

The Detective sat in the waiting room, foot tapping impatiently. Surely he had the right time-- but she was late, by at least half an hour, at least. Did he get the date wrong, again? The tapping of his foot quickened.

He sighed, but it couldn't be helped. Then he heard the rattling.

He stopped and listened for a moment. Silence. And then again. What the hell was that?

Rattle. Rattle-rattle. RATTLE-RATTLE-RATTLE--

And that was enough of that. He leapt to his feet, determined to find the source of the sound. What in the blazes was that? He stepped into an annex of the waiting room.

There it was. A child-- he couldn't have been any older than five or six-- with blond hair and wide, startling blue eyes, had something in his hands that might have been an Etch-a-Sketch, and he was shaking it up and down like he expected to season eggs with it. And damned if he didn't like pepper.

"Could you not do that?" he asked, doing his best not to sound like a complete prick and succeeding about as well as he normally did, but with observable effort.

The boy looked up at him blankly.

"The rattling thing," he said, pointing at the plastic object in the boy's hands and mimicking the motion, "The shooka-shooka. Could you not do that? I can hear the damn thing 20 yards away."

The boy set down the toy, which proved to be a pin art impression game— one of those things where you could stick your nose or hand up against it and leave a mold by pressing the array of pins out to different lengths. He looked at it on the ground, then back up to the Detective.

"*Thank* you," he sighed, exasperated, and turned around with the tiniest twinge of guilt.

He'd taken three steps toward the waiting room annex before, suddenly, *RATTLE-RATTLE!*

"Okay, look, kid," he started, turning on the spot, coat whirling.

The child stared up at him, one corner of the pin toy stuck absently in his mouth.

He looked down at the kid, and sighed. "It was a good play, but usually you're more successful if you don't start celebrating until *after* your mark's out of earshot."

The boy still wouldn't do anything but stare.

"If I take that thing out of your hands, you're gonna scream, aren't you?"

Silence.

"Smart. Even if I'm not likely to make the mistake, give me the option anyway. Though I'm probably giving you too much credit." He looked down at the kid. "Especially since you don't seem to have worked out what this is for yet. My daughter did the same with our Nexus cube. . ." He shook his head, cutting off that line of thought before it could go any further. "Look, you know what this thing's for, right?"

He didn't expect an answer, but he waited for one anyway, just to be sure the kid didn't start to see him as a threat. He picked up one of the kid's hands, and made sure it was on the pin art toy, looking him in the eye with an expression that said *I'm not taking this away from you, alright?* in a way that was at least less sarcastic in tone than everything else he seemed to say. The boy seemed more curious than anything, tilting his head.

"You're okay," he said, "I just wanna show you something." The Detective picked up the pin art toy by holding the back of the boy's hand very gently, so the boy had the option to take it away the moment he needed to, and tilted the side with the art toward the kid's face. He then poked twice with his index finger, then several times in a large arc, to make a smiley face.

The boy grinned, then took the pin art thing back, poking furiously at it.

The Detective smiled, then turned around. "That oughta be quieter, at least," he muttered, trying to salvage as much of his reputation as he could to whoever he imagined was watching, before returning back toward his seat in the waiting room, leaving the kid delightedly poking new, random shapes into the neon plastic pins in an excited frenzy.

And again, he took two steps before *RATTLE-RATTLE!*

He turned around to stare at the kid, shoulders slumping defeatedly. "Seriously? I just opened up a whole new world of expression for you, and you still go back to thi--"

Suddenly, the door at the far end of the room opened. A young, harried-looking blonde woman with a clipboard stepped through. "Mr. 'Detective?'" she called, looking into the room.

She saw the two occupants, and gave the Detective a once-over. "Time Lord. Should've known."

The Detective sighed, trying to smile as non-confrontationally as possible. "What gave it away?" he asked ruefully.

"You all dress like drama students who spent too much money at a rummage sale when you went off to college," she said with a grin, then shook her head. "Plus it's a very detective-y coat."

He smiled slightly.

“She’s ready at the back for you.”

“Thank you,” he said, stepping around the boy, who was excitedly tugging on the blonde woman’s white coat and showing her his pin-art toy.

“Wow, Davey, you made something!” She seemed genuinely pleased, then looked at the Detective, then at Davey. “Did you show him this?”

The Detective just shrugged. “I just figured it was quieter than that rattling he was doing.”

She chuckled. “He hasn’t done anything with it but toss it around since we gave it to him. Everybody else just stays away because the sound’s too annoying.”

The Detective felt something in the pit of his stomach, and pushed past it. “I’ll be honest, I don’t blame them,” he said.

The blonde lady gave a small laugh. “Well, like I said— she’s waiting at the back.”

The Detective nodded, and stepped through. He made his way to a small office, where a bright-eyed, younger woman was moving things around at a furious pace. She turned at his arrival. “Ah, Mr. . . .” she checked a note sheet she had in the corner of her desk. “Detective!” she said happily, before moving to swipe several folders off a chair. “Please feel free to have a seat.”

He nodded, then set down, taking a deep breath.

She dumped a large sheaf of sticky-note-covered manilla folders into a large, leather bag, then sat in a chair herself, laying a clipboard out and writing something in pen.

“So,” she said, making herself a bit more comfortable in her chair. “What brings you to FicPsych?”