highly unstable ectoplasmic weapons and lab equipment. Every father still believes in Santa Clause at the age of forty-two and aspires to rip their son apart...what was it...ah, "molecule by molecule." Need I go on?"

"Dad didn't know." Grumbled Danny.

A fit of laughter burst out from Masters, "That's right! He wasn't competent enough to see the ghost living right under his nose. He couldn't even recognize his own son!" An expression of amusement blossomed on his face as he wiped away a mocking tear, "I'm still surprised you harbor respect towards that inane bastard."

He set down the empty medicine bag and reached over the bed for the teenager's bandaged hand. Danny tried to twist away but Vlad quickly grasped onto his forearm and pulled it close for thorough inspection. Danny had wanted to make Vlad apologize before he could look at his hand. Oh well.

"I don't know how fast this will heal...I've never broken a bone myself. Rather hard to when you're half-ghost." The billionaire said as he rummaged around Danny's fingers, procuring a wince from the boy. "Oh, did that hurt?"

"No." He replied, stuffing down the slight grimace that had surfaced. Danny was determined to uphold what little dignity he had left. He hated that his health was at the hands of a man who continually insulted his family.

"You're a dreadful liar." Vlad pointed out as he removed the bandages and splint, letting them fall to the surface of the bed. The stitches had dissolved away, leaving behind smooth, unscarred skin—as expected of a half-ghost. Although they couldn't determine anything by the outer appearance. He continued to press and prod certain areas of Danny's hand, either stopping when Danny struggled to hide his discomfort or moving on when he saw none. The boy had an extremely high pain tolerance, so any sign of hurt spoke considerably. It may have been slightly cruel as opposed to asking Danny where and what hurts, but he knew Danny would never tell or admit it. He seemed bent on keeping his walls up.

Vlad had thought that after Daniel broke down the boy would cling to him, coming to him for advice and comfort. To vent and spill out his feelings towards his dead loved ones. Vlad knew exactly what Danny was going through and wanted nothing more than to help, to be a shoulder for him to lean on. And in all honesty, he was the only person Daniel had left anyway. But as always the teen did the opposite of what Vlad wanted him to do and became more taciturn. He'd sit on his
bed for hours, staring into empty space. Likely thinking about his old life and family rather than doing things to take his mind off them. Most adolescents and children required constant stimulation, but Daniel was constantly destimulated, and he seemed to want to be like that; stuck in his past life. It was incredibly unhealthy.

"Did you try any of the books?" Vlad asked, referring to the pile he left on the nightstand. Finished with inspecting the boy's hand he swept aside the used bandages and picked up the splint to reapply it. Some bones were still damaged and it was safer to wear until everything healed properly.

Daniel appeared less than happy to be taken care of, unafraid to hide the disapproving frown etched across his tired face. "No, I don't like to read."

"Yet you had no problem deciphering my post-graduate textbooks."

The boy rolled his eyes. "That's different." He wasn't about to point out he actually did have plenty of problems deciphering those books. It would've given the billionaire something else to poke fun at.

"The only difference is your motivation, Daniel. You and I both know you dislike reading and English..."

"That's an understatement," Danny muttered under his breath.

"...yet when the situation calls for it, that dislike is thrown aside. You can read plenty well, my boy, but your mindset gets in the way." He pointed out while securing the last strap on the splint.

"Fun. Just what I need—to be analyzed. What are you gonna do next? A palm reading?"

Discarding the sarcastic comment, Vlad continued, "It's not healthy to just sit here doing nothing. It'd do you some good to read. You might surprise yourself."

"Whatever." The teenager replied, his eyes hiding beneath disheveled black bangs.

The billionaire mumbled, "you need a haircut..." before letting go of Daniel's forearm. "Well, I have an agenda to uphold today. Is there anything you'd like me to make or bring to you? Porridge, maybe?"

The medicine also messed with Danny's appetite, so Vlad had been making porridge for him. In the past couple days he'd introduced Danny to seven types of porridge from various countries of origin, the cultured bastard.

"No." The younger hybrid answered dejectedly, pulling the sheets higher and turning away from Vlad.

"Do try and entertain yourself." He pushed, before walking over to Daniel's bedroom door to take his leave. As he pushed down on the door handle he glanced back at the lump in the bed.

"Oh, and don't call him "dad" anymore, refer to him as "Jack" from now on, hm?" And he quickly left before Danny could throw an insult or protest back.

God, he really hated Vlad. Stupid, snotty, stuffy, Mr. Arrogant. Dad's now dead, for Christ sake. Get over the grudge! Leave him alone! How is it possible someone can hold a grudge for so long?
He despised how Vlad always made Dad out as some horrible parent. Dad was a great parent, maybe even a little too good. The opposite of neglectful, for sure. He had no problem handing out chores and scolding Danny over bad grades and curfews. He also kept showing up at school to make sure Danny, Jazz, and everyone else was safe from ghosts, much to the siblings' chagrin.

Although, as inconceivable as it is now, Danny missed it. He'd give anything to have his parents around to embarrass him. Just how many things had he taken for granted in his past life?

Eurgh. It hurt to say past life.

Familiar tears started to well up again and Danny fought to keep them down. Crying's for the weak, the helpless, the defenseless. And he was none of those. Or so he hoped. He wasn't entirely sure, but for now, it was just easier to lie. It made him feel better...somewhat.

Even though he hated Vlad insulting his Dad it brought back the blissful familiarity that had once been his life. Ghost hunting, arch-enemies, and crazy families. Everything was so simple back then, he had no horrible future or worldly destruction to worry about. He'd meet a ghost, exchange witty banter, kick butt, and learn some valuable lesson about...honesty. Or something-such nonsense. He'd even gotten a couple allies and made sort-of friendships with the ghosts he'd encountered, like Johnny 13 and Youngblood. They'd enjoy pushing his buttons here and there but generally meant no real harm. It was pretty cool having ghostly acquaintances.

Although, even better than his past life was his past-past life, before he got ghost powers. When Danny was just your average non-freak loser trying to survive the social pressure and vigorous academics that came with high-school. Able to focus on his family, friends, and future.

As cool as having ghost powers is, he would give anything to be turned back to normal. He just wanted to live a mediocre life in the shadows and become an astronaut. But the moment he stepped into the portal that became impossible. Danny had been turned into a...a spectral freak, destined to be forever set apart from others. He had enough issues fitting in as a human. However the difference between then and now was that it became life and death; if he didn't fit in, he'd be cast away, feared as a monstrosity, or worse...dissected.

At first, he thought his parents would accept him but the more they talked about his ghost half the less sure he became. Danny would overhear them discussing how interesting and unique "Phantom" seemed. They'd bicker over what to do if they ever got ahold of him. A difficult decision indeed—to tear him apart molecule by molecule or examine the remains? Mom and Dad had made it clear they didn't care about whether or not the ghost was in pain and they regarded these "malefactors of post-human conscience" as monstrous beings, incapable of any sentience. The more he'd hear the more he'd doubt over whether they'd actually accept him. Would they be heartbroken their son was a monster? Or would they want to tear into his body and take notes on the weird half-human anomaly he was? They were scientists, nonetheless. If they hated ghosts then the answer would be clear, but they didn't hate ghosts. They loved ghosts. They were fascinated by them, and would no doubt be fascinated by Danny.

And in addition to his fears of being discovered was his shattered dreams. After accidentally activating the portal, he became responsible for the ghosts it spewed out. It's not like he chose the life of a hero, it chose him. The ghosts coming out of the portal were his doing, therefore it was his duty to put them back. And the more ghosts that escaped, the more he captured until it eventually turned into some sort of daily chore. By then it was too late to turn around and give up; because of his ghost powers he was the only person capable of fighting ghosts and protecting his loved ones. Too bad for him, he wouldn't be able to focus on his academics anymore, lest his family and friends be killed. And he couldn't hope to pass the multitude of blood tests that came with being an
astronaut.

The teenager lowered himself from the pillows he lay propped up on and hid underneath the bed sheets. He didn't want to be different, he never asked for any of this to happen. If he never became half-ghost then he wouldn't have Vlad chasing after him. He wouldn't have Dan to worry about. His family would've never been killed. His life and future would've still been intact. He wouldn't be here right now.

How could one stupid, silly mistake lead to all this? How could one decision, one minor detail, change the world as you know it?

He wished he could turn back the clock.

Speaking of clocks...whatever happened to that Clockwork guy? Didn't he say he was in charge of eliminating Danny's future?

Heh, some Master of Time he turned out to be. He obviously didn't succeed if Danny was still here in this nightmare of a future. Then again that was kind of Danny's fault...perhaps he should've stayed back and let Clockwork waste him. That way Danny wouldn't be stuck suffering here, his loved ones would still be alive, and the future would be safe.

Well, it was too late for all that now. That decision had been made and it was too late to take that back too. Danny groaned and awkwardly hid his head underneath a pillow using his one good hand. The IV shifted uncomfortably underneath. "Nice going, Fenton," he grumbled.

Danny was responsible for all this. In some ways Vlad was right. His "teenage arrogance" and "inexperience" got in the way of his better judgment. He was so sure he could fix it and escape his fate with his loved ones intact. But instead of fixing he made it worse, he added to the fray.

Most importantly, he not just added, but started it. To think, that this all began with his decision to cheat on a test.

It was stupid. It was so blown out of proportion.

Yet that's how life is when you're half ghost. You're pulled from your simple life and taken to a world where every breath you do or don't take determines the next outcome.

And he was still there. Lying in this bed, a scarred, innocent young boy is responsible for the next path he and the world take. While he could acknowledge his place was his doing, he didn't want to face it. He didn't know what to do besides hold out until the age of eighteen, when he can finally leave this place and escape the darkness waiting to pounce.

He didn't want to wait. But it's the only thing he had left.

(Poor Danny. He doesn't realize that if he never got ghost powers then he wouldn't have been able to save his father at the reunion.)

A long, sturdy, metal rod cut through the air like butter, creating a satisfying *whish* with each motion. It swirled and jabbed and flew elegantly, almost ribbon-like, heeding the hands commanding it. There was a calm and focused atmosphere surrounding the bow and its wielder, a pattern of a dance, like this had been practiced countless times before. Each movement matched the music slipping from the stereo speakers.

Here, practicing in one of his many exercise rooms, was Vlad Masters. Currently working on his
Karate form. A fact unknown by most is that he's a ninth-degree black belt.

He had not displayed interest in martial arts until after he met Maddie, who introduced him to it. At the time she was a seventh-degree black belt, working up to the ninth-degree. A title she earned somewhere between Vlad's hospitalization and having a family. Exactly when? He'll never know.

Before Vlad was hospitalized he'd managed to make it up to a first-degree black belt with Maddie's help and coaching. It was one of the many things they, including Jack, bonded over during their three years together at Wisconsin State—they did everything together, truth be told. Although Jack wasn't as good as Maddie and Vlad. He never reached farther than a green belt.

After going to the hospital and being placed in quarantine, Vlad didn't have the freedom or stamina to continue. It wasn't until after he was "released" and became a billionaire that he resumed the practice and completed his training alone, not only because he had the time and money and vowed to reach Maddie's level, but also because ghosts often engaged in physical combat. If you were to ever watch Vlad fight as Plasmius you'd see hints of his background in Karate. (Actually though, he has perfect form! Which is more based on the animator's choice of animation references but still. I thought it'd be fun to make some sort of connection.) He usually practiced twice a week, but with Daniel here it was swept aside, and the consequences of that were prominent.

"Nice run there, Vladdy!" The Jack program boomed over the interface after the music ended. "My systems observed you were 89% in time with the music. The majority of your actions were delayed an average of 0.73 seconds. Try speeding up a bit."

"Fuck." As soon as the word fell out Vlad facepalmed. "I mean, cheese doodles. Ugh." Ever since Daniel drove him to break his twenty-year profanity-free streak, swear words kept bursting from his mouth by accident. A habit he was now struggling to shove back underneath the surface—it'd been years since he'd had to deal with this.

As the billionaire picked up a glass of water and drank from it, the AI system continued. "You're also stiff and slightly unbalanced, have you warmed-up yet today? It's important."

"OF COURSE I WARMED UP!" Vlad roared, angrily slamming down the water and walking back to the center of the room. "Restart same track." He ordered as he got in fighting stance, bow in hand.

"Okie-doke, V-man!" The music started back up, and shortly after Vlad began the series of moves whilst expertly handling the stick.

By now you're probably wondering why Vlad has a program based on Jack, the man he despises.

Without the Jack program, Vlad wouldn't have made it throughout these last twenty years. One cannot expect another to stay focused over a long period of time without constant reminders. And that was the sole purpose of the Jack program: to remind. His infernal presence and voice reminded Vlad of the wrongs his ex-friend had done him by. Since these reminders always angered Vlad beyond reason he decided to put the Jack program to use with his many exercise rooms. The anger he felt would then be redirected into focus as he practiced honing his ghosts powers and other forms of training.

And it worked very well. Vlad was completely in the zone.

He liked being reminded of Jack, even. It felt refreshing, having that new surge of hate flowing through his veins. It lit a fire in him that kept him going through life and swept away the thoughts that'd tell him to get over it. Vlad wanted to continue hating Jack, it's what Jack deserved after the
many things Vlad had previously forgiven him for. Most of them were at fault to Jack's ADHD. He was generally oblivious—especially towards social cues—and forgetful. Like how he forgot Vlad's a germaphobe with the backwash incident. Soapy water for days followed.

Each of Vlad's moves became more angered and forceful than the last, the *whishes* of cut air turned into big *wooshes*.

Yet, for some odd reason, that never stopped Jack from being the most popular guy in college. Then again, it was usually the most idiotic kid that'd be dubbed "top dog." Everybody else thought Jack was so funny and cute and personable. He seemed to draw them in like moths to a big, loud, overbearing orange flame. The guys guffawed over his antics and "lax" demeanor while the girls laughed at his jokes and innocence. In fact, they all had crushes on him and flirted hard like there's no tomorrow, waiting for him to ask them out on a date. But Jack, being horrible with social cues, could never tell and often left them frustrated. If Jack were to ever get a girlfriend, it'd be the girl that would initiate and ask.


And Vlad? Life never treated him that well. He worked and studied so hard. All that he ever received was a set of dead parents and an accident that ruined his life.

The *wooshes* went away and the bow in his hand was no more. Surprised, he looked down to see he'd melted the bow. Again.

"End program." He barked, stomping over to the side of the room and picking up a rag towel to clean up the metallic liquid now pooled on the floor. That had been the 34th bow he's melted now. Not counting the wooden one that burst into flame. He kept making the next bow out of increasingly stronger metal, yet they seemed to melt some way or another. At this point, Vlad was considering making it out of something that's nearly indestructible like diamond or graphene.

He sighed as he gazed at the almost clean mat. Reflected back by the remaining liquid was his sweaty, tired face. Ecto-acne free.

It was hard to believe Jack was really dead. Vlad's hatred towards him was still full and alive, a fire burning brightly within that never quenched. The man never thought about it but he assumed he'd finally be at peace once his traitorous friend was gone.

However, Vladimir was far from that. Even in death Jack still had everything. Vlad never got the satisfaction of watching his friend be eaten by death. Suffering at Vlad's own hands as payback for the many wrong deeds committed. A contract fulfilled between life and death.

And while Vlad took Jack's son, Jack's wife's DNA, Jack's home, Jack's scientific legacy...Vlad still couldn't take Danny's love and respect for his father.

Pink flames began to lick the rag.

He wouldn't be happy until he had *everything* Jack owned. Vlad deserved to take everything that should've been his own. A great life. A great family. For all the hardships life barreled at him despite Vlad's constant hard-working ethic and dedication towards his only friends.

Vlad needed to bring down Danny's respect for his father. Until that happens, he won't be satisfied, not yet. Of course, with the boy under his roof, that shouldn't be too hard, nor should it take too
long. Vlad could dig up plenty of dirt about Jack.

Besides, Danny was at an impressionable age. He was just waiting to have his opinions and desires molded like soft clay.

As soon as he finished cleaning up the liquid Vlad decided to call it a day. He really needed a good glass of wine. He deserved it.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so maybe I rushed through it. The pacing was off in the endings of both Danny's and Vlad's thoughts. I think I fixed it but we'll see, I might try to improve it more.

Btw I often go back and edit the past chapters too. Fixing spelling, grammar, or just plain situations/sentences that are out of character. I recommend you go back and re-read the past chapters because I did change some small details and might continue to do so as I go along. I'm sorry, I just want to make sure it becomes even better for the next person to read.

The more chapters I write the more difficult it gets. You can never truly know when's the right time to reveal something. Here's me hoping I didn't reveal or touch on too much this chapter.
Let Sleeping Boys Lie

Chapter Notes

!!! IMPORTANT. PLEASE READ. !!!

While I'm writing this partly for my enjoyment, I'm primarily doing it for yours. Sadly, my position as a writer is not as enjoyable as you being the reader. But I'm willing to sacrifice that in order to fill the large, missing gap of in-character fics surrounding this premise.

However, I'm very new to this whole writing thing, if that somehow hasn't been obvious. And while I'm trying my utmost to give you a well-written, in-character story, I fear that my lack of experience may hinder your enjoyment of this work.

I ask that if you find a portion of this fic questionable...writing-wise or character-wise, please shout it out and let me know. So I may fix it and make the story easier to read and enjoy for everyone. I know...I should have a beta for it...but nobody's been willing to beta this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sleep is a blissful thing in this world. There is no discrimination as to who can and cannot experience it. A basic function of living beings, both inhuman and human, it offers refuge for those tired of real life and wishing for a break from the burdens they carry. You're completely unconscious, immune to emotions, most importantly pain. You can even go so far to say that it's like a get-out-of-time-free card; consecutive hours can be skipped without actually being experienced.

And someone was keeping him from it.


Said sleep-inhibitor set down his portable vial storage box and oodles of individual needle and bandage packages on the bed-side table, their crinkling decorating the quiet space of the mansion. "Say 'please'."

It took a lot of willpower to not roll his eyes or groan at the demand. He gave Vlad a pleading expression and said, "Please," with as much innocence as he could muster.

"Ah, I do so love it when you use your manners." Vlad serenely said with a smirk written on his face. "But it's not going to change my mind." To further prove his point, he opened the storage container and gently pulled out a rubber capped vial that he wiped clean with an alcohol pad.

At hearing Vlad's response and the tell-tale chink of vials gently hitting each other, Danny let out an exasperated, "Ugggghhh." and twisted onto his side so Vlad could clearly see his dissatisfaction, although the man's eyes were currently focused on the needle package he was ripping open. "I'm sick of being your stupid pin-cushion."

"That makes two of us." He replied in a grim matter-of-fact tone as he poked the tip of the needle
into the vial's rubber top and turned the entire setup upside down in his hands. Danny didn't understand why Vlad did that every time, or how the medicine never spilled out, but he couldn't care to ask. "You think I like having to poke you every day?" Vlad protested in the form of a question.

"Yes." The boy huffed indignantly.

With a careful hand, Vlad pulled back the plunger on his syringe, drawing clear medicinal liquid into the container. He focused on the task at hand for a few seconds before answering, "Well, I don't. I hate having to keep track of all the vaccinations you have and haven't taken yet." The billionaire narrowed his eyes when his steady hands slowly drew the reading point of the syringe's plunger level to one of the marked lines on the barrel.

Danny frowned and argued, "Then don't."

"No. I am not going to risk having a sick teenager in my house when there's plenty I can do to prevent it." Finished with his pre-vaccination ritual, Vlad partially ripped the covers away from Danny to gain access to his arms. He snatched the closest one and positioned it accordingly, before rubbing the targeted area in practiced swipes with an alcohol pad. The boy shivered at the cold air that engulfed him and kicked the sheets back up into arm's reach, where he pulled them close to cover everything except the arm trapped in Vlad's grip.

"You've done more than plenty." Danny accused, watching Vlad push the needle in with no grimace or wince. "I wouldn't be surprised if I couldn't pass a drug test for a year."

Despite concentrating on the current task at hand, Vlad mildly chuckled, somehow managing to keep the hand slowly injecting medicine steady. "You don't know what a vaccination is, do you?"

The boy furrowed his brows, confused. "What?"

"And Jack's a scientist, nonetheless. Oh well, I guess I shall have the honor of educating you that of which you already should've known. No need to be embarrassed, son, it's not your fault. Hm...where to begin..

Danny's eyes cranked bright green, "Don't call m—"

"The year was 1777," Vlad started, interrupting Danny. He removed the needle from Danny's arm with a practiced motion and carefully set it in a box meant to hold the used devices. "During the Revolutionary War. American forces invaded Canada with the goal of driving the British out of Quebec and convincing it's citizens to bring their province to the American Colonies. I tell you this because your History grades are as dismal as your English and Math."

The teen rolled his now back-to-baby-blue eyes but didn't pull his arm back, which had been freed of Vlad's grip since the man needed both hands to prep the next syringe.

"Although, good History grades or not, much of the American public doesn't remember that part because the effort was rendered a disaster by the small-pox epidemic. It took out half the army and any hope of persuading the Canadians to join the Revolution. Now, George Washington—the general, mind you—who had been trying to evade the small-pox, realized he could no longer do so."

Not seeing how this related to the subject in questioning, Danny informed, "This has nothing to do with vaccinations."

Vlad pushed in the second needle and began inserting the liquid. The teenager frowned down at his
'I'm getting there,' Vlad said off-handedly, speaking now that he'd finished the attention-demanding part of administering injections. "Washington knew that once you've had small-pox you gain immunity because he survived it in his early years. So, to prevent the rest of his army from contracting the disease, he purposely infected them with it." An appalled expression slammed itself on Danny's face and he opened his mouth, but Vlad barked, "Let me finish!"

He closed his mouth, and Vlad inserted yet another needle before continuing. "It was a controlled infection. You make an incision in the patient's arm and introduce pus from an infected patient's pustule into the wound. By introducing a weaker form of the disease, said patient's body had a higher chance of developing the correct antibodies to counter it. The process was called inoculation, and it's essentially one of the first forms of what we know today as vaccinations." Finished with the third injection, Vlad began to prepare the fourth. "And while today we don't slather infected fluids in people's cuts, we do introduce a weaker form of the disease via a needle." He held up the liquid filled needle as an example before lowering it to puncture the boy's skin yet again, only for Danny to fearfully yanked his arm away.

"Y-you've been purposely infecting me?! All week?!!" He exclaimed in horror, cradling his poor arm.

"Yes." Vlad said exasperatedly as he pulled Danny's arm back towards him, who continued to struggle to take it back. It didn't help that the bed bounced from the attempts. "But it's impossible to become sick from it so..." he grunted at Danny's desperate flailings. "Calm. Down. Daniel."

Danny struggled a little more before deciding it wasn't worth it and eventually complied, but not without saying, "Dude, that's still disgusting. One hundred times worse than being poked every day."

"You're a big boy, you can handle it." The billionaire teased seriously, gripping Danny's tamed arm to insert the final injection. The boy grimaced this time as he watched the needle draw closer to his skin. "And don't refer to me so casually with that...that commoner's term. It makes you sound unintelligent."

"Ooh, sorryyy..." The teenager said in mock apology, "your high-ness."

"Much better." Vlad joked lightheartedly, making Danny's jab fly high over his white-stranded head. He completed slowly inserting the last injection and dropped the needle into his disposing box with finality, announcing, "That's it for today's vaccinations, you're all done. Now that wasn't so hard, hm?"

"If by hard, you mean like a rock, then yes, it was." Remarked Danny as Vlad added yet another bandage to the growing collection all over his extended appendage. By now he could probably remove the other bandages, but he didn't care enough to do so. What resulted was one crazy looking arm, and it didn't help that he still had the IV feeding pain medication into his wrist.

"There's that teen wit of yours." Vlad reminisced, throwing away all the used paper and plastic wrappers into the trash bin under the nightstand. "Glad to see the books are giving you ideas."

"Uhm-hm." Danny covertly agreed, taking his goosebump riddled arm and plunging it back into the warm tendrils of his bedsheets. He curled in on himself, huddling the blankets to stem the coldness his arm had brought in. Vlad watched in powerful amusement, towering casually over the bed-ridden teenager with his hands placed behind his back, per usual. The stance seemed to enhance his intimidating aura and make him taller, shoulders broader.
After several moments of quiet observation, he added, "And that you're using your time accordingly. If you ever need more books, just call, alright?"

"K." The boy grumbled, turning his back towards Vlad and nestling himself against the pillow. Soft footsteps that Danny barely picked up with his sensitive ghost hearing trailed away from him, followed by the gentle click of the door being shut. Danny's walls came down and he sighed, allowing himself to finally relax now that he was left in his own company. Shortly after, he gave himself back into Sleep's grasp, eager to rid himself of Vlad's memory and travel back to the unknown.

Before the explosion, Danny hated sleep. No, not the sleeping part—he enjoyed that—but mostly his body's need for it, combined with the fact that he could never get enough; it was just another task to add to his already overzealous life. But now? Danny loved sleep more than anything in the world, literally, because he had little to love. And while he still couldn't get enough of it in terms of his desire to sleep, his body got more than enough.

Maybe too much, actually. Several hours after his now quotidian vaccinations, Danny shifted uncomfortably underneath the covers to another section of the huge bed he hadn't lain in yet. However, it felt as hard as his previous spot, aside from being cold, so he regrettably twisted back to square one. Warm, but still hard.

Fun fact: Even the softest of beds turn to stone after you lie in them for too long.

While he wanted to get up, he didn't, but not for the reasons you think. Vlad didn't know it, but Danny was more than capable of climbing—or even flying—out of bed.

You could say that he was faking illness. It's not like he planned or needed to fake it, it was one of those lies that just...fell out. Not from his mouth, but from life. And he decided to keep going with it. Vlad had assumed the medicine was making Danny not want to get out of bed, but the truth is he felt too upset to get up. Waking up was difficult enough as is, and as soon as Danny climbs out of bed he is plunged into a bucket of ice-cold despair. He wasn't sure why, perhaps he didn't want to live life, and getting up meant he had to do just that?

Sure. Let's go with it.

All he knew was that he felt better when he stayed in bed, and while it wasn't physically healthy for him, it put his mental restlessness at ease. With the amount of internal torment he'd been subjected to, he was desperate to grasp onto the tiniest bit of comfort. He deserved a break after everything that has happened.

Actually, he felt like he didn't deserve anything. But there wasn't much else to do for his loved ones' besides wait, so he might as well make himself as comfortable as possible. The last thing he needed was to fall blind to the big picture, lose his sanity, and begin asking Vlad to remove his humanity. Danny would usually trust (and not expect) himself to do such a thing, but Dan's very existence contradicted that belief. He must've been very insane or desperate at that point.

Unable to get comfortable, Danny flopped over on his stomach and hid his head under the pillow. The feeling of his spine straightening out sent away his restlessness and he gave a muffled sigh of relief as all the tensions melted away...except one. With his empty stomach mashed against the mattress, hunger pangs twisted back and protested against the position with a long growl.

Danny had also "lied" about the medicine ruining his appetite. The truth is he just was never in the mood to eat anymore...and the fact that Vlad typically used meal times as an excuse to bother him.
It was easier to lie, otherwise, the man would most likely overshadow and force him to eat, and Danny wasn't in the mood for that either. Being overshadowed made him feel contaminated and ultimately violated of his personal space.

A nauseous feeling was starting to permeate as a result of his current position, so he carefully repositioned himself upright and rested his head against the headboard. His old Amity Park sheets scratched at his skin in a reminder to him having overstayed his welcome in bed. However, he didn't make an effort to move them away, because they were warm and the room felt chilly.

"Much better..." he mumbled sleepily. Even though he got more than enough sleep, it was precisely over-sleep that made him groggy and tired, ironically. Not that he minded; the more tired he was, the faster he'd go to sleep.

The only downside to his attempted hibernation was the more frequent nightmares. Vivid and detailed ones, containing every possible thing Danny was afraid of or hated. Even things he didn't know he disliked.

Most of the time they were creepy. Like being dissected by his parents, Vlad, or Dan. And not just a little incision here and there...no...these were incredibly gory and detailed. The longer the dissection took the more Danny would lose his sanity until he eventually turned into Dan, before dying. Danny could safely say that Vlad would never dissect him—being the same species—but his parents and Dan?

Well...his parents wouldn't...because they're...they're...you know. The young teen took a deep breath to calm the uneasiness that had risen in his throat. While he was slowly coming to terms with his parents' death, it was still difficult to regard them as dead. It's not something you can fight with logic, but rather emotion.

And as for Dan...Danny wasn't sure.

Pushing against the headboard, the boy sat completely upright and clumsily leaned over the side of the bed. The mattress hardly dipped beneath his weight as he carefully opened the nightstand drawer with a hand as meticulous as a brain surgeon. Inside gently rolled out the still dented and beaten up Fenton thermos.

He had wanted to leave it on the mantle with his family's remains to remind himself of what was at stake, but he didn't want Vlad touching it, so he hid it in there. The boy figured the nightstand drawer was the next best place since he now spent all his time in bed.

An urge to touch the device arose, similar to the urge you get to touch a painting. But he refrained, feeling as if mere contact would infect him. Perhaps Danny's mind was playing tricks...but the thermos seemed to radiate evil. And every once in a while Danny could hear his evil future self rattling around slightly, angrily protesting like an evil genie. It was unnerving how tangible (excuse the pun) Dan is through the device. Although, thankfully, the thermos appeared to be doing its job albeit the visible escape attempts.

The boy wasn't sure if the thermos could continue to hold Dan, though. But he didn't know of any other devices or even a safe container transfer method without asking for Vlad's help, and there's no way he'd do that. There was too much risk in asking.

Glad that Dan was still imprisoned, Danny carefully closed the nightstand drawer, and as soon as the door hit shut, the thermos tremored disapprovingly. The poor boy shivered at the angry noises the tremor had made, pausing and staring cautiously at the nightstand like it'd blow up any second. A simple action such as dropping or shaking the thermos could result in Dan's release.
When it didn't, he sighed quietly and nestled back into his previous position, only to find what little warmth had existed escaped, leaving behind an ice cold pillow. With the speed of a sloth, he abandoned his upright position and slid low under the covers until they rested on his shivering form and head. Danny curled tight in a ball in an attempt to stem the already prominent, prickly goosebumps that had risen on his pale, hairless skin.

Slowly but surely, warmth came crawling back, and the feigned darkness from his Amity Park bed covers cosplayed night. Soon enough, Sleep embraced him yet again like the mother he had no more.

(DREAM SEQUENCE YAY! I made this as confusing and clear as possible. Have fun deciphering which components are symbolic and literal *evil cackle* lots of foreshadowing and hidden themes. Don't worry, though, it gets easier to read.)

Tightly across it stretches, the wall. As if the oppression it's trying to blind musn't sound. Decorated with the pain of many, it cannot stand proud as it should.

Thick and gaunt tapestries point away from the trap of a ceiling, standing tall and fruitfully withered. Their crucified fabrics scream foolish tales misunderstood.

The air swam thinly around it's nightmare castle. Blindfolding those true to it's cause and striking the unknowing.

And amidst all the swirling orderly maelstrom was an enslaved prince, with hair once brighter than hope, now fallen to flaming pearl. He struggles against his loving chains, blindfolded not by air but a ruler beneath. For reasons unknown, the man under has outsmarted his own existence.

Those outsmarting hands fall on the prince's terrified and unwilling shoulders. His obsidian throne presses against all odds. An aid for escape, yet harboring quotidian betrayal. The Blinds squeeze harder.

His chains seem to clasp into bone, and he struggles, and pulls, and cannot be freed. The young prince chokes on his heart and tears stand in his eyes, overflowing the sides at his escape turned painful.

Those thick commanding fingers dig into the meat of his bony stature. They speak for themselves, yet the man still harshly whispers, "Daniel, cease your wriggling at once. You're making yourself appear childish."

They continue to dig and dig and dig, prying, killing, demanding, until the boy whimpers and finally stops moving, apart from the violent shivers and sharp intakes of air. His acrid, pupil-less, red round eyes spill fear and contemplation.

They doubt and push and doubt and push. Danny slowly peers behind his back and up at the towering, slinky, fox-like man behind him. The shadows flee yet embrace him.

A decision is made.

"B-b-but I am a c-child."

Vlad's cunning expression crinkles into pressed agitation. He swoops to the boy's level, only slightly more above, forcefully grabs hold of Danny's small chin, and whips it around to face the scene before them. His touch sends horrifying yet loving shivers down the boy's back.
"You are not a child." He says quietly, gesturing around the beautifully horrible castle. "Children do not rule the world."

Danny's eyes fall upon the scene he's tried so hard to avoid facing. It burns into his retinas, peeling at his rotting core and memories.


Their despair radiates like the after-effects of an atomic bomb. Contaminating everything in the atmosphere and stinking up the earth. Nothing could ever clean up the scars open and raw. They meander without a trace of dignity, slapped around by enslavers in meaningful uniforms. They're always wrong, always slow, never right. They dare not speak or even look back.

In the center of their meanderings is a half-finished statue, supposedly meant to carry prideful standing. But the young prince can only see the agony of many, dripping off and burning into the ground. It burns into his body, his heart, his very half-dead life.

He does not want to rule the world, but he dares not voice it. He does not want a statue of himself. He does not want humanity to suffer like this. The Holocaust, it cannot be compared to this utter nightmare.

And he feels guilty for thinking against his master. Fingers dig through his chin, plunging beneath and grasping around his faint core, twisting and puncturing through. The boy knows Vlad can feel his betrayal underneath those well-maintained fingernails.

"Look at them." He orders, easily fighting the boy's natural attempt at looking away.

Standing before the boy was a group of supposed wrong-doers. But Danny can see beneath the feeble name. These people have tried to set things right like he would've done. These were noble humans, bestowed a degrading title and destined for further misery brought by the prince himself.

Danny doesn't want it to be this way. He doesn't want it to happen, but he knows it will. Vlad's forced him to watch each and every one. And he expects Danny to take charge this time.

"Do it." His master seethes threateningly.

The prince's eyes seem to swallow up the world surrounding. The more mature wrong-doers sense the pain and the fear in his pupils, the strange relationship between the two creatures they call ruler. But it's not their problem or place to question what goes on underneath this trapped ceiling. They've done their job and must pass the torch.

"I...I don't...no..." the boy stammers, knowing what will ensue after his small yet worldly defiance. He could not didn't want to these people didn't deserve it...

The man scowls and raises his palm in the direction of the youngest traitor, a child no less than seven years old. Her tattered clothes, skin wrapped bones, many scars, and missing hand tells horrifying stories untold. Her eyes were not those of a child, but that of an adult who's seen too much.

Energy seems to bend at the hybrid's will, just like the world. It sparks and crackles as it accumulates through and around Vlad's palm, one with the atmosphere and his veins. Building up slowly but quickening as it warms up, swirling around and through.

Danny's hands rise up and attempt to pull the palm away from it's target, only to be stopped short by the chains pulling his bones. "NO! VLAD! DON'T!"
He shoots.

A gaping hole in her chest.

She doesn't look scared, but like this was an everyday occurrence. She wants to be put out of her misery; to go to sleep forever. She welcomes the ectoplasmic blast and continues to send that chilling stare through Danny's red pupil-less eyes as if thanking him for *everything*. They eat at the young prince's image and mock him. Strong Hate. It feels like a leech laying eggs in it's host. Danny understands.

They turn to glass.

A sickening *flump* follows.


The stench of burned iron and ectoplasm waft up like that of fresh cookies from the oven.

Danny's seen it before. Smelled it before. So often that he was beginning to get used to it. But that was no excuse to become apathetic.

Young blood pools around her small form, leaking out slow and fast—the only thing left of her that moves. Danny stared horrified at the lifeless body, wanting to look away but unable to. The limply gaping mouth. The wide-open eyes that contradict her physical statement of death. The naturally curled fingers facing upwards.

It reminded Danny of an unused matchstick.

"Do the next one." His master demands angrily.

The girl's blood has pooled over and beneath the feet of the next wrong-doer. A young woman who doesn't cringe away from the warm liquid, but gazes expectantly at Danny.

He stares back, unsure. The Blinds flutter.

Vlad impatiently growls, "Daniel."

Danny blinks once, and the moment his upper eyelid hits the lower his eyes flicker to acid green. Although when they reopen they're back to red. None of these people deserved to be killed or in this nightmare world. How could Vlad regard lives so flippantly? Life was supposed to be a gift. Sacred, unique. How could Danny be expected to treat it like discarding a bag of marbles?

Yet...all these people *were* suffering...this kind of life was no gift, nor sacred and unique. They all went about doing slave work in the same tattered clothes, suffering from malnutrition and bodily harm. Would it be better to put them out of their misery?

...but...

He peers up at Vlad with pleading eyes, asking, *begging*, for some other way. It's been enough damage on his conscience already, sitting back and watching Vlad enslave the world. Watching Vlad kill them off like roaches. Sitting on the sidelines.

But to do it himself?

No words can explain the horror.
He knew Vlad wouldn't accept his pleas, but he couldn't live with himself if he didn't try, even hopelessly.

And hopeless it was.

Vlad's troubled ocean blue eyes erupt red when the black rings engulf him. He shoots discardedly at the woman before grasping Danny's royal collar and dragging him off the throne, chains included. They exit the grand hall and into a corridor of the castle. Danny doesn't struggle, he knows exactly where Vlad's taking him.

The blood is always cleaned up afterward, making the room appear innocent to an unknowing being's eyes. It always throws Danny off at first, and this time was no exception. The King throws Danny across it like a rag doll, roaring, "FUDGE BUCKETS."

The boy slid off the wall like water and cowered from his position on the floor. He stared at it, not wanting to see what he knows will occur next.

"Everything goes in one ear and out the other, doesn't it?" Vlad seethed, his voice dropping in volume, but not tenacity. The lower tone actually amplified the terror inflicted. "I'm SICK of reminding you who I am. So let's switch it up a bit, hm? Tell me, who am I?"

His deafeningly silent footsteps prowled towards the shivering boy half sitting on the ground. The shadows went into a frenzy, unsure of whether to flee or embrace Vlad.

The prince began to speak, but his voice cracked, so he ashamedly cleared his throat.

"Vlad Plasmius...King of all Things Living and Dead...Ruler of all Existence...Teacher...Mentor...Master..."

He broke off, and Vlad raised an eyebrow. Danny gulped.

"...Father..."

The man bared his fangs in an expression undefinable as a smirk or a sneer. "Good boy," the fabric on his body bent at his will as he leaned in close to the younger hybrid. "And do you know what that means?"

Rather than waiting for an answer, he stood up and slammed the boy's head against the ground with his foot. He kept his foot atop, and pressed the child further into the floor as he duplicated. Leaving the copy to do the hard work, he patiently strode over to Danny's line of vision, bending down so they were now facing each other. A grin rivaling the Cheshire Cat's ghosted his features.

"It means everything's mine, including you. My property. My apprentice. My heir to the new half-ghost empire. My son."

The duplicate's hand lit up and a deadly looking ectoplasmic whip materialized. The ghostly energy radiating from it glowered at the boy under. He winced when the duplicate phased off his royal cape and shirt, anticipating in horror over the actions pending. His scarred, small, bony back exposed to open air.

"You need to stop with that ridiculous rebellious streak, Daniel. You-"

The whip latched hard against Danny's back, sending the air around it swishing and crackling. Pain overflowed his nerve endings and erupted across his back, causing him to release only a grunt. He grit his teeth, seething, to avoid showing any other sign of discomfort. The world swirled, the light
Danny sat upright in his uncomfortable bed. He rubbed his eyes and face, releasing a long exhale as he dragged his hands down its length.

Another nightmare, woohoo. Broken record.

In Danny's eyes, that nightmare now rivaled the dissection ones. It didn't help that Danny couldn't tell if Vlad would or wouldn't do such a thing.

He rubbed his back and winced, still feeling the imaginary whip digging mercilessly into it. The vivid details of his dreams also included physical feelings, which made them all the more memorable despite the prospect of world enslavement, which far outdid any form of tangible pain.

The atmosphere surrounding the dream felt so suffocating, like sadness had suddenly become tangible. And the ghastly, starved expressions on the people's faces looked like they had come straight from textbook pictures of genocides. Granted, they probably did since it was a dream, after all.

Yes, just a dream. Danny wasn't actually a world dictator, therefore he wasn't truly responsible for "his" peoples' suffering—but that didn't change the fact he had somewhat experienced what it was like to be responsible for that. Words could not describe the horror.

What bothered Danny the most about the dream was that he didn't do much to prevent the atrocities besides refuse to kill. Dream Danny had not stood up to Vlad for a reason that he'll never
come to know. However, no matter what the reasons, it was odd because he always puts others before himself.

Okay...maybe he did have a tendency to put himself first when it came to the whole superhero thing sometimes, although that never happened in matters of life and death; he was perfectly capable of recognizing when he couldn't afford to do so. Ultimately, the boy sacrificed his adolescent life on a daily basis for the sole purpose of protecting innocent ones, and that itself spoke leaps and bounds. Then again, that didn't mean Danny wanted to protect innocent lives. He certainly never considered public service as a potential career, he'd rather sit on the sidelines and view the action from far, far, away. But because he was gifted—or cursed, whichever way you want to put it—with these paranormal powers, he might as well put them to use for the sake of all that is good and ethical. As Uncle Ben from Spider-man put it, "With great power comes great responsibility."

You could say Danny was required to be a hero, to uphold that responsibility. But if someone is forced into such a role...does that really make them a hero?

He certainly didn't feel like a hero, that's for sure. Not just in the dream but in real life too. Some hero he was, unable to save his loved ones' from the wrath of his future self. And here in Wisconsin, where the only place evident in ghost activity was Vlad's castle, nobody required his life-saving services. His only heroic acts were to wait now.

In all honesty, though, Danny never truly considered himself a hero at first; he certainly didn't coin the title. The only people that did that was Sam and Tucker, along with the occasional (but rare) gratuitous citizen. Everybody in Amity Park, including his parents, hated "Inviso-Bill," or "Danny Phantom" before Pariah Dark. It was only now the tide was turning in his favor.

No, perhaps he was never a hero at any point of his life. Including now. Maybe he was just some kid trying to do the right thing

But isn't that a hero too?

Argh. Danny pushed back his bed-headed and greasy hair with a shaky hand. He needed to clear his head. He needed a shower.

The boy put his hand on the covers to tear them off but hesitated, reluctant to expose himself to cold air. He stared down at his hands, contemplating, and noticed the IV was still lodged in his hand. It'd have to go if he wanted to take a shower, so he removed it by turning the device intangible and dropping it unceremoniously on the floor. Health hazard as it may be, Danny didn't care. He didn't need to use the floor to get around anyway.

After several moments of mental preparation for the cold outside the safety of his blankets, he ripped them off and literally flew to the bathroom, slamming the door shut behind him. A breath of relief followed as his bare feet touched down on the heated tile, and he wasted no time in flipping the switch to the bathroom's fan and cranking the shower on all the way to hot. As the hiss of the spout welcomed Danny, he quickly phased out of his pajamas to hop in. Hot droplets that kissed like fire at his skin surrounded him, and he sighed relaxingly as they began to wrap around his cold body.

Danny actually needed to take a shower (badly), but he didn't plan on doing much cleansing. He just wanted to stand pointlessly in the heat and think in there as opposed to his bed, which now harbored memories of many nightmares. At least the film of sweat that sought refuge on his skin was finally going away, since that had contributed to his uncomfortableness. A clean(er) body equals a clean(er) mind, and boy did he need it. Danny's views, beliefs, and interpretations of Vlad
and life had changed several times since this whole ordeal began—several times too quickly.

In addition to Danny's wonderings of what a hero is, there was also the fact that nothing seemed to be black and white anymore. Which was extremely confusing to Danny, who had ever only viewed life as such. He went from seeing Vlad as an evil villain to someone much deeper and beyond the shallow title. Rather than scheming Dad's death and Mom's affections, he took care of Danny like his own. Granted, he wanted Danny as a son, but he wasn't trying to earn it through immoral means...anymore. Vlad took time out of his day to vaccinate and tend to Danny's injuries, and in addition, tried to make sure Danny was keeping busy. Annoying as it was—since Danny wanted to be destimulated—he had to admit it was all-in-all good-natured.

Billowing tendrils of steam snaked around Danny's body and up into the air, wafting over the great opaque doors of the shower. Danny watched them curl around, but only to give himself something to look at while he sorted out his thoughts.

Vlad could also have some sort of ulterior motive, however. Thus where the grey tones began to surface along with the conflict in Danny. It was a possibility the man wanted Danny to forget his past and embrace Vlad as his only family forever. Then again...could you blame the guy? From what Danny's seen, he has no family.

Actually, Danny was having a hard time continuing to view Vlad as an arch-enemy now. Everything pointed to him just being a wholly bitter and lonely man. Perhaps it was because he'd now somewhat seen how Vlad lives—like a normal human being. Who's very rich. And half-ghost.

Too bad for Danny since he wanted to keep seeing Vlad as his arch-enemy. He missed his family and friends so much, he didn't want to put them behind. And he felt that the moment he'd try to accept his situation and Vlad's kindness he'd begin turning into Dan.

Although...Danny should be accepting Vlad's kindness and turning less icy towards him. His heart kept saying it was morally just. But the overall situation far outweighed that and justified his need to continue their rivalry. That and Vlad's insults towards Dad. As long as Vlad continues to insult Dad, Danny will have no problem continuing to treat Vlad as a villain. Which was fine by him.

It did occur to the boy how odd it was to seek comfort in such an unorthodox way, but then again, his entire life was...is...unorthodox.

Speaking of...Danny had moved his focus from the steam to his toes, which should've flushed red from the heat of the shower. However, they were only vaguely pink; same with his fingers. He crinkled his nose at the sight and brought his pruny hands closer to his face to make sure the steam wasn't desaturating the color.

Nope, it wasn't, his hands were still just pink. Hm.

Oh well, it's not that big of a deal, and there had to be some not-special explanation for it, so he let the matter fall back to his sides. In fact, this way was nicer because his fingers and toes weren't throbbing from the vast change in temperature.

However, his feet were sore from standing, so Danny decided to sit down on the built-in shower seat, but not before adjusting the shower head to point in the seat's direction.

Yes, the shower had a built-in seat. It also had an entertainment system, therapeutic lights, and a computer control panel that allowed Danny to change the inner temperature of the steam room. Top it off with the sleek, cylindrical outer appearance and the overall black color theme, and you can't even begin to imagine just how much it cost. When Vlad showed it to Danny before they set
up his room, he became flabbergasted at the sight, and even more so at the demonstration of its uses. At the time, he admitted that he'd miss this shower when he goes to the ghost zone.

Well, it turned out he wouldn't miss it because he'd never be able to achieve that goal. But he wouldn't appreciate it like he had before since he was now too lethargic to find meaning in using its features. He just needed a shower, that's all. The other things were unnecessary. Although he appreciated this hi-tech shower and bathroom in other ways, such as how it didn't look like his bathroom at home. On more than one occasion he welcomed the change in surroundings, not only because his room felt cold and the bathroom had heated tile, but because it was his room. The room from Amity Park that probably should've stayed in Amity Park.

While it thankfully helped him remain in the past, he sometimes needed a break from the melancholy that drowned his heart as a result of the memories that arose from it. He knew he deserved it, though, and that it was horrible to want a break from it at times. But he just had to, or else he might go crazy. In this sensitive situation, it was better not to risk that.

A loud and abrupt knocking on the bathroom's door tore Danny so hard from his thoughts that he jolted at the noise.

"DANIEL. HOW MANY TIMES MUST I REMIND THAT I DON'T HAVE UNLIMITED WATER."

Danny shouldn't have been startled by the sudden noise since Vlad kept bothering him about his water usage every time he stepped in the shower. But bodies are stupid, and Danny had been so deep in thought he forgot about that constant occurrence.

He yelled back, "FINE." and reached up to twist the nozzle. However, he paused mid-action at the thought that surfaced in regards to the consequences that came with turning the water off. The heat would be gone and he'd have to brave the cold outside. Despite it's warmer temperature and heated tile, the area outside the shower doors felt like Antarctica in comparison to the area inside the shower doors.

"DON'T MAKE ME COME IN THERE." Vlad threatened.

At hearing that, Danny immediately turned the water off and braced himself for the cold to come, but then realized he was being stupid. He forgot he can just phase the water off in here, and because he'd be dry it wouldn't feel cold when he stepped out. So he did just that and began to put his pajamas on, amused that he kept forgetting he could use his ghost powers to avoid everyday human annoyances.

Halfway finished with dressing himself, he realized yet another thing he'd forgotten. That he wasn't supposed to be capable of walking out of bed on his own.

Shit.

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter is kinda blah, but so much has happened that I felt the need to slow back down and regain our bearings. Besides, we've now passed one arc (a very short but tumultuous arc; it had to be) and I'm trying to figure out how to smoothly wrap that up and begin setting up the next one. That's the reason I'm taking so long to update.
After all, this IS my first big fanfic...so I'm new to all these arc transitions and such.
Danny took his sweet time getting the rest of his pajamas back on, unsure of whether he should be worried about being unable to uphold his ruse. He wasn't particularly troubled about Vlad's reaction, but more so that he could no longer use those lies as a crutch. Something inside him said that Vlad wouldn't let him stay in bed all day, and would furthermore give Danny more to do than just read. Although he hadn't been reading in the first place anyway. Still...if only he could've held it off for one more day...

Oh well, what's done is done. Even if Danny had managed to keep the lie alive, time would eventually rat him out—he wouldn't be able to use his broken hand as an excuse to stay in bed forever. It was bound to happen sometime, so it might as well happen whenever.

He sighed in discontent as he struggled to put on his socks one-handedly, his toes repeatedly slipping away from the entrance. Fabric defied his attempts to dress until he clasped the rim of the opening between his two first toes, awkwardly coaxing it over the smaller ones. The thick material felt odd against his humidity-dampened skin.

Danny didn't usually wear socks to bed because it made him feel confined and uncomfortable. However, his need for warmth went past that. If he didn't wear socks, his feet would turn stone cold, pale, and numb, even with several blankets over the comforter. It had become a somewhat usual occurrence ever since the accident.

The other sock somehow slipped on, and the teenager groaned as he got up from the heated tile of the bathroom, dreading for the moment he walks out of it. Fog manifested by the steam from his shower clung to the mirror, thankfully shielding Danny from his image when he stood up. He didn't need to see his reflection to tell he looked dreadfully tired and thin, and he didn't want to confirm the fact. Yet he stared at the blurred multitude of colors that followed him in the mirror, abstract grey patches of flat clouds glaring at him.

He gingerly set his hand on the golden door handle and contemplated whether he really should leave before deciding all this second-guessing is stupid. Pushing down the handle to the bathroom door, he hoped Vlad wouldn't point out his scrappy appearance. The man lacked a polite filter in the sense of what seemed to be his mocking of Danny, or at least that was how Danny wanted to interpret it.

Had Danny walked out of the bathroom any faster he would've bumped into Vlad's waiting form, but since he was moving at a painfully slow pace, he merely took a few steps forward with his head hung and looked up slightly when a pair of expertly-kept dress shoes slid into his line of vision. The smell of freshly dry-cleaned suit and cologne gently pushed away the lingering aroma of shower.

Height-wise, Danny was considerably shorter than the billionaire and came up to the area a little more below his broad shoulders, which was where his eyes had leveled. He wasn't in the mood to squint upwards at the sturdy pole of a man.

"Daniel," Vlad began in a slightly peeved tone. Aside from his voice, Danny didn't need to see his face to tell he was ticked off. The aura around him spoke it clear as day. "If you wanted to take a shower, you should've just told me."
Danny's eyes were fixed on the impeccable loose bow tie the man always wore, wondering why Vlad wore such an unmasculine item. "Huh?"

"The IV. You should've had me take out your IV." The man reiterated shortly. He pulled Danny's chin up to make the boy face him, only to be met with oodles of messy, overgrown hair. With a slight huff, he pushed the bangs back so he could see Daniel's muggy water-colored eyes. Only for them to spring back over them as soon as he let go. Deciding it wasn't worth it, Vlad gave up the struggle and removed his invasive hands from Danny's face.

Little did he know, had he held on any longer, the boy would've slapped his hand away.

"Doesn't matter," Danny replied, welcoming the hate that had flared in his gut. He looked down at the ground with his eyes still shielded behind their silken black veil, not wanting to stare at any part of Vlad anymore. The ground swayed slightly beneath his feet. "I can turn it intangible. I don't need your permission for every little thing."

"No, you don't." Masters confirmed. "It's nice to see you taking care of yourself without my telling you. God knows it's about time you start taking the initiative. But you obviously haven't been observant...I've stopped turning the needles intangible."

The billionaire put his hand on Danny's back to guide them away from the bathroom door, "I wasn't sure if it was healthy and could care less to find out, as I have more pressing matters to focus on." He uncaringly informed. "To be on the safe side, I'd rather do them the human way."

Danny didn't know how turning the needles intangible could be unsafe, but as much as he hated to admit it, Vlad likely knew more about anything science or ghost related than he. Although, Danny didn't care much for his physical well being and didn't see the need to go the safe route. Either way, he'd still get injected with who-knows-what kind of virus or whatever the correct terminology was. So technically it didn't matter.

The boy begrudgingly allowed Vlad to steer him and didn't bother to raise his eyes to see where they were going, although he was currently going through an inner debate over whether he wanted his alone time or to annoy Vlad.

When Danny remained quiet and didn't answer his last statement, Vlad continued. "Apart from the possible unsafe nature of turning them intangible, I'm more upset you chose to leave the needle on the floor." As he said this, his grip on Danny slightly tightened, and by reflex, the boy did too. "Firstly, it's incredibly unsanitary. And secondly, a health hazard."

Danny darkly grumbled, "Good." To which Vlad immediately slapped him upside the head.

"I won't tolerate that kind of attitude, Daniel." He warned, sending a glare so powerful it raised hairs on the back of Danny's neck, combined with the lingering sting from being slapped. It had been a lighter slap than what the man generally offered during their light show-esque fights. But that aside, Vlad had superhuman strength. Therefore his version of a lighter slap didn't fit the bill. Chills from the targeted areas trickled into the center of Danny's chest, and had he been an animal he would've hissed protectively. Instead, Danny tore his eyes from the ground and returned the man's glare.

At seeing they were now in the hallway by his peripheral vision, Danny angrily asked, "Where are we going?" No longer feeling emotionally detached but rather pissed. He didn't want to do the man's bidding or be around him for too long, that'd just confirm the position Vlad wanted Danny in.
"Now that you seem to be well enough to walk, I'd like you to do a test for me." He set the hand that had slapped Danny's head back on his shoulder in a firm grip. His fingers dug slightly into Danny's pajama shirt, and a shiver arose too fast for Danny to suppress. Images from his nightmare flitted across the back of his eyes.

"Swell. What am I, a lab-rat?" Danny jabbed, moving his gaze away from Vlad again. It was just like Vlad to pounce a test on him as soon as he seemed well enough.

This slightly offended Vlad and he gave a small, aristocratic frown down at the boy, who didn't see it. "Daniel. These tests aren't for me. They're for you."

"I'm not the one choosing to do them, Vlad." The younger hybrid quipped back. "And it's Danny. Not Daniel." He jolted as Vlad suddenly turned to enter a room with the door left open, the man's hand pulling the unsuspecting boy with him.

"You'll appreciate it when you're older," Vlad said, ignoring Danny's correction. He led Danny to the single item of importance in the room; a medium-sized grey desk with a computer screen built into it. Perched on the top was a contraption that looked suspiciously like a camera, and the desk's surface only had room for a keyboard and mouse. Like the screen, the rest of its components were built-in, making them irremovable.

Danny openly gawked at the subtly strange desk before angrily sputtering, "What the hell is this?" Having known Vlad for nearly a year, he knew not to trust the majority of his electronic devices, no matter how innocent they looked.

"A desk," Vlad answered laconically, not wanting the boy to know what he had planned. He shoved Danny closer and pointed to the cushioned black stool in front of it. "Sit."

Danny dug his socked heels into the ground, insistent on keeping his distance from the device. Since Vlad wasn't keen on telling him what it was, Danny felt obligated to return the favor by refusing to listen. "I've never seen a desk like that." He protested. "Besides, I don't want to take a test; I'm too tired."

Slightly annoyed at Danny's constant need to not follow commands like a good son, Vlad sighed and rubbed his temple. He didn't have all day to deal with Danny's teenage temperament, and he'd waited long enough to get an opportunity for the boy to take this test. "It'll only take fifteen minutes, child, and it doesn't require much thinking. Please sit down. It's the only thing I'll ask you today."

Staring grimly at the device, Danny contemplated whether he wanted to give into Vlad's demands. Obedience wasn't something he wanted to make a habit of, and along with their rival complex, he didn't feel comfortable doing something when he wasn't sure what it was. Also, this room gave him the creeps; it had plain dark blue walls arranged in a square shape, and nothing other than the computer, stool, and a printer. Why would Vlad have an empty room like this in the first place?

On the other hand, if this were the only thing Vlad wanted him to do; after these fifteen minutes were up he'd be free from Vlad's company for the rest of the day, apart from the unavoidable mealtimes. The man would likely be busy sorting out his test results instead of bothering him about other things. And Danny really wanted his alone time.

Having made his decision, he mumbled, "Fine," and sat down on the cushioned stool stiffly. "Let's get this over with."

"Marvelous," Vlad said, reaching into his suit jacket's pocket. He removed a plain, black headband
with a small white bead on the top and began putting it horizontally on Danny's head, only to be stopped by a pair of hands that kept the billionaire from lowering it any further.

Danny wasn't sure he liked where this was going. "What are you doing?" Was this some mind control device?

Vlad pried Danny's hands off the headband and impatiently said, "Applying your motion sensors." He placed it above Danny's eyes, so the band fit like a headwrap and the white bead faced forward from his forehead. On the computer screen, where several wide empty rectangles spanned across, a black dot became visible in one of them. Curiously, Danny moved his head, and the black dot followed the movement. He played around with this until Vlad ordered, "Face forward and sit still."

The man reached over and adjusted the camera above the setup until the black dot became centered on the screen. Much to Danny's distaste, Vlad also applied two bands on Danny's shins with the same white beads facing forward until they too, lined up in the boxes; apparently, there was a sensor underneath the desk. With all that complete, Vlad grasped the mouse by the keyboard to click "Next." And two pictures appeared; an eight-sided star on the left and the standard five-sided star on the right.

"These two shapes will appear at random on the screen. Whenever the eight-sided star pops up, press the spacebar." Explained Vlad, pointing to the directions beneath the star that screamed, "PRESS SPACEBAR." As if Danny was incapable of reading without help. "And whenever the five-sided star pops up, don't do anything. Do I make myself clear?"

"Crystal," Danny said unenthusiastically, scratching his arm. This test seemed simple and harmless enough, even dull. It will be a long fifteen minutes. He wished he knew what it was measuring, but it appeared Vlad didn't want to disclose that.

"I'll leave you to it then. Click "Start." when you're ready. I'll come back when you're done." And Vlad walked out, closing the door behind to leave Danny to his own devices. However, he wasn't aware that Vlad merely turned invisible and phased back into the room.

Finally. Now that Danny has nearly gotten over his broken hand, Vlad could begin the process of sculpting him. Of course, he still had plenty of tests he wanted to implement besides the one Danny's doing now. But generally, he'd collected enough information to have a physical and educational plan prepared this month—all under Vlad's tutelage. His teaching license would finally be put to good use, rather than the occasional invitation to lead business workshops.

While it was yet another item to add to his already busy life, Vlad didn't mind the extra workload. In fact, he welcomed it like the workaholic he is. More things to do gave him more meaning in life, which Vlad'd gladly take with a grain of salt. He wasn't too worried about conflicting schedules, as he could simply duplicate to complete multiple tasks.

Vlad watched as Danny breathed out rather loudly and continued clicking away at the spacebar, his eyes attentive to the movement on the screen. As simple as the test sounds, it requires a significant amount of focus to complete accurately. The stars only popped up on the screen for a few seconds before going away, and every time you made a mistake—whether it be clicking when you aren't supposed to or too late—the test recorded it. The amount and type of errors made over the span of fifteen minutes would help determine the results.

There was no particular reason as to why he pretended to leave and came back to secretly watch Daniel, other than the fact that he didn't trust the boy. Although he wasn't sure how or what Daniel
could do to mess with the test, nevertheless he felt the need to supervise him just in case. Additionally, he wanted to see how much Daniel would move or fidget. While he knew the sensors would pick up the majority of the teen's movements, it was the few things the computer couldn't sense that he wanted to watch; like Daniel's hands.

But had that detail been deemed essential the test would've taken it into account. So mostly it was Vlad's distrust of Daniel.

He wished he could trust Daniel. Well, most parents didn't trust in their teens, but this wasn't a familial kind of distrust. It was more like being unable to rely on a friend or a stranger.

Naturally, Vlad wanted to treat Danny like his child. For them to forget the past and forge a healthy and bright future together as father and son. To be civil and kind and loving to each other like so many other families were. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity for him.

But when Danny acts so barbaric and rude, it sends them back to their quarreling, tense past. And even though Vlad wanted to be civil towards the boy, it made him feel as if Daniel didn't deserve his kindness. He was Jack's offspring, after all.

However, Vlad was trying so hard to forget that. Jack's dead. He doesn't matter anymore: what matters is that Daniel is now Vlad's own offspring, there should be no connection to Jack anymore, other than Daniel's respect. The boy was more like Vlad than his parents in that they were both supernatural beings and had their families ripped away in freak accidents. Daniel was also incredibly bright, intelligent, and capable; much like Vlad in his youth. They even shared dark hair (Accounting for Vlad's original hair color), the same thin build, and rather late timing for puberty.

The billionaire took in a deep, silent breath and briefly made his smartwatch visible so he could see the time. Daniel had been taking the test for five minutes now. Ten more to go.

He moved his gaze back towards the child that so often took up his thoughts. Daniel's diamond-like eyes bore into the computer screen, absorbing the blue glow that radiated off of it and falling upon his defined but baby-fat covered jawline. His tousled tresses stuck straight up in a rather severe cowlick, refusing to adhere to the laws of gravity.

Jack's mark on the child was all he could really see right now, apart from the boy's sickly state (that'd have to be fixed…) Maddie's traits, like the boy's lanky, thin build or the way his firm jaw shaped into an elegant and small chin, were cast into the shadow by Jack's loud and overbearing ones. The subject of the test Daniel was taking only further contributed to it.

With themselves stuck in the stupid rut that was their past, it all the more made Vlad want to pummel and beat the Jack out of that boy.

Yet he refrained. Feeding the fire certainly wouldn't solve the problem, it would only confirm their nonmoving rivalrous status. As a father, Vlad needed to rise above Danny in gentlemanliness and maturity, to set an excellent example for Danny to follow. Also, beating your child was a practice frowned upon these days. How times have changed.

Yes, he'd have to continue to tread carefully with this child. To show who's boss and how he wouldn't bend down to Danny's utterly childish games. This would no longer be a primal game of "Who can Beat Up the Other." But instead, a mental game, surrounding Danny's deteriorating state. He'd proved it would take more than a breakdown to get him to cling helplessly to Vlad.

And that's okay. Danny didn't need to see Vlad as a father for them to begin training. However, it was slightly disappointing after getting his hopes up.
Nonetheless, Vlad was a patient man.

No sooner than Danny finished, Vlad strode in and had the boy get up from the stool so he could have easier access to the computer. Undoubtedly he had some post-test procedures to complete.

Thinking he was free, Danny quickly removed the motion sensors from his shins and head, placing them next to Vlad on the desk. Then made a beeline for the door, eager to get his needed alone time, but was stopped verbally by the billionaire.

"Stay here. We're going to look at your results." He ordered, clicking away at the mouse as windows popped up and down. Shortly after, the printer chimed and began to work away. Like most of Vlad's devices, the printer was state of the art; significantly quieter and faster than the one at Casper High and what Danny used to consider home.

Danny groaned in annoyance at being unable to go back to his room and slumped against the wall, arms crossed. He didn't bother to hide the prominent disgust and impatience evident on his face by this slight turn of events. Was his compliance not enough to get the man to leave him alone?

Finished with what he needed to complete, Vlad stood up from the stool and briskly walked towards the printer to pick up the papers it had neatly spewed out, glossing through the pages thoughtfully. He made his way to the door and motioned for Danny to follow, never moving his eyes from the printed test results.

Together, Vlad led them to a nearby living room—or sitting area—however you want to put it, motioning for Danny to sit on the couch across from him. The teenager unceremoniously dropped himself down and allowed the cushions to swallow him and his gloomy attitude up. They felt uncomfortably suffocating instead of blissfully embracing.

Masters continued to finger the mass of information, pausing only to remind Danny to sit like a gentleman and not a hobo. Which Danny disregarded entirely by not bothering to show any sign of having heard the command. Slightly shadowed rivets under his eyes cracked through his seemingly solid act, and a flurry of emotions and childish confliction swam beneath his tough skin —just visible by Vlad's trained and studious eyes.

Vlad let Danny have his moment of rebellion and chose to address what he really wanted to talk about.

"Interesting. My suspicions were correct." A shark of a smile formed at the edge of his sharp lips as he rearranged several papers, done with his overview of the results.

This continued secrecy of Vlad's brushed Danny's aggression, and he perked up slightly from his slouched position, the couch cushions fighting to swallow him back in despite his light weight. "Correct about what, Vlad?" He asked in a rather hostile tone, slightly forced, like all of his other angry retorts. "Why did you make me take that stupid long test?"

"There are longer tests I could make you do if I really wanted." Vlad waved off. "Anyways, what I had you take was the Quotient ADHD test." He set the papers down on the coffee table between them, so they faced Danny, who leaned forward to gain a better view out of curiosity, not respect. "You, my boy, have mild symptoms of inattentiveness-type Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Otherwise known as ADHD or ADD."

Whatever amount of anger left on Danny's face slid off in sheer surprise. He frowned in confusion at the papers, Vlad's sentence diffusing into the air like oil and water. Thick eyebrows mashed
together and he picked up the papers to bring them closer to his eyes, surprisingly gentle with them. "Attention D-duh...Deficit...what now?"

"Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder," Vlad repeated simply, crossing his elegantly long legs. It hit Danny that Vlad still wore dress shoes indoors. "But in your case it's ADD. You do know what it is, right? Jack had it."

Danny stared at the papers. The term ADHD/ADD was seldom mentioned under his family's roof — save for Jazz and her psychological rants, which he'd naturally tuned out. Other than that, he'd heard the acronym tossed around school every once in a while through gossip; it usually referred to kids who couldn't sit or be quiet like a civil person. Danny could do both with ease.

"That can't be right," Danny argued, casually throwing the test results back onto the table. In a quiet ruffling of papers, they landed askew. "I don't have ADH...whatever. You're nuts."

"I'll take that as a no, then." He straightened the papers Danny had messed up, a wholesome smile on his face in eagerness to pass on knowledge to his "son."

"ADHD tends to be wrongly portrayed in that people believe it has a set amount of symptoms." The billionaire began to explain. A foreboding feeling washed over Danny that warned of a long mantra ahead. He hoped it wasn't true. "Them being an inability to remain still, quiet, and focused on tasks. Perhaps it is because those traits can be visibly seen by others that many view them as the stereotype. However, ADHD cannot be stereotyped in that it is actually a spectrum, much like autism, and contains both symptoms that can and cannot be seen by others with varying severity. Each person is different in that no two beings with ADHD will share an exact set of similarly-severe symptoms."

Vlad uncrossed his legs and leaned forward as if to further demand more of Danny's unwilling attention. "Although I digress; for medical and communicative purposes, researchers have created three sub-categories—or types—of ADHD. Them being Hyperactivity-type, Inattentiveness-type, and Impulsivity-type. There's even controversy over a fourth type, in which two or all three are combined. Now, Hyperactivity and Impulsivity type ADHD tend to be the most visible, for obvious reasons. But Inattentiveness is much more of an inner struggle, Daniel, and not many people come to realize they have it thanks to there being little-to-no awareness for it."

He paused to see if Daniel was catching on. The boy's expression said he was more interested in scratching his arm than the subject they were discussing. His leg also bounced impatiently, and Danny kept shifting around. But he was making eye contact in the least.

"In fact, it's difficult to diagnose too. I had to reach out to your teachers, which, granted, wasn't the most reliable of sources considering their cluelessness towards your little...hobby." Vlad frowned disapprovingly as he let the word stretch out. "But it was at least something to work with, tied to my own observations of you. They mentioned that you consistently made occasional careless mistakes in your homework and had a habit of daydreaming or becoming easily distracted throughout the year. Which I assume includes the timespan before you acquired powers."

He gave Danny a severe look, his elbows resting on his knees and femininely large hands clasped between the two like a bridge. "Tell me, Daniel. Have you always struggled slightly at school? What were your usual grades before...?" Vlad allowed his sentence to trail off, as they both knew what he was referring to.

Danny peeked up from under his unkempt bangs, a glare shooting through several strands of clean hair that contrasted with his undignified sitting position. "None of your business." Vlad talking to his teachers really rubbed him the wrong way. The man's current position to Danny didn't allow
him to reach out as a parent (in Danny's eyes.) But, of course, Vlad considered himself above such "petty" rules.

"It's my business as much as yours. But seeing that you aren't willing to divulge..." He brought up his right hand, and it quickly erupted into pink flames. They subsided to reveal a folder marked, "Transcript," that Vlad had somehow teleported.

Danny's eyebrows raised at the display of powers as Vlad opened the folder and removed several sheets. It wasn't a surprise, per say, he'd seen Vlad teleport numerous times. However, he didn't know that teleporting a single item was possible. He'd be adding that to his list of, "Powers to Learn." If there was one thing he looked forward to in his fights with Vlad, it had to be the free exhibition of power techniques; the man was like a walking dictionary.

Vlad's intense eyes scanned the newly conjured papers. "B average, it seems...and then—oh! A dramatic drop to C average in your first semester of high school."

Danny scowled as all traces of previous excitement disappeared. Being around Vlad was terrible enough, and now he's being judged? "Yippee." He growled sarcastically. "So you found the reason I'm stupid. Can I go now?"

"It doesn't mean you're stupid." Looking up from the papers, Vlad frowned at Danny. It seems the Fentons may have unintentionally hit him too hard over the head about being 'a family of geniuses.' "It just means you don't fit the public school system's mold. Many with ADHD/ADD are extremely smart like Walt Disney, John F. Kennedy, and Albert Einstein. Often it's considered an advantage —excuse me, where do you think you're going?"

Danny had gotten up from the couch and was stalking towards the grand, open doors of the sitting room, "Back to sleep." He grumbled, voice slightly muted by his refusal to turn his head back. Waiting it out didn't seem like an efficient option; Vlad must have wanted to lecture him to death about that stupid disorder. In a heartbeat, Danny would bet that he didn't actually have ADHD and that Vlad's just obsessed with putting labels on everything like the mad scientist he is.

"Up-bup-bup. Manners, Daniel. Say: Vlad, I'm too tired to discuss this right now. May we talk about it some other time?"

"I'm too tired to discuss this right now may we talk about it some other time," Danny mumbled quickly.

"Good boy. You're dismissed." Before the word "dismissed," even passed his lips, Daniel had already run out the room.

Vlad calmly stood up with the test results in hand and walked out too, heading towards his the staircase so he could go down to his lab. With these results, he could complete writing his overview of Danny's ADD, as they were only a small puzzle piece in the complex jigsaw of diagnosing. The majority of it relied on observing the child rather than using questionable tests.

To say the least, Vlad knew what he was doing.

Small tennis shoes slowly touch down on the pavement, one after the other. Trailing dread in each step.

The owner of the shoes was a tired eight-year-old boy, on his way back from school—alone. Chilly San-Francisco air whipped at his unruly dark hair and the nape of his uncovered neck. He suppressed a shiver, brilliant lapis lazuli eyes darkening in emotional detachment. How he wanted to be at home so bad, yet didn't at the same time.
Removing little hands from his backpack straps, he trudged on, wrapping them around his upper body. They grasped at the thin fabric of his worn shirt. Goosebumps prickled upwards.

Up ahead lay a cheery home in appearance, with a well-kept lawn framed by a beautiful garden. The boy smiled as memories arose; mom and he tended to it every day. Just a week ago they planted camellia seeds.

He loved his mom. But his dad?

Now, that's a different story.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the slow chapter(s). Things will be picking up in the next chapter, promise.

Yeah, this story has been super dark and depressing. But that's because the subject it revolves around—killing your family thanks to a stupid mistake—is somewhat angsty in itself. I want to add funny moments and scenes but if I try it will be forced, and I don't condone that. Don't worry, I have some plot build-up planned towards some funny and uplifting scenes though! But, heh, you know. In due time.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!