

# Vincent

by Martin Oetting

He did not feel steady. Not steady at all. Trying to put one foot in front of the other was so damn hard. He was holding on to the wall next to him, not letting go, worried stiff that he was going to fall. Which, all by itself, was a curious thing. His experience with falling was limited. Strangely enough, it was never so bad when he had actually fallen. But afterwards the fear of it remained much more terrifying than the actual experience. And that was only one of the countless mysteries around and about him. If someone had asked him right now what the hell he was doing, he wouldn't even know what to say. And that pretty much summed up his life.

He was passed out for a fair number of hours each day. Most of his waking hours were a blur. He was completely lacking any precise idea of where he was, how he had gotten there, and why. Most of the time he was consumed by ferocious desires for some form of nourishment. When they kicked in, he couldn't sleep, he couldn't think, he couldn't be, he just kept screaming at the world. And somebody always seemed to be nearby. But who they were was not at all clear to him. Only one thing was certain: they were watching him. Hardly a movement of his seemed to go unnoticed. They were really big, a lot larger and taller and stronger than he was. Sometimes they were holding him, all of him, high up in the air. Sometimes they would have him crawl in front of them. Often they put him into some form of holding cell. That was when he felt most incarcerated — both inside his own (quite apparently faulty) body, and inside the thing in which they locked him up.

One of them was close most of the time, as far as he could tell. Something about that one had a most mesmerizingly soothing effect on him, which was so overwhelming that he sometimes literally passed out because of it. He wondered whether that was a drug they were using on him. Also, and most importantly, that was the one who

always brought the food. The others were more difficult to differentiate. They showed up more infrequently, and had varying shapes and sizes. Some had four legs, some had two. They also smelled in very different and confusing ways. There was one who smelled powerful and ancient. Others gave off a wet and wild scent. Some were furry, some not so. The one who came most often was almost without fur, as far as he could tell, it had only a little fur at the top. Sometimes, some of them made startlingly loud noises that could scare him into a real screaming frenzy.

Screaming, actually, appeared to be his only working mode of communication. Talking seemed almost entirely impossible. When he was trying to form words, they did not at all come out right. Or that's what it felt like. There had been a few cases when he thought he was expressing himself quite clearly, but as far as he could identify responses, apparently he was not speaking their language. As far back as he could remember (his memory was extremely blurry, at this stage) he had been trying to catch the sounds they were making, trying to make sense of them, trying to retain and repeat those noises that seemed to be recurring. But so far he was mostly failing at that. One sound which he was beginning to recognize was something like "Vincent." What that meant was unclear to him. Was it some form of code? He felt like he was hearing it more and more often.

Someone was using that code again, right now. Just as he had gathered all of his courage together, and let go of the wall. The experience was remarkable. Unsupported by anything but the two legs beneath him, away from the ground, away from the cage, he was suddenly moving. At a pace which he had never moved at on his own. He had not realized before that it was about speed as well. Speed, and a sense of ownership of his own destiny that was intoxicating. His pulse was racing, his eyes were widened, the fear of falling still had him in its grip, but finally made itself useful, pumping adrenaline through his body. That kept his muscles going,

and his sense of balance working furiously. He didn't know what he was doing with his arms, they were waving around on his sides. But he didn't care ... — hell, how fast he was moving! Moving towards ...

“Oh my God. Oh my God, Vincent, look at you. Look at you,” she couldn't help repeating it, over and over, as she was first watching and then catching him, holding him, right before he was about to fall. She got up. Her cheeks were wet with tears. She stumbled over to the phone and dialed. “You won't believe it. He walked. He just walked. Your little boy, he just took his first eight steps.”

