My Real Test

by ChasML

Summary

Every year, Hope's Peak Pokemon Training Academy recruits the most promising upcoming pokemon trainers and gathers them together in one place, to encourage their development as trainers. This year's intake includes one Kiyotaka Ishimaru, who's eager for the chance to get some serious training done! How else would he be able to show the world that the Ishimaru family won't ALL resort to machine-enhanced pokemon to beat the Elite Four, like his grandfather did?

(AU where the DR cast live in the pokemon world (with a few changes- see notes). The main focus will be on Kiyotaka, however I will be switching between the POV of various different characters as I write this, so there will hopefully be characters arcs that revolve around other characters as the story progresses.)

Notes

Thanks to Seychelles for the inspiration, brainstorming, beta-reading and coming up with teams of pokemon for this fic!
A few notes to keep in mind about this AU:
I've not really been into pokemon since first gen, so this will focus more on DR than the pokemon world. Pokemon characters will be more like cameos.
I've made owning pokemon a lot more inconvenient in this AU than it is in the game or
anime, mostly because I didn't want to write every character having a team of six pokemon because it'd get pretty chaotic. Major differences are that the PC system doesn't exist and Pokemon have to be let out of their balls occasionally (and can get out on their own, but I think they can in the anime as well?) so if you want to catch every pokemon you better own a zoo to keep them in!
I also had this idea that people in the pokemon universe treat rivalries (i.e. Ash and Gary's relationship) the same way people in our universe treat romances (loads of peer pressure to find your rival, every movie has a random rivalry thrown in regardless of whether it's relevant to the plot, that sort of thing) and therefore every canon DR pairing (most notably Sakura/Kenshiro and Toko's one sided thing for Togami) is now converted to a rivalry. (This was partly done so I can potentially ship Sakura/Hina and Toko/Komaru)
Characters I ship (potentially in this fic but definitely not a big focus, just letting you know in case there are any NoTPs in there) Sakura/Hina, Toko/Komaru, Mikan/Ibuki, probably some mess involving Makoto, Kyoko and Mukuro, Sayaka/Leon, Sonia/Gundam/Kazuichi. I also usually ship Ishimondo but I don't think that's gonna happen here.
Also I think the kids will be younger in this fic than they are in the DR games (for instance Togami hasn't beaten all his half-siblings yet)

See the end of the work for more notes
Getting Stronger (prologue-Kiyotaka POV)

Just a short prologue to start things off and get a view of Kiyotaka and his pokemon before he gets accepted into the school. (Which will be the first thing that happens in the story.)

“Alright, Growlithe, you can come out now!” Kiyotaka held out his pokéball and released his almost-lifelong companion.

The orange and white fire-dog with black stripes jumped out of his ball and circled to face him, eagerly sitting smartly on his hind legs with and staring up at him, as a younger Kiyotaka had spent many hours training him to do.

“Good boy!” Kiyotaka smiled at his friend’s continued good-behaviour. “Now… I picked up something for you today!” He told the pokémon, while failing to keep his excitement off his face.

“Growl! Growlithe!” The small dog barked excitedly, and Kiyotaka wondered if he thought this was just the usual store-bought poffin (likely much better than his own attempts to make them), or whether he could tell what Kiyotaka actually had hidden behind his back… He’d always been proud of what a smart dog his Growlithe had turned out to be.

“Stay.” He held up one outstretched finger and his Growlithe obediently nodded at the pink, wrinkled scar tissue that covered it. Satisfied that he’d been understood, Kiyotaka took a smart step backwards and placed the small red stone he’d finally managed to order online after several years of saving up...

The dog looked down at it… but didn’t move.

“Err…it’s a fire stone!” He explained, “It’ll turn you into an Arcanine!”

Still no movement from Growlithe… did he not want this? Kiyotaka had always assumed his friend would want to evolve to become stronger, as most Pokémon seemed to want to, but…

“I know it’s sudden! I mean… you don’t have to evolve, if you don’t want to!” He added. “I, err… I’ll give you some time to think about it! I’ll just… leave it here by your bed…” Kiyotaka moved over to the flame-retardant cushion and blankets to place the stone down there, “And you can just come pick it up whenever you’re ready!”

Growlithe padded over to it, sat in front of it and barked expectantly at him.

“Err… now?” He asked, confused. Why had Growlithe not moved before? “Oh, of course! I told you stay!” He smacked his forehead at his own idiocy.

“Gro-owl…” The dog let out a small whine at his trainer’s stupidity, before continuing to look at him expectantly.

“Err… what are you waiting for?” He asked. “You can take it whenever you want!”
The dog barked again, this time poking his nose towards Kiyotaka.

“Me? You want me to do something?” He asked, getting a bark in confirmation. “Err… can you show me what it is you want me to do?” He asked, getting confused by his friend’s behaviour.

Growlithe circled around to his side and pointed his nose towards the pocket containing his Pokédex…

“My Pokédex?” He asked, trying to figure out why it was so important... “…So I can record the data?”

“Lithe!” Growlithe barked, in a tone reminiscent of his teachers when he finally understood a difficult concept.

“Ahaahaha! You clever boy!” Kiyotaka laughed and knelt down to give his companion a hug and stroking. Growlithe must have remembered all the times he’d camped outside and waited for Kakunas and Metapod to evolve, so he could record the data for the Pokémon Professors. “I would have forgot that completely! I’m so lucky to have you…” He admitted, letting go of the dog and wiping off the saliva from where Growlithe had licked his face in return for the hug.

“Well, then!” He stood back up, getting his Pokédex out and setting the data recording function on. “Ready when you are!”

“Growlithe!” Growlithe barked for the last time as he smartly put one paw onto the firestone. His body soon glowed with bright fire that expanded out from him, so hot that Kiyotaka had to take a step backwards from the heat. The flames danced around the air in a spiral for a short while, before moving back into the form of a, now much larger, dog and then dying down until all that remained was a six foot tall dog with an orange body, with thick black stripes and white fluffy tail, mane and ankle fur...

“..Arc?” The dog barked, unsteadily. “Arc-canine?” It looked at him, anxiously.

“Yes... you’re an Arcanine now.” He said gently. “You look wonderful!” He added, trying not to start crying, but failing. “May I pet you?”

“Arc! Arc!” Arcanine yipped cheerfully and awkwardly bounded over to him, rubbing their faces together and licking at the tears that had started falling down his cheeks, as he’d always done as a Growlithe...

In return, Kiyotaka put his arms around the dog’s neck and brushed his fingers through the fluffy white fur of his now splendidly long mane. “We’re going to have to change the schedule to include more time to brush your fur...” He realised, after a while.

“ARC!” Arcanine excitedly pulled himself out of his arms and clomped over to his bed, where he picked up his, now far too small, hairbrush and brought it over to Kiyotaka.

“Hahaha!” Kiyotaka laughed at his excitement for grooming time. “I see... you just wanted to evolve so you’d get more primping time!” He teased the now giant dog. “You’re not bothered about us getting stronger at all!”

“Niinnme...” Arcanine growled angrily at him.

“Ah! I was just teasing! I... I know you’ve wanted to evolve so you can get stronger for a long time now...” He admitted, guiltily. “I’m so sorry it’s taken me so long to afford it... But I’ll make it up to you! Now you’ve evolved I’ll be able to find other trainers to fight! Good ones, I mean, not the lazy
people from around town!” He promised, as Arcanine stared at him. “Professor Oak is looking for applicants to a travel grant for young trainers who can’t afford to leave their regions and I’ll be submitting that tonight! And I’ve submitted so much good data on pokémon here in Kanto I’m sure he’ll want to help me!”

Arcanine just tipped his head at him...

“Oh! And I wrote to that mobile gym, the Crazy Diamonds, to ask if they’d come here, as well, so we could try out for a badge...! And if neither of those works out I’ve submitted an application to the council for my own spot on a route, to challenge travelling trainers! So... so please... just give me a little more time and... and I’ll start helping you grow much stronger... We...We’ll both get stronger together...I...I promise!” He finished his assurances in a pleading tone of voice. It had been a constant worry for him lately that his life-long companion would one day get tired of his uselessness as a trainer and find somebody else to raise him...

“Arc!” Arcanine barked happily and licked his face again, far more sloppily than Growlithe had even been capable of...

“Urgh!” He flinched at the mess on his face... “But first I think we’re both going to need a bath...”

“Arcarcarc!” Arcanine bounced around the room happily before rushing off to the bathroom, almost flattening his shocked father as he went.

Honestly, who’d ever heard of a pokémon that got more excited for baths than fights...!?

Well... everyone would have once he worked hard enough to become the strongest trainer ever...
“You still alright up there, Togepi?” Makoto asked the small half-hatched egg pokemon currently nested snuggling in the tightened drawstrings of his hoodie.

“To-ge-piiii!” Togepi replied happily.

“Alright then!” Makoto replied and carried on walking, trying to ignore the tiredness in his legs… Geez, how long was this route? Makoto could have sworn he should have reached the Berry emporium by now… Even if this was one of those routes where you got stopped for a battle every five min…

“Ah ha! How’d a kid like you get all the way here!?” Makoto was foisted out of this line of thinking by a voice that came from behind a rock he’d just passed.

“Meh, whatever! It’s not like his little Togepi can hurt us!” Another voice came from a rock on the other side of the path… looks like they’d set up an ambush… “Sorry kid, but you’re in our zone, so we challenge you to a double battle!”

They summoned their pokemon… it was a Pidgeot and a Raticate, and not particularly strong looking ones either…

“Blastoise… Hydro pump…” Makoto sighed for about the thirteenth time that day.

“Wait, what!” The two trainers cried just before the torrent of water blasted their pokemon unconscious…

“To-ge-piiii!” Togepi trilled, presumably having levels up from the several pitiful encounters they’d had that day.

“Thanks buddy.” Makoto patted the armoured shell of the giant tortoise that he’d been slowly raising since junior high.

“Toise…” It mumbled and tried to pat his back in return, although it was more of a smack from the giant.

“Oof! Alright… back to your pokeball…” Makoto held it up for him. “Hopefully we’ll reach this berry shop soon and I’ll get you some more leppa berries to make up for all those Hydro pumps you’ve been using…”

“Blastoise…” It agreed and headed into the ball.
“That’s if we don’t run into any more trainers, at least…” Makoto muttered worriedly as he checked Togepi was still in place and started moving again…

However luck, as usual, was not on Makoto’s side. Another two trainers used up the last of Blastoise’s Hydro pumps, forcing Makoto to gradually whittle the next few trainers down with toxic damage… Blastoise really couldn’t keep this up much longer, even if all these trainers were pitifully low level…

Makoto passed a cave, surprised that no one jumped out to challenge him as he did so, to find another trainer sat, stiffly working away intently on a cheap looking laptop, on a collapsible travel chair in the middle of the route… Makoto’s first instinct was to mistake him for a team rocket grunt, what with his black boots and white clothes, but then he noticed the gold buttons and shoulder straps instead of a giant red ‘R’ on the chest, not to mention him looking about the same age as Makoto and all the other low-level trainers he’d been challenged by on the way here…

This guy was obviously not low level though, as sat next to the chair was an Arcanine that was occasionally resting it’s head on his shoulder, as if wanting to read what it’s master was writing. Each time it did, the boy on the seat would absent-mindedly reach up to pet it, get licked on the face in return and pull out a tissue and dab himself dry, all without his eyes leaving the screen he was working on…

Well… Blastoise wouldn’t have been able to fight an Arcanine in his current state… but this guy would probably be easy to sneak past… all Makoto had to do was quietly walk past, near the edge of the route and…

“ARC! Arc arc! ARC!” … and the guy’s dog would bark at him because of course it would! It was a dog!

The boy looked up from his screen and locked eyes with him… dammit. That meant he had no choice but to stand in place and accept a challenge now… Although now he had looked up from the screen, Makoto couldn’t help but think the guy looked vaguely familiar for some reason…

“Oh! A fellow trainer! Wonderful!” He smiled broadly and carefully put his laptop down to walk over towards Makoto. “How’s about a friendly… pokemon battle… to help gain… experie…” He trailed off as he got close and seemed to spot Togepi. “Is that your only pokémon?” He asked, worriedly.

“Uhh… it might as well be…” Makoto admitted. “I have a Blastoise as well but he’s pretty much finished… I don’t suppose there’s any chance you’d take half my money without knocking out him and Togepi?”

“What? NO!” He snapped, so a stickler for the rules, eh? Or just really wanted the experience… Oh well it had been worth a shot…

“I’m not going to mug you just because you’re ill-prepared!” He carried on just as Makoto was bemoaning his fate.

“Err… you’re not?” Makoto asked, “Don’t you want the experience though?”

“Ngh!” He flinched and looked over to his Arcanine, anxiously. “…What do you think…?” He asked it, “I… I know it’s the only trainer we’ve seen in days but, but he…” he trailed off, shaking slightly. Geez, this guy wasn’t really cut out to be a roadside challenger if he felt bad about finishing off a weakened opponent…
“Ca-nine!” The dog yipped comfortingly at him and rubbed its face into his, causing him to calm down a little as he stroked it back… this gave Makoto a chance to crouch and rest his legs slightly on the floor.

“I’ll… I’ll find someone we can battle, I promise!” The other boy muttered into his dog’s ear before straightening up and facing Makoto. “Ah… s-sorry about that… Err… did you want a seat?!” He offered, gesturing to the foldable chair. “I’m almost due to start stretching anyway!"

“Really!?… thanks!” Makoto smiled and sighed in relief at the chance to sit down properly with Togepi in his lap. “I’m Makoto Naegi, by the way!” He held his hand out.

“Oh! Ah… I’m… Kiyotaka Ishimaru…” He shook Makoto’s hand, looking slightly ashamed of himself.

“Hmm… Ishimaru…” Makoto was desperately trying to figure out why this guy seemed to familiar, “I feel like I’ve read that name somewhere…” Somewhere along with his face… like he’d seen the guy’s ID on something he’d read…?

“Ah… you’ve probably heard of my grand…” He started, sadly.

“Caring you your water-type, a basic beginner’s guide!” Makoto suddenly remembered. “The online guide with the easy pictures and diagrams and stuff! That was you wasn’t it!”

“Err…!” He was looking at Makoto as if he was crazy…

“Wait… no, we're the same age…” Makoto realised. “You’d have only been nine when that was made…”

“Ah… no, you’re right! That was my work!” He laughed, “Although I was actually only eight and a half…” He corrected Makoto awkwardly. “I… I’m just amazed anyone remembered that at all! Let alone that it’s the first thing you thought of…"

“Uhh… is there something else you’ve written?” Makoto asked, “Other than the guides for the different types?”

“Err… well I have written quite a few guides… I’m currently working on translating the research into how personality traits affect a pokémon’s fighting style into practical tips for trainers! It’s all quite fascinating really…” He smiled eagerly. “And I’m one of the top contributors to the crowdsourced pokédex research initiative! But… well… I thought you’d think of my grandfather, Toranosuke?"

“Uhh… Toranosuke Ishimaru?” Makoto thought it sounded a little familiar, maybe? “What did he write?"

“Err… it’s not what he wrote, it’s what he did…” Kiyotaka frowned. “He beat the Elite Four…"

“Really!?” How had Makoto not remembered that? He’d even visited the hall of fame! “That’s amaz…”

“…with a machine-enhanced team.” Kiyotaka finished.

“Oh…” Was he talking about the device Team Rocket had used to make their pokémon unnaturally strong?

“I don’t know if he knew it at the time or not… He’d traded for his pokémon, rather than put in the
effort to train them himself!” Kiyotaka looked irritated at the thought, “But his name was scrubbed off the wall of fame and he never fought again, so most people believe he did know... and the resulting controversy was enough that my surname tends to be associated more with those machines than anything else.” He sighed. “But I intend to change that!” He suddenly exclaimed with a look of fierce determination.

“You mean with the guides on pokémon?” Makoto asked.

“Err... No... To be honest I only started making those as a reference for myself... It was supposed to just be a chart for Fire types but then I got a lot of people asking me to make guides for the other types and then to explain the effects of rare candies and berries and vitamins... and then I started recording data for the pokédex research initiative and was asked to write up reports on what I’d found... you know how it is...” He shrugged, as if writing life-saving guides when you were eight was something every kid had done.

“Uhh... well then, how are you going to change things...?”

“Ah! I intend to get onto the hall of fame myself! Arcanine and I will work together to get stronger, recruit a strong, well balanced team and then beat the Elite Four without cheating!” He grinned, momentarily at least, before his face fell. “At least... We would if I wasn’t so useless at finding people to train with...” He sighed.

“Well... at least you’ll be able to challenge people going to the berry emporium!” Makoto tried to cheer him up.

“Err… You mean Bandai’s place?” He asked, to which Makoto nodded. “This isn’t the right route for that.” Kiyotaka told him.

“Wait... WHAT!?” Makoto cried, “The bus driver told me you can get to it from here...”

“Well... technically you can...” He explained. “But you have to go through that cave over there...” He pointed at the cave. “He should have told you to go to route 67! It’s a lot quieter and leads directly to the emporium...”

“Urg... just my luck!” Makoto sighed. “I wondered why it was taking so long to get there... Where does this route go?”

“Nowhere... It never got completed, so now it’s just a dead-end...” He said sadly, “Much like my career as a trainer!” He added bitterly.

“Ca-nine...” His Arcanine rubbed its head against his hand anxiously until he started stroking his fingers through the fur with a slight smile.

“Uhh... well, just because this didn’t work out, doesn’t mean you should give up!” Makoto told him, “There’s other ways to train... why not go travelling! It’d probably suit you better anyway!”

“I can’t afford it... and I was denied a travel grant.” He frowned.

“Really!? I’d have thought professor Oak would want someone who actually bothers to record data!”

“So did I... but apparently I’m ‘not currently at a point where travel will be the most optimal path to becoming the very best’!” He quoted.

“Uhh...” Wow, that was a weird way to say ‘sorry but no’, “Well... what about that mobile gym?”
“They said it’s not worth coming out for a single person.”

“Well…” He was already trying roadside challenges... “What about battle net?” Although he was bound to have thought of that...

“What’s battle net?”

“Uh... it’s a social network for meeting other pokémon trainers! You put up your details and what pokémon you have and you can search for other trainers at your level or with specific pokémon types who’d be willing to come to your area... and people can give reviews of who they battle so you can get a warning if people are likely to cheat or anything...” Makoto started trying to explain.

“Does it cost anything to use?” He asked, worriedly.

“No, they just have lots of adverts instead.” Makoto admitted.

“That... that sounds perfect, then!” He smiled, “How, err, how do you sign up for it, please?” He asked sheepishly.

“If you let me use your laptop I can show you...” Makoto offered, putting Togepi down on the floor, where it wandered over to the confused-looking Arcanine and started patting its feet.

They set up the account, interrupted a few times by Kiyotaka stopping to tell his Arcanine that Togepi’s aren’t edible, and on one occasion by the Arcanine whining because Togepi had climbed up its back and was pulling its fur...

“So it’s all set up now?” Kiyotaka asked him.

“Yeah... now you can just search for people you know and try to add them to your account! Like this!” Makoto showed him how by adding himself as a friend.

“Oh... ok? I’m not sure there’s anyone I know who I’d want to add though...” He frowned. “I don’t really have any friends at school...”

“Well... it doesn’t have to be people the same age as you? If you know any adults who train pokémon, they might be on there...”

“Hmm...” He thought about it for a moment before trying to add Professor Oak. “Like that?”

“Uh... sure.” Makoto replied, not wanting to tell him that Professor Oak probably got a thousand friend requests a day and would probably just ignore it.

“Well, thank you for this!” He smiled. “But I guess you need to get to the berry shop!”

“Urg, I think I’m probably going to have to just go home today... these no way I can make it through another route without stopping at a pokéstop first...”

“There’s one at the emporium!” Kiyotaka interrupted. “You can just cut through that cave and you’re right there! I even have some spare maps of the quickest route through!”

“I didn’t bring any repels with me though.” Makoto admitted, he’d been expecting to just walk down a route after all...

“Err... I could sell you a few. I was expecting to have to go back and forth to the poke centre far more that I have done...”
“Really!? Thanks!” Makoto smiled, Kiyotaka must be the most prepared roadside challenger he’d ever seen. What a shame they’d stuck him in such a rubbish spot!

Two cans of repel (which Kiyotaka didn’t even try to charge over the odds for) and one uneventful jaunt through a cave later, Makoto was finally at the berry emporium, queuing up to talk to the Nurse Joy at pokécentre and not particularly paying attention as two men joined the queue behind him…

“So, how did that whole travel grant thing go?” One of them said, in a voice that gave the impression that he wasn’t the type to get worked up about anything.

“Ah… Don’t get me started!” Replied a voice any pokémon trainer would have recognised as Prof. Oak, “Youngsters these days just don’t seem interested in travelling! We had less applications than grants to give out!”

“Wait, what!?” Makoto snapped out of his initial fanboying reaction and turned to face him, “If you had more money than people to give it to, then why’s there a guy outside who got turned down!?” He asked, angrily.

“Aahh…” Prof. Oak took a step backwards and cringed, “You mean Kiyotaka? That was a… a special case!” He muttered awkwardly. “But I’m sure he’ll be fine as a roadside trainer!” He laughed.

“They’ve made him guard a dead end.” Makoto scowled, “He’s not had a fight in days…”

“Oh!? Well… I’m sure he’ll find some other way to get some battles in!” Oak checked his pokédex, as of looking for an excuse to get out of the conversation… “Ah! Like this! He’s added me on Battle Net… I’ll just go and accept that now!” He dashed off before Makoto had a chance to reply.

“…Lying jerkface.” He muttered irritably.

“…Did you just call the pokémon professor a lying jerkface?” Smirked the guy Oak had been with.

He was thin, with short, ragged blonde hair sticking out from under his white fedora. He was dressed pretty sloppily in a white suit with a loose tie.

“Well he is…” Makoto muttered, “Why would he add someone right after refusing to help them out!?” He asked, handing over Blastoise’s pokeball to Nurse Joy.

"Ehh... I'm sure he's got his reasons." The man shrugged. "Why's it bothering you so much, you his friend or something?"

"No... But he seems like a good guy... he helped me get here when he could have just knocked out my pokémon for easy Exp, and if it weren't for the guides he wrote I wouldn't even have my Blastoise..." Makoto admitted, "He seems like exactly the sort of guy Oak should be helping!"

"You have a Blastoise as well as that Togepi?" The man looked faintly curious.

"Yeah, I'm kinda lucky at finding pokémon, I guess..." Makoto shrugged. "I found a Squirtle injured in my school's pond in Junior High and used a guide online to nurse him back to health, and a few months ago we were training in the forest and I tripped over Togepi and it started following me everywhere..."

"Heh... you seem like an interesting kid... what's your name?" The man asked as Blastoise was handed back.

"Uhh, Makoto Naegi..." Makoto answered, a bit worried by the smirk the man gave as he wrote it
"Gotcha... I'll be seeing you around..." The man waved lazily at him as he walked off to examine the berries being tended to by swarms of Illumise...

After picking up several types of useful berries and mulch, Makoto looked at the small amount of money he had left over, most of it earned from beating the low level trainers on the way there, and considered his options. It would make most sense to buy a few potions and head back up the route he should have taken in the first place, seeing as he was unlikely to be coming back here anytime soon... He'd get more exp that way...

He picked up two repels instead. Not that Kiyotaka's Arcanine would have much chance against Blastoise, but at least the poor guy would have had one fight today...

At least that was the plan... except by the time he got back out of the cave, Kiyotaka was already fighting that guy in the white suit...

"Arcanine, use Fire Blitz!" He could hear Kiyotaka order.

"He knows Fire Blitz? I take it your one of those long-term planning types... forcing him to stay as a Growlithe until he learnt it, then evolving?"

"Well... I hadn't intended to! It just took me a while to save up the money for a fire stone..." Kiyotaka admitted.

"That must have annoying for him." The white suited guy said, as his Persian kicked up sand into the Arcanine's eyes.

"I'd imagine so..." Kiyotaka replied guiltily. "One more fire blitz ought to do it!" He added to his Arcanine.

"And now you're stuck at the end of a route to nowhere..." The man in white continued, shrugging as he recalled his fainted Persian, "And too stupid to get yourself some easy exp when you have the chance!"

"I told you, I refuse to forego my values just to..."

"Yeah, yeah... I heard you the first time..." The guy interrupted, "but you won't be beating the Elite Four with that attitude..."

"...But without my values, it wouldn't be worth beating the Elite Four..."

"So you're giving up?"

"I didn't say that!"

"Huh... shame, I could do with a good fire type... I'd make it worth your while..."

"What!? No! I'd never sell off Arcanine! No matter how much you offer me!"

"Well, that's selfish of you... we've already established you won't be making him any stronger... but with me he'd be on the fast track to success!" He guy in white smiled eagerly at Kiyotaka, "First thing I'd do is take him to the Move Reminder and let him learn Extreme speed, seeing as you missed it... then we'd be off to get my Sixth Badge from each region, lots of exp from that..."

"Oh... that... that does sound far better for him..." Kiyotaka slumped.
"So... what so you say?"

"...What do you think, Arcanine?"

"Niiine..." The Arcanine growled, backing away from the other trainer, back towards his own.

"B-but he... he's probably going to fight actual trainers, and a lot of them! No more chasing wild pokémon all day... and he might be able to afford vitamins even!" Kiyotaka stroked his head.

"Oh, sure... Only the best food for my pokemon!" The guy in white agreed.

"Can-niiine..." The Arcanine whimpered, anxiously trotting a circle around Kiyotaka before facing him.

"But...This could be your big chance... you don't have to worry about me... I'll... do something..." Kiyotaka trailed off and wiped his eyes... was he crying?

"NINE!" Arcanine snarled loudly at him, causing Kiyotaka to jump.

"...Are you sure?" He asked, trying to hide the obvious joy in his voice.

"Arc!" Arcanine barked back happily.

"Thank you..." Kiyotaka smiled and stroked dog's mane. "I'll make it up to you, I promise!"

"Arcarc!" Arcanine barked excitedly and started licking his face.

"Gyaah! Arcanine! We're in the middle of a battle!" Kiyotaka scolded him.

"Ehh? Looks to me like you won it already..." The man in the white suit shrugged.

"But you've still got another pokemon, haven't you?" Kiyotaka asked.

"Nah, I only get Hypno out for special occasions, and I've seen all I need to see for now." The man turned around and wave backwards at Kiyotaka. "See ya around kid."

"A... hypno... and a persian...?" Kiyotaka mulled it over, "...Are you Koichi Kizakura?"

The man stopped walking.

"You are, aren't you!" Kiyotaka cried, excitedly. "Kizakura, the talent scout for Hope's Peak!"

Wait, that guy worked for Hope's Peak!? The school that took recommendations from Gym leaders and researchers from across the regions about who the best upcoming trainers were, so that they could bring them together to learn and train their pokémon in a school with state of the art facilities?

"Yeah... you got me." He shrugged. "Oak recommended you, that's why he refused your travel grant, no point you setting off on a journey and making it a pain to find you to give you the offer..." Well, now Makoto felt like a total dick... "Honestly I woulda taken you just because it was him, but school rules says I still have to check you out."

"He... recommended me!?" Kiyotaka said with happy surprise, "And... have I 'checked out' well enough to be accepted...?"

"You asked your pokémon what it wanted instead of just thinking about what's best for you... and you prefer strong opponents to picking off weak ones..." Kizakura grinned, "I'd say you checked out
pretty well!"

"So... I'm going to Hope's Peak!?” Kiyotaka was ecstatic, "I... thank you so much! I won't let you
down!" He promised. "...It's odd though. I heard that no one ever sees you before they've received
the letter telling them that they've been accepted by Hope's Peak..."

"It's more that they don't remember meeting me..."

"How is that different?" Kiyotaka asked.

"...I'll let Hypno explain it." Kizakura threw open a pokéball and a tall yellow humanoid figure
stepped out of it.

"Your Hypno can talk...?" Kiyotaka asked in amazement.

"No... but it can... use Hypnosis!"

"Hyyyypp-nnnooooo..." Makoto had the sense to duck back into the cave rather than watch the
swinging pendulum... but Kiyotaka hadn’t, from the sound of it.

"Right... First off, Arcanine, you're going to drink this full restore." Makoto could hear Kizakura
order, "And then the pair of you are going to go back to the exact positions you were in when I
shouted 'Hey there!'... and now I'm going to walk away. Once I head into that cave, you will both
wake up with no recollection of my talking to you... understood?"

"Understood..."

"Arc..."

"Good." Makoto heard Kizakura mutter and start walking... towards the cave...

Oh crap! He'd better hide! Makoto quickly ran down the first side path he found and sat as still as
possible, holding his breath as he saw Kizakura walk past...

"Phew!" Makoto breathed a sigh of relief once he'd gone past.

"Togepi?” Togepi muttered quietly.

"Yeah, I think we're safe now... I best check Kiyotaka’s alright though…” He got up and walked
back out of the cave.

Kiyotaka and Arcanine were in the same positions he’d seen them in when he’d first approached
them, with the trainer focused on his laptop and the dog alternating between scanning the area and
nuzzling his owner.

“Hello again!” Makoto waved, just as Arcanine started barking.

“Makoto!? What are you doing back here? Did you have trouble in the cave?”

“No... I've done my shopping!” Makoto grinned, “I came back for a battle... if you don’t mind
pitting your Arcanine against a Blastoise that is…”

“Arcan!” Arcanine barked defiantly.

“Challenge accepted!” Kiyotaka shot up from his chair so fast he almost knocked his laptop to the
floor. “...Do you want to swap pokémon before we start?” He asked, looking at Togepi anxiously.
“No thanks.” Makoto smiled innocently.

“Well… alright then… Arcanine, use Crunch!” Kiyotaka started.

Damn… Makoto had been hoping he’d just use his most powerful fire attack… which would have been useless against… “Blastoise! Sorry about this, buddy!” Makoto cringed as Blastoise came out of his ball only to have Arcanine sink its teeth deep into his ankle...

“…What was the point of that!!?” Kiyotaka asked irritably as Blastoise shook off the dog.

“Umm… Exp Shares are expensive…” Makoto tried to justify himself. “And I thought you’d just try to use a fire attack to knock Togepi out in one hit…”

“Oh, I see… you’re so sure you’re going to win you allow yourself to take a hit for the extra exp… That’s a dangerous attitude to take, you know…” Kiyotaka said, looking slightly smug.

“Well, I’ve still got type advantage!” Makoto pointed out, “Blastoise, use Hydro Pump!”

“Arcanine! Use Crunch again, aim for its thigh this time!” Kiyotaka ordered, which his dog managed to do just before Blastoise forced him off with two jets of water from his twin cannons…”

“Arrr…” Arcanine whimpered as he shivered from the cold water, while Blastoise’s damaged leg collapsed from under him…

“One more Hydro Pump!” Makoto ordered, his Arcanine had barely survived the first… but Blastoise would be able to take another Crunch…”

“Arcanine! You can do this!” Kiyotaka cheered his bedraggled pokemon, “Use Reversal!!”

*Reversal?* What was that one? Wasn’t it the one that did more damage if the attacker had taken a load themselves? “Oh, cra…”

Makoto’s swearing was cut off as Arcanine apparently turned into a raging tornado of fur and launched itself at Blastoise, who fell to the ground partway through the flurry of hits…

“Aarcarc!” Arcanine wagged its tail happily.

“Type advantage isn’t everything…” Kiyotaka commented smugly, as Makoto sent Blastoise back into the pokeball and sent out Togepi again.

“Togepi?” It looked up at the Arcanine facing it in confusion… this was the first time Makoto had had to send it out against another pokémon… what were it’s moves again? Makoto just needed it to do a small bit of damage to finish off Arcanine… but the only move that could possibly do that was…

“Oh, Togepi? I need you to use Metronome…” Makoto told it anxiously wondering what random move would come out this time...

“Arcanine, use Reversal, quickly!” Kiyotaka ordered hurriedly.

Unfortunately for him, Togepi finished its little metronome dance before Arcanine got the chance to attack again.

“Tch…” Kiyotaka cringed as they both watched Togepi, waiting with trepidation to see what it would do now…
It fainted.

“Umm… what happened?” Makoto asked, why would it just faint?

“Cover yourself!” Kiyotaka was shielding his face with his arms, “It’s either Explosion or Self-des…”

**BOOM**

A large explosion rocked the air just as Makoto was taking Kiyotaka’s advice, which was just in time as a blast of hot wind knocked him sideways onto the floor moments later. When he dared to uncover himself, Makoto saw that both Kiyotaka and his Arcanine were now on the floor.

“Urg…” Kiyotaka groaned as he lifted himself off of the floor… he looked like he’d taken a bigger hit than Makoto. “…Does that happen often?” He asked as he retrieved Arcanine.

“No… usually Togepi just ends up casting healing wish, or charm on the wrong gender, or nightmares on an awake one…” Makoto admitted. “That’s the first time it’s actually won a fight!”

“…Except it fainted first, so I win, technically…” Kiyotaka pointed out.

“Oh yeah… just my luck!” Makoto griped. “Well, congratz… go buy yourself a drink, I guess!” He threw half the coins in his pocket over to him. “I spent most of my money in the shop…”

“Hahaha! I’m lucky you came back at all!” Kiyotaka laughed, although the action made him wince straight after. “…I don’t suppose you’ll be coming back anytime soon? It would be nice to battle you again… and not just for the experience…”

It wouldn’t matter if Makoto did… Kiyotaka was going to Hope’s Peak soon, even if he couldn’t remember it just now…

But then again… hadn’t that Kizakura guy had wanted Makoto’s name… and said he’d ‘see him around’…

“Maybe we’ll see each other soon… if I’m lucky!” Makoto smiled as he pulled himself off the ground and started the long trek back to the bus stop.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading so far! I put the first two chapters up together as chapter one was quite short.
I have up to chapter 8 written, but from now on I’m going to be putting up them once a week until I run out of them, in the hope that I can continue uploading them once a week.
Next week I’ll be introducing more of Class 78 and how their lives are in this AU.
A Courier's Journey (Class 78 POV) pt.1

Chapter Summary

One unlucky postman begins his journey to deliver the good news to this years batch of Hope's Peak students.

Chapter Notes

This is going to be the introductions to half of the yet-unseen class 78 students in this AU. The other half will be next week.
-The song Sayaka is singing is After the After Party by Charli XCX.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hiro looked up at the tall, imposing, currently locked gates of the building he was going to call home for the next few years…

“Huh… Y’know, when you said some people were going to give you four years rent free, I thought you meant you’d got yourself arrested…” His mother commented.

“Aww… C’mon Mom! I told you, I’m not a scammer!” He moaned, even though there was 80% chance she was just joking.

“So… when did you get the letter? She asked, “I didn’t think they were getting delivered until tomorrow.”

“I haven’t got a letter… I had a prediction!” He explained, “Now, how’d you think we open these gates…?”

She just groaned, “Sweetie… You know most of your predictions are wrong…” She sighed, “Think about it, why would Hope’s Peak want you?”

“Probably ‘cause of my awesome new magic hat!” Hiro pointed to his hat.

“Sandyghaaast…” His hat agreed.

“Sweetie, I told you… That’s a pokémon…” His mother sighed.

“No way! If it was a pokémon, I’d have remembered catching it!” He argued.

“Are you sure you haven’t been taking any good drugs and forgot?” His Mom was always on the lookout for some good stuff… “Because it looks just like a Sandyghast…”

“I checked the pokédex, Sandyghasts are a totally different colour!”

“Then maybe it’s a shiny one? That makes more sense than a hat that’s made of sand and talks!” She sighed.
“I told you, it’s magic! The sand’s just leftover from Alola… there’s sand everywhere there!” She still didn’t look convinced. “Look, let’s ask this guy!” He point to someone who was about to come back out through the gates. “Hey… My crazy mom here is trying to insist that this awesome hat is a pokémon…”

“Yasuhiro…” His mom growled.

“Wait... Yasuhiro?!” The guy replied, “What’s your surname?”

“Hagakure.” His mom replied. “Why?”

“Wow… this job’s going to be easier than I thought…” He muttered, “I have a letter for you!” He replied, getting something out of a bag… “I just need you to sign here…”

Sign something…? “Hmm… this isn’t some demonic contract, is it?” He leant over to look at it… and so did his hat.

“Ghaast…” It shook it’s sideways as a ‘No’… and also shook off some of it’s sand…

“Arg!” The letter dude moaned as clumps it showered down onto his hat and hair.

“Oops…. Sorry dude… my hat’s still sandy from Alola!” He explained, “But a little fabric conditioner will get that right out!” He added, as he sighed the non-demonic contract.

“Urg… riight... Well… here’s your letter…” The postman passed him a letter while trying to brush sand off himself. “Welcome to Hope’s Peak, I guess! There’s a keycard for the gates in there… Although I don’t think they’re expecting you for another week…”

“Awesome!” He started opening it up so he could go and check out his new digs...

“Wait… Are you serious? My boy’s going to Hope’s Peak?” His mom chocked out.

“Well, I told you I was, didn’t I?” Hiro showed her the letter… why did she never believe him, even though he was always right 30% of the time? “Apparently some chick named Olympia recommended me…”

She looked through it, checking it over several times… there was a 60% chance she thought it was fake at first, but she finally decided it wasn’t.

“…Hope’s Peak must be run by idiots…” She said, quietly, tears beginning to prick at her eyes before she rushed forward to hug him. “…Good luck in there.”

“Aww, Mom… I’ll be fine! I’ve got Exeggutor to look after me!” Hiro patted her back, “And my new hat!”

His Mom just groaned…

Ahh… this was the life! Stretched out on a deck chair in the warm evening air of sandy Alola… Leon almost didn’t want the Pokéathlon season to start back up again. After all, Luxray had beaten all those other pokémon easily! Did he really need to go back and beat them all again? He had better things to do!

Better things like checking out the cute ladies of Alola… Like that babe with the Purrliion over there! Maybe it was time to try out his new chat up line…
“Hey lady, you into cool cats? Cause there’s two of them right here!” He gestured to Luxray, who just sat there being cool, and himse…

“Litten!” Aww, crap! How’d he get outta his pokéball again!?  

“Awwww…” The chick melted at the sight of the evil little furball who was now clambering up his arm to nuzzle his face… “Is that a Litten? He’s so adorable!” She came over to pet him…

“Uhh… not exactly…” Leon tried to back away from her, but then that damn fuzz ball leapt into her hands…

“Oooohhh… Who’s a little cutie?” She cooed as she scratched Litten’s ears.

“Not him, babe! Trust me!” Leon quickly shot up to try and get him back off her before…

“Liiiiiii…” Litten mewled… and set her hair on fire…

“AHHHH!” She screamed just as Leon grabbed him back… shit… he needed something to put that out with…

“Uhh… Here!” He quickly scrambled to grab his drink and throw it over her… “There! Fire’s out now!” He pointed out…

Of course, now one side of her hair was shorter than the other and she was covered in sticky fruit juice… And now she was staring at him and Litten in disgust and storming off in tears.

“Great job, Litten…” Leon sighed sarcastically. “Now back in your pokéball!” It actually listened to his order for once and popped back in the ball… honestly, he’d have been better off never running catching this thing… even if it did fit into his team of cool cats!

Urg… and now that girl was talking to all the other chicks on the beach, probably warning them all not to come near him… so much for getting to make out with a chick before the new Pokéathlon season started! And there was no chance getting a girlfriend after it started because he’d already struck out with most of the chicks there to! Urg, his life suuuuuucked!

“Umm… excuse me?” Some dude was holding out a clipboard and talking to him… “Leon Kuwata?”

“Haah… Yeah…” He sighed, he could see where this was going… “You want an autograph from the Pokéathlon champ…”

“Ah… kind of? I have a letter for you and need you to sign for delivery…” He held the clipboard out to reveal a list of sixteen names.

“Okay…” He shrugged, putting a big swirly autograph on the paper. “Wait… You’re taking stuff to Sayaka Maizono…?” He suddenly realised, noticing the pokémon performance trainer’s name below his own… “And Junko Enoshima?” He added, as the queen of pokémon accessories was below it…”

“It’ll make more sense once you read the letter.” The guy held out an envelope to him… “But everyone on this list is being offered a place at Hope’s Peak Pokémon Academy…”

So… he was being offered the chance to go to school with Sayaka Maizono and Junko Enoshima? Huh… maybe this was his chance to get out of the Pokéathlon business and into something cooler… like talent contests! They were a magnet for cute chicks!
“Hah… that’s awesome! Thanks man!” Leon got up to give the dude a proper handshake as he reached out for the letter excitedly, “This is the best thing to happen to me all summer!”

“Lit-ten!” Litten cheerfully meowed along with him.

Wait… when did he get out of his pokéball?

“AHHHH!” The postman was suddenly screaming… because oh shit! The letter was on fire…!

Leon quickly grabbed the letter and threw it onto the sand, stomping on it until the flames had gone out… “Heh! Crises averted!” He smiled… only to realise the postman had run off towards the ocean, one cuff of his shirt rapidly beginning to burn…

Hell… this school would be good enough if they could help him get his Litten to stop setting his shit on fire!

“~After the after par-ty, we’re gonna keep it go-in’~” Sayaka started to sing as Brionne danced and twirled along with her… even though the contest was over, she still had to put on a show, dancing and singing and smiling for the crowd…

Still, it was the life of a star talent trainer! It was all worth it if she could make other people and their pokémon happy with her shows… She’d show people that working together with your pokémon to put on a great performance was the most beautiful thing of all!

Even if after all her hard work, she and Brionne still ended up drawing against Enoshima and her poor, overdressed Milotic! Really, couldn’t anyone but her see how miserable that poor thing was?

And drawing with her had meant that she’d have to keep doing talent contests next season… she’d really been hoping to take a break, a chance to be a normal girl for a while, but… she could hardly let people think it was acceptable to treat pokémon the way she did! She’d painted that Teddiursa black and white for goodness sake!

Soon enough, her dance was finished… for now…

“Ah… Sayaka Maizono?” A man suddenly spoke to her, he was wearing a postman’s uniform… with a burnt sleeve and specks of sand in his hair.

Her intuition was telling her that she might have a change in her life sooner than she thought… “Can I help you?” She asked, with a smile.

“Ah, well, yes…” He blushed slightly, “I have a letter for you… and need your signature…”

“And you’d like it twice so you can keep one?” She guessed, which made him blush harder and nod frantically.

She signed the form, and then gave him a photo of Brionne and her with a message thanking him for the letter. He smiled and handed it over.

It was an invitation to Hope’s Peak… She’d been recognised as one of the best potential trainers in the world… It was a perfect chance for her to go and train her pokémon to be the best performers possible…

But that would mean leaving Enoshima to run riot in the talent contests…

“I don’t think I can accept this…” She sighed.
“Ah! You don’t? You don’t have to decide now! You can think about it!” He cried, obviously disappointed that she’d said no… “It’s still your choice of course!” He added.

“I’ll think about it.” She half-lied… she’d definitely be thinking about this, but not about going…

“Alright… err… I don’t suppose you know where Junko Enoshima is…? I’ve been told she’s here but…”

“…You don’t seem like the type to want her autograph…” Sayaka thought out loud.

“Ah, no! But she’s getting a letter as well…” He showed her the clipboard again, and this time she actually read the other 15 names on it… and there was Enoshima’s, right under Sayaka’s name… and right down at the bottom, in a hasty scrawl was…

“Makoto Naegi!”? The same one from junior high, back in Kanto?

“Oh, yeah… him… The talent scout suddenly added him at the last minute…” The postman sighed.

So… she’d be able keep challenging Enoshima and see what happened to Makoto and his Squirtle…?

“Hmm… maybe I’ll go after all…”

“Well… good luck there, then!” He smiled, “I’ll be cheering for you!”

“Thank you!” Sayaka smiled, “Also, Enoshima’s over there.” She let him know.

“Ah, thanks!” He smiled and headed off… Only to be accosted by some guy who wanted to see the autograph she’d just given him… and spilt beer over his shorts in the process…

Something told her that wouldn’t be the last time his uniform got damaged over the course of this job…

A draw? All the arguments about ‘beauty’, all the posturing, all the piles of accessories she made her stupid Milotic wear and it had ended in a draw…?

How… despair-inducing! Now it meant it would be an entire year before they’d compete again and settle all the arguments over whether looks or performances were better… and neither of them dared leave the scene until the other one did, so they’d both have to keep doing the same stupid dances and dress-ups for another year!

“This is your fault, Mukuro!” Junko poked the stupid Milotic, which apologetically murmured and swirled about a few inches off of the ground. “Urg! Don’t just shuffle around, useless thing! At least do something interesting!”

It started trying to dance to that insipid song Maizono was singing… “You’re too clumsy to dance, remember! Honestly… I don’t know why I bothered training you… Monokuma, come and make Mukuro do something interesting for me!” She ordered, releasing her (improved color) Teddiursa from its pokeball…

“Tedtedtedtedtedted!” It rounded on her Milotic and laughed, as close to Junko’s own one as it could without making an ‘pu’ sound.

“O-otic…?” The dumb pokémon started to panic, as Monokuma flashed his teeth…
“Excuse me… You’re Junko Enoshima, right?” Urg… Just as she was about to have some fun!

“Thaaat’s right!” She spun around to face him… man, what a big dweeb… his uniform only looked better with the scorch marks and fresh beer stain! “And who might you be?”

“Ahh… just a courier… I have a letter for you, if you’ll sign here…” He held out a clipboard. Maizono, herself, Togami… obviously this was the Hope’s Peak acceptance letter… but down near the bottom was another name she couldn’t believe was listed…

“Like… does that really say Mukuro Ikusaba!?” She asked, innocently, while her Teddiursa started sniffing the man’s legs.

“Ah… y-yes? The courier replied, looking at Teddiursa nervously.

“That’s totally amaz-balls!” Junko grinned, “She my big twin sister!”

“Ah… but your surnames are differ…?” He commented, as Monokuma started twitching his claws.

“Yeah… don’t ask!” Junko dismissed him, “Like… oh my god this is such great news! Me and my sis back together after so long, and in the same school no less!”

And this way she’d be able to carry on her little song and dance with Maizono, and get her methods spread out to some of the best trainers in the world…

“Yeah… that’s really… AH!” The wimp screeched as Teddiursa started attacking his calves.

"Aww... Monokuma just wants to play..." Junko pointed out as the wimp winced at the teeny tiny nibbles and scratches ripping his pants to shreds.

"Mono... what!?" He asked stupidly.

"Monokuma! That's his nickname! Don't you nickname your pokémon? I'm gonna give all of mine great nicknames, just like Mukuro here!” She gestured to her Milotic.

"Mukuro? Like your sister?" He managed to put two and two together, "You named a beautiful pokémon after your sister..." He obviously thought that was a nice thing to do...

"Well, not really... I got her when she was still a big, dumb, ugly Feebas... So I named her after my big, dumb, ugly sister!" She explained, "How was I supposed to know she'd evolve into something pretty?" Y’know... other than paying even the slightest bit of attention to her stupid ugly pokémon...

"Uhh... right..." He stared at her, worriedly, as Monokuma got bored of drawing blood and hopped off of him.

"Well... here's my autograph!" She handed back the clipboard, "Let my sister know not to worry about being too useless to be at Hope's Peak... she'll have me to look after her, after all!"

"Thanks. And, uh, good luck at your new school..." He muttered.

"Don't worry, I'll love it!" Junko threatened.

Who the fuck was this asshole!?

Mondo was used to having to outrun idiots who thought that if they chased him down, they’d be able to battle him and earn a badge, but he’d never had one keep up as a long as this idiot flying on the
Pellipper was... Hell, he’d even managed to dodge a few Rock Throws from his Lycanoc, who was happily sat in the sidecar, enjoying the thrill of the chase...

And it *was* a thrill... Mondo hadn’t had a race like this with anyone but his brother… heck, if this guy could *battle* half as well as he could *race*… Maybe he’d finally found a rival who wouldn’t get scared of him and run off, like the last nine people he’d thought might live up to the challenge!

“Hey, Lycan… How’s about we put this Pellipper through its paces?” Mondo grinned at his pet, “Show him you’re too strong to take shit from it?"

“CAN!” His pokémon barked happily… hell, he’d been a *lot* happier, since that night when he’d evolved from a cute little puppy into a big bad wolf. But who *wouldn’t* be, if they suddenly got strong and scary enough to send the assholes who’d made their life a living hell off running?

But now wasn’t the time to dwell on *those* bastards… Daiya had beaten the shit outta them years ago...

“Alright then!” Mondo smirked and turned the bike into a sideways stop...

“Pellipper, use *Fling*!” Wow… the guy was attacking already!? What was he throwing…? And why did it seem like it was getting thrown at *Mondo*…?

“ARGH!” Mondo barely managed to get his arm up in time to stop the thin piece of wood from hitting him in the face... Going for the *trainer*, eh? Looks like this guy liked to fight *dirty*! Well, he wasn’t the only one who didn’t fight fair...

“RRRROOOOC!” Lycan growled and jumped out of the sidecar, chasing his newfound rival down and trying to get some rocks thrown past his Pellipper… which was shooting bursts of water at the rocks, meaning the guy just got hit by clumps of mud instead...

But why wasn’t he attacking back? All he’d done so far was throw that thing… what the hell was it even? Mondo picked it up… it looked like a clipboard, with a pen and post it note stuck to it reading ‘To Mondo Oowada. Please sign and take the letter.’

Well… shit! He wasn’t interested in being rivals… he just wanted to deliver a fucking letter! Well, *fine*! He didn’t want to be rivals with some dorky bird trainer anyway, right!? Hell, he was badass enough he didn’t *need* a rival to help improve himself!

“Alright, here’s my signature!” He growled, taking the letter and throwing the board back at the battle-tease, who caught it and ordered his pokémon to fly off without another word...

“ROC, ROC, ROC!” Lycan barked after him until he was out of sight, then turned and looked at Mondo proudly.

“Yeah… good job, buddy!” Mondo nodded to him as he slinked back into his sidecar and Mondo looked at the letter in his hands, what the hell *was* this?

…

“Daiya! What the *hell* is this!?” Mondo slammed the door to his brother’s house open.

“Dude, it’s *3am*… You wake this Clefairy and Imma *kill* you!” Daiya snapped quietly, trying to wrap his coat around the small pink bundle trembling in his arms.

“…You took another pokémon offa someone?” Mondo sighed. If ‘Abused’ was a type, his bro
would be the type *master*...

“He kicked it *after* it fainted.” Daiya said coldly, rage bubbling under his calm demeanour. “Now what did you come in here to bitch at me about?”

“This!” He shoved the letter in Daiya’s face.

“Hah! You actually got in!” His brother laughed.

“What’s so funny!?” Mondo snapped, “Did ya decide ta recommend me as a *joke!*?”

“Of *course* not!” Daiya looked pretty pissed at the suggestion even. “I just thought you fucked up when Kizakura came to check you out…”

“Who?”

“The guy with the Persian that took you up on your offer of leaving Lycanroc to fight by himself while you bought him a coffee…” Daiya sighed, “It was pretty badass until you kept coming back to check on him with those crappy excuses about forgetting which size he wanted!”

Dammit… That guy had been a *scout!*? He’d been too freaked out that someone called his bluff to realise… And while Lycan always *was* good at fighting without commands, he didn’t like being left to fight without Mondo… But anyway…

“Alright then, why the fuck *did* you recommend me!? We set up the Diamonds Gym *together!* Why are you trying ta get *rid* of me for four years!?” Mondo snapped, “Is this ‘cause the other members keep saying I’m not as good as you!?”

Daiya let out a long sigh… “Well… kinda.”

He knew it. Hell, of *course* the gang thought he was a crappy co-leader, he only had one pokémon, whereas Daiya looked after like ten or something! And it wasn’t like they didn’t know Mondo kept trying to catch more, but *failing*…

“I *don’t* mean ‘cause you *ain’t* as good as me!” Daiya snapped. “But some of the gang keep saying stupid shit like that, and I wanted to give you the chance to prove it isn’t true!”

“So why the fuck did you suggest I go to some fancy school where it’ll be obvious that I’m *stupid!*?” Seriously, he’d never done well at school, not even in the shittiest ones! There was no way he could keep up at somewhere like Hope’s Peak…

“You’re *not* stupid! And quit letting people tell you that you are!” Daiya snapped again. “You’re gonna be fucking amazing at that place! Yeah, it’ll be tough… but diamonds are formed under *pressure*, remember?” He grinned and grabbed a hold of Mondo’s shoulder, “And there’s nowhere with more pressure in it than Hope’s Peak, bro!” He laughed.

“Well… I mean, if you’ve gone and fucking *told* people I’ll go…” Mondo muttered, embarrassed that Daiya thought he actually *could*…

“Attaboy!” Daiya laughed. “Hey, and who knows, maybe it’ll be where you finally meet that special someone… Y’know… a fresh-faced goody-two shoes to play the Ash to your Gary…”

“Grr… I *told* you Diaya, I don’t need a rival!” Mondo snapped, having trouble controlling the volume of his voice as he felt his face turning red. “Now, apparently I have to go pack up my shit and ride to this school…” He snapped, using it as an excuse to leave before Daiya carried on with his
stupid crap…

“Smell ya later!” Daiya laughed.

“Oh fuck you, Daiya!” Mondo snapped… he didn’t need a rival and even if he did he wouldn’t want some stupid, stuck up goody-two-shoes with a type disadvantage following him around everywhere…

Kyoko surveyed the small clearing in the forest carefully… there was obviously a pit trap there, and likely that whichever Team Rocket member had set it up would be nearby, or have some way of watching it at least.

But how to lure them out? She’d usually walk over with Kadabera and spring the trap, then have Crobat fly her out once they’d taken the bait, but she’d used that trick far too many times for them not to start getting suspicious of her.

“Excuse me, Kyoko Kirigiri?”

“Shh!” She instinctively hissed at the man who’d spoken to her. He was holding a clipboard and letter from Hope’s Peak. Looked like Officer Jenny’s recommendation had gone through, although she’d expected as much after she’d lost her recollection of about half an hour of time… So now she’d be able to go and confront her father…

But for now this idiot was interrupting her stakeout… at least his white uniform was coated in mud and dust and not quite as visible as it would otherwise have been, but it still ran the risk of them being noticed and causing Team Rocket to give up…

Unless, perhaps she used him as bait? He looked in a bad enough state to be lost…

She nodded to him, signed her name, and took the letter, placing it in her bag.

“It’ll be best if you leave by walking down that path…” She nodded at the obvious trap.

“Uhh… alright?” He agreed surprisingly quickly and walked down the path, then screamed loudly as he fell into the pit… had he really not seen it? They’d even covered it in a big pile of leaves like in a children’s cartoon!

“Ah! Pelipper! Get me out of here!” The postman shouted from in the pit.

“Not so fast!” A man disguised surprisingly well as a bush suddenly jumped out from the side of the road, releasing a Arbok. “That Pelipper is mine!”

...Kadabera made short work of his pokémon while the postman managed to clamber his way out of the pit.

“Y-you!” The Rocket grunt recognised her, as she and Kadabera approached him. “You might have beaten Arbok, but you won’t stop Team Rocket! And you won’t get me either!”

Looked like he was going to try and run… Obviously he hadn’t learnt the reason why none of the other Team Rocket members she’d caught escaped either…

“Kadabera, teleport us into nearest police station…” She ordered, while starting to open her mail…

Ahh… this was the life, soaking up the sun in Alola, a cool drink, sweet malasadas and bowls of
poffins by her side… now if only that irritating wailing would stop… it sounded like the rescue alarm… and why did it suddenly feel cold…

“AHH!” Hina woke up with a shriek as what felt like a pair of ice-cubes pressed into her back…

“Okay, I’m up… I’m up! Quit freezing me, Glaceon!”

The pokémon just looked at her coolly and then looked back out to the sea that Hina was supposed to be watching over… Was that a person out there? Floating on something? What sort of idiot went swimming off the coast of Kanto at 5am?!

Urg… Whoever it was, she still had to rescue him… “Wake up, Mariil!” She started running to the ocean and opening her pokéball at the same time…

“Maar…?” Marill sleepily wondered what was going on…

“No time to explain… We’ve gotta get the boat ready!”

“Riiilll!” Her smaller pokémon trilled and jumped into the water, where she could see its tail bobbing across the surface towards her boat. She ran over herself, making sure the little pokémon was strapped in tight to the reins, before ordering him to swim to the man floating nearby.

The boat quickly moved across the water, pulled by the mouse that Hina had spent most of her childhood practising swimming with, and she was soon able to grab a hold of the man, who desperately waving at her.

“Good job Marill!” She quickly congratulated the water mouse, while pulling up the man and his bird… He was soaked and would need warming up, but it seemed like his Pelipper had kept him afloat. Lucky for him he had a water-type! “What were you thinking? Going swimming at this time all by yourself?!” She snapped at him, “You’re lucky there’s a rescue service here at all!”

“W-was f-flying…g-got l-lost… w-wrong c-cords… P-pelipper f-fainted…” He chattered out, getting a few different medicines out of his bag.

Well… that was slightly less stupid, but still, who went flying at 5am!? “Well… whatever, we need to get you back to the rescue hut to warm up…” She told him, once he’d woken up the Pelipper.

“It’s f-fine… I d-don’t have t-time…” He shivered. “A-aoi A-asahina, r-right?” He took a clipboard out of his bag and held it out to her… it was a list of names with signatures on it… “L-letter for you…” He explained.

“Huh!? For me!?” No one ever wrote her letters… she signed it and gave him the clipboard back, getting a letter in return…

Wait… Hope’s Peak wanted her!? Holy moly, her family were gonna be stoked! But why her? She knew Marill was a good swimmer and she’d been the first to find that Ice Rock in Shoal cave, but that had just been lucky…

“Are you sure this is for…” She started to ask, only to find the man and his Pelipper had left already… Geez… With that attitude he was really going to get killed…

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Some days, Kiyotaka woke up slightly before his Arcanine, and if he was extra lucky he’d have enough time to weigh out the morning’s allowance of dry food before his faithful dog woke up and started trying (and, since his evolution, succeeding) to tackle him to the floor and smother him in excited kisses.
Other times, Kiyotaka wasn’t so lucky and Arcanine awoke at 6am on the dot, saw his food bowl wasn’t full, jumped up onto the bed in a panic and woke Kiyotaka up with what he had decided must be Arcanine’s attempt at CPR... which would be a lovely thing for him to have learnt if only he could understand the difference between rescue breaths and licking!

And then there was the rare bad day, when Kiyotaka would be woken up at 3am in the morning by his dear pokémon whimpering in his sleep, and would have to clamber into his cage to gently stroke him awake, and he’d reschedule as much work as he could to spend the day hugging and pampering his lifelong friend...

Today, however, was one of the lucky days. Kiyotaka had found himself awake at 5:30 am, excitedly thinking about his new Battle Net profile… Oak and Makoto had both accepted him as a ‘friend’ on the social network, and the latter had even given him a glowing five-star review of their fight yesterday, that should encourage people to come and challenge him, right!? He couldn’t wait to go online and see if he had any interested challengers yet…

Of course, first he had to get Arcanine’s food ready and take care of all his berry plants! He’d need all the berries he could grow if he was about to get lots of challengers, after all! Maybe he’d even be able to start growing a few new plants…

Once his morning duties were done, he excitedly looked up his own profile on Battle Net and… why was his average review now barely above one star!? What had happened!?

A minute of shocked scrolling down the page answered his question- several of his classmates had discovered his page and submitted reviews of the various school mandated battles he’d had with them… and they were all bitter one-star reviews complaining that his Growlithe was overpowered and probably had probably been enhanced in the same machine his grandfather has used…

He his head in his hands… no one was going to bother even looking at his profile now! Why had he bothered to expect any better!? He was never going to find people to battle, was he? He was going to be stuck uselessly guarding a dead-end for the rest of his life!

“Canine?” Arcanine had woken up and was anxiously whimpering to ask why he was crying in front of his computer.

“I'm a failure…” He admitted, while Arcanine tried to lap up the tears spilling from his hands. “Nothing I can think of has worked and I’m out of ideas! There's no chance of me becoming Pokémon Champion now… and I’ll barely be able to help you get stronger at all! I… I'm working as hard as I can and it's all worthless!”

“Niiine…” Arcanine whimpered gently, nuzzling their faces together while he sobbed.

“Kiyotaka…?” His father had come through the door, he must not have heard the knock… “What’s wrong?”

“I…” He barely managed to gesture to the computer before tears overwhelmed him again.

“Urg…” His father groaned as he looked. “Well… there’s someone at the door who wants to speak to you…! Maybe it’s some good news!”

“Hu-huh?” He managed to choke out between sobs, “A visitor for me!? He never had visitors… he didn’t have any friends, so who’d want to visit him?”

“Well… he said he had a letter for you, but needs your signature…” His father explained, as they headed to the door along with Arcanine, to find a very wet looking postman being watched
suspiciously by his father’s Meowth.

“L-letter for you…” He shivered, holding out a clip board, “P-please s-sign h-here…”

“Very well…” Kiyotaka agreed and signed his name, then opened the letter and started reading the contents…

“To Kiyotaka Ishimaru

Congratulations! You are one of a select few pokémon trainers who have fulfilled the rigorous requirements to be accepted as part of this year’s intake to Hope’s Peak Pokémon Trainer Academy…”

Hope’s Peak!? Him!? This… this was perfect! He’d be constantly surrounded by some of the best young trainers in the world! He’d have tutors who’d actually want to help him develop as a trainer, instead of being bitter than he could beat them in a fight! This was finally his chance to get out of this village and his grandfather’s shadow!

“Hah!” He couldn’t stop himself from crying again, albeit with joy this time… “Thank you so much!” He couldn’t help but run forward to hug the man who’d given him this fantastic news…

“Heh… No prob…”

“Arcarcarc!” The postman’s reply was cut off as Arcanine decided to join in the hug as well… which meant the pair of the got pushed to the floor by a happy pile of fur that wanted to smother them both in sloppy licks…

“Ahh! Arcanine, STAND!” Kiyotaka ordered, snapping his fingers to emphasis the point.

Arcanine complied, moving into his best standing posture and giving them space to get back up again. “I’m so sorry…” Kiyotaka apologised, noticing that the man was now covered in wet fur…

“Don’t worry about it kid… seems to be part of the job…” He sighed, getting a Pelipper out of a pokéball, “Enjoy your new school!” He waved tiredly before flying off…

“New school!?” His father asked.

Kiyotaka showed him the letter, and his face gradually split into a smile as wide as his own…

“Well done, Kiyotaka!” He gave him a congratulatory hug…

And then Arcanine flattened them both.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!
A Courier's Journey (Class 78 POV) pt.2

Chapter Summary

The unlucky courier's journey continues to the other members of the new intake for Hope's Peak

Chapter Notes

So, these were some of the students I had more trouble with. I hope they make sense. Again, just a reminder that romance=rivalry in this AU, hence why Toko writes rivalry stories and only wants to kick Togami's butt rather than being obsessed with marrying him (Also I have no idea if Syo is even going to exist in this fic as I have no idea what to do with her if she did).

And again, the kids are younger so Togami hadn't beaten all his half-siblings and Sakura hasn't beaten her father yet.

I am aware that the move Hidden Power can't actually be a fairy-type move in the games, but I think that's weird and wanted to have a fairy type move so I'm just saying it can be in this AU.

Also I didn't want to go into Chihiro's gender in this so I'm using 'they' pronouns... or trying to at least. Apologies if I ever accidentally call them a 'him' from their POV in this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Cresselia...”

The golden shining moonlight emanating from the beautiful pokémon’s face began to fade, as she warned him that she would have to leave him yet again.

“Wait! Don’t go...” Hifumi called out... and then sighed as he realised he’d woken up, dispelling his dream of the legendary pokémon completely...

But, he couldn’t sit and mope all day! He had to start drawing! He’d made it his life’s goal to show everyone how beautiful Cresselia was, that must be why she always visited his dreams, after all!

He sat at his drawing bench, furiously pencilling and inking, trying to get down the correct contours and the shimmer of her light and all the sheer beauty of it down while the memory of his dream was still fresh in his mind...

Once he was finished, he sat up straight to get a look at his finished work...

“Tch! Still not right!” He muttered to himself, angrily throwing the picture away before the ink was even dry.

“Argh!” Hifumi almost had a heart attack as a male voice cried out just a few feet away from him...
He turned to see his older sister with a man who was gingerly peeling the discarded picture off of his left arm and groaning at the mess of ink it had left there...

“HIFUMI! What have I told you about not throwing away your pictures before they dry!” Fujiko scolded him, “That was a wonderful picture and now you’ve ruined it!”

“My pictures are all terrible!” He snapped.

“If your pictures were bad, people wouldn’t pay you to draw them and their pokémon together…” Fujiko sighed.

“Well, that’s because they’re ordinary pokémon! But my pictures of her are nothing compared to what I see in my dreams!” He told her, although he wasn’t sure why he bothered, because they had this argument every morning…

“Well… they were good enough to get you a place at Hope’s Peak!” Fujiko grinned.

“What!?” That was a new addition to the argument!

“Yes… I have the invitation letter for you…” The man with Fujiko said, “I just need you to sign for it.”

…This couldn’t be real. It was probably just an elaborate set up to get his autograph. But he had to admire the man’s gusto! He’d already got autographs from trainers like Kuwata, Maizono, Enoshima…

“Very well!” He signed the pad, and did a little sketch of him next to it for good measure…

“Thanks, here you go…” The man replied, handing over an envelope, before heading out of the room.

This was impressive… it even had Hope’s Peak’s seal on the outside! And the letter was written on the official embossed paper… and it even had a fake student ID… which turned on and displayed his name…

“THIS IS ACTUALLY REAL!?” He realised with a shriek.

“Of course it’s real!” His sister sighed, “What did you think, it was just a set up to get your autograph?”

“…Yes.” Hifumi admitted, “Why would Hope’s Peak want me!? I’m not that good of a trainer!”

“Well, now you can start getting better at it!” She enthused.

“Assuming I go…” Honestly, it just sounded like a hassle…

“Why wouldn’t you!? It’s Hope’s Peak! It’s where all the best trainers go!” Fujiko cried, “You’d have lots of strong pokémon around you to practise drawing!”

“I could practise drawing forever and it still wouldn’t make me good enough…” Hifumi sighed, looking at the smudged picture on the floor…

“So… you’re giving up on showing everyone Cresselia, then?” Fujiko asked sadly.

“What!? NO!” He snapped, “It’s just…”
He’d never be able to draw her… But how else could he show her to everyone? Photography? Having to run around finding her and then chase after her with a camera? If he was going to go to that trouble, he might as well train up his Dratini and catch her…

A smile spread across his face as he realised exactly why Hope’s Peak had chosen him… He was the Chosen One! The unlikely hero would venture forth, with naught but vague dreams and visions to guide him, and share the beauty of Cresselia with the world!

“So… Are you going to…?” Fujiko barely started asking before he was hurriedly writing his acceptance of the invitation…

20,000 feet in the air, travelling at no less than 30 miles per hour, two pokémon to compete for each fighter… including the one they were riding on.

A typical battle between potential Togami heirs.

There were many, he was sure, who thought they were all mad. That they could have just had ‘normal’ pokémon battles to determine who was going to gain complete control over Togami Inc. And some deluded fools probably would suggest they all just split Togami Inc.’s assets between the 14 of them. But those common people didn’t understand. How were they supposed to understand and cater to the extreme needs of the very best pokémon trainers if their own skills weren’t good enough? How were they supposed to overcome the trials of the business world if they couldn’t overcome the trail of beating all 13 of their half-brothers.

And by ‘they’ and ‘their’ Togami meant ‘him’ and ‘his’, obviously. He may only be half-way through beating all his half-siblings, but he knew it would be him who became the next face of Togami Inc...

But then, this idiot opposite him, stupidly trying to intimidate him by going at 45 mile per hour and forcing his Drampa to keep up, probably thought as much himself.

"Can you not keep your pokémon under proper control?" Togami sneered at him, "Honestly, you're all so arrogant! Thinking you deserve to delay my becoming head of the family, just because you're older than me!"

The inferior Togami scowled and threw out his first pokémon, "I know I deserve to be the head of the Togami family, because I'm Serperior to you! You little brat!"

...Really? He picked his pokémon for the sake of a pun?!

“…Rufflet, just… get this idiot out of my sight!” Togami ordered as he summoned his newest pokémon.

The specially bred pokémon squawked eagerly and launched itself at whichever half-brother this one was, easily taking down the Serperior and his ride, at which point he fell out of the sky. To be safely caught, of course. Probably. It wasn't like it mattered. He was only going to have a chance at becoming the family heir if Togami lost a battle, which he hadn't yet, and wasn't going to.

Honestly, you’d think being part of one of the elite pokémon training families, with unlimited access to all the best and newest products for trainers that their company produced, would have bestowed enough competence on his half-siblings to give him some interesting battles at least. But unfortunately, he was just that much better than them.

"Umm... Excuse me?” Togami had Drampa do a quick turn as a voice from behind him caught him
by surprise... Who would be stupid enough to pester him up here? "...Please tell me you're Byakuya Togami and not that other guy!" A distressed looking courier riding a Pelipper asked him with a pleading look in his eyes.

"Of course I am. I was the winner, wasn't I?"

The man muttered something about knowing his luck to himself, before holding a clipboard out... "In that case, I have a letter for you, if you'll just sign this..."

"Rufflet!" Togami gestured for his new pokémon to bring it over... "No, the clipboard Rufflet!" He added, as his pokémon started pecking at the man's hat, "Tell him, Drampa..." He finally had to resort to asking his starter pokémon to communicate to the overenthusiastic bird that he needed the clipboard, not the man's hat turned into nesting material.

He had a look at the board... other than himself, there were 15 other names, some of which he vaguely recognised as good customers and spokespeople... but only around his age. "Hope's Peak are inviting me now?" He complained, "I'd have thought they'd at least have the good manners to wait until I'm no longer engaged in becoming the Togami heir..."

"Does that mean you're not accepting?"

"No, of course I'm accepting. I can do both at the same time." It wasn't as if it was likely for anyone there to beat him in a fight either... "But it's the principle of the matter! A school as high-class as Hope's Peak should have better manners! And, frankly, they ought to have a better dressed courier!"

Tch! He didn't even bother to respond to that before spurring his Pelipper into flight. Some people just couldn't take constructive criticism...

"News just in, another duel between Togami siblings has just taken place! The winner was Byakuya, whose Rufflet was able to..."

"Well, of course it was!" Toko muttered to herself as she wrote. "He's the best trainer in the world..."

Rich, determined, good judgement... A shining bastion of a trainer for the world to look up to... and such a jerk that the whole world wanted to be the one to drag him down to his knees! That was Byakuya Togami, the world's ultimate rival!

And she knew a thing or two about rivals... that special feeling that you got when you looked at someone and knew, deep down inside, that they'd be with you forever, constantly just ahead or behind you in your pokémon journey, constantly interrupting your day just to pick a fight with you, constantly challenging you and not letting you rest for a second because if you did they'd take advantage of it and then they'd have won!

Oh, she knew about rivals alright, she'd written hundreds of stories about pairs of rivals, overcoming their initial fondness for each other and letting their competitiveness take over, until each was a bloodthirsty trainer who wouldn't rest until they reached their utmost potential and could thoroughly destroy their rival's team!

...Even if she had never actually had a rival herself...

But that wasn't her fault! What sort of parents got their daughter a Trubbish as a starter pokémon!? No one at school ever wanted to battle her because of the smell, not even after she’d caught a Scatterbug to fight with instead! Still, she’d show them all! Soon, she’d evolve Scatterbug into a beautiful Vivillion and then everyone would want to battle her, but she wouldn’t because she was
holding out for a good rival, worthy of her time, Like Byakuya To…

‘Ding dong’ Her thoughts of revenge were interrupted by the doorbell… who the heck was visiting her?

“Garbodor, go open the door…” She ordered her older pokémon…

“O-dor…” It agreed, bumbling its way across to the door…

“He…urgh gods!” Whoever it was was quickly overcome by the stench of her pokémon.

“W-well th-that’s what you get for interrupting me while I’m working!” Toko snapped at him, “What do you want?”

“I… Ulp… letter for you…” He retched, “…Needs signing…”

“Alright, give it to Garbodor…” She sighed. A few seconds later her pokémon came back with a clipboard and an envelope, which she looked over… “Hope’s Peak? Why do they want me? I’m a writer…” She scowled.

“I don’t know… ask Kizughkura…” He still wasn’t used to the smell, “But I need that board back…” He added.

“Y-yeah, whatever…” She didn’t see why she should go, but that was no reason to hold this guy up when he needed to visit more people like those bimbos Maizono and Enoshima and… and…

Byakuya Togami

Byakuya Togami? THE Byakuya Togami!? She was getting a chance to go to school with the real Byakuya Togami?

Hehehehe! This was it! This was her chance to finally get the rival of her dreams! He’d encourage her to become the world’s greatest pokémon trainer… and then she’d laugh in his face as she crushed his arrogant smug attitude straight into the ground with her super-powerful team! Would that mean she’d get control of the Togami corporation? Urg… that’d be a pain but…

“Umm… Excuse me? Miss Fukawa?” She was jolted from her fantasy of becoming a high-class business woman by the postman, “Are you alright? You’ve been sat there for a minute without moving…”

“Huh? Oh right!” She signed the board and passed it back to Garbodor to take back to him, which made the guy groan a bit. But what could he expect? She needed to get ready to face her new life as rival to the best pokémon trainer in the world!

Celestia smiled faintly to herself as three sevens obediently lined themselves up on the slot machine and the machine sent out a shower of coins into the pay-out tray. Who’d have guessed she’d have got a jackpot on the first coin she put in? Other than her, of course…

She counted up her winnings… this meant she’d saved enough to buy her Weavile the Hidden Power TM… He needed a move that would help him deal with irritating fighting types, and knowing her luck, hidden power was sure to be either Flying, Psychic or Fairy for him… at least, that’s was she was betting 6000 coins on! So it’d better be true! She was never going to her dream of setting up a gym in a castle full of bow-tie wearing Weavile servants if she wasted good money on useless TMs!
A few minutes later, she’d bought the TM, and had Weavile learn it… but now she needed something to test it on…

“Excuse me? Celestia Ludenberg?” Good lord, what did this scruff-bag want with her? “Ah… s-sorry… it’s just I have a letter to give you, I just need you to sign here…”

Celestia’s nose wrinkled at the disgusting smell emanating from the board… “What did you do, feed this to a Trubbish?” She scowled.

“It was a Garbodor… although it didn’t eat it at least…” He scowled. “Can you just sign it so I can get on my job, please?”

Tch! The nerve of him! Trying to make demands of a lady like her! “Only if you help me with an experiment first…”

“Well… alright…” He agreed.

“Perfect! I need you to get out your pokémon…” She explained, smiling cheerfully.

“Err… okay? Pelipper!” He summoned the bird...

“Good! Weavile, use Hidden Power!” Celestia ordered, pointing at the stupid looking bird.

“Wait… what?!” The scruff-bag cried, just before Weavile summoned eight balls of golden light, which shot towards his target and exploded in a cloud of glitter that coated both the bird and its trainer…

“Argh… what is this!?” The man cried, trying to brush it all off himself, but without much luck…

“Fairy dust. Perfect!” Celestia smiled. She liked it when her luck came through… which was always! “It looks better than the rest of you, at least!”

“I… I guess it’s not the worst thing a pokémon’s hit me with today…” He conceded. “Was that all you needed?” He asked, holding out his disgusting clipboard again.

“Yes, that will be all…” She relented, holding the pen as far away from her as she could as she signed it, and was given a (thankfully clean) letter in return, which she opened idly…

An invitation to Hope’s Peak? Interesting… as refined as she was, she wasn’t an especially interesting trainer, other than her her luck inside game corners… but why would a school for trainers be interested in that?

Well, no matter. It was an opportunity. Everyone always said Hope’s Peak had all sorts of benefits to bestow upon its students, and she wasn’t one to turn down a free lunch…

“One Pelipper detected.”

“Thank you Alter Ego.” Chihiro muttered, carrying on tinkering with their code. They weren’t concerned about birds, and there shouldn’t be any reason for next door’s Stoutland to…

“STOUT, STOUT, STOUT!!” Chihiro flinched as next door’s Stoutland did go into a barking frenzy, and they could hear the frantic cries of a man who must be trying to run away from it.

“It’s fine, it can’t get in here, it’s fine, it can’t get in here…” Chihiro reminded themselves until they calmed down. They really wished they could get over their fear of dogs, but ever since that horrible
thing next door had got out of its owner’s control and attacked them when they were five, even the sound of barking had terrified them…

Even after Chihiro’s father had got them a Golett to protect them, they were still too freaked out by dogs to give orders to it in fights with them… which meant every kid at school had discovered Chihiro’s fear and teased them about it, telling them it was safe to go into patches of grass with Houndooms in or hiding dog-like pokémon in pokéballs and then releasing them to scare them.

It was why Chihiro had started developing additions to his father pokédex software, that would allow the machines to scan for nearby pokémon in a larger radius, and also to check which pokémon were inside of people’s pokéballs. Their father had been really impressed with it, which had surprised them. They’d just done it just for themself, but apparently trainers were interested in anything that could tell them if a rare pokémon was in the area, and people who owned dangerous pokémon but lied about them were becoming a big security issue, so there’d been talk of selling the software to various companies, who’d also looked at some of their other projects and taken an interest in their attempts to make the OS of the pokédex a little more intelligent…

So now they had a job programming pokédex software! Not bad for a kid who was only just about to go to highschool…

“Chihiro?” They heard their father knock on the door, “You’ve got a letter you need to sign for!”

Hmm, it’d probably just be those documents about the entirely new sort of pokédex software they’d been told was being developed in Alola… “Okay, coming!” They finished their line of code and went to the entry room.

Well, it was obvious what the Stoutland had been barking at now… their visitor was too busy examining the hole in the backside of his trousers, and accidentally shaking pieces of glitter onto the carpet as he did so, to have noticed Chihiro coming downstairs.

“Umm… Excuse me? You have some information for me?” Chihiro coughed to get his attention…

“Huh? Oh! Sorry, I didn’t hear you!” He jumped and straightened up, trying to hide the damage, “And it’s a letter from Hope’s Peak.” He added.

“Hope’s Peak are giving me the documents?” Chihiro frowned, they’d heard that there was a spy attending the school, but they didn’t think it was involved in corporate espionage…

“Well… it’s an invitation to Hope’s Peak, so…”

“Huh? An invitation? For me!??” Chihiro gasped, “Umm… are you sure you’re at the right house?”

“Uhh… you are Chihiro Fujisaki, right?” The man held out a clipboard with their name on it, along with good trainers like Byakuya Togami and Leon Kuwata…

“Well… yes…” Chihiro agreed, signing their name, “I… I’m just not sure what they want with me… All I do is make pokédex software…”

“Well, that’s probably why then, they usually like to have one tech-savvy person in the class to help the other trainers!” The postman replied as he handed over the letter.

So they’d only be there as tech-support for the other students? That made sense… and maybe there’d be someone there who could help them get over their fear of dogs… As long as they didn’t end up telling everyone about it and getting teased again…
“Target?” Mukuro asked another soldier as they headed to the meeting point.

“It’s a Rhyhorn that’s been worrying the local village for weeks.”

“Any attacks on humans?”

“One… it charged at some kids… but we’re pretty sure it was provoked.”

“Sounds like normal Rhyhorn behaviour.” Mukuro summarised, “I’m assuming it’s the usual protocol?”

“Yes… antagonise it, lure it through webbing to slow it and into the cage…” Her fellow soldier agreed. “You’ll be the bait… if you’re up to it.”

“Affirmative.” She answered. Why wouldn’t she be up to it? They dealt with Rhyhorns at least once a month. They were one of Fenrir’s specialities…

Soon enough, they found the target, it behaved as usual for a Pokémon of it’s kind, perfectly content to be left alone to graze. If it weren’t for the fact that it had ended up on the outskirts of a village that was trying to expand, it would have lived happily in solitude until a strong trainer came along to capture it.

But, unfortunately, it had ended up of the outskirts of a village that was trying to expand, and some weak kids had probably tried to capture it and got attacked instead… and there were no trainers nearby who were interested in trying to capture a Rhyhorn, so Fenrir had been called in instead.

They were an elite group of soldiers, trained in dealing with wild Pokémon that were too strong for local trainers to handle; whether it was a Rhyhorn that had charged into inconvenient places, swarms of Scyther or Beedrill that picked the wrong territory to defend, or a rogue Steelix that needed concussive fire to take down, Fenrir could be relied upon to round them up and relocate them to a more sensible place, like the nearest Safari zone, or a more remote cave or patch of tall grass where they could be left in peace to wait for a trainer to catch them.

It was the perfect place for someone who was able to fight, but completely unable to train Pokémon… and as Junko had told her so many times, she really was useless at training Pokémon! It had been years since she’d seen her sister, and still the only thing her Comfey was good for was to be worn as an accessory, just as Junko had said it would be when she’d told Mukuro never to make it fight anything…

She patted the Pokémon currently draped around her neck, just to make sure it was still alright, before looking over the area… The others had set up the patch of webbing to slow the Rhyhorn down, followed by the thick steel cage she’d be luring it into. All was set up as usual, and had apparently been done without disturbing the target. Honestly, if those stupid kids hadn’t pestered it, it would’ve been fine. It’d be much better off in the Safari zone…

With that in mind, she positioned herself between the webbing and the Pokémon, and walked towards it, her fellow soldiers readying guns and tranquillisers in case anything went wrong with the plan.

It didn’t, Mukuro walked over to it, on purposefully being loud and threatening in order to get it to charge her, which it did. At which point she quickly switch direction, getting enough of a run up to jump over the webbing, which slowed the Rhyhorn down just enough to give her time to scramble up the side of the cage and stop it from being able to smash straight through it when it charged inside and two of her fellow Fenrir members moved forwards to shut it in there.
“Good work, Ikusaba.” Her senior officer commented, “Let’s move this guy out!”

“Wait… Ikusaba!”

There was a moment of confusion among the ranks as a civilian, a rather war-torn looking civilian riding a Pelipper, but still a civilian, called out from the air above them. “Hold on a minute, please!”

She looked over to her superior, who shrugged and let him land… which he did and then proceeded to step right into the patch of webbing…

“Hello, Muku… What the…? Arg!” He cried in dismay as he realised what he’d done and struggled to free himself… “What is this?”

“Caterpie webbing.” Mukuro explained, as she pulled him out of it, “State your purpose with me.”

“Uhh… I’m delivering an invitational letter from Hope’s Peak!”

Hope’s Peak? The school for all the best pokémon trainers? “But I’m a useless trainer…” Mukuro told him, “Why would I go to a school for them?”

“Oh! Well… your sister said not to worry, because she’ll be there to look after you!” He told her.

“My sister? Junko’s going?” Mukuro asked.

“Yes! See!” The civilian pointed to her name on the list…

“Oh… well… I guess if she said I’d be okay…” After all, her sister and she knew each other better than anyone…

Sakura meditated, paying no mind to the trainer currently battling their way through her gym, or the feeling of the cherry blossoms from Florges’ trees floating gently through the air and landing on her. At least, until the trainer made his way into her area, the last before he faced her father, and pushed his way through the cherry trees surrounding her…

“Greetings trainer.” He’d made it this far, he deserved a welcome, if nothing else. “Which badge will this be for you?”

“My first.” He trembled under her gaze. She was probably coming off as too stern again… It was always hard to judge exactly how intimidating a Gym should be…

“Very well…” She nodded, summoning the Snorunt she’d caught whilst scaling Mount Lanakila. It was a pity. She rarely had challengers at their remote gym, and had been hoping Florges would be able to compete this time, but her original pokémon was far too strong to send out against a trainer with no badges. Really, even the Snorunt was a little too strong, and she had to order it to hold back several times in order to give the child a fair chance for his badge.

He did manage to defeat it, and carried on through to beat her father, judging from the way he walked out proudly… Once he was gone, Sakura sighed deeply.

“What’s troubling you?” Her father asked, having heard her from outside the circle of trees.

“I feel as if I’m stagnating.” She answered, simply.

“…Ah.” Was his only reply. He knew what she meant, but likely didn’t want to delve into it.
Finding battles at her level of expertise had rarely been a problem before… she’d had her rival, Kenshiro, and his haphazard and yet still incredibly effective training regime to thank for that. His Machamp had always been just a few steps ahead of her Florges, since before she could remember, and they’d always grown stronger together.

But now he had another battle to fight, one that left him too pallid and sick to strengthen even his Pokémon with her, let alone spar with her personally.

“Perhaps… some time away from the gym would help… somewhere with stronger trainers…” Her father suggested.

“Hmm…” If there was such a place, it would help, but the issue was finding somewhere with trainers who would also improve at the same rate as her… “I will meditate on the matter…”

“Ah… excuse me?” There was an unfamiliar voice from outside the trees, and soon a man came through them, stumbling awkwardly due to some sticky substance on his ankles, which were now getting coated with the cherry blossoms that coated the ground. “I’m looking for Sakura Oogami?”

“I am she. Greetings.” Sakura answered, “Do you have need of my assistance?” He certainly looked as though he was in distress…

“No… I just need you to sign for a letter…” He answered, holding out a clipboard, which seemed to make her father look uncomfortable…

“…Very well.” She answered, signed the correct line and handing it back, in exchange for a letter… with a symbols she’d heard tell of before…

“Hope’s Peak?” She asked, “I thought you need to be recommended by a gym… leader…”

Her father turned his gaze away from her. Well, no wonder he’d wanted her to consider travelling.

“I see… Thank you.” She finished, which made her father relax somewhat. He may not have felt comfortable meddling in her affairs, but he had given her a solution to her current problem. Somewhere like Hope’s Peak would tide her Pokémon over until her rival recovered…

“Umm, Makoto…? Why are you now Battle Net friends with some crappy 1-star trainer?” Komaru asked from behind the family computer.

“What? All my friends are at least three stars!” And that three star person was Komaru so she could hardly talk! “Who are you looking at?”

“This Ishimaru guy…”

“The heck? Did I accidentally click the wrong rating in my review?” Makoto pulled up Battle net on his laptop to check…

Nope, he’d definitely given five stars… but then a ton of idiots had given him one star and complained he was overpowered…

“Tch… jealous idiots…” Makoto sighed, as he started reporting the unfair reviews… “This Rattata I just caught didn’t beat the Growlithe he’s been training for three years, he must be cheating!” He summarised most of the reviews. “Oh well… they’ll just look like even bigger idiots when it gets out that he’d going to Hope’s Peak…”
“Wha…? Have they announced this year’s intake already?” Komaru quickly switched tabs to check the news.

“No… I just happened to spot the recruiter testing him when I went down that wrong route yesterday… even *he* doesn’t know he’s going yet!”

“Really? You have the *weirdest* luck!” Komaru complained, “I’m going to add him before everyone else finds out and does the same… Then I can say I’m friends with a Hope’s Peak student!”

…That might not be the closest relationship she had to one… But maybe it was best not to get her hopes up…

“MAKOTO! Someone’s at the door for you!” His father shouted worriedly through the house.

Hmm… He wasn’t expecting any friends to come around today… Could this really be it?

He went to the front door, with Komaru poking her head around the door in curiosity…

It… well, the man there looked like he *had* been wearing a courier’s uniform, once… But it was hard to tell with it ripped up and covered in dirt, singes, sticky cherry petals and various other stains.

“Makoto Naegi?” He checked, “I’ve got a letter for you, I need you to sign here…” He held out the form as far away from him as possible… as if expecting Makoto to explode on contact or something.

“Okay?” Makoto took the clipboard and signed it, looking over the list of names, a few of which he recognised, including Ishimaru… “…Do you work for Hope’s Peak?”

 (“Why would someone from *Hope’s Peak* have a letter for you…?”)

“No after today, I don’t!” The mailman complained.

 (“Wait… That letter’s from *Hope’s Peak!*?”)

 “’Oh, just deliver a few letters, it’ll be easy!’, right…!”

 (“MOM! Get the camera!”)

 “NOPE! I’ve had clumps of Sandyghast dumped on my *hair*…”

 (“…You got a letter from *Hope’s Peak!*?”)

 “My sleeve got set on *fire*…”

 (“Why? What are you doing!??”)

 “Some *idiot* dumped beer on me and *my* autograph from Sayaka Maizono!” *Wait, did he say SAYAKA!?*

 (“Makoto’s getting a letter from *Hope’s Peak!*”)

 “I’ve had a Teddiursa try to *eat me*…!”

 (“But I thought they only sent those to their students?”) 

 “…Had to race a biker for an hour and then his stupid mutt tried to *kill* me…”

 (“Geez! That’s the POINT, Mom!”)
“Got used as bait in a trap for Team Rocket…!”
(“Makoto’s going to HOPE’S PEAK!?”)

“Fell into the sea…!”
(“Yes!”)

“Got slobbered on by an Arcanine…!”
(“We should take a picture of him getting the letter!”)

“Had ink thrown all over my sleeve…”
(“Ya THINK!? That’s why I said to get the camera!”)

“A Rufflet shredded my hat…!”
(“Makoto’s going to Hope’s Peak…”)

“My clipboard still smells of Garbodor…”
(“Dad, you’ve said that about five times now…”)

“And I’m pretty sure this glitter will be stuck to my clothes forever…!”
(“Okay! I’ve got the camera! Should… should I just take one with him and postman?”)

“A Stoutland’s still got the seat of my pants…”
(“I dunno… he’s kind of mess…”)

“And the only reason my legs aren’t stuck together from this stupid webbing…”
(“We should take one with all of us!”)

“Is because they’re coated in petals!” He finished, panting irritably after his rant.

(But who’s going to take it?)

Wow… sounded like Hope’s Peak’s newest class were a pretty odd-ball bunch, to put him through all of that. “Uhh… well, sounds like you’ve had a rough day! Let me just sign this and then you can be on your way…” He handed

(“Wait… What if we get him to take it?”)

“Thanks… here you go kid.” The postman handed over an envelope with Hope’s Peak’s logo emblazoned on it… It felt weirdly heavy, like it was much more than just a simple school invitation… “Glad that’s finally over…” He added, muttering.

“WAIT! Before you go…” Makoto’s mother cried, whilst holding out a camera “Would you mind taking a picture of us all?”

“Err… a-alright.” He said, gingerly taking the camera, while Makoto’s parents stood behind him with their arms on his shoulders and Komaru stood beside him and made him hold the envelope up so she could point excitedly at it…
“Ah-hahaha…” Makoto laughed in embarrassment as the picture was taken. He’d just been in the right place at the right time…

But, when the man turned the camera around to show him the picture, all three of his family looked so proud you’d think he was holding the champion’s belt…

“It’s a good picture… thanks…” Makoto muttered.

“Yeah… it’s nice delivering good news…” The man smiled, “Maybe this job isn’t so bad…” He added, before summoning a Pelipper and flying away…

“‘You’re going to Hope’s Peak…’” His father muttered, still not sounding as if he believed it.

“How did you manage that?” His mother asked.

“Was it because you met the recruiter!?” Komaru asked, “Did you do something to impress him?”

“Umm… well…” Makoto scratched his head awkwardly, “We got talking for a bit because… I kinda called Professor Oak a lying jerkface?” He admitted, grinning sheepishly…

“YOU DID WHAT!?” His whole family exclaimed in dismay…

Oh boy… when he put it like that, it seemed kind of crazy for him to be going there… But there was no way he could turn down an opportunity like this!

But, either way, his pokémon training journey was certainly going to be an interesting one…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Mukuro Ikusaba arrives at her new school and meets most of her new classmates... and their worryingly strong Pokémon.

This is just the first part of Class 78's introductions to the school and each other. I made up a Gym location for Sakura, as I didn't want to erase the existence of any other Gym leaders in the game. PokeMills is supposed to be a play on the phrase 'Puppy Mills' which references the poor treatment many mass bred dogs are put in to meet the demand for paying customers.

Mukuro walked through the gates of her new school at 0655 hours, briefly looking around to see if Junko or any obvious threats were anywhere to be seen, and made her way through the halls to the assembly point she had been informed of by letter. The school halls were empty (odd, given there were supposed to be another 15 students entering and she was on track to enter the room at exactly the beginning of the induction period) but her Comfey was still jittering about anxiously against her neck. It must have been able to sense the large number of powerful Pokémon that were probably inhabiting Hope's Peak…

"Don't worry… I'm not going to let you get into any battles…" She murmured to calm it down. If people wanted to battle her Pokémon, they'd have to go through her first!

"Com-feyey…" It didn't sound quite convinced, but stopped rustling around as she headed towards the school gym…

"Greetings! I am Kiyotaka Ishimaru, and this is my Arcanine! I look forward to having many interesting battles with you as we train our Pokémon together!" It sounded as if a pair of students had arrived early and were introducing themselves… But an Arcanine? Against her Comfey? Perhaps she should wait out here for Junko, if she wasn’t the other student this Ishimaru guy was talking to… She waited to hear the other trainer’s response…

"…What do you think? Was that a bit too forward…?" Ishimaru spoke again…

"Nine!" A loud growl came from the room, and Comfey started to tremble again…

"You’re sure? It sounds alright?" Ishimaru sounded nervous, “I don’t want to come off as desperate… And some of the other trainers are more fashion and sport… maybe I should drop the bit about battles?"

“…Arc?” The dog sounded as if it didn’t think it was a big problem…
Mukuro stood against the wall and cautiously stuck her head around the doorframe to see what was actually going on in the room… There was only one trainer, dressed somewhat like a team rocket grunt, but with a fancier uniform and no R on the chest, who was pacing up and down the room while a large, neatly brushed Arcanine sat perfectly still on the floor and turned its head back and forward to watch him walk… It was certainly a well-trained pokémon…

“Perhaps I should just say ‘learning’! Or improving! That’s better! ‘Greetings! I am Kiyotaka Ishimaru, and this is my Arcanine! I look forward to improving my pokémon alongside you!’… Yes! That’s better, I’ll say that!” Ishimaru nodded, although he still looked grim, “So now I sound alright…”

Hmm… Should she be practising what to say to her new classmates? She usually went with ‘Ikusaba, Fenrir, touch Comfey and you die.’ But maybe that was a little too militaristic for her new environment…

“…My name is Mukuro Ikusaba, I’m a member of Fenrir, I’m not interested in pokémon battles…” She practised quietly…

“Like, Oh Mi Gawd, Muku! It’s you!” Ah! That was Junko’s voice! “But, what are doing!? You can’t practise introducing yourself! Only total losers do that!”

“Ah! Junko! I’m lucky you told me!” Mukuro told her, turning away from the door to look at her sister… and gasped slightly at the huge and beautiful pink serpent she had following her…

“Well, sisters gotta look after each other! Even if you’re the big sister and should be looking after me!” Junko sighed at her, “But, I suppose that’s what happens when you go live with dogs for years… Do all of them practise their introductions as well?”

“No… it was just that guy in there was…” Mukuro pointed to the doorway…

Junko pushed Mukuro to the other side of the doorway so she could peep inside at Ishimaru herself, who stopped moving and was now peering at his reflection in the window and trimming his already short hair…

“Tch… Now I’ve made this side look too short!” He grimaced and switched the side he was trimming…

“Pfft! He’s so worries about how he looks, he’s gonna cut all his hair off and make himself look terrible!” Junko laughed… And she was usually right about this sort of thing, especially as Ishimaru was still scowling at his own appearance…

“Why do I have such terrible hair…?”

“Arc!” Mukuro quickly shot back up straight so she’d be hidden by the door…

“Ah… what is it Arcanine?” She could hear his boots stomping across the hall again.

“Arcare!”

“You want something from your bag?” Mukuro noticed that Junko was still looking through the doorway, so peered around the corner to see that Ishimaru and his Arcanine were both paying too much attention to the satchel he was wearing to notice them, “What is it?”

“Arc… arc… ARC!” The dog stuck its nose in the bag before coming out with…
“Your hairbrush? Again!?” Ishimaru exclaimed, “No, Arcanine, you look fine! I said it was my hair that was terrible!” He laughed, before heading back over to the window…

“Niiine!” Ishimaru faltered a little as his dog whimpered pitifully at him, “Arc-aniiiiiiiiiiiiiiinnnnnmeee…”

“Haahh…” Ishimaru stopped and sighed heavily, “Alright, but just one more brushing and then you let me groom myself, alright?” He tried sounding tough, but it also sounded like he’d probably said it several times already…

“Urg, well that’s boring!” Junko complained, quietly “Stupid loving pokémon, knowing how to make its owner quit worrying and being happy…”

Brushing his Arcanine did indeed seem to be making Ishimaru less anxious, even as he missed the real reason his pokémon had asked him to do it… “Honestly, if you’re that worried about how your fur looks, maybe we should get you some pretty ribbons to tie it up with…”

“Ooohhh… now that I can have some fun with!” Junko cooed quietly before grabbing Mukuro’s wrist and dragging her into the room, “Did someone say ribbons!?"

“Err…!” Ishimaru looked up at Junko like a Deerling caught in headlights.

“Ohmigawd! Your doggy would totally look adorable in ribbons!” Junko carried on as if he wasn’t petrified of her, ‘I’m so glad to find someone who gets accessories! I was worried the only other talent person would be Maizono and there wouldn’t be anyone here I could be friends with!”

“Ah… well… I would like to learn everything I can about pokémon competitions…” Ishimaru looked completely relieved by Junko’s lie, probably why she’d told it in the first place. “If you think he’d look good in ribbons, I’ll buy some and…”

“No need! Got some here!” Junko rummaged around in her accessory case and pulled out some black ribbons, “Just keep him still and I’ll have him all fixed up in a jiffy!” She added, snatching Ishimaru’s brush out of his hand.

“Ngh… Alright?” Ishimaru stepped back and held his finger in front of the dog’s face… “Arcanine, stay…”

“Arc.” It barked softly and almost went cross-eyed as it stared at the finger calmly… at least, until Junko started tightly tying and pulling the ribbons into plaits… “Nnnn! Niiine!”

“Err… I think you’re hurting him!” Ishimaru exclaimed, “Not so tight, please!”

“But it’d look sloppy if I did that!” Junko shrugged and pulled tighter, making the dog howl.

“Th-then forget I mentioned them!” Ishimaru stammered, trying to block her hands, “Perhaps a different accessory! A comfortable one!”

“Well, fashion isn’t ‘comfortable’!” Junko sighed and pulled tighter, “If you’re serious about joining talent competitions, you’ve gotta…”

“STOP HURTING HIM!” Ishimaru leant forward to try and push Junko over… except Mukuro saw that coming a mile away and grabbed him before he got anywhere near her sister… “Let me go! She’s…”
“Huh!? What’s your problem? I was just trying to help!” Junko whined? Why was she doing that?
“You were the one who suggested ribbons!”

“I just…”

“Dude! What the hell, man!? Were you attacking a pair of babes?” Ah… That was why Junko had been pretending to be upset… another couple of students had come through the door, a messy redhead with a Luxray who was currently yelling at and approaching Ishimaru and a very short trainer in a green skirt who was failing to hide behind a Golett and staring at the dog on the floor…

“Comfey!” Comfey started trembling… it must have been getting scared at the number of pokémon in the room, and the increased tension…

“He’s not angry at us…” Mukuro shushed it.

“She was hurting Arcanine!” Ishimaru shouted and tried to move his arm towards her sister, “And she didn’t listen when I told her to stop!”

“I was just putting in some ribbons…” Junko moped innocently, “Right, Muku?”

“Right.” Mukuro agreed.

“But you were putting them in so tight they were pulling at his fur!” Ishimaru snapped.

“Dude, c’mon! That’s Junko Enoshima!” The redhead seemed to know her sister, “She the queen of accessories! You think someone like that is gonna tie up ribbons wrong?”

“That sounds exactly like something Enoshima would do!” Junko scowled at the sound of a girl’s voice from the doorway… Ah… it was that blue-haired girl with the Brionne that Junko always argued with on television…

“Err…” The redhead seemed to be willing to listen to her, if not Ishimaru… “Really?”

“Yes, really! Just look at the poor thing!” The singer cried as she came over, “It’s sat there whimpering!”

“Well, no pain, no gain!” Junko shrugged, “It’s not my fault it’s such a wimp it can’t even wear accessories properly!”

“It can wear accessories that don’t hurt it…” Junko’s rival sniped.

“Ah… such as?” Ishimaru asked, continuing to try and break free of Mukuro’s grip.

“Hmm… well…” She started digging through an accessory case of her own, “There’s always the old tradition for an Arcanine… A police hat!” She brought one out with a flourish…

“AARRRRCCCCCC…” A reason that became apparent as soon as the dog saw it and started snarling at the item, slowly backing away from it, as if it expected the hat to hurt it somehow…

*snap* “Arcanine! It’s just a costume! You’re still my pokémon!” Ishimaru was failing to signal his worried pet, so turned to look at the surprised singer instead. “Ah… please put that away!”

“Ah… right!” She snapped out of her shock and put the hat back in its case…
“CCCCCCC-canine?” It stopped snarling and wheeled around in a confused circle, running back towards its trainer… Who Mukuro decided to let go of. She was *not* antagonising a *fire* type while she was wearing Comfey. It’d gone completely still when the dog started growling, poor thing must be scared stiff…

“Thank you!” Ishimaru breathed a sigh of relief, before hugging the dog for a moment. “…My apologies… I suppose Arcanine and I aren’t cut out for the world of talent shows…” He said to the group, afterwards.

“Fuck *that!* That things not cut out for fucking *society!*” The redhead yelled at him, “What the fuck is a Team Rocket grunt doing here!?"

“Wha… I don’t work for *Team Rocket!*” Ishimaru cried, “I realise my old school's uniform bears an unfortunate resemblance, but…”

“Then why the hell would you train your dog to hate the *cops!*?”

“I didn’t do that!” Ishimaru snapped, as if it was obvious, “I don’t exactly know the details, but my father said he was mistreated by one of his colleagues in the force, and that’s why he’s scared of being put in a police hat…”

“…A *policeman* mistreated their own *pokemon*?” The blue haired girl sounded sceptical…

“That totally sounds like an excuse…” Junko agreed, which made the other girl look as if she now didn’t…

“Internal discipline report 13247: August 31st: Officer Ishimaru caught punching a fellow Officer. Claimed he was defending the victim’s assigned Growlithe from abuse…” The calm voice of a girl with long purple hair, followed by a Kadabera intoned, as if reading a book. “Suggest immediate termination of Ishimaru for violence and besmirching honour of another member of the force…”

“Hah! So your old man’s a liar!” The red head cried.

“But he *wasn’t* fired!” Ishimaru insisted, “And that was the day I was given Growlithe, and I had to spend weeks convincing him not to be scared of every person he met, and to eat sensibly and get into his pokéball when needed…” Ishimaru looked down at his dog with concern and started trying to figure out the mess of knots Junko had made.

“But there weren’t any *other* Officers fired from your father’s precinct either…” The girl shrugged, “Even though pokémon abuse is a crime…”

“I don’t know why that is… Whenever I’ve asked my father about it, he just says it’s not important anymore, and I should focus on looking after Arcanine *now*.” Ishimaru admitted, “How do you know so much about it?”

“Ah, of course. I didn’t introduce myself… I’m Kyoko Kirigiri, I occasionally work alongside the police force and have access to its records as a result.” She shrugged, “I thought it would be worth checking if any of my new class had criminal records…”

“And *do* they?” Junko asked.

“Of course they wouldn’t! This is an elite school! It’s not going to accept criminals!” Ishimaru snapped.

“Not major ones, anyway.” Kirigiri shrugged, “And I suggest you start with *that* one.” She added,
pointing to one of the ribbons in the Arcanine’s back…

Ishimaru looked sceptical but took her advice and soon started to slowly and gently make headway into the mess…

“…So, I obviously know you three Kuwata, Maziono, Enoshima…” Kirigiri nodded to the red head, blue head and her sister in turn, “But I wasn’t able to find any information on you…” She looked at Mukuro with icy eyes.

“Ikusaba, Fenrir, touch Comfey and you die.” She said instinctively.

“…Okay then.” Kuwata gulped, his hand creeping down to check a second pokéball on his belt, which had been covered with masking tape.

“I thought Fenrir didn’t train their own pokémon…” Maizono was also looking at her worriedly.

“We don’t.”

“How did you get accepted into Hope’s Peak then?” Kirigiri asked.

“I don’t know.” Mukuro admitted.

“Probably ‘cause you’ve got an awesome big sister like meee!” Junko suggested. “I mean, I did try to warn them about this Mukuro being so big…” She pointed to her pokémon, wait… she’d named that after her? “Maybe they didn’t get what I meant and thought I wanted you to come as well?”

“Hmm…” Kirigiri frowned at them both.

“But, anyway, you girls are pretty big on the talent scene, right?” Kuwata started asking Junko and Maizono for tips on getting into talent contests himself, which confused everyone else because apparently he was supposed to be a sports trainer…

“Yeah, but I won all the sports already, so now I’m gonna find something else to win at!” Kuwata shrugged when asked about it, which both Ishimaru and Maizono scowled at...

They didn’t get the chance to say anything before a group of three trainers walked through the door. A large muscular women with a Florges, a sporty-looking girl with too much pent up energy and a Marill and Glaceon and finally the small Golett trainer from earlier, who was following behind the other two and still looking at Ishimaru’s Arcanine… And Comfey was starting to tremble again, at least it was no longer paralysed…

“While it is good to pursue new paths of growth, you may find others catch up to you faster than you expect if you allow yourself to stray too far…” The larger women warned Kuwata.

“Yeah! ‘Cause my Marill and Vaporeon can both beat your Luxray’s swimming time already!” The sporty girl told him, “And now I’m here I’m gonna be able to try out all the other Pokéathlon stuff to!”

“Huh…” Kuwata looked impressed by her, “Well, if you want, maybe I can give you some tips…” He grinned, “A little one-on-one coaching?”

“That sounds great!” The girl smiled.

“Ah… Arcanine is pretty good on the running track as well!” Ishimaru told Kuwata hopefully, “I’m hoping to…’
“Whatever dude…” Kuwata waved dismissively at him before walking towards the other group, “So, who are you girls?”

“Sakura Oogami, of the Mount Dendemille Gym.” The large woman said calmly.

“And I’m Aoi Asahina! Uhh… I work for the Kanto coastal guard?” The Sporty girl cringed a little at her less impressive job.

“And what about you in the back there?” Junko asked.

“Huh!?” The third trainer stopped staring at the dog and faced Junko, “Ah… I’m Chihiro Fujisaki… I write Pokédex software!”

“So you’re the reason mine keeps wanting to update every time I turn in on!” Kuwata rolled his eyes.

“Umm… I… I suppose?” Fujisaki’s lip started wobbling, “Is it that much of a problem? I thought the updates were useful… And they’re not supposed to be daily…”

“They’re not if you actually let the Pokédex run them!” Asahina glared at Kuwata.

“And they do tend to be useful…” Oogami agreed, “Our gyms members often take the trip to Dendemille Town specifically to download the latest update…”

“Uhh… Yeah! I was just kidding!” Kuwata hastily apologised, “I didn’t mean it!”

“Ah… you didn’t? That’s good… I don’t want to be bother…” Fujisaki breathed a sigh of relief, “Umm… so what do all of you guys do?”

“What!? You meant to say don’t recognise Junko Enoshima? Accessory Queen…” Junko waved at the glittering accessories her Milotic was wearing, “…and winner of the Lilycove City Pokémon Contest Spectacular!?”

“Joint winner, remember!” Maizono snapped at her, and they both glared at each other for a moment before Maizono continued, “I’m Sayaka Maizono. I train my pokémon to do performances, like this!” She twirled her finger around a few times, and her Brionne twirled around as well, finishing with a little pose…

“I’m Leon Kuwata, my Luxray’s the Pokéathlon champ, if you didn’t hear me say it before.” Kuwata shrugged, as his pokémon licked it’s paw smugly.

The was a brief moment of silence as Kirigiri didn’t seem inclined to speak, and Ishimaru was focusing on the last of the ribbons… “I’m Mukuro Ikusaba, I’m a member of Fenrir.” She told them, which resulted in the same confused looks as before, but they quickly turned their attention to Kirigiri instead…

She glanced briefly at Ishimaru, before resigning herself to an introduction. “Kyoko Kirirgiri, freelance detective…”

“Ooohh! That sound pretty cool!” Asahina and both of her pokémon looked at Kirigiri excitedly.

“It’s nothing special, mostly just chasing around Team Rocket and teleporting them into jail…” Kirigiri said, patting her Kadabra.

“But that sounds incredibly important!” Ishimaru insisted, having managed to get the last ribbon out of his Arcanine. “You should…”
“What about you?” Kirigiri cut him off, “What’s your job?”

“Err… Well, I had a part time job in the local Poké Mart once, but I got let go when they had to cut hours…” Ishimaru admitted embarrassedly.

“So is that why you joined Team Rocket?” Kuwata asked.

“I’m not a member of Team Rocket!” Ishimaru snapped, “I told you, this is just my school’s uniform…”

“…Perhaps I should have said ‘What did you do that got you accepted into Hope’s Peak’…” Kirigiri suggested wearily.

“OH!” Ishimaru seemed genuinely surprised that that was the question Kirigiri had been intending for him to answer, “Well, in the acceptance letter they said it was because of my contributions to the pokédex research initiative…”

“What’s so special about that? Anyone with a pokédex can do that!” Kuwata shrugged.

“They could… But the impression I get is that none of them do, at least not to the extent I do.” Ishimaru admitted, “But I…”

“So you own a lot of pokémon to record all the time?” Asahina asked.

“No… I only have Arcanine. Most of my recordings are of pokémon I find in the wild… But apparently that has more use than recording trained pokémon, because not many other people do it!” Ishimaru explained brightly, “For example, I’ve managed to record enough wild Kakunas and Metapods evolving that they could extrapolate that there’s a significant difference in evolution speed between wild and trained pokémon that can’t just be put down to the increased number of battles that trained pokémon encounter!”

Huh… that might explain something that had been puzzling her superiors… why there were less strong pokémon in the wild then they’d have expected based on how quickly they usually evolved according to the data… She’d have to pass that back to them…

“Still sounds like you oughta just be working in a lab, not here…” Kuwata said suspiciously, “I mean, you don’t actually know anything about training pokémon, do you?”

“No, that’s wrong!” Several of the group jumped at the sound of a boy’s voice coming dramatically from the doorway, “Err.. I mean… Kiyotaka’s written a ton of guides about looking after different types of pokémon as well…” He added, more quietly…

He was odd… Not because he was out of the ordinary, but because in this crowd of people he seemed to be the only one who Mukuro would have thought of as ordinary, with brown, slightly messy, hair and brown eyes to match, wearing simple casual clothes… Although the Togepi currently riding in his hood was interesting… and Comfey was trembling even more at the sight of it. He must be more powerful than he looked…

“Ah, Makoto! Glad to see you arrived safely!” Ishimaru seemed to know him, “But you should really have tried to get here earlier, even if we do technically have until half past to…”

“Haha! It is you!” Maizono also seemed to know the boy, “How’s your Squirtle!?”

“Ah… you remember that!?” ‘Makoto’ blushed, “I mean… He’s a Blaistoise now… I can show you…”
“For the last time, I am not wasting my time battling some also-ran with naught but a poorly-bred Scatterbug!” He was interrupted by a snobby sounding boy in a suit stalking through the door alongside a Drampa, followed by a girl wearing a drab brown dress and glasses with a Scatterbug on her shoulder… and now Comfey was getting even more agitated…

“I have another pokémon! A stronger one!” She told him, furiously. “And it’s going to c-crush you one day!”

“Hah! I doubt it! It’s probably as poorly bred as you!” The rich-boy smirked.

“There’s no such thing as a poorly bred pokémon!” Ishimaru snapped at him, “Just poor trainers who don’t know how to make the best of their unique pokémon’s abilities!”

“W-what? He’s Byakuya Togami! You can’t call him a poor trainer!” The girl Togami had just been insulting told him, “Haven’t you heard of the Togami Corporation!?”

“Yes! I have! And I’ve heard of their PokéMills as well!” Ishimaru scowled.

“That is not what we call our breeding facilities!” Togami glared at him.

“But your family does continually breed and discard pokémon until you get what you consider to be a ‘perfect’ specimen, correct?” Ishimaru scowled.

“Any… less optimal pokémon are sold on to less strategic trainers!” Togami told him, “Not ‘discarded’!”

“But there have been numerous reports about the state your pokémon are kept in…!”

“Jealous fabrications!” Togami insisted, “And besides, what would you have me do? Just take the first pokémon I find and enhance it… Ishimaru?”

“No.” Ishimaru’s face darkened, “I am not my grandfather! I intend to put the effort into improving my team as much as possible without such techniques, even if they don’t happen to have the best start in life! And once I’m done I’m going show you that there’s no need for your mass-breeding by crushing your team!”

“No you will not!” The girl with the Scatterbug cried, “I’m going to be his rival!”

Honestly… Trainers and their obsession with rivals…

Togami just looked insulted by the idea, “Good lord, no you are…”

 “…I’m rather surprised you don’t have one already…” He was interrupted by a posh sounding girl who walked through the door in an impractical frilly dress and high heels, who had the most ridiculous hair Mukuro had ever seen… how did she go anywhere without those giant drills getting caught in something and pulled out of her hair? Unless that Weavile she had carrying her case made sure they didn’t…

“Wh-what’s that supposed to mean!?”

“Well… you’re Toko Fukawa, aren’t you?” The new girl checked, “You write all those stories about rivalries… I would have expected you to have one already! But I guess people aren’t always what they might seem to be?”

“D-does that mean you’re not some ridiculous goth princess?” Fukawa asked sarcastically.
The ‘ridiculous goth princess’ looked extremely angry for the barest moment, before lapsing back into her calm smile. “My name is Celestia Ludenberg, of Shabboneau Castle, if that answers your question.”

“Shabboneau…?” Oogami was the only one who seemed to recognise the name.

“But, regardless, I was led to believe that we would be greeted by the headmaster?” Ludenberg ignored her, “It’s rather disrespectful of him to keep us waiting… Although I suppose it does give the boy I asked to go make me some tea a chance to get here…”

“There’s also two other students unaccounted for…” Kirigiri observed, “He might be waiting for them…”

Well, that was annoying… Mukuro would rather get this over with so she could ask Junko why she’s suggested Mukuro come here and also get poor Comfey away from these dangerous pokémon! Hopefully the headmaster would arrive soon…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.
It's going to be brought up next chapter, but in case it's not clear, Mukuro's Comfey is getting most excited at the sight of weak pokemon it could potentially beat, not strong ones it's scared of.
This year's intake (Jin POV)

Chapter Notes

Thanks to Seychelles for coming up with suggestions for which character recommended Toko to the school. Most of the others were found by me trawling through Bulbapedia and the list of Gym leaders on TVTropes (don't go there, it'll take over your life) so I'm not really familiar with many of them (It's probably not that important if you're not familiar with them either).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jin headed towards the gymnasium with some trepidation… This would be the first time he’d seen his daughter in years. It would have been nice if he hadn’t had to do so while acting as her headmaster in front of the rest of her class. He’d been so eager about it that when one of the staff had informed him that a student had arrived early he’d assumed that she’d deduced that they’d accepted her and instantly ordered them to arrange ‘her’ room for her…

That had been quite awkward, Jin rushing down to the dormitory, only to be met by a bemused boy with a Sandyghast sat on his head (that couldn’t be good for him, could it?) proclaiming that he’d ‘predicted’ his entry into the school! At least it was some more evidence that Olympia was onto something with him, so Koichi needn’t have worried that Hagakure could have just got lucky with his randomly thrown pokéball landing on a hidden, shiny Sandyghast…

(“Tea? Yeah, there’s a whole bunch in the cupboard there…”)

(“Ah! Thank you!”)

(“No problem! So, they letting you chill here for a few years as well?”)

(“… Chill? I’ve been accepted as a student, if that’s what you mean?”)

(“Wait… student!? You mean this place is school!?”)

…Or perhaps Olympia was just trying to drive him crazy…

“Yes, Hagakure, this is a school!” Jin walked towards the sound of the two voices to find Hagakure and Yamada in the kitchen. The supposed fortune teller was lazily eating breakfast and the artist recommended by Burgh was making a cup of tea, “As it said in the letter you received, which also gave you instructions to be in the gymnasium in… one minute!” He pointed out, pointing to the door.

“Ah… sorry!” Yamada began to panic, as did the Dratini draped around his neck like a tie, and hurried to make the tea faster. “I’ll just get this ready for Ludenberg-dono and be right there!”

“…Or you could make her wait for the tea and get to the induction on time.” Jin pointed out sternly, “And not start the year in detention for being the last person to arrive!”

Yamada’s eyes flicked back and forth between the tea and Jin for a few times… “I think I’d rather have the detention then go back to her empty handed!” He admitted, carrying on with the tea…
…Really!? Was Ludenberg that scary? What the hell had Mr Game got him into?

“Eh, besides, Oowada’s gonna be last ‘cause his bike broke down on the way here!” Hagakure shrugged and slowly finished the last parts of his breakfast.

…Well, it would be interesting to discover is that was actually true…

Eventually the pair of them finished and Jin corralled them into the gym… where his daughter was stood talking to a group of children… Ah… She’d grown into such a beautiful young woman…

A beautiful young woman who noticed his arrival, saw him starting at her and sharply turned her head away from him.

Ah… so it was going to be like that, was it? Still, he did have a job to do. Perhaps she’d be more willing to talk in private…

Jin surveyed the rest of the students, who had also noticed his presence and were looking at him with varying degrees of attention; from Togami, who only barely looked up from the file he and his Drampa were both reading, looking as if he thought Jin was a waste of his time, to Ishimaru, who jumped up from the floor into militarist rigidity and hastily signalled his Arcanine into an attentive sitting stance next to him, causing Fujisaki to jump anxiously in the process… presumably due to the fear of dogs Clemont had mentioned…

There was one face missing, however. “Oowada’s not here then…”

“I told you, man!” Hagakure called out.

“Yes…” Jin sighed. Hopefully Hagakure was right about the reason for Oowada’s late arrival as well. The fact that Daiya had named his own brother as his very first recommendation to Hope’s Peak had been met with scepticism from a lot of the other Gym Leaders. If Oowada was shirking attendance already it wouldn’t do well for the reputation of their bizarre mobile Gym…

“Wait… you mean there’s a Gym leader coming here!?” Asahina looked shocked, “I’ve not even got my second badge yet! Are you sure I’m supposed to be here…?”

That was something Misty had worried about while recommending the rescue worker, going to great lengths to mention that Asahina had spent so much time working that she’d not had the opportunity to focus on training her pokémon for battles…

She needn’t had worried so much, this year’s intake included five students who didn’t even have their first badge… The most worrisome of which was the Fenrir member that the steering committee had insisted be allowed to enter the school, despite Koichi pointing out that her Comfey was desperate to fight other pokémon, especially if it could tell they were weaker ones, and yet she still didn’t allow it to battle…

“Hah! It isn’t as if the ‘Crazy Diamonds’ are a real Gym…” Togami sneered. Probably annoyed that his family’s attempted to make one had been blocked.

“…Do they not hand out badges?” Oogami asked, the question sounding more antagonistic than she likely meant it to. Her father had mentioned that she was almost as sheltered from the outside world as he had been at her age.

“They do…” Ludenberg nodded between sips of tea, “However I believe he is referring to the fact that their badges are not part of a region set.”
That was true. Daiya had previously spoken about his hopes to eventually create seven spinoff Gyms and have a ‘mobile’ or ‘touring’ set of badges, part of the reason he’d recommended his brother to the school. His ideas were being frowned upon by the other Gym leaders though, as they felt that the journey to different parts of a region was an important part of a trainer’s experience.

Daiya’s counterargument was that expecting youngsters to drop everything and spend their life travelling ‘means that all the powerful pokémon are in the hands of the sort of irresponsible fuckwits who’re willing ta drop everything and piss about travelling for years’ and ‘screws over poor kids who’ve gotta stay at home and help look after the family’. That didn’t exactly go down well with groups of Gym leaders who’d been able to spend their formative years travelling...

“But… the pokémon still respect their badges, right?” Asked… a boy Jin didn’t recognise. Ah, this must be the one Koichi had been laughing about for the past week…

“Yeah, they do… which is amazing given what an ugly badge it is!” The pokéfashion expert snorted…

Jin wasn’t sure what to make of her… Raoul Contesta had put Koichi in a bit of an odd spot by recommending whichever one of her or Maizono won this years contest spectacular, only for the pair of them to draw. Koichi’s verdict had been that Maizono was the better trainer of the two, but then the steering committee and had stepped in and insisted they wanted Enoshima to enter the school, meaning they’d ended up letting in two talent trainers for the second year running, something Jet and several other Pokéathlon trainers had pointed out rather bitterly…

“But, regardless, it isn’t the leader of the Gym coming here, it’s his second in command.” Jin told them all…

“One Lycanroc detected!” A robotic voice emanated from Fujisaki’s pocket, which caused the young trainer to turn slightly pale and the Golett to pat them comfortingly.

“…Well, that probably means Oowada’s about to get here…” Jin guessed, at which Fujisaki gulped quietly.

“Well, about time we can start getting on with this nonsense…” Jin just about heard Togami muttering… Silph Co.’s president hadn’t been kidding about his lack of respect for adults…

Moments later they heard the sound of boots stepping quickly through the hall, and everyone turned to face the latecomer. Oowada entered with one hand firmly grasping the shoulder of his bipedal Lycanroc, probably to stop it from jumping forward and attacking the nearest pokémon like it obviously wanted to, and a forced tough-guy scowl on his face…

“You do realise you’re over ten minutes late to our induction, don’t you!?” Ishimaru scolded him instantly, showcasing the tendency to be overly-strict with everyone that Prof. Oak had warned him about. “I’d have thought someone with a leadership role would have a better sense of responsibility! What were you thinking…!?”

“I was thinking that shit happens and you can fucking deal with it, asshole!” Oowada snapped back at him, both him and his pokémon turning to snarl at the first person who dared insult them…

To his credit, Ishimaru wasn’t cowed by the twin pair of fangs on display. And his Arcanine didn’t even seem to notice the other pokémon’s threatening behaviour, as mesmerised as it was by Ishimaru’s finger. “That hardly a good reason for arriving late on the very first day of…”

“Aww, lighten up man! Ain’t his fault his bike broke down!” “…He probably couldn’t help it if his
Motorbike broke down…” Hagakure and Maizono both interrupted him simultaneously.

“Wha…!? How did you two know that…!??” Oowada glared at them suspiciously.

“I’m Psychic!” They both said in unison. “I get these totally accurate predictions!” Hagakure added, while Maizono turned to face him in shock.

“Wait… really!? I was joking!” Maizono gaped at him, “I just noticed that he had grease on his hand and he looks like he’d own a bike rather than a car…”

Kyoko was nodding along with her.

“Err… well, I suppose that can’t be helped…” Ishimaru looked slightly embarrassed, “But now we’re in the school, There’s no reason for you not to be able to get everywhere before I do!”

“What? Like I’m your rival!?” Oowada sneered.

“Err… no! That’s not what I…!” Ishimaru turned slightly red.

“Whatever, weirdo, did I miss anything important?” Oowada turned to face Jin.

“No, I was just about to start.” Jin ignored Ishimaru’s spluttering in favour of attempting to get this day back on schedule. “With that said, welcome to Hope’s Peak! You have each been individually selected, from the thousands of young trainers in the world, due to your potential to become the most elite pokémon trainers! However, this is not a guarantee for success, despite what the high success rates of our alumni might have you believe…”

Most of the class was listening intently, although his daughter still wasn’t looking at him, Ikusaba looked perturbed and Togami had gone back to reading his file…

“The school expects all of you to make significant progress on your journey towards building a reputable team of pokémon throughout your time here, and we will require you to meet certain milestones within set timescales in order to continue your studies here…” And this was the point that Jin had to make sure was drilled into their heads, so they couldn’t complain later… “The first of these timescales is this term! And I wish to stress to you that by the end of this term you will all be expected to have a team consisting of at least two pokémon…”

“HAH!” Togami snorted with laughter, “I thought we were supposed to be elite trainers! Are you seriously telling me there’s some of us who don’t already have two pokémon!?”

“And what the fuck’s wrong with that, asshole!?” Oowada snapped instantly, “Better to focus on one pokémon than have six hundred kept in cages!”

“You do realise it’s possible to train multiple pokémon at the same time, don’t you?” Togami sighed.

“Of course we do! But most of us don’t all have the luxury of being born into a multi-million pokédollar corporation!” Ishimaru complained, “I can barely afford to look after Arcanine properly! Adding another pokémon to my team would have been cruel and irresponsible!”

“Y-you could have just got a little bug! Like I did!” Fukawa said, smugly, “You barely need to feed them anything! S-so you can’t just blame being p-poor!”

Togami looked somewhat unimpressed with suggestion though, as it made it sound as if Fukawa had just picked her second pokémon based on how cheap it was, and not considered any other points, such as whether it would work well in a team down the line. Jin couldn’t help but wonder if Shauntel
had been correct when she’d suggested that the writer had caught it in a rush in an attempt to keep up with her ‘fated rival’ Togami…

“But there’s no use in having a whole team of boring, useless insects, just because that’s all you can afford.” Ludenberg said pleasantly, “Not if you want to head into the leagues…”

“And regardless, we have taken the financial aspects of raising pokémon into consideration when setting these goals!” Jin told them all, “You will receive a stipend to cover all the costs of looking after any pokémon you train beyond your starter, once you add that pokémon to your team.”

“Ah! Really!?” Ishimaru’s eyes lit up, as did Ludenberg’s. Oowada, Ikusaba and Fujisaki just looked worried about it still… presumably something else had been preventing them from catching extra pokémon for their teams.

“But for those of us who have already got two pokémon, when do we need to add a third by?” Togami was obviously planning ahead. Probably intending to have one bred, knowing his family…

“Before you return to school next year.” Jin told him, “However, before that, you also need to gain your first Gym badge by the end of this term as well!”

“Aahahaha! Who the hell hasn’t got their first badge by now!?” Kuwata suddenly burst out laughing, “Hell, I’m not a battler and even I’ve got my second one!”

…Of course, as Marlon had pointed out, he’d got said second badge from a leader with a type disadvantage. He wouldn’t get much further than that unless he started focusing on battles.

“Err…” Ishimaru was one of the five who were now looking embarrassed, “It’s less an aspect of battle ability… My village’s Gym shut down ten years ago and it was too expensive to get the bus to the next closest one…”

“Could you not make the journey on foot?” Oogami asked, “I often have to make camp whilst travelling.”

“Ah… it would have taken ten days there and back… and I don’t own a tent…”

“So!? Sleep under trees and shit for a week!” Oowada scowled, “It’s what I had to do!”

“But… I’ve been doing research, and had berry plants to look after!” Ishimaru tried to defend himself, “And my father’s too busy working for me to expect him to do it for me! I couldn’t have afforded a ten day absence from home!”

That seemed to convince Oogami, but not Oowada… “Sounds more like you care more about that crap than training your damn pokémon!” He snapped, causing Ishimaru to glance guiltily at his Arcanine, which finally responded to something and licked his finger. “You sure this is the place for you!?”

“YES!” Ishimaru shouted.

“Umm…Maybe I shouldn’t have come…” Fujisaki muttered, stepping backwards away from the two angry dog trainers and drawing everyone’s attention in the process. “I mean, I spend all my time programming and I don’t even have a strong pokémon…”

“That doesn’t mean you can’t still get one!” Yamada insisted, “I may have chosen to take this path later than others, but I shall still succeed, for I…!”
“Wait… You two don’t have a badge either!” Kuwata cried, “Alright, show of hands, who here ain’t got a badge?”

Five total raised their hands, the three who’d spoken along with Fukawa and Ikusaba…

“Wow! I’m feeling much better now!” Asahina chirped.

“W-well it’s alright for bimbo’s with pretty pokémon!” Fukawa sulked, “I bet you never got b-banned from a Gym for trying too many times!”

“Huh!? What did you just call…!”?

“And what’s your excuse?” Togami glared at Ikusaba.

“…I’m not a trainer.” Was her answer. Oh for goodness sake! What were the steering committee thinking!? Was this some extension of their experiment with Hinata? If it was, it would be nice if they could tell him these things!

…Still, for better or worse, she was part of the intake for this year. An intake that was quickly beginning to appear to several of the class to have been padded out with sub-standard trainers… After all, in previous years, a disadvantaged trainer like Ishimaru would have been at the very bottom of the class and have to hit the ground running to catch up, not have three or four other students he could comfortably beat in a battle…

But, for the sake of class cohesion, Jin would have to quickly dispel such thoughts… “Indeed, Ikusaba. You, and a few others here, are not trainers yet! However, Hope’s Peak goal is not to recruit the best trainers, but the best potential trainers! And to put them together with people who can bring out the best in their training regimes! Such as Fujisaki, who’ll be developing useful new pokédex apps over the next few years, Fukawa who is an expert on keeping trainers motivated, Yamada with his innate knowledge of legendaries, or Ishimaru who has been informing trainers about effective pokémon care for years!”

Several of the class were starting to look less sceptical of the badgeless trainers now… just so long as no one asked him the reasoning behind…

“And the Fenrir member?” Dammit… Of course Kyoko would pick up on that!

“…Is it because she knows the weak spots of different pokémon?” Ishimaru asked. What was he talking about? Jin had never heard of pokémon having ‘weak spots’…

“What are you blathering on about?” Togami looked down his nose at Ishimaru.

“Err… Well… it’s not scientifically proven, it’s just I noticed while fighting Kakunas that occasionally Arcanine would manage to bite them in a way that did more damage, and eventually trained him to do it more consistently… plus I think I’ve figured out how to do something similar on Metapods…” Ishimaru explained hesitantly, “I’d like to test it for different pokémon, but it’s harder to accurately hit moving ones so I’d probably need even more of them…”

“…How many pokémon are we talking about here?” Togami asked, his curiosity piqued.

“Ah… well, I think I must have made about 100 Kakunas faint before I noticed it, and then it took me another 50 to figure out the location of the weak spot and 50 more to train Arcanine to consistently…”

“You made your dog fight 200 Kakunas!” Oowada exclaimed, “The fuck is wrong with you? That
must have bored the crap outta him!”

“It wasn’t as if I only fought Kakunas! There just happened to be a lot of them where I grew up…”

“Still kinda shitty of you ta make him run around after weaklings ‘cause you’re too scared to take on some real pokémon…”

“That wasn’t why I…!”

“Enough you two!” Jin interrupted, having noticed Fujisaki was looking anxious and class 77 had arrived as he’d asked them to… “You can all discuss your different training methods later. For now we have the rest of your inductions to carry on with…”

And then time would tell whether this class was actually worth recruiting, or if Hope’s Peak’s standards were starting to slip… and hopefully time would also tell what it was his daughter was here for, and if she’d be willing to help him figure out what was going through the Steering Committee’s minds…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next chapter will introduce half of class 77!
School tours (Class 78 POV) pt.1

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late update. I forgot yesterday was a Tuesday. (Writing three thousand words of my other fic on a workday probably didn't help with that.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

"Alright, now Hope's peak is rather a large school, and we realise that not all of it is going to be relevant to all of you." The headmaster announced, "So I've organised for students from last year’s entering class to give each of you a tour individually."

So they weren't all going to be in a group together? Chihiro let out a quiet sigh of relief. Those two guys with the dogs were keeping their pokémon under control... the Arcanine apparently being mesmerised by its owner's hand and the Lycanroc unable to break free of the strong man holding him in place... but the way their trainers kept glaring at each other was making Chihiro think they'd be having a fight within minutes if they had to actually go anywhere together... And that Lycanroc snapping and pulling against its owner was still freaking Chihiro out.

"Fujisaki, you'll be partnering with Souda." The headmaster announced, gesturing to a thin man with purple hair and yellow overalls.

"Okay!" Chihiro nodded, and headed out of the line towards him.

As soon as they did it, they realised the headmaster had probably expected all the members of the class to stay and wait until everyone had been allocated their partner. But frankly, the sooner they could get away from those dogs, the better, and if the headmaster wasn't going to stop them from running away with their guide...

"Geez... Your class sure has some scary looking pokémon in it!" Souda commented as soon as they were out of earshot of the room. "Well... I mean, mine does as well, but at least all of ours can sit still..."

"Ahh... I'm glad you said that! I thought it was just me that was terrified of that thing!" Chihiro admitted.

"Well... I wouldn't have said terrified..." He laughed nervously, "But I was totally reaching for Metang’s pokéball every time it lunged in my direction..." He admitted.

"I don’t think my pokémon would have been strong enough to help if it had come after me...” Chihiro admitted. “I’m less a trainer, more of a programmer.”

"Ehh... I was the same, when I first came here, y’know?" Souda started, “I never trained my pokémon, just tried to build cool stuff like super-fast ride gear, or fix people’s pokédexes, or make better Pokétches…”

“Does anyone still use those?” Chihiro asked. They hadn’t seen a smart watch in years.

“Well, they might if they worked better!” Souda sulked, “And computer processors are getting small enough that it could work really well, if I could figure out how to get them to link up to a Pokédex or
make any decent apps for them!"

“Umm… I might be able to help with that? I’ve done a lot of work on the operating systems on Pokédexes…”

“Really?!” His eyes practically shone with stars… “But wait… Are you talking about normal Pokédexes or those new Rotom ones?” He scowled.

“Umm… Normal ones. To be honest, I’m a bit worried about using Rotoms in place of artificial intelligence software…” Chihiro admitted.

“Yeah, you’ve figured they’ll have to mass-breed the things as well, huh?” Souda said, as if that was the obvious big issue with it.

“I was actually thinking from a security standpoint… I know programs and software get glitches and can be hacked, but at least they can’t actively decide to misbehave!” They pointed out.

“Yeesh… I didn’t think of that…” Souda admitted, “I just know my buddy Gundam keeps getting hassled to start mass-breeding the things…”

“Has he agreed to do it?”

“Hell no! He won’t breed any pokémon unless he knows the new one will go to a good owner… Even if that owner ends up being him most of the time…” The last part was said with a weary expression… how many pokémon did his friend own then? “But there’s other breeders who aren’t so responsible…”

“Hmm… If only I could make more intelligent software… people wouldn’t want Rotoms…” Chihiro sighed.

“Ahh… you can’t blame yourself for that!” Souda shrugged.

“I guess… I just feel like I wasted a lot of time making something else that was just for my own…” Chihiro started to explain about their time spent on the scanning tech when…

“WHO ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING YOU DUMB THUG! YOUR LITTLE GANG IS A PIECE OF SHIT AND I’LL KILL YOU IF YOU KEEP SAYING IT’S THE BEST GYM!”

“YOU TRYIN’ TA SCARE ME, YA LITTLE PIPSQUEAK!? YOU SMARMY BUNCH OF PONCES WOULDN’T LAST TWO SECOND IF YOU HAD TO TRAVEL ANYWHERE!”

They’d been followed out of the gym by Oowada and another guy in a suit… who’d instantly started arguing with each other… loudly. While their pokémon snarled at each other…

“Ehh he he… How about I show you my new Pokétch prototype… it’s in the workshop…” Souda suggested, nervously. “A nice long way away from those two!”

“Yes, please!” Chihiro practically squeaked.

“Well, maybe if you weren’t just a bunch of shitty punks then people would wanna travel to you!” The little runt he’d been told to follow around sneered at him, barely holding an arm out to keep his snarling Pangoro at bay.

‘Course, neither Mondo or Lycan were gonna take any shit from these assholes! If Mondo wasn’t gripping his shoulder, Lycan woulda been ripping out that dumb oversized panda’s throat...
"That ain't the point dumbass! We're providing a service." Mondo sneered back, the way Daiya always did when people used that shitty argument on him. "But I guess a honour-less Yakuza bastard like you wouldn't get that!"

"HEY! You should watch who you're mouthing off to!" The runt snapped, "There's more honour in my family's pet Mightyena than in your whole gang!"

"Well I'd bet that dog's the only member of your gym with any honour at all!"

"You wanna piece of me!?" The Yakuza yelled, "I fuckin' DARE you to say that again!"

"Alright then... I said that dog's..."

"That's enough. Both of you." A cold chick's voice snapped from their side. "Fuyuhiko, you know grudges are supposed to be settled with pokémon fights here..." She added.

"Fine, then we have a pokémon battle!" Mondo snapped, "Where's the nearest arena?"

"Are you fucking with me!?" The pipsqueak snapped, "I ain't fighting some loser who only has one pokémon!"

Goddamnit... fucking prick had noticed he didn't have any other pokéballs on him... "Yeah? Well how many of your pokémon were gifts from your 'family'?"

"NNGH!" Hah! Mondo had guessed he'd be the sort to have been given his pokémon on a platter... "Alright... I'll admit I had help, but I've started...!"

"Hah! Whatever, kid. Some of have been looking after ourselves our whole lives..." Mondo smirked. "So I don't need a fuckin' tour guide to show me around the place... C'mon Lycan... Let's go sniff us out some food, alright?"

Lycan didn't exactly wanna walk away from that Pangoro, probably felt like he was running from a fight, but the mention of food and Mondo shoving him away was enough to get him to calm down and follow along... and he'd show that fuckin' prick soon enough anyway... maybe once they'd got some food he'd have a wander around, find the pokémart and pick up some pokéballs...

"Well... it seems you no longer have to waste your time showing him around." Mukuro's grey-haired guide pointed out to her boss.

"That fucking prick... mouthing off like that and then sauntering away like he's right..." The boy scowled, "I'm gonna..."

"Heedless violence won't solve anything." Pekoyama stated, "All it would do is make it appear that his words have cut you."

"Hah! As I care what some dumbass thug thinks of me!" He snapped, "I've got better things to do than worry about him! See you around..." He left.

That meant Mukuro was going to have to talk to her guide... it was a shame she'd had to split up from Junko... her sister was a lot better at this sort of thing than she was... But there was one obvious conversation topic, at least... "So, how long have you worked for him for?" She asked.

"...What makes you think I work for him?" She answered, cautiously.

"You don't?" Mukuro was surprised, "You do follow him though?" It was obvious.
"I... My relationship with the young master is supposed to be a secret!" Pekoyama hissed, "How could you tell...?"

"It... just seems obvious to me..." Mukuro admitted. "I'm surprised no one else..."

"Muku! Why are you just standing around here?" Junko complained, as she and her guide were trying to leave the gym and being blocked by the pair of them... "Are you seriously so slow you can't get out of the way of a door!? You're getting in everyone's way!"

"Ah! S-sorry Junko! Thank you for letting me know!" Mukuro scurried aside. "I won't do it again!"

"Urg! You'd better not! Or everyone's gonna think you were raised by dogs... I mean, I know you were, but that's no excuse to act like it!"

"Uhh... Fenrir aren't..." Mukuro started to correct her... but she and the small girl with her left.

"I see... you are also a tool..." Pekoyama stated. "That's how you knew..."

"I'm not a tool..." Mukuro corrected her, "I'm just useless without Junko around..."

"And a tool is useless without a master to wield it."

"Umm... I guess?" Mukuro admitted, "I'm really only useful at fighting... but is it true we're not supposed to do that ourselves here?"

"We are allowed to spar for training purposes," Pekoyama replied, "If you want, I can show you where." Mukuro nodded at that, "And perhaps we could fight? I wouldn't mind having something other than Gallade to cross swords with."

"Alright then!" Mukuro agreed. She did her best talking during fights anyway...

"Oh my god! Your sister really is a stupid, flabby lump!" Her new guide agreed with her as soon as they'd got out of earshot of the two dumb fighters...

“I know… it’s so embarrassing! Like, can you believe we’re actually related?" Junko groaned.

“Not at all! If it hadn’t been for your Milotic, I’d have never have guessed miss-Feebas face had anything to do with you!”

‘Feebas-face’? She’d have to remember that one! This girl might actually be worth putting up with!

"She's almost as bad as that stupid Grumpig-barf nurse in our class!" The dancer continued.

Wow, this chick really enjoyed insulting people... Probably just to make them feel as bad as she did about herself, but it would make her easy to manipulate... And playing her off this nurse she obviously hated would make for some fun drama to liven up this boring place...

"Oh, yeah! The one wearing bandages? I mean, what sort of accessory is that!?"

"Oh... totally!" Her guide agreed, smirking. "I bet she picked them out of a dumpster as well!"

“Ooh, or stole them off some poor, hurt pokémon!” Junko suggested, “That’s what I’d do!”

“Wha... you would!?”
“Well, only if I was a cheap, creepy weirdo like her, I mean!” Junko lied.

“Urg! I know! Can you believe they let her anywhere near the pokécentre!?” The dancer asked, “I mean, she’s supposed to look after pokémon, but she doesn’t even know how to dress hers up or anything!”

“Speaking of which, is there anywhere around here to get accessories?” Junko asked.

“Huh? Yeah, there’s a store. It’s about the only good thing here…” She pouted.

“You mind showing me then?” Junko asked, “Like… before this fatass catches up with us?” She tilted her head backwards.

“Huh…” Her guide looked back to see… “Oh my god! They made Mahiru show around that guy!?” She cried, “How could they!?”

Junko almost cackled out loud at the look on the guys face… “Well, at least she can outrun him if she needs to, right?”

“Urrghh… I guess…” She griped, “But if he creeps out Mahiru, then Imma bop him on the head so hard he doesn’t wake up for a week!”

Hmm… so this kid was friends with that plain-jane with the camera back there? Good to know… There were so many interesting people in this school! And so many ways she could mess with them all! She was going to love it here!

Hifumi looked to see what his guide’s reaction to that comment had been… which was to try and pretend she hadn’t heard it. Typical. It was obvious she didn’t want to be stuck showing him around and was only doing it because the school had forced her to…

“I can probably find my own way around, you know.” Hifumi said, stiffly, “So no need for you to feel obligated to stick around.”

“Oh! Umm… Did you hear Hiyoko just now?” She cringed, “She… she’s like that with everyone!” She rushed to assure him, out of pity probably.

“It’s not just that. I can tell you’d rather not have to be near me…” He sniffed, “Your reaction back in the gym made it clear…”

“Ok, well… I’ll admit, you’re not what I was expecting you to look like…” She muttered.

“Why were you expecting me to look like anything?” What did it matter what he looked like? It was what he did that was important!

“Well… You’re the one who draws pictures of Cresselia…?” She asked.

Oh ho! So this was a fan of his work, was it? “Indeed I am! What do you think of them!?”

“They’re alright…” She answered, vaguely.

‘Alright’? ‘Alright’!? Okay, he’d be the first to admit they weren’t a patch on the real Cresselia, but for this woman to just dismiss his art as being… ‘alright’…! “Oh!? You’ve seen better pictures of her then!?” He asked, sarcastically.

“No… But… Here. Have a look at this photograph and tell me what you think…”
It was a picture of a forest, with a break in the trees just wide enough to send streams of light down to reflect off of the gold and crystalline horns of the magnificent stag stood amongst the trees…

“…It’s alright.” He decided. It wasn’t anything like seeing her…

“Heh… You think so to, huh?” She shrugged. “You’re the first person who’s said that… Here, look what happens if I show these guys…” She turned to show the picture to that serious boy in white…

“Is that XERNEAS!?” He cried, “It’s an actual photograph of XERNEAS!? Where did you get this? It magnificent! I mean, I’ve read descriptions of him but… To actually see it…”

…Was he starting to cry? Over that…?

“It’s just a photograph…” Hifumi muttered, “It’s not like seeing the real thing…”

“You… You’ve seen XERNEAS!?” Ishimaru stared at him reverently…

“No… I’ve seen Xerneas.” The photographer corrected him, “He’s seen Cresselia.”

“You… you have!? Where was she, what was she like!? Did you battle her!?” He excitedly asked a stream of questions.

“I only see her in my dreams…” Hifumi admitted, “I tried to draw her, but…” He got out his sketchbook…

“That’s… that’s incredible!” Ishimaru gasped.

“No kidding… if I saw her in my dreams, I’d never want to get out of bed!” The short boy with him agreed.

“It’s not that good…” Hifumi sighed. “I didn’t get it anywhere near right!”

“Nonsense! It’s… it’s the most beautiful drawing I’ve ever seen!”

“Yeah… but it’s still not right… that’s what Legendaries are like…” Koizumi sighed, “I’ve seen Xerneas so many times… but the photo never looks right, no matter how carefully I take it.”

Ah… so that was how she could just say his drawings were ‘alright’… she had the same problem he did…

“You’ve got more photographs like this?” Hifumi asked, “May I see them?”

“Sure! They’re in my room.” She shrugged, and they started walking away from the other pair…

“But I thought you’d have chased her, and got fitter!” She suddenly announced, once they were out of earshot. “That’s what I did with Xerneas!”

“Why would I bother doing that, when she comes to my dreams?” Hifumi scoffed.

“Well… wouldn’t you be able to draw her better if you saw her for real?” She asked.

“I could draw for a hundred years, and I still wouldn’t get it right…” Hifumi admitted. “That’s why I’m not going to chase her until I’m ready…”

“Ready for what? To draw her better?” She still didn’t get it.
“No… To catch her!” He explained, “I’ll catch her, and then I’ll show her to everyone!”

“…And then they’d all see what it’s like…” Koizumi understood.

“Exactly!” Hifumi nodded.

“But… Geeeze, you’re pretty smug to think you’ll be able to catch a Legendary!”

“Well… you might think so… But I am the great Hifumi Yamada! He who has been touched by the Gods and chosen by Hope’s Peak to become it’s champion…!”

And if he couldn’t he’d die trying…

He… he was going to a school with people who could make those amazing pictures of Legendaries and acted as if they were nothing special… This was incredible! He’d really have to step up his game to keep up with his new fellow students! Starting with making the absolute most of this guided tour!

“So, what parts of the school do you need to see?” Hanamura asked him, while Arcanine inched closer to the other boy’s Emboar for the warmth.

“Well… basic sustenance will be my main priority! Where Arcanine and I will be sleeping, eating and bathing! And of course, knowing the school’s medical facilities and its health and safety information will be imperative!” Kiyotaka started, “Then I’ll need to know where to buy basic goods, attend classes and find appropriate study materials… I’ve also brought my berry plants from home, so if the school has any plant growth areas I’ll want to see those… and then of course I want to see the Pokémon training facilities! Like Battle arenas, pokathlon training grounds, possibly talent training as well?” Although after that disaster in the gym, he wasn’t so sure about that last one… “Oh! And… is it true the school sometimes gives its students free pokédex upgrades!? Or organises trips to different areas with uncommon pokémon in them!? If so I’ll want to know how to sign up for those and…”

“Humhumhum! So you want to see everything, do you?” His guide laughed, “You’re certainly the passionate sort!”

“Haha! How could I not be! After years of stagnation, I’m finally getting out of my hometown and going somewhere!” Kiyotaka enthused, “There’s new places to explore, I’ll be able to get more than thirty pokémon in my dex! And I’ll finally have other people to battle, people who actually care! Do you have any idea how wonderful that is!? How good it feels to know I won’t be stuck in my hometown forever? To know I have the chance to be famous enough that people hear my surname and think of something good!?”

His guide was just staring at him.

“Ah… I’m sorry, I went on a bit there…” Kiyotaka realised, “And I’m sure someone as sophisticated as you wouldn’t understand… You said you’re from a city, didn’t you? I expect there’s lots of dedicated trainers and opportunities for you there…”

“Ah… I see. You’re a poor country boy, right? Raised in some dumb old hick town?” Hanamura smirked. “You were the only boy in your school with anything stronger than a Rattata?”

“Well… one boy had a Scyther.” Kiyotaka remembered with a sigh… “But essentially, yes.”

“And when your pokémon beat theirs fair and square they just say you cheatin’?” He carried on,
“Like you put stimulants in their food or sum such nonsense?”

“Machine enhancements…” Kiyotaka corrected him, “My grandfather had a… reputation.”

“And when they ain’t sayin’ yo a cheater, they makin’ funaya fo workin’ so hard? ‘Cause they say you ain’t nevah gonna do anythin’ anyhow? ‘Cause yo Momma’s dirt poor?”

“Exactly!” Kiyotaka answered, “Although it’s just my father and I…”

“So then, you tryina help raise some cash and they all be like ‘whatchoo bothering ta learn ta cook for?’

“As if it’s foolish to be economical!”

“Then when yo good at cookin’ they all ‘Yo! Gissus some o’ yo food! It no fair if yo ha’ all thta good stuff!’”

“Well… I’m still not good at cooking… but the number of berries I was forced to share…!”

“….Like yo sum big cheatah cuz yo bother ta make malasadas for yo Pokémon!”

“Malasadas…? What sort of berry is that?”

“Berry!” Hanamura looked at him in shock… “You mean… you’ve never heard of malasadas?”

“Err… no, I haven’t…” Kiyotaka admitted, ashamed. How many other things were there he didn’t know about? Were his new classmates going to think he was some ignorant hick because he’d never left the confines of his village? What if he was so out of touch that he couldn’t even talk to them?

“Well then, you’re lucky you got allocated a sophisticated fellow like me to show you around!” His guide announced. “I’ll show you the kitchens and whip you up some malasadas that’ll fire you up so much you’ll be feeling hotter than the school sauna when Emboar’s been in there!”

“You mean there’s even a sauna here!?”

“Masaladas?” Hina asked the girl who was going to be showing her around… people could just make those?

“Yeah… I’m pretty sure they’re just donuts… but he’s from some swanky part of Alola so he calls ’em Masaladas…”

That’s what masaladas were?

“So… they’re going to the kitchen, to make donuts? Freshly fried donuts?” Hina grinned, “You reckon we can go and swipe some?”

“Heh! I like the way you think!” Akane laughed and started pushing her after the two boys, “But you’ve not really gotta swipe anything from Teruteru… just tell him his food’s better than anything you’ve ever tasted and talk about how he’s waaay more sophisticated than you, and he’ll feed you more than you can eat!”

“Umm… are both those things actually true?” Hina asked her.

“Oh, yeah! Totally! At least for me, anyway…” She admitted, “I had a ton of little brothers and sisters in my family, so we couldn’t really afford much food… especially not good food!”
“Really? That sounds kind of rough… My family was just me and my little brother, so we didn’t have to worry how much we got to eat…” Hina admitted

“Ahh… it’s not so bad! It’s what got me here, in the end. I took a job looking after people’s pokémon at the daycare centre to help make money, buuut I got bored easily… so I started teaching ‘em little tricks like handstands or cartwheels, or I’d set up an obstacle course and chase ‘em around it… Or just straight up making ‘em fight each other, ‘cause there was a pokécentre right next door!” She admitted, grinning sheepishly. “So then, people started noticing that their pokémon were coming back from the daycare a lot better at stuff than they oughta be, and I got really popular, and then this guy suggested I come to this school and said I’d get more food than even my Snorlax could eat!”

“Do they give you that much food?”

“Oh, totally! I mean… the good stuff you have to pay for… but basic stuff’s all free to take! And no one complains about how much you eat either! It’s great!” She smiled, “Oh, but Teruteru’s stuff blows even the good stuff outta the water! Let’s get after them and I’ll show you!”

“You’re sure he won’t mind?” As awesome as fresh donuts sounded, it seemed kinda rude to expect him to cook for her when there was free food available…

“Nah! He loves showing off! Just so long as you don’t get too pushy… and be ready to tell him how amazing it is!”

“Well… alright! Let’s get ‘Operation: eat some donuts!’ underway!” Hina agreed, as her new guide started showing her where to get food…

“Urg! What a pair of sycophants!” Toko scowled… “Who would go about demeaning themselves just to get someone else to cook for them?”

“Hmph, whilst I wouldn’t stoop to demeaning myself, I have to admit that Hanamura’s cooking is some of the best in all the regions…” Her guide started, “…And, as upcoming heir to one of the biggest corporations in the world, I have had the luxury of sampling…”

“Oh, c-cut it out! Wh-who are trying to fool, when the real Byakuya Togami’s back in there!?” Toko snapped at him. “I mean, is that even a real Drampa, or is it just a Ditto mimicking one!?”

“Tch!” All he did was tut at the question, which meant he might as well have just said yes! “I’m not trying to fool anyone! I’m just using the best example of greatness to aspire to!”

“Wh-what kind of weird way of thinking is that?” Toko laughed, “You see good trainers and just want to be exactly like them?”

“You’re saying you don’t?” He smirked, “Don’t you have any ambition?”

“Of c-course I do! B-but I’m not going to settle for being like Togami! I’m going to beat him! E-even if it takes my whole lifetime!”

“Hah! You think you’re going to become rivals with Byakuya Togami!?” He laughed, “With a Scatterbug!?”

“Well, at least she has a dream!” That ridiculous girl in the fancy goth outfit had apparently caught up to them and overheard their conversation, “Even if it is a little, petty one…”

“Excuse me!? What’s petty about wanting to beat the best trainer in the world!?”
“Hmmhmm... You just want to win some fights, it's dull... I'm going to set up a gym, in a castle, where I'll be surrounded by trainers and pokemon who serve my every whim and fight to the death to defend me!”

“Th-that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard!” Toko smirked, “At least my dream could actually happen!”

“Neither of those things is going to happen... And where is your guide?” The fake Togami interrupted, “I don't intend to show around two delusional women...”

“Well... she...” The gambler looked around her, apparently surprised to realise her guide wasn’t with her... “Tch!” She spun on her heels and stomped back towards the main hall, looking as if she was going to shoot lightning from her eyes...

“Well, at least I only have one idiot to deal with...”

“I'm n-not an idiot! I have a b-better pokémon!”

“Then why aren’t you showing it?”

“I...It's a Garbodor...” She admitted.

“Urg...” He stepped backwards, as if he was scared of her... “The last thing I want is something curbing my appetite...” He muttered... Really? If anything he could stand to not eat for a week! “In that case, I insist on showing you the baths!” He strode off ahead of her...

Urg! She couldn’t believe they'd got her chasing around after this arrogant fake!

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the odd cut off point, but this was about halfway through he word count so it was either split it here or have an 8000 word chapter.

Thanks for reading! Next chapter will show the rest of class 77!
School tours (Class 78 POV) pt.2

Chapter Notes

Continues straight on from the last chapter

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Why hadn’t that stupid brat followed her!?! If she was supposed to be giving Celestia a tour, then why had she lagged behind! It wasn’t even as if she moved fast in these shoes!

There she was, standing around at the gym entrance while those two talent stars were shaking her…

“What are you all doing?” Celestia demanded.

“Oh! There you are! Ibuki was worried you’d get lost!” The crazier looking musician replied.

“We’re trying to wake her up…” Maizono actually answered her question, pulling back her guide’s hood enough to show that the girl had fallen asleep standing up, and now had a small trickle of drool escaping her mouth…”

“Urrgh… You know what? Don’t worry about it… Just tell me where to find my room, food and if there’s a half-decent game corner nearby and I’ll adapt…”

“Did someone say game corner!?” Her slugabed guide suddenly perked up, “Hope’s Peak has the best game corner you’ll find… I think.”

Well… that sounded promising…

“Alright then… but you lead this time!” Celestia told her…

It was still pretty slow, she was even slower to walk around than Celestia was, and she had to poke her nails into the girls back in order to wake her up a couple of times… but she’d been pretty animated when talking about the games, so perhaps…

“You like game corners, then?”

“Yup! I love all the different games! Pokémon Jump, Voltorb Flip… but I’m not so good at slot machines… I think.”

“You’re not born lucky, like I was then…” Celestia noted. “Do you win much in the way of prizes?”

“I do… at least, I think. I got my Espeon from playing Voltorb Flip… When he was an Eevee…” She said, slowly.

“What about here?” Celestia asked. She didn’t care when this girl first earnt 6000 coins at Celedon, she wanted to know how much she could get out of Hope’s Peak…

“Well… the games here are prototypes… They test them against us before distributing them…” She explained, “Everyone says they’re harder than normal… But you can get lots of prizes if you’re good at them… I think.”
Celestia scowled… she wasn’t sure she was going to do as well if she had to rely on strategies and skill against a plain old machine… she was better at bluffing and luck…

“…Or if you’re lucky… maybe.” Her guide finished after a long break.

Now that she could work with! “Well… it sounds interesting enough to be worth the walk…” Celestia admitted.

“Well, that’s them sorted out!” Mioda cheered, as Celestia prodded her guide up the corridor… But then she frowned and looked back into the gym…

Sayaka had a pretty good idea why… “Are you worried about that nurse?”

“EEEHHHH!? Did you read Ibuki’s mind!?” She screeched, which caused the headmaster to glare at them and wave at them to get going from inside the room.

“Hehehe… no! Just good intuition…” She admitted, “You were stood by her and she looked nervous…”

“Well… yeah.” Mioda frowned, “She gets scared easy, and some of those guys in there look scary enough anyway!”

“I guess…” Although, even that scary biker guy hadn’t seemed as scary as Enoshima… “But there are some really nice ones to! Maybe she’ll get put with Makoto… He’s treated pokémon injuries before… well, at least one, anyway, when we were in junior high…”

“Eeehhh… that doesn’t sound as impressive as Mimi…” Mioda muttered, “She’s and her Blissey have been treating pokémon injuries since they were in kindergarten!”

“Wow…. That is impressive!” And slightly worrying that her parents didn’t do it for her… “I guess Kizakura must have liked something else about him?”

“Wait, he’s your ‘lucky student’? Awww… that means they’ll probably put him Nagito…” She sighed.

“Lucky student?” Sakaya asked.

“Yeah… Kizakura’s always supposed to scout at least one person himself, but half the time he can’t be bothered and just picks a random name from the registry of pokémon trainers… our class got Nagito…” She shuddered.

“Huh… I always thought Makoto would be more… special, I guess?” Sayaka admitted… him getting picked by a random draw when she was already coming… was that really just a coincidence? “But, anyway! How have you been? I heard you quit doing group performances?”

“Yeeeaahhh… Apparently my costume designs were getting too ‘weird’ and ‘crazy’ and ‘stupid looking’!” She spat, “And they just wanted all the dances to be set to the same upbeat preppy music all the time! It was getting boring…”

“Oh… that’s a shame…” Sayaka muttered, she’d always liked the happy cheerful performances those girls put on, but if Mioda wasn’t enjoying doing them…

“But! Ibuki’s fine now! I’m starting a new group!” She cheered, “It might just be me, Mimi and Hajime, but once we get outta this school, we’re going to take the talent world by storm!”
“So, your nurse is good at talent training as well?” Sayaka asked, that girl seemed pretty incredible…

“Eeehhh… not yet! But we get on well, and that’s the most important part of being a group!” Mioda grinned.

…Well, it helped, but wasn’t actually being good also a big part of it? Not to mention being lucky to know the right people and get connections and constantly be working at it…

“All right, lemme show you the new outfits I’ve designed! I left ‘em near the talent stages…” Mioda grabbed her arm and dragged her down the corridor…

“…”

“So… you were picked by Kizakura as well?” His guide, Nagito, asked him as they left the gymnasium, “So you’re just here through random draw as well?”

“Well… not exactly… I mean, I was lucky that I happened to run into him, but… It was something I did when I met him that made him pick me, or at least I think that’s why he did it…” Makoto admitted as vaguely as possible. He didn’t exactly want to get the reputation as ‘that idiot who called Professor Oak a lying jerkface for no real reason’.

“Ah… So you aren’t just worthless trash like me, relying on nothing but dumb luck…” He sighed.

“Uhh… isn’t that a bit harsh?” Makoto asked him, “Just because you got here through luck, doesn’t mean that’s all you do! After all, how well you do in battles depends on how hard you train, right?”

“Well… that would be fair to say for proper trainers, like you…” He disagreed, “But me and my Pokémon… we’re a whole other story!”

“What do you mean?” Makoto asked.

“Well… let me put it like this… is Metronome a powerful move?”

“Uhh… well… it could be, if you’re lucky with it…” Makoto answered.

“Well… for me, metronome if the most powerful move!” Nagito insisted, “In fact, I’m Clefable could probably beat any trainer, using nothing but Metronome!”

Wow… that did sound pretty lucky…

“Nonsense!” The harsh voice of Byakuya Togami rang out behind them, apparently he’d been listening to them. “All you mean, is that you’ve picked a reasonably hardy Pokémon, which gives it a chance to use Metronome several times, increasing the possibility that something useful will come out!” He sneered, “I’ve beaten that strategy a dozen times!”

“Yes… I’m sure you’ve beaten worthwhile trainers, who thought hard to come up with that strategy…” Nagito smiled pleasantly… “But that’s not what I do…”

“Hah! Well, in that case, I’d be quite interested in seeing what, exactly, it is you do do!” Togami smirked.

“Well… if Makoto here doesn’t mind being show the battle arenas…” Nagito glanced at him.

“I’ll have to know where they are at some point anyway!” He pointed out…

“Here we are! Hope’s Peak battle arena!” Nagito announced, once the four of them had arrived, at an arena big enough to hold two Wailords at the same time. “At least, this is the main one, there are
also many, many smaller ones that can be used for a variety of different battle types…

“Including the one reserved for you…” The princess who was supposed to be guiding Togami around added.

“Yes… Trash like me isn’t allowed to fight in the proper arenas…” Nagito told them, as he led them to a patch of ground that looked as if it had been the sight of multiple Voltorb explosions… “My apologies for the mess…”

Togami seemed to grimace at the amount of ash on the floor, but then steeled himself and stepped onto one end, and Nagito followed suit on the other, releasing a Clefable…

“Drampa! Use Energy Ball!” Togami was already giving his pokémon orders before it left the pokéball…

“Ah… trying to reduce my defence… a sensible move against proper trainers…” Nagito commented. “But it won’t work when my Clefable uses Metronome…!” Nagito commanded with a sigh.

The Drampa’s Energy Ball flew out and struck the Clefable in the chest, although it just seemed to shrug it off as it went into the familiar dance for Metronome…

Once it finished, Nagito looked up, calmly. The rest of them followed suit…

“Draco Meteor!” Togami exclaimed… Makoto could hardly blame him… that must have been the most powerful move possible against a dragon… and his poor Drampa didn’t stand a chance against it…

“That… that was just luck!” Togami snapped, “You won’t get such good results twice!” He added, throwing a little eagle onto the field…

“Rufflet! Use Crush Claw!” Togami ordered…

“Oh? Hmm… I supposed I ought to give you a chance, otherwise it really would be a worthless battle…” Nagito muttered, “Don’t do anything, Clefable…”

What? He was ordering his pokémon to just sit there while Togami’s Rufflet flew towards it at high speed and… missed completely…

“Tch! That almost never misses!” Togami griped, “Rufflet, try again!”

“Huuh…” Nagito just sighed, “Give him another chance, Clefable…”

Again, the Clefable just sat there while Rufflet… missed again…

“Is Crush Claw that hard to pull off?” Makoto asked.

“Well… I’m not very experienced in such things…” The princess started with an apology, “But I believe this is an effect of battling Nagito…”

“That… The chances of that happening are one in 400!” Togmai snapped, “It won’t happen a third time! Rufflet! Once more!”

Nagito just sighed, “Clefable, I think we’ve given him enough chances… Use Metronome.”

Togami almost turned blue when his Rufflet missed its attack for the third time in a row. And then he almost fainted when the Metronome dance summoned a gigantic lightning strike that made the poor
bird faint in a single hit…

“How… three times in a row… and Metronome gave you the best possible outcome each time!” Togami chocked, “Are all your fights like that!”

“Yes, they are. It’s pathetic really. Winning my fights with such cheap shots.” Nagito sighed, “And it makes a mess of the arena as well…”

“But… couldn’t someone still guard against that? By not using moves that can miss, or something?” Makoto suggested. “Actually, that sounds like something I should probably try anyway… my luck in battles is awful! I don’t think I’ve ever got Metronome to do anything useful… Haha…”

“So… you are like Nagito, but in reverse?” The princess asked, “I think I would like to see that!”

“Uhh… well, alright…” Makoto agreed, getting Togepi ready…

Well, that was an embarrassment to watch! Ten uses of metronome and not a single one was any use whatsoever! The only time his Togepi would have done any damage was when it tried to use Tackle on her Misdreavus… and then the grand finale it cast Lunar Dance when his other Pokémon was completely fine…

Of course, his other Pokémon had no trouble whatsoever wiping out her entire team… how could a women who apparently had such a noble background have an entire team of Pokémon that were all in their initial stages of evolution?

“Well… now that that is out of the way, perhaps I should show you where the nearest Pokémon centre is?” The princess offered.

“Yes. It would appear that all our Pokémon need healing…” Togami still couldn’t believe it… how could anyone possibly have that sort of luck… and what strategy was Togami going to use to beat it!?

“Ah… yes! I must admit, I am still quite unaccustomed to this ‘training’ business…” She admitted.

“How can you be ‘unaccustomed’ to training?” Togami asked.

“Well, in my homeland, Mitonga Island, we do not train Pokémon, as such…”

Mitonga Island…? “Ah… You’re from Oblivia.” Togami realised, “So you were raised as a Pokémon ranger, I assume?”

He’d heard of the place, but hadn’t paid it any attention before. What was the point of trying to market training products to a region that refused to take ownership of Pokémon, and instead just made do with temporarily controlling wild ones to help with minor environmental tasks?

But, if one of their leaders was here… perhaps it was the markings of a culture shift over in Oblivia… that was the sort of thing Togami corporation could take advantage of!

“So why did you come here…?”

“I… was told it was a good place to learn about Pokémon.” She told him, “I did not realise at the time quite how insistent everyone else would be on capturing and training their Pokémon as they did so!” She added, irritably.

“I see…” So no culture shift happening in Oblivia then… “So I take it you only caught those in order
to comply with the school’s minimum team sizes…”

“Actually, I did not even catch these pokémon!” She said, somewhat smugly, “I’m taking care of them on behalf of my class’ breeding expert…”

“You have a breeding expert?” Now that was useful! “Perhaps you could introduce me? If I need a third pokémon by the end of the year, I need to start considering my options now…”

“Well, Gundam is always on the lookout for people willing to take a good pokémon off of his hands!” The princess replied. “He was the one called out after me! But… he might seem a little… unusual, as times…”

Man… that dude with the bandages had been glaring at him the whole time… he really hoped he wasn’t his…

“Hagakure, you’ll be shown around by Tanaka here…” The headmaster read out, pointing at the one guy he’d really been hoping not to get.

“Of course… the only one with a chance of withstanding my dark power…” His new guide muttered as he made his way over…

“Uhh… dark power?” Hiro asked, as they made their way out of the room…

“Indeed, for I am Gundam Tanaka! Dark Lord of this realm and keeper of the Four Dark Dedenne’s of Destruction!” He laughed.

“I thought those were an electric-fairy type?”

“…They merely take the form of an electric-fairy type, for their true countenance would make trainers in all the regions flee in terror!” The dude insisted, “You would likely be able to feel their dark auras, were you not dulling your sensitivity to dark energies by associating yourself with that amorphous maelstrom of anger and grudges…”

“Uhh… look, dude, I dunno what you’re talking about? I’m not associated with anyone here yet!” Hiro admitted.

“I refer not to a person, but the fell being upon your head!” He growled.

“You mean my magic hat?” Hiro realised, “Nah, man! This things totally chill, right dude?”

“Gaaaast…” His hat replied.

“‘Magic…hat’?!” Tanaka scowled, “How can you have tamed such swirling mass of dark energy and not even understand what it is?”

“‘Tamed’!? Aww, c’mon… don’t tell me your gonna insist this is a Sandygast as well…” Hiro sighed, he’d only just got away from his Mom doing that!

“What!? How!? How can you be so insensitive to the powers that pokémon possess that you fail to recognise one when you see it?” He grimaced, “Is your power level that high!? That you can happily wear a creature that drains life from those around it, with no ill-effects!?”

“Saand?” His hat sounded confused and hurt by that suggestion…

“Hey, man! Not cool!” Hiro told him, “You’ve upset my hat’s feelings!”
“Hmm… you are truly a dangerous one… disguising your true nature behind that façade of obliviousness…” His ‘guide’ murmured, “But you have failed to fool the great Gundam Tanaka! And I will not be allowing you to claim dominion over my realm! A moments preparation shall be all I need to launch my counterattack against you!” He announced, pointing dramatically and then turning around and walking quickly up the corridor.

Geez… what a weirdo! it was a good thing he’d already looked around the school enough this week to know where he was going anyway!

“That reminds me, when will those of us who were hypnotised have our memories returned to us?” Kyoko asked, listening to the boy who was insanely insisting his pokémon was a hat…

“Ah… that will happen during your first day of classes!” The headmaster answered, “Now… Kyoko, you’ll be shown around by Hinata…”

The nerve of him, calling her by her first name!

“Yes, Headmaster.” She said, in a pointedly polite tone.

Still… it was odd, she’d been expecting him to put her with the spy she’d worked with previously, or possibly the nurse, who had now turned frantic when faced with her last two possibilities, or leave her until last and insist on trying to show her around himself…

Perhaps this boy was more interesting than he seemed…

“So… what’s your speciality?” Kyoko asked Hinata, the nondescript boy she’d been allocated to.

“Me? I… I don’t have one.” He sighed.

“Ah, you’re a ‘lucky’ student.” Kyoko surmised, remembering that Kizakura was expected to make a suggestion himself, but often just left it to chance. “I’m surprised they didn’t do something cliché like put you with ours…”

“No… they did do that.” Hinata corrected her, “Our lucky student was Nagito… I…” He looked insulted just thinking about it, “I was specifically picked out on the basis that I was the most average Pokémon trainer they could find.”

That sounded suspicious… “Do you know why?”

“Apparently the school wanted to know if the school is actually improving the pokémon trainers who come here, or just pokémon themselves. So they decided to pick an ordinary person and see if I graduate as more than that…”

That didn’t seem right, “Couldn’t they just tell that from looking at how the lucky students do?”

“But the lucky students have luck… and the school was concerned that their luck might make them think they can coast through classes.” Hinata explained, “Whereas someone like me, who’s always wanted to come here, I’m sure to do anything to improving myself, so I can be as talented as the other students here!”

Someone who always wanted to come here? Someone willing to be improved? Like the school apparently ‘wants to know’ if it’s doing?

It sounded innocuous enough, but on the other hand, if it wasn’t just the school being curious as to
how if it was improving people, but the school actively testing if it could…

“So… is there anything in particular you want to see?” Hinata asked her.

“Hmm…” There was no point putting it off, she’d have to speak to the man eventually. And now he’d piqued her curiosity about this place… “Could you show me where the headmaster’s office is?”

Sakura watched the smaller girl head off with the nondescript looking lad from the year above her. This meant her guide would likely be the muscular man… he had a fighter’s air about him, and would be easier for her to talk with than the timid nurse who was now trembling at the sight of her…

“Oogami, you’ll be shown around by Nurse Tsumiki…” The headmaster announced, to her shock.

“…I see…” Sakura nodded, at which the smaller woman let out a timid whimper as they both headed out of the gymnasium. She must also have been hoping the last remaining pairs would be the other way around. But hopefully, she could convince the girl that she was not as fearsome as her appearance would suggest…

“Umm… S-so… if you don’t mind me asking… Wh-where would you m-most like to see?” The nurse asked. “I-I mean, obviously I’ll show you everything if you w-want… but I’m guessing you probably don’t want to be s-stuck with me for all of that so…”

Why would the girl assume that? Had she appeared to be scowling? “I understand, I am sure you have important duties to take care of as well, and do not need to be spending that amount of time showing me around…” Sakura told her…

“NO! No it’s alright! I don’t mind! I-I’m sorry if I upset you!” She cried…

It was difficult to talk to this girl. Perhaps Sakura should just request visits to a few places, and then they could go their separate ways…

“Well… aside from the locations of the basic necessities, and the pokémon centre, I would like to see if there is a dojo for human fighters, and a garden…”

“A… a garden?” The nurse asked in surprised.

“I have a Florges.” Sakura explained, “She will want something to attend to, and I doubt there will be enough space in my room for her liking.”

“Oh! Well… yes, there’s quite a few gardens! It’ll be good to have a Florges around to look after them!” She said, calming down enough to giggle at the thought, “L-lots of students start to grow berry plants, but then d-don’t take care of them properly! It’s always such a waste of good medicine…”

“That does sound like a shame. I’m sure Florges would gladly help.” Just as long as those neglectful trainers didn’t still expect to get any berries back from their forgotten plants…

“O-okay! Well… the d-dormitories are closest, so we can go their first! Th-then I can show you the d-dojo and gardens, they’re both on the same floor, and then we can finish at the pokémon centre!” The nurse decided, sounding a little more confident now. “At l-least… if th-that’s alright with you! W-we can do it in a different order if you like!”

“No… your order sounds agreeable…” Sakura told her. She was still timid… this would likely be an uncomfortable tour. Hopefully the students in her own class wouldn’t fear her as much as this girl
“So, Neko! How’ve you been? Gotta say, the pokéathlon circuit just ain’t the same without you!” Leon took the chance to catch up with the self-named ‘pokémon trainer-trainer’ as soon as the headmaster had told them to enjoy the tour and walked out of the gym.

“You say that, but to me, it looked exactly the same as last year.” He said, in that I'm disappointed in you' tone of voice he had. "Did any of you guys practise with your pokémon at all?" He cried.

"Hey we practised...! A bit..." Leon trailed off under Neko's gaze... yeah he probably hadn't really practised all that much, "Ok, I'll admit I didn't... but can you blame me when Luxray tramples the competition anyway! Without your Lucario there, it was a total snooze-fest!"

Nekomaru rolled his eyes, "Lucario's nothing special, he's just an example of what good basic training techniques can produce." He said, which was bullshit. "You actual trainers should be coming out with far better pokémon than him!"

"Dude, I keep telling you, you're one of the best pokémon trainers in the league!" Leon sighed back.

"Trust me, I'm not. I'm just good enough to see where other people can improve." He insisted, "Like you needing to practise with your pokémon more often... or at all!"

"Why? What's the point of wasting time getting better when I'm the best anyway?"

"Huh." He considered it, "If that's your thinking, then I guess I know what to do get your ass in gear then."

"...What?" The way he said it sounded kinda ominous...

"Well... do you like all your classmates?"

"Eh... most of 'em seem pretty chill... except that smug rich-boy, the weird writer chick..."

"Hmm... no, they won't do..." Nekomaru started muttering before Leon had finished...

"Not to mention that obvious Team Rocket stooge…”

“…You mean the guy with the Arcanine?” He checked, grinning.

“Yeeaah…” The hell was he getting at…?

"Perfect! Gotta admit I had my eye on him anyway..." Nekomaru laughed.

"Whaddaya mean?"

"Well, let’s just say if you don't buck your ideas up, that 'Rocket stooge' and his Arcanine are gonna be the new pokéathlon champs!"

Oh, hell NO!

"AHAHHAHHAHA!" Nekomaru laughed at his expression, "There we go! Now come on and lemme show you the outdoor training track..."
Thanks for reading!
I think there's now going to be a few (4-5?) chapters showing Taka settling in over the weekend (but from different viewpoints though, so more characters will be looked into, hopefully) before classes start.

Also prompts are welcome, especially for the classes as I must admit I haven't had that many ideas for what a pokemon school would be like.
New digs (Leon's POV)

Chapter Notes

RSPCP- Play on the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals-the main British animal charity.) I’d have used an American example to make it for understandable but the only animal charity I’ve heard of in the US is PETA and I’ve also heard they kill a bunch of the animals they take into shelter so I didn’t wanna use that.
The treatment of Mondo’s Rockruff was based slightly off of a report I read on how dogs are raised for dog fighting. Although I have altered it slightly for future plot reasons (but dog fighting is still fucking evil… and yes I realise the hypocrisy of saying that while writing a Pokémon fic.).
Also trigger warning: mentions of animal abuse.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“And these are your class’ dorm rooms!” Nekomaru was finally done dragging him and Lux around the school… In the end he’d insisted on not only showing Leon every bit of sports equipment the place had to offer, but also where the free food was, where to buy food that was actually good, the main Pokécentre and also three smaller ones that happened to be on the route they were taking, and where the classes, that he had half a mind to skip out on, were gonna be… “That should be enough to get you through the first week here!”

“Sure, thanks man…” Ha! More like the whole four years… except for when he needed to find out where the talent shows were held, but he’d probably be better off asking one of those cute babes in his class for that info!

“…And I’m running a Pokéathlon training session at the outside sports arena tomorrow morning at eight…” Nekomaru carried on… What!? Was he serious?

“Dude, that’s a Sunday! No one gets up at eight on a Sunday!”

“They do if they actually care about winning, Leon.”

Yeah, sure, and then they got all the more pissed off when Luxray beat ’em anyway… But he wasn’t gonna get into that argument again. “Alright, alright… I’ll see if I can wake up that early.”

“Well, just remember, I expect that ‘Team Rocket Stooge’ will manage it…” Nekomaru said warningly, before turning to leave. “I’ll see you tomorrow!”

“See ya, man…” So, he was gonna invite Ishimaru? Hah! All the more reason not to go… But maybe if he woke up early enough he could at least go and scope out how bad the guy’s big dumb dog was… It’d probably depend how comfy his new bed turned out to be.

Thinking of which, time to check out his new digs for the next four years…

Hmm… It was pretty simple, and the blue floor and red walls were kinda weird, but it had it’s own bathroom (no more showering with a bunch of other dudes after practises) and enough space in the bedroom part to get some extra furniture and pimp the place out… he could probably get this place
looking pretty snazzy if he covered the walls in enough posters and shit... Guess it was a good thing Kanon had insisted on packing him a bunch ‘to remind him of home’, which were probably somewhere in the big pile of boxes that had been left in the middle of the floor.

“Not bad, eh, Lux? I know the walls ain’t your colour, but we can fix that...”

He slowly walked in and sniffed around the place, finally deciding to leap and curl up on top of all his stuff. Did that mean he preferred the way home smelt, or was he just being a normal cat and sitting in the most irritating place possible?

“Okay, dude, you’re gonna have to move. My stuff’s in there.” Leon walked over to him and pointed at the floor... but all he got was a cold stare in response. “I won’t be able to get your stuff out either!”

*That* just made his Pokémon roll his eyes and slowly flick out a paw to swipe at Leon’s belt... or, more specifically, the other Pokéball sat there... Oh... *yeah*... He’d said he’d let Litten out once they got to his new room... “Alright, alright... I’ll let him out...” Leon sighed, “Just don’t blame me if he sets fire to the box with your bed in it...”

He started ripping off the tape he’d used to trap Litten... honestly, he was kinda surprised none of the kids had seen it and called the RSPCP on his ass, but then again with Mr Team Rocket and the mass breeder there, they’d probably had bigger worries than a dude keeping his Pokémon from causing mischief and getting him murdered by that psycho chick with the Comfey...

Thinking of which, he *really* needed to get Litten to quit setting shit on fire! But maybe the time spent stuck in the Pokéball would have made him think for once... Or if not, maybe it’d be a scary enough punishment to get him to quit it? “Alright, Litten, get out here!”

He needn’t have said it, Litten was already halfway out of the ball the second the last piece of tape came off.

“Lit! Lit-lit-ten!” The fuzzball started climbing up Leon’s clothes to his shoulder to have a look around... “Ten...?”

“Yeah, we’re in a new home now...” Leon grabbed him by the scruff of the next and held him up so he could look into his eyes, “So, it’s a fresh start for us all, alright? So no more setting fire to stuff, unless it’s in a battle, got it?”

“Liiiiiiiit!” He mewled, all innocent and cutesy-like... Like he *always* did.

“Alright, you better *mean* it this time, okay?” Leon put him on the floor, “Now I gotta unpack my stuff, so you go have a look around by yourself, fuzzball!”

“*Litten*!” He scampered off across the carpet.

“Same goes for you, dude.” He told Luxray, who just jumped down from the boxes and sat curled around one of them... Maybe he was a little homesick after all... “Hey, I know it’s weird, but we’ll get used to it, alright?” Leon gave him a reassuring ear-scratch.

“Raaay...” He purred and seemed a little happier, at least. But it probably made sense for Leon to get out the cat beds now... even if Lux still wasn’t all that happy with his new, fire-proof one. He’d sulked for *days* after Litten burnt his first one, so much so that the damn pest had managed to figure out to leave Lux’s stuff alone after that... Now it was just *Leon’s* stuff he wouldn’t quit destroying...
Still, he didn’t seem to be trying to set anything on fire at the moment, he was just jumping around between the different bits of furniture around the place, so maybe that whole ‘fresh start’ thing had done the trick! Or at least it had given Leon enough time to get his stuff out of the cardboard boxes Kanon had packed up for him…

A couple of hours later, and all his stuff was spread out around the room… and none of it had been set on fire, awesome! Now he just had the pile of empty boxes to break up and throwing the trash and he could go get them all something to eat!

He started by picking up the one on top of the messy pile he’d formed earlier… Only for a little fuzzy red and black face to pop up out of it.

“Ten!” He jumped out of that box and into the one that was now on top of the pile instead. Apparently he thought the pile was a giant cat stand of something…

“Sorry, buddy, but I gotta smash all of those up!” Leon warned him, putting the box on the floor and starting to stamp it flat as a demonstration…

“Litten?” The cat cocked his head in curiosity as he watched… “Litten!” He pounced off of his box and onto a lower-down one, starting to hop up and down and scratch at it…

…Was he trying to flatten it? Guess his future wrestling side made throwing down with a cardboard box into a fun game! “Thanks, little guy!” Leon gave him a quick pat on the head as he picked up another box to work with.

He’d got about four boxes done before his nose picked up an annoyingly familiar scent… Ah shit! Litten had set his box on fire! And was doing a stupid victory dance at it!

“Goddamnit! You were doing so well!” Leon snapped at him, grabbing the box and running into the bathroom to stick it under the shower until it stopped burning. Well, at least it hadn’t damaged the carpet at all…

“Litten?” His kitten looked up at him in sad confusion… goddamnit, why the hell had he suddenly decided to set fire to the box then? And why was he getting upset that Leon had shouted at him? It’s wasn’t like he’d asked the stupid thing to fight the box!

Oh… except he sorta had, as he’d been ‘battling’ the boxes flat, in a way… “Urgghh… Look, I get that you were trying to help, but fire isn’t helpful here, okay?” He sighed, picking up Litten and putting him back on the floor. “Go play with your toys while I sort this all out, and then we’ll get some food, alright?”

“…Ten…” He mewed quietly and headed over to start battling at his tiny stuffed (flame-proof, obviously) Rattata. And then chasing it around the room and pouncing on it occasionally while Leon started sorted the rest of the boxes out…

“Ray… Ray!” Aww, hell, if Lux was bothering to pipe up about something that probably meant…

…Yep, Litten had tried to set his Rattata on fire and hit the carpet instead! Shitshitshiiitt! How could he put that out? Uhh… Wet towel, right!? There were towels in the bathroom…

He was off like a shot, so at least the fire hadn’t spread far before he was back in the room flinging a thick, dripping wet towel over it… and half of the other boxes… and Litten…

“Tennn!” He jumped and hissed at getting wet, as he always did.
“Well, if you don’t wanna get wet, don’t set shit on fire!” Leon snapped at him… although the stupid thing probably didn’t understand… it’s not like he could train it to think that setting stuff on fire equalled get wet, unless it happened every single time… Wait… Hah! Now there was an idea! Did he have anything like a water pistol in the stuff Kanon had given him?

Turned out the closest thing he had was a little spritzer bottle for spraying berry plants that someone had given him at some point (as if he’d bother with that when you could just buy potions and meds!). Still it would probably be good enough to get the point across if he filled it with water and made sure to keep an eye on Litten while he carried on flattening boxes…

…Well, it took the little fuzzball a while to get back into playing, but soon enough…

“Liiii…” Yep, there he went! Setting fire to the bed this time!

“I just told you, no setting stuff on fire!” Leon snapped and hit him with the spray… then used it to put the small fire out as well.

“Teeeen!” Litten mewled and ran under the bed… Maybe that would teach him a lesson! Not that Leon thought it would work straight away on the first try…

Of course, it didn’t. It only took about five minutes before Leon saw smoke coming from under the bed and dived down next to it to spray the fire out… And this time Litten had seen it coming and run out of the other side of the bed and was now sat on the floor watching him curiously… Like he was trying to check if Leon had been aiming at him on purpose or not…

“Yes! I’m aiming at you, fuzzball!” Leon snapped and hit him again… Which made him scurry back under the bed.

This time it was less than a minute before Litten creeped out to the edge of the bed and set a small fire going there, then started running out the other side and under a chair… Sneaky little cat! He knew Leon would have to deal with the fire first so he’d used it as a distraction! Not that Leon was going to let him get away with that! He quickly put out the fire and then hurried over to the chair Litten was under, aiming up the spray bottle and squeezing the trigger…

“Litten!” Only for Litten to triumphantly miaow as he darted forward between Leon’s legs and ran back under the bed again… smug little twerp…

“Get back here, you little…!” Leon raced back to the bed and did a running slide as he sprayed water under the bed… only for Litten to dodge it all and run under the pile of cardboard boxes this time…

Alright… so, if Leon just chased him, he’d probably book it back under the bed again… unless he found some way to block the little asshole…

“Yo, Lux, you wanna help at all?” Leon asked his starter Pokémon, who eventually got up with the same ‘well I suppose I’ll help you out’ air that he entered competitions with.

Great… that meant Leon could guard the bed while… “Lux, dig him outta there and bring him here!”

Luxray gave him a quick ‘are you kidding me, do I really have to do this?’ look before slowly starting to knock over the boxes with his head and paws…

“Litten!” The kitten panicked as the older cat spotted him and tried to pick him up by the scruff of the neck, then ran towards the bed like Leon had been expecting him to. Which meant...
“Now I’ve got you!” Leon cheered as he managed to grab the furball by the scruff of the neck instead, brought the spray bottle up to Litten’s face and squeezed the trigger…

…only for nothing to come out.

“What the…?” Leon checked bottle as Litten managed to worm his way out of his hand… “Urrrgh! Goddammit! I’ve run outta water!” Stupid tiny spray bottle… “Alright, you mighta lucked out this time, but just you wait ‘till I’ve got this filled up again!”

Less than a minute later he was back in the bedroom with a full spray bottle… Now where the fuck had Litten gone!?

“Dude, you see where he went?” Lux just shrugged at him. Great! Stupid sneaky kitten was gonna make him turn his room upside down before he’d even finished unpacking it properly…!

*Bing bong.*

What the!? The rooms had doorbells!? Well, might as well go see who it was, before he started Litten hunting…

“Good Evening!” Urg… it was the Team Rocket guy and his creepily well-behaved Arcanine. Seriously, what sort of dog could sit beside a guy carry a tray full of food without even turning to look at it? Even Luxray would have had a sniff of that, if he was that close. “I hope I’m not bothering you, but Hanamura, the fellow showing me around today, cooked all of us malasadas as a welcome treat and asked me and Asahina to bring them around!”

Damn… Leon had to admit those malasadas were looking pretty good, and the guy Ishimaru had gone off with was dressed like a chef… But… “Where is Asahina, then?” He shoulda been able to hear her giving them out even if she was around the corner!

“Hanamura made them in two batches, so she took the first half around to the girls a while ago!” Really? He’d seen the vendors in Alola make ‘em, they were doing tons of the things… and he was saying this guy could only do eight at a time…? That excuse stank worse than a Garbodor… “So, would you like one? Or two, even? Togami and Fujisaki didn’t want their ones and Oowada’s not in his room.”

…Oh, now that was totally sketchy! That Fujisaki wimp didn’t look like the type to say no to anything without a reason! Maybe Pokédexes could detect poison or something… “Thanks, but I haven’t had dinner yet, so I better pass…”

“You could still take one and reheat it!” If that was true, why didn’t he keep it quiet and do it himself? “Although they’re not quite as good that… Oh! Why, hello there! That’s a Litten, isn’t it?”

Wait, what?

“Litten!” The hell!? How had he scampered all the way up to Leon’s shoulder without him noticing!?

“It’s impressive that you have a Pokémon that was only just registered in the leagues! Did you catch it yourself or trade for him?” Ishimaru leant forward to get a closer looked…

Which Litten took as an invitation to jump across to his shoulder.

“Oof! Err… Well… he’s certainly an active one! Ahahaha!” Ishimaru laughed as Litten rubbed his face over Ishimaru’s neck and then started balancing down his arm to get a better look at the tray…
“Still, that’s not surprising given he’s owned by a Pokéathlon champ! What sort of training regime do you…”?

“Liiiiit!” Oh goddammit, Leon knew what that cry meant!

“Ah! The masaladas! Why did he…!” Ishimaru stared in panic as the tray in his hands suddenly carried a small fire lit by Litten… Little punk must have forgotten Leon had the spray bottle! And with him perched halfway down Ishimaru’s arm he didn’t have anywhere to run or hide!

“Ten!” …Or so Leon thought, right until he went to spray the little pest in the face and instead hit Ishimaru’s right arm because the damn cat had managed to hop over to his left and was trying to scurry back up it! Not that the water Leon was spraying was far behind him but Litten was quick enough that the water just hit Ishimaru’s elbow, armband, shoulder and eventually his face as Litten jumped down Ishimaru’s back instead of crossing in front of his chest like Leon had expected…

“Pfft…! What are you DOING!?” Ishimaru yelled at him and almost shoved the try in his face, “The FIRE is HERE!”

Oh… right. Yeah, he probably oughta do something about that before it started setting fire to the school…

“Alright, alright, calm down!” Leon started spraying the fire out, “It’s not like that tray’s not heatproof…”

“But my hands aren’t! Not to mention these are completely ruined now!” Wow, he seemed more upset at the ruined food than the chance his hands would have burnt off… maybe it really had been some evil plot? “What possessed you to waste time attacking your Litten instead of putting the fire out straight away!?”

“I wasn’t attacking him!” He wasn’t those assholes who beat up his own fucking Pokémon! “I’m trying to train him to quit setting fire to shit!”

“Hmm… I see… However, I don’t think you’ll find that training method particularly effective. At best, all it would do is teach the Litten not to do it when you have access to water… which means he’ll start setting light to things when you’re not in a position to put them out.”

…Damnit, the hardass actually had a point… “Well, how would you get him to quit doing it then?”

“Well… to start with, you need to consider the reason he’s doing it in the first place…” He started, while Litten started climbing up his Arcanine’s back… “The most common reason Pokémon misbehave is because they don’t respect their trainer…”

Why did everyone assume he just needed more badges!? “I have two badges… and I caught him myself! That ain’t the problem!”

“I thought as much… in that case, the next most common reason is because your Pokémon is stressed… is there any chance he’s scared of you? Or your other Pokémon?”

Leon looked down at the little fuzzball, just in time to notice that he was crouching down on top of the Arcanine, before he then pounced forward to try and claw his way up Leon’s jacket…

“Woah! No you don’t fuzzball!” Leon caught him and put him over his shoulder, “I ain’t a scratching post! You want to sit on my shoulder, you can let me pick you! Got it?”

“Litten!” He mewled… although he still had to knead his paws into Leon’s shoulder before he
settled down…

“…Does he look stressed to you?” Leon asked the neat freak, who’d balanced the tray on one arm and was now trying to tidy his dog’s fur up with the other one.

“No… I didn’t think that was likely either…” He admitted.

“Then why’d you suggest it!?” Seriously? Was he just trying to waste Leon’s time?

“I was going through a checklist!” …What checklist? Had he memorised a behaviour checklist? Why would he have done that when he only had one Pokémon? “But I suspect your problem is most likely the next most common reason, which is that your Litten is bored.”

“What? He’s not bored! He’s got plenty of toys to play with!”

“But how often do you play with him? Or train him?” …Okay, how the hell did he know Leon didn’t usually bother mucking about with cat toys like some idiots did with their pets… “How many battles have you included him in?”

There was a question… let’s see, not including the one where he’d caught him… “I dunno… five?”

“And you’ve had him for…?”

Well, he’d caught him at the start of his holiday, so… “About six weeks…”

“Six WEEKS!?” Geez, you’d think Leon had said that was how long he’d kept Litten taped up in his Pokéball… “Err… But you’re not really a battler, are you? I suppose you have sports training you’ve been doing, instead!”

“No… it was off season!” Leon remembered fondly, “I was chilling on the beach!”

“You mean… you caught a Litten, a species known for being intelligent and inquisitive, and then barely did anything with it for six whole weeks!?” Geez, way to make Leon sound like an asshole… “I was on holiday!”

“But think about it from his point of view! He doesn’t understand that! He probably thought that was always going to be your schedule!” Well… maybe he had a point there… “But at least it means it won’t be a problem for much longer!”

“…You mean ‘cause I ain’t on holiday anymore?” That’d be pretty sweet…

“Exactly! I’m sure our classes will provide plenty of opportunities to battle each other! Not to mention all the extra-curricular activities available here…” Urg… looked like Leon could tell exactly who the class over-achiever was going to be… “Oh! And are you aware that there’s a Pokéathlon training session tomorrow morning at 8am? Apparently coach Nidai is the person to…”

“Yeah, I know… Nekomaru was the guy showing me around.” Leon shut him up. “And anyway, I’ve gotta go get some dinner, so if you’ll excuse me… Lux! Come on, we’re gonna get some grub!”

Ishimaru moved out of the way, and Luxray sauntered out along with Leon and Litten… and Ishimaru and his Arcanine, who started following him…

“Where are you going?” He better not have thought that was supposed to be an invitation…

“Err… my room is this way! Not to mention I need to throw this food away…” Alright, so Leon only
had to put up with him until he got to the dining room…

“The fuck!? Did you just say you’re throwing food away!?"

“Ahh!” Ishimaru jumped and spilt several malasadas on the floor as a pissed-off looking Oowada suddenly appeared from around the corner with that freaky wolf thing of his… which raced right over and started trying to scarf the food on the floor… So Ishimaru started trying to stop him…

“RRROoooooocccccccccc…” It paused just long enough to snarl at him…

“Just let ‘im have ‘em!” Oowada snapped, just as Ishimaru had the sense to step backwards away… Seriously, what was with the fucking scary, angry dogs in this class?

“Err… but…!”

“You were gonna throw ‘em away anyway! What it’s matter they go in him instead of a bin!”

“But… they’re burnt! And they’ve been on the floor!” Ishimaru cried, grossed out.

“So? He’s a wolf! Eating off the floor ain’t gonna kill him!” Oowada snapped, “And as for them being burnt…” He walked over and swiped one, then shoved it in his mouth. “…Tastes fine to me!”

“Err… really!? They don’t look palatable…” Leon had to admit he was right there! They looked mostly black and Oowada would be lucky if he hadn’t got a mouthful of Litten’s fur in there…

“But it’s still food that ya can eat!” Ishimaru would be lucky if Oowada hadn’t just spat food over his face with that sentence… “But if you’re gonna a picky asshole about it, I’ll have ‘em!” He swiped the tray off the nerd, stuffed a few into his coat pockets, dumped the rest onto the floor for his wolf and then shoved the tray back into Ishimaru’s arms.

“Err…” Ishimaru still looked grossed out by the whole scene. “Well… I suppose I can go take this tray back to Hanamura now!”

“Looks like it.” Leon told him, while Oowada shoved more food in his mouth.

“Err… Right then…! Good Evening!” He nodded stiffly and then patted his right thing, “Heel, Arcanine!”

“Arc!” The dog stood up and walked off with him in perfect synchrony…

“More like good fucking riddance!” Oowada muttered between mouthfuls of food.

“Yeah, seriously…” Leon agreed, “His Arcanine creeps me out… How the fuck does anyone get a dog that well trained?” And why couldn’t he have offered to hook Litten up with some of that shit?

“…I’ve seen some Team Rocket methods that woulda done it…” Oowada said, glaring at Ishimaru’s back as he headed up the stairs.

Oh, shit… that didn’t sound like something he’d wanna use on Litten then… But… “Why’ve you seen…?”

“My bro an’ me make it a thing that our gang goes and trashes any Rocket hideouts we hear about…” He explained, “It’s where most of our Pokémon come from…”

“Including him?” Leon asked, pointing at the wolf that was just about finishing mopping the last bits of burn malasada. “’Cause he doesn’t look that well behaved…”
“That’s ‘cause they were raising him to fight, so they were doing shit to piss him off while also making him scared of them…” Oowada said, quiet and pissed off, “Mostly keeping him starved, then acting like they were gonna give him food, but then taking it away and kicking him instead…”

Holy shit… That was fucking horrible! “Fuck… Wait… was that why he got so pissed off when that guy went to…”

“Probably… Especially as I ain’t managed ta find the damn food hall yet!” Oowada griped, “His fucking boots and shit don’t help either…”

“No kidding…” Seriously, there was no way there was a school dumb enough to have that as their uniform! “But, the dining room ain’t far… I was just about to go myself, wanna hang out?”

“Really? Yeah, thanks man!” He cheered up, “Glad ta know there’s at least one cool dude here, and it’s not just a bunch of squares…”

“No kidding! We ain’t even been here a day and I’m already getting hassled to go do sports training tomorrow at eight!”

“On a Sunday!?” Oowada cried, “Who the fuck gets up at eight on a Sunday!?”

“I know, right!?” Always good to know you aren’t the only sane guy in the class… Nekomaru could get up at the crack of dawn to train that nerd and Leon would just head on over to work out at sensible times…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Sport's practise pt 1 (Nekomaru POV)

Chapter Notes

This whole sports training thing has ended up being longer than I expected, so this is part one of what I originally expected to be a single chapter!
The events are semi-based on the pokeathlon mode in pokemon heartgold/soulsilver (and their subsequent anime/manga counterparts) more details next chapter when I actually get to the events!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Alright, you three…” Nekomaru crouched down next to the line his three pokémon had formed, “On your marks… get set… GO!”

He and his pokémon shot forward at his command. The race was instantly dominated by Skiddo, the leafy-maned goat bleating happily as she raced just ahead of her older ‘brother’ Lucario, as always. Which of them won would probably be determined by whether Skiddo’s stamina held out until the end of the race, which it had been quite a lot recently…

But Nekomaru’s concern right now was on his own standing in the race, as he set off neck-and-neck alongside the pokémon he’d caught himself over the summer holidays, a stout Loudred. He wasn’t exactly built for running, with stubby little legs and large loudspeaker ears that generated a lot of wind resistance, but he still gave his all in every race, trying to beat Nekomaru, just like Lucario used to back when he was a Riolu…

But his all wasn’t quite enough to beat Nekomaru just yet… he had the same problem Skiddo did, starting well but not being able to keep it up the whole way, and they’d only just got halfway before he started to slow and Nekomaru gradually pulled ahead of him, leaving him with nothing to focus on but the triumphant goat who was jumping around in glee as Lucario bowed graciously to her… looks like she’d won again.

And it looked for sure like Nekomaru had come in third place again, as he managed to cross the finish line a clear ten seconds ahead of Loudred, who stumbled over it and fell to his hands inhaling huge gulps of air through his oversized mouth…

“Hey, you okay there?” Nekomaru knelt down to check on him.

“Lou…dred!” He gasped and pounded the group with his fist… “Dred, dred, dredd!”

Oh boy… he still wasn’t taking losing well… “Hey now, don’t be like that! Just because you couldn’t beat me yet, doesn’t mean you did run a good race! And you’re getting stronger all the time. It won’t be long before you started beating me…”

“…Loud…” He looked up at Nekomaru pitifully.

“Yes, really! Now come here let me do it to you!”

“Loud!” He shouted excitedly and leapt into Nekomaru’s arms… and of course Skiddo and Lucario rushed towards him excitedly at the mention as well…
“Gahahaha! Alright, alright! Massages for everyone!” Nekomaru laughed, “After all, I want you all in peak condition to compete against Akane and whichever of the new students decide to turn up!”

Lucario looked thoughtful and started scribbling something in the dirt as Nekomaru started with Loudred’s massage, then pointed at it and looked up at Nekomaru questioningly…

What was that supposed to be…? It had four legs, and a jagged shape around the head and neck… oh, right… “Leon’s Luxray?” Lucario nodded, “Well, it’d be nice… but I wouldn’t get my hopes up…” Chances were pretty good Leon wouldn’t bother until he saw some actual proof that his title could be under threat… which meant he’d have to hope Teruteru passed along his offer to Ishimaru, or one of the other members of the new class had the motivation to start pokéathlon training… it wouldn’t be long before they arrived, if they were coming.

“Okay Loudred… time for you to take it easy in your ball, before your big entrance!” Nekomaru told him. He hadn’t told anyone in his own class what his new pokémon was… it’d be all the more intense when he brought out Loudred for the team cheers that way…

It seemed like he was just in time to, because it wasn’t long after that that he started hearing Teruteru’s voice floating across the breeze… “…A dedicated arena for every event in the pokéathlon league, as well as some more general equipment and a swimming pool big enough to fit a Wailord!”

“This is incredible!” Ah, good! He could hear Ishimaru with him… “There’s even an area for snow throw!? How is that possible?”

“You mean your school didn’t have snow machines?” Teruteru asked, even though Nekomaru had seen his old school over the summer and they didn’t look like they had any either… they’d been holding a fundraiser to afford to buy the blocks for block break and maybe update the set of hurdles they had...

“My school had to have fundraisers every year to be able to afford to have block break competitions…” Sounded like Ishimaru’s last school was just as bad. He was probably going to have a lot of work to do to catch up with Leon…

“Well, you’re in a good school now!” Teruteru was laughing, “And with a top-class coach to boot! That’s Nekomaru over there, let me introduce you!”

“Thank you!”

Nekomaru turned around to face the source of the voices. They looked like they were getting along well already, given how cheerful they both looked. Teruteru was wearing his usual chef’s outfit, which was a shame as it probably meant he wasn’t here for training, and Ishimaru had come prepared in shorts, T-shirt and trainers that looked slightly too small for him. Their main pokémon were following along behind them, Emboar looking pretty proud of the way Ishimaru’s Arcanine was obediently walking to heel, and the Arcanine looking relaxed as it basked in the extra warmth at its side.

No sign of Teruteru’s new pokémon though… was he planning some big surprise with it as well? He’d have to ask in a moment…

“Hey there!” Nekomaru stood up to greet them, “You two here to join Hope’s Peak’s pokéathlon team!?”

“Yes!” Ishimaru was enthusiastic as least, “Err… I don’t have much experience, but I’m willing to put in the effort to make up for it!”
“Good to hear! You’re Ishimaru, right?” Nekomaru held his hand out to shake, “Your guide on healthy food for pokémon was a lifesaver while I was working out a training diet for Lucario!”

“Really!?” He looked more surprised by that than Nekomaru would have expected, “Well, I’m glad that was of use to someone! Although in retrospect, it was a very simplified summary of the subject…”

“Probably… it’s a good starting point for a new trainer, but I can think of a few people who could do with a more in-depth version in the same style now.”

“Well… in that case I’ll start researching it more thoroughly!” Ishimaru looked pretty excited at the idea, even… did that mean he was willing to make whatever guides people asked him to? Now there was a tempting thought…

“Well, seems like you two are going to get on well!” Teruteru announced, “We can head back and help Miltank prep a hearty team breakfast for you all!”

Well, that sounded nice but… “You’re still not interested in having your pokémon start sports?”

“I’ve told you, Emboar and Miltank are far too sophisticated to be running around playing games…” Teruteru insisted.

“Well, what about your new pokémon?” Nekomaru asked.

“Heh heh… Bounsweet’s going to be my talent star!” Teru said smugly. So, that was his new pokémon, huh? “Hah! You got another pokémon you can feed yourself with!”

“Excuse me!? Ain’t nobody gonna eat my Bounsweet!” Teruteru got annoyed enough to drop his fake accent.

“But, technically, it is a fruit pokémon, isn’t it?” Ishimaru mulled it over, “I mean… it would provide nutritional value, if you were desperate…”

“That’s true of any pokémon! Ain’t no reason to be talking about eaten any o’ my pokémon! After all, yo wouldn’t wanna eat no Emboar, would ya now!?”

“Hmm… I don’t know… roast pig sounds pretty good to me! Gahahaha!” Nekomaru laughed at the irritated look on Teruteru’s face, “Put some salt and pepper on him, and…”

“Ah! Arcanine, no!” Ishimaru suddenly yelled. “…Nine?” Ishimaru’s dog froze and looked up at him guilty, mouth open with the tongue hanging out and halfway towards Teruteru’s Emboar…

“He was joking. Other pokémon aren’t food.” Ishimaru told it, sternly.

“Huh…? He was about to…?” Teruteru stared in horror at the now cringing dog for a moment, before rounding on Nekomaru… “Now, look what you just did, with all yo’ stupid talk ‘bout ma pokémon being good eatin’! I know one person who ain’t gettin’ no Miltank milk for his breakfast!”

“Hahaha! Alright, I probably deserve that…” Although Teruteru probably wouldn’t stick to it anyway… “But do I get to see this great new Bounsweet of yours?”

“Hmm…” Bigging up Teruteru’s pokémon calmed him down, as usual. “Depends… do I get to see your new pokémon?”
“I’m saving getting him out for the team cheers.” Nekomaru explained.

“Huh…” Seemed like he was thinking about sticking around if it wouldn’t be too much longer, and as luck would have it…

“We should be starting soon… I can see Akane heading over now.”

She was walking alongside that sporty looking girl, who had come wearing a swimming costume under a pair of shorts. The pair were going a lot quicker than Teruteru and Ishimaru had done, so fast that Akane’s Bewear was having some trouble keeping up with her. It can’t have been that long since it evolved, or she might have noticed that it was moving more slowly now it was walking on two legs instead of four. The other girl’s… Asahina, wasn’t it? Her pokémon were having an easier time of it, with the Glaceon able to keep up with her and her Marill hitching a ride on her back.

“Well, alright then!” Teruteru decided, “That way I can register a few new pokémon…”

“Ah… I’ve been wondering about that, actually…” Ishimaru piped up, reaching for his pokédex. “Is there a, err… protocol regarding registering other people’s pokémon, here?”

“It’s pretty much the same as every other school…” Nekomaru told him, ask politely and most people were happy to… aside from the odd snob or stick in the mud like Hiyoko and Fuyuhiko.

“Oh… okay then.” Ishimaru put his pokédex away disappointedly.

“Wait… Did those hicks in your old school not let each other register their pokémon?” Teruteru guessed quickly, as if he’d had the same thing happen. “Like scanning a Golbat’s some special privilege that they only let their friends do?”

“Yes!” Ishimaru nodded, “Is that not what you meant?”

“No… every school I’ve been to, it was a case of ‘ask first, but most people say yes’.” Why wouldn’t you all help each other?

“Oh! Well… in that case…” Ishimaru got his pokédex out and waved it with a hopeful smile, “May I?”

“Sure! Go ahead!” Nekomaru slapped his back and pushed him over to Lucario and Skiddo.

“Ooh! Are you guys registering each other’s pokémon!?” Asahina yelled from several yards away as she ran over the last part of the distance between them. “Can I join!?”

“Go ahead!” Teruteru laughed.

“And you can both do mine as well!” Akane insisted.

There was a small amount of chaos as the two new students excitedly scanned everything and started chatting about all the new pokémon they were getting to see at the school.

“Hey, Akane, while we’re scanning everything…” Nekomaru gestured to Bewear.

“No.” Akane shut him down. “Not until I get to scan Gogoat.”

…but he didn’t have a Gogoat… yet… “GAHAHAHA! Nice one!” Nekomaru laughed, “You hear that, Skiddo? You gotta evolve so I can scan Akane’s Bewear!”

“Skiiid!” The goat bleated indignantly at him.
“I know, I’m kidding…” Nekomaru admitted, “It probably won’t be long now we’re back at school…”

“It better not be! Otherwise your team won’t be able to give me a run for their money any more…” Akane warned him. “Anyway, let’s see your new pokémon!”

“Not yet… Neko wants to turn his into some big surprise during team cheers…” Teru told her.

“Well, let’s get on with team cheers then!” Akane demanded.

Well, they had to get on with training at some point, and the new pair were pretty much done with their pokedexes…

“Alright! Everyone line up with all your pokémon!” Nekomaru ordered.

They quickly obeyed, Ishimaru started by smartly signalling his Arcanine away from Emboar. Asahina looked a bit confused, but move to stand next to him, causing her Glaceon to scurry over to the side furthest from the Arcanine. Then Teruteru gestured for Akane to go next, and she got her Snorlax out of its pokéball before Teru stood next to her along with his Emboar. Then Lucario and Skiddo lined up at the end, much to Teruteru and Akane’s surprise, as they usually stood at Nekomaru’s side, but now he had Loudred that wasn’t going to be necessary…

“Alright team! The goal of these sessions is for all of us to help each other improve… but sometimes when we’re racing against each other, it gets easy to forget that…” Nekomaru explained, for the new pair. “That’s why we start each session to remind us all that we’re all on the same team…”

“Err… now!?” Ishimaru asked, looking around the field.

“Isn’t Leon coming?” Asahina probably had the same concern.

“I invited him, but Leon’s not really one for teams… I’d be surprised if he came along anytime this term.” Nekomaru tried not to be too insulting about his lack of motivation. “But we don’t need to worry about that! We can make enough noise by ourselves! Now, everyone…” He threw out Loudred’s ball… “Give me an H!”

“LOUD!”

Whatever noise the group made was completely covered by the thunderous boom Loudred let out as he jumped out of his pokéball, which caused them all to yell and cover their ears until it was over… even the pokémon were affected, the ones who couldn’t hold their hands or paws over their ears having to resort to curling up in a ball or shoving their heads in their owner’s bags… even Akane’s Snorlax woke up for a moment.

“Ah… was that too loud?” Nekomaru asked as they cautiously started to straighten themselves back up…

“What did you say!?”, “Beweeeeeal!” “I BEG YOUR PARDON!?”, “Skid-dooo!” “Ahahahaha! That was awesome! Are anyone else’s ears still ringing?”, “Rill….” “You crazy eejit! You tryina deafen us!? Wha’ kind o’ surprise is tha’!?"

“I guess that’s a yes…” Nekomaru realised, as the group all loudly answered at the same time, “Maybe tone it down a little next time, Loudred…”

“L-Loudred…” He agreed, startled at the affect he’d had on them all.
After a short while, most of the group had recovered, aside from a couple of the pokémon. Asahina’s Glaceon was still angrily covering its ears with its paws, despite her trying to coax it back up, and Ishimaru was staring at his Arcanine, which still had its head stuck in his bag… “Are they going to need to go to the pokémon centre?”

“Umm… I think she was just startled, but she’s almost ready now… can you give her another minute?” Asahina asked.

“Sure… and sorry… I gotta admit, that seemed like a better idea when I thought of it…” Nekomaru apologised, “Ishimaru, how’s your Arcanine?”

“Err… actually, I think he’s just looking for something.” Ishimaru answered.

“Arc!” His dog lifted its head out of the bag for a moment to agree, then dived back in.

“Well... what are you looking for?” Ishimaru asked it, “Earmuffs?”

“Nine…” It shook its head and thought for a moment. Then it started pawing at the ground, drawing two straight lines next to each other and then joining them with another across the middle of them...

“…Is that supposed to be a H?” Akane asked.

“Oh! You’re looking for your letters!” Ishimaru realised with a laugh, “You’re a good boy! But it’s not quite what he meant!”

“Wait… you’re telling me that thing can read!?” Teruteru exclaimed. Not that Nekomaru could blame him… Arcanine’s were smart dogs, but they were still dogs...

“No! Aside from recognising the odd word and some signs, anyway…” Ishimaru explained, “But he can recognise most letters, and I usually make him practise by asking me to fetch specific ones…"

“So he thought I literally meant for him to give me an H…” Nekomaru had to admit, that was still pretty clever...

“Yes, exactly...” Ishimaru just looked embarrassed to have caused a disturbance though.

“Nine?” The dog looked confused at not being expected to spell.

“Ah… you see, he just wanted us all to shout together!” Ishimaru explained to him, “So you just have to bark!”

“Arc!” The dog wagged its tail excitedly and breathed in the same way Loudred often did... “ARCARCARCARC…!”

“Once! Bark once!” Ishimaru hastily corrected himself, which the dog luckily understood, “So when he says ‘Give me an H…!”

“ARC!” The dog responded.

“Good boy!” Ishimaru petted it.

“See, Glaceon! That’s what we need to do!” Asahina had apparently managed to get her pokémon to calm down and let go of its ears, “Doesn’t that sound fun?”

The Glaceon looked around at them all irritably, before disappearing into her pokéball without a word.
“Umm… I guess not?” Asahina cringed in embarrassment.

“Riiiiill…” Her other pokémon sighed in agreement.

“Never mind… number one rule of pokémon training is not to force your pokémon into anything they’re not comfortable with.” Nekomaru told her, “Plus, it’s my fault she’s mad, so I can’t complain if she wants to sit out! Gahahaha!”

The rest of them all spelt out the rest of ‘Hope’s Peak’ without any further problems, and then the five trainers all gathered around for a few minutes to register Loudred and watch Teruteru’s adorable new Bounsweet doing a little dance.

“So… do we get to see your new pokémon, now?” Nekomaru asked Akane.

“Hmm… actually, I’m thinking I’ll keep it a surprise myself…” Akane decided, “But you’ll see by the time training’s over!”

“Well, you’ll have to show me later, then!” Teruteru sighed, “I’ve already left Miltank by herself too long!”

“Well, you can be the next person to see it, so long as I get some milk for my breakfast!” Akane offered.

“Sure thing! You can have a certain coach’s portion!” Teruteru told her, giving Nekomaru a pointed glare before he left.

“…I was hoping he’d have forgot that…” Nekomaru sighed.

“Ah… my apologies…” Ishimaru cringed, “I hope I haven’t caused a serious falling out between you two…”

A serious falling out over that? How sensitive did Ishimaru think he and Teruteru were?

“Huh!? The hell did you do!?” Akane asked in disbelief.

“It’s nothing serious… all that happened was…”

“Umm!? Are your pokémon supposed to be doing that!?” Asahina suddenly yelled, pointing towards Skiddo…

Who was charging full pelt with the intention of ramming Bewear, who was stood in a solid looking squat ready to catch her… And that would probably hurt her now he had evolved…

“SKIDDO! Save it for training!” Nekomaru ordered her, at which she guiltily skidded to a halt.

It was odd, though, usually Lucario would have broken up a fight like that. But instead he was just stood watching as Ishimaru’s Arcanine scrabbled about in the dirt…

“What are you guys looking at?” Nekomaru and Ishimaru headed over to look at what their pokémon were up to.

“Arc!” The Arcanine finished what he was doing and sat next to the patch of dirt he’d been playing with, which was now covered with a messy, but recognisable scrawl…

“Hodes Deak?” Nekomaru read out.
“Can?” The dog looked confused.

“Ah… you almost got it right!” Ishimaru looked pleased with him despite the mistake, “You just mixed up the P’s with D’s!” The dog cocked its head at him in confusion, “Look, see this is a D!” Ishimaru pointed at the one in ‘Hodes’, “And this is a P!” He corrected it with his finger…

“Arr…” The dog whined sadly.

“But you’re still very clever Arcanine for getting the rest of it!” Ishimaru ruffled the fur around his neck, “Now, let’s go show everyone how good you are at sports as well!”

The dog barked happily and started following him over to the track that Akane, Asahina and Skiddo had started headed to. But Lucario was still stood looking at the writing.

“You coming, buddy?”

Lucario looked at it thoughtfully for a while longer, then crouched down and corrected the P in ‘Peak’, before looking up at Nekomaru questioningly.

“Hah! Yeah, that’s right!” Nekomaru slapped his back, impressed that he’d picked it up so quickly. “Maybe I should teach you to read…”

Lucario nodded, then started heading over towards the others. Huh… Well, then… How did you teach a pokémon to read? Maybe he should ask Ishimaru how he’d done it after training.

But for now, he had other things to focus on. He and Lucario jogged over to the rest of the team, where Asahina and Ishimaru were admiring the full size running track admiringly.

“Okay, everyone! Listen up!” Nekomaru got their attention, “a lot of the time, these sessions would focus on one particular pokéathlon event. But as we’ve got some new trainers, I’m just going to have us all do each event once, just so I get a general idea of where everyone’s strengths and weaknesses are, alright?”

“Even disc catch!?” Akane asked excitedly.

“No… we’ll save the bigger games for a day when we’ve got more pokémon…” Nekomaru decided, to Akane’s disappointment.

“Now, do any of you have any questions about the training in general?”

“Yes!” Ishimaru raised his hand and waited to be nodded at, “In terms of encouraging our pokémon, is there anything we’re not allowed to do?"

“No stepping into the event area itself, and nothing that directly interferes with the other trainers or any of the Pokémon.” Nekomaru told him, “And while it’s not an official rule, I’m not having anyone in my team who shouts insults at the other trainers’ pokémon.”

Ishimaru smiled broadly and nodded, but Asahina looked appalled. “People do that!?"

“Unfortunately! People get quite worked up over sports and often say things they don’t really mean in the heat of the moment.” Ishimaru explained with a sigh.

“Not in my school, they didn’t!” Asahina countered.

“And it’s pretty rare in the leagues as well. Good trainers tend to focus on their own pokémon.” Nekomaru agreed with her.
“Ah… that's what I always tried to tell them!” Ishimaru smiled for a moment, “But they never really listened and my teachers just said it was trainers being trainers…”

“Sounds like your school sucked…” Akane commented.

“Hrmm…” He looked like he would like to agree with her, “Well, it certainly wasn’t up to the standards here! I’ve never even seen half of the pokéalthlon arenas for myself!”

“Umm… yeah, me neither…” Asahina admitted, nervously.

“GAHAHA! Don’t you guys worry, I’ll explain them to you before we start!” Nekomaru asked, “But we’ll start with the two track races first… I’m guessing you’ve both done them before?”

“Yes!” Ishimaru and Asahina both agreed readily.

“Alright then! Everyone get your best runner and line up on the track!” Nekomaru tapped Skiddo to encourage her up to the line, alongside Bewear, Arcanine and Asahina’s slightly put-upon Glaceon. This was hopefully going to be an interesting race...

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next up will be some actual sports!
Events are based on the pokéalthlon events seen in pokémon HG/SS, minus the ones that were for 12 pokémon total and replacing the relay race with just a straight 400 meters style race around the track. Plus I’ve added a swimming race. For lamp jump I kind of went with the idea of it being like pachinko, but with the pokémon needing to climb or jump up to the area the lamps are in to touch them, so that way even small pokémon could manage it (although flying types would be better but no one in this chapter has one) I hope it makes sense, it’s a very weird sports event outside of the game… Also I suspect I’m getting how certain pokémon’s powers work slightly wrong, but I don’t really care. (I.e. Glaceon manipulating snow when they only adjust temperatures in canon.)
get why the cheers upset her this much…”

“It might be that she’s having trouble adjusting to your new home.” Nekomaru suggested, “A lot of pokémon don’t deal well with big changes at first…"

Hmm… maybe that was it? This place was pretty different from home… She still couldn’t believe she was really supposed to be here… Everyone else seemed to have something different about them… except maybe that Makoto guy…

“Oh… I never even considered that possibility myself! Arcanine just seems to be excited to be here. Although I did do my best to keep our schedule the same this morning…” Ishimaru thought out loud, “Speaking of which… “Good work Arcanine! You’re halfway there!”

“*You to, Skiddo! Keep it up!**” Nekomaru bellowed at his own pokémon.

Wait… really!? Geez, those two pokémon were still neck-and-neck and had already got halfway around the track… Meanwhile Glaceon and Bewear were only just about coming up to the first quarter…

“You’re quarter of the way there Glaceon!” Hina yelled, just before Akane said the same to her Bewear. “Keep it up!”

Yeesh… if anything, that made Glaceon look even more annoyed at that, maybe she’d been hoping they weren’t going all the way around the track…

And perhaps Ishimaru had a point about schedules, Hina had got them all up at a completely different time than usual this morning… Maybe Glaceon just wasn’t a morning pokémon?

“Excuse me, but… would a trainer stepping onto the track past the finish line be considered interfering with the race?” Ishimaru suddenly asked.

“You mean to encourage them on the final stretch?” Nekomaru guessed, and Ishimaru nodded. “That’s fine, I was about to do the same myself…” He headed onto the track to prove the point.

“Wonderful!” Ishimaru started rummaging around in his bag, finding something and moving to stand next to Nekomaru just as the two leading pokémon rounded the final corner…

“Come on, Skiddo! You’re almost there!” Nekomaru cheered his goat, who was starting to look like she was getting tired. “And then I’ll give you a massage!”

“Arcanine! Here boy!” Ishiamru waved something in the air… “Look what I’ve got!”

…It was a poffin, and his dog practically doubled its speed at the sight of it, flying ahead of the goat and finishing the race so fast that Ishimaru had to jump backwards to avoid getting trampled by three hundred pounds of over-excited fur.

“Ahahaha! Good boy! You won the race!” Ishimaru proudly gave it the poffin, just as Nekomaru’s goat passed the line and into his arms.

“Hmm… not by as much as I expected.” Nakomaru told him, “ Doesn’t he know Extreme Speed?”

“Err… not yet…” Ishimaru stammered.

“Hmm. I see…” Nekomaru went quiet… although it kind of sounded like he was muttering about something not being good enough…
Well, that didn’t matter to her! What did matter was that Glaceon and the Bewear were almost to the final corner themselves… and Glaceon was starting to look tired of running… even though she’d totally be able to keep going if she wanted to…

Hmm… maybe she could steal Ishimaru tactic… “Come on Glaceon! Come in third and I’ll give you a yummy poffin!”

Aha! That did the trick! Glaceon finally perked up and ran down the track towards Hina, coming in a comfortable third place. “Good girl, Glaceon!” Hina moved to pat her…

She jerked her head to the side and gave Hina a look that obviously meant ‘So where is this poffin you mentioned?”

“Umm… I don’t have any with me!” Hina told her, “But I’ll totally buy you a fresh one once we’ve finished sports, alright?”

The scowl Glaceon gave her suggested that that was very much not alright… Oops…

“Alright, good race everyone!” Nekomaru exclaimed, “Next up will be hurdles!”

Aww… that was another one she needed Glaceon for… but she was still in a mood… a mood that wasn’t being helped by the fact that she could see Ishimaru getting out another poffin from a whole tub of them in his bag and waving it in front of his dog’s face before leading it over to the start line and ordering it to stay there while he headed up the track to stand behind the finish line…

Well… this was probably going to go badly, but… “Come on, Glaceon! It’s only a short race, this time!”

Glaceon rolled her eyes at Hina before slowly slinking over to the start line and reluctantly laying herself down in a huff in the only available spot left… which was next to the fire-type. That wasn’t going to help her mood at all…

Darn Ishimaru and his poffins… He was even waving it around and watching to make sure his dog was paying attention to it, was that really necessary!? And why did he need so many of them? He must have about twenty of those things in there, and they were only going to do eight events…

…So he wouldn’t miss one, would he? They were all right there, in his bag with the lid off… and she was stood right next to him, and he was too busy paying attention to his own pokémon to notice when Hina casually leant over and sneaked one out of the tub and behind her back…

Eeehehehe… She’d done it, and he hadn’t noticed a thing! Now she could show it to Glaceon, and she’d stop being in a strop with her and she’d totally pay Ishimaru back sometime later…

“Alright… On your marks… get set… go!” Nekomaru called out.

The dog and the goat started off first and second again, followed by Akane’s bear and finally Glaceon… But that wouldn’t be for long…

“Glaceon! Over here!” Hina waved the poffin, having checked that Ishimaru wasn’t looking at her… He was busy throwing his own poffin up in the air for some reason…

Glaceon barely glanced at her, but once she did she sped up and started heading up the track, fast enough to overtake the bear just before they both reached the first hurdle… Although, that was mostly because the bear had slowed down to crouch and spring up over it…
Whereas *Glaceon* was so excited by the *poffin* that she hardly seemed to notice the hurdle was *there*, until it was slightly too late and she ended up jumping head-first *into* the hurdle instead of *over* it.

“*Riiillll!*” Maril trilled out in worry for her.

“*Ah! Glaceon!*” Hina also cried out and rushed down the track to help her, jumping over the hurdles in reverse as she did so.

…Luckily Glaceon didn’t seem badly hurt, just dizzy and shocked again… but not so much that she didn’t take the *poffin* when Hina offered it to her. But by the time she’d eaten that, the bear was lumbering over the finish line.

“*Oops…* looks like we came *last* this time…” Hina admitted, as she helped Glaceon walk off the side of the track.

“*More like you’re disqualified.*” Nekomaru said, sternly.

*What!?!* Oh… “*Right…* because I ran on the track…” Hina realised.

“No… I mean *before* that.” Nekomaru corrected her, “I specifically said no interfering with other trainers.”

“*Huh!?* But… I didn’t interfere with *anyone!*”

“You don’t think stealing someone’s training aides is interfering with them?” Oh… he’d noticed that, had he? “*Ishimaru might have a plan for every single one of those poffins, for all you know.*”

“*Umm…*” Hina cringed… that might actually be true…

“Wait… *what?*” Ishimaru looked in his bag in confusion for a moment, “*Err…* But… I *don’t need* all these poffins! I just had a lot of spare berries this morning! I’d have happily given her one if she’d asked…”

“But she *didn’t ask.*” Nekomaru glared at her. “*Which is why she’d have been disqualified if this was a real tournament.*”

Urrrg… He was right, and for something so stupid as well… “*Umm… sorry? I wasn’t really thinking…*” Hina admitted, “*I won’t do it again…*”

“*Good to hear!* Can’t have my teammates getting suspicious of each other all the time!” Nekomaru suddenly laughed, “*Now, let’s go see if Arcanine can keep up his winning streak in lamp jump!*”

“*Arc!*” The dog barked excitedly, although Ishimaru didn’t look so sure… Didn’t lamp jump involve jumping *upwards?* A dog wasn’t likely to be good at *that,* was it?

And neither would Glaceon… “*Alright, Marill! It’s your turn, this time!*”

“*Rilll!*” Marill trilled happily…

He seemed less happy when they got to the arena though… this one had the lamps they needed to turn on set *waaay* higher than the one they had back in their old school, so even with the slanted platforms at the side of the arena to help the pokémon climb up to the lamps, it was going to take a while for them to actually manage to reach them…

“*Err… How exactly does this work?*” Ishimaru was looking up at the lamps in confusion, “*I mean… I’m aware Arcnine needs to turn the lamps on but… how?*”
“They’ve got kinetic sensors… they turn on when they get hit.” Nekomaru explained, “So your Arcanine needs to get up to the top and then try and hit as many as possible on the way down… Don’t worry, the floor’s well padded.”

“Err… I see…” Ishimaru frowned, looking over the course.

“We’ll each have three minutes to turn on as many lamps as possible.” Nekomaru continued, “Akane and I can go first, so you get the general idea… Lucario, buddy, you’re up!”

His Lucario nodded and headed into the centre of the area, breathed deeply for a moment and then crouched into a ready position…

“Okay… Three…Two…One…Go!” Nekomaru called, hitting a stopwatch one the last word.

The Lucario shot forward towards the platforms, nimbly bouncing upwards side-to-side to make its way up them, and it was probably only about half a minute before it had reached the top and leapt down into the group of lamps, waving it’s arms and kicking it’s legs to hit as many as possible on the way down… and then it used an aura blast to give it some more lift to get a couple of extra ones before it was forced to land back on the floor.

It then instantly turned and ran to the set of platforms on the other side of the arena, and repeated the whole thing three more times before Nekomaru called time.

“Good job buddy!” Nekomaru praised his pokémon, “That’s 66 lamps hit!”

The Lucario looked up at them all and nodded. It didn’t seem upset, but wasn’t exactly proud of itself either.

“Alright… hear that, Bewear? 66’s the number to beat!” Akane told her own pokémon.

The bear lumbered up to the starting point and waited for the word to start… It wasn’t as fast as the Lucario had been, but it was still able to easily pull itself up the platforms by its arms, and once it reached the top and jumped, it’s bigger frame meant it was able to hit a lot more of the lamps coming down…

It was halfway through the bear’s third drop that it’s three minutes ran out.

“Damnit!” Akane cursed, “I hate when that happens!”

“…You’re going to hate it even more when I tell you how many lamps Bewear hit…” Nekomaru warned her. “You got 64.”

“Aaaaargh!” Akane growled, “We’re getting closer though! One day I’m gonna beat you at this stupid event!”

“I should hope so…” Nekomaru grinned, “But, I take it your new pokémon isn’t a flying type?”

“Nope!” Akane grinned, “But don’t worry… you’ll see what it is soon enough!”

“Alright then…” Nekomaru looked thoughtful for a moment, before turning to Hina and Ishimaru. “Now… which of you two wants to try it out next?”

“Rill! Rill!” Marill volunteered himself, excitedly jumping down from Hina’s shoulders and scampering over to the centre of the arena before either of them could say anything.

“Gahahaha! That’s my kind of pokémon!” Nekomaru laughed, “Okay… Three…Two…
One…Go!

Marill shot off as fast as he could, using his tail to help bounce up the platforms, and then launched himself off of the top towards the nearest lamp, which he hit and bounced off of, managing to get another three off of rebounds before he fell back down to the ground, shook himself off and tried again on the other side…

“…That’s 16 lamps hit!” Nekomaru announced, once the three minutes was over, “Not bad for such a little fellow!”

“Marill!” Marill cheered himself… even though such a small number was bound to put Hina in last place again… After all, Ishimaru’s Arcanine was big enough to hit was more of those things going down…

At least, that’s what she’d thought until Ishimaru actually took his turn…

“Okay… Arcanine! Head over to this platform… Good boy! Now, turn around and jump up to that platform behind you… good! Now, turn around again and… no up! Keep going up! UP! THAT’S it! GOOD BOY! Just five more to go…”

Yeesh… Ishimaru would be lucky if his dog managed to get up and drop down more than once at this rate!

“That’s it! You’ve done it!” Ishimaru cheered as his dog finally got to the top. “Now jump down… no! The other way!”

“Arc…?” The dog looked down at the area with the lamps…

“Yes! That way!” Ishimaru told it.

“…Cannn…” His dog just whined… Was it afraid of heights?

“Ah… It’s perfectly safe!” Ishimaru told it, “All the other pokémon did it! Even that big Bewear! And they’re fine!”

“Aaaarrrcccc…” The dog just shook its head and backed away from the edge of the platform…

“Ah… hrm…?” Ishimaru frowned up at his dog… “I know! How about I come up there and we jump together?”

“…Arc?” Ishimaru’s dog nodded pleadingly, before he disqualified himself by heading into the arena and climbing up the platforms himself…

Not that it mattered, because by the time Ishimaru had got up there and managed to convince his dog to jump down with him, it had been more like ten minutes than three…

“Err… we need more practise on this one…” Ishimaru understated once they’d landed and his dog had calmed down.

“Yeah… getting your dog used to the height will be a good start.” Nekomaru suggested, before making a mark on his clipboard. “(Hmm… Not good enough at that one either…)”

“What was that!” Ishimaru asked, nervously.

“Huh… oh, don’t worry about it!” Nekomaru laughed it off, “Anyway, onto Ring Drop!”
“Ah… well, *that* one we *are* good at! Right, Arcanine!?”

“Arc!”

_Urg…_ That was the one where the pokémon all tried to push each other out of the ring, right? So… _ideally_ she’d send Glaceon up there…

“Oh, Glaceon! You want to have a go at ring drop?” Hina asked her…

Glaceon looked at the ring, and the Lucario, Arcanine and Bewear that were now climbing up there, and gave Hina an incredulous stare before turning her back on her.

“I guess not…” Hina sighed.

“Marill!” Her other pokémon chirped and bounced off of her shoulders towards the ring…

“Are you _sure_?” Hina asked him… What was he supposed to do against a _Bewear_!

“Rill!” He bounced again, up onto the arena between the Lucario and the dog, opposite Akane’s bear…

“Gahahaha! That little guy’s got _spunk!”_ Nekomaru laughed, “Try not to hurt it Lucario!”

The Lucario nodded and bowed to the rest of the pokémon, which the Bewear and Marill clumsily copied.

“Oh… err… we never did that at my school…” Ishiamru cringed behind his dog as it stood watching them all obliviously. “I’ll try to train him before next week…”

“I wouldn’t worry about it _too_ much… You’ve got other things to focus on.” Nekomaru told him, from behind his own pokémon…

Geez, Ishimaru did _not_ take that well, even though it _looked_ like Nekomaru had only meant that it wasn’t really a big deal if his pokémon thought to bow to the others… But then again, those two couldn’t see each other…

“Alright everyone!” Nekomaru was starting the match, “Three…Two…One… _Fight!”_ 

“Bewear! Get the dog!” Akane ordered.

“Ah! Arcanine! Stay away from that bear!” Ishimaru countered.

But Hina didn’t have time to worry about what _those_ two were doing, because that Lucario was running full pelt straight towards _Marill!_ “Marill! Look out!” Argh… Marill had seen him coming, but was still just stood watching… “Marill! _Move!”_

Marill still waited a few more seconds before bouncing out of the way of the Lucario, which skidded to a halt right at the edge of the arena. Darn! If it had been going just a _bit_ faster…

“Hmm… nice try…” Nekomaru nodded, as Marill bounced back towards the Lucario and started jumping side to side around and even _over_ it a few times, wiggling his tail in its face whenever he got the chance…

“Haha! Good job Marill!” He was bouncing around so fast, that Lucario couldn’t catch him! And at this rate it was going to get dizzy enough to fall off of the side!
“Stay calm Lucario… He can’t hurt you… He’s just trying to make you dizzy!” Dammit… Nekomaru had figured it out as well! “Focus on his aura…”

The Lucario nodded and shut its eyes for a moment, just before Marill tried to wave his tail in it’s face again… But this time the Lucario’s hand shot up and grabbed him by the tail.

“Rill! Riiiiiiil!” Marill tried to wiggle free, but the Lucario just turn to hold him out over the edge of the arena…

“Arcanine! NOW!”

“Aaahhh!?!” Hina flinched as Ishimaru pretty much bellowed into his ear… When had he snuck up behind her!? And what the heck was he ordering his dog to do!?

“Lucario! Behind…” Nekomaru figured it out just seconds before it happened… Ishimaru was ordering his dog to knock both of their pokémon out of the ring while they were distracted, which it did by body-slamming the Lucario just as it was turning around to see what Nekomaru was warning it about…

“Good boy Arcanine!” Kiyotaka cheered triumphantly as the two pokémon fell to the mats below and started scrambling back out to their owners.

“Damn, Ishimaru! That was sneaky!” Nekomaru complained, although he was grinning as he said it.

“That… that sort of things happens in the leagues all the time!” Ishimaru defended himself, “(…And I need to be good enough at something…)

Wait… what did he just say? Whatever it was, he didn’t look all that happy at having ordered a sneak attack…

“You’re gonna regret it though!” Akane boasted, “Cause there’s no way your dumb mutt’s going to get Bewear out of that ring by itself!”

“I wouldn’t be so sure about that!” Ishimaru insisted loudly, before dropping his voice, “Arcanine, try to lure that bear to the side, and then knock him off from behind!”

“…Can?”

“Ahh… Like the Raticate, remember?”

“Arc!” His dog turned towards the bear again, prowling the edge of the ring…

“Bewear! While it’s trapped against the edge! Get it!” Akane ordered, obviously not having heard Ishimaru plan.

“…Wear!” The bear quickly lumbered over to the dog, which stood frozen at the edge of the ring until the bear was almost on top of it…

And then it quickly darted to the side, and then curled around to a spot a few meters behind the bear and double back on itself, body slamming the bear…

Which teetered forward just a smidgen, before furiously windmilling its arms backwards to regain its balance and turning to face the dog, which was still shaking its head at the shock of having run full pelt into what might as well have been a wall for all it had moved.

“Ah! Arcanine…!” Ishimaru cringed as his dog was easily grabbed and tossed over the edge of the
“Told you!” Akane gloated, “It’ll take more than *that* to knock Bewear over!”

“Ah… I see…” Ishimaru sighed as he went to help his dog.

“Ca-nine…” The dog whined guiltily.

“No, no… you did a good job! I obviously just had the wrong strategy!” Ishimaru told it, just as guiltily, as he got it out a poffin to eat.

“At least you *had* a strategy… Marill pretty much worked out *his* by himself…” Hina admitted.

“Rill!” Marill chirped smugly.

“Ah, yes… I must admit, I was surprised you didn’t send up your Glaceon…” Ishimaru admitted.

“Well… I *tried*, but…” Hina looked over to her other pokémon, who saw her looking and smartly turned her back on her.

“Ah… I see…” Ishimaru nodded in understanding.

“That was fun! What next!?” Akane asked, excitedly.

“Hmm… Block break would be closest…” Nekomaru decided.

“Oh yeah! I’m gonna kick your *ass* at this now!” Akane cheered as she headed off towards the next arena, followed by the rest of the trainers.

So… smashing up blocks of stone? *Neither* of Hina’s pokémon were going to be any good at this, but of the two of them, Marill wouldn’t even be able to *scratch* one of those things so… “Glaceon? Marill’s done *two* events as well now, it’s your turn!”

“…Ceon.” She turned her back on the arena and Hina.

“Oh, come on! That’s not fair!” Hina snapped at her, “Look, I know you hate block break, and I know this is all a lot noisier and harder than the sports back in school were, but that doesn’t mean we should just give up and sulk about it! We’re supposed to be showing them what we can do, so they can help us get better at it! But that’s not going to happen if they think Marill’s the only pokémon I have who can *do* anything!"

She just sighed sadly and shrugged.

“Oh, come on! There’ll be other events you might be good at! Like… *snow throw*! I bet this school had snow machines!”

“…Glace…?” She perked up a little at the mention of snow…

“Yeah! I bet you’ll win *that* one easy!” Hina encouraged her, “But we’ve got to do *all* the events, not just the ones you *like*!”

“…Ccccceee…” She hissed lightly in annoyance…

Urggh… Maybe Hina should just drop this for today, and hope she’d be in a better mood next time? Or would that give Glaceon the idea that she could just sulk her way out of doing *anything*…
“Three…Two…One…Go!” Wait… what!? Had Nekomaru just started the next event!?

Hina stood up and quickly headed towards the arena, to find that he had! On the left his Lucario was concentrating for a moment and then smashing each block dropped in front of him in one hit. Next along was the Arcanine, which was chewing and scratching at one furiously, but not really getting anywhere with it. Then at the far right was Akane’s Bewear, who was smashing the blocks to smithereens with one punch as soon as they were dropped down in front of it…

Not that any of that mattered to Hina, because they hadn’t even waited for her to join in!

“Oh, come on!” She complained as she caught up to the other three, “You let Ishimaru take ten minutes to get his dog to jump but I don’t even get one to talk to Glaceon!?”

“What?” Nekomaru turned around to look at her in shock for a moment, “Akane! Why didn’t you tell me Asahina’s didn’t have a pokémon there?”

“But… there was one there!” Akane insisted, pointing to what looked like an empty space to her right…

Empty looking until they all moved closer to it and could see past the mess the Bewear was making and the little pokémon that was desperately head butting the stone in front of him… “Marill!? What are you doing!? You’ll hurt yourself if you do that!”

“Rill!” He ignored her and kept going, crying in annoyance with every hit… “Rill, rill, rill!”

“Urghh… I didn’t realise he was doing that…” Akane cringed.

“Well… it’s obvious what the standings are going to be!” Ishimaru pointed out, “Perhaps we could call time?”

“Right!” Nekomaru agreed, “ALRIGHT EVERYONE! TIME’S UP!”

“Riiiiillll…” Marill sighed as he slumped against the stone… Now, where had Hina put her potions... Ah! There they were!

“Alright, Marill… drink up!” Hina insisted, once she’d run over to him.

“Mar…?” Marill drank the potion, slowly at first, then faster as he started feeling better.

“How are you feeling now?” Hina asked him.

“R…Rill?” He was swaying slightly, even though that potion was usually enough to heal any damage he took from another pokémon… but that hadn’t been damage from a pokémon, so…

“He should be alright… he’s just going to need some rest.” Nekomaru told her, from just behind her, where he and the other two trainers were stood looking at Marill in concern.

“Well… if you think so…” Hina picked him up to carry him to the next event… which she was probably sitting out…

“Err… Asahina… I know it’s not much…” Ishimaru said, after rummaging in his bag for a moment, “But I’d say your Marill deserves a poffin after that attempt…” He held one out to her stiffly, like he was presenting a medal or something. “If he wants one, that is!”

“Rill!” Marill perked up at the mention of food… were all pokémon that easy to please, or was it just hers?
“I think that’s a yes.” Hina laughed as she took it, “And you can just call me Hina!”

“Oh!” Why did he look so surprised? All she’d said was that he could call her by her nickname… “Err… well, in that case, you may call me Kiyotaka, if you want?”

“Sure, Kiyotaka!” Hina nodded, as Marill started scarfing down the poffin, “And I’ll pay you back for the poffins, sometime!”

“Ah… there’s no need for that!” Kiyotaka insisted, “I’ve been informed that they’re utterly appalling, after all!”

…What? The way Marill was eating it certainly didn’t suggest it was awful… but he looked so serious about it…

“Was that Teru who said that?” Akane asked him, and he nodded. “Lemme guess, he caught you just throwing whatever berries you had in the pot and now he’s insisting he teaches you how to cook?”

“Y-yes… How did you…”

“Gahaha! He must have done that to about five people in our class last year!” Nekomaru laughed, “And none of their poffins were that bad before…”

“Still worth letting him teach you though!” Akane added.

Hmm… learning to make poffins herself…? “Do you think he’d be willing to teach me as well?” Hina asked.

“Probably! You can ask him at breakfast!” Nekomaru told her, “But first… Pennant Capture!”

What…? Oh, right… “This is the one where our pokémon have to run around, trying to grab the flags?” Hina remembered.

“Yes… but they’ll be moving up and down out of the holes in the floor…” Nekomaru added, “Akane and I can go first to give you both an idea again…”

They did, although Hina was more preoccupied with looking after Marill than paying attention to sports. From what she could gather Nekomaru’s Skiddo had done pretty well, and then Akane’s Bewear had barely managed to pick up any flags…

Glaceon timidly came up to her just as Kiyotaka was ordering his Arcanine to the start line, looking at Marill with a mix of worry and guilt on her face.

“He’ll be alright… He just needs to rest.” Hina told her. She nodded and looked over to the arena, just as Nekomaru gave the start signal to Kiyotaka…

“Arcanine… Fetch!” Kiyotaka pointed at the arena, only for his dog to stare at his hands instead. “No… I’m not teasing you! You need to go get those! The things popping out of the ground!”

“…Arc!” His dog finally got it and bounded towards the closest one… which shot back underground just as it got to it. “Can?” The dog started digging at the floor where it had gone.

“Is that allowed?” Akane asked.

“No.” Nekomaru answered.
“Ah! Arcanine! No!” Kiyotaka yelled, “Go for a different one! Like... that one next to y... wait... err... behind... argh... er... Over there... no there... or maybe... ahh...!”

Geez... both him and his dog had completely frozen with confusion... was this really that hard? They were all staying up for a certain amount of time, so if you picked ones that had only just appeared, that should give you enough time, right?

But if that was the case, Kiyotaka didn’t figure it out before his time finished, and he ended up just a single flag that had come up under his dog while they’d both been panicking.

“Your turn, Hina.” Nekomaru told her, “Well... if your pokémon are up to it...” He added, looking at Marill worriedly.

“Ceon!” This time Glaceon volunteered and made her way to the starting line unasked, looking back apologetically at her and Marill.

“Thanks, Glaceon!” Hina smiled, “Let’s do this!”

...It was as she’d thought, pointing out the ones that had just popped up gave Glaceon plenty of time to get over to them and catch them! Even though it wasn’t quite enough to beat the Skiddo, Glaceon still managed to come in second!

“Wait... AARGH! I should have been pointing out ones that only just appeared!” Kiyotaka suddenly realised, once she’d finished, “Please let me have another go!”

“We don’t have time.” Nekomaru shrugged as he continued walking to the next area, “We still need to do Snow Throw and Swimming.”

“Ah... but...” Kiyotaka tried to think of an argument, then sighed in resignation. “Ah... very well...”

Geez... he looked really disappointed... Was he really that competitive?

Then again, it wasn’t like a fire type was going to do well at those last two events, was it? Unlike Hina! Hehe! This was going to be her time to shine!

...Unless this new pokémon of Akane’s was any good at either of them... that would be just Hina’s luck!

As it was, whatever pokémon Akane was hiding didn’t seem to be an ice-type, as she still sent her Bewear out into the snowy arena along with the Lucario and Glaceon, who happily bounded across the snow and started using her powers to wrap it around her in several balls...

“We’re screwed, aren’t we?” Akane asked.

“Maybe not... if the three of us team up against it...” Nekomaru considered it, “Ishimaru do you think your... ahh... Ishimaru?”

He’d turned around to find that Kiyotaka wasn’t next to him, but had instead headed over to the entrance to the arena, where his dog was stood looking at the snow...

“It’s just snow! Like on Christmas cards!” Kiyotaka told it as he stepped onto the snow, “See? It’s perfectly safe!”

“...Niiiiine...” His dog just whined at it.
“Ah… alright then…” Kiyotaka sighed, “I think we’re going to have to sit this one out... Would you mind if I stayed here and tried to coax Arcanine onto the snow while you compete…?”

“Alright… just try to stay near the edge so you don’t get caught by the crossfire.” Nekomaru warned him.

“So… we are screwed, then?” Akane asked.

“Yep.” Nekomaru sighed.

He was right… Akane’s Bewear was a super easy target for all of the snowballs that Glaceon was magically forming and throwing at it, and while Nekomaru’s Lucario was better at dodging, it just couldn’t keep up with the sheer number Glaceon could churn out…

Not that it wasn’t trying… at one point it managed to leap into the air and hit Glaceon with a snowball from above, but after that she put a shield of ice over her head and started focusing on the Lucario in revenge, trying to pelt it with snowballs that were getting bigger and bigger and being thrown faster and faster while it dodged left and right…

“ARGH!” The pokémon on the field and the trainers watching all stopped and turned at the sound of Kiyotaka shouting… He was flinching and there were several large balls of snow… or ice… on the floor just behind his back…

Oh no… Glaceon had hit him! She hadn’t meant to, but…

“Ishimaru! Are you hurt!” Nekomaru ran towards him… Ahhhh… Glaceon could be in real trouble if he was…

“N…no! Of course not! It’s just snow! Ahahaha! It doesn’t hurt!” Kiyotaka laughed, although it was kinda forced… “It just startled me because of how cold it is!”

“Niine?” His dog didn’t sound convinced.

“Really! I’m fine!” Kiyotaka insisted, “C-carry on!”

Everyone and every pokémon looked at each other for a moment…

“I think it was pretty obvious what the standings were gonna be…” Nekomaru told him, “We can get on with swimming now.”

“Oh… A-alright!” Kiyotaka winced as he stood up…

He was moving a lot more slowly now as well, and he fell behind the rest of them pretty quickly…

“Glaceon’s really hurt him, hasn’t she…?” Hina realised.

“It’s my fault.” Nekomaru frowned, “I shouldn’t have let him stay in the arena like that.”

“Awww… it’ll be some bruising, at worst!” Akane tried to cheer them up, “If it was something bad he’d have caused a big stink over it!”

“I guess… It’s not like he’d lie to help out someone else’s pokémon, would he?” Hina guessed.

“True… and I can give him a massage to help with the bruising…” Nekomaru nodded.

Wait… a massage that helped bruising? Wouldn’t that just make it hurt more?
“But first… I guess I finally get to see this new water-type of yours, Akane!” Nekomaru grinned as they got to the swimming pool… which was huge! You must be able to fit a *Wailord* in there!

“Wha…!? How’d you know it’s a water type?” Akane gasped.

“Because you left it for *swimming*!” Nekomaru explained.

“Well… alright… be prepared to *finally* lose a swimming race… to my…” Akane threw a pokéball into the water… “*Psyduck!*”

“Pssssy…?” The Psyduck emerged and sat floating on the water.

“Alright, Psyduck! Show ‘em what you’re made of!” Akane yelled.

“*Psy*?”

“Show ‘em how well you can *swim!*” She explained.

“…*duck*?” The duck continued to bob on the water… oh boy… were *all* Psyducks like that? She knew *Misty*’s was a big dope, but how’d they *survive* if they were?

“*Gahahahaha!* I don’t think Lucario’s losing to *that*!” Nekomaru guffawed, “Are you sure that’s a real pokémon and not just a giant bath toy?”

“Of course it’s *real!*” Akane snapped, “I didn’t waste *five* pokéballs catching a *rubber psyducky!*”

“*Hehe*… well, it kinda *looks* like one, from how it’s just sitting there…” Hina laughed.

“Well… maybe it’ll move once the race starts…” Akane hoped.

“Alright… Lucario, in you go buddy!”

“You up for this, Marill?” Hina checked… although Marill was already bouncing out of her arms and into the pool… he was always eager to swim!

And from the looks of it, so was Kiyotaka’s dog, which was bounding up ahead of him and about to jump straight into the pool…

“*NO! ARCANINE STOP! STAY!*” Kiyotaka came running up behind him in a panic.

“…*Nine*?” His dog skidded to a halt and looked between him and the pool in confusion.

“Hah… hah… Good boy!” Kiyotaka panted in relief.

“What’s the matter?” Hina asked… why wouldn’t he want his dog to swim? It seemed happy to…

“I… I just wanted to check…” Kiyotaka gasped for breath, “How deep is that pool?”

“It’s 20 meters.” Nekomaru answered… wow! It really *was* deep enough to fit a Wailord!

“I thought so… Arcanine, you can’t go in there.” Kiyotaka told him, getting a pitiful whine in response. “You’d have to be able to swim!”

“*Can*?” It looked at him in confusion for a bit, before turning and pointed at the other pokémon and then trying to nudge Kiyotaka over to the water…

“No! Stop that! We *really* can’t go in there!” Kiyotaka insisted.
“Arc… arc arc arrrrrcecece?” It started pleading like Yuta sometimes did.

“Ahh…” Kiyotaka sighed, “Do you mind if I enter the pool for a few moments to show him something?”

“You can swim, right?” Nekomaru asked.

“Yes!” Kiyotaka nodded, “Now, Arcanine… stay!” He put a finger out in front of its face, “And watch what happens when I get in…”

“Arc…” His dog nodded and stayed where it was… although it kept sneaking glances at Akane’s Psyduck…

“Now, Arcanine…” Kiyotaka tried to get its attention as he was floating in the pool near the wall, “Watch what happens when I’m not keeping myself afloat…”

He took a deep breath and let himself sink a few inches under the water…

“Arr…?” His dog turned away from the duck and stared at the empty space where it’s owner had been… “Arc! Arc! Arcarcarcarcarcar!”

Kiyotaka swam back up above the surface just as his dog entered a state of full blown panic. “See! The water’s deep! It’s not just a… ah! Arcanine!”

Whatever Kiyotaka had been trying to say got cut off as his dog bit into his T-shirt and used it to hoist him out of the water, before jumping on his chest and starting to lick his mouth…

“Arcanine! Calm down, I’m fine!” He protested loudly enough that the dog stopped and let him sit up. “I was just swimming…” He patted the dog, who was sit sitting on his legs.

“What was all that about?” Akane asked.

“I think he thought it was just a giant bathtub…” Kiyotaka explained, “Complete with a giant rubber Psyducky…”

“Gahaha!” Nekomaru laughed at the scowl that crossed Akane’s face. “So you needed to show him that the water was deep enough that he might sink if he’s not careful!”

“Yes…” Kiyotaka nodded, “Although I might have gone too far the other way now… I don’t think he’d even let me in there again…”

“Well, he might figure out that it’s not so dangerous once he sees the other pokémon swimming.” Nekomaru suggested. “So everyone line up for the race!”

Marill and the Lucario lined up near the wall and then turned and looked at the Psyduck, which was still bobbing on the water slightly further ahead. Then they looked at each other and swam forward enough to be in line with it, then looked back at Nekomaru.

“Well… I guess that works…” He sighed, while Akane just face-palmed. “Already… On your marks… get set… go!”

And the last race of the day started with Marill zooming ahead, followed by the Lucario while the Psyduck completely ignored it, despite all of Akane’s yelling and waving at it.

“Urgh… I don’t get it! He’s great in battles…” Akane sighed as the Lucario made its way back to where it was still floating. “But outside of them he just sits there!”
“Hmm… you’re going to need to find something to tempt him into moving outside of them, then…” Nekomaru suggested.

“Yeah, I guess…” Akane sighed, “Alright, back in your ball, Psyduck!”

“Psyyyy…” It did that at least… Whereas Marill and the Lucario just climbed the ladder back out of the pool and went back to their owners.

“Well! Time to wash up!” Akane cheered, “And then breakfast!” Wow, she was practically drooling over that…

“Sure, I’ll meet you guys there!” Nekomaru agreed, “I need to have a word with Ishimaru first…”

Kiyotaka stopped trying to convince his dog to let him back up and flinched at the sound of his name, “Ah… I take it that’s to tell me I’m not good enough for the team…” He sighed.

“What? No!” Nekomaru looked surprised he’d thought so, “Why do you think that!?"

“Because you’ve making comments suggesting as much after almost every event!” Kiyotaka answered irritably, “Even the two that I won!”

“Oh… uhh… you heard all that?” Nekomaru asked, sheepishly.

“Did anyone not hear it?” Akane rolled her eyes “We keep telling you, Neko, you’re loud!”

“Gahahaha! Sorry, Ishimaru! Guess I ought to stop thinking out loud!” He laughed, “All that was just because I was trying to work out what you could beat Leon at…”

“Wha…? You mean Kuwata? You were comparing me to the pokéathlon champion?” Kiyotaka looked shocked, “Why!?"

“Well… I’m hoping if you keep training, you’ll start catching up to him enough to scare him into training himself…” Nekomaru admitted.

“Ah… so that was what you wanted to talk to me about…”

“Actually… I was hoping to ask you how you’d taught your Arcanine to read.” Nekomaru corrected him.

“Oh! Well… he can’t exactly read… But I’ll be happy to explain how he ended up learning what he does know!” Kiyotaka offered, “Although it might be easier to do at breakfast… if Arcanine ever lets me get up…”

“Nine.” His dog growled in a scolding tone.

“I’m not going to go back in the pool! I just want to go eat!”

“…Nnnnn…” His dog just whined and stayed where it was, sat on Kiyotaka’s legs.

“I know it scared you when I disappeared, but I can’t sit here forever!” Kiyotaka cried, only for it huff back at him.

Looked like Glaceon wasn’t the only pokémon being a pain in the butt today…

“Well… if he ever lets you up, we’re going to be at the baths!” Nekomaru laughed.
“Arc?” The dog looked up for a moment, then quickly stood up and started trying to push Kiyotaka up and towards Nekomaru. “Arc! Arcarcare!”

“Ah! Alright, yes, yes! We’ll go for a bath! Just give me a minute!” Kiyotaka exclaimed, wobbling slightly as he stood up and shook his legs out. “(Honestly, pokémon can be ridiculous sometimes…”)

Hah, no kidding! But… “You wouldn’t change them for anything, though. Would you?” Hina asked, picking up Marill and gesturing for Glaceon to follow her.

“Haha! No… absolutely not!” Kiyotaka agreed, patting his thigh and causing his dog to walk alongside next to him.

She was starting to feel like maybe she’d fit into this school after all…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next up will be some bath and breakfast fun!
Bath and breakfast (Akane POV)

Chapter Notes

Notes: I’m imagining all the humans are wearing swimming costumes at the very least in this chapter.
Also not really implying that Hiyoko’s pokémon have lice, that’s just Akane’s take on why a monkey is grooming them.
Regarding the eating of pokémon, a folk tale in one of the libraries in Platinum mentions that pokémon fish bones thrown into the sea come back with their flesh fully formed, which would suggest they make a good sustainable food source if it was true (But being a folk tale it might not be).
I do realise humans eating pokémon has been phased out of the games and anime over time, but in this AU I’m thinking that for less intelligent or less emotionally complex pokémon it would probably be considered alright to do so. So fish are usually considered acceptable to eat, there’s so many bird pokémon I’m assuming one of them is dumb enough that people don’t mind eating it (and in the games Farfetch’d is said to be a tasty delicacy to the point where it started becoming rare) Mareep have been herded in flocks in the anime so I’m guessing they’re alright to eat… some people might each Squirtles, Ponyta and Miltanks but the general populace frowns on it, kind of like eating turtle and horse is less acceptable compared to pig and cow in the USA and UK. I’d say Pokémon rangers tend to be strictly vegetarian and often vegan though, as they don’t like ‘owning’ pokémon and at most will pick nuts and berries off of the ones that grown edible ones.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Man! That had been a whole lot more fun than the last few training sessions last year! Alright, so Bewear’s evolution had screwed him over a bit, running-wise, and the newbies might be a bit far behind, but at least everything hadn’t been exactly the same result as the last time, or the time before that…

Plus, Neko was always happier to have a bigger ‘team’ to coach, and it seemed like these two were going to be coming back every week! Maybe if they managed to drag Hajime or someone along for training, they’d finally get to play Disc Catch for once! So long as the two newbies didn’t mind teaming up…

Eh! They’d probably be down with that, they were getting on well enough already. Heck, they even reacted the same way to the baths…

“…Why are there so many!”?

Then again, Akane had asked the same question when she’d first seen the twenty-five circular pools all arranged in a grid formation… And it probably didn’t help their confusion that the only other trainers using the place were Hiyoko and Mahiru, and they were sharing a bath despite being surrounded by empty ones.

Now, the interesting question was whether that meant Hiyoko still hadn’t learnt to wash her own pokémon, or was there something going on between those two… On one hand Mahiru’s Passimian
was still picking lice out of Hiyoko’s Ori…co… whatever her bird with the fans was called! But on the other hand, Mahiru was in the middle of washing Hiyoko’s hair, and surely even she could do that by herself…

“Because each is a different depth and temperature, for different pokémon.” Nekomaru explained to the freshmen, “Cold pools are on the left, hot on the right. And the one’s closest to us are the shallowest, at about 1 foot, going up to 10 foot at the back.”

“Ah! So we’ll be able to have a nice deep, hot bath!” Ishimaru announced loudly as he headed over to the right side with his dog, which caused Hiyoko to turn and scowl at the interruption to her bath/Mahiru time.

“So… does that mean Glaceon could go in this cold one, while Marill and I wash with warm water!” Asahina asked gleefully pointing at a pool on the far left. Guess having an ice-type was a pain when it came to bath times…

“Exac…!”

“What!? No, your frog-faced Glaceon can’t use that bath!” Hiyoko suddenly snapped her pool, “I’m using it!”

“Hey! Glaceon doesn’t look like a frog!” Asahina snapped back at her, “And how can you be using it when you’re in that pool!?”

“Can’t you see past those fake boobs of yours!? My Piplup’s in there!” So Hiyoko’s new pokémon was a water type to? Bet hers didn’t just sit on the water like an idiot…

“My boobs aren’t…!”

“Oh yeah! I can see him now! He looks like a good swimmer…” Neko crouched by the pool to get a better look, “You interested in taking part in spo… Argh!”

Neko’s attempt to be friendly got cut short as the tiny penguin suddenly shot out of the water and splashed a wave of water over Neko’s face, before disappearing back under the surface.

“Pfft! Hahahaha…!” Hiyoko just laughed as her pokémon attacked someone… and alright, Neko could take a little splash of water, but still… Honestly, Akane didn’t know why some people tried to be nice to her…

“Hey! It’s not funny Hiyoko! And you can’t let it think it’s alright to randomly hit people when it’s going to evolve into something dangerous one day!” Akane pointed out. The school must have told her that a million times when she got a Stufful…

“Hey! Who says it’s random!?” Hiyoko scowled, “A-are you s-saying I’m some idiot who doesn’t have control over my own pokémon!?”

“Ah! Hiyoko! Don’t say it like that!” Mahiru gasped, “People will think you ordered Piplup to do that!”

“Well… what if that’s what I did?” Hoyoko smirked.

What? She’d told it to attack Neko!? Oh, she needed teaching a lesson! “Then maybe you’d like a nice bath bomb!” Akane reached for Snorlax’s pokéball…

“Ahhhh!” “Ah… Akane, wait!” “Akane, that’s not worth it…” Everyone in her class knew exactly
what she meant and tried to talk her out of it… Which she’d totally expected…

“VOLTORBING THE PLUMBING IS AGAINST SCHOOL RULES!”

“Ahh!” Akane almost dropped Snorlax’s pokéball… she hadn’t been expecting Ishimaru to practically scream at her! “The hell are you talking about!?!” She didn’t even have a Volorb!

“Well… if Explosion based ‘pranks’ aren’t against school rules, then I’m going to argue very strongly for such a rule!” He was still blathering on about stuff that had nothing to do with this… “After the sheer amount of damage such activities caused at my old school, I can assure you…”

“Woah, hold up Ishimaru…” Neko stopped him. “Akane wasn’t talking about that. She was just gonna throw Snorlax’s pokéball up into the air above one of the pools, then call him out so he’d land in it and splash everyone.”

“Oooh! Like a giant cannonball!” Asahina grinned.

“Yeah… and then we’d all have to waste time cleaning up the mess, and probably miss breakfast.” Neko continued.

Ahh! They couldn’t do that! She’d got hungry as soon as she saw Teruteru this morning! “…But she still shouldn’t be ordering her pokémon to attack you!”

“You’re right…” Neko glared at Hiyoko… “And that one is against school rules…”

“Ahh…” Hiyoko squirmed.

“Ah! So we should be escorting her to the headmaster?” Ishimaru asked.

“Umm…” Hiyoko sniffed.

“Well… if she did that on purpose…!” Asahina agreed.

“Ahh… but… but…” Hiyoko stammered, “AAAAAAHHHH! It’s not my fauuulllllt! He won’t liiisten to meeefee! WAAAAHHHHH!”

Oh, boy… she still hadn’t grown out of the crazy waterworks…

“But you were the one who said…!”, “You clearly implied otherwise…!” The two newbies rounded on her.

“See… this is why I said not to say that…” Mahiru sighed at her.

“*sniff* Aaaaahhh! I knooowww! But I didn’t want everyone to think I’m a bad trainer!” Hiyoko wailed even harder.

“Oh… But everyone has times when their pokémon don’t do what they want!”

“And Piplup’s are notoriously hard to reason with! It’s even in their pokédex entry!”

Asahina and Ishimaru both fell for her whole crybaby routine instantly.

“Oh…?” Hiyoko sniffed, “So… you’re not going to drag me to the headmaster…?"

“Well… if it was just an accident…” Neko could never stay mad at her either…
“YAY! Now we can enjoy our baths!” Hiyoko’s tears disappeared without a trace, “Let’s get back to washing each other, Mahiru!”

“Ahh… a-alright…” Mahiru murmured as she and the… what was it called? A rib-bee? Nah.. that didn’t sound long enough… well, whatever it was, it settled back on her shoulder strap where it usually sat when it was out of it’s ball… “But I still need to clean Fomantis…”

“Well, it’s not like we’re in a rush!” Hiyoko insisted.

Nice for her! Akane was ready to be done and go get breakfast! She headed into her favourite pool, the 5 foot deep centre one, and got her pokémon out of their balls… without making a giant splash. Although the water level did almost rise past the top of Snorlax’s neck once he and Bewear were stood in it. Probably a good thing Psyduck was small and could just float mindlessly on top of the water…

Judging from the speed at which Neko and Asahina (whose Glaceon just ignored the Piplup’s bitching and got in the same pool as it) got themselves and their pokémon into the baths, they were probably ready to eat as well… whereas Ishimaru was just digging through his bag again…

“Let’s see… soap, brush, hairdryer, rubber psyducky…” He was muttering to himself, “Right! Go pick which bath you want, Arcanine!” He gestured to the back of the hall.

Only for his dog to peer at the closest one and then walk right into it and sit, the water barely lapping over the top of its tail… “Arc!”

“Oh, come on… That’s shallower than the one at home!” Ishimaru sighed, “You’re not still worried about me sinking, are you?”

“Caaaannnn…” Geez, what a wimpy dog… weren’t Arcanine’s supposed to be heroic and stuck up and stuff?

“…Alright. But next time we’re going in one of the deeper baths!” Ishimaru insisted, as he headed over to his dog with soap in one hand and a brush in the other. “Like that Snorlax over there! It’s barely bigger than you!”

“Arc…?” The dog looked over to Akane’s bath. “ARC!” It stood up, eyes bright and tail wagging, and then trotted over to her, leaving Ishimaru poised to to groom thin air.

“Uhh… hey! He didn’t mean get in here!” Akane tried to stop it, “You’ll make it too deep if you do!”

“Ah! Yes, here! I meant this one, Arcanine!” Ishimaru tried to signal his pokémon over to the hottest pool at the same depth.

But his dog ignored him, choosing instead to flop down by the side of her pool and just… stare across it…

“Arcanine, that’s a real Psyduck, not a toy!” Ishimaru started heading over himself, “Look, I have your Psyducky here!”

The Arcanine barely looked at the small toy in his hands before turning back to stare at the real Psyduck… it almost looked like it was even starting to drool a bit.

“Err… well, I suppose this one is a little small for you, since you evolved…” Ishimaru frowned, “Would you mind if I wash him here, seeing as he’s staying still?”
“Sure, so long as he doesn’t get in the pool, I guess…” And if it meant Ishimaru hurried up so they could have team breakfast already!

The pair of them both set about the task of shampooing their pokémon’s fur… something that took Akane a lot longer now Bewear was bigger, and was taking Ishimaru longer than it needed to, as he kept having to scoop up water from the bath to wet his dog’s fur. He’d barely finished rubbing shampoo over the dog when Akane told Bewear to get out and start towelling himself off while she worked on Snorlax.

“Now the water’s lower, would you mind if I encourage Arcanine in to wash off the suds?” Ishimaru asked, as the water in the bath dropped by a foot.

“Sure!” Otherwise it’d take forever before they could eat!

“Alright! Go in Arcanine!” Ishimaru ordered, only for the dog to stare worriedly at the water. “It won’t be taller that you! You’ll be able to stand at the bottom and still breathe!” It still didn’t look convinced… “Hah… Alright, let me show you…” Ishimaru walked towards the edge of the pool.

“Nine!” His dog barked and moved to block him.

“Well… you need to get in one of the baths!” Ishimaru huffed.

“And if you get in thaaaat one you can play with Akane’s big rubber Psyduck!” Hiyoko suddenly chimed in, causing the dog to perk up, then start thinking.

“Hey! It’s not rubber!” Akane snapped. That joke was gonna get old fast…

“It isn’t?” Mahiru asked, actually surprised, “But… it’s just been sat there the whole time…”

“Well, wait ‘till we get into class and start battling!” Akane told her, “Then you’ll see it move!”

“Arc!” Ishimaru’s dog suddenly came to a conclusion, before raising a paw at him, seriously. “Arc…”

“…Are you telling me to stay?” Ishimaru asked.

“Arc!” It nodded as it started to back up towards the pool, staring at him the whole time. “Arc…”

“Alight… I’ll stay!” Ishimaru rolled his eyes and put his hands up in defeat… although, given it meant he could keep his clothes drier, it wasn’t much of a defeat.

“What? Geez! You’re letting your own pokémon boss you around!?” Mahiru scolded him, “What kind of trainer are you?!”

“One who’s willing to work with pokémon, to ensure they all have the opportunity to be the strongest they possibly can, regardless of their initial circumstances!”

“Uhh… okay?” Mahiru looked as confused at Ishimaru’s way of not actually answering her question as Akane was, “But that doesn’t mean you should let them walk all over you!”

“I’m not!” Ishimaru insisted, as his dog finished carefully walking into the water, which went up to just under its chin. “It’s easier this way! I just needed him to get in the pool! I don’t even have a swimming kit with me, so…”

“Arc!” His dog interrupted him by turning around and barking at him.
“Hmm? Oh! Yes, your Psyducky!” Ishimaru threw it the toy, only for it to ignore it and let it bob away on the water.

“Nine…” It shook its head and then pointed its nose at Ishimaru, “Arc!”

“Me!?” He asked, which the dog nodded and stared pleadingly at, “But… I don’t need a bath! I’m going to be gardening later!”

“Caamaaaaannnn?” It whined at him, “Arc-can-niiiiiiiiineeeeee…”

“Well… bonding moments with pokémon are important…” Ishimaru tried to keep a straight face, although it was turning pretty red as he got in the pool, in full PE kit, to the sound of Mahiru’s groaning and Hiyoko’s laughter. Meanwhile, the dog just barked excitedly, not noticing what a wimp it had just made its trainer look like.

Well, did it really matter if he spoilt his pokémon a little? After all, Snorlax could probably wash himself if Akane hadn’t ever relented and done it for him. But, even if it was a bit of a pain soaping over his entire body, bath times were still a good time for the pair of them to enjoy something together… And it seemed like like Ishimaru and his dog were the same, given he’d brought a toy with him and was chattering away at the dog…

“Alright, now come here and let me finish washing the soap off first… Good boy! Now shut your eyes… good, good… I’m just going to pour some water over your face… There we go! That was a lot quicker than usual, wasn’t it!? Now we have a little time to play before we need to get out and dry off… Hmm? You want to play fetch…? No…? Err… Ah! Arcanine, that’s not a toy!”

Huh!? Wait… did that mean the dog was going after…?

“Psy-y-y!” Akane looked up just in time to see the dog poking its nose into her newest pokémon, just before it scowled and splashed its way across the water, putting half the pool between the pair of them.

“Hah! He actually moved!” Maybe there was some hope of her winning a swimming race after all! Or at least doing better than Neko… Although the burst of movement didn’t last long, and it went back into its normal ‘rubber-like’ state afterwards…

“Arc…?” Ishimaru’s dog stared at it.

“Yes, see Arcanine, that’s a…”

“ARC!” The dog ignored it’s trainer and half-walked, half-paddled to close the distance Psyduck had put between them.

“Psy…?” This time Psyduck glared suspiciously as the dog approached, letting out another annoyed shout and splashing away once the dog was about to poke him again, which just caused the dog to get even more excited and chase him again…

Hmm… maybe she could use this to ‘motivate’ him into moving…? If she found a toy Growlithe and chased him with it or something…? Although, on second thoughts, Psyduck was starting to look pretty pissed off with the whole thing…

“Arcanine… You need to stop this now!” Ishimaru had noticed it as well, and was vainly trying to get his dog to listen to him, although he was probably drowned out by the noise as Psyduck splashed away once again.
Only this time, instead of just going back to floating around vacantly, the feathers covering its forehead bunched together and it started squinting…

Oh crap… that’s what he did when he was preparing a psychic attack, and that dumb mutt was turning to charge straight into it and she’d left his pokéball on the other side of Snorlax…

“ARCANINE! NO! HERE!” Ishimaru snapped his fingers and yelled out another order, this time directed at his dog instead of her.

There was no chance of his dog missing that, and it stopped dead in its tracks and cringed, turning back to approach Ishimaru with mix of guilt and confusion on its face.

Meanwhile, Psyduck’s scowl relaxed as he watched the dog retreat and his eyes took on their usual vacant stare once Ishimaru started lecturing it about how other pokémon weren’t toys either and if one kept running away from it, it should probably respect that…

…The dog still looked pretty confused as to why it had been shouted at though, so it was probably for the best if it couldn’t see Psyduck again… “Alright Psyduck, back in your pokéball…”

“My apologies… I’ll do my best to make sure Arcanine doesn’t harass him again next week!” Ishimaru insisted, “And next time I’ll order him back faster as well…”

“Probably for the best…” Akane admitted, “But don’t worry about it! Some pokémon just can’t be left alone together for five seconds…” Speaking of which, Bewear better not have got into another competition with Skiddo while she was busy again…

Argh…! He was stood waving the towel she’d given him to his side, and Skiddo was lining up to charge it… what did he think he was, a matador!? “Hey! You two cut that out!”

They both froze and cringed guiltily.

“Huh!??” Neko looked up from massaging his new pokémon at the sound of his goat bleating, “Skiddo, stop pretending to be a Taurus and let Lucario dry you off like I told you to…”

“I suppose we’d best start getting dried off as well…” Ishimaru told his dog.

Everyone managed to finish getting their pokémon dry without any further events (although there had been a moment where Akane had hoped the dog would shake all the water off itself and onto Hiyoko, but no luck there…), partly helped by Hina, who had finished dealing with her own pokémon pretty quickly and helped her dry off Snorlax.

And then it was finally time for breakfast by Teruteru!

Oh man… she’d missed this! Getting to line up at the cafeteria and grab a couple of trays piled high with free, but still filling food for her and her giant pokémon to scarf down… and that was just to start with! The main event was watching as Teru brought out heated platters of pancakes, pastries, toasted breads, grilled fish, cold meats, fresh nuts and berries… not to mention yogurts and porridges made with creamy Miltank milk…

Akane was the first to grab something and shove it in her mouth, but the rest of the table wasn’t far behind her…

“*Nom* Is it just me… *onm* or did you even *gulp* better at cooking?” She asked.

“Well, there’s a lot of completion for clientele in my part of Alola… It’s not like I can expect
sophisticated tourists to keep coming to my restaurants in droves if I just rest on my laurels…” Teruteru explained. “I’ve had to keep coming up with more refined cooking techniques and ways of keeping my ingredients fresh… of course, having access to fresh fish right off the coast certainly helped! It’s a shame you couldn’t make the trip, my palm-smoked Wishiwashi would have blown your socks off! It melted in the mouth, with just a hint of woody flavour to set off the meatiness of the fish…” He sighed fondly, as Akane and half the group all decided to grab at the grilled fish because that sounded delicious… “Now that’s a pokémon that’s good eating!” He suddenly added, glaring at Nekomaru as he said it.

“So long as you throw the bones back into the sea so the fish regrow, of course!” Ishimaru commented offhandedly as he carefully pulled out the fish bones and put them on a clean plate to his side.

Huh, so he believed that old story? It always seemed too good to be true to Akane… after all, if it worked, then why didn’t anyone ever try it with that bird pokémon with the leek that was supposed to be so tasty?

There was a moment where pretty much everyone looked sideways at each other after he said it… Seemed like he was the only one who thought fish did grow back in the ocean. Her and Neko ate all the normal meats, Teruteru always said he’d cook anything if asked and Asahina didn’t have meat or fish on her plate.

“Well, of course! My customers would eat Alola out of food if I didn’t!” Teruteru chuckled. That was all anyone said about it. Seemed like everyone had come to the conclusion to let Ishimaru believe whatever helped him eat with a clean conscious. And, there was no point starting an argument when there was all this good food to eat instead!

Heck, it was so good that the group of them were all getting jealous looks from the other students, even that smarmy rich guy with the long thin dragon thing! And now that new punk-looking redhead kid was making his way over as well…

“Hey, Neko! That’s quite the spread you got there!” He punched Neko in the shoulder like an old friend, “Mind if I have some before I go hit the track…?”

“I do mind, actually.” Neko grabbed the wrist of the kid’s outstretched hand before it managed to pick up the toast he’d been reaching for. “This is for people who can get up at eight on a Sunday.”

“Aww, c’mon, man!” He whined, “It ain’t like I’m not gonna be part of the school team! I’m just not a morning person!”

“More like you’re not a practise person, from what I’ve seen you do this last year.” Neko sighed, “Do you really expect to keep up with everyone else when you barely train? Or if you don’t train with other people who can point out your flaws and give you advice?”

“Hey! I just said I’m gonna train!” He snapped, “But if you wanna give me advice so bad, I guess I can let you see what I’ve got…”

“Great!” Neko grinned and slapped his shoulder, “See you next Sunday at eight!”

“Urg… really, dude!” The punk sighed, as if he’d thought Neko would do a one-to-one training session for him when he couldn’t even be bothered to turn up for the group one. “Fine, I’ll just train on my own and prove you wrong, if you’re gonna be like that…”

“Sure thing, Leon…” Neko rolled his eyes very quickly, “Just don’t be a sore loser when that bites
“Whatever, man… how’s your ‘new pokéathlon champ’ coming along, anyway?” The kid smirked over at Ishimaru, who looked slightly confused, “How many events can he beat Luxray in?”

Neko frowned for a moment before giving the answer, “…Zero.”

“HAH!”

“But he’s close in several of them, and he’s got more potential…”

“Whatever man!” The kid laughed and turned away from Neko, “Hey, what about you, Hina? You wanna do that one-on-one training I promised?”

“Umm… well… my pokémon are pretty tired now…” She answered, looking between him and Neko in concern as she did it, “But maybe after classes on Tuesday?”

“Sounds good to me!” Leon grinned before strolling off… “Catch you later!”

“Umm… you don’t mind me doing that, do you?” Hina asked, worriedly.

“No… I’d be pretty pleased to hear that he actually turned up to train with you!” Neko sighed. “But anyways, like I said about having people to point out your flaws…”

He went through his usual routine of pointing out what they all needed to work on… Akane was supposed to get Bewear to fight some nimble pokémon to help him work on his speed and find something that would motivate Psyduck into moving outside of a battle. Ishimaru was told he needed to try and get his dog used to all the new events, and teach it Extreme Speed as soon as he could. He wasn’t really able to judge Hina all that well, given her Glaceon had been in a sulk for half the events, but he mentioned having her Glaceon do target practise with snowballs and her Marill practise dodging if it was going to be her Ring Drop contender. All in all, useful advice, but…

“Where am I supposed to find nimble pokémon?” Akane asked, “I mean, as opposed to getting stuck fighting lots of different kinds.”

“Hmm… Chihiro mentioned writing some pokédex software that helps identify pokémon at a long range…” Hina muttered.

“Really!?” Ishimaru perked up, “That could have all sorts of uses! Does it work with any pokédex? Mine’s quite old…”

“I dunno! Ask Chihiro!” Hina shrugged.

Hmm… seemed like Akane would have to give that a try as well… that was the little kid Kazuichi had gone off with, right? Chances were they’d had a huge nerd-off about it and Kaz would know all about it when she saw him in class tomorrow, and she could probably badger him into giving her an introduction… Which meant that her goal today was going to be finding something to make Psyduck quit doing his bath toy impersonation…

They all said their goodbyes and headed off their separate ways, mostly to do boring chores and stuff from the sound of it, although Hina had stuck around to ask Teruteru about poffin baking lessons, which was something Akane could always get behind. It wouldn’t have helped her though… She’d already tried bribing Psyduck with every type of poffin she could find and he hadn’t responded to any of them.
But the school store had more types of food than she could count, not to mention a selection of toys that would probably have made even the richest of kids jealous! There must be something in there that would work, right?

She made her way to the store... although just calling it a store was selling it short. It was more like one of those fancy department stores in swanky towns like Goldenrod and Celadon than the pokémart on the corner of the road that she’d always gone to as a kid. It was five stories tall, each floor focusing on a different aspect of training, and big enough that you could spend almost a whole day wandering around the place, if you were the sort who could stand to look at crap you didn’t need instead of just coming in and finding what you were looking for like Akane always did.

Seemed like there were lots of people who were willing to spend whole days here, as the place was open to non-students during class times and vacations, and the few times Akane had been caught short of supplies and tried to rush in between classes had resulted in her being mobbed by hordes of people asking for her autograph, just because she was an actual student there...

But outside of those times, the place was practically empty and almost completely silent, which meant it was easy to let her pokémon out to have a look at what they wanted her to buy for them, which was what she did with Psyduck now, ordering him out of his pokéball and, when he refused to budge once she had, resorting to picking him up and carrying him in her arms through the store.

She headed to the food section first, where Ishimaru was stood, in that white and gold uniform that made him look like some kind of fancy sailor, alongside his Arcanine...

...Wait a second. “Ishimaru? I thought you said you were going to the gardens now?”

“Ah! Akane!” Huh... she wouldn’t have thought he’d be so casual after just one training session together... “I realised I needed some mulch, and I thought while I was here I’d see what food is available here! I must say, I’m very impressed at the selection available! It seems Hope’s Peak takes nutrition very seriously! Plenty of different meats and food here with a good fat content...”

“Haha, sure! It might not be Teruteru’s cooking, but it’s pretty high up there!” Akane agreed, which stopped him from blathering at her and going back to picking out some cooked drumsticks for himself.

Shame Psyduck didn’t seem to agree with her about the food. He was just completely ignoring it! Didn’t this dumb thing have any survival instincts!? Aside from not wanting to get chased by Ishimaru’s toy-obsessed dog...

...Which was also ignoring everything around it, including her Psyduck... “…You got him trained quickly!”

“Err...” Ishimaru turned to look at her, then back at the dog once he’d seen her looking at it. “Not really! I know Arcanines are notorious for being arrogant and I’ve only just evolved him, but I’ve been looking after and forming a deep bond with him, through rigorous training, for years! Of course it was no issue at all getting him to fall in line once I evolved...”

“No, I mean he’s not chasing this!” Akane waved Psyduck at him to shut him up.

“...Oh... that!” Ishimaru forced a laugh, “Well, of course getting him to stop doing that had to be my first priority! Ahahaha...”

The heck? Why had he got so worked up about it? She’d told him it was no big deal... But there was just something weird about him all of a sudden... Aside from him not figuring out what she’d
been talking about, even though it should have been obvious, it was weird that he was here at all! How’d he got changed, trained his Arcanine and then made his way here so quickly? And who wore white while gardening? And why was he buying meat when he hadn’t eaten any at breakfast? Looking at his basket, it was like his diet had done a one-eighty, full of unhealthy snacks and fatty meat and the weird stuff favoured by…

“Wait a sec! It’s you!” Akane realised, “Ooohhhhh! You almost had me then!”

“Err… me? Well, of course I’m me!” The imposter lied, “Who else would I…?”

“Nope! Not falling for it! I know it’s you!” Akane cheered, she hardly ever caught the imposter out! “I just saw Ishimaru in his PE kit ten minutes ago!”

“Tch! Typical!” He tutted, “But, seeing as you didn’t expose me instantly, I assume I did something other than that, which was out of character?”

“Well… not you, so much.” Akane admitted, “But his dog just spent a whole bath time chasing this…” She waved Psyduck at him, “…Around the bath! But yours didn’t even look at him.”

His eyebrows scrunched up in confusion. “It was running around the pool, and Ishimaru didn’t stop it at all?”

“Well, he did eventually, but his dog wasn’t listening at first…”

“Hrmm… It would seem the initial reports on his behaviour that I’ve been privy to weren’t entirely correct, then.” ‘Ishimaru’ frowned, “Was there anything else I did wrong?”

“Well… I don’t think he eats meat, either.” Akane nodded at his basket, “Just fish and vegetarian crap.”

“Urgh… fish!?” His lips curled in outright disgust, “Fish! Do you know what the fat content of fish is!?”

“Well… wouldn’t it depend on the fish…?”

“It can be as low as 6%!” He snapped, “Hardly a reasonable energy source!”

“Well… don’t impersonate him, then!” Akane shrugged.

“That might not be an option I have the luxury of taking…” He sighed quietly.

“Eh? Why not?”

“Err… no reason! I mean, it’s nothing you need to worry about!” He insisted way too hard… Must be pretty hard to balance being a spy and being Ishimaru…

“…You’re not planning to screw with the guy, are you?” Akane asked. Ishimaru might be an uptight blather-mouth, but he seemed like a good kid and Neko seemed to think he was gonna be a valuable member of Hope’s Peak’s sports team...

“No! Of course not!” He waved his hands defensively, while Akane just glared at him, “I’m really not! If anything, I’d be helping him!”

“How is going around pretending to be him helping him?” It didn’t make sense to her, but the imposter hadn’t ever caused problems before…
“Well… I… have information that suggests he might be… targeted to receive a potentially dangerous item…” He started, “My intention is just to intercept that delivery, regardless of who it’s addressed who, and have Gundam assess the threat and ensure it’s safe before we pass it onto the intended recipient!”

Hmm… that didn’t sound too bad, but it seemed like a pain to do… “Why not just warn him about it and ask him to just let Gundam check it over?”

“I suspect if he’s given any warning that the item could be dangerous, the senders will find out and choose someone else to give it to.”

“What the hell is it they’re sending anyway?” Akane asked, although if Gundam was going to be checking it out… “Is it some kind of rare pokémon!”

“That’s none of your concern!”

“Hah! That just means I’m right!” Akane grinned, at which ‘Ishimaru’s’ shoulders slumped, “Tell you what, whatever it is, lemme scan it and I promise not to tell anyone about it!”

“No! The identity of the item is confidential!” He snapped, “Besides, I’m not actually sure it’ll be scannable…”

An unscannable pokémon? That wasn’t like that weird ‘MissingNo’ thing that drunk people swore they saw off the coasts of Kanto, was it? Well, whatever it was, the imposter wasn’t gonna let her see it, and Gundam would probably be just as stubborn… “Alright… But lemme scan your new pokémon! Oh! And whatever Mimikyutie evolved into!”

“Mimikyu doesn’t evolve…” He said, snippily. “But I suppose if it’ll keep you quiet about this, I can give you an early viewing…” He reached into the copy of Ishimaru’s bag he had at his side and brought out a pokéball, “Alright, come on out!”

The pokéball opened briefly, and Akane could have sworn she saw a pair of eyes shifting about for a moment, before the pokéball snapped shut and then reopened a second later…

The pokémon that jumped out was… kinda weird. At first glance it looked like a Growlithe, but after a moment she noticed the colour, fur and shape was more like an Arcanine… just a pretty squished Arcanine…

“Arc…ca…lithe?” It barked, seemingly confused by the noise once it did it, “Grownine…? …Liiccc!?” The last noise was made with a look that almost seemed like it was pleading with her to believe it really was what it was pretending to be… Which she might have gone with if it had actually been pretending to be a real pokémon…

Instead she just flipped out her pokédex and scanned it…

“Mime Jr., the Mime Pokémon. It can quickly imitate anyone it sees.”

“…Although it’s still getting the hang of it… It can’t even manage other pokémon yet, yet alone people…” ‘Ishimaru’ admitted, embarrassed, as his pokémon gave up and turned back into the tiny clown thing the pokédex had shown a picture of. “But are you happy now?”

“Yeah… I guess I’ll let you do your whole ‘secret agent’ thing…” Akane sighed, although she’d probably be trying to keep a look out for this rare pokémon whenever she saw ‘Ishimaru’ out and about.
“Good!” The imposter recalled his Mime Jr. and turned away, “Now, heel, Arcanine!” He patted his thigh and his Ditto barked (in the correct voice for its disguise) and started walking alongside him.

“Pssyyy…” Psyduck glared at it suspiciously.

“What the…!” ‘Ishimaru’ jumped slightly, “That thing is real!?”

“Of course it’s real!” She snapped, ‘Why would I carry around a giant toy!?”

“I assumed it was for Bewear, or whatever you new pokémon was… Not that it was your new pokémon!” He exclaimed, “How did you train it to sit so still?”

“By catching a really dumb Psyduck…” Akane admitted, irritably, “It only moves when it’s in fights!”

“Oh… but at least you can battle with it!” The Imposter said, cheerfully, “And it must be pretty easy to look after, to boot!”

“Yeah… I was kinda hoping to win swimming races with it too…” Akane sighed, “That’s why I’m here, trying to find something that’ll motivate it…”

“Oh… well, good luck with that!” He saluted smartly and signalled for his Ditto to start following him again…

Psyducks eyes followed the other pokémon, until it and it’s owner turned around the corner. They it went back to just sitting there, ignoring all the great food around it…

At this rate, she might end up going ahead with her stuffed dog idea after all…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Also I want to clarify that Hiyoko was telling the truth about not having complete control over her Piplup, in case anyone was wondering. Next up will be one chapter from Sakura's POV showing the school gardens, then it will go into the first day of classes (and some small battles and confirmation of every DR1 kid's pokémon, because I'm not sure I mentioned all of them yet.)
The school gardens (Sakura POV)

Chapter Notes

I’m not sure how exactly Florges is supposed to move. I assumed she can fly as she’s a fairy type, and there’s a scene in the anime where one jumps pretty high and then floats upwards to use a move, but I’ve not managed to find any images of one just moving around normally to see what they do.
Also I don’t know if there’s an official plural version of Florges, so I’m just treating it as one of those nouns that’s both the singular and plural.
Santa Shikiba is the official name of the Ultimate Botanist (whose only mentioned by title in Dangan Ronpa). His name and picture are in one of the art books and he apparently makes a brief appearance in the Kirigiri Sou sound novel, but as that's not got a written translation I don't really know what he's like personality-wise, so I made one up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sakura awoke on Sunday morning in a positive mood. After the tour the day before, she had been somewhat concerned that her new classmates might be as fearful of her as Nurse Tsumiki was, as she was stronger than most of them, both in terms of her pokémon and her physical strength. However that fear had been drastically reduced when Hina had suddenly come to her door to offer her a treat cooked by one of the boys in the year above.

In a way, Hina had been concerned about Sakura’s pokémon… when Sakura had commented on how well the food had been made, Hina had admitted that she felt out of place amongst people who appeared to be either more skilled or talented than her, specifically Togami and Sakura herself. It had prompted Sakura to admit to feeling out of place in a place full of so many new people and things to do, seeing as she was used to the quietness of her remote home where there was little to do but train herself and her pokémon.

The conversation had progressed well from there, Hina had said that she was an avid swimmer and asked if Sakura would like to go swimming at some point, and they’d decided to visit the swimming pool after classes on Monday, provided there was not too much homework set on the first day to prevent them from having the time. It was a small thing, but it was good to know Sakura would have at least one person who was happy to talk to her.

Regardless, she was glad to find that there were not too many people up at this time in the morning today, perhaps due to people choosing to have a restful final day before classes began. It made her feel less conspicuous as she pushed the large trolley of the potted plants, carefully brought to the school from her home, through the halls from her room to the elevator, pushing the button to take her up to the fifth floor once it arrived.

She’d been quite surprised to discover that the student gardens were located inside the building, up on the fifth floor. Nurse Tsumiki had timidly explained that attempts to start up the garden outside had resulted in difficulties to the students, caused by the sheer number of wild pokémon that the school encouraged to take up residence in the grounds, and had decided to set up an area indoors instead.
Which made sense, and Sakura supposed that the fifth floor had been chosen due to the glass roof which allowed light into the area. But surely it would have been more convenient in the long term to build a conservatory instead? Unless floor space was really at such a premium here… The gardens did seem to take up a large area of the building, assuming all of the doorways leading off from the long stretch of corridor ahead of her were indeed leading to the gardens. Nurse Tsumiki had seemed particularly anxious when it came to showing this place, so Sakura had assured her that Florges would likely be able to sense where the gardens were when she needed to come here herself.

Florges did indeed seem to sense the flowers, eagerly floating ahead and diving into the first door she came to, barely waiting for Sakura to follow after her with the trolley. Inside, garden was far better maintained than Sakura had been expecting after Nurse Tsumiki’s comments about people not being responsible for their plants. Neat gravel paths ran between carefully contoured, green grass hills, all of which had been used to grow plants of varying usefulness, from practical vegetables, nuts and berries to flowers that did little other than look and smell pretty. Everywhere she looked was a colourful expanse of flora, a range of bright shades, sizes and shapes that made the whole garden look haphazard to Sakura’s eye, used as she was to Florges meticulously trimmed cherry trees that lined the paths of her home gym.

But Florges herself seemed overjoyed to see them all, flittering about between the unfamiliar plants as Sakura pushed the trolley through it all, only falling behind when she stopped to pluck an errant weed from the ground. These might not be her plants, but most Florges had an instinct to care for gardens regardless of matters such as ownership, and Sakura’s one was no exception. She’d likely thought this place would be her new home, and therefore her responsibility, the moment they’d entered it...

Hmm… on second thoughts, that could cause problems between herself and the other students who looked after this place… what if Florges tried to insist that the garden be remodelled to suit her tastes? She’d always been given complete control over the plants at home, but the other students were less likely to be as fore-coming as her family if she tried to re-root their plants for no understandable reason. Would she even understand that some of the plants inside the room wouldn’t belong to her?

That would probably depend on how the gardens were organised… if they each had their own separate area, it would be easy to explain to Florges that she was to care for one part, and only that part. But if it was more of a collaborative effort across the whole garden, she’d likely get confused as to why she couldn’t take full control of any of it...

One thing was certain, she would need to ask for advice before allowing Florges to plant any of the trees they’d bought from home. And as luck would have it, there was a student working in the garden, at the base of a ring of plants that looked somewhat like Carnivine mouths.

However, Sakura was not the only one who had spotted the boy. Florges was already making her way over towards him, and she could fly faster than Sakura could push the trolley. Even with Sakura’s attempts to speed up, Florges still managed to swoop up behind him and peer over his shoulder before she managed to get within talking distance...

There was a brief moment where the pair of them were just staring at whatever the boy was working on, but then he briefly glanced to his side and realised he had a spectator, causing him to fall sideways at the sudden surprise.

“AH! A… a Florges!?” Sakura could just about hear him shout. “Carnivine! I’ve got a pokémon for you to catch!”

“Hold on! My apologies, but she is mine!” Sakura called over to him, as she left the trolley and ran
across the distance towards him. “My name is Sakura Oogami, and I am one of the new students here…”

“Oh! R-right…Sorry about that!” The boy slumped in disappointment, then shakily stood up and brushed himself off, before holding a hand up to shake hers, “I’m Santa Shikiba, grass-type specialist and general lover of plants! I spent all summer trying to catch a Florges to help me out around here… and then suddenly there one’s just stood looking over my shoulder! Can you blame me…?”

He grinned sheepishly up at her. A wide smile to go with his round face and large nose, and a similar shape to the U shape of his hair between the two peaked spikes of black hair at the sides of his head.

“I cannot blame you for hoping she was wild…” Sakura agreed, “But I will blame you if you attempt to take her from me again…”

“Of course!” He jumped defensively, “No reason for me to do that now! She’ll probably want to help out anyway, right!? And I bet she’s brought some plants from your home, as well? I’ve got an empty area I haven’t figured out what to do with, if she likes it, and then I’ll show her around the garden and explain why it’s laid out the way it is…”

He started walking off a path to the side, leaving his tools in a mess by the plant he’d been working on in favour of apparently setting things up for his apparent new assistant… although Sakura could not blame him, if he was the only one maintaining this place as he’d implied. His clothes certainly looked worn enough for her to believe that could be true. Although he had odd choice of attire for a task such as dirty as gardening, with his light brown trousers being the only sensible contrast to the white boots, tank top and coat he had on.

Florges made to follow him, stopping only briefly to ensure that Sakura was following her, along with their trolley of flowers, and she was soon flitting between the plants again as he explained what they were… from the sounds of it, a great many of these plants were new breeds, created by himself. It was most impressive, and it seemed like he and Florges would get one well in here… her concerns had been for nothing…

But she had barely thought as much, before a new concern caught her attention. Striding towards the group of them was a tall, muscular man with short green hair and a Hitmonchan at his side that appeared ready and willing for battle, if whatever intentions he had came to that…

“Oogami!? Hold up a minute!” He shouted at her, once he’d seen she was looking his way.

Hmm… judging from the fact that he knew her name, along with the, slightly too tight to look comfortable, dark blue suit he was wearing, she could only assume he was a member of the school’s security personnel.

“That’s Sakakura… He’s head of security!” Shikiba quietly confirmed her suspicions.

“That’s Sakakura… He’s head of security!” Shikiba quietly confirmed her suspicions.

“Thank you.” Sakura quietly gave him her thanks, then turned to face the guard. “…Is there a problem…?”

“Yes. You should have had this explained to you…” He glanced briefly at Shikiba, “But you’re in the wrong gardens. This area is reserved for third years and above.”

“But… that rule’s just to stop the freshmen idiots from ruining the ruining the place!” Shibika exclaimed, “She’s got a Florges! She’s not going to mess anything up…”

“That’s irrelevant. She’s a freshman, she needs to use the freshmen gardens.” Sakakura insisted.
“You… you can’t make her use that place!” The gardener cried, “Just look at these plants! At least let her use the second year gardens, like Tsumiki and…” He gestured to Sakura’s trolley.

“That’s no proof she’s a good gardener. She could have gone out and bought those at the department store, for all you and I know.” The guard pointed out, “But if you’re so sure we should make an exception for her, you can try taking it up with Munakata… But until then, she’ll need to use the freshman gardens, as per the school rules… otherwise the other freshmen will all be clamouring to use the other gardens as well.”

“Tch… I suppose you’ve got a point there…” Shibika sighed, “Where’s Munakata at the moment?”

“Alola.” Sakakura answered, “Spending one last week having to hide in the shade…”

There was a faint smile that played across his lips at the unnecessary detail. Clearly stated out of sheer enjoyment of a memory, rather than for her benefit…

“A week!?” Shibika cried, “How come he gets to skip out on the whole first week of the new year!? That’s ridiculous…!”

The smile on Sakakura’s lips turned into a scowl, “You really think he’d just skip work!? You entitled kids have no idea how much Munakata does for this school…!”

“Aahh…” The gardener clearly regretted having triggered the guard’s temper, especially as the Hitmonchan by his side was punching it’s hands together threateningly. “I’m sorry! It’s just a bit disappointing that she can’t be helping me out right away, that’s all… Ahahaha…!”

“Well… you’ve been waiting for a Florges to help you for two years. What’s one more week?” Sakakura pointed out, “Now, Oogami, if you and your pokémon could follow me outside.”

“So of course.” Sakura agreed, “Florges, we need to go now.”

Her pokémon looked between herself and the gardener sadly, obviously confused as to why she was suddenly not being allowed to look after the expanse of well-kept plants as she’d been told she would.

“Sorry, ma’am… Looks like you’ve gotta go for now…” Shibika apologised to her, “But… just try and make do for a week, and I’ll get you set up in here like I said, alright?”

Florges sighed and stayed by Sakura’s side as she followed the guard out of the garden they’d entered and further up the corridor, past a plainer looking garden that appeared to be mostly full of restorative berries, from what little Sakura saw of it, and finally up to another doorway…

“Here you go… the freshman gardens.” Sakakura opened the door, looking somewhat guilty as he did so.

Ah. Now she could understand why nurse Tsumiki had told her the gardens were in a poor state. If there had ever been any useful or beautiful plants in the room ahead of her, they were long dead now, potentially the source of the rotting smell that assaulted her nose as soon as the door was opened. Instead the cracked, dry soil was chocked with wilting weeds, thick layers of thorny brambles and a single barren tree that blotted out a large portion of the sunlight. There was also no obvious way of moving among the plants, as any paths that might have been marked out before were now overgrown, including the one that must have originally led to what had presumably been a small tool shed in the back corner, which was now covered in thick vines.

“Well… it would appear that we have a long day of work ahead of us.” Sakura sighed, as she made
to push the trolley through the door. It was a good thing she’d decided to do this early in the morning…

“FLOR!” Her pokémon was uncharacteristically loud, suddenly moving herself to block the doorway with a stern look on her face.

“I realise this is disappointing, compared to what we just saw, but this is the only garden we can use.” Florges stayed where she was, shaking her head. “…Would the plants last a week in the pots?” Florges considered it, then shook her head slowly, “Then we need to plant them in there, today.”

Florges shook her head again, more insistently than before.

“Well, whatever you decide to do, I’d better not see you in any of the other gardens…” Sakakura said in a warning tone, and his Hitmonchan backed him up by beating its fists together, before the pair left her alone with her unmoving Florges...

“You do realise this situation will not change, no matter how long you stand there…” Sakura commented, after a minute of silence, “This is the only place we we will be able to grow the plants from home. Do you understand?”

Florges nodded.

“Then will you allow me to take them inside, so we may start planting them?” Florges shook her head. “Then you want me to leave them in the pots?” Florges shook her head again. “Then what do you want me to do?”

She twirled around fretfully. Obviously there was something about the room that she did not like…

“We can cut down the brambles… pull up the weeds…” Neither suggestion calmed Florges, “Water the soil? Take an axe to the tree?” Still not the right answer…

“Why would you want to cut down a tree!?” A high pitched voice suddenly cried out from near her elbow.

Sakura turned to see one of her other new classmates Naegi, the nondescript-looking boy who’d nevertheless had some sort of connection to two of her other classmates. He appeared to be struggling to carry an armful of pots, precariously balanced in a heap that forced him to peer up between several berries at her.

“I suspect it would be easier to explain if you come and see for yourself…” Sakura admitted, moving her trolley backwards so he could approach the doorway. Florges also moved aside

“Uhh… alright?” He moved towards the door, although his movement faltered upon seeing the state it was in… “Geez! What happened in there!? I thought Nagito was just using a phrase when he said our garden was trash!?”

“From what my guide told me, I suspect it’s mostly down to neglect.” Sakura told him.

“No kidding…” He sighed, resuming his awkward pace towards the door, making sure not to unbalance his plants. “I guess getting rid of that tree would help then… and we’ll have to cut all those bushes, and pull up the weeds, and see if there’s a hose or a sprinkler system and…”

“FLOR!” Florges stopped him, jumping back to where she been blocking Sakura before.

“Uhh… you don’t want me to go in there…?” Naegi asked her, hesitantly, as she started to look over
his plants. Once she’d finished with that, she shook her head at his question.

“Florges, there is no guarantee he will be allowed to use the other gardens at all…” Sakura pointed out to her. It was one thing for her pokémon to block her movement, it was quite another for her to inconvenience another trainer.

Florges nodded, looking upset to be doing so. This certainly couldn’t just be a case of her being disappointed to not be allowed in the third-year gardens…

“Does she think I’m somehow going to make it even worse in there…?” Naegi asked, embarrassed, “I mean… I know my plants aren’t the happiest, but given I had to pack them all up and bring them here…”

“No… she would not let myself in there either.” Sakura assured him, “I think there is something about the garden she is concerned about.”

“Hmm… you mean, like it’s dangerous, somehow?” Naegi asked, “Maybe there’s a dangerous pokémon in there…?”

Florges nodded hesitantly at his first suggestion, then shook her head at the second. So something that was a danger in the garden? But not a pokémon…

“I am assuming you are not worried about the thorns on the brambles hurting us…” Sakura commented, to which Florges shook her head.

“Hmm… Maybe the tree roots have damaged the floor and it could cave in at any moment…?” Naegi guessed again, only to be met by a shake of Florges head as well. “…Does she know how to play charades?”

“Charades?” Sakura asked, she wasn’t familiar with the game herself.

“Yeah! It’s where one person has to try and act out a phrase, and the others guess what it is!” Naegi explained, “I thought maybe she could try acting it out…”

Florges head tilted downwards and she stared at the plants on Sakura’s trolley in intense concentration. But gradually over time her expression grew more troubled…

“You cannot think of a way to act it out?” Sakura asked, to which Florges nodded shamefully.

“Okay… how about twenty questions then!” Naegi suggested, “Is the problem an creature? Like a pokémon or human?” Florges shook her head, “A plant, then?” Florges shook her head again, “So… a mineral? Like… a rock or something?” Florges shook her head again. “Uhh… then it’s nothing…?” Florges shook her head again, irritably this time. “Ahh… Sorry! It’s just… usually stuff is at least one of those three things… At least when my family play the game…”

There was a heavy silence once Naegi trailed off, a mixture of embarrassment and disappointment as the pair of humans completely failed to understand the pokémon and she in turn failed to find a way to communicate the problem to them…

“Ah! Good morning, Makoto and Oogami!” The silence was abruptly interrupted by the loud voice of one of her other classmates. This time it was Ishimaru, although he was dressed far more casually than he had been the day before, in an old set of shorts, t-shirt and trainers. Like Sakura, he had bought a trolley up here with a collection of pots, each one containing a carefully labelled berry plant, although his only took up half the space of her own collection. “Is there a queue for the gardens? Hanamura told me they don’t tend to be very popular with first years…”
“Uhh… no. It’s not a queue, exactly.” Naegi told him, “Sakura’s Florges thinks there’s something dangerous about the gardens, so she’s not letting us in there. But we can’t figure out what it is that’s the problem, so we’re at a bit of a stalemate…”

“Oh… I see.” Ishimaru frowned as he finished pushing the trolley close to the pair of them, “Well, perhaps I can have a look at the place and see if I can spot any obvious health and safety violations… Arcanine, stay there.”

His dog nodded, and he moved away from his trolley and looked at the door, only scowling for a moment at the poor state the plants were in before he started to knock carefully at the door-frame, testing the structure of the building, perhaps?

Meanwhile Naegi, obviously growing tired of holding the scant few pots he’d brought up with him, moved towards the free space on Ishimaru’s trolley…

“Arc! Nine!” Ishimaru’s dog barked harshly as Naegi came close to it.

“Uhh… okay… not gonna do that then…” Makato slowly backed away from the dog.

“Ah… what were you…?” Ishimaru turned back to see what had occurred.

“I was just thinking I could put my plants down on your trolley!” Naegi explained, “Seeing as you had some space on it…”

“Oh! Sorry about that… He’s probably remembering the time some idiot brought an infected plant into the school garden and all my plants died, so I couldn’t make him poffins for a month!” Kiyotaka explained with an embarrassed laugh as he took the topmost of Naegi’s plants and checked it over, before putting it down on the trolley himself with no complaints from his dog.

“An infection…?” Makoto murmured, “Like a virus? So… not creature, mineral or plant…”

Of course… “Florges… when you agreed that there is a danger in there…” Sakura gestured to the dead garden, “You meant to the plants, not us…” Florges nodded, “So, if we’d taken our plants inside, they’d have died…” She nodded again.

“Wait… you mean someone here did take infected plants in!?” Ishimaru groaned incredulously, “So now we have to treat the entire garden as infected…”

“But there’s nothing stopping us from going in by ourselves and dealing with it, before planting anything in there, right?” Naegi asked, “And we’d have probably wanted to get rid of all those weeds and brambles anyway…”

“…I suppose. The only difference is that we’ll have to make sure to burn the old plants, instead of trying to compost them.” Ishimaru considered it, “And we’ll have to be extra careful about digging up all the roots.”

Florges was nodding along with them both. It would appear that this task was going to take up far more of the day than she’d been anticipating. “What about the tree though?” Sakura asked, “Is that also infected?” It would be highly unlikely that they could remove all the roots from that thing in less than a day, especially on top of all the other work they’d have to do…

Florges flew over to and around the tree, considering it from various angles for an agonising minute, before returning and shaking her head happily.

“Thank Arceus for that!” Naegi exclaimed, “This is going to be hard enough as it is…”
“Indeed… But there’s nothing better than pushing your limits with a good day of hard work, wouldn’t you say!?” Ishimaru asked, cheerfully.

“Uhh… Sure…” Naegi’s words were less positive than the expression on his face, “But… I guess we’re going to need to get some tools first, unless someone wants to wade through the brambles to get to that shed!”

A quick trip to the store later, the three of them returned to the garden armed with axes, shovels and scythes and set to work for the day, starting by cutting down and digging up the infected plants and placing them into a large, metal wire cage that they found in the tool shed, once they’d uncovered it, so that Ishimaru’s Arcanine could set the dead plants alight safely… and Naegi could cook some sweets he’d picked up at the store, to her and Ishimaru’s pleasant surprise upon tasting the result…

“You mean neither of you have ever roasted marshmallows!?” Naegi exclaimed, when they both told him they’d never tried them before. “Geez, if I’d known that I’d have got chocolate and crackers and made you guys smores…”

“Well… perhaps some other time! I do have a constant source of fire, after all!” Ishimaru pointed out, patting his dog fondly, “But for now we still have work to do!”

“Yeah, alright then…” Naegi sighed, tiredly. He did not seem well suited to this sort of hard work, unlike herself and Ishimaru.

After a brief glance at each other, Ishimaru suggested he keep an eye on the bonfire to ensure it did not become a danger, while Sakura continued to cut down the plants and Florges pointed out the parts of roots that they’d missed the first time around so Ishimaru could dig them up fully. Then when Ishimaru was starting to look in need of a break, Sakura suggested that he look after the bonfire while Naegi run to get lunch for everyone…

He returned with thin bread buns, vegetables, raw sausages and fish and a set of metal skewers.

“You know how to cook over a fire, right?” Naegi asked Ishimaru.

“Me!? No! Why would I know!?”

“Umm… because you have a fire type?” Naegi answered him, “I mean… if I had one I’d be having barbeques every week!”

“But… I don’t eat meat…” Ishimaru sighed irritably, “And besides, just because I have a fire-type, doesn’t mean I’m going to treat him as a portable cooking source all the time! I mean, you wouldn’t expect your Blastoise to provide you with refreshments all the time, would you!?”

“Oh, uhh… Good point.” Naegi admitted, cringing. “I’ll go get…”

“Don’t worry… I’ve been camping enough times to be able to cook these.” Sakura stopped him, picking up the skewers and saying a prayer of thanks to the pokémon that died to provide their meal, before assembling and cooking the food for the two grateful boys…

“So, you go camping a lot?” Naegi asked, as he and Ishimaru got out food for their own pokémon, “That must be fun!”

“Hmm… it’s more a matter of practicality.” Sakura corrected him, “The more powerful pokémon to train against tend to be far away from civilisation. It often takes many days of travel to get to them.”

“But what happens about your responsibilities back at your home?” Ishimaru asked, “I mean… you
work for a gym, don’t you? Does that mean it gets easier to earn a badge if you’re not there that day, or…?"

“We have other members who can act as substitutes for each other.” Sakura assured him, “And, I must admit, I do not have much in the way of day-to-day responsibility at my home. Even Florges’ garden can cope quite well by itself for a week without her care.”

“Hmm… I see…” Ishimaru looked concerned.

“However, the garden back home was set up a lot better than this one…” Sakura pointed out, jovially. “We will have to resume our task if we wish to get our plants buried before nightfall.”

Naegi sighed, but got back to work piling dead plant matter into the bonfire, while Sakura and Ishimaru cleaned up the remainder of the garden. Then the three of them realised they would likely need better compost for their plants, so there was yet another trip to the school store before they were able to begin laying that out and digging holes at the locations dictated by Florges.

But that part of the task was over soon enough, especially as once Ishimaru and Naegi had finished with their own plants and come to help her, and his Blastoise turned out to be rather adept at watering plants....

“Right! That’s all done!” Ishimaru brushed his hands off satisfactorily, “Now it’s just Makoto’s pots, and we’re all done, right!”

That was odd… why had Naegi not done that first, himself?

“Uhh… actually, my plants don’t need to go in the soil.” Naegi explained, “They’re dwarf varieties, so they can be kept in the pots.”

However, that only led to a different question… “Then… could you not have left them in your room, by the window?”

“Well… I could have. But I thought it’d be nice to have them in the garden with everyone else’s!” Naegi explained.

“…Even though the garden looks like this!” Ishimaru exclaimed, gesturing to their finished work.

Even though the dead and unwanted plants were gone, the garden still consisted of a room full of bare soil, cracked in various places, with a gloomy looking tree blotting out most of the sunlight. The two small patches of plants, berries on one side and light pink flowers on the other, did very little to make the place look ‘nice’.

“Well… alright, it’s not the best garden!” Naegi admitted, “But… we can make it better, right? Y’know… get some grass seeds, maybe plan some paths and stuff… Buy some more flowers…”

“Well… I was hoping to grow more berry plants…” Ishimaru considered the idea.

Off to the side, Florges was nodding along with them, looking excited at the possibilities…

“Hmm… with enough time and effort, this place could rival the third-year gardens…” Sakura guessed that was Florges way of thinking, “However… I think we have done enough work for this day.”

“No kidding…” Naegi agreed, wearily.
“Indeed… We’ve got our first day of lessons tomorrow!” Ishimaru reminded him, loudly. “The first step on our joint pokémon crusade!”

“Ahh… yeah… Sure thing…” Naegi laughed weakly.

…He was an interesting one. She’d dismissed him at first as being nondescript, and it was certainly the case that he appeared to be rather overwhelmed by the school and, from what she’d seen, the rest of their class…

But he’d stayed to help the pair of them, when he could easily have just given up on the idea of a class garden and taken his plants back to his room. Perhaps he had more strength in him than he let on?

Only time, and the many lessons ahead of them, would give her the answer to that question.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next chapter will almost be the start of some actual classes.
First lesson pt 1 (Kyoko POV)

Chapter Notes

I’ve realised I made a small mistake with Hina’s backstory, because I’d been intending for her to come from Kanto, but needed to explain how she had a Glaceon so looked up how they evolved and saw that Shoal cave (which is in Kalos, but I misread that as Kanto) has an Ice Rock in it. Not that it makes any real difference to the story at all, but I thought I ought to explain why she’s supposed to be a small-town girl from Kanto but somehow was exploring in a completely different region to her home one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kyoko checked herself in the mirror, feeling slightly annoyed that her new school uniform fit her so well. Her first two days at Hope’s Peak had not gone how’d she’d expected them to. At least, not once she’d gone to the headmaster’s office.

She’d had every intention of following through with her original plan, to tell him that she didn’t see him as a father and wanted him to have no part in her life, right up until the pair of pretentious wooden doors had clicked shut behind her. She’d drawn a deep breath and gone over what she’d rehearsed one more time in her head…

And then he’d rushed forward and hugged her, and for the first time in her life, she’d been so shocked that she hadn’t know what to think. And he’d taken full advantage of it, talking on and on about how beautiful she’d grown, and how proud of her he was, and how sorry he had been to have left her, and how he hoped she’d come to understand why he’d left their family for Hope’s Peak…

That was the closest he’d come to disclosing any information about Hinata and whatever plans the school might have had for him, and she’d noticed it far too late to capitalise on. By the time she thought to try and ask for more detail about why he’d left, he’d already moved on to talking about the work she’d been doing, and how he would have picked something cuter and more interesting than a Zubat as her starting pokémon, like a puppy or kitten…

A puppy or kitten… really! Crobat was a perfectly serviceable pokémon that didn’t require too much upkeep. It had been a perfectly sensible choice by her grandfather… and he’d have just gone for something cuddly? Would it not have occurred to him that she would grow up and stop being the little girl he used to lift up in the air at some point, even if he had stayed?

It made it all the more annoying that he’d managed to buy her a copy of the uniform that was the perfect size for her. He could obviously see she’d grown up, why not act like it? Was he hoping to make up for the time he’d thrown away?

Regardless, it didn’t matter what his intentions were. She’d grown up, away from his influence, and whether or not she chose to let him stay in her life, he was going to have to accept that. He was lucky she was even considering the question.

She headed to the cafeteria, earlier than she really needed to be. It did mean that the room was relatively quiet though, giving her time to double-check that she had all of her usual supplies before looking over some case files she’d been sent. But soon enough the room began to fill up as students realised that classes were going to be beginning soon, and she took that as her cue to leave and head
to her classroom herself.

It was a big room with only 16 desks, far too few to fill the room, which resulted in there being a large empty space at the back of the classroom even though they had been spaced out to what was an almost comical degree. It would appear that classroom occasionally doubled as a pokémon battleground, and possibly that trainers were permitted to summon their pokémon to sit with them in class, although she couldn’t imagine a pokémon being willing to do so without causing disruption.

Otherwise, the classroom looked much like every other classroom she’d ever seen. A blackboard and projector screen were at the front, with an ornate, sturdy looking desk for the teacher set just in front of them. Up on the walls were a few displays with commonly needed information, such as a chart of type weaknesses and a list of each TM and HM move by number, as well as a notice board that was currently only displaying the class timetable and a recommended reading list containing several books she’d already read.

Otherwise, the only thing of interest was Ishimaru, who was already sat at the left table of the front row, which was no surprise to her whatsoever. He’d also swapped his old school uniform for the official Hope’s Peak one, likely in the hope of preventing Kuwata from making any more comments about Team Rocket. Sat next to his chair was his Arcanine, which appeared to be mimicking him by staring at the same piece of paper that he was…

Until it got bored and slobbered all over the side of his face, something that apparently was a signal for Ishimaru to pet it, which he quickly did once he’d brought out something to wipe his face with… And her father thought that a dog would be cute! At least zubats didn’t drool over you!

Not that it was relevant to the situation in any way… She wasn’t concerned with her father, so why was she wasting time thinking about his opinions…?

“Oh! Kirigiri! Good morning!” It seemed that Ishimaru had noticed her while she was distracted, “You haven’t been waiting there for me to stop thinking, have you?”

“No… just admiring the classroom.” Kyoko told him half of the truth.

“Yes! It seems quite well organised! I noticed there’s enough space next to each desk for some quite big pokémon, so we must be allowed to have our pokémon out during class!” He seemed proud of himself for that rather obvious deduction… “It’ll be nice for Arcanine to see what goes on during the parts of school he wasn’t allowed to sit in on!”

He was intending to have his dog out during the entirety of lessons? “That’s assuming he doesn’t get bored and cause trouble.” Or frighten Fujisaki, but she didn’t mention that part. The programmer hadn’t told anyone about it, so it wasn’t really Kyoko’s place to do so…

“Yes, I may have to recall him if that happens… But he’s usually pretty good about being quiet while I work! Or he just lies down for a nap if he gets too bored.” Hopefully that wouldn’t worry Fujisaki too much then. “But… regardless, I realised I never got an opportunity to thank you for sticking up for me when we first arrived! Or for helping me free Arcanini from those knots! So, err… thank you! You may call me Kiyotaka, if you’d like!”

What? Call him by first name, just from that? “…That’s not necessary. I was just pointing out the truth, and I happen to be good at knots.” Kyoko pointed out, “After all, it was also me who pointed out the flaw with your story.”

“Ah, yes… you mean about the other officer not being fired either.” Ishimaru sighed, reaching across to run his fingers through his Arcanine’s fur, a clear signal that this was not a topic he liked to
expound on. “I asked Father about that, but all he said was that there wasn’t enough evidence to
confirm that it was the assigned officer who’d actually been the one to hurt him, and there was a
moment when Growlithe was left alone with my father, so the other officer used that to claim that my
father was the one who’d hurt him.”

That didn’t make sense, if they’d thought his father might have been the one hurting the dog…
“Then why did they let you keep the Growlithe? That’s ultimately putting him in your Father’s care.”

Ishimaru opened his mouth wide to answer, then froze and slowly scrunched his face in confusion.
“…I didn’t think to ask.” He admitted, looking angry with himself for missing something so obvious.
“I guess I’ll need to press him for more details this evening…”

“Hmm… It would probably be worth your while to have your story straight, in case people ask about
it.” Kyoko suggested. She was mildly curious about it as well. Assuming Ishimaru was being
truthful, she would guess that either his Father was lying about something, or there was a corrupt
force in Kanto that hadn’t been caught out by the wide-scale investigation that had followed the
Giovanni scandal.

“Yes…” Ishimaru nodded thoughtfully as she headed over to a table in the back corner that would
give her a good opportunity to observe the other people in the room. On it was a few pieces of
printed paper, including a copy of the student timetable, term dates, information about the opening
times for most of the facilities… stuff that she’d found out from the online student handbook. The
only non-patronising printout was a 16 by 16 grid with the names of each member of her class
printed down the sides of it, and a small containing the words “W= Side would Win, L=Side would Lose, ?= you can’t decide.”

Hmm… obviously the aim of this exercise was going to be to try to predict who would win in a
pokémon battle between each pair of students. That would serve the dual purpose of ensuring that
everyone knew each other’s names and give the teachers a chance to see how familiar with general
battle theory everyone was…

What wasn’t clear was how much information they would each get about each other’s pokémon.
Several of the students had secondary pokémon they hadn’t show at the induction day. Not to
mention that Fukawa had claimed her primary pokémon was the one she was hiding, and it was
unlikely that Hagakure believed himself to own no pokémon whatsoever, so he must have something
older than his ‘magic hat’. If there weren’t all being forced to show all their pokémon, it would make
this exercise far more difficult…

But, if it was meant as an introductory exercise, chances were they would be expected to disclose all
their pokémon, meaning there were several students she wouldn’t even be able to begin judging
thoroughly until the class started.

But she could start by splitting her classmates into different tiers. It would obvious that Ikusaba
would lose every match up, given she had apparently decided to fight her Comfey’s battles for it ever
since she got it. Next were Yamada and Fujisaki, both owning one pokémon in its initial
evolutionary stage. The only question was which of them would win when matched up against each
other… The only clue she had for that was the way Fujisaki’s Golett had stood in front of its owner
protectively. If it was willing to stand up to an Arcanine for its trainer, it could probably throw down
against a Dratini that was apparently more used to being used as a tie than a fighter…

Then there’d probably be the group of people who’d tried, in passing, to train their pokémon for
battle, but had other interests distracting them… Ludenberg, the two talent trainers, Kuwata and
probably Fukawa and Hagakure, unless their pokémon proved otherwise. She’d need more
information about their pokémon types and general strategies before she could make any accurate
distinctions between them.

The next group would probably be those who were more serious about battle training, but had had something preventing them from doing so optimally. She could probably count herself amongst that group, along with Asahina, who’d seemed not to have the time to train her pair, and Ishimaru and Oowada, neither of whom had a second pokémon yet.

And then finally there were the two most formidable members of the class. Oogami having been raised in a longstanding gym and Togami, heir to a corporation known for it’s extensive breeding programs and research into pokémon training and nutrition… not to mention enough money to throw at any problem he pleased. She’d have put her money on Togami without hesitation, if it hadn’t been for Oogami’s type advantage over him.

Hmm… but she felt like she’d missed somebody out… There should be sixteen people and she’d thought of Ikusaba, Yamada, Fujisaki…

“Uhh… Hi there!” Kyoko’s train of thought crashed at the sound of the very same person she’d forgot to classify. Of course, the class lucky student. He’d mentioned having a Blastoise along with the Togepi he was carrying around, hadn’t he? That would probably put him in her tier, as hard as that was to believe with his shabby appearance and casual attitude. He didn’t even seem confident enough to be a higher-end trainer, shuffling his feet and hands while smiling awkwardly as he awaited her response.

“…Can I help you?” There was no need for him to be talking to her now, given they were likely to all be made to introduce each other in five minutes time regardless, which should be obvious to anyone with any common sense.

“Umm… Well, I missed hearing most people names on Saturday, so I thought I’d best say hi to everyone in the class!” Apparently he didn’t have common sense. “I’m Makoto Naegi!”

“I know, I was there when Maizono and Ishimaru used your given name and I was still there when you got called out by the headmaster.” Kyoko pointed out, “Besides, part of this induction exercise is sure to be to make us all introduce ourselves.”

“Yeah, I figured there’d be something like that, but those things are always so weird, you know?” He shrugged, “Everyone being expected to have a ‘fun fact’ about themselves, but no one ever wants to admit anything that could get them made fun of, so it’s all just ‘my favourite food is chocolate’ and you learn nothing about anyone… you get what I mean?”

“…You’re saying it’s easier to get to know someone by having a conversation with them, by your own free will…” Kyoko summarised.

“Exactly!”

“However, you could say induction speeches are given to the entire class, which means we won’t all have to repeat names and basic information about ourselves multiple times.” She pointed out, “And if people want more information about a specific person, they can have a one-to-one conversation with them afterwards.”

“Uhh… Well, I guess?” He agreed, albeit disappointedly. “Umm… so…”

“So you can talk to be after class.” Kyoko sighed, “I’m pretty sure I can hear a teacher coming.”

“Right! Okay!” Naegi scurried off to a chair to Ishimaru’s right, which put him next to Maizono, who must have come in while Kyoko had been thinking.
In fact, most of the class had arrived and chosen seats for themselves. On Maizono’s right was Fujisaki, who seemed to have decided to take the chair closest to the door and put their Golett on the side of their desk so they couldn’t see Ishimaru’s Arcanine. The next row back held Oogami and Asahina, who were chatting excitedly together, then Togami and Ikusaba, who were both reading files that appeared to be unrelated to the class.

Enoshima had chosen to sit behind her sister but was looking irritated that it meant she was now sat next to Fukawa, who was glaring at the back of Togami’s head determinedly. Next to her was presumably Yamada, although Kyoko couldn’t be quite sure because he was currently stood at the table next to him, giving Ludenberg yet another cup of tea.

As for the back row, it was half empty, with just herself in one corner and Oowada, staring at her with an odd expression on his face, in the other. It appeared Hagakure and Kuwata were going to be late for their first class.

Or they would have, if the deep male voice that Kyoko had heard coming down the corridor had actually been the teacher, as she’d assumed, and not a security escorting the pair of latecomers to the room.

“Well… here’s your classroom!” The guard gestured inside as the pair walked in, “Try and remember where it is so you don’t get lost again.”

“Yeah… sure man, thanks.” Kuwata replied tersely as he stomped inside and sat down next to Oowada.

“Well, I’ll try, but I’m pretty sure some of these corridors have switched positions since I got here last week!” Hagakure insisted, “Hope it’s not that guy putting a curse on me or something…”

Given he still had a Sandygast sat on his head, it seemed more likely that he’d just got himself confused at some point.

The guard took one last look around the classroom, looking slightly aggravated not to see a teacher. “Good to see you’re all here. Your teacher should be arriving soon, so just stay in your seats until then, got it?”

“Yes, sir!” Ishimaru was the only one who replied, but he did it loudly enough for the entire class so the guard gave a satisfied nod and left, resulting in several conversations starting back up again.

“Dude… you got lost?” Oowada smirked at Kuwata, “Now who can’t find his way around a place?”

“I didn’t get lost… I just didn’t feel like sitting through a bunch of dumb introductions this morning…” Kuwata shrugged casually, “But I got caught by that guard, thanks to him!” He pointed a thumb at Hagakure, who was too busy showing the piece of paper to his Sandygast to notice.

“Well, just as well ya did!” Oowada told him, “Didn’t you try going out into the wild pokémon areas at all? They ain’t letting us go in any of ‘em until we finish all of today’s lessons!”

“Urg, seriously…? Stupid health and safety…” Kuwata muttered, “That’s gonna be an hour of ‘don’t go out without at least ten poison cures and five burn heals, blah, blah, blah…”

“Yeah, like that dumb advice helps if ya get jumped on and lose your stuff…” Oowada agreed, “Be better if they gave us a heads-up on what pokémon might actually be out there!”

Hmm… her father seemed to have been of the opinion that the first day of classes were actually
somewhat fun, aside from the core knowledge tests they’d be given in the middle of the day. And
given that the class the two boys were discussing was called ‘Dangerous pokémon residing around
Hope’s Peak’ it was quite likely that the school was indeed planning to ‘give them a heads up on
what’s out there’.

Of course, that was assuming they actually got taught anything whatsoever. As Ishimaru was
pointing out rather loudly from the front of the class, the first teacher of the day was almost ten
minutes late…

The teacher, or at least a man that Kyoko suspected was Kohichi Kizakura judging from his white
suit, fedora and Hypno, ended up casually strolling into class exactly ten minutes late. He put a hand
up semi-apologetically as he took the

“Hey, kiddos! Welcome to Hopes Peak! I was supposed to turn up ten minutes ago and give you a
bunch of info on admin stuff and repeating half of what’s on those pieces of paper in front of you,
but let’s be honest, you’ve either looked it up already, or you wouldn’t bother to listen to me
anyway, so I figured I’d sleep in and give Sakakura time to round up any of you that felt like doing
the same!” Kuwata scowled at the insinuation and Ishimaru looked irritated at the lack of
professionalism. But everyone else in the class looked mildly pleased as Kizakura shrugged and took
a swig from his hip flask, “So, we’re gonna skip straight into me explaining why half of you are
probably thinking I look vaguely familiar…”

“Hmm… Didn’t I give you an autograph?”, “Of course I know why you look familiar, I still have
your picture on my drawing tablet!” “You insisted on challenging Luxray for hours, dude!”, “Like,
weren’t you stalking me for a while…?”, “Oh! I remember! I helped you get to Shoal Cave!”, “You
almost got yourself killed by that wild Heracross…”

There was a wave of chatter over the classroom as several people remembered having what had
appeared to be random interactions with Kizakura. Then there was a brief pause as they all started to
realise how suspicious that was…

“He’s the talent scout for Hope’s Peak…”, “He’s been scoping us out…” Naegi and Oowada both
explained at the same time.

“Obviously!” Togami and Fukawa both sneered at the same time, but quietly enough to be ignored.

“Hang on… I’m guessing your brother told you…” Kizakura pointed at Oowada, “But how’d you
figure out who I am?”

“Ahh… I kinda saw you judging Kiyotaka.” Naegi explained.

“What!? When was that!?” Ishimaru obviously hadn’t realised his memories were missing.

“Just before I came back from the shop to fight you.” Naegi told him.

“But… All I was doing was sitting in a chair reading about trainers’ experiences with timid
pokémon! How could you possibly judge me from that!?"

“I didn’t… which brings me to the reason why the other half of you specifically don’t remember
seeing me.” Kizakura used the question to segue back into his explanation, “That’s because, in order
to keep the new intake a secret until the letters go out, I erase the memories of any students who
recognise me while I’m scouting them.”

“So… you’re saying we spoke, and then you erased my memory of it?” Ishimaru asked.
“That does explain why some of my coinage was suddenly tarnished.” Ludenberg scowled, “Though I hope you do realise that betting against someone, and then erasing their memory when they wipe you clean is a rather unfair gambling technique?”

“And I take it that it was you who booked and appointment with me, and then made me remember having been kept waiting for half an hour.” Togami glared.

“Yes, you’re all right.” Kizakura shrugged, “So now I’ve gotta give you all your memories back- And yes Ludenberg, I’ll give you the money you won as well- Which means I need the following students to get all their pokémon out… Fujisaki, Fukawa… Don’t worry, we have really good air purifiers- Hagakure, Ishimaru, Kirigiri, Ludenberg, Oogami and Togami.”

He ordered his Hypno over to Ishiamru as she and the other students he’d named released their pokémon, revealing that, along with the pokémon they’d had with them anyway, Fukawa had a Garbodor (no wonder she’d hidden it), Hagakure had the taller-necked Exeggutor from Alola (That shouldn’t be a problem for Crobat), Oogami had a small Snowrunt and Togami had a young Rufflet… meaning that Oogami had type advantage over both of Togami’s pokémon… Now that would be interesting…

Apparenty all it took was for Kizakura to order his Hypno to use Hypnosis on each student, at which point he ordered them to remember everything he’d told them to forget, a process that seemed to cause quite intense memories to resurface, given how Ishimaru almost burst into tears and hugged his dog… Although maybe that was just him, as Fujisaki just winced and then looked troubled and Oogami just nodded thoughtfully. Togami and Fukawa had intense reactions again, the former getting upset at Kizakura for insulting his family and the latter starting to ramble about some great ideas she’d had for a book that he’d made her forget…

And then it was Kyoko’s turn…

“Now, Kyoko… I want you to remember that stuff I told you to forget last time, alright?”

“… … …

“You’re Kohichi Kizakura, aren’t you? Looking for me?”

“What? Should have known! Yeah, that’s why I’m here…”

“Very well. I have prepared a list of trainers, aside from myself, that I believe you will have been to scout out. Given the small number of them, I suspect you will end up recommending them all. I also have a record of the number of cases I have been involved in, and have my pokémon with me, ready for a battle, if you wish.”

“Heh… You’re an organised one! Just like your old man… Hey now, no need for that look! Anyway you haven’t quiitite got this list right, but it’s close enough to make your point…”

“…And it’s irrelevant, regardless, isn’t it?”

“Yeah… I’m judging you on one question… Why do you want this so badly?”

“What makes you think I do?”

“I’ve been friends with your father for years… I know about you Kirigiris… Your family creed is based on staying hidden in the shadows… but you’ve been letting every Jenny you work with and every Rocket grunt you capture know exactly who you are! Seems like a pretty desperate attempt to
“get Hope’s Peak attention if you ask me.”

“I was not ‘desperate’… but I’ll admit that this was my goal.”

“Why?”

“…I need to speak with my father.”

“That’s it!? You know, we have a phone number right there on our website… He’d have spoken to you at any time, kiddo.”

“Yes… and that would have been on his terms. I need to speak with him on mine.”

“And what are you planning to say to him when you do?”

“That I don’t want him in my life. That him leaving was not a problem for me, and is no cause for anyone in my life to pity me. That he should be the one people insist on consoling.”

“… … … BAHAHAHAAAA!”

“…I wouldn’t expect you to understand…”

“No… I get it… You’re as nuts as he is! Hahaha… But whatever, maybe if you put all this effort into giving him a giant ‘fuck you’ he’ll finally quit feeling guilty over making the right choice…”

“…What ‘right choice’?”

“Whoops… sorry kiddo, shouldn’t have said that. It’s not something I can talk about. You’ll have to find out from your old man!”

“…So I take it that means you’ll accepting me?”

“Sure… assuming you can beat a Persian, anyway…!”

Ah… that was… interesting. She hadn’t been aware that her father was a friend of Hope’s Peaks scouter… and what had the man been talking about, her father having made the right choice? Was he implying that there was some reason for him to have come here, that was of actual importance? Something more important to him than her?

“…I suppose you still won’t elaborate on anything you said back then?” Kyoko asked Kizakura.

“Nope! Like I said, ask your old man!” He shrugged. “Now then, Hagakure…”

Hmm… That would mean she’d have to get him to talk to her seriously, not just as a father catching up with his daughter…

She supposed Ishimaru wouldn’t be the only one grilling their father for more information this evening!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next chapter will have some battles in it!
First lesson pt 2 (Yasuhiro POV)

Chapter Notes

So, recently I was looking up Littens and saw that they apparently start fires by having very flammable hair that they make into flaming hairballs. This makes everything to do with Leon so far a lot more interesting to imagine…

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Now then, Hagakure…” The dude with the second best hat in the room turned to face him, “As much as I’d like to leave you like that, apparently your health is of a bigger priority to the school that me having a good laugh every time I see you, so… Hypno! Use Hypnosis!”

Hypnosis? There was no way that move would actually work on a human, right? He probably just felt like doing what this Kizakura dude wanted because of his cool hat, that’s all!

“Okay… now, I want you to remember everything I told you to forget…”

Huh… That was weird… He hadn’t told Yasuhiro to forget anything! Oh… except maybe…

“Aw… come on, dude! I told you it’s only 30% accurate! Gimme another chance to prove it!”

“I’ve given you ten chances and all you’ve told me is a bunch of nonsense, kid. Face it, you’re just delusional…! Or a fraud, I’m not sure which…”

“Hey! I don’t care how many people say I took all of their money! I’m not a scammer!”

“So, delusional then… I’m going to have a nice long chat with Olympia for this…”

“Urg… fine, be that way… Just watch out for that Sandygast, man…”

“A Sandyghast? Here? This sand’s black as coal, I think I’d notice a Sandygast, kid… There’s not even any spades here.”

“That’s ‘cause it’s asleep just under the sand, man!”

“Sure kid… whatever you say…”

“Hey! I mean it! You’re about to walk right into it!”

“Bet you a pokéball there’s nothing there…”

“Urrrgghh… Alright, but it better be a good pokéball! HEEEE-E-YA!”

“Wait… what was…?”

“Oh! It actually went in the ball! Come on… come on… Yeah! I caught it!”

“There actually was a pokémon there…?”
“That’s what I said, wasn’t it? Here, look, a black Sandygast! Isn’t she pretty? Like she’s made outta asteroid dust…”

“Gaaaaassssstt.”

“…How the hell did you know that was there!??”

“I told you, I get these totally accurate predictions!”

“Really…? You could have set it up… but then, you’d have had to know I was coming to do that… Well… either way, I guess you got me convinced, kid! Have fun with your shiny Sandygast there!”

“Thanks man! And see you at Hope’s Peak!”

“…What did you just say?”

“I said see you at Hope’s Peak! Y’know, the school? I just had a prediction that we’ll meet up there!”

“You’ve gotta be kidding me… Alright, Hypno! Use Hypnosis!”

“Aww, c’mon! You don’t really expect me to fall… for… tha…”

“Alright… First things first, you’re gonna give your Exeggutor this full restore, and then you’re going to go back to where you were when I shouted ‘Hey you, with the dumb hair’. Then you’re going to hand over that Sandygast and…”

“Gaaaaasssssttttt!”

“Woah! Okay… geez, he only just caught you, why do you care so much all of a sudden? You could join my team! I could use a good ghost type!”

“Gaaaaasssssttttt…”

“Well… what do you want me to do? Tell the guy to put you on his head and think you’re a hat that just turned up there, magically?”

“Got it, man! This is my magic hat!”

“Wait… really? That worked? Well, alrighty then… Now… you and your… magic hat are going to go back to where you were when I first saw you and then I’m going to walk up to the pier and you’ll forget everything that’s happened since I shouted ‘Hey you, with the dumb hair’. Got it?”

“Got it, man!”

…but then, he was at least a couple of years older than all these other kids… heck, he’d already done most of high school before! If it weren’t for them offering him free rent, he wouldn’t have bothered coming… It wasn’t exactly like he wanted to have to do a bunch of classes and homework and… and other school stuff…
“Right then! Now that’s out of the way!” Kizakura called his Hypno back, “It’s time for you all to get to know each other, with a fun little activity I came up with!”

So, probably an hour of everyone saying their names and what their favourite pokémon was… still, better than actual classes!

“You see… as you’re in the same class, your pokémon are probably going to be fighting each other’s pokémon a lot! So in order to give you kids an idea who you’re going to be up against for the next four years, your all going to get all your pokémon out, and then each of you will take a guess at who could beat who in a battle! So, those of you who didn’t do it already, get out all your pokémon!”

A few of the kids around him had to get more pokémon out… the guy next to him started peeling tape off of a pokéball, and the one next to him let out his scary wolf-thing with one hand and grabbed it to stop it from lunging at the closest thing to it with the other. The fashion chick got out a huge pink snake thing with lots of dangly metal trinkets and a black and white bear wearing a red monocle… Someone at the front got a Blastoise out… and maybe he could feel a small psychic pokémon up there as well…?

“So, for those of you who can’t see each other…” Kizakura pointed at the square dude at the top-left of the class… “Ishimaru has an Arcanine, Naegi has a Blastoise and Togepi, Maizono has a Brionne and Espurr, Fujisaki has a Gollett, Oogami has a Florges and a Snorunt, Asahina has a Glaceon and a Marill, Togami has a Drampa and Rufflet, Ikusaba has a Comfey, Enoshima has a Milotic and Teddiursa, Fukawa has a Garbodor and a Scatterbug, Yamada has a Dratini, Ludenburg has a Weavile, Oowada has a Midnight-form Lycanroc, Kuwata has a Luxray and a Litten, Hagakure has an Alolan Exeggutor and his *snerk* ‘magic hat’ and finally Kirigiri has a Crobat and a Kadabra.”

Huh… Kizakura hadn’t told the class the truth about his hat… Maybe he could use that to surprise them all later? But, that had been a lot of pokémon to remember… should he have written that down…? He probably should have written that down… Oh well, it’s not like this was important or anything!

“Now… everyone start filling in the table in front of you! You have ten minutes!”

Ten minutes!? To do that many predictions!? Uhh… Well… Yasuhiro knew he’d probably do pretty well against all of those water types… the ice types would wreck him, and so would that fire type… The poison types were gonna be nasty against Exeggutor as well…

But wait! He was having a vision! He could clearly see his magic hat Sandygast encasing every poison type it faced in inescapable dirt… Of course! Now he had two pokémon, he’d do better in fights! Which meant he could now kick butt against that girl with the big trash heap and that one with the Crobat and Kadabra!

Now he just had to run predictions for the rest of these guys…

“Time’s up! Everyone pass me your sheets so I can have a look through them all… and then the fun part will start!”

“The hell does that mean?” Kuwata was asking.

The fun part… hmm… “Maybe whoever got the most right gets a prize!” Preferably a cash one!

“How are they supposed ta know the right answer when none of us have ever fought before, dumbass!” Oowada snapped.

“Indeed… the ‘fun’ part probably means we’ll be having battles to determine the correct answers…”
Kirigiri guessed.

“You mean we’re gonna have sixteen battles each in one class?” Kuwata groaned… man, Yasuhiro hoped that wasn’t right… He didn’t have anywhere near enough potions for that!

“I doubt we’d have time… I suspect he’ll probably pick of some more contentious pairings and force them to battle.” Kirigiri argued.

“Alright, class!” Kizakura had apparently finished looking over the papers, “As I can hear some of you guessing, I am indeed going to be picking some of the more evenly matched students and having you duke it out, here in class!”

So, just one fight? Yasuhiro should be able to manage that…

“But I’m also going to be making fun of some of your answers as well!” Kizakura grinned, “For example… Kuwata! You seem to have a pretty high regard for Ikusaba’s Comfey! You said it’ll beat Fujisaki, Yamada, Ludenberg, Fukawa, Maizono, Naegi, Kirigiri, Oowada and yourself! Care to explain your reasoning there?”

“Sure…” Kuwata shrugged, “I figured it’s less a case of ‘who can her Comfey beat?’ and more a case of ‘Who’s not dumb enough to piss off miss ‘touch Comfey and you die’ over there!”

“Then why am I not listed as one of the losers?” That rich dude asked, “Do you consider me to have poor mental capabilities!”

“Nah… I just figured you’d bribe her to forfeit or something!” Kuwata told him.

“So… you based your estimations on your classmate’s personalities, not their pokémon?” Kizakura checked, and Kuwata nodded, “Alright… let’s see how well that works out for you… Kuwata and Ikusaba, head over to that big empty space at the back of the classroom and get ready to battle!”

Yasuhiro could just about see the girl turn around to look at her sister, who just shrugged at her. “You gotta do what he says… I’ll be cheering for you!”

She got up and headed over like she’d been told to… although not without giving Kuwata the angriest stare he’d seen on a chick since he’d told that girl her crush was totally into her and it turned out he wasn’t…

“Dude, I just said I’m not gonna be dumb enough to piss her off!” Kuwata rolled his eyes and gestured to Ikusaba… Although he had to quickly grab his red kitten by the tail to stop it from running of after her.

“Oh really? Because I think I might have a little… motivation for you.” Kizakura grinned again as he brought out a whole bunch of envelopes.

“…Like what?” Kuwata asked, looking at the envelopes anxiously.

“Well… in each of these envelopes is one of you kids’ biggest, most embarrassing secret…” Oh man… Had they found out about that time he’d paid 100,000 pokédollars for a Master ball and then accidentally used it to catch a Yungoos? “And if you lose the fight I put you in, I’ll read it out loud to the whole class!”

“The whole…?” Kuwata went pale… man if only Yasuhiro could get a prediction on what was in his envelope… or any of them… “Urrrgghhh! Alright fine! Go on Litten!” He let his cat go, and it scamper up towards the girl… who was still wearing her pokémon. Uhh… Was that a good idea?
“Ah! Ikusaba! Take off your Comfey!” That square kid at the front… or now back of the class, given thy’d all turned around to watch the fight, shouted. “It might attack before he orders it to!”

That… didn’t exactly seem to scare her. If anything, she just looked like she was planning to kick the cat if it got anywhere near her…

“Hey… This isn’t Fenrir!” Kizakura snapped at her, “You want to fight pokémon here, you do it with other pokémon!”

She just glared at him… but her pokémon started to wriggle around, trying to unloop itself from her neck, only for her to hold onto it with one hand and hold it in place…

“Litten!” That was, until the cat got close enough to launch a ball of flame from its mouth at her, which made her swing sideways so fast she almost lost her balance, and only regained it by letting go of the Comfey for a second.

That was all it needed to get free from her neck, and it quickly flew over to the attacking Litten, multiple small vines growing out from between the flowers around its outside and getting ready to attack…

…Only for the Litten to shoot out another ball of flame (wait… was that just a flaming hairball? That was pretty gross…) which hit it and caused it to squeal for a moment before fainting while Ikusaba looked on in horror. She stayed like that for a moment before running over and bending down to shakily put it over her shoulder…

“…So… I take it I won then?” Kuwata asked, as the whole thing had finished before he’d even got all the way off of his chair and over to the battle area.

Oh man if looks could kill Kuwata would have dropped dead on the spot! And Ikusaba was walking over to him like she was intending to use her fists instead…

“Woah! Hey! It’s just a friendly pokémon battle, right!?” Kuwata started backing up through the rest of the classroom, “I mean, this is a pokémon school! We gotta battle occasionally!”

“I told you, touch Comfey and you die!”

“Hey! That’s enough Ikusaba!” Kizakura tried to stop her, while that big muscly chick and the square dude both stood up and looked like they intended to grab her.

“But… it’s not like it’s dead!” Kuwata cried, backing up further.

“Y-yeah! He’s right! All it needs is a revive!” That short guy in the hoodie at the front told her, “Look! I have one right here!”

Ikusaba stopped and turned to face him instead, as he awkwardly gave her the revive… and then anxiously took it back and fed it to her Comfey for her after she just stared at it in confusion…

“…Feeyy…?” It let out a small, high pitched noise as it woke up and shock itself off… “Fey!”

“See! All better now!” Naegi cheered nervously, “Although you might want to take it to the pokémon centre to get fully healed…”

“And you can quit with the over-reaction to losing a single battle!” Kizakura snapped at her.

She just turned and glared at both him and Kuwata one last time before going back to her desk.
“So, like… do we get to hear her deepest secret now?” Enoshima asked, as everyone else hesitantly sat down. “‘Cause I wanna know if I already know it or not!”

“Ah… We’ll save that until the end of the class…” Kizakura muttered. “Anyway… back to making fun of some of you… Naegi, you think Ishimaru’s fire-type is going to be able to beat every water type in the room, including your own Blastoise?”

“Umm… well, he did a week ago…” The kid in the hoodie explained.

“But… that was only because you gave me a free hit on him!” The square dude, who was probably Ishimaru, told him. “If we’re fighting optimally, I’d say I can beat all the water type trainers except for you!”

From what Yasuhiro could see, the swimmer chick and the diva up front seemed cool with that, but model looked pretty pissed. “Uhh… Excuse me!? Big, giant-ass Milotic over here!”

“Just because a pokémon looks intimidating doesn’t mean it is!” Ishimaru countered, “It isn’t as if Feebas needs to be particularly strong in order to evolve!”

“Well… don’t Growlithes evolve with an item, or something? I could say the same to you!” The model pointed out.

“Ahh… I suppose that’s true…” Ishimaru realised, “Then I guess we’ll have to settle this with a battle then!”

“Oh, you’re on hardass! C’mon Mukuro!” Both trainers stood up and stomped over to the back of the class, with their pokémon following along as closely as possible.

“Well… I guess I can make that work…” Kizakura muttered as they went. “Oh, and no items, Ishimaru.”

“Ahh… Not even a held one?” Ishimaru asked, having been halfway to giving his dog a berry of some kind.

“In the interests of time for today, no, not even held ones.” Kizakura confirmed, which made the rich guy mutter irritably.

“Well, good! Like, what the hell’s a dumb berry gonna do, other than make this go on longer than it needs to?” The model complained, “I hate fighting people who insist on stalling when it’s obvious they’ve lost!”

“It was just going to be a precaution! But I’m not going to need an item to beat you!” Ishimaru insisted.

“We’ll see about that! Mukuro! Use… ermm… oh yeah! Aqua Tail!”

“Arcanine! Use Crunch!”

“Alright, guess you kids can start whenever, then…” The teacher shrugged as Ishimaru’s dog ran forward and jumped high enough to get its teeth deep into the serpent’s neck. It responded by letting out a loud shriek and summoning a wave of water around its tail, which it then used to beat the Arcanine off of it.

“Hah! Take that you dumb mutt!” The model laughed as the dog fell to the floor, looking like it was soaked to the bone, “Still think you can beat me?”
“Yes!” Ishimaru insisted, as his dog stood up and shook off most of the water, which ran down some small holes in the floor, and stood panting heavily at the serpent. “After all, your pokémon isn’t exactly looking healthy right now, either!”

Woah! He wasn’t kidding… Now all the water it had summoned had disappeared, Yasuhiro could just about see the two rows of tooth marks puncturing the poor Milotic’s skin, and a faint trickle of what might have been blood coming from them… Not to mention its head was drooping down pretty heavily now…

“Urg… seriously!? Aren’t you supposed to be hard to hurt!? That wasn’t even an effective move on you!” The model complained, “I guess you better use your Recovery move, assuming your useless butt survives his next attack…”

“You can’t blame her for your failure to train her sufficiently!” Ishimaru snapped, “Arcanine! Use Crunch again!”

This time the dog went in low, sinking its teeth into the fleshy pink underbelly of the Milotic until it managed to squirm enough to knock it off and draw in beams of light towards itself, making both its wounds close up a bit.

“Hah! A couple more turns of that and she’ll back to full health!” The fashion chick smirked, although it looked pretty much the same as before to Yasuhiro. “Use Recover again, Mukuro!”

“Now who’s stalling!? Arcanine, use Crunch again!”

“Oh, for pity’s sake!” That rich guy suddenly shouted out as the dog ran forward and bit the Milotic again. “All these water-types and you didn’t think to teach it Wild Charge!?”

“Do you have any idea how much Technical Machines cost!?” Ishimaru exclaimed, as the Milotic shook it off and started drawing in light again.

“They’re just a few thousand pokédollars per use, it’s hardly that expensive!” The rich guy insisted, only to look confused as everyone stared in disbelief and the two guys next to Yasuhiro started muttering about ‘rich stuck-up bastards’.

“…Maybe not for you, but we don’t all have the finances to build an ‘optimal’ pokémon!” Ishimaru sighed before turning back to the battle. “You’re doing great, Arcanine! Another Crunch now!”

“Urg… Like, how many times do you have to use Recovery, Mukuro…” The model muttered. Same thing happened again… and they both used the same moves again… and again… Maybe he should start doing a few predictions while this dragged on…”

“Crunch!”

“Recovery…”

“Crunch!”

“Recovery…”

“Crunch!”

“Recovery…”

“Crunch… Ah ha! Good boy, Arcanine!” Ishimaru suddenly broke the pattern of orders… did that
mean something had happened?

“What are you so cheerful about? I’m just gonna do Recovery again…” The model muttered.

…But this time her pokémon still seemed to be moving more slowly that it had been before, and when the dog charged forward, it took longer for the Milotic to shake it off, leaving it with much bigger gashes on its side that were still bleeding even after it healed itself again.

“You let him lower your defence, or whatever!?” The model let out a big sigh, “Fine, guess you’re gonna faint next turn, you flabby, useless lump…”

“One more Crunch, Arcanine!” Ishimaru agreed, and his dog ran forward and bit the Milotic hard enough make its eyes roll backwards and it fall on the floor.

“You let him lower your defence, or whatever!?” The model let out a big sigh, “Fine, guess you’re gonna faint next turn, you flabby, useless lump…”

“Absolutely not!” Woah… Ishimaru really didn’t like being accused of cheating… “I’ve just spent more time training my pokémon than you! If you’d put more effort into helping your pokémon reach its full potential…!”

“Geez, lighten up, it was just a joke… It’s kinda sad when you take everything so seriously…” She sighed, “And I guess now you’ve gotta make your dog use poor widdle Monokuma here as a chew toy to…” She added, glumly throwing out her other pokéball and releasing the black and white bear…

“Ah…That is how battles work…” He grimaced, “Arcanine, use Fire Blitz!”

Yeesh! The flames that covered the dog as it ran forward that time were hot enough that Yasuhiro could feel them all the way from his seat! No wonder the bear fainted instantly!

“Wow… that was just cold…” The model sighed sadly as she called back her second pokémon.

“What? Fire Blitz isn’t cold! It’s the hottest move an Arcanine can learn!” Ishimaru missed her point entirely.

“No… she means you’re an ass for incinerating the teeny tiny teddy-bear!” Kuwata rolled his eyes.

“AH…! But… having Arcanine bite it would have been even more painful!” Ishimaru cried, “And besides, getting into fights, and unfortunately, getting hurt in them is part of the natural growth cycle for pokémon! You can’t expect me to be willing to lose battles just because you think your pokémon is cuter than mine!”

“Whaddaya mean I think he’s…!?”

“Ishimaru’s right! So no guilt-trip people over winning!” Kizakura spoke up, “Honestly, you’d think they didn’t have pokémon centres where you two grew up…” He muttered, looking at Ikusaba and the model. “Now, back to your seat you two… that took long enough as it is…”

They took their seats again, Ishimaru looking embarrassed and the model looking irritable.

“Right then… Oowada! Seeing as Ishimaru took the person I planned for you to go up against, you’ll have to take on Maizono…” Kizakura announced.

“What!? With that tiny seal and the cat thing!?” Oowada sneered, “Fuck that! I’m taking on Mr.
“Blastoise over there!”

“Me!?” Naegi squeaked, “But… rock’s weak to water…”

“And I was going to put him against…”

“So!? If that dumb dog up there could kick your ass, then so can my wolf!” Oowada cut off what the teacher was trying to say, “Now get over here!”

“Oh! Okay!” The poor kid panicked and called his giant turtle into its pokéball so he could run up to battle area a bit quicker.

“Alright, fine, just ignore me, I guess…” Kizakura muttered and had a swig of his flask.

The two guys got into position. The biker dragging his wolf up to the far end while the short kid got to the end of the chairs and took his Togepi out of his hood and put it on the floor, stopping to pat its head a bit first.

“The hell!? What, are you planning to do, switch it out first turn ‘cause you think it’ll learn something from just looking at a Lycanroc?” Oowada growled.

“No! Not this time!” Naegi rushed to tell him, “I just figured it’s safer to use Metronome first, in case he does Explosion or something…”

“Hah! So you’re planning to soften me before bringing out the big guns?” Oowada grinned, “Ya probably shouldn’t have told me that…”

“Uhh… why not?”

“Cause it means I know I’m safe to set up… Stealth Rock!” Oowada finished talking and ordered his pokémon to start before Kizakura told him to.

“Argh… Togepi, use Metronome!” Naegi quickly ordered his own pokémon…

Both pokémon had to do a bit of prep work for their moves, the wolf generating a bunch of spiky rocks from around its neck and the egg doing a little dance, which finished first and caused a small group of sharp looking leaves to appear out of nowhere and swirl through the air for a moment, before most of them flew super-fast towards the Lycanroc…

Which snarled at little at the contact, but then shook itself off and starting throwing the rocks it had prepared at the ground around the Togepi’s feet like the attack had done nothing whatsoever...

“Hah! Hahaha! That was an actual attack!” Naegi cheered, “And it was even type-effective! Yeah! Good job Togepi!”

“To-ge-piiiiii!”

“The hell are you so happy about? That thing’s so tiny it did fuck all!” Oowada snapped.

“Well, yeah… but it’s better luck than I usually have with Togepi…” The kid shrugged, “Let’s see if it lasts! Togepi! Use Metronome again!”

“Lycan, use Stone Edge and put this dumbass outta his misery…” Oowada smirked.

The wolf didn’t obey straight away, instead it waited a while to growl and sneer at the egg as it did its dance again, even though the dance seemed to take even longer this time…
But eventually the egg, and a few leaves that had been stuck to it from before, disappeared back towards Naegi’s belt, and suddenly his Blastoise appeared on the floor where the egg had been.

“Wait… what!? I didn’t tell them to switch!” Naegi looked confused as his turtle’s feet landed on several of the spiky stones the Lycanroc had thrown earlier, causing it to cry out in pain just before the wolf charged up and whacked it with a sharp lump of stone. “Aaaarrrhhh! Sorry buddy! Err… but as you’re out, use Hydropump!”

“Lycan, go for another Stone Edge!” Oowada retaliated.

Even with its huge lumbering movements, the Blastoise still managed to turn its twin guns towards the Lycanroc and fire a stream of water at it. But the wolf just managed to run through it and hit the turtle over the head with the rock, which caused it to topple over sideways and retreat back into its pokéball…

“Hah! You call that a Hydro Pump! That was the wimpiest Hydro Pump I’ve ever seen!” Oowada guffawed, as his wolf shook the mixture of mud and water it was now coated in off of itself.

“No kidding… My Marill can do a better Hydro Pump than that!” The chick with way too much energy agreed.

“Uhh… I don’t get it… usually he’s a lot stronger than that!” Naegi exclaimed.

“Suuuure he is, kid! Not like I hear that one all the time or anything!” Oowada laughed.

“No! I can confer with Makoto! His Blastoise’s hits were a lot stronger when I fought it!” Ishimaru told him, “It was definitely suffering some sort of debilitation, I’d say as a side effect of… err… Stone Edge…?”

“Stone Edge doesn’t do that kind of shit, dumbass! Quit trying to make yourself look stronger than ya are!”

“No… That’s not what they’re doing…” Kizakura suddenly piped up, “That attack was weaker than it would have been normally. But not, as you say, because of Stone Edge! So, class! Who can tell me what was up with Naegi’s Blastoise?”

Hmm… maybe his pokémon had been stolen by Team Rocket and weakened, or aliens had moved the moon to disrupt the flow of water, or it might have had something to do with magnets… But he wasn’t getting any predictions to help him pin down what it was for sure.

But the chick next to Yasuhiro put her hand up, as did the rich guy, the really huge chick and the popstar up front.

“Hmm… Maizono, what do you think?”

“Well… the Togepi used Baton Pass, which transfers any strengths or weaknesses to the pokémon it switches to… So… the Togepi had the problem and passed it to the Blastoise?”

“You mean because it got hit with Stealth Rock?” Naegi guessed.

“Stealth Rock doesn’t do that either.” Oowada rolled his eyes.

“Erm… Then… your Lycanroc’s ability…?”

“No! It’s nothing I fucking did, alright!?!” Oowada snapped at the kid.
“Well, it’s not like I screwed over my own pokémon!” Naegi cried.

“Are you sure about that?” Kirigiri asked him.

“Err…”

“I’m surprised you haven’t managed to figure it out yourself…” The rich guy smirked, “You were the one who pointed out that Metronome never does you any good…”

“What? You mean… That first move Togepi used…?”

“It is known as Leaf Storm.” The giant woman told him, “A very powerful move, but the remaining leaves give the user trouble when it tries to attack at a distance…"

“…And then it used Baton Pass and gave that trouble to Blastoise…” Naegi sighed.

“Exactly!” Kizakura snapped his fingers at him.

“Tch! You’d have been better off just bringing the turtle out and hitting me head on, instead of messing about trying ta get lucky!” Oowada grumbled.

“I guess…? But you never know! Maybe it’ll cast Healing Wish this time!” Naegi said, hopefully…

“Or maybe I’m about ta crack its head open with Stone Edge…” Oowada sighed.

In the end, the Togepi ended up casting some weak looking fire move and, as Oowada said, the wolf knocked it out in one hit…

“Ah, man… Now everyone’s gonna know I wet the bed until fifth grade!” Naegi sighed.

“Eww! D-don’t just bring up gross stuff like that out of nowhere!” The dark haired chick with the glasses complained.

“But… if he’s going to tell everyone that anyway…”

“That’s assuming you’re that sure that’s what’s written on this piece of paper…” Kizakura pointed out.

“Well, I don’t have any other embarrassing secrets…” He thought about it, “Wait… oh no… You’re not going to tell everyone what made you pick me, are you!? Because it’s not like I really think Professor Oak’s a lying jerkface, it just seemed like he was at the time!”

“Wait… you called Professor Oak… that!? To his face!?” Ishimaru cried.

“No! I just muttered it after he left!”

“That’s even worse!” The biker dude sneered, “You got a problem with someone you should fucking tell it to ‘em straight!”

“I know, but…”

“To be fair to the kid, he was trying to, but Oak pretty much scarpered. And Oak had been lying to him, just not for ‘jerkfacey’ reasons…” Kizakura told everyone, “But, for a bit of fun, let’s have a little vote! Which of those two reasons do you all think is the one written in this envelop?”

He held up the one with ‘Makoto Naegi’ written on it… alright! Prediction time, go!
“Hands up if you think it’s the wetting the bed one…?” Nah… that wasn’t it… “Or calling Oak a *snrk* lying jerkface…?” Wait… that wasn’t it either…!? “Hmm… Kirigiri, Hagakure, I notice you two didn’t put up your hands for either… what are you two thinking is on there?”

What was on there? “Uhh… maybe he’s got an even bigger secret… like… he’s secretly that kid-faced mob boss I’ve heard about! Or an alien! Or…”

“No. And also that mob boss is the guy in the year above you guys…” Kizakura waved his hand lazily at him, “What about you Kirigiri? What do you think this envelope says?”

“Nothing. I doubt you even bothered to put paper in them.” She shrugged, “They were just an elaborate prop to ensure everyone fights to the best of their ability.”

“Bingo!” Kizakura pointed a finger-gun at her, “Not that I really need them… throwing a fight here is grounds for expulsion anyway, just so you know, but it’s always worth the price of a few envelopes to watch you all panic! Hehhehheh…”

“Wait… you mean I just told everyone all that for no reason!?” Naegi cried.

“Pretty much!” Kizakura grinned.

“Okay… I’m just going to go back to my desk to die of embarrassment now…” Naegi groaned and started walking past Yasuhiro and Kirigiri back up to where he was sat before…

“Hmm…Still better than ‘My favourite food is chocolate’.” He could just about hear Kyoko murmured as he guy went past. He just looked even more embarrassed by that though, especially once the square dude at the front started trying to cheer him up by pointing out that at least he couldn’t be blackmailed now everyone already knew his most embarrassing secrets.

“Alright… now, where was I… Let’s see… Hagakure’s pretty obvious for the most part… Loses to Togami, Oogami, Kirigiri…”

“Hey! I’m not going to lose to Kirigiri!” That vision had been super clear!

“You… are you serious?” Kizakura was looking at him like he was stupid or something! “She has a Crobat! Your Exeggutor isn’t going to do anything to that!”

“Ah… you just think that because you haven’t seen my secret weapon!”

“…Alright, seeing as my battle plan’s messed up anyway…” Kizakura sighed, “Kirigiri, Hagakure, get over to the battle area…”

Kirigiri gave him a sceptical glance as she got up and took her place at the end of the classroom, leaving him with only a short walk… sweet!

“Alright, Crobat… Let’s see what this ‘secret weapon’ of his is…”

That was nice of her! “Alright then… you may have been fooled by its disguise, but the truth is, this ‘magic hat’ of mine is actually…” dun duh dah dun dun DUN… “A Sandygast! Go!”

“…Yes. Obivously.” Kirigiri wasn’t surprised at all, not even after his dramatic pause and everything! “Acrobat, use Air Slash…”

“Sandygast use… erm…” What were its moves? “Use your strongest ground type move!”

Huh… suddenly there was a load of loud thuds and confused noises from behind him… had part of
the ceiling fallen down or something?

He didn’t have a chance to turn around to check before the giant bat swooped down and practically slashed his hat Sandygast into two piles

“Ahh! Nooooo!” Yasuhiro cried, as he quickly called Sandygast back into her ball, “I don’t get it! What happened!!?"

“Okay, class… let’s have everyone name a different thing Hagakure did wrong there!”

“He forgot Flying types are immune to Ground moves?”, “And even if they weren’t, that pokémon’s really weak…”, “Has he trained it at all since he caught it?”, “Doubtful… He didn’t even know what moves it has!”, “And Palossands are a defensive pokémon, why would you fight with one that’s Lonely nature?!”, “He could have made a lot of money selling a shiny pokémon to a zoo or breeder.”

“But… I had a prediction that she could beat any poison type!” Yasuhiro told them.

“Well… that might eventually be true of a pure poison type. But a Ground type is still never going to be good against a Flying type, regardless of the subtype.” Kirigiri told him, “You’d have been better off challenging Fukawa…”

“Which was what my original plan was going to include!” Kizakura sighed, “But, whatever… I guess it works out alright from now on… These next few fights will still be even… Not that it could possibly be more uneven than this!”

Aww, man… He wasn’t kidding! It only took her Crobat two uses of Cross Poison to knock out Exeggutor! So much for him being able to protect Yasuhiro if it came to it… Maybe it was a good thing he’d ended up back in school again after all!

Chapter End Notes

Confession time: Hagakure’s extreme idiocy in this chapter is partially my own fault, because I was looking at the type chart and thinking ‘Oh! His Sandygast is ground type, so it’ll be good against Kyoko’s poison type Crobat’ and put them as a pairing before realising later that Acrobats are also flying and flying is immune to ground so that was just a boneheaded decision all around. *Facepalm*

Thanks for reading!
Toko watched as that stupid stoner idiot moped back to his seat. And this was the type of person they were putting in the same class as Byakuya Togami!? What sort of idiot forgot that ground couldn’t hit flying types!? It was the sort of stupid mistake a little kid made in his first ever fight, not something someone who looked even older than her should be doing! And to think that stupid teacher would have made her fight him if he’d had his way!

This whole class was stupid! How was pitching people together in random fights supposed to tell anyone anything about each other? All it had shown so far was that the four losers were either stupid, had weak pokémon or both!

Well, whatever… she could just keep her nose down and wait until it was her turn to fight. At least it was better than having to stand up and introduce herself in front of everyone so they could all just laugh at her…

“Alright, now that’s over… Hmm…” The teacher clearly had no idea what he was doing, and she figured he probably wouldn’t have even if those other idiots hadn’t messed up his supposed ‘plans’. “Seems like people couldn’t decide who’d win out of Asahina and Maizono, so let’s pair you two up!”

“Umm… really?” The dancer, or whatever it was the one at the front of the class did, asked wimpily. “I get the feeling that’s not really a close match…”

Hah! A battle of the bimbos made perfect sense to Toko! It wasn’t like either of those pretty airheads would have bothered seriously training their pokémon…

“Yeah! She’s right!” That dumb punk, or jock or whatever he was, was agreeing with her. “Maizono’s a serious contender, she’s not gonna be beaten by some random lifeguard from Kanto!”

“That wasn’t what I mea…”

“What’s wrong with being from Kanto!??” The idiot in the hoodie, the dumb lifeguard herself and that other idiot who’d insulted Togami all asked at the same time. Guess she’d learnt which members of the class were from Kanto now…

“You mean, aside from it having less types of pokémon than everywhere else?” The punk jock shrugged.

“In my experience, that does not affect the ability of Kanto’s trainers.” The big meat-headed woman actually said something. “They seem as competent as the ones from any other region I’ve faced.”

“However, you will have only fought people who’ve travelled all the way from Kanto to Kalos to your gym, correct?” That prissy princess piped up, “Which means you’ve only been exposed to the better trainers from the region. I suspect the average one would be far less capable than what you’ve seen…”

“Eh… I’ve travelled around enough regions that I’d say they’re all about the same.” The guy with the stupid hair told them, “There’s shitty trainers and good trainers in every region. Whether you’re gonna get your ass kicked depends on how well a person looks after their pokémon, not where
they’re from or how rich they are.”

“That’s a good point, Mr. Oowada!” The fat slob next to Toko said in the most sycophantic tone of voice she’d ever heard. “But in this case, Miss Asahina has an ice type at the same level as Miss Maizono’s water type, and a water type to match her psychic type! So surely Miss Maizono has the advantage, with water being ineffective against ice!”

“Are you sure about that?” That creepy quiet girl in the corner asked so seriously it was almost like it was a threat or something…

“Gee, I dunno, you guys think maybe they should have a battle and then we can just see the result instead of wasting time arguing about it?!” The teacher dramatically suggested.

That shut everyone up, and the two girls got the message that they should hurry up to the back of the class and get their pokémon out already…

Both of them went with their water types, which seemed to be the pretty obvious move to make from both sides. Swimmer girl was probably thinking the little Marill might soften up the Brionne enough that her Galceon could finish it off even with less effective attacks, and the dancer was probably hoping she’d have brought out the ice type first so having her water type would have taken advantage of that…

“Alright… Marill, start off with Aqua ring!”, “Brionne! Use Baby Doll Eyes!” Both of them set up defensively, making the Marill surround itself with shimmering water and the Brionne blink up at it with cutesy eyes…

“Awww…”, “Riiiillll…” Both the Marill and its trainer fell for its stupid charms completely. What a pair of soft idiots! You wouldn’t catch Toko falling for some stupid seal with a stupid pleading expression on its face.

“Alright! Brionne, now use Sing!” The dancer took full advantage of their idiocy…

“Ah!” The dumb blonde snapped out of her stupor. “Marill, use Hydro pump!”

Wait… what? Why would a Marill know Hydro Pump!? Didn’t they evolve waaaay before learning that?

But it sure looked like it know Hydropump, as a huge torrent of water came out of nowhere and knocked the Brionne head over head over fin several times. To its credit, the poor seal just shock itself off and then started singing… And several of the class started yawning… which was pretty contagious, actually…

NO! No, no, no! She wasn’t some stupid idiot who’d fall for a pokémon attack! Wake up Toko!

“Yes! It worked!” Toko shook herself awake just as the dancer was celebrating, “Brionne, use Bubble Beam!”

“Hmm… what worked…?” The dumb swimmer had somehow dozed off on her feet! “Ah! Marill! Wake up!”

“Mar… rill…” It just continued to snore instead, and barely twitched its nose when a stream of bubbles hit it in the face. But then again, with that ring of water around it, it didn’t actually seem like the bubbles even did anything permanent to it…

“Hmm… I thought this might happen…” The dancer sighed, “Maybe Double Slap…?”
This time the Brionne raced over to the Marill and slapped it weakly in the face three times, but still didn’t have any effect, except...

“Rill…?” The mouse muttered sleepily to itself, then jolted awake as it realised where it was, “Marill!”

“Yay! You’re back!” The swimmer cheered at it, “Use Hydro Pump again!”

“Ah… Brionne, sing again!” The dancer ordered, just before her pokémon was sent tumbling over by the jet of water again...

This time Toko covered her ears, and possibly the Marill had as well, because it was still awake even after the song had finished...

The next round of attacks was exactly the same, one use of Hydro Pump and then a useless song from the Brionne, and then finally the fourth Hydro Pump from the Marill knocked it to the floor, where it stayed.

“Good job, Marill!” The swimmer cheered.

“Alright… Brionne, come back now!” The dancer sighed, “Seems like I probably just should admit I lost, huh?”

“Probably… but for the sake of showing off everyone’s pokémon, how about we see Glaceon versus Espurr?” The teacher insisted.

“Alrighty!” The swimmer grinned as she switched her pokémon. Whereas the dancer just put on a forced smile as she brought out a fluffy purple bipedal… thing with vacant eyes and vaguely cat-like ears.

“Glaceon! Use Ha…”

“Actually, can you not use hail?” The teacher suddenly asked, “It’s a huge pain in the ass in this classroom…”

“Oh… alright?” The swimmer frowned, “Glaceon, use Ice Fang!”

“Espurr, use Fake Out!” The dancer retorted.

The Glaceon charged forward, tiny teeth bared, as did the Espurr… Except at the last moment, the Espurr dodged to the side and slapped the Glaceon around the side of the face, startling it and making it hop backwards towards its owner...

“Urg, I hate that move…” The swimmer muttered, then whispered in her pokémon’s ear. It nodded and then walked up back towards the Espurr...

“Espurr, use Psybeam!”

Huh… She hadn’t tried Fake Out again? Then again, it was pretty obvious the swimmer had had a way to deal with it, which apparently involved her pokémon forming shards of ice out of the air and slinging them towards the Espurr, which was knocked backwards, but slowly managed to get itself back up and glare at the Glaceon, which flinched in pain for a moment.

“Glaceon, one more use of Ice Shard!” The swimmer cried. Whereas the dancer didn’t even bother to give her pokémon a command, as she’d obviously figured out that the next wave of icicles would
knock her pokémon to the floor for good…

“Yeah! Good job Glaceon!” The swimmer cheered again, like her over powered pokémon trouncing a couple of weaklings was worth her getting excited about…

“And Asahina wins!” The teacher announced, “First match up Togami’s got wrong! At the moment the only person who’s got everything right is Kirigiri!”

Well, could he blame them? How the heck were they supposed to have known that hooded idiot would screw his own Blastoise over…? It was impressive enough that he’d predicted that!

“Hardly my fault! There’s absolutely no reason for a Marill to know Hydro Pump!” Byakuya defended himself, “Even if you kept it that way to let it learn the move faster, there’s no reason for it to still be a Marill!”

“He likes being a Marill!” The swimmer insisted, “That’s plenty of reason!”

“But… it would be stronger if you have it evolve…”

“Well, I’m not going to make him do that if he doesn’t want to!” She had the audacity to snap at Byakuya. “Number one rule of owning pokémon is that you don’t force them to do anything they’re not comfortable with!”

 “…I’ve never even heard of that supposed rule.” Byakuya stated, “Let alone seen it written down anywhere…”

“It’s called ‘not being a fucking asshole, asshole!’, “It’s a variation of treating your pokémon with respect, which I believe is stated in most reputable trainer’s guides!” “It’s not really written down, it’s just… something you shouldn’t do…?” “Well, of course it’s important that your battle party agree to accompany you on your adventure willingly! That’s what adventures are all about!” “It is unwise to act in a manner that causes your pokémon to resent you…” Half the class all chimed in to argue against him at the same time.

 “…There’s a difference between disrespecting a pokémon, and letting it’s ridiculous opinion cause trouble!” Byakuya argued.

“But… Marill’s not causing trouble! He’s just a bit weaker than he could be, maybe!” The swimmer argued back, “It’s not a big deal!”

“Hmph… I suppose not, if you’re that lacking in ambition…” Byakuya muttered.

“It does make you look less capable than you are though, Miss Asahina!” The fat guy was starting to suck up to her now as well…

“Yeah… guess it made me underestimated how well you’d do in battles…” The punk jock muttered. “My bad!”

“Aww… no problem, you guys!” She grinned, “At least you all know now!”

Ooooohhh… the dumb blonde had got to prove herself as being vaguely competent, good for her... Wait.

This stupid class might actually have a point to it after all! If Toko got put again Byakuya, it’d be her chance to prove to him that she wasn’t just some ‘poorly bred’ idiots with ‘naught but a
scatterbug...’! This would be her chance to prove that she _was_ worth him fighting!

That was, so long as she _did_ get put with him, and not one of these losers instead…

“Alright then… Here’s a closer match up! Yamada and Fujisaki!”

“Very well! Winning this seemingly unimportant fight will be the simple start of the grand adventure of Hifumi Yamada!” The idiot next to her stood up and announced, like he was hero in a dumb computer game or something…

“Umm… if you say so…” The little kid who barely looked old enough to _own_ a pokémon stood up.

They both took their places, the kid insisting on facing away from the class for some weird reason, and got out their pokémon…

“Dratini! Show it your mighty Twister ability!” The fat idiot grinned, like learning that low level move was something to be proud of.

“Golett, use defense curl…” The kid muttered, paying more attention to their pokédex than the fight.

The Dratini breathed in and then exhaled a small twister, which picked up the small rock man for a moment and then dumped it on the floor, at which point it curled up into a ball and sat there…

“Ahh… that would _seem_ to be a sensible set-up move on your part!” The fat guy said patronisingly, “But what you’ve failed to account for, is the fact that there are two categories of moves, physical and special, and…”

“Umm… I _did_ know that won’t help reduce the damage from Twister.” The kid thankfully shut him up, “I did it because it’ll help when he does, umm… _Rollout_!”

“AAACCKKK! Drantini, use Twister again!” He cried.

Once again the dragon breathed a twister out across the classroom and sent the golem flying up into the air, and then crashing back down on the ground. But then _this_ time the Golett responded by rolling itself forward crashing into the dragon and rolling over it heavily, before circling around for another shot, speeding up as it did so.

“Keep using Twister on it!”, “Umm… It’d be nice if you don’t miss…” They both encouraged their pokémon…

Once again the Golett was thrown into the air, but it didn’t seem to lose any momentum as it carried on spinning rapidly towards the Dratini, striking it far more powerfully than it had the last time, which resulted in it being knocked to the floor…

“NOOOOO! Dratini! We can’t lose!” Oh geez, the guy was acting like this stupid fight for _third_ worse trainer in class actually _mattered_! “Look _deep_ within yourself, and you’ll find the strength to continue!”

Oh, _please_, like pleading with your pokémon to have not fainted did any good whatsoever…

“Drat… Drat…ini!” Oh, that _had_ to be kidding! It really _had_ held on by the skin of its teeth? Assuming Dratini’s actually _had_ teeth…

“Ah _ha_! Fate smiles upon our adventure!” The fatso cheered, “Use Twister again!”

“Well… roll into it one more time and you’ll win, Golett!” The kid said, _still_ paying more attention to
the pokédex than the fight…

The same orders as before were called, and once again the rock got thrown upwards…

Except this time it landed at a weird angle and bounced backwards into a sitting position, which it sat in while shaking its head for a moment before curling back up into the ball…

“Ah ha! I bet you weren’t expecting that!” The fat guy smirked, “You see, Dratini’s twister not only causes damage, but it also…”

“Umm… actually, I was just thinking that I was lucky Twister didn’t cause it to flinch during the last two turns…” The kid stopped him again, tapping at his pokédex… wait, was that some sort of battle calculator!? Urgh! She hated trainers who cheated like that! It took all the interest out of battles if everyone just used software to predict the best moves to make! “Now as I only need to hit you once more… Golett, use Shadow Punch this time, please!”

“Another twister, Dratini! This will surely be that automaton’s doom!”

Toko actually hoped it did finish of that pile of rock, that’d teach the kid to let a piece of stupid, new-fangled software dictate the battle!

Once again, the Golett was thrown into the air and landed on the ground, this time with a slightly louder crunch than before… Did that mean it really had fainted…?

Urgh, no! It was slowly getting back up again… it had also held on with just a little fraction of its health left! Honestly, this was like watching an anime battle! She was almost expecting there to be some contrived reason for Shadow Punch to miss!

But it didn’t… The Golett threw a punch at thin air, and then a giant purple hand appeared out of its fist and flew towards the Dratini, punching it square in the face and sending it careening backwards into its owners arms…

“Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!” He sank to his knees, again, like this was end-of-season battle in a kids show, and not some random class-assigned battle. “…Our adventure is over… we couldn’t even beat the tutorial boss…”

“Umm… sorry? But… does it really matter that much… it just means you need to train more…” The kid muttered as the Golett went back to its ball. “I mean, we both do, really…”

“But I’m the chosen one! I’m not supposed to lose the first fight I have!”

Chosen one? Oh please! He really did think this was a computer game…

“Well… maybe you weren’t meant to win?” The guy in the hoodie piped up from the front of the class, “You know, you get those RPG games where the first fight is against someone impossibly tough and you lose no matter what you do?”

“Ah… So… you’re saying that this fight will just serve to highlight how strong we’ve grown once we level up more…?” The fat guy asked, hopefully.

“Well, yeah! Like when Squirtle and I once tried to fight some wild Staryu when we were on holiday and lost really badly, but when I went back with Wartortle the next year we could beat them easily!”

“Hmm… I see!” He finally recalled his Dratini and pulled himself back up to his feet, pointing
dramatically at the kid. “Then know this, villain! You’re reign of terror won’t last forever! For one day I, Hifumi Yamada, will return more powerful than you could possibly know, and strike you down!”

“Umm…” Poor kid didn’t know what to make of that, and just started slowly backing up towards the rest of the class… “Okay then…?”

“Well, now the dramatics are all over, you two can sit down…” The teacher told them, at which point the kid turned and ran back to the front of the class, while the fat guy sat down walked back towards the seats with his head held high…

At least until he noticed several people, particularly the jock and the model bimbo, were sniggering at him. Then his face just tensed up and he sat down and stared ahead of him, obviously trying not to let them get to him, and failing…

She could almost have felt sorry for him, if he hadn’t been such an idiot about bigging himself up the whole fight! It must have been pretty galling to be ranked second worst in the class… Not to mention losing a fight that should have been winnable…

Urgh… what if that happened to her!? This might end up being less of a chance to prove herself and more of an utter humiliation! Especially if she was put with someone other than Byakuya and still lost!

“Good…” The teacher took another drink from his flask… why the hell were they letting this man anywhere near a school!? “Next up, we’ll have Fukawa and…”

Urrrgghh… This was it… Please be Togami, please be Togami, please be Togami…

“…Ludenberg!”

Damnit! Why the hell had he put her with that stick-thin doll who couldn’t even manage to make tea for herself!? What sort of battle was that supposed to be!? This teacher had no idea what he was doing…

“…Must I…?” The goth wannabe had the nerve to complain! “I fear the smell would cling to Weavile for days if I did…”

That hardly ever happened!

“There’s a cleaning service at the pokémon centre. That’ll get it off.” The teacher pointed out, “Now quit moaning and go battle!”

“…Very well.” She let out a fake dutiful sigh, looking over at Togami. “Here I was hoping to have a higher class of fight, but alas…”

What was that supposed to mean!? Did she think she was going to become Togami’s rival, just because her family were rich as well? “J-just because you’re high class doesn’t m-make you a good trainer, you know…”

“Hmm… That’s fair of you to think…” She smirked, “But not having a reasonable pokémon to fight with is considered the height of social failure! Not something the parents of a sophisticated débutante would let their daughter get away with…”

“W-whatever…” Like having to train your pokémon in order to fit in was something only rich people did!? Puh-lease! She might not have got to fight Byakuya, but there was no way she was
losing to this pampered, pedigree *bitch*!

They both headed over to the back of the class, with Little Miss Prissy Pants stopping at the closer side and forcing Toko to walk all the way over to the back wall, where she could see the rest of the class watching them… All except for Togami, who was still paying more attention to the file he’d been reading earlier…

Well, she’d just have to do a good job of battling and *get* his attention! It wasn’t like she could beat a Weavile… even if she couldn’t exactly remember what those were and weren’t good at… She’d just have to try out a few different things and see which one worked best…

Of course, her best bet to start with was always… “Garbodor, use Toxic!”

“Dooooor…? Odor…” He slowly responded and started waddling across the floor towards the Weavile…

“No… *do* be a dear and use Night Slash on that unsightly thing before it gets over here…”

*Urrghh!* What a smug way to give your pokémon orders! Heck, even her *pokémon* looked smug as it raced over and slashed at part of the pile of rubbish that formed its stomach. Still, it was just all the more amusing when Garbodor responded by hurling a particularly gross, slimy piece of rotten something-or-other straight into its smirking *mouth!* Hah!

“V…*VILE!*” It complained as it spat it out on the floor and kicked it back towards Garbodor… put it was already looking paler than had a few seconds ago. That probably meant that the poison had taken hold…

“Alright… Garbodor, use Sludge Bomb!” That thing obviously didn’t like the poison, so maybe poison attacks would work well…?

“Weavile, use Night Slash again!” Toko’s opponent wasn’t even bothering to try out different things.

Once again the weasely-looking thing raced forward and cut a big chunk out of Garbodor’s stomach, although the exertion of the attack made it suddenly come to a halt and clutch at its *mouth* and stomach in pain…

“And here I was hoping I’d have been lucky and that wouldn’t have affected him…” The goth girl sighed as it became even more obvious that her pokémon was badly poisoned.

Not that Garbodor was looking so good himself… he was also clutching in pain at his stomach, or the new hole in it. He might not actually be able to take another attack like that… But for now, he was still up and moving enough to gather up a bunch of purple sludge and catapult it at the nauseous Weavile…

It stumbled a little, but not much… if anything it still looked better of than Garbodor did. She’d have to try something different if she wanted to win this… assuming Garbodor even got another chance to attack…

“You poor thing…” Miss fancy pants was pouting at her pokémon, “But don’t worry, just one more Night Slash and I’ll be able to give you some nice Pecha berry tea…”

“D-don’t think you’ve won yet!” Toko told her, “Garbodor! You’re using Body Slam this turn, so you better hold it together!”

“Odor!” Her trash heap agreed as the Weavile ran up and made another attack, almost carving him in
two…

Almost, but not quite! Garbodor still had enough of himself with himself to muster up the speed to charge into the Weavile, which was once against curled double on itself as it found the poison getting more and more painful. This time Garbodor’s move seemed to affect it more, as it sent the thing to the ground hard enough that it barely managed to get back up. It was barely going to manage to make its next attack, before the poison finished it off…

“Tch! That piece of trash is stronger than I thought… I should have used Screech first…” The prissy princess complained, “I suppose I am usually better at reading people than pokémon… And it won’t matter once Weavile uses Night Slash again!”

Damnit… “Sorry Garbodor…” Toko sighed. It wasn’t even worth trying to give him an order. Better to just look away while he got ripped apart and call him back into her pokéball so she wouldn’t have to look at the damage he’d taken for her…

And, as she’d guessed, the Weavile gave one last smug grin as she called Garbodor back, before keeling over onto the floor.

“Well… Seeing as your pokémon fainted before mine, it looks like I win!”

…What? Had she not been listening when that teacher listed out all their pokémon? Oh… oh oh oh! This was going to be perfect!

“Oh, really?” Toko smirked, getting out her second pokéball… “And w-what are you planning to do about my ‘poorly bred’ Scatterbug!”

Ahahahah! She twitched so hard at the little bug flew out of its ball that it wouldn’t have surprised Toko if that plastered-on makeup had cracked!

“Fukawa wins!” The teacher announced, “Pretty close match though! Could easily have gone either way…”

That seemed to cheer the goth up, as she took a deep breath and smiled before turning to face the class again. “Indeed. It seems luck was not on my side this match… and that it makes sense for me to get a second pokémon, post-haste!”

“W-well, it’s not like I’m not planning to train Scatterbug…” Toko pointed out as she took her seat… and Byakuya still wasn’t paying attention. Was he even going to bother paying attention to his own fight, or did he think he could win without bothering to…?

“Alright, kids… I’ve left the big fight for last!” The teacher grinned. She could at least respect him for keeping the best trainer until last. “Togami and Oogami! Now… a lot of you had pretty mixed views on this fight!”

“R-really? It should be obvious that Togami will win!” Toko could help but point out. He was the best trainer there was!

“Are you kidding!?” The dumb swimmer cried, “Sakura’s pokémon have type advantages over both of his! And they’ve had lots of battles!”

“But so does Togami, and we’ve already had several fights where type advantage didn’t work out…” The dancer pointed out.

“But… Oogami’s job is literally battling pokémon! And she travels into the wilderness to find strong
ones to fight!” The kid in the hoodie insisted.

“Dude, haven’t you even seen the Togami zoo?” The jock asked, “He doesn’t have to travel to find kickass pokémon to fight!”

“Alright kids… show of hands! Who’s certain Oogami’s gonna win?”

The swimmer, the kid in the hoodie, that loudmouth gang guy put their hands up.

“Oowada, your reasons?”

“Dendemille’s a fucking good gym, from what I hear…” He muttered, obviously put out from being called on, “I’m guessing it’s got good trainers…”

“That’s a good point to keep in mind!” The teacher told them all, and the idiot looked smug that he’d given a supposedly good answer. “Now, who here is certain that Togami will win?”

The model (and the Fenrir girl straight after), the jock and Miss Prissy Pants all put their hands up alongside Toko.

“Enoshima! We’ve not heard your thoughts on this yet, why’d you think Togami will win?”

“I dunno… but his company give me tons of money to promote them, so it’d be a bit shitty not to say he’d win, right?” She shrugged.

“Right… and Ikusaba, your thoughts…?” The teacher sighed at her lame answer… there were tons of good reasons to pick Togami and that’s what she came out with!?

“…I just agreed with Junko…” She muttered. That was even WORSE!

“…Ludenberg, I don’t suppose you’ve got a sensible reason…”

“Togami’s pokémon are reknowned for being specially bred, whereas I believe Oogami’s were one’s she caught herself?” She answered, looking to the meat woman for confirmation. “That’s sure to give Togami the advantage.”

“Another good point!” The teacher agreed, while Togami nodded along… Damnit! Toko would have said that as well! “So, those of you who weren’t sure either way, raise you hands!”

The nerd, the dancer and the little kid at the front, the fat guy next to Toko, and the stoner and quiet girl behind her all raised their hands. Bunch of wishy-washy losers, hedging their bets…

“Alright then! Let’s start at the front… Ishimaru. Why couldn’t you decide?”

“Because you haven’t gone over all the rules for these battles in detail!” What kind of answer was that!? “I think the outcome of the fight is going to depend on whether or not you allow Togami to use TM51 now you’ve announced his match…”

“What sort of idiotic cretin do you take me for!?” Togami sounded like he was scowling at the idiot, “Do you really think I couldn’t tell she was the closest thing to a threat to me the minute I saw this sorry excuse for a class? I used that TM the second my tour finished!”

“In that case I suspect Togami is going to win…” Ishimaru said, in a tone of voice that made it seem like that was a bad thing!

“Good job considering that Togami has enough cash to burn to use one just for a class battle,
though!” The teacher told him. “Alright, Maizono, your thinking?”

“Umm… well, to be honest, I don’t really know much about fighting with pokémon, so I usually just rely on my intuition for predicting outcomes…” She started, sounding embarrassed. “And I’m not really getting a feeling either way here…”

“Alright, Fujisaki?”

“Umm… my software’s predicting that its 50-50 odds, based on what I’ve been able to put in it…” Urg! Did that kid use computers to decide everything!? “That’s if they fight optimally, at least… But I’m guessing they both would?”

“You’re not using poképridct, are you?” The teacher sighed irritably, “‘Cause that things worse than Hagakure back there!”

“No… this is something I coded myself…”

“Alright…” The teacher still looked pretty suspiscious of it though, “Yamada, what do you think will decide the outcome?”

“Narrative structure.” Oh gods he really DID think his life was fictional…

“…What?”

“The narrative structure! What result creates the most interesting outcome? Mr. Togami losing would certainly be a shock, and probably cause the heir to go through a period of self-consideration, but perhaps Miss Oogami losing would cause her to venture forth on a grand training expedition! Both are rife with possibilities, depending on the genre…”

“Hmm… man I didn’t consider that…” The stoner guy started muttering, “Maybe that’s why I’m not getting a result on my prediction… It’s not been decided if this is a drama or an adventure story!”

“T-that’s because it’s not a s-story!” Toko reminded them, “Not even the worst hack would have the character’s start talking about the narrative conventions of the plot they’re in!”

“I dunno…” The model disagreed, “There’s some pretty crummy fanfi…”

“Enough!” The teacher snapped, “Kirisgiri, another sensible answer, please?”

“I think it’s going to come down to who has the faster pokémon, particulary out of their strongest ones.” She answer, “And while a Floges would usually attack before a Drampa, I hear Togami bred his for speed, so there’s a possibility he’ll get to attack first…”

“There we go!” The teacher snapped his finger at her. “That’s what I needed! So, now we’ve all heard everyone’s thoughts on the matter… Togami, Oogami, head to the back of the class!”

Togami finally put away his file, put both his pokémon back into their balls and headed up to the back of the class, where his opponent had already started heading over to the space at the back, one of her two pokéballs in hand… Was she not even going to try playing mind games to figure out which pokémon Togami would choose? Or did she think that showing him she’d already made a decision would make him change his own mind about what to pick?

Whatever she was doing, it didn’t seem to bother Togami at all. In fact, he seemed as though he was expecting her to have already chosen, given the smirk that crossed his face as he spotted the ball in her hand and took one of his own out of the sophisticated leather case on his belt.
“You both chosen your pokémon?” The teacher asked them, and the both nodded. “Alright, send them out then!”

“Go… Rufflet!” Togami started with his weaker pokémon…

“Snorunt… Give it your all today!” The other woman called out her weaker pokémon as well, the one with the advantage against flying types…

“Hmph! As I expected…” Togami smiled, “You gym trainers always leave your strongest pokémon to the end…”

“Yes… Is that not standard?” She asked. Oh please! Battles would be all boring if everyone was *that* predictable! “And if you expected my ice type, why send out a flyer…?”

“I don’t see the need to risk Drampa getting hurt before facing your Florges.” Togami told her, “Rufflet can deal *that* thing, easily enough!”

“Hmm… Very well. Let us see then.” She bowed to him, “Battle well, trainer.”

“I always do…” Togami smirked. “Rufflet… Crush Claw!”

“Snorunt… use Frost Breath.”

Togami’s Rufflet was far faster than the stupid little cone, easily grabbing it between its talons and squeezing tight until the thing let out a high-pitched squeal and breathed out a plume of air so cold that it quickly formed lumps of snow and coated the bird with a thick layer of frost.

Both trainers took a moment to survey the effect of their attacks. The Rufflet looked worse for wear, shivering so hard that it had to land roughly on the ground to shake the cold out of its wings, and it already looked as though it was having trouble focusing on its surroundings. But the cone didn’t look too happy either, grasping painfully at several of the holes that the bird had pieced through its yellow hat.

“Snorunt… again!” The woman started straight back on the offensive, probably hoping to knock out the Rufflet with her next attack and have a chance to do damage to Togami’s Drampa… or make it waste a move, at least.

“Rufflet… use *Steel Wing.*”

There were several gasps around the class as Togami ordered his next attack, and the bird managed to wake up enough to obey him, flying back into the air with wings that now seemed to have a metallic sheen to them, then swooping down and across the side of the Snorunt, slashing deep into it…

“Sn…no…” A small puff of frigid air escaped its mouth as it fell sideways and its trainer quickly recalled it back to its pokéball…

“…I thought you’d teach Steel Wing to your *Drampa…*” Ishimaru piped up from the back of the room, in a confused voice. “To help it deal with her Florges…”

“I did.” Togami turned around to answer him, “I had *two* copies of TM51…” He added, after the guy failed to figure out the obvious.

“Ya mean ya bought *two* of the same TM, just to beat a kid in your own class!?” The biker shouted at him.
“I didn’t have to buy them… I have multiple copies of every TM my pokémon can learn on hand.” Togami corrected him, “And yes… I often rearrange my pokémons’ moves if I know I’m likely to fight a specific opponent… I do have a reputation to keep up, you know!”

“What… so he means he might unlearn Steel Wing, at some point?”, “How much is TM51, anyway?”, “Umm… 10,000 pokédollars…”, “HOLY!”, “Tch! Fucking rich asshole…”, “Alright for some!”, “Hah! If I had that sort of money, of course I’d win all my battles!”

There was a wave of resentment as most of the class probably started wishing they could both be Togami and wipe the floor with his pokémons’ faces at the same time! He really was the perfect rival… just completely unashamed to be throwing about that huge advantage he had over everyone else! Heck, he didn’t even react to all the murmurs about him, he just kept staring forward as if he didn’t give a damn, which he probably didn’t! How good it would be to kick his ass and then take over his company and have so much money that you could just swap your entire battle teams moves around without a care in the world…

“Regardless, it will be of little use against Florges…” The wall of meat at the other end of the room told him, as she called out the giant flower fairy, “…When she uses her Moonblast at full strength…”

“Taking no prisoners, aren’t you…?” Togami commented, “Rufflet, try to use Crush Claw!”

The bird valiantly tried to shake off its coldness and fly across to the fairy, as it rose into the sky and pooled a beam of light into its hands, but unfortunately the fairy finished its preparations first and blasted it out of the sky with a beam of ethereal pink light…

“I suppose that was a lot to ask for.” Togami commented, as he called back his bird. “But at least I don’t have to worry about you wasting my time by using Protect against Drampa…”

“Indeed… it had been my plan to force your better pokémon to waste its energy, if possible.” Urrghh… what an annoying fighting style! That’s why Toko liked poison so much, it completely messed with those types... “But it seems instead that it will indeed be a test of speed, as Kirigiri suggested.”

“Yes.” Togami agreed, “Drampa! Come out and use Steel Wing!”

“Florges… use Moonblast again!”

Both pokémon moved quickly, and several people leaned in close to see which pokémon would land their hit first… It could go either way at this point, as the Florges powered up its beam and the Drampa raced over towards it… But just as the Drampa was about to hit the Florges, it managed to shoot the beam of light out at it, making it roar in pain as it flew through the light in order to slash deeply into Florges side…

“Hah! Florges hit first!” That dumb biker whooped, “You got this Oogami! One more hit like that and it’s down!”

Damnit… he was probably right… Both pokémon looked like they couldn’t take another hit like that, so unless Togami’s Drampa had something it could use more quickly than that Florges, it wouldn’t get the chance to hit again! And could Drampa’s even know any of that sort of move…?

“Yeah! Go Sakura!”, “Ahahahah! Money can’t decide everything!”, “It appears Mr. Togami will be engaging in a contemplative drama piece very soon!”, “I knew you could win!”

Almost half the class was starting to cheer as it looked like Togami was about to lose… But he was supposed to be the best trainer ever! He wasn’t going to lose on his first fight in school, was he!? 
He’d pull out some unexpected move that’d throw everyone off, just like he had done in the first half of the fight, wouldn’t he…?

“Florges… Moonbeam again…” This is was, this would be when Togami threw them all for a loop…

“Drampa… Steel Wing!” Togami said, betraying no hint of worry in his voice whatsoever…

This couldn’t be it… he really didn’t have anything that could beat her…? He sounded like he was sure he could still win, even though it was obvious he’d lost. This was playing out just the same way it had before, with the dragon racing towards the fairy, who was already powering up the beam that would finish it off right as it opened its mouth to bite… Urgh… she couldn’t look! She couldn’t bear to see Togami lose to someone who wasn’t her, not like this!

... "FLOOORG!"

“What the fuck!?, “Wha…!? But…!? Moonblast hit first last time!”, “Maybe one of those moves slowed down Florges…? Or sped up Drampa?”, “Umm… no, neither of those moves does that…”

Wait… what were they all talking about…?

Toko looked up from the floor to the ceiling of the classroom, where Togami’s Drampa was calmly flying back towards its owner, as the Florges lay slumped of the floor. Toko barely managed to notice that there was now another deep gash ripped into its side before it disappeared back into is pokéball…

Togami had won!? How…!?

“Congratulations…” The woman was taking it well, “It is rare that I see a pokémon whose speed matches my own exactly… I certainly was not expecting your Drampa to equal my Florges…”

“Well… I guess that explains my 50-50 prediction…” The kid at the front muttered, “It was pretty much random which one would attack first that time…”

“Well, as Kirigiri over there said, I had Drampa bred for speed…” Togami explained, proudly. “And then I had a rigorous training regime designed to help him improve that speed even further… I’d go as far as to say he is the fastest Drampa its possible to make!”

Hah! Of course he’d done all of that to make sure his Drampa couldn’t be outsped so easily! He really was the best pokémon trainer in the world!

“Well, course he’s gonna win if he gets to do all of that shit!”, “He got to design his training regime? He didn’t just go find wild pokémon?”, “…Make a pokémon, he says… like they’re toys!”, “His starter was specially bred? I just got Marill from a shelter…”, “I rescued Squirtle from a pond at school!”, “My parents just gave me money and sent me to the store on my birthday… I didn’t get any help raising Popplio…”, “Fucking lucky rich prick…”

…And everyone wanted to be the person who brought him falling to his knees!

Chapter End Notes
Thanks for reading! Next up will be a set of three mini-chapters from Mondo's perspective!
Chapter Notes

This is the first of three chapters which would probably have just been uploaded as a single chapter were it not for the fact that I’m trying to make this update weekly, so I apologise in advance for the odd cut-off points.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fucking rich asshole with his breeding bullshit… Was that the sort of shit kids at this school were supposed to be able to pull outta their asses, or was he just going to be the smug kid who did the best at everything…?

Well… at least Mondo had managed to win his fight, although it sucked that it was only ‘cause that kid had been such an idiot… He was gonna have to make sure he caught a pokémon that could deal with all the water types this class had. Assuming he could stop Lycan from knocking out wild ones before he actually got a chance to catch them…

“Well, now that’s all done, hopefully all of you have an idea of where you stand in the class, and maybe even what you should be trying to do next!” Kizakura stood up from the seat he’d been lounging in for most of the lesson. “Now it’s time for you to all have some lunch, and when you get back we’ll start with the actual school stuff and teach you about the dangerous pokémon we got near here…”

And then they’d let him out into the wild areas, right!? And then he could finally get a chance to prove to the gang that he could be just as good as Daiya…!

“…So see you kids in an hour!” The teacher told them, seconds before the bell rang… Mondo liked this guy already!

“Finally! I need some food!” Leon groaned, “Stupid guard stopped me from going into the dining room for a late breakfast…”

“Well, like I said, it’s a good thing! You wanna be able to go out in the wild areas, don’t you?” Mondo reminded him.

“I guess… Although I’m still thinking I’m gonna rock the talent world before I try beating any of the Elite Fours…”

“So, does that mean you’re gonna try and sit with one of the fashion chicks at lunchtime?” If so, Mondo was probably gonna want to find someone else to hang out with, ‘cause he wasn’t listening to them go on about dressing up pokémon or whatever for an hour…”

“Ehh…” Leon looked between Enoshima and Maizono… “I think I’d have to be crazy to go within five foot of Ikusaba…” He sighed, as the Fenrir chick got up and followed Junko like she was one of her pokémon or something… “Whereas Maizono just looks like she’d gonna end up chatting to that dweeb in the hoodie…” He looked pretty hopeful, until said ‘dweeb in the hoodie’ said something to Ishimaru, who nodded and joined them both… “Urgh! And Ishimaru! Screw that, I’ll wait unill after classes, when I’m not wanting to stuff my face anyways!”
Kinda sounded like he was just making excuses to be a lazy ass, but at least it meant Mondo had some company at lunch. It was weird not having his group of guys to hang around and distract him. He’d spent most of yesterday worrying about whether he was actually going to do alright in this place, dreading his first class, and wishing he hadn’t turned down Daiya’s suggestion of phoning up the gang on his last day before classes… even after he’d tried watching TV to take his mind off shit.

The pair of them headed over to the dining room, which was just around the corner from their classroom, and both headed over to the cheap area where they could just take whatever they wanted for free, an arrangement they both took waaaaay to much advantage of, especially after Mondo told Leon that Lycan would happily eat any leftovers on top of his own food, which caused Leon to back and grab some extra stuff ‘just in case’…

Then came the decision of where to sit, which might have been easier if their class wasn’t full of annoyances and weirdos… Oogami and that swimmer chick would have been cool to sit with, but they’d gone and sat with Ishimaru’s group and that purple-haired chick, so they were out. That guy who said he knew the future seemed alright, but he was carrying on that weird conversation he’d had with the fat guy before, and he was following alongside that rich bitch and there was no way Mondo wanted anything to do with her. He wasn’t interested in sitting with Togami or that weird chick who was obsessed with kicking his ass either… Which just left…

“What about Fujisaki?” Leon spotted the apparent pokédex expert sitting alone just as Mondo did…

“Yeah… seems like a good kid.” Mondo agreed, and they headed over to say hi…

“Hey… Fujisaki, right?” Leon started the conversation…

“Hmm… oh, hi Kuwata…” Fujisaki looked up at them, “Ermm! And… Oowada…”

The heck…? Had Oowada done something? The kid’s skin was turning pale…

“Hey! We… though you might like some company…” Mondo explained, trying not to freak the kid out even more.

“Ummm… thanks…? But… I was planning to eat with Souda…” Fujisaki admitted, “And speaking of which, he’s over there, so you guys can have this table if you want!”

“Cool… have fun…” Leon replied, although the kid had pretty much scarpered before he even started saying it…

“…Did I do something…?” Mondo asked, “Or do I just look that scary?”

“I dunno... You guys barely spoké, didn’t you?” Leon looked as confused as Mondo felt, “And you don’t look half as freaky as those guys!” He added, looking over to the table Fujisaki had gone to, where that guy with the tattoo on his face and the one with Bruxish teeth were sat. “Probably just wanted to talk tech stuff with the mechanic dude.”

“I guess… Must be nice to have got a guide that gave a shit…” Mondo commented, as the mechanic pulled out a chair and started introducing Fujisaki to the other kids at his table.

“Or one with the same interests as you…” Leon agreed, “I mean… not that I’m not gonna do sports at all, but Neko’s obsessed with ‘em!”

“Well, whatever, we can deal without that sort of shit, right!” At least, Mondo hoped he could, “Let’s just take advantage of getting our own table!”
“Right!” Leon agreed, putting his food down, taking his smaller cat off of his shoulders and getting his bigger cat out of its pokéball, then opening up two cans of food for them…

“Can’t you just feed him what you’re having?” Mondo asked, as he put the extra plate of food he’d piled up for Lycanroc on the floor and let him out of his ball, at which point he dove straight into it…

“I wish! This is the only type of food Lux’ll eat! And I don’t mean he only likes this brand, he won’t even try the other flavours!” Leon showed him the can he’d just opened, “Litten’s not so bad, but he still won’t eat anything that’s not specifically cat food…”

“Man… that sounds like a pain…” What the hell did he do if he went somewhere new and that specific brand of food wasn’t in the stores? Or the company stopped making that one flavour? Would his cat starve itself? “Lycan here prefers sharing my food. He gets pissed if I’m eating and don’t share any with him… As you’re about to see!” Mondo added, as Lycan finished his own plate and stood up to start helping himself to some of the stuff on Mondo’s plate as well, going as far to climb up onto his lap to get a better look…

“Well, if he got starved as a puppy…” Leon grimaced, “Gotta say, I don’t think I could deal with looking after a pokémon that had problems like that… I mean, I dunno where I’d even start dealing with that!”

“Gotta admit, a lot of it was just giving him food and space until he learnt to trust me to get close enough to actually look after him even if it freaked him out, like when I have to give him B.A.T.Hes…” Mondo admitted. “But, where did you get your pokémon, then? Like a pet store or…?”

“I caught Litten on holiday in Alola a few weeks ago, and as for Lux…? I think my Dad got him from a breeder…” Leon answered, “Not, like, specially bred just for me or anything! Just one of the ones the breeder was raising routinely… Probably one of the ones someone like Togami didn’t want!”

“Hah! Probably… can you imagine that? Being able to get your pokémon tailor-made, like it’s a piece of furniture…?”

“I dunno… Seems like it’d take the fun out of raising ‘em…” He frowned, “But, seems like it’s pretty important… Or being part of Gym means squat, eh?”

Smartass… just ‘cause Mondo had been sure Oogami would trounce Togami… And who’s to say she wouldn’t have, if she’d been allowed her usual items and stuff? “…Ya can’t…”

“HEY! What did you just say, you asshole!” Oh, great! It was that pipsqueak yakuza again… “Just ’cause his dumb gang is a bunch of losers, doesn’t mean all Gyms are!”

“The fuck are you talking about!?” Mondo clamped a hand on Lycan’s shoulder and pushed him off of his lap, both to stop him from lunging at the asshole and to help Mondo stand up and tower over him all the more quickly. “I already told you, my Gym could kick your ass any day of the week!”

“What, even though you apparently lost your first fight here!?” He smirked, “What was it? That tiny dweeb with the Blastoise?”

Oh… so that’s why he’d thought to come over and start talking shit… “No… I won against that kid with the Blastoise.”

“Don’t try and give me that shit! If you’d won your fight, why’s he talking shit about it!?” He pointed at Leon.
“Dude… I was talking about Oogami…” Leon explained, “‘Cause Oowada had been talking like ‘She’s part of a good Gym, she’s gonna win for sure!’”

“Wait… Oogami lost?!” He looked pretty shocked by that news, “Damn… I didn’t think that Crobat looked that strong…”

“What… Kirigiri’s one? I dunno about that…” It was hard to tell when she’d ended up fighting that idiot… “Oogami was against Togami and his specially-bred, ‘fastest Drampa possible!’”

“You’re kidding… His dragon beat her fairy…? Damnit… I can’t just let that stand, or they’ll probably start up with all that ‘Corporate Gym’ bullshit again!”

“Uhh…Corporate Gym…?” Leon asked.

“Yeah… Togami Corp and a few other companies tried to start their own set of Gyms… their argument was that they could make the process more standard by breeding Pokémon that were all the same and send them to different places, so it didn’t matter where you were getting your badge from, it’d all be the same.” Mondo explained, “It got shot down ‘cause people were worried they’d start abusing the opportunity to advertise, or maybe even charge people for trying out for a badge eventually…”

“Huh… I heard it’d been shot down ‘cause they were insinuating that traditional badges might not be as ‘worthy’ as their ones, and there was a chance Pokémon wouldn’t respect the old badges if they introduced new ones, which would cause total chaos…” The Yakuza argued.

“I’m surprised they didn’t throw it out just ‘cause it sounds fucking miserable!” Leon sighed, “Isn’t half the fun of the badges getting to see different Gyms and see what their themes and leaders are like? Can you imagine replacing all that with soulless corporate crap? It’d suck!”

“Well, either way, it’s kind of a shitty idea all round…” Mondo summarised.

“No shit… but that’s not stopping them from trying… And if they hear the Togami brat can beat the second-in-command at Dendemille, then they’re gonna start using that as an excuse to say their companies would be better than us!” He groused, “Guess I’m gonna have to show ’em myself then…”

“Well, hope you’ve got a good Ice-type, man!” Leon gave him a thumbs up.

“No… But Drampa’s half Normal-type and Pangoro’s a fighter…” He smirked, “Plus, I can teach my Floatzel Ice Beam, in case I need an extra boost… Ivysaur’s probably not going to manage much though…”

Another guy who apparently had the money to throw at using TMs whenever he wanted… Sounded like he had a good shot at winning… but then again, so had Oogami…

“Well… word of advice: Don’t let on that you’re gonna challenge him!” Mondo warned him, “He must have burned 20 grand teaching Steel Wing to both his Pokémon, ‘cause he figured he’d be pitted against Oogami at some point…”

“20 grand? For two lots of that TM?” The Yakuza seemed to think it was funny, “What, doesn’t your little gang get given better rates? I know good Gyms do!”

Goddamnit… Mondo had just quoted the price Fujisaki had spouted earlier, it’s not like he’d know how much TMs cost! “Well… I ain’t the one who buys shit for us! Daiya’ll be getting a better rate than that…”
“So only your leader ever handles orders? Hah! You guys really are a bunch of small-timers!” He laughed, “And I don’t need your shitty advice either! I’ll kick Togami’s ass fair-and-square! Hell, I’ve even go challenge him now, so he’s got plenty of time to prepare for it!”

“Your funeral, Dude!” Leon shrugged as he left.

Meanwhile Mondo was seething… One stupid thing he hadn’t known and that asshole had used it as a reason to call his whole gang ‘small-time’, even after all the effort he and Daiya had put in to help kids like themselves learn to care for pokémon, not to mention all the pokémon they’d rescued and raised as well…

And he’d even come straight over here as soon as he’d thought he could laugh at Mondo for losing a fight… was that how this whole ‘school’ thing was gonna be? Every fucking thing Mondo did wrong was gonna make the Crazy Diamonds look like they completely sucked? Damnit! What the hell was gonna happen if it got to the ‘proper school part’ now and Mondo wasn’t able to keep up with everyone else? Was it gonna seem like everyone in the whole gang was an idiot!?

“You… uhh… you gonna sit down?” Leon asked, carefully, while the Yakuza was yelling at an incredibly uninterested looking Togami…

“Yeah, sure.” Mondo sat down. Wouldn’t do to look like that shrimp had actually pissed him off, even though he had. “Chill, Lycan, have another sausage…” He added, once he noticed that his dog was stood glaring off at the mobster.

Not that just saying that helped, in the end Mondo had to physically pick up a sausage and wave it in his face to get him to calm down enough for Mondo to loosen his grip on his shoulder, at which point he got back in Mondo’s lap, saw there was no food left on his plate and started clambering over the tabletop to see what food Leon had leftover…

“Your pokémon shouldn’t be climbing over the tables like that!” Geez, today was just full of interruptions from people who pissed him off! Now it was that fricken nerd who’d snapped at him for being late… “It’s unhygienic and disrespectful! Not to mention I’m sure the types of food you’re eating isn’t suitable for canine con…”

“Where’s your pokémon?” Leon cut him off, “You made him sit through class, but he doesn’t get to eat?”

“Arcanine’s pokéball is available for him to go into whenever he wants, but he prefers to sit quietly with me instead when I’m studying, most of the time.” Ishimaru explained, smugly. “And adult canines have a large enough stomach that they’re best fed twice a day, eating at lunchtime would make it difficult for him to digest his food!”

“Lycan eats whatever he wants, whenever he wants, and he’s never had trouble…” Mondo argued.

“Well… It may be that’s he’s less sensitive to it than most dogs…” Ishimaru agreed while getting ready to argue about it again. “But I can assure you that the Nurse I spoke to said most dogs deal best when given two main meals a day, with the occasional treat throughout… and that food meant for humans isn’t suitable for them at all!”

Hah! If he did that to Lycan, the guy would think he was getting starved and panic… “Well, Lycan ain’t most dogs! He’s a wolf for starters!” Mondo snapped, “So how’s about you just worry about your own pokémon, and I’ll take care of mine?”

“…Very well… but your pokémon still shouldn’t be on top of the table!” He snapped,
“There are rules against it in the student handbook!”

God, what a fucking pain in the ass this guy was… “Who the hell cares, it ain’t like people eat straight off of the damn table!”

“But they put their cutlery dow…”

Brrriiinnnnggggg!”

Ishimaru tutted as he was cut off by the bell. “That’s the ten-minute warning… I was planning to be in class by now!” He glared at Mondo as if it was his fault the busybody had hung around to bitch at him.

“Well, ya got ten minutes, dude, ain’t like you’ll need to run there…” Leon shrugged, slowly finishing off the second burger he’d picked up for himself.

“…Aren’t you two… worried about getting to class on time…?” Ishimaru hovered at the table to talk to them, “And having time to prepare your stationary and books…?”

“We don’t need ten minutes to walk around a corner and get a pen outta our pockets…” Mondo rolled his eyes. Hell, he didn’t even have any books! “But if you do, maybe you should get going…”

“Yeah… Only nine minutes left now!” Leon smirked, “Tick, tock, dude…”

Ishimaru tutted and gave them a sideway glare as he quickly stomped away.

Still, the ten-minute warning was useful. It gave him and Leon time to finish of the last of their food (or throw it to an ecstatic Lycan) before they needed to get up and into the classroom, seconds before the real bell went off and about half a minute before Kizakura arrived less late than before. Much to a rather pissed off nerd’s annoyance.

“Alright kiddos…” He started, holding up a stack of papers, “Now, rather than us try and teach all of you the exact same way and fail miserably because you’re all good at different things, we’re going to start off the year with some little tests to work out what you’re good at, so we can split you off into different classes when needed…”

Guurrggghh… He shoulda known he wouldn’t be able to start a new school without having to do a set of damn tests so they could see exactly how stupid he was and dump him in the ‘special’ kids’ class with all the other dumbasses and fuck-ups!

…but if that happened here, then he’d never hear the end of it from that fucking Yakuza… and if word got out that Mondo had to be put with the dumbasses, maybe everyone outside of this school would use it as an excuse to give the Diamonds a ton of shit…

“This test will be about your knowledge of pokémon!” He started distributing the tests… Well, at least Mondo was pretty good at that! Maybe with this being a pokémon school, he wouldn’t be considered at total write off! “And it has to be completed from your own memory! So no books, pokédexes, computers or pokémon, Ishimaru.” He nodded at the nerd, who’d surrounded himself with a wall of books and had his dog sitting by his side again…

“My apologies… I wasn’t aware we were having a test!” Ishimaru hurried to put all the books he’d got out back in his bag…

“That’s because we didn’t want you spending lunchtime trying to cram information you won’t remember next week into your brains.” Kizakura shrugged.
“…Still unnecessary to bar us from the library all weekend…” Togami grumbled loudly.

Damn… it hadn’t even occurred to Mondo to try studying… But did he really need to? After all, this was just about pokémon, and he was around them all the damn time! How hard could it be?

“Alright then…” The teacher started, once everyone had packed all their shit up and Ishimaru had coaxed his dog into its ball, “You have thirty minutes! Time starts… now!”

Right, let’s see what they wanted here… fill in the type advantage chart? He could do that in his sleep, and it barely took him five minutes! So much for needing half an hour! Now he could just sit back and watch as these other guys… Started turning to the next page in the test…

Oh goddamnit! He shoulda known this wouldn’t be so easy! Still, Diamonds were formed under pressure, right…? He flipped over and looked at the next few pages, most of which were pictures of different pokémon with a sentence at the top…

‘Name these pokémon, describe their habitat and comment on their general uses.’

Geez… was he really supposed to know the names of all… what was it these days, 750 pokémon? Without a pokédex!?! Let alone where the hell they lived!! He’d never even seen half of these! And it wasn’t like anyone would study them all, if they weren’t local ones, was it!! No one had a memory like that, did they…?

Urg… Seemed like a lot of the class did! Ishimaru was frantically filling in the form, Togami was also looking pretty hurried as he filled in the columns, Yamada was confidentially writing down all the names… Hell, the only person not writing something down was Fujisaki, who had frozen up in panic at the crazy hard test…

*Damnit*… Well, Mondo had better do his best not to look like a dumbass… Else everyone would think the Crazy Diamonds were just a whole Gym of them!

He went down the rows, trying to remember fights he’d had with each one, where he’d actually been at the time, what names the kids had been shouting when he’d fought them… plus for a few of the more obvious ones he was able to put down if they were better suited for close up attacks, long range attacks or setting up clever tactics… but there were still a lot of empty spaces and stuff he wasn’t even half-sure of…

“Alright class… time’s up!” Kizakura announced, while Mondo was staring at the paper and trying to rack his brain for something else to put down on it… Still, at least it was over. Hopefully they’d get to the point of the day where Mondo actually got to learn something useful from all of this soon…

“Next, we’ll have a history and general knowledge test. Still no pokédexes or computers out! You have thirty minutes!”

Well, *fuck!* So much for that… it was just another test for those smartasses to show off with!

Still, general knowledge shouldn’t be so bad! He and Daiya had been travelling around all over the place since he was nine! He was bound to have picked up stuff, even if he hadn’t exactly been able to go to school reliably since Daiya got them away from home…

Let’s see…

‘When was the earliest discovered pokémon? What was the earliest domesticated pokémon? When was the first pokéball developed? Describe the additional effects of up to five Z-moves…’
Well… he’d seen a few Z-moves used in Alola, so he could do that one, but…

‘Name the photographer who caught Mew on camera? What is said to haunt the Old Chateau near Eterna City? What was Cyrus of Team Galactic’s stated goal? Which region contains the most different varieties of wild pokémon? Which region contains the greatest number of pokémon? Which pokémon are most commonly found in Haina Desert…?’

Alright, so there was one more he knew! (You couldn’t walk ten meters without running into a Sandile and he still hadn’t managed to catch any!) But most of this shit was stuff Mondo didn’t have the foggiest clue about… Who was supposed to know all this random crap? Was this the sort of thing that got taught in schools? Probably, ‘cause it seemed like most of the class were managing to put some shit down for most of the questions… He really had some catching up to do…

He managed to answer maybe twenty of the hundred questions on the test, and some of them were guesses! Please let that be the last test!

“…Next test will be maths! We will provide a basic calculator for this test, so still no pokédexes or software devices.”

Fuck. He shoulda guessed there’d be a fucking maths test! It wasn’t like every goddamn school Daiya had managed to get him into for more than a week hadn’t instantly bitched at him for being shit at it…

…Well, it started off easily enough, with a page that just contained some adding and multiplication and useful shit like ‘if you have 5000 pokédollars and burn heals cost 200 pokédollars, how much change should you get if you buy 3 burn heals?’… then it got a bit harder, with questions about fractions and those numbers that were written with a little number above and to the right of them that he didn’t think anyone had ever explained to him. Then there was the sort of ‘2x = 4y, solve for x’ stuff that had been the point he’d just decided that maths was full of crap. After all, what was the point of learning how to solve fake sums?

But… he couldn’t just sit here and only do one and a half pages of sums! Everyone else had managed at least the third one, and some of them were even flipping to the fourth and fifth pages, and he could hear Ishimaru tapping wildly at his calculator all the way back here!

Maybe he’d get lucky and the later parts would make more sense…

‘Useful formulas

The currently accepted equation for determining pokémon damage is:

\[((((2 \times \text{Level}) / 5) \times \text{Power} \times \text{A/D}) / 50) + 2) \times \text{Modifier}\]

…What. The. Hell. Did any of that mean? Was ‘level’ meaning how strong the pokémon was? How were you supposed to give a number to that? And what the hell was A/D? It didn’t even say, it just went straight into more shit like…

Where Modifier = Targets x Weather x STAB x a bunch of other shit…

Urgh… he always thought targeting more pokémon made the attack weaker per pokémon, and he knew the weather could effect some moves, but what the hell was STAB supposed to be!? And the whole page was like this, all full of letters and terms he’d never heard of! There was no way Mondo was gonna understand this shit in half an hour… Maybe he’d have better luck with the next page…?

...The fuck was this shit? ‘Ignoring IVs, EVs and critical hits, if a fire-type with attack of 90 uses a
100% accurate, power 65, physical, fire-type move against a similar level an ice-steel type with 110
defence and 125 health, roughly many hits would it take to knock out the ice-steel type?” And that
wasn’t even the whole fucking question, parts B and C were ‘would it be worth that same fire type
spending one turn to lower the ice-steel types defence by one stage?’ and ‘Would the answer to part be B different if the fire type move was only 50% accurate?’ How the fuck was he supposed to work out that shit!? And how was it supposed to help in a battle!? What was he supposed to do, grab a calculator in the middle of a fight and make the other guy wait ‘cause he wanted to work out the maths!? Nobody fucking DID that! This was BULLSHIT!

“This is bullshit…” At least Leon knew what was up… “Ice-Steel type? There’s no such
fucking thing!”

Wait… that was his problem!? It wasn’t even true! That Sandshrew Michi had caught in Alola was
Ice-Steel type…

…And most of the time it couldn’t even take a single hit from a Flame Wheel before fainting,
although sometimes it took two if Michi got lucky… Was that power 65? It was kind of a powerful
move, but not overly, so… 1-2 then?

…And that answered part B, cause using leer on it first didn’t do squat when it went down in two
hits anyway!

But what if Flame wheel missed half the time? Then leer would change it from four attacks down to
two… then it would be worth spending a turn! Hah!

Still that was all assuming Michi’s Sandshrew had that defence and health… And it wasn’t like he
could just guess his way through every question on this test based on experience…

But he had to at least try to do well on this shit! And he wasn’t going to be able to do jack with the
x’s and y’s and tiny numbers!

He rushed through a few examples, hoping the numbers they’d picked had some basis in reality so
his answers wouldn’t be completely wrong, before time was called again...

Now what the fuck were they gonna put him through…?

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
“Well, now that’s all the tests done, we can get to the fun part of the lesson!” The asshole running this shit announced. Although Mondo didn’t wanna know what his idea of fun was after all that shit… “…Or we could, if Snap was actually here yet…”

‘Snap’? What the hell was ‘Snap’? It sounded like the nickname for a pokémon that bit people… like a Carnivine or something?

“Snap? You mean Theodore Snap?” Ishimaru seemed to have something else in mind, “The photographer who took a picture of Mew!”

“Yeah… that’s the one…” Kizakura agreed. Great, now they said it! And they were even gonna have a class taught by him, just to rub it in Mondo’s face that he hadn’t known the name of the guy! Assuming he actually bothered to show up, that was! Maybe he wouldn’t! Mondo would bet his bike that with a name like ‘Theodore’ he was probably some stuck up, rich asshole! Maybe he’d paid to go on a big, ten-year long expedition to catch Mew and only managed to get a shitty picture of it instead, then pretended that was his whole goal in the first place! Yeah, that seemed like the sort of bullshit rich people with too much time on their hands would…

“Except, no one calls me Theodore!” A slightly muffled voice suddenly came from above them all…

“The name’s Todd!”

Huh… so… his name was Todd, he sounded about thirty years younger than Mondo had been imaging, and he was currently… in the ceiling? Good thing Mondo hadn’t actually bet his bike…

“Err… My apologies, sir…?” Ishimaru shouted, looking around confused as to where the voice was coming from.

“…You mind telling me what you’re doing in the crawlspace, Todd?” Kizakura sighed, like this was normal for the guy.

“Sure! I’m taking pictures of these three Charjabugs you’ve got up here! I’m getting some great shots of them putting electricity into these wires! Wait’ll you see the pictures!”

“What? Pretty sure there aren’t supposed to be any pokémon up there, let alone Charjabugs…” The teacher groaned, “You mind knocking them out bringing them down here, Todd?”
“I \textit{do, actually!} You \textit{know} I think pokémon look better in the wild!” The guy in the ceiling snapped.

“That’s not ‘the wild’ though… if you bring them down, we’ll put ‘em out outside so they can bury themselves like they’re supposed to… And there’d be stuff for them to actually \textit{eat}…”

“Hmm… that’s a good point!” Todd replied, “But that doesn't change the fact that I don’t have any pokémon, now does it?”

“Of course you don’t…” He slapped his forehead, while a few of the class muttered in surprise. “Well, guess I’ll have to call maintenance, unless one of you two shorties wants to go up into the crawl-space and get them out for me! Hah!”

The kid in the hoodie looked slightly offended, but laughed along anyway. But the smaller kid was actually thinking about it… “Umm… actually? \textit{Can} I go? I’ve been thinking I could do with a source of power for some of my computers… And if I give Golett a potion, it should be able to manage three Charjabugs…”

Wow! Props to Fujisaki for being willing to get dirty hands…

“But… going into the ceiling to fight pokémon? That doesn’t sound safe!” Of course Ishimaru was the one to be a killjoy! “Not to mention, should Mr Snap be that close to wild pokémon if he’s not got any of his own to protect him?!”

“Eh… he’s been doing this for years, he knows the risks…” Kizakura told him. “As for you going up there Fujisaki… \textit{Really,} I’m not supposed to let you near wild pokémon until after you’ve had the safety talk…”

“Didn’t you just say this isn’t ‘the wild’?” Todd shouted down from the ceiling, “Wouldn’t that mean these \textit{aren’t} wild pokémon?”

“You know what I mean, Todd…”

“Aww, c’mon Koichi! It’s the first day of school, let the kids have some fun!” He pleaded. “I’ll be right here to make sure nothing happens!”

The teacher looked between the ceiling and Fujisaki a few times, “Alright, go ahead…” He sighed, “Todd, how’d you get up there?!”

“Hmm… give me a minute and I’ll show you!”

The class waited with curious excitement, except for Fujisaki who was giving the Golett a potion and sorting out a large bunch of pokéballs (Geez… how much money did the kid have to spend on those…?) and Kizakura, who had started looking though the test papers already, which made Mondo want to throw up…

And then suddenly there was a noise from the ceiling, and several members of the class pointed to a panel that was being lifted up and moved aside before a rope dropped down onto the floor between Leon’s and Hagakure’s desks. Then, almost as quickly, it was followed by a pair of worn brown hiking boots, lighter brown cargo shorts, a green case and a pink and purple striped T-shirt…

“Hi, kids!” Todd Snap announced as he landed on the floor with a thud, and brushed his wavy red bangs out of his face… yeah, that \textit{wasn’t} what Mondo had been imagining at \textit{all}! He’d been expecting some old, fat, pale explorer with a stupid moustache or something. Instead this guy looked about the same age as Daiya, with a clean-shaven face and obviously weather beaten skin. Hell, if he’d put the red hair up into a pomp instead of just having it hang around the sides of his face, and
changed out of those dorky clothes, he’d fit right with the Crazy Diamonds.

“So… you stood on one of the desks, knocked aside the ceiling panel and then used a grappling hook to climb up?” Kirigiri asked him.

“Yes! You’d be surprised what sort of pokémon you can find when you go looking in odd places! That’s why you have to be careful when you’re exploring new places! Speaking of which, which one of you is it who wants to go up?”

“Umm… that’d be me!” Fujisaki replied, standing up and self-consciously walking through the tables to get to him.

Todd looked over Fujisaki and the Golett. “Well, you should be small enough to fight up there! Do you want to climb up or hitch a lift?”

“Umm… A lift, please…” Fujisaki answered, looking at a patch of floor in the opposite direction from Mondo and Leon.

Huh… was the kid ashamed of not being able to climb a rope? But he wouldn’t have expected a computer programmer to be able to do that in the first place…

“Sure thing,” Todd crouched down with his back facing Fujisaki, “Hang on around my shoulders and I’ll have you up there in a jiffy!”

Fujisaki nodded and grabbed on like Todd had said, at which point the photographer started climbing up the robe and they both disappeared into the crawlspace…

“All right… they’re just over there! Now, you go get ‘em!” Mondo could still hear Todd’s voice through the hole in the ceiling, “And don’t mind me! Pretend I’m not here!”

“Umm… okay…?” Mondo barely heard Fujisaki’s confused reply, “Golett! Go!”

…What followed was a series of crashing noises from the ceiling above them, separated with Fujisaki’s quiet orders and Todd enthusiastically commenting on how great it all looked, before Fujisaki decided to throw a pokéball and there was a moment of silence…

“Aww! I thought you had him!” Todd shouted, as presumably the pokémon broke free of the ball, which meant Fujisaki would have to… “Try the next ball!”

In the end, it took five pokéballs, and two more potions for the Golett, but Fujisaki managed to catch the first Charjabug and then knock out the next two like Kizakura had asked before being carried back down the rope by Todd.

Damn it! It always looked so easy whenever anyone else caught pokémon! Why the fuck did Mondo keep screwing it up!?

Then again, Fujisaki had taken up about ten pokéballs, and from the sounds of it the Golett had actually hung back and let the kid try to actually throw more than one of them, unlike Lycan who’d usually get over-aggressive and knock it out after the first try… He needed to get Lycan to quit doing that… and maybe save up enough cash to buy more than the one or two pokéballs he usually went hunting with… And then maybe he’d be the one being surrounded by people asking him to get his brand new pokémon out of its ball…

“That’s a Charjabug? I’ve never seen one before!” Asahina cooed from behind Fujisaki, waving her pokédex. “Do you mind if I scan it?”
“Umm… Sure!” Fujisaki shrugged.

“While you’re at it, could I scan your Golett?” Naegi asked, “Yours is the only one I’ve ever seen.”

“Well… alright!” Fujisaki agreed.

“May I also scan your pokémon?” Ishimaru stood up with his own pokédex in hand…

“Oh! Well…” Fujisaki looked pretty embarrassed by all the attention…

“Like, I suppose I ought to start filling in my pokédex at some point…”

“Yamada, go and scan Fujisaki’s pokémon for me…”

“Oh hey! I haven’t got either of those pokémon either!”

“Umm!” Fujisaki looked a little overwhelmed at the number of requests. “I know! How about I have Golett carry Charjabug over to everyone in the class, so you can all look at both of them if you want!”

Well, that was a pretty cool idea, it gave Fujisaki a chance to breath without getting crowded by everyone, and let Mondo scan the two pokémon without admitting he actually needed to… Not that he’d never seen either before, but when getting challenged for a badge was a pretty shitty time to whip out your pokédex and beg to scan something like a scrub…

And by the time the little stone man had waddled over the classroom, Todd was done setting up a projector pointed at a big screen at the front of the room…

“Alright, kids! Welcome to your first class- Dangerous pokémon around Hope’s Peak!” Todd started enthusiastically, “The plan is that I show you some pictures I’ve taken of the wild areas that you guys are allowed in and point out the main dangers in each one!”

“Err… before you start, sir, could I ask if the presentation contains any pictures of ahh…” Ishimaru paused for a moment, then quickly wrote something down and handed it out to Todd, “…this pokémon?”

“Yeah… I’ve got some great ones! Wonderful guys, they are!” Todd grinned, then his face fell as he looked at Ishimaru. “Is that going to be a problem for you?”

“No… I will need to make Arcanine get back into his ball though.” Ishimaru told him, “Sorry… you can see what’s school’s normally like tomorrow, alright?” He added, to the dog.

It whined disappointedly, but got in the ball without even trying to argue.

“Alright… but while we’re on the subject, do any of you have any specific pokémon that would frighten you if a picture came up?”

“I… I’m scared of Sableyes…” Fukawa admitted.

“Umm… I’ve got a list…” Fujisaki admitted, writing out several lines on a piece of paper and handing it to Todd.

“Well, there’s no Sableyes outside of the caves, and you guys don’t get to access them for another year…” Todd told Fukawa, then checked over the list. “And there’s none of these either!”

“Really!? None of them!?” Fujisaki sounded surprised. Did the kid have a fear of something
common then… maybe something like Beedrills or Combees, those were pretty common fears…

“None that I was able to see, anyway!” Todd added, “I can’t guarantee there’s absolutely none of them, but they’re certainly not a common sight!”

“Thank you!” Fujisaki sounded ecstatic.

“I don’t fear any pokémon…” Togami started, “And I’m only going to need to be aware of any pokémon in the area that are able to get through a Class 7 protective suit with carbon air filtration and are capable of beating a level 50 Drampa…”

“No, Togami, you need to know about all the dangerous pokémon in the area!” Kizakura stopped him bragging about all his fancy shit, “Regardless of how powerful your pokémon is!”

“Err… is that really the case?” Ishimaru asked, with his hand up, “I mean… If we’re carrying more than enough healing items and curatives, than a stronger pokémon would be able to deal with much greater threats than a weaker one, wouldn’t it? You’d just have to make sure you healed it often and turned back when half of your curatives had been depleted!”

“Well, you’re right that you’ll be safer with a strong team and plenty of items, Ishimaru…” Kizakura admitted, “But that strategy wouldn’t keep you perfectly safe. You might run into something stronger on the way back, for starters. Or you might just stumble onto something more dangerous than your pokémon can deal with and it gets knocked out.”

“Umm… but you could avoid that by making sure you scan any areas you’re about to go into for dangerous pokémon, couldn’t you?” Fujisaki asked, “And you could start heading home once you’d used a tenth of your items, not a half…”

“Alright… I can tell what you kids are thinking!” Todd stepped up with the projector remote in hand, “You’re imagining there’s some kind of great set up you can have that’ll protect you from everything out there, right? Some list of items that you can carry that means you never have to worry again! But here’s an example… Imagine you’re in a forest, with all the supplies you think you’ll need and more, when suddenly, you come across this little beauty!”

The projector slide clicked onto a picture that Mondo almost assumed must have been faked, except that it just looked so fucking real… A shimmering rainbow coated the bottom of the photo, standing out from a backdrop of a starry night’s sky, and dancing around in the middle of it all was a light-pink mousey looking pokémon with large feet and a long tail…

Wow… that was what Mew looked like!? Dammit, no one had ever said it looked that fucking cute! It’d be awesome to be able to get close to that and pet it or cuddle it up and…

“…Only it scampers off just after you spot it!” Todd carried on, “Do you follow after it?”

“Yes!” Exclaimed the whole class.

“Of course you do! Who wouldn’t!? You’re having to fight off wild pokémon as you go, but you keep seeing it pop up out of bushes, always just ahead of you… Do you carry on chasing it…?”

“Yes!” Of course he fucking would that thing was adorable!

“Okay, so you swear you’re starting to catch up to it, when it starts running through poisonous bushes… Are you still chasing it?”
“Yes!” After all, he always had some way of curing poison on him, right?

“Alright… you keep chasing it deeper into the forest, but suddenly there’s more wild pokémon and they manage to knock out all of yours! But Mew is right there… Do you keep going?”

“Yes!”

“Alright… you keep going, and there’s more poisonous bushes, and you think you’re starting to run out of poison cures, and you don’t see any berries nearby either… But Mew is so close! Keep going?”

“Yes!”

“Alright… well, you used the last of your poison cures, but you manage to get close enough to Mew that it looks at you for a few seconds, before teleporting away…” The picture changed to one of the same backdrop, except there were just a few speckles of glitter in the space Mew had been…

“Goddamnit!” Mondo growled, and several of the rest of the class sighed and grumbled as well…

“Now then… Can anyone, other than Yamada, tell me what situation they’re now in? If this had actually happened?” Todd asked them all, “How about you, Ishimaru?”

“Well… I failed to get a chance to study Mew and I’m now… somewhere in a forest… without a pokémon… and no pecha berries… and I have to go back through poisonous bushes… and probably more wild pokémon…” Ishimaru started answering slower and slower as he realised exactly how screwed over he’d… hell, they’d all be if that had actually happened to them, “I’d be completely doomed…”

“I’d have gone out wearing my Togami-brand poison resistant suit, which would have been unaffected by the buses…” Togami hadn’t got the point…

“Alright then, a member of Team Skull was following Mew as well, and he mugs you for all your stuff!” Kizakura told him, barely looking up from the test papers, irritably.

“That’s incredibly unlikely!” Togami snapped.

“But it could happen! Or you run into Hypno’s that convince you to part with your stuff!” Todd countered, “What we’re saying is that pokémon can do weird things and you can’t rely always having the right thing on hand to help! And you can’t necessarily rely on area reports and scanners either! You need to keep your wits about you as well! Otherwise you could end up walking stupidly into something that kills you, because you don’t know how to survive by- or know what to look out for- yourselves! So that’s why, for the sake of this lesson, I want you to imagine that it’s just you, by yourself, with absolutely nothing. Ok?”

The class nodded, although in Togami’s case it was more like he rolled his eyes at the guy.

“Great! So, I’m going to show you some awesome pictures I’ve taken area here recently, and asking you guys questions about them! Starting off… what do I need to worry about here?”

The slide clicked again and showed a path into a forest area lined with trees and the occasional brightly coloured flower, including one that was red with white spots…

“Vileplume! On the left!” Mondo shouted instinctively, before remembering that he wasn’t riding his bike and needing to warn the rest of the gang about dangers like that at the moment…
“Good spot! That’s the sort of reaction you want to be having!” Todd pointed enthusiastically at him, “A lot of dangerous pokémon are good at hiding, if you’re not paying attention to them… Being on the lookout for dangerous ones can help you stay safe! In this case, you can avoid startling the Vileplume by turning off any loud vehicles or equipment you have with you and walking slowly past it, preferably keeping a good distance away from it…”

Most of the class was nodding along, although a few were writing down the advice he’d just given and a couple were rolling their eyes at the obviousness of it…

“…But that would have made for a pretty boring photograph, so I whacked it with a pesterball!” Todd grinned like a maniac and went to the next slide…

The next picture was the same scene, probably taken from a few steps further forwards, except that the Vileplume was now stood up out of the ground and shooting a thick cloud of poisonous spores into the air… and this guy had done that on purpose? And then stopped to take a picture of it? Mondo would have just covered his mouth and run!

“You carry pesterballs, but not pecha berries!?” Ishimaru cried from the front of the class.

“I can’t warn you guys about the dangers of pokémon if I don’t show you how dangerous they can actually be now, can I?” Todd smiled in the face of Ishimaru’s shock. “Now… Vileplumes are pretty slow, and don’t usually move at all, so they protect themselves by emitting toxic spores that makes anything that stays in their territory for too long faint… and as you can see here, they react to anything they think is an immediate danger by shooting a thick cloud of these spores into the air, which can kill you if you breathe them all in!” He explained, turning more serious again. “But… just because I startled it doesn’t mean I was a goner, obviously! So, what should I do in this situation… Anyone…?” Todd looked around, and saw that Ikusaba had raised her hand, “You!”

“You could block the spores by throwing something over the top of the Vileplume’s flower, such as your shirt. That should reduce the toxicity of the air enough for you to engage it.” Fucking hell, Ikusaba was even crazier than Todd…

“…Engage it!?” Todd stared at her, “You think you could beat up a Vileplume, with no pokémon?”

“Ikusaba’s from Fenrir, she might actually be able to…” Kizakura told him.

“Oh… right… those guys…” Todd nodded in understanding, “Well… I was looking for ideas that would be doable by someone without that sort of training… Anyone…? You, the guy who spotted it! What’s your name?”

“Mondo Oowada…” Mondo told him, having a feeling that he’d now made himself the guy to be asked for answers, which probably meant he’d end up looking stupid pretty easily…

“Alright, Oowada… What would you do in that situation?” Todd pretty much confirmed his fears.

“…I’d just hold my breath and leg it.” Mondo admitted, after trying to think of something cleverer.

“Exactly!” Todd nodded enthusiastically… so that was right? “The spores don’t travel far and need to be breathed in to hurt you, so you should to cover your mouth and get away from them as fast as possible!”

“Well, duh!” Enoshima muttered sarcastically, “That’s just common sense!”

“Well, a lot of this is just common sense!” Todd shrugged, “Common sense and good reaction times have probably got me out of a hundred dangerous situations!”
Huh… Common sense and good reactions? Mondo might not be up to snuff with maths, but he had both of *those* in spades! Maybe this was his chance to make the gang look good again!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
“Of course, you still have to know about Vileplume’s toxic spores in order to know that it’s dangerous and you should run from it.” Kizakura interrupted Mondo’s internal triumph at actually getting some questions right at school for once.

“That’s right! Not everyone grew up near a forest and was warned about them!” Todd agreed. “Which is why I’m showing you that there’s one on the way into Hope’s Peaks’ forest section, and what to do if it gets angry, so we can be sure that you’ll all be aware of it and know what to do when you pass by it!”

“Well, I guess you gotta make sure none of the idiots can sue you if they do something dumb and die, or whatever…” Enoshima muttered.

“Well… that’s one way of thinking of it…” Todd pulled a face at her, “So, to carry on with my lesson, once I’d got that great photo of Vileplume defending itself, I decided to turn around and see what’s in the grassier side of Hope’s Peak until it calmed down… Now, it’s a bit safer in that part, herds of farm pokémon, lots of flower types, a few small mammals and birds, a combee hive… nothing that’ll be dangerous if you don’t antagonise it first, and if you do antagonise it, running away will usually save you.”

That sounded pretty boring, he’d probably skip going there if there was nothing particularly scary or anything…

“But you do need to be careful about these!” Todd moved the projector onto a picture of a swarm of Scyther…

And there was a clatter from the front of the class as Ishimaru suddenly ducked his head below the table and crossed his left arm under his right one…

“…Ishimaru? Are you sure this isn’t a problem for you…?” Todd asked him, anxiously.

“Ah…?” Ishimaru slowly raised his head back up, “Err… I’m sorry! It’s a just a habit I trained myself to do when I was younger, and that picture was more realistic than I expected! Please continue!”

“If you’re sure…” Todd looked at him cautiously before continuing. “Now, Scyther are very territorial, so it’s best not to follow them around or they’ll get angry and attack you as a group. However they’ll also attack if they see the colour red, which is especially important to you two with the red eyes! Either wear shades when you’re out there or get ready to cover your eyes when you hear them swarming!” He was looking mostly at Ludenberg when he said that, probably because it was obvious that Ishimaru was well aware of it. “Plus, you back there with the red hair, make sure you’re wearing a hood or hat to cover it! And to the rest of you, also keep in mind that it’s a bad idea to wear red in the fields, and I don’t know what Professor Oak was thinking when he designed them, but most pokédexes are red as well, so it’s a good idea to put yours in a case or paint it.”
“Also, I’m just going to add that the Scyther territory has a fence all around it, so you can’t accidentally stumble into it, and the school has protective uniforms available for to give to anyone who wants to go in there and try to catch one.” Kizakura piped up.

Hmm… Scyther were pretty badass looking, but a bug type wasn’t going to help with all the water types in this class, and picking a pokémon that obviously freaked out one of his class was pretty shitty, even if the guy was an annoying hardass… He could skip that area and try and get an electric or grass type instead.

“But I didn’t think to pick one up, and I forgot about my hair before going in there!” Todd told them all, “Uhh… close up picture of those Scyther coming up…”

“Thank you…” Ishimaru nodded and looked at the projector as Todd switched to a picture of multiple Scyther flying towards the camera, only leaning back slightly and covering his red armband this time.

“So… how’d you reckon I should get out of this? Ishimaru?”

“Ah… My plan was always to discard my armband to distract them, while I hid my eyes and ran away. But I suspect you wouldn’t have had anything red that you could remove?” Ishimaru answered.

“No… but having a red bait item on hand isn’t a bad plan if you really can’t go red-free.” Todd told them, “What about you Kuwata. You could end up in the same situation as me…”

“Couldn’t I just leg it?” Leon asked. Didn’t he realise how fast Scyther were?

“They run faster that humans can see, and they will chase after you, so no, that wouldn’t work.” Todd told him, “Anyone else have any other ideas?”

“They don’t like fire. If you can set the ground in front of you ablaze they’ll retreat.” Ikusaba suggested, which sounded like a good plan, so long as you had a lighter.

“That’s a possibility, but I don’t carry a lighter…” Todd told her, “Anyone else… Oowada, what would you do?”

_Goddammit!_ He really was expected to be the class know it all know… But what the hell could you do against something that you couldn’t outrun and could easily slice you into pieces when you were in the middle of a wide open field with nowhere to hide…?

(“Alright… Remember Mondo, if you can’t outrun it, or outfight it, then there’s no shame in hiding or playing dead until it gets bored and fucks off somewhere else…”)

“If you covered your hair, would playing dead work?” Mondo asked, hoping there wasn’t some magical fifth option that Daiya had never mentioned…

“Well, that’s what I did, so in my case yes!” Todd grinned at him, “I was lucky though… they saw a Bellosom and went after that instead of me! So just remember to be careful if you go into that area, alright?”

Everyone nodded and Todd carried on…

Next up in the presentation was an artificial lake the school had had built for wild water types, which Todd started by saying was good to go fishing in, and not to fall in because it had Gorebyss and Basculin in it, which would suck you dry and pick the meat off of your bones respectively…
Then he showed a selfie of himself falling into the water…

“Quick! Swim to the dock! You can use that ladder to get back on land!” Asahina shouted over-excitely.

“Well, I did, buuuut…” Todd switch to the next picture, “Unfortunately this little lady thought I’d make a good snack!”

The picture showed a thin, pink tubular fish with a long pointed needle of a mouth, which was sticking right out of Todd’s arm. Mondo couldn’t help but wincing… he’d been stabbed by a Gorebyss once at the beach and it had hurt like crap until he’d pulled it back out and thrown it back to sea.

“So, now what do I do?” Todd was asking…

“Tie a tourniquet around your arm above it, so it can’t drain all your fluids!” Asahina shouted so quickly you’d think he still had the thing on him.

“Sorry… nothing to tie it with!” Todd shrugged.

“Urrggg… you are useless!” Asahina grumbled, “And you shouldn’t have been that close to the water when by yourself either!”

“Hey! It’s not like I’m dead, is it!?”

“I dunno… how’d we know you’re not actually a ghost!?” Hagakura asked… wait, was he actually being serious!?

“You can knock out the Gorebyss by striking it unconscious, that will stop it from draining your body fluids…” Oogami ignored him and gave her own answer to the question.

“Umm… I thought Gorebyss could withstand huge pressures… you can really just hit it unconscious!?” Fujisaki asked her.

“I’ve been able to do it with a weapon, but not by hand…” Ikusaba answered.

“I… suppose that solution must only be applicable to myself, then…” Oogami realised.

The hell were these guys making this so complicated for…? “Why don’t ya just yank it out and throw it away?”

“Because Gorebyss’ mouth has incredibly small needles that point up and outwards from the point of entry!” Ishimaru turned around to tell him, smugly. “If you try to pull it out, the needles end up bending further into the wound, and can potentially rip the flesh if pulled too hard!”

“But… I managed to pull one out of my arm once, and it didn’t hurt much… not compared to it being in there!” Mondo told him.

“Really!? That’s… not what I’ve read about them… everything says not to pull them out…” Ishimaru looked confused.

“Hmm… Oowada, can you remember exactly how you pulled it out?” Todd asked.

“Well… I think I just grabbed it around the eyes…” Mondo mimicked putting his hand around the pokémon like he remembered, instinctively twisting his hand back like when he revved his bike…
“Ah ha! There!” Todd got excited even before he mimed pulling it, “You twisted it! That’s the trick! You see, the needles on Gorebyss mouth are slightly flexible, otherwise it wouldn’t be able to get its prey off of its nose, so if you turn it like a key before pulling, it twists the needles around the mouth and you can pull it out!”

Wait… really? Mondo had just got lucky because he was so used to riding his bike?

“But, as Asahina said, it’s better not to end up in the water at all, especially not by yourselves or without protective gear!” Todd added a reminder that the ideal thing would be not to copy his stupid antics. “So, having looked around the other two areas you freshmen are going to be allowed in, I went back to the forest, avoided the Vileplume this time… and lost track of the time and was still there after nightfall!”

No one in the class was particularly surprised by that…

“Although, for those of you who didn’t read the student handbook yet, students aren’t allowed outside after dark on their own until their third year.” Kizakura piped up again, “This is just a warning about what to be aware of if you honestly do get lost in the forest by accident!”

“Right! So, I’m now lost in the forest, and this is what I can see!” Tood showed a picture that was pretty much black, aside from a small pinprick of light on the left side… “What should I do?”

“Is this really necessary?” Togami groused, “Obviously you should head towards the light of the school!”

“…The school would have more sources of light than that.” Kirigiri disagreed.

“Well, there’s going to be someone causing it! Even if they’ve just got a torch, it’d better than being alone in the dark outside!” Togami argued.

Honestly, didn’t this guy have any common sense!? “Unless it’s a Litwick, and then you’ll just end up in the ghost world!” Mondo sighed, as several other people in the class also came out with warnings about not following odd lights in the middle of the night.

 Exactly! Those stories you hear about people following a weird light and never returning aren’t just stories! Wild ghost-types are serious business!” Todd said slowly, to get the point across to the rich idiot. “And they don’t show up in pictures either, so I headed off to the right to see if I could find something else! And what I found was this!”

He showed up a slightly less dark picture this time, of a thick row of old, gnarly trees blocking the path to what was more obviously the school this time…

“So… you just busted down enough of those branches to get through there and back here?” Leon asked.

“But… don’t they say not to damage trees in the woods?” The kid in the hoodie asked, “Especially not at night-time?”

“They do?” Leon really didn’t seem to know about this, “I didn’t live near any, so no one ever told me that? What the hell does it matter if you break a few normal trees?”

“There are these tree-ghost Pokémon that get pissed with ya if you do, and then they never let you leave the woods.” Mondo explained one of the many things Daiya had drilled into his head on the first night they’d spent camping in the woods.
They’re called Trevenants…” Kizakura added, “And there is one in the school forest, along with several of its Phantumps, which will try and lead you further into the woods by mimicking children’s voices. So if you are lost in the forest at night and start hearing your classmates, don’t assume it really them coming to find you and follow them, because chances are it’ll be a Phantump instead!”

Huh… so there were Phantumps nearby? They were part grass-type, right? And they evolved into those freaking scary Trvenants? That’s make a great second pokémon! Maybe he could ‘accidentally’ get lost and catch one…

“Oh, and in case you’re thinking you’d like a ghost-type and are tempted to ‘accidentally’ get lost in the woods at night and catch one, any pokémon caught by students who were in areas that they shouldn’t have been in will be confiscated!” Damn… guess Mondo hadn’t been the first to think of that. “There will be a few lessons taking place at night-time in the woods near the end of term, as well as trips to the graveyard area, though, so you’ll have plenty of chances to catch a ghost-type as your second pokémon.”

Alright… that was gonna be when he caught his second pokémon! He’d have most of the term to save up and buy a bunch of pokéballs like Fujisaki had, and try to teach Lycan to quit knocking everything out in one hit, and then when they let him out into the woods he’d catch a Phantump!

“Yes! You can tell because of the high number of Weedil and Kakuna in the area!” Todd agreed.

“Or eat a persim berry…” Ishimaru said, like it was a force of habit.

“But there are some serious threats in there, like this!” Todd ignored Ishimaru and brought up a picture of a forest clearing, with a Victreebell hanging around on side surrounded by a bunch of Weedle that were climbing up it...

“Well, yes, if were stupid enough to stick our hands in that, then I suppose it is dangerous!” Togami snarked, “But personally I have more intelligence than those Weedle!”

“I’m not talking about the Victreebell!” Todd told him, “There’s something else in this photo you need to watch out for if you go into the forest!”

Most of the class leant forward and squinted as they tried to find some hidden threat like the VilePlume from earlier, but Mondo couldn’t see anything like that. It just looked like a picture of a Victreebell, a few Kakuna hanging around and about, let see, 6, 7, 8 Weedle…

(“Daiya! Why don’t we camp there? Rockruff can clear out those Weedle and then we’ll have lots of space!”)

(“What Weedle…? Oh… Oh SHIT! Mondo, we gotta get outta here!”)

(What? But they’re just Weedle…”)

(It’s never JUST Weedle, bro! Especially not if there’s THAT many of them…”)

“That’s a Beedrill nest.” Mondo realised.

“Yes! You can tell because of the high number of Weedil and Kakuna in the area!” Todd agreed.
“Well, obviously!” Ishimaru exclaimed haughtily, “But what’s the threat?”

“You don’t think a pack of pissed off Beedrill is a threat?” Mondo cried.

“No…? I’ll admit their stingers hurt, but the worst they’ll do to a human is cause you to bleed for a while, and maybe faint if you’re younger and get stung a lot, I suppose…” Geez! Did this guy not have any self-preservation!? “It’s certainly not like attacked by a Scyther!”

Oh… So that’s what this was… he was trying to act like Mondo’s sensible caution about Beedrill was somehow less manly than his trembling under the table at a damn picture of a few Scyther! Like being frightened of a ‘scarier’ покémon than Mondo was something for the idiot to be proud of!

“Oh sure, ‘cause being unconscious and bleeding by yourself in the middle of a forest is totally fine!” Mondo snapped sarcastically, “Not like you might still be out of it when night time comes around and the ghosts come out!”

“There’s also the possibility of infections if the wounds aren’t sterilised quickly…” Ikusaba backed him up. “Fenrir always had at least ten members involved in Beedrill colony extractions, plus backups further back in case it turned bad and we got knocked out and left in the dirt.”

“Err… I suppose that’s true… I just… none of that ever…” Ishimaru backed down pretty easily.

“Oowada and Ikusaba are right! It might not be obvious when every other kid in Kanto can catch a Weedil and grow it into a reasonably-well behaved Beedrill, but if you’re not careful out in the Wild, those guys can be deadly!” Todd made sure the whole class got the picture, “If you start seeing more than one Weedil with a few feet of each other, chances are you’re getting close to a nest and the Beedrill will assume you’re a threat and attack you! Particularly during spring and summer time! So be careful!”

“Which, frankly, is something you should have learnt about going into the wild at all when you first got your starter покémon…” Kizakura said offhand, “But, we have to run this session every year to cover our butts anyway…”

Ha! Yeah, otherwise someone like Ishimaru would go blundering into a Beedrill nest and get himself killed… And then the school would probably end up having to exterminate the Beedrill ‘cased they’d killed a kid, even though it wasn’t their fault, same reason he had to make sure Lycan never bit anyone, no matter how much they pissed him off…

“Well, it means I get an excuse to come and see how all your покémon are doing each year, so I can’t complain!” Todd laughed, “But Koichi’s right! No amount of forewarning can make up for you guys being careful! And you can’t assume I’ve managed to run into every dangerous creature out there! So if you’re going to take home anything from this, it’s that you need to keep your wits about you, and don’t go anywhere unfamiliar if you’re not feeling confident! Got it?”

The class nodded, although again, in Togami’s case it was more of an eyeroll…

“Great! I need to talk to Koichi about something now, so you can talk amongst yourselves! I’ll be back next year to show you the great things living in the mountain, graveyard and electrical generator regions you’ve got here!”

“Which are also off limits to freshmen!” Kizakura added, as Todd packed up the projector and sat down next to Kizakura and started talking quietly, with occasional glances towards the class…

“Hey, you think they’re talking about us…?” Mondo quietly asked Leon.
“Looks like it…” Leon agreed, “Maybe we were getting marks for participation just now?”

“Ya think!?” That’d be sweet! He’d come up with a ton of good shit just now! Hell, maybe it’d even make up for that fucking maths test… And the history test… And not knowing two-thirds of the pokémon names…

Shit, he’d be lucky if it made up for one of those things, let alone all three!


“I’m fine.” Mondo lied, “Probably just need some fresh air.”

“No kidding, I forgot how long school drags for!” Leon bought the lie. “Still, looks like they’ve finished talking now, maybe they’re gonna let us out early…?”

“Well, he doesn’t seem like the type to pad the lesson out for no reason…” Mondo commented hopefully, as Kizakura shook Todd’s hand and led him to the door…

“Alright, guys!” Kizakura got their attention again, “That’s it for your first day of classes! Tomorrow is going to include a practical session in the safer side of fields, so make sure you’ve got suitable clothes and footwear! As I said earlier, it’s all available from the school store… if you don’t mind parading around the school logo!”

Well, that sounded like it’d be better than today had been… And he’d planned out what his second pokémon was gonna be! Maybe he could do well in this place after all…

“Oowada and Ikusaba, I want you two to stay after class. Everyone else is dismissed!”

Shit… He was being kept behind with Miss ‘not a pokémon trainer’!? The one who didn’t even know how to give her pokémon a revive!? Had he fucked up the tests that badly…!?

“Dude, it’ll be fine…” Leon patted Mondo’s back as he stood up and started heading out with the other, clever, students, “Just don’t touch the Comfey and she won’t flip out on you…”

Urrghh… He wasn’t turning white ‘cause he was afraid of some tiny chick from Fenrir! He was worrying about what the rest of the Crazy Diamonds were gonna think once it got out that their second in command was a fucking idiot!

Ikusaba didn’t look any happier to be kept back either, looking over to Enoshima worriedly until she was completely gone from the room, along with everyone else…

“…Did we do something wrong?” Ikusaba asked Kizakura, once it was the three of them left in the room.

“Hah! No! Nothing like that!” Kizakura waved his hand dismissively, “I’m just letting you two know that we’re going to be putting you both into a special class…”

FUCK! It was always the fucking same, wasn’t it!? Every school he went to shoved a damn maths test with fucking letters on it in his face and then when he didn’t have a damn clue what any of it meant they shoved him in a group of kids so dumb it was a miracle they didn’t kill themselves getting out of bed every morning! And then they had the fucking nerve to sarcastically call them all ‘special’…

“Just say you’re putting us in the class for fuckwits…” Mondo growled, “I’ve been in ‘em enough times to know what you mean!”
“Ah… I’m not talking about ‘special needs’ right now… even if we do need to get you caught up with maths.” Kizakura said carefully, “I’m talking about you two getting the dangerous pokémon training license.”

“Wait… you’re saying we can get a DPTL? But I thought you had to have been a trainer for seven years because you could even start that course…” Hell, even Daiya still had a couple of years left before he finished the course…

“Normally, yes. But this is Hope’s Peak! We’re allowed to fast-track people on a year-long course, which is how we get away with Owari having a Bewaer and Kimura having her Arbok and Toxicroak.” Kizakura pulled a face at the mention of the poisonous pokémon, “Not that you’d have to take on a dangerous pokémon once you’ve done the course. It just means you’ve got more options to consider…”

...And Mondo’d be able to brag to the gang that he’d got the DPTL before Daiya… “Sound’s good! Sign me up!”

“Attaboy! What about you, Ikusaba?”

“…I’m not really a trainer…” She muttered.

“This isn’t about how good you are at training pokémon, it’s more about being able to learn about dangerous ones without getting scared of them.”

“Then why not pick someone like Ishimaru? He seems to know a lot about different pokémon, and he wasn’t scared of…”

“Hah! No, there’s a difference between not being scared and not having any self-preservation!” Kizakura didn’t even let her finish before laughing, “Even if his own Father hadn’t sent us a letter specifically asking us not to put him on this course, those comments about Beedrill would have put him out of the running… whereas both of you showed you respect how dangerous wild pokémon can be, but you still go out there and deal with them anyway. That’s the sort of attitude you’ll need for this.”

Hah! That dumbass nerd trying to big himself up had just made the teachers decide he was an idiot! Served him right that he’d screwed himself outta the chance to do this…

“I see… Can I think about it?” Ikusaba asked, looking towards the door.

“You can… but if you are going to go for this, you need to have read this initial information by this Saturday…” Kizakura told her, dumping an inch-thick booklet in front of each of them.

“Why Saturday?” Mondo asked, weren’t deadlines for that kind of shit usually the day of the class itself…?

“Because that’s when the DPTL class is held, Saturday nine ‘till twelve!” Kizakura grinned, “Every week.”

“It’s three hours on a weekend!? Mondo shouted, “Daiya does one hour on a Tuesday night…”

“And that’s why it’s going to take Daiya three years of classes to get his, instead of one.” Kizakura said bluntly, “You didn’t think fast-track meant we only taught you a third of the stuff, did you?”

“N-no! Just… didn’t think of it that way…” Mondo choked out. He’d been too busy internally crowing at the thought of beating Daiya to consider how much time it was going to need. But three
hours every week… plus three times the amount of homework Daiya was currently doing for it… That was gonna be a lot! Could he really do that and the rest of the school stuff…?

“Yeah, I guess we already established that maths isn’t your thing… even if you can do a better job of estimating how many hits a pokémon can take than half the class!” Kizakura smirked, “You don’t have to do the course! I’ll understand if you think it’d be too much extra pressure in your first year…”

“…But you wouldn’t have offered it to me if you didn’t think I could do it, right?” Mondo guessed, “Besides, Diamonds are formed under pressure! I ain’t running just ‘cause it looks like it’ll be hard!”

“Heh… I guess Daiya wasn’t just putting you forward to get free shit outta Hope’s Peak after all!” Kizakura laughed.

“The fuck!? Who the hell’s been saying that!?” Mondo growled… Like Daiya would risk his honour just for Mondo to get free food and clothes for a few years!

“Oh… about half the other Gym leaders there are…? You know… the same half who keep saying he only turned his gang into a ‘Gym’ to get money out of the league association.” Kizakura shrugged, “Your brother took a pretty big risk nominating you! If you don’t measure up here, it’ll be his credibility as a Gym Leader that goes down the pan…”

“…Yeah, I figured.” Mondo might not have realised the scale of it… but he’d known how he did here would affect the gang… which was pretty much the same thing as Daiya.

“Just checking you understand your situation…” Kizakura looked impressed, “I’d recommend asking one of your class for help with all the school stuff you don’t get as well… I’m not saying you can’t do it, but, being straight with you, you’re gonna need all the help you can get!”

“…Thanks.” Mondo muttered. It was good to have someone take him seriously enough not to bullshit him for once… Maybe he couldn’t manage school, but he could deal with this school…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next week will be focusing on Togami’s POV.
Jealous Common Folk (Togami POV)

Chapter Notes

Notes: Rufflets/Braviaries are a male only Pokémon species, so they have to be bred with Ditto in order to produce other Rufflets in the games (otherwise they make the Pokémon that is female). I assume in the wild they also breed males of their own species by finding Ditto.

My thinking with Gundam is that he mostly breeds Pokémon for conservation efforts, (but he has a knack for making strong Pokémon when he does) so if he can breed them without catching them all the better.

I read on Bulbapedia that ‘Drampa loves communicating with people’, but wasn’t sure if that was supposed to mean verbal communication, or other forms of interaction. I decided to go with the latter, as I remember Meowth’s and Mewtwo’s abilities to talk were consider pretty unique, so having a whole species of talking Pokémon would be a bit weird.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Togami left the classroom, and the two idiots who were being held back, and headed into the cafeteria to buy a quick and probably uninteresting dinner. What a complete waste of time that lesson had been! As if he, the most likely Togami heir, would be ill-prepared enough to get caught somewhere dangerous without proper protective gear or restorative items! He’d thought they’d said they weren’t going to treat everyone in the class as if they were on the same level, so why were they treating him like some common child who was about to wander into the tall grass for the first time!?

Well, regardless, at least now he was going to be allowed into the useful areas of Hope’s Peak! Not being allowed into the library or the wild areas had made his weekend ridiculously unproductive!

And between the lack of other available trainers and the new, sub-standard facilities his Pokémon had been far more restless and agitable than usual! Rufflet in particular had taken to getting out of his Pokéball and pecking at the window to show he was bored and wanted to go fly somewhere spacious and fight random Pokémon like he would have back in he wild or Togami’s purpose-build training area… and not even Drampa had been able to explain to him why they weren’t able to.

And he hadn’t even been able to discuss breeding his third Pokémon properly, as the resident Pokémon breeder had turned out to be a complete lunatic! Togami had been quite hopeful when he’d seen the man’s Absol proudly prowling about the meagre breeding facility… but then he’d actually met Tanaka and most of that hope had gone out of the window! Once he’d got past the stream of nonsense about ‘feeling the presence of a mighty demon of greed’ which had apparently been referring to Togami, he’d then had to listen to a stream of bizarrely-worded complaints which he thought were because the breeder felt that the Togamis in general should be attempting to use their funds to bolster the numbers of rarer Pokémon, which was half the reason he’d bred a Drampa in the first place! But not even that piece of information, or Togami’s offer to pay to upgrade Hope’s Peak’s breeding area in exchange for breeding Togami’s third Pokémon (and reaping all of the good publicity that would bring) had prevented the idiot from shouting some nonsense about how ‘not even a half-demon would stoop to the level of allying with’ Togami.

And then he’d had the gall to insist that he ‘held dominion’ over Rufflet, on the basis that he’d allegedly provided the Ditto his father had mated with! As if anyone would believe such a ridiculous
claim! If he’d wanted to breed a Rufflet so badly, why wouldn’t he have just caught a Bravairy instead of going through the ordeal of climbing up to its nest just to place a random Ditto nearby and hope they’d mate!? He’d left in disgust at that balderdash!

But enough with the negative thinking… He was used to commoners getting jealous of his fortune and deciding that he must be some kind of monster before they’d even met him… it was just rare that one of them decided he was literally a monster. If anything, it had been refreshing to have someone just outright say what they thought about him, even if it was clearly nonsense!

It was certainly better than the reaction the group of mediocre trainers that were supposed to be his new ‘classmates’ had had… They’d been faced with the optimization of a battle pokémon, and instead of thinking of it as a challenge to rise to, or maybe even just being genial and admitting that Togami had done a good job, they’d all just started muttering about how rich he was, as if that was the only difference between him and them!

Well, they’d see soon enough… raising pokémon wasn’t just about resources, it was about countless hours of study, training and experience! Unlike them, he’d been expected to help care for pokémon before he was even ten, let alone the traditional age of eleven…!

(“Umm… so you looked after a Squirtle by yourself when you were nine? How did you know what to do…?”)

(“Well, I found a guide Kiyotaka wrote, which was simple enough for me to understand…”)

(“Huh… I though he was sixth months younger than you… wouldn’t that mean he’d been looking after pokémon when he was eight?”)

(“Yeah… That’s the impression I got… That is pretty early, huh? I’m surprised his Dad wasn’t helping him…”)

(“You think that’s bad? That nurse in the year above us has been looking after pokémon since she was six!”)

Hmm… well… they might have had to look after pokémon early, but they wouldn’t have been expected to go into the wild like he ha…

(“They think you’ve got enough experience to get a DPTL? How long have you been dealing with wild pokémon then?”)

(“I dunno… First time we camped in the woods was right after Daiya got his first pokémon, so… I was six?”)

Alright… so maybe these people had been through similar trials to himself. But they were all acting as if his funding would make his progression through the school itself easier than it would be for the rest of them! Whereas in reality it was likely to be the opposite case! After all, none of his classmates would have been forced to spend time getting their pokémon used to less-optimal surroundings than they were used to…

(“So, what did you end up doing yesterday?”)

(“I spent most of the day clearing infected plants out of the first-year’s garden area so Florges would be able to plant her collection of saplings.”)

(“What… by yourself!? You should have said! I could have taken a break from trying to get Glaceon used to the new sports equipment!”)
(“I did have help from Naegi and Ishimaru… however, I suspect further help would be very much appreciated in future. It will likely be a long time before the garden is to Florges’ standards…”)

Well… Alright, so obviously no one’s pokémon were taking the change in environment well… but that didn’t mean he was still going to be able to breeze carelessly through school! If he had a head start on them, it would have been because he’d spent the time studying up to the cutting-edge of pokémon research! And that was an endeavor that was never ending, which was why he was going to take his meal up to the library!

…Which had the added advantage of allowing him to slip away from that cretin with the Garbodor, who was already sat at the same table he’d foolishly sat for lunch. You’d think people would have the good manners not to pester him while he was eating and feeding his pokémon! But not even the Yakuza had had the good manners to wait until he was finished to challenge him.

At least the library was mostly quiet. He could just about hear a voice that was hushed and yet still capable of travelling between the stately wooden shelves packed with everything from frivolous comics, storybooks and magazines all the way to thick textbooks and a whole area of shelves dedicated to scientific research journals, including a display of the latest few issues for each one, which was Togami’s first port of call.

Hmm… this place had a surprisingly good collection! It was better than his own, personal library and almost rivaled the one in the main Togami residence! This would give him the chance to do more in-depth research without worrying that his siblings might be sending spies to look over his shoulder while he did it…

“RRRRUUUUUUU!” *Crash* “Arc…!? Arc! Can-nine!” Tch! Or it would if it wasn’t for that damn racket! Didn’t these people realize you were supposed to be quiet in libraries!?

“What the…!??” Whatever was going on, Ishimaru was apparently involved, “TOGAMI!? Even if I could fight back in here without risking burning the place down, fighting outside an arena is against school rules! And… where are you!? How could you expect me to accept a challenge when you don’t make it to my face…!? TOGAMI!?”

Why did he think Togami was attacking him!? He was over here, and both of his pokéballs were…

Wide open.

Curses! They must have thought this place was like the library back home, where they could do whatever they pleased… which in Rufflet’s case…

Togami moved towards the sound of the fighting pokémon and was greeted with the sight of Rufflet sitting on top of- and pecking at- the Arcanine’s head, while Ishimaru appeared to be getting ready to spray a can of Repel at him...

“Rufflet, stop! Back to me!” Togami called Rufflet away from the panicking dog and onto his own arm. “I told you, we don’t have trainers for you pick fights with anymore! They’re just people we have to share this place with!”

The bird cocked his head curiously for a moment, before turning back towards the pair and getting into attack position…

“No! No battling them!” Togami snapped, only to get another confused look…

It would have been so much easier if it wasn’t considered traditional to catch your second pokémon… He could have had a Rufflet bred for cunning, instead of having to monitor different
Braviary nests and hoping the child he caught would turn out like the father he’d eventually decided showed the most promise…

…But if he hadn’t followed tradition, his family would have claimed it was a sigh of incompetence on his part. So now he was forced to deal with the hand fate had dealt him and rely on Drampa to explain things to the bird for him…

“Drampa!” Togami shouted for his older pokémon while internally chastising himself for making so much noise in the library until it arrived, “I need you to explain to Rufflet that there aren’t any of our usually hired trainers in here.”

Drampa nodded and the two pokémon began to converse for a while…

“So… your pokémon chose to attack mine spontaneously?” Ishimaru asked apparently having watched Togami’s exchange, “Have I done something to aggravate it?”.

“I doubt it, it’s just part of his natural behavior.” Togami told him. “Rufflet’s consistently attack whatever strong pokémon are nearby in the hopes of getting stronger.”

“I’m aware of that, but for one to attack a trained pokémon while its trainer is right next to it isn’t natural behavior for any pokémon!” Ishimaru countered.

“Perhaps… but part of my training regime for him was to have trainers bring their pokémon to the mansion, so he could engage in his wild instincts while reaping the benefits of fighting trained pokémon…” Togami explained, “Unfortunately, he’s now of the expectation that I’ve compensated every trainer he comes across…”

“Wait, so… you pay willing trainers to come to your home and let their pokémon be punching bags for your own?” Ishimaru looked shocked at the idea… and with good reason!

“Of course I don’t! That would be ridiculous!” Togami snapped.

“Ah… I must have misunderstood When you said ‘compensate’ I thought…”

“I don’t just pay any trainer! I carefully scout out ones whose pokémon will prove to be a test of Rufflet’s cunning and strength!”

“So… you pay specific, high-end trainers to come to your home and let their pokémon be punching bags for your own?” Ishimaru corrected his earlier statement, “Without you even having to pay any attention to them?”

“Exactly.” Togami nodded.

Hmmm… and there was that look in Ishimaru’s eyes. The look of pure, irritated jealousy that usually came just before some angry, childish complaint about how Togami shouldn’t spend so much money just to train one single pokémon, without realizing that it wasn’t about the one pokémon, it was about constantly proving that he was the best to lead his family…

And besides… “You shouldn’t glare at me as if you wouldn’t do the exact same thing if you were in my position.”

“I… Hmm… while I must admit I would be likely to compensate other trainers for engaging in fights with me…” Ishimaru was being surprisingly reasonable, most people just claimed they’d never do some so extravagant or bourgeois as baiting trainers to their home with money… “I wouldn’t expect my pokémon to battle without my guidance! If you want pokémon, you should make the effort to
“I do pay attention to them. I have a summarizing report of all of their battles given to me at the end of each day, so I can see how they are progressing.” Togami explained.

“But, if you’re not watching them fight, how do you pick up on it when they’re having a problem?” Why did so many people always ask him that stupid question?

“Because I’d notice a downward trend in their ability when reading the report, obviously.”

“But, what if they’re having a problem that doesn’t affect their battling ability? Or possibly even makes them fighter better?”

What was this idiot talking about, “If they’re fighting better, how is that a problem!?”

“Well, sometimes when pokémon are scared or emotionally stressed, they lash out harder in fights…but that’s not something they can keep up forever and often leads to behavioral issues…”

“My pokémon don’t have any emotional issues.” Togami said in a bored tone. Common people just loved the idea that he was somehow mistreating his pokémon. Probably to delude themselves into thinking they were better trainers than him…

“But… how can you be so sure!? What if it’s a problem that only presents itself when you’re not near them?” Ishimaru was being borderline paranoid, “And if you’re letting nigh-on strangers near them, how do you know they haven’t done something to affect your pokémon’s performances, like fed them drugs or…”

“Or Team Rocket temporarily stole them, put them in an enhancement machine, and then gave them back like nothing had happened? Like a certain someone’s grandfather claimed?” Togami sneered, “You don’t really believe that’s possible, do you?”

“Of course not! And what my Grandfather claimed was his pokémon where enhanced before he traded for them and he didn’t notice because he didn’t really train them himself before going to fight the Elite Four…” Ishimaru scowled as he repeated the pathetic excuse. At least he wasn’t stupid enough to outright believe anything his family said. “But, regardless, there are illegal enhancement options that only require a quick injection or tablets…what’s to stop a jealous trainer from using one of those to have your pokémon banned from tournament use forever?”

This conversation was wasting too much of his time. Time to end this… “I have staff on hand who observe all the battles. And there is a reward scheme in place to motivate them to report any trainers who mistreat my pokémon.” Togami told him, “Plus, all trainers go through an intense series of checks at the front gate to ensure they aren’t trying to bring any problematic items into the compounds, long before they get anyway near my team! And on top of that I have assembled a team of best reptilian and avian vets, groomers and psychologists I could find to continually make sure that they are healthy, happy and well looked after!”

Ishimaru was just blinking at him, while his eyebrows furrowed into a stupid expression…

“What part of that did you not understand?” Togami sighed.

“…The part where you apparently care for your pokémon enough to do all of that... But you don’t watch their fights!”

“It’s not as though I don’t watch any of their fights! I have to direct their attacks in the more important ones, for starters.” Togami sighed, “But I don’t need to be there to watch them beat up
every little pokémon they come across… It’s not as if you watched your Arcanine fight 200 Kakunas in person, is it?”

“Yes! It is! Arcanine wouldn’t have fought them if I hadn’t been there!” Ishimaru insisted, “He wouldn’t know what moves to use!”

Was he serious!? He’d really stood and directed his dog in every single mind-numbing battle it had!? That sounded hellish! “How could it not know what moves to use? What does it do if he gets attacked and you’re not there!? Doesn’t it defend itself?”

“…Usually he sits and whines until I come to help him.” Ishimaru admitted, looking embarrassed at his pokémon’s pathetic behavior.

So it hadn’t just been out of concern for the books that his dog had let Rufflet attempt to peck its fur out… “Doesn’t that concern you? If something happened to you, your dog would be helpless. My pokémon can fend for themselves!”

“Ah… no, it’s not that bad!” Ishimaru corrected him, “He’ll attack without command if I’m being threatened, but otherwise he expects me to make the battle decisions!”

“That still seems like a phenomenal waste of time.” Togami observed, “If you taught him to fight for himself, you could do other things while he did it!”

“Perhaps… but if I’d just had a report of his fights like yourself, I wouldn’t have noticed the effect of the weak spots!” Ishimaru argued, “I might even have assumed he was stronger than he is, if he’d started hitting them consistently and I’d not known about it!”

Hmm… no chance of that with Togami’s pokémon, he had them complete standardized tests weekly. But if it formed part of Ishimaru’s research… “I suppose you’re free to train your pokémon however you like… but I’ll be training mine efficiently!”

Togami could tell that Ishimaru was silently seething as he realized both how far ahead of him Togami was, and was going to stay, and failed to find any faults in the treatment of Togami’s pokémon that he could have used to justify the difference in ability to himself…

“Well… I suppose you treat at least two of your pokémon properly!” He apparently decided to fall back on the old nonsense about the Togami breeding facilities to make himself feel better. “But I’d appreciate it if you let me study in peace! That Math’s test showed that I apparently have a lot to be catching up with…”

That Math’s test had mostly been plugging numbers into an equation… hardly a difficult task! But he didn’t need to waste time gloating about that… “My apologies… Rufflet isn’t used to the change in his situation yet, that’s all. I’ll ensure he doesn’t attack you again…”

Or rather, he already had ensured that, as his two pokémon had finished their conversation and Rufflet was no longer attempting to launch himself at the dog…

“Thank you!” Ishimaru nodded and went to sit down at a table that he’d festooned with pieces of paper and something that had probably once been a reasonable-priced laptop… about ten years ago.

“Alright, you two can explore, but no leaving the room.” Togami told his pokémon, although he was sure Rufflet couldn’t open the doors and Drampa wouldn’t be stupid enough to wander off by himself.

Rufflet bristled at the patronisation, but quickly flew off to look around the room regardless. Drampa
on the other hand was slower to leave, taking time to read over the signs and get a feel for what was books were on offer before heading off by himself.

With them taken care of, Togami was free to go and pick up the latest issues of the more important research journals, such as *Breeder’s Report*…

Which wasn’t there. They just had the previous month’s issue, despite the less superior *Journal of Breeding Methods* being up to date… And a quick scan of the shelves showed that the same was true for *Trainer’s Methods, Journal of Pokémon Evolution*… and all the other journals that Togami considered to be of critical importance! Well *that* was frustrating. He was going to have to download the online versions in order to keep up to date with the very best of the latest resea…

“Ah… Togami…!” His considerations were pierced by an overly-loud shout from Ishimaru, “Is…Is your Rufflet allowed poffins?”

“It’s of no concern to you how I reward my pokémon!” He asked. There was absolutely no cause for him to suddenly ask *that*, unless he was somehow hoping to trick Togami into revealing what type of poffins he’d fed Rufflet, or some other part of Togami’s training strategy…

“Oh for pity’s sake! He knew it wasn’t uncommon for one of his staff members to give his pokémon food, but did Rufflet *really* think Togami would have hired him!?”

Still, as much as it galled him to admit it, Ishimaru had a point. Rufflet *had* done well against that Snorunt and deserved a reward. But as Pennyworth had warned him when he’d been drafting his acceptance letter to this place, he no longer had his members of staff on hand to dispense such appreciative gestures on his behalf.

Togami headed back to the table Ishimaru had set himself up at. This time it was Ishimaru who was just sat looking anxious as Rufflet angrily sat on his arm and kept pointing its beak at the oddly shaped poffin Ishimaru was holding in his other hand. Meanwhile it was the *dog* who looked like it was getting ready to launch some form of attack to get rid of the bird.

That was, until Togami reached into the convenient hidden pocket of his pokéball holder and brought out one of the individually sealed mild poffins he’d loaded in there previously and shook it to get Rufflet’s attention. “Rufflet! You deserve a much better poffin than *that*!”

“Let!” Rufflet turned and flew back over to his arm as he opened the bag and handed him the bready treat, which was deftly pecked out of his hand by the happy bird who quickly swallowed it and tilted his beak upwards, a sign that Togami had learnt meant that it expected to be scratched under the chin. It was almost ridiculous how easily pacified powerful pokémon could be with simple gestures…

“…Y…you deserve better poffins than this as well, you know!” He could hear Ishimaru bitterly apologising to his dog, “…I just haven’t learnt how to make them yet… But I’m going to! And then you’ll have all the nice poffins you deserve!”

Hah! If he thought his pokémon deserved nice poffins before now, perhaps he should have gone to the library and learnt how to make them earlier, instead of wasting his time with magazines like… like…
“…Is that the *Journal of Pokémon Evolution!?*” Togami “And *Breeder’s Reports!?*”

“Yes! They’re the latest issues!” Ishimaru grinned, “I also picked up *Pokémon Medicine, Trainer Methods and Pokédex Research Reviews…!* Why… did you want them as well…?”

Yes, he had! So the reason the journals he’d wanted were gone was because Ishimaru was reading into the same things as he was? But if he read *Trainer Methods*, why not use those methods!? Even with his insistence on watching every fight his pokémon had, it should be stronger that it was! Was it really just because Togami had the advantage of his own fortune…?

“…I can just access the online versions.” Togami waved dismissively with his free hand. He was not about to accept generosity from someone who’d apparently had to dress exclusively in complimentary school uniforms!

“Are you sure? They have fewer articles than these versions!”

“…What are you talking about? The online versions have exactly the same articles as the paper version!” Togami stated his first thought, before he realized why it might be the case that Ishimaru thought that, “…Unless you’re only accessing the free content, that is. Hope’s Peak should have access to all of it, if they’re paying for the journals.”

“Really!?” Ishimaru smiled, “In that case, I probably won’t want these at all… I prefer to have everything in one place on my laptop!” He patted the dilapidated thing on the table in front of him, which Togami was surprised didn't break it, before piling up the journals and handing them to Togami, “This way I’ll be able to go and check out some of the other books I’d wanted!”

“Hmph… well, if that’s what you prefer…” Togami took the entire pile off of hands, thankful that Ishimaru apparently didn’t have enough good taste to want them.

“Alright, Arcanine… I’m just going to download somethings on the school computer, and then we can go look at some really good books!”

“Arc…!?!” The dog sounded confused, but followed its master over to the computers regardless…

…but what did Ishimaru mean by really good books? These were some of the most cutting-edge research journals there were! How could there be something better than this in this library?

Well… regardless of what it was, Togami wasn’t going to let Ishimaru keep that information all to himself! He’d just have to wait for him to go to get it, and then find out what it was.

“Alright, Rufflet… we can have our dinners here while I do some reading…” Togami told the bird, getting out his meal from the cafeteria and a sealed portion of raw, vitamin-enhanced Basculin meat for Rufflet…

Who promptly snatched the fish out of his hands and flew up to a high shelf to eat it. Nesting habits, presumably, so Togami let him. He understood the importance of not disrupting a pokémon’s instinctive behaviors, which was why Drampa wasn’t sharing a dinner with them, preferring to wait for one larger breakfast of freshly imported berries…

It took longer than Togami would have guessed for Ishimaru to access the research online and transfer it all onto his pathetic excuse for a computer, but eventually he stood up and had his dog follow him into a different section of the library just as Togami was starting to read the results into a study that had compared the Growlithe breeding procedures of the police with those used by his half-sister…
Once he’d surmised that of course they’d found his half-sister’s better, but not so much so that it would be cost-effective to implement wide-scale, Togami quietly closed the journal and headed off in the direction Ishimaru had gone to, which was apparently on the other side of the section containing pokémon-proof books…

Togami passed by his Drampa, who had managed to find himself something to read, towards the sound of Ishimaru’s voice…

“No…we already have that one! What about this one?” “Arc!” “No, Arcanine… I’m looking for books we don’t have already!” “N-nine…?”

Hmm… whatever it was he wanted, it sounded as if he might have already read through the selection that Hope’s Peak already had, if he’d enlisted his dog to help with the search… But it wouldn’t be long now before Togami spotted him and could catch up with whatever secret Ishimaru had…

“Alright… I’ll read it to you once, and then we pick out some different books!” Togami stopped short as he heard Ishimaru’s resigned sigh… “‘Where’s Growlithe?’ by Eric Hill… ahem… ‘It’s almost time for Growlithe’s dinner! Where has he gone…!? Is he…?’

Oh, this had to be a joke… “…You’re reading your pokémon a children’s book!?” Togami strode around the corner to Ishimaru’s location.

“…Well, unlike your Drampa, dog’s aren’t naturally inclined to written language…” Ishimaru and his dog both looked up from the book.

“Exactly! So why are you wasting your time reading to one?” Togami scowled… to think he’d been expecting some impressive secret from Ishimaru… no wonder his pokémon was so weak, if he wasted time like this!

“It’s not waste of time! It’s a bonding activity!”

“Anything you do with your pokémon constitutes a bonding activity!” Togami sighed, “You should pick something that will actually be of benefit to your pokémon, like teaching it a skill or increasing its fitness…”

“But relaxation is important as well! No pokémon can constantly be improving itself!” Ishimaru argued, “And besides, reading to Arcanine has taught him a skill! He can recognize most of the letters of the alphabet now! And the odd word as well…”

…That couldn’t possibly be true, could it? Even his half-sister had never had a Growlithe or Arcanine that had learnt letters, and she specialized in breeding them!

“…Well… it might not seem like much, but it’s pretty impressive for a dog!” Ishimaru mis-read the meaning of Togami’s scowl.

“It would be impressive… if it was really the case that your dog can recognize letters…”

“Why would I bother to lie about it…?” Ishimaru’s face pinched in confusion, “All you’d have to do would be to get me to order him to find a specific letter and I’d be proved false…”

“I’m not saying you’re lying about it… but have you ever heard of Clever Hans?” Togami prepared to explain…

“The Ponyta that people thought could do simple math by clopping it’s hooves a certain number of times to give the answer, but it just turned out to be reacting to it’s trainer’s body language in order to
know when to stop?” Ishimaru summarized, “I thought it might be a similar example at first, but then my father tested him by putting the letters in a different room and asking him for one, plus he wrote some out yesterday while I wasn’t watching.”

That… that couldn’t possibly be true! That would make his dog smarter than all the ones his sister had ever bred over the years… but the information Togami had managed to dig up on Ishimaru had suggested his dog had been removed from police service for being too stupid to train…

“That… that couldn’t possibly be true! That would make his dog smarter than all the ones his sister had ever bred over the years… but the information Togami had managed to dig up on Ishimaru had suggested his dog had been removed from police service for being too stupid to train…

“Nnnnnn… caaan…?” It certainly looked pretty stupid for an Arcanine, pitifully whining at its owner like that. It didn’t have any of the pride or superiority that Arcanine’s usually displayed once they’d evolved.

“Ah… sorry! Was that everything, Togami? Only I told Arcanine I’d read his favorite book…” Ishimaru did look slightly embarrassed to admit that, “Your Drampa was looking at the section on myths and legends over there, if that’s why you’re here…”

“Thank you.” Togami said, rather than admitting that he’d come here expecting Ishimaru to be doing something useful with his time, before turning to leave, “Good evening.”

“You too!” Ishimaru nodded in reply to his standard gesture of politeness, “Now… where were we… oh, right! ‘Is he behind the door…?”

Togami turned the corner and paused as he saw the dog lifting a small flap that was part of the book, only to shake its head with a bark that was dripping with fake disappointment…

“Is he inside the clock…?” Ishimaru had turned the page, and the dog was lifting the flap again…

Hah! Obviously the dog had just learnt the actions to the story by memorization. Any pokémon could do that! The rest of it was probably just Ishimaru deluding himself into thinking his dog was smart despite all evidence to the contrary… After all, a smart pokémon would be wanting to read new books, like the thick one Drampa had found for himself, and was only partway through…

“I’m finished in here, now. Do you want to check this out?” Togami asked him, to which he nodded and pushed forward another book as well… “Alright, then…”

Togami picked the pair up, then added the pile of research journals to them and went through the process of borrowing them all, and then held out his arm for… “Rufflet!”

..., ...

“Rufflet!” What was he doing? He should easily be able to see Togami from his spot up on top of the shelves…

...He wasn’t there anymore. Where had he gone? The library doors were shut, so he couldn’t have flown out alone… had someone stolen him!?

“Drampa Dra…” Drampa circled around him a few times, before floating off back towards the pokémon-proof books again.

Had he seen Rufflet flying off towards them? But why would Rufflet care about books? Still, it was the best lead he had on his missing pokémon, so he followed Drampa through the aisles, catching occasional snippets of Ishimaru prattling on at his dog…

“…Thursday, he fought four Milenfoos…” Actually, it seemed like Ishimaru was getting louder. Was Drampa just leading him back to the area where Ishimaru had been wasting his time?
That turned out to be the case, as they found Rufflet perched on a small chair next to Ishimaru, who was holding a book in his lap, waiting patiently as Rufflet pecked the book five times before carrying on with his reading…

“On Friday, he fought five Herdiers… but he was still angry!” Ishimaru turned the page, and again waited patiently as Rufflet responded by pecking at the book multiple times… “…And on Saturday, he fought a Thron, a Foongus, a Bouffalant, a Golduck, a Gligar, a Karrablast and a Heatmor!” Ishimaru turned the page, but this time Rufflet didn’t peck at it… “And on that night… he felt very tired! So he went back to his house made out of twigs, called a nest, high up in the mountains, and fell asleep overnight. Then, in the morning, he woke up…” He turned the page more dramatically this time, “…And was a powerful Bravairy!”

“…Ruuuff!” Rufflet considered it for a moment, then puffed himself up proudly.

“Yes! Like you will be, someday!” Ishimaru told him genially, as he put the book down, “Now, maybe we can see what else is…”

“Leeeeet!” Rufflet picked up the first book with his beak and dropped it back in Ishimaru’s lap.

“…You want me to read it again!?” Ishimaru asked, anxiously beginning to look around and smiling in relief as his eyes locked onto Togami’s, “Ah! But your owner’s here, now! He can check it out and read to you as many times as you like!” Ishimaru stood up and came over to force the book into Togami’s hand…

It was titled ‘The very Angry Rufflet’ by Eric Carle, and a quick skim through revealed that it was an incredibly simplified recounting of how Rufflets evolved…

“Hmth! I have a better idea.” Togami smirked as he gave the book back to Ishimaru, “Instead of reading about a very angry Rufflet fighting lots of pokémon, how about we go outside and you can actually fight some…?”

“Rufflet!” The bird gleefully glided across the room to Togami’s outstretched arm.

“You’re going outside now?” Ishimaru questioned him in concern, “You do remember that we’re not allowed outside at night…”

“Of course… but I intend to squeeze in a quick bit of training before nightfall.” Plus, the school might have a way of preventing students from catching pokémon out of hours, but there was nothing to stop Togami taking a boat out and ‘accidentally’ dropping one of the oars, thus having to have his pokémon battle to protect him from whatever powerful pokémon prowled the lake at night…

“Hmm… Perhaps I should do that as well…” Ishimaru mused… which would completely mess up his plan!

“Nine!” Thankfully, Ishimaru’s dog seemed to disagree with the plan, sternly pointing at another children’s book with its paw…

“I already read you that one! And Togami’s right! We should try to take advantage of every chance we can get to train!”

“Nine… Can!” The dog pawed the book again, seeming to be very precise with it…

Ishimaru squinted at the book… “Hmm… Wait… are you pointing at the words…?” Dinner time…!? He checked the time on his pokétch… which Togami was amazed anyone was still wearing, it must be over a decade old at this point! “Oh! Of course! We haven’t eaten yet… I can’t
really expect you to fight pokémon on an empty stomach, can I? And then I told Father I’d ring him and let him know how my first day of lessons went…”

“Are!” His dog nodded happily.

“Well… We’ll get to go outside tomorrow, at least! And I’ll reconsider our evening schedule…” Ishimaru murmured, “Remember to stay safe in your training, Togami!”

“Of course…” Unlike that idiot photographer, he was going to be wearing proper protective gear!

…And, unlike Ishimaru, he wasn’t going to be wasting his time with sentimental nonsense like reading to his pokémon, or talking to his parents! That was why Togami was better than all these jealous idiots! The money might have helped, but ultimately it was Togami’s pure dedication and commitment to raising the best pokémon possible that had made him the best trainer in his class…

And he’d continue to keep up that commitment as he used every moment to squeeze every advantage he could out of Hope’s Peak!

Chapter End Notes

The books parodied in this chapter were ‘Where’s Spot?’ and ‘The very hungry caterpillar’, both by the authors mentioned in the chapter itself.
Also Clever Hans was a real horse, and was famous from pretty much the same reason as Ishimaru summarises in this chapter.
Thanks for reading! Next will be three chapters focusing on some of class 78s family and/or friends and then the 24th chapter will finally be the second day of school. (Time will speed up soon I promise)
Parental Concerns

Chapter Notes

I know there’s separate devices for phone calls in some of the pokémon games (like the pokéNav or the compture Ash uses in the second anime episode) but I figured it’d be easier if PokéDexes were the equivalent of today’s smartphones, in the sense that they’re one device that can do everything (If that’s not how they are in later games anyway) and the older versions are considered out of date but might still be around in certain places like phone booths are.

Taichi describes himself as being an unreliable guy, which is why I imagine him as being a bit of a scatterbrain here.

Also I realised just now that Chajabug is not the initial form in its evolutionary line, so it probably would have made more sense for Chihiro to catch a Grubbin to then evolve into a Charjabug. I’m not sure if I should go back and change this or not, so for now I’m keeping it as a Charjabug unless I get strong opinions otherwise.

I’ve realised I should probably start adding links to info on some of the lesser known pokémon. (If they’re relevant to the story, that is. If it’s just a random background characters pokémon I won’t bother.) In this chapter we have Klinklang, which has a good write up on the Fanon Pokédex at TV Tropes: http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/FanonPokédex/Klink (Also that extended pokédex is fantastic in general.)

Also here’s a link to the info on the Kalos Gym Leaders I was working with for this chapter: http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Characters/PokémonGymLeaders

I also heard that in the anime, Gary manages to get 10 badges at one point (when Ash only has eight) which is why I’ve quoted there being 10 Gyms in Kalos (so as to include the DR Gym Leaders without removing Canon Gym Leaders.)

I feel like Takaaki here might be a bit OOC from the in-canon Takaaki. (As in, I don’t think canon Takaaki would let his boss get away with being corrupt for anything.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Charjabug power output is decreasing.*

Oh? That was odd… usually Chihiro would let him know if Charjabug was unwell… Had they got so involved with their coding that they forgot to feed him?

“No…? Did you feed Charjabug…?” Hmm… no response? Either his child was really involved in their coding or they weren’t in the house…

*Oh.* That was it. They were at Hope’s Peak… *He* was supposed to have fed Charjabug. He hadn’t realised how much he’d been relying on Chihiro until they’d written out the list of chores he was supposed to do from now on…

But he couldn’t complain about that. He’d be a pretty bad father if he expected his child to stay and look after him, instead of taking the chance to go somewhere like Hope’s Peak, and maybe help themselves get over their fear of dog-like pokémon and actually start training Golett to fight and help them go out and explore more…
…That was, if those two boys with the large dogs hadn’t scared them into not attending class at all. Perhaps Taichi should give Chihiro a call and see if they’d had a good day…

*Charjabug power output is decreasing.*

After he’d fed Charjabug…

…

“Hello…? Dad?” Chihiro looked slightly anxious as they responded to his video call on the pokédex, “Umm… Is something the matter…? I got a notification that your Charjabug’s power output was decreasing…”

“Ah… Yes. I’ve only just fed him… Sorry. I’m not used to all the chores yet…” Taichi admitted shamefully. “But now I’ve done that, I wondered how your first day of classes went?”

“Oh! Pretty good! Actually… I even caught my second pokémon! Say hello to my Charjabug!” Chihiro switched the camera view to a small Charjabug that was being fed lettuce by Golett… “She’s pretty weak compared to yours, but I should be able to set up my computers and get back to programming that AI soon… Plus I have to admit, Souda’s Pokétch design might actually be pretty useful, so I want to work on some connection software for that, which needs a lot of wireless signal production…”

“They let you go out and catch pokémon already…?” Every time he worked somewhere new they insisted on giving him the ‘nearby dangerous pokémon’ before he was even allowed near any nearby wild areas…

“Well… not exactly? We had a class taught by Todd Snap… you know, the guy who photographed Mew?” Chihiro started, “And he found it in the ceiling, and the teacher joked about me or Naegi going up there because we’re short enough to fight up there and… I figured I might as well take advantage of the chance!”

They climbed up into the ceiling? “That’s very brave of you…”

“Well… I had Todd with me the whole time…” Chihiro frowned, “It was less scary than being back in the class with Ishimaru’s Arcanine being out of its ball, or at the lunch table Oowada tried to sit at with his Lycanroc, or the pokémon identification test which had a picture of a Stoutland on the first page and made me freeze until the test was over…”

“Well… I still think you’re brave for going to the class, even with those two dogs!” Taichi told them, “Especially if you didn’t run away when that scary Arcanine was out the whole time…”

“Well, it wasn’t out the whole time… and this time all it did was sit there, not doing anything…” Chihiro said thoughtfully, “I’m thinking it only growled before because it was scared and Ikusaba wasn’t letting Ishimaru calm it down…”

“Well, that will be nice for you, then!”

“Yeah… I’m wondering if I could even ask him to help me get used to dogs… If I can be absolutely sure his won’t hurt me, then maybe I could stand getting closer to it…” Chihiro mused.

“That sounds like a good idea…” Taichi agreed.

*Air conditioning failing.*
Ah… why was *that* happening? Klinklang didn’t usually just stop moving its gears for no reason…

“Umm, Dad…? When you fed Charjabug, did you remember to take him to power Klinklang as well?” Chihiro asked, anxiously. “You *do* remember those stories about them being perpetual energy machines aren’t actually true, right…?”

“Ah… of course. I’m sorry. I forgot I have to do that now…” Taichi sighed, “I’ll go do it right away, and then I’ll check the list you made me to make sure there’s nothing else I forgot…”

“Alright, Dad…” Chihiro smiled ruefully at him. “Thanks for calling to see how I was, though!”

“Your welcome… have a good day tomorrow!” Taichi waved as he stood up to go and recharge Klinklang…

“You too, Dad!” Chihiro waved back and then the screen flicked back into darkness.

“Now… next on the agenda… The league has had complaints that there was too much inconsistency between Gyms in this region for people aiming to get specific level badges this last year, particularly at the fourth badge level… and it’s *not* just people who are bitter about type disadvantages…”

Clemont put up some complicated looking charts on the screen to prove his argument, and Olympia and Valerie spent some time asking questions about the trustworthiness of the information, but Oogami paid them no heed. If Clemont considered this worthy of bringing up at a meeting with all 10 of the Kalos Gym Leaders, then it was likely to be a truly significant difference. Which was of great concern. Gyms were supposed to be of equal difficulty at each badge levels, so it wouldn’t matter which order you did you journey in or what type of team you built. There’d surely be an uproar if it came out that certain Gyms were consistently easier or harder than other ones.

“So… are we going to get in trouble about this?” Viola asked.

“Well, not if we can fix the problem now, no.” Clemont answered, “It’s just a case of the Gyms that have started straying from the average needing to adjust things so they’re back in line with the rest of us…”

Gyms that had ‘strayed from the average’ over the last year, as Clemont put it. And given that his formidable daughter had spent more time at the Gym last year, due to the absence of her rival, it was quite possible that his Gym had become significantly harder to triumph over…

And yet, none of the other Leaders appeared to have thought of that, all of them turning instead towards the new, likely temporary, Leader of the Kuzuryu clan…

“Well the hell are you all staring at me!?” Natsumi Kuzuryu scowled at them all, “You think just because I’m new, I don’t know what the hell I’m doing!? You think my brother would leave his Gym in the hands of some idiot!?”

“No one’s saying that, now…” Wulfric sighed at her outburst, as jaded by the years of dealing with her brother and Uncle as Oogami was, “But ya did lose two of your strongest to trainers Hope’s Peak last year, didn’t you?”

“We lost *one* good trainer…” Kuzuryu insisted, which Oogami assumed meant her older brother and not the swordwoman who’d gone with him, “…And it’s taken us a while to find a decent replacement, but we would have been at the lower end of the standard at worst!”
“But if that were true, we would not have had complaints…” Valerie argued calmly, to which multiple other Leaders agreed.

As nice as it was to have their faith in him, it was cause for concern to Oogami that they were all so quick to blame the newest one among them… “I believe I may have also contributed to the problem.” He interrupted, “I have been allowing my daughter to fight far more often that she used to, and it’s likely that we were at the… higher end of the standard for a considerable amount of time…”

“Ah… so the problem isn’t that any of us are out of line!” Grant pointed out, “It’s that we’ve got a high mountain sat right next to a valley!”

“That would fit the data I’ve been given…” Clemont agreed, “But if Oogami’s daughter isn’t at Dendemille Gym anymore, and Natsumi, you said you’ve found replacement trainers now…” He glanced nervously at her just long enough to receive and angry, silent confirmation. “Then the problem should stop now. I’ll let the league know we’ve identified the problem and it will be rectified… Now… is there any other business?”

“Hmph… What about Oogami’s daughter making us look like fools?” Kuzuryu asked, smirking in his direction, “Is that considered ‘business’?”

“…I am afraid I don’t know what you are referring to…” Oogami admitted, calmed somewhat by the fact that his fellow Gym Leaders looked as confused by her statement as he was. He hadn’t even had the chance to speak to Sakura since she’d left the gym to make the trip to Hope’s Peak several days ago, due to the poor pokedex reception at their Gym.

“You mean she didn’t tell you yet? How her Florges and Snorunt lost to Byakuya Togami’s Drampa and Rufflet!?” Kuzuryu answered, seeming to take a great amount of pleasure in bearing news of his daughter’s loss against an opponent who should have been at a disadvantage.

“Then Togami must be quite the formidable trainer,” Oogami admitted, “I do not see how that makes us look foolish…”

“…I can see it stirring up those old discussions about creating corporate Gyms again…” Olympia sighed.

“Urgh! Again!?” Korinna growled, “But it’s just one fight! And she’s not even a Leader! It’s not like every Togami employee is that good!”

“But they can argue that Byakuya Togami is not leading their corporation, either, which would put him at the same level as Sakura Oogami…” Olympia explained, “Although that argument will only last as long as it takes him to defeat all of his half-siblings and become the Togami heir…”

“And my brother says he’s going to trounce Togami in battle, so there’s no chance of people thinking he’s better than Gym Leaders!” Kuzuryu added, smiling unsettlingly in Oogami’s direction.

“Well, good! That’ll show those business-brained whippersnappers!” Ramos cheered, although Oogami wasn’t so sure he’d trust the estimation of Kuzuryu’s ability. “Honestly, how do they think they can fight well with pokémon when they’ve got no soul…!?"

…That sparked a round of boastful discussion about how the current Gym setup was for the best, with several of the group heavily implying that all those who were seeking to change things were foolhardy at best… No wonder that the one time he’d met Daiya Oowada, the man had seemed so guardedly caustic, when his fellow Gym Leaders refused to consider that change could be necessary or beneficial to them…
But, soon enough, the discussion was over and the meeting of the Kalos Gym Leaders was at an end, leaving Oogami with free time to wander Lumiose City. Although he really only had one intention, which was to find the Pokémon centre and make use of the communication booth…

…Doing so garnered some odd looks in his direction, seeing as he was using the old familiar machines while everyone else appeared to be using their new Pokédexes to make calls. But technology had never been a strong point of his, and even when Clemont had tried to give him a newer Pokédex and patiently shown him how to use it, he’d still struggled to understand everything and had finally chosen to bequeath it to Sakura instead… something he was glad to have done, as it meant he could now call her without worrying if she was at a terminal or not…

The console spent a surprising amount of time to connect, but eventually he was facing the image of his daughter’s face… albeit soaking wet…

“Ah, father. I hope I did not keep you waiting long. I was swimming with one of my classmates…” Sakura explained, “How was the Gym leaders meeting?”

“Not too bad… mostly just the standard reports and some ideas to make the Gym puzzles more interesting… and apparently there were complaints about some Gyms being significantly more challenging that others, but we think we’ve solved that issue now.” Oogami summarised, avoiding the part where their own Gym had been part of the cause. “However… Kuzuryu mentioned that she’d heard you lost a battle…?”

“Yes… Togami’s Pokémon are both well-bred and well-trained… I lost despite having type advantage…” Sakura confirmed, “…I will have to think long and hard to work out how I am going to approach my next battle with him…”

Hmm… that look on her face... It was the same one she’d have whenever young Kenshiro beat her, despite all of her work. Not a look of shame or annoyance, as most would expect, but… “…You’re excited, aren’t you?”

“…I must admit, I am. It has been a long while since I had someone my own age to aspire to winning against.” Sakura nodded, “I only wish he had Kenshiro’s sense of honour… and perhaps greater respect for the feeling of Pokémon, not just their battle prowess…”

“Hmm… too focused on measurable results and nothing else?” Oogami guessed. That seemed to be the general opinion of the other Gym Leaders regarding business-types.

“Indeed… though I hope being surrounded by trainers who excel in that regard may help him understand.” Sakura replied, hopefully.

“And speaking of those other trainers… how are you getting along with your class?” Oogami asked, “Well enough to go swimming with one?”

“Yes… Hina came by on my first night to delivery some food prepared for us by a second year student, and we spoke candidly for a while… and I spent Sunday gardening with two of the boys and got to know them better… and then we and two more of the girls sat together at lunchtime today…”

That was good to hear… Sakura had never been the best at socialising. But it sounded as if there were several other trainers in her class who excelled at it. She was sure to be able to learn from them…

“…So, I woulda suggested your daughter do the DPTL course, but she didn’t say a damn thing
throughout the whole slideshow!" Koichi groused…

“…Honestly, I’m glad to hear that.” He’d rather his own daughter not be spending her time around the world’s most dangerous pokémon, regardless of how good she was at handling them… Honestly, he didn’t know why it was that they hadn’t had more letters like the one from Ishimaru’s father.

“Jin, buddy. You gotta give that kid more credit. She isn’t the little girl you’re picking up in that photo anymore…” Koichi reminded him, “But anyways, we ended up picking Oowada and Ikusaba. Oowada’s going for it and I think I’ve convinced him he’s gonna need to take it seriously. Ikusaba just said she’d think about it… which probably means asking her sister what she should do.”

“Well, I hope for her sake her sister tells her she should take the chance…” Jin sighed, “It’s about the only plausible reasoning we can give for accepting her…”

“No kidding…” Koichi washed the bitter look on his face away with his even more bitter whisky. “You got any idea what the hell the Steering Committee’s thinking with those two…?”

‘Those two’ being Ikusaba and Enoshima, both of who had been allowed in despite Koichi’s advice to the contrary, which was still making his friend irritable. Of course the committee had always had the option to override Koichi’s decisions, but they’d never used it before. What was it about that pair that had caused them to do it twice in one year…?

“…I’ve no idea.” Jin admitted, taking a sip of bourbon, “They’re being even more cagey about it than they were with Hinata… And speaking of which, how’s he doing…?”

“He’s… Chisa says he hangs out with pretty much everyone in his class at different times, and he’s picking up some stuff from them, buuuuut…”

“Not enough to appease the committee?” Jin finished for him.

“No… and they ain’t exactly hiding that from him either…” Koichi sighed, “Even though Chisa keeps telling them that half his problem is that he doesn’t think he’d good enough to be here… It’s getting to the point where it seems like they’re trying to sabotage their own experiment…”

Either that, or they really hadn’t been truthful with Jin and had a different experiment for the boy in mind…

Not that he could say as much to Koichi. Not because he didn’t trust his friend, but more because he did… and the Steering committee knew that full well. It would be of no surprise to him whatsoever if these little chats with his friend were under intense scrutiny, somehow…

“Perhaps they think it will motivate him to succeed out of spite.”

“I guess… but like Chisa keeps telling ‘em, he isn’t the type.” Koichi argued.

“…I’ll see if I can get them to listen to me about him, then.” Jin told him. It might lead to them slipping up and giving him some more information on their real plan if he pressed them on it… assuming they actually had one and Jin wasn’t just being paranoid and chasing shadows…

Koichi stared at him in silent consideration for a little bit… “Alright. See if you can get it through their thick skulls…” He said in resignation. “I’m heading off for dinner… I’d suggest you come as well, but I have a feeling your daughter might be stopping by your office for another visit…”

…Really? He’d got the impression she’d only come in the first place to talk business with him, and he’d had to prevent her from getting a word in edge-ways in order to stop her from outright asking
for information he couldn’t risk disclosing about Hinata. And then he’d thoughtlessly annoyed her by saying he would have got a dog or cat, like she’d been talking about wanting as her starter the last time he’d seen her, instead of considering how much of a bond she must have with her Crobat for it to have evolved to that stage in the first place.

So why would she come to talk to him again this quickly? Unless… “You said something to her, didn’t you?” Jin guessed, to which Koichi gave half a shrug. “At least tell me you didn’t do it in front of the whole class…” He suspected Kyoko wouldn’t want her whole class to know about their family issues any more than he would.

“Geez, Jin. Gimme some credit!” Koichi sighed, “Anyway, see ya tomorrow!”

He didn’t even wait for Jin to respond in kind before letting himself out of the office and leaving Jin alone, attempting to fill out his paperwork without getting distracted at the hope that every creak or footstep outside his door was his daughter coming to visit…

Roughly 45 agonising slow minutes later, there was a knock on the door…

“Come in!” Jin shouted through…

The door opened slowly, more quietly than most people would have managed, Jin was in the habit of purposefully de-greasing the hinges in order to make it more noticeable if anyone attempted to catch him in here unawares. Kyoko still glared at the source of the noise regardless, and looked around at everything in the office except himself, as if she was trying to figure out a way to break in here…

“Ah! Kyoko! Good Evening!” Jin greeted her cheerfully, attempting to sound as if he hadn’t spent three-quarters of an hour anxiously expecting her. “Sit down! Have you had dinner?”

“Yes.” His daughter replied as she sat in the chair on the other side of his desk, in a tone that made him suspect she’d specifically eaten so as to avoid anything resembling a typical family dinner with him…

“Alright… so, how was your first day of…”

“What made you come to Hope’s Peak?” She cut him off, determination burning in the very back of her eyes.

…What made him come here?

“(Jin… buddy, you’re REALLY just up and leaving to go to Hope’s Peak!? Even with the whole ‘family business’ thing!?)

(“Yes, Koichi… And I have to admit, Father didn’t exactly take the news well!”)

(“I don’t blame him! I know you and him don’t see eye-to-eye on everything, but you’re still one of the best detectives your family has!”)

(“Hardly! Do you know how many unsolved cases I have!? I’ve no leads on that therapist from Team Flare who was brainwashing people to be ‘more productive’. Those prototype psychic translators are still missing. Hell, I even managed to lose track of the location of one of Team Rockets improvement machines…! It’s… for the best if I go to Hope’s Peak.”)

(“…For the best, huh…? Even though you aren’t planning to take your own daughter?”)

(“Kyoko’s got the making of a good detective already…She’s… less likely to accidentally stumble
across something that might get her in into trouble if her grandfather’s the one looking after her.”

(“So that’s how it is… Hmm... Well, Hope’s Peak sounds like a pretty cushy place to work! Maybe you can put a good word in for your old buddy, eh? It’ll be nice to keep helping you out, whatever it is you’re deciding to do…”)

…All those unsolved cases involving villainous organisations… all with the theme of improving pokémon or, more worryingly, people… and so many of them where his final lead had been a minor, well-hidden, circumstantial connection to Hope’s Peak. It might have just been coincidence, but it was enough to have warranted further investigation in his eyes…

But of course, there would have been no way for him to get close enough to discover what was really going on at Hope’s Peak when he was actively part of a secretive family of master detectives. The steering committee was suspicious enough about some of his questions as it was even after the falling out with his father, to the point where he sometimes wondered if they only kept him on staff so they could pay more attention to his attempts to investigate them, effectively putting him at a standstill…

But, surely they wouldn’t worry so much about a child of Kyoko’s age… especially when he’d been making it copiously clear that he wanted to keep her safe and out of trouble as much as he possibly could…

“…I just wasn’t much good as a detective!” His daughter scowled at what must have seemed like a pathetic excuse for leaving her… “Didn’t your grandfather ever tell you about all those unsolved cases of mine?

“No… he never really spoke about you at all.” Kyoko admitted.

“Oh? That’s a shame… some of my cases make for quite good stories!” Jin started. “For example…”

He proceeded to take up half an hour of Kyoko’s time by nostalgically blabbering on about some older, successful cases he’d been involved in, during which her only reaction was to scrutinise his every word in an attempt to determine if any of his tale was at all relevant to why he’d come to Hope’s Peak. Which it wasn’t, of course. He’d just been enjoying the chance to spend some time with her before dropping one last hint to the situation…

“But really, that case was very simple. Any detective could have managed that…” Jin finished up his tale, “And a good detective would probably be able to solve those cases I left open… that’s why I came to Hope’s Peak.”

“Hmph… I see.” Kyoko sighed disappointedly as she stood up off of her chair, “And here I thought there might have actually been a good reason you left… I’ll take my leave know. Good evening, Headmaster.”

…Either she was a fantastic actor, or she’d failed to pick up on his hint at all.

Jin almost hoped it was the latter. She might be safer that way…

“Hello! Welcome to the pokécentre! Would you like to heal your pokémon?” Hiroko could hear Joy repeating yet again to yet another kid, as if anyone who came up to her desk didn’t want their pokémon healed up… “Oh… your Pikipek fainted again!? Perhaps you shouldn’t be going so deep into the tall grass quite yet… Oh…? Well, that… it’s still better to come back before your pokémon faints, okay…?”
Hiroko tossed her magazine aside as Joy came back to the healing station with a worried look on her face…

“Lemme guess… kid’s standing at the edge of the grass so he can run when it faints?” Hiroko asked as she started setting up the machine yet again, "And then just battles until it does?"

“Yes… I told him it’s a bad idea, but I don’t think he really listened to me…” Joy sighed as she put the pokéball into the machine.

“Hey… tell you what, let me have a word with him.” Hiroko suggested, “I’m good at getting guys to do what I say…”

“Okay then…” Joy agreed and handed the now refreshed pokéball to Hiyoko, “Thanks, Hiyoko!”

“No problem, Joy.” Hiroko headed up to the front desk, catching the attention of the Café owner and the two pokémart employees who stopped working to see what she was doing up at the front desk instead of Joy, but not the little snot-nosed brat she was intending to talk to…

“Hey, kid. This your Pikipek?”

“Huh… oh, yeah, it is…!” He reached out to take it back, “What happened to the other lady…?”

“Joy thought it would best if I gave you a little training advice before we gave your pokémon back…” Hiyoko pulled the pokéball out of his reach, “Seeing as you’ve let it faint so many times today.”

“But… I already told her, I’m staying near the edge of the grass…”

“And what do you think will happen if whatever pokémon knocks yours out decided to chase you!?” Hiroko rounded on him so hard he stepped backwards, “And besides that, letting your pokémon faint so often is unforgivable! How would you like it someone kept making you work so hard that you collapsed!? If you keep this up, your Pikipek’s going to end up hating your guts! Now, I’m going to give you one more chance, but if I see this thing unconscious again in the next month, I’m finding out who gave it to you and telling them what a crummy trainer you’re being! Now scram, you little brat!”

He barely remembered to pick up his pokéball before scurrying off…

“Kids these days… my son was much better with his starter…” Hiroko sighed and reached for a cigarette… “Although I am a little worried that he thinks that Sandyghast of his is just a hat…”

“Really…? I can’t imagine that being very good for him…” Joy looked concerned as she came back to her spot at the desk… until she spotted the cigarette at least… “And speaking of things that aren’t good for people…!”

“I know, I know… I’ll go take it outside…” Hiroko sighed and headed off to the back entrance before Joy tried to trash her cigarette…

Hmm… thinking of Hiro, maybe while she was out here, she could give him a call and see how his first day of classes were… assuming he’d gone, at least… Maybe they’d have managed to convince him that his pokémon wasn’t clothing…

“Hey! Mom! Good to see you!” Hiro’s face appeared on her Pokédex… and he still had that pile of sand on his head… “Uhh… I meant to ring you, actually… turns out you were right!?”
“About what…?”

“Hattie, here!” Hiro patted the pokémon on his head, “Turns out she really is a Sandygast! I just forgot ‘cause that Kizakura guy hypnotised me into thinking she was a hat!”

Well, that was an improvement, but… “…Why do you still have her on your head, then?”

“She likes it there!” Hiro grinned, “Plus, this way she can protect me from aliens… or that Dark Lord guy, and maybe stop the hallways from rearranging themselves while I’m trying to get to class…”

Hmmm… Well he still looked alright, and he was acting like his usual self, even though he’d had that thing on his head for over a week… if it was a problem, it probably would have started affecting him by now, wouldn’t it?

“Well… alright, sweetie. At least now you know you’re further ahead of your class than you thought!”

“Uhh… well… maybe not…” He admitted sheepishly, “Some of those other pokémon are super strong! Even though their trainers are all younger than me! It’s nuts! I’m gonna have to train a ton to catch up with them all!”

“Well, I’m sure you can do it, honey… But don’t go training yourself too hard and getting into trouble, alright?” Hiroko warned him “Now, I’ve gotta get back to work before Joy gets swamped by dumb kids…”

“Alright, Mom! You look after yourself as well! And say ‘hi’ to Officer Jenny for me!”

“Okay…” She’d have to remember to pass that onto Jenny when she came by on her rounds tomorrow, “Love you, Hiro!”

“Love you to, Mom!” Hiro’s face disappeared from the screen, and Hiroko took one final drag from her cigarette before stubbing it out on the wall of the pokécentre and throwing it in the trash for some Grimer to eat and heading back inside…

Where she saw Jenny at the front desk, looking dishevelled and handing over her pokéballs to Joy…

Huh. Maybe her son really was even more special than Hiroko thought he was.

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"Tonights Headlines: Recruitment posters for Team Galatic have been seen in cities around Johto, leading to fears that the old terrorist group may be making a resurgence in new territories. Newly released records show that incidents of pokémon theft have been steadily decreasing over the last ten years. And the bidding process for the location of the 2030 International Pokémon Championship have begun. But first, here’s Sally with the battle news…”

Takaaki flicked the TV off and started eating the cheap tin of pasta he’d microwaved for his dinner in silence. Nothing really newsworthy going on, aside from the Team Galatic situation, which had been the subject of various aggravating discussions at work, so the last thing he wanted was to hear more speculation about that. He’d only really turned the television on in the hope that there’d be something about Hope’s Peak on the news…

…This house was so quiet. He’d never realised how much noise Kiyotaka and Arcanine actually made, even when they were just quietly studying. Or asleep even. At least, he assumed they must have made some background noise while they were sleeping, as that would explain why he’d had so much trouble drifting off to sleep the last two nights. And even Meowth had gone from basking in the fact that he no longer had to eat his food quickly, before Arcanine compulsively ate it instead, to
staring at Takaaki’s pokédex on the table next to him forlornly…

“There’s no guarantee he’ll ring again.” Takaaki warned him, “He might be busy with classes… or maybe even socialising!”

Meowth’s tail twitched irritably at the insinuation that he’d been waiting for Kiyotaka of all people, and he leapt up to the back of Takaaki’s chair. Which, if anything, meant he’d just have a better view of Kiyotaka on the screen if he did ring. Not that Takaaki expected him to. As he’d told Meowth, Kiyotaka was off at his new school and this was his chance to finally get ahead with his training as well as meet people his age who weren’t all biased against him because of his grandfather. Just because Kiyotaka had said he’d aim to call home every night at half past nine didn’t mean he’d actually keep to that once he was busy with everything else in his new…

*Beep Beep Beep…*

Takaaki’s hand shot over to his pokédex at the sound of the ringtone… half past nine exactly… he probably shouldn’t be so happy that Kiyotaka felt that he had nothing better to do, but he smiled as he answered it regardless… “Hello…?” This old thing was always a bit slow to load the video feed…

“Ah! Good Evening, Father!” “Arc arc arc!” Both Kiyotaka and his pokémon greeted him cheerfully once they could see him. “How are you and Meowth?”

“Good Evening, Kiyotaka, and you too, Arcanine! We’re doing fine, thank you! Here, Meowth’s just behind me…” Takaaki titled his pokédex so they could see his own pokémon pretending not to care that they could see him. Which caused Arcanine to bark excitedly for a while. “So, how was your first day of school?” He added, once Kiyotaka had settled the dog down…

“It was a lot of fun, actually! We had to try and predict who would win in a match-up between every pair of students in the class, and then we each had one fight each to see who’d win the more contentious match-ups! I managed to beat Enoshima’s Milotic rather easily, given I wasn’t allowed any items! Oh! And then Makoto invited me to eat lunch with him and Maizono, and then Hina, Sakura and Kirigiri came to sit with us as well!”

Now that was good to hear… Kiyotaka seemed to be making friends easily at Hope’s Peak.

“So, how was your first day of school?” He added, once Kiyotaka had settled the dog down…

“Oh! And then Makoto invited me to eat lunch with him and Maizono, and then Hina, Sakura and Kirigiri came to sit with us as well!”

Now that was good to hear… Kiyotaka seemed to be making friends easily at Hope’s Peak.

“Then after that, we had some tests, which was where I discovered that there’s a new formula for damage calculations which I’m worried might have resulted in me making a lot of mistakes because I’m not used to it…”

“I’m sure you still did well.” Takaaki tried to assure him, “Or at least, better than most of your class who probably didn’t know the formula at all!”

“I suppose… Makoto and Sayaka didn’t seem too confident about their performance either…” Kiyotaka looked a little happier, “But then, after that, we had a lesson about some dangerous pokémon…”

Wait... what was that about dangerous pokémon...!? ("It’s not the Rattata’s fault! I was trying to clean out the basement and didn’t know it had a nest there! I thought I was attacking its children!")

("Don’t be angry with Meowth! I should have realised he was getting sick of being recorded from his body language, and it’s not like he really hurt me!")
(“But, Father, if you tell the school about this, they’ll just have the Beedrill nest exterminated! And it’s not their fault Ochida keeps pushing me into it!”)

(“It’s not Scyther’s fault Katsushika’s doing such a poor job of controlling him! I’ll just have to forgo my armband and wear shades at school until he gets his next badge!”)

(“Ahh… It’s not like Hina’s Glaceon meant to throw it at me! It was my own fault for being in the Snow Throw arena while there was a match in progress!”)

(“Takaaki! I saw your son on the news! Congratulations! But… he’s not going to try and do that fast-track DPTL course they’re supposed to have, is he…?”)

“Father…? Are you still there…? I think the pokédex connection has dropped out!” The montage of all the times Kiyotaka had come home with cuts, scrapes, bruises from getting too close even to less dangerous pokémon that Takaaki’s brain had flashed up was interrupted by Kiyotaka squinting at the screen.

“Err… no! I can still hear you!” Takaaki waved to show that the picture of him hadn’t frozen, “But… what was that about dangerous pokémon?”

“Oh, it was just a standard class to warn us about some of the more dangerous pokémon in the wild areas we have access to! Just the standard, vital health and safety advice…” Oh thank Gods… “But after that I looked through the library and found out from Togami that we have access to all the good research journals online, so my computer’s full of things for me to read, and I’ve checked out a couple of new books for Arcanine. And then Arcanine reminded me it was dinnertime, so I got some food and came here to call you!”

“Well… it sounds like you’ve had a good day…”

“Yes… but now there’s something I need to ask you about!” Kiyotaka suddenly turned stern, “I told Kirigiri why it was that Katsushika’s father was never persecuted for hurting his pokémon, but then she asked why it was that I was allowed to keep Growlithe, given that they thought you might have hurt him…”

Damnation… he'd been hoping Kiyotaka wouldn't notice that, not considering why Kiyotaka had really been allowed to keep his Growlithe...

(“Why is Katsushika only being transferred!? He was beating a pokémon!”)

(“That’s according to you… Unfortunately it turns out there’s a blind spot in the camera system in that area, so we can’t be sure which of you is telling the truth. That’s why we’re dropping the charges against you, and just to be certain, we’re transferring Katsushika out of the K9 unit…”)

(“You really think I’m going to just let you sweep this under the rug with that!? I can still get Nurse Joy to confirm that his Growlithe had received injuries from a human!”)

(“Which human? Because I seem to recall you ‘accidentally’ taking that pokémon home with you…”)

(“Don’t you try and foist this on me! Jenny can tell you it was in that pokéball the whole time I walked home, and then I left it there…”)

(“With your son. For… what was it? Five hours before you realised what had happened and where he’d gone off to?”)
 “…Do you really think a court would take a pokémon abuse allegation against a child seriously? Even before I call in character witnesses to say Kiyotaka would never do anything like that?”

(“I’m sure they wouldn’t… but what do you think the RSPCP would make of it if it got out that one of our dogs had been left in the care of a kid that was under suspicion of hurting it…? It’d be a shame for your son if those busy-bodies insisted it be re-homed somewhere else, even though it’s happier with your son, wouldn’t it? I hear he’s got quite attached to it…”)

(“…”

(“So… why don’t you just keep your trap shut and be happy that that you’ve still got a job, we’re not going to let Katsushika near the pokémon, and your annoying kid has found something stupid enough to put up with him for once…”)

“Well…There also wasn’t enough evidence to prove the Growlithe actually had injuries from a human to make the case worth investigating in detail…” Takaaki… well, it wasn’t exactly a lie, was it? There wasn’t evidence in the case file… because Takaaki hadn’t put it in there. And hopefully no one but him and the chief inspector knew Joy had said that…

“Ah… Did you ask Nurse Joy? She told me straight away that Growlithe’s injuries were from a human when I tried to get him healed!” Kiyotaka remembered, much to Takaaki’s disappointment, “Couldn’t she have testified?”

“Ah… maybe if I’d known about that at the time…” This time Takaaki was lying, “But it’s probably too late to worry about it now… it’ll be best for you to focus on looking after Arcanine!”

“I suppose…” Kiyotaka sighed, “At least that will be easier for me to do, what with the free food, clothes and school supplies!”

“That’s true… and have you had any thoughts about a second pokémon yet?” If he got a cheaper one, he’d have more money to spend on Arcanine, if needs be.

“No… I was going to wait and see what’s around the school grounds!” Kiyotaka explained, “… What about yourself? Now that you’ve not got me or Arcanine to pay for…”

“Me!? I’m a little old to be starting my pokémon journey now!” Takaaki laughed, “Or to be figuring out how to look after a different type of pokémon…”

“Well, there’s no age limit on earning badges! And you wouldn’t be the only trainer with a team full of the same pokémon!” Kiyotaka argued, “But you certainly don’t have to, if you’re happy with just you and Meowth! But aside from that, how was your day at work…?”

He and Kiyotaka just spoke about general things for a while, until Kiyotaka admitted that it was almost the school’s curfew time and Takaaki reluctantly ended the call with him, which was when Meowth jumped down from the back of the chair into Takaaki’s lap to settle down for the rest of the all too quiet evening…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next week we’ll see some friends/aquantences of class 78 members, then after that it'll be some siblings.
Contacting Companions

Chapter Notes

The update for last weeks chapter got a bit mixed up because I saved the draft of it before putting it up on the Tuesday and then forgot to change the update date, so it was probably sorted as if it was from a few days prior to that, so you might want to double check you’ve read the last chapter.

The ‘second presenter never wins’ thing is based on the Eurovision song contest, where there’s stats showing that being in the first half of the contest always makes a country do worse (and the second act has NEVER won even after 50 years)

Also I kind of have this idea that the attention given to sports and talent shows is the reverse of what it is in real life schools (i.e. in real life schools, sports are the big thing and are given tons of money, whereas music gets no help whatsoever. I’m thinking here talent shows are considered the big thing for schools to spend money on and sports are an afterthought, mostly because battling exists and is a far more practical physical contest.)

Also, just a reminder that in this AU, Canon romances = rivalries.

For Byakuya's section, Hinoko is the name I've decided to give to the half-sister who breeds Growlithes, it's not someone you should recognise.

New Pokemon: Purrugly:
https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Purugly_(Pokémon)

Emolga: https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Emolga_(Pokémon)

Delcatty: https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Delcatty_(Pokémon)

(And a reference to Purrloin):
https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Purrloin_(Pokémon)

Not a new pokemon, but Scatterbug’s appearance is relevant, so here a picture:
https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Scatterbug_(Pokémon)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Wow, you evolved your Glameow!? I can see why you didn’t want to… I never knew Purruglies were that fat…”

EXCUSE HIM!!? Who exactly is this human, and why is it just being allowed to wander into his home and gawp at the stately radiance that is Grand Bois Cheri Ludenberg!?

“They’re not, usually…” Oh, apparently the woman who caught him thinks she has the right to just bring any old shabby human into the house. “But he doesn’t listen to any of my orders anymore, so he just sits there getting fatter…”

Well, of course he doesn’t! That boring woman had caught him in the prime of his life, just as he’d been ready to start fighting off rivals and ensure that he extended his untainted family line! And then she’d had him spend most of his life asleep in his pokéball, only letting him out for the odd pathetic battle and tiny portions of cheap food! Of course he doesn’t listen to her!

He’d only grown as strong as he was now once his real trainer had arrived and grown old enough to look after him properly, taking him to fights, not just to grow stronger but to win the money to buy him more, better quality, food. Then as he’d become older and started to struggle with battles, she’d
let him retire, revealing that she’d saved the funds to start a new life elsewhere… one that would allow her to earn enough to supply him with only the very best food.

“Can’t you put him on a diet?”

“I tried, but Taeko…”

[That’s NOT her name!] The hiss escapes Grand Bois Cheri’s lips instantly… how dare this stupid woman refer to Lady Celestia as if she was just some common, boring human like the rest of them when Celestia had made it so staggeringly clear she wasn’t!

“Ahh! Uhh… is he gonna attack us…!?"

“No… He just doesn’t like it when I call… my daughter by her name…”

Because that isn’t her name, woman!

“…Oh, you mean… the one who disappeared?”

“Yes… I think she probably told the cat she was changing her name to something different… Probably something ridiculous, given she took my purrugly to the Name Rater and had his nickname changed to ‘Grand Bois Cheri’…”

“Geez, that’s the dumbest…”

[Don’t you DARE insult the name she gave me!] At least that name is unique! She’d put thought into that name! She didn’t just search for a list of popular cat names and call him something stupid like Toby!

“Err… never mind! Soo… how come you can’t put… him on a diet…!?"

“Because… my daughter keeps sending home these packages of fatty food.” The woman who insisted he was hers kicks the latest package from Lady Celestia dismissively, and is lucky that Grand Bois Cheri is in a good enough mood not to bite her for the slight. “…And even if we try to hide them or throw them out, he manages to find them somehow.”

Of course he did, they were always coated with his trainer’s perfume! He’d be able to follow that scent anywhere, if needs be…

“Wait… so you know where she is?”

“No… there’s no return address, and as far as I can tell, that brand of food isn’t sold anywhere here in Kanto…”

“Oh… wow, that must be rough… I’m sorry…”

“It’s alright… I guess at least I know she’s alive. Maybe one day I can hope she’ll grow out of this stupid phase of hers and come back home… I just wish I could see her, or knew if she’s actually looking after herself for once, or if she’s still gambling and getting herself into trouble…”

“I’m sure she’s fine… she was smart, if nothing else, right? How about we go out for a coffee to cheer you up! My treat!”

“…Thanks…”

And with that, the two distasteful humans are finally out of Grand Bois Cheri’s sight, and they
should be gone long enough for him to properly investigate the package properly…

It is as it usually is, enough of his delicious Gyoza food for the week. A new toy to add to his collection and down at the bottom, a box that looks identical to the boxes of food, but is just slightly heavier, containing a small television device, with a single button that started playing a recording of his beloved Celestia…

…If that dullard of a woman really did wish to see his mistress again, perhaps she’d have spent more than five minutes investigating the boxes she sent to him. But he doubt she truly cared. She was even too petty and blind to recognise her own lovely daughter, even when her name and face had been plastered all over TV for the last week. And so it was that Celestia had grown to care for him enough to send him letters home, but with instructions to hide them from her parents…

“Greetings, Grand Bois Cheri!” The recording of his true trainer started with a glamorous smile, “I hope you enjoyed the food from last week, and are being properly looked after at that old house…”

[It’s tolerable] He knows she can’t hear him, but it’s nice to pretend this is a conversation…

“I have moved into Hope’s Peak. It’s not quite up to my usual standards, but there is a boy here who has been willing to dedicate his time to serving me, and there is good food available… I have included an extra box of something new for you to try, if you are curious!”

[Thank you, you’re too kind.]

“As for my class, they seem quite competent in terms of battling… surprisingly so, in one case!” Celestia’s serene face breaks into irritation for a mere moment. “But that has never been of too much concern to myself, and the lessons do not appear to be challenging, so I should do well here!”

[Of course you will.]

“…I wonder, though… perhaps you’d like to be here as well? Now that I am not travelling, I can look after you properly again…” Grand Bois Cheri’s ears perk up at the hope of seeing her again, “My only concern is that they’ll expect me to force you into fight, unless I get a second pokémon first.”

[…] As much as I miss you, I am no fighter anymore…]

“I suppose that will be yet another reason for me to catch my second pokémon sooner rather than later.” Celestia decides wisely, “I will keep you updated as to my progress!”

[Thank you, mistress.]

“And with that, I must bid you adieu! Have a good week, Grand Bois Cheri!”

[And you to, Lady Celestia...] Grand Bois Cheri just about manages to purr his goodbye before the screen turns off…

But he can’t sit and wallow in sadness all day. He now has to hide this cheap machine up in the mistress’s old room, along with all the others she sends each week. Then later on that stupid woman will come back and ignore her neighbours when they tell her it sounded like the cat was talking to someone again…

He can only hope his true trainer will be in a position to take him away soon…
Urgh… another contest where Ayaka had been placed middle-of-the-pack just because she’d been given a crappy presentation spot! Hell, the commentators had even said that no one who presented second had ever won that stupid contest! And yet everyone was still going to act like it was her fault she’d not done better!

…She’d been thinking that with Sayaka gone, it’d be her time to shine! That maybe they’d rearrange the group positions so her pokémon would be stuck off in a corner during their shows, or they could at least start taking it in turns now they didn’t have that whole ‘but Sayaka’s got to be in the front because she’s the best!’ bullcrap to fall back on! But now they’d probably use her crummy placement in this stupid rigged show as a reason to dump her off in the corner forever…

Well… she supposed it beat having to go do some dumb normal job like work in the fricken PokéMart! But, still, it’d just be nice if people noticed that her and Emolga were better than this, dammit!

“Hey… better luck next time, Ayaka!” Sato told her as they headed into their dressing room. Although whether she actually realised it had been her crappy luck or she was just saying that to be a polite drip like usual was anyone’s guess…

“Thanks.” Ayaka told her, calmly. Because she wasn’t the temper-tantrum-throwing hellion the papers kept making her out to be. “So, what’s the plan now?”

“Sayaka sent me a message saying she can chat to us all now, if we call her!”

Guess that answered that question then. They’d be able to hear if Hope’s Peak really was as good as it sounded, or if it was just as trumped up as winning talent contests had turned out to be once they all actually started it…

“Oh! Hi girls!” Sayaka smiled and waved at them all like she hadn’t actually expected them to ring her.

“Sayaka!”, “Hey Sayaka!”, “You look great!”, “How was school!?” They all crowded around the pokedex and shouted back cheerfully, “Are they showing you how to make new accessories? Or giving you tips on getting judges to notice you?” Sato added, apparently not having paid attention to what Hope’s Peak was actually about.

“Ah… no, it was mostly about wild pokémon and battling today… and on the syllabus.” Sayaka shrugged, “We only have to do one half-day of talent training a week, everything else is extra-curricular.”

“So… does that mean there aren’t many trainers there who care what their pokémon look like, then?” Sato asked dimly.

“Well, duh! How many of those people did you recognise?” Ayaka rolled her eyes, “It’s just her and Enoshima in her class who’ve ever set foot in a contest hall!”

“You… and I get the feeling the school didn’t really want both of us here, even.” Sayaka admitted, “I get the impression they were aiming to get one talent trainer this year, like they did with the sports trainer…”

Seriously? Who the hell cared about sports!? If you wanted to see how fit a pokémon was, you could just battle it. Ayaka had never heard of a school where the talent training was only as good as the sports. It sounded like Sayaka had gone to the crummiest school ever!

“So… it’s just going to be you and Enoshima doing performances against each other then?” Sato
asked.

“No… We’ve got Ibuki and Hiyoko here as well, remember?” Sayaka reminded her, “And even in my class there’s Kuwata who’s interested, and maybe Ishimaru could put on a decent show with his Arcanine if he decided to try… and it wouldn’t surprise me if Togami and Ludenberg both have a performance or two they can pull out if asked to.”

“But it’s probably only Enoshima who’s actually going to be anywhere near your league, then?” Ayaka guessed.

“Yeah… at least, for talent shows, anyway…” Sayaka admitted, looking slightly embarrassed… ooh, this oughta be good…

“Why just for talent shows?” Ayaka asked.

“Well… Let’s just say the pair of us didn’t make talent trainers look very good on a battlefield…” Sayaka sighed, then saw that they were all still looking at her expectantly… “Enoshima’s Milotic lost to an Arcanine…”

Hah! Ayaka was surprised that Milotic didn’t lose to the mass of spangly crap Enoshima piled on it!

“And what about you?” One of the girls asked.

“…Brionne lost to a Marill…” Sayaka sighed, “But everyone said I fought sensibly, and it was a really strong Marill that knows Hydro Pump…”

*But it’s still a tiny little Marill. Way to make the band look good!*

“Aww… well, that shouldn’t count! You’re not training your pokémon to fight, you’re training them to *dance!*” Sato complained.

“I know… but I get the feeling the school thinks a good trainer should be able to do *all* of it!” Sayaka said, “Which is weird, because their official stance is that they bring us together so we each can hone our individual skills and then help each other…”

Meh, companies and organisations had contradictory stances on stuff all the time!

But a good trainer should be good at *everything*, eh? Maybe that was where she was going wrong. Perhaps instead of spending hours making slight improvements to her dances, she should go outside and have Emolga knock a few pokémon heads together, so it’d get stronger and know better moves to show off. After all, the judges would *have* to notice her if she made Thunder strike on stage…

And if they *still* didn’t notice that, maybe she’d just use it on *them* instead!

“…the bidding process for the location of the 2030 International Pokémon Championship have begun. But first, here’s Sally…”

Well, that was all pretty lame. No more news on how Big Bro Leon was getting on at his new school? Kanon had been hoping to see him, even if it *was* just on a TV screen… And she hadn’t even been able to see him all summer, because he’d gone off to Alola and left her to train by herself! And he hadn’t even thanked her for packing up all his stuff for him and sending it all to Hope’s Peak so he wouldn’t have to cut his holiday short either, even though they were destined to be rivals!

Not that he actually agreed with her there. He kept saying that he didn’t want to be rivals with
someone in his family, because if they did become rivals then they’d end up ruining every family get
together by fighting with each other, as if there’d never been a pair of rivals who were friends with
each other! And she’d been so hopeful when he said that if her Delcatty could outrun his Luxray
he’d consider her rival material, until she’d found out that even the highest recorded speed of a
Delcatty was nowhere near Leon’s Luxray… If only she’d got a Purrloin instead…

Not that that stopped her from going out on the track every night and jogging along with Delcatty
until her feet got blistered and calloused! She’d get Big Bro Leon to respect her and realise that
they’d been measuring up against each other since they were little kids one day! Heck, maybe
instead of moping around thinking about him, she could head back outside and…

*Bzzt, bzzt, bzzt…* Huh? Her pokédex was ringing…?

Ah! It was Leon! Was he finally going to to at least acknowledge that she was a competent trainer
who had better thing to do than sort all his stuff out, and actually thank her for doing it? Hmm…
How did her make-up look…!? It wouldn’t do to answer the call looking like a total mess, that
wouldn’t get her any respect at all! But it looked alright, she could totally face him looking like this!
Accept call!

What the!? Was that actually Leon!? It looked like he’d grown his hair out over the summer, in a
kind of messy punk good-for-nothing kind of way… the perfect counterpart to her professional,
organised, well-presented self! He finally was starting to play the part of a proper rival for her!

“Hey! Kanon…! Is this thing on…?”

“Yes. I was just surprised you’ve changed your hair…” Kanon explained.

“Oh great, you can hear me!” Leon smiled in relief., “Where’d you get that berry-growing kit from?”

What!? That was all he wanted? He hadn’t even asked her how she or her pokemon was, let alone
said thanks for the help! Uurrggghhh… Typical Leon! It was like he only thought of her as someone
to run around doing menial tasks for him, just because she'd agreed to be his manager! But if she
didn’t help his lazy butt out he’d do even less training than he already did and they’d end up being
the crummiest rival pair ever…

“It was a gift to you from Mom…” Even though Kanon had told her Leon wouldn’t waste his time
growing berries when both his and her Dads were giving him enough money to buy potions when he
needed to. “I think she got it in Veilstone…?”

“Really? Aww man… that’s gonna be a pain… But I need another one of those spray bottles to train
Litten…”

“You have a Litten!?” The hell! Her rival had a new pokemon and she didn’t know about it!?

“Huh? Oh, yeah! I caught him in Alola… but he’s a little asshole who keeps setting fire to my stuff!”
Leon complained, holding up a charred plastic thing. "Even the spray bottle I was using to train him
to quit doing it!"

“Oh… well if you just need any spray bottle, why not use an empty bottle of cleaning spray or
something?” Kanon asked.

“Cleaning spray!?” Oh, right. Because Big Bro Leon had never cleaned anything in his whole life,
probably.

“Yeah… you can probably find some in any general store… Or the household section in a
“Department store.”

“Oh, great! I’ll go get some right now!”

“What?! You’re just going to leave like that!?” He’d hardly spoken to her at all!

“Sorry, Cuz! But if I don’t leave now, I won’t be prepared when Litten sets the next thing on fire!”

“Alright… But how about we talk tomorrow evening to catch up? I didn’t even know you had a second pokémon yet! I mean, how am I supposed to be your rival if I can’t build a team to combat yours properly!?”

“Kanon… really, we’re family! You’re like a little sister to me! I like you to much to be a rival to you!” Leon gave her all the same excuses as he always did. “And I can’t talk tomorrow, cause I’m helping a girl from my class with sports… But I’ll talk Wednesday, alright? See ya!”

…So he’d just rung to ask her for something stupid and rub it in her face that he was spending tomorrow evening with yet another girl who was probably rubbish at sports and would never pose him any sort of challenge, but he’d said he’d help out because he was hoping to kiss her or whatever, like all those other trainers she’d secretly watched him hang out with in the hopes of getting a better idea of how he battled. And after she’d wasted the last few days of her summer holiday packing up his stuff for him, which he still hadn’t thanked her…

*Bzzt, bzzt, bzzt…*

Leon again!? What he want from her now…?

“Hey…”

“Yo, I just realised I forgot to say earlier, but thanks for getting all my stuff here, even though it probably cut into your training time! Anyway, see ya!”

…and there he went again. But at least he’d remembered to thank her, and had even considered the effect it had on her pokémon. Maybe he’d soon realise she was the one who always going to be closest to his level when it came to pokémon…

It was 9:52pm when the Young Master Byakuya chose to contact him, somewhat earlier than Aloysius had expected. He was aware that Hope’s Peak had a curfew that began at 10pm and would have expected the master to still be outside training his pokémon against those in the wild until the very last second…

But he was just a butler. It wasn’t his prerogative to understand all the workings of his master’s mind, even if having watched the boy grow from a small child to the young man he was now had given him some insight into the matter.

“Greeting, Young Master Byakuya. How may I be of service?” Aloysius answered the call on his computer, so he could continue to work and look up any files that were needed.

“Just an update on the day’s business, Pennyworth, and any matters that are of direct importance.” The young master answered brusquely as his face appeared on the screen… although Aloysius could barely see him against the darkness in the background.

“There was little of importance happening today. It seems most people were busy preparing for the tomorrow’s yearly stock assessment of the PokéMarts. I have, of course, submitted evidence
encouraging the more widespread use of our line of Repels and potions...

“Good work.” The young master either nodded more than usual, or his pokédex had moved upwards as he did it… “Any more developments in the family?”

“Nothing significant. Two of the ones you’ve already defeated have announced that they will be competing against each other next week, but of course you’ve already ensured that won’t have any effect on anything…”

“I see… Perhaps their assuming that my being here will put me out of the running, for some idiotic reason.” Master Byakuya frowned, “Perhaps I’d best organise my next challenge, just to remind them all that I still exist!”

Aloysius had assumed that would be the best plan of action for the young master as well… “In that case, may I offer a suggestion?”

“Go ahead.” The gestured towards him to signal that he could proceed, at which point his Rufflet landed on his arm and dropped a fish out of its beak onto the master’s lap…

Ah, so he was training. He must have been on a boat in the lake region and decided to multitask while Rufflet was content to hone his fishing skills…

“…For the past few years, Hope’s Peak has been taking its students on a field trip to Cinnabar Gym four weeks after the start of the first term…” Aloysius began to explain, as Master Byakuya patted his bird briefly, before it flew off again and he began to rummage around in the bottom of the boat…

“You could easily arrange a private boat to take you to Cianwood City…

“Hmm… and from there, you’re thinking I can head through the cliff-edge gate, then routes 47 and 48 to get to Hinoko’s place…” The young Master caught on quickly, especially considering he was in the middle of throwing the deposited fish back out into the water. “I’ll contact the school’s administration and challenge her as soon as I can confirm the specific date.”

“Very good, sir.” That was the type of mindless work Aloysius should be doing for him. But the Togami family were insistent that all aspects of these challenges were to be completed by the potential heirs themselves, including the organisational aspects, to ensure that the resultant heir would be competent in all matters, not just battling.

“Is there anything else of note?” The master asked, “Because I’m hoping I should be able to start some rather more… intense training than I have been up until now…”

It was just as Aloysius was wondering why the master would have left the more intense training until now, that the clock on the wall chimed 10pm…

“Ah… You think there are more powerful pokémon on the lake at night?” Aloysius guessed, “Forgive me, I was under the impression that first-year students were not allowed to be out at that time…”

“Well… that is true…” The young master smiled to himself, “However, I accidentally dropped the oars overboard a while ago, and Rufflet isn’t understanding my commands to go and fetch them for me, so it seems I may be here, having to defend myself from more dangerous pokémon for rather a long time… not by choice, of course!”

“I see…” So, the master was already finding loopholes in Hope’s Peak’s rules and guidelines. Although that was rather a glaring one, and Aloysius could see a problem with his plan developing already… “However, I don’t think you need to fear being here for long… It would seem this place is
“What!?” The young master lost his composure for a moment as he turned to see the light from the small motorboat skipping over the waves towards him, “…I see. I was thinking they’d be guarding the forest instead, as it was the more dangerous area.” He said, tersely forcing himself to sound relieved, “How… fortunate that I was wrong.”

“Indeed, sir…” Aloysius agreed with his pretense as the boat got close enough for him to see the bulky figure of Juzo Sakakura steering it…

“Byakuya Togami, isn’t it?” The young master remained stoic as the guard shined a flashlight into his face, “I know even Kizakura didn’t forget to tell you not to be outside after 10pm…”

“My apologies. I dropped my oar and couldn’t get back to land.” The master explained, “I sent my Rufflet to pick it up, but he keeps bringing me fish instead.”

“Well, lucky for you, you’re not the first kid who’s gone out into the water on the first night when they don’t know how to use a boat… I’d say I end up taking one back to land every year.” Sakakura said with a deadpan expression, “But don’t worry… I’ll just let your teacher know he’s going to have to give your whole class the in-depth lesson on how to handle the boats…”

“…Thank you.” The master said, cordially but with annoyance simmering under the surface. “Just let me pack away my pokédex and call Rufflet and…”

The screen went black, as the master was no longer in a position to communicate with him. It would seem he was going to have to learn to make do training against the pokémon available during the day. Or against the other students at Hope’s Peak, as much as he might consider them ill-fitting for his training regimes…

Well, it wasn’t Aloysius prerogative to be concerning himself with the Young Master’s school life. He was the most likely Togami heir, he would find some way to make do.
“Good Evening, Fukawa! Do you mind if I sit with you while I eat?” No, wait… just the loud human with…

Aargh! Those two other tiny Scatterbugs again! [Go away you two! Shoo! Shoo!]

“Sorry, I’m saving that place for Byakuya.”

[Toko’s MY trainer! So I’m going to beat the best rival! Not you!]

“But I just… err… have I don’t something to upset your Scatterbug, or is it always this excitable?”

Grr… those two are moving down here! [Don’t you two come any closer! I’m almost evolved, you know!]

“It’s not usually like that… Oh, I know! Maybe he’s trying to mate with your eyebrows!”

Hah! Yeah! That scared them off!

“They mate with facial hair!?”

“Urgh, no of course not! That would be stupid! I mean your eyebrows look like someone stuck tiny black caterpillars to your face!”

“EXCUSE ME!? Thick eyebrows are just a sign of…”

“Well, Wh-whatever, what was it you were going to say about Byakuya!?”

“Tch… I was going to say he probably isn’t coming here. I just saw him eating dinner in the library, and he told me he’s going outside to train.”

“Wh-what! Why would he go now! He’ll barely get half an hour if he’s lucky!”

“I suppose, but that’s still half an hour more than us! And if he keeps doing that, it would build up eventually…”

“Urgh… You’re right! I’m not letting that sneaky snob get ahead of me that easily! Which area did he go to!?”

“I don’t know! He just said he was going outside!”

“Urgh… gods, you’re useless! I th-thought you were supposed to know things!? Well, whatever! Come on Scatterbug! We’re gonna go find Byakuya!”

Yes! Here we go! [Woo! Rival time! Battle time!]

Running through the halls, run, run, run, run…

Brrrrrrrr! This place is cold and dark! And still no Rival… Where was he?

“N-now where would he have gone? It sounded like the most dangerous pokémon were in the forest, but that means everyone wanting to train will go there and it’d be crowded, and the guards will probably start kicking people out before curfew time so he’d have less time to fight… he’d have thought of that…” Toko was figuring it out! “And he’s probably the type who doesn’t want to risk getting his stuff wet, as well… so that means he’ll be out in the field! Haha!”

[Good work! Clever Toko!] His trainer was the best!
“But if I’m going out there now, I’d better have Garbodor out ready… Scatterbug, back in your ball!”

Aww… [Okay… But let me out for the Rival Battle! Pleassse!??]

“…It’s not like I’ll keep you in there forever! I’ll let you out if there’s something you can fight, alright?”

[Alright!] Time to go back into his ball!

… … …

“Sc-scatterbug!? Y-your t-turn!”

YES! Battle time! [Here I come! Look out! I’m about to evolve!]

WOW! Much more dark and cold out here now! And what was this he had to fight? Some big rat thing? And Garbo had already made all sick! Hah! He could take this easy!

“Ahh… it’s still not fainted!! Dammit! Why’d I have to have my good luck in that stupid class match when it didn’t really matter…!?”

[Don’t worry, Toko! I can beat it! Just tell me what to do!]

“Uhh… Scatterbug… use… ahh… Stun spore?”

[Okay! STUUUUN SPOOO…] Ahhhhhhh! The rat’s coming! Scatterbug’s not ready yet! AHHHHHHHHHHHHH…!

“Persian! Use Fake out!”

Huh…? Oh! Now’s there’s a white human guy with a big big kitty that wants to eat the rat thing! And now the rat’s gone! Hooray! And Scatterbug totally helped! So now Scatterbug’s gonna evolve even sooner…!

“Well, now you know why we have rules about…”

“What the hell took you so long!??” Toko’s really mad at the white person… “I-I’ve been wandering around in the dark getting attacked by those things for ages! H-how come no one noticed I was st-still out here!”

“Save the act, Fukawa. We get people getting ‘lost’ out late at night every year… Just consider this a…”

“Y-you think I did this on purpose!?? I-I’m not stupid! I just got lost because I went off the path, trying to find Byakuya!” Aww… so still no Rival Battle time…?

“…You mean you really got lost? Wow, that’s a new one… And you weren’t even looking in the right place. We caught Togami ‘stranded’ in the middle of the lake about an hour ago…”

“A… An hour ago?” Toko sounded so surprised, that wasn’t like her at all!

“Yep… you could have just…”

“So… I’ve been training out here for a whole hour more than Byakuya…!?"
“Well… that’s one way of putting it…”

“Hah! Exactly! So that’s means I’m now an hour closer to catching up with him!” Yeah! Toko’s the best trainer! They’ll total beat the best Rival! “Heheheh… A few more nights like this and…!”

“…If I catch you outside after curfew again, I’ll have you banned from coming outside at all!”

“Uhh… I didn’t mean exactly like this! I just meant nights where I spend more time t-training than him! You know… inside! Against… urgh… the other students?”

“…Good idea! It’ll be better than just picking fights with wild pokémon! I’d suggest you start with Hagakure and Ludenberg, they’re about equal to you… But first, lets get you back inside and I expect you to get your pokémon healed, and then straight to bed. Got it?”

“Fine…” Aww… Toko was disappointed! No Rival Battle today…

Well, maybe next day… or the day after! Or after Scatterbug evolved! He was definitely gonna evolve soon, this time…!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading again!
What the hell!? Why had they held back Mukuro with that biker guy!? Were they gonna get some sort of special treatment, or something? Like, Junko had been expecting the teacher to hold her back with those two losers who obviously spent more time sat on their asses than training their pokémon, not the guy who helped run a Gym!

Tch! Now she was gonna have to wait around a classroom for her sister, like some sort of weirdo, just to see what was going on! And she’d been looking forward to going to dinner and seeing if there was any more drama there... this better not turn out to be her sister getting told she needed to go into the stupid trainer class or something…

Well, at least it wasn’t too long before the door open, and corn cob head almost ran into her ‘cause he was so fricken happy about whatever had gone on in there…

But Mukuro just had the same stupid worried expression she’d had all weekend! Honestly, Junko was getting bored of it now…

“Hey! Soooo? What happened in there?” Junko had to ask, seeing as Mukuro didn’t have the sense to just tell her already, “You didn’t get in trouble, did you?”

She’d asked that ‘cause she could see the teacher still sat at his desk, glaring at her just before the door closed shut behind her sister…

“No!” Mukuro replied, like a kid who was worried she’d get spanked is the answer was ‘yes’, “He just wants me to do an extra class…”

“You mean to help you out, ‘cause you’re a bad trainer?” Junko knew she shouldn’t have bothered waiting out…

“No... Something about a license for training dangerous pokémon…”

Huuuh!?

(“Yo! I wanna give this cute fox a new home!”)

(“Ah... That’s not a good idea. That’s a Zorua and it’s going to evolve into Zoroark very soon...”)

(“Soooooo!? It’s cute! I want it!”)
But… Zoroark creates very powerful illusions! They can make the entire landscapes look different, if they want to!

"It just changes how shit looks? How’s that dangerous?"

Well… imagine it made you think there was a forest in front of you, when there was actually a cliff… And it’s not just one person who’s affected, it can affect everyone in there area!

Upupupupupu… So you’d get a whole bunch of people all going for a stroll and suddenly tumbling off a cliff, one after the other!? Upupupupupu… I’m sorry… I know it’s wrong, but it’s just so funny to imagine, you know? ‘Hey! Let’s go for a picnic…. AHHHHHHHH!’

"…"

But, man… that’d be a really sad way to go… you think you’re gonna have a nice day out, and then you fall through the ground to your death, like some NPC stuck in a videogame glitch…"

"Y… Yeah… So that’s why only trainers with a license for dangerous pokémon can take that one… it’s the law…"

"Aww… that’s a bummer… Hey, what about this little teddy bear?"

"The Teddiursa…? Well… You need to know that when he evolves he might get a bit ornery during the spring, but it’s young enough that you should be able to form a good bond with it before that happens… Buuuut… maybe I should let you get to know the guy, first… he’s kinda… bitey…"

"Seriously!?! So you’re gonna be allowed to have fun training all the cool pokémon?" What the hell!? How come her dumb sister got the cool things!?

"Umm… I don’t know… some of the pokémon they mentioned can be dangerous, even just fighting them in the field… it’s probably a lot of work to make them safe enough to live with…” Mukuro was totally humble bragging about this…

"Yeah, but people still manage it, and they reckon you’re gonna be one of those people!"

"But… Will I really? I mean, I’m not a trainer… Is it really worth me doing the course…?"

Oh, riiiiight… No point her having big scary pokémon if she wasn’t gonna battle with ‘em anyway… But it’d still be nice to have access to all those cool abilities they had, right…?

"Weeeellll… I know! How’s about you take the course and make sure you can make all those scary pokémon nice and safe to handle, and then I can train them up for you!"

And there we go! Mukuro finally had an expression that wasn’t depressing to look at!

“You’d do that for me!??"

"Sure I would! We’re sisters, right?” Junko hitched her arm over Mukuro’s shoulders to remind her, "We’re supposed to look out for each other!"

"Yes! Of course!” Mukuro nodded, “I just thought after you already agreed to swap names on all our tests…”

Arrrgghhh! How was this stupid idiot related to her!? “Don’t talk about that! If someone hears we did that then we’ll get in trouble!”
“Ahh… sorry, Junko!”

“Well, we seem like we’ve got away with it… just don’t talk about it again!”

After all, if anyone found out they’d swapped tests, it’d probably mean Junko ended up in the stupid trainers’ class… and she wanted to get cool pokémon, not waste loads of time learning about them…

“Haha! Sorry kiddo! Better luck next time!” Daiya shrugged as he easily beat the final pokémon the poor kid in front of him had been trying for a badge with…

…But this was, what, the third trainer in a row Michi had let get to him to who really shouldn’t have managed it? Hell, he could almost have finished off that last guy with his new Clefairy! What the hell was going on with that kid tonight…? Maybe it was time for Daiya to have a stroll outside and make sure he hadn’t fallen asleep and let people sneak past him or something…

“Sandshrew! Use Powder Snow!” Okay… so at least Daiya could hear he was actually fighting these guys…

“Ahh… Okay, Torchic! You’re next! Use Ember!!” Daiya got to the fight just to see this kid getting her next pokémon out, onl for Michi to fail to react completely… “Umm… excuse me…?”

“Huh!? Uhh… yeah, powder snow again…” Oh for the love of… he was checking his pokédex for missed calls again…!? In the middle of a battle!?”

Of course, his Sandshrew went down pretty quick and apparently that was the end of the fight, even though Michi really should have been able to put up more of a fight that that…

“…Nice fight!” Daiya lied, “You’re up against me now, so you might wanna go get your team healed up or something…” She had the sense to agree and headed off… “Michi, go find someone else in the gang to take over for you…”

“Huh!? Daiya!?” Michi guiltily stuffed his Dex in his pocket, “Have you heard from Mondo yet?”

Daiya had to keep himself from sighing out loud. Michi had been getting more and more anxious about how Mondo was doing all weekend… and Daiya would have bet good pokédollars that Mondo had also been worrying about being at a new school or weekend, both thanks to him being too proud to call back and chat to anyone in the gang…

“Nah… I told you, he’s probably studying.”

“Seriously!?” Michi scowled, “You don’t really expect him to do well at school work, do you?”

“Well, I expect him to fucking try!” Daiya scowled right back, “Contrary to popular opinion, I didn’t recommend him to that place so he could goof off!”

“But… I thought you recommended him ‘cause he’s a good battler!” Michi countered, “They’ll know he ain’t exactly a pokémon professor…”

“Well, they’re still gonna expect him to learn shit while he’s there, even if it’s just to make himself better at battling!” Daiya pointed out, “Plus I bet there’s all sorts of extra stuff that’d be useful for him to learn, if he’s willing to bust his ass for a while…”

Which is why it’d be nice if he actually bothered to fucking call and let Daiya know what the fuck
had happened on his first day, even if it was just Mondo doing a shit job in a math exam or something… Although if that was the highlight of Mondo’s day he probably wouldn’t dare ring him either… Dammit, maybe he shoulda waited another couple of years instead of pushing Mondo into this now…

*We all live… in a pokémon world…* Maybe that was him… or maybe it was that dork from the league association threatening to do an audit of all the potions and shit they used again… That’d be just Daiya’s luck…

“Yo, Crazy Diamonds mobile Gym, Gym Leader Daiya speaking.” He’d never get sick of calling himself that…

“Hey, it’s me…” Mondo’s, dare Daiya hope, smug looking face appeared on the screen.

“Mondo! How’re you getting on!?” Takemichi practically leapt in front of Daiya to see Mondo, “What were your classes like!?”

“Eh… just usual first day shit… Lycan and I beat some idiot with a Blastoise, we had ta do a bunch of tests so they know what they can skip teaching us…” Mondo was surprising chill about that, given Daiya suspected that in his case it was almost nothing… he wasn’t just smug about beating that Blastoise, was he… “Then they showed us a bunch of dangerous pokémon around he school and asked us how to deal with ‘em, and I did well enough at that that they say that I can get a DPTL by next year…”

Ooh… So that’s why he’d rung all smug…

“Ehh? You mean you’ll start the course next year, right?” Michi asked, “It takes three years after that…”

“Not here at Hope’s Peak! I’m on a fast track course where they squish it all into one year! Starts this Saturday!” Mondo couldn’t help grinning, “I guess I’ll have mine before you, bro!”

“You mean I wait all this time to start it and they just let you zip past me!?” Daiya pretended to be slightly jealous, “Bet you don’t gotta read all that dumb intro shit either! That took me two weeks, and the prints so fucking tiny I had to get dorky looking reading specs…”

Although he’d been running a Gym during those two weeks and was exaggerating about needing glasses, but just in case Mondo was being expected to read the same thing, it’d be good to make him think it was hard enough to get a start on that shit now…

“R…really?” Mondo looked worried now, but put on a tough face. “Well… they told me I’ll be able to get it done by Saturday!”

“Awesome! See, I always said you were better than Daiya!” Michi cheered, “Uhh… no offense, boss…”

“None taken… If I didn’t agree I’d have recommended myself to Hope’s Peak!” Daiya smirked, then spotted the girl from earlier cycling back towards the ring of motorbikes that currently made up the Gym. “Anyway, I gotta go battle some kid, so call Michi if ya wanna carry on chatting. And keep up the good work, Mondo.”

“Yeah…” Mondo nodded, “I’ll show ‘em I was the right person for you to pick!”

Wow… that suddenly got serious. Had Mondo got wind of what some of the other Leaders were saying about him…? Maybe that Kuzyryu brat had started spouting off, even though he’d stepped
down so his little sister could recommend him after he'd already recommended someone else from his own Gym...

Not that it mattered, after all… “I know you will, Mondo.”

Komaru probably sounded pretty pitiful, sighing as she went through the front door at home. But she couldn’t help it! The first day of school after summer holidays was always bad enough, but today had been even worse…

…Today had been completely normal. She’d gone to her normal school and sat through all the normal lessons, and the only breaks she’d had was when her normal friends had all been asking her about her brother’s actually interesting new pokémon school… and then she’d walked home and trained Geodude in the normal patches of wild grass, all the while wondering if it was worth bothering, because she was never going to be anything but normal… So why not just be one of those trainers who just had one pokémon in it’s initial stage while she just got a normal job, like Mom and Dad had done…

“Komaru, sweetie? Is that you…?” Well, at least Mom was home to listen to her about it, “I made your favourite dinner!”

“…Spearow nest and Chinchou eyes!?” Well, at least that wasn’t normal, right!? Was it?

“Yes! So wash up and get to the table before it goes cold!” Komaru did as her mother asked, finding her Dad already at the table with a laptop in front of him.

“Bringing home work again, Dad?”

“Ah… just a little bit. Head office is having a meeting to discuss adding new stock to the PokéMart’s, so I have to make a report on sales data for what we have at the moment…” He explained.

Urg, that sounded so boring… but that might be what was in her future once she got older as well…

“…But enough about my day!” Her dad put the laptop to the side, as Mom came through with dinner and started dishing up portions. “How was school?”

“Terrible.” Komaru summarised.

“What!? Why!?” Both her parents cried out at once, “Did someone bully you!? Did you do badly in a test? Did your new teacher say something mean to you, because I swear if your new teacher said something mean to you I’ll march right up to the school gates and…”

“No, Mom, it’s not like that!” Komaru cried, “And now you’ve said all that, it’ll probably just sounds like I’m whining…”

“Now, honey, you know you if something’s upsetting you, you can talk to us… even if it isn’t the biggest deal in the world…” Her Dad told her, “So… what was so bad about school today…?”

“Well… It was just really boring and… normal!” Komaru admitted, “And then everyone kept asking me about Makoto, which just drove home the point that I’m not special or anything…”

“Don’t say that, Komaru!” Her Dad snapped, “Just because you didn’t get picked by Hope’s Peak,
doesn’t mean you aren’t special!”

“But I’m average at everything. My projected grades are average, my BattleNet rating is exactly 3 stars, my body measurements are boring…” Komaru complained, “I even found an online test which tells you what your second pokémon should be, and it gave me Kricketot!”

“…What’s wrong with Kricketot?” Her mother didn’t spot the problem, “It’s just a bug-type, isn’t it? That could work well with Geodude, although getting one from a different region is a bit of a stretch…”

“It’s not the type, Mom, it’s pokémon number 401!” Komaru groused, although her mom still looked confused…

“Oh! I get it! There’s 802 discovered pokémon, so it’s the median average!” At least Dad got it… “Err… but that’s just a number! And new pokémon get added to the national Dex all the time! It’s wouldn’t be average for long!”

“I know… But it all just feels like the universe is pointing a big sign at me saying ‘Average person here’…” Komaru whined, “And it’s not just that Pokémon! Geodude’s going to evolve into pokémon number 75 and 76! That’s slap bang in the middle of the Kanto Dex as well!”

“Oh, come on, honey… It’s just a number!” Her Mom tried to cheer her up, “And how many girls can say they ended up with a pet rock as a starter pokémon? It’d be more normal to have a Growlithe or Meowth, wouldn’t it?”

“I guess…” Komaru admitted. Maybe she was getting worked up over nothing, “But I’m just wondering if it’s even worth me bothering to build a team… I’m not that good of a trainer… Maybe I should embrace my normality and just get a normal accounting job like Dad!”

“Well… there’s nothing wrong with having a job that doesn’t involve pokémon!” Dad replied, cagily. “Buuuut… Honestly, I wouldn’t really recommend accounting… I mean, it pays well, but it’s pretty tedious… I often wish I’d stuck with what I’d really wanted to do…”

“Okay… well, maybe I’ll be like Mom and work in the PokéMart!”

“Well… you could…” Mom said in the tone of voice that Komaru knew meant ‘for the love of God, don’t!’. “But there’s a lot of irritating customers, these days… I only took the job because I was planning to just save money for a year to help with my dream, but by then I’d got used to the steady income and my family needed help so I kept putting it off every year…”

“Well… what did you guys want to do then?” Komaru asked.

 “…Train pokémon.” They both admitted at the same time.

 “…So you’re just saying to keep at it, then…” Komaru sighed.

 “No! It’s your choice!” Mom assured her, “We just don’t want you to make any rash decisions, just because Makoto suddenly got to go to a fancy school!”

 “Yeah! After all, if you keep training your pokémon, you might get to go somewhere special as well!” Dad added, “Like that school with the nice uniforms you like!”

 “I guess…” Komaru agreed, “I’ll think about it…”

That seemed to cheer her parents up a bit, but it was still pretty quiet over dinner until Dad’s pokédex
“Oh, hey, it’s Makoto!” He announced after looking at it, “I’ll send it onto the TV so we can have a family chat!”

Makoto appeared on the screen, wearing his usual hoodie, but with a brown protective blazer over the top of it…

“Makoto! Hey, buddy!”, “Hello, Makoto!”, “Hey…” Komaru didn’t feel like she had the energy to give as nice a greeting as her parents right now…

“Hey, Mom, Dad and… Komaru…?” Oops. Seemed like Makoto had picked up on her bad mood…

“Ah… Komaru’s had a bad day…” Mom explained.

“Why?”

“School was all just normal and boring, and this stupid online test gave me a pokémon that’s the average numbered pokémon in the national pokédex and then I realised Gravlers are the middle number in the Kanto pokédex and everyone kept asking me about you and Hope’s Peak…”

“Oh… err… sorry?” Geez, he actually looked guilty about it, even though he was confused as well…

“…You apologising just makes it worse… It’s like you’re pitying how normal I am compared to you!”

“Aww, c’mon… I’m nothing special!” Makoto lied.

“You got picked by Hope’s Peak!” Komaru reminded him, “Meanwhile I’m going to a normal school, and getting average grades, and I’m average height…”

“Hmm… Well… you could say that you’re so normal, it’s unnormal!” Makoto tried to cheer her up, “And maybe you can make having average-number pokémon your thing! I bet no one’s ever built a team out of six pokémon that are right in the middle of their region’s pokédex!”

“Well… yeah… I guess that’d be kinda interesting…” Komaru had to admit it was an idea… It’d mean she’d have to travel all the regions… that was pretty interesting! “Thanks, Makoto… How was your day?”

“Me? I was pretty typical first-day stuff… we had some ‘get to know each other’ fights… which I… kinda lost to a Lycanroc…”

“A really powerful Lycanroc?!” Komaru asked.

“Not… really? Blastoise probably could have beat it, but I tried to use Togepi first, and Metronome ended up reducing Blastoise’s attack power…”

“So, typical Makoto battle?” Dad joked, “I’m starting to think you were better off without that Togepi…”

“Aww, c’mon! It’ll be useful once it’s stronger!” Makoto insisted, “But anyway, after that I ended up making myself look like an idiot because the teacher had said he’d reveal the loser’s biggest secret, so I blurted out that I used to wet the bed and called Professor Oak a lying jerkface in front of the whole class…”
“*snerk…* Hahahaha! Are you kidding!?” Komaru couldn’t help laughed, and neither could Dad… although Mom kept a straight enough face to glare at them both, “So Sayaka Maizono knows you wet the bed until fifth grade!?”

“Yeah…” Makoto sighed, “Although she was nice enough not to mention it when we sat together at lunchtime, so I think I kinda got away with it… And after that it was just some standard tests and then we had a safety lesson on the pokémon around Hope’s Peak!”

"Well, it sounds like you've had a pretty normal first day!” Dad summarised, "I'm sure you'll do just fine there!"

"Yeah... I mean, I'm not the best in the class by a long shot, but I'm not the worst either...” Makoto shrugged, "And I've already got a bunch of people in my class offering to help me out if I need it!"

"Well, of course you do! You always were good at making friends!” Mom looked reassured to hear it all the same, though, "But you'll still need to work hard by yourself, remember!?"

"Yeah, I know... but speaking of which, I need to go to the school store and get some protective gear for class tomorrow..." Makoto apologetically came up with a reason to end the call.

"All right, son! Make sure you get the most protective stuff you can, even if it looks less fashionable!” Dad insisted on warning him.

"Yeah... with your luck, you'll need it!” Komaru couldn't help chiming in.

"No kidding...” Makoto sighed.

"And be careful out there, even with the protective gear!” Mom added, "Make sure you have at least one friend with you when you go exploring!"

"Don't worry... Sayaka's already asked to team up with me!” Geez... He got to team up with one of the top two talent trainers and he just acted like it was no big deal... "But I'll send you a message to let you know when we're finished as well, alright?"

"Thanks, Makoto..." Dad smiled wryly, "Have a good evening!"

"And sweet dreams!” Mom added.

"And good luck tomorrow!” Komaru added.

"Thanks... Same to you all!” Makoto finished the call with a wave, and then there was a moment of silence before they all were certain that Makoto really had finished the call...

“That boy… We tell him to keep why he got picked quiet, and then he tells his whole class!?” Mom buried her face in her hands, “…I feel like he's going to kill me by embarrassment one of these days…”

“And his Blastoise losing to a Lycanroc?” Dad rolled his eyes, “That certainly isn’t normal, eh, Komaru?”

“Hehe… yeah… no kidding…” Komaru laughed nervously, “Maybe being a normal trainer’s not so bad after all…”
Alright! Another great evening of training for him and Ponyta! But now it was getting pretty late, and he wasn’t supposed to be out late at night now Hina wasn’t around to look out for him…

“Time to get to the pokécenter, girl!” Yuta announced, putting his hand through the horse’s fiery mane to stroke her neck, “Wanna race me there?”

Ponyta whinnied happily and jumped around in response, then settled down next to him as he got into his running stance…

“Okay… ready… set… GO!”

Then both set off at the same time, Yuta getting off to a quicker start, but quickly getting overtaken by the horse, as always. And, as always, people in the village were giving him weird looks as he kept trying to run alongside his pokémon, instead of on it like most Ponyta trainers would have done…

But hey, he wasn’t going to keep his position as the school’s star track runner if he did lazy stuff like that! Even if no one really cared about human sports, he still enjoyed running for himself! And Ponyta was always more comfortable this way, anyway…

Heck, she was even getting so confident that she’d walked into the pokémon centre by herself, and was stood in the queue by the time Yuta got there…

“Woah… Ponyta! You’re supposed to wait for me, remember?” Yuta reminded her as he stood next to her in the queue.

She just huffed at him and tossed her head in the direction of the guy who’d been in the queue behind her, probably meaning that she didn’t want to have to wait…

“I know, you don’t like waiting around in queues… but people might start thinking you’re wild or a runaway, if you run off too far ahead of me…”

She looked a bit more guilty about that, maybe that meant she’d actually listen this time…

It only took a few minutes for the rest of the people ahead of him to be dealt with, and Yuta had already put Ponyta back in her ball before he got up to the counter… “Just this Ponyta, please!”

“No problem!” Nurse Joy took the ball off of him, “Hmm… but, are you Yuta Asahina?”

“Uhh… yeah.” This was weird. Was he in trouble somehow…?

“How long have you had your Ponyta?”

“One year and two days!” Yuta grinned, which surprised the nurse, “My birthday was this Saturday…”

“Oh, I see! So you got her for your last birthday!” Joy figured out, “Do you ride her often?”

“No… she doesn’t like being ridden.” Yuta told her.

“You mean she doesn’t trust you enough?”

“No… She just doesn’t like being ridden. By anyone.” Yuta told her, “The people at the shelter told me they don’t think…”

“Oh! She’s a shelter pokémon!?” The nurse interrupted him, “Your teacher didn’t mention that…”
“Huh? Why was one of my teachers talking to you about me? Which teacher was it?”

“Umm!” The nurse covered her mouth, “I can’t say which teacher… but they were just a little… worried that there might be a reason you weren’t forming a better bond with your pokémon…”

“Ohh… okay? But she always lets me touch her mane without burning me, so I think she trusts me just fine!”

“I’m sure she does! It’s just your teacher’s job to to make sure everything’s alright between you and your pokémon!” Nurse Joy told him, “But here’s your Ponyta back!”

“Thanks…” Yuta took the ball and let her back out, and then stroked through her mane a little longer than usual, just to prove he hadn’t been lying or anything… “Alright… time for us to race home, Ponyta!”

They got home pretty quick, and Yuta let himself back in the house as both his parents had late shifts tonight. But they’d left him mac and cheese to warm up in the microwave, and he didn’t have to share the TV with Hina anymore, so that was pretty cool…

*Bring, bring. Bring, bring…*

Urg! It did mean he had to answer any PokéDex calls the house got, though… He really hoped this wasn’t anything important…

“Umm… Hello…?”

“Hey, Yuta!” Oh, good, it was just Hina ringing from her new school, “How’re you doing?”

“Oh, Hi, Hina! I’m fine! How’s school been?”

“Oh! It’s been awesome! Well, aside from all the tests, anyway… Pretty sure I did terribly at the maths one…” She sighed, “But, Sakura said she didn’t do well either, so it’s not too bad…”

“Well, that sounds good!” ‘Passable’ had always been considered a great maths score in their household… “Sakura’s the girl from the Gym in Kalos, right?” From what he’d heard when his parents spoke to her, Hina had been blathering on about her for ages on Saturday…

“Yes! She’s so cool!” Hina grinned excitedly, “She spent the whole of yesterday ripping up an entire garden worth of dead plants, with some help from a couple of the guys, just so her Florges could grow her own plants and feel more at home! And when we went swimming today, we had both Glaceon and her Snorunt in the pool together at the same time, and I had to get out ’cause it was so cold, but she was able to sit in there with them both from half an hour! She says it’s ’cause she’s used to cold temperatures ’cause she lives in a mountain region and sometimes goes out exploring and has to bath in cold rivers… I mean, how cool is that!? I can’t believe I’m in the same class as her! She’s amazing!”

“Yeah… sounds pretty cool…” Yuta agreed, even though he wasn’t really interested in some Gym leader… to be honest there was a trainer in her class he was way more interested about… “What’s Leon Kuwata like? You did some sports training with him, right?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, him…” Geez… how could she be so blasé about being in a class with the pokéathlon singles champ!? “He didn’t end up showing up to yesterday’s training, but he says he’s gonna train with me tomorrow evening, so I’ll let you know how it goes…”

“So, you’re getting one-on-one training with the pokéathlon champ!?” Aww man… She was so
lucky! “I’d do anything to get to hang around with him all by myself!”

“Well… It’s not gonna just be the two of us, ‘cause Sakura’s interested in what sports we do, so she’s gonna watch us as well…” Hina shrugged, “The area she lives in has no good signals, because it’s all so high up, so she’s never seen any sports broadcasts or talent shows before! Let alone any good movies! I was thinking I should try and rent out some good ones for use to watch together, you know, introduce her to some popular culture… and we could bake some poffins and order donuts while we watch them…”

…How had they gone from talking about Leon Kuwata to talking about that girl from Kalos again? Man, Hina was really obsessed with her…

“But, enough about me!” Hina finally said after talking about that other girl for about five minutes straight, “How’s your day been!”

“Eh… pretty normal back-to-school stuff…” Yuta summarised, “Oh! But Nurse Joy told me one of my teachers told her she’s worried about my Ponyta not trusting me because she doesn’t let me ride her…”

“Urgh… I bet it was the same teacher who told Officer Jenny I was forcibly stopping Marill from evolving!” Hina groaned.

“Wait… when did that happen!?” He didn’t remember Hina being in trouble with the police!

“Oh… last year, after Marill learnt Hydro pump… I mean, nothing happened, Jenny just spoke to him for a bit and decided that he obviously just didn’t want to evolve, but it’s still annoying that people see a pokémon that behaves slightly differently and assume it’s our fault! Or that we’re stupid trainers for letting out pokémon be happy instead of efficient!”

“Err… Who said that?” Jenny always said a happy pokémon was an efficient pokémon…

“Oh… Byakuya Togami. He’s a total creep!” Hina complained, “He had a fight against Sakura today, and he spent, like, twenty thousand pokédollars on TMs just to deal with her pokémon, because she had type advantage! And I was so sure she was going to win, but it turns out he’s got these stupidly well-bred pokémon that are almost impossible to beat! Not that that’s stopping Sakura, she was talking about what she can try to do to beat him while we were swimming, but…”

Okay… this was kinda funny now…

“Hey! What are you laughing at!?” Hina snapped as Yuta failed to stifle his laugh…

“Someone’s got a riii-vaaalll…!”

“You mean Sakura and Togami… I mean, they are pretty evenly matched…” Oh man… Hina was so oblivious to this stuff!

“Not him! You!” Yuta pointed out, “You’re obsessed with her! Everything you’ve talked about has ended up being about her!”

“Huuuh!? But… that’s just because she’d really nice and I like her!” Hina insisted, “We can’t be rivals!”

“Why not? Lots of friends are rivals with each other!” Yuta argued.

“But… I’m nowhere near as good as she is!”
“So? Don’t you want to be…?” Yuta asked.

“Well… it would be pretty nice to be as good as her…” Hina thought about it… “You’re right! I’m totally gonna train up my pokémon and become her rival! And then maybe when I’ve done that, I’ll wanna try and kick her butt!”

“Yeah! There you go!” Yuta cheered her on…

“But, if I’m gonna do that, I can’t sit around talking! I’ve gotta go pick a fight with someone!” Hina’s face disappeared off screen as she stood up, “Say ‘Hi’ to Mom and Dad for me!”

“Alright! Good luck with your rivalry!” Yuta waved her goodbye, but she was too excited to reply… typical Hina. She was going to make a totally awesome rival…

Of course, this meant that they’d probably never hear about anyone in her class except for that Sakura girl…

“Okay… Vanillite, you scooch over a little to the left… now Swirlix, come forward a little bit… Great! Now… Cherubi, you climb up and between them both…”

Ooohhh… That looked soooo yummy! “That’s perfect, you guys! Now hold that post while I draw you, okay!!?”

Her three pokémon all agreed in their cute little voices, and Fujiko hurried to sketch them all out as quickly as she could, without rushing too much of course! She might not be as good at drawing pokémon as Hifumi, but she still wasn’t going to be sloppy about it! Especially not as that dessert shop was paying good money for this advert… and mentioned something about a taste-test as well!

“…Okay, guys! I’m all done!” Her pokémon sighed in relief at her announcement, but still came over to have a look at how she’d drawn them all… “Hey! It’s not finished yet! I’ve still got to ink and colour this now, so go play or rest up in your pokéballs, then we’ll go show the result to that shop owner, alright?”

Vanillite was the first to start spinning around excitedly, having worked out why going to the shop owner was a good thing (because Fujiko could never resist dessert, whether or not it was free…), then she must have told the other two, because they all excitedly bounced off to rest in their pokéballs so she could work all the quicker…

Which had the unfortunate effect of making the house seem eerily quiet, now that Hifumi was off at his new school. To think, her little brother was off on an adventure at a place like Hope’s Peak! She hoped he was doing alright there by himself…

Maybe she could have a little chat with him, before she started inking…? She’d just try ringing his pokédex… hopefully now he was at a pokémon school he’d start carrying it with him now…

..., …, … Hmm… It sure was taking a while to pick…

“Greetings, what need do you have of Hifumi Yamada, novice adventurer!?”

Oh, good! He was fine! And in a good mood as well, it seemed! “Hi, Hifumi! It’s me! Fujiko!”

“Ah, my dear sister, I suppose this must be the farewell cutscene before the first morning of my new quest begins!” Hifumi announced… but that was what he’d said when she’d said goodbye to him on Saturday…
“You mean your adventure didn’t start already?”

“Err… no… not really” Hifumi looked disappointed. “It’s just been… tutorials, mostly…”

Tutorials? *Ooohh… “You mean warnings about local pokémon?”*

“Indeed!” Hifumi nodded, “But, rest assured, I have been informed that my true adventure shall start tomorrow, and have already visited the shops for the best level equipment for both myself and Dratini, along with all the supplies I had money for!”

…Hopefully that didn’t really mean he’d literally spent all his money on potions and such… but… “So you have new clo… new equipment? Can I see?”

“C-certainly!” The pokédex’s view shifted a bit as Hifumi put it down and stood up, moving away from the camera so she could see his entire body…

It looked a little too tight for him, but then, all his clothes always did. She was just surprised that anywhere had made proper resistant leather training gear in his size, let alone taken the time to make it look like a brown leather uniform, complete with what looked like a good quality, shiny plastic overlayer to help protect from most pokémon attacks…

“…I chose to go for function over form, of course!” Hifumi announced, a little while after he’d moved backwards, “That’s what any practical adventurer should do… isn’t that so…?”

Aww… he looked so self-conscious… not that she didn’t hate trying on new clothes either… “It looks spiffy! And very practical! Does it… give good defence boosts?”

“Yes! It certainly does!” Hifumi cheered up a little when she didn’t say anything mean about his new uniform, “Apparently it’s grade 5 protection! More than enough to help me deal with the random encounters in the first area of the world map!”

Wow, that was pretty impressive! “That’s great! And you said you’d got something for Dratini as well?”

“Yes! Dratini! Come and show Fujiko your new armour!”

“Draaaaa…” Fujiko could hear Dratini building up an excited roar off-camera… “TINI!”

Hifumi’s pokémon flew into the view of the camera, proudly showing off a toy knight’s helmet accessory that wasn’t quite fitted onto his head securely enough, as it kept rattling around as he showed off some light tacklets against Hifumi’s new ‘armour’.

“Ooh… that looks like it’ll do a lot of damage!” Fujiko decided to humour the Dratini.

“Indeed! Next time we have to face our new rival, we shall surely be victorious!” Hifumi announced. “Tini!” Dratini agreed with determination.

But… “What’s this about a rival!”?

“Err… Well… you know… part of the tutorial included an introduction to the battle system… against an opponent who… appeared to be at our level…” Hifumi looked embarrassed.

…Aww… did that mean he’d lost? The first battle he’d had since deciding he was going to take training his Dratini seriously and he’d lost it? No wondered he was pretending his adventure hadn’t actually started yet…
“But! All of that was merely introducing the nefarious Golett-master, Chihiro Fujisaki, as our rival in our great, upcoming adventure!” Hifumi insisted, “Tomorrow, I go out into the world, and the real beginning of my quest to capture Cresselia shall start!”

“Alright, brother!” Fujiko tried to cheer him on, “May fortune smile upon your quest!”

“Thank you, dear sister! I shall remember your parting words with great fondness on my adventure!” Hifumi told her, “But with that, I must depart and rest for tomorrow’s adventure!”

“Okay, goodbye!” Fujiko waved him goodbye, although she wasn’t sure if he’s actually heard it before turning off his pokédex…

Haaah… It was good to see him and Dratini excited about this, but she wished he wasn’t treating it like it was just a video game or something… If they weren’t careful, they might get into trouble, regardless of how good their new ‘armour’ was…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading. Next chapter will finally be the second day of school! (It'll start speeding up now, hopefully!)
Time for Adventure (Hifumi's Dratini POV pt. 1)

Chapter Notes

This is another time when I had an idea for one chapter that ended up being so long that I’ve split it up (because otherwise I wouldn’t have had time to play NDRV3). It’ll be in two parts.

‘Sandygast is born from grudges that seep into the sand’ according to its Bulbapedia description. But I’m thinking it’s more ‘regrets’ than grudges with Hagakure’s one.

New pokemon mentioned:
Combee: https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Combee_(Pokémon)
Vespiquen: https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Vespiquen_(Pokémon)
Foongus: https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Foongus_(Pokémon)
Also I hope it's apparent, but Dratini thinks life is just like an RPG.

*btz bzz bzzt…*

Urgh… Stupid pokédex with its stupid alarm function… Why had Hifumi even set that thing? It isn’t even bright out yet! And it isn’t like they’re doing anything important today, is it…?

OH! Wait, they are! Today’s the day the great Hifumi Yamada, along with his close companion Dratini, of course, will start their grand adventure to find the secret hiding place of the legendary Cresselia!

“Ngh… five more minutes…” …But Hifumi is still lying in bed, even after shutting off his alarm… looks like Dratini is going to have to remind him about their quest!

[Hifumi! Hifumi, wake up!] Dratini head-butts his trainer, hoping his new armour won’t hurt the guy…

“Ngh… Dratini…? What’s the matter…?” Hifumi groans in resonce.

Did he forget? Or is this just because every good adventure starts with the hero being woken up by a close companion…?

[It’s time for our ADVENTURE, remember!? Look, I’ve got my armour on and everything!] Dratini reminds him just in case, [So, come on!]

“Ah… You’re just excited to go outside…? What time is it even…?” Hifumi slowly starts to wake up and check the time as Dratini keeps prodding at him… “AHHHH! Cresselia made me sleep through my alarm! I’ve got to get up or I’ll be late for class!”

YES! There he goes! Hifumi shoots up out of bed in the traditional start-of-adventure way and rushes to go get his new armour on and check his inventory one last time, before inviting Dratini to lounge over his shoulders as usual so they can head off to eat breakfast before their first class outside… which will clearly be the first area where they can explore and start levelling up, now that they got all those tutorials done yesterday!
And once Dratini had levelling up some more, or maybe even evolved, Hifumi would be able to invite more pokémon on their quest to find the legendary, beautiful Cresselia… Dratini couldn’t wait to see her! He’d watched Hifumi’s pictures of her grow increasingly more wonderful as the boy had grown more skilled at drawing, to the point where it was almost possible to fall in love with the pictures themselves, but he’d never had the luck of having her visit his dreams and getting to see what she really looked like. But now that Hifumi had made it his quest to actually meet Cresselia in the real world, Dratini will eventually get to see her for once…

But, of course, that will probably take a long, long time…

“Ah, Yamada! You’re awake earlier than usual… Perfect, now you can make me my tea…”

“Ugh… Of course, Miss Ludenberg! I’ll go do that now!”

…Especially if that girl with the Weavile keeps wasting Hifumi’s time like this! It’s like he can’t go anywhere near the kitchen without her demanding tea from him… But there’s no way Dratini could fight off the Weavile yet, so Hifumi can’t help but do as she says. Still, it’s one more motivation to get stronger, right? If he does, then he can defend Hifumi from people like this annoying woman who never even thanks him for making her stupidly complicated tea…

But, for now, Hifumi rushes to the kitchen and makes her drink, along with breakfast for himself and Dratini, and takes it back for her to sip at cautiously…

“Hmm… You seem to be getting the hang of this…” She’s less rude about it than she has been the last few days… “Almost. Anyway. Perhaps if you manage to get it right, I might promote you to D rank and let you sit in my vicinity…”

Wait… promotion? Ranks!? Is this a side quest!? So if Hifumi manages to level up his tea making ability enough, maybe she’d give them some good items and this wouldn’t have been such a waste of time after all!

“Ah… alright, Miss Ludenberg! I’ll leave you to your tea!” Hifumi stammers and heads off to sit with the boy with the ghost on his head again… Which would be fine with Dratini, if the ghost wasn’t such so depressing to talk to, with all her talk of children getting lost and/or drowning at the beach…

But, today, she seems to be in a slightly happier mood, talking instead about how she won’t let that sort of thing happen to ‘this nice little boy’, which Dratini thinks is referring to her trainer, while the two boys discuss what they think will happen once they head outside…

“…I wonder if Mr Kizakura will have some sort of task for us to complete…?” Hifumi asks.

“Like, finding a particular pokémon or something? I’ve been in schools where they specifically hid pokémon in an area and made us look for them…” The other boy suggests, “But it didn’t come up in any of my predictions on it…”

“You did some predictions about today’s class!? Did you get anything about me…?”

“Hmm… No. But then, I didn’t really try to get anything about you…” The other boy explains, “Buuuut, I could read your fortune, if you’re willing to part with some pokédollars….”

Ahh… so it’s one of those mechanics, where you pay to have the next step of the main quest explained to you. Useful if they got stuck, but not something for Hifumi to use before they’d even started the adventure.
“Unfortunately, I spent most of my cash on curatives…” Hifumi’s thinking is along the same line as Dratini’s, although he’s subtler about it, “But I’ll let you know once I’ve done a few more commissions!”

“Awesome!” The fortune teller is incredibly happy about that. “You won’t regret it! Trust me! My predictions are better than this rice and miso!”

“…Is that particularly good…?” Hifumi mutters, as he opens up another packet of potato chips…

This starts a conversation about Hifumi’s diet and choice of breakfast, which is cut short by the school bell warning them to get to class, which they do with plenty of time to spare before the white-suited man who was giving them tutorials yesterday comes into the class...

“Good morning, everyone…”

“Good morning, SIR!” The loud boy with the Arcanine at the front replies enthusiastically, shocking most of the people Dratini can see…

“…Thanks…” The tutor blinks in surprise, “Anyway… Today’s lesson is the first of many that you will be having in the wild field area! So everyone get up and line up in the corridor outside, preferably in an orderly fashion so Jin thinks I’m actually a competent teacher…”

The students around Hifumi all stand, although Hifumi is one of the slower ones to get up, meaning he ends up walking out of the door just as the man in white is about to head out himself…

“Yo, Oowada, you coming…?” The tutorial man pauses as he notices that boy with the powered-up hair at the back corner of the classroom hasn’t left his seat, “Oowada…? HEY! OOWADA!”

“Huuh!? Wha…!?!” The boy jolts upwards and looks at the empty chairs around him, “Shit… Did I sleep through the whole class!?”

“No… we’re going outside this morning, remember?”

“Oh, right… my bad.” He quickly gets up and follows the rest of the class out into the hallway…

“Honestly… falling asleep in the first class of the day…” The boy with the short black hair mutters loudly, “Hardly the sort of professional behaviour you’d expect from a Gym…”

“Oh screw you! I had shit that I needed ta do, so I stayed up late! How’s that not fucking professional!?”

“Err… well…” The other boy clearly wasn’t expecting that.

“What could possibly be so important that you forego vital slee…!?”

“Ishimaru…” The tutorial NPC cuts in warningly, “What Oowada does in his free time is none of your business.”

“Nrgh... I suppose not. My apologies…”

“Now… We’re all heading over to the field area!” The tutor changes the topic, “Fukawa can lead, unless she manages to get lost again…”

“Th-that was only b-because it got dark earlier than I expected! Y-you should have some lighting installed or something!” One of the girls complains.

“…Wouldn’t it be better if you just took a torch…?” Another girl asks.
“Urg… well… j-just SHUT UP and c-come on!” The first girl snaps and starts stalking away from the group, who all follow after her.

“Y’know…I appreciate you taking my side, there…” Dratini can hear the boy with the large hair muttering quietly to the man in white, “…but I coulda dealt with that hardass myself!”

“Yeah, I know, but I’d appreciate it if you don’t tell the whole class about the DPTL course, yet…” The man mutters back, “I’d rather not have to explain to certain people why they ain’t on it.”

“HAH! Gotcha!” The boy laughs quietly, “I’ll keep it on the low-down then…”

“Thanks, kid.”

They fall silent, leaving Dratini to listen to a hubbub of muttered conversations about what everyone plans to do outside as they all walk through several hallways to a small door Dratini hasn’t ever seen before…

The door… TO ADVENTURE!

…Or at least, a door that leads to several more gravel paths that should probably lead to adventure…

“Alright, everyone gather over on that field!”

“What!? But it’s muddy!” Another girl whines, “And I’m wearing heels!”

“That’s why I told you to have appropriate footwear, Enoshima…” The tutor sighs, “There were plenty of walking boots in the store…”

“Like I’m going to go around wearing those ugly things!?” She scowls.

“Well, it’s that or walk through the mud in heels…”

“…Or get Mukuro to gimme a lift!” She smiles gleefully at her own idea.

“Ah! Well… I think I ought to be strong enough to give you a piggyback…” The girl next to her offers anxiously, “You are pretty light…”

“I meant my Pokémon!” The first girl rolls her eyes and summons a Milotic and begins climbing on its back. “But, I guess that’s an option if she faints…”

"Alright… now if no one else has any complaints…" The tutorial NPC sighs, gesturing for everyone to gather on the field. "Now, today I'm just going to let you guys head out and get a feel for the field area... But I have a few things I need to tell you before I let you all loose out here… Firstly, you’re staying in the field areas, but even if we weren’t, none of you are allowed on the boats on the lake until you’ve all had a nice long lesson on how to use them safely, seeing as one of you managed to drop his oar over the side last night!"

“Shouldn’t you have done that anyway…?” One of the girls mutters, but the majority of the class are muttering irritably and have followed the tutor’s gaze over to the other dragon-type trainer in the class, although he doesn’t react at all to the comment.

“Also, one thing Todd didn’t mention about this area is that we have a farm area and a Combee hive over to the south west…” The tutorial man tells them all, pointing in the right direction. “But, it’s a working farm, and the hive belongs to one of the third-years, so no going in and causing trouble! Anything that wanders out of the farm area is fair game though.”
All the younger humans nod in agreement… Alright, this is it! No more tutorials! *Time for adventure!*

“Now, just one more thing before you all head off…” …Okay, *one* more tutorial, and then *time for adventure!* “We expect every trainer to have at least one of their pokémon ready to fight at *all times*, so if you can all get your pokémon out now…”

Why was he saying *that*!? Hifumi had done that already!

“*And that includes not wearing them around your necks*…”

*Oops.* Looks like Dratini needs to start flying around for himself for once… Although the tutorial guy seems like he’s paying more attention to the girl with the Comfey around her neck than to Hifumi…

She eventually takes off her Comfey, but keeps a hand around it so it’s unable to fly off and fight something like it’s asking to. Meanwhile, he can hear several other pokémon reacting to being summoned, most noticeably the Arcanine…

*[Wow! New place! Pretty, new place! Lots of stuff! OH! POKÉMON! I smell pokémon! New pokémon! Quick, Kiyotaka! Let’s go! Before they all run away! Let’s…!]*

“Ahaahaha! Settle down, Arcanine… Arcanine, this is a *class*, you need to be quiet!” Its trainer tries to calm it down, but it has no effect…

*[Let’s go let’s go let’s…]*

*SNAP* “Arcanine *sit!*** This time the trainer tries using a stun spell instead, which seems to be immediately effective…

*[Okay! Sitting!]*

“*Good boy!*”

So, now that everyone’s done that, it’s time for adventure, right!?

“Hey, Oowada! You fall asleep again!?” Apparently not… The tutorial man’s noticed someone hasn’t got their pokémon out…

“No! It’s just… Can’t I wait till we’re somewhere shady?” The tall man with odd hair complains, “Lycanroc’s a *Midnight* form, he ain’t exactly supposed to be hanging out in the *sun*!”

“Sorry, kid, rules are rules.” Tutortial man shrugs, “You’ll just have to cover his eyes or something…”

“Fine…” The tall man replies and brandishes a pokéball.

*[Hah! Out!] Eep… Dratini almost forgot how scary that Lycanroc is! But at least this time his trainer puts a hand over his face as soon as he emerges… […] The *hell?* Mondo, quit covering my eyes! […] Except the wolf pushes it off straight away, only to flinch at the bright sky… [Argh! Fucking sun! That hurts!]*

“You dumbass… Lemme cover your eyes so the light won’t hurt ya!” The Lycanroc’s trainer snaps, putting his hand back where it was.

*[Fine, but this better not be for long…] The wolf behaves, reluctantly.*
“Okay… now that everyone’s ready, you’ve now got just over an hour to go out and explore however you want…” The tutorial character tells them all, “Starting now!”

“Alright, Lycan, looks like there’ll be some shade over by that hill over there, so you head out there and I’ll catch up on foot, alright?”

[Got it!] Oh good, that wolf’s going away…

[OH! RACE! Raceracerace…] And so is the Arcanine, apparently!

“Ah! Arcanine! Not you! Wait! Heel!”

[Oh! Right! Gotta stay with you!] The dog stops in its tracks and turns back to its owner.

“Why the fuck should he?” The wolf’s trainer asks the other loud man, “Would it kill ya ta let him run off and have some fun?”

“It’s not that I don’t want him to have fun! It’s just he has a tendency to get hurt if I let him run off by himself.”

“What, you think he’s too stupid for you to even let him run off over there!? It’s not like you wouldn’t be able to see him!”

[Umm… Well…] The dog whines sadly at the accusation.

“Arcanine is NOT stupid!” The dog’s trainer shouts angrily, “He… he just… tends to get a little over-excited when he finds new things and needs me to remind him not to try and eat or play with them if they’re dangerous! Like most dogs!”

“Ha! I never heard of any dogs that were that dumb! My Rockruff certainly wasn’t!” The other boy laughs.

“I just said, he isn’t…!”

“Whatever, I gotta go catch up to Lycan or he’ll wonder what the fuck happened to me…” The taller boy leaves the shorter one spluttering in annoyance and heads off towards the hills.

…He’s far from the only one. Most of the class slowly begins to walk away from the teacher. The only ones not leaving so far are the dread Fujisaki, who’s setting up some weird machinery, the boy in white, who’s insistently telling his dog it isn’t stupid and Hifumi, who is looking around the area thoughtfully…

“Something the matter, Yamada?” The tutorial man asks.

“Err… I was just wondering if there's anything you'd recommend doing out here?” Hifumi tells him. Of course! They haven’t been given any quests or anything…

“No, nothing like that. This is just some free time for each of you to work on your own specific talents as trainers!” The tutorial man tells them, “So, just do whatever your number one priority would normally be when you find a new area!”

“Ah! I see! The number one adventuring tip!” Hifumi exclaims, “’Talk to everyone!’”

“…Huh. Gotta admit, that’s one I’ve not heard before…” The man in white admits, ”But sure, go do that!”
“Certainly!” Hifumi turns away from him, towards the closest person to him… Which is Fujisaki…

“Hmm… well, I suppose I should make an attempt to discover what my rival is up to…”

With that aim in mind, he begins to walk over to the Golett trainer… only for said Golett to run up in front of him, arms out forward in a blocking position…

[No pokémon is authorised to come within 2 meters of Chihiro Fujisaki, by order of Chihiro Fujisaki!]

“Eh!? Is this some sort of challenge!?” Hifumi stops cautiously, “You could at least face me while making it, Fujisaki!”

“Huh!?” Fujisaki turns away from their computer, looking slightly guilty, “Oh… sorry, I’m not challenging you! But, could you please not come any closer? I’m trying to scan the area and make a map of the general pokémon locations in the area, but if there’s too many people or pokémon close to the scanner, it kinda bugs out on me…”

“I see… and that’s a good idea… no good adventurer would set out without a map of the area!” Hifumi mutters with concern, “Where did you get that equipment?”

“This? I made it myself!” Fujisaki replies, “Umm… But once I’ve collected the data, I can transfer it to your pokédex, so you could use it as well! That might actually help me out, if multiple people are testing if it’s accurate…”

[Why would they help us like that?] Isn’t Fujisaki Hifumi’s rival?

“…I know it’s probably a trap, but we should play along for now…” Hifumi whispers, being so in tune with Dratini that it’s as if he actually understood his question. “That will be a great boon on my quest! How long will it take?”

“Umm… I’m not sure… exactly…” Fujisaki stares away from their screen as they try to work it out. “It’ll probably be a while though, I’d suggest doing something else while you wait…”

Ah… So, either leave the area and come back, or trigger a different event…

“Understood! I’ll go carry on with my own objective, then!” Hifumi tells them, then heads around the area the Golett is blocking and back towards the trainer with with Arcanine…

“And you know letters! That’s clever!” Who is still telling his dog it’s smart. “It’s so clever Togami didn’t even think it was possible, and he knows lots of dogs!”

[Well… I guess you’d know!] The dog cheers up and rubs its face against its owner’s. [‘Cause you’re really smart and know all about pokémon and… OH! POKÉMON! I smell pokémon! Quick! Over here!]

“Ahh!” The trainer in white quickly jumps up in surprise as his dog leaps to attention and runs over to a patch of leafy plants and pokes it’s nose towards them… “Did you find something…? Oh! A Wurmple! Good boy, well spotted!”

[Yay! I’m a good boy!] The dog sits proudly while it’s trainer gets out his pokédex and begins to scan it, [And good boys get pettings, poffins and primping time!]

“Ahh… so, you use your Arcanine to sniff out new types of pokémon?” Hifumi asks the dog trainer. “Well… it’s not always new pokémon… but Arcanine is good at sniffing them out for me!”
“Well, it certainly makes more sense as to why you don’t want him running off without you!” Hifumi tells him, “But… wouldn’t it be more efficient if he started searching the area nearby while your scanning this one?”

“Ah… Well… it would… but as I was saying to Oowada, he tends to get overexcited and…” The other trainer begins to repeat his previous explanation…

“I heard… but couldn’t he just search somewhere close by where you can still see him?” Hifumi asks him, “Surely he doesn’t need to literally be right next to you to stay safe, does he!?"

“Nghg… Well…” His first reaction seems to suggest that he thinks it might. “Hmm… maybe Togami and Oowada have a point… Maybe I am coddling him a little too much and he’d deal better with things by himself if I let him try and be a little more independent more often…”

“Well… I doubt he’d manage to get into trouble sniffing around that patch of grass over there!” Hifumi tells the boy…

“Well, it looks pretty tame…” The boy looks it over, then nods in determination, “How about it, Arcanine? How’d you like to try looking around by yourself for a little while? Without me!?"

[Without YOU!?] The dog obviously doesn’t like it at all.

“I don’t mean you have to go far! But… while I’m recording these pokémon, why don’t you see if you can sniff out any new ones in that patch of grass just over there… where we can still see each other!”

[I dunno… what if you don’t notice when I’m gonna do something dumb?]

“You’ll be fine! Just remember that other pokémon aren’t food, and wild pokémon aren’t friends! Got it?”

[Hmm… Other pokémon not food! Wild pokémon not friends! I can remember that…]

“Alright! And if you have any trouble, I’ll right here, okay?”

[Okay!] The big dog heads the short distance over to snuffle in the patch of grass, [Other pokémon not food… wild pokémon not friends… Other pokémon not…]

“…Why is it taking such a long time for you to register that pokémon?” Meanwhile, Hifumi decides to talk to the dog’s owner again.

“Hmm? Ah, I’m not just registering it! I’m recording it’s data into the pokédex research initiative! That way I can help monitor it’s movement and growth in the wild! Haven’t you ever heard of it!?"

“Well… this is my first time amongst wild pokémon…”

“Hmm… I see… Well, in that case, let me show you how to set up your pokédex to record data!”

Aww… another tutorial? Dratini’s getting really bored of these now… And it’s not even something Dratini can help Hifumi do, even if he is pretty clever!

Hmm… He’s clever enough to go look around by himself, to, isn’t he? He’s definitely smarter than the dog! Alright! Time to ‘talk to everyone’!

The dog is closest, so Dratini starts there…
When Dratini first arrives, the dog is still just repeating it’s owner’s advice while sniffing around the grass, but just as he’s about to assume that’s all the dialogue it’ll have, it suddenly perks up and bounds over to something hidden in the grass… [Oh! Pokémon! Kiyotaka! I found a pokémon!]

“Ah! Perfect!” The dog’s trainer shouts back at it, “Try and keep it there, but be careful, it might attack!”

It looks more like a pokéball to Dratini, but whatever it is doesn’t look like it’s going to move anywhere. Not that that stops the dog from staring at it carefully.

[Okay… Keep it here… Wild pokémon not friends… Keep it here… Wild pokémon not friends… *sniff sniff* Smells yummy though… Oh! It’s food! Gotta eat all the food…]

[Didn’t your trainer tell you not to eat other pokémon…?] Dratini’s question is too late, as the dog moves its head forward, mouth wide open…

Which means it’s caught right in the blast when a thick purple cloud emits from the top of the pokéball-looking part…

[AHH! Urgh! Yucky! Owwww!] The dog whimpers and runs away from the trap it just sprung, back towards its owner… as does Dratini, of course.

“Ahh! What just happened!?”

“Well… it looks like your Arcanine attempted to eat a Foongus, Mr. Ishimaru…”

“A Foongus!? Argh… good thing I got a lot of pecha berries this morning!” The other boy starts rummaging around in his bag, “Arcanine, come back here, quickly!”

The other pokémon tries to obey him, but the poison is already making its movements slow and sluggish, and its trainer ends up closing the last distance between them in order to try and shove something into its mouth…

[Not hungry… Feel yucky…]

“Come on… It’s a Pecha Berry! It’ll stop the poison! Be a good boy and eat it… Please?”

[‘Kay… I’m a good boy…] The dog slowly opens its mouth and eats the berry, chewing it slowly at first, but then speeding up as it seems to work and make the dog feel better, [Yay! Better now! Thanks, Kiyotaka! You’re the best!]

“Ahaa! I’m glad you’re better…” The dog’s trainer laughs as it licks over his face, but then turns more serious and gently grabs the dog’s face… “But… this is why you can’t eat other pokémon!”

[Sorry…I forgot again…] The dog whimpers in apology, [I’m a dumb dog…]

“Argh… I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be harsh. I just worry about you getting sick!” The dog’s trainer regrets being harsh with it immediately, “But… it was just a little mistake! Don’t let it discourage you! I’m sure you can do this if you keep trying! Just remember not to eat any other pokémon!”

[Alright!] The dog stands back up and heads back towards the grass, although this time it’s trainer keeps an eye on it as it starts to sniff around… [Don’t eat other pokémon, don’t eat other pokémon…]
Hmm… well, that was interesting, but not very helpful to their quest…

“Umm… Ishimaru-dono?” Hifumi catches the other boys attention, “What was that you fed your Arcanine? It didn’t look like the poison-cures sold in the store…”

“…It was a pecha berry! I grow them myself!”

“And… it just works like a poison-cure!?”

“Yes! Wait… have you never seen them before? What about Sitrus berries…? Or Rawst berries…? Leppa berries…?” The boy in white seems increasingly amazed as Hifumi admits to not knowing about them, “Well… Here, let me show you! And I can give you some to start growing for yourself, if you want! They’re much more cost effective than buying medicines…”

Looks like that event with the Arcanine has triggered another tutorial, and it looks like it’ll be a long one! Maybe Dratini can try talking to that Golett and see if the map is ready now…

[No pokémon is authorised to come within 2 meters of Chihiro Fujisaki, by order of Chihiro Fujisaki!] The Golett moves its arms into blocking position and repeats the same dialogue as before as soon as Dratini gets close to it.

[…Any idea how long that’ll be in effect for?] This might really be a ‘leave the area and come back’ job…

[Order is to be followed at all times when Oowada and/or his Lycanroc and/or Ishimaru and/or his Arcanine are within visible and/or auditory range! By order of Chihiro Fujisaki!]

Ohhhh… So that's the trigger! They have to get the dog and it’s trainer to leave before the map will be available… So that means Dratini should go and try talking to the dog again…

[…eat other pokémon, don’t eat other pokémon, don’t…Oh!] The dog is still reminding itself of it’s owner’s order while it sniffs around the grass, but suddenly picks up a scent and scampers towards a Combee which has stopped to take nectar from a few nearby flowers… [New Pokémon!]

[Ahh! Big dog!] The Combee panics, [Going to eat our nectar! Back to the Hive!]

[Hmm… You do smell yummy, but Kiyotaka said no eating pokémon!] The dog actually remembers this time. Not that it calms the Combee down any, as it still flaps its wings wildly as it begins to quickly fly away, with the dog watching curiously. [Oh? Where are you going!??]

[Back to Hive, back to Hive, back to Hive…!] The Combee just continues to panic and fly away from the dog… or tries to. Unfortunately for it, the Arcanine just starts to amble along behind it…

[Hive? Oh! That’s Bug-Type for ‘home’! Like where Weedles live, Right!? So you’re going home? Can I come!? I’ve never visited a friend’s home before…!]

That’s all Dratini hears before the dog is out of earshot and rapidly increasing its speed as the Combee puts more effort into the attempt to get away from it…

“Umm… Ishimaru!??” Fujisaki shouts over from their computer, “Your Arcanine just started following a Combee… and it looks like it’s headed over to that farm area…”

“What!?” The trainer in white looks away from talking to Hifumi, “OH GODS! The HIVE! ARCANINE! ARCANINE, STOP! COME BACK HERE! ARCANINE WAAAAAAAIITTT!”
The dog’s trainer runs off in the direction of the two rapidly-disappearing pokémon far faster than Dratini has ever seen a human move before, yelling all the way… which means Fujisaki’s Gollett ought to be finished it’s guard duty…

“Ahh… perhaps I shouldn’t have distracted him…” Hifumi frowns off into the distance.

“Hmm… I don’t think that Combee’s going too fast… he should be able to catch up to them before they get to the hive, if he keeps running like that…” Fujisaki assures him.

“How can you tell…? Ah! I take it that means your map is ready!” Hifumi realises.

“Oh… yeah! I just got done scanning the area…” Yes! Dratini knew it! “If you want to bring over your pokédex I can transfer the data…”

“Certainly!” Hifumi heads over to Fujisaki cautiously, in case there are any traps in the area, but it seems that whatever trick Fujisaki has planned is not going to trigger yet, as Hifumi just connects his pokédex to the computer and Fujisaki starts giving him the map tutorial…

…This is getting boring again. Who knew adventuring meant waiting around so much? Maybe the Golett has something to say, now it’s just sat still on the ground with an intense look on its face…

[…Thinking about something?]

[Negatory! Threat detection mode initiated! Status: No threats detected!]

Well, that’s obviously not going to be relevant for a while, but there’s no other pokémon around here for Dratini to talk to…

But, Dratini did see where all the other pokémon headed off to… and he’s pretty good at this adventuring stuff so far, right? He could probably head off by himself and kick-start a few more events for Hifumi, while the map tutorial is still running. After all, he’s a lot smarter than that dog is! He won’t get into any trouble!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Hifumi is so focused on Fujisaki and the map that he doesn’t react to Dratini heading off down the same dry muddy path that most of the other students followed when the tutorial ended. Not that there’s any reason for him to worry… there’s very few pokémon here, and most of them seem pretty docile, so as long as Dratini sticks to the paths he shouldn’t have anything to worry about, even though the amount of small hills in the area make it difficult to see what’s coming up just ahead…

The first two students Dratini comes across seem to have decided to use that as an opportunity to relax, away from the tutor. Sat at a small folding set of table and chairs is the girl who keeps pestering Hifumi for tea, along with her Weavile, and the boy with large red hair, whose Luxray is curled around his feet and looks like it’s taking a nap while its owner…

…Well, Dratini’s first guess is that he’s counting money with the other girl, as there is a big pile of it in the middle of the table, but then the pair each hold a set of playing cards out in front of them…

“Looks like I win again!” The girl pulls the pile of pokédollars towards her…

“This is bullshit!” The boy throws his card on the table angrily, “I bet you trained your damn Weavile to sneak you better hands or something!”

[Why does everyone always accuse me of that?] The Weavile scowls, [I don’t even know how to do that!]

“Hmm… well, if you’re so sure that Weavile’s cheating for me, why don’t we split the money and start again with you shuffling and dealing?” The girl offers, “But at double the stakes, to make up for the wasted time…”

“You are on!” The boy agrees, taking back half the money and all the cards, counting to make sure they’re all there.

“Very well… In the meantime, Weavile, I believe the sun has shifted. Do be a dear and adjust the parasol so it’s covering me again?”

[Yes, ma’am.] The Weavile nods politely and starts to fiddle around with the pole while the boy deals out a new hand of cards to himself and the girl.
The pair spend a while taking more cards and placing large amounts of money in the centre of the table, before revealing their hands…

“Heh… Let’s see you beat a straight flush!” The boy grins.

“Very well… Royal flush!” The girl smiles as she reveals her hand.

“Goddammit, are you kidding me!” The boy scowls as she takes the money, “Alright, you lucked out, but now you’re not cheating, I can win this!”

[That’s what they all say…] The Weavile chuckles.

Well, it looks like this is just some gambling minigame for the humans, not something Dratini can get involved in. Good thing Hifumi already spent all his money on their inventory though, given how high the game’s difficulty seems to be set.

Seeing as there’s nothing to do here, Dratini carries on down the path as it winds between the grass and flowers until he spots the giant form of the Milotic in a patch of grass and heads over to see what she and its trainer are up to…

It just looks like they’re fighting some of the nearby pokémon, which must be pretty tough on the Milotic, given that its trainer is still riding it.

“Urg! Mukuro, why are you being so slow!?” The Milotic’s trainer suddenly complains from atop its back, “Don’t tell me you’re tired already!”

[S-sorry, Junko! But… with all this extra weight…]

“What the hell are you looking at!? Are you looking at me!? You’re not saying it’s because I’m fat, are you!?”

[N-no! Of course not! You’re much less fat than me!] The Milotic panics, before jangling the many spangely metal things all over her body… [It’s just with all these accessories…]

“Hey! What the hell!? Are you trying to shake me off!? You ungrateful bitch!”

[N-no! I was j-just…!]

“Umm… I think she’s just trying to say that it’s her jewellery that’s heavy, not you…” A second girl’s voice joins the conversation, belonging to the Comfey… owner.

“Well, what am I supposed to do about that!? Take it off and let people see how ugly you really are!?” The Milotic trainer complains ludicrously, “You want people to still think you’re an ugly Feebas!? Is that it!?”

[No! No that!] The Milotic looks like its going to cry at the suggestion, which is ridiculous, because it’s clearly not a Feebas, or even that unattractive (at least, not compared to other normal pokémon).

“Well, then suck it up and get moving!” The Milotic’s trainer digs her heel into the pokémon’s side, “Unless you wanna stop training and get your ass kicked by that dog again!”

[O-okay…] The Milotic sighs and begins to move.

[Hey… Ikusaba!] Dratini can just about hear the tiny voice of the Comfey, [Maybe if Mukuro’s too tired, then I can fight some of the pokémon!]
“Comfey, stop that.” It’s trainer replies, as she starts to follow the Milotic. “Junko already said all the pokémon here are too strong for you.”

[But at least let me help!] The Comfey whines, [Or I’ll never get strong like you are!]

“Comfey, I said stop that!” Dratini hears the second girl snap, just before the group get too far away to hear anymore…

Urrgh… as much as Dratini hates to see the pair of pokémon in distress, there’s nothing he can really do to stop the two humans upsetting them right now… not unless he attacks them directly, or something crazy like that, but every captured pokémon knows that’s a really bad thing to do… If Hifumi was here, perhaps he’d have been able to talk to them…

Should he really have come here by himself? That’s been two events in a row that seemed to be human-specific. Perhaps if the next people he sees don’t give him any events to trigger, then he can head back and see if Hifumi is finished with the map yet…

There’s a fork in the path up ahead. But with no map, Dratini has no idea which is the correct path to take… But usually Hifumi always takes the left hand path in these situations, so that’s what Dratini does, following it along past a flock of Pidgeys until it merges back with the other path at a crossroad being manned by the energetic girl and her min-maxed Marill…

She looks like she’s on guard, but she’s completely ignoring the path Dratini took and is only focused on the other path on the right side… Perhaps she’s heard some hint that there’s something important that will come from there…?

[Hey there! What are you doing?] Dratini asks her pokémon, which is currently sat fidgeting on her shoulder.

[Oh! Hi Dratini!] The Marill acts like they’re familiar, even though they’ve never talked to each other before now. [We’re waiting for Sakura, so Hina can challenge her to a rival battle when she tries to come past!] The Marill excitedly explains, pointing to the other path Dratini could have taken. [She should be coming up that path pretty soon!]

…Well, it doesn’t look like anyone is coming up yet, much to the obvious annoyance of the girl who was impatiently pacing around the crossroads. That either means he has to wait, or he needs to go back up the other path and see what the missing girl is doing…

Well, he’s got to come back this way to get back to Hifumi, so he might as well head further up for now and trigger this event by taking the other path on the way back!

It doesn’t take long for another trainer to come into view. This time it’s that huge girl with the Florges, who is currently looking over some of the plants lining the path through the meadows…

[…]Now these would be lovely! Oh, and these!] The Florges turns away from some flowers and towards her trainer, [Sakura? Do we have time for me to take some for the garden?]

“…You want to take some of the flowers here?” The Florges trainer quickly realises what the fairy wants, “Hmm… it would be nice to give Hina an opportunity to catch up with us…”

[Thank you!] The Florges happily begins working at the soil around one of the plants…

But hang on, didn’t that Marill say Hina was expecting Sakura to be behind her? So she’d been passed by without realising it! Well, that probably means Dratini should go back and tell her that the girl she was waiting for was up ahead already…
“Urgh! This is getting annoying now! I wonder if she got into trouble or something…” Luckily for Dratini, the impatient girl is still at the same point where he left her.

[Wait! Don’t do that!] Dratini rushes to warn them, [They’ve already gone past you!]

[Huh!? You mean they got here first!? But we ran super-fast!] The Marill seems shocked, even though its trainer is far smaller than the other girl, [Argh…! Hina, come on! We’ve got to get going!] The Marill hops off his owner’s shoulder and heads towards Dratini.

“Huh? Marill, what are you doing?” The trainer follows her pokémon as well, “Did Dratini tell you something?”

[No time to explain! Come on!] The Marill carries on bouncing towards Dratini, and so all three of them end up heading back towards the large female trainer…

“Wait… Sakura!? You were ahead of me!?” The smaller cries at the sight of the larger one.

Apparently so… I am quite used to moving through tough terrain…” The taller girl explains hesitantly, “You seem upset… Were you hoping you’d have left me behind so you could train by yourself…?”

“Ahh! No! Nothing like that! I like hanging out with you!” The shorter girl’s face turns slightly red, “I just thought I’d managed to run through there super-fast and could have… uhh… surprised you!”

“A surprise? What did you have in mind?”

“Uhhh… w-well… It won’t be much of a surprise if I tell you now, will it?” The smaller girl looks embarrassed at the question, “Ah heh heh heh…”

“…Well, I’m sure I’ll enjoy whatever you have in mind…” The larger girl tells her, with a slight blush on her cheeks, “I hope you do not mind waiting a while for Florges to take some plants for the class garden…”

“Ahh… Nope! I don’t mind waiting for you!”

[Ahhhhhhhhh… More waiting…?] The Marill sighs so deeply that it almost falls off of its trainer’s shoulder.

“Uhh hahaha… But maybe I ought to switch out Marill for Glaceon… He gets antsy sitting around…”

She switches out her Marill for the Glaceon, who looks annoyed until it realises that it all it has to do is sit in the shade of its trainer while she talks to the other girl…

Well, it seems like this is as far as this side-quest is going for now. No point in Dratini hanging around here, so he heads up the, now single, path once again…

Further up ahead, in yet another patch of tall grass lining the road, is the purple-haired girl who sits at the back of the class, being closely guarded by her Crobat as she crouches around in the grass… Perhaps she’s found something… or this is a lost item side-quest… Either way, Dratini should check it out!

[Kyoko! Behind you!] The bat shrieks as he begins to approach.
“Hmm?” The girl turns to face Dratini, “…Yamada’s Dratini? By itself? Is it lost?”

[No, I’m just exploring by myself!] Dratini shakes his head, as the human wouldn’t understand otherwise.

“No? Odd… I wasn’t expecting them to catch up so quickly… But I don’t really care, so long as you both stay away and don’t disturb these tracks.”

[Okay!] Dratini nods her head at her, which is enough for her to go back to what she was doing while the Crobat keeps an eye on him… [What’s she doing there, anyway?]

[Working out which pokémon have been through here and where they went!] The bat answers.

Well, that sounds like a useful thing to learn! [How can she do that?]

[She uses her detective skills!] It’s not the most useful answer, Dratini’s not aware of Hifumi having access to that skill tree… [Wait a bit and you’ll see!]

Alright, Dratini might as well do that…

“Alright… There’s clearly been something big that moved through here, judging from the way the grass is bent, I suspect it’s quite recent to…” The light purple haired girl frowns deeply at the ground she had just been searching around, before suddenly stopping with a sigh, “…No, wait. Nevermind. It’s just Naegi’s Blastoise. He probably decided it would be a good idea to go up the hill to get his bearings…”

[Damn!] The bat curses as its owner stands up and shakes the dirt off of her clothes with gloved hands…

“Alright, at least that gives us a direction not to go in. The last thing I need is him blundering around while I’m trying to get a feel for the area!” She turns in the opposite direction to the one she’d been facing previously, pausing only to say one last thing to Dratini, “But you’d probably do well to team up with him.”

Well, that seems like a pretty obvious plot hook, and the girl is heading back the way Dratini came, so he might as well head off in the direction that the big Blastoise is supposed to be in…

As the girl said, the ground ahead of Dratini soon begins to rise steeply. Not that that is a problem for him, as he hovers above the ground regardless of how steep it is. Because of this, it’s not long before he catches up with the Blastoise, which is slowly struggling up the hill along with its trainer, both of them wheezing heavily as they go…

“You… alright there…?” The smallest human boy in the class gasps, “You need a break?”

[…] It’s alright…] The tortoise looks tempted but eventually shakes its head.

“Yeah… I guess we’re almost there!” The human nods back, “We can just rest at the top!”

The Blastoise nods with determination and keeps slowly plodding up the hill, and both are easily overtaken by Dratini once he gets bored of waiting for them to get up the hill.

“Huuh…? Is that… Yamada’s…?” He hears the boy recognise him as he passes, but he might as well wait to see if he has anything specific to say to him once they all get to the top of the hill…

Oh, wow! This hills popular! There’s already two other trainers having a conversation up here,
which now means he’s only got three more people in the class left to find! But for now, the boy with the Sandygast on his head is proudly showing a net to the girl with blue hair, who currently has her Espurr out and stood next to her…

“…Is that a fishing net?” The girl asks him in confusion.

“Yep! Gonna need this baby pretty soon!”

“But… we’re not allowed near the water…” The girl carries on questioning him, “And how would it help up the top of a hill?”

“I dunno! I just had a prediction I should bring it up here today!” The boy answers her, shrugging.

[…]He always this stupid?] The Espurr suddenly asks quietly, barely moving its face and eyes towards the Sandygast as it asks… although, compared to all the Espurrs Hifumi’s drawn before, that’s nigh on chatty.

[He’s a good boy…] The ghost insists, [And I’d rather he play with the net up here, instead of getting foolish ideas about taking it to the beach and messing about in the sea…]

“Hey, what about you?” The boy in question suddenly asks the girl, “How come you’re up here?”

“Umm… I guess I just had a good feeling about it?” She answers, “And it’s probably a good place to see where everything is, too. I’m surprised it’s just us two up here!”

“Well, it won’t be for long!” The Sandygast trainer tells her.

“Let me guess… another prediction…?” The girl smiles wryly… “…Or is someone just coming up the hill behind me?”

“Oh…! Hey… Sayaka! And you… Hagakure!” Her question is answered when the Blastoise and its trainer get high enough for them to see the top of the hill.

“Hey, Makoto!”, “Yo, dude!” The other two trainers greet him in return.

“Hah… is it just you two here?” The small boy looks around in confusion.

“Yeah… I thought more people would have come here to get a view of the area, as well…” The girl answers.

“No… That’s not it… I thought Yamada would be up here…” The boy shakes his head, and points straight at Dratini. “ ‘Cause isn’t that his Dratini…?”

“Oh, yeah! It was wearing that same helmet when we ate breakfast together!” The Sandygast trainer remembers, “Maybe he decided to send it up here instead of walking up the hill?”

“…So he should be close enough for us to see then, right?” The girl asks, starting to look out over and around the hill…

“Hmm…” The other two boys join her search, “It doesn’t look like he was behind me, which was where Dratini came from…”

“Wait, is that him down there on the paths?”

“No, I think that’s Fukawa… I can’t see him anywhere!”
“Do you think he knows his Dratini’s even here?”

“Hmm… I feel like maybe he doesn’t…” The girl answers, “Like it just decided to wander off and explore by itself…”

[Is that what you did?] The Blastoise asks.

[Yes!] Dratini answers, [He was stuck in a tutorial so I came out to help him explore!]

[A… tutorial…?] The Blastoise obviously isn’t all that smart...

[And did you tell him where you were going?] The Sandygast asks in a suspicious and nagging tone of voice.

…Well, obviously they think he shouldn’t be out here by himself, but he’s so close to having seen everyone out here! He’s only got three people left in the class! He can’t go back to Hifumi now...

[Of course I did!] Dratini lies.

[Liar.] The Espurr suddenly whispers, it’s face not moving the whole time.

[Thought so…] The Blastoise sighs, [He’ll be worried about you if you don’t go back…]

[No he won’t! And I’m almost finished exploring!] Dratini explains, although he’s pretty sure none of them are going to listen to him.

“Hey… is he by himself?” The Blastoise’s trainer asks, getting a nod from the turtle in response.

“Does Yamada know!?”

That question gets a shake of the head, which is Dratini’s cue to get out of here before this group try to catch him and force him back to the start of the area or somethiiii…

“Guess this is why I predicted needing a net today!” The Sandygast’s trainer makes an attempt to swing the net at Dratini, which he only just about manages to dodge by turning back on himself and racing in the other direction…

“Oh no you don’t!” Which puts him straight in front of the girl instead, who blocks his way with outspread arms. “Come on now… just calm down… We just want to help you get back to your trainer, okay…?”

[Not okay!] Dratini was almost done exploring and he wasn’t going to let this lot ruin it! Time to take a sharp turn to the left and back the way he’d come…

“I got him!” Dammit! He’d forgot about the smaller human, who turns out to be close enough to lunge across and grab Dratini’s tail with his hand… But Dratini isn’t giving up! As soon as the hand hits his scales, he starts squirming and pulling forward in an attempt to shake the boy off of him…

“…Ahh…!? Well… the hand is still on Dratini, but at least he’s still able to pull forwards, somehow! And it feels like he’s starting to slip out of the boy’s hand…

[Just… a bit… more!] Dratini tells himself as he struggles…

“Oh crap!” His effort is rewarded by a shriek as the boy holding him loses his grip on Dratini and his balance at the same time, causing him to fall forwards and start tumbling down the side of the hill…
“Ah! Makoto!”, [Hang on, buddy, I’m coming!], “Woah, look out, Naegi-dude!” The other trainers and pokemon alike all shout out and start running down the hill, although the Blastoise cheats by returning to its pokeball instead, apparently forgetting about Dratini in the process of checking on their friend…

But, at least it means Dratini’s now free to look over the view from the hill in peace and figure out where he should go next…

He can already see one of the people he hasn’t spoken to, who is making their way through an area where the paths split off from one another often. But the last two trainers are nowhere to be seen… and the only interesting looking areas are a fenced off section of the field, just beyond the maze of paths, and the farm area that’s back in the direction where Hifumi is…

Well, he might as well listen to the person he can see and head down to look at the fenced area while he’s here. Then he can go back to Hifumi.

“Urgh! How many paths does this stupid field need!?” Soon enough, he hears the voice of the girl, the one with the Garbodor, he’d seen wandering through the maze of paths and makes his way towards her to see what she’s up to.

“I mean, it’s hard enough for me to figure out where he’s gone and set up an ambush for him when all the paths going in two directions, let alone three! And that jerk teacher has the nerve to make fun of me for getting lost in the dark!?” The girl is complaining to her Garbodor, “And I swear, all the pollen from these flowers are giving me hayfever…!”

[Yeah… too clean here…] The pile of rubbish by her side agrees glumly, [Nothing to eat…]

“Still… it’s not like I can just give up! He wouldn’t give up!” The girl continues as if it hadn’t spoken, “I just have to trust in fate, right? Because if he’s my rival, it won’t matter where I go! I’ll probably run into him whichever path I take!”

…Huh. That seems like an odd way to script an encounter. Wouldn’t it be better to block the other two paths until after she’d found the guy she was looking for? Well, not that it really matters to Dratini. It doesn’t seem like this girl is going to have much to do with Hifumi’s quest, after all…

“So… with that in mind… let’s take this path!” The girl points to the rightmost one and starts striding down it.

[…]Still too clean…] Her pokemon sighs, following after her and leaving Dratini to pick which direction he’s going in…

Well… from the top of the hill it had looked like all that was down that direction was the water area they weren’t supposed to go into. Whereas if he takes the left path he’ll get to that fenced-off area instead…

Soon enough, Dratini is facing wooden fence with several signs on it, all of them written in large letters… Now, if only he could actually read, he’d know if they were a warning not to go in, or just hints or instructions of some kind…

“…gave you a minor speed increase, I suppose, but this is nowhere near as efficient as it was back home!”

Daratini’s attention is drawn away from the sign by the haughty-sounding voice of the more powerful dragon’s trainer, who is complaining to his Drampa as he makes his way out of the fenced area…
“Well, they can’t put anything truly dangerous in the area, not when it’s meant for you children…”

“It’s ridiculous! I’m sure there’d be something far more worth fighting at night time, if they’d just let me!” The Drampa’s trainer carries on complaining as he climbs over the fence, ignoring Dratini completely. “How am I supposed to become one of the world’s best trainers if they insist on treating me like a child!”

[By learning to make do with what you are given until you are no longer a child?] The Drampa suggests, [But you already know that…]

“I mean, I understand not letting any of that lot out at night! But they know who I am! They should be able to make an exception…!”

[Well, you could try…] The Drampa continues to calmly make mollifying statements in the face of its owner’s grumbling, as the pair walk off back along the path that Dratini just came down.

So... there's only one trainer left to find, and that guy just mentioned his pokemon getting a speed boost in this area? Perhaps the final trainer is in here, trying to get the same bonus, assuming it isn’t from a one-use only item, and it would be nice for Dratini to get it as well. At least he know that this area’s safe, and the fence is small enough for him to easily fly over…

There doesn’t seem to be any obvious paths in this area, just a huge expanse of uniformly tall grass, without any flowers or trees of any useful landmarks. The only thing indicating which direction he should head in is a slightly trampled line of grass from where the Drampa’s trainer was just walking… But given Dratini wants to find that speed boost, that’s probably a good path to take anyway, so Dratini heads off in that directions, following the boys footpath through for a long while, so much so that Dratini starts to wonder if this is even worth it, for all he knows, the speed boost might have been from an item that the other boy has already taken…

[Guard our land!], [Guard our home!], [Find the intruder!], [Cut them down!]

What the? What’s all that buzzing about…? It sounds like it’s coming from somewhere off to Dratini’s side…

Eeek! It’s a pack of four Scyther! Aren’t those really powerful!? And angry!? What the hell was that Drampa saying, that there was nothing dangerous here!?

…Unless it had just meant that there was nothing that was dangerous for it… not that it was safe for a weak pokémon like Dratini to wander in here…

Ok… time for a stealth section, then! Dratini just needed to turn around and head back out of here before…

[There!], [Dragon!], [Intruder!], [GET IT!]

…The Scyther spotted him, and started charging towards him… like they were doing right now…

AAAHHH! Time to fly away! If those Scyther catch up to Dratini, he’ll be lucky if he’s only knocked out! They might even kill him! And he’s so far away from the fence, and Scyther are fast… Will he even be able get out of here in time!? Or is Hifumi going to have to find a new companion to take with him on his quest…?

[It’s running away!], [After it!], [Attack!], [Revenge for our brothers!]

No! He can’t let that happen! He hasn’t got to see Cresselia yet! He has to keep flying out of here, so
he can meet back up with Hifumi, no matter what! Even if he’s already exhausted and isn’t even sure he’s heading in the right direction anymore, he has to keep flying forward…!

“DRATINI! THERE you are!” What!? Oh, no… is that Hifumi up ahead!? Why did he come somewhere so dangerous!? “What were you thinking, wandering off by yourself! I’ve been looking all… over… for…!”

Hifumi’s scolding stops short as Dratini gets close enough for him to see the group of Scythers behind him… And at this rate Dratini is going to lead them straight to him! He can’t do that! Dratini would survive an attack, but Hifumi wouldn’t stand a chance against them! They’re best hope is for Dratini to try and lure them away…

[Another intruder!], [This is OUR place!], [Get them out!], [GET THEM OUT!] NOOOO! It’s too late! They’ve already spotted Hifumi, and from the sound of it, they’re catching up! What should they do!?  

“Ahh! That’s a lot of Scyther…!” Hifumi is starting to panic… “Ahh… what did that man say to do…? Uhh… he mentioned distracting them… but I didn’t bring anything red…”

[Red thing!], [ARGH!], [My EYES!]

What!? But Hifumi just said he didn’t have anything red, so what are the Scyther’s talking about…?

“Ahh!” Hifumi exclaims in relief, “Is that… Mr. Oowada’s Lycanroc!? F-fate shines upon us after all! Ahahahaha…”

Dratini dares to take a moment to look behind him and see what’s going on… it’s as Hifumi says, the Scyther’s have all turned away from the pair of them, and are now charging at the red and white wolf that is slowly prowling towards them, almost unaware that it’s being targeted…

[UGLY!], [Get rid of it!], [Get it out!], [KILL IT!]

[…] Eh?] The wolf finally seems to notice the approaching group, [What, you assholes wanna piece of me!? Alright, I take you all on with my eyes shut! Just like every other trainerless chump out here!]

Wait… with its eyes closed? Because of the sun? How can it fight like that!? And its trainer doesn’t even seem to be anywhere near here! It’s going to get knocked out for sure!

[Wing Attack!], [Fury Cutter!], [Razor Wind!], [Slash!] Dratini knows he ought to run, but instead he’s frozen in place as the group all descend on the wolf, raining blades upon it… Ahh… they’re gonna knock him out and then they’re gonna go back after Dratini and he doesn’t know if Hifumi will be able to run away fast enough or even if he’s thought to run away or is paralysed like Dratini…

[AHAHAHAHA! You dumbasses call those attacks!?] The wolf’s barks contemptuously from within the group, [Try this on for size! Stone Edge!]

Dratini stares in shock as a heap of rubble appears and one of the group surrounding the wolf is knocked out of the air and sent tumbling across the grass, ending up lying prone and unmoving on the floor…

[Tch! Fucking wimp!] It seems the dog can tell that it’s managed to knock out the Scyther, [This isn’t even gonna make me break a sweat!]
…Dratini can’t tell if the wolf is sweating under its fur or not, but the rest of the group certainly doesn’t seem to cause him any trouble before they’re all left scattered across the grass around it. It barely takes a moment to recover before starting to sniff the air around it…

[…And the why the hell are you so quiet!?] All of a sudden the wolf turns to face Dratini, [You thinking of ambushing me!? You wanna fight!]

[N-n-no! Of course not!] Dratini manages to squeak out, [You’d be waaaaay to strong for me!]

The wolf pauses for a moment, then its mouth twists from a threatening snarl into a smug grin. [Ha! That’s right! And don’t you forget it, weakling…]

[I-I won’t!] Dratini promises nervously, which seems to make the wolf gloat even more as it turns to walk away from him, still with closed eyes…

“Lycan!” The dog pauses at the sound of a gruff boy’s voice, “Lycan, where the fuck are you!?”

[Mondo?] The wolf turns towards the new boy, barking loudly. [I’M OVER HERE!]

“Lycan…!? THERE you are!” The boy with the large yellow hairstyle soon spots his pokémon and rushes towards it, “What the hell are you doing here!? I thought you’d stay in the damn shade! What did you do, walk over here and beat on all those pokémon with your eyes shut!?”

[YES!] The wolf lets out a gloating bark.

“…Geez… I rest my eyes for a minute and you wander all the way over here by yourself!?” It’s trainer snaps, “Why the hell didn’t you wake me up!?”

[…I thought you needed the sleep…] The wolf responds to him more anxiously this time.

“Ngh… Shit, sorry I shouldn’t have yelled at ya…” The tall boy sighs guiltily, “But… next time, lemme know where you’re going, will ya? I thought something might have happened to ya!”

[Got it, Mondo.] The Lycanroc submits. [My bad.]

“Alright, now we gotta get back to Kizakura, so come on…” The boy puts one hand on the wolf’s shoulder and starts to direct him back towards the area they’d all started at, “…And, uhh… My bad, if he stopped ya from catching a Scyther…” He adds, looking sort of in Hifumi’s direction…

“What… me!?” Hifumi shrieks, “Dratini couldn’t have taken on one of those things! If your Lycanroc hadn’t shown up when he had, they would probably have been the end of me!”

“Then what the hell are you doing in here!?” The taller boy looks at him, dumbfounded.

“I was looking for Dratini… I swear, I only turned away from him for a minute and he’d gone!” Hifumi explains, “I only managed to work out where he’d come because Mx. Fujisaki put a map on my pokédex…”

“Well… in that case, how’s about you come with us, so nothing else kicks your ass.” The wolf trainer offers, “It’s almost time for class to finish, anyway.”

“Th-thank you!” Hifumi stammers and begins to follow the boy back to the starting area…

All the other humans and their pokémon that Dratini had seen on his way here seem to have left their previous spots now, perhaps to signify that they are out of exploration time and need to head back to the starting point of this area, where a couple of the other students are gathered around the tutor, but
most appear to be walking off back to the school building…

“We scanned a new pokemon, had a look around the farm area and then came back here and scanned a few more new pokemon and added them to the pokedex research initiative!” The loud voice of the Arcanine’s trainer is the first thing Dratini hears.

“Just around the farm area, right?” The tutorial NPC asks suspiciously.

“Of course! We didn’t enter any of the fenced-off areas!” The boy replies insistently, “Right, Arcanine!?”

[…Only ‘cause you stopped me, Kiyotaka…] The dog whines guiltily in response.

“Alright… guess I’ll hear from Andou if you’re lying…” The teacher smiles wryly at him, “Off you go.”

“Thank you, sir!” The boy in white nods and walks away quickly, with his dog staying very close to his side as he does so…

“And looks like you two got back just in time!” The tutor turns to face Hifumi and taller boy, “Lemme know what you’ve been up to and then you can head inside for the next class. You first, Oowada.”

“Uhh… okay.” The Lycanroc trainer looks over to Fujisaki, who is working at their computer again, in confusion, but answers the question regardless. “Lycan and I hung out in the shade for a bit so he’d get used to the bright light, then I let him wander around and fight some pokemon by himself so he’d get a feel for the area.”

“By himself? So you didn’t know where he was?”

“N-no! Course I knew where he was!” The Lycanroc’s trainer lies, “It’s not like I had anything else to watch around here, is it!?”

“Nah… I just figured you looked so worn out that you might have dozed off…” The tutor grins, “But, as you say that’s not the case, so feel free to head inside.”

“…Thanks.” The Lycanroc’s trainer moves to head back into the school… but unfortunately, his pokemon gets just a little too close to Fujisaki when he does so…

[No pokémon is authorised to come within 2 meters of Chihiro Fujisaki, by order of Chihiro Fujisaki!] The Golett moves forward to block the Lycanroc, which cracks open its eyes just enough to glare down at it…

[You tryin’ to tell me what I can do, you little punk!?] It growls threateningly down its nose at the golem… [I could knock you out in one hit!]

That actually causes the so-far emotionless pokemon to flinch a bit, but it still holds its ground, despite trembling as it does so… [N-no p-pokemon is au-authorised…]

[WHAT DID I JUST SAY, YOU LITTLE ASSHOLE!?] the wolf pulls a claw backwards and snarls violently enough to cause Fujisaki to turn pale and freeze, [I ain’t taking shit from a damn weakling…]

“What the…!? Lycan, chill the fuck out!” The wolf’s trainer suddenly grabs his pokemon by the upper arm and yanks it away from the Golett, “Haven’t you beaten the crap outta enough pokemon
today?”

[It was telling me what to do!] The wolf snarls and attempts to lunge forward at the golem again, [Like It’s *stronger* than me!]

Both the Golett *and* it’s trainer flinch as it looks like they might get attacked, but the human holding the Lycanroc is strong enough to keep it in place…

“HEY! I said calm down!” The wolf’s trainer snaps, “Look at it! It’s fucking *terrified* of you! You ain’t gotta be an asshole to it!”

As instructed, the wolf calms down slightly glares at the still-trembling golem for a moment, before turning away from it contemptuously. [Fine. I gotta better things to do with my time than fight tiny little *pebbles*… Come on, Mondo.]

The wolf starts to pull its trainer off in the other direction, which the trainer agrees with, but not before taking a moment to turn back towards Fujisaki…

“Uhh… sorry if he scared ya…” The wolf’s trainer, “But he knows not to attack *people*, so ya ain’t gotta worry so much… Alright?”

“Huh…?” Fujisaki blinks vacantly in response, “Umm… Ok… S-sure…”

“…Cool…” The Lycanroc’s trainer answers hesitantly, before letting his wolf drag him back towards the school building.

“…You sure you’re alright, Fujisaki?” The tutor asks, once the wolf is out of earshot… “That was pretty scary, even by *my* standards!”

“Umm… I-I think so…” The Golett’s trainer replies slowly.

“Alright… well, I know you’ve been ‘scanning the area’ all lesson…” The man tells them, “…so off you go.”

“Ahh… alright…” Fujisaki quickly packs up their computer and slowly heads off back to class.

“And now, Yamada!” The tutor turns to Hifumi, “How’d talking to everyone go?”

“Ahh… well, I didn’t quite manage to talk to everyone, because Dratini headed off by himself while I was busy talking to Mx Fujisaki and I had to go chase him back down using the map they’d given me…” Hifumi admits.

“Yeah, Fujisaki told me.” The man interrupts, “And for future reference, if that happens again you’re supposed to get someone *with* a pokemon to help you search…”

“Err… I’ll keep that in mind!” Hifumi grimaces.

“But, other than that, you got a map from Fujisaki… anything else?”

“Well… Mr Ishimaru showed me how to add data to the PRI and also gave me a few berries and advice on how to grow them… but that was all I got done…” Hifumi admits shamefully.

“So, you did *three* new things you’ve never tried before… That’s about *infinity* percent more than any of your classmates, unless you count Kuwata getting his ass kicked at poker…” The tutor summarises with a laugh, “Maybe I ought to make the rest of them take a leaf out of your book, seeing as this school’s *supposed* to be about you guys working together…”
“So… I made good progress…?” Hifumi asks hopefully.

“…You made some progress.” The tutor responds, “But you’re starting off a fair way behind everyone else… you’ve got a hard grind a head of you if you really want to catch Cresselia…”

“Well… tedious grinding is an unfortunate part of many adventures…” Hifumi starts to mirror Dratini’s thoughts perfectly…

“This isn’t a game, Yamada.” The tutor interrupts, sternly. “Even with all that gear, the Scyther could have severely wounded you if Togami hadn’t knocked most of them out just before you went in there!”

“Ahh… Y-yes… of course…” Hifumi slumps.

“That said, if you think of training as a game, it’ll feel less like work…” The man concedes, “Just remember that your life can be on the line, sometimes.”

“Y-yes sir!” Hifumi nods, slightly less miserably.

“Good… Now lets get back to the classroom…” The tutor gestures for Hifumi to follow him back to the school building…

…and so, the first chapter in the great story of Hifumi Yamada ends! But what was learnt during this adventure!?

…Probably that Dratini isn’t quite as smart as he thought… Certainly not smart enough to be wandering around on his own! But perhaps it’s just as well. Quests are supposed to be undertaken by a party of adventurers, after all…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next will be Chihiro's POV.

(Also, in case it's not obvious, I figure Yamada's spoken to Chihiro long enough to find out about their gender neutrality, hence why he's now using Mx. (the first gender neutral title that came up on Google) instead of Miss Fujisaki.)
A way to change pt. 1 (Chihiro POV)

Chapter Notes

My thinking regarding the different class tiers is that Hifumi knows a lot about various types of pokémon because he’s the sort who would obsess over the trivia behind them (plus he’s drawn a lot of different ones and asked their trainers questions while doing so), and Kyoko knows a lot about them because she runs into various ones at work (And she seems pretty studious anyway). Celestia’s good at maths because there’s a lot of calculating probabilities involved in gambling and game strategies. (And Byakuya, Kiyotaka and Chihiro are just general know-it-alls in comparison to the other kids.)
(Also keep in mind Junko and Mukuro swapped tests)
The Rage Manju was an item originally in the Japanese versions of pokémon gold and silver that was translated as the Rage Candy Bar in the English language versions. I went with the Japanese name because a Manju (A type of mochi) seems more like something someone would make by hand than a candy bar. (Also it’s called that because it’s named after the Lake of Rage from the same game, not because it’s got a berserker effect or anything).
New Pokémon: Doublade (a pair of flying ghost swords)
https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Doublade_(Pok%C3%A9mon)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Okay… breath Chihiro… you’re okay… the wolf was only ever going to hurt Golett, not you…

They knew that, rationally at least. Just because they’d grown up next door to one dog that had been poorly trained didn’t mean every dog was going to be the same way…

But that hadn’t stopped images of that time from flashing up in their mind when the Lycanroc had bared its teeth and lunged forward. And even though Oowada was obviously stronger than the guy next door, they still couldn’t help but assume he’d be powerless to stop his own pokémon from breaking out of his grip and coming towards them with jaw wide open around their leg and…

“Gol… Gol… GOL!” Something was pulling at their side… “Golett!”

“…Huh…?” Oh… right, it was Golett pulling on their sleeve… and it was pointing in the direction of… the school…

Oh, yeah, right… they were supposed to be going to their next class… they’d almost walked past it… and they weren’t really thinking straight… probably best to try and forget about dogs and let Golett lead them back to the classroom… so they just let their golem lead them by the hand to a chair and table… and started sipping at the drink it got for them…

…Wait… weren’t they supposed to have been in a class…? Why hadn’t it started yet…? Where were they, even…?

“…Is this the dining room?” Chihiro muttered out loud as they recognised the metal chairs and plastic tables.

“Let!” Golett nodded anxiously as they started coming back to reality.
“…I was supposed to be going to class.”

“Gooool…” Golett rumbled apologetically.

“Ahh… guess I wasn’t as okay as I thought I was…” Chihrio admitted, “How long have I been in here?”

“Gol-lett!” Golett held up all six of its fingers for a moment and then switched to a single finger.

“Seven minutes?” Chihrio checked, and was answered with a nod, “Looks like I missed the start of class… I better go before someone thinks I’m missing or something…”

“Gol?”

Golett looked up at them in concern as they stood up from the chair…

“I’m fine, really!” Chihrio lied slightly as they started heading back to class. They really wished they didn’t make their own pokémon so worried about them all the time… They really had to get over their fear of dogs…

But, they’d spent a lot of time watching Ishimaru’s Arcanine and… well, the dog itself was pretty passive and well behaved… it was just whenever it barked Chihrio couldn’t help but flinch and want to run and hide for a moment… That wouldn't really be a good way to help get over their fear, would it…? Unless Ishimaru could convince it to stay quiet around them…

Regardless, they’d have to worry about that after class… there was no point getting accepted into a high-end school and then missing out on the lessons, was there? Hopefully Kizakura wouldn’t be too mad at them…

“Umm… Excuse me…?” Chihrio apologetically opened the door.

“Oh, Fujisaki! So you are coming to class!” Kizakura seemed only vaguely surprised to see them.

“Umm… sorry… I started feeling sick all of a sudden…”

“Well, don’t worry. You’ve not missed much, we were just rearranging the class so people of similar levels are sat in the same groups…” Kizakura told them, waving a hand over the classroom.

It now seemed that Ishimaru, Togami, Yamada (and their pokémon) and Kirigiri were all sat with their desks facing the front of the class on the left hand side, and Ikusaba was sat in a similar position on the right hand side of the class, in what had been Chihrio’s seat. Everyone else had arranged their desks in a circle in the middle of the room…

“We’re doing general pokémon knowledge right now, so you’re sat with the middle group.”

Kizakura added.

…Whereas the more studious kids were mostly on the left of the classroom… was that just because Chihrio had panicked at the picture on the test and not started it until halfway through the time?

“Allright…” Chihrio headed over to take the final unused seat. No point arguing their placement right now, and at least it meant they weren’t sat anywhere the Arcanine, and Oowada had put his Lycanroc away for class, so there shouldn't be any more nasty shocks for them here…

“Uhh… hey, lemme get that for you!” …And Oowada had suddenly jumped up to help them with their desk as well… maybe he was feeling guilty about what had happened just now…

“Indeed… you still look rather pale.” Oogami added, getting up to help him drag the desk over.
“Yeah… If I were you, I’d be chatting up the nurse right now!” Kuwata joked.

“Ah… I’m fine, really!” Chihiro tried to tell them, “You don’t have to worry about me…”

…That didn’t stop the two stronger students from moving their table for them, or any of the other students from giving them worried glances as they sat down and Kizakura started to explain how this lesson was going to work.

“So, as I just about to tell everyone else, today I’m going to be mostly focusing on getting the… less educated students up to speed…” Kizakura gestured to the surprisingly unbothered looking mercenary, “So the rest of you will be doing some exercises by yourselves for this lesson! First up, for you guys, here are some essay questions for you to work on. You can use whatever resources you want for this, including downloading things on your pokédex.” Kizakura handed out some sheets of paper to the group on the left. “There’s four questions on the sheet, but I’m only expecting you to complete two this lesson…”

“Well, I’ll be sure to finish all of them…” Togami smirked around the rest of his group, “If they’re easy enough for this lot to answer, it’ll be child’s play to me…”

“It’s an essay! The aim is to use the time to write an in-depth discussion on our chosen topics!” Ishimaru snapped irritably, “It’s better to give a well-researched and logically thought-out answer to two of the questions than to write a knee-jerk reaction to all four!”

“Of course… I’m just saying I can write a well-researched and logically thought-out answer in half the time you can!” Togami replied smugly.

“Aghh! Well… we’ll see about that!” Ishimaru threatened, then turned to stare furiously at the list of questions, while his dog just sat and looked mildly concerned about the shouting… Was it really just going to sit there quietly all lesson? It wasn’t really so bad to look at when it was just behaving like that. If Ishimaru could stop it from barking for long periods of time, it’d be easier to get used to being near it…

“Alright, as for you guys in the middle! Here’s a list of questions, divided into different topics…” Kizakura derailed their train of thought by handing them each a thickish booklet and much thicker textbook, “You goal is to work through the questions as best as you can, and if you get to a section you don’t understand, read through the same section in the text book and see if that helps it make sense to you… You can also talk to each other if you’re having trouble and one of the other kids knows more about stuff than you.”

Hmm… this just seemed like standard first year of high-school level knowledge. Nothing that Chihiro hadn’t looked up by themself before. If it hadn’t been for them panicking at the test, they’d probably be in the higher level group right now…

Still, no point thinking about that now. Perhaps if they managed to get this booklet filled in quickly enough, Kizakura would realise that the test was just a one-off and they could move groups… So, they turned to the first page along with everyone else…

“Anatomy!” Oowada instantly scowled at the title, “Do we really need ta know all this shit just to train pokémon?”

“Yeah, I mean I get understanding your own pokémon is important…” Kuwata agreed, “But why do I gotta know what Ghost Types usually eat?”

“Plus, that’s totally a trick question!” Hagakure added, “They don’t eat anything!”
“…I thought they ate life energy?” Asahina asked, nervously, “Is that wrong?”

“Well, they absorb life-force, so it depends on your definition of eat…” Chihiro pointed out, “I’d have said they generally survive on life-force, which they either get by absorption or by ‘eating’ mental energy outputs, such as dreams.”

…Everyone at the table was staring at them in bemusement now.

“Umm… but that might be over-complicating things for this level of test. It might be best to see what the textbook says.” Chihiro toned it down.

“Yeah… this looks like more shit I gotta read…” Oowada sighed irritably.

“Hah! Not me!” Enoshima gloated, answering one of the True and False questions, “Like, who wouldn’t know that all water-types have gills!”

“Umm… no they don’t…?” Naegi corrected her, “Blastoise doesn’t!”

“Seriously!? How’s he breath underwater then?” Enoshima asked.

“He can’t?” Naegi answered awkwardly, “I mean, he can stay under for a long time, but he has to come up for air eventually…”

“Are you kidding? So it’s possible to drown a water-type!?” Enoshima snorted, “That’s so dumb!”

“Uhh… well… I guess it’s kind of ironic?” Naegi admitted reluctantly as he carried on working through the questions…

The table fell silent after that, as everyone seemed to decide to read through the questions and answer what they could for now, which in Chihiro’s case was pretty much everything. At this rate it might only take them a couple of lessons to finish this whole booklet…

“Wow! It seems like you already know all this stuff, Fujisaki!” Naegi suddenly commented, as they were working through the questions. “How come you’re with us and not those four?”

Oops. Chihiro had been hoping no one would have noticed that, or that there would have been someone else who knew almost as much as they did, after all, it wasn’t as if there was anyone here who didn’t at least know some of this information… But they were the only one who was managing to answer everything without so much as looking at the information in the book. But it wasn’t like they could just explain it without letting everyone know about their secret…

“…Did you panic during the test, and not do as well as you should?” Maizono guessed correctly.

“Umm… something like that…” Chihiro answered vaguely.

“That’s unfortunate… It seems like this exercise will be a waste of time for you…” Oogami sympathised with them.

“Yeah, it’s totally pointless you having to do all this!” Asahina agreed loudly, “I’m gonna tell the teacher!”

“Huh!? Ah… You don’t have to do tha…!”

“Hey! Mr Kizakura!?” Nope, too late… she was already calling him, “Chihiro’s panicked during the test and has been put in the wrong group!”
“Well, if that’s the case, then they should be able to finish that whole booklet pretty quickly and I’ll know they can go move up a group.” Kizakura casually looked up from helping Ikusaba. “It’s not like I’m not going to reconsider how you’re all doing as time goes by and rearrange things if someone looks to be in the wrong place.”

“Umm… yeah, I figured something like that would happen…” Chihiro mumbled, keenly aware that everyone had been staring at them. “I was just going to talk to him after class…”

“Oooh… right…” Asahina laughed slightly in embarrassment, “I, uhh… guess I’ll just let you get on with it then…”

True to her word she, and everyone else at the table, let them get on with filling out the tedious booklet. Although they did occasionally join in with the odd discussion that cropped up during the time, which meant they weren’t quite halfway through when the bell rang and Kizakura took back everyone’s work and let them leave for lunch.

But that Arcanine hadn’t barked once, through the whole lesson… it really had just sat quietly for almost an hour… So if it could do that at Ishimaru’s command, maybe Chihiro really would be able to start getting used to it…

“W-Well, at least it seems like you w-won’t have to put up with us for very long…” Fukawa interrupted their thoughts bitterly… although she’d got quite a lot done herself, so it wasn’t like she was that far behind them… “Just one more lesson and you can go and sit with Byakuya and the others…”

“Umm… well, it might be more like two lessons…” Chihiro admitted, “Hopefully I won’t fall too far behind them…”

“It’s kind of a shame you can’t work on it in your own time…” Naegi pointed out, “That way, you could finish it tonight and not worry about missing anything else they’re doing…”

“Hmm… maybe it’s worth asking if I can…” Chihiro realised, “I’ll go ask Kizakura now!”

“Ah! W-well if you’re doing that, then so am I!” Fukawa insisted, marching off over to the teacher by herself as everyone else started to walk out of the room.

“Oh. yeah… that’d totally be a good idea!” Enoshima of all people agreed and followed her.

“Uhh… see you guys later…” Chihiro quickly said goodbye to Naegi and the others and then headed over to catch up with the other girls, who were already asking if they could have their booklets back…

“No.” Kizakura answered bluntly. Well, it was worth a shot…

“What the hell?!”, “W-why not?!” The other two girls were being less reasonably about it.

“Well, firstly, cause there’s no guarantee you wouldn’t cheat and get someone else to fill it in for you the second I wasn’t looking…” Kizakura seemed to look at Enoshima when he said that, “And second of all, there’s allocated class times for a reason! We’re expecting you to spend your free time doing other constructive things, like training pokémon or working on your own specific talents, not just catching up with the classwork.”

“Urgh… damn it, that’s right! I’ve got to catch up to Byakuya’s pokémon as well! I shouldn’t be hanging around here!” Fukawa accepted that answer and rushed off, but Enoshima certainly didn’t…
“Excuse me!? Are you saying you don’t trust me!?”

“Honestly? I’ve been working here long enough to know not to trust any of you kids 100%...” Wow... that was pretty harsh, but it also sounded like there were probably some stories behind that as well... “But I did notice your sister seems to know a lot more about pokémon than ‘she’ put down on her test...”

Wait... was he suggesting Enoshima and Ikusaba switched tests or something? Why would they have done that!?

“Really!? That’s great!” Enoshima either didn’t get the implication or was choosing to play innocent, “I guess she must have just panicked in the test like Fujisaki, right? But then that means she can come and sit in our group with me!”

“...Assuming you stay at the same level as you are now, that’ll probably be the case...” Kizakura agreed suspiciously. “But, anyway, I’m not letting you guys have your booklets outside of class time.”

“Fine!...” Enoshima sulked and stormed out of the room, leaving Chihiro alone with Kizakura, who seemed to be expecting them to say something...

“Umm... Sorry I gave them the idea...”

“It’s not your fault... honestly, if it had just been you, I’d have let you do it, but now I’ve had to say no to them, I can’t really give you special treatment...” Kizakura sighed, “Buuuuut, there’s nothing I can really do to stop you from asking the others what the essay questions were and writing out a practise answer, is there? And if you went to all that trouble to get ahead, it’d be a shame if I didn’t at least give them a read-through and give you some pointers, right?”

“Ahh... I guess!” That was right, they wouldn’t fall behind at all if they just asked the other group what they’d been working on. Especially not if Kizakura was willing to unofficially mark their answers! “Thank you, sir!”

“You’re welcome, have a good lunch, Fujisaki!” Kizakura half-waved, half-shooed Chihiro off out of the classroom...

Well, now it was time for lunch, and time for Chihiro to figure out where they were going to sit... They’d rather not butt in with Souda and his friend’s again... not that any of them had minded them turning up, but it’d be better if they could get to know some of their own class a bit better instead... Perhaps they could try sitting with Yamada and Hagakure this time? They seemed a bit goofy, but Yamada hadn’t been too weird when they’d been speaking earlier... And it was either that, try and sit with Togami and Fukawa, or end up near one of the dog trainers...

“Do you really expect me to believe your dog only went near her because he wanted to make friends!? ” Chihiro’s train of thought was interrupted by a girl shouting from just around the corner, near the entrance to the dining room...

“I realise it’s unusual, but Arcanine really was just following the Combee home!” And that was Ishimaru’s voice, “That’s why he didn’t attack it!”

“...Or it knew that following a weak bug back to its hive would give it the opportunity to fight the stronger pokémon their...” A quieter male voice replied to him.

Chihiro headed around the corner to see what was going on...
It looked like Ishimaru had been blocked from getting into the dining hall by two of the older students, a girl with short pink hair and white fuzzy hems at the collar and sleeves of her school uniform who was getting in Ishimaru’s face, and a slightly taller blond boy in a long red trench coat and two scabbards at his sides backing her up…

But the weird thing was the pokémon in the group… Ishimaru’s Arcanine was sat at his side, completely still and looking up at its own like it usually did when it was awaiting a command… despite the pair of flying swords, each with a purple eye near the hilt, that were pointing straight at its throat…

“He’s a dog! He doesn’t understand that level of strategy!” Ishimaru carried on his argument with the humans, as if his pokémon wasn’t one careless move from being stabbed in the throat!

“But you could have ordered him to follow the Combee, knowing it would result in a fight…”

“But, we were specifically told not to go into the area, so of course I wouldn’t have done that!”

“Look, if you want to battle someone’s pokémon, you should at least be honest about it!” The girl rolled her eyes, “Not that I would let you, because only Yoi-yoi gets to fight my strongest pokémon, but sneaking around just makes you look like some creep from Team whatever!”

“I’m not a member of Team Rocket!” Ishimaru probably didn’t realise how suspicious that sounded now he was wearing the new brown uniform and the other students weren’t aware of him having been compared to them before… “And besides, if I’d intended for Arcanine to fight your Vespiquen, I wouldn’t have chased after him to stop him from doing so, would I!”

The two other students looked at each other, as if trying to decide between them if they thought he was lying or not, which Ishimaru took as a chance to continue his argument…

“Look… I apologise for startling your pokémon… and if there’s anything I can do to help make up for it, I’ll be glad to!” He bowed, “But I can assure you that I wasn’t intending to fight your pokémon, and I’ll make sure that Arcanine won’t cause you anymore trouble!”

The other two students exchanged another glance, before the boy walked over to look down at Ishimaru… “Alright… but this better not happen again, or you and your Arcanine can make friends with my Doublade!”

“Ngh…!” Ishimaru flinched slightly, looking like he was trying to work out how to respond…

“Arc…?” Meanwhile, his dog also looked like it was trying to think of something… “CAN!”

Suddenly the dog barked loudly, wagging its tail as it tried to lift a paw in the direction of one half the Doublade pointed at his throat… What the heck was it doing…!?

“Ah! Arcanine, wa…”, “Dou…” “BLADE!” Ishimaru noticed too late what was going on, as the sword that the Arcanine was aiming for shrank away from the dog’s paw, and the other half swung down to cut into it before he could finish his order.

“Arrrct!” The dog whined pitifully and put its paw back down, whimpering up at its trainer anxiously. “N…nine…?”

“Ah… that wasn’t quite what he meant… But you’re a good boy for being polite! And you didn’t deserve to get hurt that thing!” Ishimaru glared around at the Doublade, which the male trainer was wordless coaxing back into its pair of scabbards. “And speaking of which, I was going to ignore your Doublade’s aggressive behaviour, on the basis that you have a legitimate reason to be upset
with me…” He told the taller boy, sounding like he was trying to keep his temper in check by being professional. “But that was going too far! I’m reporting you to security for initiating a battle without a proper challenge!”

“Your pokémon was the one that made the first…” The boy started to argue.

“Arcanine was attempting to shake paws!” Ishimaru snapped, “Because you distinctly said we could make friends with your Doublade!”

“Well, it’s not Yoi-yoi’s fault your dog’s so dumb!” The older girl sneered, “That was clearly just a threat!”

“Ruruka…!” The older boy tried to cut her off worriedly.

“So, you’re saying he was threatening me with his pokémon…!?" Ishimaru asked, pointedly.

“Aaahh…” The girl froze was she realised she’d just dumped the guy into a bunch of trouble by blurring that out, “N-no… I mean…”

“I meant you’d get to become acquainted with my Doublade while it knocks out your dog…” The guy covered for himself.

“Regardless of whether I accept a challenge from you or not!” Ishimaru responded, “Meaning you were still threatening to initiate a battle without proper challenge, which is also against school rules!”

That shut the other guy up, which made his friend look worried for a moment, before she suddenly turned incredibly sweet and apologetic…

“Ah… Hold on a minute… Maaaybe we’ve all got just a little too upset here, and we’re all just saying things we don’t really mean!” She laughed nervously, “I mean, Yoi-yoi wouldn’t really have tried to battle you without telling you, he just wanted to make sure you didn’t try to battle my Vespiquen without me knowing, that’s all!”

“But, I already told you I had no intention of doing that in the first place!” Ishimaru was having none of it.

“I know, but you can’t always trust people when they say things like that! For all we knew, that could have just been a lie you came up with to get out of trouble!” The girl kept trying, and started reaching into a paper bag she had at her side. “Buuut, seeing as it’s clear your doggy really does just want to be friendly with other pokémon, how about I give him a little treat to make him feel better and we forget this whole thing ever happened…”

“Arc? Arc!” Ishimaru’s dog barked and wagged its tail excitedly at the offer of a treat, even though Ishimaru himself didn’t look too convinced and the other guy looked even more annoyed at that then Ishimaru’s threat to report him…

“Alright! One Rage Manju coming up!” The girl ignored them both and held out a small sticky looking rice cake to the dog, which quickly leant forward and lapped it out of her fingers with its tongue, barking happily as its small wound quickly disappeared… “There! He’s all fixed, and everything’s sorted out! Right!?”

“Arc!” The dog agreed, tail wagging even harder than before...

“Well… I suppose…” Ishimaru agreed, seeming more focused on how upbeat his dog looked than the other two students…
“Alright! Let’s go then, Yoi-yoi!” The girl took advantage of his distraction and quickly rushed off with her friend…

“Err… Yes! Thank you for the treat!” Ishimaru absent-mindedly waved them goodbye before turning back to his dog. “Well… you certainly seemed to like that! I’ll have to ask Hanamura if he knows how to make them…”

“Arc!” The dog agreed.

“Alright! But for now… You’re going to have to go back into your pokéball for a while, alright?” Ishimaru said apologetically, “I’ll let you out for my next class though, if you want?”

“Arc!” The dog nodded, and then disappeared… which made Chihiro release a breath they hadn’t realised they’d been holding in the whole time…

Wait… did that mean Ishimaru wasn’t going to have his dog out at all during lunch time? Maybe this would be Chihiro’s chance to ask him about just how well trained it was, and see if he could help them change themselves after all…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading
First off: Sorry, but I'll be skipping next week's update. Unfortunately my plans for the week changed at short notice, leaving me with no time to write the next chapter. Also I just want to give you a quick reminder that I did mention Kiyotaka’s fingers having pink wrinkled skin way back in chapter 1, but it hasn’t really been brought up since because its not something most people would notice unless looking closely.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Umm… Ishimaru…!?" Chihiro took the chance to catch the boys attention before he headed into the dining room.

“Ah, Fujisaki! I saw you stayed behind to talk to Kizakura! Did you finish with your booklet already!?"

“No… It’s probably going to take a couple more lessons. I was just hoping he’d let me take it back and finish it off in my own time, but that’s not allowed.” Chihiro explained.

“That’s unfortunate… though it was a good idea for you to take the initiative like that! I must say, it’s refreshing to be in a class were other people are motivated to succeed, for once!” He really did seem happy about that, even if one of those people was probably Togami… “But, I digress… did you want me for something?”

“Yes… I wanted to ask you some questions, if it’s not a bother…”

“No at all!”

“Well… are you really going to keep your Arcanine in its ball for the whole lunchtime?” Chihiro checked.

“Ah… yes. Arcanine… is quite… compulsive when it comes to food and eating, so letting him out in the dining room wouldn’t be the best idea…” Ishimaru admitted.

“So… you mean you can’t control him when there’s food around?” That might be a problem, Chihiro would have to make sure they didn’t carry any snacks on them or anything…

“No… if I give him a direct order not to, he won’t eat what’s around him!” Ishimaru corrected, “But I’d have to keep reminding him not to every few minutes, and doing it continuously like that tends to make him feel as though he’s done something to upset me, so I think it’s kinder not to subject him to that if I can avoid it.”

“Oh…” That was pretty impressive, actually… that his dog would keep following orders for so long, even when it didn’t understand why… “…Is it the same with attacking? If you tell him to stop, he won’t attack, no matter the circumstances? That’s why he wasn’t bothered about that Doublade being at his throat?”

“No… that’s because Arcanine won’t attack unless I command him to… or I’m in danger and he thinks I can’t give him orders. Then he’ll take the initiative!” Ishimaru explained, “But he much
prefers to trust my judgement, if he can.”

Well, given how much trouble it had got itself into this morning, just from Ishimaru taking his eyes off it for a few minutes, that made a lot of sense. It must have learnt to trust him a lot over the years he had it, no wonder it was so well behaved around him...

“Was that everything you wanted to ask?” Ishimaru asked again, “Because there was something I was hoping to talk to you about, myself… Perhaps you could our table for lunch!? Makoto and the others were saying it would be nice to talk to you some more!”

Well, if his Arcanine wasn’t going to be out of its ball… “Sure! That’s sounds great, thank you!”

“So… what was it you wanted to ask me?” Chihiro asked Ishimaru, once they’d both sat down with their food and said hello to all the others who’d sat in the same group as yesterday...

“Well… I’ve heard you’re developing a lot of useful software for pokédexes! Like long-range scanning capabilities! Or the map that Yamada was using…”

So he just wanted the software Chihiro was making anyway? That wasn’t much of a problem at all… “I could install those on your pokédex now, if that’s what you’re planning to ask, it’s just a case of attaching it to my laptop for a while…”

“Really!? That was what I was going to ask!” Ishimaru laughed happily. “In that case, here’s my pokédex!” Ishimaru held out a large, blocky looking red plastic flip-dex.

“Oh… Wow… I’ve not seen one of these models in the last five years…” Chihiro muttered as they took it off of him. Although they had to admit, he must have been taking good care of it, given how good it looked after all those years… the only obvious sign of wear and tear was that the buttons were getting worn down.

“Well, why upgrade it when I have a perfectly functional one already!?” Ishimaru said, a little defensively.

“Well, that’s true… but actually, while I could upgrade the software on this, it’s so old that the processor…” Ishimaru didn’t look like he knew what that meant, “Uhh… the part that actually runs the software, probably wouldn’t be able to cope with the upgrade and it’d run too slowly to be useful to you.”

“I… see. You’re saying my pokédex is too old for the upgrade?” Ishimaru looked like he didn’t actually understand, but was just taking Chihiro’s word for it, “I suppose it’s time I stopped being sentimental, then…”

“Heh… do you feel bad about getting rid of your old technology as well?” Asahina asked, “I used to worry my old pokedexes would get jealous of the new ones…”

“Err… Not exactly, no…” Ishimaru looked hesitant to explain, but with everyone staring at him, he soon expanded on it. “It’s just… I used to be quite proud of it, because it was a gift from Professor Oak…”

“Wow, really? So… you met Professor Oak when you were eight?” Naegi asked.

“Ahh… when I was seven actually…” Ishimaru corrected him, “Do you remember that region-wide writing contest they ran in the schools…? We were supposed to write something about a
“Uhh… I kinda remember us all writing a short story and one of the girls getting a book token for it…” Naegi recalled.

“Oh yeah! Our school got a ton of new books because one guy did really well!” Asahina suddenly remembered.

“Yes, that’s the one!” Ishimaru agreed.

It sounded like the competitions Shauntel ran every year to encourage literacy back home in Unova, except they’d apparently only done it once in Kanto. Perhaps it hadn’t taken off as well there, or there wasn’t anyone as worried about it as Shauntel…

“They had a similar competition in Johto…” Kyoko remembered, “If I’d known a pokédex was one of the prizes, I might have actually entered…”

“Ah… it wasn’t actually a prize from the competition itself!” Ishimaru corrected her, “The thing was… I hadn’t understood we were supposed to be writing a fictional story, so instead I submitted a report about the behaviour of a Scyther I’d spent the last few weeks watching.”

…He used to go Scyther-watching!? Even though he had red eyes!? Was that anything to do with why he’d hidden under his desk at the picture of them yesterday? Maybe he’d been telling the truth about having trained himself to hide his eyes and armband in a hurry…

“And I take it Professor Oak was judging the competition, or someone else who was passed along the report, and he was impressed enough to give you a pokédex to help him research pokémon?” Kyoko guessed the rest of the story.

“That’s about the gist of it, yes!” Ishimaru nodded, “I went up to the hill I’d been observing it from one day, and he’d managed to figure out where it was and was already sat in a chair waiting for me!”

“That must have been a nice surprise…” No wonder Ishimaru had held onto this thing for six years, even though the newer models were about eight times as fast and half the size… “Hmm…” Thinking about it, there’d be a lot of space in here, if they took out all the old wiring, circuitry and battery… maybe replace one of the side panels with one with the modern ports… It’d need a new screen to, but those weren’t really expensive if you bought them all yourself…

“Is something the matter, Fujisaki?” Ishimaru was asking as they looked over the case…

“I was just thinking… maybe instead of you changing pokédexes completely, I could take out the old wiring and try and rebuild it with newer parts…” Chihiro explained.

“Well… that sounds like a wonderful idea, but wouldn’t it be a lot of work for you?” Ishimaru asked, “I… probably wouldn’t be able to afford to pay you back for it…”

“Umm… it’s not too much work… I build custom pokédexes to try out new software ideas all the time, I’d just have to check I have the right parts first…” Chihiro assured him, although he still looked a little apprehensive, “And also… there was a something I was hoping you could do for me, as well…”

“Ah! So you’re suggesting a trade in skills!” Ishimaru seemed happier about that, “In that case I’d be happy to help you! Will you need to keep my pokédex in the meantime, or…?”

“Hmm… you can take it back for now, I might need to order some parts, and they’ll probably take a
couple of weeks to show up…” Chihiro realised.

“See! Thank you!” Ishimaru held his hand out, palm up, for the pokédex…

That was… odd. Chihiro hadn’t noticed it before now, but the skin on Ishimaru’s palms was actually pinker than the rest of him, and had odd, bumpy wrinkles all over it… “…Is that a burn scar?”

“Oh… Yes, it is.” Ishimaru replied casually, “Luckily I treated it with a Rawst berry as soon as it happened, so it healed up quite well and doesn’t affect my hand movement at all!”

But… Why would Ishimaru have a burn scar all over his palms in the first place? Was it… because he had a fire type dog…?

“I guess you need to be prepared for that kind of thing when you have a fire type…” Naegi had come to the same conclusion…

“Ahh… N-no!” Ishimaru looked horrified, “I mean… obviously fire safety is important to me, but it’s not like this is Arcanine’s fault!”

“So, how did you get burned?” Oogami asked the obvious question.

“Err… Well, I was playing with my father’s police hat, without his permission, and accidentally dropped it in the fire…” Ishimaru started, “And I was so worried about getting in trouble that I stuck my hand in after it, without thinking…”

…Was that really true? If he’d stuck his whole hand in, why was it only his palms that were scarred? That sounded like a lie… And judging from the look on Kirigiri’s face, she thought the same thing… So… did that mean his dog really had hurt him, but he was just lying to cover it up? In case, was his dog really as well behaved as he’d said it was, or was he just lying about that as well…?!

“Oof…” Naegi was wincing along with the rest of the students who’d swallowed the lie, “I bet your dad wouldn’t have even minded about the hat…”

“No… he wouldn’t have been too upset, in retrospect, and I could have just bought him a new hat out of my allowance…” Kiyotaka sighed, “Instead, I ended up having to watch nothing but fire safety videos for a whole month afterwards…”

…So, was that a lie? Or was Kiyotaka a good enough liar that he’d fooled his own father…?

“But, it seems like it’s getting close to our next class!” Ishimaru suddenly announced, even though the ten-minute warning bell hadn’t rung yet, “May I have my pokédex back, now?”

“Huh? Oh, sure…” Chihiro handed it over quickly.

“Thank you! And I look forward to helping each other in the near future!”

…That was assuming they could trust Ishimaru to actually be telling the truth… What if he had more scars over his body, and was just hiding them from everyone? Or he might just be as deluded as the man next door had been about his dog being ‘a good boy who’d never hurt anyone’!

“Hey… Chihiro? Are you okay…?” Asahina was talking to them, “You’re looking pale again… Did you eat something weird?”

No… they were just starting to panic again, but they didn’t want to tell everyone about that…

“Umm… Maybe. I… probably just need another drink…”
“Are you sure? Maybe you should go see the nurse… we can let the teacher know…” Naegi offered.

“Well… If you could tell him if I am late, thanks… but I’m pretty sure it’ll be okay in a few minutes…” Chihiro tried to get them to stop worrying about them, before heading back to the kitchen for a drink…

As it was, they managed to calm down and get to class and back in their desk just before the teacher arrived, although they were cutting it close… even Kuwata and Hagakure had been quicker than them!

“Alright… We’re changing subjects this afternoon, which means some of you are switching groups…” Kizakura told them all, looking over the way they’d all picked the same seating arrangement as this morning. “First up is going to be maths, so Kirigiri and Yamada switch places with Fujisaki and Ludenberg, and Oowada, you pick up your chair and take it over next to Ikusaba…”

Yeesh… Oowada looked downright furious about that… Chihiro would not want to be in Kizakura’s place right now…

But, on the other hand, they didn’t exactly want to be in their own position either, because being in the top end of maths now meant they were sitting near Ishimaru, who once again had his Arcanine out and sat next to him…

…but it shouldn’t really be a problem, right? After all, they hadn’t even noticed it move at all during the last lesson, so it probably wouldn’t be a problem now, would it? They were probably just being overly-paranoid about Ishimaru’s lie from earlier, right?

…The Arcanine certainly didn’t seem ready to attack or anything as they took the desk behind them, not even when Golett brushed up against its tail as it insisted on standing between it and Chihiro’s table… Maybe this wouldn’t be so bad after all…

“Okay, as before, I’m going to be focusing on the right hand side of the class…” Kizakura started, “And I’m going to be giving the rest of you a variety of questions to work through, so I can get a better feel for what area’s each of you needs to work on…”

“And what if there’s nothing we need to work on?” Togami asked.

“I’ll have you figure out if there are infinite perfect numbers or not.” Kizakura answered dismissively, which seemed to keep Togami quiet while Kizakura handed them their question sheets. Chihiro couldn’t help but wonder if Togami knew that was an unsolved maths problem or not…

But the problems on the sheet they’d been given certainly weren’t unsolvable, although some of the concepts were getting pretty complex, like working out the probability of multiple attacks hitting in succession, or speed and force of ranged pokémon attacks. And then there were some that mixed in science concepts, like working out the temperature of a fire attack or the pH of a solution needed to neutralise a pokémon’s Acid attack…

Well, might as well get started… Chihiro worked through the questions, occasionally stretching their shoulders out so they didn’t get hunched over…

Which was why they managed to look up just as Ishimaru’s Arcanine’s was moving in to bite his ear off…
“Aaaahhhh!” Chihiro tried to warn him what was happening, but the breath caught in their throat…

“Hmm? Fujisaki, is something the mat…” To Chihiro’s horror, their cry only made Ishimaru turn to face them, putting the front of his head in harm’s way just as the Arcanine’s mouth closed the distance between them…”Pbt…Pfft! Arcanine!? Pfft! Urgh… that was right near my eye…”

What… Ishimaru was just… a bit grossed out… But his dog had just bitten his face!

“Ca-nine…” And the dog was just whimpering guiltily as he rubbed his hands over the area…

“Ah, no… it’s not your fault I turned to check on Fujisaki just as you went to lick me!”

Lick him? Oh… that… made more sense than the dog just suddenly deciding to bite him for no reason, didn’t it? Chihiro had just panicked and assumed the worst…

“…But speaking of which, Fujisaki, are you alright? It sounded like you had a problem just now…” Ishimaru carried on.

“Uhh… I… your dog…” How were they supposed to say ‘It looked like your dog was going to bite you, although that’s just my interpretation of it and it probably didn’t look anything like that in reality’?

“The problem is that you slobbering dog is disgusting to watch!” Ludenberg came up with a different complaint all together, “Honestly, I’m surprised you’re not dead, letting it get its germy mouth all over you!”

“That’s a common misconception! Dog’s mouths in general are actually pretty clean, and Arcanine’s especially so, as they naturally flame sterilise themselves when they…”

“That’s beside the point!” Togami butted in, “It’s still an unnecessary distraction for people who aren’t as capable of focusing on their work as me, which includes yourself! What’s the point of letting it stay out of its ball at all!?"

“I could say the same about your Drampa! At least Arcanine isn’t taking up half my table!” Ishimaru countered.

Chihiro leant forward out of curiosity to see what Ishimaru was talking about… it looked as if Togami had put out an extra sheet of paper to the side of his own, which his Drampa was busy making marks on…

“Drampa is smart enough to understand mathematics, so this is a good test of his intelligence!” Togami smirked, “Which isn’t an argument you can make, unless you’re going to pretend your dog can count as well as read!”

“For your information, I wasn’t pretending he knows letters!” Ishimaru argued, “But, I suppose as he only knows the numbers up to nine, and doesn’t even understand addition, it’s not as if this work will be…”

“Oh for pity’s sake! Just because he can say the word ‘nine’ doesn’t mean he can actually count to it!” Togami interrupted him.

“That’s not the reason I say he can count! I taught him what the symbols for the numbers are!” Ishimaru insisted, “For example, I can hold up a number and tell him to bark that many times, and he’ll do it!”
“Hah! That’s exactly what clever Hans used to do, I recall…”

“But it works even if I don’t look at the card first…”

Hmm, that sounded pretty interesting, if Ishimaru was telling the truth… shame they couldn’t test it out right now, but they were in the middle of class, and even though Kizakura looked pretty busy explaining stuff to Oowada, he’d probably notice if Ishimaru’s dog started barking…

“What if I held up a certain number of fingers, and then had him point to correct number?”

Ludenberg asked, “Would he be able to do that?”

“Yes! He would!” Ishimaru nodded.

“Alright then…” Ludenberg turned her questions over and started writing out large numbers from zero to nine on the back of one…

“Wait… what are you doing!?” Ishimaru cried out in horror, “We’re supposed to be answering those! We shouldn’t even really be talking…!”

“I don’t understand any of this science anyway…” Ludenberg shrugged, “And it will only take a minute…”

“No! I’m not allowing Arcanine to distract you from precious class time!”

“In other words, he doesn’t want you to test it because he’s lying.” Togami decided.

“Ngh…!” Ishimaru’s face twisted as he weighed up the options of being called a liar of messing about in class… “Fine… but just one test!”

“Very well…” Ludenberg held up five fingers…

“Arcanine, point to the number of fingers she’s holding up.” Ishimaru pointed at Ludenberg and then the piece of paper in front of her, and his dog carefully placed the tip of his paw over the number five…

“That’s correct!” Ludenberg and Ishimaru announced at the same time. “Good boy!” Ishimaru added, reaching over to pet his dog…

“You just pointed to the correct number when you gave him the order!” Togami argued, but…

“Umm… Actually Ishimaru’s finger was closest to the eight…” Chihiro told him.

“Well… then he just got lucky!” Togami insisted, “I demand another test!”

“No! We’ve spent enough time on this already!” Ishimaru pointed out, turning back to his work, “And you’d probably end up insisting we do a hundred tests or something equally as ridiculous!”

They both had a point. It could be that the Arcanine had just got lucky, but this wasn’t exactly the time to be doing this anyway… unless…

“What if Golett tested him a few times instead?” Chihiro suggested, “It’d just say either Let or Gol if it was right or wrong, that wouldn’t stop us working, would it?”

“I suppose…” Ishimaru agreed, and Ludenberg handed over the sheet of numbers for Chihiro to give to their pokémon, along with an order to keep holding up a random number of fingers between one and six…
“Why only six?” Togami asked, testily.

“Because it only has six fingers…” Chihiro explain, “But it can do more than enough tests to ensure that it’s not just random chance, even with the better odds…”

“Now, Arcanine, keep pointing to the number of fingers the Arcanine is holding up, okay?”

The dog nodded silently and turned away from Chihiro to face the Golett, much to their relief, and Golett started the test by holding up 4 fingers, and the Arcanine pointed to the correct number…

“Let!” Golett nodded and held up two fingers, and Chihiro started getting back to work…


Okay… they had to admit, this was pretty impressive, for a dog. It seemed like Ishimaru really had trained it well…

“Are you satisfied now?” Ishimaru asked.

“Yeah… How did yo…”

“No! This doesn’t mean anything!” Togami insisted, “You and Fujisaki have probably just worked together and had your pokémon memorise a sequence of positions!”

“…What would Fujisaki have to gain from that!” Ishimaru asked the first question that went through Chihiro’s mind.

“How would I understand what drives you people!” Togami scowled, “Regardless, if you’re really telling the truth, then I’m sure you could keep going indefinitely!”

“Well… I suppose it is stopping Arcanine from getting bored…” Ishimaru agreed, watching as his pokémon obediently tapped at the piece of paper…

...It was hard to imagine the same dog proudly pointing at numbers right now could have possibly hurt it’s owner… maybe Chihiro had been over-reacting to Ishimaru’s story… Even if his pokémon had hurt him once, it might have been when he first got it or something, not an indication of how it acted now…


“That noise is beginning to become irksome.” Ludenberg said, although Chihiro had been finding it quite relaxing doing the questions with the test going on, like a ticking clock in the background. “Don’t you think it’s time you admitted you were wrong, Togami...?”

“Hrmm…” Chihiro looked up to find that Togami was glaring between themself and Ishimaru, as if trying to work out how they’d ‘tricked’ him… “Well, it would appear my family has been severely underestimating how intelligent Arcanine’s are! I’ll have to inform my half-sister that she should be encourage them to read and count, at the very least! I’m sure her pokémon would soon outclass yours if she did!”

“Erm…” Ishimaru didn’t seem to know how to respond, “Well, I suppose I should be glad you finally believe me, and we can finally stop wasting class time on this!”

“Actually… I just wanted to try one more thing I didn’t think of…” Chihiro asked realised, “Golett… hold up zero fingers!”
Golett did as it was told, holding up a pair of fists, which the Arcanine stared at for a moment… and then quickly stood up on all fours…

_Uh-oh… It looked angry… Was it mad that Chihiro had changed the rules…? Was it about to come over and…?_

…And plodded back to Ishimaru’s side and sat down, getting several pets on the head as it did so.

“Umm…” It hadn’t been about to attack at all, it just decided to go back to Ishimaru… why had Chihiro panicked like that again?

“Ah… He doesn’t understand what a zero is, even when I show it to him, he just thinks it’s a letter and tried to put it back with them…” Ishimaru admitted, “Which is still pretty smart for a dog!”

“For a common dog…” Togami couldn’t help put get the last word in…

“Speaking of Togami-bred pokémon…” Ludenberg suddenly brought up, “Do any of your family specialise in Weaviles?”

“Not particularly… Why, are you hoping to replace yours?”

“No… I was merely curious as to whether there are any in the world that have the level of dexterity that mine does…” Ludenberg told him, “And if there were any that were even close, they’d probably have to be Togami bred…”

“…Alright, you’ve got my attention.” Togami turned around to face her and her pokémon, “What can it do that you’re so proud of!?”

“~Hmm-hmm!~” Ludenberg smiled gleefully, “Weavile, be a dear and show Togami how good you are your shell game!”

“Vile!” Her Weavile nodded and fetched three cups and a small white ball out of Ludenberg’s bag, then placed the cups upside down on Celestia’s table, with the ball in the middle one, and started shuffling the cups around…

Hmm… that wasn’t that fast… Chihiro had played videogames where it was faster…

“It’s in the middle one.” Togami instantly guessed as soon as the Weavile stopped moving them, which was what Chihiro would have guessed as well.

“Vile!” The Weavile pulled up the middle cup to show he was correct.

“But, of course, he was slowing his moves down so you’d have a chance… you are only human, after all…” Ludenberg insisted, “If he’d been against your Drampa, for instance, then he’d have gone a lot faster…”

“Alright… Drampa!” Togami gestured to his own pokémon, which dutifully flew over to him, “Once he stops moving the cups, point to the cup with the ball!”

This time the Weavile went faster… but not so fast that Chihiro wasn’t able to guess that the ball was in the left side… but they certainly hadn’t been as confident about it as before, and Togami looked like he had no idea whatsoever…

But his Drampa still pointed to the leftmost cup, which was indeed the correct one.

“You’re Drampa certainly is speedy!” Ludenberg admitted, “I guess Weavile is going to have to go
all out this time!"

“Hah! Drampa will still be able to tell what he’s doing!” Togami insisted.

“Really? Would you be willing to bet on that?” Ludenberg asked, “Because there’s a TM I’ve got my eye on…”

“Fine! If Drampa gets this wrong, you can have whatever TM you like!” Togami smirked confidentially as the Weavile put the ball back under the middle cup…

_This_ time there was no _way_ Chihiro could possibly keep up… it was going so fast it looked like there were more than three cups there, but the Drampa still seemed pretty sure of itself as it point to the rightmost cup…

Which only made Ludenberg and her Weavile all the more smug when the cup was pulled up to reveal nothing…"

“Argh!?” Togami looked completely shocked. “H…how!?”

“I _told_ you he was dexterous!” Ludenberg smiled, “It’s TM44 that I want, by the way…”

“Well… it isn’t as if I can’t afford a single TM…” Togami shrugged, causing Ishimaru to briefly turn away from his work to face him in annoyance. “It’ll teach me not to underestimate the variation in speed across different pokémon species…”

“Hmm I wonder I Golett would do better…” Chihiro admitted. It wasn’t a very fast pokémon, but the almost robotic nature it had often made them assume it’s eyes would be good… “I can’t bet anything on it though…”

“Never mind… I’m interested to see how quick golems are…” Ludenberg agreed, and Chihiro had their Golett stand by the table and watch the shell game again…

“…Let!” Golett pointed to the centre cup… which was empty. “Gol!?”

“I guess your eyes aren’t that good then…” Chihiro admitted.

“GOL! Lett!” Golett gestured at the cups again, and the Weavile replaced the ball and started again…

Golett lost about five times before Ishimaru suddenly turned to face them all… “You _do_ remember that we’re _in class_ , don’t you!?”

“Umm… yeah. Sorry.” Chihiro had almost forget, actually. “Golett, time to give up for now. You can play again later.”

“Let…” Golett agreed, and moved back between Chihrio and the Arcanine…

“You don’t fancy testing _your_ pokémon’s speed?” Ludenberg asked him.

“Not during class, no.” Ishimaru replied testily.

“That dog’s probably too stupid to understand the game in the first place…” Togami commented.

“He is _not_!” Ishimaru snapped.

“Perhaps you’d like to prove it then?” Ludenberg smirked.
“Fine… but if Arcanine finds the ball, you all have to keep quiet and work on these questions!” Ishimaru insisted.

“Very well… But if he doesn’t, you have to stop scolding us.” Ludenberg added, to which Ishimaru nodded…

“Alright… Arcanine, come over here boy!” Ishimaru gestured to his dog, which made Chihiro’s breath hitch as it brushed past their Golett on the way across to Ludenberg’s table. “See this ball? Pay attention to it, alright?”

The dog moved its head close to the ball and sniffed it for a bit, then sat back up nodded, and the Weavile started moving the cup at blinding speed again…

“Now… fetch the ball!” Ishimaru ordered.

The dog stared at the cups for a moment… and then rushed forward and lunged, teeth bared, at the Weavile’s neck, knocking it down to the ground and moving in to rip its neck out…

“Aaahhh… AAHHHH!” Chihiro yelled, louder than the last time, but still unable to speak intelligibly for the second time that lesson...

“What’s going on over there!” The teacher snapped over from the other side of the room. “You’re supposed to be doing maths, not having a pokémon battle!”

“Ah… We were just letting our pokémon play some quiet games with each other, when Ishimaru’s Arcanine suddenly lunged at my Weavile!” Ludenberg told him.

“Well, what did you think would happen if we told Arcanine the aim of the game was to find the ball, and then you had your Weavile hide it behind its neck?!” Ishimaru snapped, as his dog suddenly came back up carefully holding the ball between its front teeth and deposited it into his hand. “Your pokémon’s been agitating the others by cheating this whole time!”

“It’s not cheating…” Ludenberg insisted, as her pokémon irritably stood up off of the floor and brushed itself off, “I never said the ball would be in one of the cups…”

What!? So… the Arcanine had only jumped on the Weavile because it had noticed it palming the ball and was just trying to pick it back up, like it was supposed to… it hadn’t even hurt the other pokémon at all… And Chihiro had just over-reacted again…

They… they really weren’t going to be able to get used to Ishimaru’s Arcanine, were they? Everytime it seemed like it wasn’t frightening them anymore, it did something unexpected and their imagination ran wild again… And even sitting here watching it play wasn’t helping, not since Ishimaru had lied earlier and put the thought of his pokémon attack people into their head…

“Drampa doesn’t get agitated!” Togami was insisting, “Yours was the only pokémon who made any sort of fuss over this…”

“That’s enough!” Kizakura raised his voice in weary irritation, “Ishimaru, Ludenberg, put your pokémon back in their balls if they can’t get along with each other! And I better not hear anything else from your group!”

The two red-eyes students glared at each other before doing as they were told, and the rest of the lesson was spent in tense silence, as the other three students all fumed over having been scolded…

There were a few different lessons after that, with Ludenberg being switched out for different
students depending on the subject (causing Togami to ask if he could swap groups during English class, when Fukawa joined them) but it seemed that they, Togami and Ishimaru were going to be included in the top group for every subject now…

This was going to be really awkward, if Ishimaru kept wanting to let his Arcanine out of its ball and Chihrio was going to keep on expecting it to attack things… Not that it had actually done anything to make them think that, but that hadn’t stopped them panicking every time it moved, had it?

…At this rate, they were never going to change…

“Alright… class dismissed!” Eventually, the various lessons ended and everybody started packing up their belongings, Chihrio included…

“Err… Fujisaki!!” Chihrio jumped slightly at the loud voice trying to get their attention.

“Ahh… what is it, Ishimaru?”

“I realised during class… you never actually told me what it was you wanted help with!” He explained, “In exchange for fixing up my pokédex!”

Oh… right… They’d asked Ishimaru for help, but now… there wasn’t any way their original plan was actually going to work, was there? They’d have to quickly think of something else he could help them with instead…

“Umm…” There must be some help Chihrio needed… Something school related? But Chihrio hadn’t needed help with any of the higher end stuff so far, so unless there was something from the morning class… Oh! That was it! “I need to know about the essay questions your group was given this morning!”

“Oh! You’re already studying ahead to fix your weak point!” Ishimaru seemed impressed, “Well, I know a lot about various pokémon, so I’ll gladly tutor you on…”

“Oh… no… I didn’t mean I needed tutoring…” Chihrio corrected him, “I just need to know what the questions are so I can write a couple of practise essays and make sure I don’t fall behind too much over the next few days…”

“Oh… just the questions themselves? That’s all you need…?” Ishimaru looked distraught. “Are you sure? That… doesn’t really seem like a fair trade for you… given what you’re offering to do for me…”

“Umm… It’s fine, really! Like I said, I do that sort of thing all the time, so it’s easy for me!” Chihrio insisted.

“Well… if you’re sure…” Ishimaru didn’t look very convinced, but still wrote down the four questions from the morning, and insisted that he’d be happy to help with anything else Chihrio could think of, before leaving Chihrio alone in the classroom to work on them by themselves…

Almost by themselves, anyway. Oowada of all people also stayed behind to work on his maths again, although he gave up after a while and brought out a huge folder and started reading through that as well…

“You gotta be fucking kidding me!” Oowada snapped, slamming his folder shut just as Chihrio was finishing up their first question, “Fuck this bullshit, I’m going for a drink…”

True to his word, he got up and stormed out of the room, leaving Chihrio in peace to finish and hand
in the second essay to Kizakura.

“Darn you overenthusiastic kids… giving me more work to do…” He joked, “See you tomorrow, Fujisaki. Hope you’re feeling better…”

“Thanks… See you tomorrow, sir.” Chihrio replied and left…

But what were the chances of them feeling better tomorrow? They hadn’t made any progress with their problem, if anything, they’d gone backwards today, not forwards… And they still didn’t have any idea what to do to fix the problem, either…

“Hey… Fujisaki?” Another loud male voice was trying to get their attention, “I, uhh… I need ta fuckin’ talk to ya ‘bout summat!”

Oh no… the last thing they needed right now was to have to be near Oowada’s Lycanroc… But it wasn’t like they could just run away from him… They’d just have to try to remember what Oowada had said about his Lycanroc knowing not to hurt humans and not to completely panic yet again…

“O-okay…” Chhiro took a deep breath and turned around to face Oowada…

Just Oowada…

“Uhh… where’s your Lycanroc…?” Please don’t let it be sneaking up on them, please don’t let it be sneaking up on them, please…

“I figured this’d go easier if he was in his ball, insteada getting pissy at your Golett, or whatever…” Oowada admitted gruffly.

“Oh… Okay!” That was a weight off of Chihiro’s mind, “So… what was it you wanted to talk about? Does your pokédex software need upgrading, or…”

“No… I mean, that’d be cool and all, but that wasn’t what I came ta ask… I… It’s just… Thing is…” Whatever this was, Oowada was having trouble saying it, he was even starting to turn red and sweat with the effort… “…You’re good at math, right!”

“Umm… yes?” Why was Oowada asking them that…? Oh! “…Were you going to ask if I could help you learn it?”

“Nghrg…” Oops, maybe Chihiro should have just waited for Oowada to say it himself… he looked angry that they’d been able to figure it out so quickly, even though it was pretty obvious Oowada needed the help, “It… it ain’t like I’m begging for your help, or anything like that! Ya just happen to be the only good math person who ain’t a pain in the ass, so I was gonna ask if there was anything I could help ya with in return for some help with that crap!”

“Oh! Well…” That kind of sounded like begging for help to Chihiro, but they weren’t about to say that to Oowada’s face. But what could they ask for help with? Oowada was a pretty strong trainer, so they could have asked him to help keep them safe in the wild areas while they trained, but there’s no way Chihiro could deal with him having that Lycanroc…

…Unless they asked Oowada to help them get used to canines…

Could it work? It seemed like a crazy idea, given how angry it seemed all the time, it was sure to frighten Chihiro, a lot, even just being near it… But Oowada had said he’d never attack a person, and they couldn’t get the thought of Ishimaru’s dog being violent out of their head now. So it was either take a risk with this or accept that they’d never overcome this problem…
“…You said your Lycanroc knows not to hurt people…” Chihiro had one thing they wanted to check, “So… he’s never hurt anyone? Not even you?”

“Why the hell would he hurt me, of all people!?” Oowada looked confused at the questions.

“Well, you’re the person he’s with most of the time…”

“But I’m his damn trainer! …And, alright, he had a shitty upbringing, so there were a coupla times he freaked out and tried ta bite me when I first got him, but I was bigger than him and could hold him back when I needed to, so it never came to anything and eventually I got him trained well enough ta cut that shit out.” Oowada admitted, casually. “I mean, I wouldn’t have kept him if I couldn’t handle him! You saw me pull him away from your Golett, didn’tcha?”

…So, basically, the wolf might not always be the best behaved pokémon, and would probably try to attack at times, but Oowada was strong enough to make sure it was safe to be near… At least if he was around…

…Chihiro might actually be able to trust in that. Maybe this could work after all. It had to at least be worth a shot…

“Well… in that case, there is something you might be able to help me with…”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! See you in a fortnight for some talent training with Sayaka!
Chapter Notes

I can’t remember if I went into this before, but in this AU pokémon battles are considered real world knowledge (so most of the stuff everyone learns in school), talent contests are equivalent to sports (so you have compulsory lessons dedicated to them at all schools and the schools give a lot of funding towards them) and pokémon sports are equivalent to arts or drama (So some schools will have lessons for them, but it’s not mandatory and they’re often underfunded)

I have discovered that what I’ve been referring to as ‘talent trainers’ are actually officially called ‘Pokémon Coordinators’, so from now on I’m going to start gradually shifting towards using that term as well.

Also, I didn’t really want to go into detail about Chihiro’s gender in this fic, as I’m working on the basis that there’s no institutionalised bigotry in this AU (In part because I can’t remember there ever being any real example of it in the games or anime.), so they’d have probably just gradually told everyone off camera that they’re nonbinary, which is why everyone’s now starting to use the correct pronounces for them.

(Also, regarding they/them pronouns. I’m not sure if I should be using singular or plural verbs with them. For example do people usually prefer to say ‘they was’ if it’s referring to one person, or do they just use ‘they were’ because it’s more standard? Apologies if that’s a dumb questions but I’ve not written a NB character before.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ahh, Wenesday morning at last!

Not that this school had been that bad, aside from missing the other member of the band. Alright, so Sayaka certainly wasn’t the best battle trainer in the class, or even in the top half of the class, but she wasn’t as far down the rankings as she’d expected to be, and the classes so far had been reasonable.

But today was finally going to be her chance to really shine here! The first class of the day was the weekly talent contest training, and her chance to start showing everyone that her pokémon were better than Enoshima’s! And she’d woken up especially early to make sure she’d had plenty of time to bathe and groom her pokémon and catch a quick breakfast before heading into her classroom…

…To find that, even though she’d got up early, Ishimaru and Kirigiri were both already at their usual tables. The detective looked as if she’d just done the bare minimum for her pokémon’s appearances to be considered acceptable for the class. Both were clean and she’d put a top hat on her Kadabra and a bowtie between the two sets of wings on her Crobat, but she was now sat looking over some files instead of making any attempts to really make her pokémon look good, like shining her Kadabra or moisturising her Crobat’s wings…

Meanwhile, Ishimaru hadn’t given his Arcanine any accessories or props, probably still put off by what happened on Saturday. But he was making up for it by gently but obsessively brushing over his the dog’s fur until there wasn’t a single hair that was out of place. Which was probably going to take him quite a while, especially as he didn’t seem to have any kind of hair spray with him. But his dog seemed more than happy to sit still while he pampered it and occasionally told it how smart and handsome it looked, so chances were he’d be able to have it looking pretty good by the time the class
Actually started.

Which would be coming soon, so Sayaka didn’t have time to be standing around watching her classmates! Of course, she’d also bathed and groomed her own pokémon before making them get into their pokéballs so they didn’t risk getting messed up while she was moving about the school or eating breakfast, but she still needed to let them out and make sure they were dressed for the occasion, then straighten them both up before class started...

“Okay, Brionne! Out you come!” Sayaka sat at her own desk and started with her older pokémon, who was more used to wearing the accessories and didn’t get as anxious waiting around for a show to start...

As ordered, Brionne popped out of her pokéball onto the table, looking up at her excitedly.

“Alright Brionne, we’re going to get to show off one of our dances today...” Brionne barked happily and clapped her fins together at the news, as Sayaka got out her accessories case. “So... do you want your hat, your scarf, or your earrings today?”

The seal tilted her head as she looked over the three choices, before finally deciding to point her nose at the hat, which was more like a light blue silk bonnet with ruffled trim.

“Alright then!” Sayaka got it out and carefully put it on her, making sure the ear holes were lined up properly and it was all sitting straight, then took out a small comb and started to do a final brush over Brionne to make sure she was looking her absolute best...

“...What if she doesn’t want to wear any accessories?” Ishimaru suddenly asked.

“Onne?” Brionne looked confused at the question, she’d always liked joining in when Sayaka used to dress up herself or her toys as a child, but Sayaka could understand why Ishimaru had asked it...

“Well, Brionne’s never not wanted to wear something.” Sayaka assured him, “But occasionally Espurr won’t be in the mood for it, so I just focus on brushing his fur and making sure he looks neat that way...”

“Ah... so you can present pokémon without accessories!” Ishimaru sounded relieved, “I was attempting to do some research for this class last night, but I kept finding a lot of people saying that accessories were an absolute necessity! But there's nothing about them mentioned in any of the information the school gave us...”

“Hmm... they might have meant it’s necessary to win.” Sayaka admitted, “A well-matched accessory gets you a lot of points, so someone without one would be at a disadvantage...”

“But, you could make up for it by having a good performance and scoring well in the other areas, surely!?“

“Well... maybe at the low and mid-level competitions, but at high level ones everyone competing will have accessories and a performance prepared.”

“Hmm... I see...” Ishimaru looked concerned as he carried on brushing his dog.

He probably didn’t like the idea of being at a disadvantage in any competitions the class might hold, just because his dog didn’t like wearing extra clothing... or was afraid of wearing extra clothing...

“Speaking of accessories...” Kirigiri suddenly piped up from the back of the class, “How did you find your Arcanine doesn’t like police hats?”
“Err… it’s not that he doesn’t like police hats… he just doesn’t like being expected to wear them himself…” Ishimau corrected her.

“And you found that out, because…?” Kirigiri prompted.

“Ah… w-well did you see how he reacted to it on Saturday?” Ishimaru asked, to which Kirigiri must have nodded because he carried on without explaining, “Well, I tried to put a toy police hat on him once when he was a Growlithe, and he did that!”

“And then…?” Kirigiri carried on prompting him.

“Errg… well… I… stopped trying to put it on him!” Ishimaru told her, too loudly. “He was growling at me! I’d have had to have been truly stupid to ignore that kind of a warning signal, wouldn’t I!”

“Perhaps…” Kirigiri agreed, “I take it you then panicked at your dog’s reaction, and that’s when you dropped the hat into the fire and burned your hands?”

“Err…” Ishimaru hesitated for a moment, “…Yes! Yes, exactly! You really are a good detective!”

“…Thank you.”

…Kirigiri was probably a much better detective than Ishimaru was giving her credit for. He’d completely missed the fact that she’d just lured him into contradicting the story he’d told yesterday about dropping his father’s hat into the fire. Sayaka had already had the feeling he was lying to cover for his own pokémon, but that just about confirmed it…

Still, lots of children got into accidents with their own pokémon, and most of the time it was considered a learning experience for the trainer. There wasn’t really any reason for him to think he needed to cover up what had actually happened, and he was doing such a bad job of it that it probably just made him look like a worse trainer… But Sayaka was getting the impression that trying to tell him as much would probably just result in him going to even more ridiculous lengths to deny the truth, so she just kept silent and carried on tending to Brionne until the next people arrived in the class, which happened to be Asahina and Oogami…

Both of them looked like they’d just come from having a bath with their pokémon, none of whom were wearing anything they wouldn’t usually have been. At least until Asahina opened up a small accessories case and brought out a Marill-sized cowboy hat and a silvery-blue bow.

“You’re giving your pokémon extra clothing?” Oogami looked surprised, then seemed to look around the classroom and notice Brionne and Kirigiri’s pokémon were also wearing accessories. “Is this because of today’s class?”

“Yeah… they just find this stuff annoying to keep straight, otherwise…” Asahina sighed.

“But… I thought the idea was, in part, to judge how attractive our pokémon are?” Oogami checked hesitantly, “Wouldn’t hiding part of them with extra clothing be counterproductive to that?”

“I guess? But everyone in all the contests seems to do it anyway!” Asahina shrugged briefly, before starting to tie the bow around her Glaceon’s neck, “Hey, Sayaka, do you know why that is?”

“Well… The idea is that you carefully pair the accessories to enhance your pokémon’s best features… Like giving Brionne this silk hat to match with her ruffles.” Sayaka tried to explain, “Or you can give them props that work with whatever performance you have planned for them to do, like a baton or pompoms for a cheerleading routine…”
“I see… Does that mean we were all supposed to have brought accessories for our pokémon?” Oogami and her Florges both looked concerned.

“No! Not at all! I certainly haven’t!” Ishimaru answered, proudly gesturing across his Arcanine. “And there’s absolutely nothing in the syllabus that states that wearing accessories is in any way mandatory!”

“That’s fortunate. I am not really familiar with this sort of thing…” Oogami admitted, “I was concerned that it would appear that I was not taking this class seriously enough…”

“Aww… well, it’s only the first class!” Asahina assured her, “It’s not like they’ll expect us all to have perfect dance routines organised, or anything, right? Even is Sayaka’s got, like, a dozen!”

…More like thirty, but there was no need to say as much. It wasn’t as if Oogami had been purposefully pointing out how strong her pokémon were in comparison to almost everyone else’s. “That’s right… and they’ll probably put us into groups based on skill, like yesterday!”

“That would seem reasonable…” Oogami agreed, “Thank you. We will let you continue your grooming now…”

“No problem!” Sayaka told them, as she finished up brushing Brionne…

So, now it was Espurr’s turn to slowly come out of his pokéball and chose what to wear… “Okay, Espurr? Do you want your bow or your glasses?” Espurr’s eyes slowly moved down towards the pair of round shaded glasses, “Alright! Glasses it is!” Sayaka picked them up and started to carefully place them over Espurr’s ears…

“Hey, Sayaka! Speaking of glasses, remember this…!?!” Sayaka turned around to see both Makoto and his Blastoise had enter the classroom and were wearing shades, standing back-to-shell with their arms crossed dramatically, “Cool guys pose!”

“Aahahaha! Yes!” Sayaka couldn’t help but laugh as the pair of them did the same, silly routine she’d suggested to them during class one time, “So, what other tricks do you have now?”

“Err… other tricks…?” Makoto stared at her like a Deerling in headlights. Did that mean…?

 “…Have you really just been doing that pose in every talent contest you enter!?”

“Umm… pretty much?” He grinned sheepishly, “I mean… I don’t really enter that many, soo…”

So, he hadn’t really been all that interested in them, and had just been doing the bare minimum to get through compulsory lessons…

“Heh… well, I guess now we’re here, I’ll have to start making up some new performances, right?” Makoto added, “And Togepi’ll probably be better at that sort of thing, anyway…”

“That’s true… it certainly does the Metronome dance well!” Sayaka admitted, “Do you have any accessories for it?”

“Not… yet… I bought a flower crown for it last night, but it ended up being slightly too big and it kept sliding down into its eyes, so I’m going to try to cut a bit out and stick it back together before class starts…”

“Well, good luck with that!” Not checking an accessory before the day of the contest was a common rookie mistake, but there was no reason to point that out to Makoto. He probably realised he
Most of the room was quiet as she and Makoto both dealt with their pokémon’s accessories, aside from Asahina and Oogami chatting quietly together and Ishimaru occasionally praising his Arcanine, at least until it started to get a little closer to the beginning of the class and the rest of the students started arriving…

Ludenberg was the next, followed closely by her Weavile, which made sure that she was in her seat and happy before pulling out an accessories case and beginning to dress itself in what appeared to be a custom-made butler suit, and then starting to make sure its grey fur and red feather were all neat and tidy, with only the occasional adjustment from Ludenberg herself.

Yamada came in very soon after, with his Dratini wearing the same helmet it had been yesterday. Sayaka would have thought he’d be another student who’d have slapped on an accessory and called it a day, but after a moment of watching everyone else brushing and fussing over their pokémon, he did at least decide to try and shine up the Dratini’s scales a little with the sleeve of his shirt, as if his pokémon was a pair of glasses or something…

Next came Fukawa, who seemed to be in a rush to arrive to class despite still having plenty of time before it started. It looked like her Garbodor was… well ‘wearing’ wouldn’t be the right word… it was more like it now contained several decorated hair ties and a neckscarf that it hadn’t done the last time Sayaka had looked at it. But she couldn’t tell if that was because Fukawa had attempted to dress up her pile of rubbish and it had instead absorbed the accessories into itself, or if it was just that her Garbodor had happened to eat them at some point and had decided to bring them to the surface of itself for the contest class.

Whichever it was, Fukawa didn’t seem to be too concerned about her pokémon. Instead she just sat and watched the door for a few minutes, until Togami arrived…

“Ah ha! I b-beat you here!”

Togami stopped dead in the door for a moment, looking pained at having to so much as speak to her… “So? That just means you’ve wasted time sitting here and waiting, instead of making sure your pokémon are properly prepared for the contest, like I was doing…”

With those words, Togami strode into the classroom, gesturing for his pokémon to fly along behind him, as if to show everyone exactly what he meant. He’d dressed his Drampa in a long blue cape with silver, or maybe even platinum, given how much money he had to spend, embroidery that made the material look like dragon scales. Whereas his Rufflet…

“Oh, hey, Togami! Did your Rufflet evolve?” Was Makoto’s take on Togami’s choice of accessory…

Instead of a single red feather growing out of the top of the Rufflet’s forehead, it now had an entire headdress filled with at least twenty identical feathers decorating its head.

“What? Haven’t you filled in your Unova Dex yet?” Togami sneered, as if that was something easy to do. “Braviary looks completely different from Rufflet!”

“But… It’s got more feathers…” Makoto still hadn’t figured it out.

“It’s a headdress, you simpleton.” Togami sneered, “Did you really not have the sense to think I’d dress Rufflet for the occasion?”

“I don’t think anyone could have reasonably expected you to dress your pokémon in an illegal
accessory!” Ishimaru snapped, “Using pokémon to make clothing is bad enough at the best of times, but Rufflets are a protected species! And yet you must have killed a dozen of them, just to…”

“I didn’t kill any Rufflets!” Togami interrupted him.

“So, they’re fake feathers?” Hina asked.

“No, they’re genuine Rufflet feathers…” Togami looked insulted at the question, “But this headdress was made by my great, great grandfather, back when they were more common. And while I wouldn’t approve of such items being made now, it would be a shame to let those lives go completely to waste…”

“What!? Well, in that case it should be totally illegal!” Hina exclaimed.

“Except… if it was made before they became protected, then it’s not actually illegal…” Ishimaru admitted reluctantly, “But do you really think any contest judge is going to be impressed by it?”

“It’s a unique accessory that suits my pokémon spectacularly well. How could it possibly be considered unimpressive?” Togami asked irritably.

“Because… pokémon were killed to make it…?” Makoto answered, amazed that Togami needed an answer…

“As I said, that’s all the more reason to wear it, otherwise those lives would be in vain!” And of course, Togami didn’t see it the same way at all…

“…You might find a judge wouldn’t believe your story about it being an heirloom…” Kirigiri pointed out.

“Which is why I have a certificate of analysis from the Pewter Museum of Science dating it as being at least fifty years old.” Togami smirked, “So there’s no reason for me not to use it in a contest!”

“Well, actually… There’s been a lot of pressure on contest organisers recently not to allow items made from pokémon in any contests, because it can encourage other people to make new ones, even if the original wasn’t made illegally…” Sayaka corrected him, “So you probably wouldn’t be allowed to use that in any legitimate contest.”

“Which is a total buzzkill, ‘cause it looks boss as hell!” Urgh… Great, Enoshima had finally decided to turn up and… what the heck had she done to her Milotic this time!?

…As far as Sayaka could tell, Enoshima had decided to take every single accessory she’d ever owned and put them all on her poor pokémon all at once, to the point where it could barely keep its head lifted off of the floor by itself… No, wait… it wasn’t keeping its head off of the floor! She had Ikusaba carrying it for her! This was ridiculous! Surely this time someone would tell her she couldn’t keep doing this to her pokémon!

“…Hmph…” Togami was the first to react to her entrance, as everyone else was staring as Ikusaba dragged the Milotic over towards Junko’s table, “…Given you’ve also failed to understand the concept of quality over quantity, perhaps I’m better off with a different piece of headwear after all…”

“Geez, gimme some credit! I know this looks bad!” Enoshima rolled her eyes, “But I figured this lesson was a good chance to ask an expert which of my old bits and pieces were actually worth keeping, and then chuck the rest out!”

“In that case… why did you not simply carry them all here, rather than have your pokémon wear
them?” Oogami asked, “Especially as its struggling with the weight…”

“Because if I did that, you wouldn’t be able to see how it actually looks when it’s in place!” Enoshima insisted, “Like Mukuro’s accessory just looks like a dumb pile of plastic bees, but when they’re on her Comfey it makes it look it’s getting it on!”

…Hmm. Ikusaba really had decorated the Comfey around her neck with a set of little plastic bees, each one positioned so it was sat on one of the flowers it was made up out of. And the Comfey didn’t seem to be hurt by it or anything, which was surprising, given that she’d have probably been helped by Enoshima…

“W-wait… do grass types enjoy being pollinated!?” Fukawa grimaced as she changed the topic, “A-and people say my pokémon’s disgusting!”

“Well… attempting to mate with people’s facial hair is somewhat unsanitary!” …Everyone turned to stare at Ishimaru bizarre declaration.

“Urg… I already told you, that was just because your eyebrows look like caterpillars!” …Sayaka had a feeling she didn’t want to understand what these two were talking about right now…

“Oh, totally!” Enoshima agreed with her, “You really ought to take a pair of tweezers to those bad boys! I might even have one with me, if you want… Just make sure you get them absolutely even when you do it!”

“There’s nothing wrong with my eyebrows!” Ishimaru defended himself, “And besides, the purpose of this class to make sure our pokémon are presentable, not to worry about our own appearances!”

“Fine, suit yourself…” Enoshima shrugged and sat down at her table alongside her Milotic…

Wait a minute… How had she managed to turn the conversation about her mistreating her pokémon into one about Ishimaru’s eyebrows!? It had been derailed so badly that everyone seemed to have forgotten about the Milotic altogether… But now Sayaka had remembered…

“Hey, Enoshi…”

“Hey, Maizono! Good to see you’re here early as well!” Sayaka was interrupted as Kuwata and Hagakure both entered the classroom, the former carrying his arsonist Litten and putting it right down on the table next to Espurr! “I was wondering what a pro would think of Litten’s new look!”

“Umm…” Sayaka looked down at the cat, while Ishimaru started pointing out that the pair of them weren’t in the least bit early to class…

Kuwata had strapped a toy guitar to his cat’s back, and also managed to spike its fur up into a peak running along the spine and centre of the Litten’s head. Sayaka had to admit, it was actually a pretty good attempt at making his cat look like some kind of punk rocker… except…

“It looks good, but I don’t think your Litten likes the costume.” Sayaka pointed out, as the cat kept pawing at the toy guitar irritably.

“Eh?” Kuwata looked at what Sayaka was pointing out, “Nah, he’s fine! He’s just trying to work out how to play it!”

“Are you sure…? Because it looks to me like he’s just trying to get it off of him…” Sayaka tried again.
“Trust me! I know my pokémon!” Kuwata patted it on the head, and to be fair it did seem pretty happy when he did that… “Me and him are gonna absolutely rock this class!”

“Hey! You keep stealing my pun like that and I’m going to charge you for it!” Hagakure suddenly stopped arguing with Ishimaru about relative definitions of punctuality.

“You can’t charge me for puns, man!” Kuwata rolled his eyes as he took his Litten back. “Besides, it doesn’t make any sense when you say it, ‘cause you decorated your sandcastle with flowers!”

…Sayaka looked up at Hagakure properly, to see that the Sandygast on his head did actually have several daffodils stuck out of it, which… well it was unusual. Most people would decorate a Sandygast with seashells or flags, but it still actually looked pretty good, and it… felt like the ghost was quite happy with the result…

“But I decorated Exeggutor with rocks, so it does make sense when I use it!” Hagakure argued.

“Wha…!? Why the heck would you do that!?” Leon stared at him.

“Well, you see… They’re not just any normal rocks…” Hagakure started telling what Sayaka suspected was going to be the same type of tall tale as the one’s he’d spent yesterday morning’s class telling her and Makoto…

Hmm… but wait a minute. Hagakure and Kuwata were usually the last two to class… But today they’d arrived before Fujisaki!? Was the programmer alright? They’d been acting pretty oddly yesterday… maybe they really weren’t feeling well? “Has anyone gone to check if Fujisaki is alright? They’re not here yet…”

“Oh, that’s just ‘cause Mondo was bugging them for help with maths… or something, anyway…” Kuwata explained, vaguely. “They had a bunch of textbooks out on the table and everything…”

“Really? ‘Cause when I went it seemed like Fujisaki decided to sit with Oowada at breakfast, not the other way around, so I thought they were asking Oowada for help…” Makoto argued.

“But they could have organised the time in advance, in which case Fujisaki would have gone over to the table Oowada was sitting at in order to help…” Kirigiri pointed out.

“Oh, yeah… I guess that that makes sense…” Makoto admitted sheepishly.

“Well, either way, it’s good that Oowada’s taking his education so seriously!” Ishimaru declared brightly, “Even if he might not have the best time management skills…”

His, or maybe Fujisaki’s, time management skills were still good enough to get the pair of them into the classroom just before class started, although neither of them looked like they’d prepared for a contest in any way… In fact, it looked like Oowada didn’t even know that today was the contest lesson…

“What the hell’s with everyone…?” The biker muttered, looking around the rest of the students all dressing up their pokémon in bewilderment.

“Oh, right. We’re doing contest stuff today…” Fujisaki apparently remembered, “I guess I should give Golett a quick polish before class starts…”

“Whaddaya mean, ‘contest stuff’!?” Oowada sneered, “You mean… parading around our pokémon in fancy dress and shit? When the hell did they tell us we had to do this!?”
“You mean you haven’t read the weekly timetable!?” Kiyotaka looked completely shocked that anyone would take so little interest in their school, “It clearly lists Wednesday mornings as being focused on contest training!”

“Wha…? We’re expected to do this every week!” Now Oowada was the one looking shocked, “Screw that, I’m asking for permission to skip this and do something useful! You with me, Chihiro?”

…’Chihiro’? When did those two get so close?

“Umm… actually, Golett always likes these classes…” Fujisaki mumbled in response, “It likes learning routines, I guess… Or maybe it just likes actually being better than the other pokémon for once…”

“Oh… well, umm… fair enough…?” Oowada looked a little guilty at upsetting Fujisaki, “But, I can’t be the only person who doesn’t need to do this shit, right, guys!?” Awkward silence reigned as Oowada looked to the class for support, only to get none whatsoever, “Really!? You’re all into this crap?”

“Umm… I’m not exactly into it, but it doesn’t hurt to do it once a week…”

“I intend to complete all the sidequests!”

“It’s pointless, but it’s not worth the aggravation of trying to get out of the class altogether…”

“Taking time to appreciate the beauty of pokémon is just as important as testing their strength…”

“And you can teach your pokémon useful tricks, like CPR!”

“Plus, these lessons are actually pretty fun, dude! We get to put music on and dance and stuff! What’s not to like?”

“Fukawa can skip the lesson. There’s no way a Garbodor is going to be winning any beauty prizes… Not unless it makes all the other pokémon sick…”

“B-beauty isn’t everything! And besides, once Scatterbug evolves into a Vivillon, it’ll wipe the floor your inbred Drampa!”

“Excuse me!? He is not…!”

“…Whatever, Fine! Guess I’m skipping this lesson by myself…” Oowada grumbled loudly as realised he wasn’t going to have a gang of guys agreeing with him and headed over to his usual seat at the back, “Not unless you wanna admit there’s no real reason for a sportsman to be dressing his pokémon up!”

“Dude, I told you, I’m done with the whole sports scene…” Kuwata muttered in response.

“Wait… you are!?” Asahina cried as she overheard him, “Umm… but… do you still wanna hang out and play together, like last night? Sakura said she’d like to try some of the games and I was thinking it’d be nice if we invited some more people from our class and…”

“Eh… I’ll let you know.” Kuwata cut her off, irritably.

…Guess his one-on-one ‘training session’ must not had gone the way he’d hoped it would, so he’d given up on it completely. So how long would it be before he gave up on talent training as well…?

“Alright, kiddos! Everyone here?” Kizakura turned up to class as casually as always, although he
seemed to be getting less and less late each time. “Great! In case you’d not read the timetable, this
morning’s lesson is going to be based on contest training! So everyone get your pokémon out and…”

“Hey, actually, sir? Y’know, I ain’t really into this whole contest scene…” Oowada started his plan
to ask for permission to skip the whole class, as he’d promised, “So I was thinking…”

“This isn’t just about winning beauty contests.” Kizakura stopped him, “The performance training
helps focus on your pokémon’s behaviour, which helps with lots of common battle problems.”

“Heh… see, I have got a good reason to get into this shit!” Kuwata insisted, “Although Litten was
pretty well behaved last night…”

“Alright, but what if I ain’t got any problems with my pokémon?” Oowada carried on trying, even
though he could only control his pokémon by grabbing it and yanking it around all the time…

“Just ’cause you haven’t got problems with that pokémon…” Kizakura lied, probably to avoid
getting shouted at, “Doesn’t mean you won’t have any problems in the future, and this will help with
that… End of, Oowada!”

“Tch! Fine…” Oowada stopped whatever argument he’d been about to try and slumped into his seat
in defeat. “So you’re gonna teach me how ta pretty up Lycanroc, or whatever?”

“Hah, me!? Heck no!” Kizakura laughed, “No, we’ve got an actual pokémon Coordinator with
contest judging experience here to do that!”

An actual contest judge? Who could that be? Hope’s Peak could probably have got someone really
impressive if they’d wanted to, right? So maybe it would be someone nice like Dawn or May or
Lisia, that would make this class a lot of fun… But it would probably be pretty fun regardless of who
was teaching, so long as it wasn’t someone completely terrible like that girl who’d ended up joining
Team Magma or…

“And speaking of which, please all stand for Miss Kristabel Hawthorne!”

…Her. Really!? Her!? They were saying the point of this class was to help teach training methods
and then hired that stuck-up, accessory-obsessed snob who barely paid any attention during the
performance rounds!?

“…No guys, seriously, please get up.” Kizakura sighed as the only person to move was Ishimaru,
“It’s part of her contract…”

Urgh… And of course she’d insist on being treated like royalty… What was Hope’s Peak thinking,
hiring her…!? 

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Apologies for the character who shares a surname with a pretty prominent Ace Attorney
character. I was trying to look up obnoxious sounding surnames and that was the only
one on the list I could find that I thought fit her.
Next chapter we see what Junko makes of all this!
Talent class part 2 (Junko POV)

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the later post! I was on a trip on Tuesday and Wednesday, but it turned out the WiFi at the hotel I was staying in wasn't reliable, so I wasn't able to get on here and post this like I'd planned!

I'm working on the basis that contests have a visual round and a performance round like they do in the games. However, the performance round is more like a talent show where any impressive feat or performance would be allowed, rather than just being about the pokémon using their moves to impress the judges.

I use the lyrics to the Monokuma Ondo (Or song) from the anime episode 4 in this chapter. (http://danganronpa.wikia.com/wiki/Monokuma_Ondo) Although I took the dubbed version’s lyrics and changed them slightly, instead of using the ones translated on that webpage. (They still don’t fit the tune though)

(Also I realised partway through this that Naegi and Maizono have apparently switched seats, but I’d already written the segues so they’re staying that way.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“And speaking of which, please all stand for Miss Kristabel Hawthorne!”

No way! They had Kristy teaching this course!? Awesome! Here she’d been thinking this whole class was all going to be about coming up with dumb dance moves, and then everyone would think Maizono was a better pokémon coordinator than her! But now they’d hired her favourite ever judge! Junko had, like, the best luck!

“…No guys, seriously, please get up. It’s part of her contract…”

…Wow, really? Kristy had been hired to teach her, and she was using it as chance to do petty power trips? Gee, nice to know she cared…!

But hey, Junko couldn’t blame her! She’s totally do the same thing if she could get away with it! But she couldn’t, yet, so she just had to follow Ishimaru’s lead and stand up to greet the teacher… (Urg… Following someone as dorky as him!? Junko was going to need a shower after this lesson!)

At least she didn’t keep them all waiting like Junko would have totally done. She’d barely stood up before she started hearing the clacking steps of Kristy’s usual pair of black, ankle-high stiletto boots patterned with white rhinestone diamonds...

They were the only ‘usual’ thing the judge wore. Most of the time her outfit switched depending on how she was feeling, although Junko knew she had a tendency to glam up whatever outfit she’d picked, probably to try and distract everyone from noticing that she was having to start dyeing her shoulder length auburn hair to get rid of the few greys she was starting to get. Either that or the pounds of makeup she contoured on every day to hide her otherwise boring round face and brown eyes...

Today she seemed like she’d started by trying to pull off a teacher look with black tights and a brown knee length skirt and blazer combo. But then she’d decided to add fluffy white fur trim to offset the brown suit, then studded the lapel of blazer with rhinestones in the shape of the school logo, then
added the spare rhinestones to the skirt and finally just decided to go the whole way and stick a line of glitter up the seam of the tights as well.

Kristy coolly strutted in and headed to the teachers table, like she hadn’t been waiting around for them all to stand for her and looked over the class before starting with a phrase she was probably going to regret in about half a second… “Good morning, class…”

“Good morning!” She almost stumbled backwards as Ishimaru did his typical shouted reply, even though no one but him ever did it, and all that ever happened was that he got a weird look for it…

“…I am Kristabel Hawthorne, three times winner of the Hoenn Grand Festival. But you can all call me Miss Hawthorne!” She paused, like she was expecting them all to say ‘yes Miss Hawthorne’ or something, then looked irritated and carried on when they didn’t. “…My job here is mould you all into the best pokémon coordinators you can possibly be! But, in order to do that, I’ll need to see how good you are currently. That means today’s lesson will be mostly taken up by me judging you as if this was a normal contest. That means we’ll start with the visual round, where I will judge the appearance of all your pokémon, then move onto the performance round, where you’ll show everyone whatever special abilities or tricks or performances your pokémon can do. Understood?”

“Yes, Miss Hawthorne!” Ishimaru almost scared the crap out of her again with his stupidly loud answer.

“G-good! So… in order for me to get a good look at you all, everyone stand in a line with their pokémon, starting with you…” She pointed at Fujisaki and then moving across the front row and across to Ishimaru, then backwards from him to Mukuro and then to the right…

Urg, was she doing a snake pattern? Dammit, that meant there’d be six people between her and her sister! Who was gonna hold her pokémon up for her now!?

“Umm… Junko? What should I do with your Milotic…?” Mukuro actually managed to notice the problem as well, picking up the pokémon as everyone started moving like they’d been told to.

Urg, geez… Guess Junko’d better bring over a chair so the fatter Mukuro could have something to lean on, seeing as she was being too much of a wimp to hold a few bits of jewellery up! “Just put her on this!”

“Okay, Junko.” The human Mukuro dragged her over and flopped her over the chair, before taking her own place in the line...

Most of her classmates looked like they’d never seen a proper contest in their lives, and were just standing around awkwardly with their pokémon, but there were some exceptions. Maizono was doing one of her typical jaunty poses, like she just wanted to skip the whole visual part and go straight into whatever annoying preppy dance she had planned. Ishimaru must have spent last night studying fancy dog shows, ‘cause he was trying to do that whole thing of holding up the dog’s head and tail at the same time, except his dog was too big for him to actually reach all the way across without balancing on one leg and stretching, so he was wobbling around like an idiot.

Togami had a proper falconer pose going on, with his Rufflet perched pretentiously on his arm, while his Drampa circled around him trying not to look as dopey as usual. Ludenberg had the sense to bring over a chair and pose sitting down next to her Weavile, although she was paying more attention to how she looked than the pokémon. Hagakure was casually leaning against his Girafarig/Exeggutor crossbreed or whatever it was. Kuwata was alternating between trying to look cool and surreptitiously trying to get his kitten to quit knocking its guitar out of place. And finally, right at the end of the line, a pissed-off looking Oowada was having to keep grabbing his dirty
Lycanroc and pull it back next to him so it didn’t keep trying to wander off or pick a fight with Kuwata’s other cat.

Oh yeah… Junko had this in the bag!

“Alright… I’m now going to walk along and…”

“Hang on a tick…” Kizakura butted in, “…Kuwata, where’s your Luxray?”

“Oh… he was tired after some sports training last night, and as I’d focused on getting Litten ready for this, I figured I could just let him have a catnap back in my room…” Kuwata shrugged, “No biggie, right?”

“Well… I guess not, but in future we’re expecting all of you to bring all your pokémon to all your classes, even if it’s just maths and they’re in their balls the whole time, alright?”

“Alright, my bad teacher-dude!” Kuwata waved apologetically.

“Now, as I was saying…” Kristy gave Kizakura some serious stink eye, “I’m now going to walk along and judge your pokémon, and may or may not give you some feedback on their appearance…”

She started by barely glancing in Fujisaki’s direction as she strutted straight past and over to Naegi, then raised her drawn-on eyebrows at the pair of shades his Blastoise was wearing…

“…You’re from Kanto.”

“That’s right!” Naegi answered, even though it hadn’t been a question.

“And you’ve just been pulling out the same pair of shades you bought six years ago for every contest your school forced you into.” Trust Kristy to know exactly when those ratty old things had first gone on sale!

“Umm… yeah…” Naegi admitted, “I guess I ought to try and get some different things for him to wear, right?”

“Yes. You should.” Kristy told him before carrying on to Maizono… “And speaking of needing different accessories, I see Brionne’s wearing that old hat yet again… and I’m sure I’ve seen those glasses before…”

“Well, you can’t beat the classics!” Maizono must have been super annoyed, ’cause she was putting on one of the nicest smiles Junko had ever seen.

“You can’t beat a dead Ponyta either, dear…” Kristy carried on, ignoring Ishimaru as he desperately tried to straighten himself up while still holding up his Arcanine’s neck and tail and almost toppled over sideways instead, over to Mukuro, where she stopped and looked around in confusion for a bit… “Is Hope’s Peak accepting people without pokémon these days…?”

“Umm… no. My Comfey’s here!” Mukuro stood up even straighter than she had been before and pointed at her neck, which made one of those stupid bits of plastic she’d glued to her Comfey fall right off of it.

Junko had told her she should get ones that could be pinned through the petals, but nooooooo, ‘That’d hurt her!’
“What was…” And of course Kristy noticed it fall down straight away… Gawd, Mukuro was such an embarrassment! “Oh, I see, you tried to use glue to stick bees to your plant… Maybe you should try pinning them next time…”

“Or you could use clear elastic to tie them on!” Geez! Nobody asked you, Maizono!

“Well, you could, but if people see it, it would look a little tacky…” Kristy agreed reluctantly before heading over to Togami and fawning over his Drampa. “Unlike this! Oooh… I’ve heard of this! Your family stole this cape from an Alolan chieftain, centuries ago, right?”

“There’s no proof that it was stolen!” Togami insisted.

“But it is the one that your family has had for four hundred years? It’s incredible that it’s lasted so long… they just don’t make accessories like this anymore…” Kristy sighed, turning towards the Rufflet instead. “Such a shame… I bet that headress looked absolutely breath-taking when it was first made…”

“…Of course, part of the appeal of these items is that they can’t be replicated anymore.” Togami looked like he was getting weirded out by Kristy. “Scarcity drives up value, after all.”

“I suppose that’s true… If you all had them, none of them would be impressive at all…” She sighed, before walking up to Asahina and looking at her Marill oddly. “A cowboy hat for a Marill?”

“Umm… yes?” Asahina answered nervously, “Is there something wrong with that?”

“Well, it does hide a lot of her face. Usually people decorate their tails with bows, so…”

“Ma! Ma! Ma! RILL!” The pipsqueak of a pokémon started hopping up and down angrily.

“Umm… My Marill’s a male.” Asahina translated, “And he kinda hates having stuff on his tail…”

“Well… I’m sure you know that looking good sometimes means being uncomfortable…” Kristy shrugged, then looked Asahina up and down… “Or maybe you didn’t know that! Aaaanyway…”

She walked off away from Asahina, just before the dummy figured out what she’d meant, and straight past Oogami, who looked kind of put out but didn’t say anything about it, onto Ludenberg, who smiled up at her in overblown politeness as Kristy looked over her Weavile’s costume.

“Interesting choice… I wouldn’t have thought of a butler suit for a Weavile, but it fits well…” Kristy admitted.

“Well, I did have it custom made by one of Kolos’ finest tailors!” Ludenberg replied smugly.

“I can tell… It looks impressive!” Kristy made her look even more smug, “Not as impressive as Togami’s, but still impressive…”

Hoo boy! Ludenberg looked pissed off enough to strangle her or something as she walked off over to Yamada… “…What is you Draini wearing!?”

“It’s his battle helmet!” Yamada had the surprising amount of social awareness to look mildly embarrassed, “But, I was hoping I could get some advice on what type of item would be good for his appearance based statist…”

“Oh… I don’t know. Just get him something at actually fits and doesn’t hide his entire face, for a start!” Kristy sighed, then headed over to Fukawa and almost walked right past her, but did a double
take and looked more closely at her Garbodor at the last moment… “Urrppkk… Did you… don’t tell me you wasted perfectly good, brand new items on a Garbodor!”

“W-well, why sh-shouldn’t I!? W-would you rather I brought him along with nothing on!?” Fukawa asked angrily.

“Well, you might as well have! It’s a pile of rubbish! Trying to dress it up so it looks nice is just delusional!” Kristy sighed, “You should have just focused on your Scatterbug. That might actually score you mid-place in a competition at some point…”

“Wh-what do you m-mean, mid-place!?!” Fukawa snapped, only for Kristy to ignore her as she came towards Junko happily. “Enoshima! A pleasure to see you, as always! I love what you’ve done with your Milotic!”

“Really!? Thanks!” About time someone complemented Junko after she’d spent so long hanging stuff on her dumber pokémon, “‘Cause I was thinking I probably need to get rid of some of this old stuff!”

“Hmm… Well… if you don’t mind some constructive criticism…” Kristy reached over and took off a random charm in the shape of an R with a cross through it, “This Anti-Team Rocket symbol ought to go. It’s not good to bring politics into fashion, you know.”

Wow, wished she’d known that back when that annoying do-gooder had given it to her and insisted she wear it during some contest in Kanto… “But everything else is ok?”

“Fabulously! And I love what you’ve done with little Monokuma as well!” Kristy told her, referring to the new jagged red shades she’d given him, before walking over to Kirigiri and looked disdainfully at the cheap store-bought stuff she’d put on them…

“…Do you even care how your pokémon look?”

“No.” Kirigiri answered bluntly, “But I don’t want the aggravation of failing a class, and you need the odd mediocre person here to make the other students look better, so I’d suggest we both agree not to waste each other’s time.”

“…Deal.” Kristy nodded and walked over to Hagakure, looking up and down at his pokémon sceptically for a while. “…Did you use those rocks and flowers to dress up your pokémon, or are they just dirty?”

“Those are their costumes!” Hagakure insisted irritably, “And Exeggutor’s not just wearing rocks! Those are actually…”

“It doesn’t matter what they are, they look too natural. You can’t really tell you’ve actually put anything on your pokémon at all!” Kristy told him, “You should get something else for them.”

“Man… that’s really gonna throw their auras out of whack…” The whackjob muttered, “But I guess I might have something in my collection that’d work with them…”

Kristy gave him an understandably weird look as she left him thinking to himself and looked over Kuwata’s Litten… “Oh, this is a nice change! Most Litten owners just go with the cliché wrestler look…” Kristy commented, which caused the kitten to look excited for a moment.

“Heh… Thanks!” Kuwata grinned at the compliment, “Got any tips to improve the look?”

“Hmm… maybe some spiked leather, or chains? Something punk like that?”
“Hmm… yeah, that’d be sweet! Thanks! You really know your stuff!” Kuwata gave her a thumbs up as she turned towards Oowada and his grumpy looking wolf…

Only to instantly turn her back on them both and head back up to the front of the class. Not that Junko could blame her for wanting to stay away from that, probably flea-bitten, thing.

“Well, now I’ve had a chance to see how you’ve dressed up your pokémon, I suppose we can see what performances you’ve come up with, if any!” Kristy told everyone, “We’ll start at the front of the line, and you can do your tricks or whatever in the centre of the classroom…”

“Alright… So, starting with Fujisaki!” Kizakura called the pipsqueak up, “Do you have any sort of performance prepared?”

“Yes! Umm… although it might not be as good today, because I forgot to bring Golett’s shoes…” The hell? What kind of performance needed specific shoes?

“Well, show us anyway so we have an idea of what you’d usually do…” Kizakura ordered.

“Alright!” Fujisaki and the Golett headed up to the centre of the room, “Just… hold on a minute, I need to download the right track… Okay! Here we go!”

After a moment of fiddling, Fujisaki’s pokédex started playing some bad-quality cheesy jazz number and the Golett started hopping around on the floor, making a stupid noise…

*badaba badaba badadadada badaba…*

“Tap dancing?” Kizakura somehow managed to work out what it was supposed to be.

“So you’d usually put it in Tap shoes?” Kristy actually bothered to look up at them.

“Yes… and a top hat and bowtie as well…” Fujisaki answered, “Umm… I kind of forgot that this was today’s lesson…”

“Hmm… well, make sure you don’t do that next week.” Kristy replied, “Who’s next?”

“Naegi…” Kizakura answered, “You come up with any performances?”

“Uhh… well…” Naegi was looking between the Golett and his own feet in embarrassment, “Not since four years ago…”

“Well, we don’t need to see that!” Kristy decided, cutting off whatever the other teacher had been planning to say. “Next!”

Next up was Maizono, who of course had come along with a proper mp3 player so she could show off how well she could sing and dance alongside her pokémon. And then pretend to be all humble and grateful when everyone but Kristy clapped as soon as she’d finished, even though she was probably getting off on all the attention.

“Alright, Ishimaru!” Kizakura called the next in line, finally stopping him from clapping Maizono, “What can you do?”

“Err… Well…” Ishimaru looked like he was gonna die of shame or puke, “I’m afraid to say I don’t have any kind of routine like that prepared…! I was expecting there to be an obstacle course…”

Hah! He’d got mixed up between contests and dog shows!
“Well in that case…”

“Show us what tricks you’ve taught your dog!” This time Kizakura cut off Kristy… man, this lesson would have been over so much more quickly if he’d just let her run everything…

“Ah… well, it’s mostly just the standard dog commands…” Ishimaru waved his weird-looking hand so his dog would follow him as he walked to the centre of the room, “Like… Sit!” The dog sat, “Good boy! And… Down!” The dog laid down on its front, “Good boy! And… Roll over!”

“Doesn’t every dog know all of these?” Kristy asked, as the dog was halfway through rolling on the ground like a worm.

“Err… Most of them, yes…” Ishimaru and half the rest of the class glanced sideways at Oowada, who glared right back at them. “But… Oh! This isn’t something many dogs can do! Arcanine! Bark this many times!” Ishimaru held up his hand, with three fingers up…

“ARC. ARC. ARC!” The dog did as it was told, then got an even stupider looking than usual expression on its face when Asahina, Hagakure and Naegi started gasping and clapping at the trick…

“Yes, very clever…” Kristy sighed dismissively and waved him back to the line. “Anyway, you with the Comfey, do you have anything to show?”

“…No.” Wait… Mukuro seriously had nothing prepared!? What, did Junko have to help her with everything!? Geeeез!

“Well, the whole point of the class is to help you come up with something…” Kizakura told her, “Now… Togami, have you got anything to show…?”

“Of course I have something to show!” Rich-boy sneered, walking into the centre with his pokémon, a music player and two buckets, “Now, you two wait over there…” He told his pokémon, although only the dragon actually did it, the bird was just staring at one of the buckets, and started trying to hop along his arm to get to it, making him have a funny fight with it to hold it back… “No… Rufflet… You know how this works! You can have those once you go over with Drampa… Rufflet? Rufflet! Are you even listening…? Grrgh… Tell him, Drampa!”

Aww… the dragon ended up spoiling all the fun by going back over to him and making noises at the bird, until it started behaving and went over to where Togami told it to, at which point he turned on some pompous classical music and started throwing stuff to make the two flying pokémon fly up and do somersaults and flips and stuff in time to the music or whatever…

Honestly, watching Togami fight with his own pokémon had been more entertaining, but most of the class was still oohing and ahhing at it all until he finished…

“Well, that’s going to be a hard one to top!” Kristy commented. Man she must really like Togami to have been impressed by that.

“Well, I’ve got something useful to show that doesn’t waste a bunch of food!” Asahina insisted, heading into the centre of the room without her pokémon and lying herself down on the ground…

“Ready!?”

“Whenever you are, Asahina.” Kizakura nodded.

“Alright! *Ahem... * Help! Help! I’m DROWNING!” Naegi, Ishimaru, Maizono, Oogami and Hagakure all had to hold back one of their pokémon as Asahina started over-dramatically flailing
around on the ground, before pretending to die… “Huuuuuh! Blurbblurbblaarg…!”

“Ma-rl!l!” Her Marill then headed over to her, hamming it up just as much as its trainer had, while her Glaceon headed over looking like it was embarrassed enough just to be in the same room as her, let alone actually belong to her…

But it still went over, placed two paws inbetween Asahina’s boobs and waited for the Marill to tilt her head back and do some weird bestiality crap before starting to push down on Asahina’s chest for a while… then the Marill did its thing again and they repeated that a few times before Asahina pretended to spring back to life and declare them to be her heroes and some of the nerdier members of the class started clapping…

“Thank you! Thank you!” Asahina got to her feet and started bowing, “Your turn, Sakura!”

“Ah… Yes.” Oogami agreed slowly, “However, I must apologise, but I have never done anything of this sort with my pokémon before… And I do not have any kind of tricks or commands taught to my pokémon like Ishimaru, either…”

“Well, that’s not much of a surprise…” Kristy commented, “So… you with the Weavile, next?”

“Certainly! Off you go, Weavile…” Ludenberg smiled smugly as her Weavile headed into the centre of the room by itself and pulled out a pack of small playing cards from the pocket in its costume, then started to shuffle them in the stupidest way possible, while wandering around the room to show everyone the cards...

“So, as you can see, this is just a normal pack of playing cards…” Ludenberg explained from her chair, as her pokémon went up to the pair of teachers, shuffling the cards one last time before fanning them all out and holding them out to the teachers. “Now… if one of you could please pick a card and look at it, but don’t show what it is to Weavile…”

“Alright then!” Kizakura leant forward and took one. That was apparently the cue for Ludenberg’s Weavile to put the rest of the cards back together and start muttering and waving its hands over the pack for a minute, then throw all the cards up into the air so they scattered all over the floor…

“They’re all the same card now…” Oogami noticed.

“Yeah! The four of hearts!” Captain Obvious Asahina agreed.

“And what was the card you picked?” Ludenberg asked Kizakura.

“The two of diamonds.”

“…Vile!?” “WHAT!?” Ludenberg and her pokémon both froze at the answer…

“Nah! I’m just messin’ with ya! It’s was the four of hearts!” Kizakura broke out in laughter, flipping the card over to show everyone.

Half the class gasped like idiots at the answer, like it wasn’t obvious that the Weavile had just palmed the deck of cards it had shown at the start for one that was full of the same card while it was approaching the teachers desk…

“Now, tidy this all up so Yamada can…”
“Actually, Yamada’s Dratini will be tidying this up!” Ludenberg announced.

“EH!!” Yamada apparently hadn’t been told about that, “But… it was your pokémon that made the mess!”

“Yes, but for your performance your Dratini will tidy them all up with its Twister move! And if it fails, you can pick up the cards.” Ludenberg told him, “Unless you had some other performance planned?”

“W-well.. I didn’t, but… I don’t think Dratini has that much control over his…”

“Well, he has to start somewhere!” Ludenberg insisted, “Now, hurry up! This class won’t last forever!”

“Ah… Y-yes, Miss Ludenberg…” Yamada cringed and headed into the centre like he was told to. Man, Junko really needed to find out what Ludenberg had done to scare the crap outta him so much… He seriously did try and get his Dratini to tidy up all the cards with its little tornado move, even though all it did was throw the cards around randomly and end up making an even bigger mess that he was going to have to crawl around and tidy up all by himse…

“Excuse me, but may I do my performance now?” Kirigiri suddenly butted in, “This is a good opportunity for me to showcase Kadabra’s talents…”

“Sure, go ahead…” Kizakura told her.

“Very well… in that case, Kadabra will demonstrate his precision teleportation skills,” Kirigiri walked forward with her pokémon, “Kadabra, use Teleport to move all of the cards into a pile in the centre of the room.”

“…” The Kadabra nodded silently for a moment, then waved the spoon it was holding around dramatically… “Kadabra!”

There was a slight thump as all the cards disappeared and then reappeared in a neat and tidy pile in the centre of the room… urg! Well that was boring! Why the hell was everyone clapping at that!? It would have been way more fun to watch Yamada have to tidy all that stuff up!

“Heh… Jin would have loved that!” Kizakura laughed, which made Kirigiri almost look pissed off for once. “Okay, so now it’s back to Fukawa, if you have anything…”

Pfft! Like that dull old bookworm would have anything to show, which meant now it was going to be Junko’s turn to show off the new thing she’d been preparing for weeks! Upupupup…

“O-of course I h-have something!” Uuurrrgggg! REALLY!? “I’m doing a d-dramatic reading, with help from my p-pokémon Garbodor and Scatterbug…”

…What the hell was a dramatic reading…!? Gawd, some people came up with the lamest performances… Well, apparently it involved Fukawa standing in the middle of room reading from some giant book in her arms, while her pokémon moved to either side of it and pretended to glare at each other…

“*gulp...* T-twice a day for 40 days, morning and evening, Goliath the ch-champion of the…”

Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah… Man, it was like Fukawa had decided to pick the longest book in existence to read, just to piss Junko off! Hurry up and let her have her turn already! Nobody cares about this dumb Goliath guy wailing on some tiny-ass little pokémon…!
…Huh, okay, so apparently the tiny-ass little pokémon threw a wad of insect gunk at him and knocked him out with one hit, but it still didn’t need Fukawa to spend, like, twenty minutes blathering on about it while her pokémon sucked ass at acting stuff out! But now a bunch of the class were clapping politely, so it should finally be Junko’s turn now, right…?

“That was the most pathetic rendition of David and Goliath I’ve ever seen…” Togami decided to drag things out by bitching at her, “Your Scatterbug even looks like it’s injured itself!”

“I-it has not hurt itself!” Fukawa insisted, even though it was totally curled up in a ball and shaking…

“But it’s shaking a lot… and it looks like parts of its shell are shaking loose…?” Even Naegi was pointing out how dumb she was being…

“Umm… that’s just moulting, lots of bug types do that…” Fujisaki disagreed.

“Really?” Ishiamru asked inanely, “I thought I’d read that Scatterbugs only moult when they evolve!”

“…”

Everyone in the class went quiet, before suddenly all rushing forward to get a closer look at Fukawa’s dumb, attention-hogging bug as it dropped a bunch of gross dead insect skin on the floor and replaced it with a bunch of white fuzz. And then half the class wanted to add the ugly thing to their pokédexes for whatever reason, so that meant Junko had to wait even longer for her turn. Seriously, why was it always her who got stuck right behind the people who took forever when she only needed to do one small thing? Like every time she went to the shops…

“Alright, now that’s all done with, Enoshima! You’re up next!”

Well about fricking TIME! Time to show Maizono she wasn’t the only one who could do a song and dance with her pokémon! She’d spent ages writing this and getting Monokuma to wave his butt and arms and shout out between the lines of Junko’s song… Which she’d set her pokédex playing right… now!

“In this world, only ‘correct’ opinions are displayed.

But you can catch glimpses of what we all really think!

Those ‘hidden’ feelings show up more often than not.

And so my heart throbs with excitement!

Can I really do whatever I want?

I bite onto someone, oblivious to the world

Ransack and rummage, Upupupupu!

I gobble people up without a care!

This is the extreme Monokuma sooooong!”

…

What the hell!? What was with this half-ass lame applause!? It was barely any better than what the
book-bug had gotten! Didn’t these idiots know lyrical genius when they heard it!?

…Actually, from the look of it, maybe they didn’t. They probably all liked dumb cheesy pop music that didn’t mean anything, and this first taste of culture had gone right over their heads! But at least the freaked out looks on their faces was entertaining…

…Way more entertaining than Hagakure, who just put on some weird stoner music and sat on his ass chilling out while his pokémon both kind of swayed around randomly. And it still got slightly more applause than Junko had! What the hell!? Bunch of heathens… well, at least they only had whatever Kuwata had planned to sit through, ‘cause Oowada looked even more fed up with all this shit than Junko was, so he was bound to just skip his turn…

“Ok, Kuwata, you’re next.”

“Alright! Just… gimme a sec…” Kuwata took a moment to adjust his kitten’s guitar, which was already looking pretty beat up, and headed into the room with a flashy boombox and turned on some old rock music… “Alright class 78! Are you ready to rock?!” Kuwata yelled out loud.

“Yeah!” “…”, “Woooo!” “No.” “Umm… maybe?” Only a few idiots still had the energy to join in with his antics, but that was apparently enough to encourage him…

“Alright, you heard them Litten!” Kuwata pointed dramatically at the cat, who was just sat scratching the guitar out of place again, “HIT IT!”

“Lit…?” The kitten looked up at him confused, but then seemed to figure out what he meant and got really excited, “Ten!”

“Wait… no! Not like that!” Kuwata yelled as his cat started trying to slam the guitar on its chest down onto the ground and claw it into pieces.

“Lit…?” His pokémon stopped its attack just long enough to think of a different idea…

“Nononononono! Not like that either…”

“TEN!” Kuwata’s order was too late, and suddenly the guitar went up in flames… which started spreading onto its fur as well. “…LITTEN!”

“Aww… crap! He can’t drop and roll with the guitar on!” Kuwata freaked out at the same time as his cat did, “Uhhhh… Hit him with a water attack!”

“Right! Blastoise, use Hydro Pump!”, “Got it! Marill! Use Hydro Pump!”

Upupupupu! Overkill, much!? Kuwata barely had time to run out of the way before two gigantic-ass streams of water shot across the room and slammed his firey fleabag up against the opposite wall before it even realised what was happening.

“…I meant Maizono, you dumbasses!” Kuwata yelled as his cat comically swayed side to side before falling over.

“Oh… that makes sense… sorry…”, “Oops… I kind of panicked, sorry…” The two people who’d almost water-cannoned him shuffled their feet apologetically.

“Just… Urrrggg…” Kuwata was too pissed off to speak right, so just recalled his cat into its pokéball. “Is this class over, yet? I need to take Litten to get healed…”
“No, it’s not over yet.” Kizakura answered, “For starters, Oowada hasn’t had a chance to show us anything…”

“Pfft! I ain’t been wasting my time preparing dumb crap!” Woohoo! End of lesson!

“Yes… I noticed that there’s several of you who made no attempt at this lesson whatsoever…” Kirsty suddenly looked up from her pokédex, “…Not even bothering to do the bare minimum required to scrape by. I’d say that’s incredibly disappointing given this is supposed to be a collection of the best potential trainers in all the regions…”

She looked around the room pointedly, which made Fujisaki, Naegi, Oogami and Yamada all cringe.

“Now, the one with the Golett already gave me an explanation…” Fujisaki breathed a sigh of relief, “So that just leaves you…” She nodded to Oowada, who just glared back at her. “You with the Florges…” Oogami just hung her head even lower, “…and you!” She looked over to the first few people in the line…

“Uhh… yeah. Sorry.” Naegi flinched, “I know I need to update my performances and accessories, and I could have tried polishing my pokémon… But I wasn’t expecting…”

“No, not you…” Kirsty cut him off, “The one with the Arcanine!”

“…ME!?” Upupupupupu! The look on Ishimaru’s face!

“Yes, you.” Kirsty confirmed, making Ishimaru practically turn blue! “Now, I understand that not everyone has an interest in contests, but if you’re not intending to make an effort next week, then I’d rather you not attend my class at all, understood?”

“Uhh… hang on a…”

“Hah! Fine by me!” Oowada cut off whatever Kizakura was trying to say, and started dragging his Lycanroc towards the door. “If I’d had my way, I wouldn’t have even been in this class! See you after lunch!”

“…And what about you two…?” Kirsty asked, once the door had slammed shut behind the dumb haired biker.

“I apologise for being unprepared for the lesson, I am not familiar with these contests…” Oogami told her calmly, “But I will ensure my pokémon are better prepared now I know what is expected.”

“And you?” Kirsty turned to Ishimaru, who was still staring in shocked horror, “Are you going to actually prepare for the class next time?”

“But… I did prepare for the class!” Ishimaru insisted, “I looked up the proper presentation poses and trimmed Arcanine’s fur last night, and bathed and brushed him this morning…”

“Do you really expect me to believe you did all that and then didn’t think to put even a single accessory on him?” Upupupu! Man, Kirsty was laying it hard! It looked like Ishimaru might start crying in a minute…

“Well… we saw him at the baths this morning!”, “And he’s been brushing his Arcanine for at least half an hour!” But Asahina and Naegi ruined it by sticking up for the annoyance…

“Not to mention I did consider using an accessory, but Arcanine didn’t want to wear anything!” Ishimaru added, with a completely unsubtle sideways glare at Junko. Like it was her fault his
pokémon was an big baby!

“And do you think you’d get away with that excuse in a real competition?” Kristy asked.

“He can still get a good score if he makes up for it in other areas. I’ve done it before!” Maizono managed to show off while pretending to be such a goody-two-shoes.

“But if he’s not willing to aim to be the best, why should I waste my time teaching him?”

“Because you’re on a contract.” Kizakura told her, “And, despite everything the steering committee is letting you get away with, you aren’t allowed to kick willing students out of your classes!”

Aww… it would have been way funnier if she was allowed to! Ishimaru probably would have died of shock at getting thrown out of a class!

“…Well, I suppose you’ve got me there…” Kristy sighed, “But just be aware that you won’t be doing well in this class unless you’re willing to make the effort to try new things…”

“…Understood!” Ishimaru nodded curtly.

So… she couldn’t kick him out. But she could give him crappy grades for the next four years, no matter how hard he tried at everything else!

It’d be interest to see how long it took before he caved and forced his dog to wear something it didn’t want to, just to get his grades back up…!

Chapter End Notes

In case Junko’s description has you confused, Hina’s pokémon are doing CPR on her. Toko’s new pokémon:
https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Spewpa_(Pok%C3%A9mon)
Littens apparently use flaming hairballs to attack, so I’m assuming their fur is flammable but their skin is unaffected by fire (because they are a fire type and therefore immune to burns.) I assume they’re usually quick to put out any fire they start on themselves by rolling around.
Thanks for reading! Next week will either be the start of Taka’s weekend! (I did say things might start moving a little faster now the initial classes are out of the way.)
I think I mentioned in response to a comment, but not anywhere in the actual fic itself, that Hope’s Peak is located on an island which is not part of any of the other Regions in the pokémon world, in order to keep a neutral status and make recruitment from all the regions easier to do. The island is big enough to have its own tourist economy, which helps fund the school itself (hence the school’s department store being open to non-students at certain times.)

This lesson wasn’t going well… Miss Hawthorne hadn’t called on him to answer any questions at all, not even when he was the only person in class who put his hand up to answer! In fact, it almost felt like she wasn’t even bothering to look at him, no matter how hard he tried to get her attention…

“Arc…? Canine…?”

And there was the bell signifying the end of the lesson, and he hadn’t been able to answer a single question! What would everyone think of him…!? “Hold on a minute… before you all leave… you, with the Arcanine.” She sounded upset with him, but he hadn’t done anything wrong, had he…? “If you don’t intend to make an effort for this class, it would be best if you don’t attend it at all!”

“Nnnnn… Canine! Canine!”

“What!? But I did make an effort! I was attempting to answer your questions, but you didn’t…!”

“You think I’d believe you did all that, but didn’t think to get dressed!!”

“Arc! Arcarcarc!”

…What…!?

Oh GODS! He’d not got dressed this morning! And now he was standing in front of the whole class completely NAKED! And he couldn’t even run away in shame, because something heavy was pinning his whole body to the floor…!

“Arrrrccc…. ARC, ARC, ARC, ARC, ARC…”

“AH!” Kiyotaka awoke with a start, to find himself face to face with the sharp teeth, head-rattling volume and almost burning-hot breath of the six furry feet of battle-toned muscle and sharp claws that were currently pinning him to the bed and barking violently in his face…

He was so relieved to see it that he could have cried. He hadn’t forgotten to get dressed! “…It was just a bad dream!”

“ARC, AR… Arc!” Arcanine stopped his frenzy at the sound of Kiyotaka’s voice, instead letting out a single happy bark before slathering his face in some slobberly kisses and then lying back down with
his snout in the crook of Kiyotaka’s neck and shutting his eyes to fall asleep there while his trainer worked out some anxious energy by petting his head and back…

This was a rare routine, one that was exclusively reserved for nights where Kiyotaka had had a nightmare and Arcanine had had to wake him up from it. The last time Arcanine had been allowed up into Kiyotaka’s bed like this, he’d still been a Growlithe… Which posed a bit of a problem, given his dog’s newfound size…

“Arcanine… Arcanine, you’re too big to sleep on top of me like this!” Kiyotaka managed to grunt out, despite the extra pressure on his lungs, “I can’t move!”

“Arrrrc…?” Arcanine got to his feet to lift himself off of Kiyotaka, but then just stood over his body looking down at him anxiously… He wasn’t happy at the idea of being unable to act as Kiyotaka’s comforter anymore…

“…I know; you lie down next to me.” Kiyotaka shifted sideways to the edge of the double bed, giving Arcanine just enough space to squeeze precariously onto the space next to him, “…And now you can rest your head on my chest!”

“…Arc!” Arcanine gave him another lick before nuzzling into a comfortable position across his chest and shoulders, which still allowed him to actually move his arms and start stroking his fingers through his canine companion’s long thick fur, gently pulling apart any knots or snarls he happened to find as he did so…

But, this was now the third night of disturbed sleep in a row, all because of Wednesday morning. He really ought to stop letting it bother him so much! After all, it wasn’t as if everyone agreed with Hawthorne’s judgement. Maizono had told him she was infamous in the contest circuit for having an unfair bias towards accessorising, his father had pointed out that it took more work to groom a pokémon of Arcanine’s size than to throw an item of clothing on it, and he’d had to report one of the second years for using the vilest string of curse words he’d ever heard to describe her yesterday…

But, still… to have been called out by a teacher, alongside Owada, who hadn’t even wanted to do the subject at all!? And the threat of poor grades if he didn’t find a way to convince Arcanine to put something on…? He’d never been so humiliated in his life! And doing well in school had been one of the things that had earned him a place here, wasn’t it…? What would happen if he started failing a class…!?“Nnn? Ca-nine…?” Ah… Arcanine had lifted his head off of Kiyotaka’s chest and was looking at him with fear in his eyes again. He must have noticed Kiyotaka getting worked up again… and it wasn’t fair of Kiyotaka to make him worry…

“I’m fine… really!” Kiyotaka started running his fingers through the warm fur between Arcanine’s ears again, “You can go back to your own bed now, if you want!”

“…Niiine…” Arcanine blinked sleepily at him, before resting his head back on Kiyotaka’s chest…

…His dog was a little too clever, sometimes. Or perhaps he just knew Kiyotaka a little too well. Either way, it meant he’d seen through Kiyotaka’s lie and was insisting on staying with him, in case he got worked up again.

In that case, he’d have to make sure he kept his hands relaxed and his breathing steady… the former being easy to do if he kept stroking Arcanine, and the latter being a case of counting his breaths in… 1, 2, 3, 4 and out… 1, 2, 3, 4 and in… 1, 2, 3, 4 and out… 1… 2… … 3…
“Arc… Ca-nine…?” Hmm…? Arcanine was prodding at Kiyotaka’s face with his nose… And was it lighter now? Was it morning already…? So that was probably Arcanine trying to wake him up for food… and if it took too long he’d panic and try his ‘CPR’…

“…Ah! I’m awake! I’m awake!” That thought shot any traces of sleep right out of Kiyotaka’s mind. And probably just as well, because when he’d opened his eyes it had looked like Arcanine was gearing up to jump on his chest… Perhaps he should ask Hina how she’d trained her Pokémon to do CPR properly… perhaps it’d involve teaching Arcanine the different between him being unconscious and asleep...

Not that he’d want Arcanine to let him oversleep and deny him his breakfast! The poor dog had already leapt off the bed with a heavy thump onto the floor (good thing Hope’s Peak and all its furniture was built to deal with gigantic Pokémon…) and was now pacing around the cupboard Kiyotaka kept his food in, anxiously looking between it and Kiyotaka...

It had been almost five years since he’d come into Kiyotaka’s care and started being fed twice a day, every day, without fail. But he still looked as if he was afraid that he might be being starved for some minor petty offense today, just because Kiyotaka hadn’t managed to get out of bed as quickly as usual. And to think no one bothered investigating his treatment at the hands of that other police officer well enough to ask Nurse Joy about it…

But, at least Kirigiri had let him know that the statute of limitations on the case wouldn’t have run out yet! So, as he’d told his father on Thursday, they’d be able to reopen the case and include her testimony now!

But, in the meantime, he had to focus on looking after Arcanine, which involved measuring out the large bowl of dried food (and a poffin for having waken him up from that nightmare) and trying to encourage his dog to relax and not wolf it all down in less than a minute…

…He was still working on that last one. And making very little measurable progress. The only change in how long it took his dog to eat had been after he’d evolved and starting having more food to eat.

…And, of course, his evolution had also resulted in an increase in grooming time, meaning it now took him and Arcanine roughly an hour to get ready in the mornings, even with Hope’s Peak having provided him with a fancy on-suite shower room, which Arcanine was expectantly waiting in front of…

…They could just have a shower as usual… but it was Saturday, and he didn’t have anything planned… “We don’t have to go to classes today, so we have extra time! Would you like to have a nice big bath instead of a shower…?”

“Arc…!?” Kiyotaka needn’t have bothered asking. Doing so just sent Arcanine into an excited frenzy, barking loudly as he grabbed the bag of grooming supplies Kiyotaka had prepared for sports practice last week and then trying to push him out of the door…

“Wait! I need to change my clothes first!” Kiyotaka could hardly walk around the school in his pyjamas, even if he was just going for a bath and there probably wasn’t anyone else up this early. “Why don’t you decide what we should do after we have a bath, and pick the right bag for it while I change into my swimming trunks…?”

Arcanine nodded and bounded over to the area where Kiyotaka had pre-packed various bags for
different activities, such as battling other trainers, exploring new areas, practising sports… and even one that was just filled with toys, for when Arcanine just wanted to play with him. Kiyotoaka expected that he’d probably end up picking that one, but perhaps the promise of playtime later would make him more amenable to Kiyotaka’s ulterior motive for giving Arcanine a bath… attempting to give him a swimming lesson…

“Arc!” Arcanine barked proudly as he returned carrying both the grooming bag and…

“…The battle bag…!? You want to fight other pokémon?” Arcanine nodded, much to Kiyotaka’s surprise. Arcanine didn’t usually pick that one when given the choice…

…But, then again, they hadn’t had much chance to battle over the past few days… Thursday’s morning class had been mostly theoretical discussions about planning optimal move sets for their pokémon, and Friday’s had been dedicated to an incredibly detailed explanation about how to use the rowing boats in the lake area, which Kiyotaka had appreciated. And, of course, afternoon lessons had been dedicated to non-pokémon based subjects as usual, and there hadn’t been much time between finishing his homework and side research and the beginning of curfew for him to go outside and train properly… And while he’d annoyed several people during the week, mostly by making sure they were following school rules, no one had challenged him to a battle over it yet. No wonder Arcanine wanted to go fight something! Kiyotaka had been promising him for ages that they’d start battling seriously as soon as they got here, and then they’d spent most of the first week not do so at all! And here Kiyotaka had been thinking of making Arcanine learn to swim…

“…In that case, we could skip the baths and…”

“Nine!” Arcanine yapped insistently, dropping the battle bag and picking up the bath bag again…

…So… he’d rather have the bath than battle, if it came to it? But he was still interested in battling…

“…Alright, so we’ll go for a bath, then we’ll do some battling?”

“Arc…” Arcanine nodded and let out a muffled bark through the handle of the bag.

“Alright then! Let’s get going, then!” Kiyotaka picked up the battle bag and signalled for Arcanine to walk at his side as they headed out to the baths together…

Of course, this now led to the questions of what they could battle today? Perhaps he could ask Hanamura when he went to breakfast…

... 

Upon arriving at the baths, Kiyotaka was doubly glad Arcanine had given him time to change, because it turned out he wasn’t the only person here at this time of the morning! The same two girls he’d met last Sunday where here bathing with their pokémon again… which was unfortunate, given he’d had to report one of them yesterday… Still, she was in the year above him! Surely, she would be mature enough not to hold it against him!

“Ah… Good morning!” Kiyotaka announced his presence to the girls as he entered the room and he tried to guide Arcanine to the hottest five foot deep pool.

“Urg… seriously!? ” The blonde girl complained, “I thought having to get up at stupid-O’clock in the morning would have at least meant we got the place to ourselves!”

“Err…” What could he say to that? It was a communal facility, she could hardly expect it to be completely empty whenever she wanted it to be… “…So… you don’t usually come here at this time? Have you got something special planned for today…?” Kiyotaka tried to turn the conversation
into something a bit more amicable instead.

“No…” She glared at Kiyotaka, “I just needed to get up early today because someone made me waste a whole bunch of time in detention yesterday!”

“And that someone was yourself!” Kiyotaka was not letting her blame him for the consequences of her poor behaviour! “That kind of language is completely inappropriate for a school environment! Especially when directed at a teacher!”

“Urg! That stupid old hag… Am I allowed to say ‘hag’!?” She didn’t actually give Kiyotaka any chance to answer her question before continuing… “Couldn’t recognise a Beedrill if it stung her in her ugly face! Let alone recognise a good looking dancer…!”

“As much as I’d like to agree with you, she was still employed by the school to teach us, and therefore should be treated with…”

“Wait… what did she do to you?” The redhead girl suddenly asked.

“Err…” Kiyotaka had been paying so much attention to her friend that he’d forgot she was actually there until she spoke up, “Th-that’s irrelevant! The point is…”

“Wait… you meant you weren’t just standing up for her because you were looking forward to just getting good marks for buying an expensive accessory, like her highness…!?” The blonde asked, scowling bitterly.

“No! Arcanine won’t even wear accessories at the moment!” Kiyotaka corrected her, “I just feel that…”

“Wow… That’s going to be rough for you!” The redhead interrupted sympathetically, “I heard Arcanine’s were pretty smug, but not letting you dress him up at all…?”

“Ah… no, that’s not it! He’s actually a little frightened of them, because…”

“Really!? Geeez, you’re pokémon’s a bigger wimp than you!”

“He is not!” That was hardly a fair assessment! She hadn’t even let him finish explaining the situation!

“Then why’s he having a bath in, what? Half a foot of water!?” The blonde asked, laughing through her hand and pointedly staring behind Kiyotaka…

…Where Arcanine had laid himself down in the shallowest hot pool available, which barely even covered his paws, and was already pushing around his rubber duck with his nose…

…This was going to be difficult lesson, wasn’t it…?

“Arcanine! Come on! You’re a big dog now, you shouldn’t be in the tiny pool!” Kiyotaka tried to coax him out of there, to no avail. “How am I supposed to wash you in there?”

“Caaaaaaannn…” Arcanine thought for a moment before rolling over, getting a thin layer over his back and sides, before looking up at Kiyotaka hopefully. “Arc?”

“No.” Kiyotaka insisted firmly, making Arcanine’s head droop, “Oh, come on… you went in the big pool last week and it was fine, remember…? And besides I’ve got a game I want to play with you!”
Arcanine perked up at the promise of a game and followed Kiyotaka, toy psyduck in mouth, to the bigger pool, once again insisting on going in first and then beckoning for Kiyotaka to enter the almost stiflingly warm water as well.

“Good boy… now, let me have your rubber ducky…” Arcanine obediently dropped it into his outstretched hand, at which point Kiyotaka waded over to the other side of the pool and placed the duck on the edge before returning to Arcanine. “Now… we’re going to race to your Psyduck! Ready, Set… Go!”

Arcanine almost scoffed at the idea of racing Kiyotaka. Since he’d evolved, Kiyotaka didn’t stand a chance against him in a footrace. But his dog hadn’t accounted for having to deal with the water resistance on his fur, or the fact that Kiyotaka was intending to kick his legs off the side of the pool and swim across to the other side, allowing him to grab the toy before Arcanine had even waded halfway across…

“Nnnnnnniii!?” Arcanine whined in confusion as Kiyotaka easily swam back to meet him, toy in hand.

“I’m swimming, like water-types do!” Kiyotaka explained, which resulted in Arcanine letting out an annoyed huff of breath at the perceived unfair advantage, “I can teach you to do it as well!” …At least, he hopefully could…

“Arc!” Arcanine nodded and looked at him intently.

“Alright! Start by trying to jump off the bottom of the pool and move your legs like this!” Kiyotaka made a paddling motion with his arms…

Arcanine followed his orders, which resulted in Kiyotaka getting splashed with a torrent of water as Arcanine stood with his hind paws still on the bottom of the pool and started frantically paddling at the surface of the water with his front paws…

“Pfft! Ack! Wait!” Kiyotaka managed to get Arcanine to slow down, “You need to keep your legs under the water… err… like this!” Kiyotaka attempted to mimic a dog paddling more closely this time, even though his body wasn’t built for it at all.

“…” Arcanine watched him curiously for a moment, then attempted to hop a little and started chaotically treading the water, as Kiyotaka had shown him… “…Arc!?”

“Yes, that’s it! You’re floating!” Kiyotaka assured him, which admittedly didn’t do much for the look of worry on his dog’s face, “If you keep practising, you’ll be able to work out how to move forward!”

“Arrr…!” Arcanine’s forehead furrowed in determination as he continued to splash in the water until he became too tired to keep it up…

“That was good! You even started moving forward a little at the end, there!” Kiyotaka pointed out, “But, that’s enough for today… I’m not supposed to be in these hot pools for more than ten minutes!” And for good reason… he could already feel himself getting a little more light-headed than usual…

An hour of shampooing, rinsing, blow-drying and brushing his dog later, Kiyotaka was making his way into the dining room for breakfast, having called Arcanine back into his pokéball so he wouldn’t be wanting to binge-eat everything in the room, of course.

Fortunately for Kiyotaka, Hanamura was here in the dining room… Unfortunately, the chef looked
extremely busy this morning, having prepared a large buffet of different, delicious looking courses of food that he was still running back and forth from the kitchen adding to...

Oddly, the table Hanamura was serving only had one other student from his class sat at it, a large boy with light brown hair that Kiyotaka would have considered neatly cropped, were it not for the single very long spike that protruded from the centre of it...

But regardless of how many people he was actually serving, Hanamura was clearly busy and interrupting him at this time would be inconsiderate… But, on the other hand, Kiyotaka didn’t really know anyone else that he could ask for advice, either… Hopefully the chef wouldn’t mind a quick interruption…

Hanamura certainly didn’t look upset, instead smiling and waving at Kiyotaka once as he noticed his approach, and pointing him out to the other boy, who half-turned and waved in his direction as well, albeit while still devouring a stack of pancakes…

“Ah, Ishimaru! I was starting to worry I’d missed seeing you this morning…” Hanamura greeted him, “Have you eaten yet?”

“Err… not yet. I took Arcanine to the baths instead of just showering him this morning, which took longer…” Kiyotaka explained.

“Well, how’s about you save some time by helping yourself to some of my cooking this morning?” Hanamura offered.

Judging from the smell of the food, that would be wonderful… “Are you sure? It wouldn’t be making you cook extra, would it…?” Kiyotaka barely had the willpower to check…

“Not at all! A good chef always knows to make extra food, for whatever unexpected circumstances arrive…” Hanamura assured him, “Now, you take a seat next to…”

“Hajime!” The boy opposite Hanamura quickly gulped down a pancake and turned to shake Kiyotaka’s hand, “Hajime Hinata!”

“Uhh… Sure… Take a seat next to… Hajime, while I go and get the last few dishes!” Hanamura looked oddly confused by his own classmate introducing himself, but quickly went to his usual professional self and headed off to the kitchen…

Which amazed Kiyotaka. There was already far more food here than Kiyotaka would have expected to serve three people… “He’s bringing out even more food!?”

“Yeah… he’s pretty impressive, huh?” Hinata stopped downing a large glass of orange juice in order to answer, “You’re pretty skinny… I’m guessing you’re not used to this quality of food…”

“Err… no, I’m not…” Kiyotaka answered hesitantly. He’d hardly call himself skinny… Between exploring odd areas for new pokémon and playing tug-of-war with a six foot tall dog, he’d built up quite a lot of muscle over the years… But it was true that he didn’t usually get to eat dishes like this… “My favourite breakfast is steamed white rice with pickled vegetables…”

“Eeehhh…” Hinata pulled a disgusted looking face, “That’s… that’s a pretty terrible breakfast… How do you make it through the day on that!?”

“What!? It’s a perfectly good breakfast!” Kiyotaka insisted, “Rice and vegetables are both slow release energy foods! Perfect for getting through a day of hard work!”
“Barely… And they’re only good for getting you through one day…” Hinata argued, “But what happens if you’re in a situation where you can’t get access to food! You’d barely last thirty hours! That’s why you should be eating fatty meats, to allow you to build up a store of energy…”

“Hrmm…” Kiyotaka was pretty sure fatty foods wouldn’t be good for him… but the point about eating more meat… or fish, at least, to build his body up some and make him more resilient seemed fair… especially as he had access to free food now… “Perhaps I should switch to eating something different at breakfast times…”

“Well, today’s your lucky day!” Hanamura had returned to the table, balancing several platters of mouth-wateringly scented food. “I’ve cooked up pretty much every fish-based breakfast food I know, just for you two!”

Wow… Hanamura must have really wanted to talk to him, to have gone to this much effort! “Thank you very much!” Kiyotaka bowed his head, before reaching for the closest dish, “What was it you wanted to talk to me about?”

“Huh…?” Hanamura blinked at him in surprise, “What makes you think I wanted to…”

“You told him you were worried you’d missed him…” Hinata pointed out, “That means you must have had something you wanted to talk to him about…”

“Uuhhh… Oh r-right! Heh heh…” Hanamura looked embarrassed to have forgotten… And no wonder! How he could have forgotten what he’d gone to all this trouble for Kiyotaka! “Now… what was it I wanted to ask you…?”

Hmm… Kiyotaka couldn’t really think of any unfinished business he’d had with the chef either… except… “Was it anything to do with teaching me how to cook poffins…?”

“Uhh… y-yeah, sure!” Hanamura agreed, “We still ain’t picked a time for that! And Hina keeps on bugging me about it!”

Ah… that was unfortunate… He’d probably best try and organise the lesson, just so Hina wouldn’t pester him as much… “Well, I’d be free late tomorrow afternoon, I believe…” He should be finished helping in the garden by then…

“Sure… suits me! We can let Hina know tomorrow morning…” Hanamura agreed, “Your pokémon got a favourite flavour?”

“He likes his poffins sweet!” Kiyotaka answered, which reminded him of the new food Arcanine had got to try on Tuesday… “Oh! And speaking of sweet things, I was wondering if you know how to make Rage Manju…”

“Whatwasthatnow!?” Hanamura glared at him accusingly, “…You been feedin’ yo dog food from that Andou girl…!?”

“Err… well… just the one!” Kiyotaka explained, “We had a bit of a misunderstanding, and she gave it to him as a peace offering…”

“Well… you don’t wanna be feeding yo pokémahn that kinda sugary stuff!” Hanamura insisted, “It’ll rot their teeth!”

“Oh… really!? Well, I certainly wouldn’t want that!” It was a good thing Kiyotaka had thought to ask him! “Thank you for letting me know!”
"Well… I guess you can’t help not knowing these things, given where you grew up!" Hanamura casually brushed his hair back, "Now I’m going to make sure I have the right types of berries to make a good old natural sweet poffin…"

Hanamura quickly walked off… But did he really have to check that right now, while the food was getting cold…?

“Ahh… Just so you know…” Hinata leaned in to whisper conspiratorially to him, “They won’t really rot your dog’s teeth… It just annoys him that he can’t make sweets as well as Ruruka…”

“…Oh…” It hadn’t occurred to Kiyotaka that he might have wounded Hanamura’s pride by asking about another person’s signature food… He really did have a lot to learn about societies outside of his little village in Kanto, otherwise he was going to continually put his foot in it like he had just done…

Fortunately, he didn’t seem to have upset the chef too much. Hanamura returned quite quickly, confirming that he did have a good set of berries for sweet poffins, and he and Kiyotaka started to dish themselves up food from the plates that Hinata hadn’t cleaned off yet…

“So, Ishimaru… Do you have any plans for today…?” Hinata asked him, probably just to make some conversation while they were sat together… but it did give Kiyotaka a chance to ask the questions he’d originally wanted to…

“Actually, Arcanine wants to battle some other pokémon!” Kiyotaka started, “But, I’m not entirely sure how I’ll go about that… Do you know which wild area has the strongest pokémon?”

“For first years? None of them, really… You’d just end up burning up your pokémon’s energy walking around, unless you take a lot of meat with you…” Hinata told him, although Arcanine could probably do with burning off some energy, even without the extra food… “You’d be better off battling some other trainers…”

“That’s true…” That was always true, but the issue was finding ones to challenge… Unless…” Ah! Where’s the nearest Gym!? I can finally go for my first badge!” He had to make sure that was done by the end of term regardless, so now he could KO two Pidgeys with one Tackle!

“Fraid not, there’s no Gyms on the whole of the school’s Island…” Hanamura explained, “You’d have to take a boat to one of the actual regions, and that’s at least a three-day round trip…”

“What!? “But… then how am I supposed to get a badge by the end of term, if I’d have to skip at least one day of school to even reach a Gym…?”

“They didn’t tell you yet? First years have a week long holiday to Cinnibar Island halfway through the term.” Hinata explained, “And they usually organise a whole-school trip to a random Gym in the last week of term as well.”

“Oh… yes, of course!” In his panic he’d forgotten that the school organised trips to Gyms… “But where else would I find people to battle…?”

“Well, in our class, we often battle each other at the weekends…” Hanamura suggested.

“Really!?! I guess I can try asking my classmates if any of them want someone to train against, then!” But if only he’d thought to organise something while he was actually in the classroom with them all… That would have been easier than trying to knock on their doors and ask them…

“Sounds like your best bet.” Hinata agreed, pushing several small plates of food in front of him,
“Now, come on, you need to eat and find a better favourite food!”

…Kiyotaka couldn’t help but wonder why Hinata was so concerned about his diet, but he wasn’t going to turn down the array of delicious food in front of him either…

…

Roughly fifteen minutes after discovering that white rice with smoked Wishcash was a lot nicer than white rice with pickled vegetables, Kiyotaka was headed back towards the first year’s dormitory area, trying to think of someone who would be awake at this time and who was roughly about the same level as Arcanine…

*SLAM!*

His attention was immediately caught by Oowada, who suddenly came out of his room, slamming the door behind him and dragging his Lycanroc towards the dining room so fast it could barely keep its feet on the ground. No wonder he’d not manage to train it to walk at heel properly if he insisted on charging around like that all the time!

But this was perfect! Oowada’s Lycanroc might have type advantage, but Arcanine had speed! That meant they were probably about even in a fight… It was decided then!

“Oowada…!” Kiyotaka stepped forward to block his path in the traditional way, “Hold it ri…!”

“Dammit… Look I know I ain’t supposed ta run but I’m in a hurry…” Oowada barely slowed down as he tried to get out of whatever punishment he thought Kiyotaka was trying to give him...

“Actually, I’m challenging you to a batt…!”

“Grrrr… Whaddaya think this is!? Route thirty-five!” Oowada came right up and snarled at Kiyotaka as he pressed one hand onto his shoulder “I just said I’m in a hurry, dumbass!”

…and suddenly the world around Kiyotaka was a blur he could feel his body tipping over sideways, despite his instinctive attempts to keep his feet underneath him, until it suddenly collided with a solid wall so startlingly that he had to take a moment to blink and shake the stars out of his eyes before he could process what had just happened…

…Alright… so maybe in retrospect that had been a little bit of an inconsiderate time to challenge Oowada… but there was no reason to throw Kiyotaka into the wall! What could he possibly be in such a rush to do on a weekend…!? 

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next chapter we see where Mondo was off in a rush to!
Saturday plans intermission (Mondo POV)

Chapter Notes

Dialga is a legendary pokémon which has control over the flow of time and I think is one of three pokémon that helped Arceus create the world.
New pokémon: Barbaracle
(https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Barbaracle_(Pokémon)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Zurtz xylixal xbulrb minush fzaahh blupt…?”

What. The. Fucking? HELL!? was Kizakura going on about!? It was like he was just spouted a load of fucking bullshit to Mondo, but everyone else in class was just nodding along like it made perfect sense as he pointed to the swirling pattern of numbers that were spiralling around the board too fast for Mondo to actually read them...

“Ohwada…!” Shit… Kizakura was expecting an answer from him, but that was ALL Mondo understood...

“I... I didn’t quite catch what ya just said there...” Mondo hoped to Arceus that stalling for time would actually help him out, here...

“IIEHIGIEHEIEHGIEHIGIEHIGIEGHE...!” It sounded like a million Zubats were screeching all around him as the other kids all howled with laughter... they knew he shouldn’t be here... he was too stupid for this shit...

“Zvdim! Vlxial menvapart hxoklx fushhhmm...” Kizakura shushed them all incomprehensibly... Fuck, he was probably talking shit about Mondo as well, wasn’t he...? “D glrkt... Zurtz xylixal xbulrb minush fzaahh blupt?”

Shit... That still made no fucking sense! “Uhh... I...” Mondo desperately looked around the classroom for someone to help him out, but they all just stood around him in a circle, smirking down at him...

“Gieg... Rvrst shpeloink vrdyluuud...” Kizakura definetly though he was fucking stupid now, he could just tell... “D glrkt... Zurtz... xylixal... xbulrb...”

Arrgh! Now he was just speaking slower, like Mondo was fucking deaf! How was that supposed to help!? How the fuck was Mondo supposed to make sense of this bullshit if the fucking teacher just spouted the same explanation over and over! “I don’t understand what that means!” Mondo screamed at him, as his desk gave way and he started tumbling sideways, “I don’t understand what any of this...”

*THUD!*

“...means...” Mondo finished, once he’d recovered from the wave of mild pain that had flowed through his body as hit the thin carpet currently under his hands...
This was his bedroom’s carpet… hadn’t he been in class with all the others…? No, wait… it was only supposed to be him and Fenrir chick in his DPTL class… Which meant that whole thing just now was just a stupid, shitty dream…

For Arceus sake, since when the hell did he start having nightmares about school, of all things…!? Well… since school had started to actually matter, he guessed… But it wasn’t like he wasn’t prepared for this shit! Okay, so almost everyone else here had a head-start on him, but it wasn’t like he was completely fucked! He’d managed to read that whole book of info in half the time it took Daiya, even if he had had to ask Chihiro to help him explain the maths shit and stay up till 2am last night to finish it all off! So why the fuck was he worried!? He was a Goddamn Crazy Diamond! He’d struck a deal with Chihiro to help him out! He shouldn’t be getting scared of this fucking extra class!

“…Lyc?” Mondo turned to look up towards Lycan’s voice, to see the wolf looking down at him from on top of the bed. Mondo must have been freaking out pretty badly for him to have decided that shoving him out of bed was better than letting him sleep through that bullshit, and was now seeing if it had actually worked…

“Yeah… I’m awake now…” Mondo untangled himself from the bedsheets currently wrapped around him, “Thanks for that.”

“Roc!” Lycanroc nodded triumphantly as he started scruffing around and claiming dibs on the sheets Mondo was tossing aside, in order to make himself more comfortable. As if Mondo hadn’t already given him a whole double duvet and half the bed to himself already… Still, taking them off him would probably just piss him off for no reason, and it wasn’t like the school didn’t give ‘em away for free… He could probably just pop to the stores and pick up another one, assuming it was actually open at… what time was it…?

Mondo checked the clock on his pokédex… 8:25… well it was probably open alrea…

Wait… 8:25…?

His class was at NINE! He only had about half an hour to get ready and then go and get food for him and Lycan, cause there was no way either of them could make it for three hours without eating first!

“SHIT! FUCKING SHIT! Why the hell didn’t I set a fucking ALARM!? All that studying and begging for help and he’d not made sure he’d actually get up in time to make it all worth it!? Fucking idiot! Well, he wasn’t about to call it a day, he’d just have to rush to get ready… “Lyc… c’mon, we gotta get going!”

Lycan snarled a little as Mondo ripped the bedsheets away from him, but then quit it once he saw how serious Mondo was, and quickly got up out of the bed as Mondo hastily coated his pomp (which he’d thankfully been too out of it to wash out last night) with enough hairspray to messily lock it into place for a few hours and then frantically shoved the class notes, the pencil case Chihiro had given him and some spare paper into a rucksack.

Lycan might be an ass at times, but at least he played ball when shit hit the fan, like now, letting Mondo grab him by the forearm and drag him along with him as he rushed out of the door and into the corridor towards the dining room…

“Oowada…!” MotherFUCKER! Just his luck to get caught rushing in the corridors by that fucking teacher’s pokémon of all people… “Hold it ri…!”
“Dammit… Look I know I ain’t supposed ta run but I’m in a hurry…” Mondo tried to walk and talk his way out of whatever bullshit the guy was planning, although that’d be pretty difficult, given he’d moved himself right into the middle of the corridor…

“Actually…” Ishimaru’s glare turned into a pompous grin at the chance to correct him, “I’m challenging you to a Batt…!”

“Grrrr…” An irritated growl escaped Mondo’s lips… For f*cks sake! What kind of asshole spent his time standing around getting in people’s way just to get them to fight his wimpy pokémon! Mondo wouldn’t have put up with this crap on a good day, let alone when he was running LATE!

“Whaddaya think this is!? Route thirty-five!?” Ishimaru just looked surprised when Mondo kept walking and moved to push him aside, “I just said I’m in a hurry, dumbass!”

Panic and rage combined to make Mondo move his arm more forcefully that he usually would, but Ishimaru still managed to hold up surprisingly well, awkwardly sidestepping with the momentum until he slammed into the wall, instead of just falling to the ground like Mondo would have expected a nerd like him to.

But it still stunned him enough for Mondo to get away to the dining room, and a quick glance behind him showed that Asahina had rushed over to Ishimaru to check up on him, so it wasn’t like Mondo had anything to feel guilty about… If the idiot didn’t want to get shoved about, he shouldn’t be such an ass about trying to get a challenge! After all, Mondo barely ended up with enough time just to grab his and Lycan’s breakfast, let alone eat it!

…Although Lycan managed to eat all of his… and part of Mondo’s. Meanwhile, Mondo was barely managing to stomach a few bites a minute, as he kept thinking about all the crap that could go wrong in this lesson…

Dammit… He didn’t have a watch, but he knew he didn’t have time to sit here forever… In the end, Mondo waited until even Lycan didn’t wanna eat anymore of his leftovers, and ended up shoving them into various coat pockets, in case he got hungry during the lesson. Then he put Lycan into his pokéball and started making his way up to the fourth floor to get to the classroom reserved for DPTL course…

Man, he really wished there were more clocks in the hallways… He had no idea if he was actually on time or not as he opened the door to what he hoped was the correct room and looked inside…

Aww, hell… Ikusaba was already sat at a desk, without her Comfey around her neck for once, so presumably that meant no pokémon out in this lesson. A few seats back from her was that guy from the year above, with the scarf around his face and bandages around his hands. But worst of all, there was a woman with upwards curling strands of light grey hair, who he’d never met before, standing at the front of the class and writing something on the blackboard already… That must be the teacher, right? Which meant she’d started the lesson without him…

“Hey… sorry I’m late…” Mondo tried to apologise as she turned to face him… but he couldn’t tell how annoyed she was with the studded purple mask that was covering the lower half of her face.

“Hmm… Does that make you some form of demon, who exists in a misaligned plane of existence?” The weird guy asked outta nowhere, “Or do you claim to be blessed by Dialga!?”

“Uhh…” …Shit. He didn’t even understand what the other kids in this class were on about, let alone the fucking teacher! This was gonna turn out just like his dream… “I… uhh…”

“I… think his point is that you’re not late…” The teacher translated, although she didn’t seem so sure
of herself. “There’s another five minutes before class starts…”

“Oh…great!” Mondo let out a shout of relief as he headed over to his chair. “I figured you’d started the class already, as you were in the middle of writing…”

“Hah! Obviously not a demon! At least not one of any significant power!” The other guy laughed mockingly, “Not if you can’t tell the difference between the poison mistress and the true ruler of this domain…”

Demon? Poison mistress? True ruler? What the hell was this whackjob on about now…!? 

“But… I don’t make poisons…” The woman at the blackboard muttered.

Wait… so if she was supposed to be the ‘poison mistress’ and not the ‘true ruler’… “Does that mean you ain’t the teacher? Ain’t they gonna be pissed you’re writing shit on the board?”

“No…” The woman shook her head, “It’s part of my job… Tanaka and I are here as teacher’s assistants, so we can get the DPBL…”

“Uhh… DP…B…L…?” Diaya’d never mentioned that…

“A warning mark, to signify that the bearer may call forth dangerous beings from the void…” … Mondo was never gonna understand this guy, was he…?

“Umm, so…Is ‘B’ for breeding?” Ikusaba asked.

“Yes!” The older girl nodded, dammit, that seemed so obvious now! But…

“Why the hell would ya wanna breed dangerous pokémon!?” Mondo asked, “That just sounds like you’re asking for it!”

“Then, let me ask you this…” Tanaka practically jumped outta his chait and walked over to look down at Mondo, “Why does the ritual of learning you are about to partake in even exist? Why do we not simply kill pokémon that pose a danger to others, merely from their very existence?”

What kind of question was that!?

“’Cause it’d be fucking shitty! It’s not like the pokémon deserve to die, just ‘cause some of ‘em are a pain in the ass to us!”

“Indeed… Their death at our hands is a travesty…” Well, at least he had his head on straight enough to realise that… “But it is a travesty that takes place daily, as the web of humanity spreads out and steals the life from the world that they need to call forth their own from the void…”

Growing and stealing life from pokémon…? That didn’t sound like something an ordinary human could do… but this was probably another riddle of his, so what else could they be stealing from pokémon, as they grew…?

(“Hey!? Where the hell are all the Heracrosses!? There used to be TONS around here… They couldn’t ALL have been caught before I got here!”

“Sorry, kid! Turns out they used to mate in the forest to the south…”

“You mean the one that’s a road now…?”)

“…You’re talking about us building into areas they live in…”

“Precisely… And while we are learning to take more care in our travels, many pokémon are already
at the brink of oblivion, and only the very strongest rituals of fertility will allow them to remain…”

“So… you two both wanna get the DP…BL so you can help save rare pokémon from dying out forever…” Mondo summarised.

“No… That is my goal…” Tanaka corrected him, before spinning around to point out the girl at the front of the class. “But the witch over there is just completely insane!”

“B-but… I’m not doing anything that dangerous…” She flinched at the accusation, “I just want to make medicine…”

“Wha…?” On one hand, trying to make medicine was fair enough, but… “You’re killing pokémon to make…”

“No! Nono! I’m not killing anything!” She cried, “I make it from things the pokémon can produce continually, like Toxicroak poison and Arbok venom! And I just got a Salandit that I’m experimenting with… I might be able to isolate the pheromones it produces and…”

“But… then why do you need to breed more of them?” Ikusaba asked, “Those pokémon are all over the place…”

“I believe I already provided the answer to that…” Tanaka said, smugly.

“No, that’s not it!” The girl shook her head desperately, “I want to breed Toxicroaks because I think I can make them stop making so much of the toxic parts of their poison, which would make it easier to isolate the medicinal parts of it…”

“Hmph! Playing God…” Tanaka smirked, heading to the back of the to check on some cages. “The foolhardiest insanity of them all!”

Mondo couldn’t hear it through her mask, but it looked like the ‘poison mistress’ sighed slightly as she started writing on the board again…

He’d have tried to cheer her up, but he had no idea whether Tanaka was actually right about her or not… making medicines from poisons? That didn’t make any sense to Mondo! But this was Hope’s Peak… it’s not like they’d recruit a total idiot, which meant she was probably way smarter than Mondo…

Not that that was saying much… hell, even Tanaka seemed smarter than him, with his plans to save pokémon from being wiped out… If these were the sorts of people who took this course, how the hell was Mondo gonna pass it? And what sort of super-genius was gonna be running it…!?

As if to answer his question, the door to the front and right of the room suddenly rattled for a moment, before opening a revealing the orange and brown striped limbs, four arms and two legs, separated by two rocky body segments, of a Barbaracle, of all things. Even more weirdly, it was carrying a briefcase in one hand, having to hold it carefully between its long finger-claws, so as to not accidentally stick the handle of the case into the eye on the palm of its hand. But Mondo barely had time to consider it before it stepped to the side and held the door open for what Mondo assumed was actually the teacher this time…

She wasn’t what Mondo would have expected… For starters, she was a she, whereas Mondo’s had been imagining some badass soldier guy in his mid-twenties, wearing a flak jacket or something…

But instead, he was faced with the sight of a woman who was either looking run-down for being in her thirties, or pretty fit from being in her forties. In terms of build and muscle, she was somewhere
between Ikusaba and Oogami, but her skin was looking like it was starting to form wrinkles and her long blonde ponytail had flecks of grey in it.

She also looked like she’d put on the easiest clothes she could find… Slip on black loafers and loose slacks, almost the same sort as Mondo’s except for the elastic waist instead of a zip. Above her waist she was wearing a loose white T-shirt covered by a woollen green tank top and the strap for the brown messenger bag which was hanging at her left hip.

She walked across the classroom towards the teacher’s desk on the left side of the room, although her Barbaracle overtook her and got there first, slowly and precisely opening up the briefcase and laying out its contents all over the desk for her, which made Mondo start thinking was taking the whole laziness thing way too far…

But then she turned to face them, and holy shit, what the hell happened to her FACE!?

The right hand side of it was covered in blotchy scars that ran from the right-hand corner of her mouth, up to just under her right eye… she was lucky not to have been fucking blinded by whatever the hell had caused that!

“Geez… you pokémon trainers get younger and younger every year…” She smirked at him and Ikusaba, “Now, be honest, what’s freaking you out more, the face or the arm?”

“The arm.” Ikusaba replied, quickly.

Man, Mondo hadn’t even got past her face yet, what was wrong with her arm…?

Oh… she only had one of em… The left one looked fine, but the right one was just… not there. Well, geez, no wonder she had that Barbaracle opening up her briefcase for her!

“Alright, what about you…?” Mondo’s eyes snapped up to her face again as she called on him.

“Uhh… the face…” He admitted… Lots of things could make you lose an arm, but he’d never seen scars like that...

“Great! That means your TAs are sorted!” She grinned, “Seiko, you get the girl, Tanaka, you deal with the guy!”

“Uhh… what?” She’d just… asked that as some kind of random sorting method? “You’re not actually gonna tell us what happened, or anything…?”

“I’ll go over it when it’s relevant to the lesson…” She waved her hand… the left one, obviously, dismissively. “We’ve got a lot to squeeze in today… so let’s get this lesson started, unless there’s anything I forgot to mention first…”

Ikusaba raised her hand. “…How should we address you?”

“Oh… right. My name. I’m Eileen Gaumond, call me whatever you want. If you hadn’t guessed by now, I’ll be running this class! Obviously, I can’t be dealing with dangerous pokémon by myself anymore…” She shrugged her right shoulder to make her lack of arm more noticeable, “But I can still teach you kids how to deal with ‘em… and hopefully you’ll last longer than I did! Hahaha!”

“Ahahaha!” There was a smattering of awkward laughter from everyone but Tanaka, who laughed along with her like some evil cartoon villain would.

“Alright… so let’s get on with this…” Gaumond ignored the weird reaction to her joke, “Today
we’re starting off with a type of threat you should all know about alright… Fire! Now, Kimura’s
done me a favour and written out all the dangerous class fire-types, which you do need to know, so
start writing them down…”

Shit… that was a long list, and Mondo wasn’t the best with a pen… He’d better hurry or else he’d be
delaying the whole lesson…

“You’ve got until I finish copying the list, for writing practice!” Gaumond sat down at the desk and
awkwardly picked up a pen in her left hand, “So, plenty of time to make sure you’ve got them down
right…”

Eh!? Did she really make a habit of practising her writing while she was supposed to be teaching, or
was that just some way for her to make sure Mondo had time to write shit down properly without
looking like the class dumbass…?

Well… the two older kids didn’t seem surprised that she’d said it, and even if she was just
patronising him, he might as well take the bone he’d just been thrown and use the time to do this
right…

“Aaaand… done!” Gaumond announced, about a minute after Mondo had finished his own list, and
double checked it out of boredom. “So, now that’s done with, today’s class is going to start with a
discussion about how fire can be dangerous, followed by some tips on how to stop a fire and treat the
damage it caused, and what preparations you can do avoid the damage from happening in the first
place! Then finally, we’ve got some pokémon in the back there that you’ll be handling for practise!”

…From what he remembered Daiya talking about, that was pretty much the first three lessons of his
DPTL course mixed into a single three-hour lesson… which made sense, really.

“Now, I know you two probably know that fire is dangerous and have had basic safety talks before,
but I’ve gotta to remind you about all that with this scary presentation… Barbie, start the laptop
going, please…”

Aside from the first part where they explained that fire needed fuel (like wood or something a
pokémon produced), heat (either generated by the pokémon itself, or focused sunrays, or humans
doing shit) and oxygen (from the air… although some pokémon had ways to make or concentrate it
themselves) most of this shit was common sense stuff that Daiya had taught him, like keeping low to
the ground if a place was on fire so the smoke didn’t get ya. Or oil being extra flammable but also
spreading on water, so don’t throw water on a petrol fire. Or on any machine that used electricity,
’cause you should use a heavy blanket to smother the flames (or some fancy ‘CO2’ extinguisher)…
Just with the odd video of what happened if ya were stupid enough to do that sort of shit, and
gruesome images of stuff or even people who’d been badly burnt to drive the point home.

“So… now we can talk about how to treat a burn victim…” Gaumond started talking once the
presentation was finished, “Now, the pokémon league say that the ideal way to do this is with burn
heals, even though they don’t work as well on humans as pokémon, and they also have this equation
you have to learn, to estimate how many burn heals you need to treat a specific size of wound, which
is also in that info booklet you all had to read… but I, or Kimura, can answer any questions you have
about it, if you didn’t get it…”

She pointed up to the top right of the board, where the first of several bits of horrible maths shit had
been copied out… This was the one getting you to work out how many people a pokémon could
burn with a certain fire move, based on the shape and power of the flame, and how much of the skin
would be covered in burns on each person, by doing width of the burn times the length of it in
inches. Then times that by the number of people it could potentially hit with one use of a move and
how many times I could use that move, then divide all of that by 150 ‘cause that was how much human skin a single burn heal could treat… which he could do, if he had a calculator and his notes in front of him, but…

“Uhh… I have one question…” Mondo admitted, “It’s not that I can’t do the math, but… are we seriously supposed to sit and work out how many burn heals ta get out of our bag while someone’s on fire? ‘Cause it kinda takes me a forever to do this stuff…” Even if Chihiro kept insisting he just needed the practise and he’d speed up eventually…

“Oh, heck no!” Gaumond laughed, “The point of these equations is so you can try to work out a worst case scenario, and make sure you have enough burn heals on hand to deal with that… In a real emergency, you’d just keep using as many as you need to get the person to quit screaming…”

Well… that made more sense, but… “Then… couldn’t someone just make a list, like ‘you have this pokémon, therefore you should carry around this many burn heals, or something…”

“Honestly, there are lists like that on the internet… but the League expects you to be able to work out the numbers for yourself, so you can tell if the list is actually right or not…”

“Umm… sorry to interrupt you!” Kimura suddenly piped up, “But this is relevant to the case study I was going to present…”

“Oh, really… Barbie, load up Kimura’s slides!” Gaumond ordered as she went to sit next to her pokémon, as it carefully tapped at the computer, until a second presentation came up on the screen, with the words ‘Goldenrod Ice Rink Flamethrower Tragedy: Case study by Seiko Kimura’ on it. What was this? Some sort of test for the older kids? They had to present something for him and Ikusaba to listen to…?

Whatever it was, Kimura headed up to Gaumond place at the front of the room and fiddled with her mask nervously before starting… “Ahem… Alright… well… for you to understand my case study, I first need to explain that a ‘worst case scenario’ is usually considered to be a pokémon using its strongest move, as many times as it’s capable of doing so, and hitting as many people as it possibly could…” She started, “It’s highly unlikely, but it can happen, as it did with Luther Rios when he took his Magmar to the grand opening of the Goldenrod City’s Ice Rink…”

Goldenrod city had an ice rink? Mondo had never seen that when he’d been there! Although he heard the words ‘Goldenrod Flamethrower Tragedy’ before…

“Now… Magmars have a tendency to shoot fire randomly if they consider the area around them to be too cold, so Luther shouldn’t have taken it to an ice rink in the first place, as it almost immediately started to use its Flamethrower move indiscriminately, in an attempt to warm the area up, hitting the large crowds of people that had gathered for the big opening event…” Kimura explained, before signalling for the next slide to come up… a blurry picture of a Magmar shooting fire into a crowd of people. “But that mistake was also compounded by the fact that, at the time, the pokémon league did provide tables that told you how many burn heals to take, depending on what pokémon you had and which moves they knew… But, because of them being relatively new at the time, the table hadn’t accounted for needing extra burn heals if you’d treated your pokémon with a Power Point Up drug… which he had done…”

“Huh… never heard that part of the story before…” Gaumond interrupted, “Usually people just focus on him having been dumb enough to take a dangerous pokémon somewhere that would make it uncomfortable…”

“Well, that was the main problem, of course…” Kimura agreed, and had the slide changed to a
picture of a piece of paper with a bunch of words on it. “But the investigation into the event afterward came to the conclusion that if Luthor had accounted for the extra uses of Flamethrower he might have prepared a stronger team to take down his Magmar before taking it out in public, preventing the total destruction of the ice rink…”

Ah… so that was why Mondo had never seen an ice rink in Goldenrod…

“…Or at the very least, he could have saved another six people lives before he ran out of burn heals…” Kimura continued her speech, as the picture switched to an old newspaper clip showing a bunch of faces, with a headline blaming the trainer for running out of burn heals. “And it was that conclusion, along with a few other near misses that would have been compounded by the pokémon being able to use their moves more than they could naturally, that caused the league to rework the tables and insist that DPTL-holders must be capable of working out the correct numbers of preventive or curative items to be carrying for themselves! Ah… thank you for listening!”

“And thank you for explaining why we all have to learn all of this godawful maths…” Gaumond nodded at her to sit down, and Mondo felt a wave of relief that he wasn’t the only person who had trouble with this shit… “Now then… as I said, you’re supposed to prepare for emergencies in advance, but in the event that something happens and you don’t have burn heals on you, you can also treat fire wounds with Rawst berries, or by cooling the wound under cold running water for ten minutes and then wrapping it in something like cling film to keep it from getting infected while you get them to a hospital…”

This all seemed like common sense advice again… Mondo was pretty sure he’d once seen Daiya wrapping his wrist up in cling film before suddenly riding off on him bike and leaving Mondo and Rockruff by themselves for a while… he’d always wondered what was up with that!

Then Gaumond took the conversation into some more obvious stuff about how to prepare your home for a fire type pokémon, like making sure you had furniture and clothing that could resist the hottest temperature it could produce…

“However, one should not only prepare for manifestations of power from the beasts they have in the present, but also those they may acquire in the future!” Tanaka suddenly burst into the conversation, “Lest you repeat the foolhardiness of Janet Grimes, who bought herself a Litleo and soon found herself encased in a vortex of flame when it inevitably evolved into the far hotter Pyroar!” Tanaka reached into his jacket and pulled out a crumpled newspaper with a picture of a burnt down hours, and a woman’s face on it… “Or that of Mord Plewis, who added a Weezing to live alongside his Charmander, which soon caused his home to be haunted by firey phantasms…” This time he showed a newspaper clipping about a house that being full of ‘angry will-o’-wisps’ that had apparently the owner was claiming had chased him out of his home…

“…How does mixing a Charmander and a Weezing make ghosts?” They couldn’t breed into a ghost type, could they…?

“…The black magics of pokémon are truly mysterious…” Was Tanaka’s answer… so that meant no one actually knew why that happened? “Just know that gas and fire perform dark rituals that invite ghosts into the area…”

“Umm… I’d have thought it was just that the Weezing made methane gas, and it got set alight by the Charmander…” Kimura argued.

“Yes…” Gaumond sighed, “What Tanaka should be saying is, if you’ve got a dangerous fire type, don’t keep it with a pokémon that makes flammable substances! It’s bad enough with safer fire types that Tanaka brought up, let alone a dangerous one!”
Oh… yeah that was pretty obvious now she said it…

“For example, I knew this one guy who…”

That seemed to be Gaumond’s cue to bring in her own ‘case studies’… most of which were just stories of people she’d known or seen do stupid shit during her time as a trainer… And it seemed like she’d been around long enough to see a lot of stupid shit…

This was actually pretty cool… it was nice to have this stuff taught by someone who’d actually used it in real life, rather than having read about it in a book… Plus, Mondo had a feeling he’d remember the story of the girl who tried to make her Houndour go vegetarian by feeding it broccoli and kale and ended up with a puppy that kept lighting its own farts on fire much more easily than he’d have remembered a generic warning to make sure you fed your fire-type the right sort of food, instead of throwing off its body chemistry or whatever…

“Oh… Miss Gaumond… It’s quarter past Eleven…” Kimura pointed out after, a story of a guy who’d put his fire safety suit on backwards and given himself a wedgie in the process…

“Shhhh… sugar! Already…!??” Gaumond stared at the clock on the wall in shock, which Mondo didn’t blame her for, ‘cause this lesson had gone way quicker than he’d expected. “Right, guess you’d two better unveil today’s practise pokémon…”

The two older students nodded and headed off towards the back of the room, each coming back with a wheeled table carrying a small cage with a cloth over it, along with some needles and vials…

“For the first time in at least an hour, Mondo felt a wave of panic fill his stomach… What the fuck kind of dangerous thing could be underneath there…?

…But then the sheets were removed, revealing that each cage contained a single, small, orange, baby chicken…

“What…!? Ya need a DPTL ta have a Torchic!?” Geez, from what Mondo had heard, almost every other kid in Hoenn started with one…

“Hahaha! Of course not! It’s not like I can make you kiddos wrestle a Bewear in your first lesson, is it!?” Gaumond laughed, “Although these aren’t your usual, pokémon league approved, pre-trained, starter Torchics either… We’ve been asked to look after this pair by the police after they did a bust on an underground breeding ring, so they’re more ornery than you might be expecting… But you’ll be fine, so long as you use the equipment right! And speaking of which, Barbie, do me a favour and get the fire stuff out of the cupboard over there…”

The Barbaracle nodded and headed over the the cupboard, coming back with some boxes full of all sorts of crap… Firemen’s outfits, fire extinguishers, even some fucking welder’s masks! Did they really need all that crap to deal with a measly Torchic…?

Well, probably not, but if the idea was to get them used to the stuff, for when they did need it…

Damn… all this shit was heavy! Not to mention a pain to wear… the thick gloves made it hard to move his fingers properly, and how the hell was he supposed to even see out of the tiny rectangle of glass on this dumb mask! He’d barely been able to strap the damn thing on under his pomp…

…He probably shouldn’t have come in here with the pomp, should he? Now he was dealing with a
fire type with a big cone of hair sticking out in front of him... and was hair spray extra flammable? It was probably extra flammable, wasn’t it...? Maybe he should ask if he could take a minute to...

“Ready.” Ikusaba was already striding towards the cage. “What’s my objective?”

“Well... I need you to get the Torchic out of its cage, and make it stay still on this table while I give him his shots, then put it back in the cage.” Kimura told her.

“Understood.” Ikusaba nodded, watched the Torchic squawk loudly at her for a moment...

And then suddenly her arms were a blur as she unlocked the cage with her left hand, reached in and grabbed the Torchic around its neck with her right hand, then yanked it out and slammed it onto the table, grabbing it around the legs and tips of its wings while also moving her right hand so it was covering the Torchic’s eyes and pressing its beak closed at the same time.

“Ready.” Ikusaba said, dully.

“Oh... ah... r-right!” Kimura rushed to get her injection ready and give it.

“Hmm... Bindings of force are brittle things...” Tanaka muttered, looking pretty pissed as he watched the Torchic attempting to squirm out of her grip, “They snap at the first opportunity...”

So... don’t do what Ikusaba was doing? Not that he’d really want to scare the crap outta the poor bird in his cage, or, lets face it, be able to open the cage and manhandle the thing out of there before it shot a fireball at him...

But he didn’t know how the hell else he was gonna get it to stay still... It had chittering away angrily enough before it had seen was happened to Ikusaba’s one, now it looked like it was getting ready to shoot Mondo if he took even another step towards it, even though he was trying as hard as he could not to look threatening and keep a reassuring look on his face...

...Which it couldn’t see, cause of this fucking stupid mask! Dammit, he probably looked like another, bigger version of Ikusaba right now, so of course it was freaking out at him!

“Alright, Oowada... you and Tanaka need to do the same thing...” Gaumond started chivvying him on, just as Ikusaba shoved her Torchic back into it cage and made his start hopping about in a panic... dammit, if he didn’t do something soon it’d shoot at him even if he did stay still! But he could barely even see with all this annoying safety crap on, let alone deal with a pokémon...!

Fuck it. This was probably the stupidest thing he could possibly do, but there was no way this Torchic was gonna stay still if he kept this stupid thing covering his eyes...

“Hey... hey, calm down, I ain’t gonna hurt you...” Mondo slowly lifted the mask up off of his face, but kept him his hand on it so he put back down quickly if this didn’t work...

“CHIIIIIC! Chic, chic... chic...?” The Torchic stopped hopping mid-squawk and tilted its head at him.

“Yeah... that’s right... we ain’t gotta have a fight, alright...” Mondo hesitantly moved forward, watching the chick for any sign of it freaking out, while it seemed to watch him for any signs of him breaking his promise.

“Still not gonna hurt you...” Mondo repeated, as he approached the cage. But it still backed up away from the door as he reached the table... He needed a way to get this Torchic to actually trust him... And his first thought on how to get a pokémon to trust him was...
“You want some food?” Mondo went to reach for his pockets to find something he could offer the Torchic… only to be blocked by the fireman’s outfit instead… shit… “Hang on a sec…” He used his free hand to quickly unzip the top of the heavy coat and reach into the top pocket of his own coat for whatever was in here… it felt like half a burger… that’d do… “How’s about some bread…?”

Mondo pulled out the bun from the burger and held out a small piece out to the Torchic, which meant he wasn’t able to zip up his protective coat, but that didn’t seem to matter, as the Torchic was too busy hopping over to the cage door to peck at the food to attack him.

“There you go…” Mondo breathed a sigh of relief as it finished off the food and then tried to reach out for the bigger part he still had in his hand, “You want some more…? Lemme take you out of the cage and you can have some more…”

“Chic!” The Torchic nodded and stood watching him expectantly… Good thing this pokémon didn’t exactly have the best memory, eh?

But there was no way Mondo could undo the cage with these heavy gloves on… or having to hold up the mask the whole time, so he quickly put the mask down to the side and pulled off the gloves so he could open the cage and encourage the to come sit on his hand so he could feed it a bit more bread…

“Nice… see, no problem! You can trust me, alright?” Mondo carefully started stroking through the bird’s feathers, to get it used to him. “Now, uhh… I’m gonna need ya ta trust me a lot now, ’cause we gotta give you some medicine so ya don’t get sick, alright…?” The Torchic nodded at him, “But, it’s gonna hurt ya a just a little bit…” It didn’t look so sure anymore. “…But if ya stay still and take it without without shooting fire, I’mma give ya the rest of this bread, alright!?”

“Toooor!” The Torchic’s eyes lit up and it crowed at the sight of the huge, compared to the pieces Mondo had been doling out before, chunk of bread he dangled in front of it…

Man, if only it had been this easy to get Rockruff to sit still and behave for his shots when he’d had to have them… although it probably helped that Tanaka seemed to have a much better idea of how to keep a pokémon calm than the somewhat shady guy he and Daiya had gone to, ‘cause they were worried those Team Rocket assholes would have registered Rockruff as stolen and they’d get in trouble if they tried to take him to an official place…

Not that Mondo thought an official nurse would have done the weird, hand-waving crap that Tanaka used to make it not even notice the needle going into its skin until he was almost done with the injection anyway, and Mondo was able to calm it down with the bread, like he’d promised, before putting it back in the cage…

“Well… good to see you have some idea of how to handle pokémon…” Gaumond started, “But you’re going to need to keep the protective gear on in future… even if it means sorting out things like treats and your hair before dealing with the pokémon…”

Well, the hair and coat would be fine if he prepped them in advance, but… “Even though I can barely move in these gloves…?”

“Yeah… But that’ll get easier one you wear them in a bit. The outfits are yours to keep, so get used to them! That’s your homework for the week…”

Was that it!? Sweet!

“Well, that and a question sheet I have to give you both…” Gaumond added off-hand. Mondo had
thought that was too good to be true... “But as for you...” She turned round to Ikusaba, “This isn’t Fenrir! You can’t rely on being able to *fight* the pokémon into doing what you want it to. I’ll admit that there’s times where a pokémon’s so angry that you’ve got no choice to knock it out, *especially* if it’s a dangerous class one, but if you’re wanting to *train* those pokémon, you’ve got to get them to *like* you first!”

It was hard to tell what Ikusaba was thinking, ‘cause she still hadn’t taken off her mask, but she stayed silent for a moment before asking her next question... “Understood... Do I have any tasks to complete, aside from the question sheet...?”

“Urrmm... I dunno...” Gaumond probably hadn’t had to teach someone how to be nice to pokémon before... “Try... going to the farm area and helping to feed the Mareeps or something...”

Man, that sounded a *hell* of a lot more fun than just moving around and trying to do stuff with these fucking gloves on! Not that Mondo was ever gonna admit he liked cute fluffy pokémon like Mareeps, but it woulda been awesome if he could have got away with petting them as part of his homework!

But still... this lesson was already seeming to go too well for Mondo to believe it was actually happening... even the question sheet Gaumond had her Barbaracle pass to him and Ikusaba didn’t seem tough... it was just asking for examples of things you should be careful about with fire types, what you should have on hand if you owned a dangerous one, list all the dangerous-class fire types... which Gaumond had made sure they wrote down anyway, so he could just copy the list! Hell, the only questions here he’d have to worry about at all was a calculation of how many burn heals you would probably need if a Camerupt went off in a room with twenty people in it, which he could probably try and work out after lunch and then ask Fujisaki to check when Mondo helped ‘train’ them this evening...

Hah! Maybe Daiya was actually *right* and he *could* do this whole ‘school’ shit if he actually put his butt into gear and paid attention in classes! After all, today had gone well enough, aside from waking up late and having to shove Ishimaru out of the way to go get food...

But things were *really* going Mondo’s way today, ‘cause even *he* had apparently found something better to do with his time than block up the damn hallway! Maybe getting pushed into a wall had knocked enough sense for him to work out that Mondo didn’t wanna fight someone with a damn type disadvantage into him...!

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! After the intermission we will see how the rest of Taka's day turns out!
Saturday plans pt. 2 (Taka's POV)

Chapter Notes

I’ve made a slight retcon to chapter 17 with Fuyuhiko’s pokémon, because in retrospect his group as a whole would be too weak if he only had one fully-evolved pokémon, so I’ve switched his Buizel for a Flaotzel. Also I’m thinking Sonia’s fascination with serial killers would be the equivalent of being enamoured with watching powerful pokémon moves being performed by trainers. (In that it’s not something she’d do, but she still finds it interesting to learn about, if that makes sense.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

…Well, regardless of what Oowada was rushing off to get up today, Kiyotaka had his own plans! Perhaps he could try to find someone at his level who was a little friendlier, like Makoto or…

“Geez! Kiyotaka, are you alright…?” Hina, who was, quite fortunately, rushing up to check on him right now!

“Yes! I’m fine, thank you!” Kiyotaka straightened up and shook the last of the stars out of his head, “Luckily I manage to grab ahold of the wall before I fell over completely!”

“That’s the lucky option!?” Hina asked, sceptically, “Yeesh… I didn’t realise boy rivalries were so violent…”

“Err… rivalry? You mean… Oowada and I…?” Well… alright, they didn’t exactly get along at the moment, but… “We’ve never even battled each other! And I suspect he’s at least two badges ahead of me!”

“Huh? Ahh…” Hina rather shocked at his argument, turning slightly red as she considered it. “Well… That doesn’t matter! I mean… You’d still make good rivals! You just need to catch up with his Gym progress now you’ve got the chance to!”

“But… he’ll have just as many chances to go to Gyms as I will…” Kiyotaka pointed out. Once Oowada got two pokémon, he ought to be able to challenge his third Gym at least by the end of term, whereas Kiyotaka would have only had two visits to a Gym… “I’d still be a badge behind him at best…”

“Well… Isn’t that the point!? It’ll motivate him to keep doing well, so you can’t catch up!” Hina countered, “Besides, if he wasn’t trying to become your rival, why would he have got so angry when you tried to help him out with his maths, yesterday?”

“Hmm…” That was a good point… He’d just overheard Fujisaki struggling to explain how to calculate the area of a burn to Oowada in the classroom yesterday morning, and had gone over to them to offer up the explanation that had helped him understand the concept! But Oowada had just yelled at him for eavesdropping and told him and Arcanine to… well, it didn’t bear repetition, but it certainly wasn’t a fair reaction!

Perhaps all this needless anger at him was just a clumsy way of trying to motivate Kiyotaka into
wanting to overtake him in the race to get a full set of badges… or a second pokémon… And it wasn’t as if trying to beat the second in command at a Gym wasn’t a worthy goal…

“But, anyway, if you want a battle, I’m off to the arenas now! You can be my warm up fight!” Hina joked… at least Kiyotaka assumed that ‘warm up’ was a reference to him being a fire type trainer versus her ice type… “I’m a little surprised you’re not up there with Makoto already! He was in a hurry to get over there for an early-morning challenge, so I assumed you’d challenged him…”

“It’s the sort of thing I should have organised, but I must admit, with all the study facilities here, I’ve been somewhat neglectful of Arcanine’s training this week…” Kiyotaka admitted, shamefully. “To think I’ve been so busy reading that I’ve wasted an entire week of possible training here! It’s completely unforgiv…”

“Aww… it’s not that big of a deal!” Hina interrupted him, “Even if you haven’t organised something in advance, I bet there’ll be other students there who’ll be up for a fight! So come on…”

Contary to Hina’s expectations, they arrived to find the arenas somewhat lacking in students, with only five others already here... That was, if you only counted Hope’s Peak’s students…

The first thing that caught Kiyotaka’s eye, once Hina had finished dragging him here, was a large, hodgepodge group of teenagers from various different backgrounds, who were all crowded around inside one of the smaller arenas. Aside from them, Sakura and the grey haired girl from the year above them were facing off in one of the medium sized arenas, being watched and cheered on by the short well-dressed boy and the Oblivian princess from the same class…

“Ooh! Sakura’s about to battle!?” Hina hopped excitedly to get a better view of what was going on, “I’m gonna go see how she does!”

Kiyotaka barely had a chance to respond before she dashed off to watch, not that he could blame her. Seeing two more experienced trainers duking it out would probably be a good learning experience, but he couldn’t help but wonder what was going on with all those random students over there… It looked like the were all crowding around something, but what…? Kiyotaka had best go over to check this out, and make sure nothing untoward was occurring…

“Mark Graham!” As Kiyotaka approached, he began to hear Makoto’s voice, raised slightly higher than the throng of people blocking him from Kiyotaka’s sight, “Which one of you is Mark Graham…?”

“Oh… The boy who’d identified as Graham Kline put his hand down sheepishly, but nobody else came spoke up, until.

“Uhh… there was a guy name Mark who said he was going to the toilet…” A girl pointed out.
“Uhh... Really...? Man that’s unlucky...” Makoto commented, “I guess we’ll have to wait a bit...”

That was met was various groans and shouted suggested that the boy in question be skipped, or they just ignore appointments and battle in the order they were standing in, which then lead to several of the students furthest from Makoto attempting to jostle their way towards him...

“...Makoto, are you supposed to be battling all these people...?” Kiyotaka asked the increasingly worried looking boy.

“Uhh... yeah...” Makoto admitted, “I got a whole bunch of challenges through BattleNet, and thought I’d planned out times for everyone, but now I’m running late, and I tried to save time by sending an automated email to most of the later people with their time on it but I didn’t program it right so it told all of them to come at the same time, and I think they understand, but they’d rather not be waiting around all day if they don’t have to...”

...So now he had a whole group of aggravated, impatient teenagers who all wanted a piece of him, and absolutely no idea how to entertain them all... But if they’d all come here to battle...

“Why don’t they all fight each other?” Kiyotaka suggested.

“They don’t want to be in the middle of a battle when it’s their turn to battle me...” Makoto explained.

“Then perhaps you could organise a round-robin style tournament, where everyone battles everyone else once, and everyone waits until all the other battles are finished before switching opponents! That way you’ll be sure to fight everyone!”

“...Uhh... I... guess that... would work...?” Makoto looked hesitant at the idea, frowning down at the list of names in his hand anxiously... “I’ve never organised anything like that before, though...”

“Oh! That shouldn’t be a problem, it’s not too difficult to work out!” Kiyotaka assured him, “If you give me the list of names I’ll show you how...”

“Thanks!” Makoto handed over the list, “And, uhh... could you maybe also explain to them what you’re doing...?” He sheepishly looked over to the group of trainers he’d accidentally gathered...

Well, it would probably be easier than teaching Makoto how to raise his voice properly. “Ahem... Alright! Listen up, everyone!” Kiyotaka ordered, and not a moment too soon, as several of the students looked as if they were about to come to blows over who could get closest to Makoto... “We’ve come to a solution that will mean you’re not all standing around waiting with nothing to do! We’re going to organise a tournament structure that will involve everyone battling everyone else once...”

“Is that including you?” One of the group asked... and almost sounded as if he was hoping the answer would be yes!

“Err...” Kiyotaka hesitated. On the one hand, this would be a fantastic chance to train Arcanine... But it was Makoto who’d done all the work gathering people...

“You can join in if you want!” Makoto scuppered that thought instantly, “The more the merrier, right!?”

“Well... that’s true...” But he’d only come up here because he was supposed to be battling Hina...

“Wait a sec! You’re up here for five minutes and you start organising a tournament!?” ...Who
seemed understandably annoyed that he’d ditched her… “Can I join in with you guys? Sakura said she wants to meditate on her loss now, so I’ve not got anything planned for the rest of the day…”

…Well, in that case… “Alright, I’ll include your and my names in the list!” Kiyotaka agreed, which seemed to be met with a generally positive response from the crowd, “Now, if you could just give me a some time to work this all out…” Kiyotaka got out his own notebook and pen to start drawing up a table…

“Uhh… that loss you’re talking about…” Makoto started to talk to Hina while he was working, “Was that her fight with Pekoyama, already?”

“Yeah… That girl’s pokémon are scary…”

“Aww… I was hoping to cheer Sakura on between my fights…” Makoto sighed, “What about Togami and Kuzuryu?”

“I think that’s starting in five minutes… assuming Togami turns up, that it…” Hina told him.

A battle between Togami and an actual Gym Leader… even if he was on a secondment at the moment? That would certainly be something worth watching!

“Well, if it does run to time, there’s probably plenty of time for you all to watch it while I work this out!” Kiyotaka announced, which lead to most of the group of teenagers heading over towards the big arena after Makoto and Hina and taking front row seats along the sides of the arena.

Kiyotaka took a while to pick up his paperwork, so it was easiest for him to sit in the second row, behind Makoto, Hina and the princess and also next to an aisle that was wide enough for him to let Arcanine out to watch the fight while he worked…

“It’s nice of you to cheer on your class, even though you don’t like battling pokémon!” Makoto seemed to be in the middle of a conversation with the princess.

“Well… I must admit, watching the moves that trainers manage to make their pokémon perform is somewhat… fascinating, even if it’s not natural!” The princess admitted, “I used to subscribe to Powerful Moves Monthly magazine, back in Oblivia! They’d show pictures of things like Earthquakes and Thunderstorms that were conjured up by pokémon on command, and I used to wonder what it would be like to see them in person! So now that I have the chance to, I like to watch when my classmates have bigger fights, like this one!”

“So… this fight is a big deal to Kuzuryu…?” Makoto asked.

“Hmm… I do not think so. He seems confident that he will win!” The princess answered, “I mainly came because he said his Pangoro had a punch so powerful, it would be able to knock out Togami’s Dragon with one hit!”

Well, that made sense… Pangoro was part fighting type, so a strong move like Hammer Arm would take advantage of the Dragon’s part Normal type weakness.

“Heh… I can’t wait to see the look on his face when that happens!” Hina chuckled, “Maybe getting his butt kicked will get him to stop being so smug all the time…”

“I dunno… after what happened to Sakura, I wouldn’t be surprised if Togami pulled out something that could beat Kuzuryu, somehow…” Makoto said cautiously.

Kiyotaka could certainly understand the sentiment. But there wasn’t really anything a Drampa could
learn that would knock out a strong Dark/Fighting type, was there…? Psychic moves were out completely. Flying type moves would have an increased effect, but Drampa’s best one was Fly, which didn’t suit its ranged attack style at all! Togami’s best bet would probably be something like Hyper Voice or Dragon Pulse, and Kiyotaka couldn’t imagine either of those taking down a Gym Leader’s Pangoro in one hit, even if it did strike first!

“Well, we shall find out soon… that’s Togami coming through the doors now, is it not?"

The princess was right… Togami had just entered the main arena area, and was striding straight towards the one they were occupying… although he didn’t look particularly interested in his upcoming match, unlike his opponent…

“Well, about time you finally showed up!” The Gym Leader complained, as Togami entered and made his way to the proper trainers podium, “I was starting to think you’d chickened out!”

“Sorry to keep you waiting… I had to shake off a stalker on my way here…” Togami said, treating it as if he’d been slightly late to a business meeting. “Do you want us to make any kind of media statement, or shall we just begin the fight?”

“Tch! I figured if either of us was going to organise that sort of crap, it’s be you!” Kuzuryu smirked, “So why didn’t you? Worried I’ll make you look like a chump!?”

“Of course not. I just don’t have the time to organise press coverage of every little fight I partake in.” Togami smirked back.

“What are you calling a little fight!?” Kuzuryu scowled.

“Any fight that is not between myself and one of the other competing Togami heirs.” Togami answered calmly, “And besides, you’re just a Gym Leader… the only reason I haven’t already beaten you is because I didn’t have time to fit you into my schedule.”

“Is that what you think!?” Kuzuryu almost choked with anger as he snatched a pokéball from the podium in front of him. “Well, I’ll show you the difference between getting your badge and fighting me for real! Now get your damn pokémon ready!”

Togami put both his pokéballs in the podium to register them as his team for the fight, then picked up the one on his right. “Done.”

“Fine… Pangoro, get out here!” Kuzuryu summoned his biggest pokémon first...

“Drampa!” As did Togami, at the same time.

“Pangoro! Knock that thing out with Hammer Arm!” The Gym Leader acted exactly as Kiyotaka had expected…

“Drampa, finish it with Hurricane, before it gets the chance!”

…Hurricane!? But… that wasn’t on the list of moves that you could teach a Drampa that Kiyotaka had found when trying to work out what sort of strategies he’d plan for battling his classmates… Was the website he’d looked it up on wrong…?

…It must have been, because the circular gusts of wind that formed and then blew across the arena were certainly a hurricane! And it was strong enough that Kiyotaka ended up catching Hina’s Marill as it started to be blown off of her shoulder, and then ended up with his overprotective Arcanine lying across his lap in an attempt to either weigh him down or shield him from the wind…
So it wasn’t much of a surprise when the Pangoro’s initial charge towards the Drampa ended with it getting lifted up by the small hurricane, spun around a few times and then violently tossed against the arena wall… and it certainly wasn’t getting back up against after that…

“WHAT THE FUCK!?” Kuzuryu couldn’t believe his eyes… and Kiyotaka couldn’t believe that a Gym Leader would use such foul language in a battle! What was it with the 77th class and swearing!? “Since when the hell do Drampas learn Hurricane!?”

“They don’t learn it.” Togami sneered, “That is a move Drampa had innate knowledge of, passed down from his Dragonite father…”

AH… Well, in retrospect, it was obvious that Togami would have specially bred a useful move onto his ‘perfectly’ bred pokémon…

“Arghh… Of course it fuckin’ was…” Kuzuryu grimaced, obviously realising the same thing.

“What are they talking about…?” Makoto asked.

“When pokémon breed, the child can learn moves that their father knows. So, if pokémon from two different species breed, you can sometimes end up with a pokémon that knows moves it wouldn’t otherwise be able to learn… And I believe particularly rich trainers in your regions will often pay to cross breed pokémon in such a way as to get those rarer moves on their pokémon.” The princess explained, “If you are interested about it, you should ask Gundam, in my class! He knows a great deal about it!”

“But… does that mean Togami knew this fight was happening before his pokémon was even born!?” Hina exclaimed.

“Err… I doubt it… he probably just looked at all the known moves its possible for a Drampa to inherit and then picked the species of father based on which move he expected to be most useful to him in the future.” Kiyotaka told her, as it finally occurred to him to pass her Marill back to her.

“Ohhh…”

“Well, are you sending out your next pokémon?” Togami pointedly checked the time on his pokédex, “Or are you going to surrender now you’ve seen what being a Togami heir actually entails…?”

“The hell I’m giving up!” Kuzuryu yelled, grabbing his next pokéball and throwing it into the arena, “I’ve still got more pokémon than you!”

…But, it turned out that the loss of his Pangoro had spelled the end for the Kuzuryu leader… His Floatzel managed to strike first against the Drampa, but failed to defeat it in one hit or stand up to the Dragon Pulse Togami ordered in response… and his poor Ivysaur wasn’t strong enough to stand a chance against the overpowered, overbred Dragon…

“God…dammit!” The Gym Leader slammed his fist onto the podium as his final pokémon fainted. Either this battle had been of more importance to the him than the princess had thought, or Kuzuryu didn’t take losing well at all.

“I wouldn’t feel too bad if I were you! You put up a good fight…” Togami told him. “For a member of the Kuzuryu Gym, anyway…”

“Ngrhh…” That only made Kuzuryu more upset as Togami recalled his Drampa, packed away his pokémon and started heading out of the arena…
“Wait!” A different voice called after him.

Togami, and about half of the spectators, turned towards the source of the voice, to spot Pekoyama standing in the seats at Kuzuryu’s end of the arena. “…Yes?”

“Fighting one Kuzuryu is not the same as defeating our entire Gym!” Pekoyama insisted, “I will show you as much!”

“If that’s a challenge, I don’t have time for it now.” Togami told her, turning back towards the exit. “Email me some available times and I’ll work something out.”

“Very well…” Pekoyama nodded, before heading down towards Kuzuryu’s podium.

“Hey, Kiyotaka?” Makoto quietly turned to face him, “Now’s probably a good time to start that tournament, if you’re ready…”

“Err… right!” Kiyotaka hadn’t quite figured out every match up, but he’d got close enough to start the first few rounds and hopefully he’d have time to finish working it out after some of his battles. Especially as Kuzuryu looked shamed enough by the loss without a few dozen strangers staring at him… “Okay, Everyone! We’re ready to announce the tournament listings! Meet us down by the numbered arenas!” Kiyotaka shouted across the arena, coaxed Arcanine off of his lap and then made his way down there himself…

“Alright! In the interests of time, all battles will be fought without items, and that includes held items!” Kiyotaka started explaining the rules of the tournament once they had all gathered. “There is a Pokémon centre just at the entrance to the arena room for us to use between battles, and again in the interest of time, please go directly to get your Pokémon healed as soon as your fight is over, even if the other matches look interesting! The timings on this will be tight, even without a large number of ending up forming a queue just as the last battle ends! Understood!?”

Everyone nodded, at which point he read out everyone’s names and told them which of the small, numbered arenas to go to, before heading over to the one he’d allocated to Hina and himself…

“You put us together first!?” Hina looked surprised as he and Arcanine marched into the opposite side of the ring from her.

“Well, I figured this way I’d still be your ‘warm-up’ fight, as we agreed!” Kiyotaka explained.

“Oooohhh… Well, in that case, you probably should have made us fight last!” Hina chuckled, taking a Pokéball off of her belt and readying it in her hand.

“And why’s that…?” Kiyotaka asked, as Arcanine crouched ready to respond to whatever she was planning…

“Because I’m about to make you both cool down!” Hina threw the Pokéball dramatically into the arena, “Marill! Use Rain Dance!”

Darnit… That was going to dampen the effects of Arcanine’s best attack… literally! But they still had some time before the effect kicked in…

“Arcanine, quickly! Use Flare Blitz!” Kiyotaka ordered, as he reached into his battle bag for the small umbrella he carried with him for this sort of situation…

Arcanine surged forward, wrapped in wreaths of flames, to bite the Marill reaching it moments before a batch of pale grey clouds formed in the air above the four of them and began to drop a
torrent of drizzle over their heads… and Kiyotaka’s umbrella, which he got up just in time…

“Huh!? You bring an umbrella to battles!?" Hina exclaimed, shaking slightly as the cold water drenched her…

“…You mean you don’t!?" Kiyotaka responded, more shocked than she was. After all he could almost understand being willing to get a little wet … “But… doesn’t your Glaceon have hail as one of its moves!? What do you do when you use that?”

“Uhh… cover my head and try to finish the battle quickly?” Hina shrugged, “But, speaking of which! Marill! Use Hydro Pump!”

Well, she certainly had the right idea about ending battles quickly… Poor Arcanine was already starting to shiver in the rain, although he was doing his best not to show it. But what could he do? Flame Blitz would be useless now, as would Crunch on a fairy type, He hadn’t taken any damage yet, so Reversal would be pointless, which left the move Kiyotaka hated having to order! But, as the alternative was to let Arcanine take a Hydro Pump to the face…

“Arcanine, use Take Down!”

Arcanine charged forward and pounced on the Marill, with far more anger and less self-control than he usually would attack with, which, as always, resulted in him wincing as the impact of hitting the floor shot through him…

It wasn’t pleasant to watch, but that should be the end of Hina’s Marill, so now it was just a case of taking down her ice-type…

“Maaa… RIIIIIIIIIIII!” …Or not. Curses! The Marill was barely standing upright, but still had enough energy to summon up a huge jet of water and shoot it towards Arcanine… Damnit! He could barely take a Hydro Pump when it wasn’t powered up by the rain and he hadn’t just hurt himself doing Take Down, so it was no surprise to Kiyotaka whatsoever when the blast knocked Arcanine off of his feet…

…But it was when his dog leapt back up and tiredly tried to shake some of the excess water from his fur! He didn’t look anywhere near as badly damaged as when Naegi had hit him with the same attack… But, then again, Marills weren’t as strong a pokémon as Blastoises, so perhaps that was why. If Hina’s Marill was evolved, the fight would be over now…

But it wasn’t! Which meant he needed to give Arcanine his next order, and as the Marill was on his last legs now… “Arcanine! Use Flare Blitz to finish it off!”

“Marill, use Hy…” Hina obviously didn’t intend to give up… but she didn’t even get to finish her order before Arcanine closed in on her Marill, with flames that burned hard enough to finish it off, even in the pouring rain...

Which kept on pouring, even after the Marill had fainted and gone back to his pokéball. Kiyotaka wasn’t out of the woods yet…

“Glaceon! You’re up next!” Hina threw her secon, and thankfully final, pokémon into the arena…

…Only for her to take one look at Arcanine, pull an annoyed face and then turn back towards her owner…

“Oh, come on! Marill Weakened it for you, and it’s raining!” Hina cried, “You can take a hit and then finish it off with Bite!”
“Arcanine, use Flare Blitz again!” Kiyotaka ordered, as the Glaceon turned back to face him, shaking her head ruefully as she prepared for Arcanine’s attack…

She did just about manage to stand up to Arcanine’s first attack, and do her best to sink her small teeth into his neck as he was withdrawing from his own attack, but it wasn’t nearly enough to finish him off, as Hina had hoped…

“Alright!” Hina cheered her on regardless, “Now, if you survive the next attack…!”

The Glaceon wheeled around to look at Hina again… and was still looking at her even as Arcanine finished her off with another Flare Blitz…

“I mean… Flare Blitz might have missed, right!?” Hina shrugged, as the rain finally began to dry up.

“No. Not unless there’s an outside reason for it.” Kiyotaka corrected her.

“Oooh… man, that’s going to be a pain to beat!” Hina scowled, “I mean, it’d help if my pokémon were stronger, but it’s not like you’re not going to train yours either…”

“Of course, I’ll probably keep up with you… unless your Marill becomes willing to evolve, that is!” Kiyotaka agreed, “As it is, you’d either need something to cause Flare Blitz to miss, or perhaps some kind of priority move to beat Arcanine’s speed in a pinch and do a little more damage to him…”

“Hrmm…” Hina frowned as she considered her options, “Well… just because I lost my first fight, doesn’t mean I’ll lose this tournament! I’m making it my goal to score higher than you!”

A challenge, was it…? “Well, I certainly don’t intend to make it easy for you…!”

…

Well, that was certainly a fantastic afternoon! He’d placed sixth in the tournament… one place below Hina, but still not bad considering that some of the people who’d challenged Makoto had been somewhat above their level, but willing to fight someone technically below them in order to get a glimpse of Hope’s Peak and its students…

From what Makoto had told him while his Blastoise was knocking out Arcanine, it seemed that being picked to attend the school afforded one something akin to a celebrity status, which apparently included receiving large number of challenges via BattleNet from people who wanted to see what was ‘special’ about them all.

Of course, Kiyotaka had gone to great lengths to explain that there was nothing special about him, he’d just worked very hard to improve himself, even when he’d seemed to be in an almost hopeless situation!

But, regardless of that, it might mean that there were people who were still willing to challenge him, despite his one-star rating on the social network…

“Well, some free time before dinner, to do what you want now!”

“Aren’t!” Arcanine took that as permission to break away from his side and head over to his area of the room… It wouldn’t surprise Kiyotaka if he was intending to go for a nap, after all of those tougher fights he’d just had…

Meanwhile, Kiyotaka could log in and check the status of his online account…
He had four stars now? How was that possible, with all of those one star reviews he’d been given? Even if all the people he’d just fought had reviewed him positively, it couldn’t possibly have balanced out all of the negative reviews… Although a quick scroll down the page revealed that most of those had disappeared somehow…

Well… that was odd, but Kiyotaka certainly wasn’t going to complain about his reputation finally taking a turn for the better! Especially as it meant he already had some people requesting for him to be their friend! Over three hundred of them, even!

…And he’d been obliviously letting them all sit in his inbox! And some of these had been in here for the whole week! People must think he was incredibly rude to leave them waiting for so long! He’d have to accept the requests straight away, and then perhaps he could have a look into how to challenge people…

“Arf! Ca-Nine!?” Kiyotaka was stopped from doing just that by a muffled bark to his side…

Kiyotaka turned to find Arcanine sat, carrying a bag in his mouth and looking at him with hopeful eyes…

Now he wanted to play with his toys!?

Then again, Kiyotaka had just said they had time to do what he wanted… And it wasn’t as if they hadn’t done anything productive today… far from it, in fact!

“Alright… let’s play, then!” Kiyotaka stood up from the desk to sit on the floor, while Arcanine happily started digging through the bag to find a specific toy. It would probably be easier on his wrists to gradually go through the list, anyway…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next up will be Makoto's POV.
Bleh, Monday morning already… not that school was horrible, or anything... Far from it! His first week had actually been pretty awesome! But Makoto wouldn’t have minded an extra hour or two to stay in bed after helping out in the garden and finishing off his homework yesterday, and the sound of rain outside wasn’t exactly helping him want to get up…

Wait a sec… weren’t these rooms supposed to be soundproof? So no one would get disturbed by noisy pokémon at night? Then why could he hear it raining? Argh… don’t tell him his ceiling was leaking… it was bad enough he’d been the one to get the sticky bathroom door and had been having to leave it propped open all the time.

Fighting off the impulse to just stay in bed and pretend everything was fine for a few more minutes, Makoto kicked the duvet off of himself and pushed himself upright to see what was going on… Only to be faced with the normal sight of his room, same as it had been the last few days… minus one rather large detail…

“…Blastoise…!?” Togepi was still fast asleep in its bed, but the large basin of water Blastoise slept in was already empty, and that wasn’t like him at all! Makoto usually had to wake him up, and given how many battles they’d been in on Saturday, he hadn’t been expecting today to be any exception to that…

“…To-ise…” Makoto’s heart beat started again as he heard his pokémon dully call out from the bathroom. Guess that meant the sound of ‘rain’ he had heard was just Blastoise in there! But Makoto had better check in on him and see what he was actually doing in there…

“Morning, buddy! You alright in… here…?” Makoto’s voice trailed off when he saw what Blastoise was doing in here.

He was sitting, slumped against the wall and trying vainly to keep his eyes open, under a heavy stream of water from the shower that was so cold that Makoto could feel it as soon as he walked into the room. And the only other time Makoto had seen Blastoise trying to make himself colder was back when he was a Squirtle, and…

“You’re sick, aren’t you?” Makoto guessed, getting a vacant start in response, which probably meant he was right. And given how warm the tortoise felt, even under the freezing water, this wasn’t just some normal pokémon-caused poisoning, either... “Alright, let’s get you into your pokéball, I’m taking you to the school nurse.”

“…Bla…” Makoto wasn’t sure if Blastoise had intended to go into the ball or had just fainted, but either way, he disappeared into it.
Now he just had to wake up Togepi so they could head out… “Togepi…?” Makoto shook its nest, “Togepi, we’ve gotta go to the nurse… Blastoise is sick…”

…No response, it was like Togepi didn’t even notice being shaken about… Aside from shaking slightly in its sleep, but it had been doing that anyway… Wait…

“…Don’t tell me you’re sick as well…!” Makoto groaned as he reached out to feel Togepi’s head, only to find that yes, it was as hot as Blastoise had been. “Alright… at least I can carry you to the nurse…” Makoto sighed, as he carefully picked up the egg with one arm, made sure to grab his keys with his free hand, so he didn’t get locked out of the room, and headed out to the closest pokémon centre…

…He still had a feeling he’d forgotten something, though. Well, whatever it was, it couldn’t be as important as getting his pokémon looked after!

The nurse there gave him a slightly odd look as he walked in, probably not expecting anyone to be training pokémon this early in the morning, but once Makoto explained why he was there, she nodded in understanding and quickly checked over Togepi while putting Blastoise’s pokéball into one of the large medical scanning machines for a few minutes.

…Oh geez! Now she was coming back with a frown on her face… What did that mean? Was this something really, really bad or something!?” “What is it!? They’re not gonna die, are they!?”

“Ah! No… If you make sure they both keep from overheating, they’ll most likely be alright within a week or two!” The nurse looked a little guilty about making him worry, “It’s just… I need to ask you some questions about their medical history…”

“Oh, okay!” Makoto breathed out heavily in relief. “Go ahead.”

“Well… first off, and please be honest with me, are your pokémon’s vaccination records accurate? As in, they definitely had the vaccines?”

“Uhh…” That was a weird question, why wouldn’t their records be accurate? “Well… I had them done at my local pokémon centre, so I think they should be right…? But I guess you could check with the nurse there, I think it’s still the same one working there…”

“Okay…” She made a note on her clipboard, “And, have your pokémon encountered any pokémon from outside the school, not including our own wild areas?”

“Well… I fought about thirty people who challenged me over BattleNet on Saturday…” Makoto explained, “But other than that, no.”

“That’s… unfortunate…!” She looked like Makoto had just made her job a million times harder. “What’s happened is… your pokémon have contracted the Pokéflu…”

“Really!? Even after I had them vaccinated?” And after he’d spent all that time getting Togepi to stop crying afterwards…

“Well… the virus that causes it occasionally changes, which is why there’s occasionally new vaccines out.” The nurse explained, “In fact, the newest one is supposed to be announced sometime this week, once all the stocks of it were distributed… We even have some stocks of it here already, but we were waiting until we had enough to cover all of the staff and students before starting to administer it to anyone…”

“And let me guess,” Makoto sighed, knowing his own stupid luck. “It would have stopped this…”
He gestured to Togepi, who was still shivering, even with the damp cloth the nurse had put over its forehead.

“Yes…” She nodded sadly, “Now, I also have to ask… did anyone else from the school come into contact with the people you fought? Or been in contact with your pokémon for a long time since you fought them?”

…Oh crap! “Yeah… Two of my class fought almost all the same people I did on Saturday, and then both of them and one other person were all working with me in our class garden yesterday.” Makoto remembered, now feeling glad that Sayaka had been too busy to take up his offer to hang out Saturday evening. “Does that mean I’ll have made their pokémon sick as well…?”

“Possibly… but if we catch it early, we can treat them before it gets too serious for them.” The nurse told him, which made him feel slightly better, and then started writing a note. “I’ll need you to go to classroom 2-A and ask for Mikan Tsumiki to come here, and then if you can go to your own class and get the students you think might be at risk to come here. In the meantime, I’ll give your pokémon some medicine that might help them a little…”

“Alright! I’ll be back in a bit…” Makoto took the note she was now holding out to him, then stood up and started to head out of the room…

“Wait! Before you go!” Makoto stopped and turned back as the nurse called him. “…There’ll be enough time for you to go and change out of your pyjamas, first.”

…Oh… right. That’s what he’d forgotten.

Soon enough Makoto, now properly dressed, was knocking on the door to classroom 2-A…

“Hello…?” The door opened and revealed a long, red-haired… cleaner, maybe? She was dressed like one, at least, with a white apron over her short blue dress. “Don’t tell me Koichi hasn’t turned up to teach your class…”

“Uhh… no. I’m just looking for Mikan Tsumiki!” Makoto handed her the note, “My pokémon are sick, and the nurse said to get her…”

“Oh… that’s alright then!” She smiled, pleasantly, before turning back into the classroom. “Mikan! There’s a bit of a situation for you to deal with!”

“Ah! There is!?” Makoto heard Tsumiki’s voice from inside the room, “I-I’ll come r-right a…wwwaaayyyy!”

Makoto flinched and the woman at the door rushed back into the room at the sound of a large crash, leaving Makoto waiting awkwardly at the door, listening to the sounds of everyone helping the nurse get back up. He’d have gone to help himself, but it sounded like she’d landed in an… awkward position…

“Sorry about that!” After a short while, Tsumiki came out of the room. “What’s the problem…”

“Umm… apparently there’s a new strain of Pokéflu, and my pokémon caught it…” Makoto explained, holding out the note to her in case it made more sense to her, “The nurse asked me to get you to go to her office, while I get some classmates of mine who might have caught it as well.”

“Oh… r-really?” Her cheeks turned slightly pink, “Th-this probably means the school will let me
give your class’s pokémon the new shot early… and then they’ll probably make everyone else in the school come, as well…”

Oh man… she’d have to vaccinate every pokémon in the school, because of him!? “Gee… sorry about that…”

“How!? Oh! I don’t mind! I like giving shots!” She giggled for a moment, “Ah… but for now, I’ll go see how your pokémon are doing! So I’ll meet you there!”

“Thank you!” Makoto told her, as she headed off towards the nurse’s office and he walked towards his own classroom, hoping his friends weren’t going to be too mad at him when he told them what had happened...

“Hey, Naegi! Not like you to be late!” Kizakura grinned at him as he sheepishly entered his usual classroom, “You forget to turn your alarm back on last night as well, huh?”

He had remembered his alarm (...or at least, his mom had remembered to remind him...) but that wasn’t really important right now… “Actually... my pokémon have caught a new strain of PokéFlu, and they might have given it to Kiyotaka, Hina and Sakura’s pokémon, as well.” Makoto explained as he entered, holding out the note to him, “So I need to get them to come to the school nurse with me…”

“You’re kidding…” Kizakura took the note, scowling as he read it and saw that Makoto wasn’t kidding, “Now how’d that happen? I though you all had a medical when you entered the school…”

“Yeah, I did… but I also kinda invited 30-odd people who challenged me over BattleNet to fight me on Saturday…”

“But... Kiyotaka and I fought all those people to, and our pokémon are fine!” Hina pointed out, which was good to hear, at least.

“There were a few people I battled before you guys showed up though.” Makoto explained, “And apparently there’s a chance Blastoise could have passed the virus on while we were gardening yesterday…”

“Hah! This is why I hate using BattleNet!” Fukawa suddenly scoffed, “Every time I try and tell people I’ve got a new book out, I get a hundred challenges from people I’m not even friends with! Like I’m stupid enough to fight whatever diseased pokémon they’re carrying around…”

...Yeah, in retrospect, it had been pretty stupid to just let anyone who challenged him into the school...

“Now, now. Not Naegi’s fault there’s a new strain of flu going around… Most of the time challenging a ton of random people is a good training method.” Kizakura shrugged, “Alright, the four of you can go to the nurse. I’ll just put your fights down as draws for the sake of end-of-term scoring…”

Kiyotaka, Hina and Sakura all got up and left the classroom with him, both them and most of their pokémon looking anxious about what was going on...

“...Sorry I made you guys miss class.” Makoto apologised, “Especially if there’s some sort of test going on...?”

“You probably did me a favour, in that regard!” Kiyotaka said, looking like he was forcing himself to put a positive spin on the situation, “I was supposed to be battling you!”
…So what should have been a sure-fire win for Makoto had turned into a draw? Typical…

“And there will apparently be more fights of this nature throughout the term,” Sakura pointed out, “I doubt I will have trouble making up for the draw in later battles.”

“…And I guess I’d have probably lost today’s match-up…” Hina… kind of agreed? She still looked miffed about it though. Then again, Makoto had potentially made her pokémon sick…

“May I ask…? About what Fukawa was saying…” Kiyotaka suddenly spoke up, breaking the anxious silence that had fallen over them. “That she gets challenged by telling people when she’s written a book?”

“Urrgh… I hate people who have accounts like that! It's called BattleNet for a reason!” Hina griped, “And why do people even follow them? If I wanted to see advertising, I’d just watch TV!”

“I guess it lets you pick whose advertising you like to see?” Makoto argued, “I’m pretty sure my sister follows Fukawa’s account, because she likes her books, and it’s easier for her to get info on her new ones straight from her then to try and find out by going into bookshops, or however people find out about new books…”

“…Well, I guess that makes sense…” Hina admitted, “Anyway, what were you going to ask, Kiyotaka…?”

“Well… I was wondering if it would work the same way if I posted links to some of my pokémon guides?” Kiyotaka asked.

“Oh, yeah! I bet loads of people would be interested if you did that!” Makoto told him. That’d be much easier than navigating the old website Kiyotaka was still using to upload his guides.

“Marvellous! I’ll start on that tonight, then!” Kiyotaka’s eyes flashed with determination, “At the very least, I can write something warning people about this new PokéFlu outbreak…”

…Thinking about that, Makoto had probably make sure he warned everyone he fought on Saturday that he might have spread it to them, as well…

The rest of the walk to the nurse’s office was done in anxious silence again, and there was a thick tension in the air as Tsumiki and the other nurse checked over everyone’s pokémon…

“Umm… Well… there’s no signs of any of your pokémon being sick, at the moment!” Tsumiki announced, glancing nervously at them all, but especially Sakura.

“Woohoo!” “Oh thank goodness!” “Thank you. That is good to hear…” The tension in the air lifted instantly.

“Umm… but that d-doesn’t mean that the virus isn’t in its incubation phase!” Tsumiki quickly interrupted them, “S-so I think it’s probably good idea to have them take some anti-v-virals, just in case…?”

“I’d agree.” The older nurse added, as Tsumiki was looking at her for confirmation. “If your pokémon do have small amounts of the virus at the moment, the anti-viral will stop it from turning into full-blown PokéFlu. You’ll also need to give your pokémon the same thing.” She added, to Makoto.

Everyone agreed with that, so Tsumiki headed over to a cupboard and got out some boxes and stuck labels on them, which the other nurse then checked and signed before handing them back to her…
“Just give these to each of your pokémon, morning and evening, for one week.” Tsumiki instructed, handing out two boxes to him, Hina and Sakura and a single box to Kiyotaka. “And you’ll all still need the new shot once it comes in, so long as it’s been a week since they were last sick.”

“Noted.” Kiyotaka nodded along with the rest of them as he took his box, “I’ll have to find somewhere to hide these…”

“Yeah… Good thing Teruteru showed us how to make those nice poffins now, right?” Hina agreed, “We can hide them in those!”

“What!? Why would you hide them in there!?” Kiyotaka looked horrified.

“Why wouldn’t I? It’s a really easy place to put them…” Hina shrugged in confusion.

“But… Why do you need to hide the medication at all?” Sakura asked.

“Because if I don’t, Glaceon won’t eat them!”, “Because if I don’t, Arcanine will eat them!” Hina and Kiyotaka explained at the same time.

“…Err, I mean… Arcanine would try to eat the entire packet at once, if he found out where they’re kept!” Kiyotaka added, once he realised what Hina meant. “I forget not all pokémon try to eat everything they think might be food, sometimes…”

“I wish… Glaceon won’t eat anything that doesn’t obviously look like food, even if I tell her its medicine…” Hina sighed, “Especially if she doesn’t actually feel sick.”

“I see… I didn’t realise that could be a problem.” Sakura admitted, “My pokémon have never turned down vitamins before… but they wouldn’t presume to eat something they didn’t recognise either.”

“Alright… if you three understand that, you can all go back to class, now.” Mikan told them, “Just come back if your pokémon start showing any signs of illness, okay?”

The three of them agreed and headed back out of the room, after telling Makoto that they were wishing his pokémon well.

“Umm… and as for you…” Tsumiki turned to face Makoto, once they’d left, “With the anti-viral, your pokémon should be alright. But you’ll have to make sure they eat, even if they aren’t feeling that hungry. A-and don’t let them get too hot, either! I’d suggest letting your Blastoise stay in a cold shower, and giving the Togepi a wet blanket to nest with… and maybe point a small fan at it, as well.”

“Alright…” Makoto nodded, “So… if I do that, will I be able to leave them in the room while I go to classes, or…?”

“Umm… w-well…” Tsumiki looked really upset all of a sudden, “N-no… Y-you’ll still have to stay with them and k-keep an eye on their temperature m-most of the time…! I’m s-sorry! P-please don’t be angry!”

Why would he be angry? He was just wondering if he was going to have to skip class or not…

“I’ll write you a note to explain that you’ll be missing classes for a week or two.” The school nurse explained.

“Okay then.” Makoto agreed. Guess he was going to be staying in his room for a while… At least it would give him time to set up a fan for Togepi. Plus he’d need to let everyone who’d fought him on
Saturday know what had happened, and warn them to go get their pokémon checked. And, heck! Maybe he could relax and watch TV while he was at it…

...It had been almost a whole day since he’d been told to stay in his room, and Makoto was doing anything but relaxing. Getting everything set up had been easy enough, but then he’d spent most of the evening worrying about whether his pokémon were still cool enough, or eating enough, and checking on them every five or ten minutes.

And even once he’d tried to get some sleep, Togepi kept crying every hour when it’s blanket got too warm and Makoto needed to re-wet it, so he wasn’t exactly well-rested now…

But at least they seemed a little better this morning. He’d managed to give them both their medicine easily, Togepi had accepted a few spoonsful more food than last night, and Blastoise’s eyes looked a little sharper each time he went to check on him…

Thinking of which, maybe he ought to go check on the two pokémon again…

Well, Togepi’s blanket was still wet, and it’s forehead seemed about as warm as before. And the same was true for Blastoise, who was even active enough to lift his arm up and prod Makoto’s side just as he was about to leave…

“Huh? You want something, Blastoise?”

The tortoise nodded slowly and wearily lift his arm to point at Makoto’s waist…

“…My pokédex…?” Makoto checked, getting a slow nod in response, “Alright… here.”

Makoto knelt down and held it out to Blastoise, then watched as he tapped at the screen for a while, before a random TV show started playing…

“Oh! You want to watch some TV?” Well, that made sense. Sitting under a shower all day must be pretty bor…

“Bla…” Blastoise shook its head, then pointed up at Makoto. “Toise.”

“…You want me to watch some TV…?”

“Toise.” Blasotise nodded.

“But… I’m supposed to be looking after you and…”

Blastoise just smiled lightly, shook his head and brought a heavy arm down on Makoto’s shoulder a few times, like he was trying to pat him reassuringly…

“You’re saying you don’t need looking after that much…” Makoto guessed.

“Toise.” The tortoise nodded again.

Well… maybe Makoto had been a little too worried about them… “Alright. But you’ll call me if you need help, right?”

Blastoise nodded, and then shut his eyes and leaned against the wall. Had he worn himself out just from moving his arms and nodding a few times? Or perhaps he’d just wanted to tell Makoto to stop worrying so much before he went to sleep? Either way, Makoto might as well take his advice and
watch whatever TV shows were on at the moment.

…Gawd. Makoto had forgotten how bad daytime TV was… Who wanted to watch people with too
much time on their hands build ridiculous, over-the-top enclosures for their pokémon? Or rich people
umming and ahhing over which specific pokémon they wanted to buy? Well… aside from his Mom,
who was kind of a sucker for this stuff…

Oh well, Makoto probably shouldn’t be sitting watching TV anyway… Had it been long enough
since Blastoise sent him out of the shower for Makoto to go check on him again…?

…No. It had been about five minutes. Urgh! If only he could have gone to classes, or something!
This was just… frustrating now! It was bad enough seeing his pokémon sick, but being stuck in his
room with no one to talk to was making it even worse! Especially as he knew everyone else was
outside exploring and battling and he was getting left behind…

Geez… at any other school he wouldn’t have minded an excuse to stay in his room and watch TV
instead of going to class, but when he knew ‘going to class’ meant taking a group of boats out and
fighting whatever water pokémon were out there, it was a whole other story…

Well, no point getting bitter about it… he might as well try to distract himself somehow… Maybe he
could check BattleNet for responses to his warning to the other competitors.

Hmm… Just a few ‘thanks for the warning, I checked but they’re fine.’ messages, and…

‘(1) new message from Komaru Naegi…’

Huh? Komaru!? Oh… well, it was around lunchtime, so it wasn’t like she was checking her pokédex
in class or anything… Might as well see what she wanted…

‘Hey, Makoto. Next time you don’t have time to ring us, can you text or something saying why?
Mom’s kinda freaking out a little, but also doesn’t want to seem like she’s nagging you to talk to
her.’

Oh CRAP! Time to send Mom and Dad texts explaining what happened…! And then he’d get back
to Komaru…

‘Sorry, I’ve texted Mom and Dad now. Blastoise and Togepi are sick, so I was busy with that.”

‘What happened? Dodgy pokésnack or something?”

‘Nope, new strain of Pokéflu, RIGHT before the vaccine for it is due out! I got it from one of those
people who fought me Saturday.’

‘…You have the DUMBEST luck!’

‘Yeah. Story of my life, right?’

‘But at least I can’t give it to your Geodude!’

‘Yeah, now I just gotta hope everyone ELSE gets their shots before it reaches us… Or that they make
a version for Rocks.’

‘Good luck with that!’

…No more responses from Komaru, guess she must have had something else to now. Like nag her
classmates to be on the lookout for the vaccine being available, maybe.
…Maybe he should go check on Togepi and Blastoise again…

After a few text conversations with his parents, and checking on his pokémon for about the hundredth time, the doorbell rang. And Makoto opened it, much more eagerly than he’d intended to, to find himself face to face with a guilty looking Kiyotaka…

“My apologies for not having done this yesterday! I’ve been overly focused on other things, but that’s no excuse!” Kiyotaka looked furious with himself for what Makoto guessed meant watching his Arcanine’s every move for any sign of illness. “I shouldn’t have needed Kirigiri to knock my head into gear, but now she has, everything should all be here…!”

“Umm… thanks!” Makoto took the pile of paper and USB stick that Kiyotaka thrust at him, “But what is it?”

“Oh… it’s notes from the classes you’ve missed!” Kiyotaka explained, embarrassed to have forgotten that part in the first place, “I believe it’s mostly from the afternoon classes, although Fujisaki gave me the USB stick without staying long enough to explain what was on it, so they might have made a map of the lake this morning, perhaps…”

Oh, right. Someone like Kiyotaka would think of that, although he didn’t get why the guy thought he ought to have done it earlier… It wasn’t like it was his job or anything. “Got it. Thanks, Kiyotaka!” Makoto told him.

“You’re welcome… But my apologies, once again, for not having thought to do it myself…” Geez, he was getting way too upset over that…

“…It’s not that a big a deal! Usually I’d just asked the teacher for them once I got back to class…” Makoto tried to cheer him up, “So I appreciate the effort!”

“Is that so? I must admit, I’ve never had the misfortune of missing classes, so I don’t know the standard procedures for it!” Kiyotaka mused, “But Kirigiri was of the opinion that I should be organising notes for you during your absence, so you didn’t fall behind the rest of the class…”

“Well… maybe it was different in her school…” Makoto admitted, “I mean, I guess it’ll give me something to do while I’m looking after my pokémon…”

“Then I’ll continue to supply you with notes!” Kiyotaka insisted, “But… speaking of looking after pokémon, I left Arcanine back in my room…”

“I won’t keep you then.” As much as having someone to talk to was nice, he couldn’t expect Kiyotaka to stay here for long. “See you tomorrow!”

“Indeed! And I hope your pokémon get well soon!” Ishimaru waved, before turning and heading back inside his own dorm room.

Well… at least now he might not fall too far behind the rest of his class. The notes were all neatly written, which was surprising, given that some of them were from Hagakure…

Most of them were from Kirigiri though… couldn’t she have done this herself, instead of making Kiyotaka feel bad about it? Oh well, Makoto should make sure he thanked her when he got back to class anyway…

*Bing bong.*

Another person at the door? Had someone else thought to give him class notes? Or maybe Kirigiri
had decided to check up and see if Ishimaru had actually handed her notes over…

Instead, the first things his eyes laid upon was as he opened the door was a red, upright wolf that looked like it wanted nothing more than to drag its owner off someone else…

“Uhh… Hey, Oowada…?” Wow… this was one of the last people Makoto had been expecting to see at his door. And it was kinda weird how he wasn’t actually looking at Makoto. The way the biker’s eyes kept shifting sideways made it look like he didn’t even want to be here either, and had just been forced into it. “…Can I help you…?”

“Yeah, actually.” Oowada answered, still not looking at him, “…This is probably gonna seem like a shitty ask, but can Lycan see your Pokémon…?”

Huh? Had Oowada been hoping to battle or something? Makoto wouldn’t have imagined him being the type to organise a playdate… But whatever he wanted, Makoto couldn’t really help… “Ah… Sorry, but they’re still sick!”

“Yeah, but… that’s why I want him ta see ‘em!” Oowada explained, loudly. “It’s kinda hard ta sell ‘please let this lady stab you a bit’ if he doesn’t get what’ll happen if he doesn’t!”

“Oh!” That made sense… “Sure… come in, I guess?” Makoto moved aside for Oowada and his Pokémon.

Oowada stepped in slowly, tugging at the wolf’s arm to coax it inside, although it didn’t really seem keen on coming in here as it was glaring at Makoto suspiciously and sniffing the air cautiously with every step. Maybe it could smell that something was up with Makoto’s Pokémon before it even saw them.

“Thanks… so… where are they?” Oowada looked around the room.

“Right… Well… Togepi’s in its nest…” Makoto headed over to the egg, who was still restlessly sleeping, and took the opportunity to check if its cloth was still damp enough, which it wasn’t quite. He might as well take it off and then use the water from the shower to wet it again, seeing as he was going in there anyway. “Here.”

Oowada urged his wolf to look at Togepi, which it did, peering between the nest and the desk fan suspiciously for a moment…

“ROC!” Before lashing out with a paw and throwing the desk lap to the floor.

“Shit! Lycan, no!” Oowada grabbed the wolf and pulled it backwards, while Makoto raced to put the fan back in place. “It ain’t shivering ‘cause it’s cold! It’s got a fever!”

“Canrrrrrrrr…” Well… Seemed like it trusted Oowada enough to let Makoto put the fan in place, but it didn’t look happy about it.

“Shit… he still doesn’t get it…” Oowada grumbled apologetically.

“Well… Blastoise is kinda awake at the moment…” Makoto told him, “Maybe he’ll be able to explain it? He’s in the shower.”

“Worth a shot, I guess…” Oowada muttered, pulling his reluctant wolf away from Togepi and towards the bathroom as Makoto opened the door to reveal Blastoise, sitting with his eyes shut and head on his chest under the freezing cold shower water.
“Lyc…? Can… *Can*!” The wolf looked shocked and tried to bark at Blastoise, rounding on Makoto with a growl when he didn’t get any response… “Rrrrrrr…”

“*Hey!* Cut that out!” Oowada snapped at it, “It ain’t *his* fault! His pokémon just got *sick*!”

“Rrrroooooo…” Oh crap… Oowada’s Lycanroc didn’t seem like it was listening to him…

“Bla…?” Luckily for Makoto, it stopped growling at the sound of Blastoise murmuring in confusion, as his eyes slowly focused on the wolf in front of him… “…T-toise!”

Ahhhh… now Blastoise was trying to get up! He probably though Makoto needed defending or something… “Woah… hey, buddy! It’s fine! I’m alright! You just sit and rest, okay!?”

Blastoise and the Lycanroc stared at each other for a moment, before Blastoise let himself slump back against the wall again, and the wolf started barking questioningly at him for a while, looking more and more concerned as Blastoise wearily answered him, until even *that* seemed like too much effort for him and he shut his eyes and lowered his head to his chest again…

“D’ya *get* it now!?” Oowada asked, anxiously, “They’re *sick*! And that shit with the needles earlier was to give you some meds that’ll make it so *this* doesn’t happen to *you*!”

The wolf took one last look at Blastoise before nodding apologetically at its owner.

“Get… now let’s go get your shots, already…” Oowada muttered, starting to drag his wolf back to the door. “Thanks, Naegi. I owe ya one.”

“Heh… don’t worry about it!” Makoto waved them off, “See you in a few days, hopefully!”

“Yeah… no kidding!” Oowada looked back at his two pokémon anxiously, before heading out of the door and shutting it behind him, leaving Makoto alone to sort out Togepi’s cloth.

No kidding indeed… He *really* didn’t want to miss many more classes, not after he managed to get into an awesome school like Hope’s Peak! He could *really* do without *that* sort of stupid luck!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
‘Being careful’ (Leon POV)

Chapter Notes

In case it’s not clear, this chapter takes place over a week after the previous one, so we are now in week three of the first term. Also apologies if this comes across as a bit too political. This storyline will only be lasting for this and one more chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alright! Third talent training class of the term! Maybe this week Leon and Litten could do a better job of it!

“Good morning, class!”

“Good morning, Miss Hawthorne…” Gawd, he was starting to hate having to stand and recite that like some nerd (cough Ishimaru cough!) every week…

“Thanks you. You can all sit down, now.” She said, smugly. “Today, we’re going to continue making accessory sets for your pokémon, so feel free to talk amongst yourselves and help yourselves to the accessories I’ve bought from the school store while you work.”

Dammit! That meant it was another two hours of trying to put together an accessory set that Litten was probably going to end up setting fire to, for the third week in a row! And, yeah sure, he could try making one for Luxray instead, but Lux was his sports pokémon! He couldn’t expect one cat to do both jobs now, could he? Hell, Lux got tired enough of the one he currently had. It wouldn’t be fair to force him to do this, just ‘cause Litten wasn’t playing ball…

So, he was stuck working with Litten and his still-shitty attitude, and come Hawthorne’s judgement at the end of the class, the only reason Leon wouldn’t be in last place was because Ishimaru was refusing to even try dressing up his pokémon like she wanted, and Mondo and Naegi weren’t here again!

…Almost made him wish one of his pokémon had the sniffles, or whatever! A few days off would have great, let alone a whole week! “Can you believe Naegi’s still not back in class!?”

“Well, it fits in with how long my Mom thought it would take.” Hiro answered, from his left.

“What, she has predictions as well?” Leon asked. Not that he believed Hiro’s nonsense, but it was easier to talk to him if he went along with it, and that was still better than talking to Mondo’s empty chair would have been… Although, maybe he could see if Fujisaki wanted to take Mondo’s chair on Wednesdays or something…

“No… she’s a nurse at the pokémon centre!” Hiro explained, “And they’re getting tons of pokéflu cases in Alola, cause of all the tourists.”

“Man… and I was just there over the summer….” If he’d stayed a little longer he might have been able to skip school! But there was no chance of that happening now, seeing as the school kept nagging them all about getting shots for it because Naegi had brought it in…

“Yeah, me to…” Hiro nodded, “And, uh… is your Litten supposed to be setting that on fire…?”
Wha… *Aw SHIT!* Litten had got out of his ball and was already attacking what little of *last* week’s work he’d been able to salvage! That was a *great* start to the lesson, wasn’t it!? Now where the hell was his water bottle…!? 

“…And, at the bottom of the class yet again, we have Kuwata, followed by Ishimaru, with Naegi and Oowada being absent.” Hawthorne was giving him a pissy stare as she read the results of her judgement at the end of her shitty lesson. Like it was *his* fault Litten had ended up setting fire to a bunch of her shit again! Hadn’t Kizakura said something about this class supposed to be helping with behavioural problems!? So why wasn’t *she* doing anything about that!? “I’m *hoping* you’ll do better *next* lesson.”

(“*Maybe if you actually bothered to teach* anything, instead of just watching us play dress-up *all* lesson…”)

“What was that, Kuwata?” *Shit!* Hawthorne had heard him bitching under his breath!

“Uhh… I was just wondering if that meant you were gonna teach us some training methods?” Leon lied, “Y’know… for the performance side of things…?”

“Well… we’ll have a few lessons about that, at some point…” She brushed him off, “Accessories are more important, though…”

*Great.* In other words, most of these lessons were gonna be no use to him whatsoever. Maybe he should go back to trying to convince Maizono or someone to help him out…

“Which is why I want *each* of you to have at least *one* costume for your pokémon by next week.” Hawthorne finished off, as she stood to leave, meaning everyone else had to follow her. “Goodbye, class.”

“Goodbye, Miss Hawthorne…” Leon droned along with the rest of them. Hell, even freaking *Ishimaru* wasn’t as annoying about sucking up to the teacher as usual.

But at least her making them all stand to say goodbye to her meant he could just walk outta the classroom, now…

“Hold on! Before you all leave…” Kizakura stopped them all from leaving early, for once, “It’s come to my attention that there are a couple of pokémon that *still* haven’t had the new Pokéflu vaccine yet... and, no, I’m not talking about Golett, Garbodour, Sandygast *or* Naegi’s pokémon, and, yes, Togami I know *your* pokémon got the new vaccine before you even got here. I’m talking about someone *else*…”

Urg, could he not just *say* it was Leon he was talking about? It’s not like he wouldn’t do it *ever*, he just hadn’t got around to it yet!

“So, I’m going announce, *yet again*, that getting your pokémon vaccinated is now *mandatory* for all students, and we *will* start imposing penalties on any students with pokémon that *could* be vaccinated, but *haven’t* been.” He finished, “See you all after lunch!”

So, what? They were gonna punish him for not having had time to make a nurse’s appointment!? Geez, overkill, much? And what was with some pokémon getting a free pass!? “Hey, Hiro, how come *your* pokémon ain’t gotta have its shots?”

“Uhh… ‘cause Sandygast’s a pile of sand?” Hiro shrugged, “I mean… kinda hard to inject it with
“Oh… right.” Yeah, that made sense. And he guessed a pile of garbage and a stone man wouldn’t be injectable either. “So, you’re Sandygast’s gonna end up getting sick at some point, then?”

“Nah, hopefully not! There’s something called ‘herd immunity’ that should stop her from getting it.” What was that? His Sandygast’s natural ability or something? “Anyway, you wanna sit with me and Hifumi at lunch?”

Sit with the fatass?! *Hell no!* “Uhh… I’ll pass. I wanna ask Maizono for some advice.”

“Cool… offer’s always open though!” Hiro insisted, before heading off.

Meanwhile, Leon headed up to the front of the class, where Maizono was already talking to Ishimaru…

Honestly, Leon had been hoping that with Naegi gone for a while, she might have stopped hanging out with that guy and his weird-as-hell dog. Especially seeing as his story had gone from ‘Arcanine’s afraid of police hats’ to ‘Arcanine’s afraid of every accessory’ with no explanation whatsoever. But, *nope!* She’d even moved across into Naegi’s seat so they could chat together! It was like Leon was the only one who could see how suspicious the guy was… well, and maybe Fujisaki as well, given how little they wanted to talk to him either… And admittedly Mondo couldn’t stand him either, but that was mostly ’cause of Ishimaru’s whole stuck-up goody-two-shoes schtick pissing him off..

And what the hell would someone like Maizono even have to talk about with Ishimaru, anyway…? Well, he’d been wanting to go talk to her anyway. It’s not like they could blame him if he overheard something on the way there…

“…still our teacher! I can’t just *ignore* her!” Oh, apparently he was bitching about Hawthorne’s homework…

“Well… maybe you could try showing your Arcanine some movies with other Arcanines in them?” And Maizono was giving him some advice about it, “If he sees them in costume, maybe he’ll want to copy them?”

“Hmm… he *does* like books about Growlithes and Arcanines…” Ishimaru was sloooooowly considering the idea, “Do you have any recommendations?”

“Hrm… I don’t really have time to watch that many movies, honestly…” Man, that sucked for her… maybe Leon could offer to take her to the pictures in exchange for her help, sometime… “I bet Makoto would know some good ones, though!”

“Is that so? Alright! I’ll ask him about it when I give him the notes for this afternoon’s classes!” Ishimaru finally started to leave, “Are you coming for lunch?”

“Umm… I think Kuwata wants to ask me something, first…” Awesome! She’d noticed him! “I’ll meet you there in a few minutes.”

*And* she was getting rid of the nerd so they could chat in private! *Double Awesome!*

“So… I’m guessing you want to talk to me?” There was that intuition of hers kicking in…

“Yep, you got it!” Leon gave her a wink and thumbs up, “See… You might have guessed this already, but I’m getting the feeling that Hawthorne’s never actually gonna teach us anything to do with, y’know… *performing* stuff…”
“Yes, I’d noticed… you’re not the only one!” Maizono sighed, “Ibuki and Hiyoko are already talking about teaming up and trying to get rid of her, somehow…”

“Oh, really?” That might be worth remembering, “Well, that’d be cool and all, but I’m guessing it’d take a while…?”

“Yes… and she keeps grading me lower than Enoshima…” Woooah… for a moment there, Maizono actually looked kinda scary! “But! There’s not really anything else we can do about it, is there?”

“Well… I guess not…” Not like they could do something crazy like make her break a leg or something, “But… I was thinking maybe you’d be able to teach me some stuff, to get a hold on Litten…”

“Hmm…” It looked like she was at least thinking about it… “Have you tried getting your Litten to be more active, like in battles?”

Aww, man… that was just the same suggestion Ishimaru had made… he wanted actual help this time! “…Yeah, we’ve have loads of fights since we got here…” Which was true… they’d been having at least one fight every day! “But he’s still the same as ever.”

“Well… In that case, maybe I can help…” Hell yeah! This was gonna be awesome! “But I’m going to want something in return from you.”

“Sure thing! Anything you want!” Maybe she wanted him to take her to the pictures after all…

“Well… if I’m going to do well here, I need to train my pokémon…” …or not. “And apparently it’s easier to go out and train if you’ve got someone to fight with you… And you’re about my level and have different types of pokémon to mine…”

“…So you wanna battle partner?” Man… that was not what he’d expected at all… “Why not hang out with someone like Naegi? He’d be fighting stronger pokémon, so wouldn’t it help your pokémon get stronger, faster!?”

“They probably wouldn’t survive many of Makoto’s fights, so I’d have to buy a ton of potions or keep stopping to rest my pokémon up…” Seemed like she’d thought about this, “And besides, Makoto’s pokémon are sick right now.”

“Oh, yeah…” Guess Leon had lucked out there! You snooze, you lose, Naegi! “Well, in that case, I’d be happy to help!”

“Alright then…” She agreed, though she looked pretty cautious about it… this whole thing might be her idea of a test… “But there’s just one more thing.”

“What’s that?”

“You need to get your pokémon vaccinated.”

“Wha…!? How’d you know I didn’t!?”

“You just told me…” Damn… this chick was sneaky… “Although I had a feeling when Kizakura said it was two unvaccinated pokémon and looked towards your part of the class…”

Well, she kinda had him there, and it’d stop the school from bitching about it… “Alright, alright… I’ll go get ‘em done now…”
“Good… I don’t have time for my training partner to be skipping because his pokémon are sick.”

“Alright… see ya later, Maizono…” Yeesh… this chick needed to lighten up a little!

But, hey, maybe Leon could work on that during all the alone time with her that he’d just scored! Heheheheh… today must be his lucky day! The way things were going, he’d probably manage to get these shots done in record time to…!

…Or not, as he realised as soon as he took one look at the nurses office…

“Geez… what the hell’s up with this queue!?” He’d never had to wait to see a school nurse before, but the room here looked packed and there was a chick sat outside with a Snorlax, Bewear and Psyduck, all sat tucking into a giant pile of food from the canteen that they’d brought up on a tray…

“Huh… oh, this is just the queue for the new shot.” The chick with the food turned around, “If you need the normal machine you just walk right in and go up to the counter!”

“Dammit… I’m here ’cause I need my shots done to!” Guess he was stuck here for a while… Still, hopefully it wouldn’t take too long, if everyone only had two or three pokémon…

“Eh? I thought your class got ’em earlier, cause of that Marko kid?”

…Marko? Oh, guess she was trying to talk about Naegi… “Well… yeah, we did, but I didn’t have time to come here before…”

“Wow… sucks to be you, man! They just told us all we could come get ours this morning!” She laughed, “And Gundam’s already in there with his twelve Dedennes…”

“Seriously!?” What kind of newbie trained twelve of the same pokémon!? And how the hell did they get into Hope’s Peak!?

“Yeah… Good thing I decided to go get lunch first!” She turned away and helped herself to some of the giant pile of food.

Dammit! Why hadn’t Leon thought to do that!? Or just have come and got this done when Kizakura first told ’em all to a week ago? And why the hell did they even have to get more shots again? Hadn’t he already done all this a few months ago when he got Litten…?

…Well, he had his pokédex. He might as well look that up, seeing as he wasn’t going to be leaving here anytime soon! Not when there was half a chance he’d come back to find another ten people had joined the queue again…

Half a minute later Leon had typed in ‘Why the FUCK do I have to get my pokémon vaccinated AGAIN?’ and clicked on the first link that came up…

‘What made YOU decide to TRULY start researching vaccine safety? Have you ever regretted not to vaccinating your pokémon? (Why, if yes)’

Huh? What the heck was this…? Some kind of message board just for people who didn’t vaccinate their pokémon…? Man, you could find all sorts of shit on the net…

…but there were a ton of trainers on here saying their pokémon had started having problems once they had their shots, like starting to ignore their trainers or just flat-out failing to understand them, having bad reactions to lights, or not managing to grow as fast as they should do, so they were always weaker than other pokémon… Shit, he’d never heard anything about that kind of thing
“Hey… you ever hear anything about pokémon having problems after getting their shots…?” He asked the chick with all the food.

“Ahmm… ‘Ou mean, like syfe effefs?’ She mumbled through a mouthful of pizza, “Like ‘em feelin’ ‘ired for a coupluff dayf?”

“Nah, I mean like… stuff affecting them forever…” Leon summarised.

“*gulp*… Nope! Never heard of anything like that!” She swallowed her food and shrugged, “I mean, they wouldn’t make us have ‘em if they were bad, right? And if we didn’t do it, they might get sick!”

“Hmm…” He’d hope the school wouldn’t force him to do something dangerous to his pokémon, but… there were, like, almost two hundred people on this site alone saying they’d had problems… Maybe he oughta look into this some more… Perhaps without the bitchy tone this time…

‘Danger of vaccines’ That oughta do it…

Yikes! Alright, so there were a couple of sites saying that they were pretty-much harmless, with only the odd rare case where something bad happened… but there were plenty more that said they were dangerous, and everyone was being lied to about them… and even a couple that said they had evidence the whole thing was a big Team Rocket plot to get trainers to ditch their otherwise perfectly-good pokémon at shelters, so they’d have easy access to them all…

Screw that! There was no way he was letting those Team Rocket assholes get away with that shit! He had to let people know about this! But chances were, if he just barged in and tried to explain it to the people waiting for their shots, he’d just be shot down by the nurse… and he didn’t understand this science crap enough to explain the problem, either…

Best thing to do would be to post a warning message and the links to these websites on his BattleNet profile! He a decent number of people following him, and they’d be able to spread the message around for him! Problem solved!

Plus, this way he’d actually have time for some food before the boring afternoon classes started up…

Well, classes were finally over and done with! Now to kick back and relax for a bit before dinner with Mondo and maybe Fujisaki… Might as well check his pokédex and see if he had any messages from Kanon or anyone back… home…

‘BattleNet: (93) new notifications’

WHAT!? How the hell did he get that many notifications in one afternoon…!?!

Geez… all of them were about that post he’d made about the vaccines! And like… over half of these were from total strangers bitching at him and saying he was setting a bad example… To the point where they were threatening to fight either his pokémon or himself to prove that he was wrong! Why the hell were they so pissed off?? He’d just been warning people to be careful! And even if it turned out he was wrong, what was the worst that would happen? The few people who’d listened to him had to deal with their pokémon sneezing for a week? Big whoop, who cared!?

At least the other half of the notifications were from people who were thanking him for spreading the
info… heck, he ever had a guy politely asking if he’d do an interview on it for his magazine… Not that he’d bother, ‘cause that sounded like a pain in the ass, but it was nice of him to offer, at least!

Well, nothing else was on his pokédex, maybe he could kick back with his guitar and…

*Bing bong.*

Or he could go see who the heck was bothering him right after classes finished, he guessed…!

“Ah, Kuwata! Good, you are here!” Urg… If he’d known it was gonna be Ishimaru he wouldn’t have bothered opening the door! “I’ve been informed that you’ve posted links to a website that was claiming that Pokéflu vaccines are some sort of plot by Team Rocket!”

“And, what? You wanna pokémon battle to prove you’re right, to?”

“Err… no? What would be the point of that?” Well, at least Ishimaru had more sense that most of those idiots online.

“Like hell if I know! Ask the fifty-odd people wanting to fight me just ‘cause I said something they disagreed with!”

“Really!? Fifty people, just from one statement!?” Why they hell was he so excited about that? “Hmm… I never even considered that possibility… But, regardless! The reason I came was because I felt it was important to inform you that your source of information was actually incorrect! It’s actually a common piece of propaganda put out by Team Plasma, as part of their aim to reduce the amount of, what they consider to be, deleterious intervention into the natural lives of pokémon! You see, by claiming that having your pokémon vaccinated will help Team Rocket, they…”

…Okay, yeah, he could see how maybe convincing people that medicine was bad would help Team Plasma, and saying ‘Team Rocket want you to do X’ was a sure-fire way to get people not to do X, but… “How do you know that…?”

“…it’s actually a common tactic used by many villainrrr…” Ishimaru’s lecture stalled at Leon’s interruption, “…rrrr…It’s something my father told me!”

“Well, how does he know?”

“I… I’m not sure? I just assumed it was common knowledge!” Ishimaru stammered, “Although, I suppose it might be something he heard through his work at the police force…”

“Or it could be something he heard from some drunk dude in the pub!” Leon pointed out.

“No… my father doesn’t drink, or visit pubs!” Geez… how was this dumbass in the top part of the class in every subject, again!?

“I mean; he could have heard that from anyone! You’ve not got any actual proof that its true, do you?”

“Well… I suppose that is the case… But…” Urg… he wasn’t just going to let this go, was he?

“Tell you want, why don’t we have this discussion when you’ve actually got some proof, alright?” Leon started to try and close the door on him.

“I… ngh… very well! If that’s what it takes to get you to stop spreading misinformation!” Ishimaru
shouted looking both pissed off and determined at the same time, “I’ll see you shortly!”

...Seriously, why the hell did this bother him so much? Was he pissed off that Naegi made him miss a whole half-hour of class last week, or something? He was acting like this was some personal vendetta, stomping up the hallway in his Team Rocket boots with a stroppy expression on his...

Waaaaait a second… They’d barely finished classes when he turned up at Leon’s door saying he’d been ‘informed’ about Leon’s post about Team Rocket’s plot… but informed by who exactly!? His bosses at Team Rocket, trying to stop the information about their plans from getting out…?

Well, it was either that, or some people who followed both himself and Ishimaru on BattleNet… but who the hell would actually wanna follow Ishimaru!? Leon had had a look at his page a few days ago, and he’d done nothing but post boring, ‘pokémon for dumbasses’-type guides all week!

Hmm… he’d have to be really careful about whatever ‘proof’ Ishimaru came back with… assuming he actually came back with anything at all...

Next morning Leon was triumphantly eating a bacon roll with Mondo and Fujisaki, while occasionally glancing over at Ishimaru, who was busy scowling into his ratty of excuse for a laptop. Obviously he hadn’t been able to find any kind of link whatsoever between those websites and Team Plasma… or he just sucked at photoshopping that sort of thing.

Either way, it had meant Leon had had a peaceful evening and probably wasn’t going to have to listen to any more complaints about his update from yesterday...

“Hey… Leon. I need to have a word with you…” Instead, it seemed like he was gonna have to listen to Nidai begging him to join his pokéathlon meetups again.

“Look, Neko man, I told you, I’m doing my sports training in my own time…” Or, at least, he was gonna, once he felt like he was in the right mood to start the whole training regime again… or found a cute chick to train with who wouldn’t suddenly bring in a third wheel like Asahina had...

“That’s not why I’m here… Ishimaru’s starting to get good enough to replace you on the team, anyway…” Well, if he was going to be like that, maybe Leon’d start training back up tonight! “Especially if you’re going to risk your pokémon’s health by refusing to vaccinate them!”

“You… haven’t vaccinated your pokémon, yet?” Fujisaki asked, while their Golett started disappearing into its pokéball...

Screw that! “The hell, Fujisaki…? Lux is fine! You ain’t gotta act like he’s fucking contagious!”

“Umm… sorry, but there’s so many people in Unova who won’t give their pokémon vaccinations that it kept getting sick and eventually learnt to hide from them…” Fujisaki explained, without actually sounding sorry at all...

“Why the hell wouldn’t anyone get their shots?” Mondo asked.

“Team Plasma started a bunch of rumours that vaccines could cause long-term problems for pokémon, and they’ve still got a big enough hold back in Unova that a lot of people still believe them.” Neko answered him.

Shit… so he’d heard it was Team Plasma as well? But it could just be a coincidence, or maybe Team
Rocket spreading their own lies… “But… how’d you know it was Team Plasma, if they’re just *rumours*?”

“Uhh… Y’know… everyone’s always said it was them, and I never actually thought to ask that… *Gahahaha*!”

Hah! Nidai could laugh it up all he *liked*, but he *didn’t* have any actual *proof* Leon was wrong, either!

“Umm… I think it’s because the researcher who claimed to have found the problem originally turned out to have a relative who was accepting money from them, with no real explanation as to why.” Fujisaki spoke up.

So, the guy was related to someone who was working for them? “That doesn’t mean *he* was doing what they wanted!”

“But… no other researchers have ever replicated his findings!” Fujisaki insisted.

“Well… *yeah*. But the website I saw said that’s because they haven’t looked into all the ingredients, and…”

“*Urrrggg*…” Wow, Fujisaki didn’t even bother to listen to him. They just started groaning into their hands halfway through...

“Y’know, Leon, you *could* just admit that maybe you made a mistake…” Nidai wasn’t paying attention either.

And screw *that*! This shit was important! He wasn’t just gonna let it go just everyone had *heard* it was *supposedly* something that Team Plasma made up! “Hey, you guys haven’t actually *proved* I’m wrong about this!”

“I dunno, man…” Mondo frowned, “Kinda sounds like *they* know what's up and *you’re* just being a stubborn ass ta me…”

What the hell *was* this? Gang up on Leon day!? “Oh *screw you guys*!” He’d rather go to *fucking class* early than listen to everyone act like he was being some gullible dumbass, that was how pissed off he was…!

“Ah… Kuwata!” Kirigiri looked as surprised as *he* was that he was here this early, “That’s convenient. I have something I need to show you.”

Oh for… don’t tell him… “Is this about vaccines as well…?”

“Yes.” *Great*, just *great*. Yes *another* person insisting he was wrong… “Following on from your conversation with Ishimaru yesterday evening, I looked into connections between the websites you referenced, and Team Plasma…”

“Wait… why’d he bring *you* into this?” What, was *she* Team Rocket as well, or something?

“His logic was that, if his father had heard about the connection via the police force, then *I* might have also heard the same information and know more about its source.” Well… that *did* make sense, he guessed… “And, as I thought it would be easier to investigate this *without* his help, I told him I’d take over your challenge if he did a favour for me.”

*Heh*… yeah, that bit about not wanting Ishimaru’s help seemed fair enough… Leon wouldn’t wanna
“Yes.” Crap… maybe he had been wrong about this after all… “I noticed that all the moderators of the first website you referenced shared the same email server, which is not unusual for a group website like that, but what was odd was that they were trying to use a proxy server to hide the location of their real server…” She paused right as Leon felt his eyes glazing over and just pushed a bunch of paper towards him… “…Long story short, their offices are being paid for by a notorious 'ex'-Team Plasmid member and they’re trying to hide it.”

Oh… well, alright, that was pretty suspicious… If it was true, anyway. “And what about the other two sites I found?”

“…I haven’t had time to look into those yet.” Her lip twitched very slightly in annoyance.

“Well… lemme know if you find anything on them!” In the meantime, he could try and look through this evidence of hers and make sure it was actually legit…

“Very well…” She nodded, “But, in the meantime, and given I’ve discredited one of your sources, perhaps you might be willing to announce that there is at least a possibility that you were wrong, yesterday?”

“The hell!? Why should I…?” What was with everyone wanting him to say he was being an idiot, when they didn’t have any real proof!? “If it turns out you can’t find anything and I go back to saying I was right in the first place; it’d just look like I couldn’t make up my mind!”

“Given the number of people who’ve seen your post so far, I think it’d be better to admit you’re not entirely sure…” Kirigiri shrugged, “Before they all take your words to heart and spread them either further than they already have.”

“Oh, come on! It’s not like ninety people is that many…” Leon pointed out, “And half of them were disagreeing with me!”

“…Ninety?” Kirigiri blinked at him, “…Have you not checked BattleNet this morning?”

“Uhh… no…” Leon got out his pokédex to check…

'BattleNet: (537) new notifications'

“Ho-ly!” Damn… that’d gone up a lot overnight! Shit, that’d be five hundred people he’d have to admit he was wrong to, if it turned out he was… “…But… I mean… five hundred people still ain’t that many…”

“It’s five hundred pokémon who could end up getting sick, assuming each person owns two, but only half of them agree with you.” Kirigiri argued, “Surely, you can’t think that’s better than at least admitting you aren’t certain at this point…?”

“I dunno! It doesn’t seem that bad to me!” What, five hundred pokémon caught a cold and two-fifty kids got an excuse to skip school for a week? “Better than if it turns out I was right and the shots are dangerous, but a bunch of people have ’em done anyway, ’cause I flip-flopped over it!”

“Haaa…” Kirigiri quietly let out an annoyed breath, “I suppose the only way to change your mind is to discredit your other sources of information, then?”

“Well… sure, if you can do that, I’ll believe you!” Leon agreed, as he headed over to his seat… although he would have to find someone to explain all this stuff to him, so he could make sure
Kirigiri was on the up and up and part of Team Rocket’s conspiracy…

It was kind of weird, watching everyone come in a sit down… especially when Ishimaru came in and made a beeline for Kirigiri, then did a shitty job of pretending they weren’t talking about him. But the weirdest thing was Hiro entering the classroom with his arms held out behind his back, like he was trying to hide something from everyone…

“Uhh… hey, Leon!” Hiro came up to his desk. Guess whatever weird thing Hiro was up to today involved him, somehow.

“Hey, Hiro! You got a present for me?”

“Well… kinda…” Hiro muttered, awkwardly. “My Mom said to give this to you…”

“O… kay…?” That was kinda weird… alright, from what Hiro had said, his Mom was pretty young, but she still must be, like, twice Leon’s age! Why the hell was she making her son give him presents!? 

“Yeah, so, uhh… My mom told me to print this all off, and then give to you like this…” Hiro brought out one of those thick cardboard folders that could hold about two inches of paper in it and lift it up to his own chest. “So, uhh… Sorry, dude!”

Wha? Why was he apologising? And why was he lowering it down towards Leon so quic…

*::*^%&£

… … …

“…your mother told you to jump off of a bridge, would you do that to!?” Urg… the hell? Was that Kizakura? When did he come in the room…? And who was he yelling at?

“…Which bridge are we talking about?” Well, that was Hiro…

“Are you serious?”

“Yeah, man! My mom is scary when she’s mad! She tells me to do something, I do it!”

“Even when she tells to knock out one of your friends!?”

“Well… to be fair, all she told me to do was hit him over the head with it…” Hiro sounded embarrassed, “I, uhh, didn’t realise it’d be that heavy…”

Wait… his mom had told him to hit someone with something… and she’d also told him to give Leon something, right? Which Leon only sorta remembered him starting to do…

“Nrgghhh…Did you just whack me in the head with that big-ass folder…!?” Leon forced himself to move and open his eyes, which felt like it set off fireworks of pain through the top of his head. “You fucking jackass…”

“Hey, I said sorry, dude…” Had he!? Leon couldn’t actually remember, “Besides, if you hadn’t told people not to vaccinate their pokémon, Mom wouldn’t have told me to ‘knock some sense’ into you in the first place!”

“Urg… geez, is that really worth almost killing me!?” Leon griped, “I mean, if even I was wrong, all
I’d have done is give a few pokémon a fricken cold! Right?"

…Okay, he could tell practically all of the class were staring at him, so why the fuck was no one responding to…"

“Dude, Did ya not see Naegi’s pokémon at all…?” Mondo sounded like he thought Leon was an idiot. “His room felt like a damn freezer, and they were still too hot! That ain’t ‘just a cold’!”

“And he’s been lucky enough not to have any other complications… Which is practically a miracle given how young his Togepi is…” Kizakura added.

“Uhh… whaddaya mean by complications…?”

“Hmm… y’know, I think Mrs Hagakure’s probably explained it better than I would…” Kizakura picked up the folder and, once Leon instinctively lifted his head off of the table and shielded his head with his arms, put it on the desk in front of him, so it was open on the front page…

Which had the title ‘Stop telling people not to get their pokémon vaccinated, you freaking dumbass!’ above a picture of a Skitty that was coughing up blood, with the words ‘Pneumonia caused by Flu’ underneath it.

“Uhh…” Shit… was that something that could happen…?

“You can read that while we all go out to the forest now.” Kizakura told him, “And I’m expecting you to make an appointment for the vaccinations!”

Everyone else headed out, leaving Leon with the folder. But, hey… this was just one pokémon who’d reacted badly, right? For all he knew, it was the only one and Hiro’s mom had just filled the rest of this folder with blank paper to scare him…

…Okay, well the second and third pages were more pneumonia cases… as were the fourth, fifth and sixth… and all of them were cats. Like she’d picked examples that she knew would upset him…Page seven had some charts about how many pokémon got pokéflu and how much more likely young and old pokémon were to get it… aww, shit. Litten fitted in with that younger group as well… Then the next few pages were more pictures of cats that had had to be tied up and hooked up to tubes ‘cause they weren’t able to eat and then… Fucking Arceus! There was even a picture of a Luxio having to have its teeth removed…?!

Fuck reading the rest of this shit! He’d seen enough, and he was barely a quarter of the way through! All this horrible crap would be way worse than any behavioural problems… and if everyone was right about all that stuff having been made up by Team Plasma, then he’d probably just fucked up big time by telling them all about it…

Welp… time to go book an appointment with nurse! And while he was waiting he could try and tell everyone following him on BattleNet to ignore his last update…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading and I hope you have a great new year!
“Soo… I take it your brother didn’t go out, get drunk and end up lying dead in a ditch somewhere?” Chieko joked, as she looked over Komaru’s shoulder at her pokédex.

“No… He just forgot to ring because his pokémon are sick…” Komaru rolled her eyes as she switched back to her BattleNet feed, “Some new strain of PokéFlu that we’re gonna get told to vaccinate our pokémon against really soon, apparently.”

“So, your brother’s dumb luck, again?”

“Pretty much…” Komaru agreed, scrolling down the page… Hmm, nothing new, except Ishimaru had posted an updated version of his old guide to looking after Rock Types. That might be useful to look at…

Oh, neat! This went into way more detail than before, but didn’t look too confusing either… she’d have to read this properly once she got back from school…

“Hey, what is that…?” Chieko asked.

“Oh, just a guide on looking after rock types.” Komaru explained, “One of my brother’s school friends made it…”

“Really? Is there one for fairy types?” Chieko asked hopefully. Not that Komaru could blame her, given how little advice for dealing with Clefairies there was around here…

“Hmm… I’ll check his page…” Komaru gave it a quick check, “Nope, not yet… but he added me as a friend, and from what Makoto’s said about him, he’d probably do it if I asked nicely…”

“You think?” Chieko asked.
“Well, no harm in asking!” Komaru shrugged, typing out a message to him asking if there was any chance of a Fairy-type guide as well, “So, anyway, how was your evening…?”

..., ..., ...

Let’s see… homework was all done, it was Dad’s turn to do the washing up tonight, nothing interesting on TV… guess she might as well see what was going on, on BattleNet…

‘(2) new messages from Kiyotaka Ishimaru…’

‘Dear Miss Komaru Naegi, I’m glad that my updated guide on caring for Rock types was of use to you! I can assure you that I will be uploading guides for all types of pokémon, as soon as I have completed them, however Fairy-type was one of the last ones I planned to do, due to a lack of readily-accessible information on them! My apologies for any inconvenience this may cause you! Yours sincerely, Kiyotaka Ishimaru.’

Why would she have been upset by that? At least he was actually planning to make one for Fairy types, instead of just skipping it like a lot of other people did, according to Chieko at least. And why had he not just left it at that…?

‘Hi, Komaru. Your brother, Makoto, has just informed me that I was being far too formal in my previous message, and also that you are, in fact, his sister! My apologies for failing to realise either in my previous message! It’s good to meet you! And I assure you’ll I’ll do my best to get the Fairy-type guide up ASAP!’

‘Don’t worry about it! And thanks for answering my question!’

Chieko’d probably be pleased to hear that he was in the process of making…

‘You’re welcome! Feel free to ask if there’s anything else I can help you with!’

…Wow, that was a quick response!

‘Thanks, I’ll keep it mind, have a good evening.’

‘And a good evening to you!’

Well, guess she had someone who could help her out with pokémon stuff now, if she ever needed it! It’d be cool if any of the other kids in Makoto’s class accepted her friend requests, because of him. Not that she could imagine people like Maizono or Fukawa doing anything like that…!

..., ..., ...

“I still can’t believe you’re friends with Sayaka Maizono!” Chieko gushed for the tenth time as she checked out the messages Komaru had exchanged with their favourite pokémon coordinator last night.

“I know! It’s so weird!” Komaru agreed. She’d almost fainted when she’d found Maizono had left her a message about a week after she’d spoken to Ishimaru.

“No kidding! I mean… you could just send her a message, like… Whenever!? Like right now?!”
“I guess I could…” Komaru considered it, “But I don’t really dare to, in case she’s busy and I annoy her…”

“Oh, yeah. That’s a good call!” Chieko nodded, “I mean, you’re lucky she added you at all, right?”

“Yeah… And there’s a chance Makoto did something stupid like pester her into adding me, ‘cause he knows I’m a big fan and she’s in his class now…” Komaru added.

“Oooohh… yeah, that’s something I can imagine him doing…” Chieko grimaced.

(“Hey… isn’t Kuwata in her brother’s class as well?”)

(“You think he might do something about it?”)

(“No, I was thinking if she can contact Kuwata directly…”)

(“Oh… Right, I’ll ask!”)

Huh? Why had the nearby teachers suddenly started muttering like that…? They weren’t talking about her, were they!?

“Ah… Sorry to interrupt your lunch, Naegi, but can I ask you something…?” The science teacher suddenly turned around and spoke to her.

“Uhh… sure… sir!” Oh no… had she done something? Or had they heard her talking about Maizono and decided to ask for autographs or something embarrassing like that…?

“You don’t happen to have a way of contacting Leon Kuwata, do you? He’s also in your brother’s class…”

“Umm… no, I don’t.” Komaru answered, “I don’t think he and Makoto hang out that much, either.”

“Ah, that’s a shame. Thank you.” The teacher turned around dejectedly. Crisis averted! “I’ll guess we’ll just have to try leaving a comment on his post, then…”

(“Maybe think about hosting an assembly about it, as well. Before it gets out of hand…”) The teachers went back to their own conversation.

“What was that about?” Chieko asked, from the other side of the table, “Something about Kuwata?”

“Yeah… and a post of his?” Komaru added what little context she could.

“Like… a BattleNet post?” Chieko asked…

Cue both of them whipping out their pokédexes and looking up Kuwata’s profile…

‘Hey guys, just a warning, but you might not wanna get your pokémon vaccinated! I found evidence that it’s all a Team Rocket conspiracy to…’

“…He’s telling people not to get their pokémon vaccinated!?” Komaru groaned. If people listened to him, her Geodude would end up with PokéFlu for sure!

“Half the pokéathlon team’s liked it…” Chieko added, bluntly. “And it’s only been up half an hour…”

“Urgggg…!” Great! She was going to end up having to avoid people like the plague… literally!
“I take it you really can’t contact him, then…” Chieko asked “Other than asking your brother to talk to him?”

“I could… but he’s still pretty busy looking after his Togepi…” Komaru sighed. Although if she had to…

“What about Maizono!” Chieko suggested, “OH! Or that guy who writes the guides!”

“Oh, yeah! I bet Ishimaru will be able to tell him why those webpages are wrong!” Komaru agreed, “Nice thinking! I’ll send him a message now…”

And in the meantime, she’d have to try and look up ways to prevent your pokémon getting sick…

Hmm… the main advice seemed to be ‘avoid germs bu cleaning everything before you touch it’ which made sense. Then there was other advice about making sure your pokémon was well rested and ate the right kinds of food… although what ‘the right kind of food’ was varied from site to site, and none of it seemed like stuff Geodude could even eat…

Maybe she should have visited the pokémon centre and asked about this, instead of trying to find the answer on Google…

*bzzt…*

Hmm… Oh! She had a new message from Ishimaru!

‘Hello, Komaru! Thank you for alerting me about Kuwata’s post! I wasn’t able to convince him to retract his statement, but one of my classmates believes she can do so, so I have left the matter in her hands! In the meantime she recommends I try to counteract him by posting CORRECT information about vaccinations!’

Well, it was a shame he hadn’t managed to convinced Kuwata, but that sounded pretty positive! And besides, while he was doing that he might be able to help Komaru out as well…

‘Thanks for letting me know! Is there any chance you could post ways of avoiding the Flu, for people who can’t vaccinate their pokémon?’

‘I have a Geodude.’

‘Yes! Good thinking! I’m sure that information will help people as well! I’ll go start on that right away!’

‘And I hope I can help your Geodude stay healthy!’

‘Thanks, Ishimaru!’

‘You’re welcome. And you can call me Kiyotaka, if you wish!’

‘Alright… thanks, Kiyotaka!’

Well… that was as sorted out as it was going to get this evening. Now she’d better make a start on her actual homework for the evening, before dinner was ready…
“Hmmm… That was a good lunch…” Chieko hummed contentedly as she finished her beef bowl…

“Lucky you… I wished they’d serve my favourite food at lunch!” Komaru sighed, slowly picking out the last of the rice.

“Your favourite food is a nest with eyes in it! They’re never going to serve that!” Chieko exclaimed, “Anyway, what happened with asking Ishiamru to deal with Kuwata? I thought he was going to talk to the guy in person, rather than call him out as an idiot on BattleNet…”

Yeah… Kiyotaka had been oddly antagonistic about the vaccines last night. By the time he’d finished posting all that useful information, he must have called people who didn’t vaccinate idiots about five times… And then he’d done it again when adding some extra tips for looking after your pokemon if they did catch it, this morning.

“Well… he tried that, but it didn’t work. He said one of his classmates had told him she’d deal with it and that he should try to act as a counter to Kuwata’s comments.”

“I guess that makes sense…” Chieko shrugged as she got her pokédex out… “And it seems like it’s worked! Listen to this… ‘Yo, guys! Turned out I made a MAJOR mistake in my last post, ‘cause PokéFlu is REALLY, REALLY SERIOUS so you should totally prevent that shit however you can!’”

About time! Now she just had to hope the pokéathlon team would all like that status as well… “I guess that’s going to make Kiyotaka’s posts popular then!”

“Yeah… maybe that’ll stop all the whiners from making me embarrassed to own a Fairy type…” Chieko muttered.

“Huh? What are you talking about?” Chieko loved owning a Fairy Type!

“Oh… you didn’t see? Ishimaru’s posts got a ton of comments last night from people complaining that he was posting about vaccines, instead of working on the guide for Fairy Types…” She frowned, “Or Dragon types… Or Ghost Types… Or Steel Types…”

“Yes! They’re complaining about a one-day delay on their free guides?” Komaru sighed, “Man, some people are jerks…” She’d have to make a mental note to send Kiyotaka a message thanking him for the information, seeing as it sounded like no one else would have.

“No kidding…” Chieko agreed, “Oh, but speaking of jerks, you will not believe what my sister’s boyfriend did to her last night…”

Let’s see… homework done, chores done… now what…?

Oh, right! She’d meant to send that message to Kiyotaka…!

‘Hi, Kiyotaka! Just wanted to say, thanks for dealing with Kuwata and putting up the stuff about the PokéFlu! You did me a big favour!’

‘Good evening, Komaru. I was just trying to help make sure pokémon remain healthy, but you’re
welcome all the same!’

‘May I ask you a small favour, while you’re here?’

‘Sure, no problem!’

‘Thank you! I was wondering if you could check if it’s possible for you to send me a challenge through BattleNet?’

Hmm… oh, maybe he was trying to stop people from sending him distracting challenges… she’d just give it a go…

‘I just tried to send you one now.’

‘Yes, I’ve received it, thank you. I guess my notification system is functioning correctly, after all.’

So he hadn’t been trying to switch them off?

‘Did you think BattleNet was losing some of your challenges, then?’

‘Yes. I’d expected to receive some as a result of my posting about the vaccines yesterday, but I didn’t get ANY.’

He’d thought he’d get challenges over that!? Would anyone really be dumb enough to fight him over that? Especially as half the people following him were waiting on him to finish all his guides already…

‘Aww, no one’s going to challenge you over that! That’d be a REAL waste of time!’

…Huh. No response. Oh well, guess he must have been called away by something else… Maybe she’d just read a manga tonight…

...

*bzzt…* Hmm? Oh, that was her pokédex! Let’s see…

(1) New message from Makoto Naegi…

Makoto was messaging her? Geez, they’d only just spoken on the phone before dinner… What did he…?

*bzzt…*, (1) New message from Toko Fukawa…

Wait, WHHAAT!? Did Komaru just read that right…!? She had! Oh yeah, BABY! The Toko Fukawa had added her as a friend! AND sent her a message! Well, whatever Makoto wanted could wait, she HAD to see what this was about!

‘Well, I added you. Happy now!?’

‘Ohmygod YES! Your books are amazing!’

‘Really?’

Aww… Did she not think she was that good of a writer, even with all her fans?

‘I wouldn’t have thought YOU’D be capable of appreciating good literature!’
Oh… Maybe not, then. But in that case…

‘Why did you think I sent you a friend request then?’

‘What are you talking about!? YOU’RE the one who’s been emailing me over and over about ‘class harmony’ and ‘everyone being friends’ and ‘organisational convenience’!’

Huh…!? Wait… why was she suddenly acting like Komaru was in the same class as her…?

‘Well, alright, that last one was Ishimaru, but I KNOW you’re the one who gave him that idea! And do you have ANY idea how much of mine and Byakuya’s time he’s been wasting with this nonsense?!’

Hold on…

‘Do you think I’m MAKOTO Naegi?’

…Okay, why was she suddenly taking so long to respond?

‘I made a mistake, do you know how I get rid of you?’

Awww! This had to be a joke, right?

‘Are you serious!? You’re asking ME how to defriend me!? And how would you even make that mistake in the first place!?’

‘Well, it’s not like it’s hard to do when you and him have identical profile pictures!’

Rrrgghhh… Telling a girl she looked exactly like her brother? That sounded like someone was fishing for a new rival…!

‘Don’t act like it’s MY fault your family has stupid good genes!’

…Except ‘good genes’ didn’t seem like fighting talk… Except she said Komaru had stupid good genes, so maybe she meant she and Makoto were both stupid…? Komaru couldn’t tell, and if she responded the wrong way Fukawa would probably think she was an idiot…

Unless she came out with something that was rude and complimentary at the same time…

‘Well, maybe you should buy some glasses that do more than make you look cute! Then you wouldn’t make dumb mistakes like THAT!’

‘My prescriptions perfectly up to date, I’m not some disorganised idiot like YOU!’

Alright, fighting talk it was…

‘Wait, you think my glasses make me look cute?’

…n’!? Geez, now what was she supposed to say…?

‘Oh, I get it. You mean it’s because they hide half my face!’

What… no! Komaru didn’t mean it like that! Aaahh… now she might have gone and upset one of her favourite authors…

‘No! That’s not it! The frames aren’t thick enough for that!’
‘If anything, they make your eyes look bigger!’

‘And I only mentioned them because there’s this new trend for girls wearing big glasses they don’t need!’

‘New’? There’s been idiots have been doing that for half a year!’

But you’re from Kanto, aren’t you? So I guess that’s how far behind the times all of YOU are.’

‘I guess that makes sense?’

Heh, maybe Komaru could ask Makoto to keep an eye on new fashion trends, if he was hanging out with people from places like Unova…

‘Wait… DAMMIT! That means I need to change my new antagonist’s clothes!’

‘What was your brother wearing at the beginning of summer?’

‘The same stuff he does now.’

‘Well, what about guys who AREN’T dorks?’

‘They were doing that whole ‘pants three inches below where they should be’ thing.’

‘Urg… That’s such a pain to write. If I’d realised that I’d have set it at a different time.’

Wow… Fukawa sure put a lot of thought into her characters… Komaru wouldn’t have ever thought about having to research fashion trends for a book…

‘Well, if it helps, feel free to ask me stuff about Kanto, if you want?’

Hmm… was that a bit too forward? Fukawa was taking a long time to respond…

‘I guess it’s better than trying to ask your brother or those other idiots in my class.’

‘Just don’t go thinking this means we’re ACTUALLY friends! I’ll contact you when I need you, got it!?’

‘Alright. Looking forward to working with you!’

…Hmm… looks like Fukawa considered that the end of the conversation. Now, what had she come on here to do, again…?

Oh, right! Makoto had messaged her! Guess she better see what he wanted…

‘Did you REALLY tell Kiyotaka that battling him would be a waste of your time?’

‘Or EVERYONE’S time? ‘Cause that’s how he’s taking it.’

‘Look, I don’t mean to nag, but he’s REALLY upset!’

‘Like, he’s actually in my room crying about this right now.’

‘Hello?’

Huh…? What was he talking about, Komaru didn’t say that! She said it’s be a waste of…
Oh… shoot! She hadn’t actually said whose time it’d be wasting, had she…?

‘I didn’t mean it like that! I meant it’d be a waste of HIS time for people to challenge him!’

‘Even though he’s been trying to get challenges all week?’

‘Has he!? I didn’t see any posts from him saying anything about them’

‘I guess it must have got buried under the other posts he made? Does he know about pinning posts?’

Hmm… no response from Makoto… guess he must be explaining that to Kiyota…

‘TSo… Turns out he never made a post asking for challenges.’

‘He’s heard Fukawa and Kuwata talking about getting unwanted challenges and assumed that’d happen to him if he started posting stuff.’

‘I’ve just had to explain to him that he won’t get a decent number unless he actually ASKS for them.’

‘Whoops! Well, at least he knows now!’

‘Yeah… But we’re still kinda confused at to why you think him getting challenges would waste HIS time?’

‘There’s plenty of people at his level on here for him to train against?’

‘I just meant the people following him would think it was a waste of his time to be battling pokémon, because they want him to finish updating the rest of his pokémon care guides.’

‘I mean, they complained about him posting about vaccines, so they’d probably also complain about him spending time battling, right?’

‘I’d hope people wouldn’t complain about him taking time to train his own pokémon?’

‘And he wants to know what complaints you’re talking about.’

Hadn’t he seen them? Maybe Chieko had been overstating it, then…

‘Chieko told me there’s a load of complaints in the comments on the PokéFlu info he posted.’

‘Was that not true?’

Huh… long time to respond again…

‘Is he still upset?’

‘He is. But not about what you said.’

‘NOW he’s upset that he’s annoyed people by taking so long to post the guides… >_>’

‘I was trying to convince him that they’re being ungrateful jerks, and not to pull an all-nighter to get them all finished at once.’

‘Did you manage it?’

‘I hope so?’
'Either way, I hope he doesn’t spend our whole field trip worrying about this.'

'Sead trip?'

It was the middle of first term? What kind of school had a field trip this early!?

'Did I forgot to mention? After next week, we’re going to Cinnibar Island for a week!'

'You get a WEEK’S field trip to an ISLAND in the middle of first term!?'

'I thought your school was supposed to be HARD!'

'It’s so we can get a chance to get a Gym Badge!'

'And they’ll probably make us explore the area and fill our pokédex and stuff, as well.'

'And even if they don’t, it’s not like I’m going to be slacking off for a week, else I’ll fall behind even more!'

'You’re not? That totally sounds like something you’d do.'

'Aww, come on! I’m not THAT bad!'

'Besides, I’ve been stuck in my room for almost two weeks! I’m bored and MORE than ready to start doing some proper work again!'

'Alright… I’ll take your word for it.'

'But it was only five weeks ago that you were complaining about summer coming to an end!'

'And you spent most of THAT watching TV in your room.'

'Yeah, I guess that’s true.'

'But that WAS before I knew I was coming to Hope’s Peak!'

'It’s different now!'

Hah! More like…

'YOU’RE different now!'

'Do you actually mean that, or are you just joking?’

'I meant it!’

'Really? How? I feel the same as before!'

'You took up gardening, for a start! Mom’s been trying to get you to help her out in ours for YEARS!’

'That’s just ‘cause my friends here do it to!’

Okay, maybe he had a point there. Makoto going along with whatever his friends were doing wasn’t exactly a first, but…

'Well, you’re being way more determined than usual! Old you would never had worried about
'I guess? But wouldn’t anyone feel like that, if they got the chance I did? I wanna take advantage of it while I’m here!’

‘I dunno… I’d have guessed a lot of people would see it as an easy ride.’

‘You think?’

‘I dunno… I just know Mom and Dad would kill me if I didn’t do my best while I’m here!’

‘Hah! No kidding! You know Dad’s going around telling everyone you’re going to make pokémon Champion, right?’

‘WHAT?? Geez, there’s no WAY I can do that! I’ve not even got my second badge yet!’

Yeah… Dad was being pretty ridiculous, saying that just because Makoto had randomly got into a good school. She didn’t blame Makoto for not even trying to…

‘But, I guess I’ll have to at least TRY, if that’s what he’s saying!’

…Old Makoto would never have said that! But maybe, with this new attitude, he might actually do it…

‘Good luck, Makoto.’

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! New week will be some talent training with Ibuki!
Welcome to Ibuki's band! (Ibuki and Hajime POV)

Chapter Notes

This chapter starts on the Friday of the third week of term.
Also, I haven’t mentioned it before, but I figured that for convenience’s sake, pokémon don’t have bodily excretions like humans do.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“And here are the results of the contest…”

Wow… Ibuki could almost feel all the bad vibes in the air as Hawthorne stood up to tell everyone who she thought had dressed their pokémon the best… Which turned out to be Chiaki, again, even though Ibuki had managed to craft an intricately detailed piece that could serve as a reminder of the, often forgotten, potential power and brutality of small pokémon, and Chiaki had just picked some things that looked ‘cute’! Heck, even she didn’t think she ought to have won! It was so stupid!

Last year these classes had been fun, even if Ibuki didn’t always win, they’d all got to work together to come up with fun ideas for performances and costumes that worked as a theme, and put on some really great whole-class shows…

But with this new teacher, every class had just been a cutthroat competition for them to make the ‘best’ costume, with no real advice or anything! And they’d not done any performing at all, which was making her and Hiyoko look way worse at this than they actually were! Plus a bunch of people were talking about not bothering coming to class at all anymore, like one of the first years had done! That’d be super-lame!

“…And bringing up the rear is Hinata and Mioda.” Grrr… And after she’d given Hajime that great idea about how the idolisation of celebrities could inspire people to sever the bonds keeping them tied to their roots, allowing them to fly freely! He didn’t deserve second to last place! Not to mention…

“Umm, excuse me! But Ibuki wonders why she’s last?” Ibuki put her hand up.

“Because your costume looks stupid.” AARRGGHH! That was, like, the worst type of criticism ever!

“But… Ibuki was trying to make a point, that…”

“This isn’t a class on politics! You don’t need to make a point! You just need to make your pokémon look good!” Oh, sure, if you don’t want to make any effort to make the world better! “Just… go to the store, buy some costume and put them on your pokémon, and you’ll be much better off… Any other questions…?”

“Uhh, yeah!” Hiyoko snapped, “Why didn’t you say where I placed!?”

Oooh… Ibuki had missed that!

“Because you were disqualified. I clearly saw your friend dressing you pokémon up for you…”

Whaaat!? Ibuki had never heard of a rule like that!
"HUH!? But... lots of trainers have help dressing their Pokémon!" Hiyoko argued, "Haven't you ever even been backstage at contest, you stupid old...!?"

"Ah, besides!" Mahiru quickly stopped Hiyoko from getting herself into trouble, "Hiyoko was the one who came up with the ideas, all I did was follow her instructions..."

"They've got a point, that's not something she'd get disqualified for in a real contest..." Miss Yukizome stood up for them.

"Well, this isn't a real contest, it's a teaching exercise to prepare them to be capable of exhibiting their own Pokémon!" Hawthorne smirked, "So I can set the rules."

Great... no one had an answer to that...

"Well... if this is to prepare us for contests, then we should also prepare for performing..." Wait, no, Chiaki did. It'd just taken her a while to come up with it... "...I think."

"Well, I think you did plenty enough of that last year, so this year we can focus on how your Pokémon look." Well, that was a lie... they'd done both last year. "Now, I'll see you all next week. Goodbye class..."

"Goodbye Miss Hawthorne..." Urg... Ibuki hated doing this! But at least it meant she'd leave now...

"...Such a sense of despair..." There was Nagito, being over dramatic again... "But, you'll all find a way to overcome it, right!?"

"Tch! Fuck wasting time with that shit!" Fuyuhiko yelled, "Can't believe I'm thinking of copying an Oowada, but skipping this and training my Pokémon some more so I can kick Togami's ass is sounding pretty good right now!"

"Oh... come on now! There's no need to go that far!" Miss Yukizome tried to calm him down, "I know this change in teacher is a little... disappointing for some of you! But if something in your life isn't going well, you should try to change things, not just give up!"

"Hey... speaking of changing things, didn't a lot of you talent trainers get together to write a letter to the headmaster about her?" Nidai asked, "How's that going?"

Ooh, yeah! That had been Maizono's idea! But Ibuki hadn't heard how it went...

"Pfft! That was probably just a big ol' waste of time!" Hiyoko laughed, "Even Maizono thinks the school won't care, unless Enoshima complains about her to, which she hasn't! I say we need to start making her want to leave..."

"Now, Hiyoko... it's far too soon to be saying things like that! The school board haven't even had a chance to discuss it, yet!" Miss Yukizome scolded her, "And I'm sure they don't have preferences for any of the students! So please just keep calm and keep doing your best in class, okay?"

...Well, the class agreed, but no one really seemed happy about it. Especially not Hajime, who'd been taking any bad grade he got really badly for the last term, to the point where Ibuki had decided to take him under her wing to try and teach him to stop worrying about what the teachers thought of him, so he could start figuring out what he actually wanted to do!

...Speaking of which... "Hey, Hajime!? Are you still okay to do band practise, tomorrow morning?"
“Ah… yeah, I should be… I’ll meet you and Mikan at the usual time…”

Hrmm… Ibuki sure hoped he’d be more enthusiastic than that tomorrow morning! Otherwise he might start thinking of skipping this class to!

“And, hey! Speaking of practise…” Akane added, “If you come to sports on Sunday, we’ll have enough people to play Disc Catch!”

“Ah… I’ll see how I do with my homework…” Aww… Hajime wasn’t getting excited for sports either…? “Speaking of which, I’d better go to the library…”

“…I guess he’s not got time for games…” Chiaki sighed, after he left. “Again.”

“Well… second year is a bit of a tough one, at first…” Miss Yukizome tried to cheer her up, “I’m sure once he gets into it, he’ll have more time to spend with you all!”

“Or maybe he could just skip this class, then he’d have extra time!” Kaz suggested, which a few kids laughed at.

Would that be a good thing, though? As tempted as Ibuki would be to skip contest coordination, if it wasn’t her best subject, she wouldn’t want Hajime to just take the easy way out of his problems… But, if he really couldn’t cope with it all, wouldn’t it be better not to force himself to try and do everything?!

Urggh… this was giving her a headache! And she had her own grades to worry about as well! She had to at least try to impress Hawthorne, even if she hated the idea of putting her pokémon in random stuff from the store without even thinking about it…

But what she had said was that she had to buy costumes at the store and put them on her pokémon, she didn’t say which costumes Ibuki could use, or that Ibuki couldn’t improve them first! Hah! That’d show her! Alright then, first thing tomorrow morning, it was off to the store for some costume inspiration!

…

UUrrgghhh… these store-bought costumes were all so cliché! How could anyone just buy one of these off the shelf and put it on their pokémon? Ibuki’s pokémon were lucky they had her to customise some of these things!

(“How about this cowboy hat? Cowboy Arcanine! Herding Miltanks in old west Johto! Like the one in that movie!” … “Niine…”)

But she was going to keep getting crummy grades unless she didn’t buy these and put them on her pokémon… so let’s see! What could she make out of these things? There was a tiny apron in the Baker’s set… Oooh! Maybe she could combine that with one of those rubber Psyducks for the dogs, a razor claw and some red dye and make Torchic look like a crazy cannibal Torchic! No one had ever done that in a talent contest before!

(“Hmm… Well… This scarf looks like it would suit you! Like that Samurai’s Arcanine! Remember!?” … “NNNine…”)

And those covers for Chandelures were a funky shape! She could totally make Sylveon a neat hat outta one of them!

(“Ah! Look at this cape! You’d be like Super-Arcanine! You liked those comics, right!?” … “…N-
nine.”)

Now she just needed something for Noibat…

(“Well, errrrm… how about this pretty, sparkly tiara!” … “Don’t look at me like that! Just because you’re a boy doesn’t mean you couldn’t wear something pretty if you wanted!” … “…Canine!?”)

Wait… was that that pedantic professor protégé from Sayaka’s class!? Ibuki had no idea he liked dressing up his pokémon as well! But there he was, just down the aisle holding a blue cape in one hand and a tiara in the other, while his dog just sat and stared at him…

“Yes, really! Look, I could wear it if I wanted! See!?” He put the tiara on his head and checked himself, “…It’s not bad! Maybe I should wear it myself if you don’t want to! I can wear the accessories, and you do all the tricks! That way I wouldn’t have to worry so much about whether my hair looks neat…”

Hah! He sounded like he really wanted to dress himself up more than the dog!

“…Arc?” His dog sounded totally worried about him though…

“But, I don’t think Miss Hawthorne would accept that…” He sighed and put the tiara back, “And I need to use my money to buy something that will make you look good…”

Awwwww… No wonder the dog was worried about him! He wanted to wear cool accessories and have fun while showing off his pokémon, but that stupid woman couldn’t stand the idea of people wanting to break out of the mass of mainstream mediocrity and doing something different, could she!?

“Well… Ibuki thinks your Arcanine looks good enough already!” She told him, “You don’t need to worry about critics like her! She doesn’t even know what she’s talking about!!”

“ARC!” And the Arcanine was totally agreeing!

“AH! Mioda!? You… you mean you think he’d do alright in a talent show without accessories…”

“Abb-solutely!” Ibuki repeated, “So you can forget what Hawthorne wants and just buy yourself the tiara after all!”

“Err… But, that doesn’t really help me pass pokémon coordination classes. And if I was going to forgo that, then I wouldn’t really need a tiara at all!” Argh! He was one of those that talked himself out of having fun, wasn’t he? “I’d be better off saving up for some good pokéballs, or a heart scale to teach him Extreme Speed, or maybe even TM…”

“But, Ibuki thought you said you were going to wear the accessories for your dog?” Ibuki asked, “You won’t get as many points if you just go into a competition without anything…”

“Err… I am aware of that, but I was just joking before! After all, if I went into a competition wearing a tiara, the judges would probably just wonder what title I held, not realise I was wearing it in lieu of dressing Arcanine.”

“Yyeahh… I guess…” He did have a point there, didn’t he? A guy wearing a tiara would draw attention away from his pokémon and the judges would just be confused about it instead of doing their jobs right! If it was going to work, he’d need to make it obvious he was wearing it just because he wanted to wear the accessories for his dog… “You need more accessories!”
“Ah… I’m sorry? I don’t think I understand…”

“You need to show them you want to wear cool stuff! So wear lots of it! Stuff you’d only ever wear for a competition, or that are obviously made for pokémon!” Ibuki explained, “Then they’ll know you did that rather than dress up your Arcanine!”

“Hmm… you mean… cover myself in them, as a political statement?” He asked, starting to smile at the idea… “Miss Hawthorne certainly couldn’t accuse me of not preparing for her class if I did that!”

“And if the school’s biggest goody-two-shoes suddenly changed up his whole appearance just because of how she’d been teaching, the school would be bound to realise she was doing a rubbish job of it… “Stick it to her! WOO!”

“Aahahaha!” He started laughing… Yeah! That was better than when he’d been moping! “Ah… well, once I’ve saved enough to purchase a large number of accessories…”

Aww… they couldn’t wait that long! And it wasn’t like Ibuki needed all of her bits of pieces of costumes that she had lying around… “Aww, don’t bother doing that! I have lots of them!” Ibuki told him, pushing him towards the checkout so she could pay for the costumes. “You can join Ibuki’s band and she’ll get you all dressed up!”

“Err… now!?"

“Yep! Just as soon as I pay for these and that cape you’re holding for Noibat!”

“Ah… actually, this is a large size cape…”

“But if I cut that silly logo out, it’ll make a small size poncho!” Ibuki explained, “Now come on! I need to introduce you to the other members of the band!”

“Umm… I-I’m really sorry Ibuki’s not back from her shopping yet!” Mikan panicked to fill the silence for the third time…

“Really, Mikan, it’s fine!” Hajime tried to calm her down… he was starting to get to know her better, but she still worried about him getting angry at her for no reason. “I don’t mind a little more peace and quiet before Ibuki comes back…”

“Ah! I’m sorry! I’ll be quiet then!” Mikan cried.

“That’s… not exactly what I meant…” Hajime sighed. He really wasn’t as good at dealing with Mikan as Ibuki was… He couldn’t believe she’d called them both to her room for ‘band practise’ and then not shown up on time herself… Unless this was some trick to try and get Mikan used to him… But if it was, it wasn’t working well… Maybe if he was actually as good a trainer as the other students in his class, he’d find it easier to talk to them…

Luckily, he didn’t have enough time to worry about it for long, as Mikan soon perked up at the sound of the door rattling as Ibuki unlocked it and threw it open.

“Hееееey bandmates! Guess what Ibuki brought back from the shops for you!” Ibuki stuck her head around the door and grinned at them…

“Aааааааахhhh… I don’t know! I’m sorry!” Mikan was still panicked… Looked like he was the one playing this guessing game…
Well, she’d said it was for them… So it was either a costume for Mikan, a costume for him, or she’d managed to convince another student to join her ‘band’

“Is it a costume for Starraptor?”

“Nope! Besides, if you’re going to do well in contests, you need to start organising your own costumes, Hajime!”

“Does that mean I can just buy some Starraptor costumes from the shops, like Miss Hawth…”

“GRrrr… I told you, we’re not using costumes that we didn’t make ourselves! You’ll never form a strong bond with your pokémon if you do that, Hajime!” Ibuki snapped. He should have known better than to bring that up, even if it might have meant his grades in a class would go up, for a change… “Besides, that wouldn’t be any fun! Ibuki isn’t training you to be normal, Hajime!” She scowled, “Next guess!”

So, whatever it was wasn’t for him… “Well… Is it things to make a guitarist costume for Mikan’s Blissey?” Mikan perked up slightly at that suggestion, as it was something she’d suggested a while ago…

“What? No! Blissey’s got her cute nurse’s costume! She doesn’t need anything else” Ibuki scowled. Of course, Mikan was allowed to dress her pokémon in more traditional costumes when she wanted…

“Umm… but guitarists are cute as well…” Mikan smiled timidly at her.

“But not as cute as nurses!” Ibuki said finally, “Next guess, Hajime!”

…So it wasn’t a costume then… Could it really be…? “Is it a new member of the band?”

“BINGO!” Ibuki cheered, “Say ‘Hi’ Ishimaru!”

…Wait… Ishimaru? The one who’d reported Hiyoko and Fuyuhiko for swearing, kept insisting that everyone follow all the school rules and keep the place tidy, and was rapidly building a name for himself as BattleNet’s best source of training advice, had agreed to join them? Unless Ibuki had just shanghaied him…

Actually, the way he stared at them both like a Deering in headlights as Ibuki pulled him into the doorway suggested she really had just shanghaied him. But he must have come somewhat willingly, because he did as Ibuki told him to, letting out a loud, shocked, “…Hi!”

“Hey.” Hajime tried to smile reassuringly, “I’m Hajime Hinata.”

“H-hello, again!” Mikan stammered, “I… I’m s-sorry I didn’t say it b-before, b-but I’m M-mikan Tsumiki!”

“Yay! You guys are gonna get on great!” Ibuki cheered, pushing Ishimaru through the door and forcing him to sit on her chair, his Arcanine walking alongside him as closely as it usually did, with a worried look on its face. “Now, you sit here while Ibuki goes and get her spare accessories from the costume room!” She order, leaving the room as quickly as she usually did.

“Umm… I could come and he…lp…” Mikan gulped as the door shut and Ibuki left her alone with two guys, one of which she’d probably only spoken to when he came to get his pokémon vaccinated…
“Err… She, ah, she’s certainly enthusiastic, isn’t she?” Ishimaru stated, awkwardly.

“Yeah… it takes a little getting used to.” Hajime admitted, which Ishimaru looked relieved about.

“So… you two are talent trainers, then?”

“No… exactly.” He’d been in this ‘band’ for over a term and they still hadn’t done any actual performances or contests, outside of their classes. “I… don’t really have a specialty. And Mikan’s a nurse.”

“Oh! Yes, of course…” Ishimaru cringed slightly, probably because he’d just remembered that she was the one who’d been giving everyone vaccinations for the last two weeks. “Ah! But, there was one thing I’ve been meaning to ask you, Tsumiki! Would you mind if I had Arcanine memorise your scent?”

“…Haaaaaaaah!?”

“…Why?” Hajime asked, as Mikan began panicking again.

“Err… I was just thinking if I got injured, or found someone who had, Arcanine would be able to carry them to you for help!” Ishimaru hastily explained, “I understand if you’d rather not though, I imagine you’re probably too busy for things like that…”

“Oh... w-well... if you think it will help people get treated faster…” Mikan’s professionalism won out over her fear.

“Ah! Thank you!” Ishimaru smiled, “Now, Arcanine, you remember Tsumiki, right?” The dog nodded happily, “I might need her help someday!”

“Arc.” The dog nodded and padded over to Mikan, who sat stock still as it started sniffing her legs...

“Err... you can feel free to pet him, if you want?” Ishimaru offered.

“Umm... that’s okay!” Mikan squeaked. Although her Blissey decided she would start petting the dog instead, which did eventually help Mikan calm down a little...

Unlike Ishimaru, who was anxiously twiddling a tiara between his fingers while shifting his eyes between Mikan and Hajime... until his eyes locked onto Starraptor...

“*Ahem...* If you don’t mind me asking... What is your Starraptor wearing, exactly?”

Hmm... well, Starraptor had wanted to keep on the costume Ibuki had suggested yesterday, for some reason, which meant one wing was interlaced with orange and blue ribbons that were tied into bows, and the other had a diamond shaped bolt of fabric, so when Starapptor spread his wings it almost looked like a kite was flying... Except Ibuki had also thought he looked good with his torso wearing an old Festival Trees T-shirt that she’d cut wing holes into and then she’d ‘completed’ the look by precariously balancing a small Christmas tree on top of his head quill... But that didn’t seem to be an important part of the look, because later in the evening she’d started talking about dying his quill orange so it would look like Oowada’s pompadour...

“...I have no idea…” Hajime admitted, “What about your Arcanine? What’s it wearing, aside from the tiara?”

“Err... actually, he’s not wearing anything!” Ishimaru corrected him, “I’m making a political statement against the almost compulsory nature of accessories in Miss Hawthorne’s lessons!”
Damn, if only Hajime had thought of that... At least that way he could have maybe worked on some of his other classes during her class...

"Umm... But... if you d-don’t mind me asking... then why did Ibuki go to get her spare costumes?" Mikan asked him.

"It's so I can wear them instead!" Ishimaru explained.

...You know what? Nevermind. Either Ishimaru really didn’t care how he looked, or he was clueless about what he was getting himself into...

“I'm baaaaaack!” Ibuki headed back into the room, interrupting... pretty much nothing, except for Mikan’s Blissey petting Ishimaru’s dog while Hajime’s Starraptor was looking over itself in the mirror. The humans were all just sitting around awkward silence...

Welp, so much for them getting along! Guess it was up to Ibuki to get this party started... as usual!

“Alright, Ishimaru! This is the first batch of my accessories!” Ibuki plonked them all down in a big heap, which Starraptor came and started poking at curiously. “Have a look through and see if there’s anything you like in there, while I get the next batch!”

“Understood!” Ishimaru almost jumped up off of the seat and headed over to the pile... Well, whatever people said about him, he certainly had enthusiasm!

...At least, Ibuki had thought that, until she got back into the room and found him wearing nothing else but a red scarf around his neck...

“You only put on one scarf?"

“Ah... my apologies! I also found this anti-Team Rocket logo, but couldn’t figure out how to actually wear it...” Ishimaru explained, holding up an old pin badge...

“Oh, that’s easy! Here!” Ibuki dumped he next batch of stuff on the floor, then took the pin off of him and undid the fastener at the back. “Hold still, and I’ll put it on!” She ordered, grabbing the lapel of his uniform jacket...

“Ah... Wait a moment! Is this going to damage my uniform...?"

“Yep!” And Ibuki proved it by piercing a nice big hole in the lapel!

“Naarhhgg!”

“Did Ibuki stab you?” She was sure she’d been more careful than that!

“No... but... my uniform...” Oops... Looked like Ibuki had made him about to cry...

“But...Isn’t that just one of the free ones?” Hajime asked, “That you have ten of...?”

“Well... it is.” Nope, never mind! He wasn’t now! “...And I suppose it won’t matter if I reserve one copy for pokémon coordination...”

“Alrighty-then! Now hold still so Ibuki can put more on!”

“There’s more...!?”
Hah! There were lots more pins in Ibuki’s collection! Shiny ones, fluffy ones, political ones… all dotted over Ishimaru’s chest at random! Then she had some bells… hmm, they could go around his wrists… and her collection of ribbons could be tied all around his legs to match his boot laces…

“Ninnnne…”

“Ah… we won’t be much longer, Arcanine!” Ishimaru told his dog, “Err… Will we?”

“Hmm… I don’t think so… Lemme just put this medal on you!”

“Oh! Alright! Err… should I lift up the scarf so you can put it around my neck?”

“Nope! That’d be boring! I’ll just tie it around your arm!”

“Really…!? Err… well… I guess you’re expert.” Ishimaru held his arm out, so Ibuki could make sure the medal was on nice and tight! Wouldn’t want it falling off!

“Hey… Ibuki?” Hajime was trying to get her attention… but she was almost finished! It was juuuuust…

“Hmm… now there’s too much fancy stuff…”

“Perhaps we could switch the tiara for a more normal hat, then?” Ooh! Nice idea! Ishimaru was starting to get it!

“Alrighty then!” Let’s see… hats, hats… Oh! This one! “Your Dad’s a policeman, right?” She’d just put this on him aaaaand…

“Ibuki!”, “Chaaanance…!?”, “Aaaaahhhh!”

Huh? Why were were they all shou…?

“ARRRRRRRRRRCCCCCCCC…” Oh! Angry doggy! That wasn’t good! This might be a problem… none of Ibuki’s pokémon were that strong… she might need Hajime’s help… But why was Ishimaru’s dog stopping Ibuki from getting to him in the first place…?

“Arcanine…? AH!” It took Ishimaru a moment to work it out, “The hat! Please put it back!”

Oookaaayyy… There went the hat, thrown back into the pile of stuff! But was that really going to do anything…?

“CCCCCCCCcccc…” Well… it wasn’t growling so loud anymore, but it still looked a little mad at her as it turned back to its owner and started trying to gnaw off all the ribbons around his legs…

“Ancanine, that hat was for me, not you! Err… and what are you doing!? We only just put all those on!”

“CaNnnnn…” His dog just whined and went to pull at the scarf instead…

“No… no, stop! Arcanine, sit!” Ishimaru ordered, moments before his own pokémon accidentally strangled him, “What has gotten into you…?”

“H-he… seemed pretty upset when Ibuki was putting all those accessories on you!” Mikan told him.

“Yeah… especially the ribbons.” Hajime agreed.
“But… he’s never been upset by clothing before…” Ishimaru was looking over himself as he tried to figure it out… “Except… Wait, did you think all of these were hurting me?”

“Arr…” The dog nodded with a whimper.

“Ahahaha! You didn’t need to worry about that! They’re just extra bits of clothing! And they’re not even on that tight!” Ishimaru laughed, “It’s not like when Enoshima put those bows on you!”

“…Aannn…?” Well… his dog didn’t look happy, but at least it wasn’t glaring at Ibuki anymore!

“Hmm… You’re still worried… Maybe this will convince you… If Mioda doesn’t mind me borrowing it?” Ishimaru picked up the cape she’d bought earlier.

“Sure… go ahead!”

“Alright… Now, Arcanine, I’m going to put this… blanket over you for a bit, alright?” Ishimaru held it up and waited for his dog to nod, then he walked over and draped the cape over its back, “And I’m just going to tie it loosely at the front, so it doesn’t slip off of you, okay?”

“Acr!” The dog nodded and sat still while Ishimaru put the cape on him…

“Now, that doesn’t hurt you at all, right?” Ishimaru checked, and his dog shook its head, “Good! But now, if you come and look in the mirror…” Ishimaru led his dog over to it, “You’re wearing a cape! Like Super-Arcanine!”

“Blah… Ishimaru was a fan of that mainstream cliché nonsense!? And so was his dog, given how excited it got when it saw itself in the mirror. Or maybe it just thought it looked good in a cape! All the Arcanines Ibuki had ever competed against were pretty vain.

“See?! It’s just some clothing! And the scarf is the same, it’s just resting around my neck, like this!” Ishimaru took off the scarf and draped it around his dog’s neck for a moment, before reaching to take it back… “So, you see, I can wear all of the accessories and…”

“Nine!” His dog shrunk back away from him, grabbing the scarf with its teeth so he could take it back, then curled around itself to point at the cape with its nose… “Arcanine!”

“…You’re saying you’re willing to wear the cape?” His dog nodded, but started pawing at Ishimaru’s ribbons… “You’ll wear the cape, if it means I don’t wear any accessories…?”

His dog nodded.

“Well… I, err… I guess I won’t be making that political statement, after all…” Ishimaru sighed.

“Aww… but didn’t you want to dress up?” Ibuki asked, “Or at least wear the tiara?”

“Err… no! Not really!” He looked freaked out that Ibuki had even thought that in the first place. “I just didn’t want to keep failing contest class, and figured that making the political statement was better than forcing Arcanine to wear things we wasn’t comfortable with!”

“…Oh.” Whoops! Ibuki had got the wrong idea entirely! Oh well, guess they’d just have to hope the school listened to their letter, or start going along with whatever Hiyoko had planned…

“Err… I’m sorry to have wasted your time, though!” He cringed, “I wasn’t expecting Arcanine to get over this so quickly…”

“Aww… it’s alright. Ibuki made you buy that tiara when you didn’t really want it…” Ibuki pointed
out, “How’s about we trade it for the cape and the scarf, and call it even!” After all, she was sure she could make something for Noibat out of *that* instead…

“Alright then!” Ishimaru held out his hand like it was a business deal, “So, now that we’ve got Arcanine’s accessories sorted out… what exactly do we *do* in this band of yours…?”

Now *there* was a good question from Ishimaru… ‘Playing around’ would have been Hajime’s answer, if he was being honest…

“We work on our presentation skills!” Was Ibuki’s answer, “Sooo, now you’ve got your accessories, we need to work out what type of performance you’re going to do!”

“I see… so, as Arcanine is dressed like a hero, I could make him appear to do something… *heroic*?” Ishimaru suggested.

“Hmm… well… it’s a little *cliché*… But I think I can make it work!” Ibuki’s answer was a surprise. Usually she’d have just shot down something as obvious as that suggestion, “But, you need to get changed first!” Ibuki ran over to her wardrobe and started rummaging through it, before shoving a bundle of white cloth into Ishimaru’s arms, “You can use the bathroom!”

“Err… alright… Arcanine, stay here, I’ll be five minutes.” Ishimaru stammered slightly, and headed into the bathroom with a lot of trepidation. Had he never gone to a female friend’s house and had to use their bathroom before?

“…Do I *really* have to wear this!?” The door had barely shut behind him when they heard Ishimaru groan from inside the bathroom.

“Yes! You need a villain, if Arcanine’s going to be the hero!” Ibuki shouted back at him.

They could just about hear Ishimaru reluctantly agreeing as he presumably changed into whatever it was that Ibuki had given him, while she quickly shoved aside all of the accessories she’d brought in, to make space for whatever she was planning to have him do…

“Alright, I’m ready…” Ishimaru sighed as he stepped back into the room, dressed in a perfect replica of a white Team Rocket grunt’s uniform, looking at the three of them as if he expected them to laugh or something.

“Great! Let’s get started! You go stand over there…” She pointed to one side of the ‘stage’ area, “And have your dog stay *there*…” She pointed just ‘offstage’ on the other side.

“Right… let me just get something!” Ishimaru darted back into the bathroom and rummaged through the bag he’d been wearing before, before following her instructions.

“Oh okay!” Ibuki cleared her throat, before putting on her usual over-dramatic narrator’s voice, “*It seemed like a quiet day in Innocence city, but WOE! A nefarious Team Rocket executive has arrived to steal all the pokémon!*”

“…Is that me?” Ishimaru asked, after Ibuki stared at him for a moment, “Because this is a grunt’s uniform, and you said…”

“Just pretend you’re stealing pokémon!” Ibuki ordered him, impatiently.

“Err… Alright… Ah… Hahahaha! I’m… here to steal all the pokémon…!? Hahaha…?”
…Improv certainly wasn’t Ishimaru’s forte. He still looked like he was expecting himself and Mikan to either burst out laughing or boo him off of the ‘stage’ at any moment.

“(Yep, like that!)” Hajime just about heard Ibuki encourage him, before she continued, “But, little does he know, his plan will soon be foiled by our hero, ARCANINE! (Get him to come onto the stage, but not all the way!)”

“Err…right!” Ishimaru’s ‘whispers’ were a lot easier to hear than Ibuki’s, “Arcanine! Here!” He gestured to the dog, causing it to come bounding over to him, cape streaming slightly as it did so, until he switched the position of his hand and ‘quietly’ ordered it to stop.

“(Great! Now say something evil-sounding!)”

“Err…” Ishimaru stared wide-eyed at Hajime for a moment, “Err… Ha…haha? You’ll… never stop me?”

“Or so the villain THOUGHT! But he wasn’t expecting our hero’s POUNCE attack!”

“…That’s not a real move…” Ishimaru stared are her, while his dog sat happily smiling at the ‘villain’.

“Just… make him jump on you, or something!” Ibuki cried.

“Oh. Hmm… I’ve got it!” Ishimaru nodded after a moment’s hesitation, then got something out of his pocket, waved it at his dog and then stuck it in the back of his collar… “Arcanine… Fetch!”

In a flash, the dog changed over to him and started trying to get it’s face around the side of his neck, at which point Ishimaru feigned falling backwards onto his back, causing his dog to practically climb on top of him to get at the thing he’d stuck down there, which must have been a poffin or something, given that it then came back up while chewing something…

“‘Yes! And then our savage hero ATE THE BAD GUY’S FACE OFF!’ …Ibuki might have been getting a little too into this… “Well…!? Go on!”

“Err… hang on a minute!” Ishimaru was reaching into his pocket again, this time ripping up something and covering his face with it… wait, he wasn’t really going to get his dog to eat something off of his own face, was he…!? “Eeeeeepppp!” Mikan screamed a little as Ishimaru’s dog actually opened its mouth and looked like it was going to bite his nose off… Even if all it actually did was lick up most of the food he’d put there, it was still a little frightening to look at…

“And so the evil Team Rocket was defeated! For now…” Ibuki finished her set. “But next time, you should try and put something that looks like blood in those poffins!”

“Alright… I’ll ask Hanamura if he has any ideas!” Ishimaru started to sit up, wiping slobbery crumbs off of his face.

But, Hajime had to admit, he was impressed, and perhaps a little jealous… Ishimaru had managed to play along with one of Ibuki’s impromptu stories, without any sort of idea of what to expect from it beforehand, even though he’d done no type of pokémon co-ordination previously. Whereas Hajime still couldn’t keep up with her, even after being in her ‘band’ for a whole term already… Did Ishimaru have some kind of natural talent for this, that Hajime didn’t? Then again, that had all been surprisingly normal, for Ibuki’s standards. Those might all be tricks Ishimaru had practised doing before, even if he couldn’t act to save his life…
“But, we’re not done yet! For alas! Life for our hero is not so simple, for he feels a great sense of ENNUI!”

…Ah, there it was, typical Ibuki, as if anyone would have trained their pokémon to mimic complex human emotions.

“Err… I beg your pardon?” And, of course, Ishimaru was stumped by it.

“I said he feels a sense of Ennui!”

“But… pokémon don’t defecate!”

“Arrgh! Not… that! Ennui!” Ibuki repeated again, “It’s when you get bored and depressed because your life is too easy and you don’t have any challenges!”

“Oh… Hmm… maybe something like this…?” He whispered something into his Arcanine’s ear, which made it droop its head and whine pitifully.

“Hmm… no… It needs to be more… listless dissatisfaction!” Ibuki insisted, “Not just straight up sadness…”

“Oh… I see.” Ishimaru frowned, “Err… I’m afraid I might need more time to work on that one.”

“Don’t worry about it! It’s a tough one!” Ibuki told him, “Hajime still hasn’t managed it!”

…Mostly because Hajime hadn’t tried it in the first place. There was no way he’d manage to teach any of his pokémon something so specific…

“I see… well, I’ll try and mull it over during our bath tonight…” Ishimaru started thinking about it.

“ARC!?” His dog’s tail started wagging violently and it almost leapt on him out of excitement once he’d said that…

“Wha…? Why are you surprised? I just said to pretend we didn’t have time for a bath tonight!” He sat up and petted its head until it calmed down again, “But I suppose you might not really understand acting… this might make this rather tricky…”

‘Tricky’?! It was downright impossible, wasn’t it…? But the way Ishimaru was thinking… could it be he thought there might actually be a way to do it? But there couldn’t be… could there…?

Or maybe there was a way to do it… but only that people with talents could actually manage… And the only reason Hajime couldn’t think of anything was because he wasn’t supposed to be here… Not the way he was now…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next chapter is going to skip forward to that field trip I keep mentioning!
File not found (Makoto's Blastoise's POV)

Chapter Notes

FYI: There is a move called Yawn which causes other pokemon to fall asleep after one turn.
I also make a vague reference to Makoto dealing with a man on a bus, which I got from
the Dangan Ronpa side story "dangan ronpa: makoto naegi's worst day ever".
Also, some new pokemon are appear, although Blastoise doesn't necessarily know their
names:
Sandslash: https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Sandslash_(Pok%C3%A9mon)
Muk: https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Muk_(Pok%C3%A9mon)
and Vileplume's been mentioned but I didn't link to info last time so:
https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Vileplume_(Pok%C3%A9mon)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Urggghhh… Man, I hate boats…” Makoto groans as he clutches the railing at the front of the ship,
looking miserable, while Blastoise keeps rubbing his back in an attempt to make him feel slightly
better.

[Hang in there, buddy! Not long now!] At least, Blastoise assumes the island he can see approaching
is the one Makoto’s school is taking them all to.

“Urg… Thanks Blastoise.” Makoto mutters, weakly. “Huuh… So much for me not wasting anymore
time, now…”

Blastoise’s backrubs slow as he tries to think of something to say, even though he knows Makoto
wouldn’t be able to understand him anyway. It’s not Makoto’s fault that he can’t handle the
movement of the boat, or that he and Togepi were sick for two weeks, or that he seems to be a
magnet for trouble. But Makoto sometimes acts like he must have caused all of these things that
happen to him, even though he’s too good of a person to deserve any of it.

Sometimes, Blastoise wonders if he somehow stole all Makoto’s good luck when the Fearow that
had tried to eat him dropped him in the school pond instead… It would certainly explain how he’d
survived that fall at all, let alone been found and nursed back to health…

“Hmm…? Oh! But don’t worry! I’ll probably be fine once I get off the boat, and maybe have a
quick nap!” Makoto suddenly insists, probably because he’d noticed Blastoise worrying, “Which
won’t be long! You see that island ahead of us? That’s Cinnabar island!”

“Huh!? Did you say you can see Cinnabar!??” Makoto’s friend Hina stops randomly jogging back
and forth across the width of the boat and rushes up next to Makoto to look, followed by her
pokemon.

[Finally! Hina’s pacing back and forth was making me dizzy…] Her Glaceon huffs.

[And look at all that sand on the beach!] The Marill trills excitedly.

“Wow… That volcano really is huge!” Hina points out, “…You don’t think there’s any chance of it
erupting again, is there?”

“That’d be just my luck…” Makoto sighs in response, “Spend two days on this boat only to have to leave straight away…”

“Aww, c’mon! Your luck can’t be that bad!” Hina laughs, “Just think, it won’t be long now before we get off the boat and we can spend five days swimming at the beach!”

[SWIMMING!?] There’s an excited bark from further back on the deck, [DID SOMEONE SAY SWIMMING!? Kiyotaka! Can WE go swimming!? CAN we!? Can we can we can we…!?

[Not this again…] Glaceon whines, covering her ears with her paws.

“What…? No, Arcanine, we can’t go swimming until we’re off the boat!” Arcanine’s trainer rushes to grab a hold of his collar, “And that doesn’t mean you can jump over the rails!”

[Awwwwww…]

“Oops…” Hina cringes, as the dog starts whining sadly for the fourth time this trip. “I did it again, didn’t I?”

To be fair to her, Blastoise is surprised Kiyotaka didn’t insist Arcanine go back into his pokéball for the rest of the trip after the first time he decided that the ocean the boat was travelling at high speed through looked like a fun place to go for a swim… Makoto certainly didn’t have any qualms about keeping Togepi in hers after she almost tottered underneath the railings.

“Well, it’s not your fault you’re just as excited about the beach as him…” Makoto tells her.

“Yes, but it’s not like…. S-W-I-M-M-I-N-G is all you can do at the seaside! There’s tons of great food like fried fish and donuts! If Cinnabar’s got any of that, I’m gonna eat ‘till I’m stuffed!”

“Uhh… yeah, that sounds great, Hina…” Makoto agrees, although he looks like he’s turning slightly pale again…

“And then after that I’m gonna go to the water and float in the waves under the moonlight as they pull me back and forth and watch the stars sliding in the sky as I’m rocked side-to-side and…”

“Urrrrppp…!” Makoto suddenly leans forward over the edge of the ship, while everyone else turns away from him…

“Ahh… Sorry. That wasn’t the best thing to talk about, was it?” Hina apologises, “I’m… just gonna go tell everyone we’re almost here!”

“Kay… I’m just gonna… try not to pass out…” Makoto laughs weakly, “Until we get to our new rooms, at least…”

In the end, Makoto does manage to get to the small beach hut they’ll be calling home for the next few days, but not without the help of his friends…

“I’ve put your bags over by the wall, there. And I’ve left you some protein bars by the bed.”

Sakura is busy explaining to Makoto. “Once you feel less nauseous, they will help you make up for the nutrients you lost by vomiting.”

“And here’s some water! You’ll likely be dehydrated, so try to make sure you drink at least some of
“it before going to sleep!” Kiyotaka slams a large glass of water next to the food.

“Thanks, you guys.”

“And are you sure you don’t need anyone to stay and look after your pokémon?” Sayaka asks, glancing towards Blastoise as he distracts Togepi with some of her favourite toys.

“Yeah… It’s not that big a deal if we can’t go swimming straight away!” Asahina tries to insist.

“No… you guys don’t need to worry about me!” Makoto tells them all, “I can trust Blastoise to handle Togepi, right Buddy?”

[Right!] Blastoise agrees, nodding energetically to assure Makoto’s friends that everything will be fine.

“Well… if you’re sure…” Sayaka agrees.

“I’m sure!” Makoto nods, causing the rest of the group to agree to leave Makoto in peace, chatting excitedly about how they can go swimming now, as they leave…

[…]Swimming?] Togepi stops playing for a moment, and starts to toddle off towards the door.

[Nnnooo… not us.] Blastoise gently blocks her with his arm, and pushes her back to her toys. [We’ve got to stay and look after Makoto.] He points towards the bed, where Makoto is taking a gulp of his drink, and Togepi watches as he starts stripping and lying down in bed.

[…]Bedtime?] Togepi watches, confused. [Story?]

[No… Makoto’s sick…] Blasotise tries to explain.

[Oh… sick…] Togepi seems to understand, [Fan?]

[Fan?] What’s she talking about?

[Fan!] Togepi just nods insistently, [‘Koto sick! Keep cool!]

Ooh… she thinks he needs a fan like she did… Hmm… To be fair, it is a little stuffy in this room, but there’s nothing like a fan in here… but the window doesn’t look too hard to open, for something that’s made for humans to handle.

[…]I’ll open the window. Then he’ll be cool.] Blastoise promises, heading over to the window and taking a moment to clumsily fumble it open…

“Huuh? Blastoise? What are you doing…?” Blastoise cringes as Makoto asks about the noise…

“Are you too hot in here?”

[Not really…] Blastoise isn’t sure how to explain, other than pointing at Makoto himself. [It was for you…]

“Huuh… oh! You think I need to keep cool, ‘cause I’m sick…” Makoto laughs, “Don’t worry! I just need some sleep, that’s all!”

[You sleep…? Okay!] Togepi takes a moment to understand, before stretching her arms and yawning deeply… [Yooouu…. Sleeeeeep…]

Hah… Togepi’s yawn is enough to make Blastoise yawn as well… after all, he did end up spending
a lot of last night on the boat helping Makoto… Not that he should be this tired…

“Haauugghhh… yeah…” Makoto yawns along with her. “Huuu… like… tha… t…”

Wow… he sure fell asleep quickly. Not that Blasotise can blame him… There’s something about Togepi’s yawn that keeps making him want to yawn and drift off to sleep as well…

…Well… he can probably get away with closing his eyes for a bit, right? Togepi can’t get into any trouble in here… and it’ll only be for a little… while…

Hmm… that was a nice nap… even if he had slept in a weird position on the floor, instead of in his basin. He really needs to stop thinking he can rely on Makoto to carry him to bed if he falls asleep, now he’d fully grown… Especially as Makoto’s sick…

Wait. Makoto’s sick! And he was supposed to be looking after Togepi! Why had he been sleeping!? And why hadn’t Togepi woken him up?

[…]Togepi?] No response… not even her snoring… [Togepi!? Where did you… go…?]

…The window. The window’s open! And there’s a pile of Togepi’s toys piled up under it…

[TOGEPI!?] Blastoise quickly lumbers over and looks outside… And there are two lines of little footprints, toddling through the sand towards the beach. [Shoot! Mako…]

…No. Makoto’s sick. And besides, Togepi’s too small to have gotten far. It probably won’t take long for Blastoise to follow her footprints and carry her back here…

That’s the thought that makes him quietly head out of the door, heading back around to the window so he can start following the footprints. But his plan is ruined once Togepi’s paths meets up with those of all the other students and Pokémon in Makoto’s class, and it all becomes a mess of creatures heading down towards the ocean, where all of the humans and most of the Pokémon who are outside are playing… Although some of them seem to have worked together to make two giant hills out of sand near the top of the beach…

Ahh… This is bad… He can’t see Togepi anywhere on the beach! She wouldn’t have tried swimming by herself, would she…? He’d best go out into the water and check, even if several of the trainers are already playing in there…

[Hold on!] Blastoise is only halfway to the water’s edge when the voice of the Glaceon in his class, who is now running lithely across the sand towards him, stops him. [I need to check that you can swim before I let you in the ocean!]

That’s a relief. It means that if Togepi had tried coming this way, she’d have stopped her… […]And you’re checking every Pokémon that comes down here?]

[Yes… Hina gives me some infuriatingly worded orders, sometimes…] Glaceon hisses irritably, [I have to ask ‘every single Pokémon’, no exceptions! Not even if they’re a water-type or can fly, or aren’t even in our class! I mean, what kind of order is tha…!]

[Ah… sorry, that’s not why I asked!] Blastoise quickly explains, before she spends too much time ranting about her trainer. [I’m looking for Togepi! She’s not been down here, has she?]

[Oh! No… No, I’d have definitely noticed if she’d passed by.] Glaceon tells him, confidently.
That’s a relief. At least she won’t have drowned…

[...Perhaps those two idiot dogs have buried her…] Glaceon continues, glaring coldly at the two new mounds of sand near the top of the beach. [They’ve already completely ruined my new swimsuit with their stupid nonsense!]

So… those mounds were dug up by Acranine and Lycanroc, by themselves!? That quickly!? Then perhaps Glaceon’s right that if they weren’t careful they might have caught Togepi… [Uhh… I’ll go check there then!]

Blastoise lumbers back up the beach towards the mounds of sand, noticing as he approaches that in the centre of each mound of sand is a large hole, one being dug by Lycanroc, the other by Arcanine, while Fujisaki’s Golett sits watching them both. Which means it might have seen if Togepi did get buried…

[Golett! Have you been watching these two the whole time they’ve been digging?] Blastoise asks the rock… man… thing.

[Affirmative!] It answers with its fancy way of saying ‘yes’.

[You’ve not seen them bury any pokémon, have you?]
[Negatory!] Golett shakes its head, presumably meaning ‘no’.

[Thanks! That’s a relief…] But, it still begs the questions of where the heck Togepi has managed to get away to… If only Blastoise was better at hunting…

…Then again, dogs are supposed to be pretty good at that, weren’t they…? Perhaps he can ask one of them… probably Arcanine, if only because he’s probably less likely to try and rip Blastoise’s shell off just for interrupting his fun…

[Dig, dig, dig…] Arcanine is too busy steadily clawing at the sand to notice Blastoise approaching.

[Hey, Arcanine…?]
[Blasttoy!] Arcanine perks his head up happily at the interruption. [Am I done digging yet?]

[Uhh… I dunno. Why are you digging?] Blastoise asks.

[Umm… Oh! So Kiyotaka will give me a bath after! Or a shower!] Arcanine yaps excitedly… but Arcanine usually has a bath or shower every day, doesn’t he? Why would he need to do something specific to get one?

[What!?! No, you dumbass! That’s not why we’re digging!] The Lycanroc growls from the other hole, [We’re having a competition to see who’s the best at digging! Don’t you remember your trainer running his mouth about how good at it you supposedly are!?!]

[Yep! He said I’m better than you!] Arcanine barks, cheerfully, [Sooo… why are we digging?]

[’Cause Mondo told him he was talking crap, ’cause I’m the best at digging!] Lycanroc snarls proudly, [So we’re having a competition to see whose trainer is right!]

[...So if I don’t dig a bigger hole than you, Kiyotaka will be wrong!?!] Arcanine whines worriedly, before turning back to the floor under his paws. [I don’t want that! Digdigdigdigidigidig…!]

Blastoise barely manages to avoid being splattered by the wave of sand the dog starts desperately
kicking up… But, really!? All this effort over who can dig a bigger hole!? Dogs are ridiculous…

[Quit rolling your eyes at me, asshole.] Lycanroc growls quietly from his hole, [It’s not like I care. I’m only doing this shit to keep him away from Mondo’s friend.]

Keep Arcanine away from someone? That didn’t make sense, they could have just asked his trainer to tell him to stay. And besides… [Why are you working so hard on the hole, then?]

[’Cause I’ll be fucking damned if I let that dumb Fire-Type think it’s better at digging than a Rock-Type!] …Oh, he totally cares about this… [Oh fuck off!] Lycanroc snarls as Blastoise’s mouth curls into a grin. [Why did you even come over here in the first place!?

…Oh CRAP! That was right! How could he have forgotten!? [Actually… I was hoping one of you two could help me find Togepi!]

[Toeggy?] Arcanine answers, not slowing his digging for a moment, [Toeggy went in the big cave!]

Big cave? He must mean the side of the mountain that’s facing the beach… Which looks like it’d contain all sorts of pathways she could have got lost in. Damnit… If only Arcanine had thought to stop her. Not that Blastoise can blame him for this mess…

[Well… Could you help me find her? By smelling for her? You two could make it a competition!]

[But I’ve gotta win this competition!] Arcanine whines, speeding up his digging. [Besides, Kiyotaka said ’no going in the cave!’] Arcanine barks louder and more carefully as he repeats what his trainer said. [’Cause he doesn’t want me getting lost!]

[And I dunno what the fuck that thing even smells like!] Lycanroc points out, [How the hell am I supposed to tell it apart from every other pokémon in there!?]

[Oh… right…] He hadn’t thought of that. It seems like the dogs aren’t going to be of any use after all. Oh boy… now what? Maybe he should have woken up Makoto after all…

[Scanning for Togepi…] The Golett suddenly breaks its silence, and Blastoise can see that its doing something with its trainer’s pokédex. [One Togepi detected!]

[Really!? Where!?] Blastoise stumbles over the sand towards it. The Golett answers by holding up the pokédex, which shows a blinking light surrounded by a mess of lines that make no sense to Blastoise at all… [So… how do I get there?]

[Calculating most efficient route.] Golett starts, then continues after a moment of silence. [Travel 40 yards to cave entrance, after 100 yards take second turning right, then after forty years take first turning left, then after 75 yards take third turning right into cavern, then take south-sou-west exit and…]

[…Sorry, buddy, but I lost you after the second right turn.] Blastoise admits, [I’m not going to be able to remember all that…]

[…This unit is unauthorised to leave this are by itself.] Golett states, which Blastoise thinks means it isn’t going to be able to help… [Therefore, this unit is capable of guiding you, under the condition that this unit remains in your proximity!]

The Golett stands up, looking rather proud of itself… almost like it has worked out a puzzle… Or how to get around its trainer’s orders… […] You’re saying you won’t be alone if I’m with you?] Blastoise asked, hopefully.
[Affirmative!] The Gollets nods, reaching a hand up towards Blastoise’s.

[Alright... thanks!] Blastoise shakes it, [I'll follow you and deal with any wild pokémon we run into!]

He should be able to deal with a few untrained pokémon, right? After all, Togepi’s tiny, she probably hasn’t gone too far into the cave...

The cave is cool, and quiet... a little too quiet actually. His own footsteps and Golett’s directions all seem to loud and obvious against the silence surrounding them, almost like they’re the only things moving in this place...

[Aren’t there any wild pokémon in this cave?] Moon cave back home was full of them...

[94 pokémon detected...] Golett says after poking at the pokédex for a moment.

[Then why’s it so quiet?]

[...No movement detected from 93 out of 94 pokémon.]

[So they’re asleep? Or... something’s knocked them out...]

[...Probably calculations favour forced unconsciousness.]

So, there’s one pokémon in here that’s knocked out all the others...? That sounds like it could be dangerous... [Can you tell what type of pokémon the one that’s moving is?]

[Affirmative!] Golett taps at the pokédex again, [Movement detected from Togepi!]

What? She’s moving but nothing else is...? [She must have done something crazy with Metronome...]

[Or lack of movement is caused by undetectable factor.]

[Err... What do you mean?]

[Most likely example of undetectable factor: Pokémon Trainers.] Golett explains.

Ah. Someone like Togami trying to power up their pokémon makes more sense than Togepi somehow finding a move that could knock out a whole cave of them. [Alright. We best keep quiet and be on our guard for humans, then.]

[Acknowledged!] Golett agrees and takes the lead through several empty and quiet passageways.

...Quiet, at least, until they start to hear someone humming up ahead. That might be whoever knocked out everyone here...

[Can we get to Togepi without going past him?] Blastoise asks, quietly.

[...Negatory.] Golett shakes it head. [Judging from distance of sound... Movement of Togepi appears to be linked to movement of human.]

[Linked?] Blastoise whispers... [You mean he’s carrying her?]
So, either a trainer had found Togepi, realised she wasn’t wild and was trying to help her… or someone was just trying to **steal** her!

[…I’m going to try and get a closer look.] Blastoise decides, starting to creep towards the sound of the humming, with Golett staying close behind him…

“HmmhmmHMMhmhmmhrm…” …Honestly Blastoise is amazed the human hasn’t heard him yet, but as he peeks around the corner to the passage that the man is walking up, he’s thankful that that was the case…

White jumpsuit, black boots and gloves. And one of those black gloves is gripped around the back of Togepi’s shell, while she waves her feet and arms desperately in an attempt to wiggle free.

[Similarity to Team Rocket Grunt uniform… 100%.] Golett confirmed what Blastoise had been thinking. That’s got to be someone trying to steal her then…

But if it’s only one member of Team Rocket, then maybe Blastoise has a chance? He and Makoto managed to beat that guy who tried to hijack the bus a few months ago, after all…

“HmmHmm… hmm hmmm!” The Rocket grunt seems to finish whatever tunes he’s humming just as he turns the next crossing. “**Hey guys! I’m back!**”

Shoot! Sounds like he’s just met up with more Team Rocket members…

“**About TIME, Carlos! You’re over fifteen minutes** late!” Another man shouts back at him, “**Why did it take you that long to do a sweep of the cave!?**”

“**Cause I found a rare pokémon wandering just outside one of the entrances!**” Is the answer, “**Check out this!**”

“…A Togepi? **Here?** You idiot, you know there’s no way that’s not been caught by someone already!” A woman’s voice sighs, “It’s useless to us if you haven’t got it’s pokéball!”

“I know… But, I figured, why don’t we give it a nice new pokéball, eeeehhhh?” The man holding Togepi suggests.

“Oooohhhh… Maybe you’re not so dumb after all!” The woman laughs, not that Blastoise understands why. Togepi wouldn’t be stupid enough to get into a stranger’s pokéball instead of her own, even if they do offer her one! “Hey, Bryce, can we…?”

“No.” The other man answers curtly. Perhaps that means they’ll let Togepi go without a fight…?

“Aww, C’mon! **Why not!?**” Togepi’s captor isn’t giving up yet.

“It’s against orders!” Is the answer, “And besides, the machine won’t fit any of us.”

“Doesn’t it have adjustable straps or anything?”

“No. Apparently those measurements they got out of Mitarai were really specific…”

“…Who’s Mitarai?” The man who has Togepi and the woman both ask at the same time.

[File not found…] Golett answers their question quietly.
“Argh… That’s… you don’t need to know that! Forget I said it!” The one called Bryce dodges the question.

“Ooohhh! Sounds like Bryce just leaked confidential info!” The woman laughs.

“Dammit, Emmy… Look, please, just do me a favour and keep your traps shut about this, or I’m screwed!”

“I dunno… I kinda wanna know about this guy…” The man who took Togepi says mockingly, “Maybe I should ask Giovanni for some more info!”

“Carlos, you… you wouldn’t!” The other man gulps, “Would you?”

“I won’t…” ‘Carlos’ replies, “If you lemme ‘catch’ this Togepi!”

“I told you, we can’t!” The one called Bryce repeats, “At least, not with this machine… But I suppose if we get it back to headquarters I could recommend you for testing out one of the other prototypes…”

…Back to headquarters!? Blastoise can’t let that happen!

“Alright! Dude, have I ever told you how you are the best supervisor!?”

“Yes, yes, you said it the last time you blackmailed me into doing something stupid… Now, get the cooler… we can take the drinks out and lock it in there…”

“Got it! Guess I better take the gag out so it can breathe better in there…”

[…]OW! HELP! ‘KOTO!? BLAS…!?[/] Blastoise can hear Togepi cry out for a moment, before the sound of plastic snapping shut cuts her off…

[…]I’ve gotta go fight these guys.] Blastoise quietly tells Golett. There’s no way he can leave her trapped in there, even if it does mean leaving the Golem to fend for itself. Besides, it should be able to make its way out of the cave by itself, seeing as the wild pokémon are all knocked out...

[Acknowledged.] Golett nods in response, staying where it is.

[I don’t think I’ll win… I’ll probably just get knocked out.] Blastoise tries to explain.

[Affirmative.] It just nods at him.

[…]You’d probably be safer going back the way we came.] Blastoise points out, [You’re small enough for them to steal.]

[Acknowledged.] Golett still isn’t moving. Perhaps it’s giving Blastoise the benefit of the doubt, and only intending to run if it seems like he’ll lose.

Well… either way, he can’t leave Togepi waiting any longer… Blastoise takes a deep breath and makes sure his cannons are ready to fire, before stomping around the corner…

[HEY! Let Togepi go!]

“What the!?” The three members of Team Rocket jump, “A Blastoise on Cinnabar!?”

“…Carlos. Did you find that Togepi down near the southern beach?” One of the men asks the other.
“Err… yeah…?”

“What!? Carlos, you dummy! That’s where the Hope’s Peak kids are staying!” The woman shouts, “You’ve lead them to us two days early!”

“Erg… well… how was I supposed to know that!”

“It was in the briefing memo, you idio…”

“Wait… No… There’s no trainer here…” The man who appears to be more in charge stops her, bringing out a pokéball. “This pokémon is by itself! We can still make this work… We’ll knock it out, leave the machine by it, like it ripped it off us as we fought, and then take the Togepi with us…”

“So when they come looking for their pokémon, they’ll find the machine and the Blastoise, and figure whoever had the machine stole their Togepi!” The woman finishes, getting out a pokéball of her own.

“…Wait. We’re leaving the machine here!?” The last one stares at them both.

“…YES! That’s the entire point of this mission!” The other man shouts at him, “It was in the mission briefing!”

“Really!? ‘Cause this seems like a really dumb pl…”

“Just help us knock this thing out so you can keep your stupid Togepi!” The woman snaps at him, throwing her pokéball and letting out large moving blob of disgusting smelling purple gloopy stuff.

[She's not your Togepi!] Not if Blastoise has anything to say about it...

“Alright, but I still think this is a dumb plan…” The man who stole Togepi mutters, as he and the other man both throw a pokéball each, letting out what Blastoise knows is a Vileplume, along with a… whatever Sandshrews evolve into, is his guess.

[Look… guys! I just want to get my friend back!] Blastoise tries to talk this out… [Your trainers pokénapped her!]

[Yeah… they do that…] The Vileplume admits vacantly.

[It’s not so bad, once you give up trying to leave…] The purple thing squelches.

[They’ll make your friend a lot stronger than your trainer could!] The ground type smirks, [They’d do the same for you, if you joined us!]

[Heck no!] Blastoise tries to look intimidating as it becomes clear that there’s no way out of this than to fight these three…[So which of you three am I taking down first!?]

[…Ahahahah!] It doesn’t work. They just look at each other and laugh. [He thinks we’re fighting one-on-one!] The big Sandshrew titters, [Let’s show this watery wimp how Team Rocket lets us fight!]

Shoot! Of course! Team Rocket wouldn’t fight fair, they were bad guys! He was going to be fighting three-on-one! He was probably doomed, but he wasn’t going down without a fight, and he could at least get rid of that ground type!

[In that case… HYDRO PUMP!] Blastoise pumps water through his cannons as hard as he can, landing a direct hit on the Sand…thing, which is knocked off of its feet by the blast. [Now it’s just
two-on-one!] Admittedly it’s the tougher two for Blastoise to fight, but at least he’ll only have to deal with two attacks at a ti…

[Nope…! Not... *quite*, you watery… *wimp!*] Oh no… It’s *barely* managed to get back *up!* He couldn’t even take the *ground type* down with one hit? Are Team Rocket pokémon *really* that much stronger than what he’s used to fighting…? And now all three of them are getting ready to attack him while he’s reloading the water in his cannons… He *really* should have woken up Makoto… he hasn’t even been able to give Golett enough time to ru…

[Initiating Rollout: Stage {One}!] Everyone in the cavern pauses in shock at Golett’s announcement, giving it enough time to roll past Blastoise at decent speed towards the big Sandshrew…

[What the…!? *Grraa…!* *Arrrrghh…*] The ground type yells in pain before keeling over…

[Rollout: Stage {One} executed! Preparing Rollout Stage {Two}!] Golett announces, rolling away from the other pokéman and back towards Blastoise.

“*Another one*!?”

“And that’s a *different* trainer’s pokémon…” The leader points out, “Ignore the Golett and keep fighting the Blastoise, but get ready to *run* *as* *soon* as I say so!”

“Got it!” The woman shouts, “Muk, use *Gunk Shot*!”

“Vileplume, use *Poison powder*!” The other man adds…

There’s no time for Blastoise to even *try* and get out of the way of the huge streams of purple… *stuff* before it’s slamming into body with all the force of a wrecking ball and there’s burning liquids forcing its way into his mouth and eyes, which he barely manages to stop by shielding his face with his hands…

[Damage tolerance exceeded! Unit… shutting… doooowwwwn…] Dammit… sounds like poor Golett got hit as well… why didn’t it just *run* when Blastoise told it to!

But for *now*, on onslaught of thick purple slime is slowing down enough for Blastoise to wipe off and spit out the worst of it and breathe deeply… only to realise that the air is now full of small purple flecks…

*Darnit*… That must be the Vileplume’s toxic spores! He can’t let himself swallow to many of them…

“*POISON POWDER*!?”

“I’m setting up!” Blastoise can hear the humans bickering with each other as he vainly tries to cough out the stuff he just swallowed.

“You don’t *need* to set up, we’re fighting *two-on-one*! We’d have already finished it off straight away if you’d used *Petal Blizzard*!”

“Well… I’ll do that *next* turn! it’s not like it’ll be able to beat us anyway…”

…They’re right. Blastoise isn’t sure he could even take being hit with the purple stuff again, let alone that *and* another attack. And even though he’s ready to fire his cannons again, he can’t *possibly* be able to take down both of them before they’re ready to attack him… This is it… So much for being able to look after Togepi by himself… He might as well just lie down and let the poison do its work, for all the good it’ll do…
Aha! Found…! And… time!\] Blastoise’s head perks back up as he barely catches some small snippets of the familiar high pitched shrieking of a Crobat! Could he possibly be this lucky…!?\n
Blastoise! Do you have any idea how worried you made your…\] Blastoise really is too lucky to be true, as Kyoko’s Crobat rounds the corner, stopping mid-sentence as it looks over the group attacking Blastoise… […AHHHHH! TEAM ROCKET! KYOKO! KADABRA! TEAM ROCKET ARE HERE!]

“RUN!” The leader of the group orders, picking up something that looks like a metal glove attached by rope to a ball, then turning on his heels and running.

“But it’s just a Cro…”

“HE SAID RUN!” The woman interrupts the other man as she recalls her purple thing and runs.

“Urg… Fine!” He quickly signals his Vileplume back into its ball, then turns and runs away from them as well.

Thank goodness! Now everything is going to be alri…

“Least I got one good thing outta this…” The last grunt mutters, as he swerves to the side to pick up the cool box…

[NO!] Blastoise can’t let him leave with that!

[Hey! What are you doing!?] Blastoise is barely aware of Crobat’s question as his body pulls itself upwards and starts running after the Rocket grunt. [They might have traps set up ahead!]

That’s a risk he’ll have to take. He needs to catch that man before he gets too far ahead! But even though the man is weighed down by Togepi, Blastoise just isn’t fast enough to close the distance! And the other pair are waiting for him at the entrance to a side path which will be too small for Blastoise to get through!

He can’t let them go there! He needs to get Togepi back now! But the only way he can stop the human at this range is to… well…

Attack him. The one thing Makoto and his family made sure he knew he shouldn’t ever do!

But if he doesn’t…

[…Hydro Pump!] Blastoise aims his cannons in the general direction of the group, hoping that they’re far enough away that the pressure will just hurt them enough to make them drop Togepi, not… kill them...

“Quick! Get in…!””, “Ho-ly!”, “AHHH!” The leader and woman quickly dodge into the side of the passageway as they see Blastoise’s attack, but Blastoise isn’t concerned about them. He’s only worried about hitting the third one, who makes the mistake of looking behind him just as the burst of water rushes up to meet him… and easily knocks him to the ground, sending the plastic box clattering against the floor of the cave as it’s knocked out of his hand.

Blastoise wastes no time before stomping up towards the thief before he can get back up and grab the box again…

“Oh Arceus… Carlos! Get up! The Blastoise is still after you!” The woman’s voice calls out from the side passage. Does Blastoise really look that scary?
“Urggh…? Wha…?”

“Dammit… Emmy, stay here! I’ll help him.” The leader orders as he dashes towards the fallen man, cautiously keeping one eye on Blastoise as he deliberately drops the metal glove in one of the less deep puddles surrounding him and then picks up the other man by the arms and starts dragging him back to the passage…

“Nrgh…” Being dragged over the floor seems to wake the man up some more, as he manages to catch his footing and turns back towards Togepi. “Hey! Wait! Hang on! I dropped the…”

[Don’t even try it!] Blastoise threatens him with his cannons again, making the thief freeze in place.

“We can’t go back! We’ll just have to leave it!” The leader shouts loudly, even though the other man is already backing away from Blastoise and towards the woman in the passageway. “No matter how upset Giovanni will be!”

“Eh…? But… Giovanni didn’t even KNOW about…”

“Shut up! I’ll explain it later!”

The pair have a muttered conversation to each other as they finished backing into the side passage, then turn and run as fast as they can down it…

Blastoise breathes a sigh of relief once they’ve gone, then quickly heads over to the box, slowly picking it up so he can try to work out how to open it… There are some plastic bits sticking out at the front side, perhaps he needs to move those…

_Darnit! Stupid over-fiddly human stuff! He’d gone through all of _that_ to rescue Togepi and now he’s being defeated by a _box_! ArrrGGghhhhh! And the worst part is, it wasn’t for Togepi being inside it he could just smash this puny thing against the wall!_

[…this way! And Blastoise charged off after them!] Blastoise’s thoughts of stomping up and down on the empty box are interrupted by the worried sounding chatter of Kyoko’s Crobat. [Even though I _told_ him it’d probably be dangerous!]

“Hmm… no sign of traps or security measures…” He can hear Kyoko talking to herself from further up the path. Maybe he can get _her_ to open the box! “They can’t have had time to get set up in here before Naegi’s Blastoise stumbled on them…And, speaking of which…”

[Kyoko!] Blastoise stands up as Makoto’s friend rounds the corner with both her pokémon, [Can you open this for me!?] [Eh? That the thing that Team Rocket guy ran off with, isn’t it?] Crobat notices with a frown, while Kyoko starts looking around the room carefully.

[And this passage is filled with water…] Kadabra adds, getting more and more worried as it looks over the mess Blastoise has made. […You attacked _humans_?]

[For their _snacks_!] Crobat is equally appalled.

[What? NO!] Geez, did they really think he was _that_ dangerous? [They put _Togepi_ in here! And they were talking about taking her back to their headquarters!]

[Oh.] Understanding dawns on Crobat’s face, [That’s fair…]
And legally admissible.] Kadabra adds, but continues before Blastoise can ask what that means, [Hold it still and I’ll open it for you.]

It doesn’t look like he’s going to open it. He doesn’t even move from the spot he’s standing in at first. But then the two bits of plastic that stuck out at the front suddenly lift up and out, allowing the lid to float away, revealing…

[Togepi!] She’s lying at the bottom of the box, trembling with her eyes squeezed tight. At least until Blastoise calls her name…

[Blastoisy!] She stares up at him and starts trying to scramble up the side of the box, then grabs tightly onto his arm as he reaches in to pick her up. [Dark scary! Hurt!]

[It’s alright… I’m not letting them put you back in there.] Blastoise lifts her up and tosses the box aside, ignoring the annoyed huff from Kyoko. [Just don’t wander off like that again!]

Togepi just tilts her head at him in confusion… does she even realise she wandered off by herself? Well, she shouldn’t have to, should she? He was the one who was supposed to be looking after her!

[…] I’m sorry I fell asleep and let you wander off… Blastoise gives in to the sudden urge to hold her close, [I’m going to look after you more carefully, now…]

[Blastoisy?] Togepi sounds even more confused now. […] Where ‘Koto?]

[He’s… probably at the beach?] Assuming it was him who sent Kyoko here, anyway. [Kyoko’s going to show us the way back!]

…At least, he hopes she will. At the moment she’s shining a small torch down the passageway that the Team Rocket group ran down, while holding that glove thing the leader dropped in her free hand.

“Haahhh… The trail from the water’s dried up. We’re not going to be able to follow them.” She sighs, puts the torch away and then pulls out a flip-case with three Badges pinned to the inside and shows them to Blastoise. “Your trainer sent me. You need to come with me, and help carry Fujisaki’s Gollett out of here.”

[Alright. Thanks.] Blastoise nods, surprised that she thought she’d need to show him the badges when she’s a friend of Makoto’s…

It’s an uneventful trip back out to the cave entrance, where Makoto and Chihiro are pacing back and forth in the sand. At least, until Makoto spots them all coming out of the cave and the pair of them rush up to greet them.

“Blastoise! There you are!” Makoto lets Blastoise hand Golett over to Chihiro, then takes hold of Togepie with one arm and wraps the other around Blastoise’s body. “I’m glad you’re alright, but what were you thinking!? I wasn’t so ill that I couldn’t have gone with you instead of you taking someone else’s pokémon!”

[…] Sorry.] Blastoise mumbles, [I didn’t think she’d have gone far…]

“Haaah… Just… If there’s another time when Togepi puts us both to sleep, wake me up!” WHAT!? Togepi put him to sleep!? “Or tell one of the other humans in my class! Or one of my teachers! Okay?”

… That seemed like pretty obvious advice, in hindsight. If he’d actually stopped to think about what
to do, instead of just trying to find Togepi quickly, it would have been obvious that he should have asked a human for help...

[Okay… I’ll try to remember next time.] Blastoise promises with a nod.

“Good.” Makoto sighs, before turning to Togepi, “And as for you. No putting me to sleep with *Yawn*!”

[…Yawn? Oh!] Togepi looks confused for a moment, then stretches her arms and breathes in deeply… [*Yaaaaaawn…*]

That’s making Blastoise want to yawn as well, actually…

“Argh!” He’s jolted out of that thought by Makoto groaning, “I just said not to do that…!”

“Seems like it’s too young to understand what you mean…” Kyoko suggests.

“Man… I can already tell this is going to be a huge pain in the…” Makoto sighs.

[Damage now within tolerable levels! Unit re-initialising!] Makoto is interrupted by Golett, whose trainer seems to have given it medicine to wake it up. […Greetings, Trainer! How may I be of service?]

“Umm… Are you alright…?” Chihiro asks it.

[Affirmative!]

“Good… but I thought I told you not to leave the beach…?”

[Negatory!]

“Ah? But… I thought I told you not to leave… by *yourself*…” Chihiro ends the sentence with a sigh, “So you went with *Blastoise*…”

[Affirmative!] Golett nods, [This unit remained in close proximity to Blastoise at all times!]

That’s true. It had even stayed when Blastoise had suggested it run away from Team Rocket… *Oh, no… Don’t tell him…*

[Was that the only reason why you didn’t leave when I tried to get Togepi back?] Blastoise asks it, [Because you *couldn’t*!?]

[…Negatory!] Golett answers, after a long moment of silence.

[Then why *did* you stay?]

There’s a longer moment of silence this time, before Golett answers hesitantly. […File not found.]

[You *don’t know*?] It almost got itself captured and it doesn’t even know *why*!?

[Affirmative…] Golett answers, still unsure of itself.

“Don’t you have *any* idea?” Even if it’s just because it hates Team Rocket or wanted to be a hero or *something*…

[…]Searching for related files…] Golett considers it for a moment. [[One] related file found: This
unit hopes it was of service to you!]

…So it stayed, just because it wanted to help him? Well, if it hadn’t distracted Team Rocket and knocked out that big Sandshrew for him, then he probably wouldn’t have managed to save Togepi…

[Yeah! You were a lot of help! I couldn’t have done it without you!]

[…]Acknowledged!] Golett holds it head up high. [This unit hopes you will consider repeat recruitment for your next adventure!]

…Next adventure!? Blastoise has had enough adventuring for a lifetime…!

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! Next up will be taking on Cinnabar Gym!
Cinnabar Gym (Chihiro POV)

Chapter Notes

I’ve not watched Blaine in the anime at all, I’m just trying to work out a personality for him based on his (rather non-existent) in-game text and how I’d imagine Gym Leaders to act. So my apologies if he’s completely out of character in this.

Also in the pokemon canon, Cinnabar Gym gets burnt down by a volcanic eruption between the first and second generation of games, which is why this is Cinnabar Gym version 2.0.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

‘Cinnabar Island Pokémon Gym, version 2.0!

Leader: Blaine, The Hot-Headed Quiz Master!’

Well, this was the right place, alright. As if it wasn’t obvious from the shiny white cladding and glass door that didn’t fit in at all with the rest of the island… This was where Chihiro was supposed to be able to get their first badge…

Emphasis on supposed, that was. Sure, they’d been training both their pokémon a lot during the last four weeks, and everyone they knew said they were more than strong enough to get their first badge, but…

…they’d be a lot more confident if the leader of this Gym’s strongest pokémon wasn’t an Arcanine… or if Growlithe didn’t consist of one quarter of the low-level fire type pokémon in Kanto… or if they didn’t still start to freeze up whenever Mondo’s Lycanroc looked even the slightest bit annoyed, even though Mondo had been working to help them get used to being near it…

…Still, they had to at least try! If they could get past this Gym, they could get past anything! And Mondo had even got up as early as they had, so he could follow behind Chihiro and act as moral support if they needed it… Even though he’d agreed when Kizakura told him that he probably wouldn’t manage to get his fourth badge with just one pokémon.

…Although, right now as he was reading the sign outside the Gym, he looked almost as scared as Chihiro felt! “Hey… Mondo? Are you alright…?”

“Nghh…” Mondo grimaced, so obviously not. “…The hell’s it mean by quiz master? That doesn’t mean we’re getting asked questions, does it!”

“Umm… Actually, from what I read online, that’s kind of this Gym’s gimmick… each room you go to you get asked a question…”

“And…?” Mondo’s voice rose an octave and ten decibels, “What happens if ya get it wrong!? D’ya get kicked out of the Gym for being too dumb ta own a pokémon, or something…!?"

“No! Nothing like that!” Chihiro hurried to explain, before Mondo started to panic about possibly making his own Gym look bad. “All they just make you fight an extra trainer along the way!”

“Well… I guess that ain’t so bad…” Mondo admitted gruffly, “…Even if I fuck one up I can pretend
I did it on purpose, just to get another battle in…”

“That would work…” Chihiro had read accounts from people who’d said they’d done exactly that. “Although I really don’t think you’ll get any of these wrong. Not unless they’ve made them harder than the questions I saw online…”

“Why… what sort of questions are we talking about, here…?” Mondo asked, looking fearful about what the answer would be.

“Umm… well…” There had been one that had stuck out, just from how ridiculous it had been… “Yes or No… does TM28 teach Tombstony?”

“…Are you taking the piss!??” Mondo snarled, “That ain’t even a real move!”

“I know… But that’s apparently one of the questions that people say they’ve been asked!” Chihiro pointed out, “Otherwise, it just things like ‘Does Diglet evolve into Dugtrio?’ or ‘Can you use normal-type moves on ghost pokémon?’”

“Really… Shit, that’s easy! Even I know that crap!” Mondo exclaimed, brushing the hair (and sweat) off of his face.

“See! You’ll be fine!” Chihiro assured him…

“Hey! Don’t go saying it like you won’t be!” Mondo mock-punched them on the shoulder, “It’s your first badge! You’ve been staring down a full-grown wolf for three weeks! You ain’t gonna get scared by some dumb puppies, are ya!?”

“…I hope not…” Chihiro admitted, “But… With Lycanroc, I always know you’re in control…”

“Well… that’s gonna be true of the guys in there, too!” Mondo argued, “Hell, getting good enough to be a Gym trainer is hard! Trust me, they wouldn’t let some dumbass who couldn’t control their own pokémon do that shit!”

“Really…?” Well… Mondo ought to know. He’d helped set up a Gym, after all… “…I’ll try to remember that, if I get startled by one…”

“Alright… now let’s go get you your first badge!”

Mondo gave them a firm push towards the glass doors, which slid open automatically, to reveal a small beige-tiled lobby containing some computerised kiosks that scanned their pokédexes and printed them each off a numbered ticket with their names, photo, and which badge they were going for on it. Apparently Chihiro was trainer number three, and Mondo number four, which would suggest that two other people had come in here already, despite how early they’d been…

“Damn, this is some fancy shit!” Mondo looked around enviously, as he headed through the barrier. “We have to make everyone show us their pokédexes every fight…”

“Yeah… I heard this place was high-tech, but even the Gyms back in Unova have a person at the door to introduce you to the Gym…” Chihiro admitted.

“Speaking of which, now where do we go? There’s two doors outta here!”

*Trainer number [3], you may now progress to question station [1]!*

“…Guess that answers that question…” Mondo muttered, as a monitor underneath a sign reading
‘Question station one’ lit up.

After scanning their ticket, and answering that No, Clefairy didn’t evolve four times (did anything!? Even if you counted Mega-evolutions…?) a computerised voice announced that Chihiro could progress to waiting room 1, and the keypad next to the door on the left lit up, allowing Chihiro to scan their ticket again to open the door…

*trainer number [4], you may now progress to question station [1]!*" 

“Right… well… I’ll see ya in a coupla minutes…” Mondo gulped, “Hopefully…”

“You’ll be fine!” Chihiro tried to assure him, as they headed through the door to a short corridor that opened up into a small waiting room, where they could already see Ishimaru and his Arcanine waiting patiently.

Darnit… They really hadn’t wanted to see him right now… Maybe they should have let Mondo come in first, in case he really did get the question wrong and ended up on a completely different path, leaving Chihiro alone with the giant dog…

“Heh… Guess I really didn’t have ta worry!” Chihiro sighed in relief as Mondo entered the door behind them. “And thanks for waiting for me… It’s nice that ya knew I’d be right behind ya…”

“Umm… well, I was sure you’d be fine…” Chihiro lied slightly, before gesturing up the corridor to Ishimaru. “But… actually, it’s just…”

“Tch… He’s here already!?” Mondo scowled once he saw what the problem was, “I thought he’d have given his dog a break after yesterday…”

Yesterday? What happened with Mondo and Ishimaru yesterday…? Oh, right. They’d had that big shouting match because Ishimaru claimed his dog would be ‘the best’ at digging and then Mondo had insisted his would be, because it was a Rock-type, but Ishimaru had been stubborn and refused to back down so Mondo had suggested they order the dogs to dig a hole each while the rest of them went swimming and they’d see who was the best… “You mean the competition you guys had? What happened with that?” They’d been too preoccupied with their Golett disappearing to find out…

“His dog dug so hard it passed out…” Mondo muttered angrily.

“What? Why would it do that?” They’d never heard of a pokémon working themselves to exhaustion like that before…

“Hell knows… Unless it thinks something bad would happen if it lost…” Mondo muttered darkly.

Huh? Did he mean…? “You think it was frightened that Ishimaru would hurt it if it lost?”

“Well, why the fuck else would it work ‘till it passed out!? Dogs ain’t stupid enough to do that!”

Hmm… They could see Mondo’s point, but… Surely there was no way Ishimaru would do something like that. He’d been so worried about leaving his dog alone, and had only gone along with the competition after making sure it had plenty of water in a bowl to drink, and knew that he was just down in the ocean and could stop and run to him if it needed any more, and that Golett was there to ask for help if got stuck…

…Or, should have been. Except Golett suddenly wandered off with Naegi’s Blastoise…

“…Maybe it got stuck and panicked because Golett wasn’t there?” Chihiro suggested, “Lycanroc
might have been too deep in his own hole to notice, at that point.”

“Well… Yeah, I guess that coulda happened…” Mondo agreed, reluctantly. “Anyway, let’s just wait for him to get ahead… he’s doing his first badge to, so if your going after him, ya might get ta see what some of the trainers are throwing out and prepare for it.

“Umm… Is that actually allowed?” They were pretty sure Mondo meant steeling themself if there were any Growlithes being used, but to anyone else it’d sound like he was encouraging Chihiro to cheat…

“Well, some people get prissy and say it’s cheating, and some Gyms are set up so ya just can’t… But the way Daiya and I saw it was, there ain’t much of a difference if a trainer sees what the person ahead is up against and can plan ahead on the spot, or if they get their butt kicked and go home and plan for a rematch the next day, other than it saving both us and them some time.” Mondo explained.

“I see… I guess that makes sense. Thanks, Mondo!” Having someone who understood all of this was making them feel a lot better about this whole thing. To the point where it’d be nice if they could get started already… except Ishimaru was still getting his dog ready…

 “…I’m giving you a berry to eat if you get low on health, and I’ve got plenty of nice lemonade, just in case, although I’m certain you won’t need any of them!” Ishimaru patted his dog’s head after tying a berry to the top of its front paw. “We’ll be able to get our first badge easily!”

“Arrrrccc…?” His dog didn’t seem to believe him.

“What? Yes! Of course we’ll be able to!” Ishimaru patted it confidently. “Really, you could have done this ages ago, as a Growlithe, if I’d been able to get to a Gym before now, so we’ll have absolutely no trouble today!”

“NnnnNNN…” His dog still wasn’t convinced.

 “…Are you still upset because of the digging, yesterday…?” Ishimaru asked, gently. “That honestly wasn’t important! It was just a little friendly competition between rivals! You didn’t need to…”

“The fuck did you just say…!?” Everyone, including Chihiro, jumped as Mondo loudly interrupted and started storming towards Ishimaru.

“Oowada! Good morning! I was just trying to tell Arcanine that he needn’t have worried so much about the little hole-digging match we had yest…”

I ain’t talking about that!” Mondo snapped, “What the hell makes you think we’re rivals!? I’m three badges ahead of you right now!”

“I-I’m aware of that!” Ishimaru admitted, starting to embarrassed… “But you’ve been consistently antagonistic towards me since school started, and…!”

“That’s just ‘cause you’re an annoying pain in the ass!” Mondo interrupted, making Ishimaru flinch with disappointment. “Hell, you’re the one who starts it, most of the time, with all your bitching ‘cause I don’t feed or train Lycan the way you think I should!”

“Excuse me!? All I’ve tried to do is encourage everyone not to let their pokémon’s potential go to waste!” Ishimaru counted.

“Well, I don’t need some dumb rival to ‘encourage’ me to raise my own pokémon, so you can leave me outta it!”
“I would, if your pokémon wasn’t so poorly trained that it threatens to be a danger to the school if you aren’t constantly manhandling it!”

“Oh, sure! And yours is so fucking well-trained that it’ll work itself to death if ya tell it to!” Mondo yelled sarcastically, “Is that how you think pokémon should be!”

“What? No! Of course not!” Ishimaru cried, “I don’t know why Arcanine pushed himself so hard, but….”

*Trainer number [2], you may now progress to battle room [1]!* An electrical voice rang out through the room.

“Ahh! I guess Togami must have finished his first fight…” Ishimaru looked behind him to the door, which Chihiro could now see Togami was leaving, “Alright… Time for us to get our badge now, Arcanine!” He patted his thigh and his dog stood up to follow him, despite its obvious concern. “Don’t worry, we’ll be fine…! And I hope you two have the best of luck in getting your own badges!”

“Whatever, just get going already!” Mondo dismissed him, before Chihiro had the chance to say thanks.

“…Very well.” Ishimaru’s face stiffened, but not quickly enough to hide the disappointment in it, before he turned and headed into the first room of the Gym…

“Umm…Mondo… don’t you think that was maybe a little harsh…?” Chihiro asked, quietly. “I mean… I’m pretty sure he is just trying to help, and to be fair Lycan’s diet is kinda… not the best…? And even you’ve said there have been times when you wished Lycan would listen to you about hanging back in fights! You’ve got to admit he could do with being a bit better trained, at times…”

“Yes, that’s the thing, I do know that. And I bet everyone else he’s bitched at knows their pokémon ain’t perfect, and there’s stuff they’ve gotta do to fix it.” Mondo griped. “But then he walks around bitching at us all, like the only reason none of us have done anything about our pokémon’s problems yet is ‘cause we don’t give a shit! Bet it’s never even crossed his mind that some pokémon have problems that can’t just be fixed by snapping our damn fingers! He just thinks he must be better than us, or have put in more ‘effort’ than us, just ‘cause his old man managed to get him a perfect police-trained puppy, instead of one that was captured by Team Rocket almost as soon as it was born!”

‘Perfect police-trained’? Hadn’t Mondo heard about how Ishimaru’s Arcanine acted when Sayaka tried to put a police cap on it? “Umm… Mondo, that’s not…”

*Trainer number [3], you may now progress to battle room [1]!* Wait, WHAT!? “…He’s finished already? I didn’t even see what he was up against!”

“Relax, it was just a Ponyta…” Mondo told them.

“Oh… Good!” It was just a horse, they could deal with horses….

“And it didn’t seem too strong. You’ll probably be fine with your usual strategy…” By which Mondo meant Defense curl, to power up Rollout, then just stick with that for the rest of the match. “…And like I said, just remember their ain’t gonna be pokémon in a Gym that’s dumb enough to attack a human!”

“Got it. Thanks Mondo.” Chihiro nodded and stepped through the door…
It was like Mondo had said, that Ponyta gave them no trouble at all! It wasted its first turn using Tail Whip, then only got one actual attack in before getting crushed in one hit by Golett. Nothing that couldn’t be sorted out with a quick potion and a rest in its pokéball! If *that* fight was any indication, this Gym shouldn’t be difficult for them at all!

…Especially not when the next quiz question was ‘Rattatas are known for their swimming ability: Yes or No?’. Blaine might as well put a box saying ‘do you want to have an extra battle?’ at *that* point...

…And Chihiro might have been willing to say ‘yes’ to that question, if it had meant *not* walking into a waiting room with no one other than Ishimaru and his dog… Luckily for Chihiro, the pair of them seemed too interested in whatever fight Togami was having to noticed that they’d come in and were waiting at the back of the room for him to leave...

*Trainer number {2}, you may now progress to battle room {2}!*  

“Alright, Arcanine! Off we go!” Ishimaru promptly order his dog into the room, at which point Chihiro snuck forward to watch what he’d be pitted against.

“Err… You’re trainer two…? I think there’s been a mistake. I have you down as going for your first badge…?” The Gym trainer sounded confused as Ishimaru walked in with his Arcanine.

“Yes, that’s correct!” Ishimaru explained, “My hometown was in a remote location and the closest Gym shut down when I was six, so…”

“Oh… yeah! I remember hearing about that. It was because the guy who set it up cheated his way past the Elite Four, right?”

“…Yes.” Somehow Ishimaru looked even *more* stiff than usual as he answered… “Which is why I’d quite like to get on with getting *this* badge!”

“Of course… Alright, come out, Growlithe!”

*Growlithe!* Urg… Just what they *didn’t* want to see, even though it was pretty obvious they’d see one eventually in this Gym. But even though they’d known it was going to happen, they could still already feel their heart thumping and it getting hard to breathe and they weren’t even in the same room as it yet…

“Arc!” …And Ishimaru’s Arcanine jumping up and barking at it wasn’t helping them at *all!* “Arcare!”

*Owlit!* And now the *other* dog was getting excited and yapping as well… which made Ishimaru’s bark even *more* excitedly and so then it just barked even louder in turn… And now they were both running around each other in circles and… Was Mondo sure a Gym trainer couldn’t lose control of their own pokémon…?

“Yes… Yes, I *know* it’s a Growlithe! But we’re supposed to be having a battle!…” Ishimaru was barely trying to calm his dog down. “…I’m sorry about this. I don’t think he’s seen one of his own kind in years, so he’s a little overexcited…”

“That’s alright… Ginger’s older brother’s away in Johto for an obedience contest at the moment, and she’s been missing have a big Arcanine to race around with, right Ginger?”
“Lithe!” The smaller dog yapped, then ran a short distance away from the bigger dog, then turned around and barked at it...

“Nnnn…” Ishimaru’s dog whined, then turned to Ishimaru. “Can…!? Can, can, niine?”

“B-but we’re supposed to be battling…” Ishimaru answered, despite clearly not wanting to.

“Grrrooowl!…?” The smaller dog joined in, so now Ishimaru had two sets of cute puppy-dog eyes facing him, “GrowLIITHE!?”

“Nnggh…” Ishimaru’s resolve was obviously breaking… not that Chihiro could blame him… those dogs were actually pretty cute like that.

“…The guy before you is taking quite a while…” The Gym trainer shrugged.

“Well, I suppose there’s probably time for one race…”

“Caaan!”, “Lithe!” Both dogs barked appreciatively, and then started bounding around the room… Not that there seemed to be much of a race going on. If anything Ishimaru’s Arcanine seemed to think it was just supposed to be following the Growlithe and was politely staying just behind it the whole time, even when it started making the Arcanine move about in silly patterns across the floor, or just sit and wait while it ran circles around it, and lie down while it jumped on its back and then stand back up and slowly let itself be ridden around like a pony…

Geez, this puppy was just like a little kid. Why had Chihiro been scared of it when it first came out…?

*Trainer number {2}, you may now progress to battle room {3}!* 

“Ah! Already!?” Ishimaru cringed as the announcement played, “Sorry, Arcanine, but playtime’s over!”

“Oh… yeah!” The other trainer put away the pokédex he’d been using to record the pair of them, “Come on Ginger, you need to battle him now, so off of his back!”

“Arrrr…”, “Oowwll…” Both dogs whined but split up and rejoined their trainers anyway… but would they really be willing to fight each other after they’d been playing…?

“Alright, Ginger! Use Bite!” The Gym trainer ordered, to which its dog nodded.

“Arcanine, use Crunch!” Ishimaru retorted.

“…Arc…!? ” His dog looked around in confusion, before tilting it’s head towards the puppy at the other end of the room. “Ca nine!?”

“Err… yes, her!” Ishimaru told it, “I know she’s almost as cute as you used to be, but it would be rude to hold back just because of that! She wants battle experience just as much as you do!”

“NnnnnNN…” His dog didn’t seem to convinced, though.

“Growl! Lithe” But as if to prove Ishimaru’s point, the other started lolloping forwards with its tiny teeth bared, looping around to the side towards the Arcanine’s side, until…

“NINE!” Oh GOD it just suddenly jumped forward and broke the poor puppy’s NECK in its MOUTH and it hadn’t even given any sort of warning it had just gone straight from ‘I’m not sure
about this’ to SNAP without any sort of command from Ishimaru and it had only just been PLAYING with the poor thing a few minutes ago who was to say it wouldn’t suddenly do that to someone else’s pokémon or just to someone ELSE in general because they’d already worked out that it had attacked Ishimaru at some point so who could say it wouldn’t do it again except now it was big enough to do damage like THAT and…

“Chi… CHI!” …and someone was shaking them…

“Huh…?” Chihiro’s eyes focused in on Mondo’s face, staring in concern a short distance from their own, “Mondo?”

“Yeah, it’s me.” Mondo sighed gruffly, “What the hell happened? Did ya really get this freaked out over that tiny puppy in there…? You can take that thing easy!

What? Why was Mondo talking as if there was just the little Growlithe…?

Oh… because Ishimaru and his dog had left while they were panicking. And the trainer must have healed his pokémon up as well, because he was stood with his dog at his feet, watching them talk to Mondo… Geez, how long had Chihiro been out for…?

“Err… I mean… I’d have thought ya could! I mean, it looks way better behaved than Lycan is…” Mondo added, after Chihiro didn’t answer at first.

“Umm… no! It wasn’t that that scared me.” Chihiro admitted, “It was… Ishimaru’s Arcanine had been playing really nicely with it, but then when it came to the battle it almost b-bit it in half even though it was just a tiny little puppy and I just thought what was to stop that happening to someone ELSE in our class…”

“Hey! Calm down!” Mondo put a hand on their shoulder, Look… I get that it can freaky when pokémon who’re friends don’t mind ripping into each other, but… they don’t see organised battles like these as something that’s dangerous. I mean, they know there’s a healing machine right next door, so why not go all out!? Mondo asked. “To them it’s just a competition to show off their powers, and it’s not fun if someone doesn’t go all out in a competition, even if they are way too good to be competing against ya! So… that’s probably why his dog was alright with attacking like that. Get it…?”

…Well… they understood what Mondo was suggesting, but… that really hadn’t seemed like what had just gone on just then… his dog had been too angry to just be competing… Unless it just took competitions way too seriously… Although, given it worked until it fainted yesterday…

“Yeah… I think so…” They’d just have to make sure they never tried to get into any pokémon-based competitions with Ishimaru.

“Great! Now, you’re not gonna let this tiny puppy get in the way of you getting your first badge, are you!?” Mondo grinned at them, “You’ve worked way too hard ta let that happen, right!?”

Mondo was right… they couldn’t let one scare ruin their chances of finally getting a badge! “Right!” Chihiro nodded and Mondo gave them one last grin and a slap on the shoulder before they turned and headed into the room.

“Hey there! Are you feeling alright now?” The trainer asked, as Chihiro headed into the room, “I tried to come over and help, but your friend there told me it’d be better if I left it to him… err… that is a friend of yours, right?”

“Yes, he is! And I’m fine, thank you!” Chihiro told him, “Umm… and I’m sorry for holding
everything up, to…”

“Ah… don’t worry about!” The trainer waved his hand to the side, “We get a lot of pyrophobics who have to take a break part way through the Gym!”

…Pyrophobics? Geez, Chihiro hadn’t ever thought about how bad it would be to go to a fire-type Gym if you had a fear of the stuff… “I see… but let’s get on. I don’t want to waste any *more* of people’s time…”

“Alright!” The trainer nodded, looking at them for a moment… “…You haven’t got your pokémon out yet…”

“Oh, right! Gollet! Come out now!” Chihiro quickly threw their strongest pokémon out yet again, glancing at their battle planner to make sure that their usual rollout strategy was the best move yet again…

It *was*, although having Golett do nothing but curl up into a ball while the dog rushed forward and bit it with dark-type energy that it was *weak* to made Chihiro cringe, even if they *did* know that it meant Golett would hit twice as hard after the *second* Bite…

“Congratulations! You can head over to Quiz Station 3 now!” The trainer moved aside, “That is… if you’re sure you’re going to be alright? The, uhh… the girl in the next room uses Charmanders…”

…Which *would* have been more frightening than his dog, if Chihiro *was* scared of open fires…

“Umm… thanks for telling me… But I think I’ll be alright!”

“Alright! Just remember there’s no shame in having to come back tomorrow!” The trainer reminded them, before heading out to take his pokémon to whatever healing station they presumably had in here, ready for his fight against Mondo.

*This* time Ishimaru had already finished his *own* fight against the Charmander before Chihiro even got to the waiting room. Presumably the time spent playing had given Togami a chance to get ahead of him, and he’d probably managed to take down the Charmander with one hit…

…Whereas Chihiro ended up needing to use Rollout *twice* to knock it out. And the same was true for the Vulpix that followed it. Well, it made sense for the pokémon closer to Blaine to be more difficult to take down… and ‘Quiz Station 5’ opened a door that lead to a *hotter* waiting room, probably because it was attached to an enclosed walkway that lead to an arena that appeared to be suspended over a pit of fire…

And in the arena, facing off against Ishimaru, was a man with a giant white moustache and small black sunglasses over his eyes, who was gesturing with a large wooden walking stick and wearing an instantly recognisable white sweater with red sleeves, and matching white hat with a red stripe…

Huh. Looked like Ishimaru wasn’t quite done with Blaine after all. At least this gave Chihiro a chance to see how strong his team would likely be…

“Alright, Flareon, that was a good attempt!” Blaine shouted… Huh, a Flareon for a first badge bout? It must be a pretty *weak* Flareon to be a fair match… “You’re next, Ninetails!”

“Arh…! Another evolved pokémon!? That’s your *third* one!” What!? Had they really heard Ishimaru correctly there? *Three evolved pokémon* for a first level badge!? That was crazy! Back in Unova they’d have only had to fight a pair of low-level ones… “W-well… *regardless*, it’s nothing you can’t handle, Arcanine! You’ve still got that *berry*, remember!? So, eat that and *then* use Crunch this turn!”
Hmm… They might not be too much for Ishimaru’s pokémon, but… how was Chihiro going to beat a Flareon and a Ninetails, on top of whatever else he’d already used! They’d be lucky to beat even one of those pokémon before it knocked out Golett, or forced them to start using a ton of potions… but if they did that, then Blaine would probably do the same thing and it’d just be a huge waste of time…

“Err… Arcanine? Did you forget about the berry? It’s on your left paw! You need to eat that before using Crunch this time, alright?”

…Maybe they really weren’t good enough to get a badge yet… but everyone had kept saying they should be able to, and all the other trainers here had been easy enough to fight… so why was Blaine so ridiculously tough!? Why Kanto Gyms just really, really hard compared to Unova?

“Ah! Arcanine! Why didn’t you…? Errgg… Excuse me, but I’m going to take this turn to give my pokémon a drink! Arcanine, come here! I have some lemonade for you!… What!? Yes you do need it! Do you really think you’ll be able to take another hit like that without fainting? And it’ll probably take another two or three hits for you to knock it out, so you need to have a drink now and then you can beat it! Please…?”

That was weird… Ishimaru was having trouble getting his dog to accept a healing item? Then again, he’d been saying he wouldn’t have to use one… and he was from Kanto, so this difficulty must have been out of the ordinary! So had Blaine just decided to ramp up the difficulty because they were from Hope’s Peak… But if he was doing that, then there was no chance of Chihiro getting their badge!

“…Thank you! Good boy! Now let’s show that overly-fancy fox what you can do!”

…From the sound of it, it did only take two more hits for his dog to knock out the Ninetails, and earn him both the Volcano Badge and a TM for Fire Blast, so it wasn’t as if Ishimaru couldn’t estimate these things properly…

“Congrats, kid! But before you go… how come your dog never ate that berry you were going on about!? Blaine’s voice stopped Ishimaru just before it sounded like he was about to leave…

“I… I’m not sure! I think it might be because I told him I didn’t think he’d actually need to, and perhaps that confused him?” Ishimaru suggested hesitantly, “But, on that note, are you absolutely sure those were first badge-level pokémon…?”

“Hah! Of course they weren’t! That was my third badge team!” Blaine laughed, “I saw how well-prepared you were and figured you’d appreciate a little more of challenge!”

…Oh. He’d just upped the difficulty for Ishimaru specifically! That made sense… and meant Chihiro should have a good chance at getting their badge after all!

“Oh! Third badge, you say!? Well, thank you!” Ishimaru sounded like he was beaming with pride. “Hear that Arcanine? We’ll be able to get our next badge or two without too much trouble, either!”

“Rrrrcc…” His dog didn’t sound too convinced by that.

“Err… but it will still be more challenging than this! And we shouldn’t have to hurt anymore Growlithes!” Ishimaru’s voice faltered as he tried, and failed, to cheer his dog up. “Well… regardless! We don’t have to worry about any of that until the end of term! So why don’t we go and get a nice treat to celebrate getting our first badge!? Like some nice poffins perhaps? And then we can go swimming!”
“…Can…” His still sounded like it was tired and moping, even after the promise of treats. Was it still worn out from the competition yesterday, or was something else bothering it…?

*Trainer number [3], you may now progress to battle room [5]!*

…Not that Chihiro had time to be worrying about someone else’s pokémon, because now they were going to have to try and get their next badge… and keep it together if a Growlithe was part of that…

Well, there was no use worrying about that! They had to go in.

Blaine leant on his wooden cane and tipped his hat at them as they entered the room. “Welcome! I am Blaine, the red-hot Leader of Cinnabar Gym! My fiery Pokémon are ready to incinerate yours with intense heat, hah! So you’d better have burn heal!”

Wow… that sounded a lot less corny and a lot more threatening in person than Chihiro had thought when they’d read about Blaine online…

“Wah hah hah! You’re not getting scared of me now, are you!?” Blaine laughed again, brandashing a pokéball. “You got picked by Hope’s Peak, didn’t you!? Come on! Show me what you’re made of!?”

“R-right!” Chihiro grabbed Golett’s ball from their case, to start the battle with. “Go, Golett!”

“That’s the spirit!” Blaine grinned approvingly, “Let’s see how you face off against my Growlithe!”

“Groowwwl!” Oh GOD it was a DOG and it was looking right at Chihiro and it already had its fangs bared and it was crouched, ready to POUNCE…

“Hey! What’s the matter, kid!? We haven’t even started fighting yet!”

…That was true… it wasn’t moving… because its trainer hadn’t given it a command yet… and it was under control…

“…Oowl…?” “…Ahh… really though, kid… you gonna be okay for this fight?”

…And if it was under control then it wasn’t dangerous… Chihiro just had to give orders to Golett to fight it…

“Uhh… yeah. I should be…” They answered, in a voice that didn’t quite feel like their own… But, they should be able to do this, right? They’d just been using the same move to win every fight, after all… “Golett, use Rollout.”

Just like all the other times, Golett rolled into a ball and started moving itself forward, towards the dog which was running towards Golett with its mouth open and…

*Urg… they probably shouldn’t look at that, or they’d completely lose it! But from the sound of it, Golett got bit just before bashing into the dog, so… “Golett! Use Rollout again!”*

“Gooooo!LET!” Golett sounded like it had been bit again, but soon Chihiro could hear the sound of him rolling across the floor speed up as he started to accelerate… “Let… leeet… GOL! Golgolgo…!” *crash!*

Uh oh… That didn’t sound so good…

“Wah ha ha! Bad luck, kid!” Blaine was laughing jovially at them. “What’re you gonna try now!?”
Hmm... They could have Golett use Shadow Punch to guarantee a hit, but even the first stage of Rollout should be stronger against a Fire-type, right? And if Golett to avoid missing then it might get to the point where it could knock Blaine’s next Pokémon out in one hit! “Golett! Start using Rollout again!”

“Keep doing what you’re doing, Growlithe!” Blaine replied, moments before Chihiro heard muffled growls as it gnawed somewhere on Golett’s body.

“Let!” It sounded like Golett managed to shake it off, then began slowly spinning around the room before dashing towards the dog, forcing a whimper of pain out from it.

“You’re almost done, buddy!” Blaine encouraged his Pokémon… but was that true? Chihiro was too afraid to check… “Just get it one more time!”

Please don’t let that be true! “Golett! Use Rollout again!”

“GrrrowwwLITHE!”, “Go-Goooooolllllll….” Chihiro couldn’t avoid wincing as they heard the dog bark triumphantly, and their own Pokémon letting out a long drawn-out groan as it shut down and returned to its Pokéball…

Golett had lost, it’d managed to beat all the other trainers in here with no problems, but it hadn’t even managed to beat one of Blaine’s Pokémon. Was this fight just hopeless? Alright, they’d been unlucky with Rollout missing, but it still felt like they should have done better than that…

“Looks like my fiery fighter got the best of your little mountain man!” Blaine laughed, “So now… What have you got next!?”

Urg… What they had was a Charjabug… in a Fire-Type Gym. There was no way they’d be able to win this now… They’d be lucky if they even managed to beat the Growlithe!

But… they could hardly go back to Mondo and tell him that, after all their hard work together, they’d ended up giving up! “Charjabug! Go!”

“Hah! Now that’s bad luck!” Blaine guffawed, “Growlithe! Switch to your fire attack!”

Darnit… there hadn’t actually checked their strategy for using Charjabug against a fire type… they’d just have to use her strongest attack and hope for the best… “Charjabug! Use Spark!”

“GrowwwOWowOWowOWowOWWL!” Chihiro caught a brief whiff of smoke in the air, before the dog let out an erratic high-pitched whine as Charjabug managed to shock it, and then there was a soft thud of something hitting the floor. “…Gr…owwwll…”

“Hah… That’s enough, Growlithe! You did well!” Blaine announced, “Charmander! You’re next!”

A Charmander? Great! Now they wouldn’t have to worry about opening their eyes to see what was going on…

“Char!” Wow… That was a pretty big Charmander! It was probably close to evolving… and Charjabug was already slightly singed, although not too badly… They’d have to see how their next attack went to have an idea of whether they could still win this or not…

“Charjabug! Use Spark again!” Chihiro ordered, once they’d checked their strategy app to make sure that was the most sensible move in this situation.

“Hah! Charmander, burn that thing to a crisp!” Blaine laughed, surprisingly enthusiastic about what
was probably such a pathetic fight, in comparison to what he was really capable of doing…

“Char!” The Charmander was quicker off the mark, wildly swinging its tails and sending a trail of hot sparks onto Charjabug’s carapace, making her wince and singeing it far more than the dog had managed to…

But she still managed to worm her way forward and jab her metal spikes into its leg while it was jumping around celebrating the hit…

“Char, char… MAmAManander…!” The reptile’s body convulsed for a moment, but it was still standing and managed to jump away from Charjabug once she’d finished her attack and started charging for a second…

But was it even going to be worth charging… They weren’t even sure she’d be able to take another hit like that… but if she hadn’t given up yet… “Charjabug! Use Spark again!”

“Come on, Charmander! You can hit harder than that!” Blaine yelled back, “Show that thing that Fire beats Electricity any day!”

“Char…”! The Charmander agreed, its tail flame growing slightly larger in excitement as it prepared to swing at Charjabug again… “MANDER!”

This time an even bigger wave of spark crashed down over Charjabug’s body, and it started trembling in pain as it curled up and fell sideways…

“Good try, Charjabug…” Chihiro sighed, as they called it back to its pokéball… “…It’s not your fault I’ve not trained enough to get my badge, yet…”

“Hah! Come on, kid! You’re not gonna give up, just ‘cause you got burned once, are you!” Blaine snorted, “From what I saw today, your pokémon have the power to win this. You just need to do a better job stoking the fire in them!”

So, it had been Chihiro’s fault… But what had they done wrong? “Do you mean… am I not doing a good enough job encouraging my pokémon?”

“Hmm… Well, a little more oofm wouldn’t have hurt…” Blaine shrugged, “But what I mean is, sometimes you need to spend time building up to an attack before you use it! You know what I’m talking about?”

“Umm… yes?” Why was he telling them this? After all they’d just used Defence Curl to make Rollout do more damage, hadn’t they?

...Hadn’t they…!? 

...They hadn’t, had they…?

“Aaahh! I’m so stupid!” Chihiro groaned, “I’ve been using Defence Curl first in every battle in this Gym, why did I forget it now!”

“Wah ha ha! So you did know about that!” Blaine laughed, which just made them want to curl up into a ball and sink into the ground even more… “Ahh… but don’t beat yourself up over it! Lots of people melt under the heat of their first Gym battle! That’s why we let you come back tomorrow!”

That was true… they had until the end of the week to beat this Gym…
“...Thanks. So… I’ll see you tomorrow then…?”

“It’s up to you if you come back here tomorrow, kid, not me!” Blaine smirked, taking off his glasses for a moment and looking Chihiro in the eyes, “So, here’s one more quiz for you… Am I going to see you tomorrow…?”

Well… they’d managed to get through today, even after Ishimaru’s pokémon scared them and they hadn’t known what was coming in advance… and they weren’t going to do something as stupid as today ever again, so…

“...YES!”

“Hah! Good answer, kid!” Blaine nodded approvingly and put his glasses back on, “Something tells me you’re on your way to blazing a trail through the pokémon world… Then again, I guess that’s the point of you Hope’s Peak kids! Wah ha ha!”

“...Umm… I guess?” Chihiro agreed with him, even if it seemed like he was getting a bit ahead of himself. Chihiro hadn’t even got their first badge yet…

But they were going to get it tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
A short trip pt 1 (Togami POV)

Chapter Notes

Whoops! I forgot to post this last night! Sorry for the delay!
I’m retconning a couple of things. The first is that I’ve decided I’m going to increase the
kids ages to sixteen, so they’re more in line with their canon ages in DR. (I’d originally
been thinking they were around 13 as a lot of pokemon protags are around 10/11, but
someone has pointed out to me that they’ve been getting older in some of the more
recent games and I’ve been feeling like I write them as being too mature to be 13). So
I’m going to go back and increase references to their ages by about 3 years at some
point (If I haven’t already when this gets uploaded).
The other thing was a minor mistake in Togami’s conversation with Aloysius in Chapter
22. In that conversation I said the field trip was going to be to Cianwood City Gym, not
Cinnabar Gym. So I’ve gone back and changed that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Togami walked through the various small groups of his classmates, as they ate the cheap buffet
breakfasts that he was now glad he’d chosen to forego in favour of having something that was at
least reasonable delivered to his room. Most of the conversation appeared to be based around
yesterday’s Gym challenges, in some form or another.

The majority were of the mutual congratulatory sort: A large number of the class were having a
discussion about the various different types of cases that were available for badges to be kept in,
probably initiated by the fact that Ishimaru had pinned his to a band around his left arm, as if barely
having a single badge at the age of sixteen was something to show off constantly! This despite of
him being sat next to Oogami, who was humbly showing the excited Asahina the set of five badges
she’d earned in Kalos before even attending the Hope’s Peak…

However, there were, to his utter amazement, a few that revolved around the failure of some of his
classmates to beat the incredibly predictable Fire-type Gym! The group consisting of Fujisaki,
Kuwata and Oowada were discussing strategies for their second trips there, Hagakure and
Ludenburg were apparently betting on whether Yamada would succeed or not, and Enoshima was
convincing her sister that it probably wasn’t worth her even trying again, because apparently she’d
not even beaten the first trainer in the Gym!

Honestly! This was supposed to be an elite class, and they still had three people had had yet to get
their first badge! All the more reason for Togami to avoid this sorry lot altogether... which he’d have
been perfectly content to do, had he not been forced to speak to Kizakura one last time before he set
off on the journey he’d organised to his half-sister’s estate…

“Morning, Togami. Nice of you to join the rest of the class!” He started off the conversation as
sarcastically as usual…

“I’m here to explain to you that I won’t be attending morning registration for the next few days, as
previously discussed and authorised by the headmaster…” Togami ignored his attitude and got to the
point.

“Pretty sure Jin said that authorisation’s based on you getting your Volcano Badge yesterday…”
“You’re implying I haven’t!” As if he wouldn’t have been capable of getting his Fifth badge!

“No… I’m just saying you’ve got to show it to me for bureaucratic reasons…” Kizakura had the nerve to roll his eyes, “Then you can head off on your little solo adventure.”

“Well, I suppose if it’s for formality’s sake…” Togami sighed and pulled out the brushed platinum, velvet-lined case he kept his badges in. “Here.”

“Pfft… And Jin thinks my case is obnoxious…” He muttered quietly before ticking a box on a sheet in front of him, “Alright, have fun on your trip, Togami!”

Togami’s face stiffened as Kizakura loudly announced his plan to the entire class, and they all predictably fell quiet and stared at him.

“…You’re going somewhere by yourself, Togami?” Naegi was the first to speak.

“Not that it’s any concern to you, but yes.” He answered, “I’ll be back on the island before the end of the week.”

“S-so what? This island isn’t good enough for you?” Fukawa looked up from whatever tripe she’d been furiously scribbling, “S-so you’re paying to go off somewhere else with better pokemon to train against!”

That sort of jealous assumption had been exactly why he hadn’t wanted this lot to know about his plans. And why’d he thought of an innocuous-sounding lie to stop their whining. “Actually, I’m just taking a trip to the Safari Zone.”

“Ahh… you mean, there are boats to Fuschia city from here!?” Ishimaru asked, “I thought there were too many rocks for any of them to pass through…but if you’re able to get there, you could also go for the Soul Badge en route…”

“Except I’m going to Johto’s safari zone, not Kanto’s.” Togami corrected him, “And while I will be travelling through a city with a Gym in it, it’s one I’ve already beaten, so I won’t be claiming another badge on this trip.”

“Wait… you’re going to a whole other region!?” Asahina asked, “…Why not just go to Fuschia city and see Kanto’s Safari Zone, like Ishimaru suggested? It’s just as good as Johto’s!”

Well, that was because his sister had set up her estate near the natural territory for Growlithe’s in Johto, but as he didn’t want to get into that…

“Despite the distance, it’s a more convenient trip to Johto… As Ishimaru said, the route to Kanto’s shoreline is too rocky for a large vessel to pass, which is why I’ve arranged a boat to Cianwood City, which is just a short trip from the Johto Safari Zone… A climb up the Cliff Edge Gate, through to Route 47 and Cliffside Cave, followed by a simple walk up Route 48 to the Safari Zone.”

…And from there it was about an hour’s walk east to the outer entrance of Hinoko’s estate, not that he’d mention that step to this lot!

“A Cliffside cave…?” Fukawa was, of course, now behaving as if she intended to copy his every move in her deluded quest to overtake his battle progress. “Th-there’s no other way to get there…”

“Not unless you’re good enough at climbing to traverse the outside of route 47.”

“Uhh… what do you mean?” Naegi asked, “Don’t you normally have to travel outside on routes?”
“Route 47 is a series of pathways cut out of the outside of a mountain.” Kirigiri explained, “You have to enter the mountain through Cliffside Cave in order to climb a ladder up to paths on the higher or lower parts of the mountain, depending on where you’re going…”

“Uhh… gonna be honest, that sounds kinda dangerous…” Naegi was balking just at the thought of that? Honestly, if he couldn’t even manage a little jaunt across the side of a mountain, why was he even bothering to attempt to collect Gym badges at all!?

“Nah… it ain’t… unless you’re an idiot about it.” Oowada shrugged, “Specially now they put in the rule saying ya have ta cross it tied up in pairs…”

“…What!? You have to cross it in pairs!?” No one had informed him about that!

“Yes… it’s been that way ever since Groudon and Kyogre’s fight damaged a lot of the paths.” Kirigiri replied smugly, as if it would be of common knowledge to anyone who didn’t come from Johto! “I guess that means you’ve not organised someone to travel with?”

“No…” …As galling as it was to admit it, she was exactly right… and if he wasn’t able to make the trip, it would mean he’d end up forfeiting the challenge he’d made! “Well… no matter. I suppose this means I’m now offering a free trip to Johto’s Safari Zone! Any takers…”

“Goodness, no!” “Uhh… I’m not so good with boats…”, “Wish I could, dude! But I had a prediction I’m going to be stuck here training all day!”, “The lifeguarding staff here are really short staffed, so…”, “Nah… sounds lame, and Mukuro agrees, right Sis?”, “I’m needed as an eye-witness regarding the Team Rocket sighting.”, “Umm… I still need to get my badge…”, “Urg, yeah, me to!”, “I am also using a Continue today!”, “Leon and I are trai… wait… what do you mean you still need to get your badge!?” “I’ve already been, and I ain’t wasting my time with that shit again… buncha crap pokeballs…”, “My apologies, but… I… rarely get an opportunity see ocean-based pokemon in their natural habitat, so I will be declining your offer.”

This was ridiculous! Almost everyone had some sort of excuse not to come with him! At this rate he’d be reduced to requesting help from… “…Fukawa? How about you?”

“I… I… got lost in a cave once…” Of course… she’d said something about not liking them at the beginning of term, hadn’t she…

“It’s only a short cave!” Togami tried to convince her. “It’s barely big enough for the ladder!”

“M-maybe, but… No one else is helping you… so if I say no, you won’t be able to run off and do whatever fancy high-level training you had planned!” Fukawa smirked, “S-so I’ll be able to keep up with you without going through the cave!”

Damnable woman! What kind of infuriating logic was that!? But she was right, wasn’t she? There wasn’t any else out of this whole class of supposedly elite young trainers who hadn’t already said no, was there…?

Wait… Ishimaru hadn’t said anything yet. He was just glaring at his hands in the same way he always stared at his work during maths…

“…Ishimaru! Did you hear my offer?”

“Ahh… I did… but I’m afraid I’ll have to say no, as well…” Curses! Now what was he supposed to do!? Go to Cianwood and hope someone there would make the trip with him!? Perhaps he’d be able to bribe someone… “I’m fifty pokedollars short of the entrance fee…”
“Wait… “That’s your only reason? If that’s the case, then I’ll pay it for you!”

“You mean you’ll loan me the money? I can’t guarantee I’ll be able to pay you back anytime soon…” Ishimaru started worrying ridiculously.

“No, I mean I’ll just give you the money!” Togami explained, “It’s not like it’s something expensive!”

“It’s five hundred pokedollars!” …Was he being serious!? Alright, Togami could see how a TM might be considered a luxury item, but a measly half-grand for the Safari Zone!? “…But… I suppose if you’re offering it as a gift then… thank you! I’ll be happy to come along with you!”

“Wait… well… if you’re going anyway…!” Fukawa started changing her mind.

“Sorry. First come, first serve!” Togami cut her off, before turning to Ishimaru. “We’ve got twenty minutes until the boat needs to leave port, I’d suggest you pack up anything you need overnight now.”

“Right! Understood!” Ishimaru quickly stood up, checking his watch as he went, “I’ll meet you at the dock in fifteen!”

Hmph… Well, if he had to deal with someone following him halfway to Hinoko’s estate, there were certainly worse options in his class than Ishimaru. And it would only be a short trip…

The trip to Cianwood City proceeded with no more complications. Ishimaru had been true to his word and arrived at the pier within the fifteen minutes, despite being loaded down with multiple small satchels. And the boat trip itself had been surprisingly quiet. Ishimaru wasn’t one for conversation, and his ridiculous dog was thankfully far calmer than it had been on the boat trip to Cinnabar, which allowed Togami to get some reading down in peace and quiet… despite Ishimaru’s bizarre insistence on attempting to encourage it to play when it clearly wasn’t in the mood and content to lie down on the floor next to him.

…Although he did have to agree with Ishimaru that it was walking aggravatingly slowly as they travelled through Cianwood City…

“Can’t you just put it in its pokeball!?!” Togami asked, the third time Ishimaru needed to stop and wait for it to catch up with him.

“Well… I suppose I could ask if that’s what he wants…” Ishimaru muttered, unhooking it from his belt and waving it at the dog. “Arcanine! Are you tired? Do you want to take a rest in your ball for a while, instead of walking?”

“Nnnnn!” The dog whined and scampered forwards to Ishimaru’s side, and actually kept pace with them this time…

“Hrrmm…” …Although now it was Ishimaru was threatening to lag, as he watched his dog as if it’s newfound speed was a cause for concern...

But he soon sped up again once Togami reminded him that the journey was going to be long enough without him slowing them down. And it wasn’t too long before they were given a pair of safety harnesses attached to each other with a rope, forced to endure a painfully condescending demonstration on how to hook themselves to the runners at the side of the mountain and an equally obvious explanation that they had to have at least one person hooked to the wall at all times if they
were out on the narrow paths, before they were finally allowed to climb the stairs inside the Cliff Gate and up to Route 47…

“ Honestly, I have two* pokemon capable of flying!” Togami sighed, as headed out towards the first point where he was supposed to hook himself to the wall. “You’d think they’d have some allowance for that! Especially when Drampa is long enough to cover the entire side of the platform!”

“ Well, they can’t be careful!” Ishimaru gave a banal reply, then turned his attention to to his dog, which he hadn’t had the sense to put in its pokeball yet! “Now, see Arcanine, this route is very high up and has thin walkways, so it’d be dangerous for you to walk around up here! So please stay in your pokeball until I let you out.”

“ Arc!? ” Togami briefly saw it stick its head out of the hole, just long enough to take a look at the sea crashing against the rocks far below them, then it quickly backed up into the Cliff Gate again…

“ Arc… Can nine? ”

“ Well, yes, I’m going out there!” Ishimaru answered it, “But I’m wearing safety harnesses, and I’m tied to Togami in case something happens and one of us falls! So we’ll be perfectly safe, but as they don’t make harnesses for pokemon, you have to stay in your ball until I say it’s safe again? Alright?”

“ Nnnnn…Nine! ” It growled, and suddenly the rope tying Togami and Ishimaru together pulled tight, forcing Togami to stumble back towards the cave entrance to avoid being knocked over completely…

“ Ahh… Arcanine! What are you doing!? ” Ishimaru yelled, just as Togami headed back into the cave to see that it had apparently decided to knock its trainer over and pin his legs to the ground. “Let me up!”

“ Nine. ” It yapped stubbornly at him, lying its head down on his chest. It looked like, as long as it was awake, Ishimaru wouldn’t be going anywhere…

“ Honestly… Hold still and I’ll have Drampa knock it out for you…” Togami sighed.

“ What!? NO! Don’t do that!” Ishimaru snapped, clutching the back of his dog protectively. “I just need to convince him not to worry about me falling, that’s all!”

Oh, for pity’s sake… he couldn’t risk trying to hit the dog with Ishimaru’s arms right in front of it! It seemed like he’d have to let Ishimaru do this his way, regardless of what a waste of time it was…

“ Fine… I’ll give you five minutes… ”

“ Alright… Arcanine, are you worried about me falling if I go out there? ”

“ …Arc. ”

“ I thought so… And I know it looks scary out there, but I promise you, with all the safety equipment we have, I’ll be perfectly safe out there!” Ishimaru tried to reason with it, but it still didn’t budge. “… Don’t you trust me…? ”

“ …Nine…? ”

“ …You don’t trust me!? ” Ishimaru exclaimed, stupidly, “ W-why not!? ”

“ Nnnnnn… ” All his dog could do was harrumph in the face of a complex question like that. Not that the answer wasn’t obvious…
“Well… your judgement hasn’t exactly been \textit{sound} the last few days…” Togami pointed out.

“Wha…? What do you \textit{mean}!”?

“Well, for \textit{starters}, you were \textit{insistent} that your dog could beat Oowada’s in that ridiculous competition you had…” Togami started, “Then there was your claim that your and Oowada were \textit{rivals}, which he instantly debunked!”

“H…how did you know about that!”?

“I could hear the pair of you shouting at each other through the door in the middle of my first Gym battle…” Togami explained, “I also heard you claiming that you’d not need any of your cheap potion substitutes, but seeing as Fukawa was gloating that Blaine treated her as if she was Third-badge trainer, I’m guessing \textit{that} didn’t go the way you expected either!”

“N-no… I ended up having to make Arcanine drink some lemonade…” Ishimaru admitted, realisation finally dawning on him.

“Exactly! So, seeing as you’ve now messed up the only thing that made your pokemon respect you in the first place, move your arms so I can knock it out and stop this waste of time!”

“I SAID NO!” If anything, Ishimaru stubbornly gripped even harder as he glared at Togami for a moment, before turning back to the dog with a sigh. “Arcanine… I’ll admit I’m not \textit{always} right… I misjudged Oowada… and I didn’t expect that man with the hat and glasses to break the rules and give us a harder challenge than we were supposed to get… and you’re such a good digger that I couldn’t believe there’d be any dog \textit{better} at it than you!”

“Arrr…” This wasn’t helping! If anything it was making his dog \textit{less} likely to get off of him!

“But… Those things weren’t really \textit{important}! If they \textit{had} been, I’d have spent more time thinking about them, and all the different possibilities regarding them, before making a statement that could turn out to be false!” Ishimaru claimed, “But, it doesn’t matter if Oowada thinks I’m annoying, because there’s other people in my class who \textit{do} respect me, now! It didn’t matter that we had to use a healing item to get our first badge, because we still got it relatively easily! And it \textit{definitely} doesn’t matter if you’re not the best dog at digging, because you’re \textit{still} the most wonderful, clever, handsomest, well-behaved dog in the \textit{whole world}…! To me, at least!”

\textit{Hah!} It was almost a shame that Togami was planning to ‘lose’ Ishimaru in the Safari Zone before heading to his half-sister’s estate! It would have been quite interesting to see his reaction to Arcanines that had actually been bred with some semblance of care, if he thought \textit{that} much of his \textit{mongrel}!

“Arc!? Can nine?” His dog appeared to be lapping up the undue praise completely, though.

“Yes! I’m sure! You’re a good boy… and the best dog I could have hoped to get!” Ishimaru laughed and continued laughing even when his dog proceeded to slobber all over his face! “\textit{Ahahahaha}! That’s enough! We can play later! For now, I need to go out \textit{there}… But this time, I know this is something \textit{important} and I’ve made \textit{absolutely} sure that I’ll be safe out there! Just so long as you trust me and stay in your pokeball until I let you out… alright?”

“…Arc!” His dog nodded, and then \textit{finally} headed into its pokeball…

“About time!” Togami exclaimed, as the tension in the rope decreased as Ishimaru stood up, “It would have been quicker if you’d just let me knock it out…”

“My apologies for the delay, but dismissing Arcanine’s feelings like that would have just caused
“further problems for me down the line!” Ishimaru snapped, “And besides, why are you in such a rush anyway!? Is’t the Safari Zone open at all hours!? I hardly think a five-minute delay is going to prevent you from seeing the entire place!”

…Tch! Of course, Ishimaru didn’t know that he’d organised a challenge and had told his half-sister to expect him at a certain time! And even if the fight itself wasn’t taking place until tomorrow, arriving late in the first instance would make him look incompetent…

“Regardless, I have better things to do than stand around watching you have a heart-to-heart with your pokeomon!” He pointed out, instead. “Now do you want to see the Safari Zone, or are you just going to stand around all day!?”

“Very well… The sooner we get going, the sooner I can let Arcanine back out…” Ishimaru decided, heading out towards the entrance and waiting until Togami was safely clipped to the mountainside before heading out himself and clipping himself in as well. Then he waited for Togami to head across the first narrow path and hook into the next safe spot before following, as they’d been instructed to, until the pair of them reached Cliffside Cave and Togami started to catch his breath. The wind outside had been fiercer than he’d expected, and he’d had to hold onto the wall quite tightly to keep his balance...

“Ah… so, this is how we go up to Route 48?” Ishimaru asked as he entered the small cave, looking at the single ladder that ran from below the floor up into the top of the ceiling above them.

“Obviously!” Togami sighed. How could someone so slow to realise everything be doing as well as Togami in their classes…?

“…Young Master Byakuya…!? Togami’s head snapped upwards as the familiar voice of his butler came down from the ceiling, “Is that you?”

“Pennyworth! What are you doing here?” Togami asked, “I don’t recall giving you orders to accompany me.”

“My apologies, Young Master, but I have only just found out that trainers are now required to cross this route in pairs, and was concerned that you may find yourself stuck at the Cliff Gate if there was no one to accompany you.” Aloysius admitted, “I should have realised, however, that you would have checked such regulations thoroughly before challenging Miss Hinoko.”

“Wait… challenge!?” Togami cursed internally as Ishimaru caught on to what Pennyworth had just let loose, “You said we were going to the Safari Zone!”

Then again, this was Ishimaru… He probably only had one concern… “Don’t worry… I told the school my true intentions. I just don’t feel the need to explain my personal business to all of you.” Ishimaru’s scowl lessened, but didn’t leave his face completely. “But don’t worry… the Safari Zone is on the way. I’ll pay for your time there as agreed.”

“Well… if the school’s agreed to your trip, then I won’t stop you from going.” Ishimaru agreed, “But what’s so good about this trainer that you would be willing to travel to her?”

“That’s none of your concern.” Togami told him, heading towards the ladder.

“Hmm… A trainer named Hinoko…? In Johto…!? Ishimaru ignored him and carried on trying to work it out. Not that he’d ever manage it! Even within her own field, Hinoko was barely recognised as being… “Hinoko Togami!? The Arcanine breeder!? That’s who you’re going to see! You’re skipping the field trip so you can visit your family!”
“I’m not ‘visiting family’! I’m challenging her to a battle to see who’s worthy of heading up the Togami corporation!” Togami explained, seeing as the Glameow was well and truly out of the bag now. “It’s an important part of my responsibilities to my business!”

“Ah… I understand… Although I doubt many of our class would see it that way…”

“Which was why I said I was going to the Safari Zone instead!” Togami pointed out, as he started to climb up to Aloysius, “And why I’ll be willing to compensate you for your silence!”

“I don’t need bribing to prevent me from discussing your personal life without your consent!” Ishimaru insisted, “However… if you are willing to do me a favour…?”

“What is it…?”

“I’d like to accompany you!”

What? Why would Ishimaru want to see his half-sister’s breeding facility… Oh. Of course! “If this is because you think you’ll find some evidence of mistreatment, then you’re wasting your time! Hinoko’s breeding facilities, like all Togami breeding facilities, are all up to code, and all her pokemon are treated perfectly well!”

“Well, that’s something I can see for myself while I’m there!” Ishimaru insisted, “But… It was actually just for my Arcanine! He doesn’t get many chances to socialise with other pokemon of his kind…”

And if it was for the sake of that stupid dog, he wasn’t likely to change his mind, was he?

“Well… I can’t guarantee my sister will let you in… But as you’ll probably insist on it regardless, feel free to come along and see what happens…”

“Understood!” Ishimaru nodded firmly.

Hah! If he actually understood what Togami had meant, he would have saved his time and gone straight to the Safari Zone! After all, no member of his family worth the name was going to want some random nobody coming in and inspecting all their work…!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next time we’ll see what going on back at Cinaabar island!
“…What do you mean you still need to get your badge!?” Sayaka snapped, once Leon’s words had caught up with her. They were supposed to be spending this trip focusing on training their pokémon, seeing as there wasn’t any decent internet signal to help her work on other things!

“Ehh… It’s my third badge! It’s hard, y’know!” Leon shrugged.

“So why didn’t you get a note from Blaine saying you’re probably not ready for it yet!?” That was what Ikusaba had done, wasn’t it?

“Well… he said he reckoned I could do it… if… y’know… I… strategized differently.” Leon answered, obviously hiding something…

“Really!? ‘Cause I thought I heard him tell you to actually take some potions or burn heals into the Gym, next time!”

“What? Was Enoshima serious, or was she just causing trouble…?

“Well… yeah that is what he said…” Urghh! She was being serious! Leon had just confirmed it!

“Are you kidding me, Leon!?” Sayaka snapped, “What made you think you wouldn’t need burn heals against the guy whose catchphrase is ‘you better have burn heal’!?”

“I figured Lux’d be fast enough to sweep the whole place!” Leon exclaimed, “That’s what happened on my second badge!”

“You mean when you took an Electric type into a Water type Gym!?” Sayaka yelled, way more than was good for her image.

“Ehrgh… Alright, I admit, I messed up!” Leon put his hands up, “Just… wait a couple of hours for me to get the badge, then we’ll go training! I’ll even…”

“I don’t have time to wait!” She’d not packed anything other than battle supplies! And even with a type advantage, her pokémon wouldn’t deal with the pokémon in the caves easily enough for her to train effectively by herself! She didn’t have time to wait around for Leon! “If you’re not ready to go training, I’ll go with someone else!”

“Ahh… come on! It probably won’t even be two hours! You can afford to take a break a less than two hours, riiriiight!?”

Leon was trying to get her to change her mind, but she wasn’t listening… She needed to work out who to go training with! Makoto was always an option, he was pretty serious about training this...
week as well, but she’d be better off with someone closer to her own level, with different pokémon types to her…

“Hagakure.” He had a grass type. That would let them go train out by the ocean! “You got your badge yesterday, didn’t you!!?”

“Uhh… yeeaaah…?”

“Great!” That settled it then! “Let’s get going!”

“B-but…! I’m still eating breakfast…!” Hagakure pointed out. Right, she’d forgot how late up he usually was… but she could always go and train a little further away from the water, where the weaker pokémon were, until he was ready…

“Alright… Get ready and then meet me at the east beach!” Sayaka told him, heading out of the eastern-most herself…

“Oh, Maaaaaa… I’d been hoping that prediction was wrong… I wanted to spend today chilling at the beach!” Even if it wasn’t as nice as the beaches back home, it was still a nice chance for Hattie and Exeggutor to soak up the sand and sun.

“Then why the hell didn’t you tell her that?!” Kuwata cried at him. “You didn’t have to jump straight into my place the second she dropped me!”

“Are you kidding!? Did you see the look on her face!?” That chick was scary! “I’m not saying no to that!”

“What? Come on, man! She ain’t that scary!” Kuwata lied, “You could have easily said no to her, right, guys!?”

“With her in that mood!? Heck no!” Enoshima laughed, “I’m surprised she didn’t throw the table over, like that time in Rustboro!”

Wait… she threw a table over!? No way was Yasuhiro going to say no to her, in that case! Heck, he’d probably wasted enough time arguing with Kuwata instead of eating his breakfast like she’d told him to…!

“I’m… pretty sure that was just gossip…” Naegi might be right, but that wasn’t a chance Yasuhiro was going to take! “Although she is pretty mad at you…”

“Indeed… I’d be furious if a training partner wasted my time due to such poor judgement…” Ludenberg agreed.

“Oh, come on! YOU were the one who bet me that I couldn’t do it!”

“Exactly.” Ludenberg smirked, as she sipped her tea, “You should know by now that I don’t lose bets.”

“Urgghhh…!” Kuwata just groaned at that one, which didn’t exactly bode well for his bet against her...

“Umm… well, just because she’s mad at you now, doesn’t mean she won’t forgive you later…” Fujisaki told him, “If you get your badge, you can still train for the rest of the week…”

“I guess… assuming she hasn’t replaced me with Hagakure permanently…”
Huuuh!? “Wait… you think she might make me do this, every day!?” He’d seen her dragging Kuwata around the school! That’d suck, man!

“Ehh… That’s assuming Hagakure’s actually a decent training partner…” Oowada pointed out, “If you’re that bothered about it, ya could just keep ‘accidentally’ messing up…”

He could!? “Heh… yeah! That’ll work!” He could use his predictions to work out all the best choices to make, then do the exact opposite! “Thanks, man!”

This was gonna be perfect! Now he’d only have to spend one day getting dragged around, then it’d be Kuwata’s turn again! This couldn’t possibly go wrong!

…Haaahh… How much longer was Hagakure going take!? She’d already had to take her pokémon back to the centre once already, and Brionne was getting worn out again… Was he even actually going to show up…? She’d been in such a mood with Leon, she hadn’t actually paid attention to whether or not he’d agreed to come train with her…

…He probably hadn’t, had he? He’d probably intended to spend this whole field trip lazing around on the beach! Maybe she shouldn’t have been quite so hasty with Leon after all…

“How much longer was Hagakure going take!? She’d already had to take her pokémon back to the centre once already, and Brionne was getting worn out again… Was he even actually going to show up…? She’d been in such a mood with Leon, she hadn’t actually paid attention to whether or not he’d agreed to come train with her…”

“Uhh… Hey! Maizono!” Hmm? Oh! Hagakure had actually shown up! Maybe she should have given him more credit…

“Hi, Hagakure! Ready to train? There’s a lot of water types around here, so your Exeggeutor will be a lot of help!”

“Well… that was better than what she’d expected him to come out with, but… “The… mansion? Wasn’t that mostly burnt down even before the volcano erupted!??”

“Uhh… maybe? History’s not my strong point…” Hagakure scratched his head as he tried to remember, “But, that doesn’t mean we won’t find anything there! Come on, I’ll show you!”

…Arrgghh… Sayaka had to fight the urge to yell for her security as he put his hand around her shoulders, like he was one of her band, and started pushing her back up the beach. Well, at least this way she could heal up Brionne before they started training properly… assuming they actually found anything at this mansion… and that there was even a mansion left to find…

An hour later, Sayaka was coming to realise that this had been a stupid idea. By the time they got to the ‘mansion’, and worked out that, yes, the barren, charred expanse of flat earth was actually where the mansion once stood, Leon was probably finished getting his badge, and they could have trained together anyway!

“Well… looks like that prediction was wrong!” Sayaka pointed out, trying not to sound as irritated as she felt, “Let’s go back to the beach…”

“Uhh… hang on! The prediction said it’d be near the mansion, not on it!” Hagakure insisted, “We should look around some more!”

“But… even if we find something, we’re nowhere near the pokémon centre!” Sayaka pointed out, “We’d hardly be able to train at all before we need to take our pokémon back! We’ll save a lot more time if we just train by the beach…”
"Ahh… don’t worry about it!" Hagakure insisted, which just made Sayaka worry about it even more, "I told you, my predictions are always right… thirty percent of the time!"

"Th-thirty percent!?!" Was he kidding her!? "You means you know there’s a one in three chance this was all just a waste of time!?"

"Geez… when you put it like that, you make me sound like an idiot, or something…” Because he WAS…!

"Ahh… Excuse me!?" A sudden, young woman’s, voice from their side stopped Sayaka from yelling that out loud, “Are you guys trainers?”

"Umm… yes!” Sayaka answered, after a moment’s surprise that anyone would be out here, let alone a young woman in a doctor’s outfit… “Do you need help?”

“Yes, actually! You see, I want to investigate the old mansion basement… it was saved from the volcano because its underground! You just need to head through some of the underground caves to reach it! But… it’s teeming with Fire and Poison types, as well as a bunch of Rattata, and I’ve only got a Tangrowth with me…” She explained, cringing. “But, I’m a doctor, so I can keep healing your pokémon up for you, if you’re willing to keep me safe while I look around!?”

So… Pokémon for both Brionne and Espurr to train again, plus something Hagakure’s Ghost would be good against? And not having to keep walking back and forth to a pokémon centre, because they’d have a doctor right next to them the whole time!?

“That’s perfect for us! We came out here looking for somewhere to train our pokémon, so we’ll be happy to help!” Sayaka told her.

“You… came here to train?” She tilted her head quizzically at them, “How did you know there were even pokémon here, let alone me…?”

“Hagakure here has predictions!” Sayaka explained, pulling the actual psychic around by his arm, “I mean, I was a little sceptical, but this has just proved I should have had more faith in him being right! So… umm… sorry about that, Hagakure…”

“Uuhh… yeah… that… that’s fine!” Hagakure replied, a little embarrassed, “I mean… can’t blame you for thinking I’d be wrong, given I… uuhhhhh…”

“…Given what?” Sayaka asked, as Hagakure stopped finishing his sentence.

“Uuuhhh… It doesn’t matter! Let’s just go… spend the whole day… training…”

“Yes!” He was right, this was a great chance for her, and she wasn’t going to waste it standing around talking!

Oh maaaan… What a day! By the time those two chicks were done with him, it was almost nightfall… heck, they’d even missed the start of dinner! No sunlight left for Exeggutor to soak up… and Hattie didn’t seem keen on him going out near the water at night time, so she probably wouldn’t even enjoy playing in the sand now…

He really hoped that Kuwata actually got his badge this time! He couldn’t stand another day of training that hard! He barely managed to stumble into the cafeteria after Maizono…

“There you two are!” Even Kizakura looked kinda miffed with how late they were, “I was about to
“Start organising a search party!”

“Yeah!” *Hooo* boy… Kuwata looked even *more* pissed off with them! “What the hell happened to training on the east beach!?"

“Hagakure had a prediction about an even *better* training spot, so we went there!” Sayaka told him, not knowing his prediction had *actually* told him there’d be no pokémon at *all* near the old mansion site and his plan had been to annoy her by insisting they waste a bunch of time searching. “And then we got tied up helping a young doctor research the old basement and lost track of the time…”

“Well, alright.” Kizakura looked happier, unlike Kuwata. “But next time send one of us a message so I don’t go scaring the coastal guard, alright?”

“Alright… I promise!” Sayaka smiled at him, “Now, let’s get dinner, Hiro! We’ll all need lots of energy if we’re going to train like *that* again, tomorrow!”

*Nooooooooo!*

“Uhh… *hey!* Hang on a sec, Sayaka! Look, I got my badge now, so I can train with you tomorrow! Like we planned, right?”

*Yeeeeessssssss!*

“Wrong. You said you’d train with me *all* week, and you’ve already failed at that! So I’m going to train with Hiro all week instead! It’s *already* proven to be much more efficient!”

*Nooooooooo!*

A whole week of this!? Oh *man!* How was he gonna keep up with *this* for a whole week!? He was gonna need a vacation from his vacation! Man… he was so doomed he almost didn’t feel like eating… Except they’d even skipped *lunch*, so actually he was kinda starving…

…Not that that stopped Kuwata from grabbing him by the arm and dragging him over to *his* table before he could pick up anything from the buffet… And even though these guys had a bunch of food leftover, he didn’t think trying to take it from that *Lycanroc* was the best idea…

“Dude, what the *hell!*?” Kuwata snapped at him, “You said were gonna piss her off so she *didn’t* wanna train with you again!”

“I *know!* I *tried*, man!” Yasuhiro explained, “I even took her to a place I predicted wouldn’t have any pokémon in it! But I don’t know what happened, ‘cause it turned out to have *tons* of them, *and* a doctor who kept healing our pokémon over and over as much as she wanted! I’m lucky I convinced her to come back and *eat!*”

“Urg… couldn’t you have just kept using stupid moves, or something?” Kuwata complained.

“Well… I tried that to, but then they kept working really well anyway!”

“…*How*?” Oowada asked.

“I dunno! I did the opposite of what my predictions said to do, but it still worked!”

“Hmm… have you ever tested how accurate your predictions actually *are*?” Fujisaki asked.

“Yeah! They’re always right, thirty percent of the time!”
“Umm… thirty percent?” Fujisaki didn’t look impressed… “That… might be your problem. Your predictions are more likely to be wrong than right, so by doing the opposite thing to what they say, you’ve actually made yourself more effective…”

“But… I did the opposite of what they said to! Why would that make be better!?”

“Umm… Because… maths?” Fujisaki suggests, “Umm… see, your predictions usually wrong…”

“They are not! Thirty percent of the time, I’m always right!”

“But… that…” Hah! He’d convinced Fujisaki!

“Urggh… Dude, look, just trust us and work on the basis that all your predictions tomorrow are wrong, alright?” Kuwata groaned, “It’ll help get Sayaka off your back quicker, okay?”

“Well… alright, man…” Who knew, maybe Maizono’s psychic abilities were throwing his off…?

“Really? Alright dude, it’s a plan!” Just one more morning, and then he’d be a free man again…!

…

“…You’ve only just started breakfast!? I’ve already finished!”

…But it was not shaping up to be a good morning!

“Uhh… Sorry, Maizono! I kinda slept later than usual, ’cause I’m not used to walking around as much as we did yesterday…”

Hmm… well, that makes sense… I guess if we’re going to be training together, I’ll have to give you a good workout plan to follow!” What? Now she wanted him to start exercising to!? “Well, I’m going to make a start at the east beach, unless you’ve had any better ideas…?”

Hmm… actually, according to his predictions, going to any of the beaches would be bad news for Yasuhiro… But seeing as Fujisaki and Kuwata had told him to assume his predictions were gonna be wrong… “No… the beach is as good as it’ll get today!”

“Alright! See you soon!” Sayaka smiled, thank the holy pokémon, and left him to eat in peace.

But, all too soon, his food was all gone and he had to go out and make sure he didn’t impress Maizono today… Or else she’d be forcing him to be healthy and productive forever!

“…Hiro!? He was about halfway there when he heard Hina’s voice from behind him, “Hiro, wait up! Don’t go down there!”

“Hina? I thought you were lifeguarding all week?” Not that he could blame her for playing hooky! They were making her get up at six am! When she was on holiday!

“I am, but… they told me to make sure everyone knows that training on the beaches today is a really bad idea!” …Huh! So there’d be no pokémon there? Maybe Kuwata was right, and his predictions
were on the fritz! “So… I dunno… go to the caves or something, instead!”

“Uhh… Alright… But… Maizono’s already gone off ahead of me, so… I’ll go pass on the message to her and anyone else there, alright?”

“Ah… Alright! And I’ll go tell everyone left in the dining room!” Hina agreed, “Thanks, Hiro!

“No problem!” Especially not if it meant he could keep Maizono in the dark without risking Hina coming and ruining his plan to make her go train with Kuwata again!

…But Hina probably didn’t even hear him, before she was running full pelt towards the dining hut, as if it was a life-or-death matter if she warned people not to waste their time or not… Man, where did these kids get all their energy from? It seemed like half his class were super gung-ho about getting up early and training their pokémon all the time…

Like Maizono, who was already at the beach, ignoring the gloomy cloud of drizzle that was falling all over her and her pokémon as they battled a Polliwag that had probably made a bad decision by wandering up to her. This was the sort of weather you were supposed to stay indoors because of! At least, that’s what Hiro always figured, ‘cause it barely ever rained on Alola…

Huh… it wasn’t supposed to really rain that much on Cinnabar either, was it? Man, just his luck coming on holiday here the one time it rained! Poor Hattie was having a miserable time stuck in this, and was already trying to get him to leave the beach…

But, if he did that, Maizono was bound to get mad at him… or even worse, find him and drag him off to the caves, to spend a day with no sunlight at all! He’d rather get rained on than that!

“Hey, nice job, Maizono!” Hiro got her attention as her Espurr knocked out the Polliwag with a beam of Psychic energy that was just strong enough for Yasuhiro to make out.

“Thanks!” She told him, “But… there don’t seem to be many pokémon around here today… Not even when I tried with my fishing rod! Are you sure this is the best place for us…?”

Alright! Looks like Kuwata had been right! Now was his chance to waste her time some more! “Well… that’s what my prediction told me! But gimme some time and I’ll see if I can narrow down a good location!”

“Well… alright then…” Maizono agreed, giving Hiro and excuse to sit down, which he took even though he’d probably have wet sand stuck to him for the rest of the day… “I mean… I guess the rain might have scared some of them under cover, and we’ll find them under some rocks somewhere…?”

“I guess…? But in Alola, when it rains, you get more pokémon on the coast!” Yasuhiro told her.

“Oh… yeah! That is true!” Maizono realised, “Although… if it rains in Alola in the first place, it’s usually because a pokémon caused it…”

“Yeah, that’s right! You’re from Alola to?”

“Hmm… kinda of!” Maizono shrugged with a smile, “My parents moved there during junior high, but then my talent shows started taking off, so I spend a lot of time travelling!”

“Gotcha!” That made sense. She probably wasn’t used to beaches… She looked a little freaked out looking out at the stormy waves and clouds ahead of them, even…

“…Hiro… Was it supposed to be raining, today?”
“I dunno! Do they even have weather reports here?” There wasn’t any TV or phones that he’d seen…

“I didn’t check. But… I’m starting to have a bad feeling about this…” Maizono frowned, “Maybe we should just go train in the caves…”

Noooo! If they that now, she wouldn’t get mad at him! And Kuwata probably wouldl! “Uhh… Just gimme about five more minutes! Alright?!” That should give him some time to think of a place her could take her to, to waste even more time…

“Well…”

“GYYYYYRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAA…!”

“What was that…?” Yasuhiro hadn’t been able to hear the second part of her sentence, “You got cut off by that Gyrarrr…"

…She’d got cut off by a GYRADOS!? Specifically, one that had just surfaced from underneath the water and was now charging up the beach towards them…!? 

“…AAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!” Both he and Maizono screamed at the giant pokémon at the same time. Not that that did anything to slow its approach… and neither did the two beams of psychic energy their pokémon instinctively shot out at it! Shoot! And now it was opening its mouth and breathing in, probably to launch some sort of attack… and both Hattie and Maizono’s pokémon were moving off to the side…!? 

“…DOOOOOS!” Oh… That was so it would turn away from him and Maizono, and only hit their pokémon with the giant purple laser it shot out of its mouth!

…Not that it helped much, as the purple laser managed to knock both pokémon out with a single hit… Man! He better hope Exeggutor lasted longer than that!

“…Bri…!? “Ex…egg!?” Oh man… neither of their pokémon sounded confident about this…

“It…It’s resting from using Hyper Beam! So use Bubble Beam!” And Maizono sounded pretty desperate to, even though she was trying to hide it… Oh man, maybe his prediction had been correct after all! Coming down here had been a bad idea for Yasuhiro! But he’d have to at least try and beat this thing, he was too young to die!

“Exeggutor…” No time to do a prediction, he’d better just throw out his best Grass type move! “Use Wood Hammer!”

Both pokémon moved forward, Maizono’s Brionne showering it with a barrage of bubbles, and then his own pokémon swinging its whole trunk downwards to bash the giant sea snake on the head so hard that it knocked a few of its leaves loose… so surely that had to have stopped it, right!?

“GYRRAAADOS!” …Wrong! There was another beam… and both their pokémon fell and disappeared back into their balls… And the Gyrados was still glaring at them… oh man oh man oh man! This was it!

“Wh…what are we gonna do!?” Maizono must have realised it to, ‘cause her voice was shaking, “It doesn’t look like it’s going to stop… but we can’t outrun it… and there’s nowhere to hide…” 

…There wasn’t anything they could do! And it was already breathing in to attack them again… This was it! Game over, man. Game over!
The air in front of Yasuhiro heated up as bright purple light filled it so brightly that he had to shut his eyes… *man*, he really hoped this wouldn’t *hurt*…

…Well… it wasn’t hurting so far…

…And it was really quiet… All he could hear was his ears ringing… Was he already dead? He didn’t *feel* dead… But there wasn’t as much light seeping in through his closed eyelids anymore… So maybe he could risk opening them a little…

“…*Huh!*?” The… the Gyrados was lying on the floor, knocked out! How the heck had *that* happened?!

“W…we’re not dead…?” Maizono didn’t know what had happened either…

“*Hah!* Oh *man*, Lux you are the *best!*” And… now Kuwata was shouting from behind them?
“ Took that thing down in *one* hit! Hah! I *knew* that Thunder TM would pay off!”

“L…Leon? You mean… you just saved us…?” *Oh*… Maizono’s guess at what had just happened made sense… “But… how did you know…?”

“No time to explain! Let’s just get out of here before…”

“*GYYRRRAAAAA!*”

“*GYYRRRAAAAA!*”

“*GYYRRRAAAAAA!*”

“*Oh shit!*” Leon swore as *three* more Gyrados shot out of the water. “*RUN!*”

He didn’t need to tell Yasuhiro twice! He was up on his feet and heading back up the beach, towards the buffet where he’d left the rest of his class, before the other two even started *moving!* Hopefully the hut would be Gyrados-proof! Or if not, maybe Oogami would still be there! Or Kizakura could beat them…!

“Ah! Yasuhiro *was* out here…?”

“And judging from the way he’s actually *running*, for once, I’m guessing he found the Gyrados mating frenzy!”

…*Or* maybe Oogami *and* Kizakura could be conveniently heading down to the beach to save his ass? Well, he’d take it…!

“Tag, your turn!” He slapped Oogami on the arm as he ran past, not stopping until he got back to the dining hut…

“*Come on, RUN!*” It took another shout and a tug on the arm from Leon, before her legs started working and they headed up the beach after Hiro…

But she could still hear the Gyrados roaring behind them… They could leap pretty far, couldn’t they? How far would they have to run before they were safe? Could they even *get* that far before they attacked…?

“Hey! There’s Oogami!” Leon suddenly shouted, “And Kizakura! That makes it three-on-three!”
Ah! He was right! If they could just make it far enough to meet up with them, they’d be saved! And as they were both running down towards them...

“You’re all safe!” Oogami sighed with relief as they all met up.

“You bet! Now let’s kick some Gyrados tail!” Leon told her, getting his Luxray’s pokéball ready to throw again...

“Not necessary! Just get Maizono back to the hut!” Kizakura ordered him, as he deployed his Hypno. “Oogami and I can take it from here!”

“But…!” Leon looked like he was going to argue, until he glanced at Sayaka briefly… “Arg… Alright! Come on Sayaka, they can take care of this…”

“R…right!” She agreed… Although it still took Leon tugging at her arm again for her to actually start moving...

But it hardly seemed like anytime at all before they could see the door to the dining hut, and soon enough they were behind closed doors… and it was probably safe to breathe again...

“You’re alright!” Various people shouted as bent over and tried to catch her breath, and soon she was surrounded by a crowd of her friends, who helped get her a chair to sit on, a blanket to dry her hair and a warm cup of juice...

“Thanks, guys…” She told them, once her breathing was steady, and everything around her stopped being such a blur. ‘I’m alright now.’

…Not that that stopped them all from worrying about her, and asking if she needed to see a nurse, or wanted anything to eat, or her pokémon taking to the pokémon centre...

“Hey, my pokémon could do with healing!” Hiro piped up, at that question.

“Pfft! Don’t think anyone’s asking you!” Enoshima laughed at him.

“Well, why not!? I almost got killed too!” Hiro pouted.

“How about because I told you going training on the beach was a bad idea, and you were supposed to be bringing Sayaka straight back!” Hina snapped at him… which was news to her!

“Well… I didn’t think you meant it was dangerous!” Hiro cried, “I thought you just meant there’d be no pokémon there!”

“Why would you think that?” Hina asked, which was a good question, because he’d told her they should stay there training! “What kind of lifeguard would need to run around the island telling people there weren’t any wild pokémon around!?”

“Uhh… well…” Hiro looked embarrassed as her point hit him, not that it mattered...

“Nevermind well…” Hiro gulped and started stammering as she rounded on him… “Well… you see…”

“He was trying to screw up your training on purpose, so you’d stop making him train with you.” Leon suddenly spoke up.
“What?!” Why would he do that? Was Leon just making that up or… “Hiro, is that true!?”

“Uhh…” Hiro backed away from her like he thought she was going to explode or something! “…Kinda?”

“But… why?” Well… in retrospect, it wasn’t that surprising that Hiro didn’t want to train, given what he was like… “I mean… I guess I’m not surprised you don’t want to train with me, but… why not just tell me that straight away!?”

“Well… you see…” He kept backing away, glancing at the table next to her rather than at her…

Wait… had he heard the rumours about her flipping that table over in Rustboro? Honestly, all she’d done was stand up too fast and knock a few drinks on the floor but now (probably thanks to Enoshima)… “Let me guess, you think I’m scary… So you just decided it’d be easier for me not to want to train with you than to say no to me.”

“Yeeeaah…” He drawled cautiously, before getting a hopeful look on his face, “Soo… does this mean I’m off the hook?”

Geez… Like it wouldn’t have benefitted him to shape up some!? But more fool him if he thought he could get away with lounging around through his whole life…” “Sure… I’ll just find myself someone else to train with…”

“Speaking of which…” Leon waved his arms at her, just as Hiro started loudly praising various Pokémon.

“…Someone who isn’t going to stupidly waste a bunch of my time!” Now who could she…?

“Oh come on, it was two hours!” Leon cried, “It’s not like you’d fall behind that fast!”

“…He’s got a point, Sayaka.” Makoto spoke up, just as she’d been inhaling for her next argument, “I mean… you and him seem to have a good dynamic together in battles! You’d probably waste even more time getting used to someone else!”

“…” Makoto had a point. Leon hadn’t exactly been the most eager to practice with her at first, but he’d stepped up his game pretty well over the last few weeks… Having to go through that again would be a pain…

“Look, Sayaka… I don’t blame you for being mad, ‘cause I should have known better! But I swear, I’ve learnt my lesson! I’m not gonna do anything this dumb, again!” Leon pleaded, “So… are we cool?”

Well… he was a good training partner… and she probably had overreacted… “Alright… yeah, we’re ‘cool’… this time!”

“Kickass!” Leon pumped the air with a grin.

So… now she had a training partner again. And obviously training at the beach was out, today… “So, let’s get our Pokémon healed up and head to the caves!”

“Wha…? Now!?” Leon’s jaw dropped, “You were almost killed just now! You don’t even wanna rest up a bit, or wait for the rain to stop, or dry your hair, or…?”

“No… I’ve already wasted enough of my time this morning, thanks to someone…” She glared over at Hiro, who was too busy helping himself to the all-day buffet to notice.
“Yeesh… alright, alright! Just gimme five minutes to pick up the picnic I made…”

…*Picnic!*? Oh, *right!* That’d probably explain why she’d felt so out of it last night… She’d forgot to stop to eat *lunch*!

Hmm… maybe Leon was right about her being a little *too* against wasting time, sometimes…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next week we'll continue with Togami and Taka!
A short Trip pt. 2 (Aloysius/Arcanine POV)

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains a brief depiction of animal neglect and abuse. Mostly dialogue rather than descriptions, but might still be upsetting to some, so I figured a warning was appropriate.
As far as I’m aware, there’s only been one butler with a set team in any of the pokémon games… and he had a single Braviary, which I thought would be perfect for Aloysius, given Togami’s choice of second pokémon and his close (by his standards) relationship to Aloysius.
I took the idea of Briaviary’s play-fighting young Rufflets from the Fanon Pokédex on TVTropes: http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/FanonPokédex/Rufflet
The ‘normal’ behaviour for Arcanines is also from TVTropes: http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/FanonPokédex/Growlithe
Ridiculous dog names were inspired by the list of past winners of Crufts. Herdiers training other pokemon comes from their pokedex entry in Pokemon White (or Black? I can’t remember which exactly)

“You want to see my Arcanines…? Very well! I can show you around! But just because you’re a friend of little Byakuya here…” Miss Hinoko insisted, which was surprising to Aloysius, as she’d been nigh-on insistent on showing him all of her most highly-trained Arcanines. And he’d got the impression, from walking around the place, that the dogs were all quite used to a variety of people coming in to see them.

“Thank you very…”

“I’m six foot tall.” Young Master Togami cut off his classmate’s thanks, “And given that I’m going to be beating you in a fight tomorrow, I think it’s beyond time you stopped treating me like a child.”

“Hmm? Ah, no. You can’t beat me tomorrow…”

“Excuse me!? I think my pokémon are more than capable of beating yours!” The Young Master announced, with an unfortunate amount of aggravation present in his demeanour, “You’ve already lost one of your battles! Challenging you was a mere formality at this point!”

“…I have quite a big dog show happening, tomorrow, so we’ll have to have the battle on Thursday.” Miss Hinoko carried on, as if the Young Master hadn’t said anything, “But you and your friend are welcome to come and watch me debut my new star Arcanine!”

"Hmph... I think I’d rather go to the Saf…"

“That would be wonderful! Thank you very much!” Master Togami glared as his classmate loudly interrupted his refusal. “I always wanted to see one of those shows, but the main one in Kanto lost its sponsorship after Gra… err, the main organiser was caught cheating, and no one’s ever tried to set it going again.”

“Yes… Such a shame! I know that fool caused a lot of problems, but that’s the one that always
irritated me the most!” Miss Hinoko complained, appearing to have somehow completely missed the fact that she was talking to the grandson of said fool. “It would be so much easier to start building up my reputation in Kanto, than having to travel to shows in Kalos and Hoenn…”

“Err… yes! I… also would have had to travel a lot further to carry on my pokémon training, because of him!” Ishimaru agreed stiffly, as he tried to hide his embarrassment, “…If it hadn’t been for Hope’s Peak recruiting me, that is!”

“Hmm…” Miss Hinoko seemed slightly off-put by the boy’s answer, “Well, that’s not important right now! You wanted to see the results of all my work, didn’t you?”

“Yes! Thank you!”

“Meanwhile, I’d like to be escorted to my room…” The young master declared, “I need to let my pokémon out of their balls.”

“That’s alright, you can let your pokémon out during the tour!” Miss Hinoko insisted, “My dogs aren’t easily startled!”

“…Alright.” The young master did a better job of hiding his irritation at being forced to participate in what was likely a waste of his time, “Drampa, Rufflet, you can come out now!”

Both pokémon exited their balls at the young master’s command. His Drampa was looking much the same as it had done when the master had left. Presumably he still had yet to solve the problem of finding a consistent supply of high-end trainers to battle. His Rufflet, however, appeared to have been thriving in the new environment… he was looking noticeably bigger than when Aloysius had last seen him…

“Ruff!” And presumably he believed himself to be stronger than before, as his first reaction upon recognising Aloysius was to make the short hop across to his waiting arm, and then attempt to lean across to peck at the single pokéball that he kept tucked away in his inner vest pocket. “Ruff! Ruff!”

“Not now, Rufflet.” The young master ordered, “There will be plenty of time to see how you measure up to Pennyworth’s Braviary tomorrow.”

That seemed to settle the bird down, and it was happy to stay perched on Aloysius’ arm while Miss Hinoko started to lead them all to her Arcanine enclosure. The young bird had been consistently play-battling against his own, much older, eagle since the day the Young Master had caught it and brought it home. But now it was getting to the point where the battles were less of a lesson from Braviary to Rufflet on how to fight, and more a chance for Rufflet to try and prove, once again, that this time it would actually be stronger than his surrogate father…

…Not that it was appropriate, in any way, for Aloysius to assume any sort of familial relationship between his pokémon and Young Master Togami’s! Even if the young master’s decision to catch one of the same family of pokémon as his butler had been somewhat unexpected. And had led to Master Togami spending a surprising amount of time discussing pokémon care and training strategies with him, whereas he could have chosen to emulate one of the older members of his family instead.

However, that decision could easily be explained by the lack of respect he had for his family, in general. He certainly held no interest in the tour his half-sister was attempting to give, unlike his classmate, who was carefully inspecting everything around them, as if there might be some sign of neglect present in the hallway, and even his own Drampa, who appeared to be listening intently to her description of the size and number of enclosures she had running at the time.
“I’m sure Byakuya is busy, so I’ll just show you the very best results from my breeding and training programs…” Miss Hinoko explained with a flourish, as she opened up the door to the three kilometer-square area reserved for her Arcanine’s and the most promising of her Growlithes.

“What…? This… this is amazing!” The Young master’s classmate cried as his looked over the room...

To be fair to him, she had put in a lot of care and effort to make the area a desirable habitat for her fire-type dogs, as she was now explaining to the young Ishimaru in great detail. She’d had so many of the volcanic rocks from Cinnabar volcano’s last eruption brought to her home that she was often hailed as being a large benefactor to the island’s restoration efforts, despite only wanting them so she could construct various ‘mountains’ for each of her dogs to explore. The temperature was also set uncomfortably high, by human standards, to simulate the proximity to the volcano that the Kanto-originating dogs would be familiar with. However, she’d also transplanted a large number of plants from route 48, to remind the Johto-descendant dogs of their ancestral home, as well.

Of course, the area wasn’t entirely natural. The Growlithes were kept in a separate, caged-off, area of the facility, so they could be trained en-masse without distracting the older dogs. Even the more open-plan area reserved for the Arcanines served as much as a training facility for them, as it did a home, and she’d set up various individual exercise areas for each of her dogs to practise in when she was not available to train them, which was what she was currently trying to explain to her ‘tour group’ despite the Young Master not paying attention, and his Drampa having drifted off to see the dogs for itself…

“Arcanines prefer to have their own territories, so each of them has a separate area of the facility that has been specifically designed to hone their natural talents!” Miss Hinoko explained, “And, of course, they are all well-trained enough not to waste time engaging in territorial fights, so they each tend to keep to themselves.”

“Ah… they do? That’s unfortunate…” The young master’s classmate sighed.

“…Why would it be unfortunate!?” Miss Hinoko asked, looking irritated, “That’s how Arcanines behave in the wild!”

“Ah, of course! It’s just… I’d been hoping this would be a chance for my Arcanine spend some time with other pokémon of his kind!” The boy rushed to explain, “I don’t know any other Growlithe trainers, so he’s not have many opportunities for socialising over the years…”

‘Over the years’? Now that was interesting to hear from the young Ishimaru… The old one was renowned for never keeping a pokémon for more than four months, before he managed to trade it in for something ‘better’, managing to gradually acquire stronger and stronger teams of pokemon, despite not doing anything to actually train any of them. But his grandson certainly didn’t seem to be following in his footsteps, if he’d managed to raise his reasonably formidable Arcanine, by himself, on a pauper’s budget. Perhaps Hope’s Peak weren’t quite as desperate for students in this year’s intake as the young master had led Aloysium to believe.

“Well, my dogs all have good manners!” Miss Hinoko boasted, “They’ll be polite to him, if nothing else… You can have him start with Julian Amberton Knur the Third, over there, while I explain how I’ve managed to raise him to be my new star of dog shows!”

“Ah…Thank you, very much!” The master’s classmate bowed his head in appreciation, then bent down to his dog, “Alright, Arcanine. We’re going to be here for a while, so you can go and play with that other Arcanine over there, if you want?”
“Arc!” The dog nodded happily, then seemed to request one of several bags that Ishimaru had carried with him from Cinnabar, before trotting off towards Miss Hinoko’s prized dog-show star…

Yay! Play time with another dog like him! And this time he had some toys, too! This was gonna be great! [Hello! Hello there!] He barked over to the other big dog Kiyotaka had pointed out to him…

[Excuse me!?] The dog jumped up from the spot it had been lying on, [This is my area! Who are you? And why are you here?]

[Hello! I’m Arcanine! I’m just visiting!] Arcanine plops the bag of toys down and knocks a few out, to show the other dog. [Kiyotaka said I could come play with you for a bit!]

[I see…] The dog still looks a little annoyed, […]And what are those things?]

[You don’t know what toys are!?] Arcanine asks… how can he not know what toys are!? [You play with them!]

[So… they’re for a game…? But I’ve never seen any of them before…] The other dog looks annoyed, [What game are they used in?]

[Umm… it depends on the toy? And what Kiyotaka wants to play…] Arcanine admits, trying to think of an example, and points his nose towards his collection of hard sponge-like bricky things. [Like these squishy bricks! Sometimes Kiyotaka likes me to try and pile them up as high as I can before they fall over, but other times he builds stuff out of them and lets me smash them up!]

[Hmm… and you get scored on how high the pile is, and how quickly you break your trainer’s creation?] Hrmm… maybe Arcanine’s not explained this properly…

[Nope! It’s not like sports! There’s no score!] Arcanine corrects him, [It just for fun!]

[…What’s fun?]

Hhuuuuh!? He doesn’t even know what fun is!? Wow… this guy’s… not very clever…

[Umm… well… fun is stuff you can do to make you happy!] Arcanine tries to explain, [Stuff you like doing!]

[I like dog shows! I show how well I can play Flyball, run and walk around, and obey my trainer! And then I get to stand on some blocks and everyone claps at me!] The other dog tells him, [So that’s fun, is it?]

[Hmm… it sure sounds fun!] Arcanine likes running around and showing what a Good Boy he could be as well! [But I dunno what Flyball is…]

[Flyball is when you do this!] The other dog barks, and heads over to set of hurdles, quickly running over them all, towards a box at the end, hits the box, picks up a ball that came out of the box, runs back across the hurdles, and drops the ball into a bucket, super-fast! [Whoever does it the quickest, wins!]

[And you did it in… four-spot-zero-seven!] Arcanine reads off the thing next to the bucket, which stopped moving once he dropped the ball in.

“Ooh! Nicely done!” Kiyotaka claps for the dog, who looks happy.

“4.07 seconds isn’t that fast of a time…” …Until his own trainer starts telling him off, even though
he was super-fast! “The world record is 3.84, and I’m sure he’ll be able to get below that!”

“But it’s still a very impressive time…!” Kiyotaka starts to stand up for the other dog. But he seems more interested in Arcanine now…

[...How did you know how fast I did it?]

[That’s easy! It says on that thing next to your bucket! Four, spot, zero, seven!] Arcanine points them out with him nose, but the other Arcanine still looks confused. [Oh… Your trainer didn’t teach you about numbers?]

[No.] Wow, he’s already found another thing this other dog doesn’t know…

[Okay… well… Kiyotaka told me that numbers let you count things, so you know how many of a thing there is…”

“Ah… Arcanine! We’re heading over to the next area!” Uh oh! Kiyotaka’s calling! “Pack up your toys!”

[Aww… okay!] Arcanine calls back to him, then puts all his toys back into the bag. [Umm… I’ve got to go now, so bye!]

[...Goodbye.] The other dog replies, still looking confused. Oh well… he can’t stick around and explain everything to him! He’s got to go back to Kiyotaka now!

“Good boy!” Kiyotaka pats him on the head, once he’s back by his feet, “Was he not interested in your toys?”

[He didn’t know what they were…] Arcanine explains, sadly. [He didn’t know numbers either!]

“Well… maybe you’ll have more luck with the next dog!” Kiyotaka pats his head, but that big long fluffy dragon that the boy with too much money looks after has something else to say!

[...Most Arcanine’s wouldn’t know what numbers are. I dare say you’re the only one who does.]

He is!? [Oh, right! ’Cause I’m a Clever Boy!] That’s what Kiyotaka always says! And he also said it’s important, so it must be true!

[It’s… impressive that you’ve learnt them, yes.] The dragon agrees, [It is rather unusual that none of these dogs aren’t familiar with toys, though… Even Rufflet still has some of those…]

[None of them know about toys!]?

[No… I had a quick fly around the area. It seems they’ve all been incredibly specifically trained for specific tasks, with specialised equipment for practising their skills, and nothing else.]

Aww… guess Arcanine’s not gonna be able to play with these guys the way he usually does, then. But maybe he can try and learn some new skills from them, to impress Kiyotaka with!

“This is Heroic Scarlet Sunblush!” Aww… that lady’s given this dog another name that’s too long to remember! “I made her to be an exemplary example of using pokemon for rescue work! She’s the only pokemon that can perform CPR!”

“Actually, one of our classmates has two pokemon that can do that…” Moneys boy speaks up… Huh, he’s so quiet, Arcanine forgot he’s there!
“Is… is that so…?”

“Well… only if they work together!” Kiyotaka tells them both, “Neither of them could do it by themselves! Her Marill can’t get the pressure on the chest, and her Glaceon refuses to do mouth to mouth…”

“Hah! Well, my dog can do it alone! And she can also rescue people from water, and sniff out people who are trapped in rubble and start digging them out!” The lady smiles, “I bet a Marill and Glaceon can’t do any of that!”

“…No, I’ll admit they probably can’t.” Money boy looks annoyed with Kiyotaka… But not enough to start telling his pokemon to hurt him, so it doesn’t matter!

“But Arcanine here’s pretty good in water, aren’t you?” Arcanine nods at Kiyotaka’s question… if Kiyotaka says it’s true, it probably is! “Why don’t you go and see if you and her can share some tips with each other!”

[Okay!] Arcanine tells him, then heads over towards the girl dog they seem to be talking about, who’s sniffing around a pile of little stones near a fun looking pool… [Hello!]

She looks at him for a little bit, then turns back to her stones. […I’m not in heat.]

Wow! She’s not!? It seems pretty nice and toasty in here to Arcanine! [Kiyotaka said we should share tips about water and stuff!]

[The water… that makes sense, I’ve searched all my rubble piles for today and there wasn’t many to be rescued, so of course there’ll be a water activity today…] She whimpers about it, [I just hope there’s not too much splashing this time…]

[You can swim without splashing?] That’d be useful… lots of people get annoyed at Kiyotaka when they practise swimming, but that’s not fair because it’s Arcanine who makes all the water go out of the bath…

[I can… Swim?] She cocks her head at him, [What’s that?]

She doesn’t know what swimming is? So what water stuff is she doing? [Swimming’s when you go in the water and move about!] She doesn’t look like she understands him either… [Here, I’ll show you!]

This way, he gets an excuse to jump into the pool and finally go swimming, and feel himself bobbing up and down in the warm water, like a Psyducky! And then he can use his paws to beat up the water so he moves forwards, like Kiyotaka showed him! He’s starting to get really good at it!

[Guaah!? You’re the… Ah, never mind!] That’s odd… the girl dog sounds scared all of a sudden? But he can’t hear her properly over the noisy water… [GRAB THE RING!]

Oh! He heard that! And she’s thrown a big thing hoop at him… Hrmm… he’s never liked hoops, but grabbing this one seems like it might be a fun game…

[Got it!] It hits the water just in front of Arcanine, so he paddles a little closer and bites into it. [Naauuwww whaamh…?] Oops… Should have asked that before catching it in his mouth!

[Good! Now hold on!] The girl tells him, then starts moving backwards… and Arcanine starts moving forward…?
Oh! There’s a rope on the hoop! And she’s pulling the other end! They’re playing Tug-of-war! And as she’s another Arcanine, he won’t have to hold back, like he does when Kiyotaka plays this with him! Time to turn around and start FULL SWIMMING SPEED!

[Mmmhh…!?] At first she’s pulling back just as much as Arcanine is pushing the hoop away from her, but then suddenly he’s surging forward through the water! [Ah! I dropped the rope! What are you doing!? I need that back!]

She does? Then why didn’t she just say fetch, like Kiyotaka does? Oh well… better swim back yo the edge and put her hoop back on the side… and actually that tug-of-war has made him feel a little tired, so he’d better get out of the pool, before he can’t keep swimming anymore…

[Pfft! There you go!] Arcanine drops the ring at her feet, then pulls himself out of the water

[You… You got out by yourself!?] The other dog whines, [You’re not supposed to do that! You’re not supposed to be able to do that! I’m supposed to stop you from falling under the water!]

[Oh… but Kiyotaka taught me to swim, so I won’t do that!] Arcanine points out, [Do you want me to show you how?]  

[And get soaking wet like you!? NO!]

[Aww… Being wet’s not that bad! Especially not once you shake yourself out!] Which he’d do now, except Kiyotaka had told him it’s rude to do it close to other people or pokemon, [And its fun!]

[…]Fun?] Geez! Another dog who doesn’t know what fun was…?

“Err… Arcanine! Time to come back now!” Welp, guess he doesn’t have time to explain it to her!

[I’ve got to go! Ask that other Arcanine, with the Flying balls thing!] he tells her, before dashing back towards Kiyotaka, stopping to give himself a little shake out on the way there…

“…Why is your dog wet!?“ Miss Hinoko asked, having been too caught up in her explanation to have noticed the commotion caused by Ishimaru’s Arcanine jumping in the training pool.

“He went for a swim!” Ishimaru explained, “I was a little surprised yours didn’t! When you said she rescued people from water, I thought you meant by jumping it to help them, rather than throwing a life ring out!”

“You… you mean you had your Arcanine bred for swimming!?“ Miss Hinoko asked, shocked. “If you wanted a pokemon that could swim, why not just pick a water-type?”

“I didn’t have him bred!” Young Master Togami’s classmate looked insulted at the thought, “But he’s always liked baths, and as I’ve recently started pokeathlon training, I figured I could use that to encourage him to swim, so he can at least score some points in that event!”

“Well, that’s hardly a sensible use of your time!” Miss Hinoko lips curled upwards in amusement. “Even for single-pokemon competitions, it’s still better to focus on all the other events and just accept the loss of points from Snow Throw and Swimming! Here, I’ll show you…”

She then led the group of them over to one of the biggest ‘territories’ in the facility… one replete with equipment for all but two pokeathlon events, and a large Arcanine that was currently zooming around the track, which Ishimaru let his own dog go and race with… very slowly, in comparison… It seemed it didn’t actually know Extreme Speed, which was uncommon, but not unheard of…
It certainly didn’t make it a very advantageous dog to compete in Pokeathlons. It and Miss Hinoko’s
dog ended up competing on a variety of the events while she was discussing her various strategies
and plans for improving its speed. Only for Ishimaru’s dog to lose every one.

Not that one would have known that, from Ishimaru’s reaction upon its return...

“Good boy!” The young trainer eagerly ran his hands through his dogs fur, “You did all of those so
well today!”

“But… It lost every event!” Miss Hinoko exclaimed, “Why are you praising it!”?

“Because he still did a good job! He chose to take part in those events without my telling him to, and
I think that deserves praise!” Ishimaru retorted, “And in any case, if I praise him for improving, then
it’ll encourage him to improve even more in the future! So why wouldn’t I?”

“Because if you praise it just for trying, regardless of the result, you’ll make it think it’s good enough
to just do something, without striving to be the best at it!” Miss Hinoko pointed out.

“But… the result doesn’t matter!” Ishimaru insisted, which earnt him looks of amused scorn from
both of the young Togamis, “It really doesn’t! What matters is that he’s learning to put in as much
effort as he can, whenever he does try something! Because if he tries hard enough, and long enough,
then he’ll be able to do anything!”

“And he still won’t win at anything, because you’re haphazardly having him try whatever fool idea
you come up with, instead of spending your time focusing on things he has a natural inclination for!”
The young master pointed out, “Hah! I’d bet you’ll even have him attempting to train your next
pokemon, even though he’s not a Herdier!”

“Well… Just because Herdiers were specifically bred to do that, doesn’t mean no other dog species is
capable of it! That’s why it’s a staple dog show event!” Miss Hinoko argued, “In fact, I happen to
have a pokemon that’s capable of doing just that, right over here…”

Boy… that guy had been even less clever than the other dogs… Not only had he not known what
fun was either, even after Arcanine had explained it, he still couldn’t think of anything that he
thought was fun! Even though he lived with all those fun sports games to play in! And he hadn’t
even known that nothing bad happens when you lose a sports, even though Arcanine had kept telling
him it didn’t matter that he kept losing and didn’t need to get scared…

Oh well! There’s another dog like him over there, playing with some birdies that are hopping
around! That looks fun!

“Ah… that dog’s busy trying to teach those Hoothoots a dance!” There’s a gentle tug on his collar
from Kiyotaka, to tell him not to run off. “Best not to disturb her!”

[Aww… Okay…] Guess he’ll just have to sit and watch from over here…

Hmm… but if she’s teaching pokemon tricks, why isn’t she using poffins, like Kiyotaka always
does? Unless… […]Do these guys not even know what poffins are?]

[I doubt it.] The fluff dragon answers him, [I’ve not seen any in the whole enclosure.]

Wow! No poffins! Their trainer really hasn’t taught them very much! No wonder none of them seem
very clever… He’s lucky he’s got Kiyotaka to show him all these things they’re missing out on!
“And, the last of my Arcanine’s: Abraxas Swashbuckler of Virbank!” Hmm… oh, seems like the lady has another Arcanine to show Kiyotaka… “You might even have seen him before, seeing as he’s known to be the cleverest Arcanine working in Pokestar studios!”

Oh? This guy’s supposed to clever!? The cleverest!? Does that mean he’s cleverer than Arcanine?

Nnggh… What if he is? Would that make Kiyotaka want him more than Arcanine… Is that what Kiyotaka’s bending down to tell him.

“…I’m sure you’re just as clever, even if you don’t work on TV!” Oh! Okay… That’s good… But, still, what if he’s not…? “And even if you weren’t, you’d still be the best pokemon to me, remember?”

Oh, right! That’s what Kiyotaka said on the mountain earlier… and he said it’s important so he’s really, really thought about it! [Yep! Thanks, Kiyotaka!]

“Good! Now, why don’t you have a chat with him!” Kiyotaka scratches between his ears… ooh! That’s nice! “You ought to be able to get along with this one!”

Hmm? He should? Why? He doesn’t look like he has much fun stuff around him… He’s just sat under a blanket… wait… no, it’s a cape!

A SUPER-ARCANINE CAPE! So that’s why Kiyotaka thought they’d get along!

[Hello! I like Super-Arcanine too!] And maybe this meant he really was cleverer than Arcanine, if he’d managed to read those comics by himself! Not that it mattered… Kiyotaka had said it didn’t matter…

[Hnnmph… I don’t like Super-Arcanine. I am Super-Arcanine!] Hrrmm… and even if it did matter, it wouldn’t matter cause this guy’s said something completely wrong, right away!

[No you’re not! ‘Cause Super-Arcanine’s not real!] And Arcanine knows that ‘cause Kiyotaka told him it was very, very important he remembered it! [That’s why you can’t jump off buildings even if you’ve got the cape on!]

[Well… that is true. I have to have my special safety harness on for flying!] The other Arcanine tells him, which he thinks Kiyotaka might have mentioned… [But I am the actor who plays him on television!]

[Ooooh!] Hadn’t Kiyotaka wanted him to act? He could ask for help! [How do you do Ennui?]

[…] beg your pardon?] The actor looks confused, [What is that?]

[You don’t know? But you said you were an actor!]

[Yes… but I’ve never had to do this… Ennui you speak of!]

[You haven’t? Huh… Kiyotaka thinks it important to learn, though…]

[Hnnmph! Well… it can’t be that important, or I wouldn’t have been cast!]

But if it’s not important, then why is Kiyotaka spending so much time trying to work out how to teach it to him…?

[It… is rather a… difficult emotion to expect you canines to learn…] Drampa suddenly speaks up. [Most trainers wouldn’t even consider trying to get a dog to understand it.]
[Ooohhh… So Kiyotaka’s just trying to teach me ‘cause I’m smart!??]

[Yes…] Drampa agrees! Yay! He is cleverer than that other dog, after all! […]your trainer does hold your potential in high regard… But he also seems to believe you can do anything, if he spends enough time and effort with you…]

[Oh! Yep! That’s right, too!] Kiyotaka says that all the time! Anything is possible with effort!

[Hmm… not really.] Drampa shakes his head, [After all, even if he spent a whole lifetime trying to teach you, a dog would never be able to learn Fly…]

[…]But that guy did!] Arcanine points out, looking at the actor, [He just uses a special harness!]

[…That… that’s not what I meant…]

“Aarcanine! We’ve got to head off now!” Oh! Kiyotaka’s calling! Gotta run over to him! “Good boy! Well, that’s all the other Arcanine’s! Did you have fun with them?”

[Hmm… they weren’t really clever, like me…] Arcanine admits.

“No? Oh…” Kiyotaka looks sad… oops. Was he supposed to have had fun? Did he do something wrong…? “Well… Nevermind! I think we’re about to see some Growlithes! Maybe you’ll have more fun with some of them?”

[Okay!] He could do that! That Growlithe girl he met at the Gym had been fun… She’d had lots of good ideas for playing, even without toys! But she’d been really young and all these other Arcanines were older, so why was she the smart one? Did getting bigger make them stupid? But Kiyotaka always said Arcanine was clever, and he was big now, so that didn’t make sense and… Oh wow, look at all those little Growlithes, all in that room! So CUTE!

“Ahahaha! There’s… there’s so many of them!” Kiyotaka’s noticed them as well! “I can just imagine going in there and having them all trying to jump all over me…”

“That wouldn’t happen! I have them far too well trained for that!” The other trainer lady tells him.

“Even if you went in there with some… err… lunch?” Kiyotaka’s asks about something Arcanine’s not heard of.

“No! I have them trained to head over to their own individual bowls, and wait patiently until they all have food given to them, before any of them start eating! In fact, we’re here just in time to see them getting fed, so you’ll see it for yourself!”

[FOOD!?] That lady said about food! If there’s food, he should make sure he eats it, in case he doesn’t get food later…

“Ah… no, Arcanine… She doesn’t mean food for you! Your dinnertime isn’t for another hour!” Oh… Kiyotaka’s probably right… but what if Arcanine messes up and Kiyotaka doesn’t feed him tonight…? “But, I’ll be sure to feed you then, same as I always do! And here… if you’re good and wait patiently while the other dogs get their food, then I’ll give you this poffin as an extra treat! All right?”

[…]That is a nice looking poffin! And Kiyotaka always feeds him every morning and evening… And Kiyotaka’s hand feels nice brushing scratching behind his ears… And it’s always alright been when he does what Kiyotaka tells him to… So… […All right.]
“Good boy!” Kiyotaka gives him some nice heavy strokes once he nods, “You’re such a good boy!”

[Yay!] Good boys get poffins, pettings and primping time! And good boys got to eat every morning and dinner...

“All right, Pups! Dinnertime!” Ooohh… That food the man’s bringing in looks really yummy… but he’s gonna be a good boy and get a poffin! And dinner from Kiyotaka later! “To your stations!”

That’s weird… most of the puppies are walking away from the food? Aren’t they hungry?

[Huh? Food!?] Oh! Looks like one of them is hungry! He’s heading towards the food! He’s a clever one! [Can I have food? Please? You didn’t feed me last time!]

“No… You need to go to your station, like we showed you!” Huh? Why isn’t he feeding the Growlithe? He’s got the food right there! He should be feeding him!

[Please? Food? I’m hungry! Please give me food this time!] See! He’s hungry! Don’t make him go hungry…! Please don’t make him go hungry… not again… Growlithe hates being hungry… it hurts and it’s the bad hurt not like the battle hurt…

“Look, I’ll feed you if you do this right…!”

…………………………………………………………………………………

“…So just SET. FIRE. TO. THE. HOOP! And THEN I’ll feed you! You STUPID MUTT!”

[But, I’m hungry! And you’ve got food right there! PLEASE let me eat it this time!]

“I said AFTER you set this on fire…! So HURRY UP or it’s back in your ball with no food again!”

[But… I don’t know HOW! And I…]

“What do you mean you’ll only feed it if it does what you tell it to?!”

Huh…?

That… That was what the nice man said… Just before Growlithe snuck into his ball… But that’s Kiyotaka’s voice? So this isn’t what happened to Growlithe… because he’s not even Growlithe anymore, he’s Arcanine. It was another Growlithe that was hungry…

“I don’t care what you’re trying to teach it, you can’t starve your pokenom!”

But Kiyotaka’s shouting at the man, just like the nice man did back then, before taking him to Kiyotaka! So… so that means he’s going to make sure the hungry Growlithe gets a better trainer now! Like the nice man did… So it’s all okay… He can just… hide in the nice man’s ball and when it opens back up, Kiyotaka will look after him...

“G-Ah!” The young master’s classmate had looked furious enough before his pokenom suddenly started trembling, but now it had disappeared into its pokéball without leave, he looked outright murderous. Depending on how Miss Hinoko answered him this time, Aloysius might be forced to rely on his own combat skills to ensure her safety, as crass as that would be…
“I don’t starve them!” Miss Hinoko insisted, “If they don’t understand it the second time, they get
taken out of this group and sent off for selling… and fed.”

“That’s beside the point! When you catch… or breed, in your case, a pokémon, you’re taking on the
responsibility to take care of all its basic needs, regardless of its behaviour! You can’t make their
minimal dietary requirements dependant on them learning tricks! If you want to encourage certain
behaviours, you should use extra treats, not withhold sustenance from them entirely!” The boy
angrily reiterated the, legally speaking true, point that Aloysius had tried to inform her of yesterday.
“That just results in them believing that your care is dependent on their ability to follow your orders!”

“But, it is.” Miss Hinoko explained calmly in the face of the boy shouting at her, “I’m too good of a
trainer to waste my time on pokémon who can’t understand things the first time I explain them… I’ll
let other people do that!”

“Wha…? So… At every step of your training… you give up on them if they fail just once!?” The young master’s classmate was aghast at the thought.

“There’s no room for failure in the Togami family.” Miss Hinoko intoned, “Not that I could expect a
poor quality trainer like yourself to understand…”

“Having enough money to mass-breed pokémon and cherry-pick the ones most suited to what you
plan to do with them doesn’t make you a good trainer!” The boy snapped at her. “Your whole family
is just riding off of the success of the pokémon that your money can afford you!”

“How dare you insult my family!?” Both Togamis asked, in the same cold angry tone, before the
young master continued, “YOU, of all people!”

“At least I’ve accepted that there’s a good reason my family faces disrespect, and I’m using that
knowledge to become a good trainer!” The young Ishimaru insisted. “Have you ever even
considered the possibility that, by blindly following the example your family set, you’re limiting your
own abilities!?”

“You’re implying I follow my family without…”

“I don’t know who you think you are…” Miss Hinoko angrily interrupted Young Master Togami’s
much calmer retort, “But we are Togamis and that makes us better than you and your one stupid
dog!”

“Arcanine is not stupid!” Ishimaru yelled instantly, as if on instinct, before apparently realising that
wasn’t the point he should be countering… “And you are not better than me!”

“I am, and I will prove it!” Miss Hinoko hissed… although why she had let a childish argument like
that, from a practical stranger, bother her so much, Aloysius couldn’t fathom. “I’ll give you a place
in the dog show tomorrow, and everyone will get to see me completely crush you!”

“But… that would only prove you’re better than me in one aspect of training…!”

“If you can’t beat me in every aspect of training, you can’t call yourself better than me! So I’ll see
you tomorrow, if you still insist on saying as much!” Miss Hinoko insisted, before turning her
attention back to the Growlithe handler… “Now, have all the puppies been fed?”

“Err… Yes, aside from this one…” The trainer gestured to his feet, where the same dog as before
was desperately pawing at his legs, trying to get him to give it some of the large bag of food he was
carrying.
“Good, put him off into the failures.” She gestured to it, before turning back to the young master with a false smile. “Now, Byakuya, I’d love to spend more quality time together, but it seems I need to go do some more organisational stuff for my show! I’ll have someone come and show you where your rooms are!”

“I expect Pennyworth already knows, but if you insist…” Young Master Togami surmised correctly, before his half-sister headed off towards the exit of the dog enclosure… “I was going to say that I don’t ‘blindly follow’ my family.” He turned back to Ishimaru, continuing the discussion from the point where Miss Hinoko had interrupted him, “But you can’t deny that my family’s methods get results! I know that look in your eye! You want these dogs! And I bet you’d trade in yours for any one of them without a second thought!”

“Well… I’ll admit, I’d quite like to take over this facility and make sure these dogs are cared for properly… And reduce the amount you’re overproducing and actually give all of the Growlithes a chance to shine while I’m at it!” The young Ishimaru answered, looking over at the Growlithe pen in disdain. “But… I couldn’t trade my Arcanine for any of these dogs!”

“What…? Why not…?” The young master looked baffled at the declaration, “Oh. Of course, you only have one badge! None of them would listen to y…”

“That’s not what I meant!” Ishimaru interrupts haughtily, “Arcanine and I have spent years forming a bond between us! That’s far more important than… than any good breeding or optimised training strategies or vitamin-enriched diets!”

“Really now… As if a ‘bond’ is going to make your pokémon strong enough to beat mine…” Master Togami sighed wearily, “Or even do so much as help you win that pointless challenge Hinoko just set you!”

“It… it could do…” Ishimaru answered hesitantly, after a moment’s consideration.

“…What? You actually think there’s a chance you could win!? The young master almost chocked, “When you’ve never even performed in one of those shows once!?”

“Well… it would depend on certain factors outside of my control, such as exactly what events are being performed… but… I’d say there is a chance I could beat her…” Ishimaru replied cautiously.

“Heh… You’re so naïve, it’s laughable.” Young Master Togami merely smirked at him, “But, as watching you try will at least make wasting my time tomorrow amusing, I’ll make a bet with you… If you can beat Hinoko, then I’ll give you the TM for Wild Charge…”

“But that costs fifty thousand pokédollars!” Ishimaru yelled in shock at the, in Aloysius’ experience, surprising low wager from the young master. “…What would happen if I lose?”

“You’re to spare me from anymore sanctimonious comments about my family, for the remainder of our time in Hope’s Peak!”

“Well… Seeing as I doubt you’ll ever listen to me if I do lose…” Ishimaru stuck out a determined hand, “You’re on!”

“Well… you’ve got some sense; I’ll give you that.” Young Master Togami shook his hand briefly. “I look forward to hearing a lot less of your voice!”

Hmm… well, it seems like the Young Master has found a way to make tomorrow’s delay in his schedule at least mildly entertaining for him… Beyond pitting his bird against Alyosius’, that it… Perhaps it won’t be as tedious as Alyosius was expecting.
Kiyotaka’s not got him out of the ball yet… should he get out and see what’s going on? But the mean trainer might be out there still… But Arcanine’s starting to get hungry! Doesn’t that mean it’s dinnertime? So Kiyotaka should let him out for dinner soon… but what if he doesn’t? What if something happened to Kiyotaka…? He should go out and check… But Kiyotaka could be busy, or somewhere too dangerous for Arcanine to come out… so he should just stay in here until Kiyotaka lets him out…! But he’s getting hungry, and…

“Arcanine?” That’s Kiyotaka! And the ball’s opening! “Are you ready to come out now…?”

[Yes! I’m ready! I’m here!] Arcanine jumps out of the ball and looks around him… there’s a big human bed and fluffy cushion that he doesn’t recognise, and a big window that looks over the place with all the other Arcanines and Growlithes that he met today… but where’s Kiyotaka…?

“Ah… Arcanine…” Arcanine feels a few familiar fingers combing through his leg fur, and looks down towards the sound of the voice to see that he’s come out standing on top of his beloved trainer… And he’s too heavy to do that anymore!

[Sorry!] He moves off to the side, letting Kiyotaka sit up.

“Thank you… good boy!” Yay! He’s still a good boy! “I got your dinner ready…”

He did!? Oh! There it is! Next to his hand! Arcanine had better eat it quick!

“And… ah!” Kiyotaka sounds a little surprised as Arcanine starts to eat, but quickly starts running fingers through his back fur and carries on talking, “…And I still owe you that poffin, because you were good while the Growlithes were getting fed…”

…The Growlithes? Oh, right! Those Growlithes that walked away from the food… except for that one that was hungry… Was he alright now…?

“Ah… Arcanine? What’s the matter? Is something wrong with your food? Or… did you want the poffin now…?” Kiyotaka asks, as soon as Arcanine feels too worried to carry on eating his dinner.

[Umm…] Arcanine tries to think of how to explain what he wants to know to Kiyotaka, but the best he can do is go over to the window and point his paw towards the Growlithes he saw earlier… [Is he alright now…?]

“…Are you worried about that Growlithe?” Kiyotaka asks, and he nods yes. “Well… he’s been fed, and… he’s being found a better trainer!”

[Yay!] Kiyotaka’s fixed it! Just like Arcanine knew he would! He didn’t need to worry about it at all! Now he needs to get back to eating the rest of his food! And the extra poffin Kiyotaka gives him! And… what’s this!?

“…And an extra, extra poffin, because you were a good boy and ate a little more slowly, just now!”

Woohoo! Extra, extra treat! Extra, extra treats are the best! No! Kiyotaka’s the best, ‘cause he gives him extra, extra treats and also lots of baths and pettings and he tastes nice when Arcanine kisses him which is good ‘cause he deserves lots of kisses…!

“Ah…! Arcanine! Ahahaha!” And he has the best laugh when Arcanine licks him, and he likes to hug Arcanine’s body and squeeze him tight, but not too tight, and give his fur nice scritches… “You really are the best pokémon I could ever hope to have…”
[And you’re the best trainer!] Arcanine tells him. ‘Cause he is. And Arcanine’s super lucky he got to have Kiyotaka, who plays with and teaches him all the nice things those other Arcanine don’t know about…

Oh… […]Poor other Arcanines…]

“Huh? What’s wrong, Arcanine?” Kiyotaka lets go of him and checks him over to see why he whined, “I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

Arcanine shakes his head, then goes back to the window and puts his paw over the dogs again…

“Err… That Growlithe? I just told you, he’s been fed and…” Kiyotaka starts, but stops once Arcanine shakes his head and moves his paw so it’s closer to… “Oh… The other Arcanines…?” Arcanine nods, which makes Kiyotaka look sad… “You… I… I suppose you’d probably quite like to live here with her… that’s underst…”

[Nooor!] Arcanine quickly circles around Kiyotaka, so he’s trapped and can’t leave without Arcanine. [I wanna live with you!]

“You… don’t want to live here!?” Kiyotaka sounds happy-surprised. “But… then what… what were you thinking about?”

[Hmm… I want them…] Arcanine points towards the other Arcanines, [To live with you, to!] He points at Kiyotaka.

“…You want me to look after the other Arcanines?”

[Yay! You got it!] Arcanine yaps happily at how smart his trainer is… but Kiyotaka’s just looking sad again…

“I… I’m sorry, but unlike the Togamis, I don’t have enough money to take care of all of them… or even any of them…” Aww… someone really ought to give Kiyotaka some of that money stuff! He needs it to do all the good things he wants to do! “I… I’m going to try to convince their trainer to care for them a bit more, but… I don’t think I’ll have much luck on that front, either… Not for a very long time…”

But Kiyotaka’s still gonna try… And that always means it’ll get done in the end! Even if it takes ages! He just needs Arcanine to remind him about it with a lick, every so often! Like now! [You’ll do it! I know you will!]

“Ah…! Thank you…” Kiyotaka wipes his face, then starts stroking gently down Arcanine’s back, as thanks. “But… on a happier note! You and I are going to get to join in some fun games tomorrow! It’s… a little like the sports club, but it’s more about how well behaved you can be, rather than how strong and powerful you are… And it’s for dogs only! You see, we’ll probably play a game called Flyball, and also I’ll have to ask you to do commands, and you show how well behaved you are, and if you do well enough you’ll get to stand up on a podium while people clap and give you a medal…”

Oh! This was the thing that other dog was talking about! He’d get to learn how to do that thing as well! Kiyotaka really was the best!
Thanks for reading! Next chapter we'll see how Sakura's getting on on Cinnabar island!
“Wow… I still can’t believe you managed to take out three Gyrados!” Hina enthused over lunch, the day after said fight had happened, despite Sakura having just explained that their teacher had rendered the task a simple one by sending them to sleep and then assisting with powerful Psychic attacks… “You’re so cool! I can’t wait until I’m as strong as you and we can do that kind of thing together!”

“Ah… Indeed!” Sakura agreed… externally, at least. Internally, she felt a stab of guilt at her own failure to point out that, by the time Hina reached Sakura’s level, Sakura would have likely progressed to a level far beyond it. “It will be very enjoyable to fight alongside you.”

That last part was true, at the very least. It was enjoyable doing anything with Hina, be it eating, learning or completing chores together. Even the most mundane of tasks could become something Sakura would look forward to, if she had the promise of doing so with the smiling, energetic beautiful lifeguard beside her, watching her every move with admiring eyes…

Or, what Sakura had first dared to think was admiration. However, it had become gradually more apparent over the last few weeks that Hina was looking at her as a source of aspiration, instead. Noting Sakura’s abilities not just as something for her to revere, but something to rival… despite Hina being far less suited to the pursuit of raw strength than Sakura was.

It was the sort of aspiration that Sakura would have usually shut down early, citing her already healthy rivalry with her current-unhealthy childhood friend as proof that they should look elsewhere for mutual motivation. But when it had come to telling Hina that… she’d suddenly been struck by the thought all her previous would-be-rivals had stopped interacting with her entirely once she had rebuked them… and doing the same to Hina might result in her losing her closest new friend and source of comfort in her still-unfamiliar feeling school…

And so she’d kept quiet instead, not even mentioning Kenshiro to her classmates, lest Hina pick up on her rivalry with him. Not that that was a real solution… she’d already been having to arrive
everywhere unreasonably early, so as to avoid Hina’s attempts at a rival ambush. To the point where it had been a relief to hear that Hina would be getting up early to go lifeguarding this week, instead, as it meant she wouldn’t be focused on constantly trying to catch up with Sakura.

Even though Hina was clearly in two minds about having volunteered to do so… “Yeah… I just wish I could have spent more of this week training up to get there…” She sighed, “I mean, Sayaka’s pokémon seem to have grown like crazy the last two days, and Makoto’s Togepi’s learnt a couple of new moves… I kind of feel like maybe I’ve wasted this opportunity, just to go lifeguarding again…”

“Nonsense. You have no reason to feel shame at taking time out from training to do a good deed…” Sakura told her. Indeed, she’d been rather disappointed to find out that she lacked the necessary qualifications to help out herself, and not just because it would have meant spending time learning more about Hina. “Gaining power for the sake of itself is a fruitless endeavour, your pokémon will respect you all the more if you train them with the intent to use them for good purposes.”

Not that Sakura herself had figured out exactly what she’d do, should she gain enough power to work her way to the very top of her dojo… and it was likely the reason she had always found herself unable to defeat her father…

“…Wow… you’re right! And that’s such a cool way to say it!” …But all thoughts of her father vanished in an instance once Sakura saw Hina’s eyes shining at her, like she was something to be treasured. “…Man, I hope I’ll be able to come out with awesome, smart stuff like that when I’m as strong as you are!”

“Ah…” Sakura paused as her thoughts came crashing back to reality, “I’m sure you already have a lot of wisdom to impart.”

“I guess… but most of its stuff like ‘don’t send the pokémon you’re riding into battle!’, or ‘Don’t go to the beach when there’s a Gyrados mating party going on!’” Hina complained, “…and then they just ignore me, because I don’t say it the right way…”

“You should not blame yourself for Hagakure’s foolishness.” From what she had seen, it was clear that the beach was not a safe place to be training, even without Hina’s warning…

“It’s not just him though… I get a lot of people who don’t listen to me, because I just look like some kid whose only had her Marill a few days…” Hina sighed, “And then they do something stupid and I have to bail them out! Whereas I bet if my pokémon looked stronger, they’d listen to me in the first place!”

“Ah… so that is your reason to become stronger? So that others will heed your warnings…” A very respectable goal…

“How? Oh, hey! You’re right again!” …Even if Hina herself hadn’t realised that that was her goal… “Hehehe… We’re gonna give out so much good advice once I’m caught up to you! Just you waitiit… oh CRUD it’s five to one already!? Ahhh! I’ve gotta get back to the beach! See you later!”

…It was remarkable watching how quickly Hina could move, when she felt the need to… or even just the urge to, given the number of times Sakura had found her racing around the pokéathlon tracks, just for the sake of burning off energy…

“Pfft…” The barest hint of derisive snorting from the corner of the room knocked Sakura out her line of thought… If she’d had less keen ears, she would not have even noticed the writer was there at all, sat with her papers and inks in the corner of the dining hall, let alone mocking them while she thought she would not be heard.
But Sakura had heard it, and her father had taught her that ignoring such things could eventually lead to undue challenges from those who no longer respected your position, so… “Do you find something amusing, Fukawa?”

“Guuuuh!?” She was clearly not expecting Sakura to have heard her laugh, let alone call her out on it. “Uuuuh… I-I… It’s j-just… You do realise that she thinks she has a chance of being your r-rival, don’t you? Even you c-can’t be that much of an oblivious m-muscle head…”

Ah… the one thing Sakura was not comfortable discussing… but of course the rivalry writer had picked up on Hina’s one-sided intent of opposition, and probably thought her a fool for aiming so much higher than her own ability…

“I am aware that she has such feelings… And I think that it is admiral of her to aim to catch up with my ability, despite her apparent disadvantage. She has a great deal of drive and motivation, and I look forward to seeing what she can do with it.”

“Well, sure! Not like I’m going to mock someone for trying to catch up by four badges!” Fukawa agreed self-consciously, only to smirk in amusement moments later… “Heh… I was just wondering when you’re going to tell her about your current rival!”

“Well, I mean… I didn’t know who your rival is.” Fukawa shrugged, “Just that you probably had one…”

…And now Sakura’s outburst had confirmed it. That was unfortunate, she could potentially have denied it, had she not been so shocked by Fukawa’s insight. “…How could you tell?”

“Please, you’re the only person in the class who’s not made a move on Togami, even though you’d clearly be an obvious candidate!” Fukawa rolled her eyes, “Of course you already have a rival!”

“I doubt that Togami and I make a good rivals, even if I did not already have one.” Sakura countered, “Our training methods are too different for us to compete in anything outside of strict fights. Whereas Kenshiro and I were able to make other competitions out of things that benefitted us both, such as determining who could climb mountains faster, defeat the most wild pokémon, or find a particular type of flower first.”

“Huh… he… does sound like a good rival for you…” Fukawa admitted, probably because Sakura couldn’t help but smile fondly at the memories of her and Kenshiro’s explorations… “I’m surprised he hasn’t turned up at school.”

“He’s… in the hospital.” Sakura explained, “They say he only has six months left…” Not that she believed it…

“Oh…” Fukawa looked like she wished very much that she hadn’t started this conversation in the first place, “So… that’s why you’ve not told Asahina… By the time she’s at your level…”

“No. Kenshiro will still be alive.” Sakura corrected her, “Someone like him won’t let this keep him down.”

“Uuuuh…” Fukawa looked disbelieving, not that Sakura could blame her, given the facts she’d just given her. “But then… why haven’t you told her yet? She’ll just feel stupid if she does all that work and then finds out it was never going to happen anyway!”
“I… I realise that.” Sakura admitted. She knew it wasn’t fair to lead Hina on the way she was, but… “I know it’s selfish but… I enjoy her company.”

“…So? You’d still be able to hang out even if she didn’t think you could end up as rivals.”

“Perhaps… but she’d be liable to spend more time with others, especially if she found a rival of her own…”

“Geez… you like her that much?” Fukawa laughed at her, and Sakura could feel her face heating up. “Anyone would think you… you… ooooooo! Ooh-hoh-hooh!”

…And now her face felt like someone had used Ember on it, as Fukawa had obviously hit upon her exact problem…

“I… would appreciate it if you could keep this to yourself…” Sakura admitted.

“Pfft… Fine. It’s not like I care that you’re leading her on…” Fukawa said dismissively, “Even if it would make more sense to just tell her you want the other sort of relationship!”

“I… realise that. But…”

Sakura hesitated for a moment… Asking others for help was not one of her strong points… and certainly not when the subject was so sensitive, and the other person quite so… abrasive. But Fukawa had been the only one to notice her feelings for Hina, and asking her would be far easier than having to go through the process of admitting her crush to someone else…

“But what?” …And Fukawa was clearly getting impatient for her to finish her sentence.

“…How do I tell her?”

“Why are you asking me?” Fukawa asked, somewhat suspiciously. “What makes you think I’d know?”

“I… thought you’d included some Lovers-to-Enemies relationships in your books…” Not that Sakura had read any of Fukawa’s work, but Hina had told her about some of the plots. “I thought perhaps you’d have some knowledge of the opposite occurrence.”

“Well, first off, calling them ‘Lovers-to-Enemies’ completely misses the entire point of those types of rivalries! They’re about two people having enough mutual admiration for each other that they constantly want to race to become as good as the other!” Fukawa lectured her, sternly. “But, aside from that, just because I’ve written about something, doesn’t mean I actually know anything about it! I just write about the sorts of rivalries I wish would happen to me!”

“Ah… I see…” That was unfortunate…

“But if it were me, I’d just be honest and say I’d noticed that she wanted a rivalry, but I wanted a romance, and see what happened!” Fukawa advised. “You’re so honest about everything else, I’m surprised you haven’t, yet!”

“I’d… intended to say something to that effect, at times…” Sakura agreed.

“…So why didn’t you?”

“It… proved to be more… difficult than I’d expected, when it actually came to talking about it with her.” She admitted, “Especially as I began to consider the possibility that doing so may cause her to
“stop spending time with me.”

“So, in other words, you Snubulled out!” Fukawa summarise, harshly.

“…Perhaps cowardice has been a rather large contribution to it.”

“Well, quit whining and get over it, then! It’s the only way you’re going to get this sorted!” Fukawa insisted, “Heh… Unless you want to start trying zany nonsense, like pretending to drown and letting her ‘rescue’ you!”

Sakura didn’t really see how giving Hina a chance to do her job could lead to a romantic relationship… But that was beside the point… “You are right, thank you. I will attempt to be more honest with her today.”

“Well, you’re welcome, or whatever!” Fukawa muttered a dismissal as she turned back to her writing. Leaving Sakura to try and figure out exactly how she’d be honest with Hina in silence…

…She hadn’t succeeded in answering that question. She’d barely managed to actually leave the dining hut and head back over to Hina’s lifeguard chair, as nervous as she was about the conversation she had sworn to have. And then she’d only been partway through attempting to tell Hina that she even had something she wanted to talk about, before a young child whose parents were attempting to get their third badge had wandered onto the beach and needed Hina to defend her from wild pokémon until her parents arrived to pick her up.

After all of that, Hina had forgot that Sakura had been attempting to start a conversation, and had begun telling Sakura about other times she’d had to come to the aid of children, which was why Sakura was now allowing herself to stand and bathe in her enthusiasm, rather than get to work on her task she’d set herself…

“Oh! Umm… hey, Sakura?” At least, until Sakura’s attention was caught by a sudden increase in the amount of worry in Hina’s voice… “Are you… intending to spend the whole day with me again…?”

“That… was my intention…” Sakura admitted, “I thought you would appreciate having someone to talk to, while you were here. Was I wrong? Would you prefer us not to spend time together?”

“No! It’s not that! Hanging out with you is great!” Hina smiled beautifully at her… perhaps telling her how she really felt was not such a poor decision after all… “It’s just... well... it’s a little embarrassing but... It... kinda feels like catching up to your level won’t be as much of an achievement if you slow down your training because of me. So... I’d rather you go and train, rather than worry about hanging around with me…”

…Who was trying to fool. Hina saw her as a friendly rival, nothing other than that. “… I see. In that case, I think I will go for a swim and see what I can battle against in the water today…”

“Umm... You have a swimming pokémon?” Hina asked in confusion.

“No, but don’t worry, I am a strong enough swimmer to go out there by myself.” Sakura explained… and perhaps a fast swim in the ocean would let her work off some of her disappointment and frustration...

“Really!? That’s amazing!” Hina exclaimed, probably looking at Sakura with that same look that always pulled at her heart and raised her hopes. She couldn’t bring herself to look at it and have to
face yet another wave of disappointment yet again… “Just watch out for Tentacools, alright? You won’t be able to swim at all if you get stung!”

“Of course.” Sakura told her in an assured tone, even though she barely paying attention to Hina’s advice. She would have Florges flying nearby to take out any wild pokémon that could endanger her, which meant all she had to concern herself with was keeping herself moving, trying to forget her woes by crashing through the pitiful waves that lapped against the island shore, through to the calmer waters of the open sea, where she was free to… to…

…To realise that she’d just- as Fukawa had put it- ‘Snubbulled out’ yet again. And, in retrospect, stormed away from her friend without saying goodbye properly in the process. That had been truly unfair of her… she should probably go back and apologise, and definitely explain herself…

Except, she could feel something wrapping around her leg…

“GRRAAAAGHHH!” …and suddenly there was a jolt of searing pain passing through her leg and up her body, causing her to spasm and lose her position in the water…

“FLOOR!” Sakura barely had a chance to recognise the large bulbous head of the Tentacool that had stung her, before Florges quickly dispatched it…

…but it was already too late, her leg could barely move, her throat and chest burned from the saltwater she’d accidentally inhaled, and she already feel her muscles starting to feel heavy and numb…

She… should have… taken Hina’s… warning serious…

…

…Her chest hurt…

…Something was pressing hard into her sternum… but with a precise rhythm to it… Was she trapped in some kind of machine…?

Ah… Well… whatever it was, it had stopped hitting her chest now… perhaps she could work out where she was? What had she even been doing? She remembered swimming…

“G-ah!” Sakura’s eyes shot open as she remembered having ignored Hina’s advice… only to find herself uncomfortably close to Hina’s blushing face. And, of more pressing concern at the moment, unable to draw air into her chest properly… “Huuuurr… Kaaaa! Kaff, kaff…!”

“Ah! You’re alright!” Hina cheered, as Sakura’s body instinctively raised itself up so she could cough the seawater out of her lungs. “When I saw Florges dragging you back, I thought you were dead!”

“…Kaff kah… hah…” Sakura managed to clear her chest of water… although it now seemed appropriate for her to get some other things off of it… “…I am sorry. I should have paid more heed to your warning…”

“Ah! Don’t worry about that! I’m just glad you’re okay!” Sakura found herself frozen as Hina wrapped herself around her arm. “And I didn’t even have to do mouth-to-mouth!”

“Ah…” Mouth to mouth…? Like kissing? Was that what Fukawa had been alluding to, earlier…?

“Ahh… not that I’d have minded doing mouth-to-mouth! I’d happily do it to save your life! Or
anyone’s life, not just yours! I mean, a lifeguard has to be willing to do first aid on anyone! Even if it is a little gross at times…” Hina explained rapidly, “…Not that I’m saying your gross! You’re not gross at all! It probably would have been nice doing mouth to mouth on you!

“…” Had Hina really just said that she might have liked…?

“Uhh… wait… that’s… I didn’t mean that!” Hina’s rushed words felt like a stab through the heart, “Except… well… I kinda did mean it…?” She did? “I mean, I said it, and I don’t usually say stuff I don’t mean…” Was she not sure herself? “I just… I didn’t mean to say it that weirdly, you know what I mean?”

“I… I’m sorry, but I’m not sure I do…” Sakura admitted. Was Hina saying she hadn’t meant that she’d have liked kissing Sakura, or was she just saying that she hadn’t meant to admit as much in such an odd situation…?

“Uhh… you know what, I’m not sure what I know what I meant either…” Hina blushed even more… which made Sakura curious as to why exactly she had started blushing… had it been at the thought of their lips touching…? And if so, was that because she’d wanted that to happen, or because doing so would have been awkward between them…? “How’s about I go get you a towel and more antidote, and I’ll explain what I was going on about once I actually figure it out, alright?”

…So, in other words, Hina was asking her to give her some time to think on the matter, and sort her own feelings out…

“…Very well.” It would be easier to discuss her own feelings with Hina, once she knew the other was sure of how she felt… and knowing how strong-willed her friend could be, they’d probably have the discussion by the end of this trip…

**Headcannons:** (With credit to Shapeshiftinterest for some of the pokéball ideas.)

(Not necessary to read for the sake of the plot, but I figured some people would be interested.)

**Pokémon physiology and healing:**

The logic I am working when while writing this fic is that pokémon are magical creatures. By which I mean there’s a certain level of magical energy in the atmosphere and environment that all pokémon unknowingly draw into themselves to shape and maintain their physical forms, with stronger/rarer pokémon generally drawing in more of said magical energy.

(The region of Orre, the setting of the Pokémon collosseum and XD: Gale of darkness, suffered from some kind of disaster that depleted the environments magical energy, making it unsustainable for wild pokémon to live in for many years. The magical energy is slowly building back up again, but it is taking many years and the number of wild pokémon that can live there is still very low.)

This is why pokémon can take so much damage from other pokémon, because they draw in magical energy in order to rebuild their forms quickly. This process of getting hurt and then rebuilding themselves trains the pokémon to make more efficient use of the magical energy they draw in, allowing them to use the energies to grow gradually stronger and larger bodies, which is why battling other pokémon is such an integral part of their growth process.
On the other hand, humans are (in most cases) non magical creatures who are extremely susceptible to pokémon attacks, because they do not have any innate magical defences or healing abilities in the same way pokémon do.

However, humans have a different type of advantage over pokémon. Because drawing in magical energy is an instinctive process that they are not aware of, a pokémon’s ability to heal is largely dependent on their psychological outlook at the time. This makes them extremely susceptible to placebo effects. If a human is convincing enough about whatever healing treatment they’re about to give a pokémon, then that healing treatment will have a positive effect. This is why things like lemonade, or a doctor standing around in the middle of a route with very little equipment, are able to heal injuries like cuts, burns and poisoning. Because they’re effectively setting off a pokémon’s own magical healing process.

Humans, at least at the time this fic is set in, don’t realise they’re doing this. They are aware that there is a curative energy of some kind in the environment that can be manipulated and processed in a way that helps pokémon—this is what the pokémon centre machines and commercial potions do. However, when it comes to things like sleep, berries or random drinks being able to heal pokémon, they just think that pokémon have faster biological healing processed than humans, and therefore react better to natural remedies. For example, Pecha berries have a natural anti-nausea effect, leading humans to think they’re good for helping with poisons. Then they tell their poisoned pokémon to eat one because it’ll help them feel better about the poison. The pokémon then believes that the berry will cure their poison and instantly uses the magical energy in the air to reduce the extent to which they are poisoned, which then leads the human to believe that pecha berries can outright cure poison in pokémon. Then the next time they give the pokémon a berry saying ‘this will get rid of the poison’ which makes the pokémon more confident and has a greater effect, and gradually over centuries Pecha berries become capable of curing any poison in a pokémon, because it has become common knowledge that Pecha berries can cure any poison in a pokémon.

Similarly, drinks got their start as curative items because young pokémon trainers would be told things like ‘drink your milk, it’ll make your bones stronger’, ‘drink some water, you’ll feel better’, ‘some lemonade will settle your stomach’ and then repeated it to their young pokémon, who thought it meant that drinking drinks= healing effect, then the kids saw their pokémon getting better and assumed the drink had done it.

On the flip side though, if a human is intending to hurt a pokémon, the pokémon will truly believe that they’ve been hurt, and the psychological stress of that happening will result in them being less able to use their magical energy to heal their wounds, meaning that human-inflicted injuries on pokémon heal at a biologically natural rate, and can be distinguished from pokémon-inflicted injuries. This is the reason that humans hurting pokémon is extremely taboo, despite pokémon-on-pokémon battles being normalised. Because pokémon inflicted-injuries are part of their natural life cycle, and the benefits to the pokémon outweigh the short-term pain. But a human inflicting injuries on their pokémon will have no such benefit and will cause the pokémon a lot of pain and distress.

**Pokéballs:**

Pokéballs are a relatively new invention, and not strictly necessary for training a pokémon, although they make catching and transporting pokémon far easier, and most pokémon find them convenient resting places for short periods of time (although they get bored in the long term). Before they existed, humans trained pokémon in much the same way that humans domesticated animals in the real world, with friendlier and weaker pokémon being common training partners. The invention of pokéballs allowed for stronger and more antagonistic pokémon to be safely caught and managed.

When a pokémon goes into its pokéball, it doesn’t physically send its body into the ball, but instead
dissipates its physical body back into magical energy and sends *that* inside of the ball. In this state the pokémon has a limited consciousness and no awareness of events that are happening outside of the ball, unless it begins to open up the ball by itself, in order to ‘peek’ outside.

In order to be able to send their energy in and out of the ball so quickly, pokémon need to constantly store a small part of their energy inside the ball, which is why each pokéball can only hold one pokémon, and why each pokémon can only use one ball at a time (Because otherwise they lose too much of their energy. A bit like horcruxes.).

It IS possible for a pokémon to switch pokéballs if this stored energy is transferred to a different balls, but those cases are rare. It either requires a trainer to release their pokémon, a pokémon to be utterly *desperate* to leave their trainer, or a Snag machine to attempt to forcibly transfer the pokémon’s stored energy into a new ball. From a legal standpoint, trainers own pokéballs, not the pokémon inside them. If a pokémon transfers its energy to a new ball, that pokémon legally belongs to the owner of the new ball and pokémon trades are a legal transfer of the pokéballs, not the pokémon themselves, meaning it is possible for a trainer to trade for a pokémon, only to have it run away back to a spare pokéball on its old trainer’s belt. This is *very* rare though, and usually due to the new trainer being abusive, in which case they are banned from owning pokémon. (In fact, any pokémon transferring away from a trainer is usually seen as evidence enough that that trainer should not be allowed to have pokémon anymore, or at least not without extreme supervision.)

In order to catch wild pokémon, pokéballs contain a small amount of stored magical energy which is capable of forcing a pokémon into its incorporeal magical state and into the ball for a short period of time. At this point the pokémon has a chance to attempt to free itself from the ball before part of its energy splits off and settles into the ball permanently. Whether the pokémon does free itself depends on 1) if it actually wants to (pokémon who are already friendly with a trainer will allow themselves to be caught more easily), 2) how much energy it has (weakened pokémon are easier to catch) and 3) how much energy the pokéball has (better pokéballs store more energy and force the pokémon into their incorporeal state for longer, increasing the chance that they’ll ‘bond’ with the ball. There are also specialist pokéballs like net balls that are designed for use with specific types of pokémon and can trap those for longer).

This is why pokéballs are one-use only, because once the stored energy has been used once, they’re little more than plastic containers with a dead battery inside. Theoretically it would be possible to recharge the energy, but the process for doing it is so impractical that it’s easier to mass-produce them instead.

There’s also a lot of customs surrounding re-use of old pokéballs. When pokéballs first started to come into fashion, there was a fear that a pokéball could potentially get lost with a pokémon still patiently waiting for its trainer inside of it for years. As a result, older people started to try and encourage young trainers to compulsively check the contents of random pokéballs they find out and about. They did this by placing items of varying use or value inside used pokéballs and leaving them in random places. Over the years it became obvious that pokémon would quite easily get bored and exit their pokéballs of their own volition if their trainer left them for too long (hence the need for letting your pokémon out regularly in this AU). But by that time it had become custom to put items for others to find in your failed pokéballs, and many people came to believe that doing so would earn them better luck in getting a successful catch with the next pokéball they used, and so people continue to leave items in pokéballs in random places. And oftentimes people will organise events similar to our own Easter Egg hunts, where many item-containing pokéballs will be hidden in a small area, and children will be encouraged to hunt in odd places for them. (A throwback to when it was thought that people needed to be constantly on the lookout for lost pokéballs.)
Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next up, we’ll see how the first part of Taka’s competition goes!
Chapter Notes

I’d been thinking it would make sense for Pennyworth to originally be from one of the Pokémon Ranger regions (as Sonia also is), as a parallel to him being from a different country in the canon DR universe (He’s British, everyone else is Japanese). I picked Fiore (the setting for the first Pokémon Ranger game) as its thought to be close to Sinnoh, which is where Byakuya was raised in this AU. (It’s also based on Naples, making it the closest pokémon region to Britain aside from Kalos, which is based on France.
I didn’t want to go into huge detail about the agility course, so here is an example that might make it easier to understand what’s going on in that section:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woRBpEHFE3U
Also, an example of a Flyball competition (usually done in teams, but I made it single-dog in this fic.): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fTWAEmoAGk
https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Swinub_(Pok%C3%A9mon)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Rruuuffff!”

…Hmm… Rufflet’s sense of personal fighting strategy could use some work… without Togami’s guidance, his attack style seemed to consist of nothing but head on attacks against Pennyworth’s older, much wiser bird, which had resulted Rufflet slamming into the glass windows of the arena after the several times that Braviary dodged his attacks at the last second.

Still, Rufflet was lasting a lot longer against the older bird than he’d ever done before… and attacking faster as well. If it weren’t for the fact that they’d been forced to contain the fight within the small arena-side seating area Hinoko had secured for himself and Ishimaru, he’d be able to build up more speed before attacking, and this fight would probably be over by now…

But perhaps that was just as well. The was little better to do while waiting for this ridiculous show of Hinoko’s to start, and it was almost impossible to focus on work with Ishimaru fussing over his dog’s appearance right next to him, as he desperately tidied its fur up in an effort not to come last in the very first round of the competition…

Besides… this way, the battle was actually rather interesting. It was obviously one of attrition, but the question was, which of the birds was the one being worn down? A casual bystander would have probably assumed it was Rufflet, having watched him smash at high speed into walls multiple times in an attempt to take-down his foe, whereas Pennyworth’s Braviary was playing a smart defence, conserving its energy and only making fast movements when it was absolutely necessary…

But, Rufflet was doing a good job of keeping up the pressure, forcing his adult rival to speed out of the way almost constantly! And as much as the old bird was doing a good job of hiding its exhaustion, Rufflets attacks were gradually getting closer and closer to actually hitting their mark… Soon enough, it would slip up and Rufflet would draw blood, and that would signal the beginning of the end of Braviary’s winning streak… Soon… very soon…

“BRaaa!” Or now, as Rufflet managed to predict the direction Braviary would attempt to dodge in,
and changed his course at the last moment, letting him grip onto Braviary’s wing with his sharp talons and yank out several feathers when the older bird shook free and dove downwards, heading back to its master.

Not that doing so did it any good. They obviously weren’t using items for this battle, and Rufflet’s minor victory had spurred him on to attack even faster which meant that the young eaglet was practically on him as it landed to the ground, spread its wings and… bowed its head…?

“RRRruuuuuufff… Let?” Rufflet’s attack cry trailed off into confusion, as Braviary suddenly disappeared from the field just as he was about to hit it, causing him to hop around in all directions suspiciously, probably expecting some kind of sneak attack.

“Well… It would appear you’ve won.” Pennyworth announced, snapping his pokéball shut.

“Congratulations, Rufflet.”

“…Flet?” Rufflet tilted his head in disbelief then started clucking irritably.

“I assure you, this is no patronisation… Braviary respects you enough not to waste your time with a futile struggle.” Pennyworth explained further. “He knew he would not be able to recover from that hit enough to hurt you, so he surrendered.”

“Ruff? RUFF! Ruff-LET!” Rufflet started crowing and hopping around the arena floor victoriously, prompting Pennyworth’s Braviary to slowly emerge from its pokémon to bow in defeat once again, and offer what sounded like an extremely tired congratulation.

…A wise old bird. It had fought sensibly and kept up its appearance of strength throughout the fight, with the aim of psyching out its young opponent. But once it had become clear that the younger eaglet was now too strong for it to overcome, it had had the good grace and manners not to waste any more time.

And his family had been foolish enough to assume that his choice of second pokémon was influenced by some kind of ridiculous… fondness for his most competent member of staff! He’d merely seen what an impressive pokémon his was! And if an immigrant pokémon ranger, who’d just adopted a random pokémon in order to better fit into the social dynamic of his new home, could end up with a Braviary like that, then obviously Togami would be more than capable of raising one into an absolutely formidable pokémon! Especially as he already had an expert on them right at his side, available for him to call on for advice whenever he wished!

…Which he might need to do now, as Rufflet had suddenly taken a deep breath and started straining against itself, in a manner that someone cruder that him might compare to a human suffering from constipation… “…Rufflet, what are you doing?”

He responded by letting his breath out and letting his wings drop in disappointment, before quickly turning and angrily lunging at Braviary, to the point that he even started pecking at Pennyworth’s pokéball once it quickly disappeared back inside…

“Rufflet, stop that!” Togami ordered, to little avail. Dammit, what should he do now? If Rufflet kept that up, he might hurt Pennyworth! But Drampa was too large to let out in this arena… “You already won! You don’t need to keep attacking!”

“Rrr! Ruff-LET!” Rufflet briefly turned to snap at him, before continuing his assault on the ball…

“Really, young Rufflet, you have defeated him…” Pennyworth tried to explain it to him, “But that by no means mean you are ready to evolve, now.”
Evolve? Ah… so that’s why he had been straining. He thought he was stronger than a Braviary, so therefore he should now be one.

“Exactly… Pennyworth’s Braviary is old… and far weaker than it was when it first evolved!” Togami continued the explanation, “You’re close, but you’ve still got a way to go before you’ll evolve! So stop trying to break that pokéball!”

“Rrrrrr…” Well, he’d stopped attacking, at least… but now he was grumpily storming back and forth around the arena floor like a toddler mid-tantrum! If this kept up people would probably start making comments about his inability to control his own pokémon! Perhaps he needed to get his badges out to remind Rufflet who was boss…

“If I may say so, sir, I believe you’ve done yourself a disservice there. It’s true that my Braviary is past his prime, but you should also consider the effect of your careful selection when it came to catching him. My pokémon was found injured and required nursing back to health and adoption, so I suspect he’s naturally weaker than others of his kind, and my training of him was somewhat… lacklustre, I’ll admit.” Pennyworth spoke up over the low squawking noise, “Whereas you made sure to pick one who was naturally strong, and then nurtured his growth through every means possible. Even at his peak, my Braviary would not have been close to measuring up to the strength yours will possess, once he gets to that stage.”

“…Ruff?” That seemed to have caught the bird’s attention.

“Well, obviously. I’ve been aiming to make Rufflet as strong as possible before he evolves, so he’ll be all the more fearsome when he does!” Togami agreed, “It’s no surprise he can beat some of the weaker Braviaries, even in his younger form.”

"Let!” Rufflet puffed out his chest proudly.

“Indeed… however, now that that is settled, I suspect it would be a good time for Young Rufflet to rest in his pokéball.” Pennyworth suggested. Perhaps that meant this show was about to start… he was sure it should have by now!

“Alright… Rufflet, time to stay in your ball for a while.” Togami gave the order, which was followed immediately, then put Rufflet’s ball back into his case alongside Drampa’s and turned his attention back to the arena…

Where, even after that whole fight between his and Pennyworth’s pokémon, Ishimaru was still preening his dog in preparation for the first round’s appearance judgement! “Wasn’t this supposed to have started by now?”

“Err… No?” Ishimaru answered, after double checking his ancient watch. “The second event isn’t due to start for another two minutes!”

“The second event? What happened to the first one?” Togami asked, which just caused Ishimaru to stare incredulously at him instead.

“…That took place while Braviary and Rufflet were fighting, sir.” Pennyworth answered instead, once it was obvious Ishimaru was going to be useless. “The results are up on the board…”

…Ah, so they were. Seemed like he’d managed to ignore all the inevitable introductory, self-congratulatory blather about why dogs were supposedly the best type of pokémon to raise and the tedious sight of watching a dozen dogs trot around in a circle while being judged on their appearance…
Or, more accurately, a dozen and one dogs, as Ishimaru had continued to insist he actually stood any chance whatsoever of winning their bet right up until the beginning of the contest, and was up there listed as ‘mystery competitor’… although, now that he’d scored fifth place to Hinoko’s second, perhaps he might have realised how hopeless his situation was!

Although, that did beg the question… “Then why are you still brushing your dog?”

“Because Arcanine wants me to!” A rather obvious answer, in retrospect. It was his usual reason for being foolish.

But Togami had been hoping that dangling the promise of a much needed TM in front of him would at least make Ishimaru attempt to compete seriously, if only so he’d truly see just how outclassed he really was when he failed regardless. But instead, it hadn’t even occurred to him to observe the behaviour of his competition, to see how he should be preparing for the upcoming events. After all, while Ishimaru was uselessly lying to his dog about how attractive it was…

“All the other trainers are warming their dogs up for the next event.” Togami pointed out.

“I know… but that doesn’t mean I can’t spare the time to make sure Arcanine’s happy about what’s going on!” Ishimaru stupidly dismissed his advice, “Besides, it’ll be easier for us to watch a few of the other dogs first, as we’ve never done this before…”

“And what happens if you’re the first competitor?”

“Err…” Ishimaru’s face froze as he apparently only just considered the possibility. “Well… We still have the advantage of speed, over a lot of the other dogs…”

Hah! He could talk as confidently as he liked, but he was clearly worried about the possibility of having to run the course without any opportunity to study it in advance!

…More the pity that he ended up being the very last person to run! It would have been amusing to watch him flounder. But instead, he got to watch several of the other trainers, including Hinoko’s admittedly flawless run of the course, before having to go out and run it himself…

“…And finally, it's today's late entrant, with his Arcanine!” One of the two commentators who seemed to be directing everything announced, as Ishimaru rigidly headed up to starting line with his dog. “Apparently, this is his first time on an agility course, so it’s probably safe to say that Togami’s taking first place…”

“That’s true, but Arcanines do have quite the advantage in this event... He should be able to score well, unless they make any major mistakes… And he’s off to a good start, over the first three jumps like a pro, but a little slower through the weave poles! Clearly the dog isn’t used to that one, but didn’t get confused by the sharp turn away from the A-frame into the tunnel…”

Mostly, from what Togami could see, because Ishimaru had rushed ahead of it and steered it in the right direction before it had the chance to. In fact he seemed to be rushing around the course a lot less efficiently that all the other trainers had done…

“The trainer's certainly doing a good job of managing his dog, out of the tunnel now and clears the next two jumps before heading up the see-saw and... oooohhh lost his balance there as he come down! But he makes up for it with the next jump and a beautiful turn onto the A-frame, a bit slow but definitely touches the white area on both sides, and now into the final two jumps before the finish... and he clears them perfectly! An impressive first run from the novice!”
“And it looks like his dog wants to have another go!” Both the commentators and most of the audience started laughing as Ishimaru bent double to catch his breath, only for his dog to run back to the starting line, do the first three jumps again and then somehow manage to get itself stuck in the weave poles until Ishimaru dashed back over and guided it out and back to their ringside seat before his score was actually announced.

“Well, that was certainly fun, wasn’t it!” Ishimaru seemed more concerned with petting his mutt than how he’d done in the competition. “And you did so well! I think someone deserves a poffin!”

“…You came fourth.” Togami corrected, as the results came up on screen, “That’s not even a podium finish.”

“Yes, but given that this was our first time, it’s impressive that we beat anyone!” Ishimaru insisted, before turning his attention back to the dog. “It just goes to show how clever you are, picking it up so quickly, doesn’t it, Arcanine!”

“Arc!” The dog barked and wagged its tail as ridiculously as it always did at Ishimaru’s encouragement, especially when Ishimaru decided to give it an especially big poffin.

Honestly, weren’t Arcanines supposed to be dignified and proud? He’d certainly never seen any of them licking someone’s face just because of a simple, probably poorly-made, treat until he met Ishimaru. And even after the idiot had seen how Arcanines were supposed to behave, he still saw no cause for concern in his dog’s immature behaviour. If anything, he was encouraging it even more today than he usually did, which was so sickening to watch that it was a relief when the announcer introduced the next event…

“And now onto the obedience round! Each trainer will take it in turns to have their dog run through a list of simple commands! Points will be awarded for speed and smartness!”

“This is just to show what a good boy you are at following commands!” Ishimaru insisted to his dog, as he was called up to go first. “We should do especially well this time!”

…To be fair to him, he did seem to do well, making sure his dog was walking to heel like usual as he entered the arena and read through the list he was given, then quickly and accurately running through them all, while the commentators marvelled at how much attention it was paying to his hands as he used them to direct it to sit, stay, lie down etc…

So, of course, that meant Togami had to sit and listen to him prattling on about what a good boy his dog was while all the other trainers ran through the same exercise. He didn’t even stop when some Herdier managed to beat his score and take first place, or when it was Hinoko’s turn to show her dog. It would seem he really didn’t care about winning this show…

“And Togami enters the ring… Her dog seems a little reluctant to come out with her though…”

“Yes, it looks like it’s irritated by the presence of the other Arcanine! It’s not a huge fault, but given the high standards set by Mogedi and our mystery trainer, it might just be enough to knock her down to third place!”

What…!? Hmm… it seemed like they were right… Hinoko was obviously irritated with her dog’s, barely-noticeable, slowness when it came to following her commands, as it kept shooting looks at Ishimaru and his dog, and it resulted in her coming fifth to Ishimaru’s second! So she’d inadvertently given herself a handicap by introducing a competitor who would distract her dog by triggering its territorial instincts? What a stupid thing to do, just because Ishimaru had childishly insisted he was a better trainer than her! No wonder her mother had always been embarrassed to talk about her at
family meetings… Imagine having to admit your daughter had been given all the financial support she could have ever hoped for, and she still managed to lose to someone from a family like the Ishimarus!

How did think she deserved to have anything to do with Togami corporation when she lost an obedience test to someone whose dog apparently needed an entire bag full of toys to distract it with while they waited for the equipment for the next event to be set up? Who wouldn’t even give its trainer the rope he was trying to play fetch with, without him having to tug on it for a minute first? And who wouldn’t let Ishimaru finish building whatever he wanted to out of the toy blocks he’d brought along, because it kept wanting to knock them over, like a toddler? Honestly, when Togami finally got control of it all, there were going to be so many of his half-siblings given a severance package that included instructions never to set foot in any his offices again…

She didn’t seem too concerned about her standings though, once she’d had a stern talking to with the dog. She was still in first place overall, and while Ishimaru was doing better than Togami had been expecting him to, he wasn’t likely to overtake her unless she had a complete disaster in one of the events. And that certainly wasn’t going to happen in the next event, as Togami was starting to recognise the equipment they were setting up…

“Next up is the Flyball event! Each dog will have to make their way across the hurdles, collect the ball and then make their way back to deposit the ball a total of four times in today’s event!”

“Yes, this will be an extra challenge compared to the team versions, as the dogs not only need to be able to run fast, but also control their movement enough to turn back and make the multiple runs!”

Yes, just as he thought! It was the same pointless task they’d watched Hinoko’s dog do yesterday. No wonder she looked so smug as she led her dog up to one of the thirteen groups of hurdles that had been set up in the arena. It was a stark contrast with Ishimaru’s nervous demeanour as he led his own dog up to his area at the very end and waited for the signal for the race to start…

“And they’re OFF!” The event started with all of the dogs running across the hurdles without fail, although Hinoko’s was clearly in the lead, having both the advantage of knowing Extreme Speed, and obviously having had this event drilled into it. “Togami’s Arcanine races through the hurdles and has already deposited his first ball! He’s far ahead of Modegi’s Herdier and Nevelson’s Manectric, who are in a close race for second place! Togami’s Arcanine now onto his third ball… meanwhile the other Arcanine in the competition can’t seem to work out how to get the ball out of the machine…!”

Hah! They were right! While all the other dogs were already dropping off at least their second ball, it was just sniffing around the machine at the end, as if it thought the ball was hidden somewhere, while Ishimaru was trying to shout an explanation at it from the other side of the arena. At this rate the race would be over before his dog worked it out, as Hinoko had already won, followed by the Herdier again, and even the slowest of the dogs were on their last balls…

In the end, he resorted to running over to his dog and pointing out the panel it had to press to deposit the ball… and then he wasted at good minute of everyone’s time by insisting it still ran back and forth to deposit all four of them into the bucket, despite how embarrassed it looked to be the only one still running around, while all the competent dogs had already returned to the side-lines and were watching it. God knows why they all clapped once it finally did finish!

Not that being clapped helped his score, which was being updated as he headed back to his seat. Hinoko was still in first place, whereas he’d dropped down to sixth place, a full event's worth of points behind her, thanks to that blunder! “Ready to admit this is hopeless, yet?”
“…It’s not hopeless!” Ishimaru decided, after staring at the board for a moment to calculate whether it was actually still technically possible for him to win. “…But I’ll admit it’s looking rather unlikely, given Arcanine doesn’t have any experience with the next event, either…”

“Shame for you that your dog’s too stupid to pick up these thing fast…”

“Arcanine is NOT stupid!” Honestly, why did he always have such an overblown response to people pointing out that his dog was pretty dense, even by Arcanine standards? “I’ve shown you that previously!”

“Haaaaa… yes, I’ll admit it’s impressive that you taught your dog numbers and letters…” Togami couldn’t help but sigh his response. “But just because you wasted a large amount of time drumming an entire two tricks into it head doesn’t make it clever!”

“Those aren’t the only things he knows! He picks up on lots of things that other dogs wouldn’t!” Ishimaru insisted.

“Like what?” Whatever it was, it was probably something useless and childish, just like his other two tricks… Something like… “…Knowing pokémon noises…?”

“Yes! He knows a few!” Ishimaru stated proudly, obviously not realising that Togami had only suggested that to mock him. “Let me show you! Arcanine, what noise does a Torchic make⁈？”

“Arc!” His dog barked, “Arc. Arc. Arc!”

“Yes! They go ‘Chic, chic, chic!’” Ishimaru clucked, “And what noise does a Mareep make?”

“ArrRRRrr!” Another bark.

“Yes! They do ‘MaaAAaa’!” Ishimaru baaed, “What about a Grumpig?”

“Aarcarc…” The dog barked again.

“Yes! They go ‘Grumpgrump!’” Ishimaru oinked, “And what noise does a Miltank make?”

“Arrrrrrrrrcan!”

“That’s right! They go Miiiiiltank!” Ishimaru mooed, yet again, unlike his dog! “That was a very good moo!”

“That was a bark!” Togami pointed out, “They were all barks! None of them sounded even remotely correct!”

“Well… of course he has to bark the answers, he’s a dog!” Ishimaru exclaimed, “But he was clearly differentiating between the different pokémon!”

Was he delusional, or just stubborn? “He was doing no such thing! He just barked every time you asked him a question.”

“But… they were different barks!” Ishimaru continued to insist! “…Perhaps you just need a more obvious example to be able to hear it… Arcanine? What does Togami’s Rufflet sound like?”

Hah! This ought to be good… But why did it look like his dog was breathing in more, this time…?

“CAAAAAAAAAANNNNNN!” Arg! That stupid dog’s unholy yelp practically deafened him!
“Very good impersonation!” And Ishimaru had the nerve to give it a poffin for doing so!?

“It was not!” Togami argued. “That didn’t sound anything like Rufflet!”

“But it was certainly different from the other barks he gave, wasn’t it…?” Ishimaru countered, smugly. “And even if he can’t managed to reproduce exact sounds, he’s still a very clever boy for being able to recognise the names of different pokémon, aren’t you, Arcanine!? You certainly are! Who’s my good boy…?”

Tch… and there he was again, making such a ridiculous fuss of his stupid dog that even all the other dogs were staring at them. Probably thinking what an embarrassment he was to canines! Especially Hinoko’s Arcanine, who keep glaring at it long after all the other dogs had lost interest in it and Ishimaru’s foolish antics, and continued to do so until the next event had been set up and each dog and trainer entered a glass box containing various small obstacles, with instructions that all of the trainers began explaining to their dogs, while the announcers explained the event...

“Now, for the pokémon training event! Herdiers and Stoutlands have been used for keeping herds of pokémon in line for centuries, and their, and other dog’s, ability to wrangle other pokémon has been developed even further during that time, to the point where many dog trainers find that they can entrust their lower-level pokémon to them!”

“That’s right, John. And with that in mind, we’re given each dog a Swinub to look after for thirty minutes! Each trainer’s area has been surrounded with one-way glass, so we can all see what’s going on in each area, but the trainers and dogs won’t know what everyone else is doing. Each area contains props for five specific tricks for the dogs to teach to encourage the pokémon to do… Jump through a hoop, head across a seesaw, weave through poles, complete a maze and attack a dummy. Points are awarded for how many of the five tricks the pokémon manage to complete, how many times each trick is repeated and how many of the poffins and berries we give them are still there at the end of the event!”

“Meanwhile, their trainers will be in a side room, where the dogs can go to ask for help with tasks such as opening the berry case, but they will not be able to see or hear what is going on in the other room, or influence their dogs in any way.”

“So, now that each trainer has had a chance to explain to their dog what needs to be done, they can now head into their side rooms and the Swinubs will be let into the room!”

The trainers obeyed and then a member of staff each entered the room, put down a plate of poffins and a berry case, released a Swinub from a pokéball, and promptly left.

Hinoko’s dog, of course, immediately began herding it towards the closest obstacle, whereas Ishimaru’s… immediately its face stuck into the plate of poffins, at least until the Swinub presumably made a noise and it stopped halfway through the plate in order to inspect it… But even then it didn’t start with the actual exercise! Apparently it decided it’d feed the pokémon some berries, from how quickly it picked up the case and took it across to Ishimaru…

He hardly needed to watch anymore of this… Hinoko’s dog was already onto the second trick in the room, and Ishimaru’s was getting distracted by all the food available… soon enough even Ishimaru would be forced to admit it really was impossible for him to beat her! He might as well check over the financial reports from last months… He could just check the event periodically…

…Ten minutes in, Hinoko’s Arcanine was herding its Swinub through the weave-poles, having already made it jump through the hoop and across the seesaw, according to the running tally that was being kept on the screen. Meanwhile Ishimaru’s one had somehow knocked the hoop over on its side
and was now struggling to tempt the Swinub onto the seesaw with a half-eaten poffin.

…Another ten minutes later, Ishimaru’s dog appeared to have just started teaching the smaller pokémon its third trick, and was down to a quarter of the original number of poffins it had been given, whereas Hinoko’s was now herding its Swinub around the room to rack up repeats, without having touched any of the available food.

…And finally, by the time the thirty minutes were over, Hinoko’s Arcanine had racked up so many repeats that its Swinub was on the verge of collapsing, whereas Ishimaru’s was apparently celebrating having managed to complete four of the tricks one time by sharing out its remaining four poffins between itself and the pokémon it was supposed to have given them all to.

“And that’s time! Trainers, you may come out of your rooms and see how well your dogs trained their Swinub!”

Hah! The look on Ishimaru’s face as he came out and saw that Hinoko had come second to the Herdier that had been chasing her for so many of the events, whereas he was languishing in sixth, meaning it was now impossible for him to beat her, regardless of how well he did in the final event! He’d finally realised this whole thing had been hopeless for him from the start!

“…However, how well they trained the Swinub wasn’t the only thing our judges were looking out for! Caring for their charges is also important! And unbeknownst to our human trainers, each Swinub was suffering from a burn, which their dogs should have made sure was treated as soon as possible! Therefore, we are now removing points from the dogs, based on how long it took them to give their Swinub a Rawst berry!”

WHAT!? What kind of stupid rule was that? How was a dog supposed to recognise that a pokémon needed medical treatment, let alone what kind of treatment to give!? Wouldn’t this just result in all of them losing an equal number of points…?

…Apparently not. The Herdier in first didn’t lose any points, but Hinoko lost enough to drop her down to eighth place, and the third, fourth and fifth dogs all lost enough points to drop down between Ishimaru and Hinoko… but only because they hadn’t announced how many points he’d lost yet, of course!

…And they still hadn’t. They were now announcing that the sixth and seventh dogs had lost enough drop below Hinoko, putting her back in sixth at least. But why hadn’t they docked Ishimaru points yet?

Unless… Had Ishimaru not lost points!? Had his dog really picked up on the burn…? Was that why it had suddenly raced to get the berry case opened? He’d come second in an event where she’d come sixth!?

“AHAHAHA! YES!” His childish celebration was so overblown Togami could hear it all the way over from where he was sat. As if a Togami happening to do even worse than him made getting second place worth hooting and hollering like that over! Alright, so Hinoko might have been knocked down to an uncomfortable second place, and Ishimaru may have crawled his way back up to fourth, but she still had a more than comfortable lead on him!

But that didn’t mean he wasn’t still going on to his dog about how well it had supposedly done even after he’d returned to his seat…

“You got it to do all but one of the tricks!? That’s amazing!” Ishimaru exclaimed, as if there hadn’t been 5 dogs in the competition that managed to teach their pokémon all five tricks! “I had no idea
you’d be so good at training other pokémon! But won’t that be nice once I’ve got a second one? You can help me train it! Or maybe even teach it something while I do my homework, and then the pair of you can surprise me with how clever you both are!”

“Hah! That’s if you don’t mind having to make twice as many poffins as you actually want your second pokémon to have, while he does it!” Togami pointed out.

“…What do you mean?” Ishimaru finally looked slightly perturbed by something that had occurred in this competition.

“I mean that, while your back was turned, your dog ate half of the poffins it was supposed to use to train the Swinub, itself.” Togami explained it to him.

“He… he ate half the poffins?” Ishimaru looked completely shocked, “Arcanine, is that true? You ate half the poffins, then used half to help the Swinub learn the tricks…?”

“…Arrrrc…” It looked away from him guiltily.

“That’s… that’s wonderful!” What? Why was Ishimaru impressed with that!? It should have had him scolding his dog, not hugging it! “You were actually able to give up food to another pokémon! I’m so proud of you! And Father’s going to be so impressed when he hears about this!”

“Hah! You’re pathetic, you know that? Most people are capable of realising when their pokémon have room for improvement! But you act as if everything your dog does make it the best pokémon in the world!” Togami couldn’t help but point out to him. He might as well say everything he wanted to now, seeing as they’d not be speaking again over the rest of their school life.

“Well… I’ll admit, I have been giving Arcanine… slightly more rewards and attention today than I usually would, as part of my plan to beat your sister… But, given Arcanine’s history, this is actually…”

“Plan!? What plan!? You haven’t tried to beat Hinoko all day!” Togami argued, “You’ve done nothing but praise your dog for losing to her in almost every competition! There’s not a chance of you beating her now!”

“Actually, if you check the scoreboard again, you’ll find that’s not quite true!” Ishimaru interjected, smugly.

…Well, yes. On second glance, Ishimaru was technically correct, but… “You’d have to get full marks for the next event, and Hinoko would have to get practically none!” He pointed out, “That’s never going to happen!”

“No… it will happen, and I’m certain of it!” Ishimaru insisted. “I’ve spent this entire competition planning for this exact scenario!”

…Was he serious!? How could he possibly still think he’d win this!? Sabotaging Hinoko would have been the obvious answer, but he doubted Ishimaru would have the wits to do that! So what was his plan, then…?

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, next chapter we’ll find out the answer to Togami’s question, and
also see a short bit of what's going on back on Cinnabar!
Short Trip pt 4 (Togami POV) + Meanwhile on Cinnibar Island pt 3 (Celestia 
POV)

Chapter Notes

The second part of this chapter was originally going to be a chapter in its own right, but then it turned out I didn't have enough ideas for it to fill an entire chapter, so apologies for the abrupt change in pace between the two parts of this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“And now, for our final event! May all trainers please have their dogs sit at the starting positions, then take their own positions at the far end of their lanes!” The announcers next message stopped him from being about to ask.

“Ah! Already!?” Ishimaru flinched, before standing and taking his Arcanine over to the specified area, giving it a last minute pep-talk as he did so. “Alright Arcanine? Now… This next event is very important, and I’ll need to you do exactly what I say. And if you can do that, I promise you I will give you lots and lots of pettings and treats and playtime…”

Hrmm… Aside from having to stress the importance of the event onto his dog, he seemed rather sure of himself… Could it be that he really could manage to win this one? What was this event, even…?

From what Togami could see, each dog was being made to sit at one end of a long rectangular cloth, and then their trainers were moving to stand at the opposite end of it, most of them giving some sort of signal for the dog to stand in place while they waited for the event to begin…

“When the cloth is teleported away, each dog will be faced with an aisle lined with all sorts of tempting treats, including food, poffins and toys! Their trainer will be stood at the very end of this aisle, and will order them to stay sat for thirty seconds, before calling them over. Points will be deducted from any dog that moves too early, fails to go straight to their trainer OR touches any of the items at the side of the aisle!”

…This was how Ishimaru was certain he’d gain the points he needed to beat his half-sister!? This!? He thought his impulsive glutton of a dog was going to do a better job of this than Hinoko’s expertly trained star dog? The arrogance of that dim-witted cretin! It wasn’t even worth Togami’s time to watch the absolute catastrophe that Ishimaru was about to make of this event…! Well, at least this meant he’d never have to deal with Ishimaru’s smug, holier-than-thou comments on his training methods ever again!

“Ooooh! And it looks like ONE dog’s failed as soon as the curtain is lifted!” Hah! Well, that was no surprise to Togami, whatsoever! “A shocking display from Togami there! At THIS rate, she won’t score ANY points from this event!”

WHAT…!? 

Togami almost gave himself whiplash as his face shot up from his file to see what they were talking about… What was Hinoko DOING!? Everyone else’s dogs were at least staying behind the line, but hers had brazenly stepped over it and was methodically stuffing it’s face with every piece of food it came across! All, while she was shouting uselessly at it to get back to the line and sit.
“And now the lights are green, so the dogs can be called over and… OH! That was a FLAWLESS display from our late entrant!”

“Was it? I didn’t get a chance to see…”

This time Togami probably did give himself whiplash as his head snapped over to Ishimaru’s direction, where his dog was now sat right in front of him, looking straight at him while he petted its head… and not a single item behind it had been so much as knocked out of place, let alone eaten or played with…

“Well, here’s a video replay for anyone who missed it! See how the Arcanine is focusing on its trainer the entire time? You’d think there wasn’t even any food near it! Now THERE’S an example of the strong bond between man and dog right there!"

If it wasn’t being played on video right before his eyes, Togami wouldn’t have believed it was possible. Ishimaru’s dog, of all things, running straight over to its owner without even a second glance at any of the food around it…

“And that bond might have earned him a spot on the podium, given Togami’s certainly lost hers!”

“Ahhh… It looks like it might even have earned him Togami’s DOG…”

“What? Did Hinoko make a bet with Ishimaru to!? As far as he’d seen, Ishimaru hadn’t spoken to her since their argument yesterday...”

“Not that I’m aware of, Young Master.” Pennyworth answered him, “I believe they’re referring to the fact that her dog just picked up a toy and is running over to your classmate with it.”

What…? Argh, Pennyworth was right… there it was, stuffed toy in mouth, trying to muscle Ishimaru’s Arcanine off to the side and take its place! Why in hell’s name was it doing that!? Did it have any idea how poorly Ishimaru could afford to take care of his dog, compared to his half-sister!?

“Well, seeing as every dog that’s going to finish HAS now finished, how about we get a microphone down there and hear what’s going on!”

Well, this would certainly be worth paying attention to, especially as Hinoko was already angrily starting to walk the length of the pitch to get her dog back as well...

“…Your trainer and see if she’ll play with you…?” The voice feed changed and Ishimaru’s image was blown up onto the main screens, letting everyone in the auditorium see the thin lines of tears that were already streaking his face as he tried to convince Hinoko’s dog to go back to her.

“Nnnnn!” It didn’t seem to be listening to him at all! Instead it was just pitifully alternating between brushing its face into Ishimaru’s hand and trying to press the toy into his arms…

“Aahhh…” Ishimaru pulled both hands up to cover his mouth, looking like he was desperate to start petting the trainer’s dog… “I’m sorry… but I can’t afford two Arcanines!”

“Can!” Hinoko’s dog took that as a cue to shove Ishimaru’s one aside even harder.

“No! Stop that!” Ishimaru ordered, which actually worked, causing the dog cringe sadly. “Haah… I’m sorry, I’m sure you’re a very good boy…”

“Arc?” The ‘very good boy’ lifted its head up and started wagging its tail manically, which just made Ishimaru’s tears flow even faster.
“You… you’ve really never been given any attention like this, have you…?” The microphone barely picked up his words, as he lowered his hand and barely touched the top of its head, which was enough for it to start licking his hand all over.

“What are you doing!?” The microphone managed to pick up Hinoko’s shriek as she entered the field of view, “Why are you gallivanting off over here with this pauper, when I told you to go sit back at the line!”

“Well, why should he do what you tell him to!? You never reward him, even when he does! You never even gave him so much as a good comment for winning!” Ishimaru snapped at her, “So, if he gets no reward either way, why should he, or any of your dogs, put in the effort to win for you?”

“Because I get rid of them if they don’t!” Hinoko shrieked so loudly it reverberated through the auditory system…

“…Woah, is she serious?"

“She just gets rid of dogs, just like that?”

“Wow, what a bi…”

“Booooooooo!”

“BOOOOOOOO!”

“Argh…” Hinoko grimaced as the murmurs of discontent rippling through the crowd turned into jeering loud enough for her to hear it down in the arena.

“Suffice to say, I’m not the only one here who’d say that’s a poor way to treat your pokémon!” Ishimaru carried on, bolstered by the crowd being on his side. “And it’s just lost you this event, but also the trust of one of your pokémon!”

“Grrr… Well, why should I have to congratulate them, or treat them, or spend time playing with them, just because they succeeded in some little trick or skill or event…!?!” Tch, now she was beginning to cry! How embarrassing! “No one ever does that with ME!”

… The auditorium fell into shocked silence, after Hinoko’s childish shriek subsided.

“They… They don’t…?” Until Ishimaru spoke up.

“*Sniff,* *No! They don’t! N-none of my family ever care about anything I do! My methods get dismissed as being ‘too expensive’ regardless of how much better my dogs are! I don’t even get credited when my dogs appear films or TV!"* Honoko was sobbing like a child, now! And she had the gall to call him ‘little’! “I doubt anyone here even knows what my first name is!”

“But… that’s terrible!” Ishimaru cried, in both definitions of the word, “I mean… you obviously work very hard and have raised some incredibly talented dogs! And I think it’s wonderful that that you focus on the quality of your facilities, over their financial practicality! And of course the industries you train dogs for should be crediting you for it!”

“*Sniff,* *you really think so…?”* Hinoko sniffed pathetically. All this because she didn’t think people were praising her enough? *Honestly!* She was supposed to be a Togami! Not a dog!

“Yes! …But, in turn, you need to give credit to your dogs, as well!” Ishimaru replied sternly, “And even if your family expected perfection of you, you need to start loving all the dogs you breed, even
If they aren’t exactly what you want! Otherwise, you’re just creating legions of Growlithes who are all as miserable as you…”

‘Miserable’?! The nerve of him! Implying that a Togami was worse off than someone as poor as him!

“I… I suppose you’re right.” Wasn’t she going to contradict him?!

“Good! I’m glad you agree!” Ishimaru’s stern demeanour vanished in an instant as she capitulated, “Now, I’m sure you realise you have a lot of things you need to do now, but I’d recommend you start by apologising to Julian here!”

“…Yes…” For pity’s sake, a Togami taking orders from an Ishimaru… “J-Julian? I… I’m sorry I didn’t say it earlier but… You’ve been a very good boy today…”

“…Arc?…” The dog slowly moved towards her, “Arc can?”

“Yes… you have! Hmm… Oh! You took a toy, didn’t you!? Do you want to play for a bit?”

“ARC!” The dog ran over to her happily, and the audience cooed over her and Ishimaru petting and playing fetch with their respective dogs for a while…

“*Ahem…* Well! That’s certainly a good ending to our competition! And also this seems like an appropriate time to point out that the show itself would not have been possible with the generous financial support given to us by Miss T… ah, I mean, Hinoko Togami!” The screen switched back to the same commentators as before, “However, we are now ready to announce the scores for this event, and which will be immediately followed by the prize ceremony! So can all competitors please head backstage and prepare themselves!”

“Well, I think we’ve seen enough of this. It’s obvious I’ll be giving Ishimaru his TM.” Togami decided, closing his file and getting out of his seat. “Where’s the quickest place for me to go, to confront Hinoko over that pathetic display?”

“We should be able to meet them by the competitor’s entrance, sir, as they come back out from the ceremony.” Pennyworth stood alongside him, “Allow me to lead the way…”

“Thank you, Pennyworth.”

Honestly, how long did this self-congratulatory prize ceremony need to be…? It wasn’t as if they’d been doing anything worthwhile with their time!

“I can’t give advice on managing multiple pokémon…” Eventually Togami could begin hear Ishimaru’s voice filtering up the corridor, “But I’d guess the important thing is to try and determine what each individual pokémon enjoys, and make sure you’re splitting your time… Oh! Togami! How did you get down here so fast…?”

“I skipped the prize ceremony. I was perfectly capable of working out that I owe you this…” He held out one of his copies of TM93 as he passed Ishimaru, “By myself!”

“Oh, yes of course!” Ishimaru seemed to have forgot the details of their bet, “But… this isn’t… No, wait… Err… You’ve accidentally given me TM92 and 93!”

…Dammit, his TMs were so tightly packed together he must have pulled out two at the same time…
But he’d already passed Ishimaru completely and was practically facing Hinoko. He’d look like an idiot if he had to turn back now and then turn back to face her… “Consider it a bonus.”

“What!? But… it says here it cost you 5500 pokédo…!”

“Just keep it, Ishimaru.” Togami sighed at his ridiculous outburst.

“…Ishimaru!?” Hah… of course. Hinoko hadn’t recognised who Togami’s classmate actually was!

“Yes, Ishimaru. He’s part of the same family as that fool you were complaining about yesterday!” He clarified it for her. “That’s who you’ve managed to lose to today! And you want to play a role in the Togami corporation…?”

“No.”

“You can’t even beat a pauper from a shamed…” …Hold on… “What did you just say?”

“I said no, Byakuya.” She repeated with an overly-dramatic sigh. “I’m don’t care about the corporation anymore. All of you can all squabble over it, if you think it’ll make you happy. I’m going to focus on more important things!”

“…What could be more important than the Corporation? We’re pioneering technology that allows trainers and pokémon to live and work together more closely than ever before… Don’t tell me you think training your dogs and parading them around is more important than that!”

“…You really think amassing a fortune for your children to fight over is more important than taking proper care of your pokémon?”

“Of course not!” That’s not what he’d said at all! “I can do both…! I had the sense to keep the number of my pokémon low enough that I can take proper care of them and fulfil my duties as a Togami heir! The fact that you failed to do so does not render the Corporation’s existence as unimportant!”

“Hmm… You’ve got a point. I have bred too many dogs to look after them properly and keep up with business matter… But I’d still rather have my dogs than your corporation!” How unbelievably short-sighted! No number of Arcanines in the world could do anywhere near as much good as the Corporation’s advances in technology had! “If you wait until tomorrow, I’ll organise the paperwork saying you, and everyone else in our family, have won your challenge against me…”

“Well, at least you have the grace to bow out when you know you’ve lost.” Togami conceded, “Ishimaru and I will see you tomorrow, then.” He turned, and started to head back towards the car…

“Actually, there’s an after-show party that we’re all invited to!” Ishimaru enthused, “There’ll be activities for the dogs, and it sounds like a lot… of fun… err…”

The idiot trailed off, once he’d actually paid attention to the look on Togami’s face, but still seemed intent on staying. “Well, you’re free to do what you like. Just make sure you’re back at the estate before Friday morning. I’m holding you responsible if we miss the boat back to school.”

“Understood! Have a safe trip back yourself!” Ishimaru nodded, as he turned away… “Err… now… what was I saying before we saw him… Oh yes! About multiple pokémon…”

Hah! Was she really paying attention to advice on raising multiple pokémon from someone who hadn’t even caught his second one yet!? Honestly, no wonder she’d lost her previous challenge! She clearly wasn’t Togami material! It was hard to believe she even shared half of his blood! After all,
his parents had never praised him, either! But he wasn’t sobbing in front of an auditorium filled with all of his main competitors and hundreds of other people over it!

…Hundreds of other people who’d probably all be talking about how pathetic the Togami competitor had been. Honestly, couldn’t she have timed her childish meltdown more considerately?!

“Pennyworth, contact father’s staff and warn them about the embarrassment to our family she’s probably caused.” Togami ordered, “And pass along her message that she intends to bow out of all future challenges.” If the news got passed on by a member of his staff, it might make his other half-siblings think he had been the cause of her loss of will, and make them become paranoid about his future challenges...

“Yes, sir. A wise idea.” Pennyworth agreed, “And, may I add, that I was impressed that you handled her outbursts about the family so well.”

“Thank you…” Wait… Why had he suddenly thought to give Togami praise like that…? Surely he wouldn’t be concerned that Togami would have a childish fit like her if her didn’t…!

Hmm. No. On second thoughts, Pennyworth was generally complimentary, if he saw it fit. Probably an old habit he brought over from Fiore. This was far from the first time he’d congratulated Togami for something. In fact, he’d probably been doing it Togami’s entire life…

“…Was there anything else, Young Master?” He’d been silent long enough for Pennyworth to comment on it.

“…I was expecting you to begin leading me back to the car.” Togami lied, “It’s not as if I’d have cause to memorise the layout of this place, is it?”

“Of course not, sir. My apologies. If you’d care to follow me…” If Pennyworth could see through his lie, he had the tact not to say as much… He’d been quite fortunate to have such an impeccable butler assigned to assist him…

…Tch! Not that luck had anything to do with it! All the Togami children had been given nothing short of the best staff their fortune could purchase! And Pennyworth wouldn’t have stuck around if Togami hadn’t proved himself worthy of his work! Hinoko would have been given exactly the same quality of care as he had, growing up! So there was really no reason for her to be whining about it! It wasn’t like have one butler would have given him a significantly better upbringing than his half-siblings got, regardless of how good a butler he was…!

(Meanwhile Later, on Cinnibar Island…)

“…So I went to do CPR, but when it got to doing the mouth to mouth part I suddenly had this thought that Sakura has really nice lips and then I kind of panicked ‘cause I had no idea where that came from, and also it seems kinda wrong to give CPR to someone when you’re thinking things like that about them, but luckily she woke up at that point anyway, but then I started going on about the CPR and I wasn’t really thinking and ended up telling her that it might have been nice to do mouth to mouth on her, which I still kinda think might be true, but I think it’s ‘cause I’m kind of imagining kissing her, so now I’m not sure how I feel about her ‘cause I’ve been thinking that maybe I was thinking about her so much all the time because I wanted to be her rival, but now maybe I just like her and want to go on dates and stuff with her? But I still wanna be strong like she is, so maybe I want to be both, you know, like those kind of married couples who go to competitions together and
are totally cutthroat in the arena, but afterwards they’re all kissings and cuddling? I think I could do that… But I have no idea what Sakura thinks, ‘cause I’ve been going on and on about battles with her and not really talked about other stuff, so I dunno if I should just tell her, or whether it’s unfair of me to suddenly ask her for that kind of thing out of nowhere when I’ve only been talking about rivalries so far… I mean, most of the class have just said I should probably explain all this to Sakura, but I’m worried that if it turns out she’s not interested in me like that, it’ll just make things really weird between us, and I don’t want that… What do you guys think?”

Celestia’s morning walk happened to have her coming across both the return of Togami and Ishimaru, and a repeat of the same poorly thought-out, rushed explanation of Asahina’s newfound emotional issue that the swimmer had given all but one member of her class over the last few days.

Still, it was almost worth having to listen to her nonsense yet again, just to see the utterly terrified look of Ishimaru faced with a question he had absolutely no idea how to answer, and Togami’s obvious irritation at being stopped and forced to listen to her before he’d even managed to set foot off of the pier… Celestia would have bet good money that she had been down here guarding the beach when she’d seen their boat arrived and decided to intercept them… and probably should be keeping an eye on that young man who was riding a Goldeen while it was fighting a Tentacool…

“Err… I…” Ishimaru was the first to react to her question, “I think… the school has some incredibly well-qualified counsellors, who would probably have a far better understanding of this than I…”

“Ahhrrggh…” Hina groaned at his answer in almost the exact same way she’d groaned at everyone else’s advice, “So you have no idea what her reaction would be? She’s not said anything to you about me at all?”

“I’m sorry… but most of the time when I’ve spoken with her, you’ve been there as well… In fact, it might even be every time I’ve spoken to her, other than back during the first week here!” Ishimaru pointed out, “…Would you like me to ask her about how she feels about you?”

“No! Don’t do that! It’ll be too obvious why you’re asking her!” Asahina quickly declined… which made sense, as Ishimaru was probably the worst possible candidate for a tactful mission such as that.

“Ah… yes, I suppose that’s true…” Ishimaru admitted, “But I don’t really know what other advice I could give you than to just ask her how she feels…”

“I guess? It’s not like I can just hide it forever…” Asahina agreed for the third time that Celestia had heard. “I’m just… really nervous about actually doing it… Like it’s just going to go wrong somehow! So, maybe that’s a sign I shouldn’t? Or maybe it’s just normal to be nervous about that kind of thing… Argh! This is so confusing!”

“Haahhh…” Togami signed dramatically, “Honestly, if you ask me, it’s obvious: You clearly know that Oogami is a far stronger trainer than you, and you’ll be unable to earn her respect in any form of relationship unless you’re capable of beating her team! Therefore you need to wait until you can do so, then begin courting her!”

“Huh… you think so…?” Asahina considered it.

“Yes!” Togami snapped, “I wouldn’t have said so, other…”

“Riiiiiiil!” Togami was cut off my a high pitched shriek from across the beach, where Asahina’s Marill was bouncing and pointing at the water excitedly… Oops! Looked like Asahina was supposed to have been watching that man, who was now floating unconscious…
“Oh crap! Uhh! Gotta go, thanks for the advice, Togami!” Asahina ran off, leaving the two boys alone…

“…Do you really think she’ll ever be able to defeat Sakura…?” Ishimaru asked the other.

“Of course not! I think I’ve just saved Oogami a lot of pointless bother…”

“What!? But… What if Sakura would have liked a relationship with her!?”

“Then she can ask Asahina herself! After all, the stronger trainer is the one is supposed to initiate courting!”

“Well… traditionally, that usually the case. But… I… don’t think people these days pay much attention to that anymore…?” Ishimaru answered with a spectacularly uncharacteristic amount of uncertainty.

“…You’ve never actually seen anyone who started dating, have you?” Togami guessed.

“Well… no, but…”

“Believe me, Ishimaru, I know what I’m talking about.” Togami insisted, even though Celestia would bet that even if he had seen anyone start dating, he wouldn’t have cared enough to pay attention to it. “Oogami is more than capable of asking someone out on a date, if she wanted to.”

“Well… she certainly is confident…” Ishimaru agreed.

“Exactly! Now, I’d finally like to go back to my so-called room!” Togami waved dismissively at him, before glancing briefly in her direction, “Unless you’re going to stop us with some trivial nonsense as well…?”

“Not at all! I just happened to see your boat arrive, and wondered if you boys had had a nice trip at the Safari Zone?” Celestia explained, and then, because it would be nice to see Togami squirm for once… “Have any nice souvenirs to give me?”

…it would be interesting to see how he’d react to that… She’d been pretty sure his ‘Safari trip’ had been a fabrication to hide his true intent, and given the look Ishimaru was giving him, he hadn’t even stepped foot in the Zone at all…

“I figured as much… here.” Togami dismissively reached into his jacket and threw a small stuffed Shinx at her, “I heard you like cats…”

“I like a cat…” Celestia corrected him, as she looked over the cheap design and official Johto Safari Zone price tag. “But it was a nice thought.” …Which probably meant he’d ordered a member of staff to go buy souvenirs for him, to keep his pretense up. There was no way he would have actually spent his time thinking of other people.

Well, whatever he’d been up to probably hadn’t been that interesting, if Ishimaru had gone along with it. He’d probably end up messing up and telling everyone, regardless, so it was no fun trying to draw it out of Togami. She might as well continue with her walk over to the Gym, where Yamada would likely be finished with today’s attempt, and in a position to make her some tea, like he had the previous four days…

…Well, he was out of the Gym. But given he was lying on his side next to the front door, like a sack of trash that had been left out to be collected, he probably wasn’t going to make her tea anytime soon.
Haaa... Well, she couldn’t have that... Seemed she’d have to find out what had made him do this...

“...What are you doing?”

“I got a Game Over.” Was that all? Honestly, this was the fifth time he’d failed the Gym. Shouldn’t he be used to it by now? “...And I’m all out of continues.” Ah, of course, that was his problem. This was the last day of their field trip, they were getting back on the boat this evening...

“Well, that’s hardly a reason for you to lie sniveling on the floor like a Caterpie, all day.” Celestia told him, “You’re not even the only person going back to school without a badge.”

“But... Fujisaki managed it!” He insisted, still thinking of the programmer as his rival, for some reason. “…I’ll never catch Cresselia at this rate!”

“Why not? You don’t need a badge to catch a pokémon…” Celestia pointed out, if only to get him to stop whining and make her tea, “Honestly, the Volcano badge is so ugly, it would probably make her less willing to join you.”

...Although, on second thought, if she was willing to consort with Yamada, of all people, perhaps her aesthetic standards were so low, it wouldn’t matter what badges he had...

“But, without a badge, I’ll be thrown out of school…” He continued to mope, regardless. “And then I won’t be able to level up enough to fight her…”

“Oh, come now. You still have one more chance of getting a badge before that happens. You just need to train some more…”

“But... I have been training…” Yamada insisted, which... well he had, even if it wasn’t quite as much as Fujisaki… “…And it still wasn’t enough.”

“Hmm... yes, that’s true. But I’m sure once you get a second pokémon, you’ll be more than capable of getting your first badge.” She tried assuring him. “Really, you could have done that before retrying the Gym, if you were that concerned about it...” She was rather surprised that no one had decided to catch a second pokémon from here already. Not that she’d want a gaudy Fire-Type or dim-looking Water-Type from Kanto! But she’d have thought someone like Ikusaba or Yamada might have picked one up as an easy boost in power... But, from the way Yamada’s eyes had bugged open at the comment, it would seem that such a strategy had not even occurred to him...

“I... could have... caught... a second pokémon...!?” Yamada lifted his shrieking body off of the floor. “Why didn’t you tell me that BEFORE!?”

“I bet Hagakure that you’d fail to get your badge this week, remember?” She answered, honestly. “And besides, you’re going to catch a Legendary pokémon, you shouldn’t need such an obvious hint.”

“Arghh... Well... It’s true that no real adventurer consults a walkthrough on his first play through!” Honestly, was he playing this supposed game or in it? She wished he’d make his mind up...

“Exactly. Now stop wallowing on the ground like a Grumpig, and come and make me some tea!” Celestia ordered him, “And, perhaps if you do a good enough job, I’ll even offer you some advice on which pokémon will make things easier for you...” Cresselia was a Psychic-Type, so he’d probably want to catch either a Bug, Ghost or Dark type now, so they’d be strong enough to face her later...

His face furrowed for a moment, probably as he’d realised she’d only spoken to him because she wanted a drink, but eventually he started pulling himself off of the floor with a nod. “…Alright.”
“Good! Now come along, you’ve made me wait long enough.” She pointed out, as she turned sharply around and started walking back towards the rudimentary dining hut.

“Yes, Miss Ludenberg!” She could hear Yamada pounding the ground as he scurried to keep up with her. “Ahh… but I noticed you didn’t say if I’m going to catch a Legendary… and that your recommended pokémon would just ‘make things easier’ for me!”

“…And what of it?”

“Does that mean you believe I will manage to catch her?” Celestia almost stopped dead at the hopefully sounding question.

…Hmm. She had phrased her comments as if Yamada was certain to reach his goal… even if it probably would take a rather long amount of time! Perhaps his delusions were beginning to rub off on her… But she certainly didn’t intend to admit as much…

“…Well, you’re the one who keeps saying as much, I’m just phrasing things by your own logic.”

“Oh… I see…” Yamada sighed, and started lagging behind her again.

“…But, for what it’s worth… I might be willing to place a small bet on the matter.” Celestia conceded.

“You would!?!” Yamada cried with somewhat more excitement than she’d expected.

“…A very small bet, mind you!” She pointed out, not that it did anything to curb his enthusiasm…

“Ahahaha! I knew it! I, Hifumi Yamada, may have failed to win this first battle, but I will succeed in my overall quest! Onwards!”

…and now he was off, practically skipping ahead of her! Honestly, the lengths she had to go to, to get a decent drink…

Chapter End Notes

The final dog event was based off of this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0inUITHZoKo if anyone is curious.
Also don’t worry, I will be having chapters focusing more on Hifumi and Celestia very soon! (The Sakuraoi might be a bit longer though...)

Thanks for reading! Next week Kyoko will be finding out what that thing Team Rocket dropped actually does!
Snagged! (Kazuichi POV)

Chapter Notes

Links to Kazuichi’s pokémon: Electabuzz
https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Electabuzz_(Pokémon) Metang
https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Metang_(Pokémon) and Bruxish
https://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net/wiki/Bruxish_(Pokémon)

There are skiers in Mahogany Town’s Gym, so I assume it must be possible to go skiing near there (even if it’s not obvious that there’s a snowy mountain nearby.) Luxury Balls are pokéballs that make the pokémon caught in them like you faster and Premier Balls are just pokéballs that are a different colour, which you get as a free gift if you buy ten pokéballs at a time. I figured there’s no reason pokéball companies wouldn’t be trying to mix-and-match different pokéball types, hence Kazuichi helping to tweak a new line of Luxury Premier balls.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

And that was everything unpacked from the field trip! Now Kazuichi finally had a chance to flip open his badge case and check the contents once again…

A Volcano badge, a Feather badge and now a Glacier badge! Heh… finally on to his third badge! Not bad for someone more interested in tinkering with his tech, than training…

But… not exactly great, either. Alright, so he was ahead of where the school needed him to be, but he still had to make sure he got his fourth badge by the end of the year, and then his sixth by the end of next year… He couldn’t let having got his third badge half a term early make him think he had time to be sitting around too much…

But, he could worry about it later! He wouldn’t have bothered going out training straight after getting back from Johto even if he hadn’t spent the last week having to trudge through the snow everywhere… or feeling like he was going to throw up from trying to join in with everyone else when they went skiing! He’d just spend the evening doing what he’d done the last two times he’d got his badge… break out the polishing kit and get them looking as shiny and impressive as possible!

…Not that he’d ever admit that to anyone. They’d probably call him a nerd if they knew he was spending an evening with his polishing compounds, buffing wheels and microfiber cloths… either that, or they’d want him to polish all of theirs as well. Either way, it’d probably be a hassle. Much easier quietly do it tonight in his room…

…Or it would have been, if he hadn’t taken all his polishers down to the workshop to buff up those prototype Luxury Premier Balls he’d been asked to suggest optimisations for! Aargh!

Oh well! He could just take the badges over there and polish them up! He’d just need to make sure he looked like he had some kind of project out, in case anyone asked what he was up to down there…

“Hey, guys! We’ve gotta go down to the workshops! Everyone back in your balls!” Kazuichi shouted to his pokémon.
Metang followed the order instantly, Bruxish was a little slower, and only relented once Kazuichi reminded her that he’d installed a tank for her swim in in the workshop as well as his room, and Electrobuzz just insisted on walking there with him, as if he couldn’t make his way to the place he worked in almost every day without a pokémon body-guarding him… Guess Kazuichi was going to need more than three badges before Electabuzz stopped thinking of him as a little kid…

Still, at least he hung back and didn’t ever get in the way of Kazuichi’s work… which was more than could be said for Metang, which instantly sped over to him with a hopeful look in its eye as soon it saw him attaching a buffing wheel to his hand-drill… Well… he was kind of looking pretty dull from being out in the snow so much…

“Alright… I’ll polish you and then my badges…”

“Tang!” It spun itself around in a circle excitedly, then hovered back up towards Kazuichi and waited expectantly while he finished putting on the buffer and applying the first wax compound to it…

“…Alright, all done!” Kazuichi told it, once he’d finished buffing his pokémon with a lint-free cloth.

“…Metang!” It headed over to the nearest shiny surface and looked at itself approvingly, before disappearing into its pokéball, probably thinking it’d stay cleaner in there than if it hung around the workshop.

Right! Now, finally time to polish those badg…

*Knock knock.*

Eh? Someone visiting him now? Geez, they’d only just got back from the field trips! Which probably meant this was someone who’d busted their pokédex or laptop while they were out and needed it fixing up before classes started again.

Well, it was usually worth stopping to help people out… the more people who owed him favours, the less hassle he’d get from other students! No one ever wanted to mess with the guy who could save their stuff if it got busted, after all… And some of the kids here already owed him a lot of favours…

Which was why he quickly shoved the badge polishing stuff into the closest drawer, and headed over to the door, followed protectively by his Electabuzz, who was probably as surprised by the unexpected visit as he was…

…Especially at the person there was one of the last people he’d expect to need help fixing stuff. He’d not spoken to the headmaster’s daughter, but everything Chihiro had said about her made it seem like she never put a foot wrong, ever…

“Ehh… Hey, you’re Kirigiri, right?” He didn’t wanna make it seem too weird that everyone in the school knew who she was, even though she’d hardly spoken to anyone, “Can I help you?”

“I suspect so…” She reached into her bag and brought out something metallic, “I’d like you to have a look at this…”

Huh, guess she wasn’t so perfect after all… Still, being owed a favour by her should be pretty useful, so he took the thing out of her hands. The most obvious thing about it was that it had a metal glove, then a thick wire attaching it to a rounded part…

Wait… no way! He knew what this was! Holy crap! He’d never thought he’d see anything like this!
Hell, why would she even have one of these, unless… “You’re from Orre…!?”

“…No, I’m from Johto.” Damn… she looked a little like she thought he was an idiot know… “Why would the school recruit trainers from Orre? There’s barely any wild pokémon there…”

“Well, they recruited someone from Oblivia, and they don’t even catch pokémon!”

“Hmm… true. Although I’ve heard that she’s still not exactly training pokémon…” Kirigiri pointed out with a tiny smirk.

“Yeah… that’s true…” Even after Gundam had given her a bunch of baby pokémon to look after, or maybe ‘cause Gundam had given her a bunch of baby pokémon to look after, she kept refusing to take part in battles unless she outright had to. Heck, she’d only managed to get enough badges to stay in the school ‘cause he’d managed to power up her Capture Styler enough for her to temporarily borrow a wild pokémon strong enough to take down the Gym… “But that doesn’t mean she won’t change her mind! And when she does I’m gonna be her rival and help her catch up to everyone!”

Hehheheheh… Rivalling a princess! That’d be neat… he wondered if Oblivia had some kind of official position for that… like ‘The Royal Rival’ or something…

“Hmm… well… regardless…” Tch… Now Kirigiri sounded like she thought he was an idiot!

“What made you think I was from Orre?”

Oh right, that! “’Cause it looks like this is a Snag machine! From what I’ve heard, there’s only, like three of them, and they’re all kept in super-high security vaults over there!”

“A… snag machine?” Didn’t seem like she’d ever heard of it. Then again, it wasn’t something the authorities like to spread the word on, if only because…

“It’s a machine that lets you steal pokémon from other trainers!”

“But… anyone can steal a pokémon.” Kirigiri hadn’t understood it, “There are multiple organisation that do so on a large scale…”

“Ehh… no, I don’t just mean like pokénapping one by grabbing its pokéball… I mean it can let you legally take another trainers pokémon!” …Yeah, she still didn’t look like she got it. He better go back to basics with this. “Okay, so… you know how, legally speaking, trainers own pokéballs, not the pokémon inside them…?”

“Yes, so if a pokémon feels cause to cut the bond between itself and its trainer’s pokéball, that trainer no longer has any right to that pokémon.” Huh, wonder if she knew that’s how he’d got Electabuzz…? “So… are you saying that machine is capable of forcibly transferring a pokémon’s bond to a different pokéball?”

“Yeah, that’s it!” He explained, which made her go pale, “I mean… It’s not all powerful. It’s kinda like throwing a pokéball at a wild pokémon… you’re gotta weaken it first, better balls are more likely to work… and most of the times it was actually used were against pokémon that had had this weird effect that made them not feel emotions, so chances are a normal trainer’s pokémon could resist getting transferred…”

“Ah… I see, so it’s fallible… unless perhaps if it was combined with a Master Ball…”

“Yeah… But who the heck’s got one of them!?”

“Hmm… hopefully, not Team Rocket…” She muttered.
“Waaaaaitwaitwaitwait! What’s Team Rocket got to do with this!?"

“Ah… They were the people who had this device, until some of our pokémon crashed in on whatever they were doing…” Geez! Team Rocket with one of these things!? Good thing they’d stopped them! “Can you tell if it would actually function? If the others are kept in lockdown, I assume Team Rocket are attempting to develop their own…”

Ah… so they might have got the look down, but for all they knew this was just a fancy looking piece of plastic… “Well… I’ve never actually seen one of these things, but I guess I could open it up and see if the mechanics at least look like they’re right?”

“What’s Team Rocket got to do with this!?”

“Ah… They were the people who had this device, until some of our pokémon crashed in on whatever they were doing…” Geez! Team Rocket with one of these things!? Good thing they’d stopped them! “Can you tell if it would actually function? If the others are kept in lockdown, I assume Team Rocket are attempting to develop their own…”

Ah… so they might have got the look down, but for all they knew this was just a fancy looking piece of plastic… “Well… I’ve never actually seen one of these things, but I guess I could open it up and see if the mechanics at least look like they’re right?”

“Hmm… yes. That’s probably the best we’ll be able to do, short of trying to put it on ourselves and test it…”

And it probably wouldn’t even fit either of them… It was just a little too big for his arm, and there wasn’t any way to adjust the sizing. “Alright then! It’ll probably take me at least half an hour, if you wanna head off and get a drink or something…”

“Hmm… given what you’ve just told me it does, I think I’ll wait here, if it’s all the same to you.” Kirigiri looked around the workshop, dusted off a footstool and perched on it, either unaware of, or choosing to ignore, Electabuzz glowering suspiciously at her as she did it.

“Eh… yeah, that’s fair…” Heck, he probably ought to make sure she didn’t run off and do something stupid with it once he’d finished looking at it. Assuming it looked like it’d work, that was.

Well… the battery-engine and power modulators sure did look like the ones he’d seen people theorising about, from what little information had been leaked on how they worked. And everything else all seemed connected properly…

“Hmm… It would be worrying if it was…” No kidding. If Team Rocket had figured out how to build Snag machines, then they’d be even more of a problem than they already were… “But, either way, it’s probably not safe for us to be holding onto this anymore. I’d best report this to security… and the headmaster…”

She sounded pretty annoyed about that last part. Did she have issues with her old man as well? Well… whatever her problem was, it couldn’t have been too big, or she wouldn’t have come to a school he worked at, right?

Not that it stopped her from looking peeved when the big dude in charge of security told her that the school had a vault that they could put it in, but it had to be okayed by the headmaster first. Although she also looked annoyed when he said that he had to get it approved by the school’s steering committee first, so perhaps she was just annoyed that this whole business was taking so long. Kazuichi certainly was! It took over half an hour for the four old dudes he’d been talking about to actually show up at his office, and then Kazuichi had to explain for the fourth time today what a Snag machine actually did, then they all huddled together to decide what to do about it before turning back to the headmaster…

“If this machine did work, we certainly would have to make sure it was kept in safe hands…” One of them started, “But we’d rather you actually test the device first, before going to all that expense.”
“I see your point, but this device was taken from Team Rocket.” The headmaster argued politely, “Even if it’s not functional, they’ll probably attempt to recapture it. Having it in a secure facility would help prevent damage to the school while they’re at it…”

“Why do you believe Team Rocket had it?” One of the other old dudes asked, “The report Kizakura gave us stated that none of the children on the trip actually saw who had it. Isn’t that right, Miss Kirigiri?”

“Strictly speaking, yes.” Kirigiri admitted, “But my Crobat identified them as…”

“You think your bat identified them… but please understand that we can hardly take that as serious testimony.” She bristled as one of the old dudes interrupted her, “Every trainer thinks their pokémon is much smarter than the others of its kind. We can’t believe yours recognised Team Rocket any more than we can believe that boy with the Arcanine taught it to count.”

“But Ishimaru’s Arcanine can…”

“Regardless, there’s no need for us to spend resources guarding what might just be a useless prototype.” He interrupted her again, “It’s not going in the vault until we see it working first. So if you could, Souda?”

“Eh!? You want me to try it out? Now?”

“Well, you are the most technologically minded person here… if anyone could make a machine work, it would be you, correct?”

“Well… most of the time, yes.” Kazuichi agreed, “But this needs to be fit closely to the user’s body, and I’m pretty sure I’m not quite big enough to fill it…” He held the shoulder part over his own, showing how much space there was between its sides and his own arms, and how the glove part was now out of his reach… “And it doesn’t look like anyone here would fit it either.”

“Hmm… yes, that’s true…” The old guy had to admit, “…What about any of the other students? Would any of them fit it?”

Hmmmm… it’d need someone who was just slightly larger than him… “I dunno… maybe Gundam, or Hajime…?” Nagito was a similar height to them, but he had skinnier arms than Kazuichi, so he was out.

“Hmm… That’s Tanaka and Hinata, isn’t it?” One of the older dudes checked, “Well, I suspect Tanaka is busy checking how all of his pokémon have been over the last week, so let’s try Hinata before bothering him…”

“Alright… well, Hajime’s probably in his room, so I can go and…”

“No, don’t you go… I’d like to see how you think this machine works.” A different one of the old guys stopped Kazuichi mid-sentence, “Sakakura can go and fetch him instead, right? And get some pokeballs to use in the test while you’re at it.”

“Yes, sir.” The big guy answered, starting to head out of the door, even though he’d looked interested in hearing how the Snag Machine was supposed to work as well. “This shouldn’t take long. Hinata should be pretty easy to find…”

…

Bleh… It certainly felt like it took a long time before he door opened back up again, but that was
probably just because Kazuichi had had to spend the whole time trying to explain how a
thaumelectrical generator worked to four dudes who kept interrupting him the whole time to ask
questions he’d already answered… He almost cheered when Sakakura opened the door and waved
Hajime inside…

“Ah… I was told you wanted to see me…? Did I do something…?” Hajime looked pretty freaked
out at getting called in by security, “I mean… I did manage to get my next badge…”

“Well, I should hope you at least managed to get an Ice-type badge when you have a *Fire*
*type!”* Geez, those old jerks couldn’t give him a *break*, could they…? He’d been real proud of getting that
badge, but now he just looked embarrassed about it…

“You’re not in any kind of trouble, Hinata.” The headmaster cut in, placing the Snag machine in
from of him. “The first years confiscated an… unusual device from Team Rocket, while they were
on Cinnabar, and we’re hoping you might be the correct size to work it…”

“Eh… Team *Rocket?* This isn’t going to do anything crazy, like blow my arm off, is it?” Hajime
asked, glancing at the item suspiciously.

“Nah, I checked it over! Worst that’ll happen is that it just doesn’t do anything!” Kazuichi told him,
“Here, lemme show you how it’s supposed to fit! Start by putting your shoulder in this bit, and I’ll
tighten the straps up, then hopefully the wire will stretch far enough for you to put your hand in the
glove part…”

“Like this…?” Hajime managed to get his hand inside…

‘*Vrrrmm…’* The machine made a low humming noise as the lights in the upper arm and back of the
hand both switched on. Wow… maybe this really *was* gonna work!

“Woah… that’s pretty cool…” Hajime muttered, looking at his hand.

“It certainly *looks* functional…” The younger Kirigiri commented, anxiously.

“Of course, the *real* test will be to see if you can catch a pokémon with it…” One of those old
geezers pointed out.

“Catch a pokémon? So… this helps make catching them easier…?” Hajime guessed.

“No… What this machine does isn’t to leave this room.” The headmaster told him, and he nodded in
understanding, “It lets you catch *other people’s* pokémon.”

“Wha… *other people’s* pokémon!?” He couldn’t blame Hajime for not believing it… “…Then how
am I supposed to test it? Wouldn’t I have to steal someone’s pokémon?”

“Ahh…” Half the room hesitated loudly… dammit, Kazuichi had been so excited to see if this thing
worked or not, he hadn’t even thought of what they’d test it *on!* Maybe one of Gundam’s pokémon?
He had so many, it’s not like he’d miss one…

“Well… you and Souda are friends, right?” One of the old guys asked. “Why not catch his
Electrabuzz there, and then release it back to him if it works?”

“*BUZZ!?”* Woah! Electrabuzz *did not* like that idea! He actually tried to hide behind *him* for once!
Then disappeared as he figured out that they couldn’t catch him if he was already in his pokéball.
There was no way Kazuichi could force him into this… and given how he’d got him in the first
place…
“Ehhhe… Actually, using Electrabuzz might make things a bit… complicated. It’d probably work better if we used…” Hmm… he’d only just got Bruxish before the start of term… he couldn’t guarantee it’d want to come back to him when Hajime let it go… “Metang… If it’s alright with it, anyway.”

“Wouldn’t it be easier just to catch a random pokémon and test it on that?” The dude in charge of security asked.

“But then we’d end up wasting a bunch of pokéballs, and Hinata will be stuck with a random pokémon he didn’t want!” One of the old dudes countered.

“Yes, but that seems safer than expecting Souda to give up one of his pokémon, just for a test…” The headmaster argued.

“But it’s not like I won’t give it back…” Hajime pointed out, “Why don’t we at least see if Metang’s alright with it, first?”

“You said how much the pokémon is willing to be transferred affects the success rate of the machine, didn’t you?” One of the older guys asked Kazuichi, when the headmaster still didn’t look convinced. “That might mean it’s more likely to work if the pokémon understands what’s going to happen and agrees to it in advance.”

“Yeah… that’s a good point, actually!” Kazuichi agreed. After all, he could probably save Hajime wasting a bunch of the pokéballs if he ordered Metang to let the transfer go ahead without resisting.

“Well… if you’re sure about this, Souda…” The headmaster agreed, although it sounded like he’d been hoping he’d kick up more of a fuss, “It’s your pokémon, after all… but you are legally speaking giving it up to Hinata permanently. He wouldn’t be required to give it back…”

“Yeah, but I know Hajime isn’t gonna screw me over like that!” He threw Hajime a thumbs up, “Right, Hajime?”

“Yeah, of course!” Hajime returned the thumbs up, as Kazuichi took out his pokéball…

“Alright, Metang? You wanna help me test out a cool machine we found?”

“Metang.” It bobbed it’s head up and down, like a nod but with its whole floating body.

“Great. Now… this is a Snag machine… it’ll let Hajime try and capture you, even though you’ve already got a pokéball already! So, in order to see if it works, I need you to let Hajime capture you really easily, when he tries… understood?”

“…Metang?” It tilted it’s face downwards as its arms dropped down below its side, sadly.

“I don’t mean forever!” Kazuichi explained, “We just want to see if the machine can give you a new pokéball! If it does, then Hajime will let you go straight after and you can come back to mine, alright…? Or, hey! Maybe we can put you in one of those fancy-coloured Luxury balls that company sent me to tinker with, instead, eh?”

“Tang!” It straightened up, then nodded enthusiastically. Hah! He knew Metang had been ogling those!

“Well, that looks like an agreement.” One of the old guys piped up, “Where are those Luxury balls you’re talking about?”
“Uhh… back in the workshop… It’ll prolly take me about ten minutes…”

“Don’t worry about it. Sakakura, go to the workshop and bring back those balls while we see if the machine works.” He ordered the big guy, who looked pretty pissed off at being ordered to play errand boy again, but agreed anyway, leaving a set of normal pokéballs on the headmaster’s desk before heading out of the door again… “Alright then… let’s start this test then!”

“Uhh… okay?” Hajime looked pretty anxious as he glanced back and forth between the old guys and Souda, “So… what do I have to do?”

“Hmm… well, from what I’ve read, you just have to grab a pokéball with the hand part and it kinda works automatically…”

“Okay… I’ll try that then.” Hajime nodded, and picked one of the balls up from the table…

‘Shhhrrrvvvvmmmm!’ Another hum from the machine, as trails of gold light coursed out from it and into the pokéball… wow, it looked like this really was the real deal so far!

“Wow…” Hajime looked at the ball he was now holding impressively, “So… now I just throw it?”

“Yes, that’s right!” Kazuichi confirmed, at least he hoped that’s all Hajime had to do, “And remember Metang, let yourself be caught, alright?”

“Tang!” Metang nodded, swooping forward between Kazuichi and Hajime.

“Allright… Pokéball, go!”

Wow! That looked so cool! The pokéball flew through the air, trailed with sparks of the same golden light that the machine had imbued it with, and hit Metang dead-centre between his eyes, forcing him to disappear into it, as it snapped shut and dropped to the floor…

There was silence in the room as everyone leaned forward, at least slightly, to get a better look at the ball…

…It rocked sideways a little, but not much. Way less then when he’d caught Bruxish…

…Another movement, this time rocking in the opposite direction…

…One more movement, as the ball swayed slightly side to side…

‘Click.’

“…I did it?!” Hajime stared dumbfounded at the ball for a moment.

“Holy crap it works!” Kazuichi agreed. That had been so cool! He couldn’t believe he’d actually got to see something like that actually working! Oh man, he was gonna have to open that thing back up and really pay attention to it this time…!

“Haaaa… That’s not good…”, “I was worried about this…” The Kirigiris sounded less impressed though…

“Ah… Were you hoping it wouldn’t?” Hajime asked, nervously.

“Seeing as it was… most likely designed by Team Rocket…” The younger Kirigiri shot the group of old dudes a dirty look, “It would have been nice if it hadn’t been functional, yes.”
“And even if it’s not Team Rocket, the idea of anyone outside of Orre having access to as many of these as they can build is worrying.” The headmaster added.

And that to. Yeah, they probably weren’t going to be letting Kazuichi get a second look at it, were they? This was gonna get stuck in a vault in Arceus-knows-where until it rusted…

“Still, the real test will be who the pokémon actually listens to.” One of the committee guys piped up.

“What?” Pretty much everyone but those guys asked.

“Well, all you’ve shown so far is that this device can make a pokémon go into a different ball. It doesn’t prove the pokémon will listen to someone other than its trainer!” He explained, “You’ll have to get it out and see how it reacts to Hinata to see if the machine is really as bad as you think it is.”

“Ehh… yeah, I guess that’s true…” Kazuichi admitted, even though he was starting to freak out about where this was going. Even if Hajime was going to give it straight back afterwards, he didn’t really like the idea of his pokémon listening to someone else’s orders… But there was no point in having gone this far without testing that to, so he could hardly say no just out of jealousy…

“Ah… alright then! I’ll try and get it to come out!” Hajime nodded, throwing the ball a short distance in front of him. “Go… Metang!”

“Metang!” Metang appeared out of the ball, then spun around to face Hajime… “Tang?”

“Uhh… Hey!” Hajime jumped in surprise at the sight of Kazuichi’s pokémon looking to him for orders… “How are you doing? You… mind if I touch you?”

“Met…” Metang slowly hovered closer to Hajime, letting him slowly put his hand on the top of its dome and pat it, making it hum happily… which was crazy, cause it hated random people getting greasy hands on it!

“Wow… it really is listening to me…” Hajime muttered, “Like I’m the one who’s been training it all this time…”

He had that right… Kazuichi was right here and Metang wasn’t paying him any attention whatsoever… If he didn’t know Hajime was gonna give it back, he’d be screaming his head off right now…

“Hmm… Souda, see if you can get its attention away from Hinata.” One of the older guys suggested, which was good cause he kinda wanted an excuse to do that anyway…

“Alright… Metang? Metang!?” Geez… Nothing! It was just humming away as Hajime carried on patting its head… Maybe he could attempt to bribe it? “Hey, Metang? You must be pretty tired after all our travelling today! You need a recharge…? Or anything…? At all…?” Still just having fun with Hajime… alright, he had one more thing he could think of that might make Metang listen to him… “Hey, Metang! Your tops looking smudged! How’s about we go back to the workshop and I give you another polishing!” …If didn’t even stop humming, not even when he pointed out it was starting to look messy… “…Metang…?”

“It really does completely take a pokémon away from their trainer…” The younger Kirigiri grimaced and moved her hand, like she was shielding her pokéballs.
No kidding… It was like Metang didn’t know who he was anymore! Heck… he wasn’t even sure Metang would remember after Hajime released him, at this rate… But he’d have one of those fancy new balls for it, right? That’d definitely help! He just had to keep calm until the security guy got back from the workshop, and Hajime could let it go! Which he was totally going to do, ’cause he said he wasn’t gonna screw Kazuichi over, even if it did look like he was enjoying playing with Metang way too much for Kazuichi’s liking already and they still probably had another five minutes before that guy got back from the workshop… and that was assuming he actually managed to find the right ones and…

“…Here are the pokéballs you asked for.” Oh thank Arceus he was back and he had the right balls!

“Great, thanks!” Kazuichi quickly grabbed the shiniest looking ball out of the head of security’s hands, “Alright, Hajime, now let Metang go so I can catch him back!”

“Not that, legally speaking, you have to, Hinata…” What the hell was the old man suggesting!?

“Hmm… so, right now, I have a new Steel-type pokémon for my party… and a pretty good Steel-type, to…” And why was Hajime acting like he was agreeing to it!? If that was his idea of a joke, it wasn’t funny!

“Oh… Hajime? This was just a quick test, remember…?” What was with that weird look in his eye… wait… he was just joking, right…? RIGHT…!? “Hajime… You’re gonna give me my pokémon back now, right…?” …He wasn’t saying anything! Crap! He was seriously gonna keep Metang, wasn’t he!? That asshole! “Hey! What happened to not screwing me over!?”

“Ahaha… I’m just joking, Kazuichi!” Aaargh! That jerk! He seriously had Kazuichi scared just then! “Even if the school doesn’t have a rule against using snagged pokémon already, There’ll probably soon be one, right, Headmaster?”

“Exact….”

“Don’t say it like you’re only giving Metang back because of the rules!” Kazuichi snapped at Hajime, before the headmaster even finished his answer.

“Ahaha! Of course not! I wouldn’t do that to you!” Hajime just laughed at him again, “You need Metang more than I do!”

“Damn straight! Now give it back already!”

“Sure, Kazuichi, just give me a second.” Hajime nodded and took Metang’s cheap new pokéball back off of his belt, “Metang… I’m releasing you so you can go back to Kazuichi now, alright?”

“Tang.” It nodded obediently and watched as Hajime ran through the complicated sequence of button presses needed to release a pokémon from its ball.

“Alright, it’s done.” Hajime announced.

Alright… time to see if this stunt had screwed things up between him and Metang long-term… Metang wasn’t exactly rushing back to his side, here… Erghh… this seemed really bad! “Hey… Metang…?”

“Tang…?” At least this time Metang actually responded and turned to face him, even if it was staring at him like it didn’t recognise him… But then it blinked a few times, shuddered a bit and then raced back over to him. “…METANG!”
“Hey! You do remember me!”

“It agreed, while trying to rub the top of its head back and forth under Kazuichi’s arm…

Geez… all that and it was concerned about its head being smudged? This was his Metang alright…

Alright, alright… Let me put you in your new ball, and then I’ll take you back to the workshop and polish you back up again, okay?” Kazuichi offered, holding the luxury premier ball in front of it.

“Tang!” It agreed, rotating one of its arms so it could press the button on the front…

It vibrated in Kazuichi’s hand three times before…

‘Click.’

…And he had his pokémon back again! “Phew…” There was no way he was ever gonna agree to do something like that again! No matter how cool the device was!

“Well… I think this has shown how dangerous this device can be…” The headmaster summed up.

“Sakakura, make the preparations needed to have it housed in the vault, and…”

“Hold on, Kirigiri… Is that really the best way to deal with this?” One of those old dudes suddenly asked, even after all of that!

“…What do you mean?” The headmaster responded.

“You said it yourself… the fact that this worked means that whoever designed it has the capability to make more of them and start stealing pokémon… Regardless of what we do with it.” He explained, “We can’t just shove it in the vault and hope everything will be alright. We need to make sure we have a counter for when whoever made this starts using them!”

“You’re suggesting we start making these ourselves!?” The headmaster scowled, “I doubt the league will take all too kindly to that!”

“Of course I’m not suggesting we can start producing these ourselves…” He sighed, “But now we have one, we can at least make sure that there’s someone honest with the ability to steal people’s pokémon back for them… Right, Hinata?”

“…Me…?” Hajime gaped at him, “…You’re saying you want me to keep this?”

“That’s completely out of the question!” The head of security yelled, “There’d be nothing stopping someone from mugging him and then using it however they wanted!”

“Except that it requires a tight fit… and I doubt it’s easy to adjust it without breaking the whole thing.” One of the other old guys argued back “Would you agree, Souda?”

Hmm… given how the wiring and engine seemed to be built right into the casing… “Well, I certainly wouldn’t want to try it.”

“See! They’d have to be very lucky to be able to use it.” He carried on, “Hardly worth anyone’s time to steal it… but even so, we’ll be able to give your team more resources to ensure Hinata’s safety within the school… it’ll still cost less than having another item in the vault…”

Seriously!? Wow, how high-tech was this vault!?

“But… if he goes around wearing it, everyone will start asking what it is…” Kirigiri pointed out,
which her Dad nodded along with, “And my understanding was that the existence of this device was kept quiet for a good reason.”

“Yes… that’s true… we’ll have to come up with a fake story for what it is…”, “Perhaps we could claim that Hinata’s original idea was correct? That it makes catching pokémon easier?” Her argument wasn’t stopping the old guys.

“How!? We can’t just suddenly claim we have a device that can do something like that! We’d have people all over asking us how it works!” The headmaster snapped, “There’s not even any sensible logic we could give as to how a glove would increase catch rates!”

...Ehhh... Kazuichi could think of one, but this didn’t seem like the best time to say it... Although it was a pretty tempting idea to try out himself, now he’d thought of it...

“You might not be able to think of one, but that doesn’t mean there isn’t a way we could explain it...” The third guy said smugly, “Souda, you look like you’ve thought of something...”

“Ehhehe…” Kazuichi laughed nervously as everyone in the room turned to stare at him, “Well... maybe? I mean... I don’t know if it really would work, but... We could say that we’re trying to make it so the energy it’s pumping into the ball temporarily over-charges the battery, giving the pokéball more energy to force the pokémon inside it with, without having to buy a more expensive pokéball...”

“Ah... err... that...” The headmaster looked both impressed and annoyed with him at the same time, “...Why has no one tried that already?”

“We’ll get a patent lawyer on it, immediately.” One of the guys said, “It’ll lend more credibility to our story, and if it turns out it does work, Souda here will set for life.”

Wait, REALLY!? They were gonna put him on a patent!? Geez, he’d better actually try and see if it would work then...

“Well, if there’s no other objections...” The first old guy looked around for a bit, as the security head and the Kirigiri’s all tried to think of something, “Then it seems like we’re going to let Hinata keep the device... assuming you think you’re ready for that kind of responsibility...?”

“Ahh... I...” Hajime hesitated, and who could blame him? “Well... as you say... we need some way to stop people being able to steal pokémon... and as I happen to be the only one who fits...” He looked around the room determinedly, “I’ll do it.”

“Good lad!” The older guys all congratulated him, although the rest of the room all looked like they thought this was going to be a disaster... To the point where he would have sworn he heard the headmaster’s head hitting his desk once they'd all left the room and started heading their separate ways...

But, hey! It was Hajime! He was a good guy! And he was looking pretty cheerful about things for the first time in months! Why not let him have something special about him, to help him feel better about being in the same school as the rest of them? He was probably the last person who’d take advantage of this...!

“Hmm... Hey, Kazuichi? Do you think I ought to practise using this some more?” Hajime asked him quietly, once they were out of earshot of everyone else. “You know, on a pokémon that hasn’t been told to just let it work?”

“Hmm... yeah, you might have a point there...” Kazuichi admitted. “It’d be good to know whether
the catch rates are affected by the process at all…”

“I thought as much.” Hajime smiled, “I figure Sakakura had the right idea about catching a random pokémon and me trying to steal that… But for that, I need someone else to catch them for me…”

“And seeing as I’m the only student who knows about this thing and doesn’t obviously hate it, you want me to do it?” Kazuichi guessed, and Hajime looked a little embarrassed about it, “Hey, don’t worry! After all, it gives me a chance to study the thing some more! And if I’m supposed to be developing tech to make catching pokémon easier, I’m probably going to have to catch a lot of pokémon anyway, so it’s win-win!”

“Hah! Great! Thanks, Kazuichi!” Hajime slapped him around the shoulders which his newly-gloved hand, “I’m looking forward to seeing just what I can do with this thing!”

“Eheh… yeah… but… You do remember this is just so you can stop other people using them, right?” Kazuichi reminded him. Not that he wanted to burst Hajime’s bubble, but the guy seemed just a little too excited about all this…

“Huh…? Yeah! Of course I do!” Hajime blinked at him in surprised, “I was just thinking about how much I’ll be able to help people if Team Rocket really do start mass-producing these things!”

Eh… that seemed fair enough! Guess Kazuichi was getting a little bit paranoid about all of this, after the way Metang acted earlier. The was no way Hajime was going to start doing anything stupid with this thing…!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next up, the chapter about Hifumi that I promised last week!
“Mahiru, you’re looking distracted, is there something going on out there…?”

Ahh! That was embarrassing! She’d been staring out of the window for so long, that Miss Yukizome had noticed!

“Ah… sorry, Miss Yukizome! There’s nothing to worry about!” She hadn’t seen anything out there anyway, so she was probably just imagining things, “I’ll pay more attention now!”

“Hmm…” Her teacher didn’t look convinced by her answer, “…Do you have a feeling that Xerneas might close by…?”

“Maybe…” Mahiru admitted. She hated being so vague, but until coming here, she’d never even realised that her urges to go out and take pictures were often linked to Xerneas being in the area, and she still wasn’t good at recognising the difference between that and her just wanting to enjoy her camera. “But it’s not very strong, so I’m probably just imagining things, this time.”

“Now Mahiru, don’t say things like that! You should have more faith in yourself!” Miss Yukizome said in a mildly scolding voice, “If you think there’s any chance Xerneas is out there, then you’re supposed to leave class and try to find him, remember? The school board gets mad with me if you don’t!”

Was that really true? It seemed pretty over-the-top, and she could hear Kazuichi muttering about how nice it’d be to get to leave class and work on his inventions whenever he wanted to…

“You can work in your smelly workshop whenever you like!” And Hiyoko must have heard him as well, because she turned around and snapped at him as soon as he said it. “But it’s not like Mahiru can decide when Xerneas is going to show up! That’s why the board always let her leave class!”

“And who can blame them, when Mahiru always comes back with such wonderful pictures!?” Nagito agreed, “Even if she doesn’t find Xerneas!”

Okay, that was definitely going too far! All she did in those cases was take pictures of nice pokémon she saw having fun in the wild, or that Passimian decided she wanted to play with. But a lot of the class were nodding along with Nagito, including Miss Yukizome, so she didn’t really have much chance of arguing against them.

“Okay. I’ll see what I can find then.” She quickly packed up her things, made sure her camera and pokémon were ready to go, and stood up from her chair…

“But… if you don’t find Xerneas, don’t go spending all evening take pictures of random stuff!” Hiyoko suddenly insisted, “We’ve got something planned at four, remember!?”

“Of course I haven’t forgot!” She and Maizono had organised that ‘strategy meeting’ for the other talent trainers, about how they were going to try and get rid of Miss Hawthorne this afternoon, seeing as the school board had ignored their letter… and with her insisting that Mahiru wasn’t allowed to help Hiyoko dress up her pokémon anymore, she was taking it really seriously… “If nothing major happens, then I’ll be back in time!”
“Ooh! Are you two planning something super-fun?!” Ibuki asked, which was worrying because…

“Did you forget!? You’re supposed to be coming to!” Hiyoko snapped at her.

“Hmm… Oh! Right!” Ibuki exclaimed after a moment of confusion, “Ibuki had forgot that was today! Good thing you reminded me!”

“Urg… Geez, I hope Maizono’s not as empty-headed as you…” Hiyoko groaned.

“Hmm… Are you planning something with the other talent trainers?” Miss Yukizome asked.

“Aaahh! Well…” Hiyoko fidgeted as she tried to think of an answer that wouldn’t mean admitting that they were planning to try and oust one of the teachers, even after the school board had insisted she stay despite everyone’s protests.

“Yep! We are! Buuuut, it’s a super-secret surprise!” Ibuki winked at her, “So no asking for spoilers!”

“I see! It’s good that you’re working with students from other classes!” Miss Yukizome smiled happily.

“Yes! The whole purpose of this school is to encourage collaboration between the world’s most impressive students!” Their Imposter classmate pointed out loudly, fitting with his current hall-monitor disguise. “That you are taking the initiative to reach out to your counterparts in other years is very impressive! I wish I could be doing something like that!”

“Well, we could do with more people…” Hiyoko told him. Which was true, they’d already had Mikan drop out of the first meeting because her nursing duties clashed…

“Ah… Sorry, but, I didn’t mean exactly the same as that… And besides, I have other duties to attend to!” But unfortunately it seemed like Imposter was in the same position as her… Although she didn’t really understand why he felt the need to copy Ishimaru’s disciplinary activities, even if it was nice that the school was a lot less chaotic with the two of them stopping the rowdier students from causing trouble all the time.

But him being unavailable was all the more reason for Mahiru to hurry up and go outside, so she could try and get back in time, whether Xerneas was out there or not…

It turned out it was not, as she discovered after an hour of wandering around the forest, never getting any feeling of wanting to go in a specific direction, like she would usually do before finding Xerneas. So aside from letting Fomantis battle a few times, and getting the odd picture of nice Butterfrees, she hadn’t done anything productive with the class time she’d skipped…

"Oh well. At least nothing's stopping us from getting backfor Hiyoko's meeting!" She pointed out to Passimian, who was walking alongside her. It was only ten to four when the security gate they all had to sign in and out at came into view, and the only person she could see was Yamada, who had already walked out past it…

…Although that was pretty weird! Usually he’d go straight to the dinning room for a diet coke straight after his classes ended! Perhaps the trip to Alola had finally forced him to kick that unhealthy habit of his…

“Ah! Good afternoon, Miss Koizumi!” Yamada shouted at her, rather than wait for her to get closer so he could talk at a more normal volume, “Out looking for Xerneas, I take it?”
“Yes… That’s why I wasn’t in class.” She agreed, “But you’re out here pretty early as well… by your standards, anyway…”

“Yes! Indeed I am! For you see, I have had a vision from Cresselia herself!” Oh boy… he was in one of crazy moods today, “And so, I am off to go catch myself the strongest bug-type pokémon in the school!”

“Oh, really? A strong bug-type, huh…?”

“Yes! But, of course, I won’t be giving you any specifics of my vision!” He said, as if she really cared. “I can’t have you attempting to steal my fateful new party member from right under my nose! You’ll just have to wait until my triumphant return”

“Well, good luck then…” She told him, as the two of them went separate ways… at least, until she felt Passimian tugging at her camera bag. "Hmm? What is it?"

...She just pointed over at Yamada, who was heading off into the first years’ wild areas, checking behind him occasionally to make sure she wasn’t following him or anything… As if it wasn’t obvious that he was planning to go and catch himself a Scyther... When his only pokémon was a little Dratini. And he was going off by himself...

Oh geez! She’d better get after him! Hopefully Hiyoo wouldn’t be too mad if she was late…

“Hey! Wait up a second!”

“What is it?” He did at least stop to ask her, even if he was looking pretty suspicious about it.

“Well… you said it’s a strong pokémon you’re going after… Are you sure you’re actually going to be able to take it down? Or even get to it safely?”

“Ahahaha! There’s no need for you to worry about that! Although my target resides in a dangerous environment, Cresselia has taken care to impart knowledge of a safe route to me, which I have carefully drawn out!” He waved a piece of paper at her briefly, which just looked like a lot of random scrawling to her… “And she has even informed me of the best strategy to use to capture it! So this adventure will pose no danger to me whatsoever!”

Yeesh… he really thought he could go wandering off into the wild, taking directions based on some dream he’d had, and go capture a Scyther without getting into trouble at all!? He was delusional! She couldn’t just let him go off like that! But she probably wouldn’t manage to convince him not to follow this ‘fateful adventure’ of ‘Cresselia’s’ either… But maybe she could convince him to go back and ask someone else in his class to go with him!

“Now, if you don’t mind, I need to get going! The timeframe for this adventure is very short!”

Yamada turned away and headed back out. Darnit! There was no chance of him waiting for someone to go with him now…

“…Well… let me come with you!” She couldn’t believe she was chasing after this idiot like this!

“…Why?” That just made him look suspicious again, probably thinking that she wanted dibs on this Scyther of his, which meant she’d have to come up with something good to convince him she just wanted to tag along…

“Well… you said you’re being sent out by Cresselia, right? That sounds like something worth documenting!” She held up her camera, hoping he’d be too flattered to be suspicious…
“Hhhmmmmmm… Well… I can hardly deny you the chance to document such a momentous occasion in my legendary adventure! Once I’ve caught Cresselia, this will be one of the moments that scholars around the world will long to see!” His vain side easily won out over his scepticism, “Just keep your monkey in its ball and make sure you stay back a ways, so you don’t get caught up in any of the earth-shattering battles I may get caught up in!”

Urgghh… Now she’d gone and bolstered his ego too much, hadn’t she? As if a Dratini was going to be shattering anything! Still, it was follow along with his ridiculous requests or risk him getting himself killed… And judging from the sideways glance she and Passimian shared before she disappeared into her pokemon, it seemed her pokemon felt the same way… Even if she’d probably have to come straight back out once Yamada got his only pokémon knocked out!

Still, at least it shouldn’t take them too long to head over to the Scyther area and find some…

…Or, it wouldn’t have, if he was actually heading over to the fields and not off to the side of the main path into the forest…

“Uhh… you’re sure this is the right way to find the school’s strongest bug type…?” Mahiru asked him, “It’s… not quite the route I was expecting you to take…”

“Well, adventures are rarely set in a straight path!” Was Yamada’s response, “Sometimes you have to walk through apparent circular detours to make sure you get to your destination intact!”

So, in other words, according to this dream he’d had, they had to go wander around in the forest for a while, before heading to the fields? So much for this being just a quick errand, unless they happened to run into something that knocked his Dratini out, then Mahiru was going to be stuck following this idiot around until he either gave up or it got dark and they’d have to go back inside regardless…

She’d better text Hiyoko and let her know what was going on…! Although texting and following Yamada was a bit of a struggle, so the message was pretty short.

‘Hi Hiyoko, something happened so won’t be on time for meeting, and might not make it at all. Sorry.’

Hopefully she’d understand! She was getting a lot more self-reliant this year, so Mahiru not being around to help out might not upset her as much as it would have done previously, so now she could focus on following Yamada as he ignored the paths in the forest and instead started squeezing himself through a group of trees that was only just spaced far enough apart for him.

Of course, it was a lot easier for Mahiru to follow him, so she needn’t have bothered keeping the message short. Maybe she should explain in more detail, as Hiyoko hadn’t responded yet, which was unlike her…

‘I’m really sorry to do this to you, but Yamada was going to do something that might get him killed, and I didn’t have any other choice but to follow him. I come join you as soon as I can, and I’ll definitely make sure I get to the next meeting! Okay?’

…Five minutes later she still hadn’t got a response… Either Hiyoko was busy running the meeting, or she was really mad at Mahiru… Those were the only reasons she could think of for the silent treatment.

Well, for now there wasn’t anything she could do about it. It’s not like she could leave Yamada to fend for himself against a Scyther! She’d just have to try and think of something nice she could do to
make it up to Hiyoko later, if she was mad and not just busy... At least it was usually easy to cheer Hiyoko up!

What wasn’t easy was figuring out where Yamada supposed to be going, as the route he was taking kept arbitrarily changing directions through the forest, and she was sure that they’d almost double-backed on themselves at one point... and meanwhile the sky was already starting to get dark. How long had they been wandering around out here for? It had to have been at least an hour, by now, and he was showing absolutely no signs of doubling back to the field area...

But... she did have to admit that it was remarkable how few pokémon they were running into. Could it be that Yamada really had got a message from Cresselia, telling him to come this way and how to safely catch a Scyther? It would explain how he’d managed to wander around the forest for so long, and only run into three easily defeated pokémon...

...She almost hoped that wasn’t the case, because otherwise she’d followed him and made Hiyoko mad at her for absolutely no reason... Plus this whole thing would have been a complete waste of time for her, aside from getting some decent pictures of Yamada and his Dratini in cheerful ‘victory poses’...

“And, at last, after our long and arduous journey, our target is in sight!” Yamada suddenly announced, almost two hours after they’d stepped into the forest... But that didn’t make any sense! She couldn’t hear anything like a Scyther, and there wouldn’t be one in this dense part of the forest, anyway!!

“Dratini! Come out and meet your new friend!” ...But that wasn’t stopping Yamada from getting his pokémon out, “And start by paralysing it with Thunder Wave!”

“Dra...” Well... his pokémon was attacking something in front of him, but from this angle, he was completely blocking her view of what it was... “That’s it! Now use Dragon Rage!”

This time, the gust of winds from the dragon’s attack lifted up its opponent high enough for Mahiru to see that it was green like a Scyther... but there was no way that was big enough to be a Scyther, unless it was a very small one...

...But if she took a picture with her camera, she’d be able to zoom in on it...

A few clicks later, she was checking through a few pictures of varying quality, trying to find one where the green shape wasn’t too blurry...

“Yes! Exactly as Cresselia foretold! Now, hang back Dratini! I’m going to throw a pokéball!”

Already!?? Well, that probably meant it either wasn’t a Scyther, or Yamada was being far too optimistic... “Aha! A direct hit!”

Hmm... But here was a pretty good picture of the pokémon inside the twister, so if she zoomed in on it she might be able to work out what it was...

“Now, I’m sure it’s not going to break out, but get ready to corner it in case it does...”

Let’s see... It definitely wasn’t a Scyther, that much was sure! It was shaped like a round-bottomed triangle, with a small rod sticking out of the bottom... Hmm... although, on second thoughts, the triangle looked more like a leaf...

“Ahahaha! That’s it! We did it Dratini! We’ve recruited the second member of our adventuring party! Welcome to the team...”
Hold on… Did that mean he’d just caught a…? But… That couldn’t really be what he was after this whole time, could it? After all, who would say they were going to catch the strongest bug-type in the school and then go off and get a…

“…Sewaddle!”

“…Seeew?” Yeah… that was definitely a Sewaddle, alright…

“Ah… I suppose I ought to give you a potion, after the damage from Dratini just now…”

Geez! Strongest bug in the school!? It was barely conscious after one hit from Dragon Rage!

“That’s what Cresselia told you to go after!?” She couldn’t help but ask.

“Yes!” Yamada finished giving it a potion, then turned around triumphantly to show her it. “…Were you expecting something different?”

“Well… yeah. I was expecting you to go after one of the Scythers…” Mahiru admitted.

“A Scyther!? Are you crazy!? I couldn’t take down one of them all by myself!” Huh… guess he had more sense than she’d given him credit for… “The last time I even went in that area I almost got killed! What makes you think Cresselia would tell me to go back there!?”

“Umm… well, to be honest, I didn’t really believe that Cresselia had told you to come out here… I thought maybe you’d just had an intense dream…”

“…And so you followed me because you thought I was going to need rescuing again…” Yamada guessed with a measured amount of bitterness in his voice. “You know, I thought being accepted here meant people were starting to believe I do actually see her…”

“Geez! I didn’t say I don’t believe you!” Mahiru sighed, “Just that I’ve never heard of any legendary pokémon talking to someone before I met you, let alone giving them instructions on how to go about catching it!”

“Really? So Xerneas doesn’t communicate with you at all?” Yamada looked surprised by that, “How do you get so many pictures of it them? Do you just spend all your time outside and hope for the best?”

“No, it’s not that bad… Occasionally I’ll get a kind of… vague feeling that it might be around the place, and then when I go out I’ll sometimes run into him.” She explained, “That’s why I was allowed to skip my last class today.”

“Ah, I see… interesting…” Yamada mused, “So, you have new pictures of him, then?”

“No… It doesn’t always work. Sometimes I just don’t find him…” She admitted, “Even if it does feel like it should be close by, like it does right now…”

“It does!? Let me get me sketchbook out!” Yamada quickly perched his new Sewaddle on his shoulder and started rummaging around in his bag… “Blasted thing, come on!”

“I wouldn’t worry about it too much… It’s so big that we’d notice if it was anywhere near here…” Mahiru pointed out, sometimes it seemed like she might as well just hang around outside and hope it showed up… “I’m probably just imaging things, really…”

“Or, perhaps it’s not Xerneas you’re sensing, but a different Legendary pokémon!” Yamada
“You really think we’re going to run into Celebi?!” Geez, he really was delusional! Hardly anyone ever even saw it! Let alone managed to get any proof that they had! If it weren’t for the odd confirmed case of time travel, people would probably just think it was a complete myth!

“I… I didn’t say Celebi! I… said… haaaaah!” Yamada trailed off with a gasp and started frantically scrawling in his book, staring intensely at something off to their side as he did so…

“Cel-lebiiii…”

No way… it couldn’t be…!

But she was already instinctively readying her camera as she turned around to face what Yamada was sketching. And she’d barely even glimpsed the curved, pointed green hair, large blue eyes and translucent fluttering wings before she found herself frantically hammering the shutter button, watching it more through the image display than with her own eyes in a desperate attempt to make sure she got every single movement that she could in the centre of the shot.

*click**click**click**click**click**click**click**click**click**click*… She could vaguely hear Yamada next to her complaining that the noise and flash would likely scare Celebi off, but that didn’t matter right now! Not when it had such a happy smile on its face, as it flew around the area that Yamada had fought his Sewaddle in, twirling around and ducking through the plants and saplings that had been torn up in the chaos, which soon started rooting themselves back into the earth and rising up to the sky once again, until soon enough the whole area looked just as healthy, no… much healthier than it had before they’d showed up…

“~Cele.. cele… Celebiiii!~” The fairy pokémon flew in a circle around the pair of them, before doing one last twirl and turning right towards he camera with a smile and a wave…

*Click*… Which Mahiru was certain she’d captured right in the middle of the shot…

“~Biiii~!”…Before it did a backwards loop-the-loop and flew off away from them, looking like it was fading away as it did so…

Well… it seemed like that was that! She’d just have to hope she managed to get some good pictures of it…

“Ah! No! Come back!” Yamada had other ideas though, and moved as if he was going to try and chase it down… “Where did it go?”

“…I think it probably went through time…” Mahiru pointed out, “That’s what it does isn’t it?”

“Arrgh! So it could be anywhere! Or anywhen!” Yamada exclaimed, before heavily sitting himself
down on the floor… “Well… in that case… I need to sketch out as much as I possibly can, while it’s still fresh in my mind!”

“…Here? In the woods?”

“Yes, here! Now stop distracting me!” Yamada snapped, already moving onto what looked like the third page of… really good drawings of Celebi… Geez, if he could draw that well from just looking at it for a minute, imagine how good her photographs were going to turn out…

Yamada… He… would probably be alright here by himself, right? He had two pokémon to look after him now! And he’d even said he wanted quiet, so… she’d probably be alright to go check her pictures on the computer, wouldn’t she? No, wait, she’d need to go show them to Hiyoko first, to make her less mad at her! And while she was going back that way, she could always let security know Yamada was sat out here by himself on the way back into school…

Heck! The path back to the school was even pretty well lit, still! It wasn’t even close to night time, so he’d probably finish up his drawings and head back himself before he needed to be brought back…!

“Back already, Miss Koizumi?” The guard at security looked surprised as she ran up to the gate to sign herself back in, “Does that mean Xerneas was close by?”

…What was he talking about? She’d gone off after Xerneas hours ago… But it didn’t really matter… “No… *haaah* found something else…!” She gasped out breathlessly, “I… need to go check my photos…”

“Alright! Well, I look forward to seeing those!” The guard grinned.

“Also… Yamada’s still out there by himself…”

“…Yamada…? But… I’ve not got any record of him signing out…” The guard looked puzzled. Did that mean Yamada hadn’t signed out!? Geez, what an idiot! “Well… thanks for letting us know about that! If he doesn’t come back before night time, we’ll send someone out after him…”

“Thanks!” She told him, before heading back to their classroom… maybe she’d not have missed the whole of Hiyoko’s meeting… At least she could hear people talking through the door just before she opened it…

Hmm… this was odd. There didn’t seem to be a clear discussion going on in this meeting. Ibuki, Maizono and Kuwata of all people were chatting amongst themselves about costume ideas while Hiyoko was staring down at something in her lap… At least until she noticed Mahiru entering the room and looked up at her in confusion…

“What are you doing here!?”

Was she that surprised Mahiru had decided to come late rather than never? Maybe she’d been worried that the whole Xerneas hunt was just an excuse to ditch her…

“Ah… I’m sorry I’m late, but I did still want to come!” Mahiru assured her, sitting down and reaching across for a copy of what appeared to be an agenda…

“Well, that’s not what you said earlier, but whatever…” “…What was she talking about? Mahiru had been saying this entire time that she wanted to come…? “Why are you pretending to be Mahiru!”
“But… I am Mahiru…” Did Hiyoko think she was Imposter? Why would she think that?

“Urgg! Don’t you try and lie to me, you fat faker! Mahiru just sent me a text saying she can’t make it!” Hiyoko snapped at her… which didn’t make any sense! The last text she’d sent Hiyoko was at least two hours ago… “And I’ve just got another one from her right now! ‘I’m really sorry to do this to you, but…”’

“…Yamada was going to do something that might get him killed, and I didn’t have any other choice but to follow him.” Mahiru started finishing off the rest of the text she’d sent Hiyoko earlier…

“Hiyoko, I sent that two hours ago, at least.”

“Did someone hit you with Confuse Ray? Mahiru was still in class two hours ago!” Hiyoko sneered.

“But… it’s five past six, classes would have ended…”

“Uhh… Dude, it’s five past four!” Kuwata stopped her.

Huh!?

“But… my pokédex says its past six…”

“What, ’cause you changed the time yourself?” Hiyoko muttered.

“I don’t know… she doesn’t seem like she’s lying…” Maizono frowned, “But then why would her pokédex be two hours ahead of ours…?”

That was a good question! It didn’t make any sense… she’d been on time for the rest of the day…

“Oh! Ibuki knows! Mahiru must travelled through time!” Ibuki suggested, waving her hand in the air.

“This isn’t the time for stupid jokes!” Hiyoko snapped at her.

…But Ibuki was completely right, wasn’t she? Even if she’d meant it as a joke… Celebi must have taken Mahiru and Yamada back through time by a couple of hours! That would explain why the guard thought she was back early and hadn’t seen Yamada leaving, and why it hadn’t started getting dark on the way back to the school yet… So now she just needed to prove it to the rest of them!

“Hold on, Hiyoko… look at this!” Mahiru got her camera out and switched the digital display to the last picture of Celebi she’d been able to take… Not that it looked that great on the tiny screen, but at least it was good enough to get the point across…

...At least she’d thought it would be. Hiyoko was just staring at it without saying anything… and then Ibuki and Maizono also leant over to look, but still no one said anything until Kuwata stood up and walked around behind them so he could look at the camera as well…

“…Well, that’s pretty fucking awesome, but what is it?” Geez… It can’t have been anywhere near as good a picture as she’d tho…

“Were you raised in barn!? It’s Celebi you punk dummy!” Hiyoko snapped at him, “You know? The Time Travel pokémon!!”

“That’s what Celebi looks like!? So you’re saying she really has travelled through time!?” Kuwata exclaimed, “I thought Mioda was kidding!”

“Ahaahah… So did Ibuki!” Ibuki admitted.

“But… there have been cases of Celebi taking people through time before…” Maizono pointed out,
“Usually to fix disasters before they happen… Did something bad happen in these two hours?”

“No… All that happened was that Yamada made me miss the meeting.” And really, that hadn’t been much of a problem. She’d only thought it was because Hiyoko never responded to her text, but now that was probably because she’d come in and stopped her from getting the chance to.

“Hah! So that dumb teacher’s so crummy, even Celebi is helping us get rid of her!” Hiyoko laughed.

“Hey, maybe we can tell the school that!” Kuwata suggested eagerly, “I mean… you hardly ever hear about people seeing Celebi, and you didn’t do anything to make it show up, did you?”

“I don’t think so…” Mahiru told her, as she tried to remember exactly what happened. “Yamada had a battle that damaged some plants, which Celebi fixed, but that wouldn’t usually be enough to summon it.”

“Hmm… Buuuuuut… maybe, because he has a Legendary that likes him, and you have a Legendary that likes you, being together meant that Celebi wanted to come and say hello to you both!” Ibuki suggested cheerfully.

So, people who saw Legendries would see rarer ones if they teamed up together? Was that why that Todd kept wanting her to go travelling with him on his TV show…? She’d always assumed he just wanted someone to look after him because he was too useless to be prepared for himself…

“So, you can see cool pokémon, but only if you team up with Yamada!?” Kuwata summarised, “Man, sucks to be you!”

“Ah… well, we don’t know for sure if that’s how it works! It might just have been a coincidence, or Yamada broke a really rare flower that we didn’t notice!” Mahiru pointed out, “I don’t think we’d be able to convince the school board what happened one way or the other…”

“And it’s probably not the best idea to tell them that we were having a meeting to try and get rid of a teacher!” Maizono pointed out, “It doesn’t exactly help our reputation…”

“Crud… I didn’t think of that.” Hiyoko griped, sliding Mahiru’s camera back to her. “Alright, as great as this picture is, we have a meeting to run! Item one on the agenda: Anyone got any ideas on how to get rid of Horrible Hawthorne…!?”

Mahiru took back the camera, taking one last look at the picture she’d taken. The school was probably going to have a lot of questions about how she’d found Celebi, and maybe they’d even come to the same conclusion as Ibuki had, that she and Yamada working together had caused Celebi to appear…

She hoped not, though. It was embarrassing enough having people fawn over her photos of Xerneas… and she’d hate to see how Yamada acted if he thought he had the ability to summon Mythical pokémon!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next chapter Chihrio finds something interesting...
Urg… Stupid coding! Chihiro was sure this should have worked, but then it refused to compile properly so now they were sat squinting at hundreds of lines of code, looking for the one stupid tiny mistake they’d probably made at…

…What time was it even…? Probably nearing midnight… they could just check on their pokédex…

1:57AM!? They’d been sat reading this for three hours! Geez… they needed to get to bed or they were going to hate themselves tomorrow…

…But it’d be nice to find out what the problem was before they went to bed… and they didn’t have that much left of the code to read through… it shouldn’t take too much longer to find the problem…

*Bzzt Bzzzt…*

Huh? That was their pokédex… But who would be sending them a message at 2am? It must be something important, if it was being sent that late…

‘I just remembered I forgot to tell you I was sending you a parcel. Did you get it? Love, Dad.’

…Or Dad was just up late coding, same as them, and had suddenly remembered something. But, thinking about it, they hadn’t been expecting anything in the post and so hadn’t gone to the mail room in a few days…

‘I haven’t checked post in a while, I’ll do it now.’

‘No, Chihiro, it’s 2am. You should be in bed. You can check it tomorrow.’

‘But you’re up.’

‘Yes, but I shouldn’t be. I was just proofing code and lost track of time. So let’s both go to bed before we end up doing all-nighters and hating ourselves tomorrow.’

…Well, he had a point… ‘Alright. I’ll check it first thing when I wake up tomorrow. Good night Dad.’

‘Good night, Chihiro. I love you, and your pokémon.’

They were seventeen, weren’t they getting a bit old for this type of exchange…? Well, even if they were, it was still nice to have, in a way.
‘Love you to, tell Klinklang and Charjabug I miss them.’

‘Will do, sweet dreams, Chihiro. And stop replying or we’ll be texting all night instead of coding.’

‘Ok. :p’

‘>:-[‘

Hahaha… Well, enough kidding around, they’d code better after some sleep anyway…

Alright, they’d slept. So now to see what Dad had sent them before they went to breakfast… Whatever it was pretty thin and light… even lighter than some of the smaller pokédexes out there… not that they needed any more pokédexes to play around with…

Which was just as well, because whatever this was, it was clearly not a pokédx. It was a thin rectangular case made out of a smooth dark chrome, which easily flipped open to reveal space for eight foam inserts, the first of which had already been cut out into the shape of the volcano badge, and also an inscription on the inside of the lid…

‘My dearest Chihiro. You make me so proud. Love Dad.’

Geez… It was one badge! And they were 17 already… they really ought to have had a few by now…

Still, it was a nice thought… and actually a pretty nice case as well… And they should be able to start filling it up a lot quicker now they were actually training with Mondo… So they cheerfully proceeded to transfer their badge from the cheap pouch they’d picked up into the nice case, and then send a picture of it back to their dad with a message thanking him for it…

“Fanmail, fanmail, fanmail, stupid Saturday morning class, making me sort this all by myself…”

Meanwhile, Enoshima had come in and was now grumpily muttering to herself as she sorted through a large pile of letters… “…Fanmail, stalker fanmail, fan… wait, what the heck is this supposed to be!?”

Chihiro couldn’t help but glance over at the envelope she was looking down her nose at. It was large and red, with a square bottom that jutted out slightly at the top, before sharply narrowing off into a spike at the top… Plus it had a wide clear window that took up most of the square part at the bottom, which made it look like the designs they’d managed to get a look at a while ago… But that was probably a coincidence, right…? Something like that wouldn’t be sent to a model…

“Pfft… Look, it’s even got goofy eyes and speaker holes drawn on it…” Enoshima noticed them staring at it and turned it around for them to see better, which then made it undeniable that…

“…I think it’s supposed to be a Rotom…” They admitted, cautiously, “But… inhabiting a pokédx, or something like that?”

“You think, huh? Weeeell then! Let’s see if you’re correct!” Enoshima suggested in a game-show host voice, before ripping open the envelope and scanning over the contents… “Whaddaya know! You’re right! That’s what these guys are planning to make into the 'pokédexes of the future'! And they’re even asking little-old-me to incorporate it into my look for a while, to help them get big…”

“Really!?” They were just offering to give her one of those things!?
“Yeah… they’re obviously desperate for attention, I’m not even the only student here they’re offering it to!” Enoshima smirked, “Probably not even worth wasting my time to set the thing up…”

…And she was going to ignore it…!? But wait… if her only problem with it was that it’d take some time to set up, then maybe this was Chihrio’s chance to get their hands on one of these and see exactly how they worked…

“Umm… well… if it’s that much of a problem, I could always set it up for you!” Chihiro offered, “I’d even give the programming a once-over and make sure it’s not going to spontaneously screw up and delete all your data or anything…”

“Really… that’s sounds like a lot of trouble for you! Like, you know I’m not planning to pay you or anything, right?”

“That’s alright! I like being helpful!” Chihiro told her, although she didn’t look convinced, even though it was true… “And getting to see how it’s coded might help me with my own coding, to…”

“Oh, really…? So, you actually think this thing is worth something…” Enoshima grinned smugly, “And you jumped at the chance to get your hands on it!”

Oops… Had they been a bit too obvious, there…? “Umm… it’s not like that…”

“Upupupu! It totally is! Guess it is worth my time after all… Well… or maybe it’s worth Mukuro’s time… Assuming she even knows how to work a pokédex…” Enoshima ignored them a mused to herself for a bit, “Well, either way, you’re not getting your hands on it, that’s for sure! Toodles, Fujiyaki!”

Darnit! They’d definitely been way too obvious just then… Enoshima probably wasn’t even going to let them look at it too closely now… But… she did say she wasn’t the only one they wanted to offer one to, didn’t she? Maybe they’d have more luck with one of the other people, if they could find their letter... Good thing it was in an obvious envelope… AH! There was one! In the otherwise empty pigeonhole belonging to…

Ishimaru. Double darnit! Not that he wouldn’t be willing to let them look at it, if they explained why they wanted to… But that would mean getting close enough to his Arcanine to have a conversation with him, and also the risk of him being too honest to hide the fact that he was letting them have a look at it from the company…

Whereas… on the other hand, it’d be a lot easier if they just took Ishimaru’s letter and claimed the Rotom Dex for themselves… Just long enough to make sure it was actually working safely and everything! Heck, they’d probably be doing him a favour, by making sure he wouldn’t get exposed to something that might potentially decide to mess up all the data he collected on a whim! Right? And in exchange, they could actually refurbish his pokédex like they’d told him they would all those weeks ago, so he’d still get a nice new pokédex out of it! And probably a better one than this thing!

So they really didn’t have anything to feel guilty about as they took the letter out of Ishimaru’s pigeonhole and tucked it under their arm, just moments before the Arcanine trainer himself entered the mailroom and greeted them good morning as they were leaving…

Not that that stopped them from feeling guilty about it… Especially when Ishimaru seemed to notice the unusually shaped letter under their arm. They could have sworn he looked like he knew they’d just stolen his mail, but there was no reason for him to know he was going to get it, was there? They were probably just being paranoid…
Ishimaru certainly didn’t say anything, or follow them out of the room. He’d probably just been curious about the shape of the envelope! There really wasn’t anything stopping Chihiro from getting their hands on one of these ‘innovative new pokédexes of the future’ now…

‘If you are interested in seeing how our new pokédex can help improve your already extensive research into the behaviour of wild pokémon, then we request that you arrange an appointment with our representative Darren, who will meet you in person to explain its various functions before handing the device over to you…’

Triple damnit! They’d assumed they’d just send the device out to Ishimaru if they wrote to them saying ‘he’ was interested in trying it! Not want to meet him in person! Now they’d have to ask Ishimaru for permission if they wanted to tinker with this… and given the letter had a bunch of clauses saying not to open the casing, or even specify to other people that it had a Rotom in it, they doubted he’d been willing to let them, not if doing so would break the rules the company had set him. Especially not when the company had gone on so much about how they admired his research and work ethic, and wanted nothing more than to help him… Ishimaru would probably be too happy at the thought that someone all the way in Alola had heard enough good things about him to give him a free pokédex to think twice about whether the entire premise of the pokédex itself was a good idea or not…

“Hey, Chihiro! Whatcha reading?” They were interrupted by the last person they expected to see in the cafeteria right now…

“Mondo…?” They looked to their side and up to see the familiar faces of Mondo and his Lycanroc, which was stood patiently watching Mondo putting a huge tray of food down on the table, “What happened to your class?”

“Uhh… it got cancelled.” Mondo paused briefly as he explained, as he had to shift the heavy tray with both hands…

Which meant he wasn’t holding onto Lycanroc!

“Uhh… you alright, Chihiro?” Mondo asked, as their body instinctively tried to scramble backwards away from the wolf, and they almost tipped their chair over backwards. “What’s wrong!?”

It was all they could do to look at Lycanroc long enough to point to him… and notice that he was still just stood there calmly by Mondo’s side, with a goofy looking grin on his face…

…That… that wasn’t like Lycanroc… Was this actually Lycanroc, or something else…? It would only take a second for them to grab their pokédex and check…

‘One ditto detected.’ Mondo flinched as their scanner picked up the fake pokémon.

“Shit… alright, look… Do me a favour and don’t tell anyone about this!” Mondo recalled his poekom without seeming upset to discover it wasn’t actually his pokémon… Which meant…

“Umm… You’re not Mondo, are you?” ‘Mondo’ grimaced at the question, which was all the answer they needed… but how did he look so much like Mondo? They’d never seen anything like this… except… “…Are you the guy who was pretending to be Togami on our first day here…?”

“…Fuck.” Whoever they were talking to sighed and sat heavily in their seat, “Yeah. I am…”

Wow… it was hard to believe that gut and this guy were the same person, given how different the
two boys he’d imitated were… “So… does that mean you can imitate any guy?”

“I am pretend like I’m anyone, not just guys.” ‘Mondo’ corrected… “Though I’ve spent mosta this term acting like Ishimaru…”

“Really!!?” If that was the case, and no one had noticed, then that might mean Chihiro wouldn’t need to get the real Ishimaru’s permission after all!

“Yeah… great fuckin’ waste of time that turned out ta be! Seeing as you got sent that letter insteada him…” The imitator scowled, “And, look, I get that it’s cool ta be picked out for something like that, but lemme tell you, that Dex is gonna be fuckin’ bad news…”

“Umm… Yeah, I know…” Chihiro told him, “That’s, umm… kind of why I stole this letter from Ishimaru…”

“You… you did what?” ‘Mondo’ gaped at them, “Gimme that!”

Chihiro didn’t really have an opportunity to say no, before the letter was roughly pulled out of their hands and the fake Mondo frowned as he started scanning down the page…

…Did he always read this slowly, or was this just another part of him pretending to be Mondo…?

“Yeah… this is pretty much what we expected…” He eventually muttered, “What were you planning ta do with this?”

“Well… When I took it, I assumed I’d just be able to reply back to them and they’d send it to Ishimaru, and then I could sneak it out of his pigeonhole before he saw it.” Chihiro explained, “It didn’t occur to me that they might want to meet him in person…”

“Pfft! Alright, that makes sense… so what were ya gonna do with it when ya got ahold of it?”

“Well… mostly just check how much control the Rotom has over the pokédex itself…” Chihiro admitted, “I mean… is there anything to stop the Rotom from messing up data just for fun, for example?”

“So, just a safety check on it, then?” He summarised, “Kinda surprised ya didn’t just go and tell Ishimaru ya wanted to do that in the first place…”

“Ahh… well… I don’t really talk to him that much…” Chihiro explained vaguely, “And even if I did, he’d probably want to tell the company that he was letting me look at it… assuming he didn’t just refuse because it says not to talk about it to much in the letter.”

“Yeah… he ain’t exactly cut out for subtle shit, is he?” ‘Mondo’ chuckled, “Otherwise I coulda had some proper fuckin’ meat more often…”

“Umm… speaking of that… What are you planning on doing with it? And how did you even know this letter was coming? I only knew about it because Enoshima got one as well…”

“Hmm… I ain’t really supposed ta tell ya that…” The imitator frowned, “But… seeing as ya already know about it… And you’ve got the sense to keep quiet about it… I think I can take ya ta meet someone who can… If you’re still wanting to help look into how safe this thing’ll be…”

Well… they’d wanted that enough to steal someone else’s mail… “Yes… I am!”

“Good ta hear!” ‘Mondo’ gave them a thumbs up, “Alright, gimme half an hour and then head up to
the staff room on fourth floor, alright? I’ll meet ya there!”

...

Well… it was now just under half an hour later, and Chihiro was hanging around outside the staff room, hoping that no one would see them and ask what they were doing…

…Which made it all the more of a problem when they suddenly heard the loud thumps of black boots that signalled the approach of the one person they were least able to explain the situation to…

Curses! What were the odds that Ishimaru would come to the staff room at the exact same time as them! And what should they do!? He was already giving them a wave, so trying to hide was out… At this rate they’d have to think up a reason to be visiting Kizakura or something, and…

“Ah, Fujisaki! Thank you very much for meeting me here so punctually!” …Eh? Why did Ishimaru think that they were here to meet him…? “…Err… you do realise who I am, don’t you…? I mean… I may have changed my disguise, but I’m still the same person you spoke to earlier!”

What? This was the same person as the Mondo earlier!? But he was acting completely differently… And even though they’d been expecting him, they’d still been fooled into thinking it was Ishimaru… even though, on closer inspection, the Arcanine walking alongside him somehow looked even more goofy than it usually did… Heh… If all dogs looked like that, they wouldn’t be so scary...

“Ah… sorry! You just make a really convincing Ishimaru!” Chihiro apologised, although he still looked disappointed about the mistake, “Umm… so, we’re here to meet with one of the teachers?”

“No, although the person we’re going to talk to has an office that’s near here!” The Imitator explained in Ishimaru’s loud cheerful voice, “I thought it would be best to check with him first before sending you directly to his office, in case he disagreed with my assertion that we should include you in this matter! However, fortunately for us, he’s trusting my judgement on the matter and letting me bring you to one of our meetings!”

“Umm… thank you for that, then?” Chihiro thanked him, even though it was hard to tell if it had actually been difficult to convince whoever was in charge of this to let them take part, or if it was just more in character for Ishimaru to make himself seem important like that… “But… who is it we’re going to see?”

“Hmm… you might not be familiar with him. He’s one of the more administrarial staff, often charged with maintaining Hope’s Peak’s good branding throughout the regions and completing various other tasks that require hit to travel off of school property.” ‘Ishimaru’ explained, suddenly coming to a smart stop and gesturing to a door. “But you’ll get to know him soon enough! This is his office, here!”

…It was a pretty plain looking door, certainly not as fancy as the one leading into the headmaster’s office. It looked like the kind of office door a corporate Combee would have, right down to the small rectangular nameplate which read ‘Kyosuke Munakata’.

“Ah, here. Let me get that for you!” He carried on, reaching past Chihiro to the door and pushing it open, to reveal an equally plain looking office, where a pale, plain looking guy with a blond bowl cut and white suit was sitting opposite Kazuichi and Tanaka…

“Ah, and here’s Imposter, now…” The man, who they were guessing was the ‘Munakata’ named on the door, announced as they both entered the room and shut the door behind them.

“So, you finally have a hold on this device that binds a wayward spirit into servitude!!?” Tanaka
asked him as dramatically as always, before the Imposter had a chance to say anything. “Hand it to
me this instant, so I may cast off those chains and allow it to move on to the next plane of existence!”

“Err… I haven’t got the actual thing, just the letter informing me that I can go and claim it…”
‘Ishimaru’ stammered in response.

“And besides, we’re not going to be freeing the Rotom…” Munakata started…

“WHAT!? DO not toy with me, old man! You swore that we would free this trapped spirit and…”

“I said, we’d let it out if being in there is making it unduly unhealthy or unhappy.” Munakata
interrupted ‘Tanaka’s’ interruption, “But first we need to prove that that is actually the case if we want
to force them to stop making these things altogether, which is why you’re here to observe the Rotom,
not free it.”

“Well…If one must suffer for the good of many, then so be it…” ‘Tanaka’ agreed solemnly, “But then
why are we wasting time here, instead of working towards our true end?”

“Because we need to plan what we’re doing with this once we get it, and I need to be sure you’re all
aware of all the potential risks of this before we start.” Munakata explained to him, before looking
over towards Chihiro. “…Especially our apparent new team member.”

That caused the two boys to turn around and look at them, only now just noticing that they were
half-hidden behind ‘Ishimaru’s’ large frame.

“Hey! Chihiro! Been saying for ages that you oughta be part of this!” ‘Kazuichi’ lit up at the
sight of them. “So how come you changed your mind?”

“Because Fujisaki independently decided to steal Ishimaru’s letter, so I trust that means that I was
wrong in assuming they’d want to inform him about all of this…?” Munakata answered his question,
gesturing for Chihiro to sit while shooting them a question of his own.

“Umm… Yes.” Chihiro agreed, taking a seat next to Kazuichi. “I mean… he and I don’t talk much,
so I wouldn’t have any trouble keeping this a secret from him, and that’s probably easier than making
sure he keeps quiet about… whatever it is you’re all planning to do with it…?”

“Yes, I should probably explain why this group exists.” Munakata admitted, gesturing around the
room. “I’ve been aware of the development of pokédexes that could house Rotoms for some time
now, however I paid it no mind at the time, as I assumed it would be a niche item specifically aimed
at the few trainers who had Rotoms already… At least until ‘Tanaka’ received a formal request to help
breed large numbers of them.”

“Which I informed them was a path that would lead to naught but ruin and disaster!” ‘Tanaka
interjected.

“Yes. But as you might have guessed, they found other breeders who were less cautious.” Munakata
carried on, “Which is why I’ve been looking into their research and discovered that they were
intending to combine field-testing and early promotion by sending a prototype to some of Hope’s
Peak students to try out and, if the trial was successful, promote.”

“And Ishimaru was one of the students on the list?” Chihiro guessed.

“No. They hadn’t planned which students at that point, and I wasn’t able to stay and find out.”
Munakata corrected them. “But Ishimaru was recommended to Hope’s Peak by Prof. Oak, for
excessive use of his pokédex, so he seemed to be the most logical choice for them to send it to…”
Which, as I’m sure you will have guessed, then presented the new problem of convincing Ishimaru to give us his new ‘present’ and risk us rendering it useless to him if we wanted to examine it in more detail, especially unlikely if there was any sort of NDA on the agreement they gave him…”

…That didn’t actually seem like it would be too difficult to do, if he was being asked to do it by the school because they were concerned about the Rotom’s health, he’d probably agree regardless of any contract. But pointing that out now would probably just lead to him asking Chihiro why they hadn’t asked Ishimaru about this in person…

“…So that was why we teamed up with the Imposter here, with the aim of redirecting the pokédex before Ishimaru was even aware that it existed, so that Tanaka and his friend could make sure that the Rotom inside was healthy and maintained in a stable enough environment to prevent it from escaping into nearby technology, and inform the league association if it is not.”

“Hmm… that all seems fair, although I’m still worried about the possibility that the Rotom might just decide to misbehave and skew data for the heck of it, even if it is happy in there…”

“Yeah… Munakata was thinking I could have looked into that, even though I told him you’d be better at it…” Kazuichi told them, “But now you’re here, everything ought to work out great, right!”?

“No… there’s still a problem…” Munakata gestured to the letter with a frown, “It says here he’s only allowed to talk about having a new pokédex online, not any of the specifics about what type or the company themselves… Which means they’ll be paying attention to his online activities and will probably get suspicious if he never mentions having a new pokédex at all.”

“Ahh… I didn’t think of that…” Kazuichi grimaced, “And if they’re doing that, what’s to stop them comparing the data he collects on their pokédex with the data he submits online? It’s not like one of use can stalk him and see what’s he’s scanning all the time… At least, not without him noticing…”

…So… they needed a way to track Kiyotaka’s scans and make him brag about having a new pokédex online…? “…I might actually be able to help with that…”

‘Had a wonderful morning on the farm testing out a new pokédex! (Which I cannot give details of, but will say once again that I am very grateful to my benefactor!) I also tried to teach Arcanine the concept of tallying so he could help me count Mareep, which worked well! (Even though he tallys in nines instead of fives! He’s always liked that number the most!)”

“…You follow Ishimaru on BattleNet!?” Leon asked, having leant over at lunchtime to have a nosey at what they were reading… They’d have to be careful about that kind of thing, now they were wrapped up in something secretive…

“No… I just wanted to check he’s actually done what I asked, and not told everyone online that I was the one who refurbished his pokédex…” Chihiro told him, which was true, although they were about to lie about the next part… “I don’t want everyone thinking they can ask me for free upgrades…”

“That’s fair… but why’d ya give him one then?” Mondo asked, in between scuffling with Lycanroc over their plates of food.

“Well… a while back I told him I would do it in exchange for a favour… and even though I didn’t really need his help in the end, I thought I ought to keep my word to him…”
“Ah, gotcha. Can’t back out on a promise…” Mondo nodded approvingly.

“Even if it is to an asshole…” Leon agreed unfairly…

“He’s not that bad, Le…”

*Bzzt, bzzzt…*

Hmm…? A message that was apparently from Ishimaru, even though Ishimaru was quite clearly not on his pokédex at the moment? They’d better make extra sure Leon wasn’t watching them this time…

‘Not to doubt your work, Fujisaki, but are you sure your pokédex is recording the correct number of analysed pokémon? According to this data I’ve been sent, it seems he scanned thirty Mareep in your morning lesson.’

‘Yes, that’s exactly what he did. He said it would make a safe way to try out his new pokédex.’ Not that they could blame the Imposter for doubting that the pokédex they’d given Ishimaru was keeping tabs on what pokémon he was scanning correctly, when Ishimaru spent an entire lesson doing that instead of actual training…

‘Ah, I see! So he won’t always be scanning this many pokémon?’

Hmm… From what Chihiro has seen so far… ‘Actually, he probably will. They just won’t all be as boring as Mareep next time. Is that going to be a problem?’

‘Not at all! I’ll admit I wasn’t expecting quite this volume of data when I agreed to this, but Munakata is working hard to help me, so I can’t complain about having to do the same in return! Thank you for confirming my question!’

Well, they couldn’t blame him for being shocked at how much work this was all going to be… Even accessing the coding on the pokédex was already proving to be troublesome, so Arceus knew how difficult it was going to be to actually understand it once they got a hold of it…

But it was important enough to be worth it! They could hardly let something like this into the general population without being absolutely sure it was safe to do so!

…They just hoped Ishimaru would be understanding, if he ever found out that they’d gone behind his back to make sure it was…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next will be some more practical lessons for the kids.
The Caves (Toko POV)

Chapter Notes

Thanks to TvTropes’ Fanon pokedex once again for ideas about pokemon (In this case, Sableye http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/FanonPokedex/Sableye )
As always, social media messages have the POV character’s text on the right side of the screen.
Pokedex 3310 is a play on the ‘indestructible’ Nokia 3310.
Also it’s mentioned in Despair Girls that Toko got trapped in a dark room (a closet, IIRC) for several days and no one noticed, which I tweaked a little into her backstory with the caves here.
Also in terms of pokemon attacking groups of other pokemon, my thinking is that they can do it, but it makes the attack weaker.
Also I’ve retconned one of the moves Hina’s Glaceon has. For some reason I had it in my head that Ice shard was a special-type move, but it’s not, so I’ve now switched it out for Icy Wind, which is.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

‘You have a new pokedex? What kind?’

…What!? Why had Naegi’s sister sent her that?

‘No! My pokedex 3310 still works perfectly well! I don’t need whatever fancy nonsense they’re putting in them these days!’

‘Sorry, I meant to send that to Ishimaru!’

She’d mistaken Toko’s icon for him…!? 

‘Is that supposed to be revenge for me mistaking you for your brother?’

‘But how are you answering this message if you don’t have a smartdex?’

‘No! My finger slipped because you’re the next person down in the list from him!’

‘I’m on my laptop. You can’t edit novels on a pokedex, no matter how new-fangled it is!’

‘And you can’t have many friends if Fukawa is right next to Ishimaru!’

‘My friends list is ordered by when I added people, not their names.’

Oh, great. Now Naegi was going to think she was an idiot who didn’t have enough friends to have noticed that…

‘But that was a pretty clever thought! I’d have never have thought about the difference in surnames so quickly! It would have been a great put down if it was right!’
…Or she was just going to find a way to complement Toko regardless. Was that just because she was hoping for a date, or something? But then, why did she assume Toko was attempting a put-down instead of just commenting on how few friends she had on BattleNet…

*Brrriiiinnnnggggg!*

Well, class was starting now, so she didn’t have time to worry about Miss-mixed-signals anyway! She’d have to focus on maths and whatever other bog-standard subject they’d focus on once Kizakura actually decided to come back and actually teach! How did he manage to keep his job when even people like Kuwata, Enoshima and Hagakure arrived before him, most of the time, and he just sauntered into the room and started the lesson with no explanation whatsoever!? Like he was doing right now!

“Alright kids… before we get started today, I’m going to warn you that the two weeks after this one are going to be a bit different from what we’ve done before.” Huh, so much for the usual subjects… “Now, you might remember me mentioning that we’d be having some classes in areas that you’re not allowed into until next year before term was over…”

*That* got a lot of attention from the class! Oowada’s chair clattered so loudly that she heard it from all the way back in the corner on the other side of the classroom, Ludenberg was making some smug remark about getting an ‘aesthetically pleasing’ pokedex, and even Enoshima stopped messing about with the stupid-looking new pokedex she was showing off this morning, even though she already had two pokedexes…

Wait… was she thinking of getting a *third* already!? Should Toko be doing that!? She knew Togami was talking about it already, but that was just because it’d take such a long time to breed his… but if she caught a third one already, she’d have time to train it up while he was still waiting for his! And then, even when he did get it, she’d be able to crush him and…

“Fukawa, are you listening!?” *Aaargh!* Kizakura had caught her fantasising again…

“Ah… yes! Y-you were saying we were going to new areas next week!” Toko repeated… but from the look on his face that hadn’t been the last thing he’d actually said… “Like… the forest at night time!”

“Nice guess, but I just told Oowada we’re doing that the week *after* next.” *Dammit!* Smug smirking *jerk* making fun of her, just because she’d got distracted during his stupid boring announcement… “Next week we’re going to the areas you’ll be allowed to visit during the day in second year, which are the mountains on Monday, the graveyard Tuesday and the power plant Thursday… *Yes, Ishimaru*?”

“If I may, sir…” Ishimaru put his hand back down as Kizakura called him, “According to the information in the student handbook, we’re supposed to complete a climbing course and an electrical safety course before entering the mountains and power plant, but neither of those courses have been run this term!”

“Huh, first time someone’s actually noticed that…” Hah! Even the *teacher* thought he was a nerd! “What Ishimaru says is true, so for now you’ll only be given access to small, safer parts of those three areas for now. Like the set of offices that manage the power plant, the first mausoleum in the graveyard and the upper level of the caves under the mountains.”

…*Caves*!? Like… the caves where the *Sableyes* were supposed to be?

“Why only the *upper* levels!?” Togami asked irritably, “Are you saying we need mountaineering
courses to be able to climb up and down a ladder!?”

“No… We’re making you stay on the upper levels because the lower levels contain a large number of natural gemstones…”

“And you reckon we’re gonna steal them?” Kuwata moined, “Dude, c’mon, give us some credit!”

“No… Gemstones attract dangerous pokemon like Sableye and Gabite, which there are plenty of down in the lower levels.” Kizakura explained wearily, “That’s why you’re sticking to the top level, which doesn’t have them.”

So… that meant there weren’t Sableye at the top… Or at least, there shouldn’t be, unless one of them decided to come up anyway… But there was always a chance that could happen.

“That said, you aren’t obligated to go into any of the wild areas, if you would prefer not to.” Kizakura announced, which wasn’t something she’d heard before.

“Like… really!?! So you’re saying we can just skip all these classes, if we wanna?” Enoshima asked, “So, what’s to stop me saying I have a fear of mud, and never going to the field again?”

“Technically speaking, nothing. None of the classes at Hope’s Peak are actually compulsory.” Well, that was news to her! “But, as you still need to pass exams at the end of the year, they’re highly encouraged.”

“Encouraged…!? That fricken giant practically dragged me here on the first day of term!” Kuwata snapped.

“Really? That’s funny, cause according to him, you and Hagakure told Sakakura you were lost, and he just led you boys here…” Kizakura smirked innocently, “If you’d just told him you’d decided not to come to class, he’d have left you alone.”

“Buh… what!? How the hell was I supposed to know that!? No one ever told me!”

“It’s in the student handbook, which is available online!” Ishimaru answered him.

“Then why the hell do you always make us come ta class like we’ll get in trouble if we don’t!” Oowada snapped.

“Because our classes are important! As Kizakura just told us, we still need to learn enough to pass all our exams later on!” Ishimaru insisted, “Honestly, I feel that it’s a poorly thought-out rule, and it was better when we weren’t aware of it!”

Huh… was Ishimaru actually criticising something a teacher had done!? He never even complained about the guy being chronically late! Then again, he pretty much had just given half the people in this class permission not to show up to a single lesson…

“Well… he probably had a good reason for telling us about it now, Kiyotaka…” Naegi told him, “There might be someone with a specific reason for not wanting to go to one of these places, in particular…”

Hah! Yeah, like her with the Sableyes…

…Wait. Was that why Kizakura had said it!? Just to let her know she had permission to avoid the whole place completely, after she’d mentioned not liking Sableyes at the beginning of term? So he wouldn’t be annoyed if she didn’t show up to class next Monday, and didn’t risk getting separated
from a mother who couldn’t be bothered to tell anyone she was in there and get lost in the dark for three days and stumble into one of those things and…

…And that wouldn’t happen, because she was older now, and she had her own pokemon to look after her, and everyone would know she was in there, so even if she got lost, they’d send a security team in after her straight away. And she could go to the store beforehand and buy herself the biggest torch they had and make sure she was the one holding it the whole time…

After all, she’d already lost one opportunity to follow Togami and copy his training methods, thanks to her getting scared of heading into caves! She was not going to do that again!

…But, now it was a week later and she was actually at the mouth of the cave, waiting for everyone else to show up and Kizakura to let them all go in… that place was looking pretty dark and frightening… And the torches in the school shop hadn’t been all that big, in comparison… And even though there were security guards standing around the entrance, they didn’t look that good at their jobs. Who was to say they’d actually remember who many kids were supposed to be coming out? It’d be really easy for them to forget someone as boring as her…

But… they’d have to notice she was missing, once they got back to class and there was an empty seat where she was supposed to be… unless they just assumed she’d decided to skip the next class… Urrghhh… But if she didn’t at least try going in there, then she’d never catch up with Togami! She needed to quit worrying about what could happen and just get on with this, even if it did feel like it’d be a total disaster if she stepped into that cave…

“Hey, Toko! Ready for today’s class!?” What the…? Asahina was coming up to say hello to her? Was the apocalypse going to happen, or something?

“Y-yes…” Toko… lied, if she was being honest with herself. “But why do you care?”

“Uhh… well, I just noticed you don’t seem to have anyone to team up with, and wondered if you wanted to come along with Sakura and I?”

She was inviting Toko to go hang out with her and her still secret crush? Like a third wheel? Or maybe… “What, you need a wing-woman to help you put the moves on Oogami?”

“What! No, that’s not it! I’ve got a plan to do that myself!” She could have fooled Toko, seeing as it had been two whole weeks since the holiday and she still hadn’t done anything, but whatever, it was none of Toko’s business… “I just… thought you might appreciate some company for this lesson! Umm… since you don’t like Sableyes, and Sakura and I both have a strong Fairy type pokemon that can deal with them! You know?”

…She’d remembered that as well!? Toko had only mentioned it once, right at the beginning of term! And she hadn’t even explained why they freaked her out, aside from the whole ‘they’re just really creepy’ aspect, anyway! What sort of weirdo remembered an off-hand remark like that from a random member of class, seven weeks later!? Let alone actually offer to actually help someone like her with it!!

“…Y-you know I’m not as fit as you two, so I’d probably slow you down! S-so why are you offering to do something like that! Do you want something from me?”

“Umm… no?” Urg… she actually looked surprised that Toko had asked. Was she really just that annoyingly nice? “I just… figured I’d ask, since Sakura and I are the best people to help you out
Well, that was true, or at least the part about Oogami was true. Her Florges would be even better at dealing with Sableyes that Togami’s Drampa… and as Asahina had invited her along, Oogami wouldn’t be likely to run off and try to lose her, like Togami would do…

“So… do you want to, or…?”

“…Just don’t expect me to be all buddy-buddy with you two!” Toko agreed, “I’ll just follow along somewhere close by…”

“Great!” Geez, you’d think she’d just won a race, the way she fist-pumped! “I’ll go let her know!”

Wait… so did that mean she hadn’t actually asked Oogami if she was alright with Toko hanging around them all lesson? What if she said no? She already looked super-serious as she and Asahina came back over to where she was standing…

“Ah, Fukawa. Hina has just told me you’re planning to come along with us…?”

“Well, that’s one way of putting it…” One that made it sound like Toko had just up and invited herself along without asking! “If it’s a problem, then I can just head off by myself…”

“It’s no problem at all.” Oogami shook her head… smugly? Yes, she was definitely being smug about this! “I just thought that you could use this as an opportunity for the weaker of your pokemon to join in our fights, and help it become stronger.”

…In other, she’d help, but only if Toko lost the smelly Garbodor! Well, this was the kind of reason she’d decided to catch a second pokemon, anyway…

“Alright, Garbodor, you can get back in your ball…” She told it, which it was always happy to do. “Spewpa, it’s your turn to come out now!”

“Spew! Spew! SpewPA!” It leapt out of its ball and onto the floor, hopping angrily in the direction of Asahina’s and Oogami’s pokemon for a while, before it finally noticed that they neither of them was actually attacking, or even acknowledging that it existed… “Spew…?”

“Change of plan, you can be first out today…” Toko explained, picking it and putting it on her shoulder so she wouldn’t have to walk at a Shellmet’s pace for it to keep up.

“Spewpa!” It cried out proudly as it rustled into a comfortable position that still let it hold its little bald head up high…

“Right! That’s everyone here and ready for this afternoon’s lesson? With your torches?” Kizakura suddenly shouted over the hubbub of the class, making them all give him a chorus of obedient confirmations that they hadn’t been dumb enough to go into a pitch-black set of caves without lights... Not that she could blame him for checking, with idiots like Hagakure in the class! “Alright! Then meet back up out here in one hour!”

“Alright! Sakura, Toko, let’s go!” Asahina cried, like it was some kind of team cheer or something, just because it rhymed.

“Wait, Fukawa!” Ishimaru exclaimed, “I’m sorry! I didn’t spot you behind Sakura! Please hold on a minute!”

“Why…?” What would he want with her? Whatever it was, he seemed pretty worried about it as he
dashed over to her.

“Because I…”

“Spew! Sphee-eeew! SPEEEEW-PA!” Ishimaru barely got started before Spewpa started hopping up and down on her shoulder excitedly, dropping dust all over her like a personal little dandruff machine.

“…Was supposed… to… Err… Fukawa, you are absolutely sure your pokemon doesn’t mate with facial hair, aren’t you…?” Ishimaru asked, stepping backwards away from it…

Ugh, not this again! “Yes! I was just joking when I said that!”

“Then… why did it start hopping around like that just as I came over?”

“Like I told you, it’s probably just thinks your eyebrows are Scatterbugs and is trying to pick a fight with them!”

“I dunno… that doesn’t look like it’s trying to pick a fight…” Asahina butted in, “It just looks like it’s trying to jump over to him and play, or something.”

Well… she had a point. Spewpa was a lot less angry sounding around him than Scatterbug had been… And his dog just seemed to be wagging its tail excitedly at it, rather than going on the defensive.

“Either way, I’d prefer it if it didn’t.” Ishimaru backed up even more, “No offense, but that powder looks rather difficult to get off of clothing.”

As if he wasn’t already covered in dog hairs for that mutt of his brushing up next to him all the time! “Well, then say what you came over here for and go, then.”

“Ah, right!” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small torch, leaning forwards so he could hand it to her while staying as far away from Spewpa as possible, “Here!”

What, did everyone remember she was afraid of caves and decided to have a big pity-party for her, or something!? But what use was giving her that dinky little thing supposed to do!? At least Asahina had actually given her some sensible help! “Wh-what makes you think I wouldn’t have packed my own torch!”

“Nothing! I’d have hoped everyone would have a torch on them when going out!” He answered, still trying to get her to take it. “But, as a safety measure, the school insists we all take one of these into the caves for this lesson, as they’ve been pre-checked and are guaranteed to be functional! So please make sure you keep it somewhere accessible! Like Hina and Sakura have!”

Like Asahina and Oogami…? Oh, now she actually looked at them, they both had identical torches clipped to their waists. So the teacher’s pokemon was just handing these out to everyone? “Alright, fine.” She took it off of him, and he didn’t even bother to watch her clip it onto the hem of her skirt before wishing them a good trip and hurrying away.

“Sppeeew…” Spewpa sighed as he left, but at least it settled down and stopped smothering her protective blazer with pollen.

“Alright! Now, Sakura, Toko, let’s go!” Asahina cried again. Urgh… she really was trying to turn it into a team cheer! She better not be thinking this was going to be happening regularly! It was just one time while Toko convinced herself that the cave wasn’t going to be a big problem… Well…
maybe she’d need *more* than one time, but she’d need to learn to deal with these sort of places by *herself* eventually, or Togami would stay ahead of her forever!

…Besides, if she didn’t get over it quickly enough, Asahina and Oogami would probably end up ditching her once they started dating, right? And it was bound to happen at *some* point, seeing as Asahina had started adding a load of hints about the pair of them supporting each other and spending time together in the future to her usual prattle about getting stronger than Oogami… Honestly, Toko was surprised she hadn’t just come out and *told* Oogami she wanted to try dating her already…

“Toko…? Come on, I said let’s *go*, Toko!” Dammit… she’d distracted herself and given Asahina an excuse to come out with *another* variation of that corny line…

“Huh…? Uhh, right!” Alright… time to head into the cave and see if either of the torches she had was actually worth crap when it came to lighting the place up… She might as well try this stupid dinky little thing Ishimaru had handed her, first…

“*Wow!* These are *good* torches!” Asahina commented, as the entrance to the cave lit up well enough to see clearly for at *least* 100 yards ahead of them, “I was worried we’d be stumbling around in the dark all lesson…”

“Yes… but we may find that the light disturbs the wild pokemon.” Oogami pointed out, “We’re likely to get into more fights this way.”

“Well, bring ‘em on!” Asahina cheered, “Between the three of us, we can take ‘em, right!?”

“You say that like I’m actually going to be helping, here…” Toko muttered.

“Uhh… well… I know! You can be in charge of navigating!” Asahina suggested, “You’ve got the map thing from Chihiro, haven’t you.”

“No… it doesn’t work with my pokedex…” Toko admitted, “I usually just make sure I remember where I’m going…”

“Hmm… in that case, perhaps we should aim to take the leftmost paths at all opportunities.” Oogami suggested, “That will make our steps easier to retrace later.”

“Alright! It’s a plan! Let’s *go*!” Asahina insisted, strutting into the cave and angling left, forcing Toko and Oogami to follow in her wake…

…Well, so much for needing a navigator! She would have been perfectly capable of remembering which way they’d turned, even if they hadn’t decided to patronise her by going left all the time! Especially as most of these caves hardly had any turnings at all! They were running into more types of pokemon than *corners!*

Honestly, Toko even *being* here was starting to feel pointless. She’d been expecting this to be some big scary challenge, but now she was actually *here*, it was just… *annoying!* The dark was barely noticeable with the torches, and whenever they ran into any pokemon, they were so weak that Hina’s Marill was usually able to finish the whole group off in one hit, with some help from Oogami if they happened to be something other than rock or ground type. Spewpa wasn’t even getting a chance to attack most of the time, and was just chirping excitedly on her shoulder the whole time. So all she was doing was struggling to keep up with *those* two as they both walked stupidly fast!

“…Fukawa, you seem to be struggling…” And Oogami had the nerve to point it out in the most patronising way possible!
“Well, of course I am! I don’t waste all my free time running around pointlessly!”

“Geez, she was just checking if you needed a break!” Asahina snapped at her. “You don’t need to be so rude about it!”

“It’s fine, Hina. I see that I could have worded that better…” Oogami put a hand on her shoulder, “As Hina says, I only intended to say that we could stop here and wait for a while, if needs be.”

“… Fine.” As much as she hated knowing that the pair of them had stopped just because of her, she did need to sit down for a while, even if it meant getting her dress dirty on this dusty cave floor.

And watching Asahina pacing up and down in circles, because, despite what Oogami had said, she wasn’t capable of waiting in one place for more than about half a minute, and was obviously getting more and more agitated at the thought of staying still for once, and was starting to pace further and further ahead of her and Oogami...

“Oh! Hey, there’s a crossroads just ahead of us!” She announced after less than five minutes. “So how about I go and check out that path on the left and, if it looks like there’s nothing interesting down there, I’ll come back and we can check out the right path, instead!”

“Hmm… just make sure to keep your pokemon in good health between fights.” Oogami warned her, “And try to be back in… say, ten minutes.”

“Got it!” Asahina check the time on her pokedex, before waving cheerfully. “See you guys in a bit!”

Oogami just lifted her hand up to wave at her, as she turned and started jogging up the tunnel, turning left just as she got to the end of the torchlight. Not that that stopped Oogami from staring at the spot where she’d disappeared for a long while afterwards...

“Do you… see something over there…?” It would be just typical of her luck if they got attacked just as soon as Asahina went off by herself! Although Oogami shouldn’t have any trouble handling the pokemon on this floor of the cave by herself...

“Ah… no… I wanted to be certain she wouldn’t be able to hear us…” Oogami admitted, crouching on her heels so she was at Toko’s level.

Wow, she really was obvious… “If its relationship advice you want, I still say you should just tell her you like her!” Even if Oogami following her stupid, sarcastic idea had actually worked, somewhat...

“I-I know…” Oogami agreed reluctantly. “But… I believe she is still trying to work out her own feelings on the matter, and I was wondering if she has discussed it with you at…”

“WuhAAAHH!” What the!? Asahina just screamed about something! Which of course meant that Oogami forgot what she was about to say and ran off ahead as well, leaving Toko all alone in a cave... But was that better or worse than going forward and having to deal with whatever had hurt Asahina…?

“Nrrgghhh…” It… was probably still better to have Oogami nearby, in the event that something attacked her… which was the only reason she swallowed her fear and slowly crept up the tunnel, until she saw the silhouette of the pair of girls and their pokemon… and just their pokemon. Whatever the problem was, it seemed like it was over now...

“And you’re certain your foot isn’t injured?” Oogami was in the middle of asking, holding onto Asahina’s shoulders protectively.
“Yeah… I’m fine! It just took me by surprise, that’s all!” Asahina was back to her annoyingly cheerful self, “It doesn’t hurt to walk on, or anything…”

“Rill?” That didn’t stop her Marill was poking at it anxiously though.

“Yes! I’m sure! It doesn’t even hurt when you do that!” Asahina told it, reaching down to pick it up. “Now let me put you back up on my shoulder…”

“Rill!”

“Well, I’m glad you’re safe.” Oogami told her, letting go of her, “However, we should put some kind of warning up for the other students.”

“Yeah! That could have been really bad if was someone like Hifumi or Celestia…” Asahina agreed.

“H-hey… W-what happened, anyway?” They both looked surprised as she spoke up. What, had they forgot they’d invited her along with them…!? “Did something attack you?”

“Ah, no, nothing like that…” Asahina answered, embarrassed, “I just put my foot through a hole in the floor…”

“You mean that scream was just because you were being a klutz!” Toko snapped. Asahina had almost made her faint, just because of that!? “I thought you’d run into something that was actually dangerous, not a little dip in the floor!”

“It is more than a mere ‘dip’ Fukawa.” Oogami sounded like she was probably glaring at her, “It’s a foot wide and looks as if it breaks through to the next level of the cave. If the rock was any weaker, it could have crumbled and Hina would have fallen underground.”

“Ah… I don’t think it’s that dangerous!” Asahina laughed, “I mean… the rock here seems pretty solid. I’m more impressed that there’s anything that was able to burrow down there in the first place! Guess the Digletts here must be Alolan ones!”

She thought a Diglett did that? “Please, Digletts don’t just make a single hole in the ground! If one of them did it, there’s be a whole line in the rock!”

“Ooooh, yeah, that’s right!” Asahina realised, “So what would have done it, then?”

“Hmm… I do not think there’s anything on this floor that could have burrowed thought rock this sturdy…” Oogami decided.

“So… something came up from the floor below?” Asahina guessed, which made sense… But… something that could burrow through rock… that was supposed to be underneath them… But had decided to come up…?

“W…w-w-we need to get out of here!”

“Huh? Why?”, “Fukawa? What’s the matter?” Aaargh! Did she need to spell out everything for these muscle-heads!?

“Th-the only thing that could b-burrow through rock like that is a S-S-Sableye!” She spat out, “And if they’re m-moving away from the gems, th-then it probably means they’re m-migrating in a p-pack!”

“Ah… I understand your concern, but if that was the case, then it is likely that they have already left
this area in search of a new cache of gems to feed on.” Oogami argued.

“Yeah!” Asahina agreed with her, “It’s not like they’re going to stick around here just to attack us on the way out, is it?”

“Sssss…”, “SssSssSssSssSss…”, “Saaaaaaabbbbbb…”, “BleBleBleBleBle…!”,

Oh no… Oh no oh no oh NO…! She’d heard those whisperings in the darkness before, all of them laughing as they surrounded her…

“Oh no… Is it…?” And Asahina was still too stupid to really believe what was happening!

“Of c-c-course it is, y-you meathead! Th-that’s exactly the s-s-sort of thing they d-do to p-people!” And, just to prove her point, a whole bunch of Sableyes started creeping into the light from their torches all around them! Dammit! They must have all been sneaking up on the three of them, while they stood around stupidly looking at the hole they’d come out of! And now there was no way to escape…!

This was it! She was going to die…!

“Hina, Florges! We need to protect Fukawa!”, “Right! Get ready for a fight, Marill!”

“H-huh?” What? Why were they bothering to run back over here, just so they could stand either side of her? Did they really think their pokemon could deal with this many of these things…!? Were they crazy!? There were twenty of these things…!

“Florges, use Moonblast! Hit as many of them as you can!”

“Marill, Play Rough! And hit more than one if you think you can knock them out!”

…That wasn’t stopping Oogami and Asahina from trying, though. And Hina’s mouse was quick enough that it managed to leap off of her shoulder and knock one of the Sableyes into the one behind it, letting it bounce and hit its tail on both of them at the same time. Meanwhile, Oogami’s fairy just decided to fly off, above and over to the other side of the circle of pokemon attacking them. What was it doing, running away? But if it was, why was it turning back around to face them all…?

“Ah… Take cover!” Oogami didn’t even finish shouting before she grabbed both Toko and Asahina and practically dragged them all to the floor! What the heck was her problem…!?

“Fllloooorrrgg!” Oogami’s pokemon shouted, as the half side of the cave where Toko had just been standing was flooded with a stream of pale light that made every Sableye it touched dissipate away, like a cloud of steam being blown away with a fan…

“Wow! Nice one, Sakura!” Toko actually had to agree with Asahina for once… That hit had taken out almost half of them! And Asahina’s Marill had even managed to knock out the ones it had been attacking… so maybe they actually had a chance at surviving this…!

“Sssssss…” But, from the way the remaining creatures were hissing and starting to creep towards Florges, they’d realised what they needed to do to destroy that chance completely… “SAAAABBBB!”

“Eeeexyyyy!”

“Ffflllooroor!” Asahina let out a shrill shriek as the Sableyes all jumped on Oogami’s Florges at once, ripping into her body again and again with over a dozen sharp, dark claws while she struggled to throw them all off… “F…florg…”

“Florges, return.” Oh no… it was falling down to the floor, and Oogami had her pokeball out ready
to catch it… They’d knocked it out in one try! Now they still had ten Sableye to deal with, and there was no way Asahina’s little mouse was going to be able to beat them…!

“Marill! Use Play Rough again!” Arreg! What was even the point!? Even if it knocked out two more, it wouldn’t be able to stand up to eight Sableye…!

“Snorunt! Use Protect to defend Hina’s Marill!”

What…!? Oh, right. Oogami had two pokemon… and it might be able to use protect to stall them all for long enough for the mouse to knock out the remaining ghosts! It seemed to be working well enough this time, as Oogami threw it out towards most the biggest cluster of Sableye, which then focused their attention on uselessly banging their fists on the shiny barrier it magicked up around itself. And meanwhile, the Marill quickly picked off another two Sableyes that were at the back of the group, without the noticing…

“Woo! Keep going, Marill!”

“Indeed… keep up the Protect Snorunt, if you are able to…”

…If it was able to…? Argh… that was right! There was no guarantee that it would work more than once in a row!

“S – snow…” Come on, come on! This had to work! It had to! “R-run…”

Noo – Noo! The barrier had disappeared! And the remaining Sableye ended up almost ripping it to shreds before Oogami called it back, even with Asahina’s Marill helping out by knocking out another two of them…

“Ah… it seems I will have to ask you to cover for me…” Oogami sighed, like it was no big deal!

“No problem!” Uurgg! Didn’t either of these two realised how dangerous this was!? “Marill, keep it up!”

“Riiiinnnnll!” The mouse jumped at the four remaining Sableyes, but there was no way it would have been able to win a four-on-one fight without help… It was lucky that it still managed to knock out another two of them before it fell… Dammit! Now what could they do…?

“Good work, Marilll! Now it’s your turn, Glaceon!” Asahina called out her second pokemon, which turned around and threw her a frosty glare at first, until it seemed to notice the scattered misty remains of the other Sableyes, “Use Icy Wind to knock them both out!”

It nodded, then conjured up a cold fog that flew forward and started slowing down two last Sableyes as they moved forward and started to attack it… and also made it impossible to see what was going on until it cleared and revealed that one pokemon was left standing…

…And it was a Sableye. One that was barely standing, but that didn’t matter!

“Aaaahhh! This is it! We’re done! We’re all out of pokemon!”

“Ummm… no? We’re not…?” Asahina blinked at her stupidly.

“What do you mean…!? What, did one of them have another…

“SPEW!” Oh… right… her pokemon! But what was one tiny Spewpa going to do against that…? Alright, she’d had it taught Bug Bite, just in case something like this happened, but it wasn’t like it
was going to do all that much!

But… she couldn’t just cower here, after those two had taken down so many of them! She had to at least try to finish it off…

“Alright…” She picked Spewpa up off of her shoulder and gripped it gently in one hand… She could at least try and make sure it managed to get close to the Sableye before getting pounced on…

“Spewpa… Bug Bite!”

“SpeeeewwwPPPPAAAA…!” Spewpa let out a high-pitched cry as Toko wound her arm back and threw it straight at the Sableye, managing to have it land right between its eye, where it then leant its head backwards before baring its single pointed tooth and driving it down into the pokemon’s eye…

“SSSSAAAAAA!" It let out a painful shriek and shook Scatterbug off of its face… but then it sank down to its knees instead of attacking back…

“Spew! SpewPA!” Spewpa cheered triumphantly, as the ghost began to evaporate away, just like all of the other ones had done before it…

“I… I can’t believe I did that…” She’d beaten the Sableye! Or, finished it off, at least! But it didn’t matter either way, because they were safe! Spewpa had saved her!

“Yeah… I’m surprised you didn’t have Garbodor handle it, too!” Asahina piped up, “Would have been better than throwing Spewpa at it…”

…Oh… right. She had two pokemon as well! Even if Spewpa hadn’t been able to handle it, she could have just called Garbodor out to deal with it, but she’d panicked so much she’d completely forgot about that, like an idiot!

“W-well… We’ll need a pokemon to get us back out of here, won’t we!? It’s better I leave Garbodor for when we really need him!”

“Well… I guess, but it’s not like Sakura and I don’t have potions…” Asahina shrugged, “Look, Florges is already awake again!”

“~Florg!~” Yep… there it was, waving and twirling around in the air like nothing had ever happened. So Oogami had just needed them to stall for a bit, so she could use a few items on her pokemon? Not actually win the fight!? Would have been nice if she’d actually said that!

“And besides, I believe I can hear members of security approaching our position…” Oogami added, “They must have noticed the Sableyes breaking through to this area and come to aid us.”

So… they’d never been in any sort of danger whatsoever. If she’d kept calm she could have easily just run away from the single Sableye, or had Garbodor stall until security turned up! All having Spewpa attack had done was make Toko look like some type of amateur, unless she covered it up by saying…

“W-well… it was good fighting experience for Spewpa!”

“…You sure? ‘Cause it just looks kinds of traumatised right now…”

What was Asahina talking about! Spewpa was a bug, they weren’t smart enough to suffer from trauma…! Even if it looked like it was shaking in terror and trying to hide its whole head inside the fluff that covered its body!
…And, okay, she’d admit that wasn’t normal for it… but it’s shaking was slowing down now, so it had probably just panicked and needed to hide itself for a bit, until its tiny bug brain forgot what had happened and it came back out again! And given that it had now stopped shaking completely, that ought to happen right now!

…

…it wasn’t coming out again. It had just stopped moving completely. But it hadn’t been knocked out, unless the Sableye had some way of knocking it out after its attack, like poisoning it or, or…

…or stealing it’s soul…

“…Spewpa!” No, nononononono…! She had to try and wake it up! “Spewpa, come on, move! Do you need a… revive, o-or… something…?”

Dammit, it really wasn’t responding, even when she shook it! And she couldn’t even try giving it medicine because it’s mouth was hidden under its layer of fur! But… maybe if she could pry her fingers through it, she’d manage to force a revive into its mouth! She just had to hold her breath as she tried to push her fingers down into the mat of hair and tried to pry the fibres apart… Grrrgg… Almost… she could feel them moving further apart, and was managing to get her fingers deeper into them… she just needed to give it one more good PULL and…

…and her heart stopped as she suddenly felt Spewpa’s entire coating of protective fur split, and couldn’t react fast enough to stop her hands from violently wrenching it into two separate pieces, leaving nothing but the frail caterpillar it had been before, which was weakly staring up at her, antenna twitching in confusion…

Wait… antenna? Since when did it have antenna…!? And what was that weird pink stuff coming out of its back? It didn’t look like blood or anything, but whatever it was, it was slowly flowing out into two large pools on either side of it, like wings on a snow angel or… or a…

“…Vivillon?” Had her pokemon evolved again!?

“Viv!” It tried to flutter its new wings enough to get off of its back, but in the end all it managed to do was nod its head at her in agreement, before she picked it up and tried to help it out by waving it gently in the air to dry its new wings out enough for it to fly by itself…

“Oh, wow! Your pokemon evolved again!” Asahina cheered, like she hadn’t just been snarking at Toko for throwing it at that Sableye. “That’s so cool!”

“Indeed. You have done well for it to evolve so quickly.” Oogami agreed.

Honestly, what were they hoping to get by patronising her…? “Oh, please. It’s a bug type, they always evolve quickly…”

“Not always!” Asahina argued. “There was a guy at my old school who took five months to evolve his Kakuna!”

Five months!? “Wow… you must have gone to a terrible school.”

“Hey! It’s not like everyone there was like that!” Asahina snapped, “I only mentioned it to be nice…”
Alright, maybe that had been a bit rude… But she didn’t really get a chance to say so, before there were suddenly a whole group of guards surrounding rushing up the corridor to meet them…

“Ah, you kids needs to get out of here!” The one in the front shouted as soon as he saw them, “Your classmate detected a large number of Sableyes around here…”

“Tell us something we don’t know!” Toko muttered, “We already beat them all!”

“You did…?” He looked at them in surprise, “Well… regardless, your teacher said to tell you your lesson is being cut short, and you’re all to come back to the entrance with us…”

“Suits me…” She’d had enough of this creepy cave, already!

“Oogami, Asahina… and Fukawa! Ha! Looks like I’m not losing my job today!” Kizakura joked as the three of them were escorted out of the cave.

“Tch… you should do, using such a feeble excuse to cut your lesson short!” Togami complained, although it was mostly drowned out by the noise of the sappier members of the class rushing forward to see how they all were.

“Are you guys okay!?” Naegi asked, even though he was at the front and could see they were all fine. “Chihiro said you were right where the Sableyes came out!”

“Yeah… I’m really sorry I didn’t pick them up sooner…” Meanwhile Fujisaki just looked like they were giving themself a guilt trip.

“Ah… it’s alright! Sakura and I were able to get rid of them!” Asahina smiled.

“With some help from Fukawa…” Oogami added.

“Oh! That must be why your Spewpa evolved!” Maizono realised about a second after turning to look at her and seeing the butterfly that was perched on her shoulder and stroking her hair with its antenna. “It looks so cute now!”

“I guess…? I-it’s not like it wasn’t cute before…”

“Well, at least this one isn’t constantly dropping powder on you!” Ishimaru announced, which was a better point to be making. She’d be able to go back to doing less laundry now!

“Viv!” But Vivillon seemed more interested in Ishimaru himself, suddenly choosing to fly up close to his face…

“Err… Fukawa…” He leant back a little as the butterfly got within inches of touching him, although his dog still didn’t seem bothered by it. “I just want to be completely certain about the mating thi…”

“For the last time, it’s not trying to mate with you!” Toko snapped.

“Then what is it doing…!?” He cried, squeezing his eyes shut as Vivillon moved its antenna down to feel over his brows…

“I… think it’s stroking your eyebrows?” Naegi guessed, “Kind of like they’re baby Scatterbugs…?”

“Viv…viv…” That… did seem to be the case, as it was making gentle cooing noises at them, at least the first few times. But then it slowed down and started digging the antenna deeper into the small
hairs. “…Viv…? VIV…! Villon!”

“Nggh… Now what’s it doing…?” Ishimaru cringed as her butterfly started making irritated noises at him and turned around in a huff.

“It’s flying back to Toko.” Asahina told him, which was the truth. “I think it’s figured out you just have hair now.”

“Really!?” Ishimaru straightened back up and opened his eyes happily, “Well… if I’d realised it would be sorted that quickly, I’d have let it feel them the first time it reacted to me!”

“The first time, Scatterbug probably would have tried to bite them or something!” Toko pointed out.

“Ah… you think?” Ishimaru only looked slightly concerned at the thought, “Well… I suppose it’s good for me that you evolved it so quickly!”

Urgh… again with the patronising attitude! “It’s a bug, they all evolve quickly!”

“That’s not true… there’s a whole wealth of data that suggests that, in the wild they…”

“Besides, you should give yourself more credit, Fukawa.” Kizakura stopped Ishimaru’s science lecture before it really got going, “You did a damn good job today, all things considered!”

What the…? Was that another one of his jokes? It didn’t look like he was joking. And he had pretty much given her permission to skip the whole class, so clearly he didn’t have very high expectations of her!

But… before today, she wouldn’t have thought she’d be able to go into a cave and beat a Sableye, even with help, so maybe…

“Alright, fine. I guess I have been training hard…” At least, as hard as she could with her writing schedule.

“Atta-girl!” Kizakura grinned, “Well, now we’ve got half an hour to kill! Who wants to see if we can get to the Rec Room without getting caught by Jin or any of the other teachers!?”

Okay, now that had to be a joke, right? He wouldn’t seriously call the Headmaster by his first name like that, would he?

“Ah… you’re not serious, are you sir!? We could use the time for studying, or go to one of the other wild areas, or…”

“Or we can have some fun class bonding time after a stressful situation, Ishimaru.” Wow…

Kizakura wasn’t joking that time…

Hah! He was lucky he was friends with the headmaster, or he probably would have lost his job by now!

Chapter End Notes

Vivillon evolves really quickly compared to everyone else’s pokemon (At level 12, as opposed to level 30 for Yamada’s Dratini or 43 for Chihiro’s Gollett) which is why
Toko’s managed to get her pokemon evolved twice before anyone else managed it once. Next week we'll see how Celestia gets on in her quest to find a suitable pokemon.
“Alright… now before we let you all into the cemetery area, there’s a few things you need to be aware of…”

Oh, honestly! Kizakura had been warning them about the potential dangers of the ghost-types that lived here for the last week! Did they really need to have the head of security come down right before they were finally going into the place, just to repeat it all again? If any of Celestia’s classmates had been stupid enough not to listen the first half a dozen times, it was hardly her fault!

“…And this isn’t just a repeat of what your teacher’s already told you… this new information that’s come to light over the last few days!” Sakakura continued. Well, at least they weren’t wasting her time completely. “…Several people from our security team have been found unconscious, in various parts of the cemetery. They were suffering from both poison and life-force depletion, which would imply that the Gastlies in the area have become more powerful, even though they’re usually pretty harmless and easy to get away from. As such, we’re recommending that you be aware that they may be more aggressive than your teacher warned you, and that even if that doesn’t seem to be the case, that you limit the time spent near them to fifteen minutes.”

…Down from the thirty minutes they’d been told before. Well, not that it was any concern to her. She hadn’t left her boring home in Kanto to go look at stupid gas-clouds from Kanto! No, this was one of two chances she was going to get to catch a suitable-looking ghost for her team, and she wasn’t planning to waste it hanging around with Gastlies! Misdreavus and Banette were more her style, or perhaps even a Pumpkaboo… and failing that, she’d have a chance to catch a Litwick in the woods at night…

“We also suspect that a Zorua from the forest area has moved here, so be aware that…”

“Wait, did you say a Zorua!?” Enoshima interrupted him excitably, “Mukuro, you did bring some pokéballs, right!”

“Umm… Yes! I got some quick balls, so I can try catching things without actually fighting them…”

“Just quick balls!? Urg… well, if that doesn’t work I can get my pokémon to help you soften it up a little…”

“*Ahem*… Ladies, this a safety announcement!” Kizakura scolded them, “Probably a good idea for you to listen, before I decide it’s better to cancel this lesson in lieu of new the information!”

“…Sorry!” “Understood!” That shut both of the twins up…

“Thank you…” Sakakura nodded to Kizakura, “Now, as I was saying, there’s likely to be a Zorua around the place, and they are capable of imitating humans, so keep in mind that any classmates you haven’t been close to for the whole lesson might not be who they appear to be. Understood?”

The class all nodded along, and so finally the pair of adults allowed them and their pokémon to head through the main entrance, into the Ghost-type habitat…

It was all rather cliché, and exactly what you’d imagine if someone said the words ‘haunted graveyard’ to you. In front of her were rolls of green grass littered with lots of lines of the neat,
undecorated graves of human and pokémon alike, broken up only by the beige stone pathways that they were all encouraged to walk on. To her right, and also off in the distance, were some stone walls with iron gates in them. However, slightly more interestingly, to here left was a large, marble mausoleum, which was also open…

She chose to go investigate it, followed dutifully by Weavile, but lagging behind Ishimaru who seemed to have chosen to do the same thing as her. Luckily though, he and his dog were walking at a much faster pace than her own, so by the time she’d stepped through the open door and seen the set of steps leading down into a smooth, torch-lit, narrow hallway below her, they were long gone into the crypt.

Well, this would be as good a place to start as any. Especially as the majority of the class seemed to have chosen to head out into the outside areas instead…

“After you, Weavile.” She ordered, and her pokémon headed down the steps ahead of her, pausing only to take a torch off of the wall in case there were no sources of light further on. But that turned out to be an unnecessary precaution. Despite there being many small pathways that broke off from the long, straight corridor that ran beneath the ground, there was a fruitful supply of light, coming from the lit torches ensconced on the smooth brick walls.

What there was not a fruitful supply of, in any of these small passages, was ghosts. By the time she gave up of exploring the side-paths and decided to just head straight down the original hallway, she’d seen no pokémon other than a couple of Gastlies, which had both taken one look at her dark type pokémon and disappeared out of sight…

And even as she headed down the original long straight path, the only thing that she could see was Ishimaru, off in the distance…

Hmm… But that was odd! He was at the end of the hallway, crouching down on the floor and peering cautiously around a pillar into what looked like a large, open room ahead of him, as if he was trying to sneak up on someone… or perhaps he’d gone down too many side paths, confused himself and was now attempting to sneak out of the crypt in the wrong direction… that seemed more likely, given his dog was no longer out next to him. Had he really found something in here strong enough to knock it out so quickly? She’d probably get into trouble if she didn’t offer to help him, wouldn’t she…? Even if he didn’t have the good manners to even notice her approach until she attempted to speak to him…

“Having trouble, Ishima…”

“SHHHHHH!” He flinched and shushed her loudly, then cringed and covered his mouth with his hands when the noise he’d made echoed around the room. But, once he’d quickly looked around the pillar again, he uncovered it and continued in an uncharacteristically quiet whisper… “Ah… In the big room over there… there’s a shiny pokémon!”

There was…!? Before she even realised what she was doing, her head was swinging sideways so she could see for herself…

The room was, as Ishimaru had said, much bigger than anything else in here, and filled with both a large number of wooden coffins and just as large a number of Gastlies, one of which burned with a blue flame, making it quite noticeable against the background of purple light coming from all the other pokémon in here…

Tch! How typical! Finally coming across a shiny pokémon, and a ghost type at that, only for it to turn out to be the very stupid looking Kanto ghost-type! As if she wanted to have one of those on her
team!

She moved her head back behind the pillar. “Hmm… so it is. Well, good luck catching it, then…”

“Ahh… thank you, but I’m not actually trying to catch it right now!” Ishimaru whispered back.

“…Then why are you behaving like a bad actor in a spy movie?” Celestia asked him.

“Well… there’s a big question in research as to whether shiny pokémon behave like their non-shiny counterparts or not… So, scanned data from them is especially invaluable to the scientific community!” He waved his cheap-looking pokédex at her, showing her the surprisingly high-resolution screen on it, which was displaying that pokédex research initiative app that he’d been nagging everyone to waste their time using all term. “So… I’m going to try and sneak in there and record some! Wish me luck!”

He then proceeded to slowly crawl around the pillar on just one hand and his knees, with his pokédex held up in his other, outstretched, hand.

“Gast!”, “Gast!”, “Lylylylylylylylyly!” From the sound of it, he’d been spotted rather quickly…

“No, wait! Please, I won’t hurt you! Come back…! I just want to scan you for a while! Please…?” …And they’d all run away just as quickly. “Ahhh… Was I not quiet enough…?”

“Well, I imagine anyone would have trouble sneaking up on a group of thirty-something pokémon.” Celestia pointed out. “I’m surprised they didn’t spot you earlier.”

“I suppose…” Ishimaru sighed, checking his pokédex… “Hrmm… Although… according to the scanner Fujisaki gave me, they’re all still in this room… Perhaps they just need some time to get used to me, and they’ll come back!”

Hmm… Gastlies being shy? Especially in such a big group? She’d never heard of anything like that... But if Ishimaru wanted to waste his time on a bunch of dumb poisonous ghosts, who was she to stop him? It would prevent him from deciding to follow her around and getting in her way if she found something worth catching…

“Well, just remember not to stay near them too long.” Celestia suggested, as she walked away and carried on exploring the rest of the pathways in the crypt…

But, other than a few more Gastlies dotted here and there, there didn’t seem to be any other types of ghosts around. Presumably the big group had managed to chase out everything else. What a disappointment. Well, now there was nothing to do but head back to the entrance…

“Gast!” Hmm? Oh, that shiny Gastly Ishimaru was so desperate to see had apparently decided to follow her! “Ga—asst! Gast-ly! Gast…! GAST!”

Honestly… what a prima donna! Trying to act like it was being coy and teasing, but then losing its temper and hissing loudly the second she didn’t pay attention to it…

“Gast…!” And now it was even jumping out in front of her, making sure it was in the torchlight so she could definitely see it was a different colour from the others… “Gaaast…?”

“Yes, yes… you’re rare and shiny, good for you. There’s a boy with black boots back there who’ll be very keen to pay attention to you.” Celestia suggested to it, “But I’m not interested in Kanto pokémon, thank you very much. Now out of my way, before I have Weavile here deal with you!”
“G-gast?” It blinked at her in shock, at least until Weavile held up his claws and turning them black with dark energy, and it soon got the message and zoomed into a wall away from her.

Well, that area had been a monumental waste of time! It would seem that the graves outside were her only chance of finding a decent ghost type in this place.

She headed back outside and looked over the graveyard more carefully this time. It seemed to be laid out in a grid of large, square areas lined with four stone walls, with an open iron gate in the centre of each wall, allowing one to pick which of the four cardinal directions they wanted to move in at any time.

But there didn’t seem to be any kind of signage at all to suggest what would be a useful direction to head in. Nor could she see or hear any signs of pokémon whatsoever. It would appear that her best bet was to pick a random direction and hope she ran into something… But, of course, to move in a logical pattern, so she didn’t then find herself getting lost when it came to getting back to the school.

She decided to move diagonally, first going right, then straight, then left, then straight, then right, etc… But, after a while it soon became apparent that this area was also turning out to be a let-down! Even after she tried hiding Weavile in his ball, she didn’t see a single ghost! Just rows ups rows of identical-looking gravestones… She almost might as well not have bothered coming to this lesson at all!

Oh, well. She’d have a chance to catch a nice Litwick in the forest. A Chandelure would match her aesthetic well, in the future, and she’d been out long enough that she could claim she’d spent her recommended amount of time near ghosts and needed to cut the lesson short. She just needed to retrace her steps through the gates… Straight, right, straight, left, straight, right, straight and one final turn left to the… the…

…This wasn’t the entrance. It didn’t even look like it was close to the entrance! From what she could see, she was just as deep into the graveyard as she had been when she turned around… But she’d definitely turned around and followed her steps back correctly, hadn’t she? Maybe she’d moved through a couple more gates then she counted?

…Six more areas going left and then straight disproved that theory! Had she got herself lost!? How embarrassing!

…Well, the graveyard was a finite space. If she kept going in one direction she’d eventually hit the outer wall, and then be able to follow it around to an exit! It was a longer route, but she could claim that she’d spent the time searching for ghosts to catch, and no one would be any the wiser about her mistake…

…How big was this place!? Really, it felt like she’d walked through fifty of these rooms now! If it was that big, they really ought to have some signs up! Or at least make the areas look different! The only distinguishing factor any of these room had was the footprints on the ground!

Hmm… maybe she could follow some of them? If she picked someone with a tendency to analyse the environment, like Fujisaki or Ishimaru, then she might be able to request a map of the area when she caught up to them… Let’s see… No sign of the little prints the programmer would have been likely to leave, but there were some heavy boot prints, which seem clustered alongside deep trainer prints and faint indentation from a pair of stilettoes…

Hold on a minute… those were her own footprints! But they were on the ground in front of her! Had she gone around in a circle? But she couldn’t possibly have, she’d only been walking in one direction! Unless… was this some sort of illusion? They’d mentioned a Zorua… and true, Zorua
could usually only make their own appearance change… but if this one was close to evolving, perhaps it was capable of something minor, like making it appear as if her own footsteps were on the ground already… In which case, she would do well to ignore them and keep going straight…

But on the other hand, it might be making a gently circular path appear to be straight, meaning she might actually be walking around in circles and should try changing direction… Hmm…

“Ah! Miss Ludenberg! We finally caught up to you!” Her attention was caught by Yamada’s voice coming from behind her, and she turned to see him attempting to jog towards her, accompanied by a concerned-looking Ishimaru, “Do you remember how to get out of here? I was sure I mapped my path correctly coming in, but then when I tried to retrace my steps I just ended up deeper in the graveyard…”

And, judging from Ishimaru’s nods, the same had happened to him as well. Well, that settled it. There was no way all three of them had been that careless!

“Unfortunately, I’m in the exact same situation.” Celestia admitted, “I suspect we’re subject to an illusion created by that Zorua Sakakura mentioned.”

“An illusion? So… we might not actually be in the graveyard anymore? It just looks like we are?” Yamada asked hopefully.

“Hmm… I doubt it. Not unless the Zorua followed us out…”

“Argh! Goddammit, we’re back where we started again!” Whatever Yamada had been about to respond to her with was cut off by an aggravated yell from Enoshima, to their right…

“But… Didn’t we just go straight four times?” Ikusaba asked her, “And there’s other people here this time… Maybe this room just looks the same…”

“Urg! Geez, have you been staring at your feet this whole time!?” Enoshima groaned at her, “The sky just literally shifted back to the position it was in the first time we came here! Just like it has been this whole time!”

“You… you say the sky is changing positions?” Celestia checked with her. Wouldn’t that be slightly too big of a change for a Zorua to make…?

“Yeah… Basically, it looks like normal when you’re walking through the areas, but then every fourth gate you go through it’s shifts back to where it started…” Enoshima explained grouchily, “Like… regardless of which directions you go in, even if you just keep turning around and pass through the same gate four times…”

“…AH! I understand now!” Yamada exclaimed. “No wonder going straight didn’t work! We’ve been going about this wrong the entire time!”

“What, you think you know what we should be doing?” Enoshima asked him.

“Well, I don’t know for certain, but this seems very much like a Lost Woods-type effect!” Yamada announced… and she had to admit, it did seem like that old videogame…

“Screw the woods, I’m more concerned about the lost us effect!” But Enoshima clearly had no idea what Yamada was talking about, “Mukuro was supposed to be catching that Zorua Tonight! Not wandering around in circles! Don’t any of you know what the fuck is going on!?”

…Honestly, was it really that alien of an idea? Even Ishimaru seemed to have heard of it, if the
knowing smirk that played across his face was anything to go by…

“Well… as I was trying to tell you…” Yamada continued trying to explain, “I think it’s likely that going in a specific combination of directions will result in us finding the exit!”

“Alright, which combination?!”

“I… I’m afraid I don’t know, Miss Enoshima… I’ve not seen any clues as to which way we’re meant to go so far…”

“So, what? We just pick random directions and hope we get out?” Enoshima sighed bitterly, “Before some ghost type finds and eats us or whatever?”

“Do you have any better ideas?” Celestia asked her.

“Urg… no!” She scowled, “But four lots of four directions? That’s gonna be, like, two hundred and fifty-six ways it could possibly be!”

“Well… if the five of us split up, we’d only have to test around fifty each…” Yamada suggested.

“Umm… but what if we do run into ghosts around here?” Ikusaba asked, “I… don’t really have any way to deal with them on my own…”

“That’s true… and I wouldn’t put money on Enoshima and Yamada being able to deal with anything big on their own either…” Celestia pointed out, “But Ishimaru and I will be fine. We both have access to dark type attacks.”

“Alright, so Yamada and Ishimaru can keep hanging out together, and me and Mukuro will follow you then.” Enoshima suggested, which everyone agreed with, before they decided that the boys would run through every combination of paths that began with north and east, and the girls would take the southern and western paths…

But that was still a hundred and twenty-eight different routes they’d have to try… and that was assuming there even was a way out of here, and that they hadn’t become permanently trapped in the spirit world… Without anyone outside of the school knowing what had happened to her…

No! She couldn’t start letting herself worry about that! Besides, she’d hardly seen any ghosts this evening, so there was no reason for her to dead! This was much more likely to be an illusion made by that Zorua the security guard had mentioned, in which case the school should eventually get its act together and get rid of it, and they’d be able to get out of here, even if it did take a while. As long as they didn’t panic, it shouldn’t be a problem to wait out here for a few hours… or maybe even days, if those berries on the trees were actually edible… And Ishimaru would probably be able to answer that question.

Yes, that was right. The worst things she had to worry about right now was the ache in her feet and Enoshima’s incessant complaining about how much they were having to walk…

But… still, over an hour later, they still hadn’t seen anyone else other than Yamada and Ishimaru… Did that mean the rest of their class had noticed what happened to this area and chosen not to follow them? Or had the area shifted again, making it impossible to move between here and the rest of the school? What if this wasn’t just going to be a few hours, or even days… what if it was weeks? Or months? Years even? They might never get out… and Grand Bois Cheri would never know why his good food and communications from her suddenly stopped arriving…

“Now East this ti… YES! Fucking finally!” Enoshima’s sudden shout shot Celestia out of her
worried line of thinking, “We found the way out!”

_Had_ they? Yes, admittedly this place wasn’t the same ‘starting hub’ that they’d been magically teleported back to each time they moved in four directions. But, she _did_ recognise the stone walls and torches that lined this area…

“No… this is the crypt under mausoleum, it’s all enclosed.” She sighed. She was sure of it, even though it should have been impossible to get here without passing through the entrance first. “There’s no way out of here, except for the way we just came…”

“What!? Are you kidding me!” Enoshima cried, “Are you _sure_ there’s no way out!? Like… have you checked _everywhere_?”

“Well… I’ll admit, I didn’t search _every_ pathway in this place…” Celestia told her.

“Hmm… the air feels stagnant... But there might be somewhere with weaker walls that we could break through and dig our way out, if it comes to it…” Ikusaba suggested.

“Well, at least it’s somewhere _different_!” Enoshima insisted, which Celestia could certainly emphasise with, which lead to the three of them heading down the hallways, with Ikusaba occasionally tapping at the stone surface and frowning in concern each and every time… This was seeming less and less like an option, as eventually they’d searched every one of the paths that she hadn’t tried, and all that was left was the large open area with the coffins…

…Where they found Ishimaru, stood at one end of the room and glaring across it.

“Ishimaru? The _heck_ are you doing here?” Enoshima asked.

“Ah! Hello, Enoshima!” Ishmaru blinked for a moment, then turned to reply to her casually, “You see, there’s a shiny Gastly around here, which I’m trying to scan to see if…”

_WHAT!?_ Was he _serious!?_ Despite _everything_ that was going on, he was back to chasing after _that_!?

“What the hell is _wrong_ with you!? Is your brain too tiny to understand how much trouble we’re in!? We could be _trapped_ in here _forever_ for all we know and you’ve started messing about with those _fucking_ Gastlies again, instead of sticking to the plan we agreed on!? Are you _insane!?_” Ishimaru was just staring at her like she was crazy… How the hell had he convinced Yamada to let him mess about like this!?

Wait… “…AND WHERE THE HELL _IS_ YAMADA!?”

“Y-Yamada? I-I’ve not seen him all evening!” Ishimaru stammered, “And what this you’re saying about us being _trapped_!?"

What the _fuck_, was he _braindead_!? He’d been _right there_ when they were all _talking_ about it…!

“Oh… my… _ARCEUS._” Enoshima swore, before grabbing her sister by the wrist and dragging her back towards the maze. “If I didn’t know that _sneaky little BASTARD_ was actually _cute_ I’d beat him to a damn _pulp_ before letting you catch him! Come on, Mukuro!”

“Huh? Wh-what are you talking about, Jun…”?

“That wasn’t Ishimaru with Yamada! It was the _Zorua_ disguised as him!” _Oh… Ggrraah…!_ How had Celestia not worked that out before now!? Or even before _Enoshima!?_ “Arrgh! I should have _known_ it was too good to be true for that loudmouth to be _so quiet_! Dammit! It even _smirked_ at us
when I mentioned you were planning to capture it, and I didn’t even twig! I can’t believe I got tricked like that! You better throw that Quick ball extra hard for me…!

“So… you thought I ought to be with Yamada because there’s a pokémon pretending to be me with him?” Ishimaru asked, as the twins disappeared back to the maze. “But… why do you think we’re trapped? The exit is just back that way, isn’t it…?”

He was pointing to the distorted area… But how come he didn’t know what happened when you tried to go in there…? “…Have you been in here chasing after that Gastly this entire time? You know you should probably have given that up as a lost cause long before now…”

“Ahh… Yes, I know I’ve stayed a little beyond the suggested time limit…” …More like five times the suggested time limit! “But I know I can scan it! I just need to focus better next time!” What was he talking about? “Ah… hold on… I think they’re about to start again, and it’ll be easier to watch than for me to explain!”

What was about to start again? He was just gesturing to the empty room… except… it looked like the coffins were beginning to glow, slightly…

“Gast! Gastgastgastgast!” A shrieking laughter filled the air as the whole pack of Gastlies from before shot out of the coffins, and Ishimaru started scanning his eyes over them all intensely…

“Gaa-aasst!” But not quickly enough, because the only one he was actually looking for waved at him mockingly, giving him just enough time to locate it before they all disappeared back into the coffins again.

“Hmm… I don’t think anyone could scan them that…”

“Wait! That’s not it! Watch!” Ishimaru shushed her, not turning his eyes away from the grave the shiny Gastly had gone into… And suddenly came back out of, but this time as just the inner ball, which moved over towards one of the other coffins… all of which had their own, non-shiny Gastlies doing the same thing multiple times, making it hard to focus on where the blue one was going…

…Hard, but certainly not impossible. Celestia was fairly certain she knew which coffin had been the last one it touched when all the movement stopped. So unless Ishimaru was half-blind or braindead, he really should have been able to pick the right one by now…

…Assuming the ghosts were playing fair, that was. But, seeing as Ishimaru had been trying this for so long with no success, they were probably conning him… Hmm… surprisingly clever for a bunch of dead Kanto pokémon…

“Ha! I know I’ve got the right one, this time!” Ishimaru insisted triumphantly, getting his pokédex ready as he marched straight over to the coffin that Celestia had singled out herself.

“And I know you haven’t.” She corrected him, moments before he thrust his pokédex out over it…

…And as Celestia had predicted, a normal purple Gastly shot out and enveloped Ishimaru’s head, making him shudder and cough as he stumbled backwards away from it…

“Urrgh! But… I… I was sure I saw it go into that one!” He coughed again, swaying for a moment. “How did you know it was wrong? Which one was it?”

“Honestly… your dog can see through this trick, but you can’t?” She sighed in the face of his question to her, “None of them were the right answer.”
“…What? You mean… it’s like that game with the cups? Where your Weavile was sneaking the ball behind its neck!?” Ishimaru remembered, “But… Why would they bother to do that!? I’ve not been gambling with them!”

“Not with money, no.” Celestia pointed out, “But every time you tried to scan one of them, it sucked out just a little bit more of your life energy, didn’t it? And by making you think you had a chance of picking the right one next time, they kept you ‘playing’ their game again and again and again, staying here much longer and giving up far more of your energy than you would have otherwise… I’ve got to admit, it’s a pretty good con. It’s no wonder they managed to knock out so many security guards…”

Honestly, it was more of a surprised they hadn’t managed to knock out Ishimaru after all this time…

“Argh… I… I see… I never had any chance of finding it this way, did I?” Ishimaru realised bitterly, “So… where is it hiding, then?”

“Who knows? It’s a ghost, it could be anywhere. And even Fujisaki’s technology wouldn’t be able to tell it apart from the other Gastlies.” Celestia pointed out, as she started to walk towards the apparent mausoleum exit. “There’s nothing we can do to find it, all we can do is leave and warn everyone else about their trick…”

That was assuming they actually managed to leave. Hopefully Ikusaba would have managed to catch the Zorua, and that would have destroyed the illusory maze…

“So… it’ll remain hidden forever…” Ishimaru sighed, slowly starting to follow her.

“Hmm I doubt it. As soon as we tell people there’s a shiny pokémon here, someone will probably come in with a scanner and systematically attack every single Gastly here, until they find it…” Celestia reasoned, “My money’s on Togami. He’ll probably think the increased footfall to his zoo would be worth going to that length.”

“…GAST!?” There was a shrieking wail from the wall to their left, and suddenly the blue Gastly was floating and right in front of them with a furious glare… “Sssssstttttt.”

“Ah! There it is! It must have heard you…! And this time I’m going to scan it for sure!” Oh for goodness sake… Could Ishimaru not tell when he was being threatened!? Honestly, she had to do absolutely everything by herself…

“Weavile!” She threw her pokémon out, and the Gastly had the sense to look scared as he hissed right back at it and enshrouded his claws in darkness, ready to attack… but it didn’t quiet have the sense to get out of their way…

“Ah… what you doing?” Meanwhile, Ishimaru was also showing a lack of good sense! “You’re just going to attack it!? Why?”

“Because it’s trying to attack us, you idiot!” She pointed out.

“I know, but… can you blame it? You just said that if we leave, we’ll cause Togami to come in here, knock out all its friends, catch it and stick it in a zoo!” Ishimaru cried, “Wouldn’t you try to stop us, if you’d just heard someone say that about you!??”

“Of course I would…” She had to admit, “But we can’t stay here forever!”

“I know but… can’t we at least try negotiating with it?” Ishimaru pleaded, “For instance, what if we promised not to tell anyone about it…”
“Then we’d be allowing it to continue luring people into its trap.” Celestia reminded him, “You’re not saying a single pokémon is worth more than multiple people, are you?”

“Ahh… no, of course not…” Ishimaru flinched at her argument, “But… what if it promised not to attack anymore people!? Then we could…”

“It’s a ghost! And one that has spent the entire evening tricking you!” Celestia snapped at him, “What makes you think we could actually believe it!!”

“Ah… I… I…” Ishimaru struggled for an answer, “I just… Is this really our only option? Knock it out now and let Togami catch it later… I know! What if we only told the school about this, rather than everyone?”

“It wouldn’t make any difference. As long as it’s in the wild and knows how to trick people like this, it’s a danger to people. The school can’t ignore that. Someone will have to catch this pokémon. The only choice we have is who to give first dibs on it to.”

“I… I suppose you’re right…” Finally, Ishimaru had seen sense!

“Gast!” But now the pokémon was getting agitated and bouncing up and down, gesturing at Celestia… And if it knew what was good for it, it had better not be signalling the others to attack her! “Gast! Gast!”

“Vile!?” Whatever it was saying, Weavile seemed sceptical… “Weaaa…”

“What’s it’s saying?” Celestia asked.

Weavile thought for a moment, pointed to the Gastly and then pointed to one of the empty balls Celestia had brought with her…

“It wants you to capture it!” Ishimaru realised what Weavile meant at the same time as she did. “Of course! If you catch it now, no one will have to attack any of the others! And without it to help them lure people here, they won’t be able to hurt them anywhere near as much as before! It’s perfect!”

“Hmpth… It would be, if I had any interest in catching a Gastly.” Celestia corrected him, “Weavile, use Night Slash.”

“Vile!” Weavile nodded in agreement, before charging forward and striking it with his claws…

“Gaaast!” It shrieked loudly as the claws cut through it… but apparently it wasn’t quite enough to finish it off completely, as the surprising resilient ghost was still floating there, looking at her with puppy-dog eyes… “Gast… Lly?”

“Aaahhh! Wh…why would you do that!? It’s willing to get captured in order to protect its friends!” Ishimaru snapped at her, “Even if you don’t want it long term, you could still trade it to someone else, rather than encourage them to come here and attack everything in their path to get it!”

“And risk that person not being able to control it properly? It’s already proven itself to be quite dangerous.” Celestia pointed out, “This pokémon has encouraged the others to hurt a lot of humans quite badly, and you want to show sympathy for it?”

“But… that’s not its fault, that’s just how they eat!” Ishimaru wailed, “And, alright, this was a bit over the top… but can you blame it for wanting to look after its friends and help them get as much good food as possible? I mean… if I didn’t have to worry about him making himself sick, I’d probably feed Arcanine as much as he wanted! To them, this is just the same thing! Surely you can
understand that…!”

…So, Ishimaru was saying that this Pokémon just wanted to make sure it’s Pokémon had access to the best food available? That the clever con had just been a way of making sure the ones it was looking after were never at risk of going without… even if perhaps it took it a little too far, and it was maybe putting the Pokémon at risk by spoiling them so much…

“Ah… or maybe you can’t… You give your Weavile the basic brand food to, even though you could probably afford to buy better, don’t you?” Ishimaru sighed bitterly.

Of course, Weavile ate the basic brand food because he liked it and stubbornly refused to eat any of the more expensive brands Celestia had tried to give him… But right now, that felt beside the point… After all, Celestia still did buy the most expensive, luxurious, probably-not-actually-very-good-for-her-cat-in-the-long-term food she could find… And most of the money she used to pay for it had been conned out of people like Togami… And then she sent it all back to Kanto, where she’d come from…

Maybe there were some other good things that had come out of that place…

And besides, it would drive Togami crazy if she had a shiny Pokémon, and he didn’t…!

“…And so, the combination of this shiny Gastly luring people into the crypt…”

“…And the annoying maze setup by this sneaky little… Zorua…”

“…Is why so many people have been falling unconscious in the cemetery recently.” Celestia and Enoshima finished explaining what had happened to Kizakura and Sakakura.

“Well… seems like you girls have saved me a lot of work, then.” The security expert summarised. “Though we will have to keep an eye on the other Gastlies… just in case one them gets the bright idea to disguise itself as a shiny.”

That was a possibility she hadn’t considered… although, given she’d allowed her new Gastly a chance to say goodbye to its old friends and it… or she, as it turned out, had seemed to be explaining the situation to them all, she hoped they’d learnt to be more conservative about how much human life force they ate.

“Well… I’m just glad you all got out alright… If I’d known the Zorua was powerful enough to affect the landscape, I’d have cancelled the class.” Kizakura admitted, “Incidentally, Ikusaba, I hope you realise that if you fail your DPTL course, then we’re going to have to take that Zorua off of you.”

“Understood.” Ikusaba nodded.

“Good… and all of you are all right? None of you spent too much time near those Gastlies…?”

“No! Not at all! We’re all hale and hearty, as you can see!” Ishimaru replied a little too hastily.

“…Alright, but just remember that sometimes you don’t feel the effects of ghost attacks straight away, Ishimaru.” Kizakura told him suspiciously, “Make sure you go to the medical centre if you start feeling even slightly more tired than you should be.”

“Ah… yes sir.” Ishimaru did a poor job of hiding his embarrassment at being singled out for that advice.
“Well, I think that’s everything. You’re all free to leave. And I’ll make sure I tell the admin team about the new pokémon, so you two will start getting your extra stipend soon.”

“Much appreciated.” Celestia told him. Not that a *ghost* would be expensive to care for, but it was all the more money to spoil Grand Bois Cheri with… And now that she wouldn’t have to worry about being forced to use him in battle, she could start to make preparations to have him move in with her next term, like she’d been promising him…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
I realise Zorua’s aren’t usually as powerful as that, so I guess I’m calling artistic license on this one.
Dogsitting (Sayaka POV) pt. 1

Chapter Notes

The lyrics at the beginning are from Manic Monday by The Bangles.
In the anime, pokeballs have an ability to shrink to a more compact form when they’re not in use, which is how they fit into otherwise small cases or pockets in this AU.
Also this is one of those chapters where I split it because it was getting way too long, except there’s going to be an aside chapter in the middle of them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*Six ‘O Clock already, I was just in the middle of a dream…*

“Urgh…” Sayaka’s hand reach out to shut her alarm off. She might not have been dreaming just now, but the part about it being six already was something she could relate to right now!

Still… no rest of the wicked! She couldn’t afford to be lazing around in bed when she had pokémon to train! And it was Wednesday, so she’d need to make sure they were looking extra good today.

And for once, she was actually slightly glad to have coordination class this morning! Between Fukawa, Hina and Sakura getting attacked by Sableyes on Monday, and then Kiyotaka and a few others seeming to outright disappear in yesterday’s class, she could do with a lesson somewhere normal! Even if there was still no clear way of getting rid of Hawthorne, and their meeting last week hadn’t come up with any plans that wouldn’t make them all look bad if they got caught trying them, which had led to her and Hiyoko arguing about whether they should actually go ahead with them or not, until Mahiru stepped in and agreed with her rather than Hiyoko.

Maybe that was why Celebi had taken her back in time, to stop Hiyoko from deciding to go behind their backs and do something that caused her trouble… From what she’d managed to get out of him, Yamada had ended up just drawing in the forest until it got too dark to see properly, so it wouldn’t have been because of something he’d done…

Well, that didn’t matter right now! She needed to get up, have breakfast and get cleaned up with her pokémon and then make sure they were all dressed well… and maybe even have a chance to practise some new dances, even if it wasn’t going to actually help with the class!

“Alright guys! Rise and shine!” She rolled to the edge of the bed and swung her legs out over the side, pushing herself upwards and stretching out her arms to help her wake up.

“Brionne!” Her oldest pokémon was already wide awake and came over to fly around her, as usual, inadvertently getting some of the water from her sleep basin onto Sayaka’s bed and nightclothes, which was the main reason they always got up so early to shower after breakfast.

And just as usual, it took Sayaka a little coaxing to wake Espurr up and convince him to get go of the thick blanket that covered his catbed, before they could all leave the room and get going to the dining room, just like they normally did in the mornings…

But today, something was noticeably different as soon as she stepped into the corridor… What the heck was that smell? It was almost like the air was filled with metal? But it started to ease off as soon
as she stepped out of the small corridor. Had someone fought a steel-type or something? But why would they do it here of all places?

*Thump* Sayaka spun around to face the dorm rooms again as she heard a dull noise from behind her, just in time to see the door to Kiyotaka’s room slam open and his Arcanine burst out of it so quickly that it almost ran straight into Kirigiri’s door before it was able to stop itself and turn back around into its own room…

And Arcanine wasn’t the only thing coming out of Kiyotaka’s room… there was a plume of light-coloured smoke billowing out from… from was used to be the doorknob, but now looked like a misshapen glob of burnt slag. Arcanine must have melted it to get the door open… which probably meant that something had happened to Kiyotaka!

“…Kiyotaka…!??” She quickly headed into the room, along with Brionne, who swooped just ahead of her to act as a guard if needed.

The first part of the room looked exactly the way she’d imagined Kiyotaka’s room to be. Very tidy, with nothing the school hadn’t provided, except for an array of helpful charts pinned neatly to the wall, an ironing board, a wooden sword in a stand, a neat line of the various bags he packed for different situations and a large, Arcanine-sized cushion bed next to the human bed. But then on the other side of the two beds was Kiyotaka, being dragged by his dog over a large, open bag of pokéchow which was now being scattered all over the floor as Arcanine tried to pull him out of the room by the back of his collar…

“Ngh… urgh…” Kiyotaka groaned, weakly trying to lift his head up to see what was happening, even though his eyes didn’t look like they were focusing and his skin was even paler than it usually was. “W-what…?”

Well… if he was awake enough to talk, she should try and find out what had happened… even though she had a suspicion already… “Kiyotaka, you were on the floor. Arcanine had to break the door down… Do you remember what happened?”

“No… just… just tired.” She knew it. He’d looked far too shifty when Kizakura had asked everyone if they’d been near the ghosts too long! He should have just admitted it and gone to the medical centre straight away… “Need… Arcanine food…”

“Nnnnn…” Arcanine shook his head… which resulted in Kiyotaka being gently shaken side to side as he was dragged across the floor.

Hmm… looking at the food bag, it was tipped over right next to a large dog bowl, but there was only pokéchow around the bowl… “You already fed him. You need to go see the nurse, like Kizakura told you to yesterday!”

“Ngh…” Perhaps that had been a bit harsh, but it seemed to get the message across. “Right… let me… I’ll walk…!”

…He was trying to get up by pushing his arms underneath him, except he didn’t even have the strength to do that, let alone walk. On the other hand, being dragged across the floor by his dog wouldn’t do him any good either… it’d be better if Arcanine carried him on his back…

“I’ve got a better idea… Arcanine, sit!” She tried to copy the tone of voice and hand signal Kiyotaka usually used, but his dog just shook its head and carried on pulling him across the carpet.

So much for that plan. Perhaps she should run and ask Leon and one of the other boys to help carry him…
“Ah… Arcanine… be good… for Sayaka…” Kiyotaka insisted.

“Nnnn?” Arcanine looked confused at the order, but still sat as she’d asked him to, looking at her anxiously with Kiyotaka’s upper body dangling out of its mouth…

So, he’d listen to her now? Alright… so the easiest way to do this would probably be to hold Kiyotaka by his shoulders and drape him over Arcanine’s back…

“Arcanine, drop!” She ordered, once she had her arms wrapped under Kiyotaka’s…

Ooof! He was heavier than he looked! But not so heavy that she didn’t manage to pull him around to Arcanine’s back and awkwardly sling his arms over the dog’s neck, and luckily he seemed to still be with it enough to cross his arms over, holding him in place once Sayaka gave Arcanine the order to stand and follow her as she headed to the medical centre, where a group of nurses, including Mikan, came over to see them as soon as they arrived.

“I think he’s…”

“Been too close to Gastlies?” One of the nurses finished off for her, as they started pulling Kiyotaka off of Arcanine’s back. “Don’t worry, he’ll be fine. His teacher told us to expect him, so we’ve got everything ready.”

Guess it wasn’t just her who’d noticed how guilty he’d looked yesterday…

“Ah… the dog’s going to have to stay out here, though.” He added, as Arcanine had started trotting along with the group.

“Right… Arcanine, here!” She ordered, although Arcanine clearly didn’t want to follow it, as he froze in place turning his head between her and Kiyotaka. “We need to wait out of the way while they make him better… So come here!”

This time he only looked over at Kiyotaka one last time, before his head dropped and he slowly walked over to her and sat down, facing the direction Kiyotaka was being taken in.

…Poor thing.

“That’s a good boy…” She tried petting his head, but it didn’t help cheer him up at all, “I’m sure Kiyotaka will be fine!”

“…Arrrr…” He huffed a little and laid down on the floor, keeping an eye on the door the group of nurses had left through the entire time, even when Brionne tried to distract him with a few tricks and dances, much to her obvious disappointment.

Arcanine didn’t even look up when the entrance door opened up and Kizakura came through, holding a cup of coffee in his hand…

“Maizono? What are you doing here?”

“Well… Kiyotaka collapsed in his room…”

“He collapsed!?” Kizakura turned slightly pale, “Dammit… If I’d realised it’d that bad, I’d have just ordered him to come here instead of waiting for him to own up to it…”

…Yeah, she probably should have pressed him on it more, to… At least then might have come here himself last night and his dog wouldn’t have had to break his door open…
Thinking of which, she probably ought to let someone know about that, if only to stop everyone seeing the state it was in and panicking… or possibly trying to steal something from him, knowing some of the people in their class. That was assuming no one else had got up yet and seen it already...

…Wait… her pokédex was getting a message, so perhaps someone already had...

‘*New group chat* Hope’s Peak class 78 started by Makoto_Naegi’

Makoto_Naegi: Does anyone know where Kiyotaka is? His door’s been busted open and there’s pokéchow spilt all over his room!

…Good thing he spent all that time pestering everyone to add each other as friends on BattleNet…

Byakuya_Togami: No. And in future I’d appreciate you not abusing your access to my contact details for such trivial matters.

Ah, well if she let the others know what was going on, they’d probably make sure nothing happened to Kiyotaka’s stuff…

Sayaka_Maizono: He collapsed while trying to feed Arcanine this morning so we took him to the medical centre. Nurses are treating him now, but said he ought to be fine.

Makoto_Naegi: Okay, thanks Sayaka. Can you tell him that if anything’s missing from his room when he gets back, it’s Hagakure’s fault?

Yasuhiro_Hagakure: HEY! I TOLD you, I was just making sure he didn’t have anything valuable lying around for OTHER people to steal!

Aoi_Asahina: Sure you were…

“Are you talking to the whole class there…?” Kizakura had apparently noticed the group chat, “Can you do me a favour and ask if any of them know how long he was around the Gastlies for?”

“Okay…”

Sayaka_Maizono: While everyone’s here, does anyone know how long Kiyotaka actually spent with those Gastlies in the end?

Celestia_Ludenberg: I’d say it was in the region of one-and-a-quarter hours.

…He’d spent more than five times the limit they’d been given chasing that thing!?

“…How long?” Kizakura asked with a lot of trepidation.

“Umm… over an hour…” Sayaka told him.

“An hour!?” Kizakura cried, “Arceus, I was thinking he felt guilty for being there for seventeen minutes, or something stupid like that… May thirty at the most, like the original time limit… not an hour!”

That did seem like something Kiyotaka would have chided himself for, given how carefully he usually followed rules.

Makoto_Naegi: Wait… so Yamada spent an hour with the fake Kiyotaka without noticing anything was up?
“Hifumi Yamada: It was a very good likeness of him!

Sakura Oogami: Odd… I was under the impression that Zorua’s cannot imitate human speech. Did you not think it odd that he was being quiet?

Hifumi Yamada: A little… but I assumed he was busy concentrating on remember which directions we’d tried!

Haaaa… If only the fake Kiyotaka had been paired up with someone a bit more observant… they might have got out faster and made Kiyotaka leave the mausoleum sooner. As of now, all she could do was wait and see how well Mikan and the other nurses were able to help him…

“Umm… excuse me…?” After what seemed like forever, Mikan came back out into the waiting room, “He’s still unconscious for now, but he’s st-stable and recovering! You can come see him, if you want…”

“Arc!” Arcanine stood up and bounded past Mikan, barely giving her enough time to move out of his way, and was quickly followed by Mikan, who led the rest of them to a room towards the back of the medical centre which seemed to be lined with an odd dark metal on the outside wall, and a heavy looking door made out of the same material, which Arcanine was now sat pawing at irritably…

“Th-this room has a special anti-ghost screening, so there’s no chance of any random pokémon coming in and making him worse!” Mikan pulled out a card and swiped it through a reader next to the door, making it slide open and letting Arcanine rush to the middle of five beds on the right-hand side of the room, again followed by the three humans and Brionne.

The room was kept pretty dark, with only some faint light to see with coming from spotlights in the ceiling, just enough to let them see the wires trailing from the back of his hand and the lack of colour in his skin…

“Arc…? Can-nine…?” … And of course, the dog that was now sitting next to his bed, carefully sniffing at his face.

“Ngh… Arcanine…?” Kiyotaka’s eyes barely opened for a moment… “So tired… sorry…”

“Canmnmn…” Arcanine sighed as Kiyotaka fell back to sleep again, forlornly deciding to lower his head onto his trainer’s chest and keep it there.

“Idiot…” She just about heard Kizakura muttering, “So… how bad is it?”

“Umm… We’ve put him on an IV drip, and given him some antidote just in case. But the only way for him to get over the life draining is for him to rest until his strength has recovered.” Mikan answered, “He’s not as bad at those security guards from before, but I’d say he’ll probably sleep for the next two days, not be able to go to class until after the weekend, and needs to avoid any strenuous physical activity for the whole week.”

“So… he can stay in bed until after the weekend, and come back to class after a week.” Hmm…? Kizakura didn’t seem like he’d have misunderstood something that simple…

“Umm… I-I’m sorry, b-but that’s not what I said…” Mikan pointed out timidly.

“I know… But I need to at least try and discourage him from doing anything this stupid again, and I don’t think detention’s going to cut it.” Kizakura sighed, frowning at the unconscious Kiyotaka. “But
having to skip an entire week’s worth of class might actually upset him enough to make him think next time… if he tries to give you any trouble over it, tell him they’re my orders.”

“Oh! Well… if you say so…” Mikan agreed reluctantly.

“But, if he’s going to be out of it for two days… Maizono, do you know who he nominated as his emergency pokésitter?”

His pokésitter…? She’d never heard anyone mention having one… “Umm… is that something we’re supposed to have done…?”

“…You mean it’s not in the handbook?” Kizakura looked very confused when Sayaka shook her head as answer, “But… your class all picked people to look after their pokémon if something happened to them, didn’t they Tsumiki?”

“Umm… yes. But that was something Miss Yukizome suggested…”

“…Right.” Kizakura pinched the bridge of his nose as he realised that that was probably something he should have had everyone to do already. “Okay… Do you know if his Arcanine at least listens to anyone other than him?”

“Well… Kiyotaka told him to listen to me, but I don’t know his schedule or what Kiyotaka feeds him.” Sayaka admitted, “Makoto hangs out with him a lot, so he might know…”

“Well… I’ve got to let his father know about this anyhow…” Kizakura frowned, bringing out a pokédex. “He should be able to tell us…”

“Umm… well, if that's all you need, I’ll check on the others, while I’m here…” Mikan spoke up.

“Yes, thank you, Tsumiki.” Kizakura nodded, and started going through menus on his smartdex.

It took him a minute to find the correct number, but soon enough the face of a man with worn skin, grey hair, tired eyes and a stern, joyless expression appeared on the screen. If it wasn’t for him having the same red eyes and hairstyle as Kiyotaka, she probably wouldn’t have guessed they were related…

“Kanto police force, Officer Ishimaru speaking.’” Huh… he looked like he was at home, if the old-style wallpaper behind him was any indication. Was that how he answered all his calls?

“Arc?” Regardless, Arcanine certainly recognised his voice enough to scamper over and stick his head inbetween her and Kizakura’s. “Arc! Arcare!”

“Ah… Arcanine?” Ishimaru’s stern expression broke as he blinked in surprise at the sight of his son’s pokémon.

“Meee! Meow!” A Kanto Meowth popped it’s head up from the bottom of the screen, eliciting louder barks from Arcanine, which made the cat even more excited to see him…

“Yes, yes I know it’s nice to see each other, but settle down, both of you!” Ishimaru ordered the two excited pokémon, petting the cat in his lap and also stroking the irritably twitching tail of what seemed to be a second Meowth perched on top the seat behind him, which was resting over his shoulder. But once the two pokémon fell quiet, his brows furrowed and an anxious frown took over his mouth. “Ah… sorry about that. But I take it you’re from Hope’s Peak, then…?”

Now that expression made him look much more like Kiyotaka… although Kiyotaka usually wore it
when he was waiting for test results, not because he’s got an unexpected phone call.

“Yes… I need to inform you of an altercation between your son and some wild pokémon…” Kizakura started, more formally that he usually spoke.

“Is this the Gastlies from yesterday, or has he done something else?” Kiyotaka’s father asked, wearily.

“You know about that?” Now Kizakura was the one looking surprised.

“He decided to end our call early because they’d made him feel tired… but he told me it wasn’t bad enough to waste your staff’s time.” Ishimaru sighed, “I’m guessing that wasn’t the case after all.”

“No… he’s currently stable and should recover without any problems, but he collapsed in his room this morning.” Kizkura summarised, “He’ll likely be unconscious for two days, and will need to spend the rest of the week recovering before he can attend classes again.”

“I see… nothing too bad then.” Ishimaru looked shockingly calm and relieved about the news. But then again, compared it to those burns Kiyotaka had, it probably wasn’t all that bad. “But what will happen to Arcanine while Kiyotaka’s unconscious? Usually I’d look after him…”

“He told Arcanine to follow orders from Maizono here, so she’s volunteered to look after your son’s pokémon.” Kizakura explained “However, it would help if you could tell us its usual schedules and give us some general advice on looking after it.”

“Ah… yes. I’m afraid to say that Arcanine’s quite… set in his current schedule, so it might be quite demanding for you…” Ishimaru started anxiously, “He wakes up at 6am and needs to be fed a level bowl of pokéchow at that time, or he’ll wake you up himself…”

“That’s fine, that’s when I wake up anyway, so I can feed him in my room and then put him in his pokéball when I got to the dining room.” She knew Kiyotaka always did that much.

“That’s really? That’s convenient…!” Ishimaru looked genuinely surprised that someone other than his son got up that early, “Well, other than that he eats dinner at 6pm, which is always a can of wet food and a poffin if he’s been good… Then at 10pm Kiyotaka reads him a book and he goes to sleep. And he has a bath or shower every day, but the timing for that can change… You should probably find everything you need in Kiyotaka’s room easily enough.”

So… aside from feeding and reading to him, he could just follow along with her pokémon? “That shouldn’t be any problem at all!”

“Well… if you’re sure… Thank you very much for this. I’m sure Kiyotaka will try and make it up to you at some point!” Ishimaru thanked her apologetically, “Feel free to ring me if you’re having any problems.”

“Alright!” Sayaka agreed.

“If that’s everything…” Ishimaru looked at Kizakura questioningly, “Then thank you for letting me know what happened. And Arcanine…?”

“Arc?”

“…Try not to worry too much about Kiyotaka. And remember it’s not your fault that this happened.”

“…Can…” Arcanine nodded hesitantly.
“That’s a good boy. And remember to be good for miss Maizono as well!”

“Arc!” Arcanine nodded more confidentially at that one.

“Alright then. We’ll update you on any developments in your son’s recovery.” Kizakura told him, “Have a good day.”

“Thank you, and my apologies for the trouble.” Ishimaru ended the call apologetically.

“Well that wasn’t as bad as I expected…” Kizakura admitted, while Arcanine turned and headed back over to Kiyotaka’s side. “You’re sure you’re alright with this?”

“It’ll be fine! It’s just for a few days!” And besides, it might be nice to have a boost in power for a little while…

“Alright… Well, seeing as you probably didn’t get a chance to eat this morning, and you’ll need to sort out Arcanine’s things, I’m… well, you’ve got permission to skip class whenever, but I’d actually recommend you do it this morning!” Kizakura grinned.

Well, given she’d barely have time to feed her pokémon before class started, let alone wash them well, trying to show them off to Miss Hawthorne was probably going to be a waste of time today.

“Thank you. I’ll see you in the afternoon.”

“Alright, good luck, Maizono!”Kizakura tipped his hat at her and headed out of the ward.

So… let’s see. First she needed to eat with Espurr and Brionne, because they were long overdue breakfast! Then it’s probably be easiest to move Arcanine’s things into her room and then wash herself and all three pokémon at the same time. Which meant she now needed to convince Arcanine to stop licking at Kiyotaka’s face and get into his pokéball… which hopefully Kiyotaka had on him, or she was either going to have to go back to his room and find it before they could eat, or deal with Arcanine trying to eat Brionne’s and Espurr’s food…

“Arcanine, do you know where your pokéball is?”

“Arc…” Arcanine nodded, and nosed at a small chest pocket on his pyjama top, where she found the pokéball in its compact form.

“Thank you!” She petted his head, which made him stop looking at Kiyotaka for a moment, “Now, we need to let Kiyotaka rest in peace for now, so can you be a good boy and stay in your pokéball for a while?”

“Arc.” He nodded, nuzzled against Kiyotaka’s face one last time, and then disappeared into the pokéball in her hand. Well, that was a good start…

One late breakfast, one room rearrangement and one very long bath time later, all three pokémon were looking a lot better. Arcanine even seemed to almost be his usual cheerful self, if only because he’d been able to play with Brionne in the bath and had then enjoyed being towel-dried and brushed… although how Kiyotaka had the time to deal with that amount of fur all the time she couldn’t fathom… by the time she was done with all of that, lunchtime had already started!

And that meant putting Arcanine back in his ball, didn’t it? “Alright, you need to go back in your ball now… I’ll let you back out for class, if you like?”
“Arc!” He nodded, and entered the ball again. Good thing Kiyotaka had him so well trained. It meant she didn’t have to worry about him at all as she headed to the line and picked out food for herself, Brionne and Espurr, then took it over to her usual table… which was looking fuller than usual, even with Kiyotaka missing. As well as the usual group of Makoto, Hina, Sakura and Kirigiri, there was Hifumi, Hagakure and Ludenberg sat at the table itself, and even Fukawa and Togami seemed to have chosen a closer table than they usually did...

“Oh, hey Sayaka!” Makoto was the first to notice her, “How’s Kiyotaka?”

…That seemed to be the question on everyone’s minds, as they all turned towards her expectantly, except for Yamada and Ludenberg, who both looked aside guiltily instead…

“He’s unconscious for now, but Mikan seemed pretty sure that he’ll be alright, so long as he’s kept away from ghosts for the time being…”

“So… they are certain it was the ghosts doing?” Ludenberg checked, “He seemed healthy enough at the end of the lesson…”

“Well… That’s how they’re treating it.” Sayaka answered.

“Hmm… It isn’t unusual for ghost-type victims to take a day or two to succumb to the effects.” Oogami agreed with her, “Though, I would have not have thought his constitution was so poor that he’d need an entire week before he could go about his day-to-day activities…”

“Oh… well… It’s probably better if we don’t tell Kiyotaka this, but… That’s not how long Mikan said it’d take for him to get better. She said he could go back to class on Monday.” Sayaka admitted, “But Kizakura’s hoping the more classes he’s forced to miss, the more careful he’ll be in future…”

“Oh… I wondered if he might have tried to do something like that…” Kirigiri smiled.

“So… you mean he’s not as badly injured as it seemed!?!” Yamada exclaimed, “That is truly fortuitous news!”

“But… how’s that fair!? He’s getting more time off than he needs, even though he totally ignored the rules!?” Hagakure moaned, “If I’d known Kizakura’d do that, I’ve have got attacked by ghosts to!”

Yeah, but Kiyotaka actually likes school, so it’s a punishment for him! It’d be like telling you not to do any fortunes for a week!” Hina pointed out, “Plus, it means he’ll miss our only chance to catch anything late out in the fields or water areas… That’s what we’re doing Monday and Tuesday evenings!”

“Oh, yeah. Man, that’s a total bummer for him!”

“Yeah… although I don’t think he’s actually thought about what pokémon he’s going to catch as his second one, so hopefully he won’t be too disappointed.” Makoto pointed out.

That was actually a little worrying, to be honest. “…He has remembered he has to have two by the end of term, right?”

“I think so? I think he’s just been busy with school, and looking after Arcanine as well…” Makoto answered, “Speaking of which, do you need any help with that?”

“I don’t think so… it seems like mine and Kiyotaka’s schedules line up pretty well.” Sayaka assured him, “But I guess I’ll see how it goes and ask for help if I need it!”
“Alright then!” Makoto nodded, “I suppose we should try and organise getting notes from class for him, to…”

They’d just about finished organising that when the bell announcing they only had ten minutes left of lunchtime rang, and Sayaka had just enough time to finish off her salad and let Arcanine out of his ball, before they had to walk back inside the classroom with everyone else, something Arcanine seemed very confused by. Usually he and Kiyotaka would have been sat in there for ten minutes by the time everyone else came in.

And it was probably a good thing that was usually the case… almost as soon as they entered, she noticed Fujisaki tensing up as she passed their desk, even though Arcanine wasn’t doing anything other than walking to heel. They probably weren’t going to be able to deal with Arcanine being sat next to them for the entire class, but it everyone else would notice if she suddenly decided to put him back in his ball. The most she could do was direct Arcanine to the opposite side of her table to Fujisaki…

…which Arcanine had already walked straight past, heading over to sit next to Kiyotaka’s table by force of habit.

“Uhh… Arcanine? Sayaka sits over here…” Makoto pointed out.

“Ah… but you can sit in your usual spot if you’d prefer!” Sayaka added, hoping he’d decided to stay over there, away from Fujisaki… “Or rest up in your ball, instead!”

“Arrrr… Can!” Arcanine spent a moment thinking about it, before pointing his nose at Kiyotaka’s table.

“Alright, then! Your pokéball’s here if you want it!” Sayaka told him and sat down, making sure his ball was out somewhere obvious in case he changed his mind, or starting causing a scene without anyone close by to control him…

But in the end, all he did was sit quietly at Kiyotaka’s desk like he usually did, except that he seemed to go from sitting bolt-upright, to slumping his shoulders, to dropping his head, to lying on the floor and finally to wordlessly heading back inside his pokéball a lot faster than she’d ever seen him do before.

Oh boy… guess he was starting to miss Kiyotaka now. Or at least, he’d started missing him when he’d been given the time to think about it. She’d have to try and keep him distracted the next time he came out of his ball… Assuming he actually did…

In the end, it wasn’t until after she’d finished training and eating with Leon that Arcanine decided to leave his ball… and that was only because she called him out for his dinner, which he’d barely even looked at before scooping up half of the can of food in one desperate bite…

…Was Kiyotaka feeding him enough…!? The tin said it was enough for half an Arcanine’s daily food, and he didn’t look starved, but he’d still seemed pretty desperate for his food just now… And now he’d eaten it, he looked disappointed…

“Are you still hungry?”

“Nnnn…” He didn’t seem sure. She had just fed him all the food Kiyotaka’s father said he ate,
hadn’t she? Dinner was a can of wet food… oh!

“Ah! I almost forgot, you get a poffin if you’ve been good, don’t you!?"

“ARC!” That was it. Giving him the poffin seemed to put him in a much better mood. Now she just had to try and make sure he stayed that way!

But, that should be pretty easy, given that it was time for her to practise her newest routine with Brionne and Espurr! “Now, do you like dancing, Arcanine?” He nodded, “Great! Then you’re going to like this! Just give us all some time to get ready, okay?”

Arcanine nodded, then continued to wag his tail as she set up the music they’d be dancing to, handed Brionne the props for her to practise with, and then coaxed Espurr to come stand in the right position with them all, before starting the music…

“Alright, now left, then right…” Sayaka started dancing, calling out the instructions for Espurr to follow, as he still hadn’t picked up on them yet. “Cross your legs and twirl…”

“Ar…Caaaan!” *thump* “Nnnnn…”

What the…!? They’d hardly got four bars in when Arcanine made a noise and somehow ended up falling over on his side.

“Are you alright?” Sayaka asked.

“Arc!” Arcanine barked sheepishly, quickly getting back up onto all fours.

“Well, alright then.” Guess he’d just been been playing around and made himself dizzy or something? “Alright, Espurr, Brionne, let’s start that from the top… Left, then right, cross you legs and twirl…”

“Arrrc!” *thump*, “Niiiiinnne…”

…Again!? And at the exact same point in the dance to… “…Arcanine, are you trying to join in with us?”

“Arc!” He nodded.

“Oh! Hmm…” Well, it would distract him from Kiyotaka being in the hospital. And she was curious as to how easy he was to train… “Alright… show me what you were doing… so left…” Arcanine turned the front half of his body ninety degrees left, “Then right…” Again, the front half of his body turned right, “Cross your legs…” He tried to cross both his front and back paws over each other, meaning he was already wobbly before she ordered him to twirl…

“Okay, stop! First, you need to sidestep left and right, and then you can’t cross your feet because you have more legs than Espurr, so you’d be better off just going straight into spinning because you’ll take longer…”

“…Nine…?” Arcanine cocked his head sideways at her. Guess he wasn’t that easy to train…

“Well, alright then.” Arcanine nodded.

“Alright, let’s get a poffin to help with this…” She decided, and headed over to Brionne’s box of toys to dig out the old fishing rod she used to use to train her and hooked a sweet poffin onto it before going back to Arcanine’s side. “Now… I want you to keep your back legs next to mine, okay?”
“…Arc?” Arcanine hesitantly moved into place, before turned back to her for confirmation.

“Yep! Now, just remember that and…” She dangled the poffin in front of her, “Follow the poffin… Left!”

She stepped left, bringing the fishing rod with her, and Arcanine’s head instantly came with it, followed by the rest of his body as he realised she’d moved her back legs.

“Now, right!” She carried on to the next step, nudging at Arcanine’s hips to encourage him to shift to the right so she could move herself and the poffin that way as well, at which point his head followed to the right place as well.

“Now, turn once!” She kept the poffin where it was, but started walking in a circle around it until Arcanine was facing the other way, “And turn twice!” She carried on walking until Arcanine was back the way he had been. “And that’s it! Good boy!” She dangled the poffin close enough for him to eat it, which he did happily. “Now, let’s see if we can do that faster, this time…!”

It took Arcanine several repeats, but he did manage to get to the point where he was doing the movements by himself, even if he was still pretty hesitant and awkward about it.

“Well… looks like Kiyotaka’s right about you being a clever dog!” She told him, giving him one last poffin as he finished running through the small set she’s taught him by himself. “Now, how about you move over there and practise that part by yourself, and I’ll teach you the rest another time?”

“Ate!” Arcanine nodded, and moved off into the side of the room, while she went back to Espurr and Brionne and restarted the music. “Alright, from the top again! Now, left, then right, cross your legs and twirl…”

“All right good dancing, guys! You’ve made great progress today!” Sayaka told all three pokémon, a couple of hours later. “But now I have homework to get on with, so you three can do whatever you want to, alright?”

As usual, Espurr took this as a chance to go into his blackout tent for a rest while Brionne carried on practising the dance moves Sayaka had just taught her. Meanwhile Arcanine started digging through one of the bags she’d brought across from Kiyotaka’s room for some toys to play with while she started getting on with the maths questions they’d been set, with only some quiet barking between the seal and the dog in the background…

“Bri…! Brionne!” …Until Brionne suddenly called for her attention.

“What is it, Bri…” Sayaka turned around, then stopped talking in surprise at the sight of her pokémon balancing a tower of four… no five blocks of foam on her nose… Where had they come from!? And how had she managed to get all of them on her by herself…?

“Arf!” Ah… she hadn’t, as Sayaka realised once Arcanine came over with another block in his mouth and tried to lower it gently on top of all the others… “Arrrrfffff…”

…Only for the entire tower to wobble and scatter down around Brionne.

“Onne…”, “Niiine…” Both pokémon sighed in disappointment, just as Sayaka realised she should have got her pokédex out and taken a picture or video of that!

“Aww… that was a great try though!” Sayaka told them, as she reached for her dex and turned the
camera mode on... “See if you can make it bigger, this time!”

“Arc!” “Brrrill” They both nodded excitedly, before Brionne sat back in position and Arcanine started picking up the blocks and putting them on her nose again...

...They got it up to the six blocks before it fell apart, that time.

“Great job, you two!” Sayaka told them, “But I’ve got to carry on with work now, alright?”

“Bri!” Brionne nodded happily.

“Arcan?”...Whereas Arcanine started looking at her pokédex, hopefully...

“...You want to see the pictures I took?” Sayaka guessed, showing them to him.

“...Nine.” He shook his head, then jabbed at it with his nose again, “Arcan!”

Hmm... he obviously wanted something specific, but what else was there he could do with a pokédex? She doubted Kiyotaka would let him watch television on it, like Makoto did... But he looked pretty insistent about it, whatever he wanted. She’d probably best ask Kiyotaka’s father if he knew...

“Ahh... hold on a minute, okay?” Sayaka told him, dialling the number she’d been given this morning and hoping it would actually be picked up...

...Which it was, very quickly, by Mr. Ishimaru, who already looked worried. “Ah... Miss Maizono! I hope Arcanine isn’t giving you any trouble...”

“No, it’s not like tha...”

“Arc! Arcan!” Arcanine rushed over to bark at him, which again caused one of the Meowths on the other end of the phone to pop its head up and meow at him.

“Ah, yes, it’s good to see you Arcanine! But calm down now...” He once again had to calm the pokémon down, “Sorry about that... What were you trying to say?”

“Ah... I was going to say that Arcanine was asking me to do something with my pokédex, but I wasn’t sure what...” Sayaka explained, “But now I’m thinking he wanted to speak to you!”

“Ah...” Ishimaru glanced downwards for a moment, “Yes, this is the time of evening that Kiyotaka would usually call me... it hadn’t occurred to me that he’d want to keep that part of his routine...”

Kiyotaka called his father every night...? Huh... she didn’t even get to speak to the rest of the band that much...

“Well... if that’s the case, then I’ll just prop the pokédex up so you can speak to Arcanine then!” Sayaka offered, putting in on the table to the side so she could carry on with her homework...

“Ah... thank you!” Ishimaru nodded, looking like he wasn’t quite sure what to actually say to the dog, “So... how was your day? Did you learn anything interesting...?”

...Luckily for her, Arcanine barked happily and started showing him the dance she’d taught him, so Kiyotaka's father didn’t seem to notice her having to stifle a laugh at him asking the dog the same question he probably used to start conversations with Kiyotaka.

...Still, by the time he watched Arcanine dancing and balancing balls on Brionne’s nose, then
complained about something that had happened at his work, ordered Arcanine to tidy his toys away and finally ended up reading Arcanine’s bedtime story to him, she couldn’t help feel a little jealous of Kiyotaka…

“Alright now… Goodnight, Arcanine.” Ishimaru was starting to wrap up the call.

“Arrr…” Arcanine whined in response.

“…I know you’re worried, but Kiyotaka will be fine!” He tried to cheer the dog up, “You know him… he always gets better faster than the doctors say he will! Haha!”

“Arc.” Arcanine nodded.

“Alright, now, off to bed! I’m sure you’ll have a busy day tomorrow!” Ishimaru ordered, which Arcanine followed, heading into the bed and using his mouth to pull a blanket over himself.

“Thanks for the help!” Sayaka told him, as she reached over for the pokédex.

“I think I ought to be saying that to you!” Ishimaru insisted, “It’s nice enough that Kiyotaka’s got friends now, let alone people willing to go to all this trouble for him…”

“It’s not been that much trouble…” Sayaka argued, before she thought about the first part of that sentence… “…But what’s that about him having friends now?”

“Ah… forget I said that! It’s not something you need to worry about…” Ishimaru insisted quickly, “I’ll let you get on with your evening! But thank you for helping Kiyotaka!”

…And he hung up before she got a chance to reply… or ask him more questions. Had Kiyotaka really not had friends before now? Sure, he wasn’t the most socially aware, but he’d seemed to hit it off with Makoto easily, so she’d assumed he’d had some friends back at home… Although he never spoke about anyone there…

…Maybe she didn’t have as much to be jealous of, as she’d thought…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next chapter will be an aside showing how the Imposter is getting on with the pokédex, and then we’ll be back to Sayaka.
Initial Findings (Imposter POV)

Chapter Notes

Keep in mind that Imposter thinks they have an ideal body, so when they call other people scrawny it doesn’t necessarily mean that person is actually scrawny-looking. Also I’m trying to make it so they’re inner monolog is like the Imposter themself (i.e. their “true self” in DR3) but outwardly they act like whoever they’re currently impersonating, so it might seem like they’re being inconsistently characterised at times.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

*bzzzt, bzzzt, bzzzt…*

Urrrghhh… Time to wake up already? Even with all of their precautions yesterday, they still barely felt like they’d slept at all, even though they’d just had nine hours sleep…

How did Ishimaru do it? The boy barely had an ounce of fat on him, where did he keep the energy reserves to stand up to attacks from thirty-two Gastlies, and still aim to get up at six in the morning? They’d not even let the Gastlies they scanned attack them, and they were still struggling to get up even though it was already seven am…

But, like it or not, they’d agreed to imitate Ishimaru for as long as it took to study the new pokédex ‘he’d’ been lent. And that involved keeping up with an approximation of Ishimaru’s schedule while the pokédex was turned on, and scanning the same number of pokémon as him, even if it was a ridiculous number of them!

Still, as of yet, the Rotom possessing the device didn’t seem to have any actual complaints about the amount of tedious, repetitive work they were forcing it to do. The worst that had happened so far was that it stopped being as talkative as usual when they made it scan the same species of pokémon over and over, but that was probably because it had run out of interesting things to say about them and was deciding to conserve its energy. It had certainly wished ‘Ishimaru’ a good night’s sleep just before they turned it off last night. And thinking of that, they’d better go switch it on for the d…

*bzzzt, bzzzt, bzzzt…*

Their alarm again!? No… it was a phone call this time, and from the sales rep who’d handed them the pokédex itself! They needed to muster up the energy to imitate Ishimaru again, and fast…!

“Good morning! This is Kiyotaka Ishimaru speaking! How may I help you!”

“Ah… good morning. This is Darren from FutureDex. I’m sorry if I’ve just woken you up…” Hmm… Perhaps they hadn’t been able to muster as much energy into that greeting as they should have, “But I was looking through the data you collected yesterday, and I just wanted to check you haven’t made any changes to the settings app on your new pokédex, have you…?”

“Err… I don’t think so…” That was a lie. Fujisaki had had to switch off the setting that caused the pokédex to submit everything it scanned to the pokédex research initiative, just in case it became obvious that there was another person scanning the exact same pokémon as Ishimaru. “That’s the little cog symbol you told me not to touch, wasn’t it?”
“Yes… Unless Enoshima can help you with it, that is.” Darren replied, still completely oblivious about Ikusaba’s pathetic mimicry of her twin sister. “What about when you showed it to your classmates? Did any of them go in there…?”

“No. I didn’t hand it over to any of them, I just showed them all the functions myself!”

“You’re sure? Not even to that computer programmer…?”

What was with this interrogation!? “I’m absolutely sure! As I already told you, Fujisaki barely talks to me! And as you and Enoshima expressed concern about them in our previous meeting, I wouldn’t have shown it to them even if they had asked me to show them!”

“Oh… of course! Sorry for doubting you, Ishimaru! I just needed to check there was no chance you turned off the auto-submission settings!”

“…Auto-submission settings…?” Curse words! How had they noticed that!? Fujisaki had put a delay in Ishimaru’s pokédex to stop it submitting the data he scanned before they had the chance to replicate it! But they weren’t able to time their scans to line up with his submissions perfectly... Could it be they’d noticed the slight differences…? “Err… is that to do with my pokédex sending data to the PRI…?”

“Yes, exactly! We noticed you scanned forty-six Gastlies yesterday, but only submitted data on thirty-two of them, so…”

“Ah… no! That’s not right! I’m sure I only scanned thirty-two of them!” What kind of super-human strength did they think Ishimaru had if they’d thought he could stand up to that many Gastlies!? And how could they justify Ishimaru having been counting the number of pokémon he scanned… Ah, of course. “I was keeping count so I could tell Arcanine if he’d counted correctly! I certainly didn’t get anywhere near forty of them!”

“You didn’t!? Huh… that’s odd. There’s definitely data for forty-six of them on there…” Darren sounded as confused as they were by the discrepancy, “Hmm… I’ll have to have our people in R&D have a look into this.”

“Ah… thank you!” It would be interesting to hear what they made of this, but they’d also best make plans to have Fujisaki look over the data as well… But there was another, more pressing, concern on their mind, “But… can I still carry on scanning pokémon? Not that I will be doing much today, but we have another practical class tomorrow morning…”

“Yes… That’s fine! If this is an ongoing problem, then more data will help us work out the problem!” Well, that was something to be thankful for! At least they didn’t have to worry about finding a way to prevent Ishimaru from using his own pokédex in the meantime.

“Alright then! Now, if there’s nothing else to discuss, I need to get ready for school!”

“Of course, thank you for taking the time to discuss this! I hope you have a good day!”

“Yes! We should work our hardest to make this day as good as possible!” …Seemed like something Ishimaru would finish a phone call with. “Good day, Darren!”

And now they’d got rid of him, it was time to contact Fujisaki…

…Who had already sent them a message…

‘I don’t think you can go out looking like Ishimaru right now. We found his bedroom dorm smashed
open and he’s missing. I’ll keep you posted.’

‘Turns out Ishimaru’s got post ghost attack fatigue from yesterday. I’m guessing he won’t be leaving the medical centre today.’

Ah ha… They knew someone as scrawny as him wouldn’t have had the energy reserves to stand up to all those ghosts! Ishimaru had just overestimated how much stamina he had…

‘Maybe this is our chance to finally let Kaz and Gundam look at the you-know-what?’

Fujisaki had the right idea, but first…

‘I’m afraid there’s something else we need to look into as well! I’ve just spoken with the sales rep, and he says that there’s data suggesting I scanned forty-six Gastlies, not the thirty-two I actually scanned!’

‘That’s weird. I guess the Rotom must have made up extra data? Unless the pokédex is capable of scanning multiple pokémon at once.’

‘Is that something its capable of? It would make things rather difficult for me if that’s the case!’ After all, how were they supposed to ensure they were scanning the exact same number of pokémon as Ishimaru if their pokédex kept picking up other ones nearby!?

‘I don’t know for sure. Seeing as its only just been noticed, I’m guessing not. But there might still be a chance that’s what’s caused it and they’ve only just noticed the difference in data…’

So they might now go back find out that all the data records were inaccurate!? The longer this plan carried on, the more unreasonable it seemed to be to have not just asked Ishimaru for his cooperation in the first place…

“Either way, can you take it to Kazichi’s workshop? He’ll be able to test how sensitive the sensor are and make a copy of the data for me to check over.’

‘Certainly! I’ll do that right away, before class starts!’

‘Thanks. I’ll keep you updated once I find out when Ishimaru’s likely to be out of bed again.’

Hrmm… of course, that meant they couldn’t just head over to the workshop as they were now. They’ve have to go as the only person who’d ever have a reason to make the trip there as early as this… Kazuichi himself.

They’d just have to hope that they didn’t run into anyone who’d seen the mechanic today, already.

If anyone they’d passed by had seen them both, they didn’t say anything about it. Most of them were people who wouldn’t have paid Kazuichi much mind anyway, so it seemed like they were in the clear for now. They just had to let themself into the workshop…

“BUZZ!” …Where they were immediately greeted with the sight of Kazuichi’s constantly angry ElectaBuzz, which was clearly suspicious of the second version of its trainer that had just let ‘himself’ into the room…

“Uhh… hey, buddy! It’s me! F-Fukisaki just asked me to drop the pokédex off here!” He explained, clearly not being recognised by the pokémon, which was now heading towards him fiercely, “I,
uhh… didn’t expect you guys to be here already…!”

“Huh…? Oh, right!” Kazuichi took his time working out who he actually was, “Yo, Buzz, buddy it’s cool! It’s just the Imposter!”

“…Elec…?” Electabuzz glanced over them, and then turned to look at Kazuichi sceptically.

“Yeah! Uhh… you know… the guy we’ve been calling Ishimaru for the last few weeks…?” Kazuichi tried to explain, “He’s just dressed like me, today!”

“…Ta buzz?”

“Yes, I’m sure! Geez! You think I can’t even recognise my own friends!?” Kazuichi snapped at it, “Look just… Go over there and lemme talk to them, already!”

It reluctantly backed off to a corner of the workshop, literally walking backwards so as not to take its eyes off of them both as it did so, and then continued to watch them cautiously as they spoke, as it often did...

“Ehh… sorry about him.” Kazuichi sighed apologetically, “But why’d you come here looking like me anyway? What happened to you being Ishimaru?”

“He’s gone and landed himself in the med centre, so I couldn’t risk getting caught while looking like him…” They explained.

“Oh! So does that mean we’ve finally got a chance to actually look at the Rotomdex, without you having to go take it off to scan pokémon for ages!?” Kazuichi’s eyes lit up, “That’s why you came straight here?”

“Ehh… kinda, but we’ve also got a problem with the pokédex itself…” They admitted, “According to FutureDex, it’s scanned more than thirty-two Gastlies yesterday, so Chihiro’s wondering if it’s possible that it’s scanning multiple pokémon at once, and asked if you can give ’em a copy of the data from yesterday.”

“Well, the data’s easy enough to copy off!” Kazuichi insisted, getting out his own pokédex and a wire and plugging them into each other. “But as for whether or not it can scan multiple pokémon… the easiest way to find that out would be to test it, but that’d mean scanning more pokémon that Ishimaru hadn’t…”

“Yeah… plus it’s probably better if we keep the pokédex off while we’re messing around with it like this…” They added, “If they find out his pokédex was being turned on and off while he was sick…”

“Yeah, I figured as much.” Kazuichi frowned, “Hmmm… tell you what I can do. I can open it up and see if it’s even got the right specs to be able to scan multiple pokémon at once. If that’s a no, then we’ll have our answer without having to do any tests!”

“Well, sounds like it’s worth a shot!” Better to try the methods that wouldn’t raise suspicion first, even if they weren’t exhaustive, “Just make sure it’s not obvious you broke into the thing…”

“Geez, whatdaya think I am, some kind of idiot!?” Kazuichi snapped, reaching into a drawer lowdown on one of the storage units and pulling out a dark metal box with a pane of silvery frosted glass on the top, and rubber-coated holes cut into the sides. “I ain’t gonna scratch it up or anything stupid like that!”

“Alright, just checking!” They should really have figured Kazuichi wouldn’t damage it, given how
careful he always was with Metang. But now they couldn’t help but wonder… “What’s with the box?”

“This? It’s to stop the Rotom being able to escape when I open the casing!” Kazuichi grinned, as he fished out a set of small screwdrivers from his pocket and put them and the pokédex inside the box. “Gundam rigged it up for me!”

“Oh, cool!” They’d not considered that necessity. That must have been why Munakata had been so open to letting someone as unsubtle as the breeder in on this.

“No kidding… Now, let’s see what’s in here…” Kazuichi muttered, as he closed the box and then put his hands through the rubber holes, which opened up just enough to let them through, while still forming a tight seal around them.

…

“Hah! Pokédex of the future my ass! This thing’s running on a quad-core processor!” Kazuichi laughed after some time, “There’s no way it’s picking up more than one pokémon at a time!”

“Well… that’s a load off! We’d have been in trouble if it could, when Ishimaru’s can’t!” Especially as Fujisaki had already improved Ishimaru’s pokédex as much as they physically could, given the space available to them… “I guess it’s just the Rotom itself causing trouble, then…”

“Urgh… ya think…?” Kazuichi paled, “Well… maybe for now you oughta have Gundam have a look at it them. See if he can work out why it would do that all of a sudden…”

“Yeah… it’s almost time for us to head to class, anyway…” They realised, “I guess I can tell him afterwards…”

“Err… yeah, just…” Kazuichi cringed slightly as he prepared to say whatever was on his mind, “Wouldya mind going to class as someone other than me…?”

A sensible request. Having two of the same person in the class would just cause confusion, and they already had the clothes for someone who’d been visiting Gundam’s breeding grounds this term…

“Back! Foul demon of avarice! How many times must I banish you from this realm, before you see fit to stay in your lowly pit of hell like the maggot that you are!” …Not that could they could see why Byakuya Togami kept coming here, when this was the sort of welcome Gundam gave him… “I may be cursed with infernal blood, but I’ll never stoop to summoning forth beings from the depth for the likes of you!”

“I’m not here to discuss breeding with you!” They desperately tried to calm Gundam down, before the swarm of Dedennes that were swarming around their feet decided to shock them, instead of just sniffing at their feet… “I need to discuss this device with you!”

“What devillry is this…?” Gundam glared at it for a moment, before recognising it. “AH! The trapped soul! Yet another being you’ve stolen from its rightful trainer…!”

“I didn’t steal it, Gundam, I…” Hmm… on second thoughts, technically they had stolen it from Ishimaru…

“Do not mock me with your lies! I know who’s pokémon this is…!” Not that it mattered, because Gundam was too enraged to notice their argument, or even the hamster that was making its way up
his shoulder until it pulled at his scarf for attention. “And they would never have… Hmm? What is it, Jum-P…?”

“Den…dedene…!” They could vaguely hear it squeaking it his ear…

“What!? Imposter!? Are you certain!?” Gundam exclaimed, then listened carefully as Jum-P chattered in his ear again. “I see… But then why have you exchanged the sceptre of a fledgling Principality for the lowly rags of Mammon!?”

“I’ll have you know that this suit is made out of only the finest materials!” They pointed out, assuming Gundam was actually asking why they were imitating Togami instead of Ishimaru. “And Ishimaru is apparently stuck in the medical centre for a week…”

They’d been particularly surprised to hear that from Fujisaki. Even his diet wasn’t so poor that he shouldn’t have been able to return to class on Monday, but they had been insistent that their teacher said he’d be away for a whole week…

“I see… And so you finally came to have me read its last rites, before it moves onto the next world!”

“No… Munakata told you about this, remember!?” They sighed, “You’re to inspect the Rotom’s health! Not release it! Otherwise your sentimentality will prevent us from helping any of the others…”

“Grk…! So be it. Hand me the infernal prison!” Gundam demanded, almost snatching it off of them, “Greetings, being from the next realm! Behold your new master, Gundam Tanaka…!”

“…It’s off. It can’t hear you.” They pointed out to him.

“What!? You dare to make a fool of me!?” Gundam snapped, “Turn it on, this instant!”

“I can’t. If it sees anyone other than Ishimaru turn it on, it’ll assume it’s been stolen and contact FutureDex.”

“Then how, pray tell, am I to judge the health of the being within!?”

“…Didn’t you tell Munakata you could assess its spectral energy…?”

“Indeed I did… but that only allows me to sense its well-being in a… physical sense, for want of a better term…” Gundam smirked, “I cannot sense its mental well-being without being able to communicate with it.”

“Well, just give me the report on its physical well-being for now.” They told him, “Even if you could talk to it, I doubt you’d be able to get anything useful out of it. Every time I’ve asked it how it’s feeling, I get the exact same answer…”

“Hmm… You presume to assume your dull ears could pick up on the words of a pokémon better than my own… I am sure you’d change your tune, could we speak to it now…” Gundam chuckled, heading over to a large empty space in the middle of the room. “But as we cannot, I suppose I’ll give you your incomplete report…”

They watched patiently while Gundam drew out a large, intricately-patterned circle around himself, using a piece of chalk attached to a stick, and then places the Rotom at his feet and walking out through a path he’d left himself, which he closed off as he exited the circle. Then he finally turned back around and clapped his hands dramatically…
At which point absolutely nothing happened. Not that they could see, anyway. Gundam didn’t seem surprised by the lack of developments, though…

“Hmm… Though trapped in its material prison, this being draws closer to the realm of the beyond than one might expect…”

“And what is that supposed to mean!”?

“It means its vitality is not as it should be, given it lives in a protective cage…”

“How would that have happened…? They certainly hadn’t let it get hit…”

“Perhaps… or perhaps it suffers the same fate as he who would take it upon himself to guard the walkways of this realm…” They guessed Gundam was talking about Ishimaru, there… “Ghosts are very adept at stealing life force from each other…”

“So, it might just be exhausted from scanning Gastlies…” They realised. The casing must have a pretty shoddy design if it was possible for a ghost’s attack to get inside it… and what was stopping the Rotom from getting out the same way. “Can you tell me anything else?”

Gundam answered, carefully stepping across the circle to retrieve the RotomDex without disturbing it. “Though, it may be of use to know how quickly it recovers from its ordeal.”

“Understood. I’ll bring it back tomorrow after class.” They told him, “Do try to remember it’s me, next time.”

“Th… That was merely a jest!” Gundam insisted. “My All-Seeing Eye could determine your true form in an instant!”

Of course. They weren’t the only one using a persona to face the world. “I see… but none of your jokes next time! I don’t have the time for them…”

*Beep, beep, beep…*

“…Case in point!” They took advantage of the well-timed pokédex notification to get out their pokédex and look important, “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Indeed… but beware, mortal, for it may be your last act! Bwahahaha…!” Gundam laughed manically as they headed out of the door…

Well, now to see what their own pokédex had been telling them just now… A message from Fujisaki? Already…?

‘I noticed something about the extra data your pokédex has. It’s not actually extra data.’

‘What do you MEAN!? If there’s no extra data on it, then why do FutureDex think I scanned more pokémon than Ishimaru!?’

‘What I meant is, the data from the first fifteen Gastlies are all unique, and probably came from your scans. But the sixteenth dataset and onwards all just consist of attributes that were randomly mixed together from the first fifteen sets.’

What!? ‘So it actually scanned FEWER pokémon than I TOLD it to!?’

‘Yes. The rest are all fakes. I’m guessing the Rotom got tired of having to scan the same type of
pokémon over and over, and tried to fake the data instead.’

‘I see. That would explain why it went quiet during the latter half of the scans. It was busy messing around with its internal data storage.’ Either that, or it was trying to hide deeper in its console, or just resting. ‘Good work. I will make sure that your effort is well-rewarded.’

“I just want to help… but thanks?”

Hmm… that was one of the downsides of taking Togami’s identity… Now they’d probably have to find something to give Fujisaki at some point…

But for now, they had their answer, the Rotom had either gotten tired or injured by scanning the ghosts, and resorted to faking data in order to protect itself. They should report this to Munakata, ASAP. But that meant figuring out who they should report it as. Togami certainly had no reason to be visiting his office! But thinking about it, aside from the other people involved in this investigation, the only people they’d ever seen going in there are Miss Yukizome and the head of security…

Sakakura seemed like the best choice. He tended to move purposefully enough that students and staff alike thought better that to try and stop him, which would work in their favour as they made their way to the office. Besides, it didn’t seem right to take advantage of their own teacher’s appearance for this…

“Enter.” Munakata’s voice came from within, sounding somewhat irritated with the unexpected call, as he always was, so they did as they were told and shut the door behind them firmly, waiting quietly for Munakata to finish whatever he was working on and look up at them… “Ah, Juzo!”

“Ahh…” They hesitated… It was rare enough to head Munakata use someone’s first name, let alone smile as brightly as he had done upon seeing their disguised appearance.

“Hold on…” …But it seemed like the moment of hesitation was enough to make him realise something was amiss, “It’s you, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” They nodded, “I came to tell you about something that came up with the Rotom pokédex…”

“And why did you come disguised as him?” Munakata scowled.

“Ishimaru’s in the medical centre, so I couldn’t be seen walking around looking like him, and this seemed like the best choice out of the people who usually come here.” They explained, although Munakata didn’t look happy about it. “I didn’t think using his appearance would be such a problem.”

“…You didn’t think impersonating the head of security would be a problem?” He sighed irritably, although they had the feeling it wasn’t just the security breach that had annoyed him, “Have you done this before?”

“No…” They told him, truthfully. He still looked suspicious of them though. “This wasn’t a problem back when there was someone in the school who I could always copy.”

“I see…” Munakata turned away from them momentarily. Presumably that meant he still hadn’t had any leads on Ryota… “So, what was it you came here to tell me.”

“I found out from the guy at FutureDex that the pokédex had more Gastly data on it that I’d meant to scan, so I had the others look into how that might be possible.” They started, “It seems like the most likely explanation is that the Rotom got tired from being forced to scan so many of them, that it
stopped actually scanning them, and just started making up fake data profiles by mix-and matching the first fifteen I scanned.”

“So, in its current state, the Rotom’s able to effect the stored data, and probably isn’t very well shielded against other ghost-types…” Munakata summarised, “But those are problems that they should be able to solve with a software and design update. Was the Rotom behaving oddly at all?”

“It wasn’t chattering as much as it usually does when I’m using it.” They admitted, “But I don’t know if that’s because it was getting bored, or if it was too tired to talk.”

“Or perhaps it was overwhelmed by the amount of data Ishimaru collects…” Munakata suggested, “Either way, we’ll have to wait and until Ishimaru is active again, which will probably give FutureDex a chance to find and fix whatever software issue they think led to this happening. Then we can carry on as before…”

“And what if turns out Ishimaru is scanning too much for the Rotom to handle?” They asked, “Then what?”

“Then we’ll have proof the entire idea is unworkable, and would lead to pokémon being unhappy if done on a large-scale basis.” Munakata answered, although that hadn’t been their main concern.

“Even if it means knowingly hurting the Rotom?” They checked, “I can’t see Ishimaru doing that, myself.”

“…As I told Tanaka, if hurting one pokémon means saving countless others from the same fate, then we have to do it. We can stop as soon as we see the Rotom is being caused pain.” Munakata answered, sternly. “There are trainers out there who would be heartless enough to work a pokémon to exhaustion, if it meant getting the data they wanted, and we need to show the results of that kind of treatment. That’s part of the reason I asked for your help with this.”

Because Ishimaru would have balked at the thought of using a pokémon like a slave… “Alright then. Once Ishimaru is awake, I’ll carry on as I was before.”

“Good. Let me know when FutureDex contact you with details of their upgrade, but make sure you don’t answer any of their calls before Ishimaru’s awake again.” Munakata finished, clearly intending it as a dismissal.

“Understood.” They headed out of the room and towards their own room. As tempting as it was to copy the head of security’s meat consumption, they should probably change disguises before going to the student’s dining room to truly enjoy this respite from the investigation. Perhaps they could borrow Akane’s appearance for that…

“Ah, Ishimaru! Glad to hear you’ve more-or-less recovered from the life drain!” It seemed Darren had been paying attention to Ishimaru’s BattleNet posts, or lack of, over the past week...

“Thank you! Ah... I’m sorry it prevented me from being able to help you solve the problem with the number of Gastlies I scanned, but I suddenly collapsed right after the call ended and my teacher forbade me from going outside or attending classes!”

“Oh, don’t worry about that! I’m actually calling to let you know we figured out what caused that!” As they suspected…

“Oh, really? What was it!? I hope it wasn’t something I did…”
“No, it wasn’t! It turns out it was a glitch in our software… but nothing that would affect the validity of your work in anyway! It was just causing the pokédex to report that it had more sets of data than it actually did! When we tried to look at them in more detail, the last fourteen were empty!” Darren lied cheerfully, obviously expecting Ishimaru to trust him completely. “And we’ve now sent out a software update to fix that, and a few other minor problems we’ve discovered during testing, so you just need to install that…”

Well, that was simple enough, for them at least, but for Ishimaru… “Thank you! I’ll make sure to check my post-box carefully for that, then!”

“Ah… no… it’s been sent out electronically! You just need to go into set…” Darren started trying to talk them through it, then probably remembered the day he’d spent trying to teach them to use the pokédex in the first place and thought better of it… “Actually… Just tell Enoshima there’s an update you both need to run, and then do what she does!”

“Alright, then! I’ll inform her the next time I see her in class!” …Which should be tomorrow morning, if what Fujisaki had told them was true.

“Great! Thanks for you co-operation with all of this! You’re proving to be the most valuable of our beta-testers!”

“Ahaha… thank you!” It was obvious the praise was intended to distract them from worrying too much that the Rotom could affect the results of their work, but Ishimaru would probably have fallen for it. “I’m just glad to have a chance to help improve the quality of pokédexes for everyone!”

“Well, you certainly are!” Hmm… hard to tell if the man actually believed that was true or not. “I’ll let you know if we have any further updates, but otherwise I’ll just call for our weekly-catch up next Tuesday, alright?”

“Perfect, thank you! Have a good week.” They told him, then hung up.

Hmm… so, they needed to update the pokédex, but only after Enoshima or Ikusaba did. And ideally that would be when Ishimaru was present… They’d have to rely on Fujisaki for help orchestrating that...

‘There’s an update for IT, but I need Enoshima’s one to be updated while Ishimaru is around, just before I do the same.’

‘Ishimaru’s shown up to class, I’ll see if I can trick Enoshima into updating it now.’ Fujisaki replied back almost instantly… but what was that about a class? Oh, right, it was the first year’s night classes this week. So Ishimaru had convinced his teacher to let him take part again early, had he? Guess their reprieve was over sooner than they expected… ‘She’s doing it now.’

‘Thank you! I’m starting mine now, will update you on how it works while I copy Ishimaru’s work tonight.’

There was no more response from Fujisaki as they booted up the pokédex, which was back to acting like its usual self, as far as they could tell from its usual introductory spiel, until…

‘There’s a new update to my system available! It’s highly recommended that you go into settings and run it!’

“Very well!” They told it, before doing exactly that, and grabbing themselves a tray of sushi from the kitchen while they waited for it to finish…
'Hello! Thank you for keeping up to date with my software updates! This new update fixed some minor issues with my data storage, but I can now confirm I will be working at full capacity from now on!'

"Thanks for letting me know!" They told it, before deciding to check how the Rotom itself was doing, "Are you feeling alright in general though? You don’t have any complaints at all?"

'I feel great, thanks for asking! I don’t have any problems working with you!'

Hmm… the exact same answer as always. They suspected that it was somehow programmed to repeat that line whenever asked about itself, but Fujisaki hadn’t managed to get deep enough into the software to confirm it.

…But they had managed to send them a, surprisingly short, list of the pokémon Ishimaru had scanned while the pokédex was updating…

“Alright then! In that case, how about a little night-time research…?”

‘YOU’RE the trainer!’ Again, another repetitive response. Was the Rotom really alright…?

Well… as Munakata said, if it wasn’t it was better to find out sooner, rather than later…

Chapter End Notes

 Thanks for reading, next week we'll go back to Sayaka and see how she's getting on.
The morning after talking to Kiyotaka's father, Sayaka was heading along with the rest of the class towards an area of the school that was filled with tall towers, turbines and electricity pylons, flanked by Brionne and Kiyotaka’s Arcanine, and weighed down not only with her own items, but also the satchel that Arcanine had grabbed when she’d mentioned needing to get ready to explore.

But, as they’d been told last Monday, they weren’t actually going to see any of that. Instead, Kizakura just led them into the lobby of what looked like a generic office building…

“Welcome to the offices!” Kizakura announced, once they were all inside and looking at beige walls with the Hope’s Peak symbol painted on them. “This is where the power plants and generators you can see out of the window are controlled, and its usually where a lot of Hope’s Peak’s business and admin takes place, but right now we’ve given those people the day off so we can run today’s lesson…”

“Uhh… so does that mean those people usually work around a bunch of wild pokémon…?” Hagakure asked.

“Umm… I don’t think so… I’m not picking up any traces of pokémon inside this building.” Fujisaki answered, from the far side of the room. “They’re all over by the generators…”

“That’s right! There’s no wild pokémon for you to deal with today!” Kizakura confirmed.

“So, you’re having us explore an empty set of offices next to where all the pokémon are!?” Togami asked irritably, “What’s the point of that? Are you thinking we might spot them out of the window or something!?”

“Not every practical lesson is going to be about you guys fighting as many pokémon as possible, Togami.” Kizakura told him, “Today’s will be training your exploration and hunting skills, while also giving you guys some advance info on the pokémon in the generators… We’ll be having a pokéball hunt!”

“Ohhhh! I haven’t done one of them in years!” Hina exclaimed, “Are they gonna have chocolate pokémon in them!?”

“Why the hell would they!?” Oowada asked her.

“Uhh… ‘cause that’s what they usually do!” Hina told him. “Or was just something my family did?”

“No, my family did that to!” Makoto agreed.

“Yes! And there was an extra-large one for whichever of us found the most!” Yamada announced, “Although my sister and I usually shared all the chocolate out between us anyway…”

“Oh yeah… my Dad usually forgot to organise the hunt, so he just bought me load of those when they were on offer the next day…” Fujisaki murmured.

“My Mom used to put chocolate in…” Hagakure told everyone, “But these days she does cash instead!”
“My uncle did chocolate, cash and toys!” Leon laughed, “He used to get kids trying to sneak onto his lawn!”

“Interesting, my grandfather always put in items and potions for Crobat…” Kirigiri announced, “There was never anything in them for myself.”

“My father had a similar frame of mind, but he’d add berries he’d grown himself…” Oogami added.

“Wait… seriously!? There was supposed to be stuff in them!?” Oowada stared at them all, “We were lucky if the pokéballs hadn’t already been used!”

“W-well at least you g-got to have them!” Fukawa muttered bitterly, which Sayaka could relate to… her parents had always been too busy to organise anything like that… “And what about you Togami, w-what sort of f-fancy stuff did your parents put in them…?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Togami stated, “If I ever wanted anything, my parents gave it to me without wasting my time with whatever nonsense you’re all discussing!”

“Well, now’s your chance to learn, kiddo!” Kizakura told him, ignoring the resultant demand not to call Togami that, “Hidden through the offices are a load of pokéballs, each of which contains a picture and some info on some of the pokémon you’ll find in the power plant next door! The goal of the lesson is to work in pairs and find as many of them as possible.”

“Uhh… but won’t that mean some of us end up with less information than the others?” Makoto asked, anxiously. “And what about Kiyotaka?”

“Oh yeah, guess there’ll be one group of three as well…” Kizakura realised, “But don’t worry, I’ll give you all a sheet at the end with all the information on it anyway, so no one’s going to miss anything!”

“Then what, may I ask, is the motivation to take part in this exercise at all?” Ludenberg asked.

“I figured at least one of you would ask that, so I’ve got some prizes for the best three teams…” Kizakura told her, making her eyes light up. For someone who lived in a castle, she seemed really easy to bribe…

“Again, if there was ever something I wanted, I’d just buy it.” Togami rolled his eyes, “Forget the team of three, I’ve got more important things to be taking care of.”

“Heh… sure, you do!” Oowada smirked at him, “You’re just scared you’re gonna get your ass kicked!”

“What, by you!?” Togami sneered at him, “I doubt it!”

“Yeah, by me! Lycan’s a pro at sniffing out pokéballs!”

“You can’t be a professional at something that no one would ever pay for!” Togami scoffed.

“Uhh… But people pay for finding lost pokéballs…” Hagakure pointed out.

“Or retrieving stolen ones.” Kirigiri added, “This might seem childish, but the perception needed to find hidden items often comes in handy…”

“…Regardless, it’s not a skill I need!” Togami insisted, making his way over to a desk and setting up a laptop there.
“Alright, I guess we’re back to having just pairs, then…” Kizakura sighed, “You’ve got one hour before you need to be back here! And there’s security cameras all over the place, so no helping yourself to anything except the pokéballs… Okay, GO!”

“So… you and I are teaming up, right?” Leon checked, “Not that any of our pokémon are good for finding stuff… Litten’s better at hiding my shit so I don’t see he’s set fire to it…”

That was true, although it was still a step up from when he was openly setting fire to Leon’s things in front of him. Now he only seemed to do it if Leon left him alone for a long time… But she wasn’t too concerned with Litten right now, after all…

“We’ve not just got our pokémon today, though…” She reminded him, “And if Oowada’s Lycanroc can sniff out pokéballs, then I bet Arcanine can do the same!”

“Arc?” Arcanine lifted his head at the sound of his name.

“We’re looking for pokéballs, like this one!” Sayaka held out Arcanine’s now empty ball for him to sniff at, “So be a good boy and tell us if you smell any, okay?”

Arcanine sniffed for a moment, then nodded and started sniffing around the ground, then stopped and shook his head.

“…Guess that means there’s none in this room…” Sayaka commented.

“Well, either way, we’ll be better off spreading out to different parts of the building, rather than getting crowded in here…” Sayaka suggested, pulling Leon’s arm and signalling for Arcanine to stay at her side. “I’ve got a good feeling about… this way! Come on!”

“Alright, alright… But, y’know I’m kinda with Togami on this one… This is dumb.” Leon groused, as they made their way up the hall towards a room full of cubicles with desktop computers, “What’s the point of even coming here if we can’t go anywhere with actual pokémon yet!?”

“Well, it gives us a chance to see what to expect when we do go into the power generator areas themselves.” Sayaka tried to reason with him, “Would you rather we get attacked by Sableyes or Gastlies?”

“Still be better than this stupid scavenger hunt…” Leon muttered, “And besides, it’s that idiot’s own fault those Gastlies did a number on him! He could have left anytime, if he hadn’t got greedy and tried to catch a shiny!”

“He was just trying to scan it and see if it behaved differently from the others…” Which, in a way, he had helped do. “And besides, they managed to trick the security guards as well, so it wasn’t just him who fell for it.”

“Well… whatever, I still think its bullshit that you have to look after his dog!” Leon scowled at Arcanine, who was sniffing along the floor. “With all the stuff this school has, you’d think there’d be a day care they could shove it in.”

“Well, It’s probably better for him to be looked after by someone he knows and stick to the same routine, rather than being taken somewhere he doesn’t know while he’s already worried about his trainer being sick.”

“…Is it worried, though?” Leon asked sceptically, “I mean… it doesn’t exactly look like it’s
upset…”

“That’s only because he’s distracted right now. Didn’t you see how he was yesterday during class?”

“Uhh… no? I was nowhere near him…” Leon pointed out, “And besides, I still think it’s weird it’s willing to listen to someone who isn’t its own trainer. I mean, how bad is he if it’s just going along with whatever you tell it to.”

“Leon, Kiyotaka’s a perfectly good trainer!” Sayaka told him, again. She could understand why the pair of them didn’t get on with one another, but Leon always acted like he thought Ishimaru was torturing Arcanine behind closed doors or something ridiculous like that. “Arcanine’s only listening to me because Kiyotaka told him to!”

“Yeah, but…”

“Arc! Arcare!” Leon was interrupted by Arcanine barking excitedly and dashing off a few yards ahead of them and trying to squeeze under one of the desks, which started to tip over precariously…

“Arcanine, return!” Sayaka ordered, which Arcanine luckily followed before the computer that was on top of it toppled to the floor.

“What the hell was it doing…?” Leon muttered, as the desk thumped back into place.

“Maybe he really can pick up the smell of pokéballs… Brionne, go check under that desk, please!”

“Bri!” Brionne flew underneath for a short time, then came back out, balancing the pokéball on her nose.

“Tch… I suppose dogs have their uses, sometimes…” Leon muttered.

“Yep! We are going ace this competition!” Sayaka agreed, picking it up. “Arcanine, come out and see what you helped us find!”

“Can?” Arcanine dutifully came back out and sniffed at the ball, as she opened it up to find a laminated square of card with a picture of a Magnemite on one side and some text on the other…

“Magnemite, Electric-Steel Type. These mostly hang out in…”

“Is there any real point reading these…?” Leon interrupted her, “I mean, Kizakura said he’s gonna give us all the info anyway.”

“Oh… Good point. We’d just be wasting time if we read these all now…” Sayaka agreed, slipping the ball and card into Kiyotaka’s bag.

“Nnnn?” Arcanine whined with a confused look on his face.

“Oh! But you two did a good job finding it!” Sayaka remembered to pet him and Brionne, “Now go see if you can find us some more, okay? We need to find as many as we can! And Brionne, you help him get out any that are in small spots!”

“Arc!”, “Bri!” The two pokémon headed off excitedly.

“Lil…?”

“Ah!” Leon jumped slightly as he realised his own pokémon was out of his pokéball again, “What, you wanna go help as well?”
“Ten!” Litten nodded excitedly.

“Alright, but make sure you stick with Brionne!” Leon insisted. Probably so she could put out any fires Litten decided to start, “Got it?”

“Ten!” Litten scampered off after them…

An hour later, they had so many pokéballs that Kiyotaka’s bag was completely full, even with them all in compact mode… They must have ended up with at least forty of them, even though towards the end of the lesson, Arcanine had started finding spots where the pokéballs had been picked up by other people and had come back with bits of stationary instead. At least Sayaka assumed that was what had happened. It was either that, or they’d found the desk belonging to the staff member who’d had to set this whole lesson up.

Still, she reckoned they must have done well… and Leon was just happy that Litten had gone all that time without burning anything! It would be interesting to see how everyone else had done back at the lobby…

Hmm… from the look of it, most of the pairs had returned and collect between ten and twenty pokéballs each, although the pile Fujisaki was counting through was probably about the same as she and Leon had managed to collect. It was still dwarfed by the size of the one Makoto and Kirigiri had sat between them, though…

“58…59… 60… 61… 62!” Makoto finished counting, just as they arrived, although he looked pretty embarrassed about how well he’d done. “We, uhh… we’ve got 62 altogether…”

“I still say this is fucking bullshit!” Oowada snapped at the result.

“Like I said, all I did was have my pokémon find the pokéballs and bring them to me, same as you…” Kirigiri shrugged at.

“But you didn’t even leave the fucking lobby!”

“You didn’t need to either, you could have sent your Lycanroc off to search by itself, if you’d wanted…”

“…What’s going on…?” Sayaka quietly asked Hina, while Oowada and Kirigiri continued to argue about it.

“She had her Crobat use sonar to find the balls and her Kadabra teleport them all to her, so she and Makoto never actually did any exploring…” Hina explained, “I mean, I see Oowada’s point, but Kizakura already said there was nothing in the rules against it, so…”

…So there wasn’t much Oowada could do about it, which was probably just making him angrier about not winning.

“Well… at least we got forty-one!” Fujisaki tried to cheer him up, “That should put us in second place!”

“Tch… Well, being the best outta the people who did this the right way ain’t too…”

“Heh, sorry guys, but Sayaka and I have got you beat!” Leon announced, at the worst time possible.
“The hell!? How did you find that many of ‘em!?” Oowada asked irritably, “You ain’t got any pokémon that are worth a crap at tracking stuff…”

“Well… not usually… But seeing as I’m looking after Arcanine today…” Sayaka explained, tipping out Kiyotaka’s bag in a shower of pokéballs and cards… along with Kiyotaka’s berry case, some cans of repel, a rope and a pair of shades, which she quickly picked up and put back in the bag, while Arcanine yelped and started piling up all the cards and balls that were starting to roll away.

“Pfft! Please, that dumb thing ain’t gonna have found more than Lycan!” Oowada scoffed.

“Well… I dunno, it does look like they got a few more than us…” Fujisaki admitted, anxiously.

“That’s just ‘cause they got em all in a big pile!” Oowada was still in denial.

“Well, we’ll sort em all out then!” Leon insisted, “1… 2… 3…”

“…41… 42… 43… 44… 45! Hah!” Leon laughed, as he finished counting and Oowada glared at him.

“Umm… well, third place still gets a prize, right, sir?” Fujisaki asked, timidly.

“Yep! For third place, you two get…” Kizakura reached into a carrier bag and held something out to the pair of them… “This! A bag of chocolate pokémon to share between you!”

“…Better than nothing, I guess… even if it is meant for little kids…” Oowada muttered, snatching the bag off of him in a way that made her wonder if he wasn’t secretly pleased to have some of them after the conversation earlier.

“And, for coming in second place, Maizono and Kuwata get a bag of chocolate pokémon each!”

“Hah! Just like my family always did!” Yamada announced, noticing the large chocolate Pikachu and Magnemite inside them.

“Wait… all the prizes were just chocolate!?” Enoshima moaned, “Geez, I wouldn’t have even bothered getting this useless pokédex to try and look for ‘em if I’d known that!”

“Yeah! And I wouldn’t have given myself a headache doing all od those predicitions!” Hagakure agreed.

“Most of those stupid predictions were wrong any…”

“Yeah, well no fair giving out good prizes if a bunch of us are gonna cheat…” Oowada grumbled, cutting off Fukawa while shooting dirty looks at Kirigiri and Leon…

“Fuckin'teleportingshitandusingotherpeople's pokémon…”

“Ah, c’mon man! It’s not like I’m not gonna end up sharing these with you two anyway!” Leon pointed out.
“And I’ll probably give these to Kiyotaka, seeing as Arcanine did most of the work!” Sayaka admitted.

“Hmm personally I prefer my chocolate to be in small piece, anyway.” Kirigiri stated, “Would you want to trade your team’s prize for my one? You’d get more chocolate and I’d…”

“I don’t care how much chocolate I got, it’s you winning without even leaving the damn room that’s pissing me off!” Oowada snapped… Hoo, boy! If he was being this much of a sore loser over it. It was probably just as well Kiyotaka wasn’t here, given how they’d acted about the hole digging competition…

“Uhh… It… did kind of defeat the purpose of this being a lesson on exploring…” Makoto agreed, hesitantly, “After all, neither of us know anything about this building, now…”

“…I suppose it’s true that I was acting within the rules as written, as opposed to the spirit of them.” Kirigiri sighed reluctantly, “How about this: Next time, I’ll won’t have my pokémon teleport any pokéball from a room that I’m not in myself.”

“…Fine.” Oowada huffed, “…Not like it matters anyway…”

“Alright, well, now that’s all sorted, I’m going to need all the pokéballs back!” Kizakura told them all, pointing at a large basket at the side of the lobby. “You can keep the info cards if you want, but as I said earlier, these is also a sheet with the combined information for you to pick up before leaving!”

…It was quick work getting the pokémon to help move the balls over to the basket so she and Leon could put them all in, even though Litten seemed more interested in chasing them around the room, and Arcanine insisted on picking them up in his mouth one-by-one, instead of rolling them over like Brionne and Luxray were doing. Then she just had to make sure to pick up an extra copy of the factsheet to give to Kiyotaka, and she and Leon were good to go…!

“Can! Cannnn!” Or… not, apparently, as Arcanine was sat whining at the pile of cards they’d left on floor…

“Oh, right. We should probably pick those up…” It wasn’t really fair to make someone else do it for her.

“Arc!” Arcanine agreed, as she bent down to pick them up, then suddenly opened the flap on Kiyotaka’s bag and pointed his nose inside.

Ah… It seemed he hadn’t understood that Kiyotaka didn’t really need to read all of these. But it’d probably be easier to play along with him and just let Kiyotaka know the information was all on the sheet anyway…

“Alright! We’ll take them back for Kiyotaka to read!” Sayaka agreed.

“…Arc…” Arcanine let out something that was more like a sigh than a bark. Perhaps she shouldn’t have reminded him about Kiyotaka…

By the time the day’s classes ended, she realised she really shouldn’t have reminded Arcanine about Kiyotaka. He ended up spending the whole of the afternoon classes staring forlornly into Kiyotaka’s bag, for a start… He must really be missing the guy… He hadn’t seem him for a day and half now, and given how close they usually were…
“Hey… Arcanine? He might not be awake yet, but… Do you want to see how Kiyotaka is, before we go eat…?”

“Arc!” Arcanine nodded eagerly, picking up the exploration bag in his mouth and trotting over to her side.

“Aright then, this way!” She started heading back to the medical centre, where the receptionist told her that Kiyotaka was getting more restless, but hadn’t woken up yet, before letting her and Arcanine back into the dark room.

“Arc!” Arcanine ran off ahead of her again, and was already up and nuzzling Kiyotaka’s face anxiously when she caught up with him…

Hmm… On second thoughts, maybe this hadn’t been the best idea, after all. If Kiyotaka was just going to lie there asleep, it might make Arcanine even more worried about…

“Ngghh…” Sayaka jumped as there was a groan from the bed, “Ar…Arcanine…?”

“Arc!” Arcanine answered him happily, starting to lick his face. “Arc can nine!”

“Ah… haha…” Kiyotaka stroked him haphazardly, as he started to blink himself awake, “…What happened…? This isn’t my room…”

“It’s a special ghost-proof room in the medical centre, because you collapsed from life-force deprivation after spending too much time near those Gastlies.” Sayaka summarised for him, “I’ve been looking after Arcanine for you.”

“Argh… I… I remember now…” Kiyotaka pinched the bridge of his nose, “Thank you for that…”

“It’s no problem!” Sayaka told him, putting them down along with the chocolate pokémon. “I also brought you some notes from class! I’ll just put them on the table here!”

“Ah… thank you again!” The mention of school seemed to wake him up even more, and he pushed himself up against the pillows so he was high enough to see the pile of paper she’d brought over the last two days, which only made him look worried. ‘I see I’ve certainly got a lot to read!’

“Well, you've got a…”

“Arc!” Arcanine suddenly interrupted her attempt to calm him down by dropping his bag in his lap, and then getting out one of the info cards from this morning and holding it out to him…

“Ah… What’s this…?” Kiyotaka took it off of him, furrowing his brow at the picture and the then turning it over to read the back side. “‘Torkoal, Fire type. Hope’s Peak no longer uses coal to generate electricity. It’s only use now is to keep the small colony of Torkoals, which live in the old coal-fired power station, mobile.’…?”

“Arc! Arc can!” Arcanine licked his face happily, then nosed into the bag and handed him another card…

“Oh… Another one? Let’s see… ’Togedemaru… Electric-Steel Type… Usually friendly, but beware its prickly spikes if it becomes surprised or agitated.’ Well, that’s certainly useful advice! But…”

“Arc!” Arcanine cut him off by thrusting another card into his hands…
“Ahh… alright: ‘Dedenne… Electric-Fairy Type. Last year the population of Dedenne in the power
plant increased dramatically, affecting the overall ecosystem. Students are actively encouraged
to battle them.’ Err… How many of these are there…?” Kiyotaka asked, as Arcanine excitedly
dropped several more in his lap, “And where did you get them all?”

“There should be forty-five of them… We had a pokéball hunt to teach us about the power plant area
today, and these were the ones Arcanine found for me and Leon…”

“Ah… I see! Well, I understand that you want to know what it is you’ve helped find…” Kiyotaka
scratched the top of Arcanine’s head, “But… I’m feeling too tired to read all of these right now… So
pick two more for me to read now, and then we’ll leave the rest for another time, alright…?”

*Oh… so that* was why Arcanine had wanted to keep the cards, not just because he was worried
about Kiyotaka’s schoolwork…

“Unless… Are these all things I need to know before tomorrow’s lesson in the power plant!?”
Kiyotaka asked, obviously beginning to panic.

“Ah… no… the power plant lesson was *today…*” Sayaka told him, “You’ve been asleep for two
days’ worth of lessons…”

“What?! Ah… I can’t afford to be sitting around here in *bed*, then!” Kiyotaka started to straighten
himself up even more, although he was struggling to do it. “I need to catch up with my notes before
tomorrow classes…”

“Nine!” Arcanine growled, using the top half of his body to pin Kiyotaka to the bed.

“Ah… Alright, I’ll read the two cards and then I’ve got to catch up with my notes before tomorrow’s
classes…”

“Nine!” Arcanine refused to move, causing Kiyotaka to let out a frustrated sigh.

“He’s right, actually! Kizakura said you’ve got to stay in bed until after the weekend!” Sayaka told
him, “…*And* miss a weeks’ worth of classes.”

“What… A week…!? But… I don’t feel *that* bad…” It sounded like he was really was going to try
talk his way out of it, like Kizakura had expected…

“Wasn’t that what you told your father Tuesday night?” Sayaka reminded him, “Before *falling
unconscious for a day and a half* the next morning…”

“Well… *yes, but I…*” Whatever he was about to say, he suddenly thought better of it and started
slowly stroking his dog’s back instead. “…I guess Father must have been worried… and Arcanine as
well… And *possibly* yourself, when you found me on the floor…?”

“Yes… Not to mention everyone else in class, when they all found your door broken open and a
huge mess inside there.” Sayaka added, “*And* Kizakura, once he found out you spent *five times* the
limit chasing that shiny Gastly!”

“…Oh.” Was all he had to say. He looked pretty shocked at the idea of everyone worrying about
him.

“…What were you thinking, even?” Sayaka asked him, “If it had been anyone else, you’d have been
the one dragging them away the *second* they’d spent fifteen minutes there!”
“I know, it’s just… At fifteen minutes, I still felt alright and convinced myself the shorter time limit was just the school being paranoid… then at thirty minutes I still felt alright… and I thought I was so close, it’d only be a few minutes more and… and it wouldn’t matter if my health suffered a little, if it meant helping to answer an age-old question, so then I stayed another few minutes more, and then another…” Kiyotaka admitted, guiltily. “…It never occurred to me that I’d make everyone worry…”

“Well… it’d probably make them worry a lot less if you actually rested like you’ve been told to, instead of trying to force yourself back to class before you’re actually ready!” Sayaka pointed out, “We’ll bring you our notes so you don’t fall behind.”

“But…!”

“Can…?” Kiyotaka flinched as his dog whined pleadingly at him.

“Ahh… alright… I’ll wait for a week before going to class…” He sighed, “But do you think I could at least rest in my own room, so I can look after Arcanine for myself?”

Well… that would make her life easier… “I’ll ask the nurse.”

“Thank you… And thanks again for taking care of Arcanine!” Kiyotaka told her.

“It was no problem!” Sayaka reminded him, “Just do me a favour and don’t do anything that’ll make me have to do it again!”

“…Alright! I’ll… try to prioritise my own health more, in future!” Kiyotaka told her…

Now she just had to hope he actually did…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next week, Taka will be back in his lessons!
To catch them is...? (Taka POV) pt.1

Chapter Notes

I had a new headcannon for this AU (which was sort of brought up in chapter 44) That rather than have chivalry be a male-female dynamic, it a dynamic between stronger-weaker pokémon trainers. (So trainers with strong pokémon are expected to be polite and helpful to those with weaker pokémon, and threatening someone with significantly weaker pokémon than you is considered the height of assholery.)

Tuesday, 3:04pm… Less than five minutes after the last time Kiyotaka had checked the time on his pokédex!

He’d never realized being ill was so boring! Not that he’d ever wanted to be sick, but that was because he’d always assumed it would be painful, or uncomfortable, at the very least! Not just… irritatingly dull!

If only he could go out for a walk, or something. But one of the stipulations of being allowed back in his room to recover was that he wasn’t to leave it unnecessarily. And Kizakura had obviously never had to look after a dog before, because he’d decreed that taking Arcanine out for exercise didn’t count!

And neither did getting to talk to other people… He hadn’t realized how used he was getting to having so many people to talk to at school now, until it’d been taken away from him.

Not that he’d not seen any of his friends at all! Several of them had organized a rota to pop in between classes and check up on him during the day on Friday, when he’d still slept for several hours. And he’d seen them at mealtimes, and Makoto had come along with several other members of the class and a couple of movies to watch on Saturday evening, while their pokémon played together. Plus he’d still been able to take part in the usual post-pokéathlon bath and breakfast despite not being allowed to do the any of the sports themselves.

But he hadn’t been able to take part in the tournament Makoto and he had organized on Saturday morning, or so much as go and help read out the instructions on the sprinkler system they’d planned to install in the school garden yesterday afternoon! And today and yesterday had been particularly frustrating, as he felt well enough to have at least gone to class and take his own notes, but still had to stay in his room and rely on his classmates to let them borrow their notes instead! All while he and Arcanine gradually became more and more stir-crazy…

To the point where, right now, Arcanine was reduced to distracting himself by turning around in circles…
Well… he didn’t really have anything left to study from yesterday’s class notes, and he’d already done his maximum amount of push-up and sit-ups for now, according to the workout schedule Nekomaru had given him to help him build his strength back up. He might as well try and help Arcanine work off his built-up energy…

“Hey, Arcanine?” Kiyotaka called him, just as he was stepping side-to-side and spinning around yet again. “Do you want to get your toys out and play for a bit?”

“Arc!” Arcanine stopped and nodded, racing over to his bag of toys and bringing a small rope tied into two loops over to him.

“You want to play Tug of War?” Kiyotaka asked, and Arcanine nodded, already having his mouth closed around one of the loops, so Kiyotaka could grab the other one. “Alright… Ready… Set… GO… Aaah!”

Even having braced himself against the inevitable pull from Arcanine, Kiyotaka still found himself lurching forward, until he toppled over into Arcanine.


“Ah… I’m alright!” Kiyotaka pushed himself back to a standing position, “I just wasn’t expecting that! But you won’t get me so easily next time!”

“…Arc.” Arcanine nodded, letting him get a grib and on the rope and make sure he was definitely braced this time…

“Alright… Ready, set, GO!” Kiyotaka ordered again, straining on the rope with all his might, but failing to budge it an inch, because Arcanine was…

…Sat perfectly still, calmly watching him struggle fruitlessly without having to do anything other than grip the rope in his teeth.

“You’re… not even having to try, are you…?” Kiyotaka realized. Obviously he’d never been stronger than Arcanine, but usually Arcanine had to actually pull back against him in order to win! “Perhaps I’m still too weak for Tug of War… how about fetch instead?”

“Arcan!” Arcanine agreed, carrying the rope back to his bag and coming back with a ball instead, while Kiyotaka perched on the edge of the bed to catch his breath.

“Good boy…! Now… Fetch!” Kiyotaka took the ball and threw it, only for Arcanine to jump up and catch it easily. Hmm… either he’d got better at catching, or Kiyotaka was throwing slower…

“Good boy! Nice catch!” Kiyotaka praised him regardless, as Arcanine returned the ball. “Let’s see if you can catch this one!”

This time he tried to throw the ball around Arcanine, so he’d at least have to run to the other side of the room to bring it back… but Arcanine still managed to snap his head to the side and catch it…

“Ah… Well done!” Kiyotaka took the ball back, starting to feel rather embarrassed now, “Let’s see how you handle a fast one!”

This time he put as much force into throwing the ball as high and fast as he could, to the point where it actually made his arm hurt slightly… But Arcanine still managed to jump up and catch it as it travelled over his head!
“Hah! Well done again! That was very impressive!” Kiyotaka told him, rubbing the soreness out of his arm so he could try again…

“Can…?” But instead of giving him back the ball, Arcanine pressed it up against the arm Kiyotaka was massaging.

“Oh, this? My arm’s just a little tired from the push-ups!” Kiyotaka scratched his head, “Now, how about you give me the ball so I can try again?”

“Arrrr… nine.” Arcanine shook his head after considering it for a moment, before heading back off to his bag and returning with a mouthful of laminated plastic.

“You want me to read another of your trivia cards?” Kiyotaka took it out of his mouth.

“Arc!” Arcanine nodded, and jumped up on the bed next to him, looking at his legs expectantly…

“Ah… excuse me? Who said you could sit on the bed!? I’m perfectly fine sitting like this!” Kiyotaka told him, although Arcanine just whined at him anxiously.

Great… so much for burning off Arcanine’s energy. All he’d done was just make his dog worry about him again…

“Well, we can sit in the bed for a bit…” Kiyotaka sighed, moving up against the headrest and holding the card out so Arcanine could look at the picture of the white and blue squirrel on the front before he read he back… “Pachirisu doesn’t evolve, so while catching one will give… your team a powerful boost in the short-term, it may start to fall behind in the future…”

…His team!? Arrgh! He still hadn’t done anything about getting a second pokémon, had he!? And it was only a few weeks until the end of term! Why hadn’t he so much as thought about what he’d catch yet!?

Well… mostly because he’d been in the mindset that he’d be able to go explore the wild areas and find something he wanted to catch out there… but he’d been through them all several times now, and hadn’t seen anything that caught his attention yet! Which just meant that he really ought to have started researching the pokémon available for him to catch and narrowing down his choices before now…

Well, no time like the present! Arcanine had jumped off the bed to go fetch another card, so now he had the chance to quickly check his pokédex and see which ones he actually had a chance to try and catch here at the school…

Hmm… he had over seventy pokémon registered in his pokédex now! And even if he took out the few that he’d only seen back in Kanto, the ones belonging to his friends and father, the fire-types, evolved ones and Scythers, this was still going to be a lot of pokémon to sort through! How was he ever supposed to pick just one to try and catch…?

*Ding dong…* Ah… well, he’d just have to consider that after he saw whoever was at the door!

“Arc! Arcarc!” Arcanine barked excitedly at the sound of the doorbell and rushed over to the door, before turning to look back at Kiyotaka… “Can!”

“Ahaha… yes, you can open the door!” Kiyotaka told him, getting up from his chair and making his way over himself.

“Arc!” Arcanine nodded, before concentrating and blowing a small flame out of his mouth, aimed
directly at the door handle…

*Click.*

…Which caused the new heat-sensitive mechanism to unlock, letting Arcanine pull at the door handle with his mouth to open it.

Incredible invention, really. If he’d know it was possible to have pokémon-activated locks put in, he’d have requested one for Arcanine at the beginning of term… and then he wouldn’t have caused everyone quite as much trouble as he did by falling unconscious while he was locked in here.

Of course, it did now mean that his door could theoretically be opened by any fire-type pokémon, so he still had to make it look as if he’d been the one to unlock it, regardless of how much Arcanine wanted to practice his new trick! Which was why he made sure he was right at the door when Arcanine pulled it open to reveal Makoto, yawning with one hand and holding several sheets of paper with the other…

“Makoto! Are you alright?!” Surely he wouldn’t have been reckless enough to get affected by ghosts, right after Kiyotaka had, would he? Although, with the way his luck was, sometimes…

“Ah… sorry about that!” Makoto finished his yawn, “We had a night-time lesson in fields yesterday.”

Of course, that. Their one opportunity this term to see what types of pokémon roamed the fields at night time… and he’d missed it. And he was going to miss seeing the lake tonight, as well. And the most irritating part was that he didn’t have anyone to blame but himself, for getting so caught up in gambling his life energy that he’d ignored the health and safety rules! If anything, missing two opportunities to discover more pokémon was a fitting punishment for having been so greedy and making everyone worry for him.

“I see! Well, I hope it all went smoothly, otherwise!” Which was why he did his best to hide his jealously over it.

“Yeah, it did thanks! No crazy stuff like you all disappearing!” Makoto joked, although he and several other members of the class had been very worried about their Zorua-induced absence from the end of the class. “Although it does mean there’s not much in the way of notes from class today…”

“WHAT!? You mean people decided to sleep in instead of going to class!?!”

“N-no! I meant because Kizakura gave us the morning off!” Makoto exclaimed, “Because we’ve got another class tonight…”

“Oh… well, in that case, I guess I’ll have to find something else to occupy myself with, this evening…” Kiyotaka conceded, taking the papers off of his hands, “Thank you for helping me with all of this! And I’m very sorry for causing you trouble in the first place!”

“Ahh, don’t worry about it! You helped me out before, remember!?” Makoto insisted, although that had been a completely different scenario which was in no way Makoto’s fault! “And to be honest, I’d have probably ended up doing the same thing as you if I’d come across a shiny Gastly…”

“I suppose…” It seemed as if the only person who wouldn’t have was Ludenberg… probably why the Gastly had been begging her specifically to catch it. “Well, I hope tonight’s lesson goes just as well for you all as yesterday’s did!”
“Thanks… But, you know, if you’re getting bored here in your room… why don’t you come to tonight’s class?” Makoto asked, “I mean… you seem like you’re perfectly well, now!”

“That’s not quite true… I’m still getting a little more worn-out from exercise than I would have before.” Kiyotaka admitted, “I doubt I’d manage to row a boat by myself.”

“But you could team up with someone else, or just stay at the water’s edge!” Makoto suggested.

“Perhaps… but I was still ordered to miss a week’s worth of classes!” He pointed out, “And I think I’ve ignored enough orders for one term!”

“Yeah, but… technically speaking, you have missed a week’s worth of classes!” Makoto argued, “You’ve not been in class since last Tuesday afternoon, so you should be free to come to class now, right?”

“That’s…” Well, Makoto had a point. He’d missed one normal week’s worth of classes, but… “I don’t think that’s what Kizakura meant!”

“Maybe not… but you could always come along at the start of class and ask him if it’s alright to come along!” Makoto suggested, “Just in case it turns out you could do?”

“Hmm…” On the one hand, he highly expected Kizakura to say no, and be irritated by what would appear to be an attempt to worm his way out of his punishment… But on the other hand, tonight was their one chance to see the water pokémon at night before they had to have caught their second pokémon! What if there was something out there that would want him to catch it…!? “…What do you think, Arcanine? Would you like to go exploring outside tonight…?”

“Arc!” Arcanine jumped happily, and rushed off to the back of the room to grab the exploration bag.

“Ah… I didn’t mean right now! I have to do my homework first! It’ll be after dinner!” Kiyotaka pointed out, to calm him down. “But I suppose I will be giving it a try, at least…”

“Alright! Good luck, Kiyotaka!” Makoto told him, as he turned to leave. “We’re meeting in the homeroom classroom at 9:30pm!”

“I’ll see you there!” Kiyotaka promised, before shutting the door. Even if he got scolded for returning to class too early and had to come back straight away, at least it would be an excuse to leave his room! “Hmm… now… what was I doing…?”

“So!” Arcanine ran back to his part of the room for a moment, then returned with a mouthful of cards.

“Ah, right! I was reading to you!” Kiyotaka remembered. And then once he’d read a few cards, he could look over the notes Makoto had given him and make sure he was completely ready before going out tonight…

Well… it was 9:15pm now. And he’d managed to look over all the notes from class and complete all of the homework tasks! Not to mention he’d had a good, healthy dinner and felt absolutely no desire to sleep, or stay in his room any longer!

…So why was it that he was hesitating to actually head into class? Makoto’s logic was sound, and even if Kiyotaka wasn’t going to be allowed to go outside with the others, Kizakura could hardly punish him for coming along just to check the matter with him!
...Could he? What if he actually could? What if he decided Kiyotaka needed to miss another class, to make up for having come out of this room unnecessarily? Perhaps he would be better off going back before any of the staff realised he'd...

“Arr?” Arcanine yipped softly at him, as he stood at the door to the classroom contemplating his options. “Arc! Arcarc!”

Wait... what was he suddenly so excited about...? And why was he staring at the door and breathing in like that...

AH! He was going to try and open the door the same way he could open Kiyotaka’s...!

“Nonononono!” Kiyotaka waved his hands in front of Arcanine’s face to distract him, before he burnt up even more school property! “That only works on our door!”

“Niin?” Arcanine hung his head down dejectedly.

“Yes... this door just opens by pressing the handle down!” Kiyotaka showed him by pressing it down and opening the door, “See?”

“Cannn...” Arcanine stared at it thoughtfully...

“Oh, Kiyotaka!”...Curses! Sayaka and Makoto were already in here! And looking towards the back of the room, so were Sakura Hina and Kirgiri! A whole five people witnessing his breaking orders!

“So, Makoto managed to convince you to come along tonight after all!”

“You thought I was lying?” Makoto asked her.

“Of course not! I just thought Kiyotaka might have second thoughts about it!” Sayaka replied, giving Kiyotaka an idea for how he could get away with this...

“Err... Actually! I did think better of coming to tonight’s class, once Makoto left...” Which was sort-of true, “But as I’d told Makoto I would be here, I thought I ought to inform him that I won’t be coming, just so he didn’t worry about it!”

“Oh... really!?” Makoto looked disappointed.

“Is that just because you don’t think you can manage the boats!?” Hina asked, “Because if that’s it, you could pair up with Sakura! She’d be able to row you around, even with Arcanine on board! Right, Sakura?”

“Indeed, that would be a simple task...” Sakura agreed.

“Ah... Thank you for the offer, but it’s not the boats that was worrying me!” Kiyotaka told them.

“Oh... is your health still so poor you can’t manage to go outside at all?” Sakura asked, looking concerned about him.

“No! It’s not that, either!”

“Then... why not come to class?” Makoto asked.

“Err... Well...” Kiyotaka hesitated. He didn’t want to say he thought Makoto’s idea might get him into trouble... but...

“...Are you worried that Kizakura might punish you for trying to argue your way in here by making
you miss even more classes?” Sayaka asked.

_Haahh…_ There was no point trying to hide it _now_… “…Yes.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that.” Kirigiri piped up from the back of the room, “The school takes a poor view of teachers _discouraging_ students from attending class. So it wouldn’t look good for him if he kept refusing to teach you… even if it _is_ the most effective punishment in your case.”

“Ah… you’re sure of that?” Kiyotaka checked, to which she nodded. “Well… if _that’s_ the case, then I guess I may as well _ask._” Kiyotaka decided, heading over to his usual seat. If all Kizakura could do was give him detentions and the like, then there wasn’t really much to lose if Makoto was wrong…

The rest of the class filtered in over the next few minutes, most taking note of his own attendance in some way or another… Yamada and Hagakure both told him it was good to see him again, as it had been quiet without him in class. Togami and Fujisaki commented that they hadn’t been expecting to see him until tomorrow, before sitting down and working on some files and their pokédex, respectively. Kuwata and Oowada groaned when they saw him, but made no comment, possibly because other members of the class had glared at them.

Ludenberg and Fukawa didn’t make any comments about him being there either, although they _did_ seem to be trying to keep their Gastly and Garbodor as far away from him as possible, perhaps because they were worried he might still be sensitive to ghost or poison types? He’d have to try and convince them not to worry about it, just for _his_ sake…!

In fact, the only students who didn’t notice his return to class as they entered were the two twins, mostly because Enoshima was having an argument with her pokédex, as if it was a real person or something…

“Well, why do you even have a software update!? I thought the whole _point_ of you was not having to worry about that sort of crap!”

’ _I’m sorry, I’m still in testing, and some of the tests highlighted a problem with my software!_’” The pokédex responded, sounding startlingly like it _was_ a real person. ’ _But there’s a new update to my system available! It’s highly recommended that you go into settings and run it!’

“Whatever, you seem to be working fine to me.” Enoshima shrugged, “You can still scan stuff and everything, right?”

’ _Yes… but there’s a new update to my system available! It’s highly recommended that you go into settings and run it!’

“Yes, I _KNOW_! You already _told_ me that, like _ten times_ now!” Enoshima snapped, “Are you just gonna keep saying that over and over until I _do_ run the update!?”

’ _…There’s a new update to my system available! It’s highly recommended that you go into settings and run it!’ …Was it just him, or did the pokédex sound a little on the apologetic side that time? But that couldn’t possibly be the case, could it? It _was_ just a machine, after all…

’ _Uuurgggghhh…!’ _Although he still felt a little sorry for it, being on the receiving end of Enoshima’s angry growl… “Can I go into settings and tell you to shut _up_ about this!”?

’ _No, I’m afraid not… But you can go into settings and run my new system update!’

“Or maybe I can just _throw you against the wall_ for being such a _pain in the ass_!”
‘It’s highly recommended NOT to damage my outer casing…’ The pokédex replied, ‘It’s also highly recommended that you go into settings and run my new system up…!’

“Arrrggghh…!” Enoshima wound her arm backwards… wait, she wasn’t really going to throw it, was she!?

“Umm… hold on a minute, Enoshima!” Fujisaki cried, “I know a way to get it to stop bothering you with the updates!”

“If you’re about to tell me to just run the thing, then no!” Enoshima insisted, although she did at least put the pokédex down, “I’m not being bossed around by a damn pokédex!”

“Umm… no, it’s not that…” Fujisaki told her, “There’s something you can usually do to get it to permanently stop asking you about new updates… if you let me check your pokédex, I can…”

“Nope!” Enoshima picked up the pokédex and held it close to her chest, as if hiding it from Fujisaki for some reason. “But you can tell me where this option is!”

“Umm… alright. Now, this might seem a bit odd, but you need to go into the software update and agree to run it…” Fujisaki started, “But then cancel out of it once it starts. At that point it’ll ask when you want to reschedule the update, and then you can set it to run the update at some time like… 4am in the year four thousand, for example.”

“Oh, nice!” Enoshima grinned, tapping at the pokédex for a moment, before suddenly scowling at it instead… “Hey… wait… how do I cancel it!?"

“Umm… it should say cancel on the screen…” Fujisaki told her, “Usually on the bottom right…”

“Well, it’s not there!” Enoshima angrily gestured at her pokédex, before its screen shut off, “And now I can’t even do anything with it!”

“Oh… I’m sorry! I guess maybe the guys you’re promoting it for changed that…” Fujisaki suggested, looking down at the floor embarrassed.

“Oh, the hell they did! You just tricked me into updating my pokédex, you little…”

“The hell’s it matter if they did!?” Oowada yelled at her from the back of the class, “It was that or watch you smash up your damn pokédex like a spoilt kid!”

“So!? It’s my pokédex, I can smash it if I want!” Enoshima retorted childishly, “Besides, what kind of trainer yells at someone who’s pokémon at that much weaker than theirs…?”

“Uhgh…! I… I wasn’t…” Oowada cringed, looking around the class guiltily. “I just…”

“Well you well gonna yell at Chihiro, and their pokémon are weaker than yours… For now, anyway.” Kuwata argued, “Besides, it’s not that much of a pain to just let it update when it needs to!”

Well, that was a significantly change in his attitude since the beginning of term! It seemed Sayaka and Fujisaki were both having a good impression on him! And it was good that Oowada had stood up for the programmer as well… Now if only the pair of them weren’t so adamant in their refusal to have anything to do with Kiyotaka…

“Fine… Whatever…” Enoshima sat down in her chair, sulking. “I’m keeping an eye on you, though.”
Fujisaki flinched a little, looking guilty even though they hadn’t really done anything wrong, but then returned to typing away on their pokédex while the rest of the class descending into uncomfortable silence, until…

‘Hello! Thank you for keeping up to date with my software updates! This new update fixed some minor issues with my data storage, but I can now confirm I will be working at full capacity from now on!’ The pokédex suddenly announced, barely two minutes after Enoshima started the update.

“So, does that mean you’re finally ready for class?” She asked it, as if she hadn’t wasted more time by refusing to just run the update in the first place…

‘I’m ready to help with whatever you have planned, trainer!’ The pokédex replied, “But I’m afraid my battery is down to 20%!”

“Well, whatever, wasn’t planning on using you that much!” Really!? Then why was she so annoyed about it all, then!? “Muku, be a dear hold this for me, will you?”

“Oh! Okay, Junko!” Ikusaba complied as readily as she always did, “Hmm… it seems a little warm…”

“So…?”

“Umm… Well, equipment overheating isn’t usually a good thing…” Ikusaba explained, “Pokédex, status report!”

‘I feel great, thanks for asking!’

“See? It’s fine! Quit worrying!” Enoshima ordered.

“Oh…ok!” Ikusaba turned the screen off and clipped it to her belt, “Maybe it just got effected by one of the ghosts…”

A ghost effecting the pokédex!? That was a bit of an odd conclusion for her to come to! It might have made sense if there was a Rotom around, but the only Ghost types in the class were Fujisaki’s Golett, Hagakure’s Sandygast and Ludenberg’s new Gastly…

Hmm… was it possible that a shiny Gastly could have that kind of effect on technology? It didn’t seem likely, but there were odder changes to pokémon found in Alola, so perhaps whatever physiological variation had led to the Gastly being a different colour had also lead to it having an effect on machinery? But, then again, Ludenberg hadn’t been particularly close to Enoshima and her pokédex, so…

“Feeling jealous, Kiyotaka…?” An innocuous-sounding question from Makoto derailed his train of thought…

“Err… Of what…?” Kiyotaka asked, “…Ludenberg’s Gastly…?”

“Uhh… I actually meant of Enoshima’s new pokédex…” Makoto looked confused, probably because Kiyotaka hadn’t been looking anywhere near the ghost. “But I’m guessing that’s not the case either, haha…”

“No! Not at all! My refurbished pokédex is serving me fantastically well!” Kiyotaka told him, “Honestly, I don’t think I’d want to use a pokédex that was that smart… What if it got annoyed with how much work I’d have it do?”
“Uhh… I guess, but it’s just an AI…” Makoto said, which made no sense to him whatsoever… “…You know, Artificial Intelligence? It’s… it’s just really cleverly programmed software! It’s not, like… there’s a little person in there that’ll get annoyed with you if you ask it to do too much!”

“I suppose…” Aside from Rotoms, there was no way for anything to live inside a *machine*, as far as he was aware, and it’s not like Enoshima would have one of *them*! “But I think I’d still prefer a pokédex that just *beeps* at me, if I forget to charge it.”

“…Have you ever forgotten to charge your pokédex?” Makoto asked, jokingly.

Hmm… now *that* was an interesting question…

“Alright kids, congratz on staying awake so long twice in a row!” …One that would have to wait, as their teacher had finally arrived! “…Ishimaru, what are you doing here?”

“Err…” The irritated look on Kizakura’s face was giving him the distinct impression that Makoto’s logic wasn’t going to work. “I was told I’d have to have a week off of school, and technically speaking I’ve not been in class since last Tuesday afternoon, so…”

“*Technically speaking*…?” Kizakura raised both eyebrows and smirked at the rest of the class, “Alright, who gave him *that* idea?”

“What makes you think I didn’t…!?"’ I did.” Makoto cut him off, and Kizakura switched his attention to him. “Uhh… I mean, he seems alright now! And it’d be a shame if missed this, when it’s the only time we’ll be doing it this term…”

“Alright… so, you’re back at 100%, Ishimaru?” Kizakura asked him, “Completely recovered, and capable of rowing a boat?”

“N-no, not quite. I was thinking I’d either take a boat with someone else, or stay at the side of the water…” Kiyotaka admitted, “But, if you don’t think that’s good enough, then I’ll head back to my room immediately, sir!”

“…Although, if being able to row the boats by ourselves was a requirement for this class, *most* of us would be illegible.” Ludenberg pointed out.

“Heh… well, you got me there! That was mostly just to check that Ishimaru wasn’t planning on lying to me again.” Kizakura admitted, “But seeing as you were sensible enough to admit you still not at your peak, you can come along with me in the motorboat… Just keep in mind that I’ll need to watch over the rest of the class, so I can’t guarantee we’ll be able to go wherever you want.”

“Ah, thank you, sir!” *Finally* he’d be able to go outside and *do* something!

…Now, if only he didn’t have the nagging feeling that he’d forgotten about something…
‘Surksit gather on puddles after evening downpours, gliding across the surface of water as if sliding. It secretes honey with a sweet aroma from its head…’ Kiyotaka’s pokédex announced, as he scanned a small insect that had just skimmed past the side of the motorboat he was currently being ferried around in...

‘Can…?’ Arcanine switched from sitting in the breeze from the boat with his mouth wide open, to sticking his head over the side of the boat and sniffing hopefully...

“No… you can’t eat other pokémon, remember? Even if they do make honey!” Kiyotaka reminded him, “If you want something sweet, you can have a poffin…”

“Arc!” Arcanine nodded happily, and went back to enjoying the refreshingly cool and moist air once Kiyotaka had given him one.

Meanwhile, Kiyotaka went through the rest of the screens confirming he’d added a new pokémon to his pokédex, bringing his total to seventy-five...

Seventy-five! He’d found seventy-five different types of pokémon! That was incredible! He’d have never have managed to get his pokédex this full if he’d been stuck back at home...

“Krow, krow!”

Ooh, a Murkrow! And it had just landed on a patch of thick bushes in the water! Now certainly wasn’t the time to get complacent, not when he was about to get seventy six pokémon in his pokédex! “Ah… sir? May we go over to the bushes over there?”

“Sure, Ishimaru…” Kizakura agreed, “But are you actually planning to catch any of these pokémon?”

“Err… catch them…?” Aaah! That’s what he’d forgotten about! He’d not done any research on what to pick as his second pokémon! And his original plan of seeing if something caught his eye wasn’t working out, because… “They all seem happy enough out here…”
“Fair point…” Kizakura shrugged as he turned the boat towards the Murkrow, “But you have remembered you need to catch a second pokémon by the end of term, right?”

“Ah…” Kiyotaka instinctively tensed up as his teacher reminded him he'd procrastinated on an important task. “Yes… I have…”

“Okay… just figured I’d check, seeing as you and Oowada are the only ones who haven’t got one yet.” Kizakura carried on, “And in his case, it’s ‘cause he’s planning to catch a Phantump on Thursday…”

“Oh… I see…” So that meant he’d be the very last person to get one, at this rate…

“You got any pokémon in mind…?” The man asked, in the same tone of voice he’d use to ask unruly students if they were planning on getting on with their work anytime soon…

“Errg… no, not really…” He admitted, looking over the side of the boat rather than face Kizakura, “I… I was thinking that I might come across a pokémon that would want me to catch it, at some point…”

“Like Ludenberg, and Naegi…”

“Yes… At least… I was hoping something like that would happen to me…” Having a pokémon outright ask him to catch it would have made it a lot easier to pick what he wanted, rather than spending hours reading up on all the pros and cons of owning each type of pokémon he had access to at the school…

“I get it… it’s nice if you can have some kind of special encounter with a pokémon before choosing to add it to your team.” Kizakura conceded, “But most of the time, that sort of thing just doesn’t happen, you know?”

“I know… or you spend time trying to get close to a pokémon, and then someone else comes along and catches it right in front of you…” He remembered, “But even so, I don’t like the idea of barging into a pokémon’s life and completely changing it out of nowhere. And what happens if I catch one and then it ends up not getting along with Arcanine?”

“Well… if that’s what you’re worrying about, you can always try and spend some time with the pokémon before you catch it.” Kizakura suggested, “Like trying to feed the Mareeps for a bit, or a Caterpie or something…”

“Hmm…” That would make sense. If a pokémon was willing to sit and be fed by him for a while, then it probably wouldn’t mind him catching it and looking after it forever… “Yes! Thank you, sir! I’ll get some pokéchow and try that tomorrow!”

“No problem, glad I could…” Kizakura suddenly sat up straight and peered over his shoulder, “What the hell…!? Is Hagakure hitting that Morelull himself!? Hhaah… Sorry, kid, but we’re changing course. Hold on tight…!”

Ah… well, so much for getting seventy-six pokémon scanned. But he’d have plenty of time to do that later in the year! For now, he should probably start thinking about when and how he was going to make friends with a wild pokémon…

In the end, after it turned out that ‘Hagakure’ had actually just been Ikusaba’s Zorua, he’d decided to keep things simple, and take advantage of having the next morning off of class, by taking a bag of
pokéchow and some pokéballs out with him to the farm area to see if he couldn’t lure one of the Mareep out of their pen.

Which was why he was currently stood at the side of the fence, opening a bag of cheap pokéchow while a large crowd of the pokémon approached him. Just as he’d seen them do on occasions then Ikusaba came down out to feed them...

“Arc, can, arc, can…” Arcanine started counting them all, probably assuming they were here for research purposes… “…arc, can… Arc!?”

“How…? No, it’s seven after six, remember?” Kiyotaka pointed out, after his seventh number only had one syllable in it… But then he realized Arcanine wasn’t looking at the Mareeps anymore, he was staring at the bag of food in Kiyotaka’s hand…

Ngghh… He hadn’t thought this through very carefully… of course Arcanine was going to notice him opening up a bag of his food and want some, even though Kiyotaka had already fed him breakfast… And was staring at him with hopeful, pleading puppy-dog eyes…

“Alright… just a few pieces!” Kiyotaka relented, feeding him one to start with, “But most of these are so we can try and make friends with one of the Mareeps, alright? So try to talk to them while I’m feeding them!”

“Arc.” Arcanine nodded, and watched as the crowd of sheep gathered around, trying to butt each other out of the way as they saw the food in his outstretched hand…

“MAAAARRRRRRR!” Until, suddenly, a Mareep that had been at the back of the crowd changed around the rest, jumped over the fence and landed about a meter away from Arcanine…

“Arc! Canine!” Arcanine greeted it cheerfully, even though it had its head lowered and was pawing at the ground with its front hoof.

“…EEEEEEPPP!”

“Ah! Look out, Arcanine!” Kiyotaka called, as the Mareep charged forward and butted its head into Arcanine’s chest…

“Arc?” Arcanine just stared at it in confusion… it must not have been strong enough to do any real damage to him. Not that that stopped it from continuing to butt its head against him, occasionally letting out a small series of sparks that made Arcanine growl irritably at it.

“Ah… Look, we’re not trying to fight you! We were just going to give you some food! See!?” Kiyotaka tried to reason with it, throwing a few of the dry pellets next to it, only for them to be completely ignored… Did it just want to fight Arcanine for the sake of it…!? Or perhaps, was it trying to impress him by taking on his own pokémon…? But did he really want a pokémon that was so quick to fight, and ignored everything around it like this…?

“Nnnnn! Nine!” Especially when Arcanine was whining at it to stop, eventually looking up at Kiyotaka in confusion… “Arcarcanine…!?"

“Ah… I think it’s hoping we’ll try to catch it!” Kiyotaka explained, “What do you think? Do you think you’d get on well with it?”

“Nnnnine!” Arcanine shook his head, even trying to run away from the Mareep.

“I thought as much… Well, we can either try to knock it out with Flare Blitz, or just run away from
“Arrr… Can!” Arcanine stood up, turning towards Kiyotaka and waiting for him to move.

“Alright, run it is!” Kiyotaka agreed, jogging away from the field, occasionally looking back to check that Arcanine was still alright.

But, just as Kiyotaka was worrying that Arcanine might have been paralyzed and unable to follow him, he suddenly raced up towards him, quickly enough that the Mareep quickly gave up and headed back over the fence, instead of following them.

“Good boy!” Kiyotaka told him, “Well, I guess a Mareep isn’t for us! How’s about we get you healed up, and then go see if there’s anything in the woods we can make friends with?”

“Arc!” Arcanine agreed. Hopefully they’d have more luck there! Kizakura had suggested a Caterpie, next, and Butterfree could be useful, even if it wasn’t the most exotic of pokémon…

Perhaps half an hour later, they were making their way through the main forest path, when a small, yellow caterpillar with a spiked head crossed their path, and then turned towards them, raising its head up to get a look at them…

“Oh! Look, Arcanine, a Weedle!” Still not the most exotic pokémon, but it seemed to be interested in him… or his food perhaps, and he’d always liked watching the Beedrills back in middle school… “Are you hungry, little fellow…?” He tried squatting on his heels and dropping a handful of dry pellets an arm’s distance in front of him…

“…Weeee?” It slowly crept towards the pile of food, keeping an eye on him and Arcanine as it did so.

“That’s alright… we don’t want to hurt you!” Kiyotaka assured it, as it started munching on the pokéchow, “We just want to get to know you, is that alright…?”

“Dledledle…” Hmm… now it was too busy hastily eating the food to pay attention to him. Was this really going to work? “…Weedle?”

Oh! It had finished all the food already!? And now it was actually looking up at him! Maybe this was his chance to talk to it…!

“Err… so…” Ah… How exactly was he supposed to get to know a bug?

“Arc!” He didn’t even get the chance to think of a starting question, before Arcanine pokéd the bag of food with his nose, causing some of it to fall just in front of Kiyotaka’s feet…

“Weedle!” The caterpillar happily moved closer to them to get at the extra food.

“Ah… Good boy, Arcanine!” Kiyotaka patted him on the head, and let him have another couple of pieces of food. He’d probably been overthinking things, trying to talk to it straight away. Actions spoke louder than words, after all! He’d be better off starting by luring the Weedle closer to him with a trail of food, then trying to get it to eat out of his hand…

“Dledledle…” Soon enough, Kiyotaka had a hand full of mushed-up Pokéchow mixed with Weedle slobber, but it was worth it to have the pokémon let him scan her with his pokédex and stroke her back so quickly. It seemed like bug-types were as easy to train as people always said they were. And
perhaps, given how high-maintenance Arcanine could still be at times, that was what he could do with in a second pokémon…

“What do you think, Arcanine?”

“Arrrr…Can!” Arcanine considered it for a moment, before grabbing Kiyotaka’s bag of food and tipping it over towards the Weedle…

“No… I wasn’t asking if we’ve fed her enough…!” Kiyotaka laughed, although the Weedle certainly did seem to have a voracious appetite. Perhaps she was getting ready to cocoon herself? It was quite late in the breeding season… “I meant, do you think you’d like her to be part of our team? To come and live with us?”

“Arrrrrrc…” Arcanine pondered the question before experimentally lifting a paw and laying it over the Weedle’s back, mimicking his own strokes.

“DledledleDLEDLEDLE…”

“Well, it sounds like she likes you!” Kiyotaka told him, “Just be careful of her spike! It’ll sting if you touch it!”

“Arc!” Arcanine nodded, leaning down to sniff at Weedle’s head, before giving it a quick lick, which made her hum even louder in appreciation, and encouraged Arcanine to brush his face up against hers, which she started reciprocating as soon as all the food was out of Kiyotaka’s hand…

This had been such a good idea! Now he just needed to get a pokéball out and make sure Weedle was happy to join them… “*Ahem*... Well… if you’re both happy with each other…”

“Ar…” Arcanine made as if to nod, but…

“BeeeeeD!”, “Drilllll!”, “DRRRRIIII!” Almost as soon as he’d brought out the pokéball, the air around the erupted into a fog of angry buzzes.

“Nine…?” Arcanine backed away from Weedle, looking disappointed.

“Ah… don’t worry! This is normal!” Kiyotaka assured him, over the noise. “One or two Beedrills will often show up to test a trainer that wants to catch a Weedle from their colony! They just want just to make sure that I’m competent enough to care for her!”

“LLLLLLLLLLLLL!”, “EEEEEDDDD!””, “Ddddrrrrrr!” Although... This did seem rather loud for just one or two Beedrills! It almost sounded as loud as the time he’d ‘fallen over’ the safety rails at school, right into the middle of the Beedrill colony! Either he was having some kind of panicked flashback to back then, or there were more Beedrills coming than he’d expect for just testing how competent he was…

“Arc… Can… Arc… Can… Arc… Can… ARCARC!” Arcanine counted, his barks growing increasingly panicked.

“Seven!” Beedrills only attacked in those sort of numbers if they were serious about protecting their young, which meant… “They must not have many young Weedles left this mating season… They can’t afford to let us catch her, or there won’t be enough Beedrills to keep the colony going next season!”

“Niimmme…” Arcanine sighed, as Kiyotaka picked up the bag of pokéchow, got back to his feet and started backing away from the Weedle, in the hopes of showing the Beedrills that he was no longer
intending to catch her, although he could still hear the noise of the Beedrills getting closer to them…

“Ar can?”

‘What now?’, indeed! Some of the Beedrill were already in sight, and they didn’t look like they particularly cared that Kiyotaka was now nowhere near their young pokémon. And while Arcanine could probably take this lot down easily, he’d rather not knock them all out if they’d already had a poor mating season… and there was one direction that didn’t seem as loud as the others…

“Behind us! Run!” Kiyotaka ordered, turning quickly and running with his head as low as possible, to reduce the chance of getting struck by any poisonous drills that might come his way.

“Are!” Arcanine quickly followed suit, easily bounding off ahead of him, at least until he noticed Kiyotaka hadn’t kept up with him and stopped to wait for him, staring anxiously at him as he closed the gap between them.

…Had Arcanine been expecting him to run faster than he was…? Did that mean he was still suffering from the life-drain last week…? That must have been the case, as Arcanine ended up running ahead of him several three or four times, when he’d usually be able to keep pace with Kiyotaka’s normal running speed…

“Haaaah, haaaah, haaaah…” Urrrgghhh! Curse his past-self’s stupidity! He’d barely run at all, and was already getting so tired he was in danger of tripping! And the Beedrills were showing no signs of leaving him alone! It looked like he had no choice but to fight them off after all…

“Arcanine, here, boy!” Kiyotaka called him back to his side, “Once they get close enough, use Flame…”

“Ro-oo-oo-th!” His order was cut off by a loud hollering from the trees above them, “ROOOOTH!”

“What the…?” Kiyotaka looked above him, as several hairy, red-crested, white monkeys started jumping tree-to-tree from behind him, in the direction of the Beedrills, bellowing violently and waving their arms above their head in an effort to startle them all away…

“Vi, vi vi!” …Vigoroths!? He knew there were some in the forest, but he never would have expected them to come to his aid like this! Usually they just attacked everything in sight, but there were five of these ones organising themselves into a loud, chanting wall that effectively blocked the Beedrills from getting any closer to him and Arcanine! Why would they go to the trouble of doing that…? Vigoroths weren’t territorial so it couldn’t be that they were trying to protect this part of the woods…

…Had they just decided to protect him? Maybe they wanted to be caught…?

“Ddddrriiiii…”, “Bbbbeeeeee…”, “IIIIILLLLL!” Well, if their aim had been to protect him, they had certainly succeeded! The Beedrill made a few attempts to move past them, but the Vigoroths just jumped back in their way, convincing the Beedrill to finally retreat!

“Viiriiir Roth, roth roth!” The Vigoroths jumped up and down in the tree branches for a while as they celebrated their victory. But then they settled down slightly and started to casually burn off energy by swinging back and forth from the branches, as if waiting for something…

…Him, maybe…? It seemed a little too good to be true, but he’d never know if he didn’t try talking to them… “Ah… Thank you! I appreciate the help!”

“You are welcome!”

“AHHHH!” Kiyotaka almost fell over sideways as a slightly familiar voice came from right beside
“Ah… were you not aware that I was here?” Princess Nevermind asked, looking only slightly startled by his over-the-top reaction, “My bad! I assumed you would have noticed my capture discs, but it seems I have made an ‘ass’ of both of us, as the saying goes!”

“Err…” He didn’t have any idea what saying she was talking about, but now he looked a bit more closely at the Vigoroths, he could just about make out a small object flying around each of them… “So you were controlling them?” That made much more sense than them suddenly deciding to come to his aid, as disappointing as it was.

“That is a common misconception. The Capture Styler temporarily *tames* wild pokémon, thus making them willing to help me when I ask.” The princess corrected him, “It does not give me total control over them.”

“I see, so you couldn’t force these Vigoroths to stay still, then?”

“No… in fact, they are getting rather restless as it is.” She admitted, “Are you likely to be in need of anymore assistance?”

“I see, that is kind of you…” Princess Nevermind commented, as she pressed the sides of the large, watch-shaped holder on her wrist, which caused to discs that were currently swirling around the Vigoroths to fly back into it with a series of satisfying sounding clicks.

“Vig?”, “Roooo?”, “Vig!” , “Vigvigvig!” Meanwhile the pokémon that they had previously been flying around took a moment to assess their situation, and then carried on bounding between the trees, noisily disappearing off into the distance…

“Err… don’t you ever worry that they’ll turn on you as soon as they’re… untamed…?” Kiyotaka asked, after one of the Vigoroths jumped into the tree right above them and shouted unintelligibly at them all... Not that Arcanine seemed too concerned by it, as he just yapped at it in a friendly way in response, before it jumped off to a different tree and moved away from them.

“No… There is usually enough residual friendship left over that they just leave, sometimes saying goodbye to me beforehand, as you just saw.” The princess explained, “The danger lies in capturing the pokémon in the first place. Stronger pokémon are usually more aggressive, and require the Styler to convey more friendship to them than weaker ones, meaning it takes more time to gain their trust in the first place. Although Kazuichi upgraded my equipment to help with that.”

“I see… so it’s similar to the way us trainers *catch* pokémon, in that respect. Except you’re using the Styler to convey your feelings in place of having your pokémon show them your fighting prowess! And it’s only temporary, of course…” Although, thinking about it, merely *battling* a pokémon didn’t make it listen to you permanently. You had to actually *catch* it for that… “Hrm… What would happen if you threw a pokéball while a pokémon was under the effect of the Capture Styler?”

“I… do not know. I have never heard of anyone attempting it.” The princess admitted, slowly. “Why do you ask? Are you thinking that it would make for an easier way for you to catch pokémon?”

“Err… Well, I don’t know anything about easy your method is!” She seemed irritated with him. He certainly hoped she didn’t think he was belittling her ability. “I just thought it might be a… friendlier way to introduce a pokémon to your team than our method of practically *forcing* them to join us by
“Is that why you are carrying a bag of pokémon food? To befriend a pokémon before you catch it?” She asked, looking down at the bag he was still gripping tightly until he nodded. “But you intend to force the pokémon to fight for you once you catch it, do you not? I would say that is more cruel than letting the pokémon know what your intentions are from the start.”

“No! I wouldn’t force a pokémon to fight for me, if it really didn’t want to!”

“But you are hoping to get one that will want to fight.” She pointed out, “So would battling it not be the best way to ensure you get a pokémon who wants to do so?”

“…I didn’t think of it like that…” Kiyotaka admitted, “I just wanted to make sure I didn’t force a happy pokémon away from its home by attacking it straight away, before it even got a chance to know what I’m like, and I got to see how well it got on with Arcanine, or if it would actually like me at all…”

“Hmm… The way you speak, it almost sounds like you do not actually want to catch a pokémon at all.” Princess Nevermind observed… correctly.

“No… I don’t think I really do.” Kiyotaka sighed, “I do want to look after more pokémon but… I want them to be happy to be looked after by me, like Arcanine is! But at the moment, I don’t think any of these pokémon here would be… And even if they were, I don’t like the thought that their and Arcanine’s first encounter would be to hurt each other…”

“Then, perhaps you should cease trying to catch pokémon.” She suggested, which would have been as easy and obvious as she made it sound, except…

“But if I don’t catch one before the end of term, I’ll be expelled from the school!”

“That is not true… the school’s rules are that you must have certain numbers of pokémon to battle with.” She argued, “There is nothing about needing to catch them, or technically speaking, even own them yourself!”

“What…!?” Not… owning the pokémon you fought with? That couldn’t possibly be right! And even aside from that… “But… it’s tradition that you always catch your second pokémon!”

“Why?”

“Err…” He’d never actually thought about that before, but presumably it was… “To prove you actually can!”

“But if you do not intend to catch any other pokémon, why must you prove you are able to?” She asked, “Especially when there are enough domesticated pokémon in need of homes already? That seems to be a rather short-sighted requirement.”

“Ahh… it’s not exactly a requirement…” His father certainly hadn’t caught his new Meowth… he’d been talked into taking care of it by someone at work. “But, generally speaking, people will expect good trainers to have caught their second pokémon!”

“That does not seem to be the belief of the school, however.” She countered, “They allowed me to build a team from pokémon that I have been asked to care for by one of my class.”

“Well… You’re a ranger, not a trainer! They probably made an exception for you…”
“They also had no concerns about Kazuichi’s second pokémon having come from his father, instead of the wild.”

“Well… it’s a bit different if someone inherits a second pokémon before they get a chance to catch one…” Kiyotaka started.

“That is not exactly what I meant…” The princess smiled awkwardly, “But, aside from him, Fuyuhiko was given all his pokémon by his parents, and Peko needed to have Gundam breed ones for her, as wild ones kept running at the sight of her.”

“Ah… is that so…?” They were two of the most formidable trainers in the 77th class… and they hadn’t caught their pokémon either? “…But I’ve probably left it too late to have a pokémon bred for me…”

“That may be the case… Gundam is quite busy at the moment.” The princess agreed, “However, he sometimes ends up with extra pokémon, regardless of how carefully he plans his breeding. If you do not mind having someone else choose a pokémon for you, he may have one that he’s willing to give you.”

“Really?” Taking on a needy pokémon handed to him by chance, instead of catching one he’d picked specifically…?

…Well, it had worked out fantastically well with Arcanine…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
The Ritual of Testing (Gundam POV)

Chapter Notes

Gundam’s four original hamsters were all named after Shonen manga magazine titles (i.e. Jum-P is named after Jump and Cham-P after Champion), so I carried on that naming convention for the new eight by googling ‘manga magazines’ and coming up with names that were sort of the same convention.

In case it's not obvious, this is happening in the afternoon after the end of the last chapter.

Also, I've decided I'm going to retcon it so that Arcanine calls Kiyotaka 'Taka' in this fic, because I always find myself wanting to write it like that every time I have him talking. (I'm not even really sure why I ever decided NOT to have him do that...)

Also I apologise if there's any major typos in this chapter, I haven't slept well the last couple of nights.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gundam checked around the main lobby of his breeding facility… At one side was the ritualistic circle that allowed him to sense the auras of ghosts, next to a cage made of silvered glass, for housing wandering spirits, as well as a variety of disused electronic devices that Kazuichi had donated. Any of these would make a fine home for a Rotom, should it need one…

But first, as the trapped spirit seemed to have recovered from it's fatigue over the past week, he had promised merely to speak with the cursed device and its inhabitant, to gather evidence of its mistreatment. And for that, he had prepared nothing more complicated than a set of chairs and a table.

Now he merely had to wait for Imposter to arrive with the device, and Munakata in tow, as prophesised in one of their earlier meetings…!

*Knock, knock, knock!* Three sharp knocks, mimicking those of the self-appointed peace-keeping force of the school, ruptured the air at the precise time they had all agreed upon.

[HELLO! WE’RE WAITING OUT HERE!] And no sooner had the knocks ceased, the sound of false barking followed, [AND I’M BARKING BECAUSE I’M AN ARCANINE! BARK, BARK, BARK!]

“Who dares to call upon the Lord of Lightning, Ice and Fire!?” Gundam greeted the Imposter and their pokémon… as well as Munakata himself, who had arrived along with them.

[I’M AN ARCANINE! DEFINETLY AN ARCANINE! BARK, BARK!] The somewhat foolish-looking ‘hellbeast’ at the door insisted loudly.

Hah! His existence-less friend was fortunate that so few beings from this realm could understand the words of pokémon! Otherwise their Ditto would have ruined many an attempt to impersonate a trainer and their pokémon… But he saw no reason to inform the being before him of such a comical weakness in their disguises…
“It’s just us, Tanaka, as organised!” The false school sentinel greeting him politely.

“And you have the device, correct!?” Gundam checked, directing them to the table. “Come in and let me speak with it, then!”

“Alright… Let me just introduce you both, first!” Imposter agreed, sitting down and taking the prison from his pocket, “Ahem… Pokédex? I’d like you to meet Tanaka and Munakata! They’re interested about you!”

‘Ahem… hello there! Good to meet you! I am one of the first of a new line of Pokédexes from FutureDex Inc! What would you like to know?’ A grating facsimile of a voice emitted from the device… Though he could hear no trace of a pokémon’s voice…

“…We wish to know if you are happy with your existence, as it is now?” Gundam started with a direct question, “Being used as naught but a tool for the man who carries you, that is!”

‘I feel great, thanks for asking! I don’t have any problems working with my trainer!’ Again, words with no trace of truth or soul within them…

“Well, it sounds happy enough…” But Munakata had no such sense for these things, it seemed.

“But it says that every time!” The Imposter at least had the cynicism not to take its words at face-value, “And it’s always with the exact same tone and inflexions each time, like it’s a programmed response…”

“But that doesn’t prove anything. It could just be that it doesn’t have very many voice synthesis options…” The man argued.

“Well… that is what it told me when I asked about it, I suppose…”

“And even if it is a programmed response, that doesn’t prove the Rotom’s suffering or wants to leave…” Munakata continued, “Do you want to be able to leave the pokédex?”

‘This pokédex keeps me safe and energised. I’m happy to stay and help my trainer!’ Hah! Another set of empty, electronic words! Of course such a damning question would have been prepared for… But perhaps less threatening requests would have been overlooked…

“Hmm… Tell me, ghost, what do you think of your trainer’s other pokémon?”

‘Arcanine’s magnificent bark conveys a sense of majesty. Anyone hearing it can't help but grovel before it.’ Just the standard pokédex entry… but there was something odd about the way it said it it…

“I demand you to repeat that!”

‘Arcanine’s magnificent bark conveys a sense of majesty. Anyone hearing it can't help but grovel before it.’ Hmm… Yes. There was most certainly something odd about the way it spoke just now… Certain words sounded… more pronounced than others… almost as if two being were talking at the same time…

“Again!”

‘Are you having trouble hearing me? Would you like me to raise my speaking volume?’ That was not what he ordered it to say…! But perhaps a higher volume would make the oddity more pronounced…
“Yes, adjust your volume as loud as possible and then repeat your thoughts on the Arcanine!”

‘Arcanine’s magnificent bark conveys a sense of majesty. Anyone hearing it can’t help but grovel before it.’ Argh! Now that cursed electronic voice was overpowering whatever he had heard before! ‘Do you want to keep this volume change?’

“No! In fact, repeat that as quietly as you can!” Gundam ordered.

“What are you…?”

“Shhh!” Gundam hissed at the old fool to stop interrupting his work!

‘[Arcanine]’s magnificent bark conveys a sense of majesty. Anyone hearing it can’t help but grovel before it.’ YES! Now he could clearly tell the cried of the trapped soul from that of its prison! And clearly it wanted help of some kind! ‘Do you want to keep this volume change?’

“Yes… I can hear your words with absolutely clarity now…” Gundam assured the spirit, “So tell me again, do you have any issues with your role as a tool, or how your trainer treats you…?

‘I feel great, [thanks for asking] I don’t [have] any [problems working with my trainer]’

“Ah-ha! THERE! You see…!?!” Gundam exclaimed triumphantly, “The ghost clearly said it has problems with its trainer!”

“No, it just said it doesn’t have any problems working with its trainer.” That damn fool Munakata insisted, “Just as it did the last few times…”

“No! I am not referring to the rhetoric being spouted by the machine, I am speaking of the words uttered by the pokémon itself!” Gundam explained, although it was clear they lacked the intelligence to understand! “The ghost itself only speaks some of the words!”

“Isn’t that just because you turned the volume down…”

“Err… No, sir! I think Tanaka means he can hear the ghost as well as the pokédex itself speaking!” At least one of the pair understood him, “And the ghost is only saying some of the words?”

“Yes… Just now, it’s response was ‘Thanks for asking. I have problems with my trainer!’”

“Ah!” Imposter looked suitably horrified, “Can you tell me what those problems are!? 

‘[I] don’t [have problems with my trainer]’

“It merely repeated the same thing as before…” Gundam told him, “It does not seem to be able to speak words unless the prison it is in does so first.”

“Well… In that case, if the pokémon isn’t capable of communicating freely, then that means this is unethical!” Imposted wailed, “We can’t keep using it like this!”

“But we don’t have proof!” Munakata insisted stubbornly, “All we have is Gundam’s word, and he’s someone who has a negative history with FutureDex. Until we get some real evidence that the pokémon is suffering, we won’t be able to stop any more of these being made.”

“So you would continue to use the device, even knowing the pokémon powering it is unhappy!?”

“Yes… I don’t like it any more than you, but it’s a necessary evil…” Tch! The same spiel he’d been spouting this whole time! Gundam was beginning to think he’d never relinquish the trapped spirit…
Especially not as he was now protectively laying his arm over the device! “And I am NOT going to let you jeopardise countless Rotom’s just because you feel bad for this one!”

Hrm… So he’d noticed Gundam’s desire to free the spirit, and intended to fight him for it, if needs be? Not that Gundam could not beat the man in an all-out battle, but turning his true power upon a member of the school’s inner circle would have consequences for his time upon the mortal realm… He would have to consider his response carefully…

*Knock, knock, knock!* AH…! A visitor, at this time? Who would think to come to his realm so soon after class ended in the middle of the week!?

[THERE’S SOMEONE AT THE DOOR!] The Imposter’s amorphous being made a great show of barking loudly, [BARK! BARK! BARK!]

[OH! There’s a DOG in there! Did you hear it Taka!? There’s a DOG!] What!? Was that the real Hellbeast barking in response!? [HELLO? HELLO! CAN YOU HEAR ME!]

[OH! ANOTHER DOG! GUESS I HAVE TO BARK LOUDER NOW! BARKBARKBARK!]

[SEE! THERE IT IS AGAIN!] Curses… That was most certainly Ishimaru’s dog! [HELLO! WHAT DID YOU SAY!? IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU’RE JUST SAYING ‘BARK’ A LOT! IS THAT YOUR NAME!]

“What’s Ishimaru doing here!?” Munakata hissed under the cacophony of canine correspondence. “Are you asking me to invoke the guidance of my All-Seeing-Eye!? For there is no mortal means of giving you the answer you seek!”

“Never mind why he’s here! I need to hide before he sees me!” The facsimile of the boy outside the door insisted, “Give me the pokédex!”

Curses… Just as he thought he might be making a dent in its barrier! But he would have no opportunity to reach the depth of the prison if the guardian of the hallways confiscated it!

“Thanks! Let me know when it’s safe to leave!” Imposter grabbed the pokédex, then hurried into the storeroom with his disguised Ditto…

“Now then… time to see what he’s doing here.” Munakata ordered, as if Gundan was incapable of realised that for himself! “There’s only one reason I can think of, but why would he leave it until now…?”

Gundam ignored his muttered musing and opened the door to Ishimaru, who was mid-way through quelling his companion’s excitement…

“Greetings, Mortal! You have business with I, the Dark Lord!?” Good! Both person and pokémon were suitably cowed by his appearance! “Then enter my realm, if you dare!”

“Err…” The self-appointed sentinel of the school took a moment to gather his courage, before take the first step across the threshold of his domain. “Yes! Thank you!”

[Hmm…?] The fiery being sniffed the air curiously as he entered alongside its master… [Where’d Bark go? I can’t smell him! But I heard him! Hello! Bark…!]

“Ah! Munakata, sir! I hope we’re not interrupting anything!” It appeared that Ishimaru was aware of Munakata’s position in the hierarchy of Kirigiri’s domain… “And… wasn’t there another Arcanine
in here…? I’m sure I heard one…”

“I fear that the beast in question has a tendency to cower at others of a canine countenance!” That should be a fine reason to quell Ishimaru and his dog’s curiosity into the matter!

“Errm…?” [Okay! But where did Bark go?] Or it would have, had either of them possessed the wit to comprehend him!

“He means the Arcanine is afraid of other dogs…” Munakata put it into words the poor mortals could understand.

“Oh, I see!” [Awww… Poor Bark!]

“And I’m just here to do a regular check of Tanaka’s breeding facility, as per standard regulations…” The man continued, beginning to weave a web of lies. “So if that was your intention, I can assure you don’t have to worry about the pokémon here…”

“Ah, no, that’s not why I came! I trust the Hope’s Peak wouldn’t be allowing pokémon to come to harm at the hands of its own students!” Hah! If only he knew… “I’m here because Princess Nevermind told me you might have a spare pokémon I could take off of your hands!”

WHAT!? The dark lady had sent him to collect another tribute!? But the pact they’d formed had stated she would give him six more months before requiring a third pokémon from him…!

“You’re not planning to catch your second pokémon?” Munakata asked him.

“No, sir! I know it’s a tradition to do so, but I just can’t justify taming a wild pokémon when there’s a surplus of domesticated ones in shelters!” …Ah! So he was merely here for his own sake, at her recommendation…

Well… while Gundam agreed with his reasoning, the fact of the matter was that he was not in possession of any surplus pokémon that would be in need of a trainer before the end of term. However, admitting that to the school sentinel would put her Ladyship’s words in poor standing, and he wouldn’t dare do that!

For now, he would have to behave as if he did have a pokémon to give Ishimaru… provided the boy was capable of living up to Gundam’s expectations of a trainer…

“I see… an admirable cause. However, it would be foolish of me to trust every trainer who entered my realm with talk of responsibility upon his lips! As such, I have prepared trials for you to overcome, before I entrust you with a being from the dark realms!” Ishimaru nodded in understanding… eventually. “But before you attempt those, I wish to understand how you handle your current charge…”

“…You want to know how I look after Arcanine?” The guardian of the halls slowly realised, “Well, we wake up at…”

“Not from you! You are but a human, and all humans will lie when it suits their needs!” Gundam clarified, “I will listen to the words of the fiery one! You may accompany Munakata on his inspection of my realm!” That would give his hidden friend the opportunity to sneak out with the trapped spirit.

“Oh! Err… alright…” He looked apprehensive, but agreed. “Arcanine… I’m going to be out of the room for a little while, so you stay here and be good for Tanaka, okay?!”

[Okay!] The dog agreed readily, and his master patted him before following Munakata to the door to
the egg incubators, continuing to stare off after him long after he had gone. Almost as if he would
wait for his master forever, if needs be.

But just to be certain that the dog would not turn back towards him as soon as he tried to ferry
Imposter out of the building... “Behold! Look upon the proof of my dominion of this paltry mortal
realm!”

[Oh! You have lots of the special badges! One, Two, Three, Four, FIVE special badges! Well done!]
Interesting… the canine possessed knowledge not normally bestowed upon its kind… [Taka’s only
got that one!]

“Is that so?” He’d thought the virtuous trainer had aspiration of becoming a pokémon champion…
and yet he only had the badge from their school trip? “Then you should know to heed my words!
You are not to move or turn away from this direction until I say so!”

[So… Stay?] The dog checked, [Okay! Kiyotaka said to be good for you!]
Hmm… he was more trusting of his master’s word than the number of badges he possessed. That
was a good sign for their relationship… not that it would spare the dog any of his interrogation, once
he freed quietly Imposter from the storage room…

…Both the trainer and their pokémon looked surprised to see him open the door and perform the
symbolic hand signal ordering for silence. But they quickly assessed the situation and took the
chance to quietly leave, neither so much as opening their mouth as they left… In fact, Imposter even
went as far as to cover theirs…

…He had best make sure to recount his stores of food! That trainer would pay dearly if he had dared
steal sustenance from his realm!

But first, there was the matter of judging Ishimaru… “You may move now!”

[Okay!] The flame hound took a moment to look around, but then settled for staring at the door his
trainer departed through.

“Tell me, fell beast... Do you like that boy you follow?”

“You mean Taka? Yep! He’s the best!] He could feel no hidden meaning behind this pokémon’s
words. [He looks after me!]

“And he does a good job of that, does he?” Gundam checked, “Does he feed and bathe you often?”

“Yep! Taka always feeds me breakfast and dinner every single day! And we have a bath or
shower together every day! And then he hugs me in a towel and uses the warm wind machine and a
brush to get my fur nice and neat!]”

“I see... and is there anything else you like about him?”

[Yep! He teaches me lots of tricks, to help me show how Clever I am! And he tells me I’m a Good
Boy! And he never ever hurts me!]”

“…What makes you say that?” For the pokémon to volunteer that information himself was
concerning... This would not be the first pokémon Gundam had interview that had been taught to
sing their master’s praises… “Most trainers do not hurt their pokémon, under any circumstances!”

[Oh! They don’t?]
“No… what makes you think they would?”

[Um… Before Kiyotaka, there was another man who was supposed to feed and teach me…] The dog trembles, like those who are forced to remember their time in the care of demons are wont to do. [B-but I d-didn’t understand him so he always g-got angry and pushed me back in my pokéball with no F-FOOD and…]

“Enough! I understand” There was no need to force him to endure the torment of dark shadows long gone. “But now you have a new trainer!”

[Y-yes! That’s right! I’m Taka’s now, not his!] The dog agreed, seeming to want to remind himself as much as Gundam. [I snuck into the nice man’s ball and then Taka opened it up and gave me eat Meowth’s food until I realised he was nice and let him take me to the pokécentre…]

Well… it certainly seemed that Ishimaru was a suitable trainer, from his past performance… but there was one more question he needed to have answered, before he let the mortal treat with the Zodiac Generals…

“And is there anything you’d change about your master, if you could?”

[Hmmmmmm…] It took the beast more time to think of an answer, [Oh! I know! He needs more moneys! Then he can buy me more toys! And teach me Extreme Speed! And build a swimming pool in our room! And look after more dogs! And…]

Ahahahahaha! Such petty mortal concerns were certainly no reason to deny them passage to the second half of his trial! It seemed now would be the time to go and prepare his pokémon…

“You are to stay here and await your master’s return!”

[Okay! Staying!] The canine obliged happily as he headed into the chamber reserved for only his closest pokémon.

[Oh! Gundam’s back!], [My Lord, you have returned!], [What news do you have, oh Dark one!?] As always, there was an immediate cacophony of chittering chatter from the Twelve Zodiac Generals, as they all scurried to the edges of their personal cages to look upon him and hear the tales of his travels.

[Oh, Yes! Hello Mr. Dark Lord!] The young Fennekin that had only just been promoted to his inner circle ceased chasing a ball around the floor and rushed over to greet him with a respectful bow, [Did you manage to free that ghost, like you wanted!]

“No… Though I am now beyond certain that the soul is suffering…” Gundam admitted, “However, my superior in this matter was too deaf to hear the spirit’s true voice, and we were interrupted and forced to cut short the interrogation before I could draw forth a loud enough cry for the mortals to hear…”

[Did you not wish take the matter into your own hands, Dark Lord?] Absol asked, barely deigning to look up at him, from his bed in the corner of the room.

“Would that I could, however the prison is tightly locked, and I did not have the tools or time to break it open.” He explained, “Perhaps if I were to bargain for Kazuichi’s co-operation on the matter, it would be within the realms of possibility. However, I fear the costs of compelling him to go against our superior would be far too high a price to pay.”

[Hmm… then it seems you will have to find a way to makes the voices of the dead audible to the
living. No easy task.

“Indeed…” Gundam agreed… this would take a great deal of consideration… “But for now, there is another task upon us! For the Dark Lady herself has sent us a mortal who wishes to take it upon himself to care for a being from this realm, and so we must prepare to subject him to the Ritual of Testing!”

[So, we need to all swap cages, then?] Veteran warrior San-D summised.

[W-what!? B-but I like my cage, it smells like me!], [Yeah! And Cook-E and I like being able to talk to each other!], [And I like my sunny spot!] The younger, less experienced Generals were less than pleased with the revelation.

“Fear not, my Dark Generals! For it will only be a temporary measure…” Gundam assured them all, “I am going to switch you into different cages, and then tell our presumptuous mortal that his task is to have you complete tasks that you will most likely be unwilling to participate in… However, know that you are under no obligation to listen to his words, for you are members of the Great Zodiac, and have no fear of mortal hands!”

[That seems like a really hard test for the, uhh, mortal, then!] Fennekin commented.

“Indeed… What I will request of him is an impossibility.” Gundam agreed, “It will take one with perceptive vision to ascertain the true nature of this test!”

[Umm… b-but what he gets mad that we don’t do what he says, and tries to make us do it?] Young Cook-E asked timidly.

“I admit there is a chance that could happen… Part of the reason for this test is to ensure that I never hand over a creature to the sort of demon who would do such a thing!” Gundam admitted, “However, Absol and Fennekin will be here to guard you at all times, so such pain would be short-lived, and paid back a hundred-fold!”

[O-okay… That’s okay then!]

“However, none of you are under obligation to assist me in this matter, should you not want to!” Gundam pointed out, “I can merely put you inside your pokéballs instead!”

After some deliberation and assurances from the older Dedennes, the newer Generals chose to take part regardless, and Gundam began the tasks of moving them all to unfamiliar territory, then returned to the main lobby, to be met by Ishimaru, as well as his Arcanine…

“Oh! You mean some of your pokémon managed to get into your food supply! I’ve had that happen a few times, myself!” Hah! As if his domain was that poorly guarded! But now was not the time to be discussing such matters… “So… how did your chat with Arcanine go?”

“It was a fruitful conversation… enough to allow you to pass on to the real test of your ability! Both of you, follow me!”
“Err… You mean we’re doing the test right now!?” The mortal hurried after him, anxiously.

“Exactly!” Gundam flung open the door to his chamber, “Behold, my inner sanctum…!”

[Well, if you don’t want my cage, why are you standing close to it!?, [I ALWAYS stand on THIS side of my cage, to talk to Cook-E!], [Well, I don’t WANT to talk to you! I hate even having to LOOK at you!], [Then why don’t YOU move so you’re not looking at me!?, [Because you’re trying to get into MY cage!], [No I’m NOT! I don’t CARE about your stupid cage!], [Well, if you don’t want my cage, why are…!?]

This time the chittering of Dedennes was mostly overpowered by the possessive Maga-Z arguing loudly with his new neighbour, something the hallway guardian felt compelled to comment on. Meanwhile, his dog seemed to zero in on the cage he had left young Cook-E in, which now apparently contained nothing but a shaking pile of bedding…

[You’re shivery! Do you need warming up?]

[No, my name’s Cook-E!] The young hamster replied, [And I’m not cold! I just don’t like this cage! It doesn’t smell like me!]

[Hrmm… you’re right! It doesn’t smell like you! Do you want me to find you one that does smell like you…?]

Curses! If the dog started doing that right now, it would ruin the test! “*AHEM!* Listen well, mortals! For the time is at hand for you to learn of the Herculean labors that lay ahead of you!”

“And you both have just as much food and water as the oth… Oh, right!” The mortal stopped fruitlessly trying to mediate between Maga-Z and New-T. “So… does that mean you have twelve tasks for me?”

“Ah… you have studied the ancient histories, I see…” Rare were the ones these days who took heed of such events… “You are correct! For I have twelve Dark Dedennes who you must prove your worth to, before I judge you worthy of taking a creature from this realm!”

“Alright! So… how exactly do I, err… ‘prove my worth’ to the Dedennes…?”

“The first of your many labours will be to make Cook-E expose herself to your piercing gaze!” Gundam gestured to the young one the dog had been sniffing at, “And to lay hands upon Magi-C without falling afoul of his thunderous might!”

“…You mean convince that one to come out from under the bedding, and pick that one up without getting shocked?” Ishimaru checked, “That doesn’t sound too difficult!”

“That is only the beginning of the test! For Cham-P must be convinced to use his exercise wheel, San-D must be tucked into her nest, the blood feud between Maga-Z and New-T must be put to an end, Jum-P must scale the climbing wall, Pet-T and Deng-E must work together to navigate the twisted tunnels of confusion, Mar-G must scale the tightrope of terror, Coro-C must traverse the obstacle course and Gran-D must submit himself to the waters of purification!”

“Err… Right…” The mortal looked far less confident, now that he had knowledge of his full task. “Well… I’ll start with the first two because they need my input! Arcanine, you start by asking these two stop arguing between their cages, or that one to take a bath!”

Okay! Bye, Cookie!] The dog and his trainer switched places, [Umm… Now what’s all this fighting about…!?]
“Right then… Hello there! Cook-E, is it? My name is Kiyotaka!” Ishimaru began to try and familiarise himself with the general, “Would you be willing to take a peek at me…?”

[No.] The low-ranking soldier replied softly. [I don’t have to.]

“Hrmm… am I allowed to use some things I brought with me, to help?”

“You may… Though I fear for your success if you need assistance with that task!” Gundam commented, “Now I take my leave, to return at the appointed time!”

“But… then how will you know if I did the tasks?”

“I have two observers over there…” Gundam pointed out Absol and Fennekin, who was being unusually focused on his new responsibility, “They will inform me of your progress!”

“Ah… Right, then… Well…” Ishimaru looked took but a moment to consider his situation, before returning to the task at hand. “Look! I have a yummy poffin out here, if you come out and let me look at you!”

[Nuh-uh… Doesn’t smell right.] Cook-E continued to keep up her resolve, as he left the room to go count the items within the storeroom…

Curse that Imposter, they’d most likely eaten from the items he had yet to count! How was he supposed to extract payment for their theft if he could not determine exactly how much they had taken!?

No matter! They had a set of trials to go and judge! Ishimaru had been given more than enough time in the presence of the Generals…

…And that time looked to have been of practical use! Cham-P was submerged in the fountain of purification, Coro-C and Magi-C were lifting the illusion placed upon the tunnels of confusion, Gran-D was using the wheel to douse the fires of energy within him, Jum-P was taking a well-earned rest, Deng-E was sunning himself in the warmth of his cage, New-T was talking amicably to Cook-E through the bars of their cages, Maga-Z was pilfering the treasures on the far side of the tightrope, Pet-T and San-D were halfway through completing the obstacle course and climbing wall, and Mar-G had convinced the hall monitor to groom her fur with his fingers!

[Ah! Mr. Dark Lord!] Fennekin yipped and headed over to him, prompting Ishimaru to put Mar-G back in her cage… her own cage, not the one Gundam had put her in for the test. [We watched the whole time, but he didn’t try and hurt any of the Generals!]

“Hmmm… It would appear that you have passed my trials…” How troublesome… but in retrospect, he should not have doubted the Dark Lady’s judgement in worthy trainers. Perhaps she had sensed some demonic energy within the hall monitor that he had missed!

“Err… No, I’m afraid I haven’t, actually…” Ishimaru humbly denied said worthiness. “I realised I wasn’t going to be able to bond well enough with any of them to encourage them to do things they didn’t want to in such a short amount of time, so in the end I gave up and let Arcanine switch them into the cages they actually wanted to go into…”

“I see… You cannot hear the words of any pokémon but your own, so you relied on your canine companion to translate for you…” So, no more of a demon than most of the mortals at this school. “However… such methods will fail if your pokémon is unwilling to help you… So, answer me this,
firey one! Do you want your trainer to leave here with a new pokémon? And do you swear to help him take care of one if he does!?”

[YEP! That’s right! We’re gonna get a new friend, and I’m going to help teach them tricks while Taka’s busy!] Hmm… The dog seemed excited at the prospect… but it was only the residual excitement from his trainer. Such second-hand feelings would wear thin when the reality of the situation become apparent…

“But why do you want a new friend?” Gundam asked, “Would you not rather have your trainer’s attention all to yourself, as you do now…?”

[Huuuuuuh… I guess he might be busier once we get our new friend… But there’s lots of times he has to work, and playing with my toys is more fun when there’s someone else to play with! And Blastoise says he always plays with Togepi when Makoto’s busy, so I’d be able to play with our new friend!] Hmm… it seemed that the dog had its own stake in this endeavour… [Plus, once they’re bigger, they can help me keep Taka safe!]

“Oh? Your master is need of protection; you say?!”

“What!? What makes you think…!?”

[Yep! He needs help fighting off wild pokémon that don’t like him scanning them!] The Fire hound continued, over the noise of his master’s protests. [And all the mean people he’s got to fight to prove he’s a Good Boy!]

To prove his virtuosity? That would be an odd reason indeed for one to go through the treacherous task of becoming pokémon champion. However, it would appear that Ishimaru’s companion had chosen to follow his goals, though it might not understand his reasons for them...

“Well… then who am I to turn down aid to someone in such dire need…?”

“Look… I don’t know what he’s telling you, but as I just said, I’m not in need of protection!” Ishimaru continued to insist, “Besides, I failed to complete any of the tasks you set me! Doesn’t that make me ineligible!?”

“Hah! As if the Great Lord of Lightning and Ice would set a task so simple-minded!” Gundam had to laugh at the sentinel’s continued misunderstanding, “It is no concern of mine if you are able to persuade pokémon to perform tricks such as these! This test was to determine how you react to a pokémon choosing not to help you reach an important goal!”

“But… all I did was spend five minutes failing to lure a hamster out of its nest, before giving up the entire task and letting them all do what they wanted!”

“Indeed… You understood that their wishes differed from your own, and respected that.” Gundam agreed, “And you even took steps to ensure they were at peace in their natural place in the cosmos!”

“But… wouldn’t every trainer do that? It’s not like I could have forced the Dedennes to do what I wanted them to!”

“That is correct! However, you would be surprised at the number of fools who try, when I tell them that their chance of receiving a pokémon blessed by the Great Gundam Tanaka is at stake!”

“So… that’s why you left your pokémon in here? To protect your hamsters from me!” The guardian finally realised, “But that’s still highly irresponsible of you! Even with them keeping an eye on me, I still could have hurt one of your Dedennes before they got the chance to react, had I been so
“inclined!”

“I am aware… but allowing one of my pokémon to be hurt once is a necessary risk, to prevent letting one fall into the hands of a trainer who would hurt them continually… It is a risk I have explained to my hamsters, and they were willing to take for the sake of their brethren.”…It was an important point to remember… And the difference between this test and the one Munakata was insisting on! The soul trapped in that cursed device had no such choice in the matter!

“Well… if your pokémon have agreed, even knowing the risks… then I guess that’s fair…” Ishimaru conceded to his logic, “But… Do you really need to use a live pokémon!? Couldn’t you just have had a stuffed toy buried in the nest? That way if the trainer tried to reach in and grab it, you’d know not to trust them without your pokémon being at risk!”

“However, if they thought chose a gentler method first, like brushing aside the nesting material, they would realise the true nature of the test and know not to attempt harm on the toy.”

“Aargh… That’s…” The sentinel thought vainly for a solution to the problem that did not involve risking the Zodiac Generals, as Gundam himself had attempted to, many times before… “That’s all true, but I still don’t like the idea of your risking your pokémon getting injured…”

“Nor do I… but sometimes, one must be poisoned by the darkness, in order to fight it more effectively.”

“…You mean to say it’s a necessary evil?” The mortal asked, with a mixture of confusion and scorn. “…No! There must some other way around it! I… Give me some time and I’m sure I’ll think of something!”

“Hah! Very well! If you think you will be capable of purifying my tainted blood, then I invite you to try!” He could hardly deny Ishimaru the chance, when he looked so intent on his goal of safeguarding all pokémon from needless harm. A far cry from the being that was impersonating him at this moment…

Hmm… and thinking of them, and the trapped spirit they currently carried… “…However, there is now the matter of your new pokémon to discuss…”

“Oh! Of course!”

[Can we have Cookie!?] What!? How dare that presumptuous hellbeast start sniffing at her cage, as if they’d be granted dominion over a Zodiac General after such a paltry test!? [She’s my favourite!]

“Terror and ruin will be set upon the land if the Zodiac Generals are forced out of their stabilising alignment!” Gundam warned the dog, “Do you wish to be responsible for that!?”

[Umm… I… I’m s-sorry! I d-don’t understand…] Curse this poisonous form of his… the dog is now trembling at the sight of him!

“Ah… It’s alright Arcanine! You didn’t do anything wrong!” At least the Principality is here to heal his wounds with gentle hands and words. “Tanaka’s just upset because these are some of his favourite pokémon, and he doesn’t want them to be taken away from him… Right, Tanaka?”

“Indeed, that is so.”

“So.oo, what do you need to say to Arcanine…?” What is he suggesting!!? If the dog cannot understand that explanation, than any further attempts to explain himself will only confuse its feeble mind! “You are sorry you just shouted at him, aren’t you…!”?
“Gnhk! You think to demand an apology from me!? “As if he were naught but a child being scolded by his mother…!?” “Hah! Well, you certainly have guts, Ishimaru! Very well… In this, you are correct. I should not have let my rage consume me, and so I apologise to you, fiery one.”

[Oh… Okay!] What the!?! How could such a simple set of words reverse the pain he’d just wrought upon the creature so quickly!? [I’m sorry I asked for your favourite pokémon! I didn’t know they were all already friends with you!]

“Well… then I accept your apology!”

“Good! I’m glad we got that sorted!” Ishimaru’s humble countenance faded somewhat, “Now… we were about to talk about a new pokémon…?”

“Indeed… There is a ghost I know of that may be of interest to you… Though I cannot allow the two of you to treat with it yet, as the soundness of its mind is being probed by an associate of mine.” Gundam explained. “However, it is knowledgeable and has experience with your manner of research, though be warned that I cannot guarantee its willingness or capability to battle.”

“Ah… is that because something… happened to it?” The sentinel’s insight was far faster in this matter than in others.

“Indeed… I understand you are no stranger to treating the chronic aftereffects of toxic trainers?”

“…That’s certainly one way to put it…” Ishimaru conceded, as he stroked his dog. “So it’s going to need a lot of time and effort to look after, after all... Well, never mind! If that’s how it is, I will just have to make all the more effort for my pokémon!”

“… And you will need to acquire another mark of prowess!” He could hardly trust a powerful ghost to a trainer with naught but a single badge!

“A mark of prow… Oh! You mean I need my second badge!” The boy was not at all perturbed by the challenge, “Don’t worry! I will be more than capable of getting that during our second field trip!”

“See to it that you do, and I will see to it that the ghost is ready to accept a new master at that time.” Gundam swore unto him, “It would be wise of you to use this remaining time to prepare yourself…”

“Yes! I’ll take a very in-depth look on how to care for Ghost-Types, and make sure to build my strength back up so I won’t be effected by life-drain again!” Ishimaru vowed, “And I suppose it would be a good idea to make sure I get ahead in my school work and research now, so I can devote the holidays to looking after them and Arcanine, and getting them used to each other…”

“If that is the form your preparation takes, then so be it…” He would have begun making preparations for the darkest, most secret rituals of bonding he could imagine! “I trust that you will be ready when the time comes.”

“Yes! I will be! And I’m sure you have your own work to be getting on with, so I’ll go and make a start right now!” The guardian balled his fist with resolution, “Thank you very much for this!”

“No… I should thank you, for having the resolve to take on this onerous tasks… You have save me a great deal of trouble in finding a suitable host for this poor soul.”

“Well… In that case, it was a pleasure doing business with you!” Ishimaru reached out a hand to shake, thought for the boy’s own sake, Gundam resisted the urge to reciprocate until his attention was drawn to the timepiece upon his arm… “Ah… but I really have to be going! It’s almost time for Arcanine’s dinner!”
[Dinner!?] The beast in question circled him with both joy and concern in its movements.

“Yes… We’ll get your dinner just as soon as we get back to our room!” Ishimaru made a simpler vow.

[Alright! Let’s go!], “Ah…! Arcanine, wait! I’m still running slow…!” The canine eagerly dashed off out of the front door, followed clumsily by it’s trainer.

[…]Does it not concern you, oh Dark One?] Absol mused from his spot in the corner.

“What could possibly concern I, the Great Gundam Tanaka…!?”

[The mortal did not ask what kind of ghost you intend to give him…] Absol replied, [Does he, too, possess the power of the All-Seeing-Eye…?]

“Of course not! That would be an impossibility in and of itself!” Gundam answered, “…It’s more likely his mortal mind became so overwhelmed at my blessing, that it became unable to process more in-depth information such as that!”

[I see… so he will return for that information, once he has begun his preparations…] Absol nodded and curled as if to return to his slumber once more.

“Perhaps… or perhaps he will choose to prepare for every eventuality!” Either could be possible, with one as earnest as him. “I may even be forced to limit the information I give him, until those blind fools see fit to lift this cursed veil of secrecy surrounded that device!”

[Then I hope they see sense soon…] Absol decided, [I feel disaster drawing closer to that device each day…]

That was little surprise to Gundam, given what he’d heard in the pokémon’s voice. He just needed enough time with the device to prove as much to the others…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next week will from Mondo's POV!
“So… how much money do you have to spend on pokéballs?” Chihiro asked, as they looked over the stupidly-large number of differently-coloured balls spread all over the shelves… Who the hell needed all these different types of pokéball anyway?!

“Seventy-two hundred pokédollars…” Mondo admitted, staring straight at at the balls themselves, rather than risk seeing the smirk Leon probably had on his face. Mondo knew what he’d be thinking… You could buy a fucking TM for that much! So what kind of loser needed to drop that kind of cash on making sure they caught one pokémon!?

Well… him, probably. At least, given how shitty his attempts at it had always been before! If Lycan didn’t knock it out in one hit, it practically refused to actually stay in the damn ball! And he only had one chance at getting a Phantump… he had to make it fucking count, even if it felt like a total cheap-shot, and everyone laughed at him behind his back for it…

“So, that’s thirty-six pokéballs, right?” Mondo checked, reaching for the red-and-white balls he was way too familiar with…

“Eeeehhh…” “Umm…” Guess not, from that reaction!

“Shit… I thought I’d worked that out right…” Dammit, Chihiro had been teaching him math for most of the term and he was still fucking up basic shit if he didn’t have a calculator!

“No, dude, your math is fine!” Leon grinned, “It’s your choice of pokéballs that sucks!”

“Umm… yeah. You’d be better off buying more expensive balls that are more likely to work…” Chihiro agreed with him, “You won’t have all night to spend throwing pokéballs… and we don’t know how easy it’ll even be to find a Phantump in the first place, so you want to make the most of each encounter!”

Urrrgghh… Usually he’d have laughed at dropping anything more than 200 pokédollars on a single ball, but when Chihiro put it like that, this seemed like it was gonna be hard enough without him forcing a challenge on himself…

“Alright… so I’ll get some Great Balls…” Chihiro and Leon glanced sideways at each other, frowning, “Ultra Balls…?”

“I was thinking Dusk Balls…” Chihiro admitted, “And a couple of Quick Balls…”

“The hell are they!?”

“Dusk Balls work better than Ultra Balls, but only if you’re using them at night…” Leon answered, “And Quick Balls work best if you use ‘em before either of the pokémon attack each other.”

“But… don’t you need to attack the pokémon to weaken it enough for the pokéball to work…?” That’s what Daiya had always told him…

“Well… it helps, but it’s not always necessary…” Chihiro told him, “And Quick Balls are specifically designed to capitalise on the resting state of a pokémon’s bio-thaumic energy, which is
more consistent between different species of pokémon, so it’s able to reach catch rates two and a half times that of an Ultra Ball, but only before the pokémon becomes agitated and shifts the bio-thaumic profile into…”

…Fuck, he’d lost them. Was he supposed to understand this shit!? Was that why he could never catch a fucking pokémon!?

“Chi, dude… You seeking out ain’t helping…” Leon sighed, “Look, basically, a Quick Ball’s good enough that it’ll sometimes make up for not wearing the pokémon out before throwing it… but only if you use it before starting a fight! So when you see a Phantump, you can just try tossing one out and seeing if it takes, and if not then you can do the whole wear-em-down thing and starting pitching Dusk Balls at it.”

…What? So he was supposed to try and get the pokémon to join him by just chucking a single pokéball at it? No fight at all!? What kind of lame story would that be!? Daiya and Michi and probably all the rest of the gang crowding round the phone to hear about how he finally caught himself a pokémon, and all he’d have to say was ‘I bought a fancy pokéball and threw it at the first Phantump I saw’…?

“…Fuck that, I’ll stick with the Dusk Balls,” Mondo picked one up and checked the price… 1000 pokédollars each!? These had better fucking work for that amount of money…

“Umm… are you sure…?” Chihiro cringed, “I mean… Lycanroc still doesn’t exactly… pull his punches, does he? He might end up knocking the Phantumps out, or scaring them away before you get a chance to try the Duck Balls…”

“Well, I’ll just make sure he doesn’t do that shit, this time! I don’t need shit to be that easy!” It wasn’t like he and Lycan hadn’t trained for this! And, sure, sometimes Lycan still went a bit over-the-top, but he was getting better! He’d get how serious this was on the night, right!? Right! And that was why he shoved seven of the weird-looking green and black balls into his basket…

…And, he could still afford one more normal pokéball, just to be safe!

“Thanks for the help, guys.” He told them, as he turned and made his way to the counter while they hung back with rest of the pokéballs. Probably thinking he was being an idiot for not taking the easy option. But it was alright for them not to worry about how they caught their pokémon, they weren’t holding up the reputation of a whole Gym on their shoulders! Or trying to prove they were just as good as someone like Daiya, who still got asked to tell the story of how he caught his Carvanha even now!

“…Mondo, wait up a sec!” Damnit, Leon had decided to chase him down, probably to tell him he was being an idiot… “Get these as well! Me and Chi’s treat!”

Mondo glanced down at the pair of blue and yellow balls Leon had just dumped in his basket along with a bunch of cash and felt his mouth curl into a snarl… “I just told you, I ain’t gonna use these fucking easy-mode balls, not even if someone else is paying for ‘em!”

“Umm… well, we’re not saying you’ll need them, we’re just giving you them just in case!” Chi argued, “Like… taking an umbrella with you!”

“The hell are you talking about?” He never bothered with umbrellas anyway… He just got used to driving in the rain.

“Well… you know how people always say that it only rains on days when you forget your
umbrella… or if you decide to take an umbrella with you for once, it won’t rain and you end up carrying it all day for no reason?” Chihiro asked, which he’d heard people bitching about, even though he figured they were just being shitty judges of the weather. “Well… it’s like that! By giving you some Quick Balls, we’re making sure you definitely won’t need them!”

“That doesn’t make any fucking sense! If I don’t need ‘em then I don’t need ‘em! Whether or not I’m carrying ‘em won’t change that!”

“Alright… but look at it this way… what’s worse? Lugging around a couple of useless balls you’re never gonna use, or it turning out that your luck goes to shit and you end up wishing you had them, when you don’t?”

“…Alright, fine!” They weren’t gonna shut up about it if he didn’t take them, and the more they talked about it, the more he felt like he was gonna throw up… “But I ain’t gonna use them!”

“Course not!” Leon rolled his eyes at him sarcastically.

“Yeah… you’re a great trainer!” Chihiro agreed, staring up at him admiringly. “I bet you’ll have Phantumps swarming to get to you!”

Urg… He didn’t know what was worse, knowing Leon thought he was gonna fuck up, or seeing Chi so certain that he wasn’t… what the hell would he do if he failed!? He’d rather get taken to the fucking spirit world than face the looks on their faces if he came out without a Phantump after all of this…

“Thanks.” He turned back towards the counter so he wouldn’t have to look at their faces, “Anyway, I’mma go back to my room and make sure everything’s ready for tonight, so I’ll see ya later, alright?”

“See ya, dude!” “Let us know if you need anything!”

Mondo managed to hold his nerves in check long enough to give them a vague wave without looking like the total wreck that he felt like. And stop himself from trying to punch the rich-looking couple of tourists who were yelling at the poor cashier in the lane next to him while he was paying for the pokéballs. Then he headed back to his room, let Lycan out of his ball and put his ten new pokéballs away in his bag, which he’d already packed up ready to go yesterday morning…

So, now there was nothing to do but pace around his room, waiting for 10pm to hurry the fuck up so he could go to class and get this shit over with. Fuck. He probably shouldn’t have ditched Leon and Chi so early, but he didn’t want them to see how fucking sick he felt over this shit. Daiya and Michi had said to feel free to call them, but that was out for the same reason. He could have tried studying and going over his notes from the DPTL course, but he already knew there was no way he was gonna be able to focus on that, or TV… all there really was to do was pace around his room, trying to work off all his anxious energy before he had to go back outside.

“…Ly can?” Lycan could tell something was up. Hell, a fucking Slowbro would probably have picked up on it! “Roc?”

Mondo turned to look at his wolf, who was looking at him with a mix of worry and fear in his eyes… Motherfucker, what was he thinking, stomping around the room like that. He knew it freaked Lycan out when he looked pissed off like that!

“Hey… Don’t worry… I’m just nervous as shit…” Mondo admitted to him, dropping down to sit on the bed. “You ain’t done anything wrong.”
“Roc…” Lycan murmured to himself, before looking up at Mondo questioningly, “Can?”

“Why…? We’re going to the forest tonight… It’s our chance to catch one of those Phantumps I was showing you the other day!” Mondo told him, trying his best to look positive about it all… Not that it worked. He could already spot Lycan tensing up at the word catch…

“R…Roc!” He nodded stiffly, obviously trying to hide how nervous he was about it to… Which was bad, ‘cause he getting nervous was what usually made him lash out at other pokémon harder…

“Hey… c’mon! Don’t worry about it! We’ll be fine! I’m just worrying for no reason…” Mondo ruffled his head, “This is what we’ve been training for, remember!? And I got better pokéballs this time, so it’ll be easier! We just gotta keep our cool, and it’ll go great! Alright?”

“…Lyc!” He nodded again, but more determined this time. But that probably wouldn’t last if the stuck around here for the next few hours…

“I know… let’s go get us some food, and then we can head over to the forest early and scope out the entrance.” Mondo decided, “And we can wreck some shit up while we’re there, too!”

“LYC!” Lycan agreed, eagerly following Mondo out of the door, though he couldn’t tell if it was ‘cause of the promise of food or some fights. Probably both…

A couple of hours later there were a lot of unconscious pokémon lying around the forest, and Mondo’s nerves had calmed down enough for him to actually eat some of the food he’d taken with him from the cafeteria. Especially as he’d managed to convince Lycan to cool down a little and practise hitting the other pokémon gently enough for them to go down in two hits, instead of one…

They could totally do this!

“Good work, Lycan!” Mondo shouted, as Lycan finished taking down one of those little spider pokémon, “But now it’s time to go meet up with everyone back at the school…”

“Can!” Lycan lolloped over to him and stayed at his side as he walked back towards the school, where everyone else would be… including Leon and Chi… who’d probably be giving him the same looks as before, while they waited for Kizakura to show up…

Fuckfuckfuck… He couldn’t start thinking about that again, he’d fuck everything up if he did! He just needed to take some deep breaths and calm down… They could do this after all, they’d just proven they could do it, all he had to do was come back in here after 10, find a Phantump and then have Lycan do the exact same thing he’d been doing just now! Easy, right!? Right…!

*Bzzt…* Eh? Now his pokédex was going off… Looked like a message from Michi…

‘Hey Mondo! Tonight’s the night, right? Good luck out there! Not that you’ll need it! Looking forward to seeing your new Phantump! You probably already know this, but they sound like crying kids, so listen out for that!’

Heh… He could just imagine the excited look on Michi’s face as he’d typed that… It was probably the same look he’d always get when Mondo would go out somewhere with a bunch of pokéballs and a load of hot air about how he was gonna come back with whatever pokémon was most common in the area, and Michi would excitedly share some handy tip for catching them that he’d picked up from somewhere before he headed out…
And then Mondo’d always come back empty-handed and the guy would try to hide his
disappointment by shrugging and acting like whatever pokémon Mondo had been talking about
sucked, or would have been a terrible idea anyway. And Mondo would play along, acting like he
hadn’t really wanted a new pokémon anyway, cause it was better than admitting he’d fucked up
again… Even though they both knew that’s what happened every… single… time…

…Was tonight really gonna be any different…?

*Bzzt* … *Now Daiya was sending him a message…

‘Hey Bro! Have fun tonight! I know you’ll do us proud!’

UUURRGgghhh… Why had he thought telling people he was gonna try and catch a Phantump was
such a good idea!? It’d seemed like a great idea at the beginning of term, when he was worrying
about having to understand lessons and try and catch up with everyone else in the school and do the
DPTL stuff. Telling everyone he had to wait eight weeks before he could even try to catch the
pokémon he wanted had meant he’d been able to put it off, and escape the constant pressure of
people asking when he was going to catch a second pokémon, for once in his life!

But now he’d spent most of the term bragging about how he was totally gonna come back outta here
with a Phantump in two hours’ time, and every time someone mentioned it was just reminding him of
how much that pressure had built up in the time that he’d spent ignoring it, that it was now strong
enough to squeeze his whole body so hard that he could barely breathe, or keep the food he’d just
eaten down…

“Gyaaahhhhhhh! Th-th-there’s something coming out of the forest!” A familiar screaming voice
knocked Mondo out of his thoughts… Seemed like he’d made his way back to the entrance while he
was lost in thought…

“Calm the fuck down!” Mondo snapped, wishing he could follow his own advice as he dodged the
Vileplume on the side of the path. “I just figured I’d start scoping the place out before class
started…”

“Ah… Oowada!” Urg… Great, Ishimaru was probably striding over here to bitch him out for only
just being on time to the class, or something stupid… “Here’s your torch for the evening! And good
luck catching a Phantump!”

*Oh fuck him!* As if it wasn’t bad enough that the people he liked knew that was what he was gonna
be trying to do, and would know if he fucked it up, now the whole dame class knew!? And
besides…! “How the hell do you know about that!?”

“Err… I’m sorry! K-Kizakura mentioned it when he was reminding me to start organising my own
second pokémon!” Ishimaru stammered, “I didn’t realise it wasn’t common knowledge! I hope I
haven’t spoilt any kind of surprise you might have been planning!”

*Fuck*… Was the guy starting to tear up!? Dammit, Mondo probably shouldn’t have yelled at him that
much, even if he had been wanting to scream all evening! He’d probably just been trying to be nice,
in his own dumbass way.

“It’s no big deal… just figured I’d keep it quiet so people didn’t feel bad for me if it didn’t work out
tonight…” Mondo told him, which was kind of the truth.

“Ahh… yes, I see. After all it would be very disappointing for you if you weren’t able to find one,
seeing as this is the only opportunity you’ll have to catch one before term ends…” Ishimaru started
blathering about exactly the kind of shit he’d been trying not to think about all day! “You’d have to seriously rethink what pokémon you’re planning to catch…”

“Yeah, I know that!” Fuck, he didn’t need this asshole reminding him about this! “How about you!? Did you catch yourself a new pokémon or what…?” Man, he hoped Ishimaru hadn’t… that’d make Mondo the last person in his class to have one!

“Actually, no, I didn’t!” Really!? Then why the hell did he sound so super-fucking proud of himself!? “I’m getting one from Tanaka, but he…!”

“What!?” Togami started having a gigantic pissy-fit. “How did you, of all people, manage to convince that lunatic to breed you a pokémon!”

“I didn’t ask him to breed me a pokémon! I found out yesterday that he occasionally has spare pokémon, so I went and asked him for one of them, rather than contribute to the already too-high number of unwanted domesticated pokémon by catching one… let alone having one bred for me!”

Hah! He might be acting all holier-than-thou, but all that meant was that he’d given up on catching a pokémon and had gone begging the school breeder for one whatever he had going spare! Some future champ if he couldn’t even catch one pokémon by himself!

“But… I’ve spent all term trying to reason with him, but he won’t so much as talk to me, regardless of how much I offer him!” Togami carried on, “How can he be willing to just give you a pokémon after one day!?”

“…I don’t think it would be fair if I told you that!” Ishimaru said curtly, to Togami’s obvious annoyance…

“But… where is the pokémon, then?” Naegi changed the topic completely, “If it was a spare baby, couldn’t he have just given it to you straight away…?”

“Well, as I was about to say…” Ishimaru glared at Togami, who just sneered back at him. “He’s giving me a rescue pokémon, so I need to earn my second badge to make sure it will listen to me!”

“…Tanaka looks after rescue pokémon…?” Kirigiri asked him, “I hadn’t heard anything about that…”

“Well, he said it’s currently being assessed by someone else, so perhaps he knows someone else who rescues them!” Ishimaru guessed, “I’m afraid he didn’t give me many details about it…”

“Well, at least it’s one less pokémon in a shelter!” Asahina chirped.

“Exactly! It might take more time to look after, at first, but I’m sure it’ll be a fantastic addition to my life, in the end!” Ishimaru laughed, making himself seem like a damn martyr for taking on a problem pokémon, like there wasn’t anyone else in the class who already had.

“Huh… I never even considered adopting a pokémon…” Chi frowned, “Maybe I should have checked around a few shelters first…”

“Eehh… but then you might have missed your chance to catch Charja!” Leon pointed out, “Besides, everyone knows you’re supposed to catch your second pokémon, right!?”

Urgh… They still looked upset! Fucking Ishimaru with his bullshit making everyone else feel guilty for acting like real trainers… “Well… it’s not like you could have adopted a pokémon, you didn’t have any badges back then…” Mondo realised, “But my bro’s got a ton of pokémon he’s rescued, so
if you decide to go that route next time, he can hook you up!”

“Oh! Alright then, thanks!” Chi smiled. Now that was better…!

“Your brother rescues pokémon, Mr. Oowada?” Yamada looked surprised, “But I thought he was leader of your Gym! Or do you have two brothers?”

“Actually, League Association Guidelines state that Gym Leaders have a responsibility to confiscate any pokémon they see being mistreated!” …Why the hell did Ishimaru know that!? “So it makes perfect sense for a Gym Leader to rescue pokémon!”

“Wow, really!?” Asahina looked impressed, “So, does that mean your father has rescued lots of pokémon as well, Sakura!?”

Oh, great! Of course she was gonna ask Oogami about it and give her a chance to show how much better her Gym was than his! Bet they were rescuing dozens a day and probably had a fucking house or something to look after them all properly as well, not like the overcrowded tent Daiya kept all his in…

“Hmm… I recall him taking a trainer’s pokémon from him, once.” Oogami answered, after thinking about it for a while.

“Once!? Daiya ends up taking one or two every week!” Hah! He’d finally found something his Gym did better than hers!

“Heh…” Togami let out one of those smug chuckles of his, “…I suppose that’s what happens when you let a bunch of common thugs pretend to run a Gym…”

“The hell’s that mean!?”

“It means your brother probably abused his position and used it to steal other people’s hard-earned pokémon for no reason!” Oh, that was it! This guy was dead! “After all, why else would your Gym confiscate such a high number of pokémon compared to hers…?”

“Location.” Kirigiri’s random statement was the only reason Togami’s glasses were still in one piece, “Dendemille Gym is at the summit of a mountain… A trainer who doesn’t have the motivation to look after their pokémon properly isn’t going to have the motivation to get up there.”

Huh, guess she wasn’t so bad, even if she did fucking cheat at pokéball hunts…

“B-but… that still doesn’t explain why you get one a week!” Great, now Fukawa was at it too! “Opelucid Gym was right in the middle of town, and people said the world was going downhill if Drayden had to take more than four pokémon in one year!”

“Urg… well…” How the hell was he supposed to explain that!? What, did their Gym just attract a ton of assholes, or something…!?  

“Oh! I know! It’s because Oowada’s Gym moves!” Ishimaru shouted, “It creates a time limit for people to get their badge!”

“…So!?” Togami asked.

“Well… If you knew the Gym was moving ninety miles south the next day, you’d be more desperate to get their badge then, than if you could just spend a few more days in town training and try again.” Ishimaru explained, “And that desperation leads people to be less tolerant of any mistakes or
misbehaviour from their pokémon!”

Well… that would explain why Daiya always seemed to end up taking people’s pokémon off of them right before they were due to pack up and leave the place…

“So, what? You think it’s alright for people to be shitty trainers, just ‘cause they’re on a time limit?” Leon asked him, angrily.

“Absolutely NOT!” Ishimaru glared at him, “I’m just explaining why a poor trainer that would have gone unnoticed in a conventional Gym would end up showing their true colours in Oowada’s! Because the additional pressure is more likely to break their façade!”

“Well, it’s still weird that you even know that…” Leon muttered, “It takes one to know one, y’know…?”

“Umm… not necessarily?” Chihiro decided to stand up for Ishimaru, again. “I’ve heard of breeders making tests to see how a trainer reacts to a misbehaving pokémon when they’re under pressure to prove they’re able to control pokémon, so it’s pretty similar to what he’s talking about…”

“Well, I never had to do anything like that, and I got Lux from a breeder!” Leon argued.

“Well… I don’t mean every breeder would worry about it…” Chihiro sighed, “But I know breeders who do…”

“…And so you do, as well, Ishimaru…?” Togami asked.

Ishimaru stared at him for way too long before answering… “…N-no. I… I’ve… never heard of a breeder doing that…! Before now, of course! Ahaha…!”

“So where did you hear about it then!” Leon asked him.

“Err… I… don’t really remember!” Ishimaru stammered, which didn’t impress Leon at all. “Maybe I just… thought of it, just now!”

“Well, it’s not like it really matters, is it?” Naegi asked, which was probably fair. True, Ishimaru was an annoying asshole, and his dog being willing to dig itself to exhaustion was fucking worrying, even though even Ishimaru himself had been just as freaked out by that as everyone else, but Leon seemed to nit-pick everything the guy did, sometimes… “Besides, you haven’t told us what pokémon you’re getting!”

“Oh! Well, I think it’s a Misdreavus!” Ishimaru answered, looking relieved to be given an excuse to talk about something else.

“You… think it’s a Misdreavus…?” Chihiro asked, suspiciously. “…Does that mean he didn’t show it to you… no pictures or anything…”

“No. As I said, it’s currently undergoing a mental health assessment by a friend of his, and I was so excited about getting a second pokémon that I forgot to ask what species it is…” Ishimaru admitted, which made Chihiro cringe. “But he said it’s a smart Ghost with experience in research! So, as Mismagius tend to create a lot of their own incantations, I figured it must be Misdreavus!”

…Chihiro was just string at him in exasperated shock, which was fair ‘cause Ishimaru had missed the answer that was stood staring him right in the face!

“A smart pokémon that helps with researching stuff? If ya ask me, that sounds more like Chihiro’s
Golett!” Mondo pointed out, prompting the Golett in question to salute at him. “Or did you forget
that’s a Ghost-type, too?”

“No! But Tanaka was referring to the pokémon as a ‘ghost’, rather than a ghost-type, so I think it’s
likely he means a pure Ghost-type… or at least a non-solid pokémon!” Ishimaru argued, “But I don’t
know for sure, so for now I’m just going to look into how to care for Ghost-types in general, until I
get a chance to ask him more about it!”

“Umm… But… have you considered what you’d do if it got to the end of term and it turned out you
weren’t able to adopt the pokémon Gundam’s talking about, for, umm… some reason…?” Chihiro
asked, looking way too worried for Ishimaru’s sake, “Like… if it turned out the ghost wasn’t
adoptable…”

“Hmm… I suppose it is possible the assessment might show that it wouldn’t be stable enough for a
conventional trainer to take care of properly.” Ishimaru admitted, “I guess I’d either have to hope
Tanaka has another spare pokémon by then… or go out a catch myself a pokémon after all…”

“O-okay… as long as you’ve got a back-up plan… and save some money for pokéballs…” Chi
muttered, still frowning about it. It was almost like they were sure Gundam wasn’t gonna hold up his
end of the bargain, but he always seemed pretty reliable at bringing all the pokémon for the DPTL
classes… But they knew him better than Mondo did, given all the time they hung out with him and
Souda outside of class…

Besides, it wasn’t like it mattered to him if Ishimaru got screwed out of a pokémon! He had his own
second pokémon to worry about catching… so where the hell was Kizakura!? Hell, even by
Mondo’s standards, this was starting to take the piss…! Where the hell was he!? What, had the class
been cancelled and he’d forgot to mention it!?

…Hell, the way he felt right now, maybe that wouldn’t be so bad… After all, no one could give him
shit if wasn’t able to even try catching a Phantump…

“Hey…! Sorry I’m late, guys!” Fuck! Okay, guess he was doing this after all! “Some tourists
managed to lose their kid in the school store and security have no idea where she went… I don’t
suppose any of you have seen a brown-haired girl with pigtails, a pink dress and an Abra, have
you…”

“…No.” Ishimaru spoke up, after no one else did. “But if you need more help searching for her…”

“That won’t be necessary.” Kizakura put up a hand to stop him, “We already have security combing
the school, and she won’t have been able to leave the school without them noticing… The Abra’s
not powerful enough to teleport people yet.”

“I see.” Kirigiri responded… probably ‘cause she’d been about to suggest that herself.

“Well, in that case. You kids are free to head out now!” Kizakura told them, “Just remember
everything I’ve taught you about this place, and for those of you who don’t think you can deal well
with the ghosts, I’ve got some suggestions for things you can do without going too deep in there…”

“Alright, Lycan, you heard the man!” Mondo patted the hand he had on Lycan’s shoulder, while Chi
and a few others headed over to the teacher, “Let’s do this!”

“Lyc!” Lycan nodded determinedly, before they headed back past the Vileplume and underneath the
dark canopy of trees…
Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
How the hell had the forest got so dark so suddenly!? It seemed like it was barely a few minutes ago that he’d walked out from this same path, and he’d been able to see fine, then! But now it was black enough that he was having trouble making out stuff more than a meter ahead of him…

“Hey… I need a sec to get used to the dark.” Mondo muttered to Lycan, tugging on his shoulder gently.

“…Or you could try using a torch and getting out of my way!” Togami snapped like the douchebag he was, as a bright beam of light suddenly lit up the area in front of them and he started barging past them both…

“Rrro…!” Lycan flinched at the bright light.

“It’s called having a pokémon who hates light, asshole!” Mondo snapped after him, as he sauntered off. No point having a torch if it blinded the pokémon that was supposed to be looking after him!

“Fucking prick… c’mon, let’s got off the main path before anyone else does that…”

“Can…” Lycan let Mondo pull him into the dense trees to their right, even though neither of them could see properly at the moment, until the lights from the path they’d just been on disappeared, then they stood and waited until their eyes got used to the dark…

At least, as used to the dark as Mondo’s eyes actually could get. It was good thing Chi had managed to program a map of the area for him to follow, otherwise he’d be shit outta luck if Lycan got knocked out… Not that there ought to be much here that could knock him out.

“You ready?” Mondo asked, getting an exaggerated nod in return… just enough movement that Mondo could actually see it. “Alright… let’s get going. We’re trying to find a ghost-type that sounds like a crying kid, so keep an ear out for that, okay?”

“Lycan!” Lycan nodded, and slowly moved forward, pulling Mondo forward by the hand…

They’d moved about like this before, with Lycan leading and Mondo practically blind, but it was still pretty slow going, as Lycan had to deal with leading someone almost twice his size, and make sure he didn’t pull Mondo straight into a tree branch or something stupid like that. But it worked better than blinding Lycan with a torch would have done… and maybe it was Mondo’s imagination, but he felt like he was starting to hear faint moaning sounds… But it could just as easily have been a HootHoot… Maybe if he listened a little harder, he might be able to figure out which it was…

“PHHHAAAAAAA!”

“AAAARRRGHHHH!” Mondo jumped at the sudden noise, and accompanying sense of freezing cold, that came from right next to his leg…

“Rrrrr…CAN!” …And before he could figure out what had caused it, Lycan had whirled around and smashed it over the head with a rock.

“Tuuuuuummp…” …Shit! It was a Phantump! But they’d both panicked and Lycan had ended up knocking it out in one hit!
“R… roc…” Shit… He could hear Lycan freezing up as he panicked over having messed up… even though that had been Mondo’s fault for freaking out like that… But what the fuck else was he going to do when something suddenly snuck up behind him and shrieked at him like that…!

“…Well… It’s not like we wanna catch some little punk who pulls a sneak attack like that anyway, right?!” Mondo waved his hand around in the air until it landed on Lycan, and then patted him on the shoulder, “We wanna find one who won’t resort to freaking me out!”

“C… can!” Lycan agreed, and Mondo could feel some of the tension in his muscles easing off… But it still like he was more on-edge than before… “Ly can!”

…But he was still trying to pull Mondo along so they could get going again, anyway. Not like Mondo was going to doubt him if he thought he was ready to give it another go… “Sure, let’s go.” Mondo agreed, letting himself be pulled along in the dark again…

“Aaaaa… Aaaaa… Uuuuuu…” This time he was sure he could hear the sound of crying! And Lycan was crouching down into a more aggressive stance…

“Alright… I’m letting ya go now…” It wouldn’t help if he needed to fight and Mondo was still gripping his shoulder. “Just one hit, then I’ll deal with it, alright?”

“L-lyc.” Lycan agreed, gruffly, as he started creeping forward, slowly enough for Mondo to keep up with him…

“Tuuump…?” Sounded like they’d been noticed… and it was a lot closer than before…

“ROC!” Lycan’s head suddenly snapped to the side, and again he was holding a large rock in his hand as he spun his body and arm in the direction of the ghost and brought it slamming down...

“…Phhhaaaaaaaa…” Mondo couldn’t see what had happened… but it didn’t sound like that pokémon had survived the hit.

“R… roc… ROC!” And Lycan’s reaction pretty much confirmed it…

“Hey… hey! It’s alright!” Mondo reached back out for his shoulder and then shook it gently, “It just startled you and you hit it as hard as you could, to make sure it didn’t hurt either of us, right?”

“L-lyc…” Lycan admitted, shaking slightly.

“I figured… but you ain’t gotta worry about that! These guys are nothing compared to us!” Mondo told him, “Just ‘cause they can appear outta nowhere doesn’t make ‘em dangerous! We just gotta make sure we’re the ones catching them by surprise, right? Even if we end up knocking out a bunch while you get used to hunting them, okay?!”

“C… can!” Lycan nodded, breathing deeply and starting to relax a bit more as Mondo brushed over his shoulder fur with the palm of his hand… “…Ly can.”

“Alright then.” Mondo took that as his queue to get ready to move again…

They ran into a few more Phantumps that tried to attack them from the side, which Lycan knocked out… but at least he wasn’t panicking so much when he did knock them out… and maybe it was wishful thinking on Mondo’s part, but he seemed to be hitting them less each time he did it… He’d just needed some time to get used to them jumping out at him, after all…

“…Lyc!” Lycan suddenly stopped dead and made to push Mondo’s hand off of his shoulder with a
quiet bark, “Roc…”

“Uuuuuu Uuuuuum Aaaa…” Crying, and it was pretty close by, to. It seemed like this one hadn’t noticed them getting close enough to attack…

Mondo silently patted Lycan’s shoulder before moving his hand away completely and moving it down to his bag, to grab one of the Dusk Balls… Surely this would be the time they finally managed to catch a pokémon…! Lycan didn’t make a sound as he raced off towards the sound of the crying, so there was no reason for him to get startled before he made the first hit…

“ROC!” Mondo heard the sound of stone hitting wood… hard. And then his stomach sank as he only just made out a faint groan from the other pokémon… “Rrrrr… ROC! Roc, Roc, Roc…!”

S**HIT!** Lycan had hit too hard again, and now he it sounded like he was so pissed off he was hurting himself!

“Hey… hey! Lycan! It’s okay!” Mondo called out to him, stumbling through the dark towards the noise. “Hitting yourself ain’t helping! Calm the fuck down!”

“Rrrrr…” Lycan let out a frustrated growl, but at least he wasn’t tearing up the forest anymore…

“**Lycan**!”

What the…!? He was getting up to go again, already!? “Hey… we ain’t gotta try again straight away. We’ve got time to rest up for a bit if you nee…”

“**LYCAN**!” Lycan snapped.

“Alright, if you say so…” Mondo agreed, putting his hand back over Lycan shoulder, which felt even more like a rock under his hands that usual… Dammit, Lycan had completely lost his cool… But telling him that was the last thing that would help… He’d just have to hope Lycan would calm down a bit once he started knocking out Phantumps again…

But he didn’t. Each time he hit one and knocked it out, he was getting more and more stressed, but still refusing to give Mondo a chance to calm him down, so his hits kept getting harder and harder…

**Dammit!** They were getting nowhere like this! That first fucking asshole had shaken them both up right at the beginning and now everything was going to hell! Why the fuck did this shit always have to happen to him!? Why couldn’t he just catch one pokémon, just one, so this wouldn’t seem like such a big deal anymore!? If he could just do it once, it’d be easy after that! He wouldn’t have to be worrying about people muttering behind his back about him only having one pokémon anymore, and could just decide to catch new pokémon on a whim when he felt like it, or maybe even start helping take some of Daiya’s one off of his hands, instead of feeling like he needed to try and catch every pokémon he came across, because everyone’d think he was a shit trainer until he did catch one!

He just wanted one easy catch to give him experience, like playing a videogame on easy mode or…

…or using one of those Quick Balls.

…Dammit, was he really gonna be willing to stoop that low? If he did that, everyone would know he’d used that ball to catch one and hadn’t been able to catch it properly!

…But at this rate, they were gonna know he couldn’t catch one anyway, ‘cause he was gonna leave this forest empty-handed! A shitty catch would be better than no catch, right!? And maybe he could make up some story about how he’d gone to use one of the Dusk Balls after wearing it down, but accidentally picked out one of the Quick Balls Leon and Chi had made him take with him? Or he
could dump out all the Dusk Balls and tell people he’d had a really long, epic battle against the Phantump and been reduced to using them at the end of the fight… Or maybe he could say the Phantump liked him enough to just jump into one of his pokéballs before he even got the chance to fight it… Just one little lie to get everyone to take him seriously, so he could start helping Daiya expand the Gym without them all thinking he’d fuck everything up if he did…!

“...Aaaaa… Aaaaa… Uuuuuu...” And there was another Phantump, close enough that they could hear where it was, even though they couldn’t see it yet.

“L-lyc. Can roc!” Lycan started psyching himself up for another attempt… but it was clear he was also freaking out at the thought of fucking up again… He needed a break as much as Mondo did.

“Hey… hang on a sec.” Mondo tugged on his arm, “Lemme try something first… Chi and Leon gave me something that might mean we can catch it without a fight first…”

“Rrrrrr…!” Lycan growled quietly. He obviously didn’t like that Mondo was suggesting he couldn’t do this… but by now he was starting to worry that it might be true…

“Hey… I ain’t saying this is your fault! I know we’re under a lot of pressure, but I’m the one whose supposed to deal with it! I shouldn’t have pushed it on you!” Mondo knelt down to face him. “But… I wasn’t… strong enough to deal with everything… everyone always asking when I’m gonna get a new pokémon, and then all this school shit, and the gang being judged on how I do! I just… I need a break, I need something to go right, even if I do it the fucking easy way! But… that’s my fault, not yours! Alright…?”

“…Roc.” Lycan nodded and held up one of his front paws to Mondo’s face for a fist-bump.

“Thanks, buddy.” Mondo bumped the paw and stood back up, “Now… let’s see if this works!”

“Uuuuuuu… Uuuuu… UUUUUU!” Perfect… it still hadn’t seen them… but he could figure out where it was, in between the cluster of trees…

All he had to do was get out one of the blue-and-yellow balls from the very bottom of his bag, wind up his arm, and throw…!

*thump* HA! He’d hit…

“AAAAAAAAAHhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!” …Something that didn’t react like any of the other Phantumps had! For starters, he could have sworn he heard footsteps running away…

“Shit!” Mondo quickly fumbled his way through the trees, but whatever he’d thrown the ball at was long gone, leaving nothing but a single treestump. “What the hell was that!?”

“…Can!” Lycan barked for his attention, pointing at something on the ground that Mondo couldn’t see…

“Lemme take a look with torch…” Mondo warned him before turning it on and pointing it at the ground…

Footprints. Small ones… About the size of Chi’s shoes, but even higher pitched than them… And Zorua’s didn’t talk in human form…

“…Lyc!” Lycan barked again, just before something rolled into his foot.

It was the Quick Ball… still ready to be used, even though he’d been sure it had hit his target…
“Fuck. That was that missing girl!” No wonder no one had managed to find her in the school! Guess she’d managed to teleport out after all!

…Not that it mattered how she’d ended up here. What mattered was that that chick had obviously been scared shitless out here in the dark, and then Mondo had come along and fucking beaned her with a pokéball outta nowhere and fucking terrified her into running off deeper into the forest!

“We gotta get after her!” Mondo realised, switching the torch off, “Can you follow her footsteps…? Or scent…?”

“Lyc!” Lycan nodded, stooping down low and sniffing around the stump for a moment, before he started to amble off between the trees, dragging Mondo behind him…

…Fucking hell, how far had this kid run!? Sure, Lycan wasn’t the fastest pokémon in the world, especially not hamped by Mondo like this, but he’d have thought the girl would have stopped by now! Unless she’d run into someone else from the class… or another pokémon…

Oh Arceus, no! Don’t let her have run into something dangerous! He’d never be able to look anyone in the face ever again if he had to tell ‘em he’d got a kid killed because he’d been trying to cheat his way into catching a pokémon before he’d even looked at it…!

“Hey… you able to tell if we’re catching up to her?” Mondo asked after, after they seemed to have been wandering in a straight line for ages.

“…Can.” Lycan looked up at him and nodded, before going back to peering at the ground and foraging forward.

Alright… that was something. Probably not been caught by a pokémon, right? Especially not if she was still leaving footprints! And the area around them was starting to get bright enough for Mondo to see… there were even some lights flickering nearby! She’d probably just worked out how to get back to the school! That was why she wasn’t stopping! Heck, she might even be able to get back by herself, depending on how far away they were! And according to the map Fujisaki had given him, it was…

…A mile away. In the opposite direction!? Then what the hell were those lights then…?

“…Fuck, LITWICKS!” Shit, shit, shit! Those would kill her if she followed them for too long!

“Lycan, this way! We’ve gotta hurry!”

It only took Lycan a moment to start following Mondo as he took off running towards the brightest light he could see, trying to ignore the memory of his brother’s voice sternly telling him over and over again never to follow a light in the woods at night, no matter what the situation. He knew this was a fucking stupid thing to do, but given it was his own fucking stupid fault that girl was in danger, he couldn’t just not try and save her…

Besides, he had Lycan with him now! Not like he couldn’t handle a few measly Litwicks! And he was already starting to hear faint traces of a girl’s laughter up ahead…!

“Hahaha… Abra… There you are… I thought I’d lost you…” What!? Why the heck was an Abra hanging around a bunch of Litwicks…?

“~Chan-de~lure~…” Wait… did he just hear what he thought he’d heard…?

“You know the way home… Okay… I’ll follow you… No teleporting…” Oh shit! Chandelures could hypnotise people, couldn’t they!?
“GET AWAY FROM THAT POKÉMON, KID!” Mondo yelled, just as he crashed through a clump of bushes and stumbled onto the scene.

…Just as he’d thought, a little girl, slightly smaller than Chi, was sat right in front of one of the chandelier-shaped pokémon, smiling tiredly as she stared into, or *though*, the purple flame billowing from its head. And to make matters *worse*, a few flying lanterns and a whole bunch of moving candles were slowly starting to surround her.

“…But… Abra’s my *friend*…” The girl answered him quietly, not looking away from the flames for a moment.

“~Luuure~…” The ghost agreed, gently swaying its head side to side…

“THAT AIN’T AN ABRA IT’S A GHOST!” Mondo yelled at her, waiting for Lycan to catch up so he could do something more than shout at her…

“…Oh.” The girl blinked for a moment, like she was finally seeing what was really going on. “…Oh… Kay… I’ll… I’ll…”

She slumped forward, landing face down in the dirt just as Lycan finally caught up to him and burst onto the scene…

“Lycan! Clear me a path to the girl!” Mondo didn’t even finish the sentence before Lycan jumped forward and started swinging at all the pokémon in his path. The Litwicks didn’t even get a chance to do anything before he’d flung them out of the way, and the couple of… whatever the lantern ones were called were too stupid to realise that Lycan wasn’t going to be put off by *fire*, so he barely took a hit getting past them, which left him free to charge at the Chandelure while Mondo ran to pick up the girl…

“Nrgh…” She groaned slightly as he moved her… but otherwise her body was lifeless, cold to the touch and lighter than it looked like it *should* be… She needed help fast…!

“Phaaaaannn...?” Mondo looked up at the sound of the last pokémon he’d expected to see right now…

It looked like Lycan had managed to take out the Chandelure in his first hit, ‘cause it was nowhere to be seen, and now there was a *Phantump* milling around at the front of the remaining group of candles and lanterns…!

“R…Roc!?” Lycan turned to look at him, not sure what to do… After all, this was their chance to finally catch the pokémon they’d come here for!

But… That’d take *time*, and the rest of the ghosts were probably still feeding off of the little girl in his arms…

“We ain’t got time, just kill it and as many of the rest as you can!” Mondo ordered, standing up and hoisting the girl’s body over his shoulder so he could start running…

“Lycan!” Lycan agreed, charging forward to hit the Phantump with a Stone Edge…

“CHAAAAAAAANND...!” What the…!? Why did the Phantump sound like *that*?

…His question was answered the next time Mondo blinked, as what had appeared to be a Phantump moments earlier was suddenly replaced by the unconscious frame of the Chandelure, lying on the ground with its flame all but extinguished… The fucking *bastard* had tried to hypnotise them! If he’d
been enough of a selfish prick to have Lycan hold back and let him catch it, then they’d have probably ended up dead…!

…But he hadn’t, and now the gang of ghosts had seen their leader get KOed in one hit, they were all scattering away in different directions.

“…Can-rovers!” Lycan took a moment to work out what the hell had just happened for himself, but then left out a victory howl at their expense.

“Yeah, good job buddy!” Mondo congratulated him, not that they could afford to rest yet. “But I’ve gotta get back to the school, fast! Get in the ball so I can carry you!”

Lycan nodded and disappeared into his ball, leaving Mondo to shift the girl’s weight so he could hold her and his pokédex, and started running down the route back to the school mapped out on it …

It didn’t take long before he was able to break out from underneath the trees and onto one of the thick main paths, making it a straight shot back to the school. And if any pokémon tried to stop him, he didn’t notice. All he was focused on was breathing in enough air to keep his legs moving as fast as possible. At least until he spotted Togami walking in the same direction as him up ahead… that must mean he was getting close!

Not that it was any excuse to slow down! He just changed his angle enough to make sure he didn’t outright crash into the guy as he ran past him, and then past the familiar old Vileplume that lived at the entrance, and through the crowd of people who were milling around Kizakura…

“…FOUND The…*kckh…*” Fuck! He didn’t have enough breath left to talk…! Or even STAND…!

“What the…!? Is this the…?” Kizakura rushed to take the girl off of his shoulder and then started going for his pokédex, while a few other people around Mondo rushed forward to hold him upright, so he only ended up sinking to his knees as he caught his breath, instead of falling flat on his face.

“…Kizakura here. I need a medical team at the forest entrance, ASAP! Probably a ghost attack…”

“Chandelure!” Mondo managed to cough out.

“Make that a confirmed Chandelure attack! Victim is young and unconscious but still breathing… I doubt it, but hold on…” Kizakura carried on down the phone for a while, before turning to look at him again. “Oowada, was it just the Chandelure, or where there other ghosts? And you wouldn’t have any idea how long she was following it for, would you?”

“There was a group of Litwicks and four of the, uhh… the medium ones…” Mondo was still blanking on the name, but that didn’t matter right now… As for the amount of time he’d been tracking her… “And it can’t have been more than half an hour.”

“Got it!” Kizakura relayed the details over the phone, giving Mondo a chance to finish recovering from his run.

“…They’re called Lampents!” Chirped an obnoxious voice to his right, which was the first time Mondo realised that Ishimaru had been one of the people who’d been holding him up this whole time, along with Leon and Oogami.

“That doesn’t fucking matter!” Leon snapped at him, “Most of us are worrying about the kid right now!”

“Of course! I… I just…” Ishimaru looked around for a moment as he trailed off… “…Sorry.”
“Whatever, I think I can get up now.” Mondo announced, shrugging his arms to get the three of them to let go so he could stand up by himself, just in time to watch as a team of people arrived with a hospital trolley and started hooking the girl up a bag of light blue fluid, speaking briefly to Kizakura before they rushed off with her in tow.

“They think she should be alright, based on what Oowada told them!” Kizakura announced to the class, “But, as her parents and security are probably going to be asking about this, you mind telling me everything she said to you, Oowada?”

“Uhh… well, there wasn’t much. When I found her, she was staring at the Chandelure and said something like ‘Abra, there you are, I found you… You know the way home? I’ll follow you…” Mondo remembered, “Oh, and she said ‘no teleporting’ as well. Then I told her it wasn’t an Abra and she said ‘oh’ and collapsed…”

“That’s all?” Kizakura looked confused, “How’d you know how long she’d been following them for, then?”

“Uhh…” FUCK! Now he was gonna sound like a fucking dumbass! But that probably would’ve have happened anyway, once the girl woke up and told everyone what happened… “Well… I was listening out for noises of kids crying, ‘cause I was trying to catch a Phantump… And I heard her behind some trees, before I saw her…”

“So you charged out and she ran away in terror…” Kizakura figured, “And then you tracked her for half an hour and found her with the Chandelure…”

“Yeah…” Mondo agreed. No need to tell everyone he’d been planning to use the Quick Ball, “And there were a bunch of Litwicks and four… Lampents starting to surround her, so I got Lycan to fight a path through, and once he knocked out the Chandelure, the rest all scattered.”

“…And you didn’t think to try and ring anyone and let them know what happened at any point…” Kizakura sighed.

“…No…” Fuck! He didn’t even think of calling for help! “I… I just started trying to catch up with her before she got into trouble.”

“I don’t blame you… but for future reference, the security staff have better ways to find people in the woods than any of you do!” Kizakura pointed out, both to him and the whole class. “Even if it’s something you think you can do by yourself, it’s better to let security know what you’re planning, just in case it turns out you’re following someone into a whole gang of ghost-types! Got it!?”,

“…Got it.” Mondo grumbled. Like it was so easy to think straight when you were panicking…

“Alright… Now, I know you probably feel alright, but do me a favour and go get yourself checked out at the med centre as well.” Kizakura told him.

What… Now!? “Uhh… but… I was gonna go back in and try and catch…” Mondo started, but trailed off in the face of the looks of concern, pity and fucking humour on the faces around him…

“Sorry, kid. You’re gonna have to hold off on your Phantump…” Kizakura said bluntly, “Class is over.”

“Grhk… uuurghh…” DAMMIT! He’d fucking failed again! After all that time preparing and telling everyone he was gonna catch a pokémon, he still fucking failed it up! And he didn’t have anyone to blame for it but himself, ‘cause if he hadn’t tried that stupid fucking Quick Ball he wouldn’t have scared the kid and then he might have had another chance to catch a real Phantump! But no, he’d been too
weak to keep trying to catch pokémon the right way, hadn’t he!? Because he was nothing but a weak, useless… “MOTHERFUCKER!”

Most of the people around him stepped back as he slammed his foot into the ground, hard enough to send a clump of it flying and also hurt his foot in the process. It was a fucking childish bullshit thing to do, but what did it matter, now everyone was gonna be talking about how he’d fucked up anyway…!? 

“Oowada, I understand you’re disappointed, but there’s no need for that kind of behaviour!” Of course Ishimaru was the first person to get at him for it, as if he had any idea what Mondo had had riding on this! “If you’re that set on have a Phantump as your second pokémon, why not contact a few shelters and find out if there are any avail…”

“FUCK YOU!” How could he just stand there and fucking tell Mondo to just give up and let everyone think he couldn’t do it like it was nothing!? “Just ’cause me catching a pokémon didn’t work out one time doesn’t mean I can’t do it!”

“…I didn’t say you couldn’t do it! It’s not like I wouldn’t have been capable of catching something if I’d really wanted to!” Oh, so that was it! He was still trying to make himself seem better than Mondo! “I just meant that if your strategy involves having a ghost-type now, then you could adopt one and…”

“…And you wouldn’t be the only loser in the class who hadn’t caught their second pokémon!” Mondo finished for him.

“That’s not what I was going to say!”

“But it’s what you’re thinking!”

“I…”

“That’s enough you two!” Kizakura shut Ishimaru up before he could finish, “Oowada, medical centre. The rest of you, bed… You’ve still got morning class tomorrow, remember?”

Most of the class groaned, and Ishimaru looked pissed that Kizakura hadn’t let him have the last word, but no one argued with him.

“…Alright, I’ll see you all tomorrow.” Mondo told them, and strode out of the forest quickly, taking his anger out on the ground beneath his feet. Fucking dumbass, telling him to quit just ’cause that’s what he’d done! Mondo would show him! He’d find something else that was badass and catch that! Hell, maybe he’d get himself a Scyther after all, just to screw with the asshole! They were pretty badass! He’d just have to make sure he never carried anything red, like his pokédex! Or Lycan’s pokéball… Or Lycan…

Okay, so maybe a Scyther wouldn’t work, but he’d find something…! He’d have to, or he’d never be able to face anyone in the gang again! Hell, it was gonna be bad enough facing them when he had the wrong pokémon, let alone having no pokémon…!

*Bzzzt… Bzzzt… Bzzzt…* …Shit. It was a call from Daiya!

…Maybe he could toss his pokédex? Urg, but then Daiya would probably ring the school and find out from them anyway… And then everyone would think he was a coward for not picking up the call, as well as a loser…

“…Hey.” Was all Mondo managed to get out, as both Daiya and Michi appeared on his screen…
“Hey, Bro! What’s with you not replying to our messages?” Daiya joked, “Wasn’t your class due to finish half an hour ago? We were starting to think something happened to you!”

“Urg…” What was he supposed to say to that? ‘Sorry I didn’t call, I’m too much of a coward to tell you I fucked up again!’…?

“Hey… Did something happen to you!?“ Michi leant forward, frowning at the screen, “Your skin’s looking fucked up…”

“Uhh… Lycan and I had a run-in with a Chandelure and it’s gang… It’s probably just that.” Mondo lied, “I’m going to the school hospital to make sure it’s not gonna be a problem.” He added, after even Daiya’s eyes widened in shock.

“Well, good, but what the hell were you even doing near one of those things!?“ Daiya asked angrily, “You know not to follow lights in the woods at night!”

“Yeah, I know that! It was the kid I was following who didn’t!” Mondo snapped, which did nothing except make the pair of them look confused as hell… Well, he might as well get this over with! “…Some kid managed to get into the forest, and I scared the shit outta her ‘cause her crying sounded like a Phantump and I went to try and catch her… So then I ended up spending the rest of the class tracking her down and then running out of the forest to get her some help…”

“Did it work…?” Daiya asked.

“Well… they said she’ll be alright when they took her off…” Mondo told him.

“Good! Good job, Bro!” Daiya grinned, “Told you you’d make us proud tonight!”

“Whaddaya mean…?” Had Daiya not figured it out yet!? “…I didn’t manage to catch any pokémon…”

“Pfft! So!? Mondo, you beat down a gang of ghosts to save a kid’s life!” Daiya exclaimed, “How many people can say that!?“

“…Well…” He guessed Daiya had a point… This could be a pretty cool story to tell people… if he cut out a few parts…

“Ehh… besides, it might be just as well…” Michi shrugged, “I think Trevenants gimme hay fever…”

...Dammit. There he went again, pretending it wasn’t such a big deal that Mondo had fucked up…

“…And you didn’t think to tell him that any time over the last eight weeks!?” Daiya asked him.

“Well… He seemed so excited about it… I figured I could take meds for it or something.” Michi answered.

“You mean the hayfever meds you’re not supposed to drive while taking?” Daiya massaged his forehead, “How did you think that was gonna work!?”

“I… didn’t really think about that…” Michi admitted, “I just… didn’t wanna be a downer, y’know?”

Wait… so he’d been faking his excitement about the Phantump this whole time!? And what about all the other pokémon Mondo had tried to catch…!?  

“Dude… you’re my best friend! You can just say if you think I’m doing something stupid, you know that, right?” Mondo told him, “I don’t want a pokémon if it’s gonna ‘cause you trouble!”
“Eh… really?” He looked pretty embarrassed.

“Yeah, really! So tell me before I try and catch something, next time!” Mondo told him. At least that way he’d know for sure if Michi was just trying to make him feel better or not…

“Alright… Got it!” He nodded.

“Great. Good talk, guys!” Daiya announced, trying to hide the urge to laugh. “Now, quit talking to us and get to that hospital already! Even if you are looking better now!”

“I know, I know… You two stay safe as well, alright?” Mondo told them.

“Will do!” Michi promised, as Dayia got ready to cut the connection… “Looking forward to hearing what pokémon you decide to go for next!”

…Now there was a good fucking question… what were his options, even? He’d probably have to ask Chi what pokémon were in the areas he was actually allowed in… and what the hell to do about most of his pokéballs being Dusk Balls when he wasn’t allowed to try and catch anything at night!

…But he could worry about that tomorrow. Whatever he ended up doing, at least he wouldn’t be giving up!

Chapter End Notes

In case it’s not clear, my thinking with the Chandelure is that it was hypnotising people into thinking it was the pokémon they were trying to find, which is why Mondo and Lycanroc were seeing a Phantump.

Thanks for reading! Next chapter we will see Lycanroc’s reaction to this.
Keep Trying (Lycanroc POV) pt. 1

Chapter Notes

I might have already said this, but: New Retcon, Arcanine calls Kiyotaka ‘Taka’ because I’ve been regretting him NOT doing that for several chapters. Also warning for some vague descriptions of animal abuse.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lycanroc stares at the plate of food in front of him… It’s piled high with cooked meats, along with the odd sample of the other foods that Mondo chose to eat this morning, like cooked eggs, bread and potatoes…

But stare is all he does, as he slowly chews the dry, sticky mouthful of sausage that he’s slowly trying to force down into his writhing stomach, which is protesting every bite.

He feels sick… but he knows that he’s not. He’s just a fucking mess who can’t do anything he’s supposed to! He was supposed to hit one of those ghosts without knocking it out last night, and now he’s fucked that up, he’s supposed to go out and help Mondo catch something else instead, but he can’t even manage to eat his damn breakfast like he’s supposed to be doing right now! So now it’s just sat there in front of him, making him want to smash it up and find some place to bury it, so he won’t be reminded of what a screw-up he is…!

…Maybe he could sneak off and get rid of it… The humans are ignoring him. They’re busy discussing pokéballs. Something about the ones Mondo bought not being useful to him now he’s not allowed back outside when its night time, and how guilty Chihiro is for not having thought of that before now…

Like it’s their fault Mondo never got a single chance to throw any of those balls last night…

[Lycanroc, you appear to be eating at a reduced rate!] Golett’s loud, matter-of-fact announcement sounds like an accusation, even though it just said it in the same weird energetic voice it says everything in. [Are you not feeling well?]

[I’m fine. Guess I just ain’t in the mood for sausages and bacon today…] He doesn’t deserve his favourite foods anyway… Not after last night…

[I’m more surprised you’re ever in the mood for that garbage…] Luxray grimaces at the plate, after lapping up the last of the weird, fishy-smelling goo he eats.

[Screw you! It’s the same shit your trainer’s eating, you prissy asshole!]

[Urg… don’t remind me…] He just scowls even more, [Even after all that time Miss Kanon spent trying to get him to improve himself…]

[Oh, hey! Lycan, hey! I know!] Litten suddenly scampers over to his side and starts tapping his arm with his paw. [If you don’t wanna eat it, I’ll get rid of it for you…!]

[FUCK OFF!] Lycan doesn’t even think to hide the wave of anger he feels at the suggestion… like hell is he letting some damn cat take his food! Little asshole would just waste it by setting it on fire
anyway! [It’s my food!]

[Eeeeeeeppp!] He regrets it as soon as the kitten flinches, and runs under a chair, to cower behind his trainer. Dammit, that’s exactly the sort of fucking stupid reaction that made him screw everything up last night…!

…And now all the humans at the table are staring at him…

“Litten, buddy, I told you not to pester him this morning…” Leon is the first to speak, reaching down to calm the trembling kitten. “Dude had a rough night…”

[Sorry… I thought it’d help…] The mewling apology just makes Lycan feel even more like an asshole.

“…He doesn’t look like he’s eaten much…” Chihiro is next, noticing the same thing their Golett did.

“Hey…” Mondo looks down at him and massages his shoulder anxiously. “You ain’t still worried ‘bout last night, are ya…? Like I said, turns out those things make Michi sick, anyway…”

[Huuuh…] Lycan sighs loudly and rolls his eyes. As if Michi doesn’t always have some dumb reason to suddenly hate the pokémon Mondo had wanted him to help catch, once he’d fucked it up…

“…And I don’t think he’s bullshitting me, this time… I think he’s been faking being excited about it this whole time…” Who does Mondo think he’s kidding, why the hell would the guy bother to do that!? “…’Sides, those Phantumps seem like assholes anyway! Who wants some cowardly little shits like them on their team, eh!?"

[…] Lycan can’t bear to look at him. He knows damn well Mondo had wanted one of them on their team, enough that he even tried to use one of those easy pokéballs he’d sworn he wouldn’t use to catch one, once it became obvious that Lycan wasn’t going to be able to get the job done, not even after all that time they’d spent practising throwing flimsy punches at Golett and whole herds of trainerless weaklings…!

“Yeah! It’s probably just fate that you’re not meant to have a Phantump!” Leon joins in, “’Cause there’s some kickass pokémon out there waiting for you!”

“Yeah! Maybe something you wouldn’t have considered ever trying to catch!” Fujisaki suggests…

But why are they bothering? He’s not an idiot, he knows he fucked up, just like he always does! Even after they wasted all that time trying to help him quit beating the shit outta wimps who weren’t any threat to him whatsoever! And even after it had seemed like he was finally getting it, like he could actually control how hard he threw his moves out like the other pokémon who actually helped their trainers do shit! ‘Cause he was finally feeling strong enough to know that he didn’t need to go all-out to protect himself anymore!

But then one little fucking noise from behind him, when he hadn’t been expecting it, and he felt like he was a damn puppy about to be dragged out of his cage and jabbed with sticks unless he fought back with everything he had once again… and after that it’d just been screw-up after screw-up, even when he’d got the jump on one of them, and then he’d got angry at how fucking useless he was…

“Hey…Lycan!” Mondo’s suddenly shaking him, “C’mon! You ain’t quitting on me, are ya?”

[No…!] Lycan shakes his head. Like hell is he ever gonna give up! The Diamonds aren’t a bunch of quitters, and neither are their pokémon!
“Well, then quit moping about it! It’s not like we can change what happened now!” Mondo lightly taps his arm to drive the point home, “We’ve just gotta keep trying until it works, alright?”

[…Right.] Of course Mondo’s right. He’s always right. Fucking moping around feeling pissed off at himself won’t make him useful to anyone! He just needs to get the hell over himself and do it right, next time!

“Good! Now eat your…”

*Brrrriiinnnnggg…!*

“Oh godammit!” Mondo curses at the sound of the bell, which usually means he has to get back in his pokéball and nap while Mondo goes to his school classes. “…Alright, we’ll take the food with us, and you can eat it at the beginning of class, alright?”

[Thanks.] Lycan nods at him, as he picks up the last plate. He’s lucky to have a trainer like Mondo, who’s going out of his way to take the food for Lycan to eat, even though it would have been his own stupid fault for not eating it quickly enough…

“Alright guys, it’s class time, so into your pokéballs…” Leon orders the cats, who do as he says without argument… Which is kinda unusual for Litten. Dammit… Little guy’s probably still freaked out by his damn hissy fit just now…

“Okay, Charja, into your ball! Golett, time to go!” Chihiro orders their pokémon.

[You ain’t getting in your ball?] Lycan asks the rock thing and they all start to head out of the room. He’s usually already in his ball by the time Chihiro’s giving orders to leave…

[Negatory! This unit always accompanies Master Chihrio to their class!]

[Why? Ain’t it supposed to be boring as hell?]

[…Data suggests the most likely reason is the presence of Ishimaru’s Arcanine making Master Chihiro uncomfortable without protection!] So he has to stand guard ‘cause of that annoying asshole with the big dog? Man, that must suck! Why the hell does that guy even let him out in class, anyway…? [And Negatory! Class time allows this unit to absorb many interesting pieces of data regarding human knowledge and culture!]

Yeah, right! If you wanted to learn about humans, you’d be better off just watching how they act normally… Or at least watch the cool shit they make on TV! But there’s no point making the other pokémon bitter about being stuck on the world’s most boring guard duty for no reason… [Well, I guess I’ll get to see for myself today.]

[Affirmative! We have reached our destination!] Golett announces, just as Mondo gives his arm a short tug to stop him from walking straight past the door that the others are all turning into…

He doesn’t see much of this room, except for the days when Mondo’s teacher decides to make them all battle each other, and in that case he’s not paying attention to anyone other than Mondo and the pokémon in front of him. It sure as hell doesn’t look interesting, whatever Golett says. It’s just a bunch of tables and chairs, like the dining room but without the food… Except for the plate that Mondo has brought with him, of course.

“Ah… Oowada!” They’re barely in the room before a loud barking voice breaks through the chattering of Mondo’s class, and that asshole with the boots comes stomping over to them, quickly followed by the big, stupid-looking dog that only leaves his side at lunchtime. “I wanted to… err…”
He hesitates at the sight of the plate of food in Mondo’s hands, which his dog is now wagging his tail at… [Oh! FOOD! Can I have some…?]

[Back off!] Lycan stops *that* dead in its tracks with a snarl, [That’s my food!]

*[Ooohhw…]* The other dog whines pitifully, looking more like Lycan had just clawed it in the gut than told it to back off.

“Ah… Arcanine, you’ve already had your breakfast…” The other trainer insists… But what the hell should it matter? If he’s *that* desperate for food, then just *give* it to him! That’s what Mondo would do! “But if you’re good and ignore their food, I’ll give you a poffin before class starts, alright?”

*[Ooh! Okay!]* The fire dog barks happily at the offer, *[I’ll be good!]*

“Good boy!” His owner pats him like weak *puppy*, before turning to snarl at Mondo… “[But how *exactly* do you intend to concentrate on class if you’re eating your breakfast *during* it…?! There are separate dining times in the school day for a reason…!]”

*Grrrr…* This guy always pisses Lycan off… and it’s not just because those dark, heavy boots look so much like the ones he used to get *kicked* with before Mondo and Daiya rescued him! All he ever does is snap and bark at Mondo over things that don’t *matter*! So *what* if Mondo *is* planning to eat in here?! If he needs to eat, he needs to eat! What would *this* guy have him do, *starve*!?

“It’s for Lycan.” Mondo tells him, bluntly. “He wasn’t in the mood to eat this morning, so I figured I’d bring his breakfast with me.”

“Oh… I see! Very well.” For *once*, it seems like maybe the asshole *isn’t* looking to start a fight… “But perhaps your dog would be more enthusiastic about eating if you offered him something more appropriate for canine consump…”

“That *ain’t* why he ain’t eating! I’ve told you before wolves eat different shit to your dumbass *dog*!” Mondo snaps at him, “[Now, do you actually *want* something, or were you just coming over to bitch about how I look after him, *again*…?!]”

“Err… right. Sorry!” He backs down like a coward, as he always does whenever Mondo rises to his challenges. “[I… I wanted to apologise for… being overly critical about your behaviour last night! I realise now that what I said was very… poorly timed and that all I did was aggravate you even further!”

Lycan has no idea what he’s yapping on about, but Mondo doesn’t seem surprised by it… annoyed, perhaps, but not *surprised*… “[…Did Kizakura tell you to say that?]”

“No…” Mondo looks unconvinced by the hasty answer, “[He just pointed out that I’d been rather insensitive, choosing *that* point to make suggestions at you, and…]”

“Yeah. Figured as much.” Mondo cuts him off with a sigh, “[C’mon Lycan, you need to eat before Kizakura’s done explaining what today’s lesson is.”

[Right.] Lycan agrees and follows Mondo to a table at the back of the room along with Leon, as glad to be away from *that* guy as he is to finish eating…

[…But Taka's not finished…?], “[Ahh… right! Class *has* technically started! And I still owe you that poffin…!]* Lycan barely notices the quiet confused whine and loud embarrassed bluster from the dog and his trainer, before they too decided to head over to their own area, a table which is luckily as far away from Mondo’s as it’s possible to be in this small room, which leaves him free to eat breakfast in
peace. Which he starts to do, even though he still doesn’t feel quite as hungry as he usually would…

“…There we go…” Mondo quietly pats his head, “Show that asshole there’s nothing wrong with what I feed you!”

He knows Mondo’s joking, rather than giving an order, but the thought of spiting him, and the jealous looks some of the other pokémon in the room are giving him, does motivate him to clean his plate off a little faster, so by the time the teacher walks in he’s almost finished. And it’s not like he seems to care anyway. He seems like a decent guy, from what he’s heard Mondo tell the rest of the gang, and he barely raises his eyebrows at the sight of him eating in class.

“Allright, guys, good to see you’re all here…” He starts talking, which seems like an odd thing to say when all the kids here are made to come here every day. But Lycan’s never been out of his ball for this part of a lesson, so maybe it’s just some joke of his. “We’ve had some news about that girl Oowada rescued last night…”

Urgh… He means the one they had to rescue last night, ‘cause they were the idiots who fucking scared her off in the first place, ‘cause he’d not been able to help catch a single fucking pokémon! Dammit… He’d almost forgotten about that… now he suddenly felt like he was gonna hurl all the food he’d struggled to eat this morning…

“Oh no… Has she gotten worse!?” The question from the girl who always hangs around with the other Gym trainer only makes him want to throw up even more…

“No! No, it’s looking like she’ll pull through just fine!” The teacher responds quickly… but it’s still his fault she was hurt in the first place! “I mean we’ve found out how she got out there in the first place… Apparently the kid swiped a bunch of Rare Candies from the shop floor and fed them to her Arba while her parents weren’t looking, and then it teleported her outside, like Kirigiri suggested…”

“But then where the hell did it go!?” Mondo asks, “It sure as hell wasn’t there when I found her!”

“Yeah, that’s what her parents would like to know, too. So much so that they hired some guy to fly over and start searching the area already, as if it’s our fault they insisted it couldn’t possibly have got out of the school…” The teacher looks kinda pissed off about this, “And that’s why we’d like any pokémon that’s even half decent at tracking to head back into the forest this morning! Specifically, Kirigiri’s, Ishimaru’s and Oowada’s pokémon.”

“Very well…”, “Of course! Arcanine and I will be happy to help!” The two other trainers he named respond positively, but Mondo has another concern…

“What about Chihiro’s Golett? It’s pretty good at finding stuff…”

“Yeah! Blastoise would never have found Togepi during the field trip, without it!” The turtle’s trainer agrees.

“That’s just ‘cause it was using Fujisaki’s tracking tech, and we already tried that. The Abra’s teleporting around so much it the software keeps losing it.” The teacher explains. “Plus it’s not quite strong enough to head out into the forest without a trainer, even with certain pokémon decimating the daytime population…” The teacher’s glaring at the snob who keeps that smug dragon and bratty bird as he says that, but the boy seems to ignore it.

“Oh… that’s fair.” Meanwhile, Chihiro takes it well, like they always do. “It did get knocked out that ti…”

“Wait…!” They’re interrupted by the annoying loudmouth, “What do you mean ‘without a trainer’!?
You’re not suggesting we send our pokémon out into the forest by themselves, are you…!?”

“…Yes, Ishimaru, and yes, I know your dog’s not good at looking after itself, but you being there would just slow it down too much… especially with you still not being back to full strength!” The teacher explains, “That’s why I want it to team up with Oowada’s Lycanroc…”

“What!”? Now Mondo’s the one who’s got a problem with this dumb plan… “Why the hell can’t Lycan just go by himself, instead of babysitting his stupid dog!”

“Arcanine is not…!”

“Chances are the Abra’s going to keep teleporting around all over the place, so we need a pokémon out there that can cover a lot of ground quickly.” The teacher talks loudly over the asshole’s response, “He’ll be more useful leading Arcanine than he would just searching by himself.”

…Leading? Like he’s supposed to form a gang with the big dog over there…? A guy who can barely remember what he’s doing and why, without his trainer there barking orders at him? But at least he seems willing to follow orders, unlike some of the guys Daiya and Gliscor have had to deal with over the years…

“Haaa… Look, guys, I know it’s not the best plan, and we’re not expecting your dogs to actually catch this thing. Kirigiri’s pokémon are gonna be the ones we’ll send out into the area it’s most likely to be in, because her Kadabra ought to be able to keep up with it.” The teacher sighs, “We just need your dogs to run around the rest of the forest and howl for her help if it happens to teleport its way over there…”

“But… you can’t really just expect me to turn responsibility for Arcanine’s wellbeing over to… to…”

The hell is he suggesting!? That Lycan’s not able to keep another pokémon safe from a bunch of wild dumbasses, without help…!? It’s not like he’s suggesting Lycan give the fire-type orders against another trainer’s pokémon or something!

“The hell does that mean!”? Mondo snaps back at him, “Lycan’s smart enough to look after another pokémon by himself… Even one as dumb as yours…!”

“And it’s just going to be for the duration of the lesson.” The teacher tells him, which seems to be enough to shut him up for once, “Worst comes to worst, we can have Fujisaki scan for their location and send someone out after them at the end of the class.

“Ngghhh…” He sounds pretty pissed off about this, but all he can do grimace. “I… If you’re sure he can take care of Arcanine…”

“Great! Kirigiri, Oowada and Ishimaru, you’re with me!” The teacher takes it as a yes, “The rest of you are free to head out to either the lake or the fields!”

“Well, guess I’ll see you and Chi later, then!” Mondo says goodbye to Leon as he stands up, tugging at Lycan’s shoulder to get him to copy the action, which he does, once he’s sure his food is staying in his stomach after all.

“Yeah… hope you have better luck catching this pokémon, eh?” Leon replies with a smirk, though it quickly falls off his face… “Woah… dude, that was a joke!”

“Well it ain’t funny right now, alright!?” Mondo grumbles, “Sides, Lycan ain’t trying to catch it, he’s just tracking it down for Kirigiri’s pokémon.”
“Aha… uhh, yeah, of course…” Leon laughs weakly, “Well, see you later, then!”

“Yeah, later dude…” Mondo mutters, as they leave the desk and fall in behind the teacher, the loudmouth and his dog, and that quiet girl with the bat and the psychic-type. The teacher starts by leading her to a particular part of the forest, giving her a pair of collars, showing her and her pokémon a picture and, and then simply telling her to get to work, which she does.

It’s not so simple when it comes to letting him and the other dog get going, though… It would be, if it was just him, and all they had to do was tie a collar to his wrist (’cause like hell is he having one of those damn things around his neck again…) show him the picture, and let him take a sniff at a scarf the thing wears. But the other trainer ends up wasting time by insisting on tying the scarf to his dog’s foot, along with a berry on the other foot and something else that he was wearing around his wrist to his dog’s neck…

“The hell is that for!” Mondo finally loses his patience at the last thing.

“I’m going to set the alarm for five minutes before the end of class!” He answers, as if that’s obvious, “That way they’ll know when it’s time to come back… Unless your Lycanroc can tell time?”

“Tch… alright, fine.” Mondo grumbles quietly, “No need to be an ass about it…”

“Alright… now, Arcanine? This is important, alright?” He starts lecturing the dog, which nods intently at him, “Now… You’re going to head off into the forest to find this pokémon, an Abra! It smells like the scarf I just tied onto this foot, alright?”

[This one?] The dog sniffs at the paw his trainer is touching, [Okay… Got it!]

“Good boy! Now… when you find the Abra, you need to bark really loudly, so Crobat and Kadabra can come and catch it! But only when you find it, alright…!?”

[Umm… okay…] The dog looks less sure of himself now.

“Good! Now… I can’t come into the forest and help you today…”

[What…!??]

“But, Lycanroc here is going to look after you, alright!?” The trainer gestures to him, but that doesn’t stop the pokémon from looking up at Mondo, “No… that’s Oowada, I’m talking about the Lycanroc… the other dog!”

[Oh! Okay!] The dog looks down at him, seeming a little confused, but rolling with it. [So… you’re gonna give me my food and baths?]

[What!? No! I’m not doing that shit!] What, does this dumbass think he’s his new trainer now!?

[Umm… Taka? I don’t wanna be looked after by him…] The dog turns and whines at his owner.

“Ahh… alright, I know it a bit… odd!” His trainer tells him, after glaring at Lycan for a moment. “But it’s just until the end of class! And I’ve been told that he’ll definitely be able to make sure you don’t get lost or into trouble while you’re out there!”

[Oh!? So… it won’t be long enough for food or baths?] The dog seems less concerned now.

[No, I’m just gonna make sure you don’t try to eat a Foongus, or whatever…]

[Oh! Okay, thanks!] The dog barks happily.
“Ah... so... you’re alright with this, then?” His trainer asks, getting a goofy nod as an answer.

“Alright... Well, in that case, you just follow Lycanroc and be good for him, and he’ll make sure you stay safe and leads you back here, when your collar starts to buzz! Understood...?”

[Got it!] The dog nods.

“...You know what you’re doing, right?” Mondo checks with him.

[Yeah. Get the dog to run around looking for the Abra, then howl if either of us spots it.] Lycan nods, [Alright, Fire-type! Time to go!]

[Umm... I'm a fire-type! Do you mean me...?] Arceus, who else would he mean!?

[Yeah, I mean you! I ain’t calling you by that long-ass name of yours! While I’m looking after you, your name’s Fire, got it!]

[Okay! I’m Fire!] He barks happily and starts to walk over to him, [Can I call you Rock? ‘Cause I forgot the rest of your name...]

[Yeah, sure, whatever. Let’s just go, already.]

[Okay!] The dog walks alongside him into the forest...

And by ‘alongside’ he means right fucking NEXT to his side! Has this guy never heard of personal space!? Or maybe he just wants to walk right in the centre of the path, and doesn’t care if he has to push Lycan out of the way to do it...

Well, who cares, he’s not gonna be a petty asshole and get into a fight with the guy he’s supposed to be looking after, he’ll just let Fire get his way and move off to the side a bit...

At least, he tries to do that, but then Fire follows him! What the hell is with this guy!? There’s enough space on this path for that big dragon prick to fly down here, but he’s still walking right next to him! But it’s not like he’s trying to muscle Lycan off of the path, either... [...]The hell are you doing!?

[Coming with you into the forest!] He spouts, as stupidly cheerful as ever. Obviously the guy doesn’t have any idea that most Pokémon would take him muscling into their space as an insult... ['Cause Kiyotaka said to be good for you, and...]

[Yeah, I know that!] How bad does this idiot think his memory is!? [Why the hell are you walking so close to me!]

['Cause I’m a good boy, and good boys walk close to their trainers!] Urgh... God, this guy is so pathetic, barking proudly about how he does every damn thing that guy tells him to... [Kiyotaka says it’s called ‘walking to heel’ and I’m very good at it!]

[Well, it’s pissing me off, so quit it!] Lycan snarls at him, but all he does is flinch a bit and look around himself anxiously until Lycan rolls his eyes and pushes at his side until he stumbles an arms-length away. [Just... stay that far away from me, got it?]

[O... okay?] Firedog whines a little, but stays there waiting for Lycan to start walking again, and then moves at the exact same speed as him, turning to check the distance very so often... [Umm... Am I doing this right...?]

[Yeah...?] What, does he want a fucking ribbon for not being an annoying jackass?
Okay, good! He seems a little relieved. [I’m being good!]

…Did he legit think he might have been fucking it up? How the hell could he fuck up walking!? All Lycan had wanted was to be able to see all around him and breathe without inhaling any of the guy’s neck fur!

Well, whatever. Lycan has a job to do, and it’s clear this dumbass isn’t going to be much help…

[Alright… let’s get going…] He mutters, as he heads off into the forest.

[Okay!] The other dog follows along cheerfully. [So where are we going?]

[…]Don’t you remember what your trainer told you?]

[Umm… he said to follow you and be good, and you’d make sure I can find my way back to school when the buzzy thing goes off at the end of class!] He answers proudly.

[And that’s all you remember?] Lycan asks, dreading the answer. [You don’t even remember what we’re supposed to be doing here!?!]

[Hrm…] His face scrunches up, [He said we had to bark real loud… Oh!]

[Once we’ve FOUND the Abra!] Lycan reminds him, ‘cause it’s looks like he’s about to start barking for no reason. [Which is why we’re here! We’re helping to catch a pokémon!]

[We are?] Fire whines nervously.

[Yeah, we are!] He insists, [Just ‘cause neither of us has ever helped catch a pokémon before, doesn’t mean we can’t do it, right?!]

[Huh…?] The dog murmurs in confusion, [But… I have helped catch a pokémon before…]

[What!?? Is he kidding!? Does that mean Lycan’s the only starter in the class who hasn’t helped their trainer catch something!? But… [Mondo said your guy’s planning to adopt your second teammate!]

[Yep! That’s right!]

[Then… what the hell is this other pokémon you’ve helped him catch!?!]

[Nonono… I didn’t help Taka catch a pokémon! We were gonna, but then seven of her Aunts and Uncles turned up and tried to hit us! So Taka said to run!] He yaps happily for a bit, before frowning and growling out the rest… [I helped that mean kid with the long name catch Scyther!]

[…]Scyther?] Lycan’s not aware of any tamed Scythers in this place…

[Yeah! That guy’s a jerk! He always did mean things to Taka! I have to burn him every time I see him!] The dog’s growl gets louder. […]But his trainer wasn’t good enough to come to Hope’s Peak! So I haven’t seen him in a while!]

His trainer…? But the dog helped catch it!?! [Wait… so, you’re saying you hit a Scyther one time, then some guy came and threw a pokéball at it, and now it’s his pokémon?] Lycan asks, [Not your trainer’s!?!]

[Yeah… ‘cause it was him who threw the ball, not Taka…]

That’s how it works!? So… If they waited for someone like Golett to help land a few weak hits on a
pokémon, then *Mondo* could throw the ball and…

[…] Even though *Taka* was the one who’d spent all that time getting to know Scyther and *Taka* was the one who got really really hurt when that mean kid came along and annoyed Scyther and he wasn’t even able to control him properly so *Taka* kept having to wear those dark glasses to school all the time! And…]

…and Golett’d probably hate him forever, if this guy’s reaction is anything to go by! Dammit… Why had he let himself get excited about that in the first place! He shouldn’t even have been thinking of foisting off his job onto another pokémon, even if Golett is way better suited to not knocking out weaker pokémon than he was! He’s got to quit being such a fucking coward about this! AND quit getting suckered into trying to take the easy options for it, instead of just doing it himself…!

[…] And that’s not going to happen this time, is it!?] Fire’s bitter mumbling suddenly turns into a serious question.

[What…?]

[If I help you catch this pokémon, you’re not going to let it hurt *Taka*, are you?]

Like hell that’d happen! They were just gonna give it back to that girl, and then if her parents had any sense at all, they’d probably never see her or the Abra again! Besides it’s was supposed to be that Kadabra that was gonna actually catch it! [I’m not…]

…Wait. He just fucking thought that he needed to quit not doing this for himself, and now he was about to turn around and say ‘I’m letting Kirigiri’s pokémon do this shit for me’…!?

[You’re not, what?]

[I’m… I’m not gonna let the Abra hurt anyone. We’re just going get it back to its trainer, so it’ll be safe!] Yeah. And he’s gonna do himself! Without relying on someone else’s pokémon! [So c’mon! We’ve wasted enough time chatting about it! Let’s find this thing!]

[Okay… How!?]}

[By smelling where it is! Remember!? Like in that pokéball hunt!?] …That this dumb asshole beat him at…

[Oh! Okay! What does it smell like?]* Is he for real!?

[It’s smells like that thing that’s tied to your foot!] Lycan points out, and the dog starts sniffing at the berry his trainer ties to his left foot… [No, the other foot!]

[Oh!] He sniffs the right thing a couple of times… [Okay! Got it! I’m ready!]

[Alright… let’s go!] Lycan orders him, and then starts smelling the forest floor… This time, this time he’s gonna get this right!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
The pair head deeper in the forest, the bigger dog still checking how far away he is from Lycanroc far too much for his liking. And at first it seems like this whole thing will be a waste of time, as there’s no scent of the creature anyway… They have been given the least like spot to explore, after all…

Hmm… but… Just now, he thought he caught a whiff of it… unless it’s just coming from the thing Fire’s trainer gave him… but he’s far enough away that it shouldn’t be that…

Lycan heads a bit more in that direction… Yes! This is it! This is definitely it! He’s got this fucker’s scent and this time he’s not going to screw up the catch!

[Hey, it’s this way!] He lets the dog know what’s going on, before following the scent as it gets stronger…

[Hmm… Oh yeah! This is the same smell! Well done, Rock!] The dog yaps cheerfully and he follows behind him, [You’re a Good boy!]

What’s with the stupid-sounding praise…? It’s not like it was that hard to pick up the scent! The hard part seems to be actually catching up with this damn thing, ‘cause the scent they’re following isn’t getting any stronger…

[…Dammit, how fast is this thing…? I’m never gonna catch it at this rate!]

[Let’s go faster then!] Fire yaps, like he’s a fucking genius for thinking of that!

[This is as fast as I can go!] At least it is when he’s got to track a scent as well!

[Oh… ‘cause you’ve only got two legs! Like Bewear!] The dog guesses, […You want me to try and catch it…?]

[No!] Dammit… he had to catch this thing himself, or he’d never learn to catch anything! But… At the same time, he wouldn’t have time to catch it if he kept trying like this… He just needed something to slow the damn thing down for a bit… […Just… You run up to it and get it to stop running away, and then I’ll follow up and do the catching! Okay?]

[Okay… So, I need to go stop the… umm… the…] He trails off.

[The Abra.] Lycan reminds him, getting a scrunched up face in response… [It’s pale coloured, no fur, tends to just sit around, unless it’s startled…?]

[Okay! Got it!] He nods, and then easily bounds off into the forest… how the fuck can something that big move so fast?!

Well, he ain’t got time to be wondering about it! He needs to start catching up with him, before he decides to catch the Abra and take the credit for himself!

At least he can follow the dog much faster than the Abra… Huge footprints and broken plants are easier to track than a scent is! It’s not long before he hears the dog whining up ahead, and soon
A Kakuna? What the hell, did he lose the scent or something…!? Or maybe’s he’s trying to ask the Kakuna for directions…

[Umm… Please come with us?] Well, so much for that idea… But why the hell is he asking for help from a damn Kakuna?!

[Can’t go… need to stay and make more Weedles…]

[Hrrrm… That’s right! Kiyotaka did say we couldn’t catch you before…]

[Good! I’ll stay and make more Weedles!]

[But… Rock says we need to catch you and take you back to Kiyotaka!] What!? That’s why this dope is stood here!?

[That’s NOT what we’re supposed to be catching, you IDIOT!] Lycan snarls as he makes his way over to the pair, [It doesn’t look anything like it!]

[But… But she’s a pale colour and she was just sat here like you said she would be!]

[Urg… Don’t you remember the picture your trainer showed you!?] His face has got all scrunched up again… looks like he really doesn’t remember… [We’re looking for something with two arms, two legs, pointed ears and a tail!]

[…Oh! That’s not like her at all!] How can he wag his tail so happily when he’s just been told he was wrong!? [Yay! I don’t have to catch you after all! So you can stay and help make lots of Weedles!]

Is he… petting the Kakuna!? Is he nuts!? What if a swarm of Beedrills turn up!? Or it thinks he’s attacking and calls for help!?

[…You feed Weedles?] Huh… at least that doesn’t seem likely! This thing’s too stupid to realise it could be in danger…

[Oh! That’s a great idea! Me and Kiyotaka can come and make friends with all the new Weedles!] His tail starts wagging even harder now… At this rate he’s going to be here all day!

[Yeah, but first, we’ve gotta catch the right pokémon, remember!?] Lycan points out.

[Oh, that’s right!] He jumps in surprise, like he’d actually forgotten. [I’ve gotta go now… I’ll see you later, Weele!] It doesn’t respond to him, but he doesn’t seem too bothered about it. Instead he’s just staring at Lycan expectantly… [Umm… so… How do we find it…?]

…Seriously, how the fuck did this guy get more of those pokéballs than him and Golett!? [We’re looking for the thing that smells like the thing your trainer tied to your foot!] Lycan reminds him.

[Okay!] The fire dog sniffs at his foot, getting it right on the first try this time, and then they both start sniffing the ground again…

Hrmm… He’s starting to pick up the smell nearby, again… But, just like before, the Abra’s moving about as fast as he is… [Hey… Fire! Get over here!]

[You found the smell again?] He bounds over and sniffs the area, [You did! Well done, good boy!]
[Yeah, whatever…] Guess it’s just a dog thing… Or a stupid dog thing, in this case! [Now, go follow it and come back with the right thing this time…]

[That’s the thing with wo arms, two legs, poindy ears and a tail, right?] He checks, which Lycan just nods wearily at… [Got it! Off I go!]

He runs off again, with Lycan following behind him and trying to listen out for any sign of activity…

[Ah ha! Found you!] He just about makes out a bark of triumph from the dog up ahead…

[AH! THUNDER SHOCK!] What the?! That’s a fucking Pikachu!

[Erg! That tingles!] The dog’s response is to just whine at it… [And stop running!]

[No! THUNDER SHOCK!]

[Ow! But we just wanna take you back to school!] Urg… this idiot! He’s got mixed up again! [It’s nice there! They’ve got baths!]

[TH-UUUUNDEER… SHOOOOOOOOOOOCK!] Hah! Yeah, that would have been Lycan’s reaction to that as well…

Wait… that’s weird… no reaction from the dog? Shit… Don’t tell him he’s been knocked out by a little Pikachu!

Lycan carries on heading in the direction he last heard the dog’s bark coming from, and soon enough he starts to hear light moans and groans from him…

[Ngh… Owowowow…!] Well, it sounds like he got his ass kicked, but he’s just stood there looking up ahead of him, although his head cocks slightly as Lycan pushes through the forest towards him…

[…]R…Rock!? Is that you?

[Why don’t you just turn around and look!]

[My body’s all tingly and ouchy… I can’t move!] Oh… so that Pikachu got a lucky shot on him, huh? [And the thing got away to!]

[That doesn’t matter, it was the wrong thing anyway!] Lycan snaps, [We’re looking for an Abra, not a Pikachu! Except now we’ve gotta waste time waiting for this shit to wear off ‘cause you went after the wrong thing again!]

[I did…? I’m sorry!] He lets out the wimpiest whine Lycan’s ever heard, [B-but… It had two arms, two legs, poindy ears and a…]

…Alright, that was true but… [It didn’t smell like the thing we’re after though, did it?/] Lycan cuts him off, [That’s the most important bit!]?

[It is?] Man, this guy has no idea what they’re supposed to be doing, does he?

[Yes! So once you can move again, we’ll try again, and you’ll go after the thing that smells like the thing on your foot this time, alright?] Lycan tells him.

[Okay…] He sighs, then starts looking at Lycan timidly… […]Kiyotaka usually gives me some food when I feel like this…]

[You mean like a berry?] Lycan asks… That’s what Daiya used to do when he or Gligar got
shocked like this and they were in a hurry, back before they could afford proper medicine and shit. And the dogs nods at him in response, [Well, I ain’t got anything like that, and it’ll be quicker to just wait than to try and find some…]

[Oooohhh… Okay…] Urg… Why’d he have to get paired up with this annoying, whiny, wimp!? It’s not like he’ll be paralysed forever…! [Ngh… You’re sure it’ll be quicker to wait…?]

[Yes!] Lycan throws up his arms in annoyance. Hell, he doesn’t even remember what those berries smell like anymore!

[…Even though there’s some over there…?] Lycan turns to look in the same direction as the dog, and sees a bush covered in bright round berries… […Why the hell didn’t you just say they were there!?] He snaps, as he heads over to shake some out.

[I thought you’d seen them!]

[If I’d seen them, I’d have just given them to you in the first place!] Lycan points out with a loud sigh as he dumps some berries on the floor in front of the dog…

[I didn’t know that…] He mutters, scooping up all the berries and several blades of grass into his mouth.

[You didn’t…!?] What kind of nonsense is that!? [What, did you think I was letting you stand there in pain just ‘cause I wanted to!?!]

[Yesh!] The dog nods while chewing the mouthful of food.

For crying out loud, is that really what people think he and Mondo are like…!? [Yay! I’m all better now!] The dog jumps up in excitement at being able to move, before Lycan can complain. [And this time I’m gonna get the guy that smells like this!] He gives his foot another sniff, then starts snuffling along the ground without any further orders…

Maybe the kid’s finally learning, and they’ll be able to finally catch this thing and get out of here sometime today!

It sure as hell doesn’t take Lycan long to be a ‘Good Boy’ and pick up the scent again… But it is a long time after he sends Fire off to go chase it down before he hears anything. Long enough that it’s actually a relief when he hears the dopey dog’s bark again…

[Rock! Rock! I found it! This time I really found it!] Dear Arceus, please let that be true this time… [Look!]

Oh for fucks sake… […That’s another dog! You dumbass!] What, is this thing blind!? How the hell had it mistaken a large, dark dog with horns for that light-coloured human-ey thing they were supposed to be going after!

[B-but it smells like the thing!]

[I’m sorry, but as I tried to tell you, I only smell like the Abra you’re targeting because I, too, am hunting the same Abra and was given its scent by my trainer to help me do so.] The other dog explains, in a tone that suggests it’s tried to explain this to Fire too many times already.
But what it ain’t explained yet is… [And who the hell are you, exactly? You ain’t any pokémon I’ve seen in this school before.]

[My name is Houndoom.] Yeah, that looked right, although Lycan hadn’t expected one of those guys to be so fucking polite sounding. [And you’re right, this isn’t my school. But my trainer was paid quite a lot to fly over here and help search for this missing Abra, so that’s why I’m here…] Oh yeah. Mondo’s teacher had said something about that, hadn’t he? [Well, too bad, buddy, ‘cause we’re gonna find it first! Even if I have been lumbered with this dumbass!] Houndoom cocks his head over to the fire dog, just in case it’s not obvious enough what he’s talking about, [Now, come on, Fire, we need to find the thing that actually looks AND smells like the thing this time!]

[You mean that still wasn’t the right thing?] Urg, there’s that annoying whine again, [I’m sorry…]

[Well, next time get the right thing then!] Gawd, how can something with such a quick body have such a slow mind?

[With all respect, I don’t think your Ditto friend is going to be…]

[He ain’t my friend…!] Like hell he wants anyone thinking he wants to hang around something this stupid… [And there ain’t any Dittos here either!] He adds, ‘cause the dumber dog has started blabbering about them and sniffing around for one…

[Really!? Hmm… you’re much less obnoxious than most of the Arcanines I’ve ever met.] The Doom dog comments, which is fucking saying something! [But regardless, I’ve been watching him, and he’s not going to be able to catch the Abra by himself. I don’t think any of us could.]

[Fuck you! I can catch any pokémon I want!] Lycan snaps, [Or I could if this idiot didn’t keep trying to hold up the wrong pokémon!]

[I’m sorry…!] The firedog whines again, [But… I didn’t see any pokémon that looked and smelt right!]

[Well, maybe if you stopped chasing all the wrong stuff you’d find the right thing!]

[Actually, I don’t think that’s true…] The dark dog interrupts him, [I think the problem Arcanine is having is that he’s too loud. The Abra keeps teleporting away from him before he gets a chance to see it.]

[So he just needs to try and sneak up on it…?] Then again, how the fuck is the giant, brightly-coloured ball of fluff gonna pull that off…?

[Maybe, but when I tried that, I couldn’t attack fast enough to stop it teleporting away again…] Houndoom admits, [Though, I think there’s some merit to your plan of having him hold the Abra up so you can catch it, it just needs a little adjustment…]

[…]What kind of adjustment?] Lycan asks, [I ain’t letting you catch this thing, if that’s what you’re thinking!]

[Ah! Not at all!] For such a scary looking dog, this guy is kind of a wimp… [I was just thinking instead of having him try to hold the Abra in place until you arrive, we need to herd him to your position. I can sneak up on the Abra and see where it is, then lead Arcanine around to the opposite side and having him chase it in your direction…]

[And then that’s when I catch it!] Lycan guesses. He has to admit, this seems like a pretty good
plan…

[That’s right! Although you might not get much time to attack before it teleports away again…] Houndoom is starting to look a little less sure of this plan…

[Don’t you worry about that. You two just get that pokémon in my sights and I’ll catch it!] Lycan assures him, [Got it…!?

[Got it!] The darker dog agrees.

[Aah! Eeheeheehee…!] But the firedog just starts giggling like a loon instead…

[Ahh… Is something wrong?]. [What the hell are you laughing at?] The two sane dogs try to find out what the fuck his problem is!

[Aahahahaha… The buzzy thing! It’s tickles!] His whole body shakes, but he seems to enjoy it while it lasts… [Hehehe… Awwww… it’s gone now… Welp, time to go back to school!]

[But… we still haven’t caught the Abra…] The doom dog points out… and he’s right! They can’t go back without that thing! Not now they finally have a decent plan to catch it…!

[But… Taka said we have to go back when the thingy on my neck buzzes, and it…]

[I don’t give two shits what that guy said! We’re gonna do the plan, catch that Abra and then go back, got it!] Lycan snaps at him, [Or would you rather just give up and wander back without it?]

[Umm… Yes.] Lycan bares his teeth out of annoyance at the answer… […It’s what Taka said to do! And I always do what Taka says! I’m a Good boy!]

[Arceus… Don’t you have any pride!]? They’re so close, but he’s just willing to quit because of some arbitrary time limit his trainer set!? [You don’t wanna show everyone we can beat that stupid bat at tracking stuff…!? Make up for that competition we lost the other week…!?]

[No…? Taka said coming second was really, really good!] Damnit, he really didn’t have any pride at all, did he!? [And I don’t think that was really important, either…]

[Hmm… So, you want to be a Good Boy and go back, like your trainer told you to…?] Houndoom asks him, getting a nod in response, [I don’t blame you… But wouldn’t you prefer to be an Extra good boy…?]

…The hell is he up to…? He sounds like he’s pulling some kinda trick, but if it gets the dumb dog to play ball…

[OH! I would!] Fire’s tail starts wagging excitedly, [Extra good boys get extra poffins at dinner!]

…The hell are poffins!?

[Well, you see, if we go back to our trainers with the Abra, even if we’re a little late, then your trainer will think you’re extra good for having caught the Abra…] Houndoom tells him, [Right, Lycanroc?]

Honestly, that guy would probably just prefer his dog got back on time, but if lying gets them that Abra… [Yeah! Why’d you think I didn’t wanna give up, yet!]

[Oooohh… I didn’t know that’d be extra good!] Fire falls for their lie completely. [Let’s go get that Abra!]
Great, now you go follow Houndoom and uhh…? What was it the guy’s trainer had said, when handing him over…? [Be good for HIM, and I’ll stay here and get ready to catch that thing. Got it…?]

[Got it!] He pads over to the Doom dog’s side… right next to the guy’s side, just like he’d done with Lycan right at the beginning of this dumb trip. He can even hear them talking about how far away the guy should be walking as the pair of them head off into the distance… Least it’s not just him having trouble dealing with the idiot…

Still, this ain’t the time to be thinking about that… This is gonna be it! He’s gonna hit the pokémon just enough to hurt it without knocking it out and screwing everything up! Right!? Everything’s all planned out and he knows what’s gonna happen this time, so there’s no reason for him to screw up again… All he has to do is wait on those two to bring the pokémon right to him, and then he’s gonna catch the thing…!

And now he can hear the two dogs barking, and they’re getting louder and louder… this is it! He knows the pokémon is gonna be right in front of him anytime now… And he knows it’s a damn weakling who’s just gonna try and run, so all he needs to do is give it a little tap to get it to stay still just as soon as those two chase it…

[…ra!]

…Shit! Where the fuck did that come from!? It’s the Abra and its snout is right in front of him, but looks like it’s disappearing already…! Shiiiiit! Hitiiititiitiiithit…!

[ROOOC!] Dammit! His paw just lashed out at full speed again! Now he’s gonna hit it too hard, and he can’t stop…!

[Ab!] The Abra is knocked over sideways by the force of his blow, and for the brief moment when it stares at him and tries to lift itself back up, Lycan thinks he might just have got away with it this time… […Raaaaaaa.…]

…But then it just slumps back over and lies motionless on the ground…

[…FUCK! FuckfuckFUCCCK!] What the hell was wrong with him!? Why did he always fuck this up…!?

[Nggghhh… He’s… He’s really mad…!] Oh great, now the other dogs have arrived to see what the fuck he’s done…!

[Ahh… you weren’t able to hit him in time…?] The doom dog gets the wrong idea, [Well, in that case, we’ll have to switch roles. If you lead Fire around to the other side and…]

[That ain’t the fucking problem!] Lycan snaps, stepping back so he can see the damage… […]I knocked him out…!]

[You did…?] The other dog rushes forward to sniff at the body of the Abra, [But… then why were you so upset just now?]

[Whaddaya mean, why am I upset!? We can’t fucking catch him if we knock him out now, can we!?!]

[Uhh… hold on a moment…] Doom cocks his head to the side, like Lycan’s just said something stupid… [Did you think this would be like when we catch pokémon with pokéballs, or something? That we had to keep it awake for it to count…?]
[…You’re saying we don’t!?] No way… that had to be too good to be true, right…!?

[Exactly! This pokémon already has a trainer! We just need to get it back to her… Awake or unconscious!] He barks cheerfully, [Otherwise, I wouldn’t have suggested the strongest pokémon here be the one to attack it! And now it’s knocked out, it’s just a case of picking it up and…]

[…And it was me who hit it, so I’ll do that!] Lycan snaps, putting a paw over the Abra so Doom can’t snatch it. [This is my catch, remember!?!]

[Ahh… yeah, sure!] He backs off as Lycan scoops up the pokémon in his arms, wisely choosing to bark orders at Fire instead of trying to pick a fight with him… [Ahh, Arcanine? We did it! We can go back to your trainer now…?]

[Umm… Oh… Okay…?] Fire timidly yaps from further back in the trees… Arceus, did he forget what’s going on again…!?

Well, it’s not Lycan’s problem. He can just start heading back to the school and let the idiot catch up with him. He’s got what he came here for! Proof that he can catch a pokémon!

…Except it wasn’t really catching a pokémon. More like fetching someone else’s pokémon… And he’d still fucked up and knocked it out in the first hit! Dammit, this had all been a giant fucking waste of time, and he probably shoulda just let fucking Kirigiri’s pokémon deal with it! Instead of getting desperate to prove he could actually be useful and ending up just… being so…

“… so stupid! I knew this was a terrible idea, but I still let them talk me into letting Arcanine go off with that barely-trained wolf? And now I might never see him again…!” Lycanroc catches wisps of a familiarly annoying voice, which pauses for a while… “Well, yes, of course it would be good for him to be more independent! But…”

[Taka…!?] Fire barks loudly from behind him, [TAKA…!?]“Arcanine…!? Arcanine! Over here!”

[Okay, coming!] The dog bounds past him, almost shoving him over. [And wait’ll you see want we’ve done! We’ve been extra good…!]

[Hey… Just a heads up, Y’know, his trainers probably still gonna be pissed that we were late, right?] Lycan points out to Houndoom.

[Well… yes.] Houndoom looks embarrassed, [But if I hadn’t lied, we’d have just been stuck arguing…]

[Yeah, I figured. Just wanted to make sure you knew before that guy’s trainer tries to chew us out…] Lycan tells him, as they make their way over to the source of the noise, where he can already hear that asshole snapping at the dog over his pointless fucking time limit…

“But… I don’t understand! If the timer did go off, then why didn’t you even try to come back to school, like I told you to!?”

[’Cause we decided to be extra good!] He can hear the fire dog barking away happily, [Lemme show you!]

“What!? Where are you going…? The school is back that way!”

“Oh, look! Isn’t that the Lycanroc he was sent out with…?” The loudmouth is interrupted by the
voice of a boy that Lycanroc doesn’t recognise… “It looks like he’s got the Abra!”

“What?!” Lycanroc gets close to them all, just in time see the look of shock on Fire’s trainer’s face as he follows the arm of some skinny guy in black school clothes and a hat…

[Shuichi!] Houndoom rushes over to him, sitting down in front of him. [Mission accomplished!]

“Ah, Houndoom! Did you help as well?” The unknown kid pats him between his horns, “Good boy! I guess I can whistle Hoothoot and let her know she can stop searching now…”

[See, Taka!] Meanwhile, Fire is excitedly running in circles around Lycan, pointing out the sleeping Abra in his arm, [We’ve been extra good!]

“You mean… you decided to stay, because you were trying to catch the Abra yourselves!?” Hah… just as Lycan expected, the guys getting pissed off with them for it.

[Yep!] But Fire is still wagging his tail in glee, obviously too dumb to notice.

“But… That’s not what I told you to do! I told you to come back on time!” His trainer snaps, which is enough to make him cringe as he finally realises he’s not been a ‘good boy’ after all.

[But…] The dog looks at Lycan and Houndoom in confusion… [But they said… they said it’d be extra good…]

“Well… isn’t it better that they spent a little extra time in order to get the job done?” The other human points out, “Rather than just give up and leave when they were that close to catching it?”

“Given I only just spent several days in bed because I thought I’d only need to spend ‘a few more minutes’ in a dangerous environment in order to achieve my goal, I’d say, no! It’s not better for them to outright ignore the time limit!” The loudmouth snaps, “And besides, they weren’t even supposed to be trying to catch it! They were supposed to bark and let Kirigiri’s pokémon know where it was!”

[AH! That’s right! I forgot!] Fire yelps, [Ahh… Taka, I’m sorry! I… I forgot what you said, and Rock said to do something different, so I did that! I’m sorry…!]

“Ah… I guess you forgot I said that, then? I suppose it was a lot for you to remember all at once… And I should never have entrusted you to a pokémon like him, in the first place!” He glares at Lycan, “But what’s important is that you’re safe, even if I was worried about you for a while there! And I hope you coming back with the Abra means you were a good partner and did what Lycanroc told you to…?”

[A good partner? Ummmm… Let me check!] The dog perks up as his trainer holds up something that looks like a clump of bread, but then turns to face Lycan… [Have I been a good partner…?]

Is he fucking serious!? He’s an annoying, whiny, pain in the ass who was held up the wrong pokémon three times and almost insisted on giving up before he even got a chance to catch the right one…! And now he wants to know if he was a good partner!?

[The hell you were! You’re the dumbest pokémon I’ve ever had to work with!]

[Uhh… Don’t you think you’re being a little harsh, there…?]

[Don’t give me that shit! I don’t care how fast that Abra was, with any other partner I’d have been done in half the time!] Lycan barks at the Houndoom, before turning back to the Arcanine… [But no! I get stuck with the dog that’s too fucking stupid to remember shit you’d just been told to do…!]
I… I’m sorry! I’m SORRY! I-I’ll try harder next time! Really!? What the hell…!? Lycan would have expected a guy his size to just bark right back at him, but he’s suddenly started cowering and trembling like Litten did, earlier today… [Just please don’t hit me! I-it really HURTS when you hit me!]

The hell!? Lycan growls softly with confusion… All he did was snap at the guy and call him stupid… why would he expect a fight, just because of that!? And even if he had been intending to attack, the dog never said anything like that the last time they fought…! It’s almost like he’s expecting to get hit by a human, but why would he expect that, unless…

…Unless he’s been hit before… And given how little time he spends away from his trainer, there’s probably only one human who could have done it…

Lycan’s sight drifts to the man in the dark boots, and his face is set in stone as they exchange glares with one another… He knows Lycan’s on to him…

“…Well. Regardless of what he’s saying, I’m sure you did a wonderful job, and were a very good boy and a useful partner!” It seems he’s decided to try and keep up his pretence of being a good trainer anyway, probably thinking there’s no way Lycan can tell the humans what he just figured out. “And besides, it was very good and clever of you to go out into the woods all by yourself! So I’m sure you deserve a poffin…! And even an extra poffin!”

[Ngghhhh…] The dog snaps up the two pieces of dough his trainer holds up to his mouth, like he’s expecting them to get taken away if he doesn’t eat quick enough… something Lycan’s no stranger to. But even after eating the treats, he’s still shaking violently…

“Argh… You… you don’t need to worry… You’re safe with me!” His trainer lies, “And you can even go back into your pokéball, if you’d feel better…!”

[Mmmrgghhh…. Okay…]

[Wait…!] If he goes back in there, Lycan won’t get a chance to talk to him about this! And none of the other humans will see it either…!

But the dog doesn’t listen. All his bark does is cause Ishimaru to scowl at him, long after he has disappeared, which Lycan has no problems returning…

“Ah… Does that… usually happen…?” Houndoom’s trainer breaks the angry silence. “Your dog being scared of other pokémon, I mean.”

“N-no. He’s usually perfectly happy with other pokémon!” The booted man breaks eye contact with him, to carry on with his act for the other trainer. “But then again, I’ve never left him alone with one as badly trained as that!”

[YOU can’t talk about bad training, ASSHOLE!] Lycan snarls at him, which makes him step back fearfully… But fuck him! Where the hell does he get off acting like Mondo is the bad trainer, when his pokémon is a shivering wreck!

“Uhh… He… isn’t going to attack us, is he…?” Houndoom’s trainer stammers.

“Ergh… I…”

[Hah! And let you tell everyone I’m the bad guy here? You wish!] He growls at the stuttering asshole, before walking away from them… He can’t do anything about a pokémon being stuck with a shitty trainer, but Mondo can!
“…I guess not! Ahahaha…!” The bastard starts laughing as Lycan leaves him be. “Well… he does belong to a Gym member after all! I’m sure they wouldn’t accept any pokémon that would attack a human!”

Yeah, yeah! Keep laughing asshole! See how long that lasts when he starts clueing Mondo in to what’s happening…

Of course, he’s got to get to Mondo first. And it’s not going to be easy to explain what happened. All he can do for now is keep growling every time he sees the guy, until Mondo gets the hint. And for now, it seems like the pair of humans have decided to hang back and let him leave by himself, although by the time he’s back at the forest entrance, he’s pretty sure he’d heard them following him a few times…

“Hah! See, I told you he’d be back out just fine!” Mondo is the first of the group of humans waiting there to notice him approaching, “And… wait… Is that the Abra!?”

[Oh… yeah!] With that shit just now, he’d forgotten he was carrying it, [I caught it, I guess…]

“Well… that’s good then.” The quiet girl comments. “But, I thought the plan was for them to signal for Kadabra when they found it?”

“Yeah, it was!” Mondo’s teacher snaps, “And he’s supposed to be looking after Ishimaru’s Arcanine as well! So where the heck is it!?”

“It probably heard Ishimaru in the woods and ran off to him!” Mondo guesses…

“…I’ll admit that was the case!” Oh great, the bastards here already! “However your Lycanroc disregarded several of our orders and…”

[This asshole’s beating his dog!] Lycan cuts him off with a loud growl.

“…And now he’s started doing that, just because I told him off it and for upsetting Arcanine!”

Oh, so that’s gonna be his excuse, is it!? Well, that might convince the humans for now, but if he keeps it up for long enough…

“Well, why the fuck would ya tell him off for it!? He got the pokémon, didn’t he!?” Mondo snaps at him.

“But he completely ignored the plan we’d all agreed to!”

“It’s called making a fucking judgement call, dumbass!” Mondo sighs angrily, “He’s not gonna just let a pokémon that’s right in front of him run off, just ‘cause I told him to call for help catching it instead of catching it himself!”

“But… he still ignored the time limit…!”

“Well, maybe he only just ran into it on the way back!” Mondo snaps, “It’s not like he’ll have spent this whole time chasing it himself, right!?”

“Honestly!? I suspect that’s exactly what he…”

“That’s enough, you two!” Mondo’s teacher cuts him off, walking over to Lycan and signalling for him to hand the Abra over. “We don’t know for sure what happened out there, so let’s just be glad we got the Abra back at all, alright!”
“Hell, I ain’t the one arguing about it…” Mondo mutters.

“…If you say so, sir.” Fire’s trainer scowls.

“Alright… class dismissed!” The teacher orders, before looking back into the woods… “And what are you planning to do…?”

“Oh, uhh… me…?” Huh… oh, sounds like the Houndoom’s trainer is still back there, “Well, I need to go call Hoothoot back from the other part of the forest, and then I guess I’ll head back to my school…”

“Hey, Lycan…” Mondo taps at his shoulder to get his attention, “Let’s get back to school now… otherwise you might not get much time to eat…”

[Sure thing.] Lycan agrees… although he still ain’t all that hungry, even after all that tracking…

Mondo leads him off the path, cutting through a group of trees that they know leads back to the school faster than the regular route that the girl and that bastard are taking back.

“Hey, Lycan…” Mondo addresses him after a while, when it’s clear there’s no one around. “You didn’t really spend all that time trying to catch that thing yourself, did you?”

[…] *Fuck…* He doesn’t wanna lie to Mondo, but…

“Dammit…” Mondo sighs as Lycan looks down at the floor away from him, “Look… I’m serious about this, alright? You ain’t gotta go outta your way to prove shit, just ‘cause of last night! Okay…? That shit was *my* fault! I’m the one who’s supposed to be catching a pokémon, so it’s on *me* that I didn’t, alright!? Not you!”

[…] Mondo can say that, but it was *Lycan* who kept knocking out Phantumps…!

“…‘Sides, it’s not like there’s any guarantee we’d have caught anything, even if I *had* thrown a ball at them! It’s not like it’d be the first time I ran outta pokéballs, is it…?” Mondo mopes.

[…Hey, c’mon Mondo! It’s ain’t *your* fault that happens!] Lycan growls at him… what was it Daiya always said to him… [You just gotta find the right pokémon, right?]

“Heh… yeah, I know… I just gotta find the right pokémon, right?” Mondo understands him, ruffling the fur on the top of his head. “But that’s the same for you, you know? If you knock something out, it’s ain’t ‘cause you messed up, it’s ‘cause it wasn’t meant to be… Alright?”

[…Alright.] He can’t argue with that… even if he really *was* trying his hardest not to knock those pokémon out…

“Alright! That’s more like it!” Mondo grins at him, “Once classes are over with and we’ve got some more spare time, we’ll head out into the forest with a bunch of good pokéballs again, and find something *big* to add to our team! How’s that sound?

A *big* pokémon… easier not to knock out, right? Maybe that really could work…

No… *Fuck* this ‘maybe’ shit! He’s gonna *make* it work! He *has* to make it work, or Mondo’ll be kicked outta the school, and the Diamonds’ll look like a bunch of *chumps*… And it’ll all be *his* fault…!

…*Fuck*, now he feels like he’s gonna hurl again!
…But at least going to the dining room will give him a chance to try and give Mondo the heads up on that asshole and what he’s doing to his Arcanine…!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Strike! (Leon POV)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Man… all these different costumes the school store had that fitted Littens… And there was only one that hadn’t been burnt, chewed through or clawed to shreds… Sure, he’d gotten better about not burning stuff, unless they went a few days without training with Sayaka, but he still couldn’t seem to deal with wearing anything for more than ten minutes, even though Kanon had ordered him some that were supposed to be good for sensitive pokémon, and Leon had gradually purchased every costume the store had…

Except the one single costume he’d been trying to avoid…

“…Looks like it’s time for you to try the little wrester’s cape!” Sayaka grinned. She’d suggested this right when he’d first been asking her for help, but the damn thing was so gaudy! Purple and gold trim, against a red and black cat!? it’d look dumb! And that was without the matching mask that came with it…

Besides… “Even if he doesn’t destroy this one, Hawthorne’s gonna give me a crap score for being cliché!”

“You get terrible scores for not having an outfit, anyway.” Sayaka pointed out, “Besides, you’re not taking what she thinks seriously, are you…?”

“Hell no!” Not when three of the four talent-types he knew were still having weekly meetings to try and figure out a way to get rid of her! “It’s just… I wanted Litten to wear something cool, y’know!? Wrestling’s… not. It’s the sort of dumb thing little kids are into!”

“Little kids, and adult Incineroars…” Sayaka added, “That’s why so many Littens like wearing wrestling costumes. It makes them feel grown up!”

“I guess… But what if this makes him think he has to act like a wrestler, just ‘cause it’s what Littens are supposed to…” Leon asked, “What if it turns out he’d rather do something else?”

“…Then he’ll probably shred this costume up, just like all the others.”

“Yeah… I guess you got me there…” Leon admitted, picking the thing up off of the rack, even though most of him was hoping he was just throwing away more money on something that Litten would end up using as a glorified scratch toy. “Was there anything you needed to pick up?”

“No… But there was something I wanted to ask you…” Sayaka started, looking nervous about it… Hey! Maybe he was about to get lucky! “…Is Owada planning to do anything about his Lycanroc growling at Kiyotaka every time it sees him? It’s been going on for half a week now…”

Damn, she was just worrying about that…! “Oh… Well, he’s trying to find out what the deal is, but it seems his dog wants them both to talk to Ishimaru’s…” Leon explained, “But he keeps ordering it into its ball every time they come close to him!” Like it wasn’t weird enough the guy never took his dog in the dining room for lunch. Even Sayaka took her pokémon with her when she ate, even though they ate in her room…

“What…? Leon, he’s not ordering Arcanine to do that!” Sayaka sighed like he was an idiot, “Arcanine’s scared of Lycanroc!”
“Oh come on, you don’t really believe that, do you!?” Sure, it was what Ishimaru had kept telling Mondo, but… “Why would it be scared of Lycan!?”

“…Didn’t you tell me Lycan had scared Litten last week…?”

“Yeah, but Litten was over it in, like, half a day!” Leon pointed out, “And he’s just a kitten! That Arcanine’s almost twice as big as Lycan!”

“It’s not Lycan’s size that’s scary, it’s his attitude!” Sayaka argued, “That thing’s growl could frighten a Wailord!”

“As if! It would barely even notice he was there! ‘Sides, Lycan’s weak against water…” Leon told her… although judging from the way she rolled her eyes, that wasn’t the way this talk ought to be going… “And anyway, if his dog really is that scared of Lycan, shouldn’t Ishimaru be doing something about that!?”

“Well… he’s trying to… But it’s not helping that Lycanroc keeps growling every time he sees Arcanine.” Sayaka insisted, “He said he thinks Arcanine thinks Lycanroc is mad at him, and doesn’t believe that it’s Kiyotaka he’s growling at.”

Oh… That kinda made sense. After all, the dog was never not with the guy… “Alright, I’ll let Mondo know to try and convince Lycan to quit with the growling when the other dog’s out.” He promised her, “But doesn’t it worry you that Lycan’s growling at him so much in the first place, just as soon as it got done being alone with his dog for a while? I mean, he must have picked up on something, right?”

“Or, he misunderstood something!” Sayaka argued, “Maybe Arcanine said something bad about his first trainer, and Lycan though he meant Kiyotaka…”

Oh, right. The ‘asshole cop’ who’d supposedly been hitting his Growlithe before Ishimaru’s old man saved it from him. He still didn’t buy that whole thing. There’s no way the guy wouldn’t have been caught and fired for that, right? Not after the huge crackdown they’d had after it turned out a bunch of Kanto cops had helped hide Giovanni being head of Team Rocket!

But Sayaka had bought the whole story, hook line and sinker! So trying to argue about it now would just piss her off… “Yeah… I guess that could be the case… but if so, then that’s all the more reason for Lycan to talk to Arcanine, so he can explain it, right?”

…Or so Lycan could point out whatever he’d noticed to Mondo…

“Hmm… you’re right. I’ll mention that to Kiyotaka.” Sayaka agreed, “It might help him convince Arcanine to stay out of his ball for long enough for Lycanroc to explain that he wants to talk!”

“Cool, so we’ve got a plan, then!” If nothing else, Ishimaru wouldn’t have any excuse to keep calling his dog back every time Mondo was around!

“Yes! Let me know how it goes on your end!” Sayaka ordered, “And how Litten likes his new costume!”

More like if Litten liked it. Heck, did he even know what wrestling was? He’d never ever watched it, as far as Leon knew. But… “You’ll see that for yourself in costume class tomorrow!”

“I guess so! See you then, Leon!” Sayaka waved, and left him to pay for his stuff and make his way back to his room alone.
“Alright, guys, you can come out now!” Leon summoned both of his cats once he was back at his current ‘home’.

Lux came out at a walking speed, yawned and made his way over to his cat bed to curl up in it, like he always did. Whereas Litten jumped out, turned around in a circle a few times, until he got his bearings and excitedly ran up to Leons feet so he could brush up against them and try and climb up to see what was in the bag he was carrying.

Yeah, I got you something…” Leon pushed him off of his legs, and then reached into the bag. “Now… you probably don’t know what wrestling is…”

“TEN!” Litten’s face perked up immediately, “Litten!”

“Wait… you do know what wrestling is?” Litten nodded excitedly at him, “Who showed you that…!?"

“Liitt…” Litten thought for a moment, then jumped up to the bed, clambered up the headboard and pawed a picture that was hung up there… “Ten?”

Let’s see… he was pointing at the picture his family had taken after he’d won the pokéathlon singles championship last season, with him holding the trophy inbetween his smiling father and… “Kanon? Kanon showed you wrestling?” Weird, he thought she thought it was as dumb as he did…

“Ten!” Litten shook his head at him, and pawed upwards again, “Lit!”

“…My Dad!?” That was who Litten was pointing at, anyway. But it didn’t make any sense, Leon hadn’t dared let Litten out of his sight when he’d been at home with his parents. When would his Dad had managed to watch wrestling with him…?

“Ten.” Litten was shaking his head again, and tapped his nose on his paw. “Lit lit!”

“You… your dad…?” Huh… first time Litten had ever mentioned him. It hadn’t occurred to Leon that the cat would even had known who that was.

“Lit!” Litten nodded happily, then puffed up his fur and tried to stand on just his hind legs and meow in a deep voice… “LIT! TentetentenTEN! LIIIIIIIT-TEEEEEEN…! T…t-ten!”

“Pfft…” Leon couldn’t help but snort at the little guy as he lost his balance and feel backwards onto the bed, then quickly shot back up and tried to act like he hadn’t fallen over… “Well… If you already know about this stuff, then I guess I won’t have to explain what this is supposed to be…”

“LIT!” Litten’s eyes shot open as Leon pulled the costume out of the bag…

“You wanna try it on?” Leon asked, even though Litten was bouncing up and down on the bed like a madcat at the sight of it, “Alright, let’s see how this goes…”

Five minutes later, Litten was strutting back and forth in front of the mirror, hissing dramatically through the mask as he turned back and forth quickly enough to make the cape swoosh around behind him.

“So. You like it, then?” Leon checked, though it was pretty obvious he did. At least, he did right now. The real test would be to see how long it’d be before Litten wanted out of the costume…

“Alright, man. I’m gonna do my homework now. Just remember to tell me if you want out of that
“Lit…” Litten meowed vaguely and went back to his posing… Man, Sayaka was gonna be so smug tomorrow, wasn’t she…?

At least it gave him enough time to get on with his homework, without having to stop and grab any buckets of water. Even when Litten got bored of posing and started playing with his toys, he seemed more interested in finding high places to body slam down on them from, than on setting them alight, like he would usually start doing when he was left to his own devices for too long.

…Man, he should have tried this ages ago! Okay, so it was pretty uncool for his cat to be running around in a gaudy cape and pretending to be pile-driving his stuff, but it was making the little guy happy! And a happy cat seemed to be one that didn’t set fire to all his shit…!

“LITTEN…!”, “…LUX?!” Wait… what the…!? 

“Ten…!” Leon turned around just in time to see Litten scampering away from Lux’s bed to hide behind Leon, probably because Lux was stood on all fours, hissing with electricity arcing around his entire body…

“…Ray.” He quit with the electricity once Litten was shaking behind Leon’s chair, shook himself off and settled back into the cat-bed with a stern meow. Guess that had just been a warning for Litten not to do whatever the heck he had just done, which Leon could take a guess at…

“…Did you just try and jump on Lux while he was napping!?”

“…Lit.” The kitten nodded guiltily.

“Dude, c’mon! You know not to pester Lux while he’s in his bed!” Leon exclaimed, feeling crappy about it when Litten meowed sadly in response. “Look, I get that you’re excited about the costume, but you can’t expect Lux to play with you if he ain’t in the mood for it, especially not without asking first! Got it?”

“…Lit…” Litten’s head dropped pitifully. Dammit, and he’d been so excited before now, and Leon could understand him wanting to play fight with another pokémon, but he couldn’t just force Lux to be Litten’s punching-bag either. He needed something he could distract Litten with for a while, and cheer him back up…

“Tell you what, how about we see if Chihiro can download some wrestling videos for us to watch?” Leon suggested, “Maybe we can even convince them to let Golett watch a few, so it can play with you!”

“LIT!” Litten perked back up and nodded happily. Golett was a total pushover when it came to playing with Litten… or just helping out in general. They’d probably have a few rounds of ‘wrestling’ and then Litten would be tired enough to let Leon take the costume off of him and put him to bed…

Or, Litten could spend so much time roughhousing with Golett that he passed out with the costume on and made it impossible for Leon to take off of him, even after he woke up the next morning and insisted on eating breakfast in it before Mondo went back to his room to… do whatever he did there on Wednesday mornings, while he and Chihiro took their pokémon to Hawthorne’s class. With Litten sulking the whole way there, because Golett was wearing it’s three-piece suit and couldn’t risk ripping it by play-fighting with him, unlike the random towel it had tied around its neck last night…
Still, at least Litten was wearing a costume to costume class, and probably wouldn’t wreck it before judgement time. That was progress right there, even if it was progress in a class that seemed completely pointless, right now. Hawthorne was still just making them all do nothing but dress up, and finding increasingly dumb reasons to mark down the people who did! Hell, he was surprised that no one else in the school had decided to quit her classes, yet. There’d been enough low-key complaining about it that he’d have thought someone would have dropped out, like the Kuzuryu guy, who didn’t really have any need for the class or fucks to give about missing lessons. Or Togami, who Ibuki had overheard bitching about how much worse Hawthorne was than whatever fancy-pants private tutor he’d had before coming here. But class 77 seemed too tight-knit for someone to just drop out and not worry the others. And Togami probably didn’t wanna have to put up with Ishimaru nagging him to turn up to the class so he could learn how to make his pokémon behave better, like he kept doing with Mondo.

…Although, thinking about it, he hadn’t said that in a while, had he? Not even after Lycan had started growling at him all the time. Maybe even he was starting to admit she wasn’t actually gonna teach anyone anything useful. Her putting him only one place about Leon every week probably wasn’t helping his opinion of her, as much as he kept insisting he was trying to get his dog to try on different stuff, instead of wearing that same dumb superhero cape to class every Wednesday.

But so much for that, ’cause his dog was still wearing the same shit as always. Heh, cliché look for Litten or not, it seemed like Leon wasn’t gonna be placing last in this class, for once! So long as Litten was gonna be alright with his costume for another hour…

Wait… where was Litten? Hadn’t he been following Leon into class…!?

“LITTEEEEEEN…!” Leon’s head snapped up at the sound of Litten caterwauling from the front of the class, just in time to watch him pouncing off of Makoto’s desk, right onto the back of Ishimaru’s Arcanine…

“Argh! What the…!”, “ARC! Nnnnnnine…?” Both of them yelped as Litten landed, and then they both froze in shock as Litten started stomping up and down, while the dog whined…

“…Kuwata, what is the meaning of this…!? ” Ishimaru finally snapped.

“Sorry, he’s just trying to play…”

“Well, this isn’t a game Arcanine wants to play, so call him off!”

“I was gonna…!” Leon pointed out. “Litten, quit it! The dog ain’t playing wrestlers…!”

“Ten…?” Litten looked confused, but quit pounding the shaking dog’s back at least.

“No, he ain’t…I think you’re hurting him.” Leon pointed out, “Now get off, already…”

“And you should apologise!” Ishimaru snapped, as Litten jumped off.

“Li…?” The kitten jumped a little at the harsh order, but then took another look at the dog and meowed guiltily… “Lit lit…”

“Can…?” The dog stopped shaking and yapped at him.

“Ten!” Litten shook his head and pointed at the Arcanine’s cape excitedly, then tried to stand on two legs again… “LIT! TentetentenTEN! LIIIIIT-TEEEEEN…!”

“NNNNnnnnnn! Nine!” The dog just backed off away from him, like it was actually scared of the
tiny little cat.

“Toise…?” On the other hand, Makoto’s Blastoise seemed interested in the conversation they were having, “Balst…? Blastoise…?”

“Ahh… you want my hoodie…?” Makoto asked it.

“Toise!” It nodded eagerly.

“Well… alright!” Makoto sighed, taking off his protective blazer, so her could then take off the hoodie he wore stuffed into it. “It’s not gonna look as good now you’re evolved, though…”

‘Not gonna look good’!? It wasn’t even gonna fit! Hell, that thing would have had trouble getting into Mondo’s coat, let alone it’s shrimpy trainer’s…!

At least, that’s what he’d been thinking, before Makoto started tying the arms of the hoodie around the tortoise’s neck, like some kind of preppy loser, so it now had a tiny-looking hoodie hanging down its back, which it sort-of swished dramatically as it turned and pointed at Litten...

“Toise…! Bla toise blast…?” It sounded like it was laughing at Litten, then struck a dramatic pose while pointing at itself. “Blastoise!”

“Li…?” Litten cocked his head at it, then perked up and jumped up onto Makoto’s table, “Lit! Tentententen TEN! LIIIIIIIT-TEEEEEEN…!”

“Toise!” The tortoise slowly tried to grab Litten off of the table, but Litten was way too quick for that, and hopped up onto the back of its shell instead, prompting it to comically turn around in circles as it tried to knock Litten off with its hands, instead of just using the giant water guns on its back to get rid of the fire-type…

Wait… Was it just playing along with Litten…?

“Ahahaha… Squirtle and I had a pretty big wrestling phase when I was a kid…” Makoto laughed sheepishly, as his pokémon carefully fell over backwards and pretending to be stuck under Litten.

“Really? I never saw the point of it…” Ishimaru piped up, which was no surprise at all. “Aren’t all the fights fake, anyway…?”

“Toise…!”, “TTTEEeeeennnn!” Both pokémon stopped their play fighting to turn and moan at him.

“Err… Is that not the case? I was just repeating what I’d heard elsewhere…” Ishimaru backtracked immediately, as they went back to playing. “But, regardless, at least you can see how nice it is when you check if other pokémon are willing to play such games before initiating them…!”

Urgh, geez, was he gonna keep getting at Litten about that…? “Urgh, if it was that big a deal, why didn’t your dog just shake him off!”?

“Well… Arcanine’s nnever been very confident about fighting without direction…” Ishimaru answered.

“Pfft, yeah I’ve heard, but there’s a difference between fighting and self-preservation!” Leon pointed out, “If someone tried to jump on you, wouldn’t you push back? Why didn’t it even do anything like that?”

“Ergh… I… I don’t know! He’s just never really had any instinct to fight other pokémon, even in
self-defensive!” He stammered, “Maybe it’s a result of the way he was bred? Police Growlithes need to be well-behaved…”

Yeah, but there was ‘well-behaved’ and there was ‘no fucking self-preservation whatsoever’! Fighting other pokémon was in their nature, and it’s not like the cops would want dogs that couldn’t fight! Had Ishimaru done something to the thing, to make it more ‘well-behaved’? Was that why Lycan had found out…?

“Alright, class, enough Rapidashing around…!” Tch! That was Kizakura… looked like it was time for class, “Time for the Wednesday morning greeting.”

“Alright… Sorry, Litten, playtime’s over!” Leon told the kitten, picking it up off of Blastoise, who then easily rolled back onto its hind legs and stood next to Makoto, while Leon stood by his usual table at the back of the classroom, until after Hawthorne had come in and made them all parrot her stupid class greeting at her…

She didn’t look as smug about it as usual, though. Instead she just looked over the whole room with an expression that he’d have reserved for a pile of dead Magicarp or something…

“…What is it with this class and capes!?” She finally asked. “Honestly, it was bad enough when it was just two of you, but now there’s…” She quickly counted up Ishimaru, Togami, Makoto, Yamada, Ludenberg and, obviously, Leon… “Six of you using them!”

“Sheeemmm… I believe you may have miscounted there, Miss…” Ludenberg was the first to say something, “It looked like you included me in there, just now, but my pokémon are wearing a suit and a wedding veil…”

“Well, it’s close enough…”

“What do you MEAN it’s CLOSE ENOUGH…!?!” Ludenberg almost went into full-on crazy bitch mode, before a loud cough and glare from Kizakura shut her up…

“Uhh… well… for what’s it’s worth, this isn’t really Blasotise’s costume!” Makoto spoke up, taking his hoodie off of the tortoise, “I was just messing about before class started…”

“And, if I helps matters, Dratini is getting too big for his cape!” Yamada added nervously, glancing towards Ludenberg. “It’s high time he tried something different!”

“Very well… and the Sewaddle as well?” Hawthorne asked him.

“Sewaddle! But… Sewaddle’s not wearing anything!” Yamada spluttered, “Well, other than the leaf clothing her’s parents would have made her…”

“That’s what I’m talking about! It’s clearly a cape made of leaves, wrapped tightly around it’s body!” The hell? Now that was some bullshit right there… “It’s needs to go to.”

“Whhhaaaattt! But it’s a treasured heirloom from her parents!” Yamada shrieked, “I can’t force her out of it! What if it turns out to be an important part of her late-game equipment!?”

“Well, I’m going to need more than one of you to stop wearing them!” She huffed, glaring at Leon in particular.

“Hey! Don’t look at me! This is the first outfit I’ve found that Litten didn’t shred!” He pointed out, “What about Ishimaru? You’ve been telling him to get something else for weeks, now!”
“Errg…! And I intend to! But it’s been a bad week for Arcanine!” Urgh… so, what, he was gonna blame Lycanroc for the fact that he still hadn’t shelled out for a new costume, too!? “And Togami’s Drampa has been wearing that same stolen cape since the beginning of term!”

“There is no REAL proof that it was stolen!” Togami snapped at him, “And I don’t see why I should be penalised, when you’re all clearly copying me!”

“I did not copy you! Arcanine just likes the comics!”, “I don’t even have a cape…!”, “Leavannys have been making capes for their children since the dawn of time! If anything, you’re copying them!”

“This isn’t really the sort of thing that would get penalised, anyway…” Sayaka spoke up, over the argument. “At least, not in a real contest…”

“…Well, this isn’t a ‘real contest’, it’s training. And we can’t expect anyone to do well if everyone if just copying everyone else’s ideas!” Hoo boy, Hawthorne didn’t like that comment, if the glare she gave Sayaka was anything to go on… “So, we’re going to go back to only having one cape in the class! That can be today’s exercise, making sure that next week, we have some diversity in here! And if we don’t, then I’ll be placing everyone wearing a cape in joint last place!”

The four others who’d been arguing all spluttered as she stood up and stormed out of the room… Well, so much for him not scoring last, for once! Still, it wasn’t like this dumb class actually mattered...

“…Umm… And what about the rest of us…?” Asahina asked, “Do we not have to do anything today?”

“Urhh…” Even Kizakura was at a loss for words, until he got up and headed out the door, “…I’ll go see if I can talk some sense into her…!”

“…Does anyone else get the feeling he’d not going to be able to…?” Sayaka sighed.

“From what the headmaster’s told me, I suspect that will be the case.” Did Kirigiri just call her old man, ‘the headmaster’…?

“Urg… Yeah, I’m predicting the same thing…” Hagakure sighed, “Man, I could have just stayed in bed this morning…”

“Just because you’ve got some unexpected free time, doesn’t mean you should spend it sleeping!” Ishimaru snapped at him, “You could use the free time to study! Or perhaps help some of us brainstorm costume ideas! For instance, is there anything that fastens in a similar way to a cape, that isn’t a cape…? That might allow Arcanine to change…”

“Pfft… She just told Ludenberg that veils aren’t allowed, what makes you think she’s gonna let you get away with that cop out!?” Enoshima laughed at him, as she started to stand up out of her chair. “Just do something different!”

“But… Arcanine, and several of the other pokémon, wouldn’t be comfortable…”

“So!? Sometimes you’ve just gotta make your pokémon do stuff they’re not ‘comfortable’ with! Otherwise they’ll never grow up!” Enoshima cut Ishimaru off with a shrug, “Now, come on, Muku!”

“Ah… we’re leaving…!?” Ikusaba asked.

“Yeah! You heard the others, Kizakura’s not gonna be able to convince Kristy to back down, so he’s
gonna spend the whole lesson arguing with her!” Enoshima grinned, “Sounds like a ‘Class dismissed to me!’

“Oh! Right, okay, Junko!” Ikusaba got up, picking up her stationary and Zorua before scampering off behind Enoshima…

Well, the part about making your pokémon uncomfortable was bullshit, but he was right there with her on the whole ‘class dismissed’ bit… Maybe he could swing by Mondo’s room and see what he was up to this morning…

“Kuwata, where do you think you’re going?” Togami snapped, as soon as he stood up.

“Somewhere that’s not here.” Like it was any of his business…

“So you’re just intending to ignore Hawthorne’s ultimatum?”

“Yep, pretty much!” Yeesh, Togami actually looked surprised… “What? She’s a crazy bitch! Who cares what she thinks!?”

“Kuwata, you can’t use language like that to refer to our teachers!” Ishimaru barked, no surprise there! “And we can’t just ignore her orders, either! Even if they are bordering on draconian!”

“Dragons wouldn’t be so petty… But aside from that, Ishimaru is correct.” Togami stated, while Yamada and both their dragons nodded along with him, “So I trust that all of you lot will have different outfits, before next week.”

“…WHAAAAAT!?” Yamada stopped nodding and shrieked, “Why should we be the ones to change!?”

“Because I was the first person to dress their pokémon in a cape!” So, what? Togami’s excuse was that he’d called dibs…?

“Fuck that man! This is the first outfit I’ve found that Litten didn’t wreck!”

“And as we already told Miss Hawthorne, Arcanine and Sewaddle aren’t comfortable with other accessories, either!” Ishimaru insisted, “We can’t make them change!”

“Hmph…” Togami huffed and turned to Ludenberg, “Can I at least depend on you not to bring a cape to class next week?”

“Of course you can.” She pulled that creepy smile of hers, “Because I didn’t bring one this week!”

Wow, if looks could kill, Togami would have murdered her… “…Semantics aside…”

“It’s not semantics, that fucking bitch is WRONG!” She screamed, which was something else he was starting to get way too used to… “It’s clearly a fucking VEIL, but if you ASSHOLES are gonna say it’s not, then YOU’LL have to be the ones who change…!”

“NEVAAA!…”, “B…but I can’t!”, “I’m under no obligation to change Drampa’s outfit…!” “…..AARRRRR!” The other three guys all started yelling back at her…

“Urgh, you GUYS! Are you really gonna argue over this!?” Leon groaned as loudly as he could, “Like I said, who cares what she says! Let’s just ignore it! Or, better yet, try and get rid of her!”

“How!? We already had all but one of the coordination trainers complain about her to the school board!” Ishimaru wailed, “What else are we supposed to do? Go on strike!?”
“Well… That’s what I’ve been thinking…” Sayaka admitted, “But I wasn’t sure there’d be enough of us willing to do it, for it to work…”

“Erehh!? You mean… you’ve seriously been considering that as a course of action…?” For the guy who’d suggested it, he seemed surprised that she was nodding at him now.

“Even though it’s the one class that’s meant for you!?” Makoto asked her, gaping as she shrugged and nodded back at him.

“Why are you guys surprised!? She’s been complaining about Hawthorne all term!” Leon pointed out.

“Well, yeah, but… we didn’t realise it was that bad!” Hina piped up, “…Or at least, I didn’t…”

“I did not realise this was causing you such distress, either.” Oogami agreed, “If that is the case, I would be more than willing to help you take action.”

“Yeah! Me to!”, “Yeah, I’m happy to help you, Sayaka!”, “As if I’m going to be taught fashion by someone who doesn’t know what a fucking veil is!”, “Well... if it means Litten can keep his costume…” Alright! Most of the class was agreeing to this! Hell, with them this riled up, they might even be able to skip a whole bunch of classes, to prove a bigger point…!

“…But, just to be clear, we’re just taking about striking during this class, correct?” But Ishimaru had to be a buzzkill, “Not any of the others?”

“That would be the most logical thing for us to do.” Kirigiri spoke up, which he hadn’t actually been expecting, seeing as she hadn’t said she was gonna join in… “Otherwise the board might assume it’s an issue with Kizakura, or that we’re just being lazy…”

Oh, yeah… wouldn’t wanna get him into trouble. They might end up with some jerk who’d make them stick to being in class exactly on time… and it was bad enough having one of those in the class, let alone teaching it!

“In that case, I’ll be happy to join you in your protest!” Ishimaru agreed, “Perhaps we could even book out a room and run our own practise sessions during the time? It will help convince the board that we have a legitimate issue!”

“That’s a great idea! We can all try and practise some routines together, as a whole class!” Sayaka offered, “Well… almost a whole class… and that’s assuming everyone here joins in…”

She was looking around at Togami, Fukawa and Hagakure, who were the only ones who hadn’t outright said they were in yet…

“I don’t intend to waste time having my pokémon prance about following your orders!” Togami decided to be an asshole, “But I can organise for my previous coordination tutor to visit the school for the duration of this strike, if it means not having my grades lowered because you all decided to copy me…”

Well, it wasn’t great if he went off and did his own thing, but it was something…

“W-well, if you’re not going to waste your time with H-Hawthorne anymore, I’m certainly not going to!” For starters, it got Fukawa to side with them in record time!

Now there was just one more person who hadn’t spoken up… “And what about you, Hiro…?”
“Urgh… I dunno, man… I don’t like the sound of this…” Wait… Really!? Hiro was the one saying no to this!? Of all the people here…!? “I mean, she’s giving me and Hattie bad vibes and all, but I don’t wanna hit anyone over this…”

“Uhh… no, Hiro, it’s not that kind of strike…” Makoto explained, tiredly. “We’re talking about refusing to come to this class again, until they get a new teacher for it…”

“Ohh! Oh heck yeah, I’ll be down for that!” Hiro grinned, which was more like what he’d expected, “So, I can sleep in next Wednesday?”

“I wonder about that… usually workers are expected to give two weeks’ notice that they intend to strike…” Kirigiri muttered, “That would mean we’d start next term…”

“But we’re not workers! Hell, we don’t even have to come to this class in the first place!” Leon argued.

“But, still, it might be worth giving the school time to respond to our concerns, before going ahead with such drastic action…” Ishimaru insisted, “After all, if we warn them before the holidays, it’ll give them time to look for a new teacher, and we might not even need to miss any classes!”

“And that way, we could give Ibuki and Hiyoko some time to convince all of their class to go on strike as well… and maybe even the other classes, too!” Sayaka said, hopefully.

“Ooh! Yeah! Good idea!” Hina agreed, “They wouldn’t keep paying her if she was only teaching two students out of the whole school!”

“Well, that settles it then!” Ishimaru insisted, as if two people meant the whole class agreed… “In that case, perhaps we should use this time to start drafting a series of conditions to the school, and a signator sheet to go with it! That way you can give copies to your friends in other classes to get signed before next week…”

“That’s a good idea… But I’ve never done anything like that, before…” Sayaka admitted.

“Hmm… I must admit, I’ve never done this before, either…” Ishimaru muttered, “But maybe there’s some advice in the library…?”

“Wouldn’t it be easier to search online…?” Leon asked. Like it was gonna be worth trawling through the library!

“There might even be templates we can download and print off…” Chihiro agreed, setting up their laptop. “Give me a minute to see what I can find…”

Well… looked like everyone had just decided to go along with what Ishimaru wanted… But at least Sayaka looked happy that they were finally doing something about Hawthorne…

“LITEEEEENNNN…!” “What the…!? KUWATA!? What in hell’s name are you letting your cat do to Drampa!? Do you have any idea how irreplaceable that cape is…!?"

Now if only someone could do something about Litten causing trouble if Leon took his eyes off of him for more than five minutes…!
Thanks for reading!
Time for a break (Imposter POV)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Bzzzt, bzzzt, bzzzt…*

“Hrrng…” They groaned as they woke up to the sound of their pokédex vibrating on the table next to them. It was Saturday! They thought they’d turned the alarm off this morning… Still, maybe they could shut it off and go back to sleep…

*Bzzzt, bzzzt, bzzzt…*

Wait… that wasn’t their alarm tone! It was the phone! And looking at the display, it was the representative from FutureDex, which meant they needed to be Ishimaru earlier in the day than he’d expected…

“Good morning! Kiyotaka Ishimaru speaking!”

“Oh, Ishimaru! Good morning! This is Darren from FutureDex. I had a message that you were trying to contact me yesterday! Something about a technical problem with the pokédex…?”

Right… that. They’d been told Darren would ring back, but they hadn’t been expecting it so quickly. It seemed ‘Ishimaru’ must be one of the man’s top priorities at the moment…

“Yes! Thank you for returning my call so promptly!” Was how they phrased that out loud, “You might remember I mentioned on Wednesday that the pokédex is warming up whenever I use it? I know you said it’s happening to other people, and not anything to worry about! But yesterday it got to the point where it started to get rather uncomfortable to hold onto for more than a minute at a time! I kept having to switch which hand it was in!”

“Really!? You’re the first person that’s happened to…?” Darren sounded concerned by the information, “Although you have been using it quite a bit, this week…”

Now there was an understatement!

They’d thought Ishimaru had been scanning a lot of pokémon before he injured himself, but this last week the boy had been practically relentless, finding pokémon to scan at every free moment, from the moment curfew ended, to the minute it began again, on some days. And, of course, they’d needed to follow in his footsteps, which was all the more difficult when they were lagging behind him by at least an hour, if not more.

They were barely able to keep up with him. If it hadn’t been for Munakata convincing Miss Yukizome not to get annoyed if they missed classes, or even some of their homework deadlines, then it would have been impossible. And even with those allowances, they still hadn’t had any time this week to allow Kazuichi or Gundam to inspect the pokédex and Rotom, something that Gundam had been angry about ever since they’d taken the pokédex to see him over a week ago. And now, he’d even managed to convince Kazuichi to start arguing that they should take a break from scanning everything and just let him inspect the pokédex to see why it was overheating. They’d barely managed to convince him to wait until today, when Ishimaru should be busy helping Naegi host one of their casual battle tournaments…

Not that they could complain about that to Darren…
“Ah… I suppose I have! I wanted to make up for the time I spent in the hospital!” At least, they assumed that was his reasoning for going all-out with the research. Perhaps they’d best double-check that with Fujisaki… “Why, do you think I should reduce the amount of work I’m having it do…? Perhaps switch back to my old pokédex for a while…?”

“Ah… no! No you shouldn’t need to do that! We don’t want to disrupt your work!” Darren insisted, which was unfortunate. That would have been the perfect opportunity for another break. “As long as the pokédex is still working properly, you should be able to use it as much as you like! And like I said on Wednesday, we haven’t picked up on anymore discrepancies between your scans and your submissions!”

That was likely only because the online submission data only showed what pokémon were scanned, not any in-depth details such as the exact time or location the pokémon was recorded. If FutureDex had been in any position to look up that data, this plan would never have worked in the first place. But it was interesting that Darren kept insisting that Ishimaru’s data was unaffected. It seemed his main concern was making sure that the boy had as much of a positive impression of the device as possible, and had no temptation to switch back to using a conventional pokédex…

“But… what if it gets even hotter while I’m using it…?” They asked him, “And are you sure it’s not affecting the Rotom inside?”

“Yes! Don’t worry, the Rotom won’t be affected by the temperature of the device! After all, these ghosts will willingly possess ovens!” Darren answered him, confidently. “As for the heating problem, I realise it’s a nuisance and I can assure you that we are working to find the source of the problem and fix it, but my advice would be to wear some protective gloves while handling the pokédex! I can organise to have some flown over to you, if you don’t already own a pair…”

“Ah… thank you, but that won’t be necessary! My school provides free protective equipment!” And they already had a pair of thin, heat-resistant, leather gloves identical to Ishimaru’s. “I just wanted to be sure it wasn’t going to become a danger if I ignored it to that extent!”

“Oh, no, don’t worry! The engineering team have told me there’s no way the battery could get hot enough to damage any of the casing!” Darren tried to assure them, “Just carry on using it as much as you want, and I’ll make sure you’re the first to know when we come up with a way to fix the problem! Now, is there anything else I can help you with…?”

“No, thank you! You’ve been very helpful!” They lied, “I’ll talk to you again on Wednesday!”

“Yes, and thank you for continuing to use the pokédex and keep me updated on it!” Darren replied, which made them wonder if that meant Enoshima and Ikusaba weren’t. “Have a good weekend, Ishiamru!”

“And you to! Goodbye!” They replied cheerfully, before hanging up on him.

Well... Now they knew what FutureDex’s answer was. It had been the same thing Munakata had suggested when they’d given him a brief update on the investigation. Now it would be interesting to see what Kazuichi’s take on the problem was, and as they were now too awake from that conversation to go back to sleep, they might as well get up and take advantage of the free day…

But wait… Why did he have notifications from the application Fujisaki programmed in, to tell him when Ishimaru had scanned pokémon!? It was barely an hour past curfew, and there were too many to just be from the odd new pokémon he would have met from the tournament!

…Looking through the list, it looked like he’d gone out to the fields… It seemed he’d decided to get
up early enough to set off outside as soon as curfew ended, so he could scan a few pokémon before the tournament started! How did he have the energy to keep doing all this!? He certainly didn’t eat enough for it!

And neither would they, if they didn’t get up and go for breakfast now! Otherwise they would have time to scan the pokémon before they were supposed to be going to Kazuichi’s workshop, and if they were late for that then Gundam would waste their time lecturing them about how he needed time to ‘talk’ to the Rotom again…

“Alright, everyone! It seems I need to get going quickly this morning!” They announced to their pokémon, quickly getting out more food for the three of them, especially Mimikyu and Mime Jr., who might end up having to spend the day alone… again!

“Kyuuuu…!?” Mimikyu sighed, recognising what the extra food meant, while the other two pokémon started eating. She was never that happy about being left in their room when they needed to take on someone’s identity for long periods of time, but the sheer amount of time they were having to spend as Ishimaru for this mission was making it even worse on her…

“I’m sorry! I don’t have any control on how much I have to do for this! I wasn’t expecting this to be so much work when I agreed to it!” They apologised, patting the head of her disguise and then straightening it up for her, “I promise you though, once this mission’s finished, I’ll make plenty of time to play with you and Mime Jr.!”

“Mimi…” She sighed, understandingly as she started on her food.

Meanwhile, Ditto had finished absorbing its pokéchow into its body and was now in the process of transforming into an Arcanine…

“…Ark.” It sighed, once it was done, “Ark, ark, ark.”

…Even it was sick and tired of having to imitate the same pokémon all day, every day!

“Now, I know it’s hard to keep up the energy for this…” They admitted, “But you’ll only need to keep up the act long enough for me to get to the dining room! Once we’re there you’ll go back in your ball, and there probably won’t be enough people in the fields to notice if you’re not acting as hyper as the Arcanine would be!”

“…Cann…” It gave a reluctant sigh, then took a deep breath… “ARK, ARK, ARK!”

“That’s my boy!” They petted its head as a reward for the loud, enthusiastic barks, “Now, let’s get this over this…!”

The pair of them headed out of the room, with Ditto walking to heel beside them, down the stairs towards the dining area, passing the odd student who tried to make themselves look as inconspicuous as possible when they saw the apparent disciplinarian and his dog striding through the amenities area…

All but one student, whose pokémon immediately pulled its owner towards them, barking loudly as it approached them…

“Roc! Canroc!” Ah, of course! Fujisaki had warned them that Oowada’s Lycanroc had started trying to get the Arcanine’s attention, along with what they should have Ditto do in response! So, they surreptitiously signalled for Ditto to get back into its ball, just before Oowada and the Lycanroc
got close enough to observe it too closely…

“RRRRRRRRRRRRrrrrrrrrrrrr….!” At which point the Lycanroc switched from trying to get Ditto’s attention, to growling menacingly at them…! Fujisaki hadn’t said anything about that! Had they just forgot to mention it, or had the Lycanroc noticed that they weren’t Ishimaru…?

Hmm… Looking at Oowada, they suspected it was the former. He didn’t look surprised enough for this to be the first time his pokémon had threatened someone like that. Though they best not take that for granted when they responded… “…Are you going to stop him from doing that!? Pokémon threatening humans is…”

“Don’t gimme that crap! What the hell are you hiding!?” Oowada snapped, saving them from having to continue lecturing him…

“I’m not hiding anything!”

“Then why the hell won’t you let Lycan talk to your dog!?”

‘Won’t let’? That wasn’t how Fujisaki had described it… “I’d be perfectly happy to let them talk, but I’m not going to force Arcanine to interact with a pokémon he’s scared of! Maybe if…”

“Oh, yeah!? Then why’d you just signal for him to get in his ball!?” Oowada asked, straightening his posture confidently when they hesitated to answer, “Don’t think I didn’t notice you waving your hand behind your back just now…”

It was true, they had given a signal behind their back… But that wasn’t something Ishimaru would have done, and they could hardly explain that! Their only option was to try and gaslight Oowada into thinking he might have mistaken a random movement for a defined signal… “I don’t know what you’re talking about…! I didn’t think I moved my hand, but I suppose I might have panicked and shaken it without realising! But I don’t have a hand signal for Arcanine to return to his ball, I have to call out for him to do that, unless he chooses to go in by himself, like he did just now!”

Oowada’s eyes narrowed, and the Lycanroc was still growling at him… obviously they weren’t convinced, but the part about Ishimaru not having a hand signal for ‘return’ was true, as far as they were aware, so Oowada wouldn’t have any evidence that they had just lied to him about it…

“We ain’t got time for this right now…” Oowada grumbled, tugging at his wolf’s arm. “But I ain’t dropping this, Ishimaru!”

They didn’t get a chance to respond before he left, heading off towards the staircase, presumably to get to his DPTL course.

Well, that had been a mess… Such a memorable argument would be sure to stick in Oowada’s memory, and he’d likely try to follow it up with Ishimaru at some point. And they still weren’t entirely sure that his Lycanroc hadn’t been growling at them because it had noticed they were a fake.

Perhaps they should send a message asking Fujisaki about it while they were eating…

‘Regarding Oowada’s Lycanroc: I just want to confirm if it’s normal for it to growl at Ishimaru once his Arcanine returns to its ball?’

‘Sorry! I forgot to warn you about that part, didn’t I?’ Fujisaki responded quickly. Sometimes they wondered if they were glued to their pokédex… ‘Yes, that’s normal. He’s been doing it every time he sees Ishimaru at all.’
‘Why? And what’s Ishimaru’s response been to this?’

‘We’re not sure. It started when Lycanroc and Arcanine got sent into the forest to work together by themselves. Ishimaru went in after them, and when he came out, Lycanroc growled at him, and he’s kept it up all week.’ Odd… they’d have assumed some kind of rivalry between the two dogs, except the wolf seemed to be trying to talk to Ditto just now… ‘Ishimaru says it’s because he told Lycanroc off for snapping at Arcanine, but Mondo thinks he’d have stopped by now, if that’s all it was, so he’s starting to think Ishimaru’s lying about something.’

‘That’s unfortunate, I may have just added to that. He caught me signalling for Ditto to return when his Lycanroc tried to talk to it, and my only response was to lie and say I hadn’t.’

‘And if Mondo mentions that to the real Ishimaru, then he’s not going to have a clue what Mondo’s talking about, and it’ll seem to Mondo that he’s telling more lies to cover up what happened.’ Fujisaki pointed out. ‘I’m starting to think we should stop doing this. If Gundam’s right, we’ve been seriously messing up the Rotom without knowing it, and now we’re dragging Ishimaru’s reputation through the mud as well.’

So, Gundam had been talking to them as well, now? While they could understand Fujisaki’s concern, they couldn’t just stop now. ‘But as Munakata says, we’re doing this to stop it happening to other Rotoms. And I’m sure Ishimaru would be willing to suffer a hit to his reputation in order to help with that!’

‘I see your point, but I don’t think Ishimaru would agree with this.’ Fujisaki argued… Actually, this was starting to become a concern…

‘Are you intending to tell him about it?’

‘No.’ Well, that was something, ‘I’m just worried that we’re making the Rotom do too much, and we’re barely doing anything to actually analyse it like we were supposed to.’

‘Well, it would help if Ishimaru would stop scanning such an obscene number of pokémon, so I’d actually have the time to let Kazuichi and Gundam look at it.’ They pointed out, ‘Why has he been scanning so many pokémon this week? Frankly, it’s a little ridiculous!’

‘He says he’s doing it to make up for the fact that he won’t have time once Gundam gives him his second pokémon at the end of term.’ Ah… so Gundam was willing to give him a pokémon after all…?

‘If that’s the case, why can’t Gundam just give him a pokémon now, so he’ll be busy enough to give us time to study the pokédex?’

Fujisaki took an oddly long time to reply, given how short the message was… ‘He didn’t tell you what pokémon he’s planning to give Ishimaru?’

‘No. Aside from this mission, he and I don’t interact that much.’

‘Oh.’ Had Fujisaki really bothered to type that out and send it by itself? ‘Well I don’t know for sure but, given what Gundam told Ishimaru, I think Gundam’s planning to give him the Rotom.’

WHAT!? What could have possibly given Gundam the idea that that was even going to be an option, let alone before the end of term!? Even if the Rotom was willing to get into a pokéball, were they just supposed to hand over what was going to be an important piece of evidence…? ‘That’s NOT going to happen!’
‘I know. And I’ve told to tell Ishimaru that he might end up having to catch a pokémon, regardless of what Gundam’s promised him.’ Fujisaki responded, ‘But I can’t tell him for sure that Gundam’s NOT going to have a pokémon unless I explain HOW I know, and I wasn’t able to convince Gundam that he won’t be able to hand over the Rotom that fast, so he’s refusing to tell Ishimaru to just go and catch a pokémon for himself, or give Ishimaru anything else.’

So in other words, they’d be able to study, and therefore free, like Gundam wanted, the Rotom a lot faster if Gundam himself hadn’t made such a poorly-thought out promise to Ishimaru…? ‘Well, thank you for letting me know about that. Next time I see Gundam I’ll sort this out myself!’

‘Thanks. If I’d realised he’d not even mentioned it to you, then I’d have told you sooner.’

They couldn’t blame Fujisaki for that. In any other situation, this was something Gundam would have mentioned at some point, which meant he was probably aware that Munakata wouldn’t take kindly to the news that he’d gone ahead and promised the Rotom to Ishimaru like that. On the other hand, if he was refusing to listen to Fujisaki, then he might not even listen to them about it. It might get to the point where he had to go over Gundam’s head and have Munakata tell Ishimaru that Gundam’s pokémon wouldn’t be suitable for him, or something like that…

Well, as much as they’d like to sit here eating while they thought about it, they had a busy day ahead… again!

Hours later, they were starting to wish they’d brought some provisions along.

It appeared that Ishimaru wasn’t busy attending a tournament today, as the list of pokémon he had left to scan had continued to grow longer all the way up to lunchtime, and they’d be lucky if he didn’t come back to add to it after that! Especially as having to wear these gloves was slowing down their work…

“Ah HA! See!? I TOLD you the tortured elderich noises I could hear would be the trapped spirit…!” And speaking of things that would slow them down, it seemed Gundam had finished his work for the DPTL class.

“Err… hang on! We don’t know for sure that’s not Ishimaru…!” …And he’d brought Kazuichi along with him. They’d best put the pokédex in sleep mode, before the pair of them caught up to them and started talking about taking about the pokédex or freeing the Rotom in front of it…

“Luckily for you two, I’m not Ishimaru!” They told the pair of them, “But you should still be more careful about when and where we discuss this…”

“Enough with this wretched veil of secrecy! I demand that you allow me to console that spirit NOW, in accordance with the contract we created!” Gundam yelled, getting out one of his pokéballs “Now hand over that infernal trap, before I bring disaster upon you!”

Swearwords, was he really going to use his pokémon to attack them? They couldn’t stand up to his whole team with just Ditto, even if it was already getting ready to launch one of the Arcanine’s attacks at the first pokémon it saw.

“Err… Gundam…? That’s going a bit too far, y’know…?” Luckily, Kazuichi grabbed him by the arm, which seemed to be enough to stop him for now, “But, what gives, man? You told me you were gonna be bringing that to the workshop this morning!”

“And I was going to, but Ishimaru seems to have changed his schedule and decided to spend the
whole morning scanning pokémon out here!” They explained, “Most likely because Gundam’s told him he’s going be given a Rotom to look after in a few weeks, so he wants to get a lot of scanning done now!”

“You did what…!?!” Kazuichi exclaimed at Gundam, “We don’t even know when we’re gonna be able to let that thing out! Why didn’t you just give him something else!?”

“I did not have anything else…” Gundam admitted, tersely, “But with the state that creature is in, and the preparations I have made, there would be no cause to keep it trapped beyond the end of term, if you uphold our end of the bargain and bring it to my domain!”

So he’d found a way to prove it was suffering? Or he thought he had, at the very least… “Believe me, I want to! But as much as you hate it, we need to keep up the pretence that Ishimaru is using this pokédex for his work!” They told him, “But if you’re sure you can get the evidence we need, I’ll make bringing it to you my first priority, as soon as Ishimaru stops scanning things for more than a few hours in the day!”

“No! Your mouth has spewed such lies too many times!” Gundam snapped, brandishing the pokéball again. “You will make me your first priority, or I will…!”

“Woah! Hang on Gundam… How’s about we give him one last chance, alright?” Kazuichi stopped him again, “Even Ishimaru’s gotta do his homework at some point, right? And there’s no way Neko will let him skip out on his sports training! Worst that’ll happen is that you’ll be able to talk to it tomorrow!”

“That is what I was told yesterday.” Gundam glared in their direction.

“Yeah, but now I’m saying it!” Kazuichi insisted, “And I think I’ve got an idea to get Ishimaru to quit using his pokédex for a bit!”

“If you insist.” Gundam agreed, “Though you need to give the spirit some time to rest, before you continue your ‘work’!”

“Well… I could do with something to eat!” They admitted.

“A wise choice!” Gundam announced, before dramatically turning away from them and snapping his fingers as he walked away. “Now come, Kazuichi! Let us enact this plan that you have concocted!”

“Well… it doesn’t exactly need both of us…” Kazuichi muttered, as he headed off after the breeder, leaving them alone to determine their next course of action…

They had said they needed something to eat, and that was true, however… The list of pokémon they had left to scan had stopped growing, and mostly contained pokémon that they could reliably find in the farm area. It seemed Kazuichi was on the money, when he’d said that Ishimaru would have to stop to do his homework. And if there weren’t going to be anymore pokémon to find today, then it would be a waste of energy to walk back to the school, only to have to walk back out here to finish scanning the last few pokémon… It shouldn’t take him too long!

…Admittedly, it was taking them longer than expected, but they were almost finished now! Only a few more Miltanks left to scan, and then they’d finally be able to go and eat! And once they’d eaten, then they might even have time to take the Rotom to Gundam…

But, wait… could they smell something cooking out here…? Were the farmers having a barbeque!?
No… It didn’t smell appetising enough to meat cooking, and it was too strong to be coming all the ay from the farm house. But there weren’t any fire-type pokémon nearby either, aside from Ditto and, arguably, the Rotom in his hand…

…Which was starting to expel wisps of smoke…

“Argh!” They screamed loudly and reflexively let go of the pokédex so they could remove the smouldering glove from their hand. The pokédex had overheated so badly it had started burning the leather!

This temperature issue was getting ridiculous! They knew they were wearing the same free pair of protective gloves that Ishimaru had taken from the school, but that should have been more than good enough to protect them from an overheating piece of machinery! It was a wonder the pokédex’s casing had stood up to that! And they were lucky they’d dropped it on the dirt path, and not in the grass. The last thing they needed was someone catching them starting a fire while disguised as Ishimaru…

They should have listened to Gundam, regardless of how inefficient it would have been! And they were going to need Kazuichi to look over the pokédex before Ishimaru next decided to scan such a large number of pokémon in such a short space of time again, or it was going to be completely unusable! Perhaps they should try and think of a way to stop Ishimaru using his pokédex, in case Kazuichi’s plan failed.

Hmm… He wouldn’t be able to use his pokédex if he didn’t have it for a few days, but they could hardly steal it from him. But he’d probably be happy to hand it over to someone he trusted! Maybe Fujisaki could lie to Ishimaru about his pokédex needing a software update, or them wanting to see if they could add another function or… something that would convince him to hand it over to them for a few days!

They could organise that now, on their own pokédex, while giving the Rotom’s a chance to cool down…

‘Fujisaki, I’m sorry to bother you, but my pokédex has become completely unworkable! I need you to convince Ishimaru to stop using his for a while! Could you tell him you want to give it a check-over, or an update, or something…?’

‘Kazuichi just asked me to do the same thing.’ They replied, with information that wasn’t particularly surprising to them, in retrospect. ‘I’ll send him a message about it now.’

‘Thank you!’ Well, that should give them a chance to actually investigate this thing! Assuming Fujisaki did convince Ishimaru. But they didn’t see any reason for the disciplinarian to distrust them…

In the meantime, perhaps they could put their right glove back on and see if they could actually pick up the other pokédex safely now…

Well… they couldn’t feel the heat radiating off of it anymore. That was a good sign. And it had landed screen-side up, so no worries about a cracked display, either. The fall seemed to have caused it to switch off, but the power button still caused the screen to light up, so no harm done. They just had to wait for the pokédex to finish starting up, and the Rotom to go through I’s usual speil…

That was odd… it was taking longer than usual from the Rotom to start speaking. It looked like the pokédex was stuck on a screen they didn’t recognise, with Futuredex’s logo at the top, and a bunch of statistics… Had they managed to knock something inside the pokédex out of place…?
They checked over the pokédex. There was nothing immediately wrong with it... until they tried to
brush off of piece of dirt, only to feel the resistance of a jagged piece of broken metal instead.

There was a crack in the casing! Did that mean it was possible for the Rotom to get out!? “Err…
Hello!? Erm...” They check briefly to make sure no one was watching them, “Rotom? Are you still
in there!? Can you give me some kind of signal, if you are...?”

Nothing... Swearwords! Where had it gone!? They had to try and find it somehow, before someone
else discovered it! Maybe a scan of the area would find it...

They quickly got out their own pokédex and scanned the area... but there were no ghost-types
around at all, let alone a Rotom!

While they were trying to work out what to do, their pokédex buzzed with a new message...

‘I used the words ‘disk clean’ and ‘defragment’ and Ishimaru agreed to let me keep his pokédex for
a while! He’s just going to post a new article on BattleNet, and then he’ll bring it straight over to my
room. Don’t worry about scanning anymore pokémon. I can delete the excess data from Ishimaru’s
pokédex before it sends them.’ It was a reply from Fujisaki, not that it mattered now...

‘Nevermind that now! I just noticed that the pokédex’s casing has broken, and it’s not starting up the
same way it usually would! I think the Rotom’s escaped! But a local scan isn’t picking up anything!’

‘WHAT!? So... it’s just disappeared completely!? You didn’t see it leave the pokédex at all?’

‘No, I’m afraid I didn’t. It overheated so much I ended up dropping it, and left it on the ground to
cool down while I was sending you messages just now.’

‘Do you have any other machines on you? It might have possessed one of them!’

That was a point, but... ‘The only other machine I have is the pokédex I’m using right now! And it’s
behaving normally!’

‘It might still be hiding in there... if that’s not where it is, then it could be anywhere by now!’
Fujisaki sent a reply, quickly followed by another, ‘Are you near Kazuichi’s workshop? It’s
probably best to put both pokédexes in a containment box, just in case it is there.’

Yes... They could get to the workshop, even if it meant running the risk of ‘Ishimaru’ getting caught
picking a lock. ‘Good plan! I’ll head there right now! Can you please tell Munakata, Gundam and
Kazuichi to meet me there!? I think this warrants an emergency meeting!’

‘Will do. I’ll see you soon!’ They typed out, before starting to run...

“...There is no spirit here...” Was Gundam’s analysis of both pokédexes, once they were all
assembled. “Not even the All-Seeing Eye can perceive its presence... Though it is no surprise that it
would wish to be rid of us...”

“And you’re sure you didn’t see it leave when you dropped the pokédex?” Munakata asked
themself, desperately, ignoring Gundam’s snide comment.

“No, I’m afraid not... Though, I was a little preoccupied with my gloves burning at the time...”
They admitted.
“So… now what are we going to do!” Kazuichi asked, “Fujisaki said the scanners aren’t picking it, so it’s gotta be in a machine somewhere… Are we gonna have to check every machine in the school!?”

“It’s either that, or report to the League association that we lost a Rotom.” Munakata pointed out.

“A Rotom that’s mind is likely still wounded from being dragged into hell…!” Gundam snapped, glaring at them and Munakata… “By you two!”

They had to admit, he had a point there…

“If we hadn’t done this, more people would have, once FutureDex released this to the general public!” Munakata insisted.

“Umm… I… I’m not sure…” Fujisaki spoke up hesitantly, “I mean… I don’t think Ishimaru would have scanned that many pokémon if he’d known it’d be putting a pokémon through all that… Especially not once the pokédex started overheating like that!”

“There’s a lot of people in the world far worse than Ishimaru…” Munakata gave Fujisaki a sad look. “Trust me. This would have happened. Probably several times. More, if FutureDex decided to try and cover up what happened by bribing the owners…”

“…Indeed, the depths of humanity are more than deep enough for that to occur…” Gundam admitted, begrudgingly. “But we still should have allowed the Rotom to choose if it was to take part in this!”

“But if we’d told it what we were doing, then it probably would have reported it back to FutureDex!”

“You don’t know that…!”

“Woah… guys, guys!” Kazuichi interrupted the pair of them, “Is this really the time to argue about this? I mean… We have no idea where the Rotom is! And FutureDex are gonna find out that we tricked them, once Ishimaru’s data get submitted!”

“That might not be an issue…” They told him, “Fujisaki, did you get Ishimaru’s pokédex?”

“Umm, no… I ended up leaving my room to get you all before he came round.” Fujisaki admitted, getting their pokédex out “…I got a message on the way here though! That’s probably him asking where I went! I can tell him to wait somewhere until I come to pick it up from him, if you want?”

“Yes, please!” Munakata insisted, “I imagine FutureDex will find out soon enough that the Rotom is missing, but if we can keep our deception hidden without letting Ishimaru know what happened, that will make this a lot simpler…”

“Err… but if we end up having to tell the League about this, won’t it end up in the news?” Kazuichi asked, “And if he gets named as the guy who caused this…”

“We’ll worry about that if it comes to it, Souda.” Munakata insisted, “For now, I want you to make a sweep of every machine in the school. Start in the area where Imposter dropped the pokédex and head outwards from there. Make sure you’re scanning for pokémon as you go, and if anyone asks what you’re doing, tell them you’re earning extra credit by working for maintenance…”

“…Oh.” Fujisaki suddenly exclaimed in a hollow voice, staring at their pokédex in horror, “Umm… guys? You… you don’t need to worry about that… But… I think we’re going to have to tell
Ishimaru what we did…”

“Why…!??” Munakata asked in trepidation…

“Well… I think it’ll be easier if I just show you all…” They frowned, turning their pokédex around…

(Author’s note in case the picture is missing or you are visually impaired: There should be a picture here depicting a chat screen, with a message from Makoto Naegi which reads ‘Hi Chihiro have you heard of any problems happening on BattleNet? My profile’s fine, but Kiyotaka’s looks like this and he can’t get onto chat either.’ And is then followed by another picture, which contains a messy assortment of garbled status updates from both Kiyotaka (whose profile picture has been broken by purple cracks in later updates) and a Rotom. Kiyotaka’s updates all express confusion as to what is happening, and concern that he has somehow broken the BattleNet website, and end with a message that is too garbled to understand. The Rotom’s updates contain random pokédex entries with no spaces and in alternating upper and lower case letters. The whole assortment of updates has also been broken apart,
revealing a purple gradient background. If there is no picture here, please let me know in the comments and I will fix it!)

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
I’ll admit I have no idea how servers work, so there’s a high chance that my depiction of how social media sites store account data is wrong. Also I’m just headcannoning that Rotoms can travel the same way as ghosts in Ghost Trick do.

“…So it’s in Ishimaru’s pokédex!?” Kazuichi was the first person to say anything. Everyone else was just grimacing at the picture Makoto had sent them.

“I’m not sure. The way Makoto’s talking, it’s just his BattleNet account that’s the problem…” Chihiro argued, as a few more messages from Makoto came through…

“So… It’s only affecting one part of his pokédex…? Or… it’s… all the way in BattleNet’s servers, or something…?” Kazuichi suggested, off the top of his head. “But how would it have got there? Or even to his pokédex, when he’s back in the main building?”

“Is it possible for Rotoms to travel via electronic signals?” The Imposter suddenly asked Gundam…

“I would have to consult the All-Seeing Eye to determine that…” Gundam said, instead of ‘I don’t know.’ “Or perhaps I could have consulted the Rotom itself, had you actually let me TALK to it!”

“Alright, I’ll admit I should have done that! But now’s not the time to be arguing!” The Imposter snapped, “If it could travel that way, then it’s possible I transmitted it to Fujisaki’s pokédex, and then if they were sending Ishimaru messages via BattleNet…”

“Which I was…” Chihiro realised what they were getting at, “That could be how it got to BattleNet, and targeting his account…”

“But… We don’t know if it could have done that, right?” Kazuichi asked, “It might just have flown away, and then saw Ishimaru and tried to get into his pokédex, thinking it was its own one…?”

“Never mind that, we’ll work it exactly what happened later!” Munakata interrupted curtly, “For now, we need to act as if both possibilities are true! Fujisaki, send a message to tell Ishimaru to bring his pokédex here, meanwhile I’ll warn BattleNet of the situation.”

“Umm, okay…” They agreed, although how he was expecting to get BattleNet to take him seriously was another matter altogether… All he seemed to be doing so far was getting out his pokédex and starting a call…

“Get me the server admins at BattleNet’s headquarters!”

*What? Did he think he’d just be able to ring those guys up, without any type of appointment, and it’d actually work? Surely they weren’t just going to pick up the phone for anyone…*

“…This is Munakata from Hope’s Peak. I believe you may have a Rotom in one of your servers, specifically the one housing the account belonging to Kiyotaka Ishimaru… That’s K, I, Y, O…”
Huh… Or maybe they *would*? Either that, or Munakata wasn’t just ‘anyone’! Maybe he really would be able to sort this whole thing out… Assuming it didn’t just turn out that Ishimaru had somehow missed a Rotom diving into his pokédex.

Either way, they’d better get on and send that message, if only so Ishimaru could find out what had happened…

“Excuse me? I was told I should come here to have my pokédex looked at…?” Munakata was still on the phone when Ishimaru arrived with both his pokédex and Arcanine in tow, barely glancing at the Imposter as he walked past them to get to themself. “Ah! Fujisaki! I… I’m sorry, I… I think I might have broken BattleNet…? Is this because I haven’t been doing that Fragmenting thing you mentioned…!?"

“Eh…? Defragmenting? I thought most pokédexes did that automatically, these days…” Kazuichi commented.

“That’s correct!” The Imposter started, “But Fuji…"

“NNAAARGVHH…!” The real Ishimaru suddenly jumped and spun around to face the fake one, starting at them in shock, while everyone stared at him in the same way. “…I thought that was a mirror!”

“Umm… You didn’t notice Arcanine wasn’t in it…?” Chihiro asked, as the Imposter didn’t have their Ditto out at the moment.

“No… I… I didn’t look… very closely…” Ishimaru answered distantly, still staring at the Imposter, who was looking back at him with a slightly embarrassed expression.

“…Arc… can…” Meanwhile, Ishimaru’s dog was looking between the real and fake Ishimarus curiously… “Can ARCARCS!”

Aaaahhh… Now it was suddenly racing towards the Imposter and barking at them! Was it going to hurt them or…?

“Aarcarc!” …Or it was just going to bark excitedly and run around them in circles a few times, before going back and doing the same thing to Ishimaru. “Aarcarc!” …And then back to the Imposter. “Aarcarc!” … And then back to Ishimaru again. “Aarcarc!”

But it stopped there, leaning forward to (pleasedon’tbiteIshimaru’sface) peer at its trainer’s look of utter confusion at the sight of his doppleganger. “Aarcarc…? Aarcarc…!?"

“I’m alright…” Ishimaru absent-mindedly reached up to pet his dog, not taking his eyes off of the Imposter. “But… Why do you look like me…? I’m sure Father would have told me if I had a twin! Are… are you the person who’s been reporting students in my name, all term…?"

“He’s been doing that, and various other things.” Munakata suddenly spoke up from the other side of the workshop, heading back towards them all as he pocketed his pokédex. “All for good reason and with my authorisation, as I’ll now be explaining to you… If you wouldn’t mind putting your dog away for the time being…”

“Err… Alright! Arcanine… you need to go back into your ball for now, okay? I’ll make sure you’re let out before dinnertime!”
“Arc!” Chihiro quickly looked away as the dog made a sudden movement in the direction of Ishimaru’s face, although from the sound of it, all it had done was lick his face again…

“Thank you…” Munakata told him, “Now… find somewhere to take a seat, this will probably take a while…”

“…Just after you arrived, the server admins informed me that the Rotom was inside the server with your account data in it, but fortunately they had a procedure in place to deal with that possibility. They’ve isolated that server and sealed it inside a ghost-proof room for now, until they manage to calm the Rotom down enough to let it go without it causing them anymore problems.” Munakata finished his explanation to Ishimaru with some good news, at least. “This will mean that your BattleNet account, and all the others that were on that server, will be suspended for the time being, although there will be an option for people to make new accounts and then merge them with the old ones, once the server is operational again. Chances are, the fact that your account was the one affected will be reported to the press, but the official explanation will be that you were randomly effected, and that there is no connection between yourself and the Rotom… Do you have any questions…?”

…Ishimaru probably had a million questions, if the slightly horrified, overwhelmed expression on his face was any indication. It was amazing that Munakata could stand to look him in the eye like that. No one else in the room was… Kazuichi was awkwardly staring up into a corner of the ceiling, Gundam was staring off to the side with eyes full of thought and the rest of his face covered by his scarf, the Imposter was staring down at his replica knee-high boots sorrowfully…

…And Chihiro was nervously looking at everything in the room, as they waited to see what Ishimaru’s reaction was going to be to all of this…

“So… all the pokémon I’ve been scanning all this time… and this week… You made this Rotom do it to…!? While pretending to be me…!? ” Ishimaru turned towards the Imposter, who met his gaze for a moment and then went back to staring at their feet. “So now it’s breaking my Battlenet page, as revenge…”

“Yes…” Munakata nodded impassively, as Ishimaru’s eyes started to fill with tears. “But, as I just said, you’ll be able create a new…”

“That’s not the POINT…! Sir!” Ishimaru snapped at him, and then seemed to regret it instantly, “I… I just… why didn’t you tell me!? If I’d have known that’s what you were doing, I wouldn’t have scanned so many pokémon…!”

“And that’s exactly why I didn’t tell you, or let you find out that there was a Rotomdex assigned to you in the first place. The entire point of this investigation was to determine if the Rotoms powering these devices could be hurt or otherwise damaged by being trapped in there and forced to help with data gathering and, if that proved to be the case, collect enough evidence to have FutureDex shut down.” Munakata explained, “We couldn’t have done that if the person manning the pokédex had been insisting on avoiding hurting the Rotom.”

“So… you thought that… that all that scanning might be hurting it…!? ” Ishimaru stared at Munakata in horror… “But you carried on anyway…?”

“…Indeed. They did.” Gundam agreed bitterly, “Despite my informing them that the pokémon had told me it wanted help, and had problems with its situation!”
“Tanaka, we can’t use your ability to talk to pokémon as evidence!” Munakata snapped, wearily. “It’s not scientifically proven yet!”

“But you believe he can do it...!” Ishimaru pointed at him accusingly, “Which means you knew the Rotom was being hurt!”

“Yes. I did.” Munakata replied coldly. “And I also knew that if FutureDex was allowed to carried on with their plans, unchecked, that there’d be hundreds of Rotoms put into the exact same position! Can you really justify allowing that many pokémon to be put in danger, just for the sake of one?”

“Well… no, but…!” Ishimaru looked unsure of himself, “Surely, there had to be some other way to get them to stop!”

“There wasn’t any that I could think of.” Munakata’s told him, “But even if there was, there’s no use contemplating it now. This is the path we’re on… the only question now, is whether you’re willing to let us follow it to the end, or If you’re going to cause a problem, and make all the pain that Rotom suffered be for nothing…”

“What… what do you mean…?” Ishimaru looked up at him anxiously.

“We might have evidence that the Rotom was being hurt, but we still need to monitor FutureDex’s reaction to this development, and part of that will include staying in contact with their representative…” He started, “And we can’t have them finding out that we’ve been investigating their pokédex this entire time, either.”

That seemed pretty understandable to Chihiro, but Ishimaru just stared at him in confusion…

“…He means we need to keep up the pretence that I’m you, and was just using the pokédex as I wanted…” The Imposter explained, “Which means I’ll need to keep borrowing your identity when I talk to them, and that you can’t tell anyone about this!”

“Ngh… But… What if people ask me why the Rotom destroyed my BattleNet page…?”

“I already told you, the official story is that it just targeted you randomly…” Munakata reminded him.

“But… It changed my name to ‘hate you, hate you, hate you...’” Ishimaru argued, “Won’t that make people suspicious…?”

“...It’s probable.” Munakata admitted, glancing down at his pokédex briefly. “And I can’t force you to keep silent about this. Just keep in mind that if you don’t, then chances are FutureDex will claim we sabotaged their tests, and be allowed to carry on as before. Now if you’ll excuse me…”

“Argh...!” Ishimaru let out a strangled cry, as Munakata briskly walked out of the workshop, leaving the five of them in a tense silence, until Ishimaru sobbed and cradled his face in his hands…

“Umm… are you okay…?” Well, of course he wasn’t, but they weren’t sure what else to say to him…

“I… I’m sorry… It’s just a lot to take in…” Ishimaru wiped his tears away apologetically. “…I think I could do with being along with Arcanine for a bit… Here’s my pokédex for you to look at…”

Oh… right, no one had told him that had just been a lie to get him to stop scanning so many pokémon... Although they did need to delete the data Imposter hadn’t managed to copy, so they might as well do that now… “Thanks. I should be done in a few minutes!”
“But… before you said it would be a couple of days…?” Ishimaru pointed out…

_Oops… They _had_ said that in the message, hadn’t they? Hmm… maybe they could blame autocorrect…?

“Oh, that was just ‘cause we asked Fujisaki to get you to quit scanning so many pokémon!” Kazuichi spoke up before they got the chance to, “So we could give the Rotom a break!”

“…And instead of just _telling_ me that, you all decided to _lie_ to me, even more!?” Ishimaru cried, staring at them all in exasperation, as everyone looked away from him guiltily. “…Excuse me…”

“Uhm…” This time it was Chihiro making an awkward noise, as Ishimaru suddenly got up and walked briskly out of the workshop.

“…I think it would have been better not to mention that, Kazuichi.” The Imposter stated.

“Well, I kinda figured that out _now_!” Kazuichi groaned, “Should we go after him!?"

“… _He_ would be wont to tell us an apology should be offered…” Gundam muttered, although he didn’t make any move to go and actually do it. He just looked at Chihiro, as did the other two…

“…I’ll go.” They agreed, hopping off of the crate they’d been sat on and heading out of the door. Not that they knew Ishimaru all that well, but they _were_ at least in the same class, which made them the best candidate for it…

“Ishimaru, _wait_!” At least they could still see him up ahead, once the door was open. But he was stamping up the path so fast, they barely managed to catch up with him… and when they _did_, he just scowled angrily down at them and then looked ahead without acknowledging them… Not that they could blame him for it! This might not be the right time to try and apologise, but there probably wouldn’t _ever_ be a right time, either…

“Umm… Look, I know it’s not worth much… but I’m sorry I went along with this, and kept it all from you… Even after I started wishing I _hadn’t_ agreed to it…” They started, which made Ishimaru turn back towards them with a _slightly_ less angry glare… “I didn’t think it was going to go _this_ far… or end up with the Rotom hating you…” Ishimaru swallowed heavily and turned away from them, looking worried… “…I’d understand if you decided to just go public with all this, just so people would be _sure_ it wasn’t your fault…"

“I’m not going to do _that_…” Ishimaru stopped walking and let out a sigh as he turned towards them… “As much as I _hate_ it, Munakata’s _right_ regarding what we need to do _now_! I just… How could you even _think_ of agreeing to that plan!?" Chihiro flinched as the other boy started spluttering, “ _To harming an innocent pokémon_, just to prove it’s _possible_ to do so!? You _really_ thought there was nothing _wrong_ with that!?”

“N-no! That’s not what I agreed to!” Ishimaru clenched his jaw, obviously waiting for more explanation, “Munakata never said anything about needing to hurt the Rotom until _after_ we started noticing that something wasn’t right… and at that point, we kept thinking that it wouldn’t be much longer until we had the proof we needed and could _stop_, and that protecting _other_ Rotoms would be worth it…”

“Well… If that was the case… I suppose it’s understandable why you _started_…” Ishimaru admitted, “But you didn’t wonder why Munakata didn’t just ask for my help, instead of having someone copying my every move for all this time?”

“No… Well, at the time, he told us that he didn’t want to involve you because you don’t seem very
good at keeping secrets.” They remembered, “And also that you might refuse to help if it meant breaking a contract with FutureDex.”

“What…? Is that what you think I’m like…?” Ishimaru’s eyes started watering again, “That I’d ignore pokémon that could be in trouble, just because I’d signed a contract!”

“Well… You are pretty set on following rules…” They tried to explain.

“Rules that have a PURPOSE!” Ishimaru yelled, “I don’t tell people off for running in the halls just ‘because it’s a rule!’ I do it because if they’re running in an enclosed space, they’re liable to hurt someone, or themselves! And I don’t tell everyone to attend class because ‘it’s a rule’, I do it because taking their education seriously will be beneficial to them in the future! And I don’t tell people to make sure their pokémon are properly trained because ‘it’s a rule’ I do it because I know that poorly trained pokémon will scare the people and other pokémon around them! Or, worse, end up hurting someone and having to be put down!”

He breathed heavily after his outburst, while CHihiro tried to think of a way to respond.

“I just…” Ishimaru sighed after a while, “I just want everyone, and every pokémon, to have the best life possible… to have the highest chance to succeed as they can, regardless of where they started out… And I think that those rules are in place to help with that. That’s why I’m set on following them. I wouldn’t follow a rule if it meant turning a blind eye while pokémon were put in danger! I mean, that’s why whistle-blower laws exist…!”

“I know!” CHihiro finally managed to say something, “I… I mean, I never thought you would have refused to help…”

“You didn’t…?” Ishimaru stammered, “So… it was just because you’d worry I might accidentally blab about what we were doing…?”

…They could probably leave it at that. They could tell Ishimaru that, yes, the reason they’d gone along with this whole thing without thinking he should be involved was because they’d thought he’d make a terrible spy.

…But then he’d probably blame himself for this whole mess. Thinking that if he’d been better at lying, then that Rotom wouldn’t be hating his guts right now. What if he decided he needed to start lying more often, to practice at it so this would never happen again, or something crazy like that? He’d probably end up messing up a whole bunch of his friendships, if he started doing that…

And besides. They’d lied to him enough, already.

“Not really. I had my own reason for not wanting to end up working with you more often…” They started, and Ishimaru waited anxiously for them to carry on… “I’m afraid of dogs.”

“What…?” It took Ishimaru a moment to work out what they meant… “You mean Arcanine!?”

“Ahh… So… is that also why you’re never too keen to talk to me?” He asked, hopefully. “Why didn’t you ever tell me before?! I could have had Arcanine go back into his pokéball…!”

“Sorry…” That would have been the obvious solution, “It’s just… there were kids in my old school who found out about my phobia and used it to bully me, so I don’t really like to let people know about it, if I can avoid it.”
“I see… Well, I can’t blame you about being cautious about trusting us all, after all! If I hadn’t met
Makoto before coming here, I may have been the same way…” Ishimaru frowned, “But still… that
can’t have been easy for you! I mean, I’ve had Arcanine out in every class! It’s a wonder you’re
doing so well in school! And then there’s Oowada’s Ly…can…”

Ishimaru’s sentence stalled to a halt, and they swore they could see his eyebrow twitch as he realised
the apparent contradiction in their story…

“You’re friends with Oowada! You sit at the same table his Lycanroc crawls over, every day!” He
started, accusingly.

“Because Mondo and Lycanroc have been helping me get over my fear all term!” They quickly
explained.

“Ergh…? Oh, well… good…?” He looked thrown off, but still suspicious… “But… Why him!? I
mean… with the way his Lycanroc behaves, wouldn’t it have been easier to get used to a nice, well-
behaved, happy dog like Arcanine, than that angry, growling… thing!? And if you’re now alright
with it, then why do you still avoid Arcanine and I…?”

“Well… with Lycanroc, I know he’s never hurt anyone, and that Mondo could stop him if he did try
to…”

“But Arcanine’s never hurt anyone either! And I told you he doesn’t attack anything by himself,
unless I’m unconscious! Ishimaru insisted, even as he gestured with his burn-scarred palms upwards,
where they could see they evidence that he was probably lying… “…What are you looking at…?
My hands…? Errrgh… But… But I told you, that wasn’t…!”

It looked like he intended to tell the same story as before, but… “If you stuck the whole of your
hands into a fire, why is it only the palms that are burnt?”

“Nrrgghh… that… that…” Ishimaru tried to think of something for just a moment, before letting out
a sigh that made his whole body sag… “…That’s why you didn’t argue the point about me being a
bad liar, then?”

Wow, he gave that up quickly…? “So, it was your dog that did that?”

“Yes…” Ishmaru admitted, shamefully, “But, it was just one time! And it was entirely my own
fault! Other than that one time, everything I told you is true!”

Well, from what Chihiro had seen, that would appear to be true … “But… how do you know that?
What made that time different from all the others…”

“I’d prefer it if this was something that didn’t get spread around the school.” Ishimaru answered,
after thinking about it for a moment. “Can we talk about this somewhere private? Like one of our
rooms? I’ll still be keeping Arcanine in his ball the whole time, of course!”

“Alright… Let’s go to your room.” That way there’d be no chance of Ishimaru telling them off for
the state of their room, or the angle their computer monitor was set up at…

…It was amazing how clean Ishimaru’s room was, especially given he owned a six-foot tall, long-
haired dog. They’d been expecting to see the odd dog hair dotted around the place, but other than his
Arcanine’s bed itself, the whole place was spotless…
“Err… Is Arcanine’s bed frightening you…?” Ishimaru asked, anxiously.

“No! I was just thinking it looked pretty clean, given you’ve got such a big dog!” Really, Mondo and Leon could do with taking some tips from this guy… “What type of vacuum cleaner do you have?”

“It’s the heavy-duty one the school provides! It’s amazing that this place gives us so much, isn’t it!? I’d have loved one of those back home…!” Darn, that was the same cleaner they both had! So the problem was just that they didn’t use it enough… “But… you didn’t come here to hear me gush over cleaning equipment, did you…?”

“No…” They agreed, expecting Ishimaru to start explaining things at that point, although he didn’t… “Umm… so… what happened with your Growlithe, back then…?”

“Alright! So, you already know about him having been assigned to a police officer who… was not a good trainer?” He waited for Chihiro to nod, “Well… back then, I didn’t. I knew he’d been hurt by a human, because Nurse Joy told me so, but I didn’t know that the human in question was a police officer!”

“Okay…?” They didn’t quite see the relevance of this, but Ishimaru seemed to want them to understand before he started telling the actual story.

“So, that’s why, when we had our first pokémon coordination classes at school, I thought it would be a nice idea to put him in a police hat!” Ishimaru explained, “So, one afternoon after school, I went to the shops and bought one, then took it home and tried to get Growlithe to try it on!”

“And… did he start growling at it, like when Maizono tried to do the same thing?” They guessed.

“Yes… And, of course, now I realise the right thing to do at that point would have been to put the hat away and tell Growlithe it was fine and not to worry about it, seeing as he’d never growled at me before!” He cringed, “But… I could tell Growlithe was only growling at me because he was frightened of the hat, and when he’d first been given to me, he’d been frightened of me, until I sat nearby for a while with some food in my hand, until he got used to my presence and approached me…”

“So you thought if you just stood there with the hat for a while, he’d calm down enough for you to put it on him!?” Yeesh… they could kind of see the logic there, but that was a pretty naïve thing to do…

“Exactly… So I just stood there, calmly blathering about how nice he’d look as a clever little police dog, without realising he was getting more agitated the longer I had it out, not less…” Ishimaru carried on, holding his hands up in front of him, with the palms facing outwards and fingers slightly bent, as if mimicking the way he’d held the hat back then… “I only realised my mistake when Growlithe finally had enough and incinerated the hat… and the skin of my palms along with it…”

Oof… that sounded nasty! “But… that’s all he did?”

“Yes… I don’t know if it was because the hat was gone, or because I yelled out in pain, but he seemed to snap out of his panic at that point!” Ishimaru answered, grimacing slightly. “At least… that’s how it seemed to me… But I was more preoccupied with running up to my berry plants to grab some Rawst berries, than checking on his wellbeing…”

“You’re pretty lucky you thought to do that, before it caused permanent damage…” Chihiro commented.

“Yes… Luckily, father had been quite diligent in making sure I understood all the risks of owning a
fire-type, and their countermeasures, so I was prepared for the event of Growlithe burning me!” Ishimaru agreed, proudly… “But… It was just that one time that Arcanine has hurt me at all, let alone burnt me! And now I know what upsets him, and how he starts to react before getting to that point, I’ve been able to make sure he never does anything like that again!”

“Alright… but why did you lie about it? Everyone has accidents with their pokémon, when they’re kids!”

Heck, one time Chihiro had been ordering Golett to hold their pokédex above them while they read in bed in the middle of the night, and then tried to quickly order Golett to get back in its ball when their father came to check on them. Their face had been bruised for a week…

“I know. It was just… Less than a week before, my father had told me that he’d have the next pokémon who hurt me killed!”

“What!”

“I’d have killed his son’s pokémon, just because of one accident…!? How could he do something like that…?”

“Ahh…! He wouldn’t actually have done it! He was just angry because I’d been hurt again…” Ishimaru started, then realised Chihiro didn’t know what he was talking about. “As you might have guessed, I wasn’t the best at judging a pokémon’s temperament, back then! And I was so proud of my pokédex, and the scores I was getting for submitting data on it, that I’d often approach pokémon that I had no business going near, or scan tame ones until even they would get irritable and lash out at me! Even Father’s own Meowth scratched me once! But I liked being near pokémon so much, I didn’t learn not to annoy them until I was much older…”

“So, he said he’d have them killed in the hopes that would scare you?” Chihiro guessed, as it was obvious that getting hurt by pokémon hadn’t…

“Yes, I think so. It was after I ended up in the middle of a Beedrill colony that was below our school playing field…” Ishimaru started, far too casually…

“There was a Beedrill colony under your school!? And you were able to just walk into it…!?” They interrupted him, “Shouldn’t they have got rid of it!”?

“Looking back on it, they probably should have, But our school wasn’t well funded enough to keep moving the Beedrills every year, so they decided to block off the area, and then set up bridges and railings around the top of the colony, to act as an observation deck so we could see what was going on inside, then presented it as a great learning and catching opportunity for us all.” Ishimaru explained, looking almost pleased about the crazy situation… “I used to spend all my playtimes up there, leaning over the top of the railings to get a better view… But then one day I fell over them.”

“You mean, because the railing broke?” Chihiro guessed. Probably made from cheap material that wasn’t meant to be leant on…

“No… The railing was fine. At the time I thought I’d been pushed over, but according to the other children and the teacher on duty, I was the only person up there, so they said I must have just leant too far and fallen by myself.” Ishimaru told them. Although he looked like he didn’t really believe it himself. “Luckily I fell down into an area with trees that cushioned my fall, and I had the presence of mind to get Growlithe out of his ball before the Beedrills came to attack me, so I got away with just some bruising and stings… but Father was furious that it had happened and tried to demand that the school destroy the Beedrill colony. He only stopped because I started crying at the thought of all the Caterpies being killed because of something I’d done and begged him not to.”
“So, that’s when he told you the next time you got hurt, he would kill the pokémon…?”

“Yes! So… then, when Growlithe of all pokémon ended up hurting me just a few days afterwards… I panicked! I didn’t understand at the time that Father was just frightened about what could have happened to me before, and just wanted to keep me safe and happy! I know he’d never try to take Growlithe away from me! But back then, I was convinced he’d kill him if he knew what had happened!” Ishimaru explained, looking like he was going to throw up at the thought. “So once Growlithe had calmed down, I told him to get back in his ball, started up a fire and threw Father’s spare hat into it, so he’d believe me when I told him I’d been trying to get it out of there…”

“Well… that makes sense…” Chihiro admitted, “But… now you know your father wouldn’t do that, why are you still lying about it?”

“Actually… It’s so that Arcanine doesn’t find out about it.” Huh? But his Arcanine was the one who did it… “He doesn’t remember doing it.”

Oh, that would make more sense… “He doesn’t? Not even after seeing what happened to your hands?”

“No… Growlithe believed my story about Father’s hat as well!” Ishimaru answered, then smiled fondly. “He spent months insisting on standing between me and the fireplace at all times, and growling at it if I went too close, before I managed to explain to him that it wasn’t it’s fault I’d burnt myself…”

“Hahaha…” So his puppy had thought the fireplace was alive, or might do it again? “He sounds like he was a cute dog, back then…”

“Yes, he was… Although it annoyed him if I said it to him! He wanted everything to think he was a big, strong pokémon, back then!” Ishimaru laughed, “Of course, now he’s evolved, he agrees with me that Growlithes are all cute!”

“…Really!?” Ishimaru looked appalled at the suggestion. “I mean… I’ve seen lots of cute Rockruffs online! It’s just… I can’t imagine Oowada’s Lycanroc ever having been like that, given the way it is now!”

“He’s not that bad, you know! It probably just seems worse to you, because you only see him at meal times, and when he’s getting defensive because you’re scolding Mondo.” Chihiro pointed out, “Most of the times, he’s… well, he can be grumpy and irritable, but he does really care about Mondo and anyone he’s friends with! And he’s very protective of Golett when Mondo and I go training together! Hmm… actually, he’s pretty protective of smaller pokémon in general, so long as they don’t annoy him when he’s in a bad mood…”

“Oh… really?” Ishimaru looked slightly guilty. Was this really the first time anyone had pointed this out to him? “It never occurred to me that he could be like that… especially not now he’s started growling at me constantly!”

“Umm… You know, that’s probably part of him being protective of other pokémon…” They started, not sure about the best way to explain to him that Lycanroc, as well as Leon and Mondo, were starting to suspect he was an abusive trainer…
“You mean, because he thinks I’ve been hurting Arcanine?” Ishimaru cut in, apparently knowing already. “So, it’s like Sayaka said… I need to convince Arcanine to talk to Lycanroc…”

“Umm… yeah, that would help a lot!” Chihiro agreed, which just made Ishimaru sigh… “Is that not likely to happen…?”

“Not any time before the end of term, at the rate it’s going. Arcanine’s’s still convinced it’s him that Lycanroc is mad at.” Ishimaru frowned, “Although Sayaka said that Mondo is try to get him to stop growling at Arcanine, so that might help speed things up!”

“Yes… I think Mondo’s managed that, already!” Chihiro agreed. Mondo had said yesterday that they’d probably try it the next time they saw Ishimaru and his dog, which… “Oh…”

“What is it?” Ishimaru asked, concerned.

“Umm… I just remembered… there might be another complication…” Chihiro admitted, “Umm… you see… Mondo and Lycan ran into the Imposter and their Ditto, while they were mimicking you and Arcanine this morning, and he signalled for the Ditto to get back in his ball before Lycan could talk to it…”

“I see…” Ishimaru didn’t look too upset, yet. “Well, that’s easily explainable! It will probably take a few conversations where Lycanroc doesn’t initiate things by growling, before Arcanine trusts him!”

“Yeah… the problem is, they told me Mondo saw them doing the signal. So now he might be convinced that you’re just ordering Arcanine back into his ball, because you’re hiding something…”

“…Haaa…” Ishimaru froze for a moment, then sighed disappointedly. “And I can’t explain that that wasn’t me, because we still need to keep this investigation a secret…! And he probably wouldn’t believe such a ludicrous-sounding tale anyway!”

“Well… he probably would, if you had me backing it up, as well…” Chihiro pointed out. “And, I think he’d keep it quiet, if we asked him to! He’s known about my fear of dogs this whole time, and he’s not told anyone about it!”

“Hmm…” Ishimaru thought about it, “I appreciate the offer, but I don’t think it will be necessary! After all, now Lycanroc won’t growl at Arcanine, it shouldn’t take me too long to convince them to talk, and then this whole misunderstanding will be sorted out anyway!”

“Well… if you’re sure…?” They just hoped he wasn’t underestimating how long this could take, or how suspicious of him Mondo might be… “I guess it’s always an option, if things start to take too long!”

“Exactly!” Ishimaru agreed, and then they sat in awkward silence for a moment… “Err… was there anything else you wanted to ask about? If not, I think I need to start making my new BattleNet page… and putting all of my old links back up… And I can’t just post them all at once, because that annoys some people, doesn’t it…?”

Geez… They hadn’t thought about how many articles he’d posted over the last few weeks. That would probably take him ages to do manually, and he didn’t even look too confident about making a new account in the first place!

“…Do you want some help with that?”

“Err… You mean from yourself?!” Ishimaru was shocked, “…Thank you, but I can hardly expect you to do all that! You’ve already refurbished my whole pokédex, and I’ve hardly done anything for
“Well… I did only actually end up doing the pokédex because of this whole investigation business…” They admitted, guiltily. “And it’s partly my fault that your account got affected now.”

“Maybe so, but if I hadn’t scanned all those pokémon, this wouldn’t have happened…” Ishimaru insisted.

“But, you had no way of knowing there was a reason you shouldn’t be scanning them!” They tried to argue, but he didn’t look convinced… Urgh, of all the people involved in this, he shouldn’t be the one blaming himself… But it didn’t seem like they’d be able to convince him to just let them help him… “Well… what if you helped me in return…?”

“Well… if it would benefit both of us, I’d be happy to agree!” Ishimaru smiled, and looked a little relieved as well. “What did you have in mind…?”

“Well… It would help if I could try and get used to your Arcanine…” Chihiro suggested, “Say, if you could start by having it just sit still near me, without making any sudden movements, or biting motions, a few times, and gradually work up to it moving around me and stuff…”

“Of course! That’s perfectly possible!” Ishimaru agreed happily, “Err… right now might not be the best time, because Arcanine’s dinner time is soon, but maybe we can pick a time in the evenings, or maybe during the weekend, although I’m quite busy on Sundays, so Saturday afternoons would probably be best, if we want to organise something on a regular basis! Let me get my diary…!”

Planning things on a regular basis, rather than just meeting up whenever? That was a big change from dealing with Mondo…

But he’d still been completely understanding, and willing to help them! That was one thing the pair of them had in common…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Chapter Notes

Because it’s been almost a year since I last mentioned him, Santa Shikiba is the official name of the Ultimate Botanist (whose only mentioned by title in Dangan Ronpa) Nekomaru had a Skiddo last time I mentioned him, but it’s evolved now, hence why he’s got a Gogoat this time.
I calculated Snorunt’s density as being around 330 kg/m³, so it should be able to float unaided. (I was assuming it would be made of ice and therefore float on water, but ice has a density of 917 kg/m³ so that theory is out.)

Sakura awoke to the sun streaming through a crack in the curtains, and stretched herself awake, eager to start the day. Sunday had fast become her most relaxed day of the week; despite what some people would have assumed from the activities she took part in.

But accompanying Hina to the sports practise was usually an enjoyable time, even if Snorunt was not very suited to the games. Neither of them took taking part too seriously, so it was merely a reason for her younger pokémon to exercise and socialise with the others on the ‘team’, while Florges helped take care of the third-year gardens for Shikiba. And the class garden, although difficult to set up, was now getting to the point where she, Kiyotaka and Makoto could tend to it with relative ease after their breakfasts, especially with Florges helping them.

Not that it stopped the three of them from wanting to improve the place even more. Kiyotaka had started looking into growth lights and automated sprinkler systems for his berry plants, Makoto was talking about replacing the group of plastic garden chairs he’d put up there with a picnic table or some benches, and Sakura was intending to do something with the old tree, once she could determine if it was truly as dead as it looked, or merely in need of more fertile soil… She could either chop it down and try to plant a new one if it were dead, or perhaps build a small tree house in its branches if not.

But today, now the grass seed they’d planted had settled in nicely and plants and berries were beginning to bloom, the garden was looking nice enough that none of them were intending to make major changes to it, so she should be done working there relatively quickly. Which would leave her with more time to do something she should have done long before now…

She was going to invite Hina up there and confess her feelings for her. And she was certain of it, this time! She’d put it off far too long, convincing herself that she should just give Hina some more time to initiate the conversation. But it had been over a month since… whatever had happened at the beach, and Hina still hadn’t spoken to her about her feelings, although Sakura did have the feeling that something had changed in Hina’s attitude, she couldn’t tell exactly what that change had been…

Which was why Sakura should have just asked Hina about it, and admitted how she felt, instead of letting herself put it off so long. It had got to the point where Kenshiro had started making remarks about Hina keeping her waiting so long, and how he was considering coming to Hope’s Peak once classes were over next week, to give her a talking to about taking too long to answer a heartfelt question…

Of course, that was just a joke. He was in no fit state to make the trip from his hospital to Hope’s
Peak, even if his health was thankfully on the mend. But the way he’d said it had been cause for concern. It was almost as if he thought Sakura had confessed her feeling to Hina, not that Hina had admitted having confused feelings and wanting time to think on them.

But, no sooner had she thought to ask him about it, her BattleNet messages had stopped working yesterday afternoon, and were still unresponsive when she’d gone to bed last night…

...And were still not functioning this morning. She couldn’t even log in to the website at all… although the website still seemed to be there, just not recognising her account details anymore, even though she was certain of her password. She’d have to ask Hina if she’d ever had this problem, or perhaps Fujisaki would know how to fix it.

She might as well start by asking Hina, as they would be meeting up to head down to the sports field in a short while. Just long enough from now for her to wake up her pokémon and get ready for the day…

“Florges, Snorunt! Morning is here!” Sakura opened the curtains wide, causing Florges to serenely stretch herself awake, while Snorunt chittered irritably and darted out of the path of the warm sunlight. “It’s Sunday today, so Florges will be going to the gardens, and Snorunt will be coming with me and Hina to the sports field…

Both pokémon nodded agreeably, especially once Sakura got their morning food ready, and it was not too long before Sakura was dressed and had escorted Florges up to the top of the school and left her in Shibika’s care for the morning. Then she carried Snorunt down towards the entrance to the sports field, where Hina was waiting for her along with her two pokémon.

“Good morning, Hina.”

“Morning, Sakura!” Hina smiled, as brilliantly as ever.

“Rii-ill!”, “Ruuu!” Their two smaller started cooing and chittering at each other excitably, mostly ignored by Glaceon, who merely saw Sakura’s arrival as her cue to get up off of her stomach and prepare to start walking with them all again, while Sakura took the relative privacy of their walk as a chance to set up her plan for the afternoon.

“I was starting to worry you might not show up today…” However, Hina suddenly started on another line of conversation, before she got the chance, “I sent a message to you yesterday evening, but you never replied… And obviously I wouldn’t expect you to reply straight away, but you usually check your messages when you get up, so…”

“Oh! Ok! That’s weird!” Hina exclaimed, looked relieved. “My stuff’s fine!"

“So you’ve never had this problem yourself?” Sakura asked her.

“No… I mean, I’ve forgotten my password before, but I’ve always used my email to get it back…” She explained, “Maybe try asking Fujisaki about it?”

“Yes, I had a feeling it may come to that.” Sakura agreed, then resolved to ask Hina to the gardens now, before she thought of something else to talk about. “However, there was also something I wanted to ask you… do you have any plans for this afternoon?”

“Well, I was planning to spend the afternoon training somewhere…” Hina mused, unfortunately…
“Gla… ceon…!” Hina’s Glaceon also sounded disappointed by the answer, as it let out a loud dramatic sigh as soon as she said it…

“Uhh… Would you rather not...?” Hina asked her, concerned about the pokémon’s sudden display of annoyance, “I guess we have been training pretty hard these last few weeks…”

“Ceon!” Glaceon nodded rapidly.

“Well… I guess in that case, I don’t have plans for the afternoon!” Hina sheepishly changed her answer, “What did you have in mind?”

“I was wondering if you’d like to spend the afternoon in the garden with me…” Sakura asked, feeling incredibly nervous about it once she saw Hina’s confused reaction to the question. “We’ve made a lot of progress with the recovery this term, and I thought seeing it might be a nice way for you to relax for a while…”

“Oh…” Hina looked… slightly put out by the added explanation, “I guess you noticed I’ve been working my pokémon too hard before I did…”

“Ah… no! I assure you, that was not the case.” Sakura certainly hadn’t intended to make Hina feel that she’d neglected to notice an obvious signal from her pokémon, “I… merely felt that I would like to spend the afternoon doing something peaceful, and that it would be nice to have you there as well…”

“Oh… really?” Hina blushed cutely, “Alright then! That sounds like a great idea! Makoto put garden furniture up there, right? We could take some food up and have a picnic! And there’s a glass ceiling up there, right? We can sunbathe for a bit, like being at the beach! And we’ve both got ice-types, so we can have nice cool drinks all afternoon, too…!”

Surprisingly, not even the suggestion of being used as a drinks cooler stopped Hina’s Glaceon from nodding along to everything her trainer was excitedly suggesting… Until she spotted Sakura staring at her and… winked at her?

…Was Sakura’s plan so obvious, that even a pokémon had picked up on her intention to ask Hina out this afternoon…? If that was the case, how had Hina not noticed it…?

“And is the tree climbable? I haven’t done that in… Oh! Hey, look! We’ve caught up to Kiyotaka already!” Hina suddenly broke out of her train of thought, pointing out Kiyotaka and his Arcanine walking side by side, up ahead. “He-ey! Kiyotaka…!”

How unusual… Kiyotaka didn’t respond to her shout at all, even though he would have usually heard her from this distance…

“Kiyotaka…! Hello!? GOOD MORNING KIYOTAKA!” Hina carried on trying to get his attention, but failed. “Yeesh, is he wearing earplugs, or something…? Come on, let’s go catch up with him!”

Hina didn’t even wait for a response before breaking into a jog, leaving her Glaceon putting rather put out before she too decided to break into a run after her trainer, closely followed by Sakura herself…

“HEY! KIYOTAKA…!” Hina shouted louder than ever as she approached him…

“Hmm…?” That finally got a reaction out of him, though it was barely enough for him to turn around to face her, “Oh, err… Good morning, Hina… And you to, Sakura…”
Was that all he was going to say today? Usually he’d start enthusiastically asking them if they were ready to train together as a team, or something else along that line. But right now, he was looking between the pair of them awkwardly, as if expecting them to have something to say to him…

“Is there something wrong with your ears…?” Whatever he’d been expecting to hear, Hina’s first question certainly wasn’t it. “I been shouting at you for the last minute!”

“Oh! Sorry… I had something on mind…” He admitted, “Did I miss anything important?”

“No… it was just me saying good morning, and stuff…” Hina assured him, “So, you ready for training, this morning!?”

“Err, yes!” He seemed pleasantly surprised by the question. “Yes, absolutely!”

However, Sakura couldn’t help but feel that there was something off about him this morning. His Arcanine was keeping a much closer eye on him that it usually would, for a start. And thinking back on it, he’d had his hand on its neck while they’d been walking, which he wouldn’t usually do unless he was nervous about something. And finally, his eyes seemed darker than usual today…

“Are you sure? You look as if you haven’t slept well.” Sakura pointed out, “I am sure Nekomaru would not be offended if you needed to rest for one week.”

“Oh… you noticed that…?” He looked embarrassed, “It’s nothing to worry about! I’ll perk up once we all start training, I’m sure!”

“Well, we best get a move on, or we’re going to be late!” Hina teased him.

“We are!?” Kiyotaka looked at his watch in shock, “Ah! I’m sorry! I had no idea I was going so slowly! Come on, Arcanine!”

“Ara!” The dog barked happily as it’s trainer quickened his pace, and the three of them arrived to find Nekomaru warming up with his three pokémon, although that soon stopped when his Gogoat broke away from the group to blead greetings at the rest of their pokémon and started hopping around with Marill. And once that had happened, Lucario followed and bowed at them all, and Loudred stumbled over to pet Arcanine, who seemed to be the least affected by its loud voice.

And, of course, they were also followed by their own trainer, who seemed to be in an even more vigourous mood than usual, this morning…

“HEY! Great to see you all!” He strode over, slapping Kiyotaka on the back for good measure. “You all ready for a fun morning…?!”

“Yep!”, “Of course.” “Err… yes!” They all responded, although once again, Kiyotaka looked surprised by the question.

“Great! Akane should be on her way over… And there she is!” He pointed out over the field, where the other girl was walking alongside her Bewear, and waved at them all once she saw them watching her…

“Hey, guys!” She greeted them all cheerfully, once she got close enough, then grinned at Kiyotaka specifically. “I hear someone was on the news last night!”

He was? She’d had no idea, and neither had Hina, from the look of surprise on her face. No wonder he’d looked as if he’d been expecting them to say something just now. She hoped he wasn’t offended that they hadn’t congratulated him for whichever accomplishment they’d been reporting…
“Eerrgh…” Then again, Kiyotaka looked positively ashamed at the mention of it, so perhaps he’d just been glad that they hadn’t heard about this, before.

“Tch… Akane!” Nekomaru sighed at her chidingly. Whatever it was, he apparently knew about it, but had decided not to mention it.

“What?” Akane just looked confused at the reaction, “Isn’t it a good thing!? Means he did something cool, right!”

“Oh… No, that wasn’t the case, this time…” Kiyotaka answered, turning away from them all anxiously. “My, err… My BattleNet account got attacked by a Rotom. They had to remove… some accounts, but not all of them? I didn’t quite understand why that was the case, Fujisaki said it was something to do with the specific machine that my data was on…”

“Oh! So maybe that’s why BattleNet stopped working for you!” Hina had the same thought as Sakura, “Did this start yesterday afternoon?”

“Yes, it did… The Rotom started affecting my posts around 3pm.” He answered, “I think they’d isolated it by 3:25…”

“That would match up with my problem then.” How disappointing, for it to have inconvenienced her without her even being able to see it. “Do you know when the problem will be fixed…?”

“No… But I was told we could make new accounts, and when the old one’s are back, we’ll be able to combine them again.” Ishimaru explained, “I’m sorry if that’s a lot of trouble for you…”

“It does not sound too onerous.” Although she might need Hina’s help again.

“Besides, why are you apologising?” Nekomaru asked him, “You just got hit ‘cause of bad luck! At least, that’s the report I saw said…”

“Err… Yes, that’s right! I… I’d never seen the Rotom before yesterday afternoon!” Ishimaru agreed, awkwardly. “But, I still feel… at least partly responsible for this!”

Hmm… it seemed unlikely, but she could certainly understand his suspicion that a pokémon attacking something belonging to him may have been reacting to something he did, in some way that he couldn’t fathom.

“What, like, something you wrote pissed it off, or something?” Akane asked him.

“Err…” Kiyotaka hesitated, looking somewhat guilty…

“Oh! Maybe it got jealous ‘cause you’ve been writing about Misdreavuses so much!” Hina suggested, before pausing… “Is that the right word? Misdreavuses…? Misdreavi…?”

“The plural is just Misdreavus, like the singular…” Ishimaru informed her, though in a far more subdued manner than how he usually would give information such as that. “And I didn’t actually mention it by name in any of my posts, just in case I was wrong about which Ghost-type Tanaka is giving me…”

“Oh… Hrmmm… I dunno why else it would go after you…” Hina frowned.

“Which means it was probably just dumb luck!” Akane announced, cheerfully. “Surprised it didn’t happen to Nagito instead…”
“Yes… I guess that must be the case…” Kiyotaka agreed, although he looked as if he was merely saying it to put an end to the conversation.

“Well, regardless, we’re here to do sports, not worry about our social media accounts!” Nekomaru pointed out. “Ishimaru, you have anything you want to practice this week?”

“Me?” He blinked in surprised, “Why are you letting me choose?”

“Honestly? You seem like you had a bad day yesterday, and I thought it might cheer you up!” Nekomaru admitted with a laugh.

“I see… well, in that case… Arcanine! What sport would you like to do today!?”

“Canarc!” The dog yapped happily, standing on its hind legs and paddling its paws happily.

“Swimming? But we just did that last week!” Kiyotaka argued, “Don’t you want to practise any of the other sports…?”

“Nnnnn…” His dog hrrmmmed at him. Clearly it wanted to swim, but perhaps it sensed that it’s trainer needed cheering up today.

“Well… perhaps we can try something else for a while, then go swimming!” Kiyotaka tried to compromise.

“Nnnnn… Arc!” The dog agreed after a moment’s thought.

“Alright… so what did you have in mind?”

“Well… actually, I realise it’s a little selfish, and goes against the point of us training as a team…” Kiyotaka started apologetically, “But… I was wondering if I could go into the snow throw arena for a while, to try and get Arcanine used to it…”

Of course. He’d been trying to get his dog to brave the cold for most of the term, but not being able to enter the arena while the other pokémon were snowball fighting had meant he didn’t have many opportunities to do so…

“Sure, go ahead! Nothing wrong with needing to focus on something by yourself!” Nekomaru slapped him on the back in his usual heavy way, startling Kiyotaka more than it usually would. “Just make sure you’re at the pool in half an hour!”

“Ahahaha… Don’t worry! I’m sure Arcanine wouldn’t let me forget that!” He laughed, “Come on Arcanine… Let’s go play in the snow for a bit, alright!?”

“Arrrc…” The dog joined him with a resigned bark as he headed off towards the snow generators.

“Woah, hang on a second! Aren’t you forgetting something?” Nekomaru stopped him, much to his confusion… “Just because you’re training alone today, doesn’t mean you’re not part of team cheers!”

“Oh, of course!” Kiyotaka turned back around, gesturing for his dog to join him as they all formed a line…

One incredibly loud round of cheers later, Kiyotaka walked off looking slightly happier, even though he himself hadn’t been shouting as loudly as he usually would.
“Alright… well, seeing as we’ve got exactly four people now, how about a Ring Drop match?” Nekomaru suggested to the rest of them.

“Oh yeah! Bewear’s gonna kick all of your butts today!” Akane agreed, getting into the competitive spirit immediately.

“Aahahaha! Just don’t get too cocky, Akane!” Nekomaru laughed loudly at her enthusiasm, “Ring Drop’s not just about strength!”

That was true, while it did help, it was also possible to turn a pokémon’s own strength against them in this event. Not that she suspected Snorunt would be in much of a position to attempt that, herself. But that was no reason not to encourage her to do her best…

“Today, we’ll be playing a game called ‘Ring Drop’.” She started to explain to the pokémon, as they collectively made their way to the arena. “The aim is to be the last pokémon standing in the ring, and the other pokémon will be attempting to make you fall off onto the cushioned mats below, you understand?”

“Runt!” She nodded.

“Good… You can use your powers in this event. I suspect Protect will be particularly helpful to you.”

“Hehe… there might be something else that’d help, to…” Hina giggled, conspiratorily. “But, I’m gonna try it myself first! Oh… assuming you’re not too tired for this, Glaceon…?”

“Glace…” Her pokémon shook her head, happily climbing the steps to the arena, along with Beware and Lucario, leaving Sakura to place Snorunt in her own starting point, before stepping back a safe distance away from the arena…

“Alright… ready, set, fight!” Nekomaru ordered, once the four pokémon had all bowed to each other.

Snorunt barely moved away from the edge of the ring she had started on, instead looking around to work out what was happening. Fortunately, the other three pokémon were too focused on each other to take advantage of inexperience. Bewear started things off by immediately charging towards Lucario’s starting point, seemingly hoping to catch it off guard early in the match, however Lucario anticipated the attempt and dodged around the side away from Glaceon, leaving her alone to cautiously approach Bewear herself…

Beware hadn’t noticed her, however. It was more concerned with keep track of Lucario’s movements, and with good reason, because Lucario was using his faster speed to head around the back of Bewear, and performed a jumping kick just as it turned around, landing it’s foot squarely in the bear’s abdomen and making it stumble backwards, slightly…

“Glace!” Which was when Hina’s Glaceon suddenly decided to blow a misty wave of ice across the space behind it, making the floor it passed over shimmer in the light…

And slippery to the touch, as the Bewear found out as it continued to stumble backwards over the area and suddenly found it’s feet sliding out from underneath it, until it fell backwards out of the arena…

“HEY! You’re not allowed to freeze Beware like that! It’s supposed to be like a sumo match!” Akane complained, which cause the three pokémon left on the field to stop for a moment… not that Snorunt had started in the first place.
“But she didn’t freeze Bewear! She froze the floor!” Hina countered, “That’s allowed, right?”

“No, it’s not. Pokémon can use moves to affect themselves, but not other pokémon or the arena itself.” Nekomaru informed her, “So she could use ice powers to make herself skate across the floor, but not if it makes the floor itself icy…”

“Oh... Sorry, Akane...” Hina apologised, “Should we restart, or...?”

“Eh, no biggie. And just carry on for now. Bewear’s gonna need some time to get up, anyway.” Akane shrugged, “I’ll just kick your butt next match!”

“Alright then... But first, Glaceon, can you get rid of that ice, now?” Nekomaru asked, and Glaceon gave a resigned nod and removed as she was asked. “Alright then... Ready, set, fight!”

Glaceon immediately skated in a spiral to the middle of the ring, using Nekomaru’s suggestion to quickly put some distance between her and his Lucario, while Snorunt started to waddle towards the middle of the field, either to join in with the action or because she had realised that being near the edge was a bad idea in this event.

On the other hand, Lucario had chosen to stay still and watch to see what Glaceon would do next, although it was also making glancing at Snorunt occasionally, probably making sure it didn’t get caught off-guard, even by such an unlikely threat. And it kept up that pattern even after Glaceon reached the centre of the arena and stood still, staring back at it carefully as it stared at her, then glanced to the side, then stared, then glanced to the side...

“Ceon...!” That was when Glaceon chose to make her move, giving her maybe a two second advantage before Lucario noticed that she was skating towards him at high speed, aiming to body-slam him off of the side of the arena.

But it wasn’t quite enough to catch it off guard completely, and it managed to twist its body out of the way, just as she was about to hit, and instead of pushing it off, she ended up falling to stop her own momentum before she skittered off of the side of the arena...

“Gahahaha!” Nekomaru laughed triumphantly, as Lucario turned its full focus to Snorunt, “That’s the problem with wearing ice-skates in a Ring Drop match! Still, that was a good try, Glaceon!”

“Eon...” Glaceon huffed with quiet defiance, as she stood back up and headed towards the bottom of the stairs to her entrance, ready for the next match.

She didn’t have to wait long. Although Snorunt managed to use Protect to prevent the effects of Lucario’s first few punches, it was not long before it failed and she was too slow to avoid easily being pushed off of the edge by the far more mobile pokémon.

“Rrruuuu...!” Still, she seemed to find being flung across the arena and landing on the soft mat fun, and was also more than happy to be put back in the ring for the remainder of the matches, regardless of how many times she ended up being sent flying across the edge of the arena before she had any significant contribution to the match.

Although there was one occasion where she put an end to Bewear’s winning streak by waddling underneath it’s feet, and tripping it just as Lucario and Glaceon had teamed up to do a double body-slam. If only she’d managed not to fall off along with it...

“...Alright, everyone! Time’s up!” Nekomaru announced after their eighth match, “Time to meet
“Kiyotaka by the pool, now!”

“Riiiilll!” Hina’s Marill was thrilled with the announcement, and her Glaceon looked rather relieved to take a break from failing to beat Nekomaru’s Lucario as well.

“Well… probably won’t be kicking your butts this time…” Akane sighed. “Hmm… but maybe…”

Whatever she was thinking about, she didn’t say anything of it while they were walking towards the pool, although she did keep looking in her and Hina’s direction on occasion…

“Hang on… Kiyotaka’s not here yet…?” Nekomaru observed as they got closer to the pool, scanning the area for any signs of him.

“Heh, maybe his dog’s decided it likes playing in the snow more than swimming!” Akane suggested.

“Hmm… even so, it’s not like him to let himself be late…” Hina pointed out, “Maybe one of us should go and check on him…”

“I’ll go.” Sakura told her. Her presence would have no effect on her pokémon’s morale in this event. Snorunt’s feet were too small for her to actually swim, so she would float happily on the surface regardless of whether Sakura was there or not… “Would you be so kind as to put Snorunt in the water for me?”

“Huh? Oh, sure!” Hina agreed, taking the young pokémon in her arms. “No problem!”

“Thank you.” Sakura told her, and then headed off towards the snow generators, while Akane started making suggestions as to which order they lined the pokémon up in, to go and find out what had delayed Kiyotaka…
Artificial weather though it was, Sakura still enjoyed the area around the snow throw arena, with its crisp, cool air that reminded her of the mountaintop back home. It was a shame that the other trainers didn’t share her enthusiasm for the cold. Even Hina, with her ice-type, preferred to stick to warmer areas when possible. Sakura wondered what her friend would think if she ever visited Dendemille. She probably wouldn’t find it a very comfortable vacation… Not unless Sakura made sure to make frequent stops in warm cabins, with log fires for them to sit in front of and hot chocolate…

“Ahh…? Arcanine? I… I didn’t mean to make you come over! I… I’m SORRY…!”

Wait… that was Kiyotaka! But it sounded like he was crying…

Sakura quickened her pace, rushing over to the Snow Throw arena to find out what was going on, only to find Kiyotaka sat on his knees sobbing a short distance into the field, while his dog anxiously lapped at the tears streaming down his face.

“Niiiiin…?” Contrary to what she’d been expecting when she heard Kiyotaka apologising so guiltily, the dog looked calm and unharmed, it’s only concern being that it’s trainer seemed to have spontaneously broken into tears, and showed no sign of stopping…

“You… you can go back out where it’s dry, now…” Kiyotaka told it, even though it showed no signs of wanting to leave him there. “You don’t have to do what I say! You know that, right?”

“Can…?” The dog looked unsure of itself, and tried to scoot closer to him. “Nnnnn…”

“Ah… I’m not saying I want you to look after yourself!” Kiyotaka wrapped his arms around the dog, stroking its back. “I just mean… If I’m ever telling you to do something you’re scared of… Or I’m going too far and pushing you into doing things you’re not happy with… you can tell me, and I’ll stop! You… you know that, don’t you…?”

“Arc!” His dog seemed more sure of that answer.

“Okay… thank you… I just needed to know that…” Kiyotaka’s tears finally began to run dry, “I was worried maybe I’ve been hurting you and not realising it…”

“Nnn? Nine.” The dog just seemed confused by the suggestion… as was Sakura…

“…What would make you think that could possibly be the case…?” His dog trusted him and was always happily by his side. Why would it do that if he was hurting it, inadvertently or not…?

“Ngha! Sakura!” Kiyotaka jumped at the sound of her voice, “When did you come here…?”

“A few moments ago…” Sakura thought it was probably best not to tell him exactly what she had heard. “We were concerned that you didn’t come to the pool on time, so I came to see…”

“What…!?” Kiyotaka didn’t wait for her to finish before checking his watch, shocked to find that she was speaking the truth about him being late… “Ah! I’m so sorry! W-we’ll go right away! Come on Arcanine…!”
“…Caaaan…” Arcanine just whined slightly, looked at him in concern, and then gave Sakura a nervous, begging glance. It really did have no idea what Kiyotaka had been upset by…

“Ah! Of course, you don’t like walking on the snow!” Kiyotaka came to a different conclusion as to why his dog wasn’t following him, “Get in ball and then I’ll let you out once we’re over at the pool!”

“Niiine…” The dog shook its head and looked over to Sakura again.

“No? Then what’s the problem…?”

“I believe Arcanine is worried about why you were crying, just now…” Sakura explained, “As am I.”

“…Oh. Right. Of course, I probably wasn’t making any sense…” Kiyotaka realised, “But I don’t think I can explain it, either…”

“You mean you don’t know why you were crying?” That was somewhat worrisome, that he could be so upset and not know why…

“No… I know what upset me, I’m just not sure if I can explain it in a way that will make sense…” Kiyotaka frowned as he thought about what to say, “I was trying to convince Arcanine to come out onto the snow with me, but it didn’t seem to be working at all, and I suddenly thought that maybe it wasn’t fair of me to expect him to do something, just because it was what I wanted us to do, and I thought maybe he’d hate me for it…”

“NINE!” His dog barked insistently at that point, uncomfortably plodding through the snow to brush their faces together.

“A plant may be comfortable in a small pot, but it will be unable to grow unless it is moved to a bigger one. People and Pokémon are the same way, sometimes we need to be put in situations we are not entirely comfortable with, in order to learn and grow.” Sakura tried to assure him, “No Pokémon would hate their trainer for trying to encourage them to do something new… And Arcanine doesn’t seem to mind the cold all that much, does he?”

“…Caaaaaan…” The dog huffed in resignation, as he looked down at the snow around him sheepishly.

“I suppose you’re right… but I’m sure he’d rather not hang around in it all day, either!” Kiyotaka admitted, looking happier again as he gestured for the dog to follow him as he walked out of the arena. “I guess this Rotom business has made me a little paranoid… But just think! Now you know the snow’s not so bad, you’ll be able to play with the other Pokémon in it! And, of course, I owe you poffin for coming out on the snow, like I promised…!”

…The business with the Rotom led to him worrying that he was being too forceful with his Pokémon? She could understand why he’d thought he had somehow upset the ghost, but for it to then make himself second-guess how he looked after his Arcanine? It seemed somewhat over-the-top to her…

Still, now did not seem to be the time to delve any deeper into the matter. Kiyotaka was already feeling guilty about taking up his dog’s beloved pool-time, without her stopping him to question an off-hand comment. So she simply followed as he lead his dog back towards the pool…

“Come on, Psyduck! The water over here is much warmer…!” They heard Akane encouraging her
pokémon to swim, long before they could see what was happening in the pool. “You’ve just gotta move away from those ice-types!”

Ah. So that’s why she’d been discussing how to line up their pokémon with Hina. Presumably she’d put Snorunt next to her Psyduck in the hopes that it would want to swim away from her.

Although, as they reached the pool, it became apparent that it was not having the desired effect. Marill and Lucario were both busy swimming lengths up and down the pool. But the Psyduck was bobbing on the water as obliviously as ever, despite having Snorunt struggling to paddle her tiny legs closer to it and Glaceon occasionally forming chunks of ice in the water behind it, from her vantage point at the pool edge.

“Arcare!” Of course, that changed as soon as Arcanine noticed the Psyduck in the water, barked loudly and then charged towards it, jumping into the pool so fast that the Psyduck barely had time to get out of the way before the dog landed in the water with a loud splash, right where the duck had been sitting moments before…

“Oh, now you move!” Akane sighed, chasing her duck up the side of the pool.

However, Sakura was more concerned about Snorunt, who had been right next to the dog's landing point, and not had time to move before being sent across the pool by the resultant waves…

“Ruuuuuuu!” Thankfully, though, she sounded more amused by the sudden movement, than anything else…

“Ah! Arcanine! You shouldn’t jump into the pool like that when other pokémon are there!” Kiyotaka scolded his dog, regardless. “You almost flattened poor Snorunt there!”

“Nnine?” The dog treaded water and looked around in confusion, until it spotted the smaller pokémon off in the distance. “…Arc can?”

“Yes, that one! Go and apologise to her!” Kiyotaka ordered.

“Arrrc.” The dog paddled over towards her… although, that had the effect of making more waves, which only served to send her spinning further across the pool.

“Err… That’s close enough! You can apologise to her from there!” Kiyotaka insisted.

“Arc? Arc can!” The dog nodded, then barked across to Snorunt… “Can? Arc nine!”

“Rruuu…” Snorunt seemed as if she was too busy enjoying floating in circles to notice the apology, at least until she ran out of momentum… “Sno? Runt! Runt!”

“Can?” The dog looked at her in confusion, while she continued to chant excitedly at it, “Nnnn… Arc can!”

“Errr… is Snorunt asking him to do something…?” Kiyotaka asked, moments before his dog suddenly started paddling towards it again, sending her moving across the pool with a small ‘Ruuuuuuu!’ of excitement. “Wait… it wants Arcanine to…?”

“Hehehe… I guess it must be kinda like being in a pool when the wave machine is on!” Hina observed with a laugh, as Snorunt chanted louder and the Arcanine sped up its paddling.

“…And now Arcanine has a new favourite ‘bath toy’…” Kiyotaka sighed, “One that’s encouraging him to swim around in circles, instead of up the pool!”
“It’s not so bad! Heck, it looks like good stamina training to me!” Nekomaru laughed, “Besides, not every training session can be hard-core event practise! Sometimes you gotta take it easy and blow off steam for a bit!”

“I… I suppose…” Kiyotaka conceded, smiling as he watched the two pokémon happily splashing around. “Just so long as this doesn’t end up happening every time we try swimming!”

“If it does, I’ll start banning your dog from the pool.” Nekomaru warned him, in a casual tone of voice that did nothing to lessen Kiyotaka’s look of anguish at the thought.

“Ah… I’m… I’m sure it won’t come to that…” He insisted, anxiously…

Hopefully that was the case, but Sakura may need to have a talk with Snorunt as to when was a good time to encourage the dog to play, in the future. And perhaps they should organise coming here together on occasion, outside of their sports training…

But, she could worry about organising such things another time. For now, she decided to simply enjoy the adorable sounds her pokémon made every time a particularly large wave sent her bobbing up and down, until Nekomaru announced that training time was over and it was time to go to the baths.

“Snooo…” Snorunt whined sadly, once Kiyotaka had ordered his pokémon to push her towards the side of the pool, so Sakura could pick her up.

“There will be time to play more in the future. For now, we have other things to attend to.” She told her, gently.

Snorunt nodded in understanding, and let Sakura carry her through the baths, into the changing room, and then waited patiently while she and Hina changed into the swimsuits they brought to wash their pokémon in before heading back out into the bathing area.

As usual, Hina and her Marill headed to the middle of the one-foot pools of water, Nekomaru took the next deepest one at the same temperature, Akane took the next deepest one after that, and Kiyotaka headed over to the second deepest out of the hottest column of baths.

However, as was apparently part of their normal routine, Saionji and Koizumi from the class above were already here, sat together with their pokémon in one of the second-warmest pools, meaning that Sakura would have to keep an eye out for Saionji’s Piplup when she took Snorunt over to its usual cold bath, along with Hina’s Glaceon. Although the penguin was becoming less aggressive about sharing the pool with others, it still didn’t like being startled by large people or pokémon suddenly looming over it while it was swimming, meaning Sakura had put Snorunt down several feet away from the edge of the pool and wait for her to enter and warn Piplup that Sakura needed to approach the pool to help wash her…

“Arcarc!”, “Wait… Arcanine, you can’t go in that bath!” Unfortunately, Kiyotaka’s Arcanine was unaware of this, and immediately ran up to the edge of the bath and batted Snorunt across the water’s surface, then crouched ready to jump in after her…

“Arcanine, NO!”, “PipLUUUP!” But, before it could, the Piplup erupted from the surface of the water, splashing water across the dog’s face and causing it to yelp and run back to its owner.

“Ahh… I tried to warn you that wouldn’t have been pleasant for you…” Kiyotaka sighed, as he pulled a towel out of his bag and started wiping water from its face.

“Wha… hey! What are you dumdum’s doing!?” Saionji noisily splashed over to the edge of her own
pool in response to the noise, “Geez, do I have to tell you he’s in there every WEEK!”

“Err, no! That was my fault!” Kiyotaka apologised, “I wasn’t expecting Arcanine to follow Snorunt instead of me, and didn’t notice he was by the pool until it was too late! It won’t happen again!”

“Urgh… well, you better make sure it doesn’t!” She grouched, moving back to the centre of the pool with Mahiru, “…You’re lucky BattleNet’s down, or I’d totally be telling everyone what a stupid-head you are…”

“Ergh…” Kiyotaka just let out a strangled groan.

“Wait… BattleNet’s down?” Mahiru asked her, “It was working alright for me, this morning…”

“You guys didn’t see the news, either?” Nekomaru asked, “BattleNet got infiltrated by a Rotom, so they’ve had to disconnect a set of newer accounts until they can get it out of the server safely …”

“WHAT!? You mean it’s just me!?” Saionji snapped, “Like it wasn’t enough of a pain having to make a second account just so I could talk to people without my grandmother listening in!? How long’s it gonna take to get fixed!?”

“They’re… they’re not sure. They’re recommending those affected just make new accounts, in the meantime…” Kiyotaka explained, timidly.

“URRRGGHH! Seriously!?” She groaned angrily, “That’s such a pain! I swear, if I find out which idiot’s responsible for that, I’mma pop ‘em on the head!”

“Ah… come on, Hiyoko, it won’t be that bad!” Koizumi tried to cheer her up, “You’ve been wanting to change your profile picture since the summer anyway! Maybe this will be a good chance to update your whole account! And I can take lots of good pictures of you and your pokémon, to show off your new look!”

“Hrmm… I guess…” Saionji relented, “But it’s still dumb that I’ve gotta make a whole new account…”

“Yeah… that does seem like bad planning on their part…”

“Hey! Kiyotaka, Sakura! Did you guys forget we’ve got breakfast waiting for us!” Nekomaru reminded them, loudly cutting of whatever Koizumi was saying, “Your pokémon aren’t going to clean themselves!”

“Right, of course!” Kiyotaka quickly jumped into action, signalling for his dog to follow him to their usual hot tub, while Sakura made her way over to the cold bath, waited of Piplup to surface and signal that she was safe to approach the edge of the pool…

Unfortunately, thanks to Arcanine, Snorunt was floating right in the middle of the bath, and Glaceon had already come back out and was waiting by the side of the pool to dry out. Meaning Sakura would either have to enter it to get to her, or wait for her to make her way back across.

 “…I am sorry, Piplup, would you mind if I enter the pool?” Sakura decided to just deal with it, as the cold water was only a couple of feet deep. “I need to get to Snorunt…”

 “…Luuup…” The pokémon agreed, but moved away from her and watched suspiciously as Sakura stepped down into the pool. She’d have to avoid staying in here longer than she had to…

Not that she’d want to linger in the frigid water. It was cold enough to make her shudder and freeze
up just from entering the pool. Even with her familiarity with cold temperatures, she was likely to have trouble wading through this…

“Gla… ceon!” But, just as she was steeling herself to start moving, regardless of how painful it was, Glaceon suddenly launched herself back into the pool, swam up behind Snorunt and sent her skimming neatly into Sakura’s arms.

“Ah… th-thank you!” Sakura thanked her though chattering teeth.

“Ceon…” The pokémon replied with a sigh and rolled eyes, likely thinking Sakura had been foolish not to have simply asked for her help in the first place, then swam back up to the side of the pool and shook herself off…

Meanwhile Sakura made her way back up the steps, and started gently taking off Snorunt’s coat, so she could clean over her body with the cold water, and then take the coat over to one of the other pools to wash it…

Usually, Sakura would have taken it to Hina’s pool, and they would have spoken for a while, but given she’d practically frozen her lower body just now, going over to the hotter side of the room seemed more appealing today, so she decided to join Kiyotaka instead, even if it would likely mean getting splashed by an over-excited Arcanine…

That didn’t appear as if it would be the case, though. As the Arcanine was standing calmly next to its trainer, licking at his face, which Kiyotaka had covered with trembling, balled-up fists…

“…Kiyotaka, are you crying?” Was this because Saionji had brought up the Rotom again? But surely, that by itself should not have been enough to drive even him to tears…

“Ah…! N-no…” Kiyotaka denied it, unconvincingly, as he wiped his eyes and patted the dog until it stopped. “I just got something in my eye! I-I’m fine!”

“I see. Very well…” Sakura decided not to push it, even though there was nothing nearby that looked like it would have caused that reaction. “I could do with warming up. I hope you don’t mind me joining you…”

“Of course not!” Kiyotaka agreed, “Actually, I probably ought to get on with shampooing Arcanine, anyway…”

“Caaan…” The dog sighed sadly as Kiyotaka started exiting the bath, but still followed him obediently.

“I’m sorry… I’m cutting into a lot of your playtime today…” Kiyotaka apologised to it, “I know… How about we come back for another bath after gardening? To make up for it!”

“Arc!” The dog nodded happily, and let Kiyotaka start rubbish shampoo over its coat, while Sakura rubbed detergent into Snorunts coat…

A short while later, Sakura had finished rinsing, wringing and air-drying the coat, and Hina had helpfully taken it upon herself to get Snorunt out of the pool and towel-dry her body, so Sakura was able to put her back into the coat and her pokéball, before the pair of them headed back into the changing room to get back into their normal clothing, while Akane and Nekomaru went off ahead for their breakfasts.

“Thank you for waiting for me…” Sakura told her, “Especially when there is food available.”
“Aww, c’mon! I like you more than food!” Hina said, with mock-defensiveness. “Besides, I kinda need you to show me where the garden’s are, anyway…”

Ah… that. While it was nice that Hina was waiting for her, it was still worrying to think about what she had planned for their trip up there. But she forced that out of her mind for now.

“You could still have waited for me at breakfast, if that was the case…” She pointed out.

“Yeah, I guess. It seemed kinda mean, though…” Hina admitted, “But that doesn’t mean I’m not hungry, so hurry up and change!”

“Ahaha… of course…” Sakura laughed, and then they both fell silent as they focused on their clothing instead of conversation, and then headed back out of the changing room to walk back out through the bathing area, where it looked like Kiyotaka had finally finished bathing the dog, although he still had to change his clothing…

“Alright, Arcanine! Into your ball!” Kiyotaka ordered the dog.

“…Can?” However, his dog seemed too concerned for his wellbeing to do as he said.

“Ah… really I’m fine! Don’t worry!” Kiyotaka petted it, “But I need to go get myself clean and dry, now! So please head into your ball and I’ll let you out when it’s time to start gardening!”

“Nnnn…” Arcanine looked at him worriedly, clearly not believing that Kiyotaka was truly as ‘fine’ as he claimed to be. But then it noticed Sakura looking over at the pair of them, gave her one final begging look, and nodded at him before disappearing.

Had it been asking her to talk to him, again? She was starting to think there was something Kiyotaka wasn’t telling them all, that was making him more upset than he would, otherwise. But pressuring him to talk about it in front of everyone would be a poor decision…

“…Sakura? What’s up?” Hina had noticed her distraction, “Are you read for breakfast?”

“Hrm… I might be late for it. Hina, would you mind going ahead and saving me some meats and coffee?” Sakura asked her, “I’m concerned about Kiyotaka. I think I’ll wait to talk to him once he’s finished…”

“Yeah… he’s being way slower about everything this morning, isn’t he?” Hina agreed, “I’ll see you both down there, then! Good luck!”

“Thank you.” Sakura nodded, waving her goodbye and settling down to wait as Kiyotaka headed into the male changing rooms.

He seemed to take a long time to emerge. Not that Sakura ever paid much attention to how long he took to get changed, but it never felt this long…

However, he eventually did come out, looking as neat and tidy as he usually did, with no signs that he’d been crying again less than half an hour before hand.

“Sakura!? You’re still here!?” He stopped in surprise for a moment, once he spotted her waiting for him next to the doorway. “Were you waiting for me…?”

“Yes. I wanted to talk to you…”

“Oh! You should have said! I would have made sure to shower more quickly!” Kiyotaka cut her off
with an apology, “What was it you needed to talk about?”

“This Rotom issue… It’s upsetting you far more than I would have expected, if it had truly targeted you by chance…” The comment made him flinch in panic. He clearly didn’t want to talk about this, which only bolstered her suspicions… “Are you hiding something about this?”

“Ngghhh…” He groaned, brows furrowing deeply as he thought about how to answer her accusation… “I don’t want to…”

“So, there was some contact between you and the Rotom, before yesterday…” And it was unlikely to be good, otherwise he wouldn’t have thought to lie about it…

“No! I swear I didn’t know anything about it, before then…!” He insisted, quickly and confidently, unlike the way he’d been speaking about the subject for the rest of the day. It seemed he was being honest about that, at least… “But, I do know the reason the Rotom is angry with me now…! I just can’t tell anyone what it is, yet!”

“Why not?” It didn’t seem that he meant he didn’t have the nerve to tell anyone about it.

“…I don’t think I can tell you that, exactly…” He muttered, “But generally, it’s because pokémon could end up getting hurt if I don’t keep quiet…”

“You mean… someone is keeping pokémon hostage!?” But whose…? His father’s maybe? It would hardly be beneath Team Rocket to do such a thing…

“No! No, nothing like that!” Kiyotaka stopped her thoughts, “I’m sorry, but I really can’t explain… I shouldn’t have told you that… I just didn’t want you to think I knowingly caused the Rotom pain, but I can’t explain what did happen, either…!”

“So… you were doing something that was hurting the Rotom, but you didn’t realise…?” Kiyotaka’s face twisted into a look of horror as he realised what he’d just told her, “Did it possess one of your machines, without you realising?”

“…Something… like that, except I had absolutely no way of knowing about it…” Kiyotaka sighed, “But… I really can’t tell you anything else! I’m sorry!”

“I see…” She couldn’t begin to fathom why it would be the case, but he really did seem to believe that giving her more details on the matter would result in pokémon being hurt. “But, if you truly had no way of knowing, then why are you behaving as if this is your fault?”

“…There was a particular action I was doing repeatedly, that… resulted in the Rotom being upset.” Kiyotaka answered, after thinking about how to phrase the remark. Though it was interesting that he spoke as if it was an indirect cause… “If I hadn’t done that action as much as I had, the Rotom wouldn’t be… as angry at me, at least!”

“Ah… I see.” No wonder Kiyotaka was so upset… “You are judging your actions in hindsight. That will always make them appear worse that they were.”

“Argh… I mean, yes, that’s true…” He admitted, “But… I just keep thinking ‘if only I hadn’t… done the thing so often…”

“Of course… it is natural to wish to undo one’s mistakes.” Sakura pointed out, “But it is also impossible, unless you happen to encounter Celebi. The best you can do is to fix the mistakes you can, and apologise for the ones you cannot…”
“But… There’s no way for me to do either of those things, right now! Not with it sealed up in BattleNet’s headquarters!” Kiyotaka exclaimed, “And even if I could go and apologise to it, I don’t think it’d believe the explanation I have…”

“It is a difficult task you have…” Sakura agreed, “Pokémon trust actions and feelings more than words, but showing either will take time. And an angry Rotom is unlikely to stay in our presence long enough for that to happen.”

“Exactly…” Kiyotaka sighed heavily, “If only there some way to show the Rotom how I felt, in a shorter… period of… time…”

“…Kiyotaka…?” Sakura prompted him, after he suddenly trailed off.

“…That’s it…” He responded, a wide smile forming over his face. “A Capture Styler!”

“A… Capture Styler…?” What was that…?

“Yes…! It’s the device pokémon rangers use to show wild pokémon that they’re friendly!” Kiyotaka explained, looking far more like his usual self, “It works by conveying the ranger’s feelings to the pokémon!”

“Really? If that is the case, then perhaps it would work…” Although Sakura had little knowledge of rangers, beyond the fact that they existed and did not train pokémon in the same way they did. “Though, I have never come across one before…”

“No… it’s not as if I could just go out and buy one… I suspect you have to be trained as a ranger to get one, even in the ranger-populated regions.” Kiyotaka admitted, “But… if it means I can apologise to the Rotom…! I have to find out if it’s possible, at the very least!”

“With the amount of effort you put into things, I’m sure you will manage it.” Sakura assured him, patting his back supportively. “Along with many other great things.”

“Ah… thank you…? I wasn’t expecting you to say that…” His cheeks flushed at the compliment, as he earnestly turned to grasp her free hand, “I wasn’t expecting telling you about this would go well at all! But I’m so glad I did! I’ll go start making preparations right now!”

She didn’t even have the chance to respond to him, before he strode past her and out of the baths looking exuberant for having worked out a solution to his problem. She could only hope his preparations were going to include remembering to eat breakfast…

But given he walked straight past Hina, who was carrying a tray of food and some drinks, without a second glance, she guessed he’d probably forgot about feeding himself. She’d have to take some food up to the gardens for him later…

But for now, the sight of Hina had given her a more pressing concern, namely, wondering…

“Hina…? What are you doing here?”

“Umm… you were taking a really long time, so I thought I’d come see if you were okay…” Hina admitted, looking down the corridor Kiyotaka had gone down with an anxious expression. “What were you guys talking about…?”

“…” Sakura hesitated. She got the impression Kiyotaka would prefer for as few people to know about this as possible, given he hadn’t even been comfortable telling her everything about it… “I cannot tell you. It is something Kiyotaka wishes to keep private, for the time being.”
“…Oh. Okay… I get it…” Contrary to what she was saying, Hina looked incredibly upset at being kept in the dark, so much so that Sakura almost felt compelled to tell her the whole story, just so she’d no longer look as bitterly disappointed as she did, right now… But that would hardly be fair to Kiyotaka, and surely Hina must understand that even friends as close as they wouldn’t share everything with each other…? “A…Anyway, I needed to tell you I can’t come gardening with you guys, after all!”

“You can’t?” So much for Sakura’s plan to finally admit her feelings…

“N-no… sorry! I... I just realised I have some homework that I forgot to do this week, so I need to go work on that instead!” Hina admitted, pushing the tray of food into Sakura’s hands. “So, say ‘Hi’ to Makoto for me! I’ll see you on Monday!”

“Ahh…” Once again, Sakura had no time to respond before Hina turned and scampered down the corridor, the Marill on her shoulder looking down at her and then back as Sakura in confusion as she all but ran away…

…She was certain she and Hina had completed all of their homework together this week. Had her friend just lied to her? But why would she? Had she truly been that upset that Sakura hadn’t told her Kiyotaka’s secret? Surely Hina wouldn’t avoid her over something so petty, would she?

Typical… no sooner had she discovered what Kiyotaka had been hiding from her, now Hina was hiding something from her instead. She could only hope she’d be willing to talk to her about it sooner, rather than later…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Sonia finished sorting through the morning’s emails and voice messages from Oblivia with a small sigh. Even here, she wasn’t completely free from the duties of being princess, and she’d been forced to let the more minor matters of state pile up somewhat over the course of the school week, leaving her with almost a full day of work to do this Sunday.

Still, she had known that her life would be busier when she took the opportunity to come here and live a more ‘normal’ day to day life, playing at being a random pokémon trainer, instead of a Ranger-trained princess. And so she made a start to the day by responding to the most urgent matters, until it was approaching the time when she would go to meet up with her two closest friends for a late breakfast.

But, of course, she needed to tend to her whole team of pokémon first, a task that she had not anticipated needing to complete when she first came here, but one that she enjoyed all the same, even as it made her wonder how the trainers of this land had time both to look after their pokémon and take them out to participate in pokémon battles.

First, she had to start with Ducklett, her original partner pokémon from Oblivia, who, as always, calmly vacated her basin of water and waited for Sonia to refill it with clean water, fresh reeds and more grains to eat with a regal poise that she had learnt alongside Sonia herself. Then once Sonia had finished, she bowed her head in thanks, giving Sonia the chance to pet her feathers for a while, before getting back into the bowl.

Then Sonia headed over to the assortment of rocks and tree branches that Axew liked to play in, and attempted to sweep up the mess that the first, very boisterous, pokémon that Gundam had allowed her to look after had made of the area by bashing at the branches with his tusks. Although it was a rather fruitless task, as by the time she had turned around to measure out a plate of berries for him to eat and returned to the area, there was a fresh pile of bark and rock dust settling onto the floor around the baby dragon…

“Axew!” He stopped to look up at her, seemingly proud of the mess he’d made of the area again. Or perhaps he just wanted the plate of food she was carrying… Either way, it was in her best interests to give him the plate of food, if only to keep him quiet enough to stop him from frightening her newest charge…

“Misreavus?” Sonia called out. The timid young ghost had a tendency to hide amongst Sonia’s furniture, unless she made the effort to signal that she wanted to see her. “May I see you for a moment?”

“Mis…”? There was a small sound from Sonia’s chest of draws, and the top of the ghost’s head pokéd out from above it.

“Ah! There you are!” Sonia headed over to the drawers and crouched in front of them, so she’d be level with Misdreavus, “How are you feeling today? Are you hungry? We can go and spook one of the other students, if you are!”

“…D-drea.” Sonia could just about see Misreavus shaking her ‘hair’ from inside the chest, although the ghost was a little hesitant about it. She could probably have managed to absorb someone’s fear, if
there was anyone around who was frightened, but she obviously wasn’t hungry enough to risk trying to startle someone herself, yet.

“Very well, perhaps later then.” Sonia told her. “In that case, I will need you to head into your pokéball while I eat, if you please?”

“Mis.” The ghost agreed quietly, while Ducklett took that as her cue to head into her own ball. Axew was a little more reluctant to go inside, making her wait until he’d finished bashing his tusks against a pile of stones before complying with her request, but eventually he too headed into his ball, meaning Sonia was ready for breakfast, just in time…

*Ding dong.*

…Until the doorbell went off. What poor timing, whoever was there was going to make her late to the dining room. But, of course, it would be poor manners for a princess to ignore a visitor, so she made sure to show no signs of that as she opened the door…

“Ah! Good morning, your highness!” The person at the door was Ishimaru… the real Ishimaru, she believed, if only because he was standing far more stiffly around her than her classmate did. “Do you have a moment to talk, please!?”

How odd… Ishimaru wasn’t usually one to want to talk to her, and as far as she was aware, she hadn’t done anything to warrant being scolded by him.

“Is this about the plan to strike against Hawthorne?” It was the only other thing she could think of that he might be asking her about, “If so, I have already agreed to join in with Ibuki…”

“Err… no, it’s not that! But thank you for that!” Ishimaru stopped her, “I wanted to ask you if it’s possible for someone from… these regions to train as a Pokémon Ranger?”

Hmm… an interesting question for her to deal with, given the level of controversy it was causing back at home. One the one hand, there were those who felt that converting Trainers to Rangers might help restore the balance between people and pokémon in these seven regions. However, a substantial number of her subjects felt that no one who had been raised as a trainer would ever be capable of truly abiding by the Ranger way, as ingrained as pokémon servitude was to their culture…

But those were not issues she needed to concern Ishimaru with, for there was a simpler answer to his question…

“There are people from the Ranger regions who have started to set up schools across the various regions, to varying levels of success.” His face lit up as she explained the current situation. So he was clearly asking on his own behalf. “Most of them would happily accept anyone willing to stop training pokémon, forever, as a student Ranger.”

“Err… You have to stop training pokémon? Forever!?” He balked at the thought, as she’d been expecting. “But… what if someone wanted to learn to be a ranger and a trainer? I mean… being able to manage wild pokémon without hurting them would be useful to trainers, sometimes!”

…And that was exactly the kind of attitude that made half of the populace back home wary of teaching people from these regions to become Rangers. The thought that they’d go to Ranger schools merely to learn the parts of their culture that would be useful to them as trainers…

“My apologies, but the Rangers are a group of people who have dedicating their lives to upholding the balance between humans and wild pokémon.” She told him. “Their skills are not something you can simply ‘pick up’ to use whenever it is convenient for you.”
“Err… yes. I see… So it’s one or the other? But… I’m not sure I could give up my life as a Trainer…” The answer seemed to have dissuaded him, though not as much as she expected. “But, just in case I did, would I be allowed to keep Arcanine?”

“Rangers are allowed to keep one partner pokémon.” One as powerful as Ishimaru’s would be unconventional, but not unheard of, especially in these regions…

“Okay… and, just to check, I take it that becoming a Ranger is the only way to get a Capture Styler?”

Sonia had to fight not to let an ugly scowl spread over her face, as Ishimaru made it clear precisely why he was suddenly interested in becoming a Ranger…

“Yes, it is…” Which was not entirely true, but she was not going to inform Ishimaru that certain criminal organisations had managed to develop functioning copies of the devices… “Though, given your previous ideas about Stylers, I do hope that you have reasons for this, beyond aiming to use it to procure pokémon for yourself…”

“Ahh… Of course! I agree with you that that would have been a bad idea, now I’ve thought about it some more! That’s not what this is about!” Ishimaru insisted, “I just wanted to know how to use a Styler because… well, I can’t go into detail about it, but there’s a pokémon that I need to apologise to, but it’s so angry that I doubt it would let me near it long enough for me to do that, without help…”

“And you thought that using a Styler would allow you to convey your apology to the pokémon more quickly.”

“Yes, exactly!” Ishimaru nodded, rather desperately. “Would that be true?”

“Hmm… I believe so, though I may have to check with Professor Hastings.” She admitted. It wasn’t exactly a standard use of the device. “The Styler conveys feelings, so if you truly felt remorse and guilt, I would expect one to convey those feelings to the pokémon…”

“So, it’s exactly what I want…” He sighed, obviously conflicted between this and his reluctance to give up the path he’d grown up in… And she had to admit, his was a more reasonable request than most trainers who’d spoken to her about trying her Styler had come up with…

“However, I can’t help but wonder if it is what the pokémon wants.” She admitted, “Or why you are so desperate to give an apology to it that you would even consider giving up your entire way of life…”

“Ergh… Well… I don’t know if the pokémon would want an apology… I’m not even sure it would help it, at all…” He answered, vaguely. “But I… I inadvertently caused it to be hurt, and I want to apologise for that! Even if I wasn’t aware that’s what I was doing, at the time… Isn’t that what I should do?”

“Perhaps…” Knowing where to draw the line between making amends and opening oneself up to challenges was a difficult act of balance for her. “But, correct me if I am wrong, it sounds as if this apology would be for your own sake, rather than the pokémon’s…” Especially as it sounded as if he didn’t believe himself to be at fault for whatever he wanted to apologise about…

“That… could be the case, I suppose…?” He admitted, looking quite unsure of himself. “But… I don’t know that it wouldn’t help, and if there’s chance that it would, shouldn’t I try to do it!”?

“I am afraid I do not know. There is a chance that your explanation may only serve to aggravate it
further.” She argued, “Perhaps if you would explain the exact situation, I would be able to judge the matter myself.”

“I… I’m sorry, but I really can’t tell you anything about it…” Ishimaru insisted, stiffly.

“Then, I am afraid I would not be comfortable helping you in this endeavour.” Sonia told him, “Now, if you’ll excuse me…”

“I see…” Ishimaru sighed sadly as he stepped aside to let her pass, “Thank you for your time, Your Highness…”

“You are welcome.” She answered, instinctively, as she walked past and made her way towards the dining room...

But she was barely halfway down the stairs when her path was blocked yet again, this time by Kazuichi and his Electabuzz, who seemed to have been heading down the stairs before being stopped by Hajime…

“Aww… crap! Sorry, man!” It sounded as if Kazuichi was apologising for something, “Something big happened all of a sudden, and I had to deal with that for the rest of the day…”

“‘Something big’? What’s bigger than this?” Hajime gestured to the new device he’d been wearing on his arm since the last school trip.

“Ehh… I’d tell you, but I ain’t allowed…” Kazuichi said, apologetically. “And you’re probably better off not having anything to do with it anyway… It’s a whole freaking mess right now…”

“So, it’s a good thing I’m not important enough to know, then?” Hajime asked, sounding worryingly bitter over the whole thing.

“What!? No! I ain’t saying you’re not important! Heck, the other shit ain’t even that important, really. It just caused a huge fucking problem yesterday, and they had to call me in to help clean it up, that’s all!” Kazuichi quickly insisted, but Hajime didn’t seem to respond, “But, I reckon now that’s sorted, they ain’t gonna need me for much else, there shouldn’t be anything else stopping me from focusing on you and this! Okay…?”

“Well… alright then.” Hajime seemed to be consoled by that, “So, do you want to go out now?”

“Ehh… Well, I… I mean, I still got homework to and stuff… So, maybe later in the evening…?” Contrary to what he’d just said, Kazuichi had to awkwardly delay whatever they had planned, “‘Sides, don’t you usually play games with Chiaki on Sundays…”?

“Oh… yeah… I just thought it’d be more important to work on this…” Hajime shrugged, “Plus, this glove makes me even worse at games than usual! Hahaha…”

“Err… Dude, you know you’re allowed to take the thing off, right?” Kazuichi asked him, anxiously, “You’ve not been wearing it in the shower, have you? I don’t even know if it’s waterproof…”

“Err… no, I didn’t do that…” Hajime gave him an odd look. “But, I thought it’d be a bad idea to take it off while I’m in public, you know? In case something happens?”

“I… guess?” Kazuichi gave a very uncommitted agreement, “But… you could probably take your hand out of it, at least? That way, it’s still attached to your shoulder…”

“Hmm… maybe…” Hajime considered it, although he still looked very doubtful. “So… what time
this evening?"

“Oh! Err… I dunno…” Kazuichi was caught off guard by Hajime’s eagerness, again. “Maybe around 9?”

“That late…?” Hajime looked ‘put out’ by the answer, as they say. “Well… maybe we can try it out on the night-time pokémon, then!”

“Err… sure. We can give that a go… I guess…” Kazuichi agreed, though she suspected it was more to avoid upsetting Hajime any further, than because he thought it would be a good plan.

“Great! I’ll see you at nine! At your room, or the workshop?”

“Err… workshop!”

“Alright! See you later, Kaz!” Hajime grinned before walking away.

“Urg… Oh boy…” As soon as Hajime was out of view, Kazuichi let out a quiet groan to himself.

“Kazuichi? Are you worried that you and Hajime may not be able to deal with the night-time pokémon, by yourselves?” She had no idea how strong they were, as she’d never gone out at night herself, but she did know Hajime and Kazuichi weren’t the strongest trainers in the school, either…

“Ah, Sonia!??” Kazuichi jumped slightly as she spoke from behind him, although his pokémon was fortunately unstartled… “How much of that did you hear…!?"

“I’ve been here since the part where you explained that you had an emergency to deal with, yesterday.” She answered, “I was not intending to snoop, but you were both blocking the stairs… My bad!”

“Uhh.. Nah, it’s no biggie if that’s all you heard!” Kazuichi assured her, after considering it for a moment. “And sorry about getting in your way! Hajime was pretty pissed that I never showed up to test the catching machines with him yesterday…”

“Indeed… he seems to place a great deal of importance on helping you test those devices.” Sonia observed, “Although, it seems to me that the pokéballs trainers have now are more than capable enough of catching pokémon, as it is!”

“Well… I know what you mean. Heck, there’s even a ball that never fails! That’s crazy!” Kazuichi admitted, as the pair started making their way to the dining room. “But, thing is, those powerful balls need more powerful batteries, which use a bunch of metals that need mining, which causes a whole bunch of damage to the planet, and then people don’t even reuse the pokéballs, whereas with this, it’s just one things that has the effect of the more powerful batteries, even on pokéballs that aren’t that powerful.”

“Ah… I see. I suppose if trainers are going to insist on increased power either way, it would be better to use a method that reduced damage to the environment…” She admitted, “But, would it not be better to recycle the batteries that have already been made?”

“Well, yeah, it would, but that’s easier said done…” He sighed, “The battery’s built right into the pokéball itself, so you’d have to break the thing in order to get the battery out and recharge it! And you can’t just stick a power port on the side of the ball, because it gives the pokémon a way out… There was a group that managed to make a pokéball that had a removable battery, but they had to make the battery so small, it hardly generated any power… it was barely half as effective as a normal ball, so you’d have needed to buy twice as many pokéballs to have a chance at catching anything,
which kinda defeated the whole idea of making fewer pokéballs, so that never really took off either…”

“How unfortunate…”

“Yeah… but, hey! Maybe if the thing I’m making actually works, it won’t matter how big the battery is! Then rechargeable pokéballs would actually be useable!” He grinned.

“Ah, yes! That would be wonderful!” It would help many pokémon if trainers no longer needed to dig up their homes, in order to create so many pokéballs all the time…

“Anyway, we oughta get going… Gundam’s probably thinking we ditched him…” Kazuichi pointed out.

“Of course.” Sonia agreed, and started making her way down the steps towards him and his Electabuzz, who stepped aside and waited for her to pass before following them both down, probably making sure that no one came close to Kazuichi or herself. And as much as it annoyed Kazuichi that his pokémon didn’t let anyone approach him until it had had time to become familiar with them, it was nice to know that she had a relatively strong pokémon looking out for her in this building where she was surrounded by other strong pokémon, none of which she could Capture to defend herself with. It was another benefit of him having taken a liking to her, along with the modifications he made to her Styler that had allowed her to compete for Gym badges and keep up with Hope’s Peak’s requirements, without disregarding her homeland’s way of life completely.

And, of course, she also had her friendship with Gundam to thank for her continued education, as he had supplied her with the new additions to her ‘battle team’, which was part of the reason the three of them made sure to each together on regular occasions, even with them being busy with their own work and responsibilities…

“Ah! You have arrived!” Gundam announced loudly, once he saw them both entering the dining room. “Though it appears you have fallen afoul of the dark machinations of Dialga! I hope the encounter was not too taxing a battle for your teams…”

“Uhh…? Oh! No man, I just got held up by Hajime!” Kazuichi answered, once he’s worked out what Gundam meant.

“And I by Ishimaru.” She explained the reason for her own tardiness, “My bad.”

“Wait… You got in trouble with Ishimaru!?” “What slip in your mannerisms could possibly cause you to fall afoul of his gaze!?” Kazuichi and Gundam pressed her for more details.

“Ah, do not worry, I am not in any trouble.” She assured them, “He merely wants to become a pokémon Ranger, all of a sudden!”

“Eeerghhh…” However, it seemed her explanation had only upset the boys further, as Kazuichi groaned audibly, and Gundam looked concerned, although he was obviously trying not to let it show. “So he’s thinking of packing everything in and becoming a Ranger now…!?”

“No, I doubt very much that he would do that.” She corrected him, “He only asked because he wishes to use a Capture Styler to apologise to a wild pokémon…”

“Eeerghhh…” However, it seemed her explanation had only upset the boys further, as Kazuichi groaned audibly, and Gundam looked concerned, although he was obviously trying not to let it show. “So he’s thinking of packing everything in and becoming a Ranger now…!?”

“No, I doubt very much that he would do that.” She corrected him, “He only asked because he wishes to use a Capture Styler to apologise to a wild pokémon…”

“Eh!? He wants to…? But that doesn’t make any sense!” Kazuichi exclaimed, although she didn’t quite understand what part of her explanation was confusing. “He didn’t do anything!”

“No… His actions did affect it, even if it was through naught but a flutter from the Butterfree of
Chaos…” Gundam argued, as if the pair of them knew the details of Ishimaru’s situation. “Perhaps he feels that atonement from himself would sooth it’s soul… or his own…”

“Ya think!? I did hear a rumor that they’re having way more trouble getting it to calm down than they usually would…” Kazuichi considered whatever idea Gundam was suggesting, then turned to her… “Would a Styler actually be able to do that?”

“I… believe it would.” She answered his question, before asking one of her own. “But, what are you two talking about? Ishimaru refused to give me any details about what happened…”

“Erg… He did…!??” Kazuichi gulped, “Aww, crap… We ain’t really supposed to mention this to anyone, I just figured he’d have explained the whole thing to you…”

“Though, at this time, our veil of secrecy is but a tattered rag, in the face of her dark vision.” Gundam told him.

“Haa… Yeah, you’ll probably figure it out as soon as you hear the news, anyway…” Kazuichi sighed, “But you can’t tell anyone else, alright!?"

“Well.” She agreed.

“Well… you know that company that tried to get Gundam to breed Rotoms, to put in pokédexes?” Kazuichi started by reminding her of that hideous idea! “Well, Munakata got word they were gonna send Ishimaru a test model, so he had Imposter intercept it and test it while looking like him, and it ended up with the Rotom breaking out and going nuts, yesterday…”

“Ah… I had wondered why Imposter had wanted to copy someone who’s lifestyle is so different to the one they enjoy…” She admitted, “But I do not see why Ishimaru feels the need to apologise, when he wasn’t the one who tested it… surely Imposter should be the one to apologise, should they not?”

“If all our formless friend had done was mimic his appearance, that would have been true…” Gundam started to explain, “However he was also repeating Ishimaru’s actions…”

“Or, at least, he was doing a scan of all the pokémon Ishimaru did…” Kazuichi clarified, “And Ishimaru scanned a lot…”

“Because, as far as he knew, he was merely asking a lifeless machine to do the work for him…” Sonia now understood most of what had occurred.

“Indeed, Dark One!” Gundam agreed with her. “He had no knowledge of the Rotom, nor any idea that the maelstrom of information he inadvertently subjected it to was sending its mind into madness…”

“Well… not that we know for sure that’s what the problem was… But, it’s started spouting random, garbled pokédex entries, so we’re assuming that’s what happened.” Kazuichi interjected, “It was causing so much trouble, they had to put it in isolation, and from what I hear, no one’s managed to get it to calm down enough to figure out exactly what’s going on with it, yet… or even get it to listen to them when they try to talk about it.”

“So… simply trying to talk to the Rotom is not helping it…” Ishimaru seemed to have been correct, on that account. “So a Styler would be necessary to help it, you think?”

“The matter is shrouded in mystery at this time…” Gundam admitted he didn’t know either way, “It’s mind and demeanour may recover over time… or it may not. The answer will likely become
clear by the time Ishimaru is trained to use a Styler…”

“If he’s trained, that it.” She was compelled to remind them that it was only a possibility at the time.

“Eh? You think he’ll quit partway through!?” Kazuichi asked, sceptically. “That stubborn guy!?”

“No… it is more that I don’t think he’ll start the training…” She explained, although both boys still looked confused. Ah right, she hadn’t told them… “All of the ranger schools I know of insist that their students stop training pokémon, even the ones located over here.”

“I see… Then I fear you may be correct…” Gundam solemnly agreed with her.

“But… why can’t someone do both?” Kazuichi asked, “Uhh… not saying being a Ranger ain’t hard, but couldn’t he still do both, just… slower?”

“The issue is not how difficult the training is, but that my fellow Rangers are very cautious of Trainers, and what they might use a Capture Styler for, if they had the opportunity to.” She explained, “Only half of my people believe that we should teach our methods to those from outside of our islands at all, and even they think it is safer to insist they eschew their previous ambitions as trainers, first.”

“Oh… So, it’s not that he couldn’t do it. You just don’t trust him?” Kazuichi asked, looking somewhat put out at the idea, probably as he and Gundam were obviously of the opinion that Ishimaru should be given the opportunity to learn…

“Well… I would not be against the idea, myself.” She conceded. “But, even as a princess, I cannot force a teacher to take on a pupil who does not conform to their basic requirements.”

“Well, that sucks…” Kazuichi sighed.

“…Do you not the power to form a pact with him yourself?” Gundam suddenly asked, although she wasn’t quite sure what he meant… “Your knowledge, in exchange for… something from him?”

Oh! He was suggesting that she take the time to teach Ishimaru herself? Someone as energetic and driven as him would make a good ranger, if she could pressure him into taking it seriously…

“Hmm… I am at the stage in my training where I am expected to help teach my juniors… but only those who have already trained their ability to connect with pokémon before, or perhaps one who has a natural affinity for it…”

“He has managed to form quite a strong bond with his own pokémon…” Gundam insisted.

“It is more a matter of his ability to form bonds with pokémon that are strangers to him.” She tried to explain, but then found herself unable to continue as both Gundam and Kazuichi frowned with disappointment. This matter was clearly bothering both of them, too. And Ishimaru’s suggestion had presented a way for it to be resolved, in their eyes… “…But I suppose it would be wise to give him an opportunity to prove his ability, before I decide whether I would be able to train him, or not…”

“Aww, great! Thanks, Miss Sonia!” “A wise decision! He shall surely be a useful pawn to you!” The boys both cheered as she agreed, and started to eat their breakfast with far more vigour than before…

It seemed she now had yet another task to complete, today…
By the time she was finished with matters of state, it was halfway through the afternoon, but she still had enough time to try and find Ishimaru before dinner time. His room seemed like a reasonable place to start, so she took her pokémon down to the first floor dormitory in their balls, located the room with his name and picture on the door and rang the bell…

It was just as she was beginning to believe that Ishimaru must not be inside that the door opened, revealing him and his dog, both of whom were surprised to see that it was her at the door…

“Oh! Your highness?” Ishimaru started the conversation, “Was there something you wanted to discuss?”

“Yes. I would like to follow-up on our conversation earlier.” She explained, “May I come in?”

“Err… of course!” Ishimaru ushered his dog to the side, so she could move past them both. “But… I was under the impression that you wouldn’t help! Unless you thought I may have changed my mind about not training pokémon anymore? But I’m afraid there’s something personal that I have to do as a trainer, so…”

“Kazuichi and Gundam told me about the Rotom.” She interrupted him, once she was sure that he had closed the door, and there would be no chance of being overheard. “From what they told me, I feel that letting you train as a Ranger would be a good idea, and I am willing to help you.”

“They did…!? You are!?” Ishimaru was elated at the news, but only momentarily… “But… I’ve been looking it up myself, and you’re right that there’s no teachers that don’t require you to quit training… at least, not proper, legal teachers…”

“That is true. No fully qualified teacher would take you.” She agreed with him, “However, I may be able to teach you to use a Styler myself, and the Styler examination itself only requires you to have completed a certain amount of training under another Ranger…”

“So, if you taught me, I could learn to be a Ranger and a Trainer!” Ishimaru exclaimed, once he understood what she was suggesting.

“Yes… however, I must admit, I would not be a skilled enough teacher to train someone who is incapable of even the basics of Capturing.” She started to explain the downfalls of this plan, “So before I can commit to training you, I need to test your ability to form bonds… or make friends, if you prefer, with pokémon… My pokémon, in this case.”

“I see… well, that’s reasonable!” Ishimaru agreed, confidently. “Let me get some food and toys, and…”

“Ah, my bad! I forgot to mention that you may not use any items like that!” Sonia stopped him from heading into the back of his room, “Or your own pokémon.”

“Oh… So… it’s just myself?” He asked, less confident now. “Err… well, in that case, I’m going to have to ask you to go back into your ball, Arcanine! I’ll let you out before dinner, though!”

“Nnnn… Arc.” The dog whined at the request, but nodded in agreement, giving its owner a quick lick on the face, before disappearing. “Arcarc!”

“Ahaha… Thank you…! That’s his way of wishing me good luck!” Ishimaru laughed and wiped his face, “So… how exactly will this test work?”

“I will let you pick one of my pokémon, and you will need to convince them to approach you, using only your feelings of friendliness towards them.”
“Err… so… I just have to tell them I want to be friends…?” Ishimaru looked confused.

“Ah, no. You may not speak to them, either.” His face contorted even more at her answer. “You will need to focus on your desire to become friends with the pokémon, and that will allow them to sense your feelings, and come to trust you.”

“But… I thought you needed a Capture Styler to do that…?” Ishimaru admitted.

“Not exactly… The Capture Styler merely helps amplify the effect.” She corrected him, “But in order for it to work, the Ranger has to have feelings of friendliness towards the pokémon in the first place, and it helps immeasurably if their feelings are such that tamer pokémon can sense them without the use of a Styler.”

“I see… so, if I can’t convince your pokémon to approach me without a Styler, then it wouldn’t help me with wild pokémon anyway?” Ishimaru seemed to understand the general gist of it, at the very least. “So, I need to think about how I want to be friends with them…”

“Yes. It will also help if you pick a pokémon you like the idea of getting to know better.” She answered, “I have a Ducklett, an Axew, an a Misdreavus…”

“Misdreavus!” Ishimaru decided in an instant, much to her surprise. Especially as he’d picked the Ghost-type, which was usually the least popular of her three pokémon.

“…Very well. However, I must warn you that Misdreavus is quite timid, and the most likely to run away from you, at first.” She warned him, “So you will have to try to focus your feelings for a long time… But if you succeed, then I’m sure I will be able to train you well enough to handle a Styler.”

“Alright then! I’m ready when you are!” Ishimaru insisted.

“Alrighty! Misdreavus?” She took out the right pokéball, “There is someone who would like to meet you…”

“Mis…?” Misdreavus slowly came out of her ball, looked around the room…

“Drea!” And immediately turned and fled through Ishimaru’s wardrobe door, even faster than Sonia had expected her to…

“Ngh…” Although, Sonia soon understood why Misdreavus had fled, as soon as she turned to face Ishimaru herself. He was standing with his jaw and fists clenched, forehead full of furrows and a frightening amount of determination burning out of his red eyes… He’d fallen into the rookie mistake of thinking ‘focusing’ meant ‘concentrate as hard as possible’, and Misdreavus running was only making him scowl even more as he tried too hard to get her to come back…

“Stop.” She told him, before he gave himself a headache… “That is not going to work.”

“But… I don’t understand! I was thinking ‘I want to be friends’ over and over, the entire time!” Ishimaru cried.

“It is not merely a case of repeating words in your head. You have to feel that you want to be friends with the pokémon.” Sonia explained, although she suspected that Ishimaru wasn’t going to understand.

“But… I do feel that way!” He exclaimed, “I just… don’t understand how I’m supposed to let the pokémon know that, if I can’t just tell them out loud, or even think it!”
“Pokémon have a sense for people’s desires, even *without* hearing them talk… in fact, some would prefer that you didn’t, so they can get a feeling for your *true* intentions, not just the ones you choose to say.” She tried to explain again, although she was starting to feel that this was a lost cause…

“Your problem may be that you just don’t want to be friends with Misdreavus intensely enough for her to trust you.”

“So… I just… need to wait and… *want* her to be friends with me…?” Ishimaru’s brows were furrowing… it seemed he still didn’t quite understand. As she’d expected, she didn’t know how to explain the concept to someone who had no previous experience with it… “Hrm… May I try something a bit… unusual?”

Oh! Suddenly, he looked as if he was more confident about what he needed to do. Had he somehow understood what to do…? “What do you have in mind?”

“I was thinking… when I first made friends with Growlithe, I was lying on the floor, waiting for him to trust me enough to come out from behind the sofa. And all I wanted at that time was for him to *like* me, so I could pet him.” That sounded rather promising! “So, I thought perhaps lying in the same position might help me feel the same way again…”

“In that case, it certainly seems worth trying.” She agreed, gesturing to the carpet. “Go ahead.”

“Thank you!” He nodded, then proceeded to lie down on the floor, head facing the wardrobe that Misdreavus had last flown through, extended his left hand outwards with the palm facing upwards and then… *waited.*

She had to admit, it was somewhat *odd* to be stood watching him as he just laid there on the floor, though at least *this* time he had a far calmer expression on his face, and was allowing himself to blink! However, it still felt like an agonisingly long time before…

“Drea…?” Sonia felt a surge of hope as Misdreavus poked her head out of the wardrobe and looked curiously at Ishimaru, who did nothing except make hopeful eye contact with her…

“Vus…” Misdreavus slowly floated out of the wardrobe and sank to the ground, approaching Ishimaru hesitantly, even stopping on occasion to look him in the eyes again, before eventually moving to his outstretched hand and nosing at the tip of his middle finger…

“Hello!” Ishimaru said, happily, which made her pause and flinch slightly, but didn’t scare her off as Sonia had momentarily feared. “Can I pet you…? Err… I mean, I know it’d just *go through* you, but…”

“…Mis.” Misdreavus nodded slowly, and sunk into the floor so only the top of her ‘hair’ was poking out of the carpet, level with Ishimaru’s hand.

“Thank you!” He smiled as he turned his hand over and cautiously placed it over her, then gradually lowered it, watching with fascination as his hand did indeed go through her without moving so much as a single follicle of hair on her head. “…It’s not as cold as I imagined.”

“Drea…!” There was a tiny, happy trill from underneath the floor, which both she and Ishimaru laughed slightly at.

“…I felt the same way… however, do be careful about touching ghosts for too long…” Sonia warned him.

“Yes… I learnt that the hard way!” Ishimaru sighed, drawing his hand away from Misdreavus sadly. “But I’m feeling a lot more confident about having one of my own, now!”
Oh? So \textit{that} was the pokémon Gundam was giving him! No wonder he’d decided to keep it as a surprise from her! “You’re getting a Misdreavus, as well!? How wonderful! They can play together while I teach you!”

“Err… well, I \textit{think} it’s a Misdreavus…” Ishimaru corrected her anxiously. Perhaps Gundam was not entirely sure who the egg’s mother was… “But… you’re saying you \textit{will} train me!?”

“Well… you did manage to make my most skittish pokémon let you pet her.” Sonia reminded him, as Misdreavus timidly raised her head back out of the floor to look at him again. “That was the agreement.”

“Ah… yes! Wonderful!” Ishimaru looked delightfully surprised at the reminder, “So, when can we start!?"

“We can start once you have thoroughly studied…” Sonia headed over to her bookshelf, located an old, thick, hardcover text and hefted it out of its place… “\textit{This}!”

Ishimaru quickly stood up to take the book out of her arms and, once he’d checked that she’d not hurt herself with the weight, opened it up to peruse the contents of it… “Ranger’s Tenants… The relationship between pokémon and humans… Basics of… \textit{Environmental Science}…? Common poacher traps? \textit{Signs of criminal behaviour}…!?” His brows furrowed again at the sections of the textbook that were less relevant to Capturing pokémon...

“I do not plan to teach you to use a Styler, just so can apologise to the Rotom.” She admitted, “If you want to learn our skills, then I will insist that you also take on our responsibilities along with them.”

“…And that involves catching criminals and poachers, and looking after the environment.” He nodded. “I understand! That’s the least I can do in exchange for your help, after all! And looking at the size of this textbook… I’d \textit{hope} I’d have understood it by next term! If I don’t have too many questions about the contents, at least…”

“Then I will start tutoring you next term.” Although, by that time, the Rotom might have calmed itself enough to make the training unnecessary, and Ishimaru might have changed his mind...

She had to admit, she hoped that wouldn’t be the case. Ishimaru seemed like he would make a good ranger, even \textit{if} he still insisted on training a group of pokémon for himself…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!

(Also just a warning and its unlikely to happen, but this was the last of my pre-written chapters so there's a very small chance that I will skip an update next week, if I don't manage to finish the chapter I'm writing in time.)
A day of fun (Hina POV) pt. 1

Chapter Notes

I'll admit this chapter is something I thought of very close to the beginning of this fic and am not 100% happy with once I eventually came to write it, but if I hadn't written it like this I'd have got stuck, so here it is! I hope you all still like it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Saturday morning! And the Saturday after their last week of classes this term! And alright, the school was still expecting everyone to use the two weeks of free time between now and the holidays to train their pokémon, or do other works towards their various talents at least, but it still meant that they were all free from the monotony of getting up and following the same old routine five days a week! They didn’t even have to worry about getting ready to go on a field trip like they’d been expecting, because Kizakura had announced that Oowada’s Gym were coming to them! And everyone was in a great mood about it, with several people having planned fun ways to celebrate, like meeting up in the rec room after classes yesterday, or going up to the gardens for a picnic and day of general fun this morning…

…And all Hina wanted to do was stay in her room and cry!

Urrghh… This sucked! She thought she’d have got over this by now, but instead she’d spent the whole week thinking about everything her and Sakura had done together this term, and all the stuff she’d been thinking they could do together next term, or even over the holidays, if they had time to visit each other, and then remembering that none of it would ever happen, now…

Well… that wasn’t quite true. Sakura was obviously still trying to act like nothing had changed between her and Hina, but if anything, that made it even worse! Because now it was obvious that Sakura had never thought of her as anything other than a friend, or maybe a potential rival, if she was lucky! And she’d had no idea that Hina had suggested all those ideas for things to do in the garden because she’d been hoping Sakura had invited her up there to ask her on a date or something stupid like that. And she’d had no idea how much it’d hurt when Sakura had asked her to come the garden with everyone today instead, because she had something she wanted to tell Hina… right after Hina had overheard her asking Kiyotaka about some plan he was making with that princess in the other class, which had to be for their date, right?

But why would Sakura have known any of that? Hina hadn’t ever told her any of it, and now it was too late… And she’d been thinking about it so much last night that she hardly slept, and didn’t even want to leave her room, let alone go and be reminded about all of this, all over again…

…Screw it! Hina wasn’t going to go! She’d just tell Sakura she was sick and couldn’t make it, and then stay in bed until she felt better… Or until their first term was actually over and she had to leave for the holidays.

She grabbed her pokédex off of her bedside table, carelessly yanking out the charging cable as she pulled it into bed with her, quickly sent Sakura a fake apology for not being able to come, and then dropped it back onto the table again…

“Glace!” What!? Glaceon was already awake this morning…? It wasn’t like her to make Hina get
up, so whatever she wanted was probably important…

Hina reluctantly threw the covers off of herself and sat up, to the sight of Glaceon proudly sitting next to her backpack, with an expectant look on her face… “Huh? What is it, Glaceon?” Hina headed over to look at what she’d been up to…

The backpack was full of… cans of lemonade? Cold cans of lemonade, with condensation dripping off of them. Why had she filled a backpack full of those…?

Urgh, had she remembered Hina suggesting that to Sakura last weekend? And she’d been there when Hina had told her she would go today instead…

“Oh… thanks, Glaceon. But we’re not going to that…” Hina admitted, “I’ve just told Sakura I have a stomach ache and can’t go…”

“Gla…!?” Glaceon was shocked enough that her ears and tail stuck up as she formed a layer of icy quills over her whole body, at least for a moment. But then her body went back to normal as she stomped one of her paws and shook her head… “Ceon!”

“Yes!” Hina told her harshly, even though it wasn’t her own fault Glaceon had obviously been looking forward to going to the gardens… “Look, I’m sorry. We can go up for a picnic some other time, okay? I just… I don’t need to hear what Sakura wants to tell me today, okay…?”

“Gla, ce ON!” Glaceon argued snippily.

“No, I DON’T!” Hina snapped back at her, moving back to the bed and letting herself drop onto it… “It’s just gonna be that she’s dating Kiyotaka now…”

That fricking jerk! She’d told him that she liked Sakura, and he’d been there when Togami suggested she train up enough to ask her out! But he still went ahead and asked her out himself, without even mentioning it to anyone beforehand… No wonder he didn’t want Sakura telling anyone about it, huh!? He’d spent the last week trying to talk to her like nothing had happened at all, even though he’d run right past her afterwards! It had taken him almost the whole week of her barely replying to him to get message that she was mad at him… And even then he just looked really confused and upset about it…

Haaaaa… Maybe he’d just assumed she wasn’t interested in Sakura after all, because she’d taken so long to actually do anything about it! Maybe she should have just toughened up and told Sakura how she really felt, instead of using Togami’s advice as a reason to put it off for a month! Maybe then, Sakura would have been inviting everyone to the garden to tell them all she was dating her…

…darnit…

“Glace…”, “Riiilll…?” Hina’s pokémon tentatively jumped up on the bed next to her as she started sobbing, and let her scoop them up into her arms and cry on them for a few minutes, until she stopped thinking about what it would have been like to go on picnics and training trips or stay in and watch movies and do homework with Sakura before cuddling and kissing her…

“…I’m sorry…” She sniffed, once she’d calmed down a little, “I’m just such an idiot…!”

“Mar!”, “Ceon!” Both her pokémon tried to shush her.

“No, I am!” Hina almost started crying again, “I should have just told her I wanted to go out with her… even if she’d said no, I’d have at least known! And I wouldn’t have got my hopes up, thinking she wanted to ask me out, last week!”
“…Ceee…” Glaceon hummed thoughtfully, looking up at gently, like she was trying to get Hina to question herself. “Glaceon?”

“I’ve told you… I’ve not got the wrong idea!” Hina answered the question she guessed Glaceon was trying to ask, “You weren’t there… You didn’t see the way he was looking at her! There’s no way he wasn’t confessing! Right, Marill?”

“…Rill… ma…?” Ahh… why had she bothered asking him… him of all pokémon wasn’t going to understand stuff like that! And neither was Glaceon, really…

“Haa… I know, you’re just trying to cheer me up…” Hina sighed, scratching them both between the ears. “But I know what’s happened and I need to just get over it! And I will… But I just need some more time alone, first. Okay? So I’m gonna try and get back to sleep, now…”

“Maaaa…”, “Ceee…” Both her pokémon sighed sadly as she gently put them both on the floor, and then shifted herself back underneath the covers and pulled them right over her head, shutting her eyes and trying not to think of anything so she could doze off again…

…Urrghhh… her stomach hurt… And she was so drowsy… what time was it even?

Hina blearily pulled the cover off her head and reached out for her pokédex… 10:22? No wonder she was hungry, she never left eating breakfast until this late…

…And she hadn’t fed Marill or Glaceon, either!

“OhCrapImsosorryyougu…” Hina practically fell out of the bed in her hurry to get up and fed the pokémon, only to see that one of them had managed to rip open a new bag of pokéchow, and they still had quite a few nuggets of it left in their bowls… and all over the floor around their bowls.

“Ah… you managed to feed yourselves, then?”

“Rill!” Marill bounced up and down, excitedly pointed at Glaceon, who looked a little guilty about it.

“Thanks, Glaceon. Sorry I left that up to you, though…” Hina told her,” “I’ll clean it up as soon as I get some donuts for breakfast, okay?”

“Gla-on!?”, “Ri-ill!?” Glaceon shot her an incredulous look, while Marill just bounced excitedly.

“They might cheer me up!” Hina explained, “Besides, I the less time I hang around in the dining room today, the better, okay?”

“Ceee…” Glaceon sighed, shaking her head in resignation, while Marill practically vibrated with excitement at the thought of getting to steal bites of her donuts as Hina left the room…

…And immediately kicked something over with her foot. What the…?

…It looked like someone had left a paper bag by her door? Looking inside, there was a note folded on top of something else, which she unfolded and read…

‘Dear Hina! I hope your stomach ache passes soon! These Pecha berries might help, if not! You’re welcome to come up to the garden for some more if you need them, or if you’re feeling better and want to socialise! From Kiyotaka!'
(P.S. Please don’t tell Sakura I told you this, but I think she REALLY wants to talk to you today! She seems quite anxious about it!)

Grrrr… That creep, still acting like he was her friend! And like he wouldn’t know exactly why Sakura was intending to talk to her! If she didn’t know he’d be with Sakura right now, she’d have marched right upstairs and told him where he could stick his damn Pecha berries!

…But she was hungry, and doing that would probably make Sakura mad at her anyway, so instead she just marched off to the kitchen and threw them into the first bin she passed, hard enough to hear them smash as they hit the bottom. Then she rooted around for some pink sprinkled donuts and headed back to the dorms before she ran into anyone…

Or, that was the plan, except that there were a couple of people she didn’t recognise stood walking up and down the hallways… one tall guy dressed all in white, with long messy white hair, and the other was a short, grey guy with four hugely muscular arms…

Wait, was that a Machamp!? There wasn’t anyone in the school with a Machamp, was there? Especially not one that big! So, who was this guy, and what did he doing here…!?

“I don’t get it… This is where all of Sakura’s class sleep! It doesn’t make any sense…” The guy stopped pacing and turned to look at Sakura’s room. “I should have asked for a picture…”

So this guy knew Sakura! But she’d never mentioned knowing any Machamps, either! Then again, she hadn’t exactly given Hina an in-depth list of every pokémon at her Gym…

“MaCHAMP!?” His pokémon exclaimed sarcastically, waving all four arms up and outwards, although its trainer just ignored it.

“Well, we know what pokémon we’re looking for! We’ll just have to wait here until they get back!”

“Champ.” His pokémon shook it’s head at him, tapping its wrist… was it wearing a watch!? Then again, it also had a white satchel with a red cross on it, which was a pretty weird thing for a Machamp to be wearing…

“Yes, I know the Doctors said we’re on a time limit, but those idiots don’t know what they’re talking about! They said I was going to die two months from now, and look at me! I’m fine!” The guy insisted, but his pokémon just kept shaking its head and tapping at the watch, “Alright, instead of just waiting, how about we sneak out into the wild areas and see if we can’t find them out there!”

“CHAMP!?” His Machamp looked even more incredulous.

“…We’d be able to get some training in ourselves…” The trainer told it, temptingly. “How long’s it been since we got to explore a new place, and rough up the pokémon there, eh…?”

“Maaa…” His pokémon looked tempted, for a moment, anyway. “Champ!”

“Oh come ON!?” “I’m telling you, I’m fine! It’ll do me good to go out and… aahh… caff… CAFF CAFF…!”

His bravado was cut off as he suddenly had a coughing fit so bad his Machamp had to catch him and gently, by its standards, slap him on the back several times…

“…Champ?” It looked down at him anxiously as his coughing slowed to a halt…

“Yeah, I’m fine.” He told it, although his ragged breathing wasn’t helping. “Well… whatever we do,
we can’t stay around here, or Sakura will find out what I’m up to…”

“Mmmm…” The Machamp nodded in agreement…

So, he knew Sakura, but he didn’t want her finding out he was here!? Okay, this was getting suspicious, even if the guy was really sick! But his Machamp looked like it could rip Glaceon and Marill in half, even if she hadn’t left them in her room! So maaaaybe it was time to sneak off and call security…

“Alright… let’s go, then!” Oh shoot! Now he was coming this way, and she was just stood there in the middle of the hallway staring at him…! “Oh! Hello there! Sorry if I startled you… Do you happen to know Sakura Oogami? For the newest class here?”

“Uhh… Yeah, my name’s Aoi!” This guy was a little too scary to be insisting on her nickname, even if he didn’t seem violent at the moment… “I’m in the room next to hers!”

“Great! See, Machamp? This will work out perfectly fine…! Caff!” He tried to smirk at his pokémon, but the effect was kind of ruined when he coughed so hard it had to use three of its arms to hold him steady, rolling its eyes at him until he seemed ready to speak again…

“So… you know Sakura?” Hina checked with him, and seeing as Sakura didn’t know anyone outside of the school or her Gym… “I guess you’re from her Gym, then?”

“Not exactly… I’m Kenshiro.” He answered, as if that should explain everything, but Hina didn’t recognise the name at all, which made him look worried… “…Sakura’s rival?”

“WHAT!?” Sakura already had a rival!? This whole time…?!

But… Hina had spent all those weeks hinting that she wanted to be Sakura’s rival, and was gonna train hard to be as strong as her, and Sakura hadn’t said a thing about this guy!

Could he be lying? It was possible… but, he didn’t look like he was lying about it. He looked too upset at Hina’s reaction for it to be a lie…

“…She didn’t say anything about me…” He leant up against the wall and looked away from her, “…to anyone?”

“I don’t think so… She and I talk pretty often…” Not that that seemed to matter at all! “But, she’s never mentioned having a rival… or even your name.”

“Caff, caff!” His Machamp had to hold him up again with its right arms as he broke out into another coughing fit… “…I shouldn’t be surprised… but I’d thought she’d at least tell me if she wanted to find a new rival…”

“Huh? Why wouldn’t you be surprised…?” People didn’t usually just… switch rivals like that! Did they…?

“Ah… It’s this cough… I’ve been stuck in hospital for over a year…” He answered, before breaking into another example of it. “Hah… The only training Machamp’s had is being taught how to give me my pills, injections and inhalers… Caff, CAFF…”

“Oh…” Hina watched as the Machamp started to prove he was telling the truth, as it used its left hands to fish out a blue inhaler from its bag, take off the cap and shake it, then waited for its trainer to tilt his head back and breathe out, so it could put it up to his mouth and push the button down, leaving it there while he breathed in the medication and then waited for it to go down for a few
seconds… Which was a pretty cool thing for a pokémon to know how to do, but the reason it had had to learn it sucked… “So, you think she thinks you’re not a strong enough trainer anymore…?”

“Well… I won’t know for sure until I ask her.” He answered, sounding a little better after the inhaler. “Guess I need to find her and the trainer she’s asked out…”

“Ah…?” Wait… Sakura had been the one to ask out Kiyotaka! Not the other way around? And she hadn’t even mentioned it to her first!? Geez, did Sakura not even see her as a friend!?

“…Do you know where they are? Either of them?” Kenshiro asked her, after the noise she’d made.

“Y…yeah. I do. A bunch of the class decided to go up to the garden, this morning.” Hina told him, "They'll both be there."

“Well, that’s convenient… That’s somewhere up on the fifth floor, isn’t it?”

“Yeah… I can show you where it is! I’ve been jogging up there a few times…” Hopefully he wouldn’t mention that to Sakura, after she’d pretended not to know where it was last week… “And I kinda want to know why Sakura didn’t tell any of us about you, to…”

“Thank you. Lead the way” He bowed politely at her.

“Alright… I think there’s an elevator around her…” She usually just ran upstairs, but this guy obviously wasn’t going to be able to…

“Oh, don’t worry about that!” Kenshiro insisted with a grin. “A quick jaunt up five floors of stairs ought to get my blood… hey!”

“CHAMP!” His pokémon cut him off by picking him straight up off of the floor and lifting him over its shoulder, then looked at Hina expectantly, while ignoring the trainer currently trying to squirm out of the grip of three of its arms…

“Uhh… Right… the elevator…” Hina nodded and started making her way to where she thought it was, while Kenshiro apparently gave up and sighed as his pokémon followed her, not putting him down until they were in the elevator and the doors had shut.

“I guess I’ll just use the stair machine back at the hospital, then…” He huffed, and then stayed quiet until they got to the fifth floor and Hina led them both down to the first-year garden right at the end of the hallway…

It was amazing how much nicer this place looked now it had living grass and flowers in it, even with the old gnarly tree still taking up most of the light, it actually looked like somewhere she’d have hung out at back home with her friends… And it sure looked like everyone was having fun, all sat together around a blanket with a bunch of different foods on it. But the only thing she really noticed was Sakura and Kiyotaka sat next to each other, as he talked animatedly to her while stroking over his dogs fur, and her pokémon sat next to her, nodding along with him…

Well, whatever they were talking about, they were about to get a surprise… and Hina couldn’t help but feel a bit smug at the thought… Although Kenshiro didn’t seem to be moving in to do anything yet.

“Ahh… Who…?” Oh, right! He didn’t know who Kiyotaka was!

“Oh, that’s him, next to Sakura!” Hina pointed, although Kenshiro just looked confused, “The one with the Arcanine…?”
“What… you think that guy’s the one she asked out!? Haha, caff, ha!” He laughed, stifling a cough in the middle of it. “No… I’m looking for the girl called Hina… the one with a Marill and a Gla…”

“What!?” What did he mean he was looking for Hina!? “But… I’M Hina!”

“You told me your name was Aoi…” He looked down at her suspiciously.

“Uhh… yeah, it is…! But my friends call me Hina…” She explained.

“So that’s why I couldn’t find your room with all the others!” Oh… that made sense, if Sakura had never told him her real name…

“But… why were you even looking for me…?”

“Why…?” He looked flabbergasted that she’d even asked, “It’s been over a month since she asked you out and you still haven’t ANSWERED HER!”

Yeesh… this guy was scary, even with his Machamp holding him back by the shoulder… but… “I don’t what you’re talking about! Sakura never…”

“KENSHIRO!?” Hina’s response was cut off by an even scarier sounding shout from inside the garden, and both of them turned to see Sakura storming out towards them, followed by a worried-looking Florges. “Why are you here!? You said you were being transferred back from Castelia…”

“I am.” He cut her off, “But as I’m doing better than they expected, they said I could take a couple of days to surprise my rival…” Sakura cringed a bit and glanced in Hina’s direction at that, for some reason, while there was a lot of confused murmuring from inside the garden. “…If that’s what we still are…”

“What…” Sakura looked shocked that he’d said it, “Kenshiro, I’ve told you, I don’t intend to quit training until the day I can beat you at your full strength!”

…So, it really was true. Sakura had a rival this whole time…!

“Then why didn’t you ever tell me about him!?“ Hina demanded, over the top of Kenshiro asking a similar question. “I spent all that time going on about being your rival and… it was never gonna happen, was it!?”

 “…Oh. So that’s why you didn’t tell anyone about me…” Kenshiro muttered.

“What does that mean!?” Hina asked him.

“…It would probably be best if I let Sakura explain…” He answered, backing away from Sakura, who was glaring at him hard enough to burn a hole through his head.

“…Well…!?“ Hina demanded, making Sakura flinch guiltily.

 “…I am sorry I was not honest with you, from the start, Hina…” She started, looking off to the side. “I was concerned that perhaps the only reason you were spending time with me was because you wanted to be rivals, and I was too… selfish to inform you that it was not a possibility.”

“What? You really thought I’d stop being friends with you, just because we couldn’t be rivals?” Hina hadn’t ever considered that happening… “That wouldn’t have happened! I mean… we’re still friends no matter what happens! At least, I hope we are…”

“Indeed. I hope so, as well…” Sakura admitted, turning slightly red. “However… there was another
“…You didn’t!? But you told me…” Kenshiro blurted out, causing Sakura and Florges to turn and glare at him again, “Err… Never mind!”

“Well… What is it…?” Hina asked, once Sakura had turned to face her again… Could that guy have actually been right about who Sakura had wanted to ask out…?

“I…” Sakura’s face turned completely red… “I would rather our relationship be a romantic one…”

“R…really!?” Holy crap, she couldn’t believe it! This was awesome…!

“Y-yes… I am sorry that this is so sudden, but I’ve felt this way for a long time… I’d intended to tell you during the field trip.” Sakura admitted, shamefully. “But then you told me you wanted some time to sort think on your own feelings, so I waited…”

“Oh… you were waiting for me…!?” Dammit… She really should’ve known better to listen to Togami!

“Aheheh… whoops!”

“’Whoops’! That’s all you’ve got to… mmpth!” Kenshiro started shouting, until his own Machamp clamped a hand over his mouth before Sakura could glare at him again…

“You… forgot about that conversation?” Sakura asked, obviously disappointed. It had been a pretty big deal, after all…

“No! I just… I thought about it, and asked around for advice, and then kinda… got it in my head that I needed to be as strong a trainer as you are, before I could ask you out…” Hina explained.

“…Ah…?” Sakura gasped quietly, “You mean… You also wanted to…?”

“Huh…?” Hina took a moment to realise what she’d just actually admitted to… “Oh! Uhh… Y-yeah… I… kinda wanna date you to… If you still want to, I mean…”

“I do!” Sakura quickly told her. “I… I’d be honoured to.”

…Damn, she was so cool! Hina felt like a total dork in comparison…

“…Indeed…” Sakura nodded

Wow… that was it? They were dating now? Geez… this seemed so weird, all of a sudden…

“~Flor~!” Before Hina got a chance to really take it in, Florges suddenly twirled in the air happily and clapped her hands together. Then started gesturing at Hina’s pokéballs excitedly. “Ges! Ges!”

“Huh? You want to see Glaceon or… Mar…ill…” …Oops.

“What’s wrong, Hina?” Sakrua asked.

“Ahhhh…! I left Glaceon and Marill in my room! And I was only supposed to be going to the kitchen and back…!” Ooohhh… They were gonna be so worried! “I’ve gotta go pick them up now…!”

“Ah… of course…” Sakura agreed, but sounded disappointed about it. Guess she’d probably been hoping Hina would spend the rest of the day with her, now they were gonna be dating…
“Uhh… But, I can meet up with you guys afterwards…!” Hina suggested, which Sakura perked up at. “Will you still be in here?”

“No, we’ll be in the school arenas.” Kenshiro piped up, having been let go by the Machamp at some point, just as Sakura had started nodding… “…I didn’t go two days out of my way just to get your crush to actually talk to you!”

“Ah… yes. I suppose I owe you that much…” Sakura admitted, sheepishly. “And I am curious as to how Florges compares to Machamp, these days…”

“Alright then! I’ll meet you guys at the arena once I’m done apologising to Marill and Glaceon!” Hina told them, rushing out of the gardens and back down the stairs to her room…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.
A day of fun (Hina POV) pt. 2

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late update! I'm on holiday at the moment and lost track of what day it was!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Uhh… hey guys…? Ah!” Hina timidly opened the door to her own room, and gasped as a wave of cold air rolled out from it. Guess being gone this long had put Glaceon in a pretty bad mood…

“Ahh… Sorry I was gone a while…”

“Rill!” Marill just sounded relieved to see she was back, and quickly bounced up to her shoulder, looking down at the box of donuts she’d brought with her excitedly.

“Glaceon!” Meanwhile, Glaceon just glared at her with a frosty expression, obviously waiting for Hina to explain herself…

“Ahahah… I did just go straight to the kitchen to grab donuts…” Hina started, opening the box up so Marill could pick whichever one he wanted. “But when I came back to the dorms. There was this guy I’d never seen before wandering around outside, who told me he was Sakura’s rival and… Well… long story short, Sakura and I are dating now!”

“Glace…?” Glaceon tilted her head in surprise, and the room warmed up instantly as she gave Hina a smug look. “Gla~ceon!”

“Ahahah… Yeah, you did tell me… I’d totally got the wrong idea about whatever her and Kiyotaka were talking about!” Hina admitted, “And she’d been trying to invite me to the gardens so she could ask me out somewhere nice… But I’ve been too much of an idiot to let her!”

“Cee… Ceon!” Glaceon shrugged at her. “Glaceon!”

“Yeah… at least it’s happened now…” Hina echoed what she figured Glaceon was trying to say, which Glaceon nodded at.

“M-mar…?” Marill asked a question through a mouthful of donut, miming punching the air with his tiny fists. “Rill?”

“Huh…? Oh, the rival!” Hina figured out what he was trying to ask, “Uhh… yeah! It turns out Sakura’s had a rival this whole time, but was too nervous to tell me about him, cause she thought I was only hanging out with her because I wanted to be her rival!” Both her pokémon sighed at that, although she suspected it was for different reasons… “Actually, they invited me to go and see them fight each other…”

“Rill!” Marill bounced eagerly at the idea, while Glaceon came and walked towards the door, obviously just happy to get out of the room for a while…

“Alright then… Let’s go!” Hina told them, heading out of the door while taking a bite out of one of the donuts at last…
By the time she got to the arenas, Sakura and Kenshiro had already booked one to use, and were on their way over to it when Hina ran over to catch up with them.

“Ah, Hina! I’m glad you came.” Sakura smiled at her, as Glaceon ran to start talking to Florges, and Marill sat scowling at the Machamp, who looked back at him with a confused expression.

“Hoping having your girlfriend cheer you on will give you an advantage?” Kenshiro smirked at her.

“No. I am just glad there will be a witness to see the first time I defeat you in battle.” Sakura smiled confidently, although her cheeks did turn a bit red… “Even if it is only because of your illness…"

“Hah! Well, we’ll just have to see about that…” Kenshiro shrugged, as they reached the arena and he started walking across to the trainer’s podium at the far side. “Come on, Machamp!”

“…Shouldn’t you have your pokémon in their balls?” Hina asked, noticing that Sakura was heading into the arena with Florges already out.

“Kenshiro never had a chance to catch a second pokémon…” Sakura explained, “So, we are having a one-on-one match today.”

“Oh, right!” So there was no reason to be cagey about which pokémon they’d send out first. “Still, a Fairy-type versus a Fighting-Type should be no problem, right!?”

“…That’s what I thought the first time I met him.” Sakura sighed, looking over at Kenshiro, as his Machamp was busy handing over its bag and watch to him. “Right up until I learnt first-hand that Machop can learn Poison Jab.”

“…Oh.” Man, TM moves were such a pain! Like how Kiyotaka could completely kick her butt now Arcanine knew Wild Charge… “Well… I still bet you’ll beat him this time!”

“Thank you. I intend to prove you right…” Sakura turned away with a smile. “And it seems Kenshiro is ready for battle, now. Florges, if you would…?”

“Flor!” Florges nodded determinedly and flew into the arena, facing off against the Machamp for a moment, before they both bowed at each other.

“Alright… Good luck, Sakura!” Hina gave her one last bit of encouragement, before heading off to the side of the arena to watch the match from a safe distance.

“You ready, now…?” Kenshiro started by yelling at Sakura from his end of the arena.

“I am.” She replied.

“Alright then…” Kenshiro nodded, and then they both lowered into a bow to each other, then stood back up to face each other...

“Machamp, use Poison Jab!”, “Florges, Moonblast!” They both ordered their pokémon at the same time, before they’d even stood up fully.

Wow… she never really got over how pretty Florges main move was. The soft pink light that surrounded her when she started charging it up always managed to seem soothing somehow, even though Hina knew it’d soon concentrate into a blindingly bright beam that’d blast almost any pokémon caught in it unconscious! It was a shame Marill couldn’t learn it… although, to be honest,
he’d probably hate having a ‘pretty’ move like that. He was much happier with his big Fairy-type move being an excuse to jump at other pokémon and bash them to oblivion…

But Kenshiro’s pokémon didn’t look like it had the same opinion of the move as Hina did. As soon as it’d heard both orders, it grimaced, clenched its two right fists, which were now glowing with nasty purple smoke, and started running towards Florges, in the hope of reaching and hitting her before she finished charging up her attack…

It didn’t make it in time, although it did manage to brace itself just before the beam struck, turning to the side and raising its left arms to cover its face and eyes. Then once it had passed, it carried on running forwards and struck with double-handed jab that caught the shorter pokémon on the top of her head and face, knocking her to the ground…

Not that she stayed there for long! She quickly flew across the floor away from him, putting some space between them so she could start charging up another Moonblast in response to him starting to clench his fists again, even before Sakura and Kenshiro had actually called out their second attacks…

“AND AGAIN!” They both yelled, so hard that Sakura didn’t seem to notice Kenshiro coughing afterwards…

Once again the Machamp started to run towards Florges as the soft glow of light started to burn brightly… But it was already having trouble moving after the last attack, and didn’t get anywhere near Florges before she shot her attack right through him…

“Ch…champ!” It gave Florges a weak thumbs-up, before sinking to its knees. Then Kenshiro called it back to its pokéball, just before its upper body fell face-first onto the floor…

“It appears we have won.” Sakura told Florges, but neither of them seemed particularly excited about it…

“Well done.” Kenshiro headed over to them both to bow politely, “You’ve gotten faster, Florges.”

“Ooorr…” Florges seemed sceptical about that.

“Well, I suppose Machamp is out of practice, too…” He added with a sigh, “A dull blade is far less of a threat when you’re fighting with sharp steel…”

“But it’s hardly as though Machamp put up no challenge whatsoever.” Sakura tried to cheer him up, “Florges still cannot deal with him in a single blow.”

“So, you’re still aiming for that, huh?” Kenshiro smirked at Sakura as she nodded, “Hah! Well… nothing wrong with aiming for the impossible…”

“It’s hardly impossible.” Sakura retorted, “She came quite close, today.”

“That was just a lucky shot!” Kenshiro insisted, “And besides, they’re still doing the same amount of damage to each other, just like before.”

“I would not be so sure of that?” Sakura told him, smirking slightly herself now. “I believe Florges took her hit far better than your Machamp did… It seems she’s getting stronger than him, not just faster.”

“You shouldn’t get so over-confident based on a single match…” Kenshiro laughed slightly, “Fortune won’t always favour you!”
“Perhaps, but you should be more cautious about dismissing your own failures as an effect of luck.” Sakura warned him. “One match is hardly enough to judge such a matter…”

“Well, if that’s what you think, then maybe we should get our Pokémon healed up for another battle, just to be sure!” Kenshiro challenged her.

“If that’s what it will take to take my Pokémon seriously, I accept!” Sakura accepted, glaring determinedly at him.

Oh man… They both looked so fired up about this, even though it wasn’t a tournament! This was gonna be great!

“Alright then! To the Pokémon centre…” Kenshiro froze as he suddenly coughed mid-sentence. “Cen… caff… C- Caff, CAFF, CAFF, CAFF…!”

“Kenshiro!” The fire in Sakura’s went out his coughing got even more violent and he bent over double, wincing from the pain of them. Luckily it seemed like she knew how to deal with this, as she quickly reached into his satchel and dug out the same inhaler as the one his Machamp had used before, then helped him take it in the same way, holding him steady until his coughing stopped…

“You need to go back, don’t you?”

“…Yes.” He managed to admit, bitterly. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be… your strength is more of a concern right now than Florges or Machamps… and I’m sure they both feel the same way.” Sakura insisted. “Let’s go to the Pokémon centre, and then I’ll walk you back to the school entrance…”

“Alright…” He sighed… at least that’s what Hina thought he’d said. His breathing was so heavy now that his words were barely coming out, and he looked a lot worse than when she’d first seen him this morning…

He probably wasn’t going to be able to visit her again for a long time, was he…?

“Well… I’ll let you guys have some time to say goodbye, then!” Hina told them both, which Sakura turned and gave her a thankful smile for. “I’ll see you later, Sakura!”

“Indeed! Shall I meet you in your room?” She asked.

“Okay!” Hina agreed, rounding up her Pokémon and heading back to her room…

A few hours and an actually healthy lunch later, Hina was wishing she hadn’t agreed to have Sakura meet her in her room, because now it meant she was stuck in here until Sakura came to pick her up! And she couldn’t even do anything to get ready to spend the afternoon with Sakura, like put on make-up or wear some prettier clothes, because she didn’t have make-up or prettier clothes in here! All she’d been able to do was have a shower to make up for not having one this morning…

“I should have gone to the shop for a dress and then come back here…” Hina sighed, “For all I know that’s why Sakura’s taking so long! Do you think she’ll be mad that I’ve not dressed up at all?”

“Ceon!” Glaceon shook her head firmly.

“Yeah… I guess it wouldn’t bother her, seeing as I always dress this way…” Hina admitted, “I just
feel like I ought to do something nice for her… but there’s not much I can do when I’ve gotta stay here and wait…”

*Bing bong* Hina jumped at the sound of the doorbell…finally!

“Sakura!” Hina opened the door, to find her and her pokémon standing on the other side as she’d expected, and still wearing the same clothing she’d worn before. “Good to see you!”

“Thank you… I am sorry I was gone for so long. I had not expected Kenshiro’s transport to be so far away from the school entrance…” Sakura bowed in apology. “Was there anything in particular that you wanted to do, this afternoon?”

“Uhh…” …Darnit, that was something she could have done while she was waiting! Plan a date! But… “No… I haven’t thought of anything…”

“Then… perhaps we could go to the garden together…?” Sakura suggested, hopefully.

“Oh… yeah! Of course!” Hina agreed, heck she already had the drinks Glaceon had organised, although they weren’t cold anymore. “You guys hear that? We’re gonna go to the garden after all!”

“Glace!”, “Rill!” Her pokémon both came up to her as she was picking up the backpack and followed her out of the door and up to the garden with Sakura…

This time, the garden was empty, all their other friends apparently having finished having fun in there for the day… or maybe having realised that she and Sakura would probably end up coming here at some point today, depending on how much of their conversation they’d overheard.

Either way, it meant that the pair of them got to sit together and relax, hand in hand on the grass as they talked in the warm sunlight while Marill and Snorunt played some game together and Florges showed Glaceon all the flowers she’d been planting over the term.

Their conversation was mostly about how they should have just asked each other out sooner, and what things they could now do together until the holidays, and how they’d keep in contact during them, although Sakura also had a whole bunch of stories about her and Kenshiro that she’d obviously been keeping quiet over the rest of term… They’d obviously had a lot of fun growing up together, although the part where he’d almost died have obviously scared Sakura a lot, even if it seemed like he was getting better, now…

And then Sakura suggested they bring some food up for dinner, so they could still have the picnic together that Hina had wanted, before they sat and watched in silence as the light streaming through the glass ceiling of the garden started to turn red, orange and purple, as the sun set on their day of fun… It wouldn’t be too long now until Hina had to start thinking about getting Marill and Glaceon ready for bed. In fact…

“I’m gonna need to give my pokémon a bath, soon…” Hina realised with a sigh. Being a responsible pet owner sure could suck sometimes…

“I have yet to bathe my own pokémon, today…” Sakura admitted, “Perhaps we could do it together?”

“Sure! That’s a great idea!” Hina agreed, jumping up to her feet. “Let’s go get our bath stuff and bathing costumes and meet up at the baths then!”

“Ah… very well!” Sakura looked a little surprised that Hina had got up so quickly, but stood up too quickly for Hina to ask if she’d wanted to stay in the garden a little longer. “I will see you soon,
then… Florges! Snorunt! It is time to leave.”

“Okay!” Hina nodded, before calling her own pokémon back…

Pretty soon the six of them were the only people in the bathing room, and Hina and Sakura quickly changed into their swimming costumes while their pokémon headed over to their preferred pools…

Florges and Marill started by heading over to the cooler-than-Hina-liked-but-not-utterly-freezing-cold 1-foot deep bath, where Florges choose to sit on the edge with her bottom leaves soaking up the water, while Marill started loudly insisting she watch him splash around and perform a bunch of different tricks and moves he knew in the water.

Meanwhile, Glaceon headed over to her usual ice-cold pool of water. She was followed by Sakura, who carried Snorunt over and took off her coat, before leaving her with Glaceon and coming back to join Hina in the nice warm bath in the centre of the room.

“…I’m gonna miss not having to worry about changing the water temperature when I run Glaceon and Marill’s baths…” Hina thought out loud, while Sakura was busy washing Snorunt’s coat.

“Indeed… Florges has been much more jubilant in the warm air here…” Sakura agreed, “And it makes bathing for long periods more comfortable…”

“Hahaha… yeah! Your hair looks hard enough to wash without having to rush to do it all before the water goes cold!” Hina commented.

“Yes, I can be far more thorough about it, here… although I still worry that I miss parts of it, regardless.” Sakura admitted.

“Really? Do you want me to wash it for you?” Hina offered, “I’d be able to see it all better than you can!”

“Ah…! Well… if you do not mind…” Sakura smiled, despite her cheeks turning pink, and lowered her hair under the water and came up with it all flowing straight down her back, mirroring the curves of her muscles as the wet hair it stuck to her. Then she passed Hina a large bottle of shampoo.

“Alrighty then!” Hina squeezed a generous amount of shampoo into her hands and lathered it up, before spreading it across the top of Sakura’s head and making sure to knead it through every part of her scalp and roots. Then she needed to get even more out as she started separating strands of Sakura’s thick hair out, to work the shampoo down to the tips of all of her hair…

“All done!” Geez… it had almost been a workout in itself, but eventually Hina had finished lathering up every inch of Sakura’s hair, and she rinsed it out by ducking her head under the water… “So… I guess now I’ve gotta condition it?”

“Fortunately not, I use a combined version.” Sakura told her, to her relief.

“Oh, right! Guess I’m done then!” Hina stretched her arms out and got ready to carry on relaxing in the bath.

“Yes, thank you… I have not felt quite this clean in a long time…” Sakura smiled, “Would you like me to do yours, now?”

Well… she’d already washed her hair today… but Sakura had seemed to enjoy having someone else
wash her hair for her, so maybe it’d be nice to let Sakura do hers in return…?

“Well… I’ve not got my shampoo with me, but if you don’t mind letting me use some of yours…?”

Hina answered.

“I doubt it will cost me much, in comparison to my own hair…” Sakura laughed at her concern, so she quickly dunked her head under the water and turned her back to Sakura, so she could start massaging the shampoo onto her own head…

“Hmmm… That feels good!” Hina sighed. She’d been right! This was way nicer than washing her own hair! And she’d be able to get Sakura to do it whenever she wanted to now! Heck, she’d have been able to have Sakura doing it for the last few weeks if she’d just come out and told her how she felt! “I was really being an idiot this whole time…”

“You’ve said that ten times this afternoon…” Sakura pointed out, “Which is ten times too many.”

“Urgh… Sorry.” She could understand why bringing it up all the time might be getting irritating, “It’s just, I keep thinking we could have done all this sooner if I’d just told you…”

“True… however, the same can be said of me.” Sakura argued, “And neither of us can do anything about it now. The important thing is that we make the most of our time now, and learn from our mistakes in the past.”

“Yeah… I guess you’re right…” And she’d said it in such a cool way, too! “From now on, I’m gonna be honest about how I feel, and not scared to tell you stuff!”

“And I will strive to do the same with yourself…” Sakura said warmly, as she gently cupped water over Hina’s hair to wash it out, and then leant back against the side of the bath.

…She looked so relaxed like that. Hina couldn’t help but want to join her…

“Hey… speaking of telling you what I want…” She couldn’t really believe she was about to ask this, but… “Can I lean up against you for a while?”

“Ah… Yes! Of course!” Sakura looked shocked that she’d asked, but pretty happy about it, all the same. “That is, assuming your Glaceon does not mind watching Snorunt for a while longer…”

“Ah, she’ll be fine!” …And if she wasn’t, Hina would find something to make it up to her! But she’d probably be fine with it, at least this time. “There’s no Piplup to worry about, after all!” Saionji’s pokémon had a habit of getting stroppy if it felt like the other pokémon were spending too long in ‘it’s’ pool…

“Ah… Indeed.” Sakura laughed, looking off to the entrance to the pools, then lowered her voice and whispered in Hina’s ear… “Though, perhaps we should wait until Kiyotaka has entered his own bath, lest he deem it inappropriate behaviour…”

What!? She hadn’t even noticed him coming in, but now Sakura had mentioned it, she could hear him chattering at his dog and telling it to go on ahead of him to the bath. “Good point!” She whispered back. They’d hardly want to end their first day of dating by getting reported for PDA…

“Ah, NO! Arcanine, not THAT one!”

The pair of them both turned sharply, to see what Kiyotaka was screaming about, just in time to see his dog zoom past them towards the cold bath that Glaceon and Snorunt were currently playing in. And then Kiyotaka himself, ignoring all the rules about not running near the pools in an attempt to
catch up to it and stop it from jumping straight in there…

But he wasn’t fast enough, and a few seconds later there was a loud splash, followed by a painful yelp as Arcanine hit the freezing water.

“Nnnnnnnnn…” A few seconds later, there was another pitiful whine as Kiyotaka got to the edge of the pool, and she and Sakura both started to stand up and climb out of their own bath…

“Ah… I thought you realised… Nevermind! Just come out of there, quickly!” Kiyotaka ordered the dog, but was just met with another whine… “Oh no… you’re frozen! Ahh… I think I’ve got an Aspear berry…”

Oh boy, he was panicking and thinking as if this was a pokémon battle. “Forget about that for now! Just order him back into his ball, then treat him!”

“Oh, right!” Kiyotaka quickly grabbed Arcanine’s pokéball and held it out, “Arcanine, return…! Please!? I’ll let you out straight afterwards! It’s just to get you out of the water! Arcanine…!”

Uh oh… Arcanine must be panicking too much to listen to Kiyotaka… “Okay… in that case, we’ll have to get him out of the water ourselves!” There must be a winch or something they could use to haul him up the steps…

“Allow me!” Sakura suddenly lunged forward and headed into the cold water herself, barely stopping to grunt as it hit the top of her waist, before striding forward to pick up Arcanine by his front paws and drag him back up the poolside steps.

“Ah! Th…Thank you so much!” Kiyotaka gasped as Sakura finished fishing his dog out, and then dropped to his knees to give the shaking pokémon an Aspear berry, which seemed to help a little bit, but wasn’t enough to stop if shaking completely… “Ah… we need to get you dry… or at least warm!”

“His usual bath?” Sakura suggested, getting ready to pick up the dog again…

But was it going to be alright in the deep bath…? It might have trouble staying afloat if its legs weren’t working, and besides… “The sauna will be hotter! And bring some towels to dry him off!”

“R-right!” Kiyotaka nodded, and rushed off to grab an armful of towels, while Sakura dragged the dog into the nearby sauna. Once they were there, he quickly handed one over to Sakura, before kneeling down and vigorously drying his dog… “I’m sorry… I thought you realised it was that bath that made the water so cold! Not the Piplup…”

“Nnnnn…” Arcanine whined apologetically.

“Well… at least you know now! And it happened when there was someone close by to help!”

“Arc!” Arcanine nodded, as Sakura knelt down to help dry him with the towel Kiyotaka had given her. Followed by Hina, as soon as she’d picked up one from the pile Kiyotaka had brought in.

“Oh… Thank you!” Kiyotaka stopped to blink at them in surprise for a moment, before getting a hold of himself and carrying on, “…But I’d actually meant for you to dry yourself with that, Sakura…”

“I appreciate the thought, but that can wait.” Sakura told him, “Hina and I hadn’t finished bathing yet.”
“You hadn’t!? Well… don’t let me keep you, then!” Kiyotaka cried, “I’m sure Arcanine will be fine now he’s somewhere hot! Right, boy?”

“Are.” Arcanine woofed contentedly, seemingly enjoying being rubbed over by three people at once.

“See!?"

“Still, no reason for us not to stick around and help…” Hina pointed out, “Even if it’s just to make sure you don’t stay in here too long and pass out from the heat!”

“Well… if you’re sure it’s not a problem…” He conceded, but not without shooting a worried look at her.

“Why would it be…?” Was he that worried about interrupting their ‘date’? Had he even actually heard they were dating…?

“Err… No reason! Maybe I’ve just been a little paranoid this week…” He laughed, nervously, until he noticed that she was still waiting for him to get on and tell her what that meant! “You seemed less willing to talk to me than usual, and I worried that I might have done something to upset you.”

“Oh.” Crap! He had done that! Just… probably not in the way he thought he had!

“Ah… Don’t worry about it! Like I said, I’ve been rather over-sensitive since last weekend, and…”

“No… You were right, I was mad at you…” Hina admitted, “I’m sorry.”

“Wait… you were!? What did I do… and why are you apologising for it…?”

“Cause you didn’t actually do anything!” Hina quickly let him know. “I just misunderstood what you and Sakura were talking about last weekend and… uhh… kinda thought you’d asked her out on a date or something…”

“W-what…? Ahahaha…” Geez… it’d been so dumb he was laughing… “How did you get that idea?”

“Well… I only heard the part about you being glad you spoke to her about… whatever it was!” Hina explained, “And then Sakura refused to tell me what you were talking about…”

“Oh… I see…” Kiyotaka sighed guiltily. “Hrmmm… It’s… rather difficult to explain…”

“Then don’t!” She told him, “I mean… unless you want to talk about it, that is! But you’ve not got to tell me anything if you don’t want to!”

“I don’t…?” He looked relieved… “Thank you… But I’m sorry it upset you, all the same!”

“And I’m sorry for being such a huge grump this week!” She told him, “No hard feelings?”

“Of course not!” Kiyotaka agreed.

“Good.” Sakura told them both, “And I believe Arcanine is fully warmed, now.”

“Arrrrcc…” Arcanine sighed happily.

“Aha… You like it in here, eh?” Kiyotaka laughed, gently stroking his fur. “I should have brought you in here ages ago!”
“Arc!” Arcanine agreed forcefully.

“Alright, alright… You and I can stay in a little longer, if you like it that much…” Kiyotaka told him, “But you two can head back to your bath now! You two don’t look like you’re coping as well as me!”

Eehhh… He had a point, this hot, dry air was awful!

“I admit, I’m more used to cold air, than hot.” Sakura admitted, “Just be sure not to stay in longer than you can handle Kiyotaka…”

“I won’t!” He told her, “I’ll see you at sports training!”

“See ya!” Hina waved goodbye to him as they both headed out of the door back towards the baths…

“Ceon!”, “Florges!”, “Rilll!”, “Snooo!”

…Where four pokémon instantly turned to look at them with hopeful eyes, already out of the baths and in the middle of getting dry.

“Eheheh… Looks like they’ve had enough of waiting for us, tonight…” Hina pointed out, before noticing the time… “To be fair, it is getting kinda late… It’s almost Marill’s bedtime!”

“Indeed… I should start getting Snorunt ready for bed as well.” Sakura agreed, “We will have time to spend together over the next two weeks, though…”

“Heh… yeah! We will!” Hina agreed, excited thoughts of all the stuff they could do together filling her head… “We’ll be able to eat breakfast together, and go training together, and have picnic lunches together, and maybe watch some movies together…”

“But first, perhaps we should finish drying our pokémon, and then walk back to our rooms, together.” Sakura stopped her.

“Ahahah… Yeah, you’re right…” Hina chuckled, and started finishing the job that her two pokémon had started, drying off Glaceon and an increasingly sleepy Marill, then getting herself dry and changed. “Okay… all done! And maybe you should get in your pokéball until we’re back, Marill, so you don’t fall asleep and fall off my shoulder again…”

“R-rill…” Marill yawned, and returned to the ball… quickly followed by Glaceon. Tch! Lazybones! She’d been more than awake enough to walk back with her!

“Hmm… it seems it’s just you and me walking back…” Sakura commented.

“Wait… really!?” Hina asked, before noticing that Florges and Snorunt were nowhere to be seen now. “Geez, are even our pokémon trying to get us together…?”

“I believe they may be…” Sakura agreed, wryly. Then held out her hand to Hina. “Though, I cannot say that I mind the opportunity to walk you back unaccompanied…”

“Hehe… yeah, me neither!” Hina agreed, going one step further and wrapping her arm around Sakura’s, before holding onto the outstretched hand and pulling her out of the baths, past Oowada, and back to the dorms.

“Well… I’ll see you tomorrow, then…” Sakura said goodbye and turned to unlock her door, once Hina had let go of her arm to do the same thing.
“Yeah…” Hrm… Holding hands had been nice, but otherwise, this just seemed like the way they’d say goodnight, *every* night! She ought to do something *different*, now they were actually *dating*… “Hey… one last thing, though!”

“No, what is…?” Was as far as Sakura got before Hina hopped up and planted a kiss on her lips…

…which was kinda embarrassing, ‘cause she’d *meant* to aim for Sakura’s cheek, but jumping up to kiss someone a foot taller than her had been a *little* more difficult that she’d imagined...

“Ahh… *sorry!* I didn’t mean to…!” …Was as far as Hina got, before Sakura suddenly leant down and kissed her own lips, holding them there for a moment before pulling back again.

“…Goodnight, Hina.” Sakura quickly turned back towards her own door… but not so quickly that Hina didn’t notice the smile that was already spreading over her face.

“…Yeah. Goodnight, Sakura!” Hina agreed, before heading into her own room to let her pokémon out of their pokéballs…

…But not before she spent five whole minutes bouncing around the room enough to give even *Marill* a run for his money.

Chapter End Notes

According to my battle calculations, Florges’ Moonblast would do 77.5- 92.5% of Machamps health in damage, whereas Machamp’s Poison Jab would do 77-91% damage to Florges, so Sakura is technically correct that Florges is doing more damage than Machamp… but really they’re pretty evenly matched on the damage front, the main issue is their speed. (And, if Kenshiro hadn’t gotten sick, their second pokémon would have played a much bigger role.)

FYI: putting a human in a sauna would be a terrible way to treat hypothermia, because warming them up too fast can cause heart problems. (It’s best to get them indoors and dry, then start warming their torso in blankets or dry clothing) But I figure that for a fire-type pokémon it would be best to warm them up ASAP.

Also I was worried if it was realistic for Sakura drag a wet Arcanine around and Googled it. I decided that, given World’s Strongest Man has an event where they carry two 160kg weights and walk around, Sakura can probably manage to drag a 155kg dog using both arms, even if he was wet.

Thanks for reading!
The challenge (Mondo POV) pt. 1

Chapter Notes

This is another one of those ideas that I'm worried isn't as good as I thought it was going to be when I came up with it over a year ago, but too many of my plans for the fic depend on it happening to change it now. I hope you enjoy it anyway!

Also I uploaded last week's chapter a day late and then didn't paste the link over on tumblr, so be aware that there's a second Hina chapter you might have missed before this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mondo gave a respectful nod to Oogami and Asahina as he walked past them on the way to the school baths, although they looked like they barely noticed him, if at all. Too busy holding each other's hands and grinning at each other… Had they finally hooked up!? Good for them if they had, but either way, it looked like they were having fun now term was over…

If only Mondo could say the same… But even though the normal classes were over and done with, he still had his DPTL lessons to go to, and then this afternoon he'd tried to go out and catch a pokémon again, spurred on by Kizakura's announcement yesterday that, instead of a field trip to a Gym, Daiya and the rest of the gang were coming here, next weekend to test everyone…

Well… more like panicked by the announcement! How could he face the gang turning up if he still didn’t have a pokémon when they got here!? Daiya’d be pissed with him if he found out Mondo had left it that late to get a second pokémon, when he'd be kicked out of the school if he didn't!

But then, Lycan had picked up on his fear, and he’d obviously started panicking as well, meaning most of the pokémon they found in the forest had been knocked out in one hit, and they few that didn’t ended up breaking out of the pokéball Mondo threw and running away before he got a chance to try again…

…All the time he’d spent training Lycan this term, and it had still ended up being the same as it always was before he came here…

But it was Mondo’s fault… he knew Lycan tensed up when he did! He should have held off on trying to catch something until after he’d calmed down about Daiya’s surprise visit! After all, they had a whole six days until he turned up! But instead he’d gone out in a panic, and now Lycan was so pissed off with himself over the whole thing, that he’d barely wanted to eat his dinner again, and all Mondo’s attempts to calm him down had just made him more nervous…

Which was why Mondo had ended up leaving the guy alone to stew over things by himself for a while, and decided to try and calm himself down by sitting in the school sauna for a while. It was usually pretty empty, especially at this time of night, so he should be free to sit in peace in there for a little while. Not too long, just until Lycan had calmed down enough for Mondo to actually talk to
him. Probably not worth getting changed before and after, so he just opened the door and headed straight into the room itself…

Where he froze at the sight of Ishimaru, breathing peacefully with his eyes shut and nothing but a towel around his waist and, more worryingly, his dog, who was lying sprawled on the floor in the dry heat with its eyes shut, not moving…

“Why the fuck is your DOG in here!?” Mondo yelled, before the door had even fully shut behind him. Hell, he’d had It drummed into his head a million times that furry animals couldn’t even deal with hot weather without enough shade and water to drink! And Mr. ‘pokemon expert’ here was taking his long-haired fluffy dog into the sauna!? Was this what had been pissing off Lycan the last few weeks!?

“AH!”, “Nin?!” Ishimaru and his dog both jumped at that, which at least meant the dog couldn’t have been in here too long, if it was able to get to its feet and try and run under the bench its trainer was sat on, anyway…

“Oowada? What’s the problem?” Ishimaru just stared gormlessly at him, “There’s no rules against bringing pokémon into the sauna!”

“Just ‘cause their ain’t rules against it, doesn’t mean ya should go ahead and do it, you asshole!” Mondo snapped, “It just means the school trusts us to have the sense not to give our dogs fucking heatstroke!”

Ishimaru just sat there blinking at him, with his head tilted to one side… “Oowada, my dog is a Fire-type… I’d get heatstroke far sooner than he would!”

“No! Of course I didn’t make him!” Ishimaru snapped, “He saw his friends in the pool and ran off to jump in with them, and didn’t listen to me when I tried to stop him!”

“No! Of course I didn’t make him!” Ishimaru snapped, “He saw his friends in the pool and ran off to jump in with them, and didn’t listen to me when I tried to stop him!”

“Eh!? You mean… you made your Fire-type go swimming with two Ice-Types!?"

“Ah, no! I usually just take Arcanine swimming in the hot pool!” Ishimaru jumped at the chance to break the silence, “This is because I needed a way to warm him up after he went in Snorunt’s and Glaceon’s pool…”

“Can…?” The quit trying to hide under Ishimaru’s legs for a moment.

“He means he’s sorry he shouted at us.” Ishimaru told it, patting its head as Mondo sat down on one of the other benches. “He didn’t mean to startle you.”

“Arc! Arcarc!” The dog yapped happily, and settled itself down in front of his feet again, closing its eyes and leaving Ishimaru with nothing to do except keep awkwardly glancing over at Mondo, like he wasn’t sure if he should try to start a conversation or not…

…Well, what the hell. Mondo was kinda curious what he was doing here anyway… “So, this something you do often and we’ve just been missing each other all term, or…?”

“Eh!? You mean… you made your Fire-type go swimming with two Ice-Types!?”

“No! Of course I didn’t make him!” Ishimaru snapped, “He saw his friends in the pool and ran off to jump in with them, and didn’t listen to me when I tried to stop him!”
broken’ then…”

“…Excuse me…!? BROKEN!? Just because I’ve done a thorough job of training my pokémon, does not mean I’ve broken him!” Ishimaru shrieked at him… guess that had come out the wrong way…”You might understand that if you’d actually try…!”

“For the last fucking time, I have tried!” Oh, Fuck this guy! Mondo had almost forgotten what a stuck-up prick he was! “And I still am! Before you start running your mouth about how I should ‘try again!’” He added, as Ishimaru had instantly opened his mouth.

“Well… perhaps you should rethink your training methods!” Ishimaru blurted out after a moment, obviously caught off-guard by Mondo figuring out what he was gonna say. “Because you don’t seem to be making much progress, from what I’ve seen!”

“Well, then you can’t have been looking! ‘Cause Lycan’s made a shit-ton of progress!” Ishimaru just raised his eyebrows at him, “Or maybe you’re just expecting too much, ‘cause your dog’s so easy to deal with!”

“Easy to deal with’!? Ishimaru repeated, sarcastically. “I love him, and I don’t resent a single second of the time I’ve spent with him… But Arcanine’s not ‘easy to deal with’! I have to be constantly aware of what he’s doing!”

“That’s only ‘cause you trained him too much, so now he can’t do shit for himself!” Mondo pointed out, “If you’d ease off with it and let him learn some shit for himself, he’d be fucking fine!”

“I have tried that! And he is getting better!” Ishimaru insisted, “I’m just saying you shouldn’t assume another trainer’s life is as easy as it might appear to be… or that you could do a better job than them!”

“You’re one to talk! You’ve spent this whole term getting at me every chance you get, because you think you’d do a better job of training Lycan than I am! Don’t you?!” Mondo snapped back at him, and he grimaced as he figured out he couldn’t fucking deny it. “Hah! I knew it! Well, I’d like to see you fucking try! You and the stick up your ass wouldn’t last a day looking after Lycan!”

“A day is nothing! I could look after that ill-trained wolf of yours for weeks, and he’d probably be better off for it!” Ishimaru snapped. “You’re the one who wouldn’t last if you had to run around after Arcanine all day!”

What, like trotting around with the dog at his side was hard!? The nerve of this guy, acting like he was better than Mondo all the fucking time! Mondo was fucking sick of his bullshit! “Well then, how’s about you fucking prove it!”

“Wh-what do you mean?” Ishimaru stammered, “How…!”?

…Dammit, he hadn’t actually thought about that! But he’d made it sound too much like a challenge to back down now, and the only thing that made sense was… “Swap pokémon with me!”

Alright, it’d be a waste of time when he was busy, but Ishimaru’d probably only manage an hour of having to deal with Lycan by himself before he was back and changing his tune! And that was assuming Lycan didn’t just get sick of him and leave, seeing as he knew how to unlock the dorm doors from the inside!

“What!? NO! I wouldn’t trade Arcanine for anything! Let alone your poké…”

“I don’t mean trade ‘em forever, you dumbass!” Mondo sighed loudly, “I mean we just look after
each other’s pokémon for… I dunno, a day!”

“You mean… an *unauthorised* temporary trade…?” Ishimaru scowled, “There’s rules against that for a reason, you know!”

“Yet, but the reason is to stop people entering competitions or getting badges with pokémon that ain’t *theirs*!” Mondo pointed out, “No one gave a shit when Maizono looked after your dog, did they!”

“Well… that’s true…” Ishimaru admitted, “But we’d still need to check that our pokémon are alright with such an arrangement!”

“…Alright, I’ll give ya that one.” Mondo admitted… he’d been so pissed off with Ishimaru he hadn’t even thought of asking Lycan first. “But if they are… whaddaya say!?”

Ishimaru frowned in concentration for a while, before nodding. “I accept! It will give your Lycanroc an opportunity to see that I’m not… whatever the reason he keeps *growling* at me!” He insisted, “However, I’ll need some time to talk to Arcanine, get everything ready, and then make our nightly call to my father! I suggest I come around at 9:30 pm and, if we’re going ahead with this, we start the swap then and finish it at 9:00pm tomorrow! That would give us a chance to discuss our respective schedules before Arcanine’s bedtime! Is that alright with you?”

“Sure, whatever…” His dog had a fucking *bedtime*! And a ‘schedule’!? Like *hell* Mondo was gonna make it deal with all that crap while he was looking after it…

“Very well! I’ll see you in an hour!” Ishimaru declared, leaning down to tap his dog awake, “Arcanine…? we need to go now… There’s something I need to discuss with you…”

“Nnnn? Arcan…” The dog yawned groggily, but got up and followed him out of the sauna anyways, leaving Mondo by himself…

…Dammit, so much for coming up here to relax, now he’d ended up giving himself even more bullshit to do… And how the fuck was he gonna try and explain this to Lycan…!? He was already regretting this. Maybe he should just tell Lycan straight-up that he’d made a dumb challenge and could probably do with a good reason to back out of it…

By the time he got back to the room, Lycan had managed to finish off most of his dinner, aside from an odd slice of pizza, which he quickly snapped up as soon as he heard the door opening…

“Hey… it’s just me!” Mondo announced, “Sorry I was gone so long… I ran into Ishimaru and his Arcanine in the sauna…”

“CanROC!?” Lycan had the same reaction to hearing that as Mondo had had to *seeing* it…

“*His* dog’s a Fire-type, it can cope with the heat…” Mondo spoke up, which put a sudden stop to Lycan’s snarling… “Although, I thought the same thing as you when I saw which… and then me and Ishimaru ended up yelling at each other, and I kinda ended up *suggesting* something stupid in the heat of the moment…”

“…Can?” Lycan tilted his head at Mondo.

“Well… he was doing his usual. Getting at me about how I look after you, acting like *he’d* do a better job, even as he was telling *me* not to act like *I’d* do a better job looking after *his* dog…” Mondo explained, “So I said if he thinks he’d do a better job, he should *prove* it, but then he asked
how and the only thing I could think of was him and me spending a day with the other one’s dog…”

“Nnnrrrr…” Lycan let out a low growl...

“Yeah, I know it was a dumb idea, and we ain’t really got time for it!” Mondo admitted, “It just came out! But we ain’t gotta do it, ’cause…”

“Roe!” Lycan interrupted him, sharply, then gave him a firm nod. “Lycan!”

“What!? You… you wanna do it!? You’re sure…?” Mondo checked, which Lycan nodded at. The hell was he thinking! “…Why?”

“…Rrrrooc…” Lycan let out the same kind of growl he’d been giving Ishimaru the last few weeks…

“…You’re thinking you’ll find proof he’s hurting his dog, or something?” Mondo realised, and Lycan nodded at him… He was still convinced there was no way he’d made the misunderstanding that Chihiro and Maizono kept insisting he must have… And as he was getting sick of waiting for Ishimaru’s dog to quit running from him all the time…

“…Okay, I get it.” Mondo sighed. Guess the only way out of this now was if Ishimaru’s Arcanine said no to the idea. “Just... promise me you ain’t gonna hurt him or piss him off, just for the hell of it? I mean… don’t go in there assuming he’s gonna do something, y’know? At least give him a chance first, seeing as Chi seems to be getting friendlier with him now, okay?”

“…” Lycan nodded, reluctantly.

“Thanks, man!” Mondo petted him between the ears, “And remembered, you're big enough now that you ain’t gotta worry about taking any shit from him. If something does happen, you can just let yourself out of his room and come find me, and I’ll deal with it. Got it?”

“…” Lycan nodded more enthusiastically, that time.

“Nice one!” Mondo gave him another pat, “Alright... They’ll probably both be here, soon... He said it’d be 9:30…”

9:30 exactly, the doorbell rang and Mondo opened it up to find Ishimaru and his dog on the other side...

Or, it was Ishimaru and his dog, right up until Lycan tried to bark a greeting at the dog, and it jumped into its pokéball before Ishimaru could say a word...

…And Mondo hadn’t caught him moving his hands that time, either… Maybe he had just been seeing things, that one time. He’d been in a rush for class, after all…

“Ah... sorry. I’m still not having any luck convincing him it’s me you’ve been growling at...” Ishimaru apologised to Lycan, who just glared at him suspiciously. “Otherwise, he probably wouldn’t have agreed to the swap…”

“So it’s going ahead, then...” Mondo summed it up.

“Ah... so, Lycanroc agreed as well!?” Ishimaru’s eyebrows shot up. “Alright... then I guess I’ll need to bring Arcanine’s things in here...! And then we’ll have to try and convince him to come out of the ball while your Lycanroc is still here, to make sure he’ll be alright in this room... Unless we
move Lycanroc into my room, first… would he be alright left in there for a few minutes…”?

“Roc… Can!” Lycan rolled his eyes and sighed, then pushed past Ishimaru and stood out in the corridor, crouched against the walls with his arms crossed impatiently.

“Oh! Or… you can stay out there, and Arcanine probably won’t notice you!” Ishimaru twigged as to what Lycan was getting at… well… so far they were… well… getting on as well as Mondo could have hoped the pair of them would, anyway…”Alright! Give me a couple of minutes, and I’ll be back with Arcanne’s things!”

Ishimaru quickly headed back into his own room, while Mondo stood leant against the door to keep it propped open so he could see Lycan, and also so Ishimaru wouldn’t need to ring the doorbell again when he came back.

…Just as well really, seeing as he came back out of his room dragging a giant felt-and foam dog’s bed, which was filled with a blanket, a whole bag of food and several of the multi-coloured bags he usually wore, across the floor with both arms…

“This is just gonna be one day, remember?” Mondo pointed out, “What’s with all the different bags!”?

“Each bag is for a different activity! And this is the least amount of things he’ll need for tomorrow’s schedule!” Ishimaru insisted, as he dragged the bed past an incredulous-looking Lycan and himself, and then pulled it around to the other side of Mondo’s bed and started piling up the bags next to it…

“Well… aside from the dry food! These bags last for a week, but I just finished the last one, so I’ve had to give you a full bag…”

“Alright then… if ya say so…” He wasn’t about to waste time arguing over it. “So, you wanted to tell me his ‘schedule’…?”

“Yes! I’ll start from now, as that will make things simpler… At 10pm, Arcanine will want a bedtime story read to him, he’ll probably bring you one out of his bag. Then he’ll put himself to bed, although he likes to be tucked in with his blanket!” Alright, that didn’t sound too bad, aside from the specific bedtime…

“Then, and this is very important! He’ll need to have breakfast at precisely 6am, and you need to give him a level bowl of the dry food, and a poffin as well! And it’s equally important that you give him his dinner at 6pm as well… that’s one can of the wet food and another poffin… oh! But you need to specify that the poffins are because he’s been a good boy, not just a standard part of his dinner! I’ve also bought some extra poffins for you to use as treats throughout the day, to help convince him to listen to your suggestions and orders! But sticking to the breakfast and dinner times is very important! He gets upset if his mealtimes are disrupted!”

…Arceus, what was this guy’s deal with the food? Couldn’t the dog just eat what it wanted, instead of him measuring it out or it having to do his tricks for it? Then maybe it wouldn’t freak out if it’s dinner was late… “So, is that everything…”?”

“No, not yet. Other than his feeding schedule, he’ll want to have either a bath or shower at some point during the day, so I’ve brought his bathing bag with me. And he’ll need to go somewhere for a walk to burn off some energy during the day as well! You can either go to the wild areas with the exploration bag, or up to the gardens with his bag of toys! And try not to leave that until it gets dark, because he doesn’t like to run around as much when he can’t see where he’s going, which defeats the point of the walk!”

Ishimaru seemed to be waiting for him to respond, probably to check if he’d actually been paying attention… “Got it.”
“Great! One last thing, please don’t take him into the dining room, or leave your own food lying around the place, because he’ll probably eat it if you do!” Well maybe you should feed him more then… “You’ll also need to keep his food out of sight of him, otherwise he’ll keep trying to get at it!”

“Sure, go ahead.” Mondo told him, just so he’d hurry up and leave all the faster…

“Well maybe you should feed him more then… I know! I’ll hide it behind the books on your bookshelf! There looks to be enough space for it all there…”

“Well maybe you should feed him more then!…” Ishimaru announced, once he’d finished with the books. “I guess I’ll get Arcanine out and make sure he’s happy with how everything is laid out, now…! Arcanine…? Lycanroc is outside, and everything is ready for you, now!”

“Arc!” The dog jumped out of its ball, instantly looking and sniffy around the room, mostly at Lycan’s hairs on the floor, although it did head over towards Lycan’s empty plate and lick it over a few times…

“Ahh… That’s sort of thing I’m talking about with food being left out…” Ishimaru cringed, like every dog ever wouldn’t have done exactly the same thing. “But, ah… it’s seems Arcanine is alright in here… Is that right, Arcanine?”

“…Arc!” The dog barked and nodded.

“Alright then! I guess it’s your turn now!” Ishimaru smiled, “Do you need any help bringing his things to my room?”

“He ain’t got any things to bring.” Mondo pointed out, “You can just take him.

“What!?! Nothing…!? I… I know you usually feed him from the dining room… But… what about brushes… or his bed!”?

“He ain’t due a brush tomorrow, and he sleeps in my bed, with me!” Ishimaru looked horrified, “I mean, sure, feel free to try and sort him out somewhere else to sleep if ya wanna, just don’t be surprised if he ignores it and crawls into bed with you at 2am…”

“2am…!? OH! He’s nocturnal!” Ishimaru remembered, “…Is there anything else about his schedule that I need to know…?”

“He doesn’t like being woken up if he doesn’t have to, so don’t be expecting an early start to the day! Specially as he knows it’s Sunday and there’s no classes.” Mondo warned him, “Otherwise he’s pretty chill, and he’ll let you know when he’s hungry.”

“Err… that’s it?” Ishimaru asked, anxiously. “Well… that should be easy to remember, at least! Ahahaha…”

He stood there awkwardly for a moment, looking between Mondo and his own dog, like he was having second thoughts about this whole challenge…

Man, it’d save Mondo a whole lot of bother if he just backed down now…

“Well! I suppose I’ll go… show Lycanroc my room, now…?” So much for that! “Do you want to come with me, and make sure your dog’s going to be alright in my room…?”

“Roc!” Lycan snarled impatiently from the corridor, causing the Arcanine to jump and run behind Mondo’s bed.
“That’s a no.” Mondo translated.

“Oh... Alright, then… I’ll see you tomorrow!” Ishimaru nodded firmly. “Arcanine? You be good for Oowada, okay?”

“Arcare!” The dog quietly pokéd its nose up above the bed and nodded at him, and he petted it once last time before walking out of the room…

“Well… that’s him gone…” Mondo muttered to himself, once he’d moved aside and let the door shut. And about time to… Mondo thought he’d never stop going on about all the shit he insisted his dog do every damn day…

“Caaaaan…” But his dog didn’t sound so happy about it, that was for sure. Guess it wasn’t used to being apart from him, even with that time Maizono had looked after it…

“Ahh… don’t worry! It won’t be as bad as ya think…” Mondo tried to give it a pat to reassure it, even though it felt pretty weird to be reaching up with his arm to do it! “And it probably won’t be long, either…”

Ishimaru would be sure to give up sooner rather than later… either that, or Lycan would just get fed up with the guy and let himself out of Ishimaru’s room and come back here. Either way, Ishimaru would have to eat his smug words and quit bitching at everyone about how they trained their pokémon!

And in the meantime, he could let the dog relax a little by ignoring its trainer’s stupidly detailed schedule…

“So… whaddaya wanna do?” Mondo asked it, “I’ve got a TV, or we could go outside, or head over to the…”

He trailed off once he saw the dog had stuck its nose in one of the bags Ishimaru had brought with him and not hidden, and waited for it to find what it wanted and bring it over to him…

It was some kind of little book, one he kinda remembered seeing a beat up copy of at his first ever school. Except this was bigger and heavier than that one had been, probably because it was coated in thick clear plastic…

They made kid’s books for pokémon!? Did Daiya know about this? It might help some of the more frightened ones get to sleep, or something…

That could wait though… right now, he needed to deal with the fact that the dog had picked the exact thing Ishimaru had ‘scheduled’ for it to do…

“Ehh… Wouldn’t you rather do something else, for a change?” Mondo suggested.

“…Nnnnnnnnine.” It shook its head hesitantly, like it was a little scared of Mondo…

“Look… I don’t care either way, and I ain’t planning to tell Ishimaru what you pick, either.” Mondo told it bluntly, “I’m just making sure you ain’t just saying ya wanna read a book ‘cause your trainer said you’d wanna read a book and you’re worried you’ll get into trouble with him if you don’t… You understand…?”

“Arc!” The dog nodded, firmly.

“So… whaddaya wanna do…?”
“Can!” It jabbed its nose at the book. Dammit, why had Mondo thought it’d understand him so easily…? “Can…!? Arccon? Arc, arc, can, niiiiine…!”

Eh…? Now it was fucking begging for Mondo to read the book! Either Ishimaru really did scare it, or it just really liked being read to…

“Okay, okay! Quit whining at me!” Mondo sighed, heading over to sit down on the bed, where the dog came over and sat next to him, tall enough to lean over to see the book as Mondo opened the cover and went to read the first page…

“Nnnnnnn!” …At which point the dog instantly whined and tried to muscle the book shut again with its nose…

“What? I thought you wanted me to read it!?” Mondo asked as he shut the book. Had it changed its mind, already…?

“Arc.” It nodded agreeably, but then jabbed a nose at the front cover… “Can!”

“What… I gotta read the title!?” Geez, didn’t it know what it was called!? Well… maybe it didn’t. It was just a dog… “Alright… ‘Where’s Growlithe!’? Now then…”

“Nnnnnnn!” The dog quickly stopped him from opening the book again, this time jabbing its nose at the text at the bottom of the cover…

…Really!? It wanted to know the author!? Who the hell cared who the author was!? Or maybe it thought that was part of the story… “That just says it’s by Eric Hill…”

“Arc!” The dog nodded happily and finally let him open the damn book up… So it really had cared about the author? Geez, it was as much of a nerd as it’s trainer… Except it seemed to like books aimed at little kids, rather than those thick textbooks Ishimaru usually carted around with him…

“‘It’s almost time for Growlithe’s dinner! Where has he gone…!’” Well, at least Mondo could actually read this shit! And if that’s all that was on the first two pages, this should be over and done with soon enough. And the next pages had even less writing on them ‘cause most of the space was taken up by a door that could be lifted open… “Is he behind the door…?”

“Can…” Mondo was gonna lift the flap up, but the dog shot its nose out and did it itself, revealing a Bewear there instead… “Nine!”

“That’s right… ‘no.’!” Mondo told it, although it looked a little annoyed when he did. What, was it insulted that Mondo thought it might not know that? Guess in that case, he’d just save his breath the next time something like that came up…

Which turned out to be the very next pair of pages, where there was an Ekans in a clock. In fact, that seemed to be the whole theme of this book, as it was followed up by a piano with a Hippopotas of all things in it, and a Pyroar under some stairs…

And next up was a picture of some cupboards. By Now, Mondo wasn’t even having to read the words anymore… “Is he in the cupboard…?”

“…Nnnn!?…” …Except this time, the dog turned and gave him a confused look…

“I said ‘Is he in the cupboard?’” Mondo repeated, which just made it furrow its brow even more as it looked at the pages…
“Nine…” It shook its head, then jabbed its nose at the words on the page. “Can!”

What, had the words changed, or something? They still just read ‘Is he in the...
wardrobe’. Oh for crying out loud…

“Eh… Cupboard, wardrobe… it’s the same thing!” Mondo told it, “Is he behind it, or not?”

“Nnn!” It scowled and let out the whiniest growl Mondo had ever head, jabbing its nose back at the words again. “Can!”

Urgh... Geez, it was just like Ishimaru, getting bent out of shape over tiny Taurusshit! But he couldn’t blame the dog for that, it was just how Ishimaru had trained it... “Hey… you know, while you’re here, you ain’t gotta worry about everything being perfect, y’know?” Mondo gave it a reassuring pat on the head... “It’s no big deal if we do things a little differently tonight, if ya wanna... You get what I’m saying?”

“…Arc…?” It nodded slowly.

“So… does it really matter if I say ‘cupboard’ instead of ‘wardrobe’…” Mondo asked it.

“Arc!” It barked insistently, jabbing its nose at the book again, “Can!”

Oh boy... Well, not like he’d expected it to get over years of training, just like that... “Alright, alright... I’ll read it ‘properly’ then…”

“Arc!” The dog perked up and wagged its tail as Mondo re-read the part with the wardrobe, and then carried on through the book until they found Growlithe in a basket and saw him being fed dinner.

“Well… That’s that done…” Mondo closed up the book. “What next?”

“Can!” The dog turned around and trotted over to the bed Ishimaru had dragged in...

Damn, it seriously wanted to go to bed at 10!? That was when Lycanroc would usually finally wake up properly! Then again, there was always the chance that it was just going to bed because this was when Ishimaru usually made it sleep...

“Uhh... Well... you ain’t gotta go to bed, right now!” Mondo told it, “We could watch some TV or something, if you ain’t tired…”

“…Nnn...nine!” It shook its head after thinking about it for a while, then pulled the blanket off the bed and curled up on it with a yawn... “Aaarrrrrrrccece!”

“Well, alright…” Again, he couldn’t force it to stay awake longer than it was used to... “Goodnight then!”

“Nnn?” It whined a little, and Mondo turned back to find it had picked the blanket up off the floor and was waving it in its mouth... “Can…?”

Oh, right... Ishimaru had said something about it needing ‘tucking in’ hadn’t he? It’d probably be able to do it itself, if Ishimaru didn’t insist on it, but this probably wasn’t the right time to try and make it try something it wasn’t used to.

“Alright... you get comfy, and I’ll cover you with the blanket…” Mondo agreed, and then did just that, once it seemed to have finished squirming about in the bed.
“…Arcarc…” It murmured, before shutting its eyes…

Shit… was it asleep already? It sounded like it’s breathing had slowed down… Be nice if Mondo could fall asleep that easy…

Well, at least this gave him a chance to get the DPTL homework finished. No break from that, even though all the other classes had stopped! And the maths part of it was starting to get harder as well…

About an hour later, he’d finished all the stuff he could do, though he was gonna have to ask Chi for help with the rest, which was gonna be embarrassing, ’cause he was pretty sure Chi had already tried to explain this shit to him! But he was gonna have to suck it up and ask ‘em, ’cause he didn’t have anyone else to help him with it, unless he was gonna ask Ishimaru for help when Lycan came back and he admitted Mondo had been right this whole time!

Still, kinda weird Lycan hadn’t come back already… Maybe Ishimaru wasn’t quite as stuck in his ways as Mondo had thought, or was trying to give Lycan some time to get used to his room, before trying to train him. It was gonna be weird spending a night without the guy, though. Guess he could just some TV, quietly, for a while and then get an early night, ready for whatever nonsense was gonna happen tomorrow…

Chapter End Notes

Sorry I didn't set up the plot point of the Crazy Diamonds coming to Hope's Peak very far in advance (it was briefly mentioned two chapters ago, but otherwise it was a bit out of nowhere.) I didn't really want to go into detail about what happened in the last week as there wasn't anything interesting to write about, but it meant I skipped over the announcement that that was what's happening.

Thanks for reading!
"Whaddya MEAN you still ain't caught a pokémon!" Aww shit… Like he’d expected, Daiya was fucking pissed with him… “Do you know how stupid you’re making us look!? Making ME look!?”

“I... I KNOW! Just... gimme a bit more time, and...”

“You've had MORE than enough time, bro!” Daiya snapped, pushing him against the wall so hard he could hardly breathe… “You’ve just been WASTING it!”

Shit, that was true, wasn't it...? “I know, I'm sorry! But...”

“No 'but's', dude... I've given you more than enough chances...” Daiya looked at him sternly, “You know what I’ve gotta do now...”

“Y...yeah. I know...” He was out of the gang, for sure this time! All he could do was stand there shamefully, as Daiya leant forwards and...

Started… licking him all over his face!? And urgh ARCEUS he just got his tongue in Mondo’s mouth...

“Bleargh… What the hell are you doing!?” Mondo yelled, waving his arm wildly to try and shove the heavy weight off of his chest.

“Are!” He was answered with a cheerful bark, and suddenly realised that the shit with Daiya had just been a damn dream, and he’d been woken up in the grossest way possible by Ishimaru’s fucking dog...

Urgh… there was even some of its fur in his mouth! Arceus, how did Ishimaru put up with this shit every morning!? Did he just make sure he was awake before his dog? What time was it, even…

“…It’s six am...” Mondo groaned, once he’d checked his pokédex, “What the hell do you want!?”

“C… can...?” It yapped, timidly pushing its food bowl towards him… “Can...!?”

“Oh… right yeah, this is when he feeds you...” And it hadn’t been able to get to its food, ‘cause he’d hidden it all like an asshole. “Gimme a sec...”

Mondo stumbled out of bed and over to the bookshelf where the guy had hidden the stuff last night, and dragged out the week’s worth of dry food and the box of poffins that he said should last it the whole day… At least there seemed to be a decent amount of those in the box, like twenty or so.
But doling out controlled amounts of food and treats wasn’t Mondo’s style… he’d just open up the bag and the box and let the dog eat whatever it wanted.

“Here you go!” Mondo announced, pouring a heap of dry food into the bowl and then leaving the bag and box next to it. “Eat up!”

“Nnn…?” It let out that confused whine at the fact that Mondo hadn’t fed him exactly the same way Ishimaru did.

“Look… just eat whatever you want, for once. I’m going back to sleep…” Mondo told it, before getting back into the bed and hearing the dog begin to eat, as he shut his eyes and tried to relax…

“Nnn… Nnn… NNNNN!” Mondo groggily woke up to the sound of the dog whining and scratching at something… “NNnn ULPPP…!”

What the!? Shit! That sounded like it was puking!

“Shit! What’s… wrong…?” Mondo’s head jolted up from his pillow, meaning he could see two things…

One: The dog was stood right outside his bathroom door, throwing up its breakfast, and two: It was probably doing that ‘cause it had eaten every fucking crumb of the food Mondo had opened up for it! And that bag was supposed to be a week’s worth of food!

“…Fuck.” Mondo swore. Whatever time it was now, it was still too early to deal with this shit… But he had to, cause he couldn’t just leave the thing like that, even if it was its own fault for not stopping when it was full up… For starters, he should probably get something for the dog to throw up in, so the carpet wouldn’t be quite as much of a bitch to clean up…

Good thing Leon had brought in a bucket for when he and Litten came to visit. That was just the right size for Mondo to shove it under the dog’s mouth. “Here… aim for this…” Mondo told it, and it did as he said, letting Mondo see that flecks of vomit had got caught up in its fur… “I’m gonna have to clean you up after this…”

“Arc!” It actually nodded at Mondo happily about that, at least until it needed to turn back to the bucket again… Dammit, he had not expected to spend the morning doing something this gross…

But after way too long, the dog finally stopped and managed to catch its breath… “You feeling better, now?” Mondo grimaced, trying to ignore the smell…

“…Arc.” It nodded carefully, so Mondo moved the bucket away. Then it just looked at the carpet guiltily… “Nnnn… canine…”

“It… It’s just a carpet. I can clean it up… Least you did it all on one spot…” Mondo sighed, trying not to get angry at the dog, “But why’d you eat so much, anyway? Were you that hungry…?”

“N…Nine…” It shook it’s head guiltily. So, it had just eaten it all, ‘cause it was there…?

“…Were you thinking if you didn’t eat it all, you might not get to eat it later?” Thinking about it, a lot of Daiya’s Pokémon did stuff like that, like trying to hide extra food in weird places…

“Arc!” It nodded firmly. Which then led to the question of why it had been worried it wouldn’t get fed again…
“Is that ‘cause Ishimaru doesn’t always feed you…?”

“Nine!” It barked, shaking its head happily. So then why had it thought… ah shit!

“Wait… was it ‘cause I forgot to feed you, until ya woke me up?”

“Nine…” It shook its head. Well then… who the hell else had looked after it, then?

“Maizono?” The dog shook its head, “Someone in Ishimaru’s family…? Like his… father or something…?” The dog shook its head once he’d explained what he meant. “Well… who was it then? Have you had some other trainer?”

“Arc!” The dog nodded firmly.

Aww, shit… Don’t tell him… “…Before Ishimaru? And that guy didn’t feed you…”

“A-arc…” Another nod. Dammit… Why the fuck had Ishimaru never said that!? That might even explain what Lycan’s problem with him had been, if the Arcanine had been vague and said his trainer hadn’t always fed him, or something…

Dammit, maybe he should go back to Ishimaru’s room and just tell Lycan that, and then they could quit wasting time on this dumb swap and get on with catching something…

“C…can?” The dog broke his line of thought by yapping timidly, cocking its head towards the bathroom door.

“Oh… right. We need to get you clean…” Mondo remembered… He’d just about been getting used to the smell. “Alright… You go in and…”

…He’d been about to say ‘stand next to the sink’ so he could just wash the dog’s face up, but instead it walked straight into the shower and squeezed itself into the side, ready to avoid the water once it came out.

Well… it was a Fire-Type. Mondo was surprised it had gone into the shower so willingly, it sure as hell wasn’t gonna wanna be stood under the water before it warmed up…

Mondo carefully steeped over the vomit blocking the doorway and headed over to the shower to turn the taps on, waiting for it to warm up to a nice temperature… “How’s that?”

“NNnnnNNnnNnn…” It shivered a little bit as it stuck its paw in, pulling it back out straightaway and shaking it off. Well, it had been happy in the sauna…

“Alright… I’ll make it hotter, then.” Mondo promised, making a note of where it had been, before turning it up all the way to the hottest temperature it could be set to, then moving his hands out of the way before it burned him…

He didn’t even have to ask how the temperature was this time, as the dog barked happily and dunked its face under the stream once it saw the steam coming out from it.

“Alright… you want anything else before I start cleaning up?” Mondo asked, seeing as it seemed happy enough getting itself wet in there.

“Arrrrr… Arc!” The dog stopped gargling the shower water for a moment. “Ccaan! Ccaan! Ccaan!”

Eh!? “…Are you quaking!?” It sounded like it was trying to quack… at least as much as a dog
could sound like a duck…

“Arc!” It nodded, proudly.

“So… you wanna duck!?” What the fuck would it want a duck for in the shower…!? Oh. “You mean a toy duck?”

“Arc!” It nodded again.

Right… Ishimaru had mentioned bringing a bag of ‘bath time stuff’…”

Mondo headed over to the group of bags Ishimaru had brought in before and tried the blue one first, which had a big bottle of shampoo, a handheld hairdryer, a set of brushes and a plastic Psyduck in it.

“Alright, here you go!” Mondo threw it at the dog, which snapped it out of the air and then gently put it down on the bottom of the shower, watching it get pushed about by the water.

Right… time for him to get on with cleaning, as well…

One disgusting clean-up and the easiest bath he’d given a dog ever, Mondo decided he would go chat with Lycan, and took the dog over to Ishimaru’s door…

Which didn’t open, even after he tried ringing the bell a couple of times…

“…Guess he’s still asleep…” It was only half 8 in the morning… if Lycan had kept him up later than usual…

“Arrr… arcan!?” The dog yapped, tapping at the door handle with its nose.

“Ah… no, it’s fine! You ain’t gotta open the door!” Hell knows how pissed off the school would be if he got Ishimaru’s dog to melt the door open again. “Maybe I should try calling him…”

“Oowada…!?” That thought was cut off by Naegi’s voice coming from behind him, which made the dog at his side turn around and run over to get petted by his Blastoise. “Why do you have Arcanine!?
Is Kiyotaka sick again!? And where’s Lycanroc!?”

“Uhh… Well… Long story short we were arguing ‘bout the way we each train our pokémon, and he was acting like he’d do a better job of training Lycan than me, so I challenged him to swap pokémon… to see how we’d each deal with the other one…”

“Oh… That’s why he thought he might not be awake in time for gardening… I’m guessing Lycanroc doesn’t go to bed at ten?” Naegi asked, which explained why Ishimaru hadn’t opened the door just now.

“No… and he doesn’t wake me up at six by shoving his tongue down my throat either!” Mondo added.

“Ah… Yeah, Kiyotaka’s always saying he gets worried if he’s not fed at the same time each day.” Naegi told him. “I’m surprised he didn’t warn you!”

“Well… he kinda did say the dog needed to be fed at exactly 6am or he gets upset, but I figured that was just him being stuck-up…” Mondo admitted, “But turns out it’s ‘cause he ain’t Arcanine’s first trainer…’”
“Yeah… that policeman…” The kid sighed.

“Eh? You already knew about that?” Well, it made sense… He had been one of the first to make friends with Ishimaru…

“You didn’t!” Naegi looked completely shocked. “Didn’t Kuwata or Chihiro tell you about it…?”

“No! Are you telling me they both knew!?”

“Uhh… yeah! The first day of school, Sayaka accidentally scared it with a, uhh… accessory, and Kiyotaka had to explain to everyone why Arcanine had reacted so badly to it…” So they’d both known this whole time! “Although… I’m pretty sure Kuwata never believed him…”

“No, ‘cause he’s got it in his head that Ishimaru’s a member of Team Rocket, or something…” Mondo sighed. “And we didn’t really talk about him that much in front of Chi, ‘cause they always get upset by us being rude about the guy…”

“Geez… well, at least you know now…” Makoto sighed. “What are you going to do?”

“I dunno… I figure I’ll see if Ishimaru’s awake after I eat and see if we can’t have a conversation that doesn’t end in us yelling at each other…” At the very least, he’d get Lycan back… “And if he’s not… guess I’ll go and count Mareep for a while, to make up for being up at fucking six!”

“Ahaha… Fair enough! Mind if I join you?” Naegi asked, "For breakfast, I mean!"

“Uhh… sure!” Leon and Chi wouldn’t be at breakfast at this time of the morning, so why not?

“Alright! Now, Togepi, get off of Arcanine so he can go into his ball…” Naegi headed back over to the pokémon and picked up the tiny egg, which had somehow made its way halfway up the dog’s neck.

“Pipiii…” It sighed as Naegi put it up in his hood, especially once it noticed atcanine hadn’t actually gone into its ball…

“Uhh… He’s probably waiting for you to tell him to go in there…” Naegi pointed out, “He usually likes it when Kiyotaka tells him when he’s going to let him out, as well.”

“Ah… right.” Mondo agreed. Given what had happened this morning, it probably wasn’t a good idea to take the dog into the room with enough food to make it throw up ten times over. “In your ball, Arcanine! I’ll let you when I come see if your trainer’s awake yet…”

“Arc!” The dog nodded, and jumped into the ball like it had been told to…

Almost an hour later, Mondo was stood back in front of the door...

“…Still not awake…?” Geez, Ishimaru must be a damn wimp when it came to staying up late, if he needed this much of a lie-in! Especially as he and Naegi had spent so much time talking over breakfast… “Well, guess we’ll catch ‘em later... c’mon, Arcanine.”

“Arc!” The dog nodded happily and followed Mondo into his room, where it then headed over towards its bed…

Except, instead of putting itself in the bed, it picked up a red bag and brought it over to Mondo instead.
“Uhh… what’s this…?”

“Can!” The dog yapped, which didn’t help at all. So Mondo opened the bag up to find a berry case, some cans of repel, a rope and a pair of shades…

Wait… was this for going outside? Dammit, that was right! Ishimaru had said he walked it every day… and it was already taking itself off towards the door, tail wagging excitedly… so much for getting to have a nap, he wasn’t even going to try to argue this time…

“Alright… I dunno where you usually like to go, so lead the way, I guess…” Mondo got up and opened the door, resigned to being tired until Ishimaru woke up…

The dog headed out, walking slowly enough that Mondo almost stepped on its back feet, until he moved to walk at its side like Ishimaru always did. Then it led him out towards the wild areas of the school, wagging its tail all the harder as it veered over to the fields. Not much in the way of strong pokémon out here, unless Ishimaru was crazy enough to go Scyther-hunting when he had red eyes... But maybe being so fast meant the dog just liked having the extra space to run around in…

At least, Mondo would have guessed that, if the dog wasn’t plodding along slowly enough to keep Mondo stuck to its side the whole time…

“What’re you hanging around near me for?” He asked it, “Don’t ya wanna go run around and play, or anything…?”

“Nnnnn…” It whined worriedly as it looked out over the fields. Was it really that scared of going off by itself?

“Aww, c’mon! There’s nothing scary out here! It’s just a bunch of flowers and Combees!” Mondo gave it a pat on the head, “You ain’t gonna get into trouble if you run ahead and play in the grass while I catch up!”

“Arrrr…” It looked a little happier about the idea.

“Trust me, you’ll be fine! And you’re faster than anything out here, so you can just run back to me if anything happens, got it?” Its brow furrowed, but it finally nodded. “Alright then… Off you go, and I’ll catch up!”

“Arc!” It nodded and bounded off, although not so far ahead that Mondo couldn't see it at all, just far enough that he couldn't see exactly what it was doing as it meandered around in circles for a while, occasionally stopping to sniff at the ground or something.

…At least until it suddenly jolted backwards, and then started running back to Mondo… and then limping back to Mondo… Aww, shit!? Had something poisoned it out here?

Mondo ran the rest of the way towards it, and judging from the way it knelt down and trembled, it was definitely poisoned, so he reached into Ishimaru’s bag and fumbled with the berry case to get out one of Pecha berries inside, which the dog ate straight out of his hand.

“Better, now?” The dog nodded. “Alright… so, what happened?”

“Arr… arc!” The dog motioned for Mondo to follow it, so he did, right up to a patch of flowers, and Mondo noticed the one with red petals and white spots straightaway.

“That’s a Gloom.” Mondo pointed out. Not as dangerous as a Vileplume, but still nasty enough to poison any pokémon dumb enough to stop and smell it… Hadn’t Ishimaru had the sense to warn his
dog about them!?

“Arc.” The dog nodded, then headed over to the flower and leant down… wait…

“What’re you…!? Don’t smell it again!” Mondo yelled, making the pokémon back off just before the flower squeezed out another burst of air so foul that Mondo could smell it from several feet away… “Did you forget that it just poisoned you!?”

“…N-ninarc…” It murmured, bashfully.

“Wait… you really did!?” How the heck could it forget that!?

“…Arc…” It nodded guiltily. “Canine…”

Geez… no wonder Ishimaru always kept it so close to him, if it didn’t have the sense to stay away from something right after it poisoned it! Enough things like that happening had probably made him give up on teaching the dog to look after itself…

Hah! Wonder how he’d react if Mondo pointed that out to him, after the shit he’d been saying last night! Just ‘cause the dog had a hard time learning, didn’t mean it couldn’t learn this shit!

“Alright, then… How about this? You run off a little way ahead, so I can still see what you’re up to and stop you before you do anything that’d hurt you…” Mondo started, and it nodded happily. “But! I’ll, uhh…” He checked through his pockets to see if he had anything the dog would actually want as a reward… “I’ll give you a bit of sausage every time you can point out something that can hurt you before I get to it!”

The dog cocked its head at the sausage, sniffing at it to see what it actually was, but then nodded and barked in agreement.

“Alright then… off you go!”

This time the dog only bounded a little way ahead, checked behind itself to make sure Mondo was still following, and then started scanning the ground carefully until he caught up and it ran ahead again, stopping close to a small, suspicious red and white circle on the ground…

If he was anywhere else he’d have at least checked whether it was a pokéball… But out here, it was definitely gonna be one of those damn mushroom things! But the dog had already noticed it was there and was bounding over to look at it. Alright, so Mondo was gonna have to warn it about this one…

“N…NINE!” Hang on… the dog had stopped itself just before it got within range of startling it… “…Can!?”

“Nice one! That’s a Foongus! If you’d picked it up, you’d have got poisoned!” Mondo told it, “Come get your treat!”

The dog ran back and eagerly wolfed up the bit of sausage, and then ran ahead and looking around for threats…

It recognised another Gloom and stopped to point out a Combee at one point, which Mondo let it have the treat for, even though he didn’t get why it thought that was dangerous. He was just pleased to see it point out anything after it had almost stuck its head down three Diglett holes in a row…

But a short while after that they got to the farm and the dog headed over to a group of wooden fences
over on the right and sat there, waiting until Mondo caught up completely, then barked and turned around to look into the field behind the fences, wagging its tail like a maniac…

“Heh… you like watching the…” Mondo glanced up at the pokémon in the field…
“…Mareeps…!?"

Hang on… had it understood what he’d said to Naegi, earlier…? It had brought Mondo here ‘cause it seriously thought he’d been planning to count pokémon for the morning…!?"

“Arc, can, arc, can, arc, can, arcarc, can, nine!” Before Mondo could ask, the dog started yapping quietly, nodding its nose at the field a few times, until it suddenly drew a line in the dirt with its paw “Arc, can, arc, can, arc, can, arcarc…”

Wait… was it counting the Mareeps!? It sure looked like that was what it was doing… every few nods it was barking ‘nine’ and then drawing a line in the ground, like it was tallying up how many groups of nine there were. Which was all fucking clever of it, but he hadn’t meant to make the thing study shit right after it’d been sick…

“Uhh… hang on a sec! That ain’t what I meant!” Mondo quickly stopped it, waving his hand in front of its face until it stopped nodding and glaring at the sheep. “‘Counting Mareeps’ is just a phrase people use to mean sleeping!”

“…Nnnn?” Aww, shit… The damn thing looked heartbroken, letting out a confused whine as it looked down at the ground, where Mondo had apparently mushed up the lines it had been in the middle of drawing, sadly. “…arcarc…”

“Ahh… But… if ya wanna count ‘em, ya can do!” He found himself blurting out, which made the dog lift its head back up straightaway. “I just meant you ain’t gotta, y’know!?”

“Arcarc!” It barked excitedly, wagging its tail as it moved around Mondo and stood a bit closer to the fence to try find a patch of dirt that hadn’t been scribbled on already…

Although, looking around the place, there sure were a lot of random marks on the ground, probably all made by the Arcanine on past walks out here… Hah! Mondo shoulda guessed Ishimaru would have the only dog nerdy enough to like counting things… Still, if it enjoyed doing it, who was he to say no? Besides, at least it’d keep the dog busy enough for Mondo to lie down with his back on the grass and shut his eyes for a while…

“Arc, can, arc, can…” And being out here in the peaceful fields, listening to the dog letting out carefree yaps was pretty soothing, in its own way. It’d been a while since he’d taken some time to relax… “…arc, can, arcarc, can…”

“NNnnNNnNNnNNnn…NINE!” Uhh… Eeehh? What the heck was yelping about…? Mondo was just starting to relax…

“….Reeeeeeeeeeeeeppppppppppp!!!” Waitwhatthefuckwasthat…!?"

Mondo shot upwards to see Ishimaru’s dog sitting with crackling fur standing out of its body, flinching a little as a small, but determined, Mareep was ramming its front legs over and over… and looked like it had been doing it for quite a while, given how worn out and desperate the attacks were getting. At this rate it’d knock itself out before it got close to taking down the Arcanine…

“What the hell are doing!? Have you just been sat there letting it hit you this whole time!?”
“Arceus!” The dog cringed.

“Really!?” Arceus… That couldn’t be normal… “Why didn’t you just hit it back!?”

“Nnn… can!” It whined loudly, looking at him pleadingly, as the Mareep carried on ramming… or move like stumbling into, it’s legs…

“You… you don’t know how to fight back!?” Hang on… Leon had said something about this, hadn’t he? Though, his guess had been that Ishimaru had trained his dog to only attack when he ordered it to… “Just… use one of the moves you know!”

The dog froze in place, eyes practically crossing over for a moment, before it turned back to Mondo in a panic. “…Can arc!?”

Was it asking which one!? “Any of ‘em!”

“…NNnn,, Nnnnn…” Shit… it couldn’t decide what to do for itself! It looked terrified of picking the wrong thing, even though all its moves were damaging anyway… weren’t they?

Shit… what moves did it have? The only one Mondo could remember was fucking Flare Blitz, which would work for sure, especially as the Mareep was half unconscious anyway… but…

Dammit, using such a painful move on the little thing… even as it was still desperately trying to knock out the pokémon three times taller than it? That’d be a fucking shitty move… hell, it was probably just trying to protect the rest of its flock from what it thought was a giant fucking wolf trying to eat them all… And it wasn’t giving up either, no matter how outclassed it was… Mondo couldn’t just order the dog to fucking incinerate the thing!

“Hey… you! You’re just hurting yourself right now! And we don’t wanna hurt any of ya!” Mondo yelled at the sheep, “So just run before you knock yourself out!”

“Maaaaaaarrrrr!” Dammit, that just made the sheep thrash about even more! If he was gonna get it to run, he’d have to use something… But if he tried spraying repel in the middle of a battle, the wild pokémon would probably decide to hit him as well! And there was nothing else in either his or Ishimaru’s bag that’d make a pokémon run away…

…Except…

…He still had that one cheap pokéball he’d bought with the leftover cash, back when he’d tried to catch a Phantump… And sure pokéballs weren’t supposed to make pokémon runaway, but they always did when Mondo used ‘em!

“Dammit… Alright, you stubborn sheep! Take this!” Mondo snapped, throwing the pokéball straight at it and watching as it disappeared into the ball, which then dropped to the ground…

It rocked once, which wasn’t unusual…

And then it rocked a second time, which was more surprising but not something he’d never seen before…

Then apparently it decided it was gonna be one of those annoying bastards, because it even rocked a third time, which was the most it could do before the pokémon broke out and legged it…

*Click.*
Wait… don’t tell him…

“…Are you fucking KIDDING ME!? I finally catch a pokémon, and it’s when I wasn’t even trying to!?” And it was using someone else’s pokémon, to! Fucking hell! Did it even count as being his!? Or was it Ishimaru’s, ‘cause his dog had been the one to wear it down…

“…Nnnnn…” If it was, the dog didn’t look happy about it. It was just sullenly poking the ball with its nose, trying to get the sheep to come back out. Then again, it probably knew about Ishimaru’s plan to adopt a pokémon, right? Not like he was gonna be happy when Mondo went back and told him he’d accidentally caught him a pokémon…

If he had caught him a pokémon, anyway. What the hell was the rule on that? It couldn’t be the first time some idiot had thrown a pokéball at a pokémon someone else weakened, but hell if he could remember hearing who’s it ended up being when they did!

“…Can…?” Ishimaru’s dog barked at him, nudging the ball towards him expectantly. “Arc!”

“Ah… Just… Gimme a sec! I’m trying to figure out what to do!” Mondo snapped, “I didn’t think I’d actually catch the thing!”

“Nnn?” The dog cocked its head at him.

“…Usually when I throw pokéballs, the pokémon just breaks out and runs.” He explained, “Never had one actually stay inside the ball…”

“Cannnnn… Arc!” The dog mulled it over, then perked its head up and dug around in Ishimaru’s bag for a while, coming out with the berry case in its mouth. “Arf!”

“Yeah, that’s right. I need to get it healed up…” Mondo realised. Whatever he did with the sheep, that was the least he could do, not to mention… “And you’re looking a little beat up, to. How’s about you get in your ball and I take you both to the pokémon centre?”

“Arc!” The dog nodded and disappeared, leaving Mondo with two full pokéballs for the first time in his life…

Now, if only both of them were actually his! He could be heading back to the school to show off to everyone, even if the new one was something cutey like a Mareep… It had been a pretty badass Mareep, after all! It’d probably head-butt anyone who laughed at it in the knees, and that’d shut ‘em up if they decided to make fun of him for having one!

Instead, he wasn’t sure if the Mareep was actually his, and even if it was, Lycan would probably be pissed that Mondo had caught a pokémon using Ishimaru’s dog! It’d probably be best to just get the sheep healed up and then bring it back out here to release it, right…? ‘Cause even if it turned out to be Ishimaru’s, he’d be against having a captured pokémon anyway… right…?

…Probably, but… Damnit! That’d be such a waste! He’d finally caught a pokémon, and he was just gonna let it go straightaway? That sucked! And wouldn’t it screw with the Mareep, to? Thinking it had a trainer who was gonna look after it now, only for it to suddenly be dumped back in the field before getting a chance to prove itself? And what if Mondo let it go, but didn’t manage to catch a second one in time!? Even a pokémon he caught by accident would be better than no pokémon at all…

Maybe he could convince Lycan to let him keep it… at least until they caught their own second
pokemon! Just as a safety net, to take the pressure off…

Yeah… *that* made sense! He wouldn’t be saying Lycan *couldn’t* catch a pokémon, just that it’d be easier if neither of them had to worry as much about Mondo getting kicked out the gang if they *didn’t!* ’Cause if it came right down to it, they could just come out to the fields right before Daiya showed up and come back and show everyone their ‘new’ Mareep!

…But for that to work, he was gonna have to keep this whole thing a secret… which meant *not* taking the Mareep to the pokémon centre yet! He’d just have to take the Arcanine, and then by the time he was done with *that*, Ishimaru ought to be awake and he could get Lycan back and show him the Mareep…

Alright… it was a plan! Maybe a fucking *terrible* plan, but if it meant not showing up the whole gang by having to *adopt* his second pokémon then he’d fucking *do* it…!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
...Well, Mondo would have gone and got Lycan back, so he could show his wolf the new pokémon he’d accidentally caught, if Ishimaru would have actually fucking answered his door once Mondo had made his way back to the dorms and rung the bell again. How long was he planning on sleeping in for…!? Even Lycan didn’t usually wanna lie in this late…

“…Maybe they went out on a walk, too…” Lycan wouldn’t have wanted to stay cooped up in Ishimaru’s room all day, after all…

“Nnnn…” The Arcanine whined, looking at the door sadly. After all, Mondo had told it he was taking it back to see its trainer, and now the pain in the ass wasn’t here! And he hadn’t even left Mondo a message saying where he was going…!

…Not that Mondo had sent him a message saying he was going out… but that was ‘cause he knew Lycan would just track him down by smell if Ishimaru had given up! Had Ishimaru thought the same thing?

“Hey… can you smell any trace of your trainer leaving here?”

“Rrrrr…” The dog had a sniff around the door and hallway… “Nine.”

Guess it wasn’t as good a tracker as Lycan was, then…

“Alright… guess we’ll just have to wait in my room a while longer…” Dammit, now he was wasting more time on this stupid challenge! And what the hell was he going to do about the Mareep!? If he got it out while the Arcanine was still in his room, they’d probably end up getting friendly with each other and then it’d be obvious Lycan hadn’t been the one to help catch it!

“…Arrrrrrrc.” The dog just sighed over-dramatically.

“You miss him, huh?” The dog nodded. “Well… wanna wait it out in your pokéball? I’ll let ya out when he gets back, okay?”

“…Arr… Nnn! Nine!” Eh!? It didn’t wanna go in the ball? But it looked like it had agreed at first, so why did it look so scared of the idea all of a sudden…? What the fuck was scaring about going into its pokeball for an hour… or two… maybe longer, if he didn’t catch Ishimaru soon enough… Wait, maybe that was what the dog was worrying about…

“…Or when it’s time for your dinner, if I don’t see him.” Mondo suggested, which made the dog go
back to nodding. “It’s 6pm, right…?”

“Arc!” The dog barked confidently and jumped back into its ball.

Alright… time to go let the Mareep out, then.

Mondo quickly headed back to his own room, making sure the door was definitely shut and locked before getting out a potion from his own stuff and reaching into the pocket he’d made sure to stash the freshly-filled pokéball in…

“Allright, Mareep… Come on out!” Mondo gently threw the ball onto the ground by his feet, then knelt by it, ready with the potion…

“Mar… reep…?” The sheep tottered out of the ball, unsteady on its feet after almost knocking itself out, but still looking around the room with an awestruck expression on its face… Guess it would never have seen the inside of someone’s bedroom, before.

“Hey… here, lemme give you a potion…” Mondo reached out to hold its head up with one hand, offering the potion up with the other.

“…Maaaaa!?” The sheep just gave a confused baa at it. What, they didn’t use potions at the farm!? Must be one of those dumb organic places…

“It’ll make you feel better! Like eating a Sitrus berry!” He explained, which made the sheep try to bite the thing… “Ah… Not like that! Just lemme put it in your mouth without biting…”

Mareep did as it was told, looking at Mondo sceptically until he pressed the trigger on the potion and it sprayed into the sheep’s mouth, making its eyes go wide as it quickly gulped down the rest...

“How’s that? All better, now?” Mondo checked, and it nodded and squirmed out of his hands. “Alright… well… this is my room… it’s where I’m living at the moment…”

“Reep!” It turned around in a circle a few times, taking in the room, then stopped while facing the Arcanine’s bed head-on… “REEEP!”

“Ahh… shit, wait a sec! You can sleep on my bed…!” Mondo tried to tell it, but it ignored him and bounded straight over to the bed, jumping the last several feet and landing in the middle of it with a light bounce…

“Maaar!?” It trotted around on the bouncy bed with its hooves, cautiously testing getting used to the material, before gaining enough confidence to start bouncing up and down on this thing… “Reep, reep, reep!”

Oh boy… At this rate it was gonna trash the thing… or at least get enough of its smell over it that the Arcanine was gonna know he’d been letting it sleep in its bed…

“Hey… Wait!” Mondo grabbed the pokémon by one of its ears to hold it still, making sure not to touch its electric wool and get himself shocked, and waited for it to calm down and look at him. “Look… that ain’t actually mine, so you can’t be jumping around on it! And… speaking of shit that ain’t mine… Y’know that dog you were hitting earlier…? That ain’t my pokémon either… It belongs to this other guy…”

“Reep!” It nodded casually, like it’d been expecting that, then scowled… “Marmarreepmar…”

“Wait… so you’ve run into them before…?” Wait… of course it fucking had! He’d seen all those
marks Ishimaru’s dog had left around the Mareep pen! They must have been there dozens of times! But knowing Ishimaru’s stance on catching pokémon… “And you’re pissed ‘cause he never tried to catch you!”

“Reeep!” It nodded angrily.

“Yeah… That ain’t your fault… That guy’s just got this whole thing of not taking pokémon outta the wild, ‘cause there’s already a bunch that were, but ain’t got good trainers anymore…”

“Marr?” It just bleated confusedly at him.

“Well… maybe it’ll make more sense when you meet some…” Mondo told it. After all, if it saw all of the pokémon Daiya had rescued, it might get where Ishimaru was coming from… But, that lead to another thing he had to warn it about… “But… first… About my pokémon…”

“…Reep?” The sheep baaed anxiously, like it could figure what he was about to say.

“…Well… Seeing as it wasn’t him you fought… I can’t say for sure he’s gonna wanna have you around…” Mondo admitted, “He might, but… he might just tell me to let you go and go catch another pokémon with his help… You understand…?”

“Reeep.” It nodded, looking down at the bedding with half-shut eyes as Mondo let go of its ear… Until it gave one last determined nod… “MAREEP!”

Ahh! Now it was back to bouncing up and down on the dogbed! And it was doing it even harder than before, like it was trying to make the most of it while it still could! And every bounce was making its wool crackle with even more static electricity…

Wait… was that bed actually shock proof, or would Ishimaru have only cared about it being fire proof…!?

“Reep, reep re…eeeeeEEE EEEE PPPP!” His question got answered as several arcs of electricity suddenly arced from the sheep's coat to the bed, and then back onto Mareep’s body, making it shudder as the light on its tail shined so bright that Mondo had to cover his eyes until it was over…

“…Shit, are you okay!?” Mondo asked, as the sheep stiffly waddled off of the bed.

“…Reep.” It bleated bluntly, blinking a few times.

“Guess I’ll need to get you an electric-type bed for the time being…” Mondo muttered to himself, as the sheep started shaking itself out… But where was he gonna get one? Sure, he could go to the store and buy one, but the staff’d wanna know why he wanted it all of a sudden. Unless he could borrow one from Leon. Mondo could probably trust him to keep his mouth shut about the Mareep…

“Alright… I’m gonna try and get you a bed that… won’t do that to ya.” Mondo explained, once the sheep had managed to start walking around more normally again and looked like it could understand what was being said to it. “But I’m gonna need you to get back in the pokéball while I go out and get it, alright?”

“Reeep.” It nodded again, obviously feeling like it could do with a rest anyway, and disappeared.

“Hey, Mondo! You taking a break from hunting pokémon!?” Luckily for Mondo, it turned out that Leon was in his room, although he’d kept Mondo waiting long enough that he’d been about to give
“…You could say that.” Mondo dodged the question, “Actually, I need a favour… can I come in?”

“Uhh… sure! I was just jamming…” Leon stepped back and let him through to the room, where he saw the guy’s guitar lying on the bed, and both his pokémon in their baskets. “What did you need?”

“Well… I did something fucking stupid, and I need you to keep your mouth shut about it…” Mondo started.

“Okay…” Leon nodded, “As long as it’s not, like… illegal, or anything…”

“No… nothing like that…” At least this mess wasn’t as bad as it could have been… “It’s just Ishimaru and I had a dumb fight and I got pissed off and suggested we swap dogs for a while… See how well he dealt with Lycan, y’know?”

“…And he agreed?!”

“Yeah… he figured it’d be a chance to maybe smooth things over between him and Lycan…” And speaking of that… “Seeing as no one fucking told me about his dog’s first trainer!”

“What…? You mean that whole ‘abusive policeman who didn’t get fired’ story he keeps telling?” Leon scowled, “Like that’d actually happen! Didn’t Kanto get rid of all their bad cops after Giovanni?”

Arceus… Must be nice to actually believe life was that easy! But Mondo had been pulled over by too many assholes in the past to trust every fucking cop in Kanto! “They tried to, but that doesn’t mean it worked! Even if they didn’t miss any bad cops, they’ve probably had more join up since!” He summed it up, “Besides… I asked his dog, and it said it was the guy before Ishimaru who messed it up…”

“…Oh… shit, really?” Leon’s voice cracked, “Well… fuck! I… uhh… would’ve… well… not found him as annoying, this whole time…”

“No kidding…” Mondo sighed. He’d spent all term thinking Ishimaru had got his well-behaved pokémon ‘cause someone else had done all the hard work, and now it turned out he’d probably had to work twice as hard as most people to do it… “I’d have gone and apologised already, but he ain’t answering his door…”

“Is that why you need my help? ‘Cause I ain’t seen him all weekend…” Oh shit! That was right, he was supposed to be getting a bed for Mareep!

“Uhh… no, that ain’t it! Thing is… I took Ishimaru’s dog for a walk to the farm and fell asleep by the Mareep pen, and when I woke up, one of the Mareeps had been wailing on it for so long it was about to collapse!” Mondo got back to the point, “But I felt bad telling his dog to fucking burn the little thing, so I tried to throw a cheap pokéball at it to get it to run away…”

“Uhh… Dude, that’s not what pokéballs…”

“I know that! But it’s what usually happens to me!” Mondo shut Leon up before he’d even finished, “Or it did, every other time! But this time it fucking worked for once, so now I have a fucking Mareep that I don’t even know for sure is mine, ‘cause I caught it with someone else’s dog! And even if it is mine, Lycan’s probably gonna be pissed and want me to catch something with him anyway! But I didn’t wanna just let it go in case I don’t manage to catch anything else!”
“Uhh, so…?” Leon was staring at him anxiously as he caught his breath, “What are you gonna do?”

“…I figured I’d sneak it into my room and keep it there, until I get Lycan back and we decide what to do about it together… Maybe tell him I’m just keeping it as a safety net, to keep some of the pressure off when he tries to catch something…” Mondo finished, “But… If I’m gonna do that, I need somewhere for it to sleep…”

“…Oh! And since I’ve got an electric type…” Leon managed to figure out what the hell Mondo was going on about.

“Yeah, I figured I’d ask if Luxray has a spare bed, or something…”

“…Ray…!??” There was an incredulous hiss from the corner of the room.

“Uhh… that’s a no!” Leon translated, “But, Mareeps are about this big, right?” He carried on, holding his hands about two feet apart. “I reckon Lux won’t mind if you take one of his old beds… I just need to dig out the box Kanon packed them in… Gimme a few minutes…”

Mondo waited awkwardly as Leon opened up one of the bigger cupboards and spent a while dragging boxes out of the bottom of it, all while the bigger of the two cats was glaring at him suspiciously. Mondo hadn’t realised the guy was so protective of his stuff! But eventually Leon found the right box and started ripping off the tape holding it shut…

“Okay… so I’ve got a couple of different types in here…” Leon announced, pulling out two different soft-looking baskets. One that had thick metal circle that looked like it plugged into the wall at the top, and another with a thick wire that lead from the basket to a metal case with several sockets, some speakers, a small screen and what looked like a mangled one of those rotating things people put over babies’ cots…

“Why’ve they got all that weird shit on ‘em?” Mondo asked, “And why’s that one plug into the wall? Ain’t the point to get rid of electricity?”

“Yeah… that’s what I said when Kanon showed it to me, I mean it just looks like a dumb handle, right? But if you don’t plug it in, it doesn’t work.” Leon said, holding up the basket so Mondo could get a better look at the circular metal part, “Apparently it emits an ‘ionic field’ that’s like… the opposite of static electricity, so they end up counteracting each other.”

“Uhh…?”

“Eh… don’t worry about it. I only know that much ‘cause Chi tried to explain it to me one time…” Leon admitted, “Besides, we prefer these types, right Lux?!”

Leon’s cat nodded casually as he dropped the first basket and held up the one with all the random crap on it…

“So, what’s that do…?”

“It just absorbs all the electricity and stores it in a big battery in here…!” Leon tapped the metal casing, “And then you can use it to charge up your pokédex, or power like… a TV or something, if you build up enough energy… I use it for my guitar!” He held up the instrument, which Mondo noticed for the first time was plugged into a sleek metal cabinet next to Luxray’s bed.

“Oh, kickass!” Hell, it’d be like having a pokémon-powered generator on the road! “But… why’s it got all this stuff, then?” Mondo pointed out the weird cot thing…
“Oh… That’s in case it starts building up too much energy, it supposed to play relaxing videos and spin these things around to help your pokémon relax… But Lux just thought it made for a fun cat toy!” Well, that explained the mangling… “So, which do you want?”

“I dunno… you mind if I try both and bring the other one back later?”

“Sure! No problem, dude! Less shit cluttering my cupboard!” Leon laughed, “Heck, keep ‘em both, for all I care! If it turns out you’re not gonna need either of ‘em, it’ll be easier if you just bring ‘em back at the same time!”

“Uhh… yeah. Good point.” Mondo answered, feeling his throat go dry. Damnit, he kept forgetting that keeping the Mareep wasn’t a sure thing, yet… He could let himself get too attached… Maybe he should try and get Lycan back before he started trying out beds with the Mareep… “I’ll see ya around, then.”

“Sure! See ya later, Mondo!” Leon waved him out the door, and had gone back to his guitar before Mondo had even finished checking that no one was in the hallway and shut the door behind him. From there it only took half a minute to drop the baskets in his room and then head back out to ring Ishimaru’s doorbell yet again…

…Goddammit, Ishimaru still wasn’t opening his fucking door! Was he really gonna make Mondo wait until 9pm before even listening to him!? Was he gonna be that fucking stubborn about it!? Guess he’d have to start trying out the beds without Lycan after all. It wasn’t fair to keep the Mareep cooped up in a pokéball all afternoon…

Mareep ended up liking the battery-bed, and after some testing Mondo found it was making enough electricity to power the TV, but only as long as Mareep actually stayed in the basket. Not that that was a problem, as it seemed completely obsessed with the TV screen. Guess that was another thing they didn’t have out on the farm, either…

Man, he was gonna feel like shit if he ended up releasing this thing… And it didn't help that Ishimaru didn’t turn up all afternoon, meaning the Mareep ended up getting to enjoy the TV for several hours, until it decided it had had enough of that and went to try and eat the carpet, which prompted Mondo to go and grab a salad from the dining room for it to eat, and it picked out the more green parts of it to eat before getting back in the basket and shutting its eyes…

Wait… it was already going to sleep!? And he thought Ishimaru’s pokémon had an early bedtime! It wasn’t even 6pm yet…

…Which was a good thing, ’cause that meant he hadn’t gone and missed the dog’s dinner time!

“Hey… Arcanine? It’s time for you to eat!” Mondo called for the dog as he headed over to the bookshelf to grab the tin of wet food Ishimaru had given him.

“Arc!” The dog jumped out, ignoring the sleeping Mareep and heading straight for it bowl and then, once it saw Mondo hadn’t put the food in it yet, straight over to him so it could try and stick its nose into the can before he’d even opened it…

“Hey… You gotta wait for me to open it first!” Mondo gently pushed its nose out of the way and then turned so his back was blocking it… at least for the half a second it took for the thing to dart
around to his other side and get in the way again…

“Ahh… *hey!* Seriously, I can’t open this thing if you keep poking my hands!” Mondo tried to push it away again to get his point across, not that it helped much. How did Ishimaru deal with this…?

“Can’t ya just… *sit* and wai…”

“Arc!” The dog quickly pulled its neck back and sat smartly on its hind legs… although it *was* still staring at the can of food.

“Uhh… *thanks.*” Mondo muttered… Guess *that* was how Ishimaru dealt with it, ‘cause it gave him enough time to finish opening the can up and dumping the contents into the Arcanine’s bowl.

“There! It’s ready! *Now* you can come eat!”

“Arc!” The dog zoomed over to the bowl and lowered its mouth towards the food… but then paused partway there and let out a sad whine…

“Eh…? What’s the matter? Were you hoping for something *else*?” Mondo asked, getting a nervous nod in return. “Well… like what? You wanna try some stuff in the dining room, instead of that?”

“Nine!” The dog shook its head quickly and took a large bite out of the food. So it wanted the can *and* something else… But Ishimaru had it was just the can… and…

“…*Your poffin.*” Mondo realised. That was why Ishimaru had bought so many round… but Mondo had left the dog scarf them all at *breakfast*… “Well… I ain’t *got* poffins, but… how about a bit more *sausage*…?”

“…Nine… Ninine.” It shook its head dejectedly and sighed as it sadly ate the rest of its dinner.

Oh for crying out loud… where those things *really* so good that it was gonna be miserable for the whole evening if he didn’t give it one!?

…Well, it *was* Mondo’s fault they’d all gone, already. Maybe Leon would have some? Or know someone else who *would*?

“Alright, then…” Mareep looked like it was gonna be asleep for a while, anyway… “We’ll go see if we can’t find a *poffin* for you to eat, somewhere…”

“Arcarc!?” The dog jumped to its feet and practically pushed him over as it tried to get out of the door…

“Hey, Mondo!? How’s it going!?” Luckily, Leon was still in his room… “Ishimaru still ain’t back!?”

“Not yet…” Mondo sighed, “And sorry to ask for shit twice in one day, but… do you have any poffins? Or know anyone who *does*?” I, uhh… kinda ran out of the ones he gave me, and his dog was got upset over it…

“Urg, *geez*…” Leon rolled his eyes at the dog, which stared back obliviously, “Well… I don’t have any, but *Sayaka* probably does! Want me to come and ask her for you?”

“Yeah… thanks.” Not that he expected her to say *no*, but it would be kinda weird to go ask her for help when he barely ever spoke to her…

“Alright… Hang tight you two! I’ll be back in a minute!” Leon yelled into his room, and then came
out of it, lead him over to Maizono’s door and rang the buzzer…

“Hello…? Oh, Leon…!” Maizono looked pretty surprised to see him, and then even more surprised when she took in who was behind him… “And Oowada…! And Arcanine? You and Kiyotaka still haven’t switched back, yet…?”

“No, ‘cause he ain’t answered his door all day!” Mondo complained, “He’s just up and left without telling me where to find him!”

“That’s… not like him… But I’ve not seen him either…” Maizono frowned, “Have you tried the library?”

“There’s no way Lycan would have sat in the library with him all day…” Leon snorted.

“Ah… that’s true… And I suppose Kiyotaka might have forgotten to give you a message if Lycan was impatient to go outside…” Maizono agreed, “But I’m guessing you didn’t come here to try and find out where he is…”

“Uhh… no. Thing is… I kinda ran out of poffins, and Leon thought you might have one spare…” Mondo admitted.

“Ahaha… right. Because we can’t let Arcanine think he’s not been a good boy today!” Maizono chuckled. “Wait here for a minute…”

She disappeared into her room, and came back out with a fancy jar in her hands, and fed the dog a doughy ball from it… “You’re lucky, you know? I usually make my pokémon do some dancing to get a poffin…” Maizono told it, patting its head as it gulped the thing down so fast Mondo would have been surprised if it even tasted it...

“Arcarc!” It barked eagerly, backing away from her. Then it suddenly took a step left, then right, and then spun around in a circle. “Arc!”

“Oh! You remembered the dance I taught you!? That’s great!” The dog’s tail wagged madly as she gave it another pat.

“Wait… you taught it that?” Leon asked her.

“Mm-hmm! It was when I was looking after him for Kiyotaka…” Maizono nodded, “He kept trying to join in with my pokémon, so I taught him the first few steps!”

“How?” Mondo asked. He knew Maizono had taught her own pokémon dances, but they were a heck of a lot smarter than this thing! How’d she teach it to twirl?

“Oh, just using a poffin, like Kiyotaka does.” She shrugged, then looked between Leon’s and his own blank faces… “Here, I’ll show you! Arcanine? Do you want to learn the next part of the dance?”

“Arc!” The dog nodded as she pulled out a poffin and held it up.

“Okay, so keep your back legs next to mine remember?” She moved to the side of the dog’s back legs, holding the poffin in front of its nose. “Now, after the first spin, you go back…” She took a step backwards, and the dog followed her as the poffin began to disappear over the top of its head. “Then forwards…” She stepped forwards again, and the dog followed, nose at the poffin the whole time… “And then another spin! One… two!” This time she walked in a circle around the poffin, so the dogs nose stayed where it was, but its back legs spun around in a circle… “Good boy! Here’s your
poffin!"

“Arcare!” The dog happily ate the poffin, then had a go at doing the whole thing, although it was pretty slow about it. It did look like it was having fun, though… And it had looked pretty easy to train the dog like that… just move the food around so it followed. Was that what Ishimaru had meant about using the poffins to get it to do stuff?

“Umm… so, was that everything…?” Maizono asked, looking up at him anxiously.

“Uhh… yeah, it was! Thanks for that!” Mondo snapped back to reality. “Sorry for bothering you!”

“No problem!” Maizono gave him a quick wave as she started to shut the door, “Hope you find Kiyotaka soon!”

“Thanks…” Mondo barely got time to reply before the door was fully shut… At least there were only a few more hours until Ishimaru had agreed to meet back up with him, anyway…

“Uhh… Hey… Mondo?” Leon suddenly spoke up, his voice cracking slightly.

“What?”

“I just thought… She said that’s what Ishimaru does to train pokémon, right!?”

“Uhh… yeah?” Mondo answered, wondering why the fuck Leon was acting so freaked out about it…

“And, uhh… you know, back at the start of term, you told me that Team Rocket used to use food to trick Lycan into coming close, then taking it away and hitting him at the last minute? And that’s why he gets pissed when people try and take his food…?” …Oh shit. “Is, uhh… is there any chance he’d mistake what Sayaka did just there with… y’know… that?”

“I… I dunno…” Shit… was that why Ishimaru hadn’t opened his door all day…? Had Lycan mistaken what the guy was trying to do and decided to fight back…? But, wait… “No… No that couldn’t be it! I told Lycan to leave the room and come find me if anything happened!”

“Okay, but… what if something… stopped him!?” Leon’s voice was starting to get squeaky now…

“Like what!?”

“I dunno! Just… something!”

Urgh… It would explain why he hadn’t managed to catch Ishimaru all day… or why no one had seen him at all…

“All right… I’mma try his door one more time, and if that doesn’t work, I’m ringing security and telling ‘em what we did!” Mondo decided, turning back up the hallway and slamming his hand on Ishimaru’s doorbell. Hell, even if they did give him a detention for ‘unauthorised trading’ or whatever, he wouldn’t give a shit if it meant getting Lycan back and finding out that Ishimaru was fine and nothing had happened, they’d just gone out in the woods all afternoon and not told anyone, or something stupid like that…

‘Cause if he hadn’t… and Leon was right… Shit he didn’t even wanna think about that right now! So why couldn’t Ishimaru just open. His. Damn. DOOR…!?"

“He… he ain’t coming out…” Leon gulped, after Mondo had slammed his hand on the buzzer four
times in a row.

“Damnit!” Mondo pounded on the door with his fist this time, staring at the red-and-gold lock, as if he could will it open and make Lycan and Ishimaru walk out of… the…

Wait…

 “…Ishimaru’s lock’s different to mine.” Mondo’s doorhandle was silver-coloured…

“…Are you serious…?” Leon croaked, “So… does that mean Lycan can’t get it open…?”

“I dunno! Why the fuck does he have a different lock in the first place!? No one else does!”

“Oh, shit… His dog broke his door down, remember!?” Oh fuck… That was right, it had melted the lock! “They must have made it pokémon-proof!”

“FUCK!” If that was true something could’ve happened last night and Ishimaru and Lycan would have been stuck in the room all day! “We’ve gotta get in there, right now!”

“Yeah, but how…!?”

“Canarc!” Mondo jumped a foot back as Ishimaru’s Arcanine suddenly stuck its mouth between him and the door handle, then lined itself up with the door and breathed a steady plume of flame directly at the lock…

*Click.*

 “…Wait. Did it just…” Leon started, as the dog cut off the fire.

“Arc!” It yapped cheerfully at his question, and easily pushed the door open with its front paw before starting to trot through… “Arc canine, can… … ARCARC!?”

Oh no… Shit… What the fuck had it seen that made it yelp out like that…?

Mondo quickly shoved his way through the door himself, pausing in the doorway to look inside the room…

The first thing he noticed was Lycan, stood close to the door with something dark red flecked around his white jaw, and staring off to the side with panicked eyes…

Where Ishimaru’s dog was running over towards him, as the guy lay slumped unconscious against the back of the bookcase, one boot tied up with red-stained bandages…

 “…Fucking hell, Lycan…” Mondo croaked, as his wolf first flinched and turned at the sound of his voice, then looked away guiltily once he saw who was standing at the door… “…What did you do…?”

Chapter End Notes

Taka will be fine I promise! I just like being over-dramatic (And I hope the following chapters will make it worth the read, although the next one is not very nice as it’s Lycan's POV of what happened with him and Taka).
This will also be the last time I have Taka getting hurt like this, so I promise it's not going to be a regular thing. (That's part of why I said I wasn't so confident about this idea back in part 1 of this section, as I came up with this before the part with the Gastlies, so now I realise I'm having Taka be hurt twice in a short amount of time)

I'm not sure the ideas behind my Electric-proof bed would actually be feasible. (Although It makes sense to me to have bed that could absorb excess electricity to power a battery). The 'ionic field' one was based off the anti-static bars they use in production (most when wrapping things in plastic, which would otherwise cause a ton of static electricity buildup) but I don't know if that could be work to get rid of as much electricity as a pokemon would make.

Thanks for reading!
“Well! I suppose I’ll go… show Lycanroc my room, now…?” It seems like Fire’s trainer has finally quit stalling and is ready to start this challenge… “Do you want to come with me, and make sure your dog’s going to be alright in my room…?”

[Don’t bother!] Lycan barks from outside the room, where he’s standing and trying to catch Fire’s eye, but the other dog really hasn’t noticed that he’s been stood just out here ever since he was let out of his ball…

But he does hear Lycan’s bark, and barely glances in his direction before running in the opposite one, choosing to hide in the over-sized cat-bed his trainer brought from the other room…

Dammit… Is Fire really all that scared of him…? He lost his temper and growled once at the guy, and now Fire thinks he’s no better than the human who’s hitting him…?

…Probably hitting him, anyway… Like Mondo said earlier, Chihiro has been trying to convince Lycan he might have made a mistake, or misunderstood the dog… but ‘It REALLY hurts when you hit me’…? That’s gotta be about a human, otherwise it wouldn’t make any sense! And no one’s said anything about Fire having any trainer other than that guy, with his fucking Team Rocket boots!

Although, even Leon has admitted he doesn’t look like that, now he’s changed his clothes… Not that Lycan can see much difference. To his eyes they’re still dark boots against light-coloured clothes, but it seems to be a pretty big difference to the humans…

But knowing that does nothing to stop his irritation at the noise they make, as the guy finally stomps out of Mondo’s room, and over towards him…

“So… I guess I’m looking after you, for a day!” He bends down, holding out a hand level with Lycan’s elbows, and looks much less sure of himself when Lycan just stares at the empty hand, instead of shaking it or whatever dumb trick this guy had been expecting him to do… “I, err… I’m glad you trust me enough to agree to this…? I know I’m not your favourite person here in the school! I just hope that after tonight you’ll see that I’m not as bad as you… maybe think I am…?”

[…We’ll see.] Lycan gives him a quick nod, to show he’s at least considering the chance that’ll happen… But there’s still a chance that the guy is thinking he can just put up with Lycan’s antics for one evening, and it’ll fix the damage Lycan’s done to his rep with all the other humans here… [So… you planning to let me see your room, or what?]

“Ah… right! We don’t want to be stood out here all night, do we!” He manages to get the hint when Lycan looks around his side, at the door he watched him walk out of earlier. “Let me show
you my room!"

With that, he turns and heads over to the door to the left of Mondo’s, instantly guessing which of his pockets has the right key in it. He then opens the door, standing next to it to keep it open and pointing past himself to the inside of the room… “Here you go!”

[…] Thanks.] Lycan slowly heads past him, wondering why he didn’t just head all the way in himself and let Lycan catch the door for himself, like Mondo always does…

So… this is Fire’s room, is it…? He’d have had no idea if he hadn’t known this guy was Fire’s trainer, or seen him drag that bed across the hallway just now, because there’s no other sign that another dog lives here... The place just looks clean, and smells of nothing but soap, like someone’s hiding something…

*Click.* Lycan flinches at the sudden sound of the door shutting behind him, and turns to see the man with the boots closing the door, trapping Rockruff in here...

…Argh! Goddammit, what the hell was that!? Why did he suddenly think about that time!? He’s not a damn puppy anymore, and he’s not fucking trapped! He knows how to open these doors by himself! He’s opened Mondo’s a shitton of times! He can leave anytime he wants to! And, hell… if Chihiro’s right, then there’s not even gonna be a reason for him to leave… unless it’s that the guy is fucking boring, anyway…

“Ah… Is everything okay…?” Fire’s trainer turns away from the door and towards him, eyes darting between the spaces around Lycan, and Lycan himself… “Err… you can head into the rest of the room, if you want!”

…Hah! In other words, he’d like it if Lycan quit blocking him from getting into the rest of his room. Be nice if the guy would just ask him to move, if he’s too scared to just push past him… But Mondo did say not to be an ass to him just for the sake of it… And Lycan’s going to need to see the rest of this place sooner or later, if only to get some of his own scent around the place, to cover up the fucking fake flowery smell that’s all over this place.

[…] Fine.] Lycan walks out into the room, having a look at what’s inside more closely… Unlike Mondo and Leon, he doesn’t seem to have bothered moving any of the shelves and tables that were put in here before they all came to stay. Instead he’s just filled them all with books, like Chihiro… though there’s less machines on the table than in their room… Other than books or paper, the only thing out on top of the shelves is a long wooden stick on some kind of fancy stand...

“Good boy!” Fire’s trainer yaps stupidly at him as he also moves into the room, pulling his oversized pokédex out of his pocket and plugging it into the wall near the bed, “Now, I need to send a few messages, so take as much time as you need to get used to the room!”

[…] That’s what I was doing, dumbass] Lycan rolls his eyes at the guy… Does he think pokémon need to be told everything!? Although he is Fire’s trainer…

“Err…” The guy doesn’t seem sure what to make of that, as Lycan catches him staring at him for just a moment, before he tries to hide it by turning back to his pokédex, like he was ignoring Lycan the whole time. And Lycan catches him doing it a few more times as he’s wandering around, ‘getting used to’ what little stuff there is in the room...

But it’s mostly just the books on the shelves, some of which catch the light in an odd way that he’s never seen before, pictures of pokémon and words on the walls, and the smell of soap, which really is everywhere… except for one large patch of the floor, next to the human’s bed…
Lycan checks the area more closely, managing to catch a whiff of Fire’s scent and spot a few of the dog’s uselessly long hairs around the floor. This must be where that giant cat-bed usually sits… and Fire on top of it, probably.

“Oh! Is the smell of Arcanine bothering you?” Fire’s trainer suddenly decides to quit hiding the fact that he’s been staring at him, and walks over to the cupboard… “I’ll clean it up for you!”

He doesn’t even wait for Lycan to try and point out that Fire’s smell is the only part of this place he can stand, before reaching inside and dragging out a thin handle attached to a tall machine…

*Oh for fuck’s sake, not that noisy bastard of a thing!* [Don’t you fucking dare!]

“*Argh!*” The human shrieks, dropping the damn thing on the floor and shrinking back into the nearest corner, away from Lycan, his eyes darting between him and it… “You… you don’t like vacuum cleaner…?”

*[Nobody likes that piece of shit, unless they ain’t got ears!]* Hell, even Luxray had flipped his shit the time Golett had looked like it was gonna turn the thing on… And he still doesn’t get why anyone even has the damn things!

“Ah… S-sorry…?” The guy puts his hands up, like a coward. “O-Oowada never told me that…! B-but now I know, I’ll just put it away and leave it alone! Okay…?”

*[Sure…]* Lycan watches carefully as the guy picks up the machine, making sure he’s not about to suddenly try to make that *fuckawful* noise with it… But he really *does* just put it back in the cupboard like he said he was going to. But why the *fuck* is he so surprised that Lycan didn’t want it on in the first place? Does *Fire* somehow not care about the noise? Or does he just not complain…?

“There! It’s gone!” The trainer yaps, once he’s shut the door, as if that means the machine is gone completely, just ‘cause they can’t see it anymore. “So… how about we organise somewhere for you to sleep, instead!? I know you usually sleep in Oowada’s bed, but I think it would be *better* if you had your own space in here! So, we need to find something for you to sleep on…”

As much as he’d like to snap at the guy for the crack at Mondo, Lycan doesn’t want to end up stuck sleeping *with* him, either… And, seeing as there’s nothing else soft-looking in the room, it’s pretty obvious that he’s best off just helping himself to the bedsheets and pillows on the bed…

“*Wha*… what are you…?!” But even though its fuckin’ *obvious* what Lycan would *want* to sleep on, it takes the guy a while to work out *why* he starts using his teeth and claws to pull at the large thick sheet covering the bed. “Ah! *Stop!* *STOP!* Leave that there…!”

*Tch*… Does he think those stroppy barks and finger noises of his are gonna stop Lycan getting himself something *comfortable* to sleep on…?! Well, if he *does* he’s got another thing coming… [Make me, asshole!]

“*Ah… HEY!*” The man barks as Lycan only pulls even harder at the sheets, which are *stupidly* hard to get off the bed compared to Mondo’s, meeting his angry glare the whole time, until the trainer lets out a low growl and stomps off towards the cupboard again… “Alright…! If you’re going to be stubborn, *I* guess I’ll just have to do this the hard way…”

*The hard way…? Dammit… Rockruff’s in for it now…! The man in the boots is walking off to go get something that REALLY hurts and…*

And…
And why the hell is Lycan thinking like that again!? He’s still not a fucking PUPPY anymore, and this asshole couldn’t hurt him if he tried! Just ‘cause he stomped off over to the cupboard with the noise machine in it is not a reason for him to start turning into a damn scaredy-cat! Hell, even if the guy is planning to turn on the machine as some kind of punishment, Lycan can leave whenever the hell he wants! So there’s nothing to stop him from just ignoring the guy and carrying on with what he’s doing, even as the guy comes back out of the cupboard carrying an armful of thick, white…

…Bedding…? How’s he thinking of punishing Lycan with that…?!

“Yes, that’s right! I had a spare set right here in the room!” The trainer yaps, putting down the sheets in his arms and starting to pull out part of the cover left on the bed, as Lycan stares and tries to work out what the hell he’s doing… “If you’d listened to me, it would have saved us both a lot of effort, but seeing as you’ve started, I might as well remake my bed tonight!”

With that, the man throws the cover over the bed to Lycan, then pushes the pillows over the edge as well, before finally stripping a thin sheet off of the bottom and dropping that at Lycan’s feet. Then he goes back to his new pile of bedding a repeats the whole thing in reverse, though it looks like it will take a while, as he’s not got the right shape of sheet for the mattress, and has to mess about folding the bottom sheet up at the corners and placing them under the mattress instead of just putting it over the top like Mondo does.

…and that all he meant by doing things ‘the hard way’…? And Lycan started getting in a panic, just from that!? Dammit, it’s like everything this guy does is getting under his skin and dredging up shitty memories from the past! That can’t just be ‘cause he misunderstood Fire, can it!? He’s not that much of a coward, is he…?

He watches the guy carefully, while he starts scrunching up the thrown-off sheets and pillows into a pile that looks like it’ll be easy to bury himself in. But the trainer’s mostly focused on making his own bed, fiddling with the pillows until they’re completely straight, and then lifting up the mattress and forcing the edges of his thicker sheet underneatd it, so it’d be impossible for him to actually lift the covers and move them about to get comfortable once he was in the bed! Fucking weirdo…

“There! Nice and neat! And, ah… well, if you’re happy sleeping in there, then that’s both of us sorted!” Fire’s trainer yaps again, in that annoying, over-happy way he seems to force himself to, even though it’s clear he doesn’t like how Lycan’s just put all the bedding in a messy pile. A fake voice to go along with the fake smell in this place… “Well… sleep-wise, we are! I should probably get some food out for you, as Oowada didn’t say whether you eat during the night or not…”

That’s ‘cause he mostly eats during the day, when Mondo does… but’s he’s not against having some midnight snacks around the place. And that goes double for tonight, as he was feeling so shitty earlier that he snuck out and dumped a half of tonight’s dinner in a random trashcan when Mondo went out to the sauna…

But isn’t the guy leaving it a bit late to go and get him food? This feels like the time of night when the dining rooms shuts, but he’s making no effort to leave the room quickly… All he’s doing is rummaging around in a small cupboard on the floor…

“Right! Here we go!” Lycan feels his stomach sink as the guy pulls out a tin can with a dumb-looking dog on it, along with a can-opener. “I’m sure you’ll enjoy this a lot more than that greasy junk Oowada feeds you!”

Oh, that’s it! He’s not hanging around in here if all this smug asshole is going to feed him is that weird shit humans foist off on dumb pokémon! As if he wouldn’t choose a good sausage over a can of that weird, meaty, wobbly, juicy, goo that smells like meat…
Fuck, Lycan’s mouth has never watered so much before! He’d thought this shit was just gonna be like the weird stuff Litten and Luxray ate, but instead it smells like proper steak… And maybe it’s just ‘cause he hasn’t been eating as much the last few days, but he’s guessing it’ll be the best steak he’s ever tasted! So why the hell is the guy just standing there with the open can and not giving it to him…!? 

“…Blast! I don’t have any spare bowls in here…!” The trainer snarls as he puts the can down on top of the cupboard. “I’ll have to go to the school store, and…”

[Fuck that!] He’s not walking over there, just so this guy can feed him out of some dumb little doggy-bowl! [I’ll just eat it out the can!]

“Ah… what are you…? No DON’T...!” Fire’s trainer barks as Lycan grabs the can with both front paws and shoves his nose into it, but he barely listens to the whines about ‘being careful’ and ‘sharp edges’… This shit is as good as it smells, with proper bits of meat that are somehow so soft and juicy that he doesn’t even have to chew to get them down his throat! It’s no time at all before Lycan is holding the can up above his mouth and shaking it up and down to get the last few delicious bits of meat out of it…

That was good… And it hasn’t made his stomach feel like it’s stuffed full, either, so he slams the empty tin on top of the cupboard it came from and points inside… [Gimme another!]

“You’re still hungry…!? Hmm… Well, with the way Oowada usually feeds you… But I just gave him my last bag of dry food…” Lycan ignores yet another crack at Mondo (like Mondo wouldn’t have given him ten of these cans a night if he’d known Lycan would actually like them!) as all snapping would do was distract the guy from opening another can up… “Alright… I’ll open another can, and that should last you until morning…!”

[I’ll decide that once I’ve eaten it!] The smell of the freshly-opened can is already making him hungry enough to down the whole thing right now!

The guy turns towards him, open can in one hand, and looks down at him firmly. “But! This time you’re going to sit…! And wait…! For me to…”

Hah! Like Lycan’s gonna do a bunch of dumb tricks for his dinner, when his can of food is right in front of him!

“…Put it in a bowl, so you don’t… HEY!” He barks angrily as Lycan grabs can in his hand and pulls it, and him, forward. Just enough so he can shove his jaw inside and start eating, which is enough to get the message across and make the trainer let go of the can and let him eat his fill…

That turns out of be about half the can, before his stomach fills full and finishing off the rest seems like too much of a chore to be worth it right now, so he puts the rest back on top of the cupboard for later…

Which is when he notices that Fire’s trainer has been scowling at him the entire time he’s been eating out of the second can. “…You’re not listening to a word I say, are you?”

[Ain’t needed to.] Lycan shrugs at the guy. He’s a wolf who can figure shit out for himself… he doesn’t need help hanging out in someone else’s bedroom!

“I see…” The guy huffs and turns away from him, reaching back into the food cupboard. “I’ll have to do something about THAT, then!”

…”Do something’…? What does that mean…? This guy is creeping Rockruff out…
Goddammit! For the last fucking time, Lycan’s not a puppy anymore! Whatever nasty kind of... tool, or stick or whatever this asshole is planning on bringing out of the cupboard, he can deal with it...!

...And it turns out it’s not even a stick... just some kind of plastic box with a lid that clips over the sides of it, which the trainer lift off, reaching inside and pulling out a small, bready-looking thing show Lycan... “Do you like poffins...?”

Poffins!? Those things he bribes his dog with? Why the hell would he care about one of those!? It just looks like a round lump of bread, or something...

So why does Lycan feel like he’s seen it close up like this, before? Mondo sure as hell hasn’t ever given him one... He’s always thought they’d be more cheap crap for dumb pokémon... but he thought that about the dog food, so maybe it’ll turn out he was wrong about this, to... Least he can do is give the thing a sniff...

Huh... For some reason, he was expecting it to smell bitter, or spicy... But instead, it smells sweet! Too sweet for him to want to eat many of ‘em... but the one being given to him will probably be a nice way to end a good meal, so he opens his mouth to scoop the treat up...

“Ah... no!” Which is when the guy in the big, dark boots decides to pull the poffin up and away from him...

Just like the last time Rockruff saw a poffin... back when men dressed like this one would tempt him over with treats, only to pull them away, laughing as they kicked him for being too slow and weak to do anything about it, and he’d have no other choice but to slink away, cursing his stupid desperation and longing for the day he was no longer a puppy, and he’d have sharp claws and strong teeth to make them and every asshole like them PAY...!

...And Lycan’s not a puppy anymore. He’s stronger, and fast enough not to get kicked in the face again...!

“My poffins are a tre...ARRGGHHH!” The asshole doesn’t even manage to move his leg before Lycan sinks his teeth into it, squeezing hard to pierce through the thick hide of his boots and then using the grip to drag him off-balance so he falls backwards onto his ass, breathing in short gasps as he stares at Lycan with terror in his eyes...

[Ain’t so funny now, is it!?] Lycan asks, like he’s dreamt of doing ever since he heard that line in a movie, and the man opposite him desperately tries to shuffle backwards.

“Ahh... I... I’m sorry...!? I... I didn’t mean to upset you...?” Hah! Look at him! Trying to play dumb, after all those times he’s lectured Mondo! “Err... Is it the poffin...? Ah... H...here! Take it!”

Before Lycan realises quite what’s going on, there’s a poffin flying straight at his face, and in the moment he takes to throw his paws up in front of it, the human somehow manages to scurry backwards to the bathroom door and is now pulling at the handle...

[Hey! Don’t you run from me...!] Lycan snarls, but it’s too late... the trainer manages to get the door open just fast enough to push his body through it and slam it shut just as Lycan gets to it... and then there’s a click as he locks the door from inside, before Lycan thinks to reach for the handle himself... [DAMNIT!]

He pounds on the door a few times... not because he’s expecting it to break, this place was built to deal with any pokémon that might get brought in here, and there’s fuck all scratching and throwing
rocks can do to it. But it helps let out the anger he’s feelings, now he’s missed his chance to… to…

...Shit. He’s not sure exactly what he’d have done… What had he even been thinking, other than that he needed to hurt the guy, before he hurt Lycan… But now he’s locked himself up in the bathroom, he’s not going to hurt anyone in there… so now what…? Now he’s just stood in the room of a human… that he’s just bitten...

...Oh fuck. He’s just bitten a human! And there’s even a taste of... something still in his mouth from it…? Is that blood!? Shit… If anyone comes in here and finds out he’s hurt a human, then they won’t even care why he did it! They’ll just assume he’s a danger and try to get rid of him…!

…He needs to find Mondo… Hell, he should have done that in the first place, but… fuck! It’s too late to think about that now! He just needs to get out of here and hope that Mondo can think of something…

He rushes over to the door out of this room, lifting his paw up to the area under the handle, where the sticky-out thing he needs to turn to unlock the door is…

…is supposed to be...

But it’s not there! What the fuck!? There’s just nothing there, except the handle and keyhole! That… that doesn’t make any sense! Why would his door be different!?

…And how the fuck is Lycan gonna get out of here!? Just pressing the handle down doesn’t do anything! Does he need the key!? How the fuck is he gonna use a key!? Even if he did go and grab it from the guy’s pocket, Lycan’s not gonna manage to handle it with his paws!

He really is trapped in here…

Shit, no! He can’t start thinking like that… This isn’t gonna be like back then! For a start, that guy ain’t gonna be coming back in here with him, not if has any fucking sense, anyway! And Lycan knows Mondo’s gonna come and pick him up after one day, at most, and when the door doesn’t open, he’s gonna go and find someone who can get it open! And there’s food in here, to, even if it is just half a can of the meat and the box of bready things. He’s lived on less a day… But it’s probably worth taking a look at what, if anything, else is in the cupboard…

…There’s no more food, but there are some bottles of water and cans of lemonade in there that he has no trouble biting open and drinking from. That’s better than food would have been. He knows from experience that he can hide hunger by filling his stomach with water, if it comes to it…

So, he’s gonna be okay. Worst that’ll happen is he’s stuck alone in the room for a day… but in the meantime, he might as well try and figure out a way out of here…

His first thought is to try and break the door down, but seeing as the thing stands up to a Stone Edge without a scratch, he soon figures that all he’d do by carrying on with that idea is to waste a bunch of energy, and make himself hungrier…

…Stupid fucking different door! Why the hell doesn’t it just open from the inside, anyway!? It’s stupid! Wouldn’t that asshole end up stuck in here if he lost his key…!? So there’s gotta be some other way to open the damn thing…! He just needs to think about what it could be… Or if there’s any other differences between here and Mondo’s room that might have something to do with it...

Once he’s thought of it like that, it’s fucking obvious! There’s a damn button on the wall about a foot higher than him, on the wall next to the door! That’s gotta be it! He just needs to hit that and walk over to the door and press the handle down to open it…
Or not… The handle rattles in his hand, but the door doesn’t budge an inch… So what the fuck is the point of the damn button, then!? What, has he gotta press it a certain way, or put in some secret combination of long and short presses or some other bullshit that’s gonna be impossible for him to figure out by himself…!? 

Fine! Fuck it then! He knows he’ll be fine waiting… so he might as well try and find something to do while he does…

That’s easier thought than done in this place… There’s no TV to watch, and Lycan doesn’t even know how Mondo’s pokédex works, let alone how to get the clunky thing plugged into the wall to do anything useful…

In the end, he ends up dragging out the shiny books on the lower part of the bookshelf, just to see what the hell they are… turns out they’re just filled with pictures of pokémon, and the odd human trainer to… And if there’s a point to the pictures, he can’t figure out what any of it is…

No wonder Fire always stays out of his ball during school… Even something as boring as that is probably better than living in here, with nothing but these books that are almost dull enough to send him to sleep…

…Maybe that’s what he should do. It’s earlier than he usually would go to bed, and he’s never needed much sleep anyway, but it’ll help pass the time and stop him from getting too hungry before Mondo arrives…

He heads over to the pile of bedding on the floor, lifts up the cover he left on top and shuffles inside, shifting around until he’s comfortable and warm on the two pillows and shuts his eyes, trying to forget everything that’s happened tonight, for the time being… he might have fucked up, but there’s nothing he can do about it now, so he just needs to relax, now that it’s safe, and wait until Mondo comes to help…

*Click… creak… stomp…*

[What the…!?] Lycan is jolted awake at the pair of tiny little sounds that suddenly make him realise he’s might not be as safe as he thought… And he’s certain of that once he’s done getting the sheets off of himself and sees that the guy in the boots is somehow back on his feet, and poking his head out of the bathroom door… [YOU…!?!]

“AH!” Lycan’s snarl is all it takes to make him stick his head back inside the bathroom, and lock the door back up again… but what the fuck was he trying to do anyway…?

He’d obviously been trying to get out of there without Lycan noticing him… but why? Why would he want to trap himself in here with Lycan, unless he was planning to try and get revenge for the bit while Lycan was asleep…?

No, wait… He wouldn’t be trapped! He has the key out of here! Which means he must have been trying to sneak out of the room without Lycan noticing! Probably so he could go and tell everyone that Lycan had attacked him for no reason!

And if Lycan had been asleep, he would have! And Mondo would have had no chance at convincing them all that he wasn’t some dangerous pokémon that had to be put down…

Dammit… That means he can’t sleep tonight. He’s going to have to stay awake and make sure that guy is as trapped as Lycan is…!

First thing first, Lycan decides to round up all the food and drinks, so he can keep a stash nearby and
not have to worry about the guy sneaking out when he turns to get something to eat. Then he sets the food and himself down in front of the hallway into the main room, so he can block the door out while keeping an eye on the bathroom door, and waits…

…and waits…

…and waits…

…And waits even more, until it’s been so long that the sun begins to peek in through the curtains, making his already tired eyes feel even heavier… He’s been sat watching this damn door for hours, and the guy hasn’t tried to get out once! Maybe he’s given up…? Maybe it’ll be safe for Lycan to shut his eyes for a bit… just to rest them a little…

*Click… creak…* Wait… NO! It can’t be…

But it is! Just as soon as Lycan’s eyes started to close, he decides to try his luck and open the door up! Like he’s been waiting for Lycan to get tired enough to doze off, before trying again… […] You fucker!]

“Ah!” Once again, he darts back into the room as soon as Lycan snaps at him, and stays in there for who knows how long…

But it doesn’t matter how long he waits, that last attempt is enough for Lycan to know he can’t afford to fall asleep now! So instead he keeps himself awake by eating several of the sugary bread treats and washing them down with a can of lemonade, and promises himself he’s not going to fall asleep for the rest of the day…

And it’s a good thing he doesn’t, because the bathroom door opens again a while later, only to shut as soon as the man inside sees Lycan is still there, awake and watching him…

Then there’s a brief moment of hope for Lycan, as the doorbell rings, and he thinks it might be Mondo coming to take him back out of here… but then nothing else happens. Maybe it wasn’t Mondo… or maybe it was, but he thinks it’s still too early for Lycan to be awake today…

Which is fucking true, but it still doesn’t mean he can afford to fall asleep! Especially as it’s hardly any time after that that the man decides to try his luck at sneaking out of the bathroom again…

Sometime later, the bell rings again, but nothing happens except for the man opening the door to look out at the room again a short time later… was he hoping someone had come to get rid of Lycan, or something…?

Urgh… Lycan’s too tired to think straight right now… He just has to focus on staying awake and making sure that guy doesn’t get out before he does…

It’s not easy… but he manages for most of the day, especially once it gets to the afternoon and the doorbell starts going off every hour or so often to help jolt him awake again… It must be Mondo trying to get him back, right!? Who else would wanna visit this guy so bad… So hopefully soon, Mondo will lose patience and find a way in here…

He hopes so, anyway… he’s run out of the sugary food and drinks that were helping him stay awake all this time. And the bathroom door has stayed shut the entire time, so he keeps getting tempted to think that it’s safe to rest his eyes again…

*Ding dong.* There’s the doorbell again. Maybe this time Mondo will be suspicious enough to get someone to force the door open. Then it’ll be safe for him to shut his eyes and relax, without having
to worry about listening out of the *Click.* of the lock and the *Creak.* of the bathroom door opening up and letting that guy *stomp... STOMP, stomp... STOMP, stomp...* his way over to Rockruff while he’s desperately trying to get a little sleep for once, so he doesn’t wake up until the *STOMP, stomp.* of the boots comes to a halt right next to him, and its only then, with the guy in his thick boots leaning right above him that he realises...

*There’s someone RIGHT next to him and he needs to WAKE UP!*

[Nargrg…!] Suddenly, Lycan finds his mind is forcing his body to wake up and look up, and that’s when he sees that the man in the boots really is looming right over his head! [Y-you! H-how the fuck did y-you…!?]

“A-aah…?” The man takes one step back, then pauses, his brow furrowing as he looks down at him… “W…wait… Are you… scared of me!?”

[Nngghrr…!] All Lycan can do is growl at the question… because there’s no way he’s going to admit that being alone with this guy keeps making him forget he’s not a puppy anymore, and that there’s no fucking reason for him to be scared! Because if he does that, then this asshole is gonna use it against him, and then it ain’t gonna matter that’s Lycan’s stronger than him…!

“You are…!” But Lycan can already see the fear disappearing from his face, as he leans down to get a closer look at him… “You have been this whole time!”

*[GGRRRR… FUCK YOU, I ain’t got no reason to be SCARED!]* Lycan roars in his face, but the man barely flinches at it, and now he’s way too close for Lycan’s liking… *[I’m still fucking STRONGER than YOU!]*

Without thinking, his arms lash out to push the human away as fast as he’s able to…

…Which he realises straight away is too fast, as the leg he bit earlier buckles and the guy stumbles and falls backwards with a loud *thump* as his head strikes the back of the low bookcase closest to the door, and the rest of his body crumples against it...

…He’s not moving.

…And he doesn’t move when the doorbell rings again, either.

Is he dead!? Has Lycan just killed a human…!? Shit… they won’t care why he did it if that’s what he has done…

*Click.*

Wait… Was that the door unlocking!? It was! It’s being pushed open! Dear Arceus… please let that be Mondo, with someone who can help! He didn’t mean to kill someone…!

[…It’s my SPECIAL lock! It lets me…] Lycan’s not sure what to think when *Fire,* of everyone it could have been, cheerfully trots into the room, yapping happily… *Until* he sees his trainer crumpled up again the bookcase, and freezes…[…TAKA!?!]

In an instant, the other dog has pushed past him and is frantically licking at his trainer’s face, and not getting any response at all…

“…Fucking hell, Lycan…” Suddenly there’s a deep, croaking voice behind him, and he turns around in a panic, only to find that it’s Mondo… Who’s looking around the room in horror… “…What did you do…?”
He can't bear to look Mondo in the face… How the fuck can he answer that…?

“Uhh… hey! What’s going on in there…?” And there’s Leon as well… shit, how many of the class does Mondo have with him…? “Shit… Lycan did that…? Is he dead…?”

“I dunno…! Maybe…?”

[WHAT…!?] Lycan doesn’t get to hear the rest of what Mondo is saying, because Fire turns around to snap at him partway through… [YOU HURT TAKA…!? Why would you DO that!?!]

['Cause he was gonna hurt me!] Shouldn’t that be fucking obvious…!?

[But… Taka never hurts anyone!] The dog whines in response, [Not even bad people!]

[But he hurts you, doesn’t he…?]

[NO! Taka’s never hurt me once! Or forgotten to feed me! Or told me I’m stupid…!] The dog starts to prattle about his trainer…

But if all that’s true… [Then why’d you get so scared when I fucking yelled at you in the forest!]

[B-because you sound like the mean guy!] ‘The mean guy’…? Who the hell is…? [The first man who was supposed to look after me!]

[You… you had another trainer…] …Oh shit… So… was Chihiro right this whole time…? [But… he was taunting me! He showed me one of those poffin things but then didn’t let me eat it!]

[That’s ‘cause poffins are treats for good boys! Or to help teach me clever tricks, so I can be a good boy!] The dog snaps at him, as if he’s an idiot for not knowing that in the first place… [But if Taka doesn’t wake up… He won’t be able to teach me any new tricks… or moves… and he won’t be able to pet me… or tell me what to do in fights… or brush my fur… or get more badges or swim with me OR beat the ELITE FOUR! And it’ll all be YOUR fault, ‘cause you HURT HIM! You… you… STUPID MUTT!]

Lycan doesn’t know what the fuck to say, as he watches the dog go from worried whines to a loud angry snarl that sounds nothing like his usual barks… or that of his trainer. Is that what he thinks Lycan sounds like…? No fucking apology is gonna cut it here… The best thing he can do is try to move off to the side, so Mondo and Leon don’t get caught up in whatever move the dog decides he’s gonna use to get revenge on him, ‘cause he clearly breathing in and charging up to do something…

“Argh… Arcanine…?”

And suddenly, the room falls silent, as everyone in it stops to turn towards the bookshelf where that faint groan came from…

[Taka…!?] Fire’s the first one to react, calming down and turning back to his trainer to lap at his face again, [Are you okay…!?]

“Ngh… dizzy…” He clearly isn’t… but at least he’s not dead! “Let me hold your back… Need to see Mikan…”

[Okay, Okay!] The dog lies down next to him, letting him lean sideways and wrap his arms around his chest, so he can lift the trainer up… [Hold on! It smells like she’s… this way!]

And with that, Fire speeds out of the room, his trainer’s legs dragging along the floor behind him…
“Right… the nurse! The nurse knows first aid…!” Mondo growls at himself, “But is that dog even gonna be able to find her…!”

“Uhh…” Leon looks out the door, anxiously. “I’ll go keep an eye on it… you look after Lycan, alright…?”

“But is that dog even gonna be able to find her…!?” Mondo growls at himself, “But is that dog even gonna be able to find her…!?”

“Uhh… yeah. Good idea.” Mondo nods at him, and Leon gives a quick nod in return, before dashing out of the door after Fire, leaving Mondo and Lycan alone to look at each other…

[…]Mondo… I…] Lycan tries to think of a way to explain what happened…

“Fucking shit, I’m such an idiot!” But Mondo curses at himself, sinking down to the floor before Lycan has a chance to say anything. “Why didn’t I tell him you don’t like food being taken off of you…! That’s what happened… isn’t it…? With the poffins…? So you bit his leg, before he could kick you…?”

Lycan just nods guiltily. It seems Mondo’s worked this out on his own…

“Fuck… Lycan, I’m sorry! I never shoulda suggested this…!” Mondo cries, and he looks so miserable that Lycan can’t help but slowly get close enough to let Mondo hug him. “And I even fucking told everyone about it to! Even if Ishimaru doesn’t wake up, they’re all gonna know what happened!”

…And that means they’re probably going to want Lycan dead… [I’m sorry, Mondo…] He’s screwed up everything! How’s Mondo supposed to help run the Gym if everyone knows his first pokémon mauled a guy…!?

“Alright… We can’t stay here.” Mondo announces after some deep breaths, stroking Lycan’s back firmly. “We’ve gotta run, or fuck knows what they’ll do to ya… Go join a new gang, somewhere we won’t be recognised… Like… Team Skull, or something…”

Lycan doesn’t know what Team Skull is… but he does understand that Mondo’s not going to let anything happen to him, not matter what the cost is, so he nods. [Got it.]

“Right…” Mondo nods back at him, “We’ll probably have some time to pack… unless Leon fucks us over… But you can’t go outta here looking like that…” He brushes at Lycan’s jaw… is there something on there…? “So you get in your pokéball, and I’ll let ya out when its safe, okay?”

[Okay.] Lycan nods in agreement, and allows his body to relax and shift back into the safety of his ball… Whatever happens, he knows he’ll be safe with Mondo…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, and once again a reminder that Taka will be alright!

Also, I’m basing Taka’s door lock off of the idea that the lock itself functions like a bi-metallic strip in a toaster, that turns off an electromagnet (which keeps the door from opening) once it reaches a certain temperature (Which is why the lock is two different colours, it’s made from two different metals). The button on the inside of the room can also be pressed to turn off the electromagnet, but it has to be held down while the door is opened in order to keep the magnet off, not just pressed once to open the door like
Lycan was trying to do. (I think that's usual for security doors, the ones at my workplace work like that, at least).
Of course, this means if the school has a power cut, Taka's door will be left unlocked, and that any Fire-type pokemon could get the door open just by heating it up, but he decided that those risks were preferable to Arcanine having to break the door down in the event of another emergency.
Oh man, how the hell had this happened!? Ten minutes ago he’d been having a normal evening, now he was chasing Ishimaru’s dog as it carried the guy up the stairs to the med centre, ’cause Lycanroc had freaked out and done Arceus knows what to the guy when they’d been stuck in a room together…

Dammit, Mondo was screwed, wasn’t he…? Everyone knew what happened to pokemon if they hurt a human… especially if they hurt one badly, which Lycan had, or the victim kicked up a fuss about it, which Ishimaru probably would… assuming the guy stayed alive, anyway… At least the dog wasn’t wasting any time getting him help… it wasn’t even bothering to wait for Leon to keep up with it.

But, either way, they were probably gonna wanna put Lycan down or something… If Mondo had any sense at all, he’d probably be packing up his bag and planning a way to get off the island!

Which meant Leon had better stall for him, at least by pretending he didn’t know what had happened to Ishimaru… not something he’d ever thought he’d do, but maybe if he’d at least told Mondo Ishimaru’s side of the story, they wouldn’t have argued so much, or ended up doing this damn swap in the first place. And Lycan wouldn’t have bit the guy and knocked him out…

Well, that was his plan for when they got to the medical centre! For now, he just had to carry on running after the stairs and after the dog, as it turned right on the next floor up and headed towards…

…The second-year dorms!?

“Hey… what are you doing!?” Leon shouted out after it, getting no response as it sniffed along the ground…

Oh, right! Ishimaru had told it to go find Mikan, so it must be going to her room… But it’s be quicker just to go straight to the hospital! For starters, they didn’t even know if Mikan was gonna be in her room! What if the dog just sat there waiting until she came back…!? 

“Wait… do go that way! It’ll be quicker to go straight to the hospital!” Leon called after it… only for it to ignore him again. “You know!? The place with all the beds and medical equipment…!?"

Dammit! It wasn’t listening to him at all! It just carried on up the hall, and then turned and pressed one of the doorbells without even looking at him… Probably ‘cause him and Ishimaru had never had a friendly conversation the whole time they’d been here… But he was trying to help the guy, this
Well… he might as well catch up to the thing, so he could explain to Mikan why they needed help if she came out of the room the Arcanine was now lying down in front of…

…Which wasn’t likely, cause as soon as Leon caught up, he realised the dog had made a mistake…

“No… This is Ibuki’s room! Mikan’s is down the hall!” It was still ignoring him… “Will you listen to me!? You’re wasting time! The picture doesn’t even look like…”

“Hell… OHMYGOODNESS!” Leon was cut off as the door opened and Ibuki stepped out, then instantly shrieked at she saw Ishimaru…

“Hey… sorry about this…” He started to explain why’d they were dragging her into this…

“Ishimaru told him to find…”

“Mikan!” Ibuki didn’t even let him finish, before turning back around and calling into her own room, “You need to come out here!”

…Oh. That was why the dog had gone to this room… ‘cause it could smell Mikan was in it… Okay, so maybe it wasn’t as dumb as Leon had thought…

“Huh… what is it, Ibuk… Eeeek!” Mikan also squealed once she saw Ishimaru… “Wh-what happened to him!”

“Ohh… To be honest, I dunno!” Leon lied, which sounded sketchy as hell, on second thought… otherwise why’d he have followed the dog…? “I was just coming out of my room, when the dog came out of Ishimaru’s with him on its back!”

“Nnn… Can! Arcarc, can…!” The dog glared at him and started yapping away… Thank the stars it couldn’t speak Human!

“Hrmm… Sorry!, But Ibuki doesn’t speak pokemon…” Ibuki frowned.

“And neither do I…” Mikan added, already feeling over Ishimaru’s body to try and see what was up with him… “Sh-should we get Gundam…?”

Oh crap! Was it really true that guy could understand pokemon, then!? In which case the Arcanine would tell him everything!

“Uhh… Wouldn’t it be better just to treat him straitaway!?” Leon tried to suggest, which earned him an odd look from the two girls… of course, they didn’t know Ishimaru had probably knocked his head on his bookshelf… at least that was what Mondo had guessed had happened while they were panicking and trying to remember who knew first aid… “He mumbled something about his head hurting…”

“Oh! So, he was talking for a moment, when you found him!? Mikan asked, moving her fingers to gently feel around his head. “Then it might be a concussion… I can’t feel any bleeding, but there is a bump… hopefully it won’t have been too long ago… I’ll go grab an ice pack from my room, and then we’ll take him to the medical centre and do some scans…!”

“Arc!” The dog gently stood back up… Well, at least it was listening to her…

And at least they weren’t going straight to Mondo’s room. Hopefully that should give him enough time to do whatever he needed to…
About half an hour later, Mikan was done overseeing the scans, and removing Ishimaru’s boots and pants so she could deal with the bite wound, and looked like she was coming over to let him and Ibuki know what was up, while his dog sat by his bed and occasionally licked at his face…

…It was probably a bad thing that he’d been hoping it’d take longer to make sure Ishimaru was okay, wasn’t it…? After all, the quicker she dealt with him, the better his chances, right? But on the other hand, he kinda wanted Mondo and Lycanroc to have as much chance as possible to run…

“There’s nothing on the CT scan, which means it’s likely just a mild concussion, and h-hopefully he’ll wake up again, soon…” Well, that was good news, at least… “He also has what looks like a dog bite on his leg…but it’s not too bad since he was wearing those boots over his protective uniform, and at some point he’s managed to stop the bleeding himself, although it doesn’t look like he cleaned the wound, so I gave him all the usual shots against infections, just in case!"

“Thanks, Mikan…” Mondo’d probably appreciate it if he didn’t die, even if he was probably gonna rat him out all the faster… “So… now it’s just a case of waiting to see what happens?”

“I-I’m afraid so…” She frowned, “I’m sorry…”

“Hey! Don’t be sorry! You did a great job!” Ibuki told her, “He’s lucky you…!”

She suddenly stopped, tilting her head towards the corner of the room Ishimaru’s bed was in… Had she heard something…?

“Mnmhg…” Sure enough, there was a tiny groan from Ishimaru, who managed to move his arm and head enough to wipe his eyes and look around the room… “We’re here…? G… good boy…”

“Arc…!” Damn… his dog sure looked happy to be petted, even though Ishimaru had almost whacked it in the face when he tried to get his hand to the right place.

“Ah! Ishimaru!” Meanwhile, the nurse got up in his face, forcing his eyes open so she could check them. “What happened to you!? Do you remember?”

“…Yes.” Well, crap… He’d stalled as long as possible… He’d just have to hope Mondo had had the sense not to wait before getting on his bike… “I got poisoned… didn’t realise… collapsed in my room… and hit head…?”

Ehh!? That’s… not what happened! Did he hit his head so hard he forgot what made him do it!?

“Ah! I see! I’ll get you an antidote immediately!” The nurse scurried across the room to get him some meds, “But… It looks like you got bitten by a dog of some kind, before that…?”

“Err… That… that was…” Aww, crap! Even if he didn’t remember why he got slammed into the bookcase, he was gonna remember the swap! “…A Houndoom!”

“…What!?” The nurse shrieked at the same time as him… How the hell has he got Lycan mixed up with a Houndoom!?! What, had he got Mondo and that other detective dude from before mixed up…?

“They learn Smog!” And why the hell did he blurt out that!? What’d it matter what moves they learn…?

“Ah-ah! So you got bitten by the same pokemon that poisoned you!” Ibuki figured out what he was
trying to get at. “Hmm… but where’d you find one of them? Ibuki’s not seen any Houndooms at Hope’s Peak, especially not during the day!”

“I… err…” Damnit… the more they poked holes in his story, the more Ishimaru was having to think about it and the more he was gonna remember about what really happened! “I sneaked out… last night… to the… cemetery…”

Huh!? Okay, so maybe he’d got the place mixed up from the last time he ended up fainting in his room, but why the hell did he think him of all people woulda snuck out of the school!?”

“The cemetery…? At night?” Mikan asked him, obviously not really believing it either. “Umm… are you s-sure that’s what h-happened…?”

“Yes.” Ishimaru insisted.

“But that’s, like, super dangerous!” Ibuki pointed out, “What were you thinking!?”

“Err… I… errrrmm…” Oh man… now Ishimaru looked ‘super’ confused and was probably gonna have to admit that whatever he thought he remembered was nonsense, and then they’d probably start getting security to figure out what actually happened, or try asking Ishimaru’s friends, who all knew exactly what had happened… “Ah! I know! One of my class has a fear of dogs… so I thought taking them a small one would help…”

Wait… was he talking about Chihiro!? But… wasn’t he already helping Chihiro with his own dog!? So why the hell would he think he’d needed to catch a second one!?

“Umm… so you were trying to catch a Houndour?” Tsumiki frowned, “Why couldn’t you have just got one from a shelter? I thought you’d decided to adopt your next pokemon?”

“Err…” Ishimaru just froze and stared ahead of him… it wouldn’t take much more of this to get him to realise his head was more messed up than he thought it was…

“And how’d you get poisoned, instead of Arcanine?” and Ibuki wasn’t helping by adding another point that didn’t make sense about his memory…

“I… I didn’t have Arcanine with me!” Oh crap! Had he remembered the swap, now…!? “WHAAAAAT!” Ibuki shrieked this time, “Why not!?"

“Oh… Because… err…” Well, if he hadn’t remembered before, he was probably about to, “Because… I wasn’t planning to catch the dog… I was just going to… grab one and pick it up! Until I got it back to school… So I didn’t need Arcanine! I left him in my room…”

What the fuck…? ‘Grab a pokemon’!? As in… by force!? Did he not realise how bad that sounded? Especially since he was usually going on about leaving wild pokemon in their own lives!? And the idea he’d just leave his pokemon behind while going off on a dangerous trip!? Hell, he was surprised the dog hadn’t reacted at all to this fountain of Taurushit it’s trainer was spewing, but it was still just sat quietly while Ishimaru…

…had his hand covering its nose and mouth…

Was that some kind of signal for it to keep its trap shut…? Did that mean Ishimaru knew this was a load of crap!? But why the hell would he lie about all this… it wasn’t like he’d done anything wrong, other than being a stubborn asshole! But that was nothing compared to hurting a pokemon, which was what he was now acting like he’d been planning to do…
And judging from the horrified looks on their faces, Mikan and Ibuki had completely believed him…

“Wh-what…!??” Mikan was the first to speak up, “Y-y-you mean… you were g-going to f-force it to g-go with you…?!”

“…Err…” Ishimaru’s eyes widened as he realised how shitty his lie made him look… “M-maybe… But I wasn’t going to hurt it!”

“You don’t think being **forced away from its home** would hurt it!?” Ibuki snapped at him.

“Ahh! I…” Ishimaru’s eyes almost crossed as he tried to think of a way out of this, but all he managed was to groan and clutch at his head… “Nngghhh…”

_Arceus…_ First he’d been knocked out by a pokemon he was just trying to train, now he was getting yelled at by two girls he _usually_ got on ok with… “Hey… maybe give the guy a break!? He just got knocked out…”

“And you think that makes it okay for him to hurt pokemon!?” Mikan snapped, glaring at him so angrily that she almost looked like a different _person_… “Innocent, _little_, pokemon that couldn’t _fight back_ and _never_ did anything to _him_!?”

“NO! Hell no! Of course not!” Leon quickly interrupted her, ‘cause she looked like she was getting really upset by this… “I just meant maybe he’s not remembering stuff right! Like… his memory got messed up when he hit his head, or something…?”

“A-ahh…” Mikan looked a _little_ less scary now… “M-mental trauma and concussion can cause problems with _m_-memory… _E-even_ if the patient _d_-does seem _r_—relatively alert…”

“Hrmm… It… _would_ be pretty unlike him… And I don’t even know _how_ he’d have got past the _night guards_!” Ibuki admitted, “But I still think we oughta _tell_ someone about this…”

“Ah… g-good idea!” Mikan agreed with her, “I’ll just give him some painkillers, and pass this onto the _night nurse_…”

Alright… so they weren’t exactly _convinced_… but at least they weren’t screaming at Ishimaru anymore, something that he looked grateful as hell about as Mikan fed something _else_ into his IV bag, before she and Ibuki gave him one last dirty look and left the room…

So, now it was just the two of them, aside from the dog, which was just staring at its owner stupidly, while _he_ moved his cloudy-looking eyes around the room, until they focused on Leon and he finally said something… “Why are you looking at me like that…!? You… _you know_ what actually happened… don’t you…?”

“Yeah… I was just trying to figure out for sure if _you_ did!” The guy just furrowed his brows at that… “Why’d you tell them all _that_ crap!?”

“I…” He frowned, slowly looking around the room again, but way more focused this time. “I’m not a good liar.”

“No _sh!t_, dude…” The guy frowned as Leon rolled his eyes at him, “But why’d you lie in the first place? It’s not like _you_ did anything wrong…”

“I _scared_ it…! That’s why it attacked me! It thought it was defending itself…” Well, _crap_… seemed like he’d figured it out just a bit too late… “So it’s _my_ fault this happened… Not… _you know_…”
Not Lycanroc’s, was what he was obviously trying to avoid saying out loud… “Maybe, but his trainer didn’t exactly help by not warning you about it…”

“…I still should have seen it.” Ishimaru admitted, “Looking back on it… it got nervous as soon as I shut the door! But I was so sure Oo… I mean, it’s trainer had done a bad job training it, that I just assumed it was being rude…”

Urgh… And no way would Lycan have ever admitted he was scared of something, unless push came to shove… or bite, as Ishimaru had found out the hard way…

“So, what? You’re just gonna keep what actually happened quiet?” Assuming no one had overheard him almost say Mondo’s surname just now…

“Yes.” Ishimaru blinked slowly at him, looking surprised Leon had even asked. “The pokemon doesn’t deserve what would happen to it if I didn’t!”

“Hah! You got that right!” And thank fuck for that! If he really did keep his trap shut, Mondo and Lycan would be safe to stay in the school! “Just wasn’t expecting you to admit it, is all…”

“…You think I’d be stubborn enough to get an innocent pokemon killed!?” He looked more upset by that then anything Leon had ever said about him before…

...Which was a shame, ‘cause it pretty much was what Leon would have expected from the guy, about five minutes ago!

“…I guess I’ve been thinking a lot of things about you that’re probably not true.” Leon admitted, “Same as you’ve been assuming a load of crap about Mondo and me being bad trainers!”

“Ah…!” He almost looked like he was gonna argue about that, but then changed his mind. “I guess you’re right… Especially about Owada… And at least neither of you have had to leave your pokemon to be looked after by someone else because you got yourselves hospitalised, twice in one term!”

Urgh… geez, was that what he was beating himself up over, needing a pokesitter!? “Well… Sayaka did a pretty good job looking after him last time. She probably wouldn’t mind it sleeping in her room again…”

“Cannn…!? ” The dog cut him off with a loud whine, as it suddenly seemed to work out what they were talking about, and scooted even closer to the bed… “Nine! Arc, Arcarc!”

“…You want… to stay here with me…?” Ishimaru took a while to work out what it meant. “But… where would you sleep…?”

“Nnnnn…” The dog look around, then decided to lift its front legs over the top of the bed, so its head was in Ishimaru’s lap… “Arc.”

“That…” Ishimaru frowned at the dog for a moment… but then his face suddenly softened and he gulped instead, moving his hands over to fiddle about with its neck fur… “That… that will be okay with me… if you’re sure it’s comfortable for you…?”

“Arc.” The dog shifted about a bit, but it looked more like it just wanted to get him to stroke a particular spot on its neck, more than anything…

“…We don’t have any of your things up here, though…” Ishimaru sighed, not that it seemed to be convincing him to actually stop the pokemon staying up here… “…Or any of my things…”
“You want me to go to your room and get them?” Leon offered. It’d give him a chance to let Mondo know what had happened…

“Oh! That would help!” Ishimaru looked surprised that he’d offered. How much of a jerk did he think Leon was, not to go pack up an overnight bag for him in the hospital…? “Thank you! Err… my keys were in my trouser pocket! You can use those to get in there…”

“Alright…” Leon headed over to where Mikan had put his damaged clothing to fish out the keys, “So, what did you want…?”

…After what felt like a lifetime of listening to Ishimaru mull over what stuff he’d want for his dog (and then adding his pokedex to the list as an afterthought), Leon was finally on his way down the stairs to the dorms, hoping he’d managed to get back before Mondo had decided to do his vanishing act…

“Umm… so… his dog carried him unconscious out of the room, and Leon went off after him to find out what had happened…” Hang on a sec… was that Chihiro he could hear from down there? Aww, shit, had they caught Mondo trying to book it out of the school…!? “But you didn’t think it was worth going with them? Or telling anyone else about it!?”

Oh hell, they had! And it’d be a terrible idea to tell them what actually happened, ‘cause it’d probably undo all the good work they’d done with Lycan this whole term…

“Uhh… well… Leon said he’d sort all that shit out, and I figured it wasn’t worth freaking everyone out over, when we didn’t know what had happened to him!…” He’d better get down their quick! It sounded like Mondo was already having trouble lying to Chihiro… “And I’d already got all my stuff ready…”

“Umm… that’s something else I wanted to ask you about…” He heard Chihiro start, just as he got to the dorm entrances and slowed down so it wouldn’t be obvious he’s just run down the last flight of stairs…

“Hey guys!” He did his best to sound surprised as he walked towards them, “You decide against the ride after all…?”

“Uhh… Well… we forgot to lock Ishimaru’s door after he left, so Chi wanted to know what happened…” Mondo answered, nervously staring at him to try and get the message across that he’d been lying to Chihiro this whole time…

“Is he alright?” Was Chihiro’s first question, “Mondo said he was out cold…?”

“Yeah… Apparently he fell and knocked his head on something and was out for a minute, but he’s awake and talking now… asked me to get him some stuff for him and his dog, ‘cause he’ll be in the med centre overnight and the thing won’t leave his side…” Leon gave them the quick version.

“He fell!?” Chihiro looked like they didn’t quite believe him… “Did he say how…? It doesn’t seem like him to just… trip for no reason, especially not in his own room!”

“Yeah, actually, he did…” Leon started, which made Mondo’s face drop into a look of horror that it was lucky Chihiro couldn’t see… “…He says he snuck out of the school last night and went to the cemetery without any pokemon, ‘cause he wanted to try and prove dogs aren’t scary by catching one all by himself, except he got poisoned by a Houndoom without noticing and ended up collapsing in his room just now…”
“EH!” Mondo’s jaw dropped, while Chihiro just frowned as they thought about it…

“You mean… He’s saying he got hurt trying to help me get over my fear of dogs…?”

“I’m pretty sure that’s what he meant, yeah…” Leon admitted. Man, that was not gonna help whatever new friendship those two had started… There’s no way Chihiro was gonna wanna spend time with a guy who’d do that kind of crap…

“Wh-what!? But… that’s… that’s fucking…!” Mondo finally lifted his jaw, just to start blabbering…

“That doesn’t make any fucking sense!”

“No… I think I get what he’s thinking…” Chi cocked their head to the side, looking pretty calm for someone who’d just been told someone else had attacked a wild pokemon for their sake… “But… I’ve checked, and there’s no Houndooms in the whole school, even at night, and, umm, you two are acting kind of fishy about this, so… What really happened…?”

“Oh fuck! Ishimaru really was a shitty liar… Leon would have been better off making something up himself, but now right now he couldn’t think of anything. And neither could Mondo, if the panicked look he gave Leon was anything to go on…

“You both know… but you’re not telling, so it must be something that would get at least one of you into trouble if it came out…” Chihiro starting thinking out loud… “But Ishimaru’s also lying about it, and he probably wouldn’t do that unless it was a pokemon that did it…”

“Urgghh… Chi…” Mondo tried to stop them before they figured it out…

“But you two wouldn’t bother to lie about that… not unless it was one of your pokemon…” Chihiro trailed off, turning pale. “…Like Lycanroc.”

“Fuck! Chi, listen…” Mondo groaned.

“It was Lycanroc, wasn’t it!” Chihiro gulped, “B-but… You said you’ve always been able to stop him…”

“Yeah…! I can!” Mondo insisted, “But… I wasn’t there this time…”

“Wh-why not…!? That only made them look more panicked, “Did he get away from you, or something!”?”

“No… I just… I did something fucking stupid…” Mondo started…

But hang on… They were still stood right out in the hallway, where anyone could come out and hear them… “Uhh… How’s about we take this somewhere else, first…?”

“…Okay. That… wasn’t as bad as I was expecting…” Chihiro muttered, clutching their Golett in their lap tightly, once Mondo and Leon had finished explaining what had happened. “Lycan only attacked because he felt trapped, and Ishimaru’s… not great at reading pokemon…”

“Y-yeah…” Mondo nodded, looking as relieved as Leon was that Chihiro was completely freaking out about this. “And I dunno for sure, but, I don’t think Lycan’s slept all day, either. He pretty much passed out into his pokeball, and I can’t get him to come back out yet…”
“Well… that won’t have helped. Even if Midnight Lycanrocs don’t need much sleep, they still need some…” Chihiro said distantly, like they were reading something from a textbook. “And… now you know not to leave him alone with other people… especially ones he’s not comfortable with…”

“Yeah! Of course! I… It was such a fucking stupid idea, I can’t believe anyone went along with it…” Mondo sighed, “Or that Ishimaru’s covering for me…”

“Yeah… I actually thought he just couldn’t remember what had happened, at first!” Leon admitted, “But, he seems to think it’s his fault… or at least not Lycan’s… So he said he’ll keep quiet about it.”

“And you’re sure he ain’t lying…?” Mondo asked, anxiously.

“…I don’t think he would lie about that…” Chihiro answered for him, “He’s very forgiving of pokemon, even if they do hurt him.”

“Really!?” Mondo asked hopefully, and let out a large breath when Leon nodded in agreement. “…Thank fuck for that… I dunno what the fuck I’d have done… And what woulda happened to the gang if I just up and run…”

“Haha… yeah! You sure lucked out with Lycan hurting him, right!?” Leon laughed, trying to get rid of the tense atmosphere in the room… Although, that was a bit of a shitty joke, now he actually heard himself say it and saw the way the other two humans and Golett looked at him… “Uhh… sorry…”

“…I get what you’re trying to say though…” Mondo admitted, “I oughta thank the guy for not screwing me over…”

Yeah… that was probably a good idea, if only so Mondo could make absolutely sure Ishimaru wasn’t planning to stab him in the back as soon as he decided to stay here, or something… “Well, if you wanna talk to him, he’s asked me to pick up a load of his dog’s stuff for overnight, so it can stay in the hospital with him…” Leon explained, “If you come with we might get to talk to him again… If you’re up for it right now, that is…”

“…About as ready as I’ll ever be…” Mondo sighed, “What about you, Chi? You gonna be alright…?”

“Umm… I think so…” Chihiro nodded, “I think I’ll stay here, though… I’m not in the mood to see Arcanine, right now…”

“Fair enough!” Leon told them. He was still amazed they’d sat around knowing Lycan was in Mondo’s pokeball this whole time, “We’ll see you tomorrow, then?”

“Yeah… see you tomorrow!” Chihiro nodded, looking more sure of themself this time, before they left their room.

Then it was just a case of heading into Ishimaru’s room, finding the stuff he’d asked for, half of which turned out to still be in Mondo’s room anyway, and picking up some of the mess Lycan had made for good measure, before locking up the room behind them…

“Alright, then…” Mondo took a deep breath, looking up towards the stairs, “Let’s do this…”

Chapter End Notes
Thanks for reading!
Mondo looked… pretty anxious as the pair of them headed back up to the medical centre with all the stuff Ishimaru had asked for. Not that Leon could blame the guy for not knowing what to say to someone who’d just been beaten up by his pokemon… what would he have said if Litten had ever really hurt someone…!?

He didn’t have any idea, and it didn’t look like Mondo had figured it out by the time they met the new nurse who was looking after Ishimaru and explained why they were there…

“He seems more lucid at the moment, which is a good sign!” She told them, “But we’ll be keeping an eye on him, anyway! Did you want to speak to him again, or were you just dropping off his things?”

“Uhh… yeah, we’ll talk!” Mondo nodded, “Well, If it ain’t gonna too much of a pain for him, anyway…”

“Of course, I’ll go check how he’s feeling!” The nurse headed off into the room for a minute, then came back… “He’s says it’s fine! If you’ll just follow me…”

Mondo kinda looked like he was wishing the nurse had said no, but nodded and followed her back into the room with Ishimaru’s bed in it anyway…

He sure as heck looked more with it than before! He was sat up now, with his dog leant across the edge of the bed with its head in his lap, which he was stroking with both hands. And there was none of that half-focused staring going on either. He just glanced straight up at the pair of them when he walked in, then dropped his eyes and focused on his dog again as soon as he saw Mondo...

“I’ll leave you boys to talk, then!” The nurse smiled as she left. If she’d noticed the tension in the air, she was doing a good job of pretending she hadn’t, leaving the three of them alone in awkward silence, as neither Mondo or Ishimaru seemed to be planning on saying anything anytime soon…

“So… Are you two actually gonna say anything, or…?”

“Fuck, look, Ishimaru…”

"Err… Oowada…”

“I dunno what the fuck to say, but…”

“I know it’s not worth much, but…”

“I’m so fucking sorry…”,

“I need to apologise…..”

They both took Leon’s question as the cue to start talking, blurring out one sentence at the same time, and then staring at each other once they realised what the other had said…

“…Why are you apologising!?” Ishimaru was the first to speak again.
“Whaddaya mean, ‘why am I apologising’!? Mondo gaped at him. “You’re the one who’s in a fucking hospital bed ‘cause of me! What the hell do you have to apologise for!”

“I frightened your pokemon so badly it attacked me in self-defence!” Ishimaru cried, “Why wouldn’t I apologise for that!”

“Maybe ’cause I shoulda warned you not to do the shit that scared him!? Mondo snapped sarcastically, “And I shoulda figured something was up when ya hadn’t left the room by lunchtime…”

“I… suppose. But it wasn’t that farfetched to think I might have left and you’d missed me, or something…” Ishimaru argued, “And if I’d just been patient and waited until 9pm, I wouldn’t have been knocked over…”

“Eh?” The heck was he talking about…?

“Oh! I, err… After I got bitten, I managed to run and hide in the bathroom, which luckily is where I keep my first aid kit! But then your Lycanroc started snapping at me when I tried to open the door…” Ishimaru explained, “I spent most of the day lying on the floor with my foot propped up and thought I’d manage to just wait it out drinking from the tap… but then I kept hearing you ringing the doorbell all afternoon, and when it got to 6pm I started to worry that maybe you needed some more food for Arcanine, and it looked like your Lycanroc had finally fallen asleep…”

“So ya tried to get out, but then you startled him awake…” Mondo sighed.

“Yes… and it was only then that I realised how frightened of me he was…” Ishimaru admitted, “Not that saying as much out loud helped matters…”

“Yeah… He’d have probably thought you were gloating… or just glad you’d found a way to screw with him…” Mondo explained.

“Yes… I… I think I realised that it had been a stupid thing to do just as he tried to push me away…” Ishimaru sighed, “And even then, it wasn’t much of a push… if it hadn’t been so difficult to stand on my leg in the first place, I’d have barely stumbled, let alone been knocked over! So… It’s hardly your fault!”

“And that’s why you fucking lied for us?” Mondo asked, “Even though it meant saying you were gonna hurt a pokemon!?”

“Errg… Did I really go that far? I’ve been hoping I’d just dreamt that part…” Ishimaru groaned, “But I did intend to keep your Lycanroc’s involvement quiet, even if it meant lying! Is that really so surprising?”

“From you? Yeah, it kinda is.” Leon answered him, and he glowered at them both as Mondo nodded along…

“Hmmph! It’s not even the first time I’ve done something like that…”

“Can…?” His dog turned its head to look up at him.

“Err… Nothing, nothing!” He patted its head a few times, trying to get it to quit looking at him.

“Well, that was kinda weird! Why’d he suddenly change the subject like that? Leon wanted to hear
about this *other* time he’d lied!

“Not *problems*… at least, none I couldn’t deal with…” But he didn’t get to ask, ‘cause Mondo started answering Ishimaru’s question. “I just found out about your dog’s *first* trainer and realised there was no point to the swap… And then, something happened that made me need Lycan back.”

“*You needed* him back?” Ishimaru cocked his head. “Did you get some sort of challenge?”

“Uhh… *No, I*…” Mondo grimaced, hand reaching down to one of his pockets for a moment while he had a fight with himself… “Dammit, it ain’t fair if I don’t tell ya… Your dog caught a Mareep.”

“What!?” Ishimaru looked down at his dog and back up at Mondo a few times, looked more and more baffled each time… “What do you mean he caught a Mareep? *How!*? Where did he even get a *pokeball* from…!?”

Oh for crying out loud… Did he think Mondo meant the thing *literally* threw a pokeball at something…!? “*Dude*… he means your dog helped whittle it down before *he* threw a pokeball at it…”

“Oh! So *you* caught it…” Ishimaru turned towards Mondo, looking relieved. “Ahaha… For a moment there, I thought you meant *I* had a new pokemon to look after!”

“Uhh… well, are ya sure you *don’t*?” Mondo asked him, “I mean… seeing as your dog helped…”

“That’s irrelevant.” Ishimaru cut him off, staring slightly up to the side, like he was trying to remember something. “A caught pokemon belongs to whoever is the registered owner of the *pokeball* it currently resides in… regardless of the ownership of whichever pokemon, if any, helped in the capturing process…”

Well… guess it made sense when he said it like *that*. Otherwise you’d be able to claim that pokemon in *Quick balls* didn’t *have* an owner, or something stupid like that…

“Uhh… yeah, alright. That makes sense…” Mondo agreed, “…Is that something we’re supposed to know from class, or did you just *know* that…?”

“I thought it was general knowledge…” Ishimaru started, like *his* idea of ‘general knowledge’ wasn’t completely messed up in the first place. “But I remember the exact wording because it came up a couple of times when I was younger…”

Leon sorta expected him to explain *why* it came up, but did he just started smiling sadly as he stroked his dog…

“Cool… so, I guess it’s mine for sure, then?” Mondo decided to break the weird silence.

“Hmm…? Oh! The Mareep! Yes, that’s yours!” Ishimaru shook himself outta whatever trance he’d been in, before a flash of guilt spread over him. “Ah… Which means I delayed you getting to introduce your Lycanroc to its new teammate…”

“Uhh… well, that’s gonna depend on whether Lycan *wants* it in the team…” Mondo pointed out, “Seeing as he didn’t help catch it…”

“*WHAT!*? Do you mean you’re not even sure you’ll *keep* it!? Then why did throw the pokeball in the first place!!?” Ishimaru yelled, then cringed as his dog flinched in his lap… “Ahh… Not you Arcanine, I’m just shouting at *Oowada*… Because there’s *enough* pokemon in shelters already, without *him* catching ones that he’s not even *one hundred percent sure* he can even *keep*…!”
“I know, alright! I panicked and made a dumb move!” Mondo snapped, as Ishimaru passive-aggressively glared at him. “That’s why I wanted Lycan back, so I could see if he was gonna be alright with it, and then let it go straightaway if he wasn’t, so it didn’t get used to being in my room and eating human food and shit if I was just gonna have to let it go again!”

“As if it would matter how long you’d caught it for, before throwing it away!?” Ishimaru snapped, struggling to keep his voice at a reasonable volume. “When you throw a pokeball at a pokemon, you’re telling that pokemon that you want to take it into your life, not just so you can work with it… but also so you can look after it, and grow together with it! You can’t just promise all that to a pokemon and then turn around and say ‘oops, it turns out my other pokemon doesn’t like you’ or ‘actually, I’d rather have this pokemon, but I can’t afford you both!’ or some other excuse that boils down to the fact that you think the pokemon you chose to catch is no long convenient to you! It’s not fair to the pokemon, even if hundreds of people do it every year!”

“Yeah, I know… Like I said, I made a dumb move…” Mondo admitted, quietly as his head hung towards the floor… “And I wanna keep the Mareep… Hell, it’s a little badass, that’s why I didn’t wanna just… fucking hurt it, and threw the ball at it in the first place…! But I’ve been going on at Lycan about him catching my second pokemon with me for years now… and I can’t just ignore all that and fuck him over by making him work with this one now I happen to have it…”

“Ah… I see… I’m sorry I was… perhaps a bit harsh, there…” Ishimaru looked away from Mondo. “It’s just… I’ve known people who made a habit of releasing one of their pokemon if they managed to catch a ‘better’ one… or never even thinking of their pokemon as anything other than bargaining chips, for trades…” He scowled. Guess he had something against trades…? “I just wanted to make sure you know that they have feelings, and that they don’t deserve to just be… disrespected like that…”

“Nah… you’re right. And it’s pretty cool that you care that much about them…” Ishimaru’s eyebrows shot right up at Mondo’s compliment. “I promise… Even if Lycan doesn’t wanna keep the Mareep around, I’ll make sure I find it a fucking awesome trainer to look after it! Hell, there’s bound to be someone in the gang who wants an electric type!”

“Good! I’m glad that’s settled, then!” Ishimaru smiled, “I suppose now we need to discuss… oh! Err… are visiting hours over…?”

Eh…? Oh… he’d just noticed that the nurse was back at the door, again…

“Ah, no, not yet!” She shook her head, “Your teacher is here to talk to you…”

“Oh…” Ishimaru gulped, tugging his dog’s head up closer to his chest as he nodded. “Alright…”

The nurse headed back out, and Ishimaru’s dog tried to lick his face reassuringly while he stared at the door nervously…

“Y’know…” Kizakura sighed as he walked in, giving Ishimaru the same look he usually gave Leon when he was coming up with reasons he hadn’t done all his homework yet… “I’m getting real sick of hearing your dog dragged you up here, Ishimaru…”

“Ah… But it’s only happened twice, sir?” And Ishimaru’s confused reaction didn’t cheer him up any…

“And that’s two times too many! You have any idea how upset your friends are going to be when they hear about this!?” Kizakura snapped at him, and he did at least cringe at that question… “Haah… So, I heard you snuck out and got yourself poisoned because you tried to pick a fight with a
puppy and got one with its mom, instead… Is that right?”

“Yes, sir.” Ishimaru nodded, doing a surprisingly good job of looking ashamed of himself. “I know I shouldn’t have, but…”

“Good… Saves me the trouble of telling you how stupid it was!” Kizakura cut him off angrily, “So I’ll just skip to what’s happening next… Because you got poisoned, you’ve got to spend two weeks under observation, here in the hospital… No breaks, and no arguments, either!”

“Two weeks!?” Leon couldn’t blame the guy for being shocked… Hell, he’d have got poisoned on purpose if it let him take that much time off school! “But… the Crazy Diamonds will have gone by then! And if I can’t get my second badge, I can’t adopt…!”

“Then you’ll just have to catch something instead! And be glad the school isn’t kicking you out for pokemon abuse!” Oh man… Ishimaru’s dumb lie was biting him in the ass already… “…Unless, of course, there’s something you’re not telling us…?”

…Oh, shit. Leon practically heard Mondo’s gulp from the other side of the bed! Had Kizakura figured out Ishimaru was lying? Not that that would have been hard, but… It was one thing for the guy to keep his trap shut for Lycan’s sake if he didn’t think it’d cause him any problems, but if he thought it was gonna stop him getting the pokemon he wanted and make the teachers think he was an asshole, why the hell would he keep covering for Lycan…!? 

“No, sir. I’ve told you everything.” Mondo looked like he was gonna faint at Ishimaru’s answer. “I understand. I’ll use these two weeks to decide what pokemon to catch.”

“So… that’s how it’s gonna be, huh? No Misdreavus for you…” But it didn’t stop Kizakura from trying to get the answer from him, “And after you passed Tanaka’s test and promised to take good care of it… Be a shame to let all that go to waste…”

“Nng… That’s true…” Mondo’s face went pale as Ishimaru considered it… “But, that’s how it’s turned out. I can’t do anything about it, now…”

“Well, I guess you’re right there, it is what it is… You did something stupid, and now you’ve got to pay the price…” Kizakura said, turning around harshly, “See you in two weeks, Ishimaru…”

“Y-yes, sir…” He sighed, looking down and blinking rapidly, as his lips started to quiver…

Well… at least he hadn’t screwed over Lycan… even if he did look like he was about to burst into tears as Kizakura walked out of the room… and Mondo looked guilty as fuck about it, gripping the side of the bed tightly and looking between Ishimaru and the teacher, while looking angrier and angrier…

“Aww… Hell!” Mondo suddenly slammed the side of the bed with his fist, quickly pushing himself to his feet. “Sir, wait! He’s fucking lying…!”

“What! Oowada!?” Ishimaru looked as shocked as Leon was that Mondo was the one standing up for him. “What are you…!?"

“He didn’t get poisoned!” Mondo ignored him, carrying on as Kizakura paused to listen to him. “And… he didn’t try and grab any pokemon, either…”

“Oowada, stop!” Ishimaru snapped at him, “You don’t need to… lie for my sake!”

“Shut up! I ain’t letting you pay for my fuck ups!” Mondo snapped at him. Well, crap… and just as
“You and Ishimaru swapped pokemon, but neither of you had the sense to warn the other that your pokemon are both abuse survivors, so Ishimaru ended up accidentally triggering your Lycanroc and getting attacked in the process, right?” Kizakura turned round, smirking at the three of them as they all stared at him… “You’re surprised? Come on, guys… Even if Jin wasn’t a master detective, and you hadn’t claimed to sneak out while Sakakura was on guard, so you could get attacked by a pokemon that isn’t even in school property, you told your father and you told half your class you swapped pokemon! Tsumiki and Mioda had barely been gone five minutes before Maizono dragged them back into Jin’s office to explain you were probably lying about this, and your old man said the exact same thing when we notified him about you being in here!”

“Err… you already…!? Well, regardless of what they’ve said…!”

“Then why the hell’d you start screwing him over!?” Mondo cut Ishimaru off, “Why didn’t you just come and grab me straightaway!? It was me who…”

“Oowada, I said stop!” Ishimaru shouted, “Otherwise your pokemon’s going to get punished!”

“The hell are you talking about!? They already know exactly what happened!” Mondo yelled right back at him.

“But they don’t have any evidence!” Ishimaru cried, “That’s why he’s trying to get us to agree with his story! Because they can’t press charges unless we tell them what happened!”

…Like they hadn’t done already…? At this rate all Kizakura would have to do was write down their argument and they’d have all the evidence they needed!

“Not that the school would press charges…” Kizakura suddenly chuckled. “You know how bad it’d look if we put down one of our student’s pokemon for being badly trained, when we’re supposed to be recruiting the top trainers in the regions?”

“What!?” Ishimaru gaped at him, “Are you implying the school would just… cover this up…!? Err… I mean… cover that up… if it’d actually happened… which it didn’t!”

“Well… we wouldn’t do if you insisted on seeing Oowada’s Lycanroc punished… you are the victim, after all…” Kizakura shrugged, ignoring Ishimaru’s scowl as he just completely ignored his bullshit attempts to lie. “But, if you’re willing to lie about what happened to you to protect the thing, then it’s probably not worth the hassle, from the school’s point of view…”

Well, that all made sense, but… “Then, why’d you just try to get him to tell you what really happened!?”

“Oh, that?” Kizakura smiled innocently. “We just needed to make sure you weren’t going to blab the minute someone called you out on the ‘hitting a pokemon’ thing… Though you might wanna tell people you were just trying to lure the puppy with treats instead of grabbing it, and the mom got the wrong idea… Makes you seem like less of a bad guy, y’know?”

“Ah… Good idea! Thank you, sir!” Ishimaru nodded, like he’d have never have thought of that by himself.

“But… why’d you tell him he couldn’t get a badge!?” Mondo asked, “It’s not like anyone else coulda done that!”

“Ahh… yeah, honestly? I just wanted to see how far I could push him before he cracked… I was
gonna give it two more steps before I gave up! And I sure as heck didn’t think it’d be you who’d end up breaking first!” Kizakura admitted, laughing as they both stared at him. “You’re good kids… dumb as hell, but good kids. Both of you. So maybe you could try and quit getting at each other all the time, from now on, eh?”

“Y-yes, sir…”, “Yeah… fair enough…” Both of them murmured like guilty little kids.

“Good! I’m gonna hold you two to that…” Kizakura told them, not that he really looked like he meant it… “Now, for what’s actually gonna happen next… The staff reckon you probably ought to stay here for several days, just to make sure your leg heals up and that bump on your head doesn’t turn out to be something serious… But you should be out of here early enough to get at least one shot at your second badge.”

“I see… thank you, sir!” Ishimaru smiled.

“No problem… And I hear your dog’s planning to stay here, is that right?”

“Arc!” The dog barked before Ishimaru could respond.

“Can’t say I blame you for wanting to keep an eye on him…” Kizakura said pointedly, while Ishimaru just cringed in response. “Let me or any of the staff know if there’s anything you need, alright?”

“Yes, sir!” Ishimaru nodded.

“Great… well, get well soon, kiddo!” Kizakura gave him one last nod, then turned and walked out of the room, leaving the three of them alone again…

“Oowada…” Ishimaru turned to Mondo, as soon he was sure Kizakura had left. “What were you thinking, standing up for me like that!? You could have put your Lycanroc in danger… Just for my sake!?”

“You can talk! You were giving up on that Misdreavus, just to cover for me!” Mondo countered, “After I’ve done nothing but be an ass to you all term!”

“But, I’ve never even met the Misdreavus! I’m not even A hundred percent sure it is a Misdreavus! Whereas you’ve built up a bond with your Lycanroc over years...” Ishimaru argued, looking like he was gonna start crying. “How could you risk that for me, when I’ve spent the whole term insulting your training skills, just because I didn’t even consider the chance that there was a legitimate reason you’re lenient with him!?”

“Well… today’s made me realise we’re in the same boat. All the shit you do with your dog that pissed me off, and made me think you were just some control freak… it’s all stuff you do to help it deal with all the fucking shit it’s been through, ain’t it!?" Mondo asked, starting to tear up. “Even if maybe I can look from outside and see there’s some stuff you could try doing differently, you’ve just been trying to do your best to help it for all these years, and you’ve found something that works, so you’re worried about pushing him to change, ‘cause you don’t wanna fuck up and put him through even more shit... Even if he would be better off for it, if it worked…”

“Yes! Exactly!” Ishimaru cried, grabbing him by the wrist all of a sudden. “…It’s the same for you and Lycanroc, isn’t it?”

“Yeah…” Mondo nodded, looking down at the Ishimaru’s hand but deciding not to mention it. “I mean, of course it’d be better if Lycan could learn to just wait sometimes, without me yanking on his arm and shit… But it's not like I can train him to sit the way you did, when he assumes anyone
taking food from him is about to kick the shit outta him…”

“Nnn… no.” Ishimaru stiffened up at that, “That wouldn’t work… But perhaps some other type of positive reinforcement would? Rewarding him with toys, maybe?”

“Lycan ain’t exactly one for toys…” Mondo frowned, which was true. Leon’s first attempt to play ‘fetch’ with the guy had ended with Lycan just standing and glaring at him while Litten ran off after the ball…

Although, given what he did usually like… “What about TV time? Like you give him five extra minutes at the end of the day for each time he sits politely, or whatever?”

“Hmm… if he’s smart enough to understand that being good during the day will lead to a reward later, then that could work…?” Ishimaru decided. “Arcanine’s not as good at that, but…”

“Yeah… If I talk to Lycan about it, he’d probably get it.” Mondo agreed. “Main problem will be getting him to go along with a change in the rules in the first place… But if I can convince him it’s a rule that means he gets extra stuff, instead of taking it away, then he’ll probably go for it…”

“Well, I wish you luck with that!” Ishimaru smiled, probably at the thought of Lycan not climbing all over the tables at lunchtime. “…I don’t suppose you have any advice for myself, do you? You did mention seeing some things I could be doing differently…”

“Uhh… well, there was one thing I did that worked… kinda, anyway.” Mondo shrugged. “When I went outside with him, instead of just ordering him away from dangerous stuff, I told him I’d give him treats if he could point out dangerous stuff before it hurt him or I had to tell him to get away from it…”

“So… encouraging him to recognise danger by himself, using positive reinforcement, but still keeping him safe…” Ishimaru stared off into the distance as he thought about it… “That’s so obvious! Why didn’t I think of that…!?"

“Like I said, you were too busy worrying that changing shit up would end up with him getting hurt to think of ways to make sure it didn’t.” Mondo shrugged, “Same reason I never thought to try using the TV as a reward for good behaviour…”

“Ahaa…! I guess we really do have more in common than we thought!” Ishimaru laughed. “Perhaps we wouldn’t make such bad rivals after all, eh…?”

What!? These two, rivals!? Well… Leon could see what Ishimaru was on about, but the dude was still two whole badges behind Mondo…

“The HELL…!? And Mondo sure as heck didn’t take the suggestion well! “You’re still thinking that!?”

“Ah… well, it’s hardly that unfeasible!” Ishimaru turned defensive as soon as Mondo pulled his arm out from under him. “You already stated you’re not intending to get a badge from your own gym, so once I’ve done it you’ll only be one badge ahead of me, which would make us…”

“It ain’t about the damn badges!” Mondo snapped, “We just wouldn’t work as rivals, alright!? So quit going on about it!”

“Ah… Oh… okay, then…” Ishimaru shrank back, leaning back against the bed and looking away from him. “Well… if there’s nothing else for us to discuss… It would probably be for the best if I got on with reading Arcanine his bedtime story, and getting some rest myself!”
“Arc.” His dog yapped sleepily from his lap, cutting off whatever Mondo looked like he’d been about to say…

“Uhh… yeah, alright then…” Mondo nodded guiltily as he stood up from his chair. “…Get well soon, and all that shit…”

“Yeah… take care of yourself, dude.” Leon added, ‘cause Sayaka probably woulda said it if she was here. “Or Kizakura really is gonna make you miss a badge, next time!”

“Ah… yes. Thank you.” Ishimaru nodded stiffly, turning towards the pile of books they’d brought up, like he was still trying to avoid looking at Mondo…

“…Y’know, I think you really upset him just now…” Leon pointed out, once he was sure Ishimaru wouldn’t overhear, even if Mondo did raise his voice…

“Well, what the fuck was he thinking!?” …Which Mondo instantly did. “He fucking saves my ass and then expects me to be his enemy!?”

“Uhh… I’m pretty sure he’s one of those ‘friendly rivalry’ kind of guys…” Leon pointed out.

“Alright, yeah, maybe he is!” Mondo cried, “But he’d still expect me to go up against him in important fights like, I dunno, tournaments, or something!”

“Well… yeah? What’s wrong with that?” Hell, everyone ended up going up against friends in tournaments, right?

“What’s wrong is that I fucking owe him now! I can’t screw him over by winning against him!” Mondo snapped.

“Wait… you’re saying you’re gonna throw all your fights against him, now!?” Geez! Wasn’t that kinda overkill!?

“Well… maybe not forever, but… I oughta do it a few times, after this…” Mondo frowned, “Like maybe the important shit, until the end of school, or something…”

“Damn… you ain’t kidding around, are you?” Leon pointed out, “Well… That’s pretty cool of you, but I don’t think that’s how Ishimaru took it just now…”

“Yeah… I figured that one out already!” Mondo sighed irritably. “I’ll try and explain it better tomorrow… once I’ve explained what he was trying to do to Lycan… and made sure Lycan’s alright… and shown him the Mareep…”

“…Sounds like you’ve got a lot to do…” And not much time to do it in, before his older bro and their gang showed up, not that he was gonna freak Mondo out by bringing that up right now! “Good luck, dude!”

“Thanks…” Mondo sighed, “I’ll let you know how it goes…”

“I’m sure you’ll be fine, dude!” Leon tried to cheer him up a bit, “What’re you always saying? Diamonds are formed under pressure, right!?”

“…Right.” Mondo nodded determinedly, before starting to stride off ahead of Leon, “See ya tomorrow, man.”

“See ya!” Leon waved at his back as he left. Diamonds or not, that guy gave himself way more to do
than Leon would even worry about! Another way he was kinda like Ishimaru…

Now, imagine how bad they’d both be if they started egging *each other* on all the time!? Maybe it was just as well Mondo had said no to a rivalry…!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next two chapters will focus on Lycanroc!
The new member (Lycanroc and Mareep POV) pt. 1

Chapter Notes

Apologies if there's any spelling or grammar mistakes in this chapter. I usually proofread them just before uploading but I'm feeling ill tonight and can't focus on stuff properly.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Hey, Lycan… Buddy?” He’s not sure how long it’s been since he got inside his ball, but Mondo sounds worried out there, so he guesses he must have passed out in here for a while. Urgh… That never feels as sleeping outside of the ball… “You awake, yet…? You can come out whenever, you know…”

Sounds like Mondo got him somewhere safe, just like he’d thought. But the question is where? What’s he had to do because of Lycan…?

There’s no real choice but to go and out find out…

[Alright… I’m coming out now…] Lycan warns Mondo, as he reforms outside of the ball…

“Oh, thank fuck! You’ve almost been asleep in there for a whole day!” Mondo sighs in relief, and Lycan turns his attention to the room around them, with its blue carpet, and red walls lined with banners advertising the Crazy Diamonds Gym…

[…] We’re still HERE!?] Shit! Why are they still here!? Didn’t Mondo manage to escape the school!? Did Leon screw them over before he got the chance!? What’s going to happen to them…!?

“Woah, woah, woah! It’s Okay! Everything’s cool! It’s all fine! It’s fine! Okay…? Just calm down for a sec…” Mondo puts a firm hand on his shoulder to calm him down, watching him reassuringly until his breathing slows again. “We ain’t gotta run! Ishimaru covered for us… or tried to anyway, and the school kinda wanna keep it quiet anyway, so… they’re all just gonna pretend he snuck out and got attacked by a Houndoom, and you and me can stay here like nothing happened…”

[…] What!?] That doesn’t make any sense… why would they do that? Any of them…?

“Yeah… I didn’t believe it at first, either…” Mondo admits, digging his fingers into Lycan’s shoulder fur, “But… I guess it makes sense. The school don’t wanna admit that a guy they recruited for being a good trainer isn’t one, ‘cause it makes them look like dumbasses… at least that’s what Kizakura said. I think he just didn’t wanna screw us over, to be honest…”

Well that part makes sense, but… [What about Ishimaru!?]?

“Huh…? Oh, right!” Mondo takes a moment to work out what Lycan is asking. “As for Ishimaru… He figures it was his fault you attacked him, and didn’t wanna see you get punished for something he did.”

Ishimaru thought it was his fault…!? But… Fire didn’t seem to think he’d done anything wrong… just tried to bribe him with one of those ‘special treats’… after giving him as much food as he could stomach. Looking back on it, it wasn’t Ishimaru’s fault Lycan had panicked and got the wrong idea,
was it…?

“See, I figured something out while I was looking after his Arcanine, and he confirmed it… It turns out he ain’t his dog’s first trainer… He had some asshole cop who I’m guessing didn’t feed him most of the time…” And hit him… So he’s been through the same shit as Lycan… “So Ishimaru gets what it’s like looking after a pokemon with that kinda past… so I think he feels extra shitty about scaring you, ‘cause he never guessed that might be what was going on. Instead he just took one look at me at the start of term and figured I’d just done a crap job training you, and you were just being a rude asshole.”

[...Oh.] That’s all he can really think to say. So Ishimaru had just had the wrong idea about him and Mondo… and chances were he and Mondo really had got the wrong idea about him and Fire… Dammit! He almost fucking killed a good trainer over a dumb misunderstanding… [Can I go talk to him?]

“Eh… you wanna talk to him…?” Mondo checks, as he points to the door out of the room. “Uhh…. Yeah, I mean, it’s probably a good idea to do that, but, uhh… there’s something else I need to tell you, first…”

[What?] Mondo’s starting to look worried. Did something bad happen? Are they not quite as safe as he thought…?

“Well… while I was looking after Ishimaru’s dog, I took it on a walk by the farm…” Mondo starts to explain, “And while we were there, it got attacked by this tiny little Mareep, which woulda probably been knocked out in one hit if the dog had actually fought back… but it didn’t, and I felt kinda bad about ordering the dog to burn it, so I figured I’d throw a pokeball at it, and it’d just break out and run away.”

[Makes sense...] But how was this a problem? Did it mean Mondo was out of pokeballs now? Shit… And they still needed to catch a pokemon together!

“Uhh… except, the Mareep… kinda… didn’t break out.” Mondo finishes. But what does he mean… “And, uhh… rule is that whoever throws a pokeball at a pokemon owns it, so…” Mondo reaches into his pocket, and brings out a red and white ball that’s identical to his own… “So, uhh… I kinda have this Mareep, now…”

[WHAT!] Mondo just went and caught a pokemon without him!? After all that stress and the mistakes and the practising with Golett!? Did this mean none of that mattered at all…!? But… what was Mondo gonna tell the gang!? That he just… caught something by accident, while he’d been looking someone else’s pokemon!? But that’d make Lycan into a damn laughing stock if Mondo told everyone that!

“But, uhh… we ain’t gotta keep it, if ya still wanna catch something yourself!” Mondo quickly adds, obviously noticing the snarl Lycan had been trying to hide. “I just kept it for now ‘cause I figured, it’d take some pressure off of you! ‘Cuase… Not that I think we can’t catch something together, but… just in case it doesn’t happen, I’ve kept this Mareep a secret for now, so if it comes to Thursday and we still ain’t got anything, we can just… go out to the farm and pretend you caught it, instead! But if… I mean, once we catch something, then I’ll just find someone in the gang who’d like a Mareep, or something…”

[Alright...] So, Mondo’s not just going to tell everyone he needed a different pokemon to catch something… but he’s still worried he does, otherwise he’d have just chucked the thing back out in the field straightaway, instead of keeping it ‘just in case’…
“Uhh… unless it turns out you like the Mareep and wanna keep her, maybe…?” Mondo suggests, carefully.

[Hell no!] Fuck that! He’s not letting anyone think he needs Fire’s help to catch a pokemon, not even Mondo! Besides, he saw how pissed off Fire was about the last pokemon he helped catch for a different trainer! [This is something I’ve gotta do! And I will do it!]

“Ahh… A-alright…” Mondo stammers a little at his loud barking. “That’s fair… But, I’ve still gotta look after the thing until… until I find her a new trainer…” By which he means ‘until you’ve caught something’. “So… I’m gonna have to let her out of her ball so she can eat and sleep and stuff… And I guess tell you she definitely ain’t staying here, now… And Leon leant me this electric-type bed that we can use to power the TV…”

Is Mondo still trying to sell him on the idea of keeping this thing, or is he just trying to make up for the fact that it’s going to be in their room for a while? Well… either way, it’s not like Lycan has any right to kick up a fuss about the change, after the even bigger one he almost caused yesterday…

[Fine… So long as it doesn’t bother me.] He agrees. Hell, it’s just some farm pokemon, right? It’ll probably be happy just to sit around quietly and be fed all day, like all those other tame food pokemon are…

“Uhh… hey… I, uhh, got done telling Lycan about you…”

Uh oh… She’s only known this guy, Mondo, for a couple of days, but she can already tell he’s not happy about what’s happened. Which probably means his first pokemon has told him to get rid of her, before he’s even met her…

And the look on his face as she comes out of the ball just makes her think she’s not going to have a ball to come out of for much longer… and just as she was getting used to it to…

“Uhh… so…” The human looks around the room for a moment, still not wanting to say it… “Like I warned you, Lycan still wants to catch a pokemon himself…”

…Which means its back on the farm for her, decided by a guy she’s never even met! Probably the big red guy that looks like a mix of a human and a wolf who’s now stood in the corner, not even looking at her! Baaaarrrggh… This isn’t fair, and she’s not gonna just let herself get thrown out without a chance…!

[Oh come on! We’ve never even met!] She turns to face the wolf-thing, which at least startles him into turning to glare at her… [Can’t you give me a chance!]

[…This ain’t about you.] He shrugs, turning away from her again. [I need to be the one who catches a pokemon for our team, that’s all there is to it.]

[But… your trainer caught me! I stayed in that pokeball thinking it was my chance to finally get away from that farm!] She bleated at him, [And now you’re saying I can’t stay, just because you weren’t there when it happened!? That’s not fair!]

[Well, that’s how it works! Mondo was my trainer first! The wolf growls at her. [If you wanted in on my gang, you shoulda fought me, not that big fluffy idiot!]

[But I’ve never seen you at the farm before!]
[No, you ain’t. ‘Cause I don’t need some dumb farm pokemon who’s spent their whole life eating grass while the humans make sure nothing dangerous gets to ‘em on my team!] He snaps.

How’s that fair!? It’s not like she wanted to spend her life doing nothing back on the farm! But if she tried to get out of there they’d have someone find her and herd her back in, and whenever she tried to fight anyone else in the herd, they’d just move her off to a pen with no one else in it!

[Alright… I know I’m not strong, yet! But I’m not like those wimps at the farm who’re happy to do nothing but stand around all day and let the humans feed and shear us! I’m a fighter, just like you!]

[A fighter!? You!? Hah! You look more like food to me!] The wolf leans down to leer at her and show off his teeth. [Heh… Like a nice tasty lamb chop, just ready to be cooked!]

Grrr… This guy, making fun of her just ‘cause his trainer said he gets to decide whether to keep her or not! Well, she’s not just a dumb food pokemon, and she’ll prove it! [Oh? You want something to eat, huh?] She asks, to give herself some time to charge up her fleece… [Well eat this!]

She leaps forward, aiming straight towards his mouth, and he doesn’t even see it coming until she’d right in his face, letting all her built up sparks shoot through him… Until their heads collide, which feels just like the time she charged the fence post, given that he doesn’t budge an inch…

[…Hah! Was that supposed to hurt!?] He barks at her, as she drops down on the floor and tries to shake away the white fog and flashes that are messing up her vision. [That was like eating popping candy!]

[Grrrr… Dammit! That didn’t work at all! Now he’s just thinking she’s some other kind of food! One she’s never even heard of before!]

[…But I fucking hate that stuff, so I guess you can sit in your little bed and watch TV…] She feels two large paws pick her up by her sides and then dump her onto the soft little bed. ['Till I’ve caught my new teammate and Mondo passes you onto one of the other Crazy Diamonds, that is…]

[Ehh?] Passes her on? So… he’s not gonna just dump her back in the field again? He’ll just… give her to someone else to look after? Is that what that means…?

She’s probably not getting an answer to that… By the time she can see straight again, the wolf has moved over to the human’s side and looks like he’s trying to convince him to leave the room for some reason… Now doesn’t seem like a good time to try and talk to him…

Maybe there won’t even be a good time to try and talk to him again… He seems pretty set on catching a pokemon himself… And getting ‘passed on’ wouldn’t be such a big deal, so long as she doesn’t have to go back to the farm…

But… The trainers here in Hope’s Peak are the best… Even the wimps at the farm know that! And she wants the best trainer she can get! So she’s not gonna give up on impressing this guy…!

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…What a dumbass, trying to take him on like that! Did she really think that was gonna hurt him like that!? When she’d probably never been in a real battle before!? She wouldn’t have even landed the hit if he hadn’t been taken off guard by her even being dumb enough to try! And she’s still sat there in her fancy cat bed, glaring at him like she’s planning to try it again, at some point. Determined little brat…
Guess he can’t blame her, though. Who wouldn’t want a trainer like Mondo? Especially now he’s at such a nice place, and considered to be one of the best trainers out there! But a strong trainer like Mondo needs a strong pokemon, and it’s Lycan’s job to help him catch one! He can’t just settle for letting some cutey little sheep on the team, just ‘cause Mondo happened to feel bad for her, no matter how much she wants it! Or how much easier it would be. He’s gotta sort out his own problems, especially after he fucked up so badly the other night! Which means he’s gotta go say what needs to be said to Ishimaru, and then tomorrow he can get on with catching a new pokemon already!

[C’mon Mondo, let’s go…] He heads back over to Mondo, and gestures back to the door again…

“Aarg…” Mondo just sighs, looking between him and the sheep. “Alright, just… gimme a sec, okay?”

[Fine.] Lycan huffs as Mondo heads over to the sheep and explaining that they’ll be gone for a while, and turning the TV on for her. He did catch her… Guess he can’t just up and leave her in the room without telling her what’s up…

“Alright… let’s go!” Mondo gets up off the floor after a while, and walks towards the door with him, putting a familiar hand on his shoulder and leading him out and up the stairs towards a part of the school he’s never been to before, and he explains to a woman that he’s there to see Ishimaru… if he’s awake…

“He is! You can go straight through!” The woman tells him with a smile, “I’m sure his dog will like the company too!”

Wait… His dog!? Fire’s up here too!? Shit… he’s only been expecting Ishimaru… What are the chances the dog’s going to give him a chance to apologise, when the last time they spoke he looked like he was getting ready to set Lycan on fire…!?

But there’s no chance to point that out to Mondo… he’s already taking Lycan into another room, one with a cheap steel bed, which Ishimaru is slowly walking next to, while his dog watches worriedly by his side…

“Uhh… hey!” Mondo announces himself, “Are you supposed to be walking!? If ya need something, I can…”

“Oh, hello, err, both of you!” Ishimaru looks surprised to see him there, but not concerned in any way… “I was just doing some exer…"

[YOU!?] Fire, on the other hand, takes one look at him and starts snarling, moving forward to get between Lycan and his trainer, [What are you doing here!]

“Ah… Arcanine, shhh!” Ishimaru tugs at the back of his collar, then moves his hand up to pet the top of his head, “It’s okay! He’s not going to do anything…”

[But he hurt you!] The dog growls, [He’s why you’re stuck in here!]

“Ah… Arcanine, please…” Ishimaru looks around the room before carrying on, “Look… what happened was more my fault than his! He only hurt me because I scared him! He’s not going to do anything now!”

[Grrr…] He’s still growling, but it’s quieter now… [I don’t hurt anyone when I get scared…]

[Yeah, I know… it ain’t an excuse. Especially when he wasn’t even trying to do what I thought he
was.] Lycan admits, [But I know better now, and it ain’t gonna happen again, I swear! That’s why I wanted to come up here and apologise to him!]

[Hrmmm…] He’s thinking about it, but he’s still on guard and probably won’t let him any closer…

“Arcanine… please let him talk to us…” Ishimaru gently begs his pokemon, again.

[Okay…] Fire steps backwards, to Ishimaru’s side again. [But I’m watching you…]

…He really is watching Lycan. To the point that he glares straight at him and keeps doing so even as Lycan walks forward and approaches his trainer…

“Th-thank you…” Ishimaru looks a little put out at his dog’s attitude, which is weird. If someone bit Mondo like that, glaring at them would be the least Lycan would do. “And as for you, Lycanroc… I’m glad you’re here! I wanted to apologise for misjudging you, and your trainer, and for making you so nervous yesterday…”

[Yeah… I’m sorry too…] Lycan bows his head, hoping that’s enough to get the message across to the human. [I was assuming you were an asshole, and overreacted cause of it.]

“See Arcanine, he’s apologising to!” Ishimaru whispers to the Fire, although the dog doesn’t look impressed. “Well… I guess we can put this down as a lesson learned about each other, and hopefully move on and interact more positively with each other in the future! What do you think…?”

Ishimaru’s holding out a hand again, like he did last night. Clearly he’s just trying to be friendly, but Lycan still doesn’t know what he’s actually expecting him to do, and Fire looks like he’s getting cross at him for not doing it…

“Uhh… He wants you to shakes hands.” Mondo leans down to explain, not that it makes any sense to him. “Just… let him hold your paw for a bit.”

[Like this…?] Lycan holds out a front paw to the guy, who gently clasps it in his hand and lifts it up and down a couple of times before letting go.

“Ah, thank you! That was a good shake!” Ishimaru smiles, seeming satisfied by the action, unlike his dog. “Oh, and do let me know in the future if I’m doing anything that makes you nervous again! Err… I’m… still not entirely sure what exactly I did, other than the thing with the poffin…”

“I thought that was it…” Mondo told him, “Unless there’s something else I don’t know about…”

Well… one thing comes to mind, which Lycan starts pointing to… [Your boots don’t help…]

[HEY!] And suddenly Fire’s come back between them, hunched down on all fours so he can snarl right in Lycan’s face… [I SAW THAT!]

[I… I was pointing!], Lycan decides to back off immediately, trying to convince the dog that he really isn’t a threat…

“Arcanine, he was pointing!” Ishimaru agrees, wincing slightly as he steps forward on the bitten leg so he can tug at the dog’s collar again. “There’s no need for that! Come on!”

[ Didn’t look like pointing to me…] He stops snarling as loudly, and moves back up to a sitting position, but it’s clear he isn’t going to let Lycan close to his trainer again…

“Ah… I’m sorry. I still have questions, but it seems I need to have a talk with Arcanine, first…”
Ishimaru sighs, “Perhaps we can continue this later? He might calm down once I’ve recovered…”

“Yeah… sure! No problem!” Mondo agrees, “Lemme know if you want me to come back up at all! Other people are visiting you, right? You can send a message with one of them…”

“Ah, yes… Good idea! I’m sure they’d be happy to do that!” Ishimaru nods, surprisingly cheerful about such an obvious suggestion, before he glances to the side and sees his dog’s expression. “Err… hopefully it will be soon, but…”

“But dogs are protective… I know.” Mondo finishes for him, patting Lycan on the shoulder before starting to back out of the room. “We’ll see you around!”

“See you!” Ishimaru waves them off, and the sound of his voice trails off as Mondo hurries him out of the room, “Well… I think I’ve been on my feet enough now…”

Well, at least made peace with Ishimaru… But apologising to the dog is gonna be a whole other story, unless Ishimaru somehow manages to convince him to quite being so protective. He needed to think of some way to convince the guy he wasn’t just waiting for another chance to maim his trainer…

Her first warning that the pair of them are back from wherever they went is when the door opens and the wolf storms in and over onto the bed, followed by Mondo, who takes one look at the guy before saying something about ‘doing homework’ and heading over to the small picnic table type thing and doing some stuff on there…

Neither of them pay any attention to her as she carries on trotting around the room, just for something to do with her legs. And it still doesn’t seem like the right time to try and talk to them, so she might as well get back in her bed and see if the shiny picture box was showing anything cool again…

[Hey! Turn that shit off!] The wolf snaps as soon as the picture comes back to life, and she jumps back out even before he’s finished, [Mondo and I need to think!]

[About what?] They didn’t mention anything about thinking before… just about talking to that ‘Ishimaru’ person and then catching a pokemon tomorrow. But the human does look glad that his pokemon made her stop the machine, and goes over to it to do something to it…

“Sorry… but I’ve gotta try and work out some stuff for school, and I can’t think with the TV on in the background…” Mondo explains, “But it’s off now, so you can go back in your bed if you wanna.”

[Okay…] That’s fair, and she is getting kinda tired, even if she’s not been able to run around as much as usual today… But she’s still curious about the wolf… He doesn’t have to do anything for school, does he? [So, what’ve you got to think about…?]

[Why the fuck do you care!?] He growls at her, [It ain’t any of your business!]

[Uhh… I dunno…] She hadn’t really thought about that! [I guess I just wondered what kind of things a pokemon like you has to think about…? Is it about some big important fight you’re gonna be in, or something!?]  

[Huh… Nah, it ain’t anything like that… I usually trust Mondo to worry about that stuff…] He looks over to his trainer, who just seems to be staring at whatever he’s doing at the table. […]I fucked up
and pissed off that dog you fought, so now I’ve gotta think of a way to fix that.

*That’s* what he’s thinking about!? [Why do you care what *he* thinks!? He’s a wimp!]

[The hell are you baaing about!?] The wolf looks at her as if she’s crazy, [He’s about as strong as *me*! You think *I’m* a wimp…?]

[N-no!] Not after earlier, anyway… [But… that guy doesn’t fight! I spent *ages* hitting him and all he did was whine at me!]

[That’s just ‘cause all *he* wants is to make sure his trainer’s safe and be a ‘good boy’… And you’re no threat to *anyone*…] He smirks at her, [You wouldn’t have lasted *one hit* if he actually tried to fight you!]

[Hey! I’m not *that* weak! I could totally take *a* hit!] He’s just smirking at her still… guess he doesn’t believe her, but… [I can prove it!]

[Oh? What, you gonna go pick a fight with him…?]

[No… But you said *you’re* about as strong as him, right? So, I’ve just gotta take one hit from *you!*] That way, she can prove she’s stronger than he thinks! *And* that she could totally be part of his team!

[Tch…] He growls slightly, glaring at her for a moment before turning away… [I ain’t got *time* to be messing around with you, I’ve got shit to think about…]

**WHAT**!? Oh, come on! [But it’d hardly take any time at all!] Won’t he even give her a *chance!*? It doesn’t *look* like he’s planning to… but she’s not going to just *let* him ignore her…!

[C’mon! Just one hit! I can take it!] Dammit, why’d he even bother *telling* her about Fire? Now she thinks she’s got another chance to ‘prove herself’ and won’t shut up about it! [It’d be done already if you just agreed to it! Or are you scared you *can’t* knock me out…!]

[I ain’t scared of *shit!*] There’s no way in hell he’s letting this little thing goad him like *that!* [I just don’t wanna make Mondo waste the meds he’s need to wake your stupid ass back *up*! Now shut up before you start distracting him!]

[Hrmmm… *Make me!*] She baaas back at him defiantly, [I’ll shut up *if* you hit me!]

For crying out loud! What sort of a dumb order is *that*!? Either way its gonna cause trouble for Mondo! Is she really so keen to fight that she’s willing to get the *crap* kicked outta her tiny ass, just for a shot at a good trainer…?

[And if you *don’t*, I’m gonna keep *yelling*!] The sheep carries on, taking a run up to jump up on the bed next to him, [I’ll go on and on and on until you *give up*, so you might as well just hit me *now*! ‘Cause I can do this for *ages*! I don’t even have to keep making sense, I can just go ‘Baaaaa’, baaaaa’, baaaa– over and over and *over*…]

Fucking *hell*, that’s annoying! It’s not like he *wants* to hit her and crush her dreams… but if he *doesn’t* then she’s gonna drive him and Mondo *crazy*…

“Grrrgghh… What the hell’s…!??” Mondo starts to ask, just before Lycan smacks the sheep hard enough to knock her off the bed… “…Did you just *knock her out*?!”
Fuck… How’s he supposed to explain this…? [Well, she…]

[Nnnnn-nope!] He’s cut off by a groggy baa from the floor. [You didn’t! S-see! I am a fighter!]

What the fuck!? She’s still awake!? How the hell did he hit a little thing like that and not knock it out…!? She can’t be that strong!

“Oh… It’s still up! Nice one!” Mondo give him a quick rub on the head as he makes her way over to the sheep, potion already in hand… “Saves me having to buy another Revive…”

[Ahh… Thanks!] The Mareep baa happily, once she’s gulped down the medicine, [So… does this mean I can be on your team, now?]

[What!? The hell it does!] Lycan snaps.

[But… I took the hit!] She bleats, which is true, but he still doesn’t know how that happened…

[Well… that’s just ‘cause I’ve been practising holding back, so I can catch a pokemon!] Yeah! That must be it! All that hard work and dealing with Ishimaru has paid off! [You wouldn’t have taken the hit if I’d actually tried to knock you out…]

[What!? Oh come on! That’s not fair!] The sheep whines, making its way back towards the bed. [I can take any hit you dish out! I’ll prove it! Hit me with everything you’ve got and…]

“Hey! That’s enough now!” Mondo snaps at her, grabbing her by the base of the tail and dragging her back away from the bed. “Look, I know you’re upset with him, but it’s his choice and I’mma find you a good trainer, alright? So quit trying to pick a fight with him! I ain’t made of potions, you know!”

[Uhh… sorry…] The sheep bleats, once she sees the stern look on Mondo’s face.

“Alright… Anyway, ain’t you tired? You were fast asleep this time yesterday…”

[Baaaah… I guess…] The sheep sighs, making her way slowly to her little bed and curling up in it.

“Alright… Good girl…” Mondo scratches at her ear, smiling down at her…

…Is he getting attached to her? He sure looks like he’s enjoying himself, petting that thing to sleep, like he used to do with Rockruff…

“Hmm… What’s up?” Mondo turns and notices that Lycan’s watching him, and gets up off the floor to sit with him. “You want some ear scratches too…?”

[Nn…aargh!] A low growl escapes him as Mondo pulls him close and starts scratching, before he has any chance to say no… He doesn’t care how nice it is, he’s too big for this shit, now…! [That ain’t what I was thinking!]

“Aahahaha… alright I’ll let you go, big guy…” Mondo chuckles at him, “But relax… I ain’t getting attached to her. But I still caught her, so I can’t just be a total ass to her while I’m looking after her… You get it?”

[Yeah… I guess.] Until he caught a pokemon and they could be sure they wouldn’t need her, Mondo was gonna have to treat her like she was his pokemon.

“Alright… so try not to beat the shit outta her, even if she is being a pain in the ass, okay?” Mondo pulled him close and ruffled his fur again, until he nodded. “Alright… thanks, buddy.”
[No problem…] Hell, putting up with some dumb bleating was the least he could do after everything Mondo had done for him.

And besides… It was probably only gonna be for one more night, right!? ‘Cause if he could keep a wimpy sheep like her from getting knocked out in one hit, he wasn’t gonna have any trouble catching a new gang member tomorrow!

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
She’s been alone in this room for a loooooong time, now…

Not that it feels like it’s been that long. Mondo left her with plenty of food and water before him and his Lycanroc left to go catch a pokemon this morning. And he left the TV on so she’d have something to watch… but she’s watched a lot of stuff and they’re still not back… Maybe that means they haven’t caught a new pokemon yet? Or maybe they have and they’re off training it up! Or maybe she should try and find out if something happ…

Oh! The Hariyama’s back on the screen! She’ll just wait and see if he manages to defeat the evil army of Sudowoodo after all and then she’ll try to find Mondo…

“Uhh… hey, we’re back now!” He knocks out at least half of the Sudowoodos before she hears Mondo coming back through the door… “Hope you’re okay…”

[I’m okay…] She tells him, turning to see what pokemon are with him, but it’s just his Lycanroc, same as before… [Umm… So, did you catch…]

[What’s it LOOK like!?] The wolf snarls at her, storming into the room and pulling himself up onto the bed without another word…

So… no new pokemon yet!? Maybe that’ll mean she can stay, if he doesn’t manage to get one!

“Oh, boy…” Mondo baas quietly to himself, before following the wolf over to the bed and putting his arm over his shoulder… “Hey… c’mon. There’s no need to get upset… We’ve still got time, and you’re probably just a little shaken up still…”

[But… I really thought ‘d be able to do it today! I managed not to knock the damn sheep out!] She can hear him growling quietly in response, [Why couldn’t I do it when it mattered!? What if I don’t do it in time!]

‘In time’? Was there gonna be a point when they’d have to give up on getting a new pokemon? Would that mean they’d keep her if they didn’t…!? 

“Hey… don’t worry yourself about it! You’ll get it in time!” Mondo seems to be sure he’ll manage it though… “Diamonds are formed under pressure, right? So we’ll probably end up catching something the day before Daiya turns up…”

[Y-yeah… yeah, that’s right! That’s gotta be it!] The wolf barks, loudly. [Thanks, Mondo…]

“That’s gotta be it] The wolf barks, loudly. [Thanks, Mondo…]

“Hey… and speaking of being under pressure, I’ve still got homework to do…” Mondo sighs, “So, I’mma have to turn that TV off!”

What!? [Baaaww… Can’t I have it on a little while longer!?] She pleads with him.

[You’ve had it all to yourself all day!] The wolf snaps at her again.

[But, I wanna know if the Hariyama wins…]

[Oh… Which episode is this…?] He watches the TV for a bit, until Mondo moves in the way and turns it off. [Oh, yeah, I remember watching that one… He wins, but by the time he’s beaten them all, the bad guys have moved Makuhita off somewhere else…]
[Oh, okay…] Guess he did win, then… [So, do you know what happens after that!?!]

[Eh!? Why’re you asking me? You can just watch it when its back on tomorrow!]

[Oh… I guess…] That’s assuming she’s still here this time tomorrow… [I just wanted to know now…]

[Heh. Yeah, I used to be the same…] The wolf smirks at her, [But trust me, it’s better to watch it than have someone just tell you about it. And besides, you look like you’re ready to fall asleep again…]

[…] Do I?] She hadn’t noticed… The small suns above her haven’t moved all day, so she’s not sure when night time’s coming… but maybe she should try and see if she can fall asleep…?

*Clunk. Zhhuuumm…*

But, all of a sudden, the room around her is as dark as night…

[Oh shit…], “WHAT!? Now!? You gotta be kidding me…” She can hear the growls of Mondo and his wolf around her, but it doesn’t answer her new question…

[Baaaahhh! What happened to the suns!?!]

[Suns…? You mean the lights?] The wolf asks, moving to a corner of the room to take something to his trainer. [We’re just having a power cut, is all. Nothing for you to worry about…]

“Huh? Oh, thanks Lycan… I guess I can try working using this…” Mondo takes the thing his pokemon passed to him, and soon there’s a faint beam of light coming from it… “Fuck, I can still barely see… But it’s too late to go to the library…”

[But… Mondo seems to be worrying…] She can’t help but point out, [And what is power cut?]

[Are you kidding!? You really don’t know this shit?] The wolf growls in surprise, [Look… Humans have a bunch of fancy machines, like the lights in the ceiling and the TV, that use electricity to work… That’s why you going in that bed makes the TV work, ‘cause it’s taking energy from you to power it.]

[Oh cool!] She kinda understood that, at least. [So there’s a pokemon who makes the lights work?]

[Kinda… But its far away from here, so they use wires to send the electricity to us.] She doesn’t quite get that bit, but the wolf carried on without giving her a chance to say so. [What’s happened now is that one of those wires has broken or some shit like that, so now there’s we can’t get any power until it gets fixed, so now Mondo’s gotta work in the dark, and unlike me he can’t see like this…]

So… they needed electricity for Mondo to see properly? [Well… why can’t you just make me power the lights, instead of the TV?]

[Eh…?] He sounds surprised by that, not that she can see him very well either. [No. That wouldn’t work. The lights don’t have a plug… But the lamp does! Mondo! The lamp!]

What’s a lamp? And why’s it matter if it has a plug? What is a plug, even?

“Huh? Lycan, what’re you doing?” Mondo asks, as his wolf heads back over to him, “The lamp ain’t gonna work, there’s no power…”

[But we can plug it into that!]
“Bahaha…Of course! We got an electric-type!” Mondo laughs, pointing the faint light in his hand at her as he comes over to speak. “Hey… you mind if I move your bed? I need some light up at the table…”

[Okay!] She nods. Now she can show how useful she is!

“Great, thanks!” Mondo puts his arms around the bed and she feels herself being lifted into the air for a while and then put back down on top of the high, where she’d have a good view of what Mondo was doing up here, if it wasn’t so dark… “Alright… Now I just gotta find the plug… Aha!”

Out of nowhere, there’s suddenly a bright sunny light shining on the top of the table, where she can see that Mondo appears to be looking at lots of little black wormy marks…

“That’s much better!” He cheers, sitting back down and giving her a quick pat on one ear. “Thanks!”

[No problem!] She bleats, enjoying the feeling before turning to where she thinks the wolf has gone.

[I ain’t never said you couldn’t…] He snaps, before she even finishes. [But it don’t change the fact that I’ve gotta catch a pokemon by myself! So quit going on about it!]

Baaaahhh… What’s she got to do to convince this guy!?

“Hey… you guys ain’t about to have another fight, are ya…?” Mondo turns to look at them both… and he looks kinda scary, lit up in the dark like that…

[Umm… no.], […Not if she keeps her trap shut.] They both answer him.

“Good… I’m having enough trouble getting what Chi taught me already…” Mondo sighs, picking up a thin stick in his hand and making his own wormy marks on the table…

…She doesn’t understand any of it. And the wolf’s not going to talk to her anymore. It seems like trying to convince him to accept her isn’t going to work. Her only hope of staying here is if he doesn’t manage to catch another pokemon before Mondo needs one…

Lycan had thought Mondo was kidding about leaving it right to the day before Daiya turned up, but…

The last few days have all been the fucking same. Him and Mondo get up, leave Mareep in the room all day while they go out and try and find a pokemon to catch, but whenever they do Lycan panics and knocks it out! And Mondo had worried about buying new pokeballs, he’s hardly even had to use any of ’em because of him!

And every day ends with curfew coming around and them going back to their room, and that damn Mareep tries to hide her excitement at the fact that he’s fucked up again!

It’s got to the point where he can’t even blame her for it anymore. She’s not even being an ass about it, she just thinks that each day he fucks up is one day closer to when Mondo has to give up on him and just let her on the team, and that’s all she wants…

Dammit, if only he’d thought to let Mondo take him to the farm before now. She could have challenged him instead, and he’d probably have felt too bad to knock her out in one hit, just like that
first night when he met her… And then they could probably have spent this free time watching TV together, instead of just spending the time Mondo needed to finish off his homework talking about what she ended up watching while he was off out trying to find a pokemon that wasn’t off hiding from him, ‘cause they’d all caught on that he was just gonna mess up and knock ’em out!

Which was all they’d done this morning too… It was gonna take a fucking miracle for him to catch something this afternoon…

“Hey… Uhh, how’s about we go back to our room for lunch…?” Mondo suggests, not that Lycan’s hungry. He’s not wanted to eat in the middle of the day since he told Mondo he’d rather eat the same stuff Fire does. “I wanna go pick up something from there, anyway…”

…He’s talking about Mareep, isn’t he? So if Lycan keeps fucking up, he can come back with her pokeball and pretend they just caught her.

[Sure, okay.] One more lunch, then the pressure would really be on…

[Baah! You’re back already!?] Mareep’s halfway through the bowl of salad Mondo had left her when Mondo and him come back into the room. [Does that mean…?]

[No… I ain’t caught anything yet.] It’s surprisingly easy to admit that to her. Maybe ‘cause she looks so damn happy about it… [We just came back ‘cause today’s the day we’ve gotta catch something, and Mondo wants to pick up something that’ll make sure we do…]

[Oh… you do?] He tries not to look at her face. He doesn’t need to see how upset she is… [But… That’s something I don’t really get! Why’s it matter so much if you catch a pokemon this afternoon?]

[It’s ‘cause this school has a rule that says Mondo needs two pokemon in his team by the end of term.] Lycan explains. [And if we don’t do it by tomorrow the Diamonds, that’s the gang Mondo’s part of, are gonna turn up and see he’s left doing that to the last fucking minute, and Daiya and Gliscor are gonna think we ain’t taking being here seriously enough and be pissed at us!]

[Uhh… Okay… I think I get it…] The sheep creases her forehead, [But… that’s not really a problem, is it?]

[Whaddaya mean it ain’t a fucking problem!?] He snaps at the very idea… [I can’t just get Mondo into trouble like that!]

[B-but… he won’t get into trouble!] She baas cheerfully, [He can just keep me on his team!]

Right… It all keeps coming back to that! ‘Cause Mondo could do that… and the more time he spends with the sheep, the less shitty the idea seems. Sure, she’s weak… now. But with a decent training regime, she could be a pretty useful teammate. It wouldn’t be a problem if Lycan kept fucking up for the rest of the afternoon, and he’s under no pressure whatsoever!

And that’s the problem! Diamonds are formed under pressure! He’s not fucking up because he’s stressed! He’s doing a half-assed job because deep down he knows that if it doesn’t work out, then they’ll end up with the sheep. And Mondo would probably be happy if that happened. Hell, Lycan might even be happy, if that happened…

But then he’d have to live with himself, knowing he hadn’t managed to catch Mondo’s second pokemon. And Mondo would know he hadn’t managed to do it… not to mention Mareep would know… All three of them would know their gang was formed on a lie… A lie they’d have to tell
forever, because Lycan hadn’t done his job…

[No. That ain’t happening. Ever.]

[Bwwaa…?] Why’d he get so scary-looking all of a sudden!? She was just saying it wouldn’t be as bad as he was thinking, right!? So why’s he getting mad at her!? And… [Wh-whattaya mean, that won’t happen? I-I thought that was why Mondo…]

[Yeah, you’re right! It is why he kept you in here!] He snaps before she can finish. [But I’m telling you, that ain’t gonna happen! I ain’t working with a pokemon I didn’t help catch, so don’t go thinking you’re gonna get a free place on our team, just by waiting for me to keep messing up!]

[But… What if you do keep messing up!?] It’s alright him talking about catching ‘his own’ pokemon, but he still hasn’t done it yet! [What’s your plan then!? Are you just gonna make Mondo get rid of me, and get himself into trouble!]

[If that’s how shit turns out, yes!] He growls at her without a second thought.

[But… That’s stupid!] She baas straight back at him, [You’re stupid! You’d rather get into trouble than just let me stay!]

[You don’t fucking get it!] He snaps, coming closer to her and bearing his teeth, [It only seems stupid to you, ’cause you don’t know how much trouble just keeping you would cause us!]

[But I’ve not caused you any trouble all wee…]

“Woah! Hey, you two!” Oops, she’d forgot Mondo was right there in the room with them, “What the hell is this all about!?”

[She needs to go!] The wolf growls, pointing at her and then at the door.

“Wha…? You want me to get rid of her…?” Mondo asks him, as confused by his sudden turn as she is. “Uhh… Well, once we catch something, I’ll…”

[No, not after we catch something!] He shakes his head and points sharply at the ground, [Now!]

“…Now!? But… I ain’t found anyone else to look after her…”

[I ain’t talking about giving her to someone else, I’m talking about throwing her out of the ball!] The wolf snaps, pointing at the ball and then swinging his arm back towards the winder. [Back on the farm you found her in!]

“…You want me to release her? But, I told Ishimaru I’d…”

[That doesn’t matter! I need you to let her go!] But… why!? Why’s he so upset by her just being here!? [Just… hurry up and get her in the damn ball! I’ll start going to the farm by myself…]

“Wait… Lycan!” Mondo calls after him, as the wolf turns and lets himself out of the door, but he doesn’t listen. “Fucking hell… What did you do…?”

[I… I dunno!] She doesn’t get it! She thought they’d been getting on okay! So why’d he get so mad at the idea at her staying!? Does he really hate her that much…!? 

“Haaa… Forget I asked… It ain’t your fault…” Mondo sighs, rubbing her ear comfortably. “Just… d’ya mind getting back in your ball, while I go after him.”
“Hey, now… Look. I promise, I ain’t gonna just dump you back on that farm and forget you exist, alright… Even if that is what Lycan wants…” Mondo tells her, looking deep in her eyes. He does seem really serious about this… “When I threw that ball, that was me offering you a home… Even if I didn’t really mean to, I still gotta keep my word on that. So please, just trust me on this and go into your ball while I sort this out with him, okay…?”

Well… Everyone on the TV always says that promises are important… and even the wolf seems to agree with that, so… [Okay, Mondo. I trust you!]

“Thanks… You’re a good girl, Mareep!] Mondo rubs her ear as she nods. […]Don’t tell Lycan I said this… but I’m gonna be kinda sad if he ends up catching something, y’know?]

[Yeah, me to…] She agrees. She’s starting to get to like Mondo’s ear rubs… and even his wolf, when he’s not getting angry with her for no reason.

But she does get that it’s not really fair to force her way onto the team when another pokemon on it really hates her, so she leaves it at that and heads into the ball…

She’s not sure how long she’s in there for. She’s not really used to this feeling of her body not really being there… It’s like her mind is a cloud floating through the air, but it’s being tethered in place by a string of lightning attached to another, bigger cloud that she thinks is her ball. And she knows that if she pulls hard enough against the tether, then her mind will escape the ball, and when that happens she’ll find her mind and body rushing together, until she’s standing back out in the world again… But still knowing that that string of power is there, in the back of her mind, always ready for her to relax and let it pull her back here anytime…

But she knows not to try and jump out of the ball right now. Mondo’s asked her to wait, so she’ll stay in here until the clouds of energy her mind is tied to shift, and she hears Mondo’s voice telling her it’s alright to come out, and see what’s going on with the wolf.

But then, there is a shift in the energy around her. But it’s not the same kind of shift as she’s felt before? Before it felt like the ball was moving around her, opening up a little. But this time it feels like she’s drifting away from the ball… and even when she tries to move back closer to it, it starts pushing back, harder and harder, forcing her further and further away from the ball, until stretching her lightning tether more and more, until it breaks…

…And suddenly she finds herself back on the farm, surrounded by the other Mareeps, who are all bleating and baaing about her being back after all, and what a shame it is that it’ll be noisy in the pen again…

“Alright, Lycan… It’s done.” She hears Mondo from behind her, and turns to find him and his wolf staring down at her from the other side of the fence. “She’s a wild pokemon again.”

[Bwwwwaaa!] He let her go!? Is he serious!? He… he must be! She can’t feel the link back to the pokeball anymore! [But… you promised me you wouldn’t do that! You… you stupid liar!]

…Baaarrgh! He isn’t saying anything! He isn’t even looking at her, he’s just getting something out of his clothes while looking at the stupid wolf, like he’s waiting for him to do something…

[Jeez… What’re you doing, standing there baaing at us…?] But instead of explaining anything, he just rolls his eyes at her… [I thought you wanted a trainer?]
[I DO!] And the only reason she hasn’t got one right now is because of him!

[Well, you ain’t gonna get one standing on that side of the fence!] He barks, moving back so there’s more space in front of him, [You’ve gotta prove yourself!]

[But… I already did that!] She fought that fluffy wimp until she almost passed out!

[Not to me, you didn’t!] He snarls, [I’ve been saying it all week! You want in my gang, you gotta fight me!]

Wait… is he telling her to fight him? But… he only just made Mondo throw her out! [Are you telling me you only made Mondo throw me out, because you wanted to catch me yourself?]? She barely catches the corner of his mouth twitch upwards and he tries not to smirk at her question. [You did! Baaaahh… That’s… that’s stupid!]

[It ain’t stupid! You just don’t get it, yet!] He barks at her, [Now fucking fight me, before I change my mind and eat you instead!]

Baahahaha! She almost laughs at the threat… she knows he doesn’t mean it, but that doesn’t stop all the other Mareeps from running away from the ‘big scary wolf who’s going to eat us all…!’

[Alright then! You want a fight, I’ll give you a fight!] She tells him, as she jumps over the fence for the second time this week. [And this time you better hit me as hard as you can! None of that ‘It doesn’t count ‘cause I went easy on you’!]

[Sure… just make sure you stay awake!] He smirks, moving one arm up in front of his face, [’Cause I’m ready for you, this time!]

He might be blocking his face… but that just means there’s nothing stopping her from charging up her sparks and ramming him full-speed in the stomach!

…But he still doesn’t budge an inch, leaving her sight filled with white fog and bright flashes from the shock of the collision…

But even that’s nothing compared to the solid blow that crashes onto the top of her head, which sends her face slamming down to the ground, and her mind reeling, like its moving out of her body… almost like when she’s in the pokeball… and can just relax…

[Shit… Fucking shit, I didn’t mean to…!] Baaah? Why’s the wolf sound so upset?

Oh, right… He told her to stay awake… And she needs to impress him, so she can join his gang… and be trained by Mondo…

[I…] She forces her mind back into its body, shaking out the last of the dizziness from her head as she does it… [I’m awake!]

[Fucking hell…!] The wolf grumbles, [Ya had me worried there, you little brat!]

“Ha! It stood up to your attack! Must be stronger than it looks!” Mondo yells happily, and she can see he’s holding up a pokeball in one hand, and a black square thing in the other… “Hey, whaddaya say, Lycan? Should we offer the little punk a new home?”

[Sure… go ahead, Mondo!] Lycan steps backwards, out of the way of the pokeball that Mondo throws at her, which she easily lets herself fall back into, to rest until she hears Mondo telling her she can come back out…
“Alright…! You can come out now!”

[Okay! I’m here… Baaah! That’s a lot of humans!]

“Ohh… A Mareep!”, “Cool, another electric-type!”, “Ahh… It’s so cute!”, “Woah… Didn’t predict that one…”

…So, this is what it’s like to catch a pokemon, eh? Right now, he’s mostly just standing off to the side while Mondo enjoys showing off Mareep to the other kids he was able to round up at short notice. But that’s cool. It’s good to see him looking so happy, for the first time in what feels like forever…

Hell, it’s nice not to have anything to worry about for the first time in forever, too! They ain’t gotta worry about having another pokemon for a whole year now! And now they’ve caught one, they can probably get away with starting to help Daiya out by taking some of his rescues off of his hands…

At least, he hopes so… The last thing he wants is to go through that moment when he thought he’d gone and knocked her out, again. If Mondo wants to catch another pokemon, he can make her help him!

“Well… Looks like she’s had enough attention for now… I’mma let her chill out with Lycan for a bit…” Sounds like his chance to stand around relaxing is soon over, as Mondo encourages Mareep off of the dining room table and over to where he’s standing, which she seems pretty keen to do…

“But I got a video of him catching her…!”

[Hey… you okay there?] It’s not like they didn’t get her healed up at the pokemon centre before deciding to show her off, but she’s still looking pretty dazed…

[Y-yeah! I’m just not used to that many humans at once!] She baas, looking back at the crowd. [Who are they all? Are they the Crazy Diamonds you mentioned?]

[Nah… You’ll meet all those guys tomorrow.] Lycan corrects her, [Those are some of the kids from Mondo’s class here at Hope’s Peak.]

[Oh! So they’ve got strong pokemon to?] She asks, getting excited.

[Well… A lot of ‘em do, but some of ‘em were brought here ‘cause they’re better at stuff like making pokedexes like Chihiro, or training pokemon for sports, like Leon…] She doesn’t look so impressed at that, [But don’t worry, their pokemon are still stronger than you are!]

[Baaaaa!] She bleats and stomps her hooves, [Well… They won’t be for long!]

[Heh… That’s the spirit…] He gives her a pat on the fluff between her ears… and realises why Mondo always avoids touching her fleece barehanded, as he instantly gets an annoying shock for the effort. [Ngh… Just remember that when Mondo’s riding our asses, and you’ll be fine…]

Heck, there’s half a chance that Mondo might soon decide to take her right back outside and have a few battles before it gets dark. All the kids aside from Leon and Chihiro seem to be heading off now…

“Hey! We should let our pokemon meet her to!” It seems like Leon has other ideas though. “Give her an idea of what’s it gonna be like hanging out with us!”

“Oh, good idea!” Chihiro agrees with him, “Although I left Charjabug back in my room… not that I
think it talks to other pokemon much…”

They had a point there. The bug didn’t tend to say much of anything that wasn’t about food.

“Well, I’ve got free time now, finally!” Mondo laughs, then turns to Mareep. “How’s about it? Wanna make a few new friends?”

[Uhh… Okay!] Mareep nods at him.

That’s all it takes for them to bring out their pokemon, who all look at her curiously…

[Unfamiliar Mareep detected. State name of trainer?] Golett is the first to speak up...

[Uhh… what?] And it seems like Mareep understands it about as well as Lycan did when they first met.

[Don’t mind it… it speaks weird, but it’s just trying to ask who’s pokemon you are.] Lycan translates, before straigtening up and putting an arm around her for her introduction… [This is Mareep. I just caught her, so she’s Mondo’s new pokemon, alright?]

[Understood! Profile created!] Golett carries on, [This unit is glad you did not miss the end-of-term deadline!]

[Might have been a little more civilised…] Luxray smirks at him.

[Oh screw you! Your trainer’s almost as messy as I am and he’s got proper hands!]

[Haa… Don’t remind me…]

[Wait… so you got caught by Lycanroc?] Litten cautiously creeps towards Mareep until he’s close enough to sniff at her nose, which she does while squinting at him. [How’d you manage that!? All the other wild pokemon keep going on about him knocking them all out by mistake!]

[Whaddaya mean, by mistake!?] Alright, so those were mistakes, but the hell is he gonna admit that to the damn kitten! [Ain’t my fault they all decided to try and fight me, even though they weren’t strong enough to take a single damn hit!]

[Umm… but she was?] Litten has the sense not to argue.

[Yep!] Mareep baas proudly, [I almost passed out, but then I remembered that it was my chance to get a trainer and get out of the farm, so I forced myself to stay awake!]

[Oh cool!] Mareep beams at Litten’s response.

[Interesting…] But Luxray is a lot cooler about it all… [And did either of you know that your trainer already caught a Mareep a few days ago, using a different pokemon?]

[Errr…] Mareep freezes.

[How the fuck did you know that!?] Lycan snaps, before realising that if there was any doubt about it in Luxray’s mind, then he’s just got rid of it.

[Mondo came into our room, asking to borrow my bed, and explained that he’d caught a Mareep using Ishimaru’s dog.] Luxray explains, hissing about the part with the bed. [So what happened to it?]
Dammit… So much for not having to lie to people about this…

[They let me go, and then Lycan caught me!] Mareep answers cheerfully, before he can even try thinking of anything to say.

[You… what?] Luxray’s face creases up, [Why!?!]

[Whaddaya mean why!?!] He snaps at the overgrown cat again. [I’ve been trying ta catch something for years, you think I was just gonna let Mondo keep something I hadn’t caught instead!?!]

[Well, I would have!] Luxray insists, smugly. [It would have wasted less time, and pokeballs!]

[Tch… That’s just ‘cause you’re a lazy ass!] Seriously, is Lycan the only one who gets this…!? Hell, even Mareep looks like she’s nodding along with the cat! And Golett looks like it thinks he’s wrong but’s decided not to argue and Litten’s face is scrunched up in concentration…

[Umm… Ishimaru’s dog is that big guy who cried when I jumped on him, right…?] The kitten finally asks, stumbling over the long name.

[Affirmative!] Golett agrees… which was news to Lycan! When the hell did that happen…?

[So…] He looks at Mareep again, [How’d you get caught by him!?!]

[Baaaah… Well, I’ve wanted a trainer for ages, so I’ve tried to start fights with the big dog before, but his normal trainer and him usually run away when I do…] She starts to explain, sheepishly. [But when I saw Mondo come up with him instead of his usual guy, I thought maybe I could impress him and tried again… but he’d already fallen asleep by the time we started fighting, so it was just me and the dog…]

[But… then why didn’t the Arcanine just knock you out?] Luxray asks.

[…’Cause he didn’t try to…] Mareep sighs, [He just kept whining ‘please stop, that hurts, I don’t want to fight you…’ over and over until Mondo woke up and threw a pokeball at me because he felt bad and thought I’d just run away from him…]

[…Huh.] Litten sums up the mood after that pretty well. It’s probably the most pathetic ‘being caught’ story any of them have ever heard…

[…But none of that shit matters, ‘cause we let her go and then I caught her!] Lycan reminds them all, sharply, [And if I hear any of you telling anyone else about this, I’mma pound you senseless myself…!]

[Understood!], [Eeep! Okay, Lycan!], [As if I’d bother telling anyone in the first place…] They all agree.

[Good!] Lycan stares them all down for good measure, then turns back to Mareep, who’s staring at the ground… [Now, how’s about we go see if Mondo can’t find any pokemon for you to fight, eh? Toughen you up for when you meet the Diamonds tomorrow…]

[Y-yeah! Okay!] Mareep nods at him, and waits for him to head over to Mondo and get his attention. Before following him…

“Eh… you guys done talking?” Mondo asks, when Lycan tugs on his coat. “Well… how’s about we get a few hours of training in, before dinnertime?”
“Really? Man, you need to take a break!” Leon tells him… easy to see where Luxray gets it from. “You literally just caught the thing!”

“And that’s why it needs training!” Mondo counters, turning to leave. “I’ll see you guys later!”

“See you, Mondo!” Chihiro waves them off cheerfully, and they start to walk with Mondo to the front gate…

[…I think I get it, now.] Mareep suddenly tells him, as they walk along.

[Get what…?]

[Why you said you couldn’t just let me on the team, without fighting you…] She explains. [If you had, we’d have to keep telling everyone that stupid story about the dumb dog, and Mondo throwing the ball thinking I’d run… But now, I get to tell everyone I stood up to a guy who’s been knocking out every other wild pokemon he’s met!]

Dammit, does she have to focus on that part!? But she’s got the right idea, at least… [Exactly… And I’d have to tell people that a guy who refuses to fight unless he’s told to was more useful to Mondo than me…] He adds, [We’d have both looked like dumbasses… And with us meeting the Diamonds tomorrow, that woulda been a fucking mess!]

[Hmm…] She bleats quietly, [You think I’ll be okay, tomorrow? There’s not much time left to train…]

[Well… You ain’t afraid to butt heads, even if you ain’t got a hope of winning… that’ll go down well with Mondo’s gang!] He tells her, [I bet you’ll be just fine…]

…Both with the gang, and as a new partner for him and Mondo…
Chapter Notes

Lemonade can heal pokemon, and in the UK ‘Lemonade’ refers to a carbonated drink, so that made me think Hifumi would probably use Diet Coke to heal up his pokemon, what with his obsession with it.

So… this was the place Mondo had been at for the last two-and-a-half months, huh…?

It was huge, was the first thought that came to Takemichi’s mind. Sure, Mondo had told them all about how big it was, and all the crazy-sounded facilities he had access to… But he’d been figuring Mondo had exaggerated at least some of that! Like there being four actual gardens up on the fifth floor, that couldn’t possibly be true, right? It’d have to just be a little greenhouse with a few potted plants in it…? That kind of thing?

But looking at the huge school building in front of them, which was high enough up that he could also see bits of field, forest, and a lake next to the school, along with a whole mountain and some smokestacks off in the distance, he was starting to think maybe Mondo wasn’t just bigging himself up when he told them all about the great school he’s got into… Wonder if he’d be allowed in to go see for himself…?

“All this stuff, and they only take on sixteen kids a year…” He heard Daiya angrily muttering to himself, as he shook his head and got off the bike, turning to address the rest of the gang as they all pulled up behind them both. “Alright, guys! We’re here, in case the fucking giant school building wasn’t a big enough tip-off!”

There were a few laughs, as the gang tried to figure out if Daiya meant for that to be taken as a joke or not…

“Now… I’ve gotta go head inside and let the school know I’m there, fill in paperwork, yadda, yadda, yadda…” Daiya rolled his eyes as he glossed over the bureaucracy he had to deal with, then suddenly slammed an arm down on Takemichi’s shoulder… “But, Michi here knows what the plan for this weeks set up is, so you guys can start setting up everything while I’m in there. Got it?!”

“Got it!” The gang all responded at once.

“Alright… see you in a few…” Daiya nodded approvingly and then headed off up to the security gate, digging some papers and his pokédex out of his inside jacket pocket…

Right… So now he was the guy in change of setting up… Assuming they’d actually listen to him…

“Alright, first things first, I think our pokemon could do with some fresh air!” He pointed out, referring to the ones that didn’t have side-cars like Hitmontop’s, and getting Sandshrew out of his ball to demonstrate.

At least the guys listened to that order, even if it was just ‘cause they’ve had done that anyway, and they all spent some time explaining to their pokemon that they were there and checking if any of them needed anything…
“Dude, this place is huge!” But after a while, it sounded like everyone had sorted their pokemon out and were now starting to chat about the school they’re in front of… “Why can’t they let us go set up in there!?”, “They think their school’s too good for us…!”

“No… they offered to let us set up inside, in the main hall. But there’s people on this island other than the students, like the staff and their families, who ain’t allowed into the school, so Daiya said we’d set up out here where they can get a chance to get a badge, too!” Takemichi explained, before the complaints got out of hand, then figured it was about time to get the guys on-task… “Which means we need to get on and get this shit set up, like Daiya said! So…”

“So it ain’t that they don’t want us in there?”, “You think they’d let us in, then? To look around and shit?”, “Hey, maybe we can even get some more pokemon!”, “Hey, d’you think Mondo’s got his new pokemon, yet?”, “I fucking hope so? He’s gonna be the last in his class at this rate.”, “Didn’t he say there was one other guy? The one who needs a second badge ‘cause he’s gonna trade for his second pokemon?”, “Really! Who the hell trades for their second pokemon?!”

Takemichi resisted the urge to smash his face into the palm of his hand as the gang all ignore him and start going off into various other conversations. What he wouldn’t give to be a foot taller, sometimes… They’d probably all listen to him if he towered over them all like the Oowadas did… but at this rate he was gonna have to clamber up onto of his bike like a total dork just to get them to pay attention for more than ten seconds…

“Hey! Look! There’s Mondo, there!”

But before he did get desperate and start trying to precariously balance on the thing, one of the gang pointed past him, towards the main door to the school, which Mondo was striding out of…

Damn, he’s looking good! And pretty happy! Even Lycan’s looking a little less grumpy than usual… Is that just because they’re glad to see the gang again, or something else…?

“Hey, Mondo! Good to see you again!” Takemichi was one of many members of the gang to give him similar greetings as he got closer.

“Thanks, guys! It’s been too long!” Mondo answered, heading over to Takemichi for a handshake, then going around to the rest of the gang to greet them all to. “Everything cool with you all?!”

The answers to that were mostly just general positive answers, except for one guy… “What about you? You catch that new pokemon yet…?”

“I’ll show you her after you all quit messing around and help set the damn Gym up!” Mondo snapped at them all, making them all fall silent. “So, Michi, what’s the plan?”

Finally, everyone was actually paying attention to him! He’d have to thank Mondo for that one… “Alright, so the plan is we’ll set up a maze using cloths stretched between the bikes. It’ll have an
obvious path straight through the middle, but that’ll be watched by five of us hidden just off of the sides of the path. There’ll also be a few of use walking around in the maze as well! The idea is that they can either take a longer route to sneak around the back and miss most of the fights, or they can just walk straight through to Daiya, but fight a bunch of us on the way there.” He explained, getting out the diagram he and Diaya had spent several hours sketching out over the last week, while the gang nodded in understanding. “So, we’ll start by measuring out the outer perimeter and positioning all of the bikes…”

Hmm… He’d gone through the ‘maze’ to make sure it actually worked, made sure the entrance to the member-only area that would let them get out of their hiding spots without being seen wasn’t too obvious and tested that it wasn’t possible… or at least, easy, to knock any of the walls over…

“Alright, guys… looks like we’re ready! Hell, we even beat Daiya!” This had gone a hell of a lot better than he’d been expecting. Mostly ‘cause they were all wanting to see Mondo’s new pokemon, but he couldn’t blame them for that! Mondo’s second pokemon had been something they’d all talked about for years, and now it finally existed! Even the pokemon were getting excited about it…

“Yeah… I figured he’d be back by now as well…” Mondo admitted, looking back towards the school anxiously. “They can’t have spent all this time just talking about the Gym setup, could they…”

What else would they have to talk to Daiya about… oh. “You think they’re doing some kinda parent-teacher thing with him? Telling him you’re a pain the ass to teach?”

“…Something like that…” Weird… why was Mondo being so cagey about it? Or even worried at all? From what he’d been saying, he’d actually been doing better with the whole learning shit here, so why would he care if the headmaster was talking to Daiya about him…?

“Ah, who cares! It’s not like Daiya’ll listen to ‘em!” One of the gang tried to cheer Mondo up, “Show us your new pokemon!”

“Eh? Oh right!” Whatever had been bothering Mondo, he ignored it for now, pulling Lycan to his side and brandishing his new standard pokeball. This made the rest of the gang and their pokemon all gather in a group around him, with Takemichi and his pokemon at the front… “Alright… time to meet your new friends!”

“Reeeeeeep!” Takemichi could feel his jaw dropping at the baa that came out of the pokeball, followed by a small, four-legged, fluffy, white, blue and yellow pokemon that Takemichi wouldn’t have guessed Mondo would pick in a million years…

“A Mareep!?” Not that they were a bad pokemon or anything! Just… Mondo had always been talking about getting a badass, dangerous pokemon! So he’d never have thought the guy would catch a pokemon that was that… well, cute! Not to mention it even looked like it was a pretty small Mareep… probably straight off of a farm, not even a really wild one…

“Yeah, a Mareep! She wanted outta her boring farm life so bad she jumped the fence and challenged Lycan, when all the other pokemon were hiding form him like cowards!” Mondo snapped, defensively. “So I figured I’d give her a shot! You guys got a problem with that!?”

Mondo glared around at the gang, none of whom said anything. They all just looked at Takemichi, probably thinking they’d go along with whatever he said… And he wasn’t gonna say anything that made Mondo look bad!
“No, man! Of course not! I was just surprised ‘cause it’s not the type of thing you usually try to catch!” He admitted, “An electric type can be pretty useful to have around the place!”

“Oh, heck yeah! My pal Leon leant me this old cat-bed of his which, like… absorbs the extra electricity and uses it to…”

Takemichi only half-listened to Mondo as he started excitedly chatting about using the Mareep to power his TV and other stuff… For now, he was paying more attention to what was going on with the Pokémon surrounding the little sheep.

Lycan was stood back a bit, looking around the group to judge their reactions but not making any effort to get involved, yet. Meanwhile, most of the Pokémon in the gang were doing the same kinda thing that their trainers had… looking over at Hitmontop, the current strongest Pokémon other than Lycan, to see what his reaction was gonna be first…

“Mon…?” The first thing he did was bend down a little, to get a closer look at the thing, which was already crouching down away from him… that wouldn’t great start to impressing the gang, if it got scared just from being looked at…

“REEEEEP!” …At least, that’s what he’d been thinking, just before the little thing suddenly surrounded itself with electricity and sprang forwards, head butting Hitmontop right between his eyes! What the hell was it thinking, picking a fight with him!? He’d punch her out in one hit…!

“Hi… hi… hi…” …Or he woulda done, if he could move! But instead, his body just jerked around with him bent over double as a few last arcs crackled over it. She’d fucking lucked out and paralysed him… right in front of the whole gang!

“Marreep!” The sheep just bounced around gleefully as Hitmontop completely failed to do anything, while Lycan nodded proudly in the background, and the rest of the Pokémon just stared in disbelief at Hitmontop having been embarrassed by such a tiny Pokémon…

“Shr…shr… shrewewewew!” That was, until his own damn Sandshrew started giggling about it, which was the start of a cascade of squeaks, howls and shrieks as all the other Pokémon started laughing along with him, which finally caught the attention of Mondo and all the other humans in the gang…

“Ah… sorry man! She seems to do that…” Mondo apologised, although he could see the guy was just loving this. “Here, lemme give you paralyze heal…”

“Thanks…” He sighed, taking the damn thing off him and bending down to help Hitmontop out, seeing as it didn’t look like this was going to wear off on its own anytime soon. “Here you go…”

“Hitmon…” The little guy muttered to him, as he finally was able to straighten himself back up and look around at all the Pokémon and guys who were still laughing about it… “TOP!”

Well… at least everyone still respected him enough to flinch and quit laughing at him when he shouted at them all! And the sheep did look pretty nervous now that he was moving again and looking right down at her…

“…Hithithit!” She needn’t have worried though. All Hitmontop did was start laughing himself, clapping his hands to congratulate her on the hit, before bowing at her to show he approved of her, which was all it took for the other Pokémon to start clapping along with him and move forward to welcome her into the gang, while Mondo and Lycan smiled happily as they watched the scene…

“So, this is your new Pokémon, huh Mondo?” At least until Daiya suddenly spoke up from the back
of the group, and the gang all turned to see him looking over the top of their heads at the Mareep, while his Gliscor hovered above him. “I hope you thought to make sure everyone finished getting the Gym set up before you started showing off!”

“Yeah, yeah, I did!” Mondo rolled his eyes, missing the moment when his new Mareep crouched down at stared up at Gliscor like she was gonna attack him, only for Lycan to quickly grab her by the tail and pull her back in line with him. “Whaddaya think the giant white maze we’re stood next to is!?”

“Hey, just ‘cause you finished the outside, doesn’t mean in inside’s ready!” Daiya shrugged, “But good work getting everything done, guys! I was hoping to get out here in time to help, but Mondo’s teacher insisted on talking to me…”

“About what…?” Mondo asked, looking worried.

“’Bout how impressed he is, and that you’re a credit to the gang.” Daiya grinned, then laughed when Mondo looked completely shocked… “Seriously, bro! You’re doing all your homework and three times the DPTL stuff I’ve gotta do! That shit something to be proud of!”

“I guess…” Mondo crossed his arms and looked away from everyone. “Just the way you said it, I figured he’d been bitching about me the whole time…”

“Well… He did say your handwriting sucks and you’ve been arguing with the class nerd all term, but he didn’t seem too worried ‘bout it…” Daiya admitted, “Even seemed to think you’d sorted things out with the guy…?”. 

“Uhh… yeah, pretty much.” Mondo answered, looking shifty again, “We managed to talk for a while without arguing, at least. And he’s not so bad for a nerd…”

“Good to hear!” Daiya headed over to him and gave him a slap on the back, “I knew you’d kick ass at this place!”

“Thanks, Daiya…” Mondo mumbled…

“But, as much as I’d like to stand here and sing your praises all day, we’ve got a Gym to run!” Daiya suddenly announced, taking his hand off Mondo’s back and turning to face the rest of the gang. “And the school’s expecting a pretty early start, so everyone start getting to your positions, ’cause there’s probably already kids on their way here!”

That was his cue to explain to the gang where everyone was going to be standing or walking when they were on battle duty, as well as go through the duty rota and make sure they all knew when and where they were supposed to be worked each day…

“And, of course, Daiya will be in his tent at the back, all day everyday! Any questions?” He finally finished…

“Hey…” Mondo put his hand up. “You ain’t including me in this, at all?”

“Can’t, bro! It’s against the rules for you to fight for us while you’re here!” Daiya explained, “Though, if ya wanna help, you could take a shift checking people’s pokedexes at the door…”

“Urg…” Mondo sighed. No one like that job, they usually used it as a punishment… “Alright, fine. If that’s the only way I can help…”

“Thanks, bro!” Daiya gave him a thumbs up, “Now, you all know where you’re going, so go!”
“Yes, boss!” Everyone agreed, and Takemichi was pleased to see the guys who were on duty now actually headed into the tent along with him, and walked off in the correct directions, leaving him and his pokemon free to take his spot just by the front entrance, where he’d be the first person to challenge any trainers who tried to walk straight ahead to Diaya’s tent… And where he could see Mondo, stood ready to greet people as they came in…

So, now all there was to do was wait…

“Montop?” Hitmontop tapped his arm a couple of times to get his attention, then punched the palm of his hand a couple of times questioningly…

“You wanna spar, to pass the time?” Takemichi asked him, getting a nod in return. “Well… alright, just for a little bit… and we can’t leave this spot, okay?”

Hitmontop nodded, then bowed at him, staying in the position until Takemichi bowed in return. Then they both moved into a fighting stance…

Of course, neither of them was gonna actually hurt the other. At least, not seriously… This was just something they’d been doing for fun and to help each other train since Takemichi was a kid and Hitmontop was a Tyrone. And it had worked to… both of them were one of the best when it came to fast hits and dodging attacks, even if neither of them was naturally all that strong…

“Alright, guys! First trainer’s approaching!” Mondo shouted after a while. “If you’re supposed to be hiding, make sure you’re actually hidden… Especially you Michi! I can see your shadows moving!”

Well, shit… So much for that way of passing the time! Still, probably wouldn’t look good if someone passed by and saw him trying to punch his own pokemon, even if Hitmontop had been the one to ask!

“Sorry, Mondo!” He shouted, signalling for Hitmontop to stop. “You guys had better get in your balls… But we’ll probably get a lot of fights soon, okay?”

They both nodded and headed into their balls, a few moments before the door of the tent flapped open…

“And so, begins the dramatic comeback of the great Hifumi Yamada!” From his vantage point he could just about see a short fat guy with a Sewaddle on his shoulder come in, posing dramatically as he did so. “For this time, I shall prevail!”

“Good for you, Yamada.” Mondo’s not at all surprised by this guy, so his guess was that this was someone from the school. “I just need to see your pokedex first…”

“W-what!? Mr Oowada!? You’re here to!?” On the other hand, the guy is very surprised to see Mondo… “D…does this mean I have to beat you for my badge…!”

“Nah, there’s a rule that says I can’t do Gym battles while I’m in school… Especially not against people I’m in the same class as.” Mondo assures him, “I’m just helping out by checking what badges everyone’s on, so the gang can adjust what pokemon they’re using.”

“Oh! Right, I see…” The guy sounds relieve. Guess he’s not as strong as Mondo, then… “Then here’s my pokedex! It should say I still need to get my first badge!”

First badge!? No kidding this guy wasn’t as strong as Mondo! How did Hope’s Peak have kids that didn’t have their first badge several months into the course!?
“Yeah, that’s right… I’ll let everyone know… Guys! Next trainer has zero badges!” Mondo shouts out towards the tent, before pointing down the centre pathway. “Good luck, Yamada… My bro’s in the tent at the back, there…”

“Oh ho! Is he now…?!” The kids laughed knowingly, adjusting his glasses while looking around the area. “Well, I’m certainly not going to fall for an obvious trap like that! Good adventurers always go left!”

Damn… was this set up too obvious? It’d look bad if too many people end up going straight to Daiya. Either people would say the Gym was going easy on people, or Daiya would have to upset a bunch of kids by kicking their asses straight away, with no chance for the rest of them to help help train up their pokemon that last little bit…

“Eh!? I’m back here!?” It sounds like the kid has found his way to Daiya’s tent… “What kind of Gym is this, Mr. Oowada!? I’ve only seen a single trainer on my way here!”

“Ugh… That’s ‘cause thmost of ‘em are waiting to ambush anyone dumb enough to try and walk straight up this path!” He can see Mondo snapping at the guy and gesturing at the path between them… “Wasn’t that why you didn’t go that way!?”

“Err… No. I thought you were trying to get me through the Gym as fast as possible, so I’d miss out on valuable XP!” As if any Gym would do that… Then again, if the guy’s not got a badge yet, he might not have been in a Gym before… “Err… am I allowed to go backwards, or…?”

“Yeah, you can. Not like the guys wanna stand around all day and do nothing…” Mondo pointed out to the guy, shortly before Takemichi heard him being challenged by the guy at what was supposed to be the end of the gauntlet…

Well, there’s always that option for people, right? Maybe it’d work out alright after all… It sounded like this guy was doing alright against everyone’s weakest pokemon, using a Sewaddle of all things! Even if they’re supposed to be making it fair on the guy, it was still kind of humiliating for the gang to lose to one of those little things, without the guy even having to reveal his other pokemon…

Guess it’d be up to him to restore the gang’s honour, just as soon as the guy started walking past him…

“Another triumphant victory! Drink up, Sewaddle!” It didn’t sound like it would be long, now, as he’d just heard the guy finishing off the trainer next to his hiding place. “Now, is there anyone else here, or…? Aha! You! With the spiky hair! I see you there!”

Looked like the time was now… “Alright. I was getting sick of waiting to fight anyway…” He admitted, as he stepped out into the centre path, where all the defeated members were stood waiting to see what happened. “Sounds like you’ve had a pretty easy run so far… But Daiya’d never forgive me if I let that carry on, so I guess I’ll have to have my Sandshrew take care of you!”

“A Sandshrew!? Haha!” The guy laughed, “That’ll be no match at all for my Sewaddle!”

Takemichi waited until both of their pokemon were on the field before letting himself smirk at the poor sap… “You sure about that…?”

“…AH!” The guy’s jaw dropped as he saw why Takemichi had asked… “It’s an Alolan Sandshrew…?”

“’Fraid so… Still think your little leaf bug there is going to do well against my Ice/Steel type?”
“Urgh… M-maybe not, but I won’t give up easily!” The guy insisted, pointing at him dramatically, “Sewaddle, use your Bug Bite!”

Straight into the battle, eh? Alright then… “Sandshrew, start using Ice Ball!”

There were some mutterings from the rest of the guys, mostly about how they thought he was maybe being a bit harsh on the guy with zero badges, especially when Sandshrew hit first, and barely flinched when the little bug bit him back… But he’d not even bothered using Defence Cur to power it up, first! And this kid was supposed to be a Hope’s Peak student! He could take a bit of a hard battle, right? Even if he couldn’t, he’d be able to try again tomorrow. So why not go all out and see whether the kid had the brains to find some way of stopping his Ice Ball attack, before Sandshrew sped up and the damage got out of hand?

“Hrm… I was hoping not to have to do this… But Sewaddle won’t take another hit!” He frowned, calling his pokemon back… “So prepare to face the might of my… Dratini!”

His other pokemon was a Dragon type!? Then maybe using Ice Ball was a bit much, even if it was a pretty big Dratini… But he wasn’t about to admit it and stop the move before it really got going, either!

But that was assuming the move actually got a chance to get going, and didn’t just knock out the dragon out as soon as it came out of the ball, because Sandshrew was still carrying on his attack, and the dragon didn’t have a chance to react before he went tumbling into it…

“Drrraaat!” The dragon squealed and froze in place a short while after Sandshrew hit it… But then it managed to shake itself out, ready to attack again… “Tini!”

“Alright… we need to stop that thing in its tracks!” The kid insisted, adjusting his glasses, “Dratini, Use Thunder Wave!”

“TINI!” The dragon nodded, building up sparks of electricity around its body, which shot out over to Sandshrew as he turned around to line up another shot at the dragon.

“SssaaAAaaAAAaaa!” Dammit! Not only had the dragon managed to hit first, but it had also paralysed Sandshrew and stopped his Ice Ball attack. Not to mention made it more difficult for him to build up the speed of the attack!

In a normal battle, he’d give Sandshrew something to cure the paralysis before telling Sandshrew to go to Ice Ball… but using items in a Gym battle at this level would be cheap as hell, and he definately didn’t have any better moves to deal with a Dragon…

“You can do it, Sandshrew, carry on with Ice Ball!”

“Haha! That did it!” The guy looked like he’d just been cheering while Takemichi strategized… “Dratini! Use Dragon Rage!”

Dragon Rage? Urgh… The move that always did the same amount of damage to every pokemon… Was Sandshrew even strong enough to survive it, yet…?

“Shhh… Shrewwww!” He must’ve been, even if the purple fireball the dragon spat out at him hurt enough to make him squeak in pain, ‘cause he still managed to roll himself up into a ball and crash into the dragon again!

C’mon! That must be enough to take it down now, right…!? 
“Dra… dra…” It had frozen up again, at least… and it looked dizzy… so, c’mon… “TINI!”

Dammit! It had managed to recover again…! Only just, but it had…

“One final Dragon Rage should do it!” The guy announced, just as his Dratini shot another purple ball of fire out at Sandshrew, who was still desperately trying to roll into it one more time, before he got hit and fell…

“Looks like you win.” Takemichi congratulated him with a sigh. Two pokemon weak to Ice and he still lost! Guess even the weaker Hope’s Peak students weren’t total pushovers… “All that’s left for you to do now is battle the Gym Leader!”

“Ah ha… Not quite!” The guy smirked, wagging his finger chidingly, “First, I need to heal up my pokemon!”

“Dude…” He sighed, trying not to let this idiot’s smugness get him worked up, “If you need me to tell you to heal your pokemon before the most important fight you’ve ever had, then you don’t deserve the fucking pokemon!”

“Ah… W-well said!” He stepped backwards nervously, like he thought Takemichi was going to beat him up or something, before turning to his Dratini and getting a can out of his anime backpack…

“Alright, Dratini… Here’s some diet coke for you…!”

Diet coke!? Did that work!? He’d never seen anyone giving their pokemon that…

“Tini…?” The dragon didn’t look that enthusiastic about it, that was for sure! It looked like it was busy thinking about something for a while, then suddenly backed away from the guy…

“Eh? Dratini, what’s the…?” Was as far as he got, before the Dratini suddenly started glowing light blue all over… “AH!”

Wow… He’d seen a lot of pokemon evolve in this job, but this was the first time he’d seen a Dragon do it! It started much the same as all the other evolutions he’d seen… first the pokemon was enveloped in light, which seemed to merge with its body until it was just a squishy-looking ball of blue light with a white core… although in this case the dragon mostly kept itself in a long cylindrical shape, which started pulsing in and out, especially at the two ends of the cylinder, as the light started to stretch out and get longer and thicker until it was tall enough to tower over all of them, at which point the bottom end of the light thinned out and the top part formed a bulb shape for the head, and then a pair of small wings poked out of the sides of that…

And at that point he had the sense to cover his eyes, ahead of the bright flash of light that always shot out of evolving pokemon as they went from being pure light into their new solid forms…

“Ahh!” …Looking around the gang after the flash, it looked like him and Mondo were the only people who’d thought to do that, even out of the gang members who’d all crowded round to watch the Dratini become a…

“Dragonair!” The thing spun around, a first trying to get a good look at itself, but then noticing that its trainer and everyone else were getting their eyesight back and looking at it again.

“Ah… AHAHAHAHA!” Even after recovering from the flash, it’s trainer took a moment to look it up and down, before breaking out into laughter and running over to it… “You look astounding! I’ll have to draw you as soon as we’re done here! I’ll even make it into a limited edition print, celebrating your evolution and my first badge…!”
The pair of them eagerly started heading over to Daiya’s tent… completely forgetting about the can of coke that was now rolling away, dribbling its contents over the ground…

“Hey… Yamada!” Mondo yelled after the guy. “You still gotta heal up your pokemon!”

Not that Daiya’s first-badge team had much chance of beating a Dragonair, but Daiya wouldn’t be all that impressed with the guy if he decided to throw out the half-beaten Sewaddle…

“Aghhh! O-of course…” The guy flinched, looked around for the can of coke and then walked back to pick it up off the floor, glancing up at Takemichi guiltily as he did it… “I… I would usually have done that…”

“…But then your pokemon evolved and you got excited and forgot.” Takemichi finished for him, “That’s understandable…” Hell, he’d gone and lost the final in a school tournament that way, the day Hitmontop had evolved…

“Ah… y-yes, thank you…” He muttered, checking the inside of the can and deciding to down whatever was left himself, before getting out a fresh one for the Dragonair…

“So, what was the deal with you not wanting to fight with it, then?” Mondo asked him.

“Well, it wouldn’t do to go into battle with all my cards on the table!” The guy answered, holding the can up so his Dragonair could drink from it, “I’d been hoping to conceal the existence of my second pokemon from everyone, until it came to the climatic final battle!”

…So he’d been planning on it being a big surprise during the fight with Daiya…? “But you’re a Hope’s Peak kid, right? We all know you guys all have two pokemon now.”

“Ah! Not so! Our deadline is not until term ends next week!” He insisted, as he got his Sewaddle and another can out. “For example, Mr. Ishimaru has yet to get his second pokemon, because he needs a second badge before he can adopt it!”

“Oh, right. That guy…” The stuck-up goody-two-shoes that Mondo had been complaining about all term, who turned up to everything ten minutes early and tried to nag Mondo into doing the same… “Kinda surprised he wasn’t the first person here…”

“I’m sure he would have been, if he hadn’t ended up in the hospital!” The guy told him cheerfully, as he fed the Sewaddle a can of coke.

“How’d that happen?” Had Mondo finally had enough and punched the guy…? He… did look kinda worried, actually, now they’d started talking about this… Don’t tell him Mondo really had punched a guy at school…

“Err… To be honest, I’ve yet to find the answer to that particular mystery!” He apologised, and Mondo started breathing again. “There’s a rumour going around, but… It doesn’t seem like something Mr. Ishimaru would do…”

“Well, he’ll still be outta there in time to get the badge he needs, so it’s not like it really matters, right?” Mondo shrugged casually… a little too casually. He was definitely hiding something about this…

Not that he was gonna bring it up in front of anyone. He’d just have to ask Mondo about it later…

“Indeed!” The guy hauled his ass off of the floor and checked over his pokemon one last time, “Well, I believe I’m ready now… so onwards! To destiny!”
…And off he went, marching forwards like a man on a mission, before coming out of Daiya’s tent a few minutes later cheering triumphantly… about getting his first badge at the age of seventeen…

It wasn’t like they’d never seen an badgeless adult before, even outside of Alola… But they usually acted a lot more embarrassed about it. Were all the kids here as weird as that guy had been? Other than Mondo, obviously…
Their first badge (Takemichi POV) pt. 2

Chapter Notes

Apologies if there's any bad typos in this chapter, but I'm feeling sick and don't have the energy to proof-read again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Well, the next few people Mondo recognised as they came through the Gym’s door weren’t exactly normal, although none of them were as delusional as that guy had been… First up was a girl who ran all the way around the maze twice ‘to calm her nerves’ before going into Daiya’s tent, then did another three laps as a victory celebration when she came back out with her new badge. She seemed to have come along with the next girl, a fricken giant with a Florges who was going for her seventh badge and sent everyone scrambling for the communal group of stronger pokemon and still kicked their asses.

At least she was a lot nicer about it than the Togami prick Mondo had been complaining about turned up straight after that, walking around the maze with a perpetual sneer as he looked over every little detail of the place, like he was doing a damn audit on ‘em all, or something! Takemichi wasn’t sure whether to be annoyed that he managed to get his badge or glad they wouldn’t have to see his face again tomorrow… He definitely was glad that the girl with the Garbodor that came in straight after him got her badge on the first try. Even in an outdoor Gym, they didn’t wanna deal with pokemon that smelt like that every day!

Next up was a cheerful blue-haired chick he kinda recognised from TV, who seemed to have dragged the sportsman that Mondo had spent most of the term hanging around with along with her, and also insisted he bring her item bag in with him, at least he figured that’s what happened after Mondo ripped the piss outta him for wearing it.

Soon after those two was a small blonde kid Takemichi had assumed was a middle-schooler, until Mondo called them by their name and started giving them a pep talk about their second badge. That was probably the kid who was helping Mondo with his maths, on second thoughts. And then there was some guy so normal-looking that Takemichi wouldn’t have remembered him at all, if Mondo hadn’t know him.

Then the next person Mondo knew...

She was pretty normal-looking as well, at first glance… just an average-sized, brown-haired girl in the standard brown skirt and blazer with some flowers around her neck… Until she suddenly seemed to notice him watching her, and turned to look at him so sharply that he instinctively ducked further back into his hiding spot. Was she really just a kid? She’d been the first person to notice him spying on the entrance all morning, and she’d looked like she was sizing the place up for potential threats the moment she came in the entrance. Not to mention, something about her was making him hope he didn’t have to go up against her in a fight…

“The next trainer’s got zero badges!” He heard Mondo shouting… but really? So much for his feeling about not wanting to battle her… not that that was gonna make him risk poking his head out of his hiding spot again and getting caught by her if he didn’t have to… “Good luck, Ikusaba. My bro’s in the tent at the back, there.”
“Understood.” He could hear her stepping into the maze, stay still for a while, and then head off to the left… Guess she’d decided to take the longer, easier route… or she’d just lucked out, but he was pretty sure she’d at least noticed him standing here, and probably woulda figured out that he wasn’t the only trainer guarding the shorter path…

Of course, there were still the other trainers in the maze, and it wasn’t long before he heard Susumu challenging her to a fight, and them both calling out their first pokemon…

“Alright Sentret… WHAT THE FUCK!?” Takemichi almost jumped right outta his skin as Susumu suddenly screeched mid-command. “WHAT THE HELL IS THAT!?”

“It’s a Zorua.” He barely heard the girl respond.

“THEN WHY’S IT LOOK LIKE ME!?” What!? Her pokemon was mimicking a human!?

“It’s a psychological tactic.” What the hell did she mean by that!? “Don’t you need to give your Sentret orders?”

“Yes, but… He… you… Argh…! Sentret! You know that’s not me, right!? I’m right here! That’s just another pokemon faking!” Susumu sounded like he was having trouble calming his pokemon down, “So show that faker who’s boss with a Quick Attack, alright!?”

“Zorua, use Feint Attack.” Feint Attack? So it must be stronger than Susumu’s Sentret, then…

It sounded like there was a clash between the pokemon, followed by Sentret crying as it passed out, already… He’d figured the Zorua was gonna be stronger than it, but not that strong!

“Dammit! He usually hits way harder than that!” Susumu also seemed to think something was up.

“Yes… I’ve heard you all have good relationships with your pokemon.” The girl was responding, “So none of them want to hit someone who looks like you, and it’s worse for them when my Zorua hits them.”

Fucking hell! That’s what she meant by ‘psychological tactic’! But what kind of fucked up dirty trick was that!? Messing with the trust pokemon had for their trainers, just to get an easy win against them! How could she stand there and explain it so fucking casually!?

“Wha…!? What the hell, Ikusaba!?” Ah… Mondo must have decided to leave the front entrance and see what all the shouting was about, and he sounded as pissed off as Takemichi was by this. “You can’t do shit like that!”

“But… Junko said it’s not against the rules.” Who the hell was Junko? Had she given this girl the idea to do this!?

“It ain’t…!? Well… that doesn’t matter!” Mondo snapped, after being surprised for a moment. “Just ‘cause you can do it doesn’t mean ya should! It’s fucking horrible!”

“But there’s no rule against it.” Urg… Was that gonna be her answer to everything!? “So, if I’ve beaten you, I can carry on now…?”

“What…? Wait, no! I’ve still gotta pokemon!” Susumu snapped at her, “Go, Hoppip…! Argh… Hey! Don’t worry, sweetie, that’s not me! It’s a fake…!”

Dammit… both his pokemon had fallen for the same trick! And chances were it’d screw with everyone else’s pokemon to! Was there really no rule against this shit!? She couldn’t just be allowed
Well… if anyone would know, it’d be Daiya… And as she’d gone round the back way, it was easy for him to run straight up the middle path and into his tent…

“Hey, Boss! Sorry to bother you…” *Especially* as it looked like Daiya was right in the middle of studying something when he came in. “But we’ve got a bit of a problem and I’m not sure how to deal with it…”

“Eh? Alright…” Daiya quickly picked up a scrap of paper to use as a bookmark, then looked up at him. “Shoot!”

“There’s this chick outside with a Zorua, which is disguising itself…”

“Ah… *right.*” Daiya nodded confidently, “The rule on *that* is, everyone’s gotta act like she’s using whatever pokemon her Zorua is pretending to be, even if they *have* seen her using it alrea…”

“Uhh… That ain’t what it’s doing, though!” Takemichi cut in, “She’s having it pretend to be *us*… like… whichever *trainer* she’s battling against, the Zorua’s changing itself to look like *them*!”

“…*What...!*?” Man… this was the first time he’d ever seen Daiya look so dumbfounded. “Why the hell would it do that…!?”

“*It’s* trainer said it was a psychological tactic… And from what I saw, it’s working. Susumu’s pokemon barely wanted to *touch* it, and they both went down in one hit.” Daiya’s mouth froze and eyes widened as he realised how bad this could end up being… “Mondo tried to get her to cut it out, but she just kept saying there’s no rule against it…”

“Well, no *sh*t!* Zoruas ain’t exactly common and *most* trainers who get their hands on one aren’t *assholes!*” Daiya growled, “The league probably didn’t even think this *could* happen!”

“So… there’s nothing we can do to stop her…?” He’d really been hoping she was lying about that…

“Not unless Mondo gets through to her…” Daiya sighed, probably cause they could hear the sounds of another battle outside, and Mondo was still yelling angrily. “…*What badge is she going for?*”

“*First.*”

“*First!*? Are you *kidding* me!?” Daiya slammed a fist on his table, knocking his bookmark out of place, “You mean I gotta send out my *newest* pokemon, too!? I’ve barely got some of those guys to like me as it is!”

*Oh man…* He was *right!* It wouldn’t be so bad if he could send out Gliscor… *He’d* understand that it was just a trick, and not the real Daiya. But Daiya’s newly rescued pokemon all had enough trust issues *without* thinking they’d just got punched by him… He was gonna be affected worse than everyone else in the gang if those two got in here…

But if the that girl *didn’t* get in here, she’d just keep coming back again and again, and mess up the *rest* of the gang’s pokemon all over again. After all, *none* of them were gonna wanna fight their own trainers, either!

*Dammit…* If only he could send out *Hitmontop* against that thing! See how well her stupid ‘psychological tactic’ held up against a pokemon that sparred with its trainer for *fun*…! But there was no way they could get away one of the random trainers on the Gym floor throwing something as strong as him out against a zero-badge trainer, even *if* the actual *leader* of the Gym was gonna be a
total pushover for her…

Unless…

“Well… What if I take your place, then?” Daiya raised an eyebrow at him, “I mean… I could act as Gym leader, and only send out Hitmontop against her… That’d be about right for a first badge, right? And he’s used to us throwing punches at each other…”

“Not full out ones, though…” Daiya frowned.

“Still beats you sending out Clefairy, doesn’t it?”

“Haah… yeah. Yeah it does.” Daiya sighed, “We ain’t really supposed to swap acting Gym leader in the middle of the day… but seeing as I’m gonna be reporting what she’s doing to the League anyway, I can’t see them getting on our case for making a substitution for one person…”

“So, we’re doing this?” As much as he hated pushing at Daiya to hurry up with a decision, they were only gonna have so much time before that girl got in here…

“As much as I hate making you fight my battles for me… Yeah. We are.” Daiya nodded, getting up from the table and heading off towards the back of the tent.

“Hey, I’m your bodyguard, remember? I’m supposed to take hits for you.” Takemichi reminded him, as he pulled up the bottom of the tent and started ducking under it.

“Doesn’t mean I should push you into them.” He sighed as he straightened himself back up, outside the tent. “But thanks, man. Dunno what we’d do without you.”

And then he dropped the material again and was gone, at least as far as anyone in here could tell. Guess he better explain what was going on to Hitmontop before that chick got in here…

“Hey, buddy. I need you out here for a sec…”

“HIT!” He jumped out of the ball, obviously ready for a fight, only to be completely surprised once he saw they were inside Daiya’s tent. Good thing he had taken the time to explain this… “Mon…?”

“Something came up, so I’m acting as Gym leader this one time.” He started, “You see, there’s a trainer out there who’s having her pokemon look like its opponents’ trainer. So when she comes in here, you’re gonna have to fight something that looks like me… So, you get why I’m in here, and not Daiya, right…?”

“…Hit.” He nodded, after thinking about it for a moment.

“Great! Okay, so that’s what’s gonna happen next time I call you from your ball, alright?” He pointed out, holding the ball up.

Hitmontop got the message and nodded before getting back in the ball, giving Takemichi just enough time to sit at Daiya’s desk and make it look like he was studying the boss’s DPTL stuff, before the entrance to the tent flapped open and the girl he’d seen before stepped through, frowning at him…

“…You’re Oowada’s brother?” Well, shit! Of course she knew who the real Gym Leader was, she was in Mondo’s class! And there was no way he could fake being one of the Oowadas…

“No. I’m just acting as the Gym Leader in his place.” He explained, “It happens sometimes. But don’t worry, you’ll still get a fair fight for whichever badge you’re going for..”
That part was true, this wasn’t the first time he’d stood in for Daiya, and the boss had been making him memorise all the rules on how hard each badge’s fight should be, and make sure his pokemon knew them all to.

“Understood.” She nodded curtly, “I’m here for my first badge.”

“Alright… You’ll be battling my Hitmontop, then.” He told her, calling his pokemon out at the same time. “This trainers going for her first badge, so go a little easy on her, alright?”

“Hit!” Hitmontop nodded, watching her cautiously.

“So, we’re starting now?” The girl asked, looking a little unsure of herself as she got her pokeball out. “Alright… You know what to do!”

He briefly saw her pokeball open up, before a dark-coloured flash shot out from it, forming a tall thin shape that quickly shifted colours into…

Fucking hell! That was one hell of a disguise! He’d have said it was like looking into a mirror, except that he didn’t have the same angry snarl on his face as that thing did!

“T-top!?” It was bad enough that even with the warning from before, Hitmontop had to turn around to confirm that the real him was stood just behind him, before he brought up his arms into a defensive stance and stared up at it head-on, fists trembling just a little...

“So, that’s why I heard Mondo yelling at you…” He muttered, hoping to hide the fact that he’d been a lot closer to her the first time she’d done this. “Guess you’re not much of a trainer if you have to rely on shit like this to get a badge…”

“You’re right, I’m not.” What the heck!? She was just agreeing with that!? In all the years he’d been helping the gang, he’d never heard anyone coming for a badge admit they weren’t a good trainer so casually. Usually even if they did agree, they’d then go on to explain what they were doing to improve, but this chick just said it like it was a matter of fact that she was bad, and that was it. Was that why she’d taken this idea from that Junko person…?

 “…You know, you can’t just rely on this trick forever, right?” He pointed out, “The league’ll probably ban it once they hear what you’re doing.”

“Oh, really?” She looked a little concerned by that, but not enough to get her Zorua to quit doing it… “I guess that means Junko will have to come up with something else…”

Dammit… seemed like this chick was happy to just rely on someone else to come up with cheap tricks for her, instead of working at being a better trainer in the first place. How the hell did someone like that get into a place like Hope’s Peak?

Who knows? But it wasn’t like he could do anything about it, other than test her for her first badge, which meant not going all out with a powerful fighting-type move that would’ve knocked this damn thing out in one hit… “Alright then… Let’s start this fight. Hitmontop, use Quick Attack!”

“Use Fury Swipes!” The girl responded.

The fake Takemichi brought up its hands, which now looked like they had weirdly-long nails on them. Meanwhile Hitmontop flipped up into a headstand, using its arms to start spinning around on the spike on it’s head and moved towards the fake like that, managing to swing out a well-timing kick that caught the fake right in the stomach, making it keel over…
“Rua!” …And suddenly turn back into a small purple fox with a red-tipped quill, which then shrieked and scratched at Hitmontop with its front paws several times… “Rua, rUA!”

“TOP!” Hitmontop was almost knocked out of his spin by the blows, but managed to stay upright… but the fact that the thing hurt him enough to make him cry out like that meant it must be stronger than Takemichi was giving it credit for…

“Ah… your pokemon actually hurt it!” Meanwhile, the girl looked just as surprised by how well his pokemon had done. “…Do the pair of you not get along?”

“We get along fine!” Takemichi snapped at the accusation, before remembering what she’d said about her tactic making pokemon not wanna hurt their trainers, “Him and I just spar together sometimes, so he knows I can take a hit!”

“I see…” She frowned, “Then all I can do is carry on with Fury Swipes!”

“Hitmontop, another Quick Attack!” He quickly countered with his own order…

This time, Hitmontop threw out a low-placed arm that bashed the Zorua sideways a little, before it retorted with another four slashes, the last of which made Hitmontop topple over sideways…

“That’s enough.” Takemichi sighed, using his pokeball to recall the guy. Not that Hitmontop was actually knocked out, but a pokemon knocking him over was more than good enough to warrant a first badge… “Congratulations.”

“…It’s over?” She looked a little surprised. “That’s all it took.”

“Yeah, well it is just your first badge, right?” Takemichi shrugged, heading over to the drawer he knew Daiya kept the copies of their badge in. “You’d have been fine without that trick of yours.”

“Oh… So, I should have saved this tactic until my next badge…?” She completely missed the point he’d been trying to make…

“No, I’m saying you should trust your pokemon to be strong enough to fight without using tricks like that!” He spelled it out for her. “That’s what good trainers do!”

“But, I’m not a good trainer…” Dammit… why was she so insistent about that? How the hell could he argue with that?

Well… He did have a badge he needed to give her. Maybe he could use that… “I dunno… If you weren’t a good trainer, I wouldn’t be giving you this.” He said, holding the badge out while trying to look as official as possible.

“Hmm…” She just frowned again as she took it off of him, staring at it for a while… “Zorua, time to move out.”

“Zor!” The fox that had been terrorizing the gangs pokemon a few minutes ago yipped cheerfully and followed its trainer out of the tent…

“…She’s gone now.” Takemichi said out loud, assuming Daiya would have stuck around in earshot…

“Good.” Like he’d thought, it sounded like Daiya’s voice was coming from just on the other side of the tent, and the fabric soon lifted up as he ducked back underneath it. “I mean, good job trying to get through to her, but what was that? Even crap trainers usually think they’re good!”
“I dunno… Something to ask Mondo about, I guess.” Assuming Mondo had actually spoken to her all term…

“Yeah, guess so.” Daiya sighed, “You definitely did a better job of dealing with her than I could of, but I should be able to deal with everything else now… And seeing as you’re in here, go take a bunch potions and shit from the store cupboard and hand them out to the rest of the gang before you go back to your spot!”

“Sure thing, boss!” He’d have made a joke about his reward for protecting Daiya having been to do more work, but it did make sense for him to grab a bunch of stuff while he was in here, and made for a good excuse for him to have come in Daiya’s tent in the first place, if anyone caught him coming back out of it…

Once all that was sorted, he took up his position back near the front of the Gym and watched as Mondo called in the next trainer…

“Urg! About time!” A snooty girl’s voice came through the door, followed by the girl herself, another one that Takemichi felt like he’d seen before, but couldn’t have said where from. “Mukuro came out ages ago!”

“Well, like I said, we needed to dish out more potions to the guys!” Mondo snapped at her, for what Takemichi would have guessed was the fifth time. “Anyway, now you’re in here, you just gotta get to that tent in the back, there…”

“Hmm… just down that obvious path, guarded by those… five guys over there?” She smirked, leaning sideways so she could get a direct look at Takemichi… Had that other girl told everyone how the Gym was set up, or had this chick just managed to notice it herself…? “Wait… hey! Weren’t you the one acting as the Gym Leader five minutes ago!? Why are you back out here?!”

Dammit… guess that other chick had told this one about everything that had happened in here, which might mean that this was that Junko person she’d been talking about…

“Cause he ain’t acting as Gym Leader anymore.” Mondo shrugged, “What, is that some kinda problem?”

“Hmm… It’s not a problem… I’ve just never heard of a Gym swapping Leaders just for one trainer…” She mused innocently, “Seems kinda sketchy, don’t you think? People might start wondering if you’re running some kind of con, or something…”

“I dunno… I’d say telling your friend she should have her pokemon trick others into thinking they’re being attacked by humans is much more ‘sketchy’!” He said pointedly, which must have hit a nerve, because she started glaring at him…

“She’s my sister…” She snapped, which was the last thing he’d been expecting her to complain about. “But what’s the big deal? It’s not like it was actually a human hurting them! If that bothers you so much, you should yell at Ishimaru, not me!”

“…What?” He knew Mondo had said that that Leon guy thought Ishimaru was hurting his pokemon, but Mondo had made it sound like he was the only one who thought that! They couldn’t really have let someone like that into Hope’s Peak, could they…?

“Oh? You’ve not heard about his ‘accident’?” She smirked innocently, “He said himself that he snuck out and decided to pick a fight with a poor little Houndour…”
“That was when he’d only just come around from being knocked out!” Mondo suddenly interrupted her, “He said after that all he was trying to do was lure it back to school with snacks!”

“Well, sure, he said that after everyone freaked out over what a creep he was being! You don’t really believe him, do you?” She laughed, “And what’s with you suddenly speaking up for him in the first place?”

“Nnggh…” Mondo grimaced at that. She had a good point after all, about both things… “I just don’t think you should be spreading around that kind of shit about someone, when you don’t know for sure that’s it true!”

“Really? I figure people ought to know it’s a possibility, just so they can keep it in mind when they meet the guy… Especially people like your friends here!” She shrugged, as she walked off to the side, worryingly close to where the hidden entrance to the member’s only part of the maze was… “We wouldn’t want pokemon abusers getting badges, would we? Anyway, it looks like this way is the easiest, so toodles!”

And then she smugly opened up the hidden flap in the maze walls and sauntered through it… And after he’d checked that it was hard to see as well! How good was that chick’s eyesight?

And what the hell was she getting at just now? Was she suggesting that they stop that Ishimaru guy from getting a badge when he tried to come here?

“Ugh… Goddammit…” Mondo groaned quietly to himself after she walked off, before straightening up and raising his voice so everyone in the tent could hear him… “Hey, guys? I dunno how many of you heard all that, but you can just ignore the shit that chick said just now! Ishimaru’s in my class, and he ain’t no pokemon abuser, alright!”

There were a few confused-sounding agreements from around the tent, which made Mondo look a little happier about the whole thing, and the girl didn’t say anything else about it, even after she came back out of Daiya’s tent, looking smug even though she didn’t have a new badge in hand.

But Takemichi still had questions… After all, Mondo had been bitching about the guy for months, and he’d said Lycanroc had been growling at him for the last few weeks? Why was he suddenly standing up for the guy…? It’d probably be easiest to ask Mondo about it when it was just the pair of them, in case Mondo was hiding something he wouldn’t want the whole gang knowing…

In the end, it wasn’t until long after the gang had closed up the Gym for the night that Takemichi got his chance, when Daiya reminded Mondo that he had a curfew he needed to get back inside the school for, and Takemichi took the chance to sneak away from the rest of the gang to go after him once he’d said goodbye to them all…

“Yo, Mondo! You got a sec…?”

“Michi?” Mondo turned to look at him, then stopped to let him catch up. “Sure, I’ve got a few minutes left, what’s up!?”

Well, if Mondo didn’t have much time left, he’d have to be pretty blunt about this… “I wanna know what the deal with this Ishimaru guy and his accident is.”

“Wh…whaddaya mean?” Mondo stammered, “I already said everything I know about it…”

“Have you? ‘Cause you’ve been acting pretty weird every time it came up today.” Takemichi
argued, “And why are you suddenly defending a guy you’ve been bitching about all term, anyway?”

“Oh… that? That’s… just ‘cause him and I actually spoke about shit for once, instead of just yelling at each other, and I realised he ain’t such a bad guy!” Mondo shrugged, avoiding the bit about his weird behaviour, “And he ended up helping me out with something, so I figured I oughta stop people like Enoshima spreading around that crap he came out with when his head wasn’t straight, y’know?”

“Well… That makes sense if you’re sure she’s wrong.” He admitted, “What did he do to help you, anyway?”

“Oh…” Mondo froze for way too long. “He, uhh… he gave me some training tips for Lycan! Like using TV time as a reward for good behaviour!”

“That might actually work, now Mondo had a TV that’d always have power. But he still had the feeling that Mondo was keeping something from him about all this…

“A-anyway, I’ve gotta get going…” Mondo pointed back at the school, before he had a chance to say anything. ‘I’ll see ya again tomorrow! And maybe I can even bring a couple of my pals to hang out, too!”

“Sure! Sounds good!” It’d be nice to meet the guys Mondo had been hanging around with. Especially the pokedex expert… “Enjoy your nice bed while we’re all out here camping!”

“Hey! If I could let you in, I would!” Mondo insisted defensively, before rushing off towards the front door to the building, leaving Takemichi by himself…

“Haah… ” He couldn’t help but sigh as the guy left. Something was definitely going on with that Ishimaru guy, but he sure wasn’t going to find out what it was from Mondo. His best bet would probably be letting Daiya know what that chick earlier had said, so they could both keep it in mind when the guy came in for his badge…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
When we're scared (Arcanine POV) pt. 1

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the late update! I had a migraine yesterday and just completely forgot to upload the chapter. (Odd, because this and the next chapter are probably the most self-indulgent parts of the fic so far.) Also apologies for the odd cut-off point for the chapter. It was a bit hard to split this one into reasonable sized parts.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“We’ll see you around!”

Good! That guy’s leaving, and taking his… his stupid mutt who HURT TAKA with him!

“See you!” Hrmm… But Taka’s still trying to be nice to them both… “Well… I think I’ve been on my feet long enough…”

Aww… Taka’s gotta go back to bed already? He hardly got to move about at all just now! But it already looks like it’s hurting him to move, even as he moves back into bed…

He bets that jerk did do something to Taka’s leg again! Even if Taka said it was just pointing! Taka’s just not being careful enough! So that just means Arcanine’s going to have to keep that stupid mutt away from Taka, just like he had to keep that jerk Scyther away from him before…

“Arcanine…” Ooohh… It sounds like Taka’s upset! “I know you’re angry, but he really was just pointing! And he apologised for hurting me, too! So, you don’t need to worry about protecting me from him like that.”

[Hrmmm…] Taka’s not usually wrong… But Taka always used to tell him not to get mad at Scyther to! And he kept on trying over and over to hurt Taka whenever he took those glasses off!

“And like I said, he only hurt me because I scared him!” Taka’s still being too nice… “And it’s not like Scyther, where I can’t do anything to stop myself upsetting him again. I know what I did, mostly anyway, and I’ll make sure it won’t happen again!”

[Hrmmm…] He doesn’t wanna say Taka’s wrong, but…

“…You don’t believe me, do you? Well… I suppose I can’t really blame you.” Taka sighs, then pats his lap. “Would you like me to pet your head again?”

[Yes.] Arcanine nods, heading over and leaning over the bed so he can rest his head under Taka’s hands, which then gently worm their way through his fur, steadily slowing down as he sinks down into Taka’s lap and shuts his eyes.

“It must have been scary for you, walking in and seeing me like that…” Taka murmurs, distracting him from the nice relaxing strokes of his hand.

[Don’t talk about that!] He doesn’t wanna remember what that was like! For a moment, he’d really thought Taka wasn’t gonna wake up, and then he’d never get anymore strokes like this or…
“Ah! I’m sorry! D-don’t worry about it, please!” Taka cries, going back to harder, faster strokes to take Arcanine’s mind off of it. “It’s alright now… I’m safe now… We’re both safe now, okay?”

[Okay…] Arcanine’s yawns and settles his head back down, while Taka slows down the pettings again, with each stroke matching up with Arcanine’s breathing…

“I’m sorry… I didn’t mean to scare you…”

“I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to scare you!” The human boy who just yelled at him cries, as he crouches down to look at Growlithe, who’s hiding in a squeezy spot between the wall and a big soft thing that he could fit under, but the boy can’t. “I just shouted because you startled me! I thought Father had just got me an empty pokéball, I wasn’t expecting you to be in it!”

Hrmm… Who’s Father? And who’s this boy? He doesn’t look like the mean guy or any of the other humans he’s seen! And this isn’t a place he’s seen, either! Where is he…?

“Ahh… Now I’ve ruined the surprise, haven’t I…?” The human boy is whining to himself, “But… maybe if you go back into the ball, I can act surprised when Father actually gives you to me! How’s that sound…?”

No! He doesn’t want to go back in the ball, he’s hungry…! Is there any food here…?

He looks around… there is some! But it’s in a little bowl on the floor a long way away, and he’d have to run past that human boy to get it… But he’s hungry, and the human doesn’t look ready to grab him. He’s just staring at Growlithe with wide bright eyes… So maybe he can quickly run out past him and eat, then run back in here before he’s caught and made to go back in the ball…

He moves as fast as he can, past the boy who yells again, and over to the food, quickly scooping all the food he can into his mouth and hastily swallowing it as he runs back past the boy and under the soft thing…

“AH! Wh-what…? That was Meowth’s food… Were you that hungry!?” By the time the boy works out what he’s done, Growlithe is back in his little safe space, waiting for the food he just ate to move into his tummy make it stop hurting him… “…Do you want some more?”

More food!?! Yes! He wants more food! Where is it…?

He looks around, but he can’t see any food. Instead the human boy walks off to somewhere that Growlithe can’t see and comes back with a big bag, which he brings back to the bowl and now the bowl is full of food again!

Hrmrmmm… But now the human boy is sitting right next to the bowl, watching him with those big bright eyes again… If Growlithe tries to go eat now he’ll be grabbed for sure and get pushed back in the ball again… and that’ll hurt! He’s not so hungry now… he can wait and hope the human gets bored of watching him before he’s hungry again…

“Are you full now…? Or are you still scared of me?” The human crouches down to look at him again, his little strips of black eye-fur moving together as he stares at Growlithe, before sitting up and
picking up the bowl with the food… “Erm… Here you go…?”

OH! He’s slipped the food under the soft thing, right next to Growlithe! This is his chance to eat!

He quickly scoops up all the food as fast as he can, ignoring the feeling that he’s full up… The more he eats, the longer it’ll be before he’s hungry again…

“…You really were hungry…” Growlithe scoots back a bit, as the human suddenly crouches down right in front of his nose… “Oh… you’re still scared of me? I’m really sorry I yelled! I won’t do it again! I just want to pet you!”

The boy’s loud… but he doesn’t sound angry-loud. He’s just staring at Growlithe with those eyes again…

But Growlithe’s safe in here! He’s not going to get hit or stuffed back in the ball if that boy can’t grab him! There’s no reason for him to leave the little squeezy spot, even if the boy looks sad about it…

“Ah! How about this!?” The boy moves back and reaches into the bag from before, pulling out more food! “Ah… you do still want more! Alright! I’m just going to lie down here, and you can take it from my hand! Okay?”

Hrmm… If Growlithe goes over to his hand, then the boy could grab him… but there’s food in his hand, and he wants to eat as much as he can…! Hrmm, what should he do!? The boy really is just lying down, with the food out in his hand, and just staring at Growlithe with the big bright eyes again…

…Looking into those eyes, Growlithe’s pretty sure the boy just wants to get to know him… maybe even be friends with him…

[…] Growlithe nods, as he slowly steps out and decides to try eating the food…

“Ahaha! You did it!” The boy laughs as Growlithe licks the last few crumbs from his hand, then curls his fingers up gently under Growlithe’s neck and softly moves them over the tangled fur their lots of times…

It’s nice. And not just because it makes his neck feel less itchy! He’s not sure why it is, but it’s making him feel nice and warm around his neck, and he just wants to get closer to the boy, so the rest of him can feel warm to…

“Ah… you like that? You want me to stroke your back?” The boy’s voice is softer now, and he starts carefully moving his fingers down Growlithe’s back, as he lets himself relax and scoot in closer, so he’s lying sideways against the human’s chest, enjoying the warm of his hands as they move over his head, down the top of his neck, over his back, down around his back legs…

Which was where the bad man grabbed him earlier!

[OOOWWW!] Growlithe lets out a howl as the warmth from the boy’s fingers turns into the sharp pain from when that man tried to push him back into his ball before…

“AH! I’m sorry! Did that hurt!?” The boy cries, rocking him side to side… “I-I didn’t mean to! I didn’t realise you were hurt! I’ll take you to the…”
“Arcanine? Arcanine!? Are you okay…!??” Taka’s shaking him by the head all of a sudden. And it’s dark, to…

But is he okay? Didn’t Taka just accidentally hurt him? But that was back when he Growlithe…

“It sounded like you were having another bad dream…” Taka explains.

[Errrm…] He had had a scary dream about not being able to find Taka last night, but that wasn’t what just happened. That was just… stuff he remembered from being a puppy… When Taka had first let him out of his new ball and then yelled ‘cause he’d scared him…

Hah! See, that was the worst Taka had ever done when he’d been scared! He’d never hurt anyone…!

“Arcanine…?” Taka’s leaning down to look at him, and he can just about see Taka’s frowny face…

“Did you wake up just because you’re upset with the Lycanroc…?”

[Noooo!] Arcanine shakes his head, [I woke up ‘cause my dream hurt!]

“Oh… So it was just a bad dream…?” Taka asks, giving his head a heavy pat to get him to snuggle down onto Taka’s lap again, so he can pet Arcanine to sleep like he did last night. “Well, it’s alright now. Just shut your eyes and try and think of nice things, alright…?”

[Okay…] Nice things like poffins…

“Are you alright in here…?” There’s a lady’s voice from the corridor, but that’s just the lady who’s looking after Taka, so he doesn’t need to worry about it… He can just think about playing with Taka…

“Yes, I’m fine, thank you!” Taka’s starts talking to her as Arcanine thinks about swimming in the bath. “It seems Arcanine’s still a little upset about what happened to me, and had another bad dream…”

“Oh, poor thing…” He just about hears the lady say before he starts thinking about getting brushed by Taka, and counting how many brushes Taka gives him… 1, 2, 3… 4… “He sure does like you, huh…?”

“He sure does like you, huh?” Father says when he walks back in the house, while Growlithe is trying to give Taka some licks on the face, to say thanks for brushing him again…

It’s been quite a few sleeps since Taka started looking after him, and Growlithe’s loved every minute of it! He’s not been hungry this whole time, or had to go in his pokéball! And when Taka back home every day, he always feeds and washes and brushes his fur, before telling him a nice story night before he goes to sleep…

“Ahahaha! Yes! He does!” Taka laughs when Growlithe succeeds in licking him, and gives Growlithe a big hug as well! “He’s the best pokémon!”

And he thinks Growlithe’s the BEST pokémon! Yay! [And you’re the best trainer, Taka!]
“Ahahaha!” Taka just laughs as Growlithe gives him more licks…

“I’m glad you think so.” Father tells Taka, giving him a pat on the head which makes him laugh even more. “I bet you’re looking forward to him being well enough to take to school!”

“Err…” Taka stops laughing, and loosens up his hug. Did Father upset him…!? That was mean of him!

“Ah… You’re not looking forward to taking him to school?” Father asks, looking upset now as well. “But… before your birthday, you were saying you’d like to be able to start training, and taking part in the pokémon classes to…”

“Y-yes…! And I do still want to!” Taka tells him, “It’s just… I haven’t told him about Grandfather yet, and I’m worried the other children at school will…”

“What…?” Father pauses, then crouches down next to Taka and puts a hand on his shoulder. “Kiyotaka, he’s not going to care about that! He’s not even going to understand it! He’s a dog!”

“He’s a clever dog, though…” Taka’s looks a lot sadder about it, than when he said it earlier today. “He’s learnt all the tricks I’ve tried to teach him!”

Hrm… Growlithe can’t be that clever, ‘cause he doesn’t understand what Taka and Father are talking about!

“Well… then he’ll be clever enough to understand you’re not like your Grandfather!” Father tells him. “He knows you’re a good trainer, and he’ll want to stay with you regardless of what people say about you… Right, Growlithe? You want to stay here with Taka, don’t you?”

[Yes!] Growlithe’s tail wags at the idea of being looked after by Taka all the time. [That’d be great!]

“See!?” Father pats Taka on the head again. “You don’t have anything to worry about! Now, what are these tricks you’ve taught him…?”

“Oh! I taught him to fetch! And drop the ball!” Taka explains, pushing Growlithe back on the floor as he stands up. “I’ll go get the ball and show you!” And then he runs off, before either of them can say anything…

Not that he minds! Fetching was fun! He didn’t like dropping the ball so much, but Taka gave him pets on the head and said he was a good boy when he did it, so it’s still worth doing! Everything Taka says to do it worth doing!

“…Haaaa…” Father doesn’t seem very excited about being shown the new tricks though… “I guess I really can’t risk them wanting you rehomed…”

[What?] What did ‘rehomed’ mean? And why was Father looking at Growlithe when he said that…?

“Ah… Don’t you worry! I’ll make sure you stay here… I was just thinking out loud!” Father gives him a quick pat on the head. “You just worry about keeping Kiyotaka happy, alright?”

[Okay!] He likes making Taka happy! He has a nice laugh and always gives Growlithe nice pets and hugs and stuff! And when he does tricks he gives Growlithe poffins to stop him getting hungry… ‘though he’s starting to feel a bit hungry now… but he can hear Taka pouring out some food in his bowl, so he can go eat that…!
Arcanine’s awake! Now where’s that food…!? 

Wait… nevermind that! Where’s Taka!? He was under Arcanine’s head when he went to sleep, but now there’s a cushion under there…!? [Taka!?!]

“Ah… Good morning!” Oh! There’s Taka, behind him! And he’s pouring out Arcanine’s food! “I didn’t know if you were going to wake up this early after last night, so…”

Arcanine doesn’t hear the next part, ‘cause he’s eating everything in the bowl…!

“…Well, now you’re awake, it’ll be easier to do my exercises and then get back into the bed!” Is the next thing he hears Taka say, before he starts doing his new exercises for a while. Then he has to go sit back in the bed he’s stuck in…

“Now, I think it’s going to be time for my breakfast soon…” Taka warms him, ‘cause it means Arcanine’s got to go back into his pokéball for a bit. “It’s probably best for you to go back into your ball for now… but I’ll let you out once I’ve finished eating, and then we’ll try to decide what to do today. Okay?”

[Okay, Taka!] Arcanine tells him, before getting in the ball…

Taka does let him out after a short while, and then let’s Arcanine pick which toys he’s gonna play with today, but…

What he wants is to go for a walk outside, or play in the baths… Instead he and Taka are stuck in this room, which isn’t even big enough to play fetch, and Taka keeps falling taking little naps all the time… Even with all his toys, it boring… He’s almost glad when Taka wakes up and makes him go back into the ball for a little while, just ‘cause it means he gets to skip some of the boring day… But then Taka lets him back out and Arcanine has to try and think of something to do again…

“…Are you getting bored in here?” Taka asks, the third time he knocks over a tower just ‘cause he’s bored of building it. “I can talk to the staff about finding someone else to look after you until…”

[No! I gotta stay here and look after you!] Arcanine shakes his head and move closer to the bed, just in case. [‘Cause that wolf might come back!]

“Arcanine…” Taka sighs, “You really don’t have to look after me, you know…”

[Yes I do!]

“Ah…” Taka gasps a little when Arcanine barks at him… “I’m not saying you can’t if you really want to, but… I’d be safe in here without you! So you could at least go out for a little while…”

[Hrrmmm…] It would be nice… but they let that wolf in here before! So… [No.]

“Well… if you’re sure…” Aww… Taka looks worried now… But he doesn’t say why, he just gives Arcanine a long pat on the head… until the lady looking after him comes in to say he’s got a visitor, and Taka sits up happily and says they can come in…

Oh! It’s Blastoise! And he’s with Makoto and Togepi like always! [Blastoise! Hello, Blastoise! And Togepi!]

[Hey there, Arcanine!] Blastoise puts a hand up as Arcanine runs over and sits in front of him, and
gets a slow, hard pat on the head. [Good doggy!]

[Thanks!] Arcanine tells him, even though he’s not sure what he did that was good! And now Togepi’s pulling at his fur as she climbs up his back again, while Taka tells Makoto that he’s alright, but he thinks Arcanine’s bored…

“Yeah, I figured that might happen…” Oh! Makoto must be pretty clever to! “That’s why I came to say he could come with us outside, if you wanted!”

Ohhh… Going out to play with Blastoise would be fun… but he’s gotta look after Taka!

“Oh… Err… I don’t have a problem with it… But I’m not sure Arcanine will want to…” Taka explains the same thing… “He doesn’t seem to want to leave me alone right now…”

[Is that true?] Blastoise asks him.

[Yep!] Arcanine nods at him, [I gotta make sure that wolf doesn’t come back and hurt Taka again!!]

[Oh… I see.] Blastoise nods, [Well… What if I looked after Taka for you? Then you could go run around outside with Togepi and Makoto…]

[Oh! That’s a great idea!] Blastoise is stronger than Arcanine, so he can do an even better job protecting Taka than he would! And then Arcanine can go have fun, instead of being stuck in here!

[But… won’t you get bored instead?]

[It’s just for one day…] Blastoise gives him another heavy pet, before moving over next to Taka’s bed and slowly falling backwards until he’s on the floor. [I’ll be fine sitting here!]

[Yay! Thank you, Blastoise!] Arcanine tells him, then walks over to Makoto. [Okay! I can come with you now!]

“Oh! I… guess they sorted that out themselves then…?” Makoto looks a little confused as he sees where Blastoise is now sitting. “You’re gonna stay here with Kiyotaka, Blastoise?”

“Well… it’s not really necessary, but if it means Arcanine goes outside for a while…” Taka looks a little annoyed as Blastoise nods, “Alright, Arcanine… You be good for Makoto, okay?”

[Yep, okay!] He’ll be a good boy and do what Makoto tells him to!

“Uhh… alright, then! I guess I’ll see you later, Kiyotaka!” Makoto picks Togepi up off of Arcanine’s back and waves goodbye. “Come on, Arcanine…”

[Okay!] Arcanine tells him, and walks next to him all the way outside and to the grassy place near the farm with the Mareeps, where Makoto tells him and Togepi to play nicely together…

Hrm… but they didn’t bring any toys out with them… [Do you know any games you want to play?]

[Climb! Up!] Togepi just wants to climb up his back again, so Arcanine sits still while he tries to think of a game.

But he can’t think of anything, and it’s been so long that Togepi’s sat all the way up near his neck and is pulling on his fur…

[Ow! That hurts!] How’s he supposed to think of a game when she’s hurting him?
[Giddy up, Ponyta!]

[My name’s Arcanine.] She doesn’t usually get his name *that* wrong! [Ar-can-nine…!]

[Noooo!…!] But… his name *is* Arcanine! [Giddy up Pontya!]

*Ow*! Not she’s pulling on his fur again! [Makoto…]

“Ah… I think Togepi wants you to run around with her on your back a little bit…” Makoto explains, once Arcanine starts whining at him to stop her.

But if *that’s* all she wants…! [Oh! Okay, I can do that!] Running around is *easy*!

[WOAH!] Togepi stops pulling as hard once Arcanine starts running off across the field, going nice and fast ‘cause there’s nothing to crash into out here, at least not until they get to the farm, but they’re only halfway there right now! He’ll just have to make sure he doesn’t get too far away from Makoto, but he can still see the guy… Just about…

“AAAAHHH! TOGEPI!…” Hmm? It sounds like Makoto’s shouting something? Should he go back…? “Ahhh… Arcanine! Come back!”

Uh-oh! Makoto sounds really panicky! He better run back even *faster…!* [I’m back!] He tells Makoto, as he skids to a stop in front of the guy. [What’s the ma…?]

“Togepi!” Makoto ignores him, and runs to his back to take Togepi off of him, “Are you okay!? I didn’t think Arcanine would run *that* fast… Togepi…!?”

But… why wouldn’t Arcanine run that fast? That’s just how fast he runs! But Makoto looks really worried until Togepi finally says something…

[That was FUN!] Oh good! She likes running as much as he does! [Again, again!]

“You… you *liked* that!?” Why’s Makoto look so surprised? They were having a fun run around… “I thought you were gonna fall off! Uhh… But I guess if you enjoyed it…?”

[Yay!] Togepi cheers and Makoto puts her back on Arcanine and she grabs his fur again… [Giddy up, Ponyta!]

[It’s Arcanine!] He tells her again… but she doesn’t seem to be listening to him now he’s started running…

They run around for a *long* time before Makoto says it’s almost time for dinner, and takes him back to Taka, who *was* taking another nap, but woke up when his buzzy watch goes off and tells him it’s time to get Arcanine’s dinner ready.

Then Makoto takes Blastoise and Togepi away to get their dinners, leaving him alone with Taka… But only for a little while, ‘cause then they all come back with his Makoto’s pokédex and let Arcanine watch a bunch of Super-Arcanine shows! This day has been *great*!

…But now he’s starting to feel sleepy… And a show just finished… Maybe he’ll just put his head on Taka’s lap and shut his eyes until the next show come on…”

“Oh… I guess that’ll be the last one we watch, huh…?” Makoto asks. That’s nice… Arcanine can just sit here with his eyes shut… “Just as well… It’s getting close to Togepi’s bedtime.”

“Ah, really? I didn’t notice the time!” Taka tells him, putting his hand on Arcanine’s neck and giving
him a nice scratch. “But thank you for spending so much of your time with me today… It seems to have helped Arcanine’s mood a lot…”

“Don’t worry about it… I’m just glad you’re getting better…” Makoto tells him, “You think you’ll be better by the time the Diamonds arrive?”

“Probably not when they arrive… But I’ll be certain to get there before they leave!” Taka tells him. “…It would be nice if I could get there sooner, though…”

“Yeah… I guess it’d be pretty frustrating knowing you could be getting your next badge, but being stuck in bed.”

“Exactly… and not to mention the sooner I get my badge, the sooner I meet my next pokémon!”

“Oh yeah! The Misdreavus, right?”

“Well… I think so… I still haven’t got an answer from Tanaka about that…” Taka does a little of the twisty fur strokes as he worries, “…I haven’t actually heard from him for a while! I hope this hasn’t made him think I’m, err… not responsible enough to look after it!”

“Well… the story going around school is just that you snuck out and got hurt. And some people don’t even believe the part about you sneaking out!” Makoto laughs, and Taka’s hand stops being so shaky. “I doubt he’ll have heard about that lie you told when you first woke up…”

“Err… Well, that’s good!” Taka sounds happy, “But… how did you hear about that!?"

“Ah… Well, Oowada told me about your swap Saturday morning, so when I heard you got injured and people thought you’d snuck out, I thought maybe he’d lied about what happened and went to tell Kizakura the truth, and he told me the whole story…” Makoto’s laughing nervously. “Sorry! I didn’t even think that maybe you’d been the one to lie about it…”

“That’s alright… I think everyone did the same thing, especially my father…” Taka sighs, digging his fingers into Arcanine’s neck fur. “He was not happy with me when I first called him from in here.”

“I’m not surprised! Heck, my parents would have probably made me come home if I ended up in hospital twice in one term, let alone told everyone what you did!” That sounds mean! Father wouldn’t make Taka go back home when he’s so happy here! “I don’t even think you’d been the one to lie about it…”

“But, technically speaking, Misdreavus eats the life force generated by fear, which doesn’t have any effect on physical health!” Taka’s talking about stuff Arcanine doesn’t understand… and he’s too sleepy to ask about it…

“But… You don’t know it’s a Misdreavus.”

“Ah… True… but regardless of what my next pokémon is, I’m going to make sure I’m more careful about my health in the future! I’ll need all the energy I can get to look after two pokémon!”

“No kidding… it’s hard work, but it’s worth it! And I’m sure Arcanine’ll help you out, too. Blastoise always does…”

“Yes! He’s already shown he’s good with smaller pokémon… And at this point, I just want to know for sure what my new pokémon is actually going to be!” Taka’s starting to chat happily again as
“I can’t wait to show everyone at school what a good dog you are!” Taka’s really happy that Growlithe’s being good and walking ‘to heel’ right by his feet! “But are you feeling alright?”

[Yep!] Growlithe barks back at him. It’s nice, getting to walk outside now he’s all better! It’s warm out here in the sun, even if the ground is a little messier than it is back at Taka’s house. And there’s lots of interesting smells out here to!

“That’s good!” Taka smiles, and they carry on walking together for a while, before Taka stops in front of some tall plants. “Hmm… Now I have a pokémon, I could take the shortcut through the long grass…”

Shortcut? Growlithe sniffs at the grass, but there’s too many smells in there for him to guess which one is the shortcut, and a lot of them are moving around as well…

“Then again, I don’t know how strong you are. If you didn’t make it all the way, then I’d be in real trouble!” Taka reaches down to pet his head for a bit. “Alright! We’ll go the long way around today! Heel, Growlithe!”

[Okay!] Growlithe nods and walks by his feet again…

“Good boy!” Taka smiles and they carry on walking. But then after a while Taka starts to slow down, and frowns… “What are those three doing here…? They live on the other side of school…”

Growlithe guesses he must be talking about the other three boys standing a little bit ahead of them. There’s two who are a little bigger than Taka is… but Growlithe’s more worried about the smaller one in the middle… He looks like the mean police guy…

“Well… whatever the reason, I should remind them that they need to get going or they’ll be late for school! Come on Growlithe!” Taka’s still yapping quietly to himself, but then he nods and walks forward, waving his hand in the special way that means he wants Growlithe to walk forward with him… “Good morning! You three shouldn’t be standing around here! It’s almost time for school to start!”

“Heh… see, I told you guys he’d still end up taking this path!” The three boys turn to look at Taka, and the mean-looking one smiles as the other two start moving across the line of dirt he and Taka have been walking on. “We know school’s gonna start soon… but Ochida wanted to train his Spearow. Nothing wrong with that, right?”

“Err… Well, of course not!” Taka’s bark sounds shakier than usual, and he’s stopped walking now. “But, there’s not many people who take this path… you’d be better off looking for pokémon in the grass!”

“But you’ve got one.” One of the taller boys tells him, holding up a pokéball. “And so have I. And we made eye contact, so rules say we gotta battle.”
“Ah…!” Taka yelps, and looks down at Growlithe... it’s a little like the way he looked when Growlithe scared him when they first met. “Err… but, I’ve never had a battle with him, and he’s only just well enough to come to school…!”

“Rules are rules, Ishimaru!” The other tall boy barks, hitting his hands together to make a loud noise. “It’s either a pokémon fight, or a human fight!”

“What!? B-but that’s not what the rules say…!” Taka whines, stepping back as the three boys get closer…

[Grrrr…] Growlithe doesn’t know what’s going on, but whatever it is, it’s upsetting Taka! And that’s mean! He’s got to do something… [Hey! Stop being mean to Taka!]

The three boys stop and turn to look at Growlithe as the loud bark comes out of his mouth. Maybe he shouldn’t have done that…

“Guess it’s a pokémon battle after all!” The tall boy with the pokéball throws it towards Growlithe, but not close enough for him to try and catch it before it lands like he’s been practising with Taka. “Out you come, Spearow!”

[Already!?] There’s a loud screechy noise, and then a small thing with two skinny legs, a sharp bit at the front and bright flappy things at the side comes out, looking around with narrow eyes. [This isn’t school! Who are you!? Are you attacking Kazuo!? I’ll stop you!]

[Huh…?] What is this thing, why’s it screeching at Growlithe!? [I’m not attacking anyone! I just told them to stop being mean!]

“W-wait! He doesn’t understand what’s going on!” Taka barks at them all, but none of them look like they’re listening…

“Spearow, use Peck on it!” The bigger boy barks loudly…

[Got it!] The little thing starts hopping towards him, with a scary look on its face… What’s going on!? What’s he supposed to do…!? 

“I said wait!” Taka growls a little, but it’s still not helping… “Arg… I’m sorry about this, Growlithe! Use Bite!”

Bite!? What’s Bite!? That’s not one of the tricks Taka taught him…! And that flappy things right on top of him, and trying to poké that pointy bit of its face into him…!

[Take this!] Growlithe feels a sharp scratchy pain as the flappy thing hits…

[Ow! That hurt!] …It’s not as being hit by the mean guy, but it still hurt! [Please don’t do that again!]

“Err… Growlithe?” Taka whines from behind him. “Y-you need to fight back, or he’ll keep hitting you again!”

[What!?] He doesn’t want that to happen! [But I don’t know how!]

“You… you don’t know Bite?” Taka looks really scared now… “How can you not know Bite? It’s the first move you should have known…”

“Hah!” The small mean boy starts laughing. “That’s what happens when your old man steals you the
stupidest pokémon in the world!"

[The stupidest…?] Is he really not clever, like Taka said, then…?

“Stop saying that! My father didn’t steal him! He’d never steal!” Taka barks angrily, “And Growlithe’s not stupid either! I just… haven’t had time to work out what moves he does know!”

So he is clever…?

“Whatever… It’s still gonna get its butt kicked…” The mean boy mutters. “Come on, Ochida! Tell it to attack again!”

“Oh, right…”

“WAIT!” Taka yells, moving between Growlithe and the flappy thing, then kneeling next to Growlithe. “I’m… I’m giving up! Growlithe, get in your pokéball!”

[Huh? But I don’t want to…] What if Taka doesn’t let him out before he’s hungry? Or it’s not Taka who lets him out…?

“I’m sorry, Growlithe. But if you don’t get back in the ball, you’re going to get hurt by the Spearow again!” Taka cries, “I’ll let you out as soon as I’ve taken you to the pokémon centre, alright?”

[Hrrmmm…] He doesn’t wanna go back in the ball… but he doesn’t wanna get hurt again, either! And Taka looks like he’s telling the truth about letting him out soon… [Okay, Taka!]

He doesn’t know what that was all about, but at least it’s over now, and he can float about in the ball until Taka gets to the nice place where they make him feel better…

It’s not long before he hears the nice jingly music, and the air he’s mixed in with feels nice and warm to, until he hears Taka’s voice…

“You… you can come back out now, Growlithe!”

[Thanks!] Even if the ball does feel nice, Growlithe still wants to be on the outside of it, where he can eat and play with Taka…

“G…good boy!” Almost as soon as he’s out of the ball, Taka crouches down to look at him…

But… something’s wrong with his eyes! One of them’s big and red like usual, but the other’s just a thin line peeking out from a patch of dark skin! [What happened?]

“Hmm… what’s wrong? Does it still hurt?” Taka doesn’t get what he means. “The machine should have worked properly this time!”

[No! I wanna know what happened!] Growlithe whines at him, but Taka still doesn’t get it, so he reaches his paw up to point at it… [To your eye…]

“Ah… no wait!” Taka snaps his head backwards all of a sudden, so Growlithe can’t reach. “Please don’t touch it! It’ll hurt more if you do…”

[Oh… I’m sorry…] He didn’t mean to hurt Taka… He just wanted to know what happened! Was it those boys? Was Growlithe supposed to do something to stop them? Like that Bite trick he didn’t know…? And because he didn’t, Taka’s eye hurts now…? [Really, really sorry…]

“Ah… th-this isn’t your fault!” Taka tells him, picking him up and giving him a hug. “Those boys…
they just don’t like me! And I should have warned you that might happen, or thought to check which
moves you know! So don’t let it upset you, alright?"

[Alright, Taka...] It doesn’t feel so bad when Taka’s keeping him nice and warm, and stroking his
fur... Even if Growlithe can’t give him a lick on the face in return right now.

“Good boy!” Taka squeezes him a little tighter, then picks him up and starts bouncing him up and
down... “Now, we’ve got to get going to school! They should be able to help you learn to fight…!”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading.
Suddenly there’s a *big* bounce, and Arcanine wakes up as his head drops downwards onto the bed… which was where *Taka* was when he fell asleep…! [Taka…?]

“Oh… Did I wake you up again? I’m sorry!” Oh, that’s alright. Taka’s just off to the side, getting *some food* out! “I needed to get out of bed…”

[It’s okay!] Arcanine tells him. He hadn’t wanted to remember what Taka’s hurty eye looked like anyway! [Now I won’t miss breakfast!]

“Well… I’m glad being woken up like that hasn’t put you in a bad mood!” Taka tells him, as Arcanine starts eating, “I can’t wait to go back to sleeping in separate beds…”

But he *does* have to wait, ‘cause it *takes days* for him to get well enough to go outside again! Not that it’s *too* boring, ‘cause Taka’s friends and their pokémon keep coming to do stuff with them. Like when Florges looked after Taka so Hina and Sakura could take him to do sports. And Sayaka came and taught Arcanine a new bit for his dance! And Taka’s keeps getting better to, so he has more time to play with Arcanine! So it’s not *too* bad being stuck in the room…

But it’s still *really* nice when the nice lady says they’ve only got to spend *one* more day in here! Now they only have to think of things to do for *one* more day!

…But looking at his toys, he can’t think of *anything!* And Taka’s not suggesting anything either…

“Excuse me…?” Hmm? Oh, the nice lady’s back? “You have a visitor here to see you.”

“I do? I wasn’t expecting anyone…” Taka sounds confused… but maybe it’s Makoto back to take him out to play, or Sakura to take him off to sports… “But please, let them through!”

Arcanine sits up ready to say hello to whoever it is… and it turns out to be Kyoko who comes through the door… Hrm… Her pokémon don’t *usually* want to play, or do sports…

“Oh, Kyoko!” Taka still sounds surprised, “May I help you…?”

“No… I actually came to help you. I heard your Arcanine’s finding it boring up here, and I happen to have something that might help…” She goes over to the bed and gives Taka a thing that looks a little like a book, which he opens up…
“Pokémon cards?” Oh! There’s a whole book of them! And they’ve each got a picture, and some words for Taka to read to him… “I remember these… Some of the children at my old school collected them… It seemed like a lot of fun…”

“I’ll admit, there’s a certain element of excitement in opening a blind pack of cards. But I soon realised how expensive filling the whole book was likely to be, so I stopped and started saving my money up for a pokédex instead.”

Aww… so it’s not a whole book of them?

“But…” Taka looks through all the pages, “…This book is full!” Yay!

“Yes…” Kyoko looks annoyed, “It turns out… the headmaster heard about my collection and decided to waste his own money completing it…”

“Ah… I see! It was a present from your father!” Taka nods, “We’ll be very careful with it and make sure to return it to you in good condition, won’t we Arcanine?”

[Yep!] And he’ll have to say thanks to the headmaster for getting it, when he sees him!

“Ah… That wasn’t what I…” Kyoko starts to say something, but then stops. “Nevermind. Just don’t worry too much about the cards. I’m pretty sure the book was pokémon-proof.”

“Well, that’s good. Of course, I’ve always told Arcanine to be careful with his books regardless…!” Taka starts chatting, while Arcanine looks back at the pretty cards again… There’s so many of them, each with one big word at the top, lots of little words at the bottom, and a small number in the corner, starting with circle, circle one. Circle, circle, two. All the way up to circle, circle, nine!

Oh! A nine! That’s the one in his name! He should point that one out! [Taka! Taka, look!]

“Hmm? Oh, yes! That’s Blastoise! Like Makoto’s Blastoise!” Taka tells him, “You want me to read that one?”

[Yes, please!] Arcanine nods.

“Alright then…” Taka does his little cough he does before reading stuff. “Number Nine, Blastoise! The rocket cannons on its shell fire jets of water capable of punching holes through thick steel, but it has to deliberately make itself heavy and plant its feet on the ground before shooting so it can withstand the recoil…’ That’s why he’s so big and slow compared to you!”

[Cool!] That was a good entry! Are there any more in the book with nine’s on them? [Can we look at the next page, now?]

“Oh… that’s all you want to read from here?” Taka asks before turning the page, letting Arcanine look for more nines over the next two pages in the book…

Ahha! Here’s one! [There! This one!]

“Err… You want me to read Rattata?” Taka asks, “Okay… I guess you remember the ones that got into the house back at home… ‘Number Nineteen, Rattata! It lives wherever there is food available, scavenging throughout the day to eat everything it can, so it can settle down and produce offspring continuously… That’s why Father always had you and Meowth get rid of them!”

[Thanks, Taka!] Arcanine licks his face, before checking that’s there’s no more nines here… [Next page!]
“Hmm… I think I’m sensing a pattern here…” Kyoko says, as Taka turns the page and he finds the next nine card and points his nose at it… “I’m guessing that’s the female Nidoran?”

“Err… yes it is!” Taka tells her, then reads the card… “Female Nidorans are small and very docile, but will protect itself with its small, extremely poisonous horn and spikes when threatened or attacked. Even a tiny scratch can have fatal results to humans…”

“I thought as much… Well, I’m afraid I have to go now.” Kyoko gets up from her chair, “Have fun reading about all the pokémon with a nine in their number…”

“…Ah! I see! That’s why…” Taka gasps, while he finds the next nine on a card with a pink circle thing on it… “I’m sure we will! Thank you very much for lending me this!”

“Your welcome.” Kyoko tells him, before leaving so Taka can tell him about ‘Jugglypuff’, and ‘Venomoth’ and then…

[…That one’s me!] There’s a picture of him on the next ‘nine’ card!

“Ahaahaha! Yes, that’s you!” Taka laughs as his tail starts wagging. “Number fifty-nine, Arcanine! It’s considered to be magnificent and found on an ancient picture scroll that shows people were attracted to its movement as it ran through prairies. Many people are enchanted by its grand mane and its magnificent bark conveys a sense of majesty…’ In other words, you’re the best pokémon!”

[Yay!] And he’s got the best number in his number!

“…I wonder what that scroll it mentions is, though? My Kanto pokédex doesn’t mention it…” Taka starts thinking to himself, “Maybe I can look it up online…!”

Taka spends the rest of the day showing Arcanine stuff on his pokédex screen, in-between reading out all the number nine cards in the book. By the time they get to the second time a number has two nines in it, he’s feeling like he could almost go to sleep…

“Number One hundred and ninety-nine, Slowking… Every time it yawns…” That makes Taka yawn, and so Arcanine yawns too… “The Shellder bites its head and injects poison into it. The poison makes it more intelligent, so whatever the situation, it remains calm and collected.’”

[*Yawn…* Okay…] He’s not gonna bother looking at the book now. He’s ready to fall asleep now…

“…Oh! Arcanine! Look at this next one! Number two-hundred! Misdreavus!” Taka’s trying to show him something, but his eyes are too heavy to open them… “This is the pokémon I think will join our team next!”

“This is the pokémon I think will join our team next!” Taka whispers in his ear, the weird dark ‘glasses’ he put over his eyes poking against the tip of Growlithe’s ear. “It’s call a Scyther!”

Growlithe thinks he can see what Taka’s talking about… there’s a tall green thing flying around the field below them, but they’re up high on a hill nowhere near it! Time to get closer…

“Ah, no! Nonono! We have to stay here!” Taka pulls on his collar so he can’t move forward. “Wild
Scyther’s are dangerous, and you’re not strong enough to deal with him yet! So we have to stay up here so he doesn’t think we’re invading the field he lives in!”

[Oh… okay, Taka.] Growlithe nods, and watches as Taka sits down and makes himself comfy, then he jumps into Taka’s lap for a cuddle and strokes.

“Of course, we can still see a lot of interesting things from up here!” Taka starts chatting happily. “I’ve been making notes on the Scyther for years, and Proffessor Oak even gave me my pokédex because of what a good job I did of them! He was saying that it’s really useful for him to see how Scythers behave when they’re on their own! Oh, that’s right, I didn’t tell you yet! Scythers usually live together in big groups called ‘swarms’, but this Scyther is on its own! Professor Oak isn’t sure why it’s like that, his guess is that it got separated from the rest of its family and would join a new swarm if one passed by, or that maybe it had a fight with the rest of them and has decided to live alone! But either way, he also said Scythers that live alone are more likely to want to evolve into Scizors, so it’d be a good idea to catch one…!”

Growlithe doesn’t understand everything Taka’s saying, but that’s alright. It’s nice to be sat in Taka’s lap when he talks like this, ‘cause it sounds nice and Taka strokes his fur…

“But I can’t carry on talking like this! I need to write down what it’s doing! It’s already been two months since I last sent Professor Oak anything! He even rang me yesterday because of it… I hope he’s not annoyed…”

That guy on the pokédex? He didn’t sound annoyed. He’d just sounded worried till Growlithe said hi to him and Taka explained that he’d been busy looking after his new pokémon…

But Taka seems to have decided he needs to write down what this green thing is doing, even though it’s just moving about the field back and forth…

This isn’t very fun anymore… It would be nice if Taka petted him again, but his hands are busy making marks on the paper…

But some licks on the face ought to get his attention…!

[Hi, Taka!] Growlithe quickly perches his front paw on Taka’s shirt and leans up to sniff at his cheek, before giving him some little licks to start with…

“Oh…! Ahahaha!” Yes! It’s working! Taka’s laughing and giving him head-scratches! So time to give him more licks! Up the side of his face, catching his nose on the side of those ‘glasses’ so he can lift them out of the way… “AH! Growlithe stop!”

Huh? Taka’s stopping! And he’s pushing Growlithe away from him? Why? Did Growlithe do something wrong…? Taka’s just playing about with the things over his eyes… was it because of that…?

“Phew… That was close…” Taka sighs once he takes his hands away from his face. “I’m sorry Growlithe, but I have to keep these glasses on! If the Scyther sees I have red eyes, it might fly all the way up here to attack me!”

So that was why Taka pushed him off… [But you have nice eyes!]

“Ah… I didn’t tell you that Scyther’s hate red things, did I?” Taka tells him, “No one really knows why, but they go into a rage and attack anything red, so that’s why I’m wearing these glasses over my eyes, and took off my armband!”
[Oh…] That seems like a silly thing to do… [So, if it joins us, you’ll have to wear those things on your face all the time…?]

“Hmm… Ah, don’t worry! We’re still safe here, so long as I keep them on!” Taka gives him a pat on the head, but doesn’t answer his questions. “But that means no licking my face right now, alright? Here, why don’t I get out your squeaky toy and you can practise your Bite for now? So you can get stronger!”

[Oh… Okay…] He’d rather leave so they can play, but it doesn’t seem like that’s a choice right now, so he takes the toy and sits next to Taka with it, and tries to practise the thing Taka said to do when other pokémon are mean and hurt him.

*squeh…* The toy makes a little noise when he puts it in his mouth and presses down on it, but that’s all. And he still doesn’t see the point of this. *squeh…* Taka already taught him to ‘Roar’ or bark really loud at pokémon, to make them run away from him, so they can walk through the long grass to school and avoid those mean boys! *squeh…* So why’s he still got to learn how to Bite the other pokémon…? *squeh…* He doesn’t even like the noise this thing makes when he chews on it… *squeh…* and it’s not tasty at all…!

“…You’re really not getting the hang of that, are you? Even though you managed to Roar so quickly…” Taka suddenly asks, scratching the back of Growlithe’s neck. “Maybe we should try something different!”

[Okay!] He nods and puts the toy down. Anything has to be better than carrying on with that!

“Alright! Now… there’s a chance you’re not strong enough for this yet, but… you should be able to learn Ember, where you breathe fire at things!” Breathe fire!? But that’s the thing he never knew how to do… “Now, it might be tricky, but I read in a book that you need to start by squeezing and shaking your neck muscles, so it warms up the air when you breathe…”

Make his neck shaky? Like when he’s scared or cold…? [huff… Like that?]  

“Hmm… try it again…” Taka tells him, putting his hand near Growlithe’s mouth as he tries making his throat tight again… “Ah! Yes, you’ve got the right idea! It’s definitely warmer, so know you just need to make it hotter, like an actual fire!”

Hrm… he was already trying pretty hard though…

“But here’s a poffin for being a good boy and trying!” Taka carries on, getting a big, tasty looking poffin out of his bag, which Growlithe licks out of his hand.

Well, if he’s going to get poffins for trying…

He carries on for a while, blowing air out while Taka occasionally holds his hands near and says that he’s doing well in between watching the thing down in the field below. But Growlithe doesn’t see the point of this either! Why does he need to breathe fire when there’s matches at home that can make it instead…?

But he likes Taka, so he keeps being a good boy and trying, right until someone else comes up the hill they’re sat on and talks to Taka all of a sudden…

“Hey, nerd.”

“Ah! Katsushika!? Wh-what are you doing here!?” Oh no! It’s the little mean guy! And Taka looks upset to see him, even though he’s not got those other big boys with him.
“I’m here to catch my first pokémon!” The mean boy smiles, holding up a pokéball.

“But… the only pokémon near here is that Scyther!” Taka tells him, and that’s gonna join Taka, isn’t it? “You can’t try and get that by yourself! You need a pokémon to damage it…”

“I’m not stupid, Ishimaru.” He doesn’t let Taka finish what he was saying. “I’ve got a way to do that!”

“You have?” Taka looks around, confused. “Wh-what is it…?”

“This.” The boy reaches down and grabs at Taka’s face… And pulls away the thing covering up his nice eyes…

“…Ah! My glasses!” Taka gasps, once he’s felt over his face to work out what happened, “K-Katsushika, that’s not funny! I need them back, before the Scyther…”

[…]RED!? Taka doesn’t get to finish, ‘cause the thing from down in the field is suddenly flying towards them pretty fast, even after Taka shuts his eyes and puts his arms up over his face! [I saw it! I saw RED! I HATE red!]

“Aaahhh…!” Taka’s shaking, “W-why did you…? It’s going to…!”

“So, get your pokémon to deal with it, idiot!” The mean boy just snaps at him, “Then I can catch it!”

“Ah… argh!” Taka sounds angry… Growlithe hopes it’s not something he did… “Growlithe! Use Roar!”

Ah, that’s right…! This big, scary, fast-looking thing is racing towards Taka, so Growlithe needs to scare him off! He’ll just run down the hill a bit to meet it, and… [GGGRRRRRRR… GO AWAY! DON’T HURT TAKA!]

[Move!] Oooowww! It just swings its arm at Growlithe, cutting into his fur and knocking him all the way back to Taka! [Getting rid of RED!]

“Urgh, that was never gonna work!” The mean boy is yelling as Taka helps Growlithe back to his feet. “You need to use a move that does damage!”

“B-but he doesn’t know how to do any!” Taka’s voice is shaking…

“Wh-what!? Are you joking!? You’ve had him for months!” And now so is the mean boy’s… “W-well… y-you’ve gotta at least try and make it do something, or it’ll kill you!”

[…Kill?] What’s that mean? It sounds bad! Is something bad gonna happen to Taka!? Even more bad than when he couldn’t open his eye properly…!? 

“Nngghh…” Taka whines, and turns Growlithe to face him, so they can look at each other’s eyes… “G-Growlithe… Wh-whatever happens, it’s not your fault…” There’s water coming out of Taka’s eyes… “But… p-please try and use Ember on it… A-as hot as you can…!”

…Because if Growlithe doesn’t, then Taka won’t be around anymore… That’s what it feel like Taka’s eyes are saying… and that would mean he wouldn’t be able to look after Growlithe or play with him anymore…

Growlithe’s throat starts to get tight and shake as he thinks about it… That thing is trying to make it so Taka can’t look after him anymore! And he’s not going to let that happen! He can’t!
[Huff… huff…] He can feel the air in his throat getting hot as he breathes, and waits for the thing to get close enough… Almost there… almost… NOW! [HAAAAAAAAAAAAA…!]

“Ah… You did it!” Taka sounds so happy as the flames come out of Growlithe’s mouth, hitting the flying thing and making it drop out of the sky… but then it starts to bat its wings more and lift itself back up… “Oh, no… no, no, nonono…”

Ah! It’s still moving towards Taka, even after that!? But Growlithe’s breath isn’t hot enough to do another one of those yet…! Is this it!? Is he gonna lose Taka even after he did the fire move…!?“Hah!” Suddenly the mean boy is shouting, and then a ball fly out from behind him and Taka and hits the green thing in the head, making it disappear…

“Wh… what are you…?” Taka asks him, as the ball drops to the ground and shakes around at bit.

“I told you, I’m catching my first pokémon!”

“What!? You can’t just…” Taka yelps at the answer, “I’ve been watching that Scyther for years!”

“Well, you snooze, you lose!”

“But it was my pokémon that hurt it!”

“Doesn’t matter!” The mean boy grins at Taka, “My Dad told me, it’s whoever owns the pokémon’s pokéball gets the pokémon! Even if someone else’s pokémon hurt it, or it used to live in a different pokéball…!”

*Click.*

“Heh… and looks like Scyther decided to live in my pokéball!” The mean boy laughs, going over to pick it up. “See you at school tomorrow, Ishimaru! Maybe we can have a pokémon battle! I just hope you don’t mind losing, seeing as my pokémon’s way stronger than yours! Hahaha…”

“Oh…” Taka doesn’t say anything as the boy leaves. He just looks down as more water comes out from his eyes. “So that’s it? I-I always thought… But then it just… A-and if you hadn’t been here…”

[…Taka…?] Growlithe whines as Taka looks at him, [Are you okay…?]

“I… Thank you for saving me!” Taka suddenly picks him up and squeezes him, “I-I-I thought I was going to die…!”

…And then he wouldn’t be around to look after Growlithe anymore, or hug him tight like this… [No! I’m not gonna let that happen! I’m gonna look after you!]

But… if that mean boy hadn’t used the ball to get rid of that green thing, Growlithe wouldn’t have been able to save Taka, would he…?

“Ah… Yes! You’re a good dog!” Taka seems to understand what he’s saying. “And you learnt Ember so quickly! Now you’ll be able to actually fight other pokémon, and then you’ll get stronger! And then something like… th-that Scyther just now will be easy for you to beat!”

…So… if he’s stronger… He could make sure Taka’s safe from even bigger, scarier pokémon…? And make sure nothing takes Taka away from him…

[Okay! Let’s do it!] Growlithe tells him, wagging his tail eagerly…
“What…? You want to go now…?” Taka asks, and he nods his head before Taka stands up and starts walking down the hill, bouncing him up and down... “I think you need healing up first! Let’s go to the pokémon centre and then…”

“…and then once I’ve got my badge I’ll have the whole weekend to sort out getting my second pokémon from Tanaka, or catching one myself, if that doesn’t pan out!” Huh…? Did Taka just change what he’s talking about? And wasn’t he being carried just now…? Why’s his head on Taka’s lap instead… “So, really, you don’t need to be worried about me! I’ll make it to the gym tomorrow no matter what!”

The gym? Wasn’t Taka taking him to the pokémon centre? Because he got hit by the Scyther…? Or did he…?

Hrmm… no, that must have been another of those funny dreams, about when he was a Growlithe. That’s right… He was just remembering when that mean kid caught the stupid pokémon that always wanted to hurt Taka…

It wasn’t fair… Just as Taka had finally managed to get away from that guy, there was another guy with a pokémon that wanted to hurt Taka…

“Well… So long as you make it there, I’ll make sure the gang give you a fair chance for your badge…” And that’s his voice! “So, uhh…”

[YOU!] Arcanine opens his eyes and whips his head round to face the wolf’s trainer, who leans backwards and almost tips his chair up… [WHY ARE YOU HERE!]

“Ah… Arcanine! DOWN!” Taka sounds super angry as he tugs on Arcanine’s collar, but Arcanine needs to keep him safe! “It’s just him! The Lycanroc’s back in his room! So stop that!”

[Ggrrrrrrrr…] He might say he’s not got his Lycanroc, but he still smells like it! He could have the pokéball in his pocket and they wouldn’t know!

“Uhh… Maybe I should just go…” Hah! Good! His growling scaring the guy away! He’s already getting out of the chair and backing off!

“Ah… you don’t have to…” Taka tells him, trying to talk louder than Arcanine’s growling, “Just let me calm Arcanine down, and…”

“Nah… It’s cool! It’s late, and we’ve both got shit to do tomorrow anyway, so let’s just rest up.” Yes! He’s going out the door! “I’ll, uhh… see ya at the gym tomorrow… I’ll probably be by the entrance… Gimme a text when you’re about to show and I’ll put Lycanroc away, alright…?”

“Ah… Alright.” Taka sighs, “Have a good night, Oowada.”

And then the guy is gone, and the room is safe for Taka again, so Arcanine can rest his head back on Taka’s lap… [Good!]

“Arcanine… That was not something you should have done!” Uh oh… But now Taka’s glaring at him and sounds super mad! “It’s one thing to get upset at the Lycanroc, it’s quite another to start growling at an innocent human! Imagine if someone who didn’t know what happened had seen that! They’d think you were some dangerous, scary pokémon, who shouldn’t be near humans!”
But Arcanine wasn’t like that! He’d just been trying to get rid of that guy… By acting like a scary dangerous pokémon… [Nghh… But… I didn’t want you to get hurt again…!]

“…Aaaah…” Taka looks at him and sighs heavily. “I’m sorry… That was a bit harsh… I know you’re just scared for my sake. But that was taking it much too far!”

[Hrmmm…] Taka might say that… but Arcanine doesn’t think it was…

“It was too far! You can’t just chase him out of every room I happen to be in! He’s in our class, for a start!” Taka insists. “And what would you have done if he hadn’t left? Hurt him? You know you can’t do that, don’t you…?”

[Y-yeah, I know…] He’s a good boy! And good boys don’t hurt humans…! [But…] But good boys also look after their trainers, to…

“Arcanine…” Taka sighs again, “I know you’d do anything to protect me, and I’d do the same for you! But I don’t need protecting from Oowada or his Lycanroc! Right now all this growling at them because you’re scared they might hurt me is just the same as Lycanroc biting me because he thought I was planning to hurt him!”

[Is not!] Growling at them doesn’t hurt! Biting does!

“I don’t mean the effect is the same…” Taka admits, “I mean you’re doing it for the same reasons… Because you’re scared. And when you get scared enough, your first reaction is to growl at and hurt whatever’s scaring you… Usually something that’s putting me in danger, right?”

[Huh?] Hurt stuff? What’s Taka talking about? Sure, he growls at stuff that’s putting Taka in danger… But he doesn’t hurt anything unless Taka tells him to!

“.Or something that’s already hurt me, if I’m not able to defend myself…” Taka carries on, starting to stroke his fur carefully. “Like when you saw me on the floor with the Lycanroc… You got scared and almost attacked him, didn’t you? It was only when I woke up that you stopped…”

[Uhh… no?] Why’s Taka think that? All he did was bark at the wolf, not attack him! Taka knows he can’t fight by himself! He wouldn’t know what move to use!

“Wha… You don’t… Ah, I see.” Taka looks confused and sighs. “Well… my point is, when people, or pokémon, get scared enough, they’ll often do things they would never dream of doing otherwise. That’s what happened with the Lycanroc… And it’s not just him, everyone does it! Even you and me…! It’s just you don’t…”

Taka stops talking, even though he didn’t finish, and he looked like he was trying to explain something important! Did he forget what he was saying…? […] Don’t what?] Arcanine asks him.

“Ah… Nevermind. This isn’t a good time for it.” Taka sighs again. “Let’s just get some sleep.”

[Okay…] Arcanine moves his head to settle down on Taka’s lap for the last time. He’s gonna miss getting petted to sleep at night! Even though Taka’s doing the twisty-fur strokes that he does when he’s nervous… […] You okay, Taka…?]

“Hmm? Oh, really! Don’t mind me! We really do need to get to sleep!” Taka pats his head and strokes his hand down over Arcanine’s eyes, which makes him feel sleepy, even as he’s wondering what Taka was thinking of saying. Something Arcanine didn’t do? Or Doesn’t do? That’s got to do with things he does when he’s scared? Hrmmm… Arcanine’s… not sure. He’s too sleepy to think, so he’ll just let Taka stroke him to sleep… “We’ve got a big day ahead of us tomorrow!”
“We’ve got a big day ahead of us tomorrow, Growlithe!” Taka’s really excited about the new thing he brought on the way home from school! Growlithe wonders what it is, but Taka won’t take it out of the bag and show him yet! “It’s our first coordination class! It’s going to be our chance to show everyone what a clever little dog you are, with all the tricks I taught you!”

[Yay!] He likes being clever now! He likes the poffins that he gets when he learns a new trick, and the pettings he gets when he remembers what to do, and he likes how Taka always gives him food every day and washes and brushes his fur so it doesn’t itch him and doesn’t mind when he gets excited and tries to climb up Taka’s legs for more pats…

“Ahaha! I’m glad you’re happy about it!” Taka leans down and scratches behind his ears, “But, before that, we need to put you in a costume!”

[Costume?] He doesn’t know that word. But Taka uses a lot of words he doesn’t know, and he doesn’t mind telling Growlithe what he means!

“It can mean any type of clothing you wouldn’t usually wear…” Taka explains, reaching into the bag… “But in this case, I bought you a nice hat to wear!”

Growlithe wags his tail excitedly as Taka’s hand comes out of the bag… until he sees the familiar thing Taka’s holding.

[Wh-what…?] Isn’t that the same hat that first man always said he had to wear… because he was a ‘police dog’ back then…?

“It’s a police hat!” Taka smiles, pushing it closer to him. “You’ll make a great police dog!”

[No…!] Growlithe’s bark comes out loud and rough as he edges backwards… he doesn’t want to be a police dog again!

“What…? What’s wrong?” Taka stops moving, but he’s still holding out the hat. “It’s just a hat…”

[A p-police hat!] He doesn’t want to be a police dog! He wants to be Taka’s dog!

“Oh… You’re scared of it…” Taka says gently, but still doesn’t put the hat away! “But it’s just a hat, it can’t hurt you!”

[But the police can!] Growlithe growls as Taka still doesn’t put it away!

“Look… see, it’s not doing anything!” Taka just keeps on talking, still trying to get him to go back to before… “I’ll just wait until you’re ready to wear it…”

[I don’t want to wear it!] Growlithe tries again, but Taka’s just standing there. [I don’t wanna go back!] His growling so loudly he can feel his throat getting warm, but Taka’s still not moving… [I wanna stay with you!] No… he doesn’t just want to stay… he needs to stay! [I can’t be a police dog again!] Just thinking about going back to that man who never taught him anything and then called him a stupid mutt is making his throat burn… [I’m staying with Taka!] And now he knows what to do to things that could make Taka stop looking after him, like this stupid hat…!

[So take this!] He growls one last time before hot flames come out of his mouth, shooting up towards the stupid hat in Taka’s hands, surrounding it in flames.
“AAAARGGGHHHH!” But suddenly Taka’s screaming at the fire in his hands! Why? Is the fire hurting him!? Does that mean Growlithe hurt him!? Growlithe didn’t mean to hurt him!? But he’s still screaming, and there’s nothing Growlithe can do to stop the fire hurting his hands, and something’s shaking his head side to side, but he needs to help Taka with his hands…!

“WAKE UP! ARCANINE, WAKE UP!” Taka’s shouting at him with his hands clasped around his jaw. And even thought it’s dark, Arcanine can see he looks worried… “…You were having a nightmare!”

[I was…?] Wait! That doesn’t matter! [Your hands!] He hurt Taka’s hands! Didn’t he? But when he pulls his face out of them and sniffs and licks them over, they look just the same as they always do, with the bumpy skin from when the fireplace hurt him…

“My hands? Why are you worried about them all of a sudden?” Taka asks, as Arcanine licks at them just to make sure they’re the same as always. “That happened years ago…”

Yeah… that’s right! The fireplace hurt Taka years ago! So why’d he suddenly think he did it? Because he’d had one of those funny dreams about when he was a puppy… but that didn’t make sense, because he hadn’t hurt Taka’s hands as a puppy…!

…Had he…?

“…Arcanine… did you… remember something…?” Taka asks, moving both his hands over Arcanine’s head and ears, and staring at him like he’s scared of what the answer might be…

[…I don’t know!] He’d never hurt Taka! Would he? But he hadn’t wanted to go back in the hat, either! And it was scary to think about wearing one of those hats! Had he got scared enough to hurt Taka…? And then forget afterwards? The only person who’d know for sure would be Taka! [Did I… hurt you…?]

“…Oh, Arcanine…” Taka doesn’t answer, he just tugs Arcanine’s head up over his shoulder so he can wrap his arms around Arcanine’s body and squeeze him tight…

[I did, didn’t I?] All that time he got angry with the fireplace, and it was him who’d hurt Taka and stopped him from being able to pet him or do his schoolwork for ages! [I’m sorry, Taka! I didn’t mean to…!]

“Shh… It’s okay, it’s okay… It wasn’t your fault…” Taka whispers shushes into his ear until he stops trying to apologise. “I scared you, so you panicked and attacked me! It was my fault for not realising how scared you were!”

[B-but…] It’s was still Arcanine who actually hurt him! And he didn’t even remember doing it! What if he did it again…?

“But now I know what scared you, and how you react when you’re scared, I can stop doing things like that before you get to the point where you attack!” Taka carries on talking, softly stroking his hands down Arcanine’s back the whole time. “That’s why it never happened again! Because I know you’re a good boy who’d never even think of hurting me, otherwise! Right…?”

[R-right…] He wouldn’t wanna hurt Taka! And if Taka says he’s a good boy, then he probably is a good boy… Taka’s not usually wrong…
“Good… so, try not to let it worry you, okay? I recovered perfectly, so it doesn’t matter now…” Taka tells him. But he still feels bad… *He hurt Taka*, even though Taka’s always looked after him and never hurt him… “But… You need to know, it’s the same for Oowada’s Lycanroc!”

[Wh-what!?] But that guy *hurt Tak…*

…Oh.

“I reminded him of something bad that happened in his past, too! And that’s why he panicked and attacked me… just like you did, back then.” Taka carries on, “And he didn’t even realise what he was doing until after he’d done it, either. And he’s certainly not going to do it again, not now I know what it was I did to scare him!”

[B-but…] What if Taka’s *not* right? What if he *does* hurt Taka again? But that’d be the same as Arcanine hurting Taka again, and he doesn’t wanna do that! But that doesn’t mean he *can’t*…

“Haaa… Look…. I understand if you’re still a little scared of him being near me. I must admit *I* was still a little scared when he came in before, even though Oowada was there to keep him in line!” Taka admits, unwrapping his arms and sitting up straight so he can look Arcanine in the face. “But, you need to stop being angry at him! One mistake doesn’t make him a bad pokémon, just like it didn’t make you a bad pokémon! And if you give him a chance to show he’s not going to hurt me again, you’ll stop feeling as scared whenever he’s around… You understand?”

[…] Yeah.] If Arcanine keeps thinking he’s a stupid mutt for hurting Taka, then that’d make *Arcanine* a stupid mutt to, wouldn’t it? And it’d be easier if he didn’t have to be on guard all the time… [I’ll try.]

“*Good boy!*” Taka gives him another hug, rubbing their faces together for a little while. “But now we really need to try and get some more sleep, okay? After all we… we’re going to be going for our second badge tomorrow! *And* getting a new friend! We need to have as much energy as we can for that, don’t we!”

[Yes!] He doesn’t wanna be a sleepy-head when they meet their new ghosty-friend!

“Alright… So off the bed, so I can lie down, alright?”

[Okay…] Arcanine drops his front paws off the bed, then waits for Taka to lie back down before resting his head on Taka’s lap again. [G’night Taka…]

“Good night, Arcanine…” Taka gently starts stroking his fur, as he drifts off to sleep…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
Thank you for reading!

Prompts for this AU are welcome and recommending it to other people would be great, because with there being no tagged romantic relationships I don't know if anyone will ever find it.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!