A mountainous road with a silver lining

by GoldenRaven

Summary

After losing to Red, Giovanni left Kanto to avoid the fallout. Now he's back, and confronted with a painfully familiar face. Silver doesn't remember the man who claims to be his father, but he's offering everything he's wanted since escaping The Mask of Ice. But it all feels too good to be true.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

Less than two blocks from his hotel, he’s somehow picked up a tail. It’s dark, and he can’t tell who, but there’s a feeling of a pair of eyes on his back that Giovanni is all too familiar with, though what they could want he can only guess.

A pickpocket would have struck earlier in the day, when Olivine’s seemingly endless supply of tourists were active, providing crowds to be lost in. And he doesn’t look like an easy target anyway.

If it’s more personal…

There’s no reason to be looking for him here. He’s been back from his trip to Sinnoh, taken to avoid any fallout from the police or league after the mess that was Silph co. and the following weeks, for just a day. And anyone looking for him would be more likely to have gone straight to Viridian, or at least Vermilion if they knew he was travelling by sea. The two day break from travelling in Olivine had been a spur of the moment decision.

He changes his route, taking a turn down an alleyway, absently glancing over his shoulder as he does so. No one stands out, no faces abruptly turn away from his, no one looks familiar.

He’s halfway to the opposite street when a small but heavy form lands on his shoulder.

Claws prick Giovanni’s skin through his shirt as he moves to grab the assailant, his other hand moving to a pokeball.

He freezes when his eyes meet the curious red eyes of the dark blue pokemon currently clinging to him.

A sneasel.

Hesitantly the pokemon scrambles into a steady position, perching on his still raised arm, regarding him with wide eyes. He feels the tension leave the creature as he leans against the brick wall at his back, trying to assess the situation.

It’s not attacking him.

That means it wants something.

The sneasel starts squirming, not enough to be difficult to hold, but enough that he can tell it’s looking for something. Or more likely someone. Its eyes land on something above him and before Giovanni can react, the small pokemon lets out a soft cry.

He hears a faint crunch of gravel; there’s someone up there.

His hand returns to his pocket, closing around Beedrill’s pokeball as he tilts his head back, looking up. This isn’t an ideal way to start a fight. The sneasel’s claws are inches from his throat and the tight alley works against almost his entire team. But he’s in no position to leave, and he’s faced worse regardless. He’ll manage.

All thoughts of a fight vanish when a mess of bright red hair pops over the edge of the roof and pale gray eyes meet his, replaced with a sharp pain in his chest.

It’s not possible. It’s some twisted coincidence brought about by a world hell-bent on shoving his
failures in his face.

On his arm, Sneasel shifts, climbing onto his shoulder in a painfully familiar position, and he glances at her, breaking eye contact with the boy for a few precious seconds.

There’s something pleading in Sneasel’s eyes, her head bobbing up and down in small nods.

He almost laughs.

His entire world has been turned upside down; why wouldn’t this happen now?

He stares up at his son, struggling to find a way of playing this that won’t end in the wide eyed boy simply collecting his partner and leaving.

“Silver…” the name slips out quietly, he doesn’t even realize he’s spoken until the boy reacts, eyes widening even more, before he disappears back behind the edge of the roof. There’s a flash of light and then Silver and a murkrow appear, lowering to the ground.

Another flash and the bird disappears, leaving Silver standing alone in front of Giovanni.

There’s nothing even remotely resembling recognition in the boy’s eyes. Giovanni isn’t surprised, but it stings regardless.

“How do you know my name?” Silver’s voice is quiet. His eyes dart around the dark alley. He’s tense; if Giovanni had to guess he’s expecting a fight.

He doesn’t blame him. The boy is far too thin, his clothes and hair are a mess. He’s either on his own or on the run. Most likely both.

Giovanni sinks to his knees, putting himself at eye level with the skittish child. “I’ll tell you if you come with me.” It’s a gamble, but he doubts that a full answer right now will do anything more than send Silver running. And he refuses to let that happen.

Silver’s eyes drift to Sneasel, his brow furrowing slightly before he stuffs his gloved hands into his pockets and asks, “Come with you to where?”

As wary as he’s being, the boy wants answers. It’s written across every inch of his face. Giovanni is grateful for it, curiosity is an easy way to keep Silver with him.

“I’m staying at a hotel around the corner. You can have whatever you want to eat, a bath, sleep. I’ll answer all your questions.”

The promise of food gets almost as much of a reaction as the promise of answers.

Sneasel hops off of his shoulder, grabbing Silver by the arm, tugging him towards Giovanni. At least he has an ally in this discussion.

Silver turns his head towards the ice type. Some silent discussion passes between trainer and pokemon before he turns back to Giovanni. “She gets to stay out. But I’ll come with.”

It’s more than a fair deal. And a much quicker agreement than Giovanni had expected. With a nod he stands up. “This way then.”

He looks over his shoulder as he leaves the alley to see Silver following only a few steps behind. He looks confused. Sneasel, on the other hand has what can only be described as satisfaction written across her face. He’s surprised she remembers him, and somewhat amused by the fact that she seems
to have caused all this intentionally, but he’s not going to complain.

Silver’s eyes widen as Giovanni holds the door to the hotel’s lobby open. He pauses momentarily in the door way, before a slight nudge from Sneasel sends him in, looking around with a mix of awe and caution on his face as he takes in the room with its chandeliers and expensive furniture.

Giovanni gives him a moment to get his bearings. It’s close to midnight, the room is empty save for them and the receptionist, who’s currently buried in her computer. After a minute or so he clears his throat, snapping the boy out of his daze, and gestures for him to follow to the elevators.

He’s staying in a suite on the top floor, a decision that feels less like an ego driven waste of money now that he has a plus-one along. He watches Silver slowly pad through the living room, taking in everything before finally sitting on the edge of a couch, setting his curious gaze on Giovanni.

“How do you know me?”

The question hurts to hear, one of what he’s sure will be many unwanted reminders of the almost seven years he’s lost. He forces out a sigh as he walks across the room, sinking into an armchair across from Silver before saying, “I’m your father.”

Silver freezes; whatever he’d been expecting, that wasn’t it. And to be fair, it shouldn’t have been. The meeting in the alley had been pure chance, happening due to the sheer dumb luck that Sneasel had noticed him in the streets at some point earlier.

“You’re my…”, the boy trails off, caught on the last word. His expression changes quickly from shock to an almost disturbing blank slate, the only sign of emotion being the tears glistening in his eyes.

Giovanni wants to hold him, pull him close, offer the comfort he has no doubt he’s been deprived of. He settles for working his way to the floor, kneeling in front of Silver and lightly setting a hand on his shoulder.

There’s a moment of quiet, Silver’s hands curling into fists on his knees, and then thin arms wrap around Giovanni’s neck as he all but throws himself at him.

Giovanni’s slow reaction costs him, Silver tenses and starts to pull back when he doesn’t move. He stops him with a hand settling between his shoulders, pulling him closer.

Here, with Silver right next to him, Giovanni realizes just how thin he is, ribs noticeable through his well-worn jacket. His hair is a mess, leaves and twigs tangled into the red strands.

He’s also shaking, from what Giovanni hopes is exhaustion and nothing more. The state the child is in, a simple cold would likely land him in bed for a week.

Silver moves first, stepping back. His eyes linger on Giovanni’s shoulder, not looking up. One hand clings to the collar of his father’s jacket, the other clenched at his side.

Giovanni brushes his fingertips against Silver’s cheek, not surprised to find it damp with ignored tears. When Silver doesn’t react he turns his face towards him, noting how he still objects to any eye contact.

He’s scared.

It stings.
“Do you need anything right now?” It’s late, and Silver looks only moments away from passing out where he stands, but he doesn’t need to be going to bed hungry either.

Silver ducks his head, looking at the floor before mumbling, “Can I sit with you? Just for a little bit?”

“Of course.” He pulls himself onto the couch and waits as Silver climbs up next to him. The boy leans into his side and after a moment Giovanni feels a small, gloved, hand slide into his.

He’s not surprised when Silver falls asleep within a few minutes, his head falling to one side as his eyes close. Carefully, Giovanni slips his hand out of Silver’s grasp, wrapping his arm around his shoulders.

A thousand questions are flying through his mind as he studies the sleeping child: where he’s been, how he got away from whoever had been controlling that damned bird, what they wanted…

With a sigh he leans back, trying to clear his thoughts. For now what matters is Silver is back and, as much as the boy might not believe it, safe.

He gives himself one more minute to run those thoughts of finally taking his son back home through his mind, letting years of seemingly pointless searching and dashed hopes be forgotten, before he shifts, sliding his free arm under Silver’s knees, letting the boy’s head settle against his shoulder as he picks his son up for the first time in years.

He stands up, moving to put him to bed, as Sneasel hops up from whatever chair she’d curled up in to follow him.

Silver twitches in his sleep as Giovanni sets him in bed, brow furrowing as his hand clutches at Giovanni’s shirt. He almost feels guilty as he gently opens his hand and sits back.

He tugs the boy’s shoes off, pulls a blanket over Silver, tucking it around him, and then stops.

After a moment, he slowly brushes the boy’s bangs from his face, still struggling to convince himself that this isn’t some fever dream, that Silver’s here. He doesn’t remember him, and everything about his behaviour suggests having been through a hell Giovanni doesn’t want to imagine, but he’s here. He should leave. Tomorrow just got much more complicated and he needs to sleep, but there’s a part of him that wants to stay in here, to keep watch. But there’s no reason to, beyond the paranoid corner of his brain dragging up memories of the last time he’d tucked Silver into bed.

Shaking his head as he stands up, he turns towards the door back to the main room. At some point Sneasel had climbed onto the foot of the bed frame, studying him with red eyes that gleamed in the dark. He sets a hand on her head, ruffling her short blue fur with his thumb as he whispers, “Thank you.”

He’s never been sure how much of human languages pokemon could actually understand, but the slow blink Sneasel gives in reply before she creeps across the bed to sit by her trainer is enough to tell him that his gratitude (and it is genuine, this is all her doing) was understood.

He leaves the door cracked on his way out before turning off the lights in the living room and throwing his jacket over the back of a chair. There’s a lot to do, Silver needs new clothes, and a ticket back to Kanto, but for now they both need to sleep.

He pretends not to notice the way his hands shake, or the tears that prick at his eyes as he lays down on the couch.
Chapter 2

Silver wakes up and immediately decides he’s dreaming. Not that the change from nightmares isn’t welcome, but this isn’t real.

He can’t remember sleeping in a bed ever in his life (his cot in his cell didn’t count), and everything about this room is too nice to be real. The bed is too warm, too soft. No, this is an elaborate dream that he doesn’t want to wake up from.

As he decides this, he rolls onto his side, eyes closing again, just because it’s fake doesn’t mean he can’t enjoy it.

He hears movement on the other side of the partially open door and a hazy recollection of last night forms in his mind; Sneasel peering over the edge of the roof he’d been planning on sleeping on before darting off, a stranger in an alley who she had seemed to know, and who knew his name, following him back to the hotel.

The word ‘father’ swims to the front of his still sleep addled brain and he sits up, much to the dismay of Sneasel, who opens her eyes to glare at him.

Without thinking, he runs his fingers along the edges of his face as he lets the realization sink in.

He found his family.

Or rather Sneasel did.

He scratches the top of her head for a moment, hoping she’ll accept it as an apology for waking her up.

It takes a lot of effort to climb out of the bed, he doesn’t want to leave the softness and warmth. He’s not used to it, but he likes it.

Curiosity and the desire for food win, and he slides down the side of the bed.

He’s surprised when his bare feet hit the carpeted floor. Glancing down he’s relieved to see his boots sitting by the foot of the bed. He stops to pull them back on before walking to the door, where he pauses. He bites his lip, trying to think. He doesn’t like not having a plan, but what is there to plan?

He feels Sneasel climb onto his back, her toes hooking into his belt as she grips his shoulder. She nuzzles his cheek, her rude awakening forgotten for now. Somewhat reassured he pulls the door open.

His father (Silver needs to find out his name) is sitting at the table by the room’s small kitchen, a mug in one hand as he reads what looks like a newspaper that’s been spread over the table.

Silver keeps his footsteps quiet as he wanders around the room, stopping when his eyes land on the coffee table and the meal that’s been spread over it. There’s a tray full of what he assumes is some type of pastry, along with toast and a container of jam, and a covered dish that feels warm against his fingers even through his gloves.

To Silver, who’s been living off of what he could find in the woods or could get out of vending machines with stolen cash, it looks like a feast.
He glances back over to his father, who doesn’t seem to have noticed him, before he quickly snatches one of the pastries. Like he thought, it’s sweet. He eats it in small bites, savoring the flavour along with the sensation of eating an actual meal. Once he’s finished he grabs another and wolfs it down, already reaching for another as Sneasel hops off of him.

“You’re going to be sick if you stuff yourself like that.”

Silver jumps at his father’s voice, turning towards him as he swallows the last of the roll. The man’s studying him with an expression that’s a mix of amusement and something else. Concern maybe, but Silver can’t figure out why. He stands up, filling a glass with water at the sink, before walking over to offer it to Silver.

“The food’s not going anywhere, just relax.”

Silver nods slowly as he takes the glass. He takes a sip as his father sits down on the couch on the other side of the table. “I know.” he mumbles as he sets the glass down. And he does, on a rational level, know that it probably isn’t going anywhere. But he doesn’t trust this sudden ease with which he’s getting things, doesn’t expect it to last.

He watches as his father takes the lid off the hot plate, revealing some sort of egg dish. He scoops some onto a smaller plate before holding it out to Silver with a raised eyebrow.

He takes the plate and hesitantly grabs a fork before sinking into the armchair behind him. He takes a cautious bite, the temperature of the food forcing him to slow his pace, which, he thinks, is probably intentional on his father’s part.

“Did you sleep okay?” the man asks as he dishes a second plate for himself.

“Yes.” It’s not a lie, he slept the whole night, and the aches and pains from sleeping in trees and on hard rooftops are, while not gone, certainly muted after a night in a real bed.

“That’s good.”

Silver watches his father eat as he mentally braces himself; questions about what happened to him are inevitable, and he doesn’t want to think about it. Let alone discus it with someone who, despite having been nothing but what he supposes can be classified as kind, at the end of the day, he doesn’t remember.

“I am going to Vermilion City tomorrow, and from there Viridian. I will be be getting your ticket for the S.S. Anne today, you are coming with.”

Silver nods, scanning the room for Sneasel as he listens. So he’s going to Kanto. Maybe he’ll be able to see Green.

“For now though, let’s get you some new clothes. Does that sound okay?”

Silver has to think on that. While he is still wearing the clothes he was in when he escaped, and the torn up hems of his jeans show it, he doesn’t want to get rid of anything. It’s all still usable. His jacket in particular, while big on him, is warm, and durable, and he’s used to it.

And he is not getting rid of his gloves.

But he nods again. If nothing else he’ll be able to get a better read on his father while they’re out of the hotel. So far he’s worked out nothing beyond that Green’s guess of him being from a wealthy family, made after he’d shown her the silk handkerchief currently folded in his pocket, was right. As
little as he knows about how most people go about their lives, there’s no way this hotel was cheap.

A small smile flicks across his father’s face as he stands up, “We’ll go once you finish eating then. Take your time.”

Silver watches quietly as he walks back to the kitchen table, grabbing a black jacket off the back of the chair.

This all feels far too simple.

A paw on his arm catches his attention and he looks back to see Sneasel eyeing his eggs. A faint smile crosses his face as he cuts the remainder of his breakfast in half, sliding some to her. She hooks a claw through the food and swallows her portion in one bite.

Silver finishes his own serving, and slips another one of the pastries into his pocket as he stands up.

Silently he wanders back over to his father, who glances back up from his newspaper when Silver hesitantly sets a hand on his arm.

“How long have you been in Olivine?”

The question makes him jump, and it takes him a moment to process it, partly because he hadn’t been keeping track of town names, just drifting while he waited for an update from Green.

“Maybe a week?” He’s uncertain as he responds, but a week sounds right. Predicting another question, he adds, “I wasn’t paying a lot of attention to where I was, I just sort of… ended up here.”

They pause at a cross walk and Silver glances up at his father. Gray eyes meet coal black ones for a moment before he quickly turns his head away.

He feels coarse fingers settle on his shoulder as he hears, “Good thing you did then, isn’t it?”

Tilting his head up again, he nods. After a few seconds of working himself up he slips his fingers through his father’s, holding his hand as the light changes and they’re on their way again.

Back at the hotel, Silver idly wanders to a chair by a window, tugging the roll from breakfast out of his pocket, taking a bite as he sits down. It tasted better fresh, but it’s still leagues better than what he’s used to.

Footsteps draw his attention from his small lunch and he looks up to see his father studying him with an expression that’s caught between surprise and confusion.

“You could have told me if you were hungry, have you been carrying that around since breakfast?”

Silver nods, “Should I not have?” He doesn’t see why it would matter. This is the first time he’s been inside a place like this, but he’s dug through enough dumpsters out of desperation for a meal to know
that untouched food tends to get thrown out. Really he should have stashed more, but he’d been
distracted.

“No. No it’s fine.” His father sits in the chair across from him, now studying him with a more
concerned expression. “Did you want to get something more to eat?”

“No.” After a breakfast the size of what he’s used to eating over the course of a whole day (if he’s
lucky, which he rarely is) and his current snack he’s fairly certain he won’t be hungry until morning.

Realizing that his answer probably bordered on rudely blunt, he adds, “This is already a lot more
than I’m used to eating. I’m not hungry.”

This does little to lessen the concern written across his father’s face. Silver watches as he leans back
in the chair, gaze drifting to the window.

There’s a few moments of quiet, before Silver speaks again, “Can I ask you something?”

His father raises an eyebrow, “Of course.”

“Why haven’t you asked about where I was?”

“Did you want to tell me now?”

The question surprises Silver. The answer is simple; he doesn’t. He knows he’ll have to at some
point, but for now he doesn’t want to think about any of it, at least not until he’s no longer imagining
icy fingers on him, or feeling a mask that’s been gone for over two years.

But the fact that he seems to be allowed to put it off as long as he wants surprises him.

He shakes his head finally, staring at the floor.

Out of the corner of his eye he sees his father nod. “When you’re ready, then.”

“Thank you.” The words slip out without thinking, and Silver isn’t sure he heard him. Silently, he
pulls his knees into his chest, curling up in his chair. It feels strange to have nothing he needs to do.
To rest.

Though, he supposes, he should update Green. But it can wait, at least until he’s genuinely alone, as
contacting her in front of his father requires explanations that he’s just said he’s not ready to give.

He shifts, gazing out the window. He’s spent days exploring the city, jumping from roof to roof,
finding tourists with too much cash who didn’t pay enough attention to their surroundings. There’s
something almost satisfying about sitting here staring down at a city full of people he’s spent the past
week outsmarting.

He glances back over at his father, the man’s eyes are closed, he’s fallen asleep. A thought pops into
Silver’s head and he slides out of his chair, padding across the floor to his father. When he doesn’t
react to Silver’s hand on his knee, the boy slips his hand into his pocket, small fingers closing around
a wallet.

Ducking behind the chair, sitting on the floor and out of sight, Silver opens the simple black wallet.
He pauses to stare at a roll of cash, habit and instincts screaming at him to pocket it, before digging
for an I.D.

He can’t remember the man’s name, and at this point doesn’t want to ask. Finally his fingers find the
smooth plastic of a driver’s license and he pulls it out.

Giovanni Sakaki. Silver reads his father’s name a few times. He’s not sure what he was expecting upon finding it. A sudden recollection of long forgotten memories? He’s supposed to have given up on such things. After a few seconds of thought, he tucks the I.D back into the wallet and slips it back into Giovanni’s pocket.

Quietly he steps away, glancing to where the bags of new clothes sit on the coffee table. Then in direction of the bathroom, and more importantly, the bathtub. It’s still the middle of the day, but his walk through town and the more (as far as he can tell) upscale stores, has him much more aware of the layer of dirt from the woods currently clinging to him.

And he was promised a bath last night.

Making up his mind, he grabs a bag from the table and disappears into ‘his’ room.
There’s something uniquely soothing about being at sea.

Supposedly.

Giovanni has always and will always prefer solid ground beneath his feet to the constant swaying of a ship, the shelter of buildings or a forest to the openness of water, and it’s a lack of alternatives that has him travelling by sea.

Silver doesn’t seem to agree.

The child has been staring out the window of their cabin on the S.S. Anne since the minute they’d arrived, curious eyes taking in everything.

For as much as he dislikes the ship, Giovanni will gladly take quiet fascination over the nervousness of the previous day.

And the boy sitting silently by the window, waiting out the five hour long trip to Vermilion, already barely resembles the one he’d found in the alley. It’s remarkable the difference a bath, sleep, and clean clothes have made.

He’s still much too thin, only time and regular meals will fix that, but he no longer constantly looks in danger of collapsing, and he’s calmed down somewhat.

Giovanni knows there’s still a long ways to go, but for now Silver does seem to have convinced himself that none of this is going anywhere, and that he can rest.

Or it’s all a delicate act, and he has an even rougher road ahead than he’d expected.

A mostly muted horn sounds somewhere on the ship and Silver flinches violently as he turns to locate the source.

“Relax.” Giovanni murmurs. When Silver turns back towards him looking confused, he adds, “It means we are an hour out from Vermilion, that’s all.” He leans back in his chair, watching as Silver nods and resumes his earlier position.

Closing his eyes, Giovanni tries to get his thoughts in order. He hasn’t been back to Kanto in almost a year, having left just under a month after loosing to Red. He’s been in contact with no one since then. He’s a man of his word, Team Rocket’s gone. For now.

He had, however, kept an eye on the news, and he’s not surprised to find that no names have been listed anywhere in regards to the organization. The League covering for its own mistakes most likely. One ‘corrupt’ gym leader can be explained away as an accident, but four (technically five but Blaine had made his stance clear, as if a morality crisis undid all that he’d done) was harder.

He supposes that does make the Viridian Gym still technically his, if only by oversight. Not that he has any desire to return to the position, but it could make returning to the city itself difficult.

Then again, he knows how to keep his head down., and it’s too late for a change in plans anyway. He’s already dragging Silver across the continent, he doubts he’ll handle another abrupt change to his plans well. As adaptable as the boy seems, everyone has their limits, and having the promise of going home dangled and then snatched away all within three days seems a likely one for Silver.
Or, as he discovers an hour and a half later, as they enter Vermilion’s train station, perhaps it’s an even simpler one.

Silver, who had up to this point been clutching his hand, trying not to get lost in the crowd, freezes upon the realization that their trip will be taking them under ground. Or maybe it’s the thought of the cramped train cars that has the boy on edge, but regardless the look in his eyes is one of panic.

“Are you alright?” he asks, lightly tugging Silver out of the way of the doors.

He’s breathing quickly, and the shaky nod he gives in response is an increasingly obvious lie. A part of Giovanni regrets the decision to let Silver take his time in telling him what had happened to him, if only so he could at least attempt to predict what was likely to set him off.

“Are you sure?” he cups his hand under the boy’s chin, tilting his head so their eyes meet. When Silver nods again he adds, “It’s half an hour to Saffron, and then we switch trains and it’s another two hours to Viridian. Or we can stay the night in Saffron if that’s too much. You just have to tell me, okay?”

“Okay.” Silver’s voice is quiet, but at least he’s speaking again.

His grip on Giovanni’s hand is almost painful as they board the train.

The trip to Saffron is uneventful, and when Silver offers no protest about continuing, they switch trains, and by evening are in Viridian.

It feels strange to be home, especially when he can barely call it that.

Giovanni is thankful for the late hour as he leads Silver through back alleys and side streets, avoiding main paths and praying no one recognizes him. He has neither the time or patience for a fight, or giving explanations of where he’s been.

Once they reach the forest his guard drops somewhat, his feet finding the familiar path to the estate hidden away among the trees. Silver releases his hand for the first time since Vermilion, tired but curious eyes flitting over their surroundings as he steps away, letting Sneasel back out of her pokeball as he does.

“Stay close, we’re almost there.”

Silver glances back towards him, nodding as they continue through the forest.

Soon the familiar outline of the mansion appears, and he lets the remaining tension in his shoulders leave. He hasn’t been back here in a year, and a quick glance at the exterior alone is enough to tell him that much of the next week will be spent cleaning, but he’s home. And, more importantly, so is Silver.

Turning back to the boy, he finds him studying the house with a confused expression, his head tilted and his brow furrowed. Does he remember it?

Walking up to the door, pulling keys out of his pocket as he goes, he gives Silver a few moments to take in the building.

The door sticks for a moment, and creaks loudly as he all but forces it open. That will need to be fixed.

He feels for a light switch, and tries not to feel too relieved when the hallway lights turn on. He’d
kept the utility bills paid, both to give the impression that someone was still living there to decrease the likelihood of the property being traced to him (it’s owned under an alias but caution has yet to fail him), and because he’d never planned on staying out of Kanto permanently to begin with.

He hears Silver stepping up behind him as he enters the house, and steps to the side to let the boy further in as he closes the door, trying not to wince at the protesting hinges.

“You haven’t been here in a while.” It’s not a question, but the look on Silver’s face seems to be requesting an explanation as he takes in the thick layer of dust on everything in sight, the filthy windows, and the musty air they’re both inhaling.

“I haven’t, no.” Giovanni replies, trying to piece together a reason that isn’t a lie (because he will tell Silver everything, but the boy needs to actually trust him first), but also doesn’t give away everything. He forces two windows open (he doubts either of them needs to be breathing in whatever is lying around the dust covered house) and continues down the hall, opening windows and testing lights as he goes.

“Why?”

He glances back at Silver, who’s slowly trailing after him, eyes scanning each room carefully. He almost seems like he’s looking for something.

Sighing, Giovanni replies, “Several things went wrong at once, and it was safer to leave. I’ll tell you more later.” When he was sure the child wouldn’t run.

That said, safety in fleeing seems to be something Silver understands, as the boy nods, apparently satisfied with the answer.

As they work their way through the rest of the house Giovanni pieces together what Silver’s doing as the boy almost methodically searches each room; his eyes lingering just a bit too long on the kitchen knives, the letter opener on his desk, the heavy bases of several lamps, searching for possible weapons as he pointedly avoids the large windows.

They’re actions that speak of specific training, and the thought drags up a long muted anger, over the son he’d lost, the childhood Silver had lost, and the fact that even with the boy back there was still no one at whom to direct his fury.

He forces a slow, deep, breath in and out, in a mostly successful attempt at soothing his temper, before turning from the doorway to his study to see Sneasel standing in the now open door to Silver’s old room.

He hadn’t noticed the pair wandering off, a fact that doesn’t sit well when mixed with his other realizations.

After a slight hesitation he walks over, looking in to see Silver standing awkwardly in the middle of the room, his hands shoved into his pockets as he studies the shelves lined with toys and picture books that haven’t been touched in years.

The sight hurts more than it probably should. There’s a distinctly lost look in Silver’s eyes as he turns back towards the doorway.

There are several moments of silence before Silver finally speaks, “I don’t… I don’t remember anything from before.” Turning his head away he continues, “You probably figured that out already anyway. But I just…” he stops, glancing back to Giovanni.
Quietly, Giovanni walks over, setting a hand on Silver’s shoulder as he kneels in front of him. Silver avoids his gaze as he replies, “You’re right, I knew—”

“I’m sorry.” Silver cuts him off, then immediately pales, quickly mumbling another apology as he ducks his head, “Sorry, I’ll be quiet. Keep talking.”

“You don’t need to be.” The fear glinting in Silver’s eyes is, while not surprising after the past two days, painful none the less. A reason for the boy’s apology occurs to him and he adds, “Nothing would have changed if you had told me. I was bringing you back no matter what. Okay?”

He’d apparently found the source of this sudden anxiety; Silver’s eyes tear up as he nods. “I thought I’d start to remember once I got… home. But it’s all still just blank.”

He sighs as he rubs the boy’s arm, it takes effort to not just pull him into an embrace, this is the most vulnerable he’s seen Silver since Olivine and every minute he’s standing there trembling and fighting tears hurts, but he doesn’t want to push it. He’s told Silver he can take his time opening up and he meant it.

Keeping his voice as soft as he can, he replies, “I can’t promise that you’ll remember anything. You were two when you were taken, I’d be more surprised if you did remember. But if you have questions, ask them. If I can answer I will.”

Silver nods again, looking around the room slowly before stepping closer. Giovanni tenses as he leans into him, before wrapping his arms around around the boy.

“Tired?” he tries to keep the amusement out of his voice as Silver’s hands grab at his jacket.

He feels Silver shake his head against his shoulder. “You’re warm.” his voice is faint, Giovanni’s not sure if the statement was meant to be heard or not.

“And you’re not?” he asks, noting the boy’s forehead against his neck. He doesn’t feel too cold. Giovanni would prefer he was at least back up to a healthy weight before getting sick.

“I’m fine.”

After a moment he presses a kiss against the top of Silver’s head. He feels his grip on him tighten but otherwise Silver doesn’t react. “Let’s get the room across the hall set up for you, for tonight. You’re a bit big for the bed in here.”

Silver nods again, stepping back, “Okay.” He looks around the room one more time as Giovanni stands up, “Thank you. Father.”

He says the word slowly, like he’s testing it out, and Giovanni is left praying the ache in his chest that it caused doesn’t show on his face.
“I found my father.”

The excited squeal that leaves the communicator on Silver’s wrist makes him jump as he hears Green start laughing. “What’s so funny?”

“Nothing. I’m sorry”, she sounds breathless, “it’s just, you’re almost never the one to call, I thought something was wrong. And then you just dropped that on me. How did you find him?”

Silver shifts away from the tree he’d been leaning on, laying down in the grass as he explains what happened in Olivine, and the trip to Viridian.

“Wow”, Green sighs when he finishes. “Silver I’m so happy for you.” If she’s jealous (which as far as Silver’s concerned she has every right to be) she does a good job of hiding it. “What’s he like?”

He’s extremely glad she can’t see the face he makes at the question. He’d considered putting this call off until he could actually answer it, thus far he knows next to nothing about the man. Though to be fair he hasn’t asked as many questions as he imagines Green would have. He prefers to do his research through searches and there is very little to go off of in the house.

“He seems okay.” It’s a dull answer, and probably not quite what she was hoping to hear, but it’s true. After a moment of thought, he continues, “Serious though. And you were right about the money, you should have seen the hotel in Olivine.” Green laughs as he adds, “But he’s letting me do what I want. I haven’t gone into town on my own yet, but as long as one of his pokemon is with I can do whatever in the forest. I’m not stuck in the house or anything.” That’s not entirely true, he has to be home well before dark, but he thinks, given everything that had happened, that’s fair. And if he really needed to sneak out he could.

He glances over to where Giovanni’s nidoqueen is sunning herself in a clearing to his left. She’s his watcher for the day, seemingly happy for the reason to be out in the woods, though they aren’t very far from the house.

“Good. So you’re happy?”

“I think so? It’s… strange. I’m home, I haven’t missed a meal in two weeks, and I’m sleeping in a real bed, but it all feels… off, somehow.”

“You’re just not used to it.” Green replies, using what Silver had secretly dubbed her ‘big sister voice’. “Give it some time, and try to relax because I know you’re not, you’ll settle in.” She pauses before adding, “It’ll take about a week but I can head back to Viridian. Do you want to meet up? I’ve got a lot to tell you too. And maybe we could go to Pallet and I could introduce you to the Professor and…”

He lets her ramble, listing off a few names he doesn’t recognize, and he starts laughing, sitting up to try and catch his breath right as the laughter starts to devolve into quiet sobs that bring Sneasel down from her tree and Nidoqueen over from her nap.

“Silver?” Green sounds concerned now, the cheerfulness from moments ago gone, “Are you okay? Did I say something wrong?”

“I’m fine.” he manages, as Sneasel makes a grab for the handkerchief in his pocket, and starts wiping at his eyes. Nidoqueen lays down again, curling around him, regarding him with large eyes as he
adds, “It just all feels so normal. And we’re not even close to done.” Taking a shaky breath he says, “Sorry, I guess I’m kinda rubbing everything in. I’m not trying to.”

“No, it’s fine. My parents weren’t trainers when I was little, and I doubt they are now. I wouldn’t want to drag them into all this anyway.”

Silver still feels like a jerk, but Green brings up a point.

“That reminds me, how much do you want me to tell him?”

Green’s quiet for a moment before saying, “However much you want. Who knows, maybe he can help. You said he’s got a team right?”

“Yeah.” Silver leans against Nidoqueen, staring up at the sky through the trees. “I think he used to be a gym leader. I found a bunch of badges when I searched his desk.”

Of course, Giovanni helping would require Silver telling him everything, and he’s still not sure he’s ready for that. It would mean owning up to several break-ins on His orders, not to mention everything he’d stolen after getting away. Silver has a hard time picturing no issue being taken with the fact that he’d wound up a criminal after being stolen. Especially if his guess about the gym is correct.

“Really?” There’s something different about Green’s voice, but Silver can’t place exactly what. She’s quiet for a few seconds before adding, “So you’re just destined to be talented then, huh?” Her tone is teasing, but it sounds off; too cheerful, even for Green.

“Are you okay? You sound weird.”

“Yeah. Just tired. It’s been a long week. Lots of training.”

Now he’s certain she’s hiding something, but there’s little point in harassing her for answers. She won’t give them unless she wants to, and she clearly doesn’t.

“I’ll let you go then. I should be getting back anyway.” He stands up as he adds, “Be careful.”

“I will. And I’ll let you know when I get to Viridian. Bye!”

“Goodbye.”

He ends the call and tucks his hands into his pockets, starting down the trail back to the house. He likes the forest; it almost feels endless, and would be easy to disappear into if he had to, which gives a much appreciated feeling of security to the otherwise exposed feeling mansion he now calls home.

It hits him as reaches the yard that, if Green is coming, then he only has a week to give at least a partial explanation.

She probably did that intentionally.

He’s quiet as he as he wanders into the house, leaving Nidoqueen in the yard to return to her nap.

It had taken a week, but the layers of dust coating everything were gone, the kitchen now stocked with food that Silver was struggling to convince himself he was constantly allowed access to, and his bedroom now resembled one of an eight-year-old rather than a toddler.

The house didn’t feel lived in, they’d only been there two weeks and it felt too big for only two people regardless, but it was comfortable.
That didn’t equal safe in his eyes, but it was an improvement over his previous situation, for what little that was worth.

Silently, he wanders through the house, winding up in the library out of habit. He’d picked his research into the legendary birds back up, though it wouldn’t take him as long as he’d expected to work his way through his father’s collection of textbooks and encyclopedias. A room filled floor to ceiling with books and maybe a fifth of them were in a language he could read.

Silver grabs his current research material off the table he’d left it on and curls up on the couch by the window. Sneasel climbs up next to him as he finds where he’d left off and starts reading.

But it’s almost all material he’s read before, or already knows; nothing about the feathers or a weakness, simply legends, and his attention starts to drift, his eyelids get heavy and he lets himself close them for a moment.

When he opens them there’s ice on the window.

He can’t move as he watches it expand; creeping onto the wall, the shelves, the couch, his skin. His vision is narrowed, the edges blacked out, and there’s a cold pressure on his face.

Silver screams.

There’s a warm hand on his shoulder, shaking him awake.

His eyes snap open to see Giovanni kneeling next to him, Sneasel clinging to his shoulder.

“Everything alright?”

Avoiding his eyes, Silver nods. “Sorry if you were doing something.” He pulls away, shivering. Imagined or not, he can still feel the ice.

He turns towards the window as Giovanni stands up, walking away.

He’s hesitant as he extends his hand, pressing his fingers against the glass.

It’s warm.

He jumps when he feels a blanket wrap around him. Turning he finds his father regarding him with an expression he can’t quite read.

“You’re shaking. You’re not getting sick are you?”

Silver doesn’t get a chance to reply before he feels Giovanni’s hand press against his forehead. He’s still rattled from the nightmare, and the contact on his face is far more grounding than he was expecting.

“I’m fine.” he mumbles as Giovanni’s hand moves to his shoulder. Silver looks up at his face, not missing the way his eyes skim the textbook still open on Silver’s lap, or the way his expression darkens as he does.

“Alright. Do you need anything?” When Silver shakes his head, Giovanni lightly squeezes his shoulder before walking over to a bookcase.

Silver turns back to his book, watching through the curtain of red hair that falls when he tilts his head, as his father takes a book from a shelf and sinks into a chair on the other side of the room.
Now he’s confused. He’s fairly certain Giovanni had been in his study when he had gotten back. Silver’s not sure what he’d been doing, but there had clearly been something. And now he was ignoring it to what? Keep an eye on him? Why?

Pulling his attention back to the book, Silver tries to focus more on the words in front of him than on the questions buzzing through his head.

He makes it through another three pages before completely loosing interest.

Shoving the book to the other end of the couch, he pulls the blanket tighter around him as he leans back, taking a faint sniff of the fabric as he does so.

The whole house smells faintly of what Silver thinks is cigarette smoke, and the blanket and couch are no exception, though he hasn’t actually seen Giovanni smoking.

A kicked habit maybe? One more thing he’s mentally filed away for later investigation. Along with the gym badges, and now, Green’s strange reaction to finding out about them. He knows she’d entered a league tournament a year ago, maybe she’d met Giovanni?

Though when he thinks about it, she’d seemed more stressed than surprised.

Speaking of Green, now that she’d helpfully put him on a schedule, he’d need to tell at least enough to explain who she was by the end of the week.

He glances towards his father, still reading in his chair. There had to be some way of leaving out the less savory of his actions, at least for now. He’s just not sure how, and he’s not sure blatant lies are the best way to handle things either.

What would happen if he did tell the truth? His lack of memories of his father hadn’t led to any problems, but he feels like there’s a difference between lost memories and breaking into labs (and museums, and pokemon centers, and he thinks there may have been a gym or two mixed in there), even if it had been on someone else’s orders.

After a moment of debate, Silver sits up, taking a deep breath as he turns towards Giovanni, still trying to figure out how to phrase his question.

“Father?”

There’s a slight pause, before Giovanni looks up, closing his book as he says, “Yes?”

Before he can over think it, or otherwise deter himself, Silver asks, “If I had done something… bad while I was… gone, it wouldn’t change anything, right?” He winces as the words leave his mouth, it sounds entitled, like he expects his crimes to not matter.

The corner of Giovanni’s mouth twitches, but he otherwise doesn’t react. “No. Nothing would. Why?”

“I… was just… wondering. That’s all.”

Giovanni nods, sitting back. Silver thinks he should take the opportunity to tell everything, but he’s still uncertain.

Giovanni may have given the answer Silver had been hoping for, but that meant little when he was likely thinking of stolen wallets and food, which, while not wrong, didn’t even scrape the surface of everything Silver had done under The Mask’s orders.
After a minute he asks, “Why wouldn’t it matter?”

He expects a simple answer, ‘because you’re my son’, or something to that affect. It’s been Giovanni’s reply to plenty of other, similar, questions.

Instead, he gets a dry smile as Giovanni replies, “Whatever this ‘bad’ thing you’re ‘just wondering’ about is, you don’t seem too eager to do it. Again or otherwise.” he pauses before adding, “You’re home, you could consider it a fresh start if that will help.”

A fresh start. Silver likes the idea, impossible though it is at the moment.
“What’s Team Rocket?”

Giovanni just barely manages to avoid choking on his coffee at Silver’s question.

Coughing as he sets his mug on the kitchen table, he mentally runs through the fairly limited list of places Silver was likely to have heard that name. He could have gone through Giovanni’s desk, he’d dug through every other room of the house, but it seems unlikely, any incriminating files are locked up under false bottoms of stuffed drawers. Which he supposes leaves the option of a news outlet, except Silver hasn’t been reading any, to his knowledge.

Giving up on coming up with an answer on his own, he asks, “Where did you hear that name?” This is not how he’d planned on bringing this up.

Silver holds up a newspaper clipping, “It was in a book upstairs.”

Giovanni takes the paper, now he’s slightly irritated with himself. It’s an article from years ago, when he’d been much more dedicated in keeping an eye on how much the media reported on Team Rocket’s actions. That task had quickly been delegated off to subordinates, but he’d apparently neglected to completely purge the house of all signs of the work.

Silver’s still studying him, clearly expecting an answer. Setting the paper on the table, he gestures to a chair, “Sit.” He may as well get this over with, Silver catching him in a lie later would probably do more damage than the truth anyway.

At least he hopes so.

Silver climbs into a chair across from him as Giovanni, choosing his words carefully, explains, “Team Rocket was an organization that I created, to research ways of increasing the abilities of pokemon.” Silver tilts his head, looking curious. “There were other goals as well but that was the main one.” That’s not entirely true, but Silver doesn’t need to hear a more detailed description until he’s older. Much older.

“You said ‘was’. Did something change?”

“I got… overconfident. Drew too much attention” Which is true. He should have kept their actions out of the public eye more than he did, shouldn’t have taken over Silph co. as obviously as he had, should have killed Red at Mt. Moon before he became a problem. “Remember what I said about needing to leave to stay safe?” Silver nods. “That’s why.”

“What kind of research?” Silver’s leaning in slightly, he looks far more interested in this than Giovanni was expecting.

“Genetic, mostly. Enhancing the natural abilities of each species, tests on reactions to different environments, seeing how they responded to being exposed to genes of a different species.”

“Is that legal?”

He has to fight back a laugh; it is a reasonable question for a child to be asking, and for as much as
Silver seems convinced otherwise, that is at the end of the day, what he is. “No.”

He watches the boy’s reaction closely, his brow furrowing as he takes in the confession. Silver sits back, not meeting his eyes as he asks, “So you’re…”

“A criminal?” Giovanni finishes when he trails off. It’s been true for years, longer than Silver’s been alive at least, and this is the first time the description has bothered him. Too much is riding on Silver taking this well for it not to.

Silver’s quiet for what feels like several minutes, not looking up from the table. Finally he speaks, “Would you bring it back?”

That’s a difficult question to answer. On one hand, how can he regret disbanding when it had led him to Silver? On the other, it would be lying to say that he had never planned to bring the organization back.

He settles for avoiding it.

“Most likely someone else will try to pull it back together even if I don’t.” Criminals don’t stop simply because they’re told. He’s no exception. “But, for now, I have no plans.”

Silver nods slowly. Giovanni studies his face, trying to read his expression, assess how much of his son’s trust he’s just lost.

Silver’s face remains its usual blank mask; something Giovanni has begrudgingly grown used to, it only ever seems to slip when he’s tired. A shared trait; and one that in most circumstances he’d be proud of, but currently all it does is frustrate him by pointing out how little he actually knows his son.

But nothing about his behaviour says he’s scared, which is a drastic improvement over what Giovanni would have expected even a week ago. So perhaps all is not lost.

“Are you okay?” he says finally, breaking the silence before it can be dragged out anymore.

“Yes.” Silver stands up, “Thank you Father.”

The boy darts out, Giovanni can’t hear his footsteps but he’s fairly certain he’s returned to the library upstairs.

He takes the fact that Silver isn’t leaving for another hike through the forest as a good sign, he’s gotten more comfortable with staying in the house, and their conversation seems to have at least not undone that. There is an unpleasant irony in the way he feels more secure with Silver in the house he was stolen from, than when he’s out in the woods that the boy has repeatedly shown to be perfectly capable of navigating, but the fact remains that he does.

It is strange, however, suddenly sharing his living space again, regardless of how much effort Silver seems to put into not being noticed. He’d slowly grown to despise quiet halls and empty rooms, until he’d begun splitting his time almost entirely between the gym and which ever base he was most needed at. But now he finds he’d apparently also grown used to them; and he’s frequently caught off guard by Silver when he finds him wandering through the house.

Something he’s reminded of that night, sitting in the living room, trying to quiet his thoughts before bed (having nothing to do after years of drowning himself in his work is a terrible combination), when he feels a pair of eyes on him.

Turning, he finds Silver standing in the doorway, half hidden by shadows. Giovanni’s eyes dart to
his watch, it’s nearly midnight, Silver should have been asleep hours ago.

“Do you need something, Silver?”

He starts to step back, but stops. Giovanni notices Sneasel clinging to his leg. After a moment Silver nods. “Can I talk to you?”

The question is barely audible, and about the last thing Giovanni had been expecting, but he nods quickly, “Of course, sit down.” As Silver slowly wanders over, climbing onto the far end of the couch, he adds, “What is it?”

Sneasel climbs up next to Silver, positioning herself between him and Giovanni, as Silver says, “I’m ready to talk about… what happened.”

His eyes flick up from the floor, glancing to Giovanni, seemingly for permission because when he nods Silver takes a shaky breath and continues.

“The man who took me called himself the Mask of Ice. There were six of us, he trained us to fight for him. I think he’s looking for something.

“He kept us in a bunch of caves he’d built into. We weren’t allowed out unless we were going on a mission.

“If you broke the rules then you got locked in a cold cell with no light, or sound. If you cried you got sent there, or failed a test, or tried to escape, or tried to take your mask off, or were too nice to your pokemon, or if he thought you were too close to your partner.”

While Silver had started off calmly, sounding like he’d practiced this speech, he was slowly devolving into a shaking mess. Clutching at Sneasel, he pauses, still not looking up.

Giovanni stares at a point on the wall just above Silver’s head as he lets everything he’d just said sink in. The ‘rules’ Silver had listed bounce around in his head as he realizes just how many of them a small child removed from all familiarity would break almost constantly. It’s a miracle Silver’s able to function at all.

Moving slowly, he slides to the other end of the couch, setting a hand between Silver’s shoulders. He almost moves back when he flinches, but stops when Silver leans into his side, clutching at his shirt.

‘Comforter’ is not a role he’s had to play since Silver had been taken, and he’s not entirely certain how to proceed. After a moment he pulls Silver into his lap, the boy’s head resting on his shoulder as his arms close around him. He’s not sure if the lack of protest is good or not.

In a much softer voice than he’s used in years, he asks, “How did you get away?”

Silver’s quiet for several minutes, his shaky breathing evening out before he finally replies, “About three years ago Green, my partner, she’s a little older than me, found a way out through an air duct while I was locked up for messing up during training. She snuck into the cell to get me out, and then we ran. I don’t know if they’re still looking for us, but they were for a while.

“We split up once we thought they’d stopped. I was supposed to stay in Johto, while she went to Kanto. She remembered being from Pallet, thought that she might be able to get home. But she couldn’t find anyone she recognized, I don’t really know what she’s been doing since then.”

The girl’s name sounds familiar, and Giovanni has a sinking feeling that Silver’s friend and the girl who broke into Silph co. are one and the same. But that’s a dilemma for later.
With Silver calmed down, he takes a risk, and asks, “Do you remember anything else about the man who had you?” He doesn’t need much to find someone, and he will find him.

And end him.

Silver shifts in his arms, nodding. “He uses ice types. He was tall, and-” he stops, turning his face so it’s buried in Giovanni’s shoulder.

“And what?”

“It sounds stupid, but I think his body was made of ice. His arm broke off once during training, and it just grew back. And when he grabbed me his hands felt like icicles.”

It takes considerable effort to hide the realization sinking in. What Silver described sounds like a moving ice sculpture, something Giovanni only knows of one person capable of making: Pryce.

“What part of Johto were you in when you got away?” he asks finally. There’s no point in bringing up suspicions when he can’t prove them.

“Ecruteak. We came out of a cave and ended up there.” Silver pauses before adding, “Why?” He sits up, actually looking Giovanni in the eye, “If you know something you need to tell me, please!”

He’s strongly tempted to lie, deny all the theories forming in his mind, but it feels wrong to not give Silver what he wants when this is the boldest he’s been. With a quiet sigh he responds, “There’s a gym leader in Mahogany Town, which is on the other side of the mountain the two of you would have come out of, who specializes in ice types. One thing he’s known for is how his team is trained to create ice sculptures, there’s some technique where they make them move.”

There’s a flash of realization on Silver’s face, before he asks, “What’s his name?”

“Pryce. But Silver, listen, don’t go looking for him.”

“Until we can prove it, I know.”

Giovanni shakes his head, “No, don’t go. At all.” Before Silver can argue, he adds, “You just said that you don’t know if he’s still looking for you or not, it’s not safe.”

“So just leave it to you?” There’s an extremely jaded look in Silver’s eyes as he turns his head away.

“What can you do?”

A year ago he’d have had a personal army’s worth of protection to offer. Now he’s left with what he can offer on his own.

He doesn’t blame Silver for not considering that to be enough.

“If I find anything out, you’ll know. But you’re home. Rest, and let someone else worry about it.”

Silver still looks unconvinced, but he nods. Slowly he leans in again, his head settling back on Giovanni’s shoulder.

Giovanni stands up, still holding Silver. The boy tenses when he leaves the couch but doesn’t complain, simply wrapping his arms around his father’s neck.

“Let’s get you back to bed then.” Giovanni murmurs, walking towards the stairs.

He doesn’t think he’s ever going to feel completely secure about Silver sleeping in his room again.
He still finds himself glancing back at the window, making sure the hole is gone, and subconsciously stepping around shards of glass that have been gone for years.

But Silver had settled in before he’d thought to act on those pointless anxieties, and watching him climb into bed, metallic eyes scanning the room once before he lays down, is oddly calming after years of struggling to convince himself his son was gone for good.

He sits on the edge of the bed as he tucks Silver’s blankets around him, before brushing his fingers through the boy’s hair. “Thank you for telling me.”

Silver studies him for a moment, nodding slowly. He mumbles something Giovanni doesn’t quite hear, before rolling over, eyes closing as Sneasel lays down next to him.

Chapter End Notes

*takes deep breath* FUCK PRYCE
Viridian was a strange city. By all accounts it should have been a small town on the edge of the forest, and if you’d never been that was likely all you’d think it was, but upon arrival it was revealed to be a much bigger, busier, city, stuck with its small town reputation purely because it wasn’t quite as big as Saffron or Celadon. Appearing nice and simple, and turning out to be large and complicated on closer inspection.

Which, Green thinks, sums up this entire trip quite nicely. She should have just been going to see Silver, catch up, celebrate him being home, and instead she’s trying to figure out how to tell her best friend that his father was a mob boss who’d essentially taken over half the region for several years.

She’d wanted to be wrong.

She’d dug through league records hoping to find that there had been some other gym leader in Viridian who’d retired a few years ago (because really, a kidnapped child was the perfect reason to retire from any job), but nope! Giovanni had been gym leader there for the past seventeen years.

So she’d looked up records of already retired gym leaders, looking for someone who fit the description Silver had given who could have moved to Viridian at some point (it wasn’t like he’d described the badges he’d found). That had come up blank.

Finally she’d gone through news reports from Viridian, looking for any record of a child being kidnapped. She’d briefly celebrated finding nothing that could be Silver, before it occurred to her that someone in-charge of the largest crime syndicate in the region was unlikely to want the police helping him with anything.

With every route she could think of exhausted she’d come to the conclusion that she’d just have to tell him. A decision that had left her feeling awful every time she thought of how happy he’d sounded over the phone, but she also knew that she couldn’t possibly keep that big of a secret.

Not to mention that, depending on what Giovanni’s plans were, Silver knowing everything was also a matter of his safety.

She was choosing to ignore the massive can of wurmple that was Giovanni still being in Kanto in the first place, so far there was no sign of Team Rocket, outside of minor incidents that seemed more like bored former members than anything organized, so, for now, she could focus on other problems.

Like making sure Silver didn’t hate her by the end of the day.

An outcome Green’s trying desperately to find a way to as she stands on a street corner studying Silver, who’s sitting at a table outside a coffee shop across the street.

He looks different, which she knows is a good thing. He’d been home for almost a month, of course he wasn’t covered in a layer of dust and leaves, or still wearing his torn-up jeans and too-big jacket anymore.

But his neatly brushed hair and clean blue sweater are still jarring, not matching the image of him she’d grown used to. She’s more relieved than she really needs to be when she notices that he is still wearing his old gloves.
Finally she makes herself walk across the street, plastering a cheerful smile across her face. She was going to tell him, but it could wait.

“Hey!” The smile that crosses his face at her greeting makes her feel even guiltier, but she ignores it, sliding into the chair across from him, her eyes drifting around as she did.

Sneasel's curled up in a tree, watching them. Nothing else stands out, to Green’s relief. Though she is surprised that Silver seems to genuinely be alone, no sign of either Giovanni or any of his pokemon, or at least none of the ones Red had listed off when she’d asked.

“What do you think of Kanto?” Green asks, taking in Silver’s face. His eyes look a little brighter, less tired, and his face isn’t as pale. Not quite one-hundred percent, but getting there.

“It’s not that different from Johto, Green.” Same dry tone as always. She tries not to enjoy the fact that at least something is still the same.

“That’s not what I meant.” she says, wrinkling her nose as she stands back up, “Come on, let’s go for a walk.”

As they wander to a nearby park, Green fills Silver in on the past two years. More or less; she leaves out her battle with Professor Oak, she wants Silver to like him, and finding out about him driving her to a panic attack to prove a point would ensure the exact opposite. And she leaves out Team Rocket, better to get that over with in one shot.

When they reach the park she changes subjects, “But enough about me. Am I gonna get a more detailed description than ‘okay’ and ‘serious’?” she says, sinking onto a bench next to Silver and Sneasel, leaning back to study the clouds. A part of her just wants to get this over with, jump straight to the worst part. Comforting she can do. Dancing around something she doesn’t want to talk about? Not so much.

Of course, there is a slim, slim chance that she was wrong.

“I was right, he was a gym leader.”

Never mind.

“Where?” she asks, already knowing the answer.

“Here.”

Not for the first time, Green’s glad for how good she is at hiding her feelings. Telling herself to get it over with she takes a deep breath, “Um, Silver-”

“I know about Team Rocket. If that’s what you’re going to say.”

Wait, what? She hadn’t expected that. Denial yes. Yelling and crying, maybe. But Silver already knowing? Why would Giovanni have let him find out? “You- How did you find out?”

“I asked, he told me.”

Oh, he’d had complete control over it. That made sense. “How much do you know?”

“About the experiments, mostly. The business stuff didn’t make a lot of sense. But he told me a little about Silph co.. You were there, right?”

Green nods slowly, “And how do you feel about it?” Because he’s talking far too calmly. He’s
Silver takes a shaky breath, his arms wrapping around Sneasel, before he says, “I know that what they did, what Father did, was wrong. And I know people got hurt, including you.” He glances over with wide, apologetic eyes, “But he stopped. And he says he’s not planning on bringing it back. So, for now, I’m going to trust him on it. And it’s not like we haven’t broken the law too, so…” he trails off, not meeting her eyes.

Green doesn’t like the way Silver’s comparing their actions to Giovanni’s; two completely different sets of actions, with nothing in common. She’d like to blame Giovanni for the mindset, but Silver’s always viewed what they did to survive, both under The Mask and on the run, as much worse than it really was, so she can’t.

It’s just Silver being Silver.

Sighing, she sets a hand on his shoulder, thinking for a moment before making up her mind, “Okay.”

“What?”

“If you’re gonna give him a chance, I will to.” A chance he doesn’t even remotely deserve, but Silver’s happiness comes first and dragging this out will do nothing more than leave him conflicted. Even if she is dooming herself to lying to Red, Blue, and the professor.

Oh well, she doubts they really trust her anyway.

Silver’s quiet for a few seconds, seemingly deep in thought. Apparently Green hadn’t been the only one bracing for an argument. Finally he leans back, nodding, “That’s good, because I told him pretty much everything a few days ago.”

“And?”

“And he thinks he knows who took us.”

Green stares at Silver, not entirely sure she heard him right. “What do you mean?”

“Do you remember how we thought that his body was made out of ice?” Green nods. “There’s a gym leader, Pryce, in Johto who can make something like that, moving ice statues.”

Green’s first thought is that of course it was a gym leader, decent ones seemed to be the exception, not the rule. Her second is wondering why they’d never thought to look into that particular trait, when looking back it probably would have been the easiest to narrow down a list with.

Leaning forward, her elbows on her knees, chin in her hands, she tries to think. Any fight with this ‘Pryce’ was going to be on her own. Silver, for all his talents, was still lacking a full team, and she wouldn’t let him go charging into a fight with someone as ruthless as The Mask anyway. No, she’d head to Johto on her own, get proof, and then piece together a plan.

Except, it occurs to her, that means leaving Silver alone in Viridian, and for as much as he seems to be fairly at ease here, she doesn’t trust Giovanni.

Phooey.

“What’s… your father… planning on doing about it, then?” she asks finally, whether she likes it or not Giovanni’s plans will be determining hers.
“I don’t think he’s decided yet.” Silver says simply. After a moment he stands up, “We should probably head back.”

Green nods, pulling herself up and grabbing Silver’s hand, trying to hide her souring mood as they head back to the coffee shop.

“Is that your ride?” she asks when she spots the black sports car parked around the corner from where they’d met up.

Silver follows her gaze and nods. He lets go of her hand and starts to step away, before Green pulls him into a hug.

He tenses up for a moment, before she feels thin arms wrap around her waist, squeezing back.

Ducking her head so her lips are right by his ear, she whispers, “I am happy you’re home, okay? Don’t think I’m not.” Silver nods, and she presses a kiss against his forehead. “I love you. Stay out of trouble.”

He makes a face as he steps away, “Look who’s talking.”

Green watches him run off to the car, and climb in the back.

After a few moments of debate, she lets Jiggly out of her ball, and sends her off with orders to follow them. She wants to at least know where Silver’s staying.

She does twenty-five laps around the block, slightly slowed by her window shopping, before Jiggly returns, and they set off again, Jiggly leading her to wherever Silver’s living now.

The first thing she notices is the size of the house, letting out a low whistle as she takes in the stone building. It’s slightly overgrown with vines, but still impressive.

She skirts the clearing around the house, sticking to the treeline as she looks for a room with a light on. She just wants to get an idea of how Silver’s settling in, and how Giovanni treats him. There will be time to figure out her next move later.

When she spots a room that looks occupied she drops behind a bush, tugging her scope out of her pocket as she lays down on her stomach.

She tries not to feel guilty as she adjusts the zoom (she’s making sure Silver’s safe, that’s her job, they’re partners (partners don’t spy on each other (she’s not going to do it again, it’s just this once))), finally getting a clear view into the house (was that even the right term for this place?).

Silver’s sitting at a table across from Giovanni, who, much to her dismay, she can’t get a clear look at; his face is blocked by the edge of the window.

Scowling, she turns her attention back to Silver as he takes a bite out of a sandwich, nodding in response to whatever Giovanni had just said.

She should have stuck a microphone on him.

There’s a feeling twisting in her gut that she refuses to label as jealousy as she watches them. Silver seems happy, in his own, heavily concealed way. His eyes aren’t darting around the room constantly, and he’s relaxed in his chair instead of perched on the edge, ready to bolt.

He really had settled in.
Green had meant it when she told Silver she was happy for him. That didn’t change the fact that she doesn’t trust Giovanni and his motives, but seeing Silver sinking into what was clearly a comfortable life (regardless of how illegally said comforts had been brought about) is simultaneously comforting and painful.

Comforting because she’d spent years trying to convince him that there was a family somewhere looking for him, and struggling to stop him from buying into The Mask’s insistence that their families had given up on them and wouldn’t want them back. It’s good to see all that pay off, said family’s identity aside.

But painful because at the end of the day, she wants to go home, and this all serves to remind her of it.

She watches as Silver finishes his meal, then wanders off, out of her line of sight. After a moment Giovanni gets up, and Green gets her first look at his face; all sharp angles and dark lines, made even more so by dark hair and clothes.

But also oddly normal. Red had described him as intimidating, and while that’s not wrong, she’d been expecting something more… dramatic.

An expectation that she knows is unrealistic (there had to be a reason no one had believed them after all), but it’s almost a let down to see the man responsible for so much destruction as so normal.

Though that’s probably better anyway, for Silver’s sake.

Giovanni walks off, following Silver, as Green shimmies away from the bush and stands up, ducking behind a tree, just in case.

She has plans to make, regarding both Giovanni and this new lead to The Mask.

Chapter End Notes

two quick things-
I’m referring to her as Green here because that’s how the translation I first read had it and what I’m used to, I know that’s not the popular take on her and Oak’s grandson’s names but I write quicker when I don’t have to keep double checking which name I used And second, I’m not sure how much I’ll be using Green as a POV character, she’s fun to write and I think this chapter sort of needed to be from her POV, but she’s also probably not going to be added permanently into the rotation unless I change my plans for how I want this to go.
Thanks for reading! :)
Silver’s out for another walk, and Giovanni’s halfway through sorting through the reports and files still in his desk (he really should just burn all of them), when he hears a knock at the door.

His thoughts drift momentarily to the police, before he dismisses the idea. If they find him there will be far more fuss than a singular, quiet, knock on the front door.

He’s not sure if he should be surprised or not when he opens the door to find a young girl with brown hair and a black dress studying him.

“Green.”

She smiles, a small doe-eyed smile that he supposes would get her whatever she wanted from most encounters. How unfortunate that that won’t be the case here.

“I thought we should talk.” is all she says, before calmly walking past him into the hall.

Her posture is just a little too stiff as she slowly turns back around to face him, eyes darting around the room. Her surveying is subtler than Silver’s, but still noticeable.

Giovanni raises an eyebrow as he closes the door (not locking it, her eyes narrow slightly when she notices), “Alright.”

“What’s your plan?”

He bites back a laugh at her directness, reminding himself that antagonizing her won’t end well. Silver’s said nothing but good things about her; it’s clear he adores her, Giovanni’s only real option is to stay on her good side. Or rather to get on it.

“Regarding what?” Because there are a few things she could mean by the question; Silver, Team Rocket, and, if Silver had told her, Pryce.

He walks past her before she can think of an answer, heading towards the living room. This will be a long talk, he’s not having it in the hall.

He hears her quiet footsteps behind him, sinking into a chair in the far corner of the room as Green says, “Just in general. I want to look into Pryce, that’s the closest to a decent lead we’ve ever gotten. But I’d rather not leave Silver out here until I know what you’re planning on doing. And neither of us wants him going with.”

He appreciates her bluntness, it’s refreshing after years of people dancing around the truth, trying to only tell him what he wants to hear out of fear.

And she’s right. Silver isn’t leaving Viridian until ‘The Mask’, whether it is Pryce or not, has been buried.

A smirk crosses his face, disappearing as quickly as it appeared. “Well I hate to disappoint, but I don’t have one at the moment.”

“Then why come back to Kanto?” Green sits in a chair across the room from him, leaning back casually. He’d buy her easy confidence if she wasn’t making such a point of being between him and the door.
“I said I don’t have a plan now. My reasons for coming back have been put on hold, for obvious reasons.”

“Are you planning on bringing Team Rocket back or not?”

He’s tempted to drag this out, partly for the fun of it, but also to stall. He’s still not sure how to answer that question.

His original plan had simply been to disappear for a year or two and then bring it back. Silver’s return had at first merely been a reason to slow down the plan, but now, given that Silver seemed to have handled finding out about the organization as well as he had purely because it was dissolved, he’s been forced to rethink things again.

It’s almost amusing, his actions being dictated by an eight-year-old, but he’s not willing to throw away this second chance he’s been given with his son.

“No.” he says finally, disliking the way he can’t tell if it’s true or not, “Not at the moment. But I wouldn’t take that to mean it’s gone for good. There are others who will try.”

“Can I get a list of names?”

“I’m not making your life that easy.” he replies, catching the glint of annoyance in her eyes.

“What about Pryce then?”

The change in subject catches him off guard, he’d expected her to keep pushing for information.

“It’s like you said; he’s just a lead that needs to be looked into.”

“But if it is him, then what?”

The thought of admitting to plotting murder to a child doesn’t sit well, especially when he knows it would likely be repeated to Silver, but he can already see her jumping to conclusions, he may as well confirm them.

“If it is him, he won’t survive the revelation, we’ll put it that way.”

That her response is a simple nod says something about what she’s been through.

“Are you planning on heading to Mahogany Town then?”

“Not right away. But yes, once Silver’s willing to be on his own for a week or so.”

Green’s eyes narrow, her gaze shifting to the floor. She’s quiet for several moments. It occurs to him that she’s likely here for more information before cementing her own plans.

Very well then.

“If you’d rather look into things yourself I’m willing to help.”

“Why?”

“I understand wanting closure. And you’re both entitled to it, I won’t take that away. I also know it would crush Silver if anything happened to you, so for now you could say I’m invested in your well-being.”
Green snorts before standing up, “I’ll think on it.”

She turns to leave, pausing in the entrance to the hall to add, “I haven’t told anyone that you’re back. I’d appreciate it if you didn’t make me regret that.”

“We’ll see.”

Her eyes narrow again, before she turns back down the hall.

In the hour between Green leaving and Silver coming back Giovanni finishes with the files, burning the ones that he knows he won’t need again.

He keeps the files on league members (taking care to put them out of Silver’s reach (his research into the birds is obsessive enough, he doesn’t need to be digging into Pryce on his own as well)), but everything else gets thrown in the fireplace.

He supposes this should be the part where he feels a weight leave his chest, but there is no weight to be removed, only a new found uneasiness.

He hears the door shut as he sits staring at the ashes of the documents. It’s a pointless thing to obsess over, and he knows it, but it’s taking his assurances of not bringing Team Rocket back from placating half-truths to something that threatens to become a reality and he doesn’t like it.

Silver pads in, his footsteps barely audible. He holds Beedrill’s pokeball out quietly once he reaches Giovanni.

“Did you have a good walk?” Giovanni asks, noting the boy’s wet hair and clothes as he takes the ball and leans back on the couch.

Silver sits down next to him as he says, “Yes. It started raining on the way back though.”

“I can tell.”

Silver glances up, meeting his eyes for almost a full second (Giovanni considers that a win), before leaning into his side, seemingly oblivious to the water he’s now pressing onto his shirt.

“Wear yourself out?”

“No.”

So he says, but his voice is sleepy.

Silver’s well past the age most children would have stopped napping, but he’s also very active for someone just now reaching a healthy weight, resulting in multiple short catnaps each day that Giovanni is fairly certain accomplish little more than keeping the boy up at night.

But, for once, Silver does seem to be putting an effort into staying awake. He sits up straight again, criss-crossing his legs as he sets his hands on his knees, suddenly the image of alertness (apart from his still tired eyes).

“I’m fine.” he says, looking up again.

“What were you doing out there?” Giovanni asks, shifting to face Silver, who looks slightly startled by the question.

“Training. All the trees are good for Sneasel, and I don’t want to get out of practice.”
“Is that something you’d want help with?”

Silver smiles. A small, brief smile, but a real one (the first real one Giovanni’s seen since he’d found him). “Yes. If you can.”

“Whenever you’re ready.” Giovanni replies, mentally filing training away in his mental list of things Silver genuinely seems to enjoy (thus far the only other things on it were Sneasel, thick sweaters, and hot drinks (and Green)).

Catching a lock of wet red hair on one finger, he adds, “For now though, maybe you should go dry off, hmm?”

Silver tilts his head for a moment, studying the damp strands, before registering what Giovanni had said.

“Oh. Right, sorry.” His face flushes a pale pink and he stands up, “I’ll go do that.”

Silver darts off before Giovanni can reply.

He hears a door close upstairs as his thoughts drift back to Green’s unexpected visit, and all the unwanted things that would likely come with it.

He’s not surprised, when he thinks about it, that she’d found where they were, most likely she’d followed them back after her and Silver’s meeting a few days ago. It’s a logical action, and his only real thought is to scold himself for not noticing.

And, assuming her timing of stopping by while Silver was out had been intentional, the implication that she’d been keeping tabs on the house comes as little surprise either.

No, what interests him is her claim of having kept her mouth shut regarding him being back in Viridian. There’s some hidden motive there, it’s certainly not optimism on her part.

Assuming she’s working with a similar mindset to what Silver seems to have, it could simply be stubborn independence. Or a lack of faith in her supposed allies.

Though, he supposes, it doesn’t really matter. Their goals align for now; so long as they stay out of each other’s way there’s no reason to dig into every little decision the other made.

Asides from curiosity and the fact that she was already doing it to him.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Silver isn’t sick

He tells himself so when he wakes up with a splitting headache and churning stomach.

And when he gets chills the minute he gets out from under his pile of blankets.

And when the room spins when he stands up.

And when he stumbles twice on his way to the stairs, and when he has to cling to the rail the whole way down, and when his voice comes out much weaker than intended when he greets his father in the kitchen.

“Are you alright Silver?” Giovanni sounds much more concerned than Silver feels is necessary.

Because he isn’t sick. He doesn’t get sick (except, he remembers, he had gotten caught in the rain yesterday, and he may not have been entirely honest about how much time he’d spent getting poured on (but really that’s just more reason to deny anything being wrong, he can’t be put out of commission by something as simple as a rain storm right after he’d been offered help with his training (what kind of a trainer would that make him? (a useless one)))).

So he nods, “I’m fine.”

Giovanni’s eyes narrow slightly and he walks over to where Silver’s less than subtly leaning against the wall for support (his legs are aching from his walk yesterday, not because he’s sick).

Giovanni kneels in front of him, pressing a hand to his forehead. Silver tries to pull away, who cares if he’s running a fever (which he’s not), he has stuff to do, training to start.

“You have a fever.” Silver opens his mouth, to argue that it doesn’t matter, as he lowers his hand and continues, “Go back to bed, I’ll bring you something to eat.”

Silver’s not sure which is worse; the idea of being stuck in his room all day, or having to go back up the stairs.

But the chills still running up and down his spine make the idea of curling back up under his blankets seem much more appealing than it should, and his gaze drops from his father’s face to the floor as he mumbles, “I don’t think I can make it back up the stairs.”

The corner of Giovanni’s mouth twitches, “I can help you.”

Silver nods, taking his father’s hand wordlessly. By the time they reach his room he’s being carried, his head tucked against Giovanni’s shoulder as he curls his finger’s into his shirt.

“I’m not sick.” he mumbles as he gets set back in bed, almost immediately sinking down into his pillows as his exhausted body betrays him.

There’s amusement glinting in his father’s eyes (if Silver felt better he’d be offended), as he nods, “I’ll bring you something warm to drink. Humor me and stay here for a bit.”
Silver scowls as he stands up, but doesn’t try to follow him out. Instead he trains his gaze on the slowly moving ceiling fan, scolding himself; he should have realized it was going to rain and come back yesterday, not stayed out (he knew that at the time too, he just hadn’t cared), and now he’s paying for it.

Though, compared to the the last time he’d (let himself admit to having) gotten sick, this seems more tolerable. There’s little risk of it getting worse here in his warm, dry, bedroom. Maybe he’ll only be stuck in bed for the rest of the day.

Which, he realizes quickly, will be much worse than he’d initially thought. It takes Giovanni only twenty minutes to return with tea and toast, but by the time his breakfast is in his hands Silver’s already bored, not sick or tired enough to go back to sleep, but not well enough to do much more than sit in bed either.

“Can you bring me some books?” he asks when he finishes his meal, running his fingers along the edge of his still-too-hot drink. He’s going to do something productive, though he’s not sure how much good his research is doing at this point.

“Which ones?”

“There’s a pile on the table in the library, textbooks…” he trails off when he catches the way Giovanni’s expression darkens.

Slowly he responds, “Silver, I think you should take a break from researching the birds. At least until you’re not sick. Alright?”

“Why?” Because it’s not alright. No one’s letting him help with anything. He’s not surprised that Giovanni hadn’t wanted him going after Pryce, but Green hasn’t said anything since he’d told her about him either, even though he knows her, knows she’s planning something. And now he’s not allowed to even look into the birds?

“Because you’ve been glued to those books since you found them, and while I’m glad you’re so willing to learn on your own, going at anything with no breaks the way you’ve been isn’t healthy.”

Silver compliments himself on the self-control it takes to not point out that the books he’s been pouring over were all already worn out, meaning that, at some point, someone else had been just as obsessively digging through them.

“It’s not permanent. Just until you’re feeling better, so you can let your head clear. Is there something else you’d like?”

“Do you have something on other myths?” he asks after a moment, he’ll drag this, and Giovanni and Green’s attempts at sheltering him, up again later, when his head doesn’t feel like it’s splitting in half.

Giovanni nods, taking Silver’s empty plate as he stands up. “I’ll see what I can find. And drink that, you’ll feel better.”

Silver nods as he walks out, taking a sip of the tea. Slowly he leans back, studying his blankets.

He’s torn, on one hand he understands that they’re both trying to keep him safe, and getting home, not having to fight anymore, had been what he’d wanted.

But now he’s left feeling useless, he’d given Green the best lead they’d ever gotten, and she hadn’t said a word about it since. There’s an unpleasant voice in the back of his head telling him that she has new friends now, who she clearly likes, who can probably help more than he can, of course
she’s leaving him out.

Frustrated, he takes another large sip of his drink, coughing when he swallows too much, before setting the mug on the table by his bed and laying back down.

He rolls onto his side, staring out the window. It’s sunny out, other than the mud from yesterday’s rain it would be a great day for training.

Figures.

He closes his eyes, taking a deep breath as he pulls his blankets tightly around himself. Giovanni had told him to rest, he might as well try to sleep.

It doesn’t take long before he’s drifting off, with his protests and denial forgotten he’s run out of reasons to keep himself awake.

It’s not until his fever addled brain registers someone standing over him that he wakes up, heart pounding, tired, aching, limbs tense from a nightmare he’s already half forgotten.

Still half asleep, he slides his fingers under his pillow, grasping a knife he’d swiped from the kitchen.

With speed more typical of a sneasel than a sick eight-year-old he slashes the knife back, rolling onto his back as he goes.

Warm fingers snap closed around his wrist, not letting go when he tries to pull his hand back.

It takes him a moment to register who’s holding his arm, his eyes meeting his father’s as he lets himself go limp, still clutching the weapon as he tries to slow his breathing.

“Silver, drop the knife.” Giovanni’s voice is calm, more so than he probably should be after nearly getting stabbed in the leg, but firm.

Silver’s grip tightens instinctively, his knuckles turning white as he tries to pull his hand away again.

Metallic eyes flash with an automatic panic as Giovanni slowly pries his hand open, slipping the knife out of his grip and setting it on a shelf, well out of Silver’s reach.

Finally he releases Silver’s hand, letting it fall to the bed.

Silver studies the knife, the only weapon he’d managed to stash, as he tries to work out what his chances of replacing it are. He has a feeling the kitchen knives will be getting moved before he’s out of bed, which leaves him with very few options whose absence won’t be immediately noticed.

He feels Giovanni sit down next to him, and his gaze snaps back to him.

There’s a concerned look in his eyes, and Silver slowly sits up.

“Sorry.” His voice is quiet as his eyes drop to the bed, he can almost sense his freedom to leave the house as he wished being taken away, probably something else too (just so long as it’s not Sneasel...). Even with everything he’s been allowed to get away with, this had to have some consequence.

He tenses when a hand settles on his shoulder, but doesn’t pull away.

“It’s fine. Are you alright?”
The question startles him, and he glances back up, nodding slowly.

“Alright.” Giovanni squeezes his shoulder once, before he stands up. “We’ll talk about this later.” he adds, taking the knife from its shelf.

“If I’m in trouble can you just tell me now?” Silver mumbles, staring at his hands.

He hears him sigh.

“You’re not in trouble Silver. You’re not getting the knife back, and I’d appreciate it if you didn’t take another one, but that’s all.”

His brow furrows, that makes no sense, but not being punished isn’t something to complain about, so he nods quietly, still not looking up.

They’re both quiet for what feels like several minutes, before Silver feels his father’s hand return to his shoulder.

“Are you sure you’re alright?”

He’s not, and he knows it. His heart’s still racing, his head still hurts, he’s somehow both too hot and too cold, and he’s just noticed that his hands are trembling. But mentioning any of that will just result in Giovanni feeling obligated to do something about it, and Silver’s being enough of a burden. So he nods again, making himself look up as he says, “I’m fine. Probably just need to sleep, like you said.”

“Do you want me to stay?”

“You’re busy.” Silver mumbles, turning his head away. He doesn’t want to be alone, but he also doesn’t want to interrupt Giovanni’s day more than he already has.

“No, I’m not. If you want to be alone-”

“I don’t.” The words slip out before he thinks to stop them. “I want you to stay.” It comes out much more pleadingly than he’d intended.

He slides over as Giovanni sits back down next to him, curling into his side as he feels his arm wrap around his shoulders.

“Try to sleep.”

Silver nods slowly, his gaze drifting around the room, before landing on a book resting on the table by the bed. He’d forgotten about asking for one.

“Can you read to me?”

It’s a simple request, but he’s still surprised when Giovanni shifts, reaching for the book, “If you want.”

On closer inspection, the book’s more colorful than the textbooks Silver’s been flipping through, more storybook than teaching tool, and he thinks there may be a subtle message in his father’s selection of it.

All the same, he sits up straighter as Giovanni flips through it, letting his head rest on his shoulder.

Quietly, Silver slips his fingers through his father’s, closing his eyes again as he settles against him as he starts to read, feeling marginally better than when he’d woken up.
Well I've been teasing him getting sick since the first chapter so...
(and it's not a fanfic 'till someone's on bedrest anyway)
Thanks for reading :)}
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It says something about what his life’s come to, Giovanni thinks, that he’s barely surprised when he walks into the living room to switch off the lights and finds Green spreading out several papers on the coffee table.

“How did you get in here?” is his greeting, as he leans against the door frame, studying her.

She barely glances at him as she says, “My Abra teleported me in. I can get through the lock on the door, I just figured you’d rather I didn’t set an alarm off.”

She sits down on the couch, looking up, “Silver is asleep, right?”

“Yes.” It’s after midnight and he’s still getting over his cold, so there’s no reason to doubt the answer, though it occurs to Giovanni as soon as he responds that lying probably would have gotten rid of the girl, given her apparent need to keep any conversation with him hidden from Silver.

Green nods, gesturing to the papers as she says, “Good. I thought about what you said, and here’s my deal; this is all the information I’ve put together, I know Silver said he’d filled you in, but he doesn’t remember everything, and this is more detailed anyway. You can have it, and in exchange I want any information you have on Pryce, and, when I do have a plan together, some way of getting to Mahogany.” She pauses before adding, “And Blaine told me you kept files on all the gym leaders in Johto and Kanto, so I know you have something.”

Her demeanor is completely different from three days ago; more confident, and the concealed fear from before is almost gone.

Which begs the question of what he’d done to convince her she wasn’t in danger.

“Keep asking questions about me, and someone’s going to think you’re hiding something”, he muses, walking over to a chair as he considers her offer.

He needs more information before he can act, there’s no way around that. And she’s right, Silver’s descriptions may have pointed him at Pryce but that’s all he’s gained. He doesn’t really even have a way of confirming that it was him. But if Green could do that for him…

“What are you planning on doing if it is him?” he asks, repeating her question from before as he sits down.

Green bites her lip, looking away for a moment, before saying, “I’m not sure. He’s looking for something, and I need to stop him from getting it, which means I need to find whatever it is before he does, but I don’t have anything to go off of there.” She’s quiet for a moment before adding, “Though I guess if you’re planning on killing him that doesn’t matter much.”

“You’re awfully calm about that.”

She shrugs, “He deserves it.” The corner of her mouth twitches slightly but she keeps whatever is amusing her to herself.

Leaning back, Giovanni lets out a slow sigh, before saying, “If I go along with this, trade
information, and get you to Mahogany whenever you’re ready, you’ll tell me what you find out, correct?”

“Of course.”

He nods, “Alright. But there’s two more conditions.”

“Silver stays out of it?” she guesses.

“Yes. And you continue to keep quiet about my being back, deal?”

She nods slowly, “Deal.”

“The file you want is upstairs.” He stands up as he says, “Wait here.”

The files are tucked away in a locked box, placed on top of a bookshelf in his study. He doubts it’s enough to actually keep Silver out of it, but he’s hoping the lack of lack of effort put into the hiding place will keep his interest from being raised.

He thumbs through the papers, looking for the folder on Pryce. If he’s honest, Green’s getting the short end of the deal, the only useful thing in the file is the floor plan of the Mahogany gym, everything else is information more easily gathered elsewhere.

But handing it over gets him an easy way to end this; Green is more likely to be able to confirm if it is Pryce that they’re after or not than he is, so there’s no reason to withhold it.

File in hand, he returns to the living room, sparing a glance into Silver’s room to make sure he’s still asleep.

Green flips quickly through the file when he hands it over, he can see disappointment glinting in her eyes at how little there is to be gained from it; but there simply isn’t much to Pryce’s public image, and until a week ago he’d had no reason to dig further into him.

He returns to his chair as she pulls the blueprints out, spreading them across her lap, brow furrowed as she runs a finger along the images.

Quietly Giovanni leans forward, studying the papers she had brought.

There are two rough drawings of floor plans, likely from memory, and a pile of what look like pages ripped from books, he’s not surprised to find that the contents are about the birds.

One paper catches his attention however, a list of pokemon, divided into five sections. The one consisting of ice types is likely Pryce’s team (it matches what he remembers from league events as well) but the other four…

“Silver mentioned there being four other children, are these their teams?”

Green jumps at the question, but looks over and nods. “Yes, I don’t know a lot about them though, just that they’re older than me.” She pauses, biting her lip for a moment, before continuing, “We weren’t aloud to use our names, and we never saw each other’s faces either.”

Giovanni hates that he can see the logic behind all of it; hiding faces and not allowing names, dehumanizing them to each other, and keeping ages far apart, all to prevent attachments so they don’t team up.

He nods slowly, returning to the papers. He’s not sure how helpful they’ll be in terms of getting to
Pryce, but the floor plans and scribbled down notes paint an unpleasant picture of what the pair’s childhood had been, and he’s begrudgingly impressed by just how much Green’s managed despite it.

They’re both quiet for a while, only the sound of turning pages breaking the tense silence. At some point Green gets up, wandering around the room looking lost in thought.

Giovanni keeps half an eye on her as he sorts through the stacks of paper. For as unassuming as Green’s collection looked, it was slowly proving helpful; surprisingly thorough breakdowns of their opponents battle styles, a map of Mt. Mortar with an area he assumes is her best guess at an entrance to her former prison circled, and, curiously, a list of all the mythical birds from both Johto and Kanto, with Articuno, Zapdos, and Moltres all crossed off.

“You never identified the bird that took you?” At least he assumes she was stolen from her home the same way Silver had been.

Green pauses in her pacing, looking slightly defensive as she shakes her head, “We narrowed it down to Ho-oh and—”

“It was him”, he cuts her off, staring blankly at the papers in front of him as he’s momentarily lost in memories of the sound of breaking glass, and screams he’s never going to fully get out of his head. He’d made it to Silver’s room in time to see the red bird taking off with his whole world in its talons. He’d sent Beedrill after them, still has scars from when he’d all but collapsed on to the glass shards when she had come back empty handed.

He pinches the bridge of his nose, trying to clear his head as he hears Green’s quiet reply of, “Oh.”

She shuffles awkwardly as he returns to the papers, before asking, “When’s Silver’s birthday?”

It takes him a moment to realize she’s trying to get the topic to something lighter, and a very faint smile tugs at the corner of his mouth. How odd that she’d be asking this before Silver had even thought of it (he’d asked about his age yes (and his expression had soured upon finding out, he’d apparently thought he was older) but not the date that determined it).

“December twenty-fourth”, he replies. It occurs to him that this will be the first time in a while he’ll need plans for the date that don’t involve hard liqueur and a box of photographs that still hurt to look at.

He supposes he’ll have to include Green in whatever they end up being.

She hums in acknowledgement, turning back to her pacing as he glances at his watch. It’s nearly two in the morning.

“Shouldn’t you be getting back to where ever you’re staying?” he asks, keeping his tone light.

“Why? Are you sick of me?”

“It’s two a.m and you’re, what, eleven? It’s not a matter of being sick of you, this isn’t healthy for you.”

“Twelve”, she snaps back, though there isn’t much bite to it. “And I’ve pulled all-nighters before, I can handle it.”

He coughs, hiding a laugh, before saying, “You shouldn’t. And either way, if you want to keep all of this from Silver you shouldn’t stay too long.” He’s surprised Silver’s actually stayed in bed tonight, he’s usually up with a nightmare at least once.
“If you don’t want to leave the papers with me you can take them. I’m sure you’ll wind up breaking in again”, he adds when she looks hesitant.

She nods slowly, walking over and gathering up Pryce’s file. “Do you want this back though?”

“No.” He’s already memorized the floor plans and has no use for anything else in it. “Keep it hidden though. It shouldn’t be traceable, but just in case.”

“Okay.” She picks up what looks like a shoebox from the floor and starts putting her papers in it. After a moment she asks, “How is Silver?”

“Getting over a cold at the moment, but otherwise he’s good.”

Green looks unconvinced, and Giovanni’s reminded that, whether he likes it or not, she knows Silver better than he does. After a moment he adds, “Anxious, and still obsessing over his research, but he’s getting better.” And had apparently been sleeping with a knife, but he leaves that out (it’s not the worst habit he could have picked up, Giovanni would just rather not risk getting stabbed every time he wakes him up).

A smile briefly crosses Green’s face, “He seemed happy when we met up. I can talk to him about the research if you want, I got him to do it, he might stop if I ask.”

“If you’ll feel better with it off your conscience”, he replies (silently praying she will, and that it’ll work), before standing up. “You’re planning on having your abra take you back, correct?”

“Yes.” She’s already reaching for a pokeball. She tosses it, and the yellow pokemon appears, hovering about a foot off the ground.

“Before I go, I haven’t asked Silver yet, but could I take him to Pallet at some point? I won’t mention you to anyone, it’s just I’d said I would a little while ago…”

He has to think for a moment. He’d rather Silver stayed in Viridian, but it seems both harsh and naive to write off Green’s ability to defend the two of them. Finally he says, “That’s fine. Do you have some way of getting there and back quickly though? I’d prefer that he isn’t gone over night.”

Green nods. “I don’t do birds, but my Jigglypuff can get us there in about an hour.”

He has several questions about that statement, but they apparently won’t be getting answers; Green turns to the abra, nudging it to get it’s attention, nods to him again, and then the two disappear.

Chapter End Notes

Anyone else think it's a tragedy these two never talk in cannon? It wouldn't even need to be about Silver, it just should have happened.
Thanks for reading ;)
“This is a terrible idea Green.”

“That’s the fifth time you’ve said that Silver.”

Silver looks over at her, wrinkling his nose at the teasing look he gets. They’re almost to Pallet Town, sitting on Jiggly as they slowly drift along.

He’s still not sure why he’d agreed to this, let alone why his father had agreed to it, but here he is.

“Why is it a terrible idea?” Green asks, she’s laying on her back, idly stroking Jiggly’s head.

“Because we’re just going to be telling your friends a bunch of lies, not to mention you said the professor worked with the league, what if he recognizes me?”

“Red and Blue aren’t there right now, they’re both off training. And I doubt that’ll happen. Even if he had met you, it would have been years ago.” Her tone is teasing as she glances over with a smirk, “Besides, you need friends.”

“And Professor Oak is where you want me to start?”

“Sure, why not?” She reaches up to poke him in the nose as she adds, “Besides, your father wouldn’t have agreed to this if he thought it’d give you, or him, away, right?”

Silver nods, lightly pushing her hand away, “Yeah, I guess.”

“Speaking of, was he serious about going out for dinner when we get back, or was that just a nice way of saying I’m not getting out of bringing you back tonight?”

“You just want free food.”

“Me, try to get something for free? Never!”

He smiles, “I think he was serious. He seems like he wants to get to know you, even if it’s just to shut me up.”

“Or the guy who spent almost seven years looking for you genuinely cares about you being happy. Just a thought.”

Silver raises an eyebrow, “So now that he’s offering to feed you you’re being nice? Is that how it works?” He tries to ignore her comment, he knows she’s right, it’s just a hard concept to get into his head.

“When was I not nice?” she asks, giving him one of her signature ‘kicked vulpix’ looks; eyes widened as her brow knits and a small frown forms.

Before he can point out that those looks don’t work on him she rolls on to her belly, looking under them, a smile slowly crossing her face. “We’re here!”

Silver shifts, cautiously laying down next to her, studying the town as they start to descend. It’s much
smaller than Viridian, and there’s a lot more pokemon wandering the streets.

Green stretches her arm out, pointing, “That’s Professor Oak’s lab over there. But we’re meeting him there.” She moves her arm from the large white building she’d first identified to a park closer to the clearing Jiggly had picked as their landing site.

“How much did you tell him about me?”

“Not much.” Green sits back on to her knees, “I said we knew each other from before, and that you’d gotten home. And before you complain, you’re very clearly not living off the streets anymore, he’d probably figure it out even if I did lie.”

“So what am I supposed to tell him if he asks for more details?”

“I don’t think he will.”

Silver glares at her as Jiggly lands in the grass. They both slide off her as she deflates back to her usual size.

“This way.” Green adds in a cheerful voice, setting off towards the park.

He catches up with her, slipping his fingers through hers as Jiggly follows behind them.

“Who else knows about me?” he asks.

“Just the Professor right now. I don’t want to drag Red and Blue into all this if I don’t have to, and the more they find out the more they’ll want to help.”

Silver glances at her, slightly confused. Was she planning on taking The Mask on by herself then? She didn’t seem to want his help anymore, and apparently didn’t want theirs either.

“You’re being reckless”, he mumbles.

Green looks at him out the corner of her eye, “What did you say?”

“Nothing.” He gives her a small smile. He doesn’t want an argument right now, he can bring it up later.

She smirks back as they enter the park. Silver scans the area; there’s a few children playing on the playground, people he assumes are their parents sitting on benches around them, and, sitting at a picnic table-

“There that’s him!”

Silver jumps, following Green’s gaze back to the man reading at the table. He looks exactly how she’d described him, minus the lab coat.

Silver lets Green drag him over, wondering how big of a lie he’s likely to be able to get away with here.

She throws an arm around his shoulders when they reach the table, “Hey Professor. This is Silver.”

Oak jumps at her voice, looking up from his book, “Oh! I didn’t even hear you two walking up. Hello Green. It’s nice to meet you, Silver.” He gives both of them a warm smile, which Silver forces himself to return.
“It’s nice to meet you”, he echos awkwardly. Slowly he sits down next to Green, fighting the urge to cling to her hand.

He shouldn’t have agreed to this.

“So”, Oak starts, “what do you think of Kanto, Silver?”

Why does he keep getting asked that? It’s slightly warmer than Johto but beyond that there really isn’t a difference.

Green nudges him when he doesn’t reply, and he says, “It seems okay. I got here maybe a month ago.”

He tugs on the sleeves of his jacket for something to do. He’s not cold, but the only way he’d been allowed to leave the house had been in layers (something about how he’d get sick again if he didn’t (which is dumb, he’s been in much colder climates than Pallet in late fall and been fine)).

“Green said you’d found your family, is that why?”

(Wouldn’t ask for more details, huh Green?)

“Yes.” Green nudges him with her foot again, and he adds, “My father is a… businessman, I don’t know exactly what he does. He has a place near the forest.” Truth. Lie. Lie. Half-truth.

“That sounds nice. How are you settling in?”

Silver studies him, trying to figure out what he’s doing. He doesn’t have any reason to be asking that, it’s not his problem.

At another nudge from Green he says, “Pretty well, I think.”

Oak nods, looking back at Green as he asks, “And you two able to see each other more then?”

Ah, he’s worried about Green. That makes more sense. Silver’s okay with that.

“Yes.” Green replies cheerfully. Silver’s not sure if he should throw that into his mental tally of lies or not; sure they’re able to see each other more, but that hadn’t stopped Green from ignoring him since she’d found out about Pryce.

He pushes those thoughts out of his head, he’s here to meet one of Green’s friends, not wallow in self-pity.

“I assume you’re a trainer too?” Professor Oak’s looking at him again, and the realization that he’s not getting out of this conversation sinks in.

“Yes.” Before Green can nudge him again he adds, “I have a sneasel and a murkrow.” Come to think of it, he should have let Sneasel out, she’d be a nice distraction if nothing else (or she’d get twitchy and take a swipe at the professor (which would get this over with…)).

“Those are both pretty rare, did you catch them yourself?”

(What exactly was Green’s definition of ‘more details’?)

“I’ve had Sneasel since I was little”, he says slowly, Oak’s expression changes as he seems to realize he’s treading into delicate subjects.
“And I caught Murkrow after me and Green split up.” With Jiggly gone with Green he’d needed transportation, and another dark type had seemed like a good friend for Sneasel.

“I see. That’s still quite impressive though, how old are you?”

(Green was getting a dictionary for Christmas.)

“Eight”, he says after a moment. Which had been a depressing realization, he’d assumed he was close to ten by now.

Oak nods, turning back to Green as he asks, “And what have you been up to?”

“Well I was in Cerulean for a bit…”

He tries to listen as she and the professor catch up, but very little of it affects him, and he winds up tuning it out, watching a rattata dig through someone’s forgotten bag as his thoughts drift to what Green’s plans could be.

“Silver!”

He jumps, pulled from his thoughts by Green’s voice.

“Yes?”

She looks worried as she says, “I said I was going to show you around town a bit, and then we should head back.”

“Oh. Yeah, that sounds good.”

“Are you sure you don’t want me to come with?” Silver looks over at Oak, whose standing up, looking ready to leave.

“Yep. I’ve pretty much got the town figured out, don’t worry.” Green says, giving him a grin as she pulls herself up. “Come on Silver!”

Hesitantly he waves to the professor, before standing up to follow Green.

Once they reach the side walk Green asks, “Are you okay? You seem off today, if you’re still feeling sick you could have said something.”

“No, it’s not that…”

“What then?”

He takes a deep breath, trying to figure out how to put this.

“Why are you leaving me out of all your plans?” he says finally, looking her in the eye.

“What do you mean?”

“Ever since I told you about Pryce you’ve been completely silent. You haven’t asked for help with anything, or any updates on my research, or told me what you’re planning to do, or anything. At first I thought maybe you’d gone to your other friends, but you don’t want their help either. It’s like you’re trying to do all of it by yourself, and you know that won’t work.”

Green’s gaze drops to the ground for a minute. Silver watches as she bites her lip, before saying
softly, “I want to show you something.”

She takes off, and Silver follows; down several streets, until they’re outside a neighborhood. Green glances at a street sign before making a final turn and stopping, staring at a house across the street.

“That’s my old home.” The words leave her mouth quietly. “I couldn’t remember the address, but Professor Oak told me a while ago, it was in an article from when I disappeared or something and he’d saved it.

“My parents moved out five years ago. They didn’t tell anyone where they were going, I guess they got sick of being the couple whose daughter vanished, I don’t blame them.

“But I can’t remember enough about them to find them now.” Her voice breaks as she continues, “Being from Pallet was my only lead, and now it’s shot and I don’t know if I’ll be able to find them.”

She turns to face Silver, “Which means you’re the only family I have left. I can’t lose you too.” She takes a shaky breath as she adds, “So if it seems like I’m cutting you off, I’m sorry, I’m not trying to. But I need you to stay safe.”

“And what am I supposed to do if something happens to you?” Silver asks, trying not to snap, Green looks close to tears. “I need you too.”

She laughs. It sounds bitter. “But that’s the thing; you don’t. You’re home. You’re safe. Giovanni’s an awful person, and I don’t trust him at all, but he’s not going to let anything else happen to you.” She stops to rub at her eyes, taking a deep breath before saying, “If something happens to me, you’ll get over it. If something happens to you I’ll lose almost everything.”

Silver steps forward, wrapping his arms around her waist as a quiet sob leaves her lips. “That’s not true”, he says, trying to keep his voice firm. “I still need you. You’re the only friend I have, you know what we went through, I’m not gonna get that from anyone else. And Sneasel listens to you, all the time, so you know she likes you too. And your other friends would be sad if something happened to you, I know the professor would be.”

He tightens his grip on her as he adds, “And you can’t throw yourself away like that. If The Mask beats you, he wins. It won’t matter if he gets what he wants, or if Father gets to him, or whatever. If he beats you then… then you may as well have not gotten away, and everything we’ve done since then is for nothing, because he’ll have won. Please Green.”

She sniffles, and takes a shaky breath as she hugs him back. “Silver, you make it sound like I’m trying to get killed, I’m not. I promise. I just want this to end, without anyone else getting hurt.”

She steps back, wiping at her eyes with her hands. A smile briefly crosses her face when Silver holds up his handkerchief, and she takes it, drying her face.

“I’m sorry, I brought you out here to do something fun, and here I am, crying my eyes out.”

“It’s fine. But I still want to help you.”

Green sighs, giving the handkerchief back, as she says, “I’ll think about it, okay? Right now I don’t have much of a plan.”

There’s something about how she says it that makes Silver not want to believe her, but he nods. “Okay.”

She wraps an arm around his shoulders, “Don’t look so worried, I’m fine, I promise.” She gives him
a smile that doesn’t quite reach her still tearful eyes as she starts leading him away from the neighborhood.

Silver’s used to Green switching between emotional extremes on a dime (she’d done it a lot when they’d first escaped, going from thrilled at their new-found freedom to pacing for hours trying to figure out how to keep them alive for the next week), so he’s not surprised that she’s suddenly acting fine again, but he is more than a little unnerved by her outburst. If she’d been bottling all that up, how much else was she keeping from him?

“Are we going back to Viridian?” he asks after a moment.

Green nods, “I didn’t have a whole lot planned, and by the time we get there it’ll be about dinner time, right?”

Silver thinks for a moment, it had been just after noon when they’d left, and they’d been here for at least two hours, plus the hour and a half long flight…

“Yes, I think so.”

He’s not sure if the idea of dinner with both his father and Green is exciting or terrifying.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for reading!
I lied; Green's back~

Giovanni was waiting for them when Green and Silver landed in the clearing outside the mansion.

Or at least he’d been outside, sitting in a chair by the back door, reading in the porch light. Green doesn’t think he actually heard them approaching as she slides off Jiggly, pausing to put her back in her ball as Silver walks over to him.

She lingers in the shadows of the yard for a moment, not sure if she should follow.

Maybe they’d both forgotten about getting dinner out, and she could go back to the Center, get something to eat there, and spend the rest of her evening pouring over the file Giovanni had given her (which was totally different from the research she was supposed to be talking Silver out of doing (which she’d forgotten to do)).

It doesn’t sound better than getting dinner out, per say, but it does sound less stressful.

But Silver’s waving for her to come over, and slowly she works her way across the grass.

“Well, did you want to get dinner?” Giovanni asks once Green reaches them.

She glances at Silver, who’s nodding slightly, looking hopeful.

“Sure,” she says after a moment. She’d told Silver she’d give him a chance, in theory she should act on that beyond haggling for information. And a free meal is a free meal, regardless of who was providing it.

Silver is all too willing to give her a quick tour of the house before they leave (which is made much more awkward than it needs to be by the fact that she’d been there twice before without him knowing).

“Can I see your room?” she asks, glancing idly around the (unused looking) dining room they’re standing in.

Silver nods, looking surprised by the request. “There’s not much in it, but if you want.”

He leads her to the second floor (which she can honestly say she hadn’t been on before), and into his room.

There’s a large window across from the door, that had had a couch shoved in front of it, blocking half of it (her thoughts drift momentarily to the way Giovanni had frozen up at the mention of Ho-oh, and she’s fairly certain whose idea that had been), and two bookcases (one of which had a pillow and blankets on the top shelf, likely Sneasel’s latest nest) against the wall, across from the bed.

Beyond that, Silver’s comment of there not being much is true. The bookcases are lightly stocked, with books that look like they’d simply been scavenged from around the house (while she would
never say it in front of either of them, Giovanni has a book hoarding problem to rival Professor Oak’s (though it may simply be due to having more cash to throw around)). The rest of the room has a similar lack of personality to it.

Which isn’t surprising (and if she’s being honest, the room Professor Oak had offered her back in Pallet is equally plain (but then, she’s not living in it)), but still telling.

Taking in the room slowly she says, “How do you think you’re settling in?”

“I’ve already answered that today.” She glares at him, and he smiles, “Okay, I think. It’s weird to have rules again, but he’s not that bad about them. Or at least they make sense. Getting sick was annoying though, I wasn’t allowed to do anything.”

“You’re supposed to rest when you’re sick Silver.” She pokes him gently in the nose when he glares at her, and adds, “Do you feel like you’re sleeping better?” It had been over two years since they’d been traveling together, but he’d almost never slept through the night back then and, if her own nightmares are anything to go off of, his probably haven’t improved much.

Silver nods, “I still have nightmares, but it’s easier to get back to sleep after them. Part of that might just be that I’m not sleeping in trees anymore, but…” He shrugs and adds, “And if I wake him up he’ll sit with me until I go back to sleep, which helps.”

That was a level of patience Green hadn’t expected from Giovanni, even regarding Silver. Something in her face must have changed, because Silver says, “I know you don’t trust him, and I know why you don’t, but he is trying. With me, and I think with you. And I’m happy here.”

Green takes a slow breath, trying to let some of her stress over all this go; that was a much more confident answer than she’d gotten two weeks ago over the phone, or when they’d first met up, so he clearly was making progress. After a moment of not being able to come up with a better reply, she says, “Come on, we shouldn’t keep him waiting.”

Silver nods, and she lets him lead her to the garage where Giovanni’s waiting for them, leaning against a red car parked next to the black one from a week ago.

“Are you two ready?” He doesn’t sound particularly impatient, opening the back door for Silver as Green walks around to the other side.

There’s a very brief stare-off over the roof of the car when she opens the front passenger door instead of the back, before she smirks and slides in, giving Silver a grin over her shoulder (that totally isn’t meant to hide her checking his seatbelt to make sure she’s doing hers correctly (it’s not like she can’t remember the last time she’d ridden in a car or anything)).

The drive to Viridian is short, and (mercifully) quiet, leaving Green with just enough time to mentally run through the trip to Pallet.

And how badly she’d screwed up.

If Silver had been worried about her before, her outburst had undoubtedly made everything worse, now she’d be lucky to be able to plan anything without him wanting details.

And if Silver was going to be snooping around then her already delicate deal with Giovanni was at risk, and as much as she doesn’t want to admit it, if she wants to get to Mahogany she needs help.

The kind that came with no moral lectures (she likes Professor Oak, really, but The Mask wasn’t going to be beaten by playing fair).
She does her best to put her plans at the back of her mind as she climbs out of the car, examining the restaurant. From the outside at least it looks simple, clearly nice and more expensive than anywhere she’s been, but not the five-star luxury nightmare she’d been expecting (though she’s not sure there’s anything like that in Viridian, to begin with).

At the very least, she’s not horribly underdressed in her dress and thin sweater.

Their table’s in a corner in the back. She slides into a chair facing the door, already assessing the other guests. The two old ladies at the table closest to them look fairly harmless, as does the young couple by the door. The two biggest variables accounted for she moves onto studying the tables in the middle, running her thumb along the sharp edge of the knife in her silverware, testing the edge. Just in case.

“How was Pallet?” Giovanni’s question pulls her from her thoughts as a waitress sets a menu and water glass in front of her.

“It’s really small”, Silver says, studying the menu in front of him with curious eyes.

“We met up with Professor Oak and went for a walk”, Green elaborates when it becomes clear Silver sees no need to add on.

“You don’t think he’ll figure out that you’re back after seeing me, right?” Silver asks.

“You never met him before today, and he doesn’t have any reason to dig further. You don’t need to worry about it.”

Giovanni turns back to his menu, and Green can’t help it, mouthing “told you so” as soon as he looks away. Silver makes a face and kicks her under the table.

The rest of their meal is fairly devoid of conversation. Orders are taken, food brought out, and Green’s left to run through her plans, or lack thereof, until-

“Green, you still have Nidoran right? Has she evolved?”

She stares blankly at Silver for a few seconds, since when was he attached to- oh.

Giovanni has a nidoqueen, and Silver’s trying to find some form of common ground between them.

She’d be impressed with his apparently growing social skills if she didn’t want to strangle him for starting a conversation she can’t get out of.

Slowly she nods, “Yes. And yeah, she evolved a few months ago.” This couldn’t hurt. Much.

A glance towards Giovanni tells her he’d caught onto what Silver was doing, his eyes glint with something resembling amusement as he says, “That’s a long time to have a nidoran.”

She’s not sure if he means it as an insult (and he’s not wrong, they evolve fairly quickly), but she sits a little straighter as she explains, “I kept most of my team from evolving for a while. It got people to underestimate me.” And then they’d place higher bets on battles they were destined to lose, or not go to the police to save face if they picked a fight after realizing she hadn’t been completely straightforward about what she was selling them.

“I’m sure no one made that mistake twice.”

Was that a compliment?
“You’d be surprised”, she muses, catching the small smile on Silver’s face out the corner of her eye. After a moment she decides that if there’s anywhere to brag about successful cons it’s here; Silver won’t judge her (plus this seems to be making him happy) and Giovanni is far from in a position to do so, so she adds, “I had a whole business running in Celadon; just selling accessories and other random stuff like that. Except I told everyone they’d make their pokemon better in battles, so I’d get triple whatever it was really worth. I never got a repeat customer, but it was pretty good money.” Smirking, she adds, “We did that in Goldenrod too, to get some funds together before we split up. And I had Jiggly and Clefy trained to put on a bit of a show, and Silver would swipe wallets while people were distracted.”

Why Silver needs to look scandalized that she’d told Giovanni that he’d broken a law at some point she has no clue. Or maybe it’s the casual way she admits it that’s annoying him, but she’d worked hard to perfect that bubbly act (sucking up to egotistical eleven-year-old boys had made her want to gag more often than not) and she was going to take the opportunity to brag about it. Besides, if he hadn’t wanted her to drag up their old plans he should have let her sulk over her dinner in peace.

“Had?” Giovanni asks, looking almost thoughtful. Oops.

“I broke into Professor Oak’s lab two years ago, a security camera got a picture me, and when he found me later the deal was that he wouldn’t do anything about me taking his squirtle if I promised to stop stealing”, she says slowly, not wanting to bring up the battle itself.

“You got caught on a camera?” Silver asks, blinking innocently when she glares at him. The corner of his mouth twitches.

“If you’re gonna get smug over that, I can always go over Blackthorn again. You know, since we’re telling stories anyways.”

His eyes widen slightly, “Don’t.”

“Too late.”

They’re there for another half hour as Green goes over the old mission (really she should tell Giovanni about some of them anyway, there’s bound to be a pattern somewhere), and slowly Silver goes from mortified (which he really didn’t need to be, the screw up she’d teased him about had been losing a map, which, while it had meant leaving a trail, wasn’t the worst way one could mess up sneaking into the Dragon’s Den (even if they had gotten in trouble for it, but she leaves that out)) to cutting in, correcting her version or adding what he’d been doing at certain parts.

At some point, a check is dropped off, and Giovanni herds them back out to the car as they reach the end of the story.

“You’re staying at the Center, right Green?” Giovanni asks as they leave the restaurant’s parking lot.

“Yes.” She starts to lean against the car door, before quickly sitting up when her face brushes the cold glass of the window. “Thanks for dinner.”

He nods, and she turns her gaze out the window.

It takes ten minutes to get to the Center, and by then Silver’s fallen asleep in the backseat. Giovanni
pulls over, and Green opens her door and climbs out.

“Wait.”

She jumps and turns around, to see him holding out a small, black phone.

An expensive, small, black phone, she realizes when she hesitantly takes it from him. It’s not the most recent model or anything but is the sort of thing she’d have tried to resell instead of just tossing if she’d needed to steal a phone and wound up with it.

“What…?”

“I’d appreciate a heads up next time you plan on breaking in, okay?”

“Okay”, she echoes, studying it. There’s a logic to what he’s saying, she can’t exactly stake out the house until Silver’s asleep or not there every time she wants to go over something, but she’s still caught off guard. “Thank you.”

He nods, “Good night.”

“Good night.” She steps back, shutting the car door, and watches as they leave, before turning her attention back to the phone.

She’s going to need to keep it hidden, at least until she has a not-illegal sounding excuse for having it (though, provided names were left out, “Silver’s father gave it to me” isn’t a terrible explanation on its own), she’s not sure anyone would believe her about not having stolen it otherwise.

Though now that she thinks about it, there are plenty of other ways Giovanni could have had her contact him; it didn’t have to be an expensive phone. In a way, it feels like a peace offering.

Quietly she tucks it into her pocket to be messed with later and walks into the Center. It’s been a long day, she can go over files and figure out the phone later, for now, she wants to sleep.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The scent of tobacco hangs in the air, as sickly sweet as ever, and there’s a familiar burn in Giovanni’s lungs as he exhales a breath of smoke.

After two hellish days of withdrawal in Sinnoh had highlighted just how much of a weakness the addiction was he’d forced himself to work his way down to one a day; a number he feels he will be staying at for a while. He intends to quit (has to really, he knows what drives people to the vice and isn’t in a hurry to make it easy for Silver to fall into the same pit when he gets older), but for now these early morning smoke breaks serve as a compromise with his better judgment.

He’s in the shade of a tree in the yard, in plain view of the windows in case Silver goes looking for him, but far away enough that the boy won’t notice the cigarette between his lips.

In front of him, standing perfectly still apart from the occasional contented sigh is Nidoqueen. She’s out while he deals with the dry, flaking, skin on her back. It’s a result of the colder weather, happens every winter like clockwork.

Interestingly, her counterpart, Nidoking, never seems to be affected, which is fortunate; no amount of reprimands have changed the way he’s an utter nightmare to treat.

He moves to add more ointment to the patchy skin when she shifts suddenly, and he snaps his fingers; an unspoken repetition of his previous order to be still. She settles again, and he’s about to write the movement off as the result of her starting to doze off and jerking awake when he notices her wide eyes tracking something up by the house.

Now concerned, he tucks the jar of ointment into his pocket and gestures for her to follow him.

Once he’s closer however, concern is replaced with curiosity when he realizes what had caught her attention; Silver is almost frantically digging through the living room. It’s a very organized chaos, nothing’s been too far removed from its place, but he’s clearly after something.

He holds up a hand to dismiss Nidoqueen and drops his cigarette onto the pavement of the porch, before grinding it out with his heel and kicking it under a bench. Out of sight, out of mind (whoever had come up with that saying was an idiot).

Upon entering the room he notes the worry written across Silver’s face as he digs through the couch cushions. Out the corner of his eye, he can see Sneasel sitting atop a bookcase, watching her trainer curiously.

“Something wrong?” he asks, walking over.

Silver jumps and looks up. There’s a slight pause in which Giovanni notices he’s shaking, before he says, “I can’t find it.” He sounds out of breath.

“What is ‘it’?”

“The handkerchief, the one with my name on it. I can’t find it.”
For a very brief moment Giovanni sees not the panicking eight-year-old in front of him, but a much younger boy, come to solemnly inform him that he’d lost yet another belonging, and if Silver hadn’t looked so horrified he’d be laughing.

But he understands why the handkerchief is causing so much fuss; Silver had slept with it clutched in his hand their first night back home, and Giovanni had caught him messing with it more than once when he’d been particularly antsy. One of only two links to home for years, of course he’s stressed by its disappearance.

A word he uses rather loosely though, because, “It fell out of your pocket when I was carrying you in from the car last night. It needed to be washed, and now it’s drying in the bathroom upstairs.”

“Oh.” Silver blinks slowly, looking surprised.

“Are you alright?”

Silver nods as he slowly sinks onto the couch, eyes darting around the room before landing on Sneasel as he says, “Sorry for panicking.” He pulls his knees up to his chin before adding, “I lose things a lot, I thought it was gone when I couldn’t find it.”

Silver’s still staring at Sneasel, and doesn’t see the brief smile that crosses Giovanni’s face, nor does he connect it to the way he coughs, hiding a laugh. He’s not amused by the boy’s distress, but he can’t help being humored at the fact that this trait had stuck over the years. Though judging by the fact that he can find all his keys, and Silver’s closet is still fully stocked, it had lessened somewhat.

Quietly he walks across the room to Silver, sitting down next to him as he says, “You’re fine.”

Silver glances at him, before nodding. Slowly he starts to uncurl, crisscrossing his legs and letting Sneasel climb into his lap when she wanders over.

“Thank you for last night. For trying with Green, I know you don’t have to”, he says after a moment. “Why wouldn’t I?” Because so far as Giovanni’s concerned, making an effort to get along with Green is all but required of him: she’s the only friend Silver has, and a very big part of why he’s still alive (because for as stubborn and resistant as Silver presents himself there is not a doubt in Giovanni’s mind that he would not have survived long enough to escape in the first place without her). He owes her, far more than one meal out.

Silver studies him over Sneasel’s head, looking like he’s trying to think, before saying, “I just thought that we’d end up having to split up once one of us got home.”

“Why?”

Silver shrugs, “It seemed like it made sense. I don’t know.”

“What were you expecting coming home to be like?” Because he highly doubts it had been what he’d gotten, and now he’s curious. Silver’s brow knits in confusion, and he adds, “Only if you want to tell me.”

“I didn’t think about it a lot. Green would tell me what she could remember about her family, I think she was trying to keep the memories fresh. So I guess something like that: a house in a neighborhood somewhere, school.” He shrugs again, still studying Giovanni. “What would it have been like if I hadn’t been taken?”

Giovanni’s quiet for a moment, before saying, “You would have been in school, yes. And with as
obsessed as you were with the gym when you were little I probably would have had you help there as you got older.” He’d never have wanted for anything, would have had more friends than one girl who’d been forced to grow up even quicker than he had, wouldn’t sleep with a knife, wouldn’t have gone through seven years of life in all but total isolation.

Maybe, in this hypothetical world where nothing had gone wrong, Giovanni would have put more effort into the gym as the years went by, instead of clinging to it simply because a boy who no longer remembered it had once obsessed over it.

And, perhaps, not driven to his limits and beyond, he wouldn’t have created Team Rocket; simply run the gym, living off the payout from old endeavors, instead of slowly working his way up to one of the most powerful and feared men in Kanto.

Silver’s head tilts, and, as if he knew what he’d been thinking, asks, “Do you miss being a gym leader?”

The honest answer is that he hasn’t thought about it. He misses the authority the position had brought, certainly. Even in the beginning that had been part of why he’d taken the job. And he misses teaching; granted he’d never taken on a proper student, but advice offered over a battlefield was nearly as good; easier to remember than anything dug out of a textbook at least.

“More than I thought I would”, he says finally. “It’s not really worth lingering on, but yes. I suppose I do.”

It’s not that he couldn’t go back.; enough money poured into the city’s latest project and no one would care about the ramblings of three children (though it would break the unspoken rule of not antagonizing Green), and Interpol, having elected to keep their mouths shut about him thus far, would be unable to touch him without a P.R nightmare.

But that’s all purely hypothetical, and missing something is not the same as wanting it back. He’s content with his current situation, and if that changes traveling is a much easier option.

Leaning back into the couch cushions, he asks, “What about you? Are you happy?”

Silver’s quiet for a few seconds, in which he almost regrets asking, before nodding. “Yes. It still feels a little weird, and I forget where I am when I wake up sometimes, but I am.”

“What feels weird?” Gently he brushes a loose strand of hair from the boy’s face, tucking it behind his ear. Silver’s eyes follow the action, and he lets his hand drop back to his lap.

Silver inches closer, leaning against him. His breathing is still faster than it should be, but the shaking has stopped, and he otherwise shows no sign of the panic from earlier. “Knowing I’ll be eating every day, that there’s a roof over my head, that getting sick isn’t going to kill me.” He pauses and wrinkles his nose, “Sorry, that sounded darker than I meant. I am happy here, it’s nice to feel safe for once.”

Feeling more relieved than he’d expected, Giovanni runs his fingers through Silver’s hair, noting the way he leans into the touch. Such a small thing to read into, and such a small action to have missed being able to do, but here he is, getting sentimental over it.

A small smile inches it’s way across his face as he says, “That’s good. At least you know none of this is going away, right?”

“Mm-hmm.” Silver curls closer, almost dumping Sneasel into Giovanni’s lap.

“Are you sure you’re okay?”
“Just tired.”

Strange, he’d slept well last night. But then he’d also been tearing the house up over the handkerchief, which probably had worn him out.

“Do you want to go back to bed?”

Unsurprisingly his suggestion is met with a faint glare as Silver shakes his head, “No. I just got too worked up, it happens sometimes. I’m fine.”

He says as he all but clings to him, but if Silver wants to be stubborn about it then Giovanni will let him. Prying will complicate things more than going along with it will.

All the same, he rubs Silver’s arm as he says, “You’re allowed to get upset.”

“It’s a handkerchief, I shouldn’t get that worked up over it.”

Giovanni doesn’t point out that he hadn’t said anything about the handkerchief so clearly it was still bothering him, instead saying, “Is there something else?”

Silver shifts so he can’t see his face, and after a moment says, “Nothing you can help with.”

“Are you sure?”

He’s quiet, and then, “I’m worried about Green.”

“Why?”

“She’s trying to deal with everything by herself, and it’s not going to work. We’re a team; she should be letting me help her.”

He should tell him to talk to her, but the problem is likely that Green’s hiding that they’re working together and feels guilty lying to him, so Silver bringing it up more will likely just make the whole thing worse.

“She’s probably trying to keep you safe. Did something happen in Pallet?”

Silver sighs at his suggestion then shakes his head. “That’s what she said too. But how she said it… I think she’s being too reckless and she won’t listen.”

“Is she normally reckless?” That’s something he should know before sending her to Mahogany.

“Sometimes. She just finds a goal and doesn’t think about what reaching it’s going to take.”

“You could tell her why you’re worried, that might help more than just saying you are”, he says, out of other ideas.

Silver nods slowly, “Maybe.” After a moment he stands up, “Thank you.”

“Going somewhere?”

“To read.” Quickly he adds, “No research, just…” he trails off with another shrug.

“That’s fine.” Honestly, he’s surprised Silver’s actually stayed away from the textbooks this long.

He watches Silver leave, then stands up to head back outside and finish with Nidoqueen when the
phone in his pocket vibrates.

A glance at the screen tells him it’s Green (not that anyone else has a reason to be contacting him), and he glances down the hall to make sure Silver’s gone, before stepping outside and answering.

“That was quick.”

“Just listen; I know I said I wanted to get to Mahogany before anything else, but there’s something else I think we need to look into, it might help…”

Chapter End Notes

Do you think Gio ever found some handkerchief or toy Silver had lost just tucked somewhere around the house after he got kidnapped?
Silver pauses on a particularly large tree branch to catch his breath.

He’s out in the forest with Sneasel and Beedrill, racing Sneasel through the trees to the river. It was an easy game and training that he needs badly; while his father had agreed to help with Sneasel and Murkrow Silver’s abilities in a fight by himself apparently didn’t matter.

Because he needs to “rest” and “let someone else deal with it”.

It’s an unhelpful and naive sentiment that he’s sure is meant to keep him out of danger, and one he’s trying to prevent from affecting his skills. He’d tried battling The Mask conventionally, it didn’t work, and now he needs to be just as much a fighter as his pokemon and no amount of well-intended coddling would change it.

Taking a deep breath, he pushes off the branch and lands momentarily on one in the next tree before leaping again, working his way through the dense forest.

Up ahead he can see Sneasel throwing herself from branch to branch; much quicker than him. He’d been able to keep up with her when he was smaller and able to land on the same branches, but now he has to think more about where he lands and she has time to get ahead.

Behind him is Beedrill, supervising and also ready to catch him if he falls (he only had once, and that had been due to rain, not anything he’d done).

He reaches the treeline by the river and realizes he can’t see Sneasel. He leans as far out as he dares, looking along the river bank for her (she might have let him get ahead but he doubts it (and he’d just seen her in front of him)), trying to ignore the bubble of anxiety forming in his gut, and his eyes land on a little girl with long blonde hair, kneeling as she holds out a handful of berries towards a bush.

Maybe (hopefully) to Sneasel.

He works his way down the tree, landing softly in a patch of grass before silently walking over. Beedrill settles in a tree, apparently not considering the girl a threat.

She looks up as he approaches, looking startled.

“Hi! Is she yours?” she asks, pointing towards the bush.

Silver cranes his neck, relief hitting him when he sees Sneasel sitting in the shadows behind it. She perks up when she sees him.

“Yeah, she’s with me”, he says, slightly unnecessarily, as Sneasel darts over, climbing up his back to cling to his shoulder.

The girl stands up, giving him a sweet smile and holding her hand out, “My name’s Yellow. It’s nice to meet you.”

“I’m Silver”, he says slowly, startled. He glances around as he cautiously takes her hand, there’s a sketchbook tucked into her belt, and now that he’s not so focused on finding Sneasel he notices a rattata and a doduo sitting by the river.

Yellow tilts her head, studying Sneasel, “What kind of pokemon is she? I’ve never seen one like her
before.”

Silver hesitates, but Sneasel clearly likes the attention now that he’s here, climbing higher up his back to let Yellow get a better look at her over his shoulder, so he holds his arm out for her to balance on as he says, “She’s a sneasel, I don’t think they’re very common in Kanto.”

“Cool. Wait, are you from Johto then? I don’t think I’ve seen you around before, and I know almost everyone in Viridian.” She says this with a note of pride in her voice, a grin crossing her face.

“Um…” How does he answer that? Technically he’s from Viridian, but he’s only been here for a little over a month. “Kind of.”

If she thinks there’s something strange about his half answer she keeps it to herself, “Do you like the city then?”

He nods, not sure what to make of the sudden conversation. He doesn’t really mind it though, she seems friendly.

Yellow starts walking towards her pokemon, glancing back at him as she says, “Do you mind if I draw her? I try to do a picture of every new pokemon I meet, it’s kinda like my own pokedex.”

Sneasel jumps off his arm before he can answer, padding over to her, looking curious as she pulls the book from her belt and sits down.

“If you want.”

Yellow smiles, and motions for him to sit next to her as Sneasel helps herself to the berries she’d dropped.

He watches her draw, it’s a quick picture but he can tell she’s putting effort into it. Sneasel’s long, skinny limbs end up just lines, but Yellow does manage to make the face capture the wide, curious eyes studying her.

Sneasel creeps over when she finishes the berries, sitting in his lap as she studies the picture.

“Like it?” Yellow asks her. Sneasel lets out a soft purr, blinking slowly.

“She does”, Silver says, idly running his fingers along the feather on her head.

Yellow grins, “Thanks.” She writes ‘Silver’s Sneasel’ at the bottom of the page, and closes the book, setting it down in front of her, “And thanks for letting me draw her.”

“You’re welcome”, Silver says. After a moment he adds, “You said you know most of the people in town?”

She nods, leaning back on her hands as she says, “I might have been exaggerating a little, but I do usually know when someone’s new. I grew up here, I kinda learned how to spot new people.”

She lays down when her rattata wanders over, scratching it between the ears. It sniffs the air curiously, then settles on her stomach, studying him.

“So how long have you been in Viridian?”

“A month. Why?”

She turns her head, looking up at him, “You seem really calm in the forest, that’s all. Most new
people hear one thing about what was going on a year ago and won’t come near it.” She sounds slightly upset.

Going on a year ago? He thinks for a moment, trying to figure out what she means, before remembering a vague comment Giovanni had made about the forest being used as a training ground for Team Rocket’s ‘experiments’ when he’d asked for more details about the organization; something about how it was a shame to damage the forest that badly, but it had been an otherwise ideal location.

Probably not what he should say to Yellow.

“The wild pokemon were agitated, or something?” he asks, not sure what else to add.

She nods, “A bunch of the townsfolk got together, and managed to calm them down. There are still a few running around that’ll pick a fight if you’re not careful though. But they’re all much further in.” She stretches out as she adds, “It’s nice to be able to be out here again.”

Silver hums in acknowledgment, trying to come up with a different topic; this one was treading too close to dangerous territory for his liking.

He’s spared having to come up with something, however, when Yellow asks, “What’s Johto like?”

“It rains a lot”, he starts, and she laughs as he continues, “and the cities are a lot smaller.” Vermilion had been jarring after weeks spent bouncing between Ecruteak and Olivine, Saffron had been even worse, and he’s very glad Viridian isn’t any bigger than it is. “And everyone is pretty laid back.” And by that, he means easy to steal from.

“It sounds nice, do you miss it?”

Not really; it’s hard to miss nearly starving or freezing to death being a weekly occurrence, but with how he’s described it he can’t exactly say that.

“I miss the way everything was familiar”, he says after a moment, and it’s true. He’s figured out the forest, but the city is still confusing (though part of that is probably due to the fact that he hasn’t been able to explore it by himself).

Yellow smiles, “That makes sense. Hey, if you want I could show you around the city some time.”

He tilts his head, trying to figure out why she was offering that. But he nods, “Maybe.” Probably not though, unless Green could be talked into tagging along; Yellow looks younger than him, but it seems rude to say that.

She sits up, taking care to hold onto the rattata, as she says, “I should get going, my uncle worries if I’m gone too long, but it was nice to meet you.”

She whistles the doduo over, and climbs on its back as Silver nods, “Nice to meet you too.”

She grins, and then the doduo takes off, running along the river bank. Silver watches until Yellow’s ponytail disappears into the shadows of the forest.

After a moment he pulls himself up, waving to get Beedrill’s attention as he slips back into the shelter of the trees, starting home.

His walk back through the woods is slow, he’s tired from racing Sneasel, and also isn’t in a hurry to get back.
In his head he plays the conversation with Yellow over again, trying to figure her out. He’s pretty sure she’d been mostly interested in Sneasel, which is fine because Sneasel likes the attention and he can brag about her all day, but her questions about Johto are strange. Maybe she’d just never been outside of Viridian and was curious?

None of it felt like she was prying or digging for information, and she’d seemed friendly.

Maybe that’s what he’s hung up on; that she’d just wanted to talk and didn’t seem to have any other motives for it.

(He’s also now convinced that Sneasel had been faking her initial shyness to get him to talk to her.)

When he reaches the house he pauses at the edge of the yard, staring up at the bench by the back door; why was Green here? And, while he’s glad for the apparent development, why was she talking, seemingly calmly, with Giovanni?

Beedrill nudges him forward when he takes too long to figure out what’s going on, and he starts walking again, still confused as Sneasel jumps off his back and darts up to Green.

“Hi”, he says when he reaches them, studying Green as he hands Beedrill’s pokeball back to his father.

“Hey.” Green gives him a cheerful smile.

“What are you doing here?” He’s not complaining, but something about this feels off.

“Green’s going to be staying here with you for a few days while I look into something in Lavender”, Giovanni says.

“Look into what?” How had he gotten a hold of her? And why couldn’t Silver just go with? (Though he doesn’t really want to.)

“Just tying up a few loose ends, it should take a week at most.”

Silver decides he doesn’t want to know what ‘tying up loose ends’ means, and nods slowly, still confused. If this had to do with Team Rocket why was Green helping?

“So when are you leaving?”

“Day after tomorrow. It came up on short notice.”

“I’ll be spending tonight though”, Green pipes up, “The Center’s getting crowded, and I’ve already been there longer than I think you’re supposed to be anyway.”

“Okay.” He’s not sure what else to add, but if they’ve decided to get along then this shouldn’t be too bad.
“Be back at the house by sundown, stay in Viridian, stay out of your desk, don’t go off the main paths in the forest, don’t steal anything, keep my phone on me at all times, stay out of that one part of the city that smells like vomit so we wouldn’t be going near it anyway, and you have the contents of the liqueur cabinet memorized so I’m not going to get away with sneaking any.”

Okay, so Green had added that last one, but Giovanni had made her repeat the rules for the next week at least five times and she wants to see if he’s even listening.

“If you’re going to be adding more rules then you better follow them”, he replies, taking a dark trench coat off a hook. “And if you’re out of the house, you’re both in a coat.”

“I don’t have one.” She has a sweater, that does a better job hiding things than it does keeping her warm, but Viridian this time of year was nothing compared to what she’s used to.

And she’s not his responsibility anyway.

“Buy one, there’s cash on the counter.”

“It’s not that cold out.”

How he manages to look completely done with her without a muscle on his face moving she has no clue, but it’s impressive.

He takes a hat off another hook and opens the door to the garage, “If you’re going to Mahogany you’re going to need one anyway, just get it now. Have a good week.”

“Good luck”, she forces out before he disappears behind the closing door.

They hadn’t told Silver, but the reason he was leaving was to look into a break-in in Lavender that Green was positive had been one of the other teams from The Mask. She’d offered to go, but Giovanni thought he’d have an easier time getting information on what they’d taken, so she was staying while he went.

She isn’t overly optimistic that he’ll find anything, but if he did they’d be a little closer to figuring out what Pryce was after.

Wandering back into the kitchen, she finds Silver sitting at the table finishing his breakfast.

“Have you eaten yet?” he asks.

“Yes”, she lies as she digs through the cupboards for a coffee cup. “What do you want to do today?” She finds a cup, and fills it with the last of the coffee, before turning to the fridge to dig up some form of creamer.

“We could go into town.”

Wait.

“And do what?” she asks as she dumps milk into the coffee cup and puts the carton back.
“You still like shopping right?”

She takes a sip of the coffee, studying Silver over the rim of the cup, trying not too gag on the much-more-bitter-than-she’d-expected drink (but she didn’t sleep well last night and needs the caffeine so she’s going to finish it anyway).

“Did you ask him to tell me to get a coat?”

“No.”

He’s a bad liar.

“Uh-huh.” She sets the cup down and picks up the stack of cash Giovanni had left. It’s far more than enough for food for the week, which removes her last argument against the shopping trip she’s been all but ordered into.

It’s not the idea of new clothes she’s against; it’s the charity. It was slightly easier to take from Professor Oak because he’s like that with everyone, but here… Giovanni’s helping her out of what she assumes is a feeling of obligation (she’d kept Silver in one piece until he was able to last on his own, and now he thinks there’s a favour to be returned) and she doesn’t like it.

“Are you okay with walking into town then? We could have Jiggly fly us there if you’re not.” She picks up the coffee and walks over to the table, sitting down across from him, “Or I could hot-wire one of the cars…”, she adds teasingly (not that she’d done it before).

“Don’t. And I can walk.”

“Sounds good.”

Half an hour later they leave.

The two times Green had walked out to the mansion she’d followed the road, this time Silver leads her to a barely noticeable trail starting at the edge of the yard.

“It lets out by the gym”, he explains as Sneasel darts ahead.

“Alright. Where do you want to go once we’re there?”

He shrugs, “Up to you.”

They’re both quiet for several minutes, before Silver pipes up again, “So, I met someone two days ago. Or I guess Sneasel dragged me to her.”

“She seems to do that a lot”, Green muses before adding, “And? What happened?”

“Her name’s Yellow, she drew a picture of Sneasel, asked a few questions about Johto and offered to show me around the city, and then she took off.”

He’d made a friend! Without her help!

“Look at you being social”, she teases.

Silver looks over his shoulder to glare at her and she laughs, “I’m sorry. That’s good though, I’m glad you’re making friends.”

“We only talked once.”
“But she wanted to meet up again right?”

He nods, “I guess.”

They drop back into an easy silence for the rest of the walk until the partially crumbled outline of the gym appears through the trees.

Silver seems content to simply march past, but Green pauses to study the blown out wall.

Red had given her and Blue a recount of the whole battle, in a far more serious voice than she’d thought him capable of, but she hadn’t actually seen the damage.

“How’s this one look?” she asks, zipping up a pale pink jacket, checking how the cuffs fit around her gloves.

“Nice. And I meant it about the other clothes Green.”

“Why are you being so stubborn about it?”

“Do you have clothes other than that dress and sweater?”

Not really.
She sighs, glancing at him as she slips the jacket off. He’s one to talk, she’d tried to replace his old jacket and he’d just argued over it.

Though that might be why he’s being so difficult now, if Giovanni had had this same argument with him already.

“She’s one to talk, she’d tried to replace his old jacket and he’d just argued over it.”

“Fine.” She sets the jacket in the cart next to Sneasel and the backpack and lets Silver drag her over to a display rack.

They’re there for another hour because if she’s going to be getting anything it’s going to be something she genuinely likes.

After they pay, as they sit at a picnic table outside stuffing the new clothes into the backpack (that she did probably need even if she has no intention of telling Silver) and slowly working their way through a lemonade from a vending machine, she asks, “So what do you want to get?”

“I already told you, I don’t need anything else.”

“I’m not talking about clothes. It can be a toy, a blanket, a book, anything. Your bedroom needs something with personality in it; it looks like a hotel room.”

Silver’s spared having to come up with a rebuttal by a call of, “Green? Is that you?”

Oh no.

She twists around, ignoring the startled look on Silver’s face as she spots Red walking towards them.

“Hi”, she says, trying to sound cheerful as Red slides onto the bench on the other side of the table (Giovanni was going to pick right now to call and check in, wasn’t he?).

“Hey.” His eyes land on Silver, who’s slowly pressing into Green’s side, studying Red. “Uh-”

“This is Silver”, she says, quickly slipping an arm around his shoulder and making him sit straight. “Silver this is Red, the trainer I mentioned a few weeks ago,” (had she only been in Viridian for three weeks? Arceus her life was hectic). Over Silver’s head she mouths “don’t mention Team Rocket”. She’s not dealing with that conversation today.

Red gives a subtle, if confused, nod before smiling at Silver, “It’s nice to meet you.”

“Hi”, Silver says, still looking uncomfortable. Sneasel pops her head up from where she’d been lounging in his lap to examine Red.

“What are you doing here?” Green asks, glancing at Sneasel out the corner of her eye; she was normally good about who she did or didn’t consider a threat, but with as on edge as Silver is she wants to be ready to grab her.

“Just passing through, I had a break between challenges finally, and I was going to head back to Pallet for a bit. You?”

He’d somehow managed to say almost everything Green hadn’t wanted to hear in one sentence.

“Not much, just taking a bit of a break.” Not a complete lie.

Sneasel twitches and Green briefly wonders if there’s something else bothering her besides Red before she feels Silver slip her wallet from her pocket.
“I think she’s hungry”, he says as he stands up, keeping an arm around Sneasel, looking more like he wants away from the conversation than anything (to his credit it had been a long morning). “I’m going to run to the bakery, do you want anything?” he adds, pointing towards a shop to their right.

“Surprise me.”

He nods and walks off, letting Sneasel climb onto his back once they’re a ways away.

“Who’s he?” Red asks once Green turns back to him.

“A friend from before”, she says simply, hoping he’ll drop it.

He doesn’t. “Has he been traveling with you?”

“No. We split up back in Johto. He ran into his father there, so he’s home now.” That matched what she’d told Oak, and was technically true. “I’m just staying with him for the week, then I might be getting back on the road.”

“And Team Rocket…?” His voice drops as he asks, as if he’s worried someone will overhear them and panic (doesn’t he know whispering makes everything more suspicious?).

“Life on the streets sucks, in case you didn’t know”, she says vaguely, taking a sip of lemonade.

“It doesn’t have anything to do with all your questions about Giovanni then?”

“No. I was just curious.”

“So he wasn’t a possible lead or anything?”

She tries not to smile, “Nope.”

“Do you have any? Or do you want help?”

Green shakes her head, giving him a smile meant to shut him up, “No, but I’ve got it, don’t worry. Besides, you’re busy now Mr. League Champion.”

“Don’t call me that.”

“Why? Does it attract attention, Champ?” She raises her voice just a bit, eyes glinting with amusement.

“Green.”

“Sorry.”

“No, you’re not.” He’s still smiling as he adds, “It’s not that bad, but things tend to snowball as soon as it gets out that I’m in a town. I like it though.”

“That’s good.”

Red nods, glancing up as Silver walks back over carrying a bag, with Sneasel on his shoulder holding a snack and looking significantly calmer.

“It’s nice to see the city getting back to normal now that the pokemon have calmed down”, he says as Silver sits down, slipping the wallet back into Green’s pocket.
She hums in agreement, shooting him a glare as a reminder.

After a moment Red stands up, “Well I’ll let you guys go. Let me know when you’re free Green, I’ll be in Pallet for a little bit if nothing comes up.”

“See you around.”

He waves as he walks off, disappearing into the crowd.

“So he’s… from Silph?” Silver asks after a moment.

Green glances at him, trying to figure out if that was really all he knew, before deciding that if it is, then it’s not her job to elaborate. “Yeah. And he won the tournament.”

“Is that a big deal?”

Sweet Silver and his still terrible grasp of day to day life.

“To some people.” All the tournament had been for her was a way to get her name and face as widespread as possible, in a faint hope her parents would see it, but she gets that the title matters to most people.

She pulls the drawstring on the backpack shut and shoulders it, taking the cookie Silver offers her from the bag as she says, “Did you make up your mind about what you wanted?”

“No, because I’m not going shopping.”

“Yes, you are. That was the deal.”

“We never made a deal.”

“Pick a store or I’m picking something for you.”

An hour later they’re headed back to the house, Green’s backpack thrown over her shoulder and Silver glaring at her over a large stuffed gyarados.

Chapter End Notes

Red: vaguely implies that Giovanni might have had something to do with Green and Silver getting kidnapped
Green: Wow, it's like I can feel you getting re-added to a hitlist
Thanks for reading!
Silver wakes up to Green’s phone ringing.

He feels her shift away to answer it, and half-listens to her end of the conversation until-

“So you’re on your way back then?”

He rolls onto his back in time to watch her make a slight face at whatever Giovanni had said, biting the tip of her thumb for a moment before saying, “Alright, thanks. And no, we won’t.”

She hangs up and looks down at him, “Good morning.”

Silver nods sleepily, “Why’s he coming back so soon?” It had been four days since he’d left, out of the full week they’d been told to expect.

“Didn’t say”, Green says simply. “He’ll be back tonight, said not to wait up.”

“Okay.” He shifts under the blankets, not really wanting to get up.

Green smirks at him as she stands up, “You can go back to sleep, I’m gonna shower, then I’ll come get you and we can talk about breakfast, okay?”

Silver nods and watches as she leaves, returning to the guest room where she’s supposed to be sleeping (and isn’t because he just wound up sneaking into her room with nightmares anyway), before rolling over and curling his fingers into the stuffed gyarados she’d all but bullied him into getting. It’s dumb and childish (it’s warm and soft, and unlike a certain dark type doesn’t get up at an unholy hour to climb on the furniture), and he’s only keeping it in the bed to keep Green happy (and he likes it).

He hears her start the shower, and lets himself drift back off to sleep, sandwiched between the doll and Sneasel, who climbs down from her nest in the bookcase to curl up in the still-warm dent where Green had been sleeping.

Green’s feeling adventurous when she comes to wake him back up, and neither of them is very hungry yet, so they end up packing breakfast and heading to the river to eat.

Which means that by the time they get there Silver’s stomach is growling and he’s regretting the decision, and is quick to settle on a large rock in the sun as he tears into the muffins they’d gotten in town the day before.

Green lets Blasty out, perching on his shell as she eats, along with Horsea, who settles next to Silver, studying him with wide eyes.

He runs a finger along her back as he eats (he had missed her, but he knows that look and if Green had been teaching her to beg they’re going to be having a talk later).

He watches Green stretch out on Blasty’s back, idly noting how weird it is to see her out of the black dress. She seems to be making a point of wearing her new clothes only, and while she looks nice, the skirt and pink jacket very much contradict the image of her he’s used to.

“Hey Green?” he asks once he’s done eating, thoughts drifting to his father’s advice from a week ago.
“Yeah?”

“What are you planning on doing once Father gets back?”

He can’t see her whole face from where he’s sitting, but he thinks her brow is furrowed, and after a moment she says, “Taking off. I might stick around another week or so back at the Center while I get a plan together but I am planning on leaving the house tomorrow at least.”

“You don’t have to go back to the Center, it’s not like we’re short on space.”

She laughs, before sitting up and saying, “I guess not. But I don’t mind being on the road, and I’ve got stuff to do.”

“Are you going to Mahogany?”

She stiffens, “I have to at some point Silver. We need to know if it’s him.”

She’s right, but he dislikes the implication that she’s going alone. “Could I go with?”

“No.”

The flat answer catches him off guard, he’d expected her to dodge the question at least once.

“Why?”

“We’ve been over this.”

“But it’ll be safer if both of us go.” They work better as a team, and he refuses to believe that a few years apart had completely undone that fact.

She holds his gaze calmly, “You think Giovanni would let you?”

No, he wouldn’t.

“I could sneak out.”

“No”, Green repeats, looking serious. “You’re safer here, and do you really want to do that to him? Disappear again when you’ve only been home for a month?”

“But-”

“No! Once I have a plan together I’m going to Johto by myself and you’re staying here where I know you’re safe. End of discussion.”

Silver doesn’t flinch when her voice raises, because it’s Green and he knows she isn’t going to do anything to him, but he still leans away, eyes widening. He’s seen her angry before but it’s never been aimed at him.

There’s a flash of guilt on her face, and her shoulders slump as she studies the ground. “I didn’t mean to yell. But I mean it Silver; if you want to help you’ll stay where I won’t be worrying about you.”

“So I just stay home and do nothing while you go charging off to fight him yourself?”

She shifts, looking uncomfortable, “I’m not planning on fighting him, if it even is Pryce. I just want confirmation first so I can figure things out.”
Silver takes a slow, deep, breath, trying to think. She’s hiding something; she doesn’t want his help or help from her other friends, and yet supposedly isn’t planning on any fights by herself. There’s some piece to all this that he doesn’t have yet and it’s frustrating him.

But it’s a piece she clearly isn’t willing to give him right now, and he doesn’t want any more of an argument, so he nods, “Okay. Will you at least let me know if you need help?”

She smiles, looking relieved, “I will, you don’t need to worry about me.”

She lays back down on Blasty, and they’re quiet for several minutes, before she asks, “Could you let Murkrow out?”

“I thought birds still bothered you.”

“I want to work on it.” She sits up again, looking determined, “Freaking out over birds nearly got me killed twice, and cost me a battle in the tournament; I need to try and get over it. And Murkrow is small, and yours, so he might be a good place to start.”

Nearly gotten her killed? No, he doesn’t want to know.

“If you’re sure.”

He slides off the rock and walks slightly further away, glancing back as he reaches for Murkrow’s ball.

Green sits up a little straighter and nods.

Keeping half an eye on her he tosses the ball straight up, watching as Murkrow materializes. Silver catches the ball again, then holds his arm out for him to land on.

Murkrow hops along his arm, looking curious. Silver scratches his neck with one finger as he looks back at Green, who’s pale but otherwise seems okay, “What do you want to do?”

“Maybe just go back to the rock, and keep him out for a bit?” Her voice is slightly higher than usual.

“Okay.”

He sits back down, digging through the bag they’d brought their food in for crumbs, which he tosses on the ground next to him, making sure Murkrow isn’t getting any closer to Green while he eats.

Behind him Horsea is messing around in the water, and Sneasel’s somewhere in a tree to his right, he can hear her jumping around. It’s weird to have all three of them back together; Green had had Horsea since they’d split up, he’d almost stopped counting her as his.

Green’s studying Murkrow, her head tilted slightly as she takes breaths that are just a little too deep to actually be relaxed.

Deciding distracting her might help, Silver asks, “What time did Father say he was getting back?”

Green jumps, her eyes darting back to him as she says, “Around eleven, I think. He said not to wait up, but I’m not gonna drag you to bed if you try to.”

He nods, about to stand up when he feels a familiar weight on his head.

“Really?” he mumbles, glancing up at Murkrow as he settles on top of him. He hears a soft, content caw in response.
Green laughs, looking slightly less on edge as she watches them. “If you’re ready to head back we can. Keep him out ‘till we get to the house?”

“Okay.”

Murkrow stays on Silver’s head the whole way back, which is fun for him and annoying for Silver, especially once Sneasel gets sick of tree climbing and jumps onto his shoulder, but he lets him stay because he’s pretty sure him flying around will set Green off. For as calm as she’s acting she’s also keeping several feet between them.

To her credit though, once they reach the house she tries to pet him, attempting to set a shaky finger on the back of his neck, before her nerves get the better of her and she steps back shaking her head.

“Small steps”, she says, forcing a smile.

They spend the rest of the day around the house; Green finds a deck of cards somewhere and attempts to teach him a few games, which lasts until she notices the cards are marked, and Silver notices she’s cheating. She shows him the subtle differences in the patterns on the backs of the cards so she can say she was teaching by cheating, then puts them back.

Then there’s a chessboard in the library that neither of them knows what to do with, but they improvise a game of checkers with the pawns.

Evening rolls around and they have cereal for dinner because Green wants to and she’s the one “cooking”, then she disappears into the library to read and Silver goes to bed.

Or tries to; he takes a bath and lays down, and it feels like as soon as he drifts off he’s jolting back awake from a nightmare, nails biting into the sides of his face as his gaze darts around the room in an attempt to convince himself he’s not in a cell.

He tries to get back to sleep, because Giovanni had said not to wait up and if he goes downstairs like he wants to that’s exactly what he’ll be doing, but he can’t. He’s too rattled, and the small nail marks on his forehead are stinging enough that he wonders if he broke skin in his attempts to remove an imagined mask.

Quietly he slips out of his room, dragging a blanket behind him.

He glances in the library to see Green asleep on a couch with a book in her lap.

Taking care to not wake her up, he works his way down the stairs and curls up in an armchair in the living room, bundled up under the quilt.

Out from behind the shut door to his room, and lulled by the ticking of a clock in the hall, his eyelids get heavy and he lets himself drift off, staying asleep until warm arms slip under him, pulling him from his nest.

“Hi”, he mumbles, curling his fingers into Giovanni’s jacket. He smells like the forest and the city, and Silver thinks he catches a whiff of smoke.

“I thought I said not to wait up.”

“I was asleep, you woke me up.”

He hears a quiet huff of laughter as Giovanni picks up the blanket and heads for the stairs.
His grip on Silver feels tighter than usual as he says, “Did you have a good week?”

“Mm-hmm.” Silver is barely awake as they reach the second floor. “Missed you.”

“I missed you too.” They enter Silver’s room and he adds, “I see you two went shopping.”

Silver’s gaze drifts to the gyarados resting on his bed, “Green made me get it.”

He sinks back into his pillows as Giovanni sets him in bed and wraps him back in the blanket. This, he thinks, is one of his favorite parts of being home: the way he can curl up in his nest of pillows and blankets every night, safe, comfortable, and most importantly warm, that that warmth will still be there in the morning rather than turning out to be a figment of his imagination, that there has been someone with him every night since Olivine.

He feels coarse fingers brush through his hair, just like every other time he’s been tucked in, but this time they pause.

“What are these from?” Giovanni asks, and Silver feels his thumb lightly brush over the still-stinging skin on his forehead.

“Bad dream.”

“Do you want me to stay until you’re asleep?” There’s a note of worry in his tone.

Silver nods as he rolls onto his side, hands seeking out the doll. He’s calmed down by now, but falling asleep is easier when he’s not alone. “Goodnight”, he mumbles, before feeling a quick kiss against his temple.

“Goodnight, Silver.”
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Giovanni stays for another twenty minutes after Silver falls asleep, simply watching the way his breathing deepens and his fingers grip tighter at the stuffed toy as he drifts further from consciousness.

He’s slightly amused by this doll, be it Green’s fault or not. Something so childishly normal seems at odds with Silver and his habit of trying to act well beyond his years; perhaps this will serve as a reminder that he is allowed a childhood.

His eyes drift to where Sneasel is curled up in her nest in the bookcase and he leans against the wall, letting out a slow sigh.

He is glad to be home. Silver has been back for less than eight weeks and he is chiding himself for every second that he’d missed, and while the trip had been necessary he much prefers being here, where he doesn’t have to struggle to convince himself that everything is fine.

Silver shifts in his sleep and Giovanni quietly pulls the blanket back over his shoulder before sitting back, trying to memorize the sight in front of him in an attempt at quieting the unwanted anxieties at the back of his mind.

He’d been gone less than a week and that had been all it had taken for them to flare back up; images of re-broken windows, glass covered floors, and an empty house filling his mind at every opportunity, and if he’d gone over his self-imposed limit of one cigarette a day whilst he was gone then that was for him alone to know. (And what does it say of how far he’s fallen that of the two (three?) of them he was the one most affected by this short trip? Silver had hardly batted an eye at the idea of him being gone for a few days, and yet here he is needing to remind himself that the world had not fallen apart (again) simply because he’d left.)

But what matters is that Silver is fine, nothing had happened, and Giovanni is more than willing to write those worries off as the pointless paranoia that they are as he leaves the boy’s room, taking care to leave the door propped open (that’s one thing he’s noticed, Silver does not do well left alone behind closed doors).

He finds Green asleep in the library, an old storybook resting in her lap.

He could carry her to her room, and given the hour probably should, but Silver had learned to sleep with a knife from someone and he’d rather not chance a blade to the throat.

Gently he sets a hand on her shoulder, shaking her awake. His hesitance in picking her up proves good when almost immediately she’s snatching at his wrist, looking alarmed.

“It’s me, you’re fine.” (Though how much of a comfort that is he doesn’t know.)

He eases his arm from her grip, noting the kitchen knife she slips back between the couch cushions as her eyes clear.

“Would you like a better knife?” he asks, letting a note of amusement work its way into his voice as he gives her a moment to wake up.
She glares at him for a few seconds before sitting up. “Did you find anything?”

“The stolen data was information on Celebi, it had been moved to Lavender for safekeeping a few years ago after other break-ins for similar information.” There’s no point in trying to send her to bed, and it’s better to get this over with while Silver’s asleep anyway. “Does any of that sound familiar?”

“He never told us what we were getting specifically. I think the older kids knew, but all me and Silver got sent after was stuff that could be described, and he never said why.” She shrugs, “I guess he thought we were too young for anything more complex.”

But not too young to be kidnapped and conditioned into child soldiers in the first place. Flawless logic.

“Either way”, he says, sinking into a chair across from her, “if you want to know what he’s after you should start in Ilex Forrest and Azalea Town. Or go straight to Mahogany, it’s up to you.”

“Do you think finding out what he’s after is important?”

Oh, he’d love to know what was so vital it warranted the kidnapping of his son, just so he can ensure it never happens out of spite, but in terms of actually getting to the man… “It depends. If we’re wrong about Pryce it’ll be one of the only leads we have.”

She nods, staring at the wall. After a moment she says, “I’ll go to Mahogany first then. Search the gym, maybe his house. Just wish I knew what to look for.”

“Anything that matches the stolen research. With as long as he’s been at this, I doubt he’s keeping more than that where it can be easily found.”

“Was there anything else?”

“According to the security guard I spoke with, there were two people, maybe older teenagers. He didn’t get a clear look at their faces, but the girl had blue hair, and the boy’s was dark.”

She nods again, “Sounds right. How did you find all that out?”

He briefly considers not answering, and just letting her imagination run rampant; except he’s supposed to be offering an olive branch, not destroying the barely laid foundations of a glass bridge, and implying threats seems more likely to do the latter.

“I offered to cover the cost of repairs; two windows were broken, along with a handful of cracked walls and scorch marks inside. They’re already underfunded, a large donation with no strings attached was apparently worth a few answered questions.”

She nods slowly, studying him with narrowed eyes. After a few seconds, she says, “You don’t make sense.”

“How so?”

“You do things like have an entire city taken over, and then turn around a year later and you’re all subtle and gentlemanly.”

He lets a smirk inch its way across his face for a moment, “Well, as you said, it’s been a year. And do you really expect me to be operating the same as before now that my resources have been whittled down to two people?” The resources he has easy access to at least.
“I guess not.” She crosses her arms, her gaze shifting to the ground as she asks, “Can I talk to you about something?”

“If you go to bed afterward.” Because he’s tired, and “keep it quick” is rude and likely to make the rest of this conversation intolerable.

She glares at him for a moment, before saying, “I am grateful for the clothes, I know it was probably Silver’s idea but I needed them, and I know I need a coat for Mahogany anyway; so thank you, and I’m not complaining. But you don’t owe me anything.”

“What do you mean?” Because he does. Far, far more than he can actually repay. She’d all but raised Silver; been a sister when he had no other family, and that’s not something he can let go ignored.

She takes a deep breath, “I can manage on my own, I don’t need help. Like I said, I appreciate the clothes, really, but Professor Oak’s already smothering me trying to help, and he’s like that with everyone so it’s not really worth trying to talk him out of it, but I know you’re only helping me because of Silver so just… I don’t want to feel like a charity case. I’m going back to the Center tomorrow, so I’ll be out of your hair until I go to Mahogany, and after that, you can just go back to ignoring me. It’ll probably be better for everyone anyway.”

“Yes, Silver asked me to give you the money for the clothes”, he starts when she seems to have said her piece. “He’s worried about you. And you staying here puts no burden on me, financial or otherwise, if you’d rather go back to the Center that’s fine, but you’re also welcome to stay. I’m sure he’s going to ask you to regardless. And we both know ignoring you isn’t an option.

“As for whether or not I owe you, you’re going to have to accept my disagreeing. My son would likely be dead without you, that is a debt I intend to repay.”

Green taps her fingers on her arm, “You’re giving me too much credit. And he doesn’t need to be worrying about me.”

“He thinks you’re reckless, I’m inclined to agree.” His knowledge of what happened inside Silph co. is patchy at best, but he has a general idea. It doesn’t paint Green as the most cautious person in the world.

She glares at him, “If I say you sound like the Professor will you leave me alone?”

He’s too tired to bother hiding the brief laugh her comment earns, sitting back as he says, “That’s quite the insult.”

“He’d probably say the same thing.”

“Most likely.”

She crisscrosses her legs on the couch, setting her hands in her lap to pick at a loose thread on one of her gloves. “One more question, then I’ll go to bed.”

“What is it?”

She takes a shaky breath, “This isn’t your problem, but Oak will just tell me what he thinks I want to hear, and you’re probably the best person to answer it anyway. My parents moved out of Pallet five years ago, no one knows where they went. I think they just wanted to get away from just being ‘the missing girl’s parents’ but… Do you think they gave up on me?”

Her voice is quiet, and she’s still staring intensely at her gloves, likely making the thread worse as
she tugs on it.

Giovanni exhales slowly, not sure how to answer. He’d prefer not to, but he knows why she’s coming to him with this question, and she’s right that all she’s likely to get elsewhere is reassurance.

Finally, he says, “I think you’re right that they wanted to distance themselves. If you’d been gone two years by then the police would have been telling them to try to move on and to not get their hopes up for anything new. That’s not pleasant to hear, especially on repeat once it gets out.” There are several reasons he’d used only his own resources to look for Silver and this is one; he’d helped with enough fruitless search parties through the forest as a gym leader to know exactly how the whole unpleasant ordeal went and had had no interest in being pitied.

“So they probably think I’m dead?” The flat way she says it startles him.

“I doubt they’d be upset to find out they’re wrong if they do.”

She nods, not lifting her gaze. “Thank you.” After a moment she stands up, “I’ll go to bed then.”

She pauses in the doorway, glancing back at him, then at the floor as she says, “Thanks for helping me. I know you could get most of this done yourself so you don’t have to, so thanks.” She takes a deep breath, and then, “And I still don’t like you, but I am glad Silver found you. It’s nice to know he’s safe. And to see him happy.”

So she trusts him to keep Silver safe (or more likely, to not hurt him). Quite an improvement over a few weeks ago.

“I don’t expect you to like me.” He’s well aware that’s a status that’s not even remotely reachable at the moment. “And thank you for helping; you’ve made a lot of this much easier than it would be otherwise.”

She nods, looking surprised, “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

Chapter End Notes

Okay but really, Green getting to Pallet and her parents just being gone must have messed with her so much? Like suddenly she needed to look for them too, instead of just going home like she’d probably been, at least subconsciously, expecting?
Half the yard is frozen.

Which is exactly what Silver had planned from the beginning of this battle and absolutely not a last minute adaptation made when he’d realized simply freezing Rhyhorn wasn’t going to work and he and Sneasel would need to improvise.

He doesn’t particularly like this strategy, he’s had enough of sliding around on ice, but desperate times mean desperate measures.

Though he had enjoyed watching the stubborn rock type slide around for several minutes before he had managed to stop, settling in a small patch of not-quite-frozen-over grass, tracking Sneasel with his gaze as she darts around the yard waiting for further instruction.

Watching the whole thing from up by the house is Giovanni, hands in his pockets as he leans back against the wall.

He’s not giving orders, simply observing. Because today’s lesson is on containment; which means Rhyhorn’s only instruction is to get to Silver or Sneasel, while they try to prevent him from doing so without actually knocking him out.

He understands the idea, mostly, but that doesn’t mean he enjoys it when another earthquake shakes the yard, cracking the ice as well as knocking him off balance.

He grunts in pain when he hits the ground, before quickly pulling himself up and sliding out of the way of another poorly thought out charge. Rhyhorn slides past him on the ice, his already poor ability to turn worsened by the slippery ground.

He calls for another Ice Beam, aimed at the rock type’s legs.

Sneasel hits, and Rhyhorn is left struggling to move.

Assuming he’d been worn out to the point he couldn’t break free, Silver turns back towards the house, expecting some sign that he’s done and instead being met with the sight of Green slipping out the back door onto the porch (so she’d over-slept, he’d thought she’d snuck out before anyone else was awake).

Distracted, he doesn’t see the boulder Rhyhorn forms and throws at him in frustration, leaving him caught off guard when Sneasel tackles him to the ground to get him out of the way.

The attack sails harmlessly over his head, landing a little ways away.

After a moment he pulls himself back up, glaring at Rhyhorn.

He hears footsteps and looks over to see Giovanni walking over, taking care to avoid the ice.

“Apart from getting distracted, you did well. I don’t think any of you are hurt, correct?”

Silver tilts his head at the assessment, mulling it over. “No, no one’s hurt. But what do you mean? I messed up.”
Before Giovanni can answer, Rhyhorn breaks out of the ice, cautiously walking over to them. He stops just behind Giovanni, who sets a hand on him momentarily, before waving him off.

“You stopped him, albeit briefly, without any serious injury. That was all I asked for, you did well.”

“Briefly”, Silver repeats, looking up as a hand settles on his shoulder. “And he was still able to get an attack out.”

“Are you going to get distracted again?” Silver shakes his head. “So that’s another lesson you can take from this. And I didn’t expect you to stop him permanently.”

“Stop going easy on me.” Because that’s what he’s doing, these training matches and their accompanying challenges, while difficult, have no consequence when he messes up.

“I’m not. You asked me to teach you, that’s what I’m doing.”

“But I messed up.” He keeps his voice quiet, because Green’s still on the porch watching curiously, and he doesn’t want her (very biased) input. “Do something about it.”

“Where do you think you messed up?”

“He broke out, he was still able to attack, and it took longer than it should have.”

“Do you know why I had you do this?”

“No.”

Silver hears his father sigh before he says, “You had him stuck in place for a little over a minute. If this was a real fight how far away could you have gotten with Murkrow before he broke out? Far enough to not be followed, correct?” Silver nods slowly. “The point of this was to get you thinking about other ways to end a fight. Knocking out every opponent isn’t always an option. Sometimes they’re too strong or you don’t have enough time. Does that make sense?”

“Yes.” He doesn’t like the second lesson that he thinks is being implied here, but it does. “Is that it for today?”

“Yes. We can do this again tomorrow if it’s bothering you.”

Silver nods, waiting until Sneasel hops onto his shoulder before working his way up to the house.

Green’s holding a cup of coffee (with enough cream in it that it’s barely recognizable as such) and sitting quietly on a bench when he reaches her.

“Are you staying?” he asks almost immediately, wanting an answer before anything else because yesterday she’d been adamant about leaving and now she seems to have changed her mind.

She stares into her mug for a moment, before nodding, “For a little bit.”

“Thank you.” Sneasel hops off his shoulder to sit on the table in front of Green.

She shrugs, “Don’t really have anywhere else to be. And I should stick close to Pallet anyway.”

He nods as he sits next to her. “What changed your mind?”

“The Centers are pretty dull when you’ve been living out of them for two years, and I missed you.”
He leans into her side, setting his head on her shoulder as she adds, “How long has he been teaching you?”

“Started right before we went to Pallet.” With a battle that Silver had lost seemingly before it had even begun, again with no consequence.

She nods, taking a sip of coffee as Giovanni walks over.

The tension between them had apparently settled, much to Silver’s relief. He understands why it’s there (and if he’s honest, he’s not entirely certain Green wouldn’t still be this protective if he had gone home to a “normal” family), but it’s nice to not have to try to ignore them both being on edge.

“So you’re staying?” Giovanni asks, sinking into a chair across from them.

“If it’s okay.” Silver can feel her tensing.

Giovanni nods, “Is there anything you need?”

Unsurprisingly, she shakes her head, “I don’t think so.”

“Why don’t you go through your things and make sure.”

Green’s fingers tap twice against her knee before she gives in, “Alright.”

Silver shifts to let her up, and watches her slip back into the house. He gets up to follow her, more out of habit than anything, but as he heads for the door-

“Wait a minute, Silver.”

He turns back to his father, “Yes?”

Giovanni studies him for a moment, before, “What did you mean when you said to ‘do something’ about you messing up?”

“Nothing. I didn’t mean to say it.”

“That’s the second time you’ve gotten worked up over not getting in trouble for something, is there something bothering you?”

He slips his hands into his pockets, his gaze darting across the yard to where Rhyhorn’s lounging in a patch of grass that hadn’t been iced over.

“Why don’t you do anything when I do something wrong? I almost stabbed you a few weeks ago and you just shrugged it off, there should be some sort of punishment for that. And this isn’t the first mistake I’ve made in training either, you’re ignoring all those too.” Before escaping, something like his mistake this morning would have landed him in a pitch black, soundless cell until he was desperate for any form of sensation, painful or not (likely followed by a beating that would keep him from sleeping for the next week).

(And he doesn’t want to know what would have happened if he’d lunged at The Mask with a knife the way he had his father.)

There’s a hand on his chin, lightly turning his face to the side and he looks over to see his father kneeling next to him.

“I am never going to hurt you, Silver. You know that, right?”
“I do.” Something he’d realized fairly quickly in his first few weeks here, much to his relief; the list of people he trusts is incredibly short, he’d been glad to be able to add a second name to it.

There’s a glint of relief in Giovanni’s eyes as he says, “I didn’t do anything about the knife because you were sick and probably not thinking clearly. You didn’t take another one so I didn’t bring it back up.” Silver nods slowly as he continues, “As for mistakes in your training; you’re making a bigger deal out of them than you need to. You are a very good trainer, and I’m proud of you. But you’re being unfair to yourself with what you’re expecting.”

“But I need to get stronger.” It’s the only way Green’s going to let him help.

“And there’s nothing wrong with wanting that. But you also don’t need to dismiss everything because of one mistake. You were doing fine this morning until you got distracted.”

Silver reaches up and threads his fingers through his father’s, studying his hand; the scars on his knuckles, the long, narrow one across his palm, the watch around his wrist. It’s an easier target for his gaze than his face as he replies, “And you’re really not going easy on me?”

“I am teaching you the same way I would any other student your age.”

He turns that statement over in his mind, not sure how he feels about the fact that his age is a factor in all this. As he glances back at his father, another comment registers, “You’re proud of me?”

He squeezes Silver’s hand, “Yes. You’re a good trainer, you’re smart and independent. I wish you’d learned all that under better circumstances, but I am.”

“Thank you”, Silver mumbles, not sure what else to add.

Giovanni slips his fingers from Silver’s grip, and gently ruffles his hair, “You’re welcome. And thank you for telling me what was bothering you.”

Silver nods, before leaning back slightly as Giovanni brushes his bangs from his forehead, probably checking for the marks from last night (they’re gone, Silver had made sure).

“Your face’s all covered with dirt.” Silver lets him pull the handkerchief from his pocket. His voice is quiet as he adds, “What will I do with you, little rascal?”

“It’s Rhyhorn’s fault.” Silver tilts his head to keep the now loosening dust out of his eyes, very familiar with this routine from Green and Sneasel.

A smile tugs at the corner of Giovanni’s mouth as he shakes out the cloth and hands it back, “Go clean up. The two of you somehow went four days on pastries and cereal, we’re going to need to make a run to the store.”

“We had sandwiches in town”, Silver counters. “Once.”

“‘Once’ would be the issue”, Giovanni replies, sounding amused, before standing up and ruffling Silver’s hair again, “We’ll go in an hour. Get cleaned up, and let Green know, alright?”

“Okay.”
Before anyone pipes up about me making Gio too nice of a teacher or trainer:
He was a gym leader, which predates Team Rocket, both in this fic and seemingly in
canon. The position seems to require some amount of teaching skills, so there's no
reason to assume he can't be a decent instructor when he actually likes his student
And Gio may view pokemon as tools, but they're tools that need to like and trust him so
they listen, you don't gain the loyalty of a five hundred pound poisonous lizard through
fear, you gain it by providing something that's better than the alternative of being in the
wild. And he has a crobat in FRLG, if that's game!Silver's claim to redemption then I
get to use it here too
Basically, I think he can be decent, just frequently elects not to be, and as with so much
else in this fic, popular fanon interpretations can bite me~
Thanks for reading!
Green can’t let herself settle here.

She knows this.

The mansion is Silver’s home, not hers, and her deal with Giovanni lasts only until The Mask is dead.

But that doesn’t mean she dislikes waking up in the same (soft, clean) bed (that she knows no one other than her has slept in recently) every morning (even if that awakening is sometimes caused by the whole house shaking from an earthquake as Silver gets back on track with his training). Nor does it stop her from enjoying the other luxuries that come with this too-big house, like the tub in her bathroom (that’s only hers and doesn’t need to be shared) that she could lay flat on her back in if she wanted, or the seemingly endless supply of books spread through the building.

There’s also the fact that Silver seems genuinely happy.

Not relieved to have avoided punishment, not briefly celebrating getting away from pursuers, not forcing a smile to make her feel better; just happy.

He falls asleep in the living room with no apparent worries about being overexposed, reads things that aren’t textbooks, eats and goes to bed without (much of) a reminder, and seems to be putting more caution into his training (or he just finally has a teacher who cares about his safety).

Or rather, he’s acting like an eight-year-old boy should.

Giovanni, for his part, does seem to be living up to Silver’s claim of trying to get along with her; he offers to get her more clothes than the three outfits Silver had talked her into, had made no comment when a bottle of perfume that Green thinks matches what she remembers Mummy wearing had landed in the basket on said shopping trip, and lets her do what she wants around the house.

He also, most likely prompted by Silver mentioning their failed attempts, teaches her a handful of card games when she’s up late, unable to sleep.

(And shows her how to hide cards up her sleeves, and deal so she knows who has what, and how to actually take advantage of the small markings on the back of the one deck, and tells her with a glint of amusement in his eyes that it’s not really stealing if your target is already willingly risking their money when she points out her deal with Oak in a half-hearted protest.)

It’s also nice to have time to herself, in a room that no one’s going to be bothering her in, except maybe Sneasel if she hears the word “bath” one too many times.

Which is apparently what had happened today, as she sits behind Green on the bed in the room that is hers but isn’t, ears pricked for Silver’s quiet footsteps in the hall as Green finishes stitching up the first glove in the pair that’s going to be his birthday present (because he is getting something now that she knows the date, and she knows he’s not going to tell her if he wants anything, and his current pair really could use replacing; they’re worn out and probably getting too small).

Her own gloves are sitting next to her, being used as a template. Which means her already-frostbite-scarred fingertips are getting repeatedly pricked by the needle, and she’s starting to regret not just buying him a new pair.
Sneasel darts under the blanket just as a quiet knock sounds on the door, and Green quickly folds the quilt over her small sewing kit as she grabs the dark type (who does smell just a little too much like mud to gain anymore help in avoiding a bath then she’s already gotten) and carries her over to the door, ignoring the betrayed glare she gets.

“Looking for her?” Green asks as she opens the door to find Silver waiting quietly.

“Yes.” Sneasel lets out a hiss that they both know is completely bite-less. “She needs a bath.”

He holds out an arm and Green lets Sneasel go, watching as she climbs onto his shoulder. He scratches under her chin as he adds, “She’s just being dramatic; she’ll calm down.”

“So long as you’re the one bathing her”, Green points out, trying to dodge what might be an attempt at getting her help.

Silver smiles slightly as he nods, “Probably.” His eyes land on her bare hands and his brow knits, “What were you doing?”

“Fixing a hole in my glove, that’s all.”

She tucks her hands behind her back, he’s seen the scars a hundred times (and has some of his own) but that doesn’t mean she likes them getting attention.

He hesitates before asking, “If you wanted a break, do you want to come with? You don’t have to help, just talk?”

Translation: Silver wants to talk about something, but doesn’t want to actually say so. A habit she’d really hoped he’d have kicked by now.

She sighs, but nods. “If you want.”

Sure enough, once Sneasel’s actually in the tub of cool water she drops the dramatics, other than the glare she gives Green as Silver works soap in between her claws.

“Was there something you wanted to talk about?” Green asks finally, sitting on the counter.

Silver nods, studying Sneasel as he says, “I stopped with the research, is that okay?”

He’d stopped? On his own?

“That’s fine. Why’d you stop?”

“You weren’t asking for updates, and I wasn’t finding anything we don’t already know.”

“I was going to ask you to stop anyway.” If he’s feeling guilty over it she might as well tell him.

Silver looks up at her, looking startled, “Why?”

“Your last few updates had just been that you were only finding dead ends.” She shrugs, “It wasn’t going anywhere, you might as well be doing something you actually like instead.”

He looks relieved, sitting back as he says, “Okay.” Then after a moment, “What did you do with the feathers?”

“Hid them in Oak’s lab. He doesn’t know they’re there, but I don’t want to keep them on me now that I’ve got other options, and it’s not like I can’t get them back.” Send Ditty up to the attic while no
one was looking and she’d have them back in minutes, the trip to Pallet aside.

Silver nods again, “I haven’t told Father about them.”

Green hums in acknowledgement, not sure if Silver’s hinting that that should be changed or not. Technically telling him probably was a good idea; even if he didn’t know what they were for, Giovanni still has access to more resources than the two of them ever did to find out.

But she’s not sure she trusts him with the location of something that they know nothing about other than it being dangerous either.

She slides off the counter after a moment, not wanting to chance that particular debate getting started, “If you’re good I’m gonna go finish with the glove, okay?”

“Okay.”

She pauses in the doorway, glancing back, “Thanks, by the way. For getting him to let me stay.”

He smiles, “It’s nice to have you around more. So thanks for staying too.”

She returns the smile, then slips out and back into “her” room, and after a moment packs up the in-progress glove and slips her own back on.

She flops onto her back on the bed, studying the ceiling fan. She understands what Silver had meant about everything feeling off now. Even at the Center there still were things that needed to be done; travel plans to be made, supplies to get, check-ins with Professor Oak (that she’s technically still supposed to be doing). But now, while there are still plans regarding Mahogany to be made, nothing is urgent; she’s not going to go hungry because she over-slept or misjudged something.

Again; it’s temporary, but she’s still going to let herself enjoy it. She’s tried living like nothing could be enjoyed for fear of it vanishing and it had done nothing beyond make her miserable.

She stretches her arms out and her hand hits something hard by her pillow.

Confused, she picks it up, giving it a slight shake before opening it.

Inside is a butterfree knife with gold and brown handles. She pulls it out of the box, letting a smile tug at her lips as she flips it open with a gesture that’s a little too practiced, studying the dark gray blade.

So he’d been serious about getting her a better knife.

She knows when she’s being bribed, and this is even less subtle then the phone had been, but it’s a nice bribe.

And debatably a more practical one, she’s not even going to pretend that she expects Mahogany to go smoothly.
Chapter 19

They’d lied.

Silver had woken up around midnight and wandered out of his room to get a drink, only to overhear Giovanni and Green in the library quietly discussing plans for what had sounded like Green taking a trip to Mahogany to look into Pryce.

He knew she’d been planning to do that, and he knows Giovanni had planned to go there himself at some point, but neither of them apparently felt that he needed to know that those plans overlapped.

He understands.

Kind of.

They want to keep him safe, and there are a dozen other excuses they’ve both rattled off. They both mean well.

But they still lied.

And he’s still mad and conflicted, as he sits in the tree he’d climbed into after slipping out the back door for some air and a chance to think uninterrupted.

He’s a little ways into the forest, not so far that he can’t find his way back, but enough that-

That what?

They won’t find him? He knows they’re not going to hurt him (though Green is going to be mad, and he doesn't actually know how Giovanni will react), and either way, it’s not like they’ll have noticed he left yet (not that he’s planning on going anywhere). No, those nagging thoughts are useless paranoia based on rules that don’t apply here and he needs to get that into his head.

He shifts on the branch, leaning against the trunk as he goes over what they’d been talking about again-

Green’s going to Mahogany in a few weeks, to search Pryce’s house and gym.

And before all that, she needs a fake trainer I.D (because the one Oak had gotten her is in her real name for some reason, doesn’t he know people are looking for her?).

On a branch over him, he hears Sneasel moving around. She doesn’t like that he’d snuck out and is putting no effort into hiding it as she pointedly stares back in the direction of the house, but he’s not ready to go back.

He knows the forest is dangerous, and (despite Green’s too-late attempts to shelter him) he knows why, and there’s a small, reckless part of him saying that if he did wander further in and find one of the still overly-violent pokemon Yellow had mentioned, then maybe they’d both get the apparently necessary reminder that he can handle himself.

But he stays in his tree because he’s annoyed, not suicidal and he doesn’t know anything about how one of those things would be to take down.

Except that just leaves him where he started; uncertain what to do now.
Three years ago, if Green had tried to leave him out of a plan he’d have just followed her anyway, but that won’t work here. Going half way across Johto is very different from anything he’d snuck along on before, and she is right about him not being willing to simply vanish on his father (even if that’s basically what he’s doing now); he’s seen the veiled looks of stress aimed at the window in his room, and the way he’d seemed just a little off when he’d gotten back from Lavender a few weeks ago; hands lingering on his shoulders and face just a little longer than they needed to for the first day or two that he’d been home. Disappearing on him without a word would be cruel, and there’s no other way he could do it.

But he also just plain doesn’t want to run. He is so tired of running; of never knowing when he’d be sleeping or eating next, of every shadow being a cause for concern, of strangers always needing to be evaluated as threats, and following Green in secret will entail all of that.

He tucks his hands into the pocket of the sweatshirt he’d been sleeping in and tilts his head up to study the stars through the tree branches. He’ll wait another ten minutes and then go back. If nothing else, he knows enough to force a straight answer or two out of Green in the morning; even with her being as evasive as she is, he doesn’t see how she can get out of this.

A faint breeze picks up, tugging at his hair and brushing it against his face.

A completely mundane sensation, but something he’d obsessed over for at least a year once that stupid mask was finally gone and he’d clung to any reminder that it was like a lifeline. Like the time he’d seen his reflection in a creek and stared at the too-pale boy on the water’s surface until Green came to check on him, or when they both got sick because their response to rain had been to sit in it and enjoy the feeling of the cool drops, and the way Green had made a habit of poking him in the nose when he seemed too stressed.

He glances back at Sneasel, to find her studying him over her shoulder.

So much for her passive-aggressive display of indifference.

He holds up an arm and she climbs down into his lap, and that’s when he notices that she’s tense; ears pricked and her gaze directed at something further into the trees.

Not good.

Silver signals for her to climb onto his shoulder, and once she’s in place he shifts until he’s partially standing on the branch, scanning the dark woods silently as he gets ready to run.

Nothing moves.

He waits a full minute, then slowly works his way back to the trunk of the tree to get down. He doesn’t want to be jumping through the trees in the dark if he doesn’t have to.

He has to turn his back to get a grip on the tree, and that’s when the attack gets launched; a large boulder that he hears but doesn’t see, whistling through the air towards him.

He lets go of the tree and plummets to the ground, flinching when the rock hits the tree, and again when his ankle bends at an angle he knows it’s not meant to when he lands.

But there’s no crack, so it’s not broken, which means it can wait until he’s away from whatever he’d apparently woken up.

Ankle throbbing, he runs deeper into the trees for cover, hoping his opponent is too big to follow easily.
Two more rocks get thrown (at the same time, so there’s at least two things after him), and miss him as he digs for Murkrow’s pokeball.

It’s not there.

His throat feels tight as he tries to work out what could have happened; most likely he hadn’t actually grabbed it on his way out the door, and, given that the alternative is that he’d dropped it somewhere in the woods, that’s the answer he’s going with.

A glance over his shoulder shows three golem following.

His thoughts drift briefly to Giovanni’s own golem, and its nearly impossible to get through armor as he tries to come up with a plan. He already knows Sneasel probably won’t be able to do anything noteworthy to them, and he can’t get back in a tree right now, so going over them isn’t an option either.

Which leaves him with running back to the house, which sounds painful, but so does staying, and of the two options, it’s the one least likely to end in him getting buried alive under boulders.

At his quiet instruction, Sneasel freezes the forest floor, and he slides along the ice for some added distance and speed just as another rock sails past him.

As he sprints through the trees and the random patches of ice Sneasel forms to trip up their pursuers, trying to ignore his limp, he works out a route back to the house.

He hears a crash and looks back to see one rolling to the side, ice spreading over its eyes.

“Nice hit”, he pants out, smiling slightly at Sneasel’s smug sounding purr, until he notices the collapsed Golem starting to glow.

Scrambling, he ducks behind a thick tree, curling around Sneasel and planting his hands over his ears and shutting his eyes just as the whole patch of forest turns white and the sound of the explosive attack rips through the air.

The tree he’d hidden behind is old and big enough that the shock wave doesn’t send it toppling over, but the same can’t be said for several nearby and he’s up and moving again before he can be crushed.

Except now he doesn’t know which way he needs to go. Things look different enough in the dark already, but now his surroundings are completely changed and he has no idea which direction will take him back to the house.

He’s lost.
Chapter 20

“Can I have a sip?”

“It’s scotch, so no.”

Green’s lips flick up in a small smile that Giovanni doesn’t see as he sets the glass of coppery liquid back down, because his attention has been glued to the map of Mahogany spread between them for the past half hour.

They’re getting her a fake I.D for the trip whenever his contact gets back to him and tells him it’s done, and then she’s leaving at the beginning of next month, so everything until then is just last minute checks to make them both feel better (or to make Green feel better at least, she’s not sure why Giovanni’s being so meticulous about it), so there isn’t much of a reason to be going over the map again, especially this late, but she’d been up anyway and Giovanni seems to have given up on getting her to go to bed at decent hours.

The plan is to start in Mahogany, and to do her best to blend in with all the other trainers out for gym badges, and only to go digging in Azalea if Pryce turns out to be a dead end, because she can always try to work out a motive later to sate her curiosity, what matters right now is identifying and eliminating.

And “eliminating” is what they will be doing, because even if she didn’t secretly enjoy the idea of The Mask knowing the kind of fear she’d lived in for years, there’d been a target on the man’s back from the minute Silver had told Giovanni anything, and stopping him, in this case, is not a fight she thinks she’d ever want to bother with.

She pulls her legs up onto the couch, tucking them under her, and she’s about to ask him something when there’s a loud tapping on the window.

For a brief moment she’s back in a room she barely remembers, large talons breaking through glass to grab her, and she jumps back, a pokeball in her hand as she fights the urge to run; because she knows that’s not what’s actually happening and Giovanni really doesn’t need to see her panic (more than she just did).

That said, his reaction is equally noticeable; he’s gone completely still, a hand inside his jacket to grab what Green sincerely hopes is just a pokeball as he stares at the window with an expression she can’t read.

After a moment his eyes narrow and he stands up. Green watches as he walks over and opens the window, letting Murkrow in.

Had Silver started letting him out at night?

Except Giovanni’s gaze is trained on something out in the yard, and Green has a sinking feeling that Silver’s just done something incredibly dumb.

She waits until the bird is settled on Giovanni’s shoulder before walking over and peering out the window in time to see Sneasel disappearing into the trees.

“What’s he doing?” she murmurs, thinking back over the past few days because Silver isn’t above taking off when he’s upset, but she can’t think of anything that would have set him off.
“Doesn’t matter, we need to go.”

Giovanni’s already shutting the window and stepping away as Green nods. The forest is dangerous, and under different circumstances she’d be quick to point out whose fault the majority of that is, but this is very much the wrong time for that argument.

She follows him out of the house, taking a flashlight when offered, and out to the trees.

“Should we split up?” she asks, letting her gaze drift through their surroundings. The forest is much more intimidating at night.

“How well do you know your way around?”

“Not very”, she admits, matching his quiet tone. No point in waking anything up.

“Stay close then. And switch that light off if you hear anything getting close, we don’t need a fight.”

“Okay.”

After maybe ten minutes she notices something glinting in the flashlight’s beam on a tree and darts over.

It’s a small patch of ice, and despite the situation she snorts in amusement once she notices a small trail of them leading further into the forest.

At least one of them has common sense.

“Sneasel left a trail”, she calls, glancing back at Giovanni as he walks over. “She probably let Murkrow out too.”

The trail goes on for a ways, until they hear several large somethings crashing through the undergrowth.

They both take off toward the noise, following until something starts glowing, and Giovanni jerks her behind a tree just as an explosion tears through the forest.

Green’s ears are ringing as she steps away from him, disoriented.

“Golem then.” Giovanni sounds worried, but not surprised. “That’s one down at least.”

She’d be mad about his callousness if they weren’t after Silver.

There’s more caution to their movements as they continue, but there’s a clear trail to follow; Sneasel had iced over large chunks of the ground, and even if she hadn’t golem aren’t subtle creatures.

Finally, the outlines of two more of the rock types appear, just as one drops to the ground from what had looked like an ice beam.

Before the last one can do anything, Green sends Blasty after it, watching as a jet of water sends it crashing into a tree.

Her eyes land on Silver as he sinks to the ground, panting and clutching at his ankle. Sneasel sits down next to him as Green darts over. As much as she wants to tell him off for bolting like he had, he looks terrified, and clearly he’s hurt. Her brewing lecture can wait.

She sinks down in front of him, tilting his face up, he’s covered in small scratches from stray
branches. “Are you okay?”

“Ankle’s sprained”, he mumbles, pulling away.

Green nods, taking a deep breath to calm herself. He’ll need to be carried back, but so long as it’s really just a sprain he’ll be fine. Which means she feels a lot less guilty than she otherwise would as she asks, “And what were you thinking, running out here, at night, by yourself?”

Silver studies her for a moment, then his eyes dart to Giovanni for a few seconds before settling back on her, “You lied to me.”

“What?”

“You both told me you’d tell me about your plans for dealing with The Mask, but you’re working together. I heard you in the library, you’ve been hiding everything from me. Stop trying to shelter me, it’s my fight too, and I can handle myself!”

“And running into a forest that you know is dangerous is your way of proving that?” she snaps back, her tone harsher than she meant but now she’s frustrated with all three of them. They should have been more careful, he was never supposed to find out.

“I wasn’t trying to get attacked!”

“No, but you still shouldn’t have been out here!” Out the corner of her eye she can see Giovanni leaning against a tree, his face unreadable in the dark. Does he think Silver’s more likely to listen to her, or is he just saving a lecture for when they’re back at the house?

Silver curls his knees into his chest, no longer meeting her eyes, “I just needed to think, I was about to head back when they showed up. But please just stop with all the lying.” He glances back up, “I want to help, I want to know what’s going on. You don’t want me in fights; fine. But there’s no reason I can’t go with to help if you’re not planning on getting into one.”

She hates that she looks back at Giovanni for backup, but (even if she’d agreed with it) it had been his idea to leave Silver out, and considering how much she needs his help to go through with her current plans, now seems a poor time to start something by changing their arrangement without asking.

He sighs as he steps away from the tree, “Yes, there is a reason; Green will blend in with other trainers out on journeys for badges, you won’t. You’re too young, and if there is anyone still looking for the two of you they’ll be more likely to notice you if you’re together anyway, that’s why you split up in the first place, right?” Silver nods, studying the ground as he continues, “If you want to help it would need to be something you can do from here, and right now there isn’t anything, we’re just waiting for Green’s I.D to be done, and then she’s heading out.”

“But why didn’t you tell me anything?”

“You’re home, you shouldn’t have to do all this anymore.” Green’s voice is tight, and she bites her lip as Silver glares at her. “This is what you wanted, I’m trying to let you have it, and we’re both trying to keep you safe.”

She knows what he’s thinking; that that doesn’t matter and it shouldn’t change anything that he’s home, but she also knows he’s not going to say that in front of Giovanni.

Finally he takes a shaky breath then asks, “Will you tell me what you find there? And let me help if there’s more after?”
There won’t be anything to help with if they’re right about Pryce, just getting rid of him, which is entirely Giovanni’s job (which is fine, because Green wants him dead, but not necessarily on her conscience), but she doesn’t tell Silver that.

“Yes”, Giovanni says after a moment, sinking down next to Green, “We’ll tell you.” Silver’s eyes glint with relief, and Green’s slightly confused about how quickly Giovanni had given in, but she doesn’t say anything as he adds, “Are you ready to head back now?”

Silver nods, pulling himself up with help from Sneasel as Green and Giovanni both get up and Blasty disappears back into his ball.

He makes it about ten steps before he’s limping, and Giovanni beats Green to offering to carry him (which she’s more than fine with; she’s tired now that the adrenaline has worn off).

She watches as Silver settles on his back, exhaustion written across his face. Sneasel hops onto Green’s shoulder as they start back to the house, giving her an almost apologetic look.

Quietly she scratches behind the dark type’s ear in what she hopes is a comforting gesture. “Not your fault”, she mumbles, trying not to yawn.

Sneasel nuzzles her cheek, and Green’s pretty sure it’s meant as a repeat of her own reassurances.
Chapter 21

Giovanni is genuinely surprised that both children are still awake when they get back to the house, though Green stays just long enough to make sure he doesn’t need anything before disappearing into her room.

Silver is another story.

In the ten minutes it takes to wrap his ankle and clean the small cuts on his face Giovanni thinks he’s heard at least twenty quiet apologies.

“Silver, it’s fine.”

“But it’s not.”

So they’re back to this. He’d let Green say her piece in the woods and hadn’t added on, in the hopes of avoiding this discussion, and clearly it hadn’t worked.

“Yes, but you know that, so there’s no reason to do anything.” He lowers a disinfectant-soaked cotton ball from his face as he adds, “You’ve done nothing but apologize since we got back, clearly you’re not going to do it again, so there’s no point in dragging it out.”

Silver looks doubtful, still not meeting his eyes. Giovanni goes to set a hand on his shoulder and the boy flinches back, then tilts his head down, his face hidden by his hair. “Sorry”, he repeats, staring at the handkerchief that he’s been messing with since they got back.

He keeps his hands on the counter, where Silver can see them as he says, “You’re fine. Can you walk to bed, or should I carry you?”

“You can carry me.”

Carefully he picks him back up, feeling small fingers curl into the back of his jacket as they head to Silver’s room.

“Can you stay?” Silver mumbles before Giovanni can set him in bed.

“If you want.” Might as well, he’s not going to try to fool himself into thinking he’ll be getting any sleep after all this. He sinks down onto the bed, keeping Silver in his lap as he leans against the headboard, taking care to not disturb Murkrow, who’d decided to roost on it for the night. “Is there something else bothering you?”

Silver shakes his head, not looking up.

“You handled everything well.” When Silver glances up he adds, “You stopped two golem with just Sneasel, that’s impressive.” Two genetically modified golem, but if Silver hasn’t worked that out himself then he’s not going to bring it up.

“I guess”, Silver mumbles, curling closer. After a moment he says, “Can you tell me a story?”

“What kind of story?” His eyes drift to the bookshelves across the room. Sparsely stocked though they are, there’s a bit of a selection in the books that Silver’s scavenged from around the house.
“Really, he should take him to get some that aren’t decade-old volumes that weigh as much as Sneasel.”

“Something from… before.”

He tenses, but if Silver notices he doesn’t react. “Like what?”

“I don’t know, just something. I know none of it’s gonna come back, but I want to know more. If that’s okay.”

“Of course.” He takes a deep breath, trying to think. So many things he could go over; only a handful that he actually wants to think about. After a moment he says, “You used to lose things almost constantly. I think I needed to replace something almost once a week.”

“I still lose stuff a lot.”

“It was worse, believe me.” He shifts, leaning further back as he continues, “You and Sneasel were a handful; anything you couldn’t get into, she would for you. You two would play hide and seek at the gym, you’d forget who was supposed to be hiding and I’d end up having to look for both of you.” He feels the corner of his mouth twitching at the memories that no longer bring only agony.

But Silver had asked for a story, not idle musings, and after a moment of thought he finds one.

“We went to Kalos once, right before you turned two.” Some trip for a once innocent business that had been long since corrupted into little more than a series of fronts, and if the people he’d left in charge of it as Team Rocket expanded are any good at their job it has also been distanced from him over this past year. “We spent a month in Lumiose, then a few weeks in Cyllage.” Names that likely mean nothing to Silver, but at least he’s listening, and distracted.

Somewhere, buried in his desk most likely, there are photographs of a younger (happier) Silver, contentedly building a sandcastle with Sandslash. But this is the first time he’s asked about any of this, so Giovanni is hesitant to bring them up, worried he’ll push too hard.

“You seemed to enjoy the beach, but I think Sneasel hated it.”

“Too much sun?” he guesses, sounding sleepy.

“Most likely.”

Silver lets out a quiet laugh, before his expression darkens. After a moment he asks, “Does it bother you, that I can’t remember anything?”

“No.” His response is immediate, because while those gray eyes landing on him without a trace of recognition in that alley had hurt like a serrated knife through his chest, it doesn’t bother him, not in the way he’s sure Silver’s assuming; where it’s some issue that he’s holding against him (and if Silver not remembering him had been the cost of him not remembering being taken to begin with then he thinks it’s a fair trade, he’s starting to see the damage those particular memories have done to Green, he’s glad Silver was spared at least that).

Silver looks unconvinced, and he adds, “You’re alive, and home. That’s more than I let myself hope for.” He takes a deep breath as Silver’s grip on him tightens, “And I am sorry that we lied.” The apology sounds awkward, but Silver needs to hear it, needs to know that his intent had not been to hurt him.

Silver nods slowly, “I get why you did it.”
His tone makes it clear he’s still not happy about it, but he sounds too tired for more of a response.

It takes another hour, but Silver calms down enough to fall asleep, his head settling on Giovanni’s chest and his grip on his jacket loosening.

Not that Giovanni slips out from it, instead quietly running his hand in circles on the boy’s back as he tries to calm himself down.

Murkrow’s tapping on the window had set his heart racing in a panic that had no right being there, and that hadn’t left since he and Green had set off after Silver. Something that simple should not have his knuckles turning white on a pokeball, and it’s a weakness that will need to be removed, and that shouldn’t have been there to begin with.

There’s also Green’s reaction to puzzle over. She’d told him she didn’t handle birds well, which isn’t a surprise, but the speed with which she’d gone from calm to practically throwing herself across the room at the noise has him concerned; sending her to Mahogany could be a death sentence if Pryce has Ho-oh under his control, he doubts she’d be able to fight anything bigger than a pidgey.

But then, she’d beaten Sabrina, who specialized in exploiting fears, so perhaps she has better control than he’s giving her credit for.

Finally he makes himself slip out from under Silver, gently setting him down and pulling his blankets over him, then setting the gyarados doll closer. Despite how much Silver denies liking it, his fingers clutch at the toy the moment it brushes his still-gloved hands.

He’s slow as he stands up, not taking his gaze off Silver’s face. He’s not surprised by how easily he’d snuck out of the house, but that doesn’t make it any less unsettling. If Sneasel hadn’t sent Murkrow to get them Silver could very easily be dead right now; another casualty of-

No. No, he is not going down that path right now. Silver’s fine; there’s no point.

Chapter End Notes

hey, while we're on the subject of Kalos, anyone else notice the fun-and-not-at-all-angsty parallels between pokespe Gio and AZ?
“He just gave this to you?” Silver sounds fascinated as he scrolls through Green’s pokedex, eyes wide and curious.

“So long as I help with his research it’s mine, yeah.”

They’re in the park in Viridian where they’d gone her first day there, keeping themselves entertained while Giovanni picks up her I.D. from whoever his contact is.

He’s taking much longer than Green thinks he should, but she’s trying to ignore the voice at the back of her head saying something’s wrong; he’d be an idiot to try and do anything with Team Rocket while she’s staying with him, and Silver serves as the best insurance policy she’s ever going to have regarding him not hurting her.

Maybe internationally wanted criminals just make small talk sometimes, who knows?

She leans back against the table they’re sitting at, studying the clouds as Silver continues fiddling with the pokedex.

Mahogany feels so close.

A possible blow against The Mask.

His eventual end.

Closure.

The ability to look for her parents without worrying about endangering them.

It’s all so close.

(She just wishes it was all being helped along by someone easier to trust (except that’s unfair, Giovanni has plenty of reason to want The Mask dead, if he stabs her in the back it won’t be over this, or until it’s all over.))

At her feet, curled up in a snug ball is Nido, and Sneasel is perched in a leafless-tree a little ways away, keeping an eye on them both. A quiet, soothing, bordering-on-normal picture that gets interrupted when she spots a little girl with a blonde ponytail pausing under Sneasel’s tree, looking up at the less-than-well-hidden pokemon.

Probably nothing, but Sneasel’s also fairly identifiable. (But then, who’s going to be after Silver here?)

Silver notices her tensing up and pulls himself away from the pokedex. Green watches him scan their surroundings, before he turns back to the device.

“That’s Yellow. She and Sneasel like each other, but she’s not a problem.”

Yellow. The friend he wouldn’t admit to making, right.

She watches as Sneasel hops onto the girl’s shoulder, pointing up towards them, and then nudges Silver’s foot as the two approach.
He glares at her for a moment, before closing the pokedex and looking up. “Hi.”

He actually sounds sort of cheerful.

“Hey!” Yellow smiles, leaning forward slightly before glancing at Green. “Is this your sister?”

Silver hesitates, and Green answers with a “yes” before his pause can get suspicious, deciding that Giovanni could take as long as he wanted getting back after all, because she is not selling that act if he shows up before Yellow leaves. “You’re Yellow right?”

“Yep. What’s your name?” She holds out a hand.

“Green.” She shakes her hand and smiles.

Yellow grins back, before her eyes land on the pokedex resting on the table and go wide.

“Is that a pokedex?” Her gaze snaps back to Green, “Do you know Red?”

The look that crosses Silver’s face almost makes her laugh; a slightly softer version of the look of complete exasperation she gets from Giovanni at least once a day.

“Yes. And yeah, I do.”

“How is he?”

“Good, I think he’s in Pallet right now. If you guys are friends I could tell him you said hi.”

Yellow’s face turns a faint pink as she shakes her head, “No, you don’t need to.”

Interesting.

She smiles before turning back to Silver, “What are you up to then?”

“Not much.”

Sneasel jumps down onto the table, sitting next to Silver as Yellow asks, “Did you get the city figured out, or do you still need a tour?”

“I’ve got it worked out, thanks though.”

After a moment Yellow sits down on the other side of the table, and Green lets her attention drift as they talk. Yellow seems to have plenty of questions about Johto, and its pokemon, and Sneasel specifically, and Silver is surprisingly forthcoming with answers.

Which is good, he needs friends.

Still unable to shake the feeling that something’s wrong, Green scans their surroundings again, almost deciding that she’s just being paranoid, before her eyes land on a man with teal hair in a black jacket wandering over towards them.

He looks off, too much purpose in his gait, and he’s dressed a little too nicely. At her feet Nido starts to get up, picking up on her trainer’s nerves.

Behind her the conversation stops.

“What is it?” Yellow asks as Silver and Sneasel both look up.
“Not sure.” Green keeps her tone as light as she can as she taps Ditty’s pokeball, feeling the pokemon wrap around her wrist, morphing into a simple bangle until needed. “Just act natural.”

The knife in her coat pocket feels heavy as she works out her best guess of the situation.

He’s clearly not from The Mask, which leaves the remnants of Team Rocket (unless she’s ticked someone else off unknowingly), which means the smart thing to do is probably to call Giovanni.

Except someone had sent him, and Koga, Lt. Surge, and Sabrina are all supposed to be dead.

She needs answers, and there’s no guarantee that Giovanni will hand them over, which means she’s doing this her way.

When he reaches their table she stays still, and friendly as he asks, “You’re Green correct?”

She nods, slipping her phone out of her pocket and hiding it behind her hand.

“Excellent. Professor Oak gave me a message for you, can you come with me for a moment?”

“Sure.” She slides the phone to Silver, glancing over her shoulder as she follows the man away to mouth “call Giovanni”. He nods, looking worried. Yellow twists her ponytail, eyes wide.

Green’s not sure if them figuring out who the man is and where he’s likely from would be a good thing or not as she signals to Nido to stay with them.

“This is as far as I’m going”, she announces once they’re out of earshot, tucked in a small cluster of trees but still visible from the table. “And I know Oak didn’t send you.”

“Yet you came with anyway.” There’s a smirk on his face that she doesn’t like, and a closer look shows what she thinks is a knife tucked up his sleeve. “That’s a special kind of foolish.”

“I dropped a building on three of your superiors, so maybe don’t get overconfident.”

“Straight to the point then, sounds good. Where are the boys?”

“I don’t know.”

He clicks his tongue disapprovingly as he tosses a ball and a wheezing appears. “We both know that’s a lie. Where are they?”

“Why?”

His hand twitches towards the knife, and the wheezing shifts, but neither moves towards her. He sighs, “Look, I’m not here for you. I don’t particularly want to kill you at the moment, it’ll be a hassle, and I’d need to shut your friends up too. Tell me what I want and you’re free to go.”

Liar.

Out the corner of her eye she can see Silver lowering the phone and saying something to Yellow. Neither of them gets up from the table, but at least Giovanni might be on the way.

It’s not that she doesn’t think she can beat him, but she knows nothing about how Yellow will do in a fight, she’s pretty sure she won’t run just because she’s told to (Silver definitely won’t, still-sprained ankle or no), and there’s too much of an easy confidence to his demeanor to have her thinking he’s just some low level grunt.
And Giovanni showing up would probably ensure that no one would be going after her again. Which would be nice.

“Why do you want them?” She lets her voice shake, innocent and terrified is much easier to underestimate than demanding and in control.

Annoyance flashes in his eyes before he says, “There are some people who’d like to speak with them. Now tell me where they are.”

Something feels wrong, her breath is tight, almost painful.

She glances at the wheezing, and tries to hide the nervousness setting in. If it’s releasing fumes she only has a few minutes at this range before she passes out. It’s smart on his part; there are still wheezing loose in the forest, they’d get blamed long before he would if she died here.

“I told you, I don’t know. We don’t keep in touch.”

He folds his hands behind his back, studying her through narrowed eyes. On her wrist Ditty tightens, an attempt at reassurance or an act of nervousness. She’s going with the former.

Movement behind him catches her attention, and she chances a glance. Her eyes land on Giovanni, heading towards Silver and Yellow.

Looking away was a mistake, a hand slams into her throat, and she’s pinned against the tree, staring up at cold eyes as she digs her nails into his arm.

“You know something.” She’s apparently hit his limit, his voice is barely above a snarl. “Tell me where they are, right now, or I’ll have Wheezing drop all three of you.”

Between his hand on her neck and the wheezing she can barely breathe, but she lets a slow smirk inch its way across her face. “That’s a pretty terrible plan. All things considered.”

His eyes dart back to where she’d been staring a moment before, looking for a source of her apparent confidence, and Green sees a flash of recognition, then confusion and maybe a hint of fear as he registers Giovanni walking over to them as Silver and Yellow dart up the path, likely to the car.

Ditty takes the man’s distraction as an opportunity to squeeze under his hand and force him off Green. He twists back to stop her from slipping away but he’s not fast enough and she kicks him in the back of the knee, then pushes him while he’s off balance and drops down with him to pin him to the grass, keeping a knee on the arm with the knife.

She gets her own knife under his throat just as Giovanni reaches them.

“Who sent you?” she demands, out of breath.

He tries to pull away from the knife but otherwise doesn’t respond.

“Give her what she wants, Proton.” Giovanni sounds dismissive as he steps around them, slipping a ball off “Proton’s” waist and recalling the wheezing.

It doesn’t get the fumes out of the air, but at least they won’t get worse.

“Sabrina called me”, Proton says finally, “I don’t know if Koga and the lieutenant are with her. Sir.”

There’s not a trace of sarcasm in the word.
Green weighs his response as Ditty settles back around her wrist. Most likely Koga and Lt. Surge are with her, she doubts Sabrina has much reason to be going after Red and Blue otherwise.

Unless she’d thought getting Red out of the way would get Giovanni to go back to whatever remnants of Team Rocket she was apparently managing.

Would it?

She catches a whiff of cigarette smoke, and glances over to see Giovanni holding out a hand. She stares blankly for a moment before realizing he’s offering to help her up, and she slips the knife back into her pocket before letting him pull her up.

She keeps him between her and Proton as the smaller man stands up, debating if she should just bolt to Silver and Yellow.

Probably.

She stays, braced to run but in place. She doesn’t trust Giovanni to share whatever answers he gets if she doesn’t.

“And what is it that she wants?” Giovanni asks in that same bored tone. Proton glances at Green and he adds, “Just ignore her.”

“She’s looking for you. Wanted me to take the brats out before anything else got put in motion.”

Giovanni’s quiet for a moment, and Green fights the urge to hold her breath. Because what’s really stopping him from getting a hold of Sabrina and going back? A commitment to helping her that he certainly wouldn’t need anymore if he did? No. And Silver would stay no matter what he did at this point, she’s almost positive.

But then he laughs, a short, not-particularly-amused sounding laugh. “If she wants to talk tell her I’m here. And that she-”, he gestures to Green, “-gets left alone. Am I clear?” There’s a sudden edge to his voice that makes every inch of her want to run as far as possible.

“Yes, sir.” Proton looks slightly confused, but he nods. Then after a moment turns, walking away, apparently dismissed.

Green leans back against a tree, letting out a shaky breath. “Thank you.”

“You seemed like you had it under control.” He glances back at her as he adds, “But I wouldn’t recommend making threats you can’t act on.”

“What do you mean?”

“You had a knife to his throat. I’m just wondering if you would actually use it.” He steps away, heading back.

“Why?”

“I prefer knowing peoples limits, and thus far yours seem to be fairly lenient.” She glares at him as she catches up. “That’s not a insult.”

“Coming from you. Anyone else it would be.”

She could swear a smile tugged at his lips.
“Is it going to be a problem, that they know you’re back?” she asks, wanting to change the subject.

“Not for us, no. But if it’s going to bother you, you could make a few phone calls, give any warnings that you think are necessary. Sabrina is fairly level headed, but I can’t say the same for anyone she might have with her. Things could start picking back up.”

“Do you care?”

“No.”

At least he’s honest.

She tries not to roll her eyes as they reach the car, where Silver’s waiting, sitting on the hood with Nido and Sneasel perched next to him.

“Is Yellow okay?” Green asks as she sets a hand on Nido.

Silver nods. “I talked her into leaving. Just in case.”

She nods as she recalls Nido back to her ball and opens the car door. An envelope, presumably with her I.D, is sitting on her seat.

“Everything’s okay, right?” Silver asks as he slides off of the car. He winces slightly when he puts weight on his ankle, and glances between them.

“He won’t be coming back, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

Giovanni makes it sound so simple, like they hadn’t just been discussing how far the effects from this could go. But Silver nods, looking reassured, and no matter how this plays out none of it is going to affect him, so Green leaves it; simply nodding in agreement.

“Yep, everything’s fine.”

They’re halfway back to the house before she realizes Giovanni hadn’t actually turned down Sabrina’s request for him to return.
“Brick break.”

Sneasel darts out of the way of the attack before Silver’s even finished giving an order to dodge, settling between Sandslash and her trainer, bouncing back and forth in what Giovanni’s sure is an attempt at hiding how winded she must be at this point. Between the two hits she’s taken and the sandstorm currently raging around them there’s no way she’s not.

Still, he’d given Silver the option of calling the match if he thinks it’s necessary, and the boy has yet to say anything.

He snaps his fingers and Sandslash rolls in for another swipe at Sneasel.

“Feint attack!” Silver’s quick with the counter order.

Sneasel hits the ground type in the stomach and sends him briefly stumbling back, but he still lands his own attack, catching her in the side.

Her reaction is as expected; hissing and jumping back again, but Silver pales slightly, his eyes widening with worry. He doesn’t handle Sneasel getting hurt very well, a common enough problem for younger trainers, and unsurprising given his reactions to every other mistake and slip up in training.

With Sneasel still off balance, he takes the opening to possibly end this. “Earthquake.”

Sandslash jumps into the air, flipping once as Giovanni steps back in a practiced motion, bracing himself before the pokemon slams into the ground with enough force that Sneasel gets knocked off her feet and Silver nearly follows.

“I think that calls it, then”, he says as the storm dies down. “Unless you wanted to use Murkrow?”

He can see the irritation burning in Silver’s eyes as the boy shakes his head, recalling Sneasel to her ball with a quiet murmur of praise before she can get up and worsen any injuries. “No.” He shifts, studying the ground, “I am making progress, right?”

“You are. You’re making better decisions, and you’re getting less worked up when something goes wrong.”

Silver nods, still looking put out. After a moment he looks up. “Thank you.”

“Of course.” He recalls Sandslash then walks over, setting a hand on his shoulder. “Come on, let’s go in.”

Silver follows quietly, but the annoyance is gone from his face, replaced with concentration, as he tries to think his way through the battle and to a different outcome.

Green’s either still in bed or keeping to herself, and the kitchen is empty as they go back in. Silver pulls a carton of juice from the fridge and waits as Giovanni hands him a glass.

“What do you want to eat?”

The boy’s eyes flick briefly to the box of sugary cereal that Green has made a habit of looking him in the eye as she adds to the cart on every shopping trip, before he shrugs. “It doesn’t matter.”
After a moment, Giovanni hands him the box (let him be a child) and pours a coffee for himself as Silver puts his breakfast together and heads to the table.

He leans against the counter, studying Silver over the rim of the mug for a moment. “Your birthday is next week.”

Silver goes very still, and Giovanni wonders if bringing it up had been a bad idea, before he hears a quiet response of “oh”.

“Is there something that you’d want?”

He puts a slight emphasis on “want” because Silver has a habit of only addressing needs (and even then barely) unless prompted and he’s trying to get him to break it.

“I don’t need anything.”

Giovanni hides a sigh before walking over; not sitting at the table, but leaning against the wall near it to give Silver space in case this conversation ends up being too much.

“You’re allowed to want things.” If someone had told him seven years ago that he’d need to remind the little boy who’d torn into presents with an almost impatient eagerness of that fact he’d have laughed, but Silver simply stares blankly at him.

“Why does it matter?”

How had Green talked him into that doll?

“I would like to get you something. It’s been years since this was a date I could celebrate, and I’d like to let you have… something normal.” What he’d been thinking was “a birthday he could actually remember” but this isn’t the time to play that card.

“It doesn’t need to be anything big: a scarf, a book, a new coat. Provided it stays out from under your pillow I’ll get you a knife.” He wishes he had a more appealing list to rattle off, but Silver has no real interests to cater to.

Unless he offers to take him to catch something, but perhaps that would be better saved for when it’s warmer.

But either way, it’s been seven years, he is getting the boy something.

“You don’t have to give me an answer right now, just something to think about.”

Silver’s head tilts, and he studies his bowl, his brow furrowed.

“Could I have a watch?” He’s quiet for a moment before adding, “It’s more practical than anything else I can think of.”

Giovanni doubts that that’s actually something Silver wants, so much as an attempt at dropping the subject, but his choice of words does seem to imply some mental list that he isn’t willing to share; maybe turning him loose with cash for a day would be more productive.

But a watch is certainly doable, and he’d answered the question, which is in itself progress.

“Of course, if that’s what you want.”

Silver nods, standing up and starting to pick up his dishes, before setting them back down and
padding over to wrap his arms around Giovanni’s waist.

He tenses up, caught off guard by a much more open act of affection than he’s used to from Silver, before slowly sinking down to his knees to close his arms around the boy.

Silver leans against him, his breath shaky.

“Everything okay?”

He feels more than sees Silver’s slow nod. “Yes. Just… thank you.”

“For?”

Silver shakes his head as he takes a step back, letting Giovanni’s hands stay on his shoulders.

He takes the moment to study his face; the way there’s a bit more light in his eyes than when he’d found him, more color in his cheeks, and there’s more than just skin and bone under his hands. Physically he’s almost fine now; he might have even grown an inch.

He presses a kiss against Silver’s forehead, then stands up, gently ruffling his hair. A very small smile darts across Silver’s face.

“Well, you’re welcome, for whatever it is.” He drops his hand. “Don’t forget to take care of Sneasel”, he adds as Silver picks his bowl back up.

“I won’t.”

Less than a minute after the boy leaves the room, the phone in his pocket vibrates. He pulls it out already knowing what he’ll find, and sure enough it's the same number from Vermilion that it's been every other day this week.

He drops it back into his pocket without a second thought.

They can wait.
Chapter 24

After the near miss with the knife Giovanni had made a point of not disturbing Silver while he was asleep, outside of carrying him up to his room on occasion. That, and the fact that Green’s rarely up before him meant that he could usually get up whenever he wanted. A small but very much appreciated luxury.

So when he’s lightly shaken awake an hour earlier than usual, his first thought is that something is wrong, and his fingers close quickly around the offending hand as his eyes open.

“Sorry! Sorry, it’s me. It’s okay.” Green’s eyes are wide, her tone apologetic as she sits back to let him up.

Silver lets go of her arm, looking up through the mess of his bangs as he asks, “What is it?”

She holds out a small package. “I wanted to give you this, and then I’m taking off for a few hours, there’s something I need to do.”

“What’s it for?” He slips the package from her fingers, studying it.

Green blinks twice, looking startled. “Your birthday’s today. Giovanni told you… right?”

Oh.

“I forgot”, he mumbles. He also hadn’t expected her to do anything, which he realizes now was hilariously naive; of course she’d gotten the date from his father.

Cautiously he undoes the wrapping, and two black gloves fall into his lap.

“Yours seem worn out, and your hands are probably getting too big. Plus that fabric’s thicker, so they should be warmer.” She hesitates then adds, “Try them on while I’m still here though. I want to make sure they fit.”

Silver nods, still caught off guard. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. And happy birthday.” She tilts her head, smiling as she brushes his bangs from his face.

He lets a small smile work it’s way across his face as he switches the gloves. The new pair fits fine, and she’s right that they’re warmer. And softer.

“Where are you going?” he asks as he opens and closes his hands, trying to get used to the thicker fabric.

“Pallet. I need to pick something up. And I want to let you two have today by yourselves.”

“You don’t need to go.”

She shrugs, standing up. “Believe me, when you have more friends you’re getting a party whether you want one or not, but I need to go do this, and I’ll be back by dinner anyway so if you want a cake I can grab one.” He shakes his head, because any pastry Green buys is guaranteed to be nauseatingly sweet, and she grins, “Or not.”

She steps back, towards the door, as she adds, “But either way, I won’t be back too late, just relax,
have fun. And brush your hair, it’s a mess.”

He sticks his tongue out and she laughs as she slips out.

But he follows her advice; running a brush through his tangled hair until it’s smoother, then sinks onto the couch by the window, studying the gloves as he tries to talk himself into going downstairs, instead of back to sleep.

He tugs experimentally on the cuff of one glove, folding it back slightly, and he’s not surprised to find his name spelled out in scarlet thread on the inside.

Finally he makes himself get up and wander to the living room, where he finds Giovanni sitting by the fireplace, reading, with a cup of coffee sitting on the table in front of him.

“Good morning”, he says, hopping off the last step.

Dark eyes flick up to him as the book closes and a small smile tugs at his father’s lips. “Good morning. Did you sleep well?”

“Yes.” He pads over, stopping when Giovanni holds out a small box.

He takes it from him, fingers hesitant on dark, polished wood as his eyes dart back up to his father’s in an subconscious request for permission.

“Happy birthday, Silver.” His voice sounds tight, and there’s something in his eyes that Silver can’t read as he adds, “Go ahead, open it.”

Silver nods, gingerly pushing the lid open to find a watch with a black band, and metal face.

Like he’d asked for.

More to sate the note of almost eagerness that had been in his father’s voice at the time than anything else, but still; it is what he’d said he’d wanted.

At this point that shouldn’t be surprising, but it is.

He tugs it out and sets the box down, taking more care than is really needed as he examines the trinket.

It’s not the first gift he’s gotten from him, that title goes to a thick blanket Giovanni had caught him messing with in a store their first week in Viridian (and had spent close to twenty minutes convincing him he could, in fact, have), but it is the first given just as a gift, with no need or practical reasoning behind it.

“That’s what you wanted, right?”

Giovanni’s question pulls his attention from the watch, and he looks back up, nodding. “Thank you.”

“Of course.”

He looks back down, and feels warm fingers brush through his hair. He takes a hesitant step forward, then leans in, letting his head settle on his father’s shoulder when he meets no resistance.

“Are you okay?”

Silver nods, and lets himself get pulled into the chair, curling up in Giovanni’s lap as warm arms
close around him.

It’s quiet; his fingers still tight around the watch as he tries to keep his breathing even.

He has no reason to be crying right now, why are his eyes itching?

“Thank you”, he repeats. “For everything.”

Because four months ago he’d still been partially convinced that there was nowhere to go home to, that he’d forgotten everything because there was nothing to remember, and now he is home, curled up in front of a fire; safe, and warm.

(And having a birthday; that strange, fantastical concept that a younger him had been convinced Green was making up to humor him.)

There’s a hand on the side of his head, fingers brushing his hair and holding him close as Giovanni replies, “You don’t need to be thanking me, Silver.”

He doesn’t respond, not sure how to put his reasons into words, instead rubbing his eyes, trying to keep the motion subtle and likely failing miserably, before turning his attention back to the watch in an attempt to clear his head.

“Do you want me to help you set that?”

He glances up before nodding and handing it over; watching and listening closely as Giovanni walks him through setting the watch, and then it’s around his wrist, slightly awkward with his glove but tucked securely under his sleeve.

The new pressure is odd, but the leather band is smooth, and warm from all his fidgeting with it.

He sinks back against Giovanni, letting out a slow sigh.

“Are we doing anything today?”

“Was there something you wanted to do?”

He curls closer in response and hears a quiet laugh.

“Alright then.” He feels him shift to pick the book back up, and Silver sits up enough to see the pages as he opens it.

It’s a strategy guide for battles, with enough complex terms and charts that he needs a minute to decipher it all; hesitantly placing a finger on the page to stop Giovanni from turning it to soon.

“Does this make sense to you?” He sounds surprised, and it probably is information that should be over his head.

But it’s not, so he nods as he lowers his hand, letting him turn the page and settling in as he feels a hand squeeze his shoulder.

“Let me know if something doesn’t”, is all Giovanni says in response. Silver glances up to see a smile flicking briefly across his face as he turns back to the book.

He’s not sure how long he stays curled up there; listening to calm, patient explanations when he finds something in the book that doesn’t make sense, and eventually dozing off, lulled by the steady sound of his father’s heartbeat.
What he does know, is that when Green gets back she has a (thankfully small) cake, and a smirk that tells him he should have expected this.

(And judging by the change Giovanni didn’t let her return when they both thought he wasn’t looking, she hadn’t been alone in her scheming.)
Chapter 25

I guess we should get going with that whole "murdering Pryce" thing huh?

Giovanni drove her out to New Bark Town.

Which is much more help than Green was expecting.

Even if the trip had been down back roads that his car was very much not meant for, and that she doubts are on the maps of anyone not dealing in stolen pokemon, but still, she appreciates the gesture. And the main roads are probably clogged with traffic anyway.

It’s noon by the time they reach the small town, and she has two hours to burn before her train leaves, so at Silver’s suggestion they stop for lunch before splitting up; at a small restaurant by the water, sitting out on a deck. Not the best place to be, given the slight chill in the air, but at least they’re mostly alone.

She takes a slow sip of her tea (it’s not caffeinated, she’s anxious enough), trying to work up her nerves enough to hand over the pouch in her pocket.

“How long do you think it’ll take?” Silver asks, studying her over his half eaten meal.

“It should take, what, three days to get to Mahogany?” She glances at Giovanni for confirmation, and he nods.

She looks back at Silver, “So three days to get there, two or three days of scouting, then searching everything, and then if I don’t need to go to Azalea, I’ll be back in two weeks.”

He nods, and she can tell he’d still rather be coming with from the way his jaw’s set, but he’ll get over it.

Taking a deep breath, she glances around to make sure no one’s paying attention then pulls the small cloth bag out of her coat pocket and holds it out to Giovanni.

He raises an eyebrow as he reaches for it. “What’s this?”

“They’re feathers from Ho-oh, and I think Lugia. I stole them when we escaped.” Silver’s head snaps up, his eyes wide. “If he still has the birds then he’s probably replaced them by now, but I remember they were important. I’d been hiding them in Professor Oak’s lab, but they’re probably safer with you. And you might have an easier time figuring out what they’re for than I will.”

There’s a glint of surprise in his eyes as he tucks the bag into a coat pocket. “I’ll look into it.”

She nods, taking a last sip of her drink before standing up. “I should get going.”

Silver’s out of his seat and wrapping his arms around her waist before she can do anything else. “Be careful.”
She pulls him closer, squeezing enough that he squirms in protest, before saying, “I will be. It’ll be fine, don’t worry.” She steps back, keeping an arm around his shoulders slightly longer than she needs to, before letting him go and turning to Giovanni with her hand held out. “Thank you.”

His hand closes around hers, warm and firm. “Of course. Check in when you get there.”

“I will.”

With a final, hopefully reassuring, smile to Silver she takes off, jigglypuff bag over her shoulder and a forged train pass in hand.

Green had only ridden a train once before; a quick trip from Lavender to Saffron when she had cash to spare, taken out of curiosity. She’d hated it; too confined, too many people, too much noise, but she’d written those problems off as her having only been free for a year and a half, and surely they have to be gone by now.

They are not.

She taps her foot on the floor, staring out the window at the trees shooting by as they go through a brief stretch of above ground track, trying to keep herself calm. Just the one train ride today, to Violet, then one more tomorrow to Ecruteak, and then she’d be back to traveling on foot.

There would still be two rides back to New Bark Town to get picked up, but she’s not going to think about those right now.

Instead, she forces her thoughts to an arguably less pleasant topic; the apparently growing chances of Team Rocket reforming, with or without Giovanni.

She’d called Blue and Red after Proton had cornered her, and while neither of them had had any issues, as of Red leaving Pallet again two months ago they’d both been on the move, as opposed to sitting around in one spot, so it didn’t really mean anything other than they were difficult to track.

(And, really, if she’d been sent after the three of them, she’d start with her too regardless. Prior to Silver coming to Kanto there was no one who’d notice her vanishing in much less than a week.)

But they had both promised to be on guard, and to alert the remaining gym leaders if anything else happened, though they’d all be keeping quiet for now.

No point in causing panic.

As for Giovanni…

She’d spent the past two weeks thinking it over, before finally deciding that she was going to continue as planned. She’s in too deep to bolt, doesn’t want to hurt Silver, and at the very least she doesn’t think he’d do anything while she’s still an immediate factor. So she has until The Mask is dead to work out a better plan.

Finally the train rolls into the station at Violet and she tries not to run off.

Her eyes drift around the city as she leaves the station. She’s been here before, but only briefly owing to the large population of bird keepers.

But, if she can ignore the pidgey and spearow everywhere, it is a pretty city. And not particularly crowded either.
Her breath is shaky as she sets off to find a hotel. It’s not late, but this isn’t a city she wants to socialize in.

And tomorrow’s going to be a long day.
Chapter 26

Silver’s half-asleep on the couch, leaning against Giovanni and clinging to the arm he has wrapped around him. The only noise is the occasional turning of a page in whatever book his father is currently reading, and he’s hovering on the brink of a deeper sleep until Giovanni’s phone rings. It’s just a quiet buzzing, but it’s enough to jerk him awake.

“Is it Green?” he asks, sitting up as Giovanni pulls it from his pocket.

“No.” He studies the screen for a moment, before sighing and answering.

Silver shifts away, trying to read his expression. He looks more annoyed than worried.

Which is good.

Hopefully.

He can’t hear the person on the other end, but after a moment Giovanni stands up, walking out of the library, into the hall.

Silver hesitates, not sure if he should follow or not. He’s curious, and still isn’t sure he’s always getting full answers, but if he was supposed to overhear this call then Giovanni probably would have stayed.

His thoughts drift to the man at the park, who’d been after Green. Vague answers and reassurances hadn’t stopped him from putting two and two together; he knows why he was there. If this has to do with that…

He slides off the couch, creeping across the room to the door and stopping just enough to the side to be out of sight.

“I’m not taking a trip out to Vermilion just to make you three feel better. You have my answer.”

There is a sharp edge to Giovanni’s voice that Silver does not like, and has to remind himself isn’t being directed at him.

After a moment he hears another response, “How long have you been here?”

Then, “I’ll be there in an hour. Make it worth my time.”

There’s nothing after that, and Silver realizes the call had ended in time to dart away from the door, not quite making it back to the couch before Giovanni’s back in the room.

“How much of that did you hear?”

Silver freezes mid-step, tense as his fists clench.

He hears a faint sigh, followed by, “You’re not in trouble, I’m just asking.”

He makes himself take a deep breath as he turns around. “You’re going into town?”

“We are, yes. Go put something warm on.”

If he’s going with it can’t be that bad.
“Right?”

“Okay.”

Forty-five minutes later he’s getting dropped off at a bookstore in Viridian.

“How are you going to be?” he asks as he takes the small stack of cash Giovanni’s offering, somewhat confused by its presence.

“A coffee shop two blocks down. It shouldn’t be more than an hour, but if you need me you can come find me. Otherwise stay here and I’ll be back for you when I’m done, okay?”

“Okay. Um—” he holds the cash up “—what am I supposed to be getting?”

“Whatever you want. And keep Sneasel out, alright?”

He nods, letting the pokemon in question climb onto his shoulder as he steps back, but he stops, staring at the ground. “Does this have to do with the guy who was after Green?” He needs to know. Even if he doesn’t want to.

“Yes.” He feels a hand settle on his shoulder and looks back up. “Nothing’s going to change, alright? They just want to talk, and I want to get this over with, that’s all.”

“Okay.” He bites his lip, he doesn’t like this but every other question about Team Rocket has gotten him an honest answer, he doesn’t see why that would change now. “Bye.” He makes himself smile as he slips out from under his hand.

Giovanni gives him a small smile and a nod, before heading down the street.

Silver waits a moment, watching him leave as he slips the cash into his pocket, before making himself open the door to the store.

His eyes dart around as he wanders further in, not wanting to attract attention by freezing in the doorway. Where’s he supposed to go? His first thought is reference books, but there are plenty of those at the house, and he’s probably supposed to be getting something non-educational anyway.

A wall towards the back is covered in pastels and cartoony pictures, and he supposes that’s where the books for his age range are, but the thought is nauseating so he picks a random section and works his way through the store from there.

A strategy which works until a staff member politely guides him towards the “children’s section”, giving him a smile that he’d learned to associate with well-meaning adults who didn’t think he should be “down that dark alley” or “climbing that tree”, and he knows any argument is going to be a lost cause. Apparently whatever section he’d wandered down wasn’t “age appropriate”.

Now left surrounded by books that he doubts will hold his attention, he makes himself spend a few minutes browsing, just to ensure he’s been forgotten about.

At some point Sneasel dozes off on his shoulder, climbing into the hood of his sweatshirt before wrapping her arms around his neck and drifting off.

In the interest of letting her get a nap, he grabs a book that doesn’t look completely terrible off a shelf and heads to a set of chairs by a window to sit down for a few minutes.

He makes it through the first chapter with no interruptions, and more interest than he really wants to
admit, but when he briefly glances up his eyes land on someone he very much doesn’t want to see: Professor Oak.

He’s just browsing, but Silver doesn’t feel like talking right now, so he quietly closes the book and stands up, debating if he wants it or not. He had been told to get something, sort of, but getting in line increases his chances of being noticed…

“Silver?”

Too late.

He looks back over to see Oak heading towards him, and he reaches back to nudge Sneasel awake. She yawns, glances around once, then climbs back onto his shoulder.

“Hi Professor.”

His stilted greeting gets him a warm smile in return, and a nod directed at Sneasel. “Is Green with you?”

He shakes his head. “She took off a few days ago, I think she said she’d be back next week if you’re looking for her.” If everything went according to plan at least.

Oak nods, studying him for a moment. “And how are you doing?”

“Good…” He inches back, not sure how to leave without seeming rude.

“I won’t keep you if you’re in a rush.” Another smile, then, “It was good seeing you.”

He nods, then turns towards the checkout. Thinking over the book had gotten him hung up, he may as well get it.

He glances back at the Professor as he gets in line to see him talking to a boy about Green’s age with spiky brown hair. What was her other friend’s name? Is that him?

It’s a relief to get out of the store, and he tries not to rush towards the restaurant Giovanni had mentioned. It’s cold enough that no one else is out, and the brief walk is kind of nice.

The cold air also perks Sneasel up, getting her off his shoulder and darting around on the sidewalk as he walks.

He spots the coffee shop across the street, and he’s about to dart across when he realizes Sneasel had continued up to the edge of the building next to him, looking into the space between it and the next. Keeping his steps quiet, he walks up behind her to see what has her attention, and his eyes land on a man with blonde hair, sunglasses, and a dark green jacket sitting at a table in the alley.

The air reeks of cigarette smoke, and the man turns his head towards him as Sneasel gets back on his shoulder.

“Need something kid?”

“No. Just getting her.”

Something feels off, he’s not sure what but he should leave.
“What’s your name?” The man’s still studying him, and Silver takes a step back.

“What’s yours?”

A smirk works it’s way across his face. “You don’t need to know that.”

“Then you don’t need mine.” There’s a thought at the back of his mind that Silver doesn’t like, but it makes sense; four other gym leaders in Team Rocket: the scientist who left and three others whose names he can’t think of, and he’s starting to think this man is one of them. Maybe he’s keeping watch for Giovanni and whoever he’s meeting.

The man’s eyes flick to Sneasel, and Silver decides that’s a cue to leave so she doesn’t get twitchy, taking another step backward before turning and walking across the street.

It’s probably rude, but he doesn’t want to pick a fight.

He pauses outside the coffee shop to glance back again, but the man seems to be ignoring him.

Letting out a slow sigh, he pushes the door open, stepping in out of the cold.

His eyes land on Giovanni sitting in the back, talking with a woman with long black hair, and he catches his attention briefly, before walking up to the counter.

He’s not nervous about what they’re discussing.

He doesn’t need to be.

Nothing’s changing.

Giovanni said so.
He’d ignored their calls for two weeks, so it’s not exactly surprising that there’s tension at the table when Giovanni sinks into a chair across from Sabrina. She’s sitting far too still, even for her, and studying the art on the walls with too much interest.

“Well, it’s not exactly surprising that there’s tension at the table when Giovanni sinks into a chair across from Sabrina. She’s sitting far too still, even for her, and studying the art on the walls with too much interest.”

“He’d ignored their calls for two weeks, so it’s not exactly surprising that there’s tension at the table when Giovanni sinks into a chair across from Sabrina. She’s sitting far too still, even for her, and studying the art on the walls with too much interest.”

“Do the other two not feel like joining us?” he asks, settling in for what’s going to be an unpleasant talk.

“Koga’s managing things in Vermilion, Surge is across the street.” She sounds pleasant, at least. But that’s not going to last. His answer hasn’t changed.

Curious that they’re bothering with keeping watch though. Are they expecting him to sell them out? No, he wouldn’t have been told. It’s likely just paranoia.

“What is it that he’s managing?”

“A lot of people came back, once there was a point to return to. The warehouses are all almost untouched; police only found a few of them. Shipments could be back up and running in a few weeks at most, I know we lost both labs but they could be replaced. Apart from Blaine and the birds being gone, we could pick up where we left off in a matter of months.”

An impressive amount for them to have managed by themselves, he’ll admit that. But she’s missing how much Blaine and the birds being gone cost them (even if the birds’ purpose has been rendered fairly useless by this point (Mewtwo’s original one even more so)); years worth of research destroyed when Blaine had fled, an equal amount wasted with the birds released, and while he’s not sure what happened to Mewtwo, the activity around Cerulean had ceased as quickly as it started. Perhaps the creature simply couldn’t last outside of a sterile lab.

He leans back, studying the opposite side of the street. Sure enough the lieutenant is in an alley, working his way through a cigarette.

“So what is it you’re looking for? Permission? I’ve already told you I have no intention of going back at the moment.”

“To Sabrina’s credit her expression doesn’t change. “Why not?””

“Something else takes precedence right now. I don’t care what the three of you do, but it will be without me.” Once he’d have scoffed at the idea of Team Rocket existing without him; now he just needs them out of the way, and if this is what will do it, so be it.

“Does that ‘something else’ involve the girl?” There’s a note of irritation to her tone, and he almost smirks.

“I need her for a part of it, yes.” There’s no point in denying it. The psychic won’t go digging through his thoughts, she knows better, but that doesn’t make her easy to lie to. “Do what you want with the boys, but she gets left alone.”

Well-manicured nails tap on the table. She doesn’t like it, he can tell.
Too bad, he’s handing everything else over; she can give up petty revenge.

“What are you after? You could come back once you have it. Or we could help. You’re letting one failure overwrite years of success?”

Several failures. But his own are included so he doesn’t press the point.

Especially when she raises a decent one along with it.

He can see how it could be made to work.

He won’t really need to play nice with Green once The Mask is dead, and yes if it isn’t Pryce there will be more work to be done, but the end result will still be the man being revealed and killed.

Silver would likely prefer he kept up their truce, but it wouldn’t be as necessary.

He could go back.

Pull strings from far enough away and he might not even need to find a way of justifying it to him. He’d already told him there was a chance of someone else reforming it all anyway.

And Sabrina isn’t wrong; a few months of shipments of whatever was left in the warehouses and what could be collected alongside it to old buyers and there’d be enough funds for new labs to be constructed. Blaine could be replaced; there will always be someone willing to compromise morals for funding.

Kanto could be back under his control in less than a year if everything was played right.

All he’d need to do is go back, and he’d have all that power at his disposal again.

Out the corner of his eye he sees a mess of red hair out the window.

He’s not surprised Silver didn’t last the whole hour in the bookstore, what is surprising is the bag dangling from his hand.

He pauses outside for a moment, before pushing the door open, and briefly catching his eye before wandering to the counter to order something.

His thoughts drift to the glint of fear that had been a near constant in Silver’s eyes those first few weeks, and how much progress he’s made since then.

Going back would at best jeopardize all that, if not out right undo it; he’d be slipping right back into a role he’d done his best to conceal from Silver.

He can’t.

Whether he wants to or not is irrelevant (and not a question he has an answer to), he can’t do that to Silver. The boy has seen too much of the harshness of the world, he deserves a respite, not to be dragged back in.

"If I’m ignoring all that you three did, why am I passing everything on to you?" Before she can answer he adds, “Bring Team Rocket back, or shred its remnants and go back to your gyms; I don’t care. I don’t need your help, and you will not be getting mine.” Admittedly, he has little faith in their abilities to resurrect the organization without him, but still. They’ll be busy and out of his way, that’s all he needs.
Sabrina crosses her arms, studying him with a look that she’s clearly fighting to keep neutral.

Someone enters the building, and she glances over her shoulder as the door swings shut. He can see the moment her eyes land on Silver at his table with Sneasel.

“How…?”

“Luck, and this stays between us.” No one but her knows about Silver; he’d like to keep it that way.

“Of course.” As she stands up, she adds, “You could have saved me an hour and opened with that.”

He doesn’t respond as she turns to leave, leaning back as soon as her back’s to him.

Before there’d been Team Rocket, and labs, and increasingly desperate measures, he’d gone to her, with a handkerchief and a request, and there’d been a faint look of sympathy in her eyes when she’d found nothing beyond a vague sense that Silver wasn’t dead. That she’s miffed he’d tried to avoid bringing anything up is fair. In theory he owed her a follow up.

As soon as she’s out the door Silver walks over. He’s doing a good job of hiding any worry, but he doesn’t meet Giovanni’s eyes as he slides into the seat Sabrina had just left.

“Find something?”

His tone is light and prompting, and Silver nods, staring at his cup on the table. Sneasel climbs into his lap, and he looks up, shoulders tense.

“Are you going back?” There’s a quiver in his voice that stings, but it is somewhat earned, he supposes, given how close he’d come to changing his mind.

“No, of course not. Nothing’s changing, like I said.”

Silver lets out a slow, shaky, breath as he nods, leaning back in his chair. “Thank you. I mean, I didn’t think…” he trails off, looking apologetic.

“It’s fine Silver. Finish your drink, and we’ll go.”

When they leave the restaurant his gaze lands on Sabrina and Surge talking across the street. Neither of them looks over, but Silver stops, eyeing them.

“Who are they?” he asks, letting Giovanni lead him down the sidewalk after a few seconds.

“The former leaders of Saffron and Vermilion’s gyms.” Well, “former” isn’t the right word, none of them have been replaced yet, but it’s an inevitability at this point.

“They worked for you?”

He nods, glancing around out of habit more than worry that someone’s listening.

“So stay away from them, or…?”

“If I’m not with you, yes.” It’s an automatic response, that is reasonable, but he realizes too late that implying a threat where there isn’t one is a poor move with Silver. “You are safe. They won’t do anything to you. But caution never hurts.”

“Okay.” Silver doesn’t sound overly stressed, and after a moment Giovanni feels his hand slip into his. He squeezes his fingers, noting the small smile that crosses Silver’s face at the action.
Chapter End Notes

This is more in character than that stupid celebi event, I'm just saying
The gym is cold.

Green really shouldn’t be surprised by that, but she hadn’t expected a place as “normal” as a gym to resemble her old prison quite so much as it does. Frost creeps up the walls and icicles hang from the ceiling, the only notable difference is the softer lights.

She’d searched Pryce’s house already and found nothing of use, which had left her with digging through the gym and asking around town.

What she’d found out from the locals about him was likely going to set off a long tantrum when she got back to Viridian, but for now, she’s ignoring the rage building at the back of her mind, and focusing on something else.

Namely that she has yet to find concrete proof.

Oh, she knows it’s him.

Shelves lined with books on Celebi and the birds, along with the ice sculptures staring at her from the back of the gym are enough that if it was just her and Giovanni working on this with no outside variables she’d call it good. She’d been told to not expect more than the research anyway and the sculptures are identical to ones she remembers filling training rooms from before.

But of course, there are other factors, namely the slim chance that this gets connected to her by Professor Oak, or Red, or Blue. She’s going to need to tell them that The Mask has been dealt with, there’s no way around that, and given that a gym leader in Johto will have gone missing around when that conversation happens, she wants something to hold up as proof that she’d been right.

Explaining the “gone missing” bit is something she’s still working on.

She makes herself wander onto the battlefield, gaze flitting around the cold room. She’s not sure where to look here; there’s no office like she’d been hoping, leaving her with little to work with.

She reaches the sculptures, and her fingers close around a chisel out of curiosity. It’s heavy, the tip pointed. It’d make a decent weapon, albeit a painful one.

“Those are sharp”, a voice calls from behind, and she freezes.

The gym had been empty when she’d slipped in, she’d made sure. How had she been snuck up on? Yes, the doors are all automatic, but she should have heard footsteps at least.

She needs to turn around, not stand here gasping down shaky breaths with her back to him, but she can’t. The voice is much calmer than she remembers, but it’s him.

At least she has proof now.
Her throat feels tight, and Ditty squeezes her wrist in an attempt to calm her down as she makes herself turn around.

Suddenly the need for a body made of ice is abundantly clear, as her eyes land on the frail looking man sitting in a wheelchair in the doorway.

This is him?

This man?

She knew to expect someone older but still.

Giovanni had been almost disappointingly normal in person, but he at least looked capable of everything he’d done. Pryce… if her heart wasn’t in her throat just from the sound of his voice she’d be packing up, assuming she’d been wrong right now.

“I’m sorry if I scared you”, Pryce adds, rolling over.

“It’s fine.” Her voice is barely above a squeak, and she clears her throat. “It’s fine. You didn’t.” Her eyes dart to the swinub sitting in his lap as she weighs her chances.

She can’t take him in a fight.

She’s not dissing herself, she knows she can’t. She needs to get out without him recognizing her.

At least he hasn’t seen her face in seven years.

Ditty twitches, and she realizes she has a stranglehold on the ice pick, and she makes herself set it down.

“I just came in to see if there was a map of the city. The sculptures caught my eye, but I’ll go.” She starts to step around him, when a thought occurs to her. The table is lined with possible weapons, and she has her knife. Yes, he has the swinub, but Ditty could block at least one attack.

That’s all she’d really need.

She has gloves on, no one other than Giovanni and Silver knows she’s here…

“Are you lost, then?”

Pryce’s question pulls her from her thoughts, back to reality. Where she can’t take that risk. “Hey Professor, can you bail me out for murdering a gym leader?” is not a call she wants to make.

“If you could point me towards the Center that’d be great.” She smiles.

She needs to get out of this city.

Right now.

Pryce gives her directions that she doesn’t follow, and less than an hour later she’s on her way back to Ecruteak. If she switches between flying with Jiggly and Blasty for a bit she might be able to reach the city by nightfall.

But for now she’s walking, both so she’s a smaller target, and because phone calls from the air are difficult.
She pauses when she pulls her phone from her pocket; that’s a lot of missed calls from Blue.

Whatever it is, she can deal with it when she’s back in Kanto, she decides as she goes digging for Giovanni’s number.

He picks up on the third ring.

“Everything okay?” He sounds tired, and with a grimace she realizes that it’s probably late in Viridian.

“It’s him.”

“You’re sure?”

“Yes.” She explains about the books, the sculptures, and what happened in the gym.

He’s quiet for a minute, and she adds, “I don’t think he recognized me. He had me cornered and didn’t do anything, and he didn’t try to stop me from leaving.”

“Where are you now?”

“Heading to Ecruteak. I’m going to need to spend the night there, but I’ll head out first thing in the morning.”

She hears him sigh. “Be careful. And call if something goes wrong.”

“I will.”

Blasty gets her to Ecruteak just as the sun sets, and it’s nearly midnight by the time she finds a hotel that meets her requirements of out of the way and nice enough to have some semblance of security.

Though she’s not expecting cameras and electric locks to stop much as she shuts the door to her room. She closes the curtains before doing anything else, though she knows that won’t stop anyone, then drags a pillow and blanket off the bed and into the bathroom. She’s slept in worse places, and it’s another wall between her and anyone sent to find her.

She switches all the lights off, and she curls up on her makeshift bed, coat and shoes still on, backpack looped around one arm and her knife in hand as Snubbull settles on the counter to keep watch.

She isn’t expecting to sleep tonight.

The sound of a door opening wakes her up, and she’s on her feet immediately. Snubbull is tense, his hackles raised as he studies the door.

Green slips the bag the whole way on and eases the door open a crack, stopping when she sees the silhouette of a girl with long hair studying the beds.

Someone pulls on the bathroom door, and she shoves it into them.

The girls twists around as her partner lets out a faint yelp of surprise.

Green points at the girl before she can do anything else. “Take down!”

Snubbull launches himself at her, and Green turns to the boy as he reaches for a pokeball. She hears the girl fall backward, and makes a split-second decision to bolt towards the window.
Yes she’s two floors up, and yes it’s going to make a lot of noise, but it’s easier than fighting through the boy and risking them having backup in the hall.

A signal to Snubbull has him breaking the window then jumping onto her back as she throws herself out, releasing Blasty in time for him to catch her and take off, jetting into the woods.

A glance over her shoulder shows her the pair following with two murkrow. She forces down a shaky breath as she turns back to where she’s heading.

Blasty makes it maybe five minutes before his tanks empty, and he skids to a halt. Practice stops Green from falling off as he spins out, and she recalls him as she scans the woods.

Pointlessly; she can’t see anything, and not for the first time she misses Sneasel and her night-vision. Having her along would almost have been worth bringing Silver.

Almost.

But she doesn’t hear anything, and after a few seconds of trying to reorient herself she takes off; heading away from where they’d come. With any luck, she’ll find a trail soon.

Ten minutes of wandering lands her in a thinner patch of forest, and she thinks she can see the lights of a city far in the distance.

It’s going to take a while to reach, but at least she has a reference point now.

Snubbull growls, and just as she looks down to see what has his attention she hears it; quiet footsteps behind her.

She turns slowly, flipping the knife back open and reaching for Jiggly’s ball.

The boy steps out, his mask almost glowing in the moonlight. Following him is a xatu, and Green’s legs start shaking.

Her chest hurts as her throat tightens. Without thinking, she takes a step back.

Snubbull moves before her thoughts can clear; throwing himself at the bird. Green sees white teeth sink into feathers right before an arm wraps around her neck.

Her empty hand shoots up to grab it, and she slashes back with the knife. She doesn’t hit anything, but the older girl shifts to avoid it and she slips under her arm, gasping for air.

“Why are you helping him?” She’d meant to sound intimidating, but it comes out hoarse. The xatu screeches and she flinches.

“You’re still not over that? It’s been years; toughen up.” The girl takes a step towards her, eyes darting to the knife as she adds, “As for why we’re not being ungrateful traitors who ran away because they miss mommy… Well actually, come to think of it; do you remember home at all? I know you’re friend didn’t. Sort of makes all these dramatics pointless doesn’t it? If you’ve got nowhere to go? Unless you come back…”

“Shut up.”

“Sorry?”

“Shut up!” It comes out as a shriek as she lunges for her, aiming a punch at her throat. Not with the knife (they’re victims too, even if they’re jerks), just her gloved hand, which quickly proves to be a
mistake when the girl ducks and Green’s fist hits solid ice.

Something cracks.

She doubts it was the mask.

But her head still snaps back, and Green’s about to land another hit when the girl whistles, and a black blur slams into her, shoving her to the ground.

Her head hits the ground, and she makes herself stay down long enough for her vision to clear. Which is also long enough to realize her ribs had hit a rock, and that there’s a splitting pain racing up and down her side from it.

Lovely.

“Where is your partner anyway? Lose him?” The older girl’s voice is taunting as she and her umbreon stare down at Green.

“Oh, he’s great actually. Said to tell you lot to go choke.” She pushes herself onto her elbows, glancing back at where Snubbull is doing his best to keep the boy and his bird occupied. He looks exhausted, she needs to end this soon.

Her hand is hurting. So is her back. Broken fingers and bruised ribs; exactly what she wants right now.

Settling on a plan, she flicks Jiggly’s ball to the side as subtly as her injured hand will allow, and after a moment the soft sound of her song fills the forest.

Green’s heard it enough to have more time than the other two; and while her eyelids are drooping, they hit the ground first, and Jiggly stops.

She recalls both her pokemon, before limping off.

The cost of using Jiggly is that now she’s really feeling her lack of sleep tonight, and she stumbles more than once, making the ache in her ribs, that she now thinks are broken, worse, not to mention her hand when she tries to catch herself.

But she makes it to Violet in one very worn out piece, intending to just pass out on a bench somewhere and call Giovanni in a few hours. She’s safe (for now), a little longer won’t make much of a difference. It’s not like he’d get here right away anyway.

Her plan is cut off when a shadow passes over the street she’s on just as she passes the Center.

It’s likely just a cloud, but her exhausted and paranoid mind jumps to Ho-oh, and she sprints through the Center’s doors.

The nurse on duty behind the counter looks up, eyes widening as they land on her, and Green manages a smile (she doesn’t want attention right now), before sinking onto a couch, intending to catch her breath.

Instead the world goes black.
“Stir slower; you’re going to spill it.”

Silver glances up, giving a slight nod as he slows down with the spoon. He’d asked to help with breakfast, and Giovanni had mostly left him to his own devices with the pancakes; he does seem to do okay in the kitchen, at least with the simpler meals he’s let him help with.

Yes, he has a habit of scaling the counters when he can’t reach something, rather than simply getting a chair, but still; it’s a nice, mundane, task, that Giovanni doesn’t need to try and dissect for deeper motives beyond just an independence streak poking out again. It’s progress; he’ll take it.

He catches Sneasel mid-leap onto the counter, and lets her climb onto his shoulder as Silver spoons batter onto the waiting pan. A cool paw presses against the back of his neck as Sneasel sniffs at the steam.

The phone in his pocket vibrates, and he glances at it as subtly as he can.

It’s Green.

It’s too early in Ecruteak for her to just be checking in; something happened.

“I’ll be right back.” He lets Sneasel work her way to the floor before stepping away.

Silver glances up from the pan. “Okay.”

Giovanni steps out of the kitchen, closing the door as he answers the call.

“I need you to come get me”, she says before he can get manage as much as a greeting. She sounds terrified.

“Where are you?”

“Hospital in Violet. I got jumped in Ecruteak, made it to here and passed out at the Center.”

“Jumped by who? Are you hurt?”

“Two kids. Pryce sent them. I’ve got broken ribs, and my hand’s messed up, otherwise I’m fine.” He hears her take a deep breath. “Look; they said to call my parents. Oak’s gonna want to know why I was in Johto but I can come up with something if…”

“If he doesn’t want to take the risk of bringing Silver to Johto” he fills in silently when she trails off. And he doesn’t. It’s not as if the house is any safer, but he doesn’t want to. He could leave him here, in theory, but again; the idea doesn’t sit well. At least with them both here he can lie to himself about some semblance of safety, and he’s about to tell her to just call Oak.

But there’s no good excuse for her to have been in Johto, under a fake name or not, and all involving Oak will do is introduce a variable he does not want to deal with.

He holds the phone far enough away that she won’t hear the deep, steadying, breath he takes. “We’ll come get you. It’s going to be late by the time we get there, but we will.”

“Thank you.” Her voice is shaky.
“Rest. I’ll let you know when we get there.”

He hangs up, and with a sigh, slips back into the kitchen.

Silver turns around as he closes the door. “Is everything okay?”

“Finish up, and eat. We need to go get Green.”

Predictably, his eyes widen. “Is she hurt?”

“Not that badly; she’ll be fine. Eat, and throw together a bag for overnight.” He doesn’t want to spend the night in Violet, but he can’t see a way around it.

It’s an eight hour drive to the city, that becomes nine when they stop to eat in New Bark Town, because Silver is not missing a meal, no matter how much he protests, and it’s dark by the time they reach the hospital.

Silver’s gaze drifts suspiciously around the waiting room as a doctor explains Green’s injuries. She hadn’t downplayed them, which is a surprise, but there’s a less-than-subtle implication to the doctor’s words; that she’d clearly been in a fight and should speak to the police but won’t.

“I’ll talk to her about it.” The lie slips out easily as he fills out paperwork with a fake name.

Finally they get walked down to Green’s room. As soon as the doctor leaves she’s pulling herself up as Silver pads over, taking far more care than one would expect from a nine-year-old as he sits down next to her on the bed.

Giovanni tries not to think about the implications of his too-good bedside manners and how he picked them up as he sinks into a chair in the corner.

“How are you feeling?”

“Sore.” She studies him over Silver’s head as she pulls the boy closer. “I feel okay to leave though.”

“They should let you go tonight.” He leans forward, elbows on his knees as he adds, “We’ll head back to Kanto in the morning.”

She bites her lip, and Silver’s fingers curl into a fist, but neither one argues. “And after that?”

“I’ll get you both back to Viridian, then head for Mahogany.” No point in giving time to regroup.

Green nods, leaning back and dragging Silver with her.

“What happened in Ecruteak?”

“You said to stay out of the centers, so I was gonna spend the night in a hotel on the edge of the city. I guess he had a team tail me, they broke in around midnight.” She shrugs and winces, “I should have gone further before calling it a night, but they won’t have followed to here.”

He doubts any of them are convinced of that.

They’re there for another two hours, in which Silver naps, Green skims channels on the television, and Giovanni digs through the news on his phone. Green’s escape from the hotel had resulted in a seemingly endless stream of theories as to what had been the cause of the blown out window (he’s both offended and amused at how many times Team Rocket is brought up, when had he ever ordered something similar to this?), and he doesn’t blame the doctor for the doubt in her eyes when
Green declines speaking with police again as they leave.

Dinner is takeout, because a restaurant seems a likely breaking point for both children right now, and he’s more interested in getting them both to bed regardless.

While they divide up food on the coffee table of the hotel suite, Giovanni drags an end table in front of the hall door, balancing a vase on the edge, where it’ll fall and shatter if the door is opened. Not much of an alert, but it’ll have to be enough.

He tosses Nidoqueen’s ball as he steps away from the door, watching as she materializes next to him, a glint of confusion in her eyes at being assigned guard duty. But her eyes land on both tense children and she settles quietly on the floor between them as he sits down to eat.

Sometime around eleven, Silver falls asleep, his head resting in Green’s lap. By some miracle he doesn’t wake up when Giovanni picks him up, simply wrapping his arms around his neck as he heads towards one of the two bedrooms.

When he goes to set Silver in bed, however, his grip tightens, and Giovanni sinks onto the bed, sitting next to him as he eases his arms off him.

When he sits back, he finds tired eyes studying him through a mess of red hair. There’s a familiar glint of fear in them.

“Everything’s going to be fine. You’re safe, okay?” He cups a hand under Silver’s chin, wishing he believed himself.

Silver’s fingers slip through his as he nods, laying down.

“We’ll be home tomorrow, and this will all be over by the end of the week, okay?”

“Okay.” He still doesn’t let go of his hand, and Giovanni squeezes his fingers.

“Is there anything you want to do after that?” Get his mind on something else, then maybe he’ll sleep.

“Like?”

“We could take a trip somewhere. Or catch something for you team.” He pulls a blanket over Silver as he adds, “I think you could manage a gyarados, if you like them so much.”

Silver wrinkles his nose, and he smiles, before leaning down to press a kiss against his forehead.

“Come get me if you can’t sleep, okay?”

“Okay.” Silver shifts onto his side, a hand slipping under the blankets, and after a moment Sneasel appears on the bed. “Goodnight Dad.”

Again, there’s a smile tugging at his lips, but this time he keeps it hidden. “Goodnight.” He squeezes Silver’s shoulder as he stands up.

He seems calmer, at the very least isn’t clinging anymore, and Giovanni steps away as he closes his eyes, returning to the living room where he finds Green studying the cast on her fingers and stroking Nidoqueen’s head.

“Is he okay?” she asks, glancing up as he walks over to the window.

“He’ll be better once we’re out of here, but he’ll sleep if that’s what you mean.”
She nods, sitting back. “Thanks for coming to get me.”

“I said I’d help you, that includes if you’re hurt.”

There’s a familiar look of doubt in her eyes as she studies him. “Did you find out anything about the feathers?”

“Are you stalling going to bed?” he counters, smirking at the scowl it earns him, before adding, “I think they’re how he controlled the birds. As you said, I’m sure they’ve been replaced by now, but I don’t know of anything else he’d have needed them for. If it’s important I can try and find out.”

“It’s not that big of a deal, I was just curious. Maybe it’s better if I don’t know anyway.” She pauses, her brow furrowing. “What are you looking for?”

His hand freezes in the pocket of his jacket. He hadn’t even noticed he’d been digging through it, but the answer to her question is a cigarette.

It’s been two days since the last one, and even if today hadn’t been a stressful mess he’d be feeling it, but the box is tucked into the drawer of his desk at home.

“Nothing.” He shows both hands as empty, before dropping them to his sides.

Green’s eyes narrow, but she turns back to Nidoqueen, who seems more than happy to continue soaking up the attention. After a moment she pipes up again, “When we get back to Viridian…”

“Yes?”

“When we’re all back would you mind teaching me? At least for a little bit?”

He raises an eyebrow, stepping away from the window. “If you want.” He sits down across from her. “What brought this up?”

“I should have been able to handle those two, I ran from the hotel because it was safer for everyone if I got out but once we were in the woods I should have had it under control. But they had a xatu and I froze up. Again. I know I need to work on that on my own, but I also haven’t had a teacher since Pryce, if I’m even gonna call him that, and I think it shows.”

He nods, leaning back. “That’s fine. Let’s wait until your ribs are healed, you don’t need to be pushing yourself right now.”

“Thanks.” She stands up, wincing when she pushes on the wrong hand. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight. Take whatever they gave you at the hospital, you need to rest.”

She nods, slipping into her and Silver’s room, and Giovanni lets out a slow sigh before standing up.

Nidoqueen perks up as he walks to his own room, but he holds up a hand before she can follow.

“Stay.”

She settles back on the carpet, seemingly content with her clarified orders. He’d have sent her in with Green and Silver, but he’s sure they’ve both released half their teams by now.

And this way there’s someone ready if the door gets broken through.

Which it won’t.
From a practical standpoint he knows this; going after Green earlier had likely been to scare her off more than anything, Pryce has no reason to think she has help, this hotel is the last place he’d be likely to look, and he gains nothing from recovering either child at this point anyway. The obedient puppets he’d wanted are long since gone.

That doesn’t make getting to sleep any easier.
Wanting to go home is a feeling that Silver is intimately familiar with. It had been at the back of his mind for years, since the first time Green had sat with him whispering stories of her family to refresh her own memories, and he’d lain awake that night trying to figure out if any of it could ever have applied to him.

That there is a place to miss now makes it worse, not better, he decides as he shifts in the hotel bed. He misses his room, his bed, his blankets, his view of the dark forest out the window.

He misses the stupid gyarados, and the way it gives him something solid to cling to.

Sneasel sits up next to him as Green slips into the room. He hears her let Blasty out, and her quiet instruction for him to keep watch, but doesn’t say anything. He knows her well enough to think she’s going to want to talk right now.

She climbs into her bed, and after a moment he hears another pokemon be released, and then Jiggly’s soft, familiar lullaby fills the room.

He doesn’t try to cover his ears, the pokemon will keep going until they’re both asleep anyway. His eyelids get heavy and he lets himself drift off.

He does not sleep well.

Dark, steel corridors, creeping ice, and grabbing hands fill his mind until he wakes up shaking and gasping for air.

He sits up and the room spins. Still struggling for air, he pulls his knees into his chest, resting his forehead on them as he tries to slow his breathing.

Sneasel leans into him, making quiet, soothing noises. He turns his head to watch her for a moment before laying back down.

His breathing is still ragged, and he can’t make himself relax enough to sleep. He briefly considers waking Jiggly up, but a glance over shows her sleeping in Green’s arms. Waking one will wake the other, and Green needs to sleep.

Which leaves him the option of waking Giovanni up, as much as he doesn’t want to. But he had been told to get him if he couldn’t sleep.

He sits back up, picking Sneasel up and letting her work her way to his shoulder as he slips out of the room, careful to not wake anyone up.

Nidoqueen twitches in her sleep as he creeps past her in the living room, but she doesn’t wake as he eases the door to his father’s room open.

He freezes in the doorway, not sure what to do. Wake him up? Crawl into bed?

“What is it Silver?”

He jumps at the question, still trembling as his grip tightens on the doorknob.
“I can’t sleep”, he says after a moment, tense and almost wishing he’d stayed in bed, but he makes himself meet Giovanni’s gaze in the dark.

“Come here.” When Silver doesn’t move, he adds, “Just lay down, you’re not in trouble.”

Still on edge, he pads across the room, slipping under the blanket and staying close to the edge of the bed as Sneasel curls up next to him.

“Are you okay?”

“Just a bad dream.”

He inches closer, hesitantly seeking the warmth that comes with being held, and feels an arm slip around his shoulders.

“You’re shaking.”

“I’m fine.” His tone is far from convincing.

They’d had close calls before; Pryce had spent months sending teams to find them and they’d gotten into more than a few fights trying to avoid getting caught, so in theory no part of this should seem worse than normal.

But he has more to lose now. He knows what he’d lost before and the thought of it all being taken away again terrifies him in a way the threat of loosing their delicate freedom from before hadn’t.

He lets himself get pulled across the bed, settling next to his father as he tries to convince himself that he’s just being paranoid.

“He’s not going to find you, alright Silver? He has no reason to look here, you’re safe.”

Silver nods, not trusting himself to speak as he closes his eyes. He tries to keep his mind on his father’s arm around his shoulders, and the faint feeling of security that comes with it, instead of the growing feeling of fear at the back of his mind.

“It’s almost over?” The question comes out barely above a whimper. “He’s going to be gone soon?”

“Yes.” Giovanni’s voice is far too soothing for the topic, but the simple answer, the acknowledgement that this is real, that they are this close to ending it, is all Silver had really wanted.

Quietly, he slips his arms around him. “Goodnight.” His voice is hoarse.

“Goodnight.”

Silver wakes up by himself, with Sneasel sitting by the window and the room otherwise empty, and for once he’s out of bed almost immediately.

Sneasel follows him out to the living room where Green and Giovanni are finishing breakfast.

“Good morning.” Green gives him a smile that doesn’t reach her eyes as she points to a plate for him.

He tries to return the smile as he sits down next to her.

“What now?” he asks, reaching for his plate.

“We’re going back to Viridian as soon as you two are done. We’ll work things out from there once
we’re home.” Giovanni sounds tired, and Silver has to bite back an apology that he knows will just get waved off.

“Okay.” He slips a piece of toast from his plate as Giovanni stands up, returning to his room.

“Was everything okay last night?” Green asks, studying a cup of coffee on the table. Both it and her plate look untouched.

“Couldn’t sleep, didn’t want to bother you. That’s all.”

“I’d have had Jiggly sing for you if you asked.”

“I know. But it’s fine, I went back to sleep pretty quickly.” Green nods and he adds, “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine.”

“Green.”

She sighs, “I’ll tell you about it later. But I’m fine for right now okay? Just really sore.”

“Okay.” He inches closer, not quite leaning into her as he adds, “We’ll be home soon.” It sounds stilted, but he’s trying to be comforting.

Out the corner of his eye, he sees her nod. His gaze drifts down to her hands, one in a glove, the other in a cast, and quietly he reaches for the uninjured one.

She squeezes his fingers. “I’ll be fine, I promise.”

He nods, still trying to come up with something to cheer her up. As she leans back on the couch, he says, “We should do something fun, once you’re feeling better.”

“To celebrate?” He shrugs, and she smiles. “What I want to do, is have Sneasel make a bunch of masks, then smash them up.” Silver laughs as she adds, “But we should do something, you’re right.”

He sinks back, still holding her hand. “It’s almost over.”

“Yeah.”
“Please be careful.” Silver’s voice is tense, and Green can see him fighting back more from her spot in an armchair in the living room.

She can also see the faint glint of amusement in Giovanni’s eyes as he sinks down in front of him. “I will be. Everything’s going to be fine; I’ll be back by the end of the week, okay?”

Silver nods, and Green lets her gaze drop to her glove and cast as he wraps his arms around Giovanni’s neck. (She’s not jealous, and nothing the girl in Ecruteak had said had gotten under her skin. Not even a little bit.)

It’s close to midnight, and she’s sure Giovanni had been planning on leaving without a much of a conversation (they’d been going over the plan constantly for the past two days, why bother?), but Silver had apparently been waiting up, and she’d come down in an effort to catch him too, which means the whole thing is getting dragged out.

She looks back up at the sound of her name, to see Giovanni standing back up, his eyes on her as Silver stays clinging to his hand.

“What?”

“There’s a stack books on the shelf outside your room. I marked a few chapters, you can start with those since you’re supposed to be on bed-rest anyway.”

She nods, watching as he slips his hand from Silver’s grip, ruffling his hair once before picking up a suitcase.

“Have a good week. Rest.” He steps back down the hall, and as soon as he’s out of sight, Green stands up, trying not to wince at the pain that shoots up her side.

“Go up stairs. I’ll be up in a minute.” Silver makes a face, and she points at the clock in the hall and raises an eyebrow. He doesn’t technically have a bedtime, but it’s still late.

“Fine.”

She waits long enough to make sure he’s going up the stairs, before slipping down the hall, catching up with Giovanni in the garage.

“Forget something?”

She shakes her head, holding the door frame for support. “When you’re on your way back, can you let me know when you’re past Ecruteak?”

“Why?”

“I was going to call the police there about the base in the mountain. So the other four kids aren’t trapped there. I’ll do it anonymously.” She’s going to do it whether he agrees or not, but this way he’ll know about what’s likely going to end in increased police presence.

Something close to a smile darts across his face. “That’s fine; I’ll let you know. Is that all?”
She thinks for a moment, before saying, “Just don’t hurt his pokemon, unless they’re attacking you. Please?”

It’s a dumb request, especially since they’ve all been plotting murder for months, but a trainer’s actions aren’t their pokemon’s fault.

(Even if he’d apparently been completely pleasant to them all along.)

Giovanni’s quiet for a few seconds, and, while she can’t quite read his expression, he does look caught off guard; hands slipping into his pockets, and his head tilting just a bit before he finally says, “I suppose that’s fair.”

“Thanks.” She steps back into the house, startled by his easy agreement. “Bye.”

“Goodbye.”

She finds Silver sitting on her bed, Sneasel in his lap, and a nervous look on his face.

She sinks back onto the bed, taking a deep breath of the perfume she’d spritzed it with when they’d gotten back from Johto. Maybe it’s not what Mummy had worn (maybe she’d never worn any, and Green’s just trying to make herself feel better by lying), but the smell is still comforting even on its own.

“He’ll be fine.”

“I know.”

He sounds unconvinced, but she doesn’t push it, instead wrapping an arm around his shoulders when he lays down next to her, pulling a blanket with him.

“Do you want to talk? About Mahogany and…?” His voice is quiet.

She lets out a slow sigh. “What do you want to know?” This was going to get brought up, she knew it, and he has a right to know.

“Just… what happened, what he was like.”

She snorts, sending another shot of pain through her side. “Pryce is a frail old man, who doesn’t look capable of anything he did. We spent ages terrified of someone we’ve both been stronger than for years.” Silver tilts his head as she continues, “He’s also a hypocritical little-” She cuts herself off with a shake of her head.

“What do you mean?”

She glances at him out the corner of her eye, an old memory of a scared little boy getting dragged to a cell for crying for Sneasel drifting to the front of her mind, and she lifts up her injured hand, studying the old scars; from the cold, and falls on the ice (adapt), and punishments (don’t fight back), and knives and scuffles (don’t rely on your pokemon).

She lets out a shaky breath, “I asked around town, to find out what he’s like; if he ever disappears for days at a time, what kind of a trainer he is, stuff like that. And I found out that he’s a ‘very affectionate trainer’ who ‘takes his position as gym leader very seriously’. She laughs, “He spent years drilling into us not to care about anything, and maybe how he acts around town is the act instead, but if it’s not? I don’t know, I just thought that no one could be that horrible and still be fine to everyone else, but there he was, nearly killing us over things he didn’t even believe.”
Silver’s quiet, and after a moment he reaches up to slip his fingers through hers through hers. He squeezes her hand, still staring up at the ceiling.

“I guess it’s not that surprising”, he says finally. “They never got in trouble for messing up.”

He’s not wrong.

Green turns her head, burying her face in his hair as she tries to think of a response. Silver beats her to one when he asks, “Did you ever get a new lead on your parents?”

“No.” She shifts away, and as soon as there’s space between them Sneasel darts to it; curling up in a ball. “Oak’s been trying to help, but they just left. I get why they did; whenever someone recognizes me there it’s awful, false sympathy sucks. I just wish they’d told someone where they went.”

“Maybe they did, and you haven’t found them yet?”

“Maybe.” She pulls her blanket higher over her shoulders. “What did you do while I was gone?”

“Um… I went to the bookstore… And I ran into Professor Oak.”

“By yourself?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Sounds fun.” She fights back a yawn. “Did you get anything?”

“A book about the league.”

“You’re such a nerd.”

He glares at her, and she smiles. “Are you gonna stay in here?”

“Can I?”

She nods. “Just don’t squirm. Ribs still hurt.”

“Ohkay.”

He falls asleep before she does; curling up on his side as Sneasel settles against his back. Quietly, she reaches for where Jiggly’s ball is resting on the nightstand.

The pink pokemon materializes next to her, studying her with wide eyes. Green shifts to the side to give her a place to sit. She settles in the crook of her arm, and Green lets her gaze drift to the window, not quite ready to ask for a lullaby yet.
Mahogany is a quiet town.

Which is a nice way of saying too trusting.

Trusting enough that the dark figure sticking to the shadows with a practiced ease, before slipping into the gym as the sun sinks behind the mountains, draws no attention from any of the remaining stragglers out in the cold.

Some league official perhaps, not worth a second glance or thought.

Nor is the fact that the door to the gym locks behind him.

Giovanni moves quickly through the lobby at the front of the building to the battlefield, and leaves the lights off as he releases two pokemon.

Nidoking settles by the door, off to the side enough to not be noticed immediately but still close enough to block it, and Beedrill drifts towards the ceiling, hovering quietly until needed.

Their trainer, however, strides casually across the battlefield, stopping at the far end and turning to face the door (isn’t that a familiar sight).

Behind him is a table covered in ice sculptures, the very things that led him here, and he chances a glance back.

Not at the sculptures, but at the tools around their base.

He takes a step back, slipping an ice pick into his hand. He intends to let Beedrill do most of the work, he’d rather not go home with split knuckles, but why turn down such an easily reached tool?

The door opens, and there’s a brief pause, and then the lights flicker on.

He’d been expecting some form of attack, and sure enough there’s an almost immediate blast of ice from the swinub settled in Pryce’s lap.

Giovanni steps to the side, avoiding most of it, but a shard catches his arm. It’s a shallow cut, but it stings.

He snaps his fingers, and Nidoking moves from his spot just out of Pryce’s sight, grabbing the old man by the collar, and hoisting him up; sending the small ice type falling to the ground.

“You’re awfully twitchy.” Giovanni tucks the chisel up his sleeve as he walks over, ignoring the quiet snarls from the swinub. He almost kicks it away, but if Green wants to trick herself into thinking they’re keeping some ethical high ground in all this, he’ll humor her. “It’s a good thing I
already know what you’re hiding; otherwise you’d have tipped your hand.”

“What do you want?” He sounds like he’s struggling for air; his hands clawing at Nidoking’s scaly paw.

“Don’t play dumb. It’s an insult to both of us.” In a practiced motion, he slips Pryce’s team from his pockets, recalling the swinub to its empty ball before slipping the capsules into his own pockets. He catches Pryce’s hand, pulling it away from Nidoking, and, without breaking eye contact, bends a finger back until it snaps. “Why don’t you guess.”

Any remaining performative confusion leaves Pryce’s face, replaced with a glint of pain as he tries to hide a sucked in breath. “How did you find out?”

He steps back, signaling to Nidoking to drop the old man, watching as he hits the ground in a heap, before saying, “A body of ice, a base in Mount Mortar, a penchant for sculptures; was it supposed to be hard? Did you really think you’d get away with it?”

Pryce pushes himself up, favoring one hand. “From what I’ve heard; you’re in no position to-”

His retort is cut off when Giovanni’s foot connects with his ribs, his breath leaving him in a wheeze as he falls onto his side.

“I’m not interested in whatever hypocrisies you feel like pointing out. You made the first move. You took my son. I’m merely finishing the fight you started.”

“You know-”, Pryce coughs, “- he spent so long crying for you. Frail little thing, but stubborn. Convinced you’d find him. Until he forgot at least. He must be home if you’re here; tell me, did he remember anything?”

There’s an old, familiar, anger boiling in Giovanni’s gut, and without a second thought he digs his heel into Pryce’s fingers, keeping his face straight even through the sound of more bones snapping. “If you’re hoping angering me will make your death quicker-”, Beedrill drifts closer, sensing his rising temper, “-then I’m pleased to inform you; it won’t.”

What feels like hours later, Giovanni’s out of breath, his jacket long since abandoned on the floor, and his hands covered in blood drawn with the now discarded ice pick, and his upper arm damp from his own, as he studies the choking lump on the floor.

Pryce hadn’t said much after his first few jabs, taking everything else with an infuriating silence. And now with some combination of toxins from Beedrill and Nidoking coursing through his veins Giovanni isn’t expecting much coherency anyway.

But there’s one answer he still wants.

One of Pryce’s pokeballs had fallen from his coat pocket, and rolled across the floor, now resting a few feet away from its owner.

Perhaps that’s what he’s struggling for, but it doesn’t matter; Giovanni places a foot over the ball, pressing enough to hear the casing start to crack, and Pryce goes still.

“Don’t. Please.”

The first real plea he’s heard from this man, and it’s over a pokemon.

Hadn’t Silver said something about being punished for being too affectionate with Sneasel? Given
how little their relationship has changed since he was a toddler it had clearly been a frequent occurrence.

He considers finishing the job, flattening his foot and shoving Pryce’s hypocrisy in his face, but he doesn’t. He’d told Green he wouldn’t, and the terror in Pryce’s eyes is useful.

“Answer one question and I’ll even drop them at the Center on my way out of town.” He owes this man nothing beyond a world of pain, but he wants an answer.

“What?”

Slipping his foot off the ball, he sinks down, taking care to avoid the growing puddle of blood.

“Why him?”

A faint look of amusement crosses Pryce’s face. “You.” His voice is barely above a croak, but still dripping with malice.

Giovanni stands back up, glancing at Nidoking. Any reaction to Pryce’s response is kept carefully hidden as he nods to the pokemon.

“Fissure.”

The floor of the gym splits as the creature’s fist connects; swallowing the choking gym leader, before closing over him, leaving a jagged scar across the battlefield.

Chapter End Notes

I guess you could say he PAID THE PRYCE!
(I'm so sorry)
(That's not even my joke)
(Please let me know if you think i need to re-tag anything)
Chapter 33

“I made lunch!”

Sneasel pushes the door to Green’s room open for Silver, letting him slip in with a plate of food in his hands.

Green looks over from where she’s curled up by the window, and Silver sees her tucking her phone into her pocket as she smiles.

“Thanks.” Her voice sounds odd; like she’s upset.

He walks over, handing over the plate, and sitting down in front of her.

“Is everything okay?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you sure? Are your ribs bothering you?”

She picks at her food with her fork; brow furrowing as she takes a deep breath. “You said you ran into Professor Oak while I was in Johto. Where was Giovanni when you did?”

He tilts his head, confused. “He met up with someone. It was about the guy at the park.” Her shoulders tense up, and he adds, “He’s not going back.” What had brought this up?

“Who was he meeting with?”

“I didn’t get her name, but he said she was from Saffron. Or Vermilion.”

Green nods, not looking at him as she takes a bite of her lunch.

“Why?” he asks after a moment.

“A friend of mine saw someone from when we were at Silph in the city. He called to let me know. I just wanted to know if it was going to be a problem or not.”

“It’s not. Dad’s not going back.”

She nods, not looking completely convinced. “Thanks for making lunch.”

“You’re welcome.” Sneasel climbs into his lap, and he wraps his arms around her. “Did you call about the other kids?”

“Yes. I don’t think they’ll go with the police, but at least they’ll be out.”

“Too bad no one’s going to know it was him.” From what Green had said a few days ago, it seems like the general opinion in Mahogany was that Pryce was a good person, and, while Silver doesn’t really care, he’s not sure how to feel about the fact that they’re essentially covering everything up for him.

“Someone might notice that he disappeared when the base was found and put it together. It doesn’t really matter. I’d be surprised if anyone believed it anyway.”
“What are you going to tell your friends then?”

She taps her fingers on the floor. “I haven’t really thought about it. They’ll believe me about it being him, I just don’t know past that.”

He nods, watching as she pulls the plate into her lap and leans against the window. “We’ll think of something.”

“Yeah.”

Silver waits until she finishes her food, then takes the plate, leaving Green to take an nap that he doubts she really will.

In an attempt to encourage her to keep resting, he keeps to himself for the rest of the day: reading in the living room, and playing (training, he tells himself) with Sneasel and Murkrow (the halls are good for tag, and the whole house works for hide and seek)(it’s training), until dinner time, when he makes sandwiches for both of them, ignoring Green’s protests that she can make it herself.

After they eat, he wanders through Giovanni’s room, and out to the balcony, and from there works his way onto the roof.

It’s not warm out, but it’s not too cold either, and he wants to wait up for Giovanni. He hadn’t said he’d be back too late, and Silver isn’t tired anyway.

Sneasel settles next to him as he lays down on his back, folding his arms behind his head.

He closes his eyes for a moment, listening to the sounds coming from the forest; bird calls, faint noises of digging, and, if he strains his ears, he thinks he can hear the occasional crackle of electricity. But no signs of the city this far into the trees.

A faint breeze brushes through his hair, and he opens his eyes again, taking in the stars; constellations he doesn’t know the names of.

He could look them up. There’s bound to be a book with that information somewhere in the house.

He could do whatever he wants now, as Giovanni had pointed out in Violet.

The thought is terrifying.

“The future” hadn’t been a concept he’d let himself think about before. There’d been no point; too many variables, too many ways for everything to go wrong. Why plan for something that might not happen?

Now he has that luxury, and no idea what to do with it.

At some point the sound of a car pulls him from his thoughts, and he works his way back to the balcony, landing on the stone floor just as he hears a door open and close inside.

His watch says it’s after midnight as he opens the glass door; his eyes landing on where Giovanni’s standing with his back to him. Silver doesn’t miss the way he stiffens at the sound of the door opening.

“Hi.”

There’s a slight pause, then Giovanni turns around, looking almost amused.
“Hi. What were you doing out there?” He sounds tired.

“I was on the roof.”

He stays still as his father walks over, tilting his head when he kneels down in front of him, but he doesn’t protest when his jacket gets wrapped around his only-sort-of-cold shoulders.

“Couldn’t sleep?”

“Didn’t want to.” His eyes land on the outline of a bandage poking through Giovanni’s sleeve. “What happened to your arm?”

“Don’t worry about that.” He sinks down, sitting at the base of the bed. “Come here.”

Silver sinks into his lap without comment, leaning against him as an arm wraps around his shoulders.

He pulls the jacket tighter around him, feeling the silky fabric against his face. It smells like the forest, and fresh turned earth.

“He’s dead?” The question slips out without much thought. He knows he is, he just wants to hear it.

“Yes.” Giovanni’s grip on him tightens just a bit. “He can’t hurt you anymore.”

Silver lets out a shaky breath, nodding as he wraps his arms around his father.

It’s over.

It’s really over.

Tears hit his cheeks before he thinks to try and rub them away, and he turns his head; burying his face in Giovanni’s chest to muffle a sob as it escapes his throat.

A warm hand settles on his back, tracing a slow circle as he forces down a deep breath, trying to stop crying.

He’s home.

The Mask is dead.

It’s over.
The spite-filled words of dying men mean nothing.

In fact Giovanni had gotten quite good at keeping them out of his head over the years, and it’s more than frustrating that Pryce’s won’t stay out.

It doesn’t matter that it was most likely a lie; the implication that some motive behind the hell Silver had been put through could have been to get at him won’t let him rest. Nor will the other image Pryce had so thoughtfully dug up in his last hours; of a terrified little boy, forced to give up hope of a rescue that, despite his best efforts, had never come.

Between that, and the still stinging cut on his arm, his breath is shakier than it should be as he checks over his team in the early morning light outside the house. Neither Nidoking or Beedrill is hurt, but routine dictates this be a weekly occurrence regardless.

It also gives him something else to focus on.

A glass of scotch had gotten him to sleep last night, after Silver had been persuaded to go to bed, but that’s over, and he’s back to mulling over things that shouldn’t matter at this point.

Pryce is dead. Silver is home. The details shouldn’t be bothering him.

A low growl from Nidoking pulls him from his thoughts, and his inspection of the beast’s claws (which he’s going to need to clean later; there’s still faint traces of blood).

“What do you need Green?” He doesn’t bother looking up, he knows it’s her. Silver gets curious blinks, and tilted heads, but no snarls. He’d made sure of that early on.

(And anyone else would be pinned to the ground by now.)

“You met up with Surge and Sabrina?”

He tenses, and looks up, studying her as he sets a hand on Nidoking to calm him.

There’s no accusation in her tone, and her expression is calm, but not forcibly so, as she pulls a too-big gray sweater tighter around her.

“Yes, what about it?”

“You’re not going back?”

“No.” He steps out from behind Nidoking. “I have no use for it, and Silver’s safer if I don’t.” Safer, and calmer. And he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t enjoying the lack of demands on him right now.

She nods slowly, holding out a gloved hand to Nidoking for him to sniff. She gets a snort in response.

“What do they have set up? Did they tell you?”

“There’s a few warehouses in Vermilion that they’ve either taken back or are working on retrieving. Beyond that I don’t know.” He sees the way her brow knits, and adds, “It’s not really your problem.”
“The police are useless.”

“They are. But you could also take a break from playing hero.”

“I wasn’t playing hero.” She sinks onto a bench, still favoring one side.

“No? Then why were you in Silph?” His tone is teasing; it doesn’t really matter, but he’s curious.

“Thought the pokemon the badge amplifier made would be useful against Ho-oh.” She pauses, then looks back up. “Is that what it was for?”

“Yes.” He leans against Nidoking, squinting at the rays of sun peaking out from around the house. “I needed a way to fight him, so I made one.” It had been the same with Mewtwo; no psychic he went to could find Silver, he’d made one that could have. Had it not escaped.

Green nods, leaning back. “Thanks.”

“For?”

“Pryce.”

He laughs, stepping away from Nidoking. “You’re welcome. You still don’t want to know why he did it?”

She shakes her head. “If he wanted us to think he was a monster then he can stay that way.”

“Smart girl.”

She smiles. “Was there anything in the news about the other four?”

“Police went in the day after you called.” He’d skimmed a newspaper in New Bark Town, though it had been scarce on details. “Two of them took off then, and the other two are in the hospital, I think one was hurt.”

“Might have been from me; I’m pretty sure Snubbull bit one of them. At least they’re out.”

He nods, calling Nidoqueen over as Green stands back up.

“Since you’re up when you shouldn’t be anyway, would you like a quick lesson?”

“On?”

He sets a hand on the blue pokemon’s side. “Well you have your Nidorina, maybe just a quick lesson on what will change when she evolves? As a starting point?”

She nods, walking over.

Green stays quiet as he talks her through the weak points of Nidoqueen’s natural armor, blind spots, and ways of working around them. He can see her following along; her fingers skim over each spot he points out, and her eyes follow the movement when Nidoqueen’s paws flex.

Most of his experience doesn’t apply to Sneasel or Murkrow, and while the challenge of figuring them out while still teaching Silver has been nice, he’d also missed simply teaching what he’d built a reputation around years ago.

“Questions?” he says finally, watching her trace a scar on the pokemon’s back.
“Aren’t they supposed to be smaller?”

A smile tugs at his lips. “In the wild they will rarely get much taller than you, yes. When given a better diet than a meadow or forest will provide, and injuries and illnesses are treated, they’ll keep growing for a bit. That applies to most pokemon, the measurements you’ll find in books, or I suppose your pokedex, are usually taken in the wild. A trainer’s will tend to be bigger.”

She nods, looking up. “You like teaching?”

“I don’t mind. You asked, and you know what you’re doing. So long as you’re attempting at cooperation, it’s fine. I’ve taught worse.”

A small smile darts across her face as she slips her fingers behind Nidoqueen’s ear, scratching gently. “Well, my standards for teachers are low so…” She trails off, glancing over.

“I will try to raise them then.” He sinks onto the bench she’d left, tucking the hand of his injured arm into a jacket pocket as Nidoking lays down at his feet. “Did you get your reading done?”

She nods. “If you wanted notes they’ll need to wait-”, she waves her injured hand, “-but I got it done.”

“Learn anything?”

“A bit. You wrote a book?”

He raises an eyebrow. “I didn’t give you that one, did I?”

“No. It was mentioned in one of the ones you did though.”

“Should tell you how old it is.”

He hears the back door open and close, and glances over as Silver pads around the corner of the house.

“Good morning.”

“Hi.” His voice is barely above a mumble, and he curls up next to him on the bench, looking ready to go back to sleep as he tucks his bare feet under him.


“No.”

Green looks over from Nidoqueen. “You said you were going to bed right after dinner.”

“I did. It was after dinner when I went to bed.”

“That’s not what that means.”

Silver glares at her, before closing his eyes and burying his face in Giovanni’s shoulder.

Carefully, he pulls the boy into his lap, the familiar weight a small comfort.

“Sleep okay otherwise?”
Silver nods, curling his fingers into Giovanni’s jacket without looking up.

Green wrinkles her nose, before working her way down to the grass. Nidoqueen follows, curling around her slightly, seeking more attention.

“How are your ribs feeling?” he asks before she can get too distracted.

“Still hurt.” She looks up, shifting her weight a bit. “I’ve gotten worse, and I actually have painkillers this time so it’s not that bad.”

“You’re supposed to be staying in bed.” Silver pushes himself up to look over.

“Yeah? What time did you go to bed last night?”

He sticks his tongue out in response, and Giovanni pulls him back before they can start more of an argument.

“He’s right. You can stay out for a bit, but you do need to be resting.”

Green waves in acknowledgement as she leans back against Nidoqueen.

Taking care to keep Silver’s weight only on his good arm, Giovanni stands back up. Thin arms slip around his neck as he starts towards the door.

“Do you want to help with breakfast?”

Silver yawns. “Can I have coffee first?”

“No.”
He shouldn’t have asked to see these.

The longer Silver stares at the pictures spread across Giovanni’s desk, the more certain he is of that.

He knows, logically, that the boy in them, whether a wide-eyed baby clinging to a younger (and less serious looking) Giovanni (or, in a few, a woman with hair just a little lighter than his), or a dirt covered toddler carrying Sneasel like a doll, is him. Same hair, same eyes, and there’s no one else it could be. It just… doesn’t make sense. That he’d been that happy, that carefree.

He’s not trying to jog his memories; if he was going to remember something he would have by now. No, it was just curiosity that had made him mumble out a request to see the photos, and it’s curiosity (and stubbornness) keeping him in the leather chair behind the desk as he studies them, not sure what he’s trying to accomplish.

The boy in the photos is gone, except he’s not, because he’s him, and no amount of time changes that. Or changes the fact that he’d been that happy once, had had all this before, could have had it all along. Should have had it-

He shoves the chair away from the desk, rolling back a few feet before coming to a stop, panting.

Giovanni looks up from where he’s sitting by the window, and after a moment asks, “Do you want to go for a walk?”

Silver studies him with a quiet gaze, before nodding and sliding out of the chair, trying not to feel like he’s running away from pieces of paper.

He follows him through the house, stopping only to pull a jacket on before they both slip out the backdoor.

Giovanni lets Rhyhorn out when they reach the treeline, and Silver stays next to the heavy, gray, pokemon as they venture further into the forest.

He hasn’t been out here since running into the golem, and while that hadn’t been the main reason for his avoidance of the forest (his sprained ankle, not wanting to be out in the cold now that he no longer has to be, and Green’s injuries were all bigger ones), he’s not eager for a repeat either; eyeing the trees as he vaguely registers that they’re heading for the river.

“Is something bothering you?”

The question pulls Silver from his thoughts, and he looks up at where his father’s paused, looking back at him, as he tries to figure out an answer.

He stays quiet until they reach the water, sinking to the ground next to a bush as he finally says, “I don’t know how to do any of this.”

Out the corner of his eye he sees Giovanni sit down next to him.

“There’s nothing that you need to be doing, Silver.”

“That’s the problem. I don’t know how to… be normal, I guess.”

Green has (vague) memories of home, of what “normal” is supposed to be. She has a base to work
towards, even if it’s a shaky one.

On the other hand, his earliest (pleasant) memories are of her sounding out the letters stitched into his handkerchief to figure out his name. There’s nothing to look to for reference of what he’s supposed to be doing now that everything’s over.

“I’m not complaining about anything. I like it here, I wanted to come home. I wanted it all to stop.” He takes a shaky breath and shifts so Giovanni’s behind him. “But, everything’s always been a fight; I don’t know what to do now that it’s not.”

Behind him he hears Giovanni sigh, and he doesn’t look back.

He’s whining. He knows it.

There’s nothing wrong with his life right now, it’s far better than anything he thought he’d ever get, and yet he’s sitting here saying that it’s not enough.

“You don’t need to have everything figured out, Silver. None of this is going away, you have time.” He nods, still not looking back.

“What would help?”

“I don’t know.”

“If you think of something, you’ll tell me?” He nods.

“Alright. What brought up the photos?”

“Nothing. I was just curious.” His thoughts drift back to the pictures, and he adds, “Who was the-never mind.”

Still tense, he leans back, settling against Giovanni as his arm wraps around him.

“What are you planning on doing now?”

“I haven’t decided yet. Nothing really needs to change, or we could travel, if you wanted a change of scenery at some point.”

Silver nods, letting his gaze drift up to the clouds. “Could you go back to the gym?”

“Why?”

“You said you missed it a while ago.”

He hears a quiet laugh. “I suppose I did. It would take a lot of work, but I could.”

“Would you?”

Giovanni’s quiet for a moment, and Silver tilts his head back to see him staring at the river, his brow furrowed. He glances down, meeting Silver’s gaze, and the corner of his mouth twitches. “It’s something to think about. Would you be interested in that when you’re older? Taking on the League?”
He shrugs. Green has a few badges, but Silver’s pretty sure they’re stolen. In theory that means he would get bragging rights for earning even one, but he doesn’t really see the point beyond that.

“It’s just a thought. You have a few years to go before you’d be able to anyway.”

Silver nods slowly, sitting back up as his gaze moves to the river.

“I think I want to catch something.”

“Do you know what?”

He shakes his head.

“Well, there’s a decent variety around Viridian, or we could go somewhere else. Just let me know.”

“Something around here.”

Giovanni nods. “It’s getting too late today, but there are maps at the house, or I suppose Green’s pokedex if she’ll let you use it. Find something you want, I’ll help you get it.”

“Okay.”
“If I wanted to find someone, what would be a good place to start?”

Green’s leaning over the back of the couch in the living room, her head just a few inches from Giovanni’s as he flips through a textbook.

“Your parents?” He doesn’t look up, or wait for a response. “What have you tried?”

“Oak asked around Pallet to see if anyone knew where they went, and my name was in most of the articles and stuff from the tournament, because I thought they might see it. Which they didn’t.” Obviously. She shrugs. “I’m out of ideas, and I think he is too, even if he won’t say it.”

Giovanni closes the book, leaning back to look at her. “They probably avoided anything about the tournament. Last year in particular since it’s the first you were old enough to enter. Not the most pleasant association, especially if you obsessed over it when you were little.”

“Oh.” It had seemed like common sense that people would keep an eye on tournament winners (and she would have won had Oak not picked right then to take a leaf from Sabrina’s book), but what he’s saying makes sense. “Do you have another way though?”

Before he can say anything, Green’s phone rings. Confused, she digs it out of her pocket, not reassured by the fact that it’s Professor Oak calling.

“Hello?” She steps away from the couch, slipping the phone into her uninjured hand.

“Hello Green. I know it’s getting late, but you wouldn’t happen to still be in Viridian would you?”

“Why?” Hopefully it’s just an errand, but she’d not optimistic.

“There are two agents from Interpol here who want to talk to you.”

“Interpol?” Her throat feels tight, and out the corner of her eye she can see Giovanni look back up at her.

“You’re not in trouble”, Oak’s quick to reassure. “They have a few questions for you, and I thought the four of us could meet up in Viridian if you’re still there.”

On impulse, she jabs the mute button, and looks over at Giovanni.

“There’s two agents, he said they have questions. What do I do?”

“It’s probably about the other kids. Just ask where they want to talk, I’ll drop you off.”

“You’re sure?”

“They won’t drop it unless you at least pretend to give them what they want, and you shouldn’t walk that far with your ribs.”

She nods, lifting the phone back to her ear and un-muting it. “That’s fine, Professor. Where did you want to meet?”

He gives her a location, and an hour (and an argument with Silver about why he’s staying home and going to bed, instead of coming with (that was only won when she handed over her pokedex for him
later, she’s sitting in Giovanni’s car, half a block down from the restaurant.

“Well, I’d offer to walk you in, but it won’t end well.”

She smiles. “What do I tell them if they ask about how many of us there were? Oak’s met Silver, he’ll think it’s weird if I lie about him.” And lying to the police in front of him isn’t the best way to sell her “good behaviour” act either.

“Do you remember what you two told him in Pallet?” When she nods, he continues, “Just work off that, and keep it consistent. We’re not here, I’m paying you to house sit, go from there.”

“Okay.” She opens the door, and starts to climb out, regretting agreeing to this the minute she stands up and her ribs protest.

“Let me know if anything important comes up.”

“You mean you?”

He smirks. “I’ll be across the street when you’re done. And it’ll be fine; they wouldn’t call ahead to arrest you.”

Green nods, and shoves the door shut. Her hand slips to the belt on her skirt, tapping Ditty’s ball. The pokemon settles around her wrist, comfort as much as protection, and she sets off for the small restaurant.

It doesn’t look open, but she’s guessing either Oak or one of the agents knows the owner, because the door opens without protest when she turns the handle.

Sitting towards the back is Professor Oak, and two other men.

One looks on the younger side, with dark brown hair, and a lighter (worn-out) trench coat.

The other has graying hair, and… well it doesn’t look like a persian, it’s too fat, but she has no idea what else it could be, curled around the legs of his chair.

He also has a gun on his hip. It’s hidden under his shirt and a jacket, but it’s there.

“Hi.” She makes sure to take the chair closest to the door.

“Green, these are Agents Nanu, and Looker.” Oak gestures to each of them, and Green nods. “They had some questions for you about something that happened in Johto.”

“Okay.” She sits back, hands clenched in her lap under the table.

Nanu leans forward. “Have you heard anything about the police raid on a base in Mount Mortar? It was a few weeks ago.”

“A bit. They found four people?”

“Yes. Now, the Professor here, has told me that, a while ago, you told him a story about escaping from a base in northern Johto, so was that it?”

“Probably.” She tugs at the cuff of her glove; it barely fits over her bandages, but she wants to keep the injury hidden. “I mean, there can’t be that many hidden prisons in one mountain range, right?”

“Fair enough.” Nanu sits back a bit. “So there were other people being held with you?”
She nods.

“Why not go to the police once you got away?”

“Because they don’t do anything. Or, I didn’t think anything would happen if I did.” With Pryce dead there really hadn’t been a way for anything to go wrong, but before… She’d spent long enough dreaming about rescue to not expect much.

“How many other people were there?”

“Four were left when I got away.”

“Did anyone leave with you?”

She shifts back, nodding.

“Could we talk to them?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because he’s nine, home, and happy for the first time since I met him, and I don’t trust anyone with a police badge to not screw that up.”

Oak raises an eyebrow at the slight raise of her voice, but Nanu just nods. “That’s fine.”

Looker pulls his attention from the notebook he’d been writing in since they started talking. His and Nanu’s eyes meet over the table, and Green tries to piece together whatever silent discussion they’re having.

After a moment Looker turns to her. “Does the name ‘Pryce’ mean anything to you?”

Green knits her brow, biting her lip as she shakes her head. “No. Should it?”

“Not necessarily. Something else, we’re seeing if it’s connected or not.”

Nanu stands up, digging a card out of his pocket and setting it in front of her as his sorta-persian gets up. “That’s all we needed for now. We might be back later, call if you think of anything helpful.” He pauses, then adds, “If you hear from Red, pass than number along. We want a word with him too.”

“About Giovanni?” The question slips out without thinking, and she immediately regrets it.

Looker nods as he stands up. “We need something more… concrete than what he gave us last time someone talked to him.”

“More concrete?”

Before Looker can respond, Nanu cuts in, “The word of an eleven-year-old against a gym leader, even one who can’t be bothered to actually run the damn thing, isn’t going to go very far.”

Green notices his hand twitching towards the pistol. There’s a story there.

But there’s also something interesting in what he’s implying. “You can’t arrest him?”

Nanu studies her with a look she can’t read, but doesn’t like, and after a moment, he nods. “Not yet.
We’ll get proof, then him at some point. Nothing you need to worry about.”

“I’m not worried.”

He smirks, before looking back to Oak. “Thank you, Professor.” He nods to Green. “And you.”

“You’re welcome.”

She watches as they leave, taking a moment to force down a deep breath, before standing up.

“Where are you staying? I can drop you off.”

She looks at the Professor, thinking for a moment before shrugging (and wincing). “I’m kinda out of the way right now. Thanks though.”

“Staying with Silver?” He stands up, straightening the tablecloth a bit, before turning towards the door.

“His father had a trip for work. I’m watching the house until they get back.”

He nods, holding the door open for her. “You look like you’re doing okay.”

Suddenly very aware of exactly how much money she’d burnt through on her wardrobe, Green crosses her arms. “He gave me some money for new supplies and stuff. I think it was Silver’s idea.” She gives a half-shrug, trying not to aggravate her ribs anymore. “I didn’t steal anything.”

“I wasn’t accusing you of anything. I’m glad someone’s keeping you out of trouble.”

She blinks, staring at his back as he heads for his car. “Who’s Pryce?” she asks after a moment, wanting a better grasp of how much has been worked out.

He glances back, looking surprised. “A gym leader who went missing in Johto a few weeks ago.”

For someone who teaches for a living, he’s incredibly gifted at being vague. How much does he know? And, more importantly, how much does Interpol?

“Oh”, is all she says in response, scanning the far side of the street for Giovanni, or at least where he was likely to have gone. No sign of him.

“You can get back okay, then?”

She nods, giving Oak a small smile. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.” She waits until he’s in his car, and gone, before darting across the street.

She finds Giovanni sitting at a table outside a cafe that’s closed for the night.

“How did it go?” he asks when she stops next to him.

“Oak’s glad you’re keeping me out of trouble.”

He at least has the decency to hide his laugh with a heavy cough.
“Why aren’t you worried about this?”

The exasperated look on Green’s face is by far the most amusing thing Giovanni’s seen all week, as the girl pauses in her pacing to stare at him.

“Why do I need to be?” He leans back in his chair, resting his head on a fist as he studies her.

Green had been too tired to go over what Looker and Nanu (because of course he’s here) had wanted last night, but had taken the first opportunity she got this morning to do so. Which is fine, he wants to know, but he doesn’t see why it warrants this much of a reaction.

“Because they’re back to digging into you? How is that not a problem?”

“Yes, over a year later. Don’t you feel safe with Kanto’s hyper-competent police force?” She glares, and he sighs. “You just said they don’t even have enough to arrest me. That’s an improvement over what I was expecting, so no reason to stress over that.” Though it isn’t that surprising. It’s not as if there’s any real proof it was him at the gym that night. “As for everything else, Pryce getting connected to the other four was inevitable. They were found within days of him disappearing, I assumed you had thought of that.”

She crosses her arms, studying the floor. “I just didn’t think things would get connected that quickly.”

He nods as he leans forward. “Well they did. But either way, none of this will trace back to you. And if things do go wrong with Interpol, which they won’t, but if they do, I have plans.” Safe houses in other regions, aliases, contacts who owe him, the hardest part would likely just be convincing Silver to leave. “And I have a possible solution to that anyway.”

“What?”

He shrugs. “The gym.”

Silver had brought it up a week ago, and the more he thinks about it, the more it seems like a logical step.

“Currently, the league needs to replace five leaders, and that’s assuming Blaine’s staying”, he explains when Green gives him a confused look. “That’s at least five qualification tests, not to mention advertising the positions, and anything else the new leaders would need. It’s a lot of work, and money, and even one returning would cut down on that drastically.” Well, it might only be four, he can’t remember if Koga’s daughter is old enough to take the job or not; but his point still stands.

“So you’re counting on that being enough to get an investigation halted?”

“I’m counting on them wanting to save face, and money. It’s easier to say that one boy made a mistake, than to repair the building, find a replacement, and admit that they missed as much as they did for as long as they did.”

“They can’t be that shallow.”

“That’s why they’ve put so much effort into getting word out about who was responsible for everything at Silph, right? It’s politics, they’re all shallow.”
She wrinkles her nose, and sinks down onto the couch. “You were still gone for years.”

“And my excuse is currently in his room, over-sleeping.” There are no records of Silver disappearing, but with Green and Oak’s dramatics at the tournament, and the base having been discovered, it wouldn’t be impossible to piece together a non-incriminating version of the truth.

She stares at him for a moment, and he’s half-expecting a complaint, but instead she shrugs. “If you think it would work.”

“You’re being oddly agreeable.”

“I’m tired.”

“Then go back to bed, I won’t stop you.”

She glares at him, and makes no move to get up. Her fingers tap on the arm of the couch for a moment, before she asks, “What did you do to Nanu? Once you got brought up he seemed on edge. And he was the only one armed.”

Unpleasant memories bubble at the back of his mind, and before they can solidify, he shrugs. “We were on decent terms years ago. Then he stirred up things he shouldn’t have, and he’s smart enough to watch his back. If you could try to prevent him and Silver from crossing paths, I would appreciate it.”

She nods slowly, curling up against the arm of the couch.

With a sigh, he sinks back. “Did you want my help with your parents?”

That gets her attention, and she sits back up. “What would you need?”

“Names, your old address, and if you can, what their jobs were. And a lack of complaints about my methods.”

“I’ll need to call Oak for some of that, but I’ll get it. Thank you.”

He nods, watching as she pulls herself up, eyeing the stairs for a moment, before slipping down the hall instead.

“I wasn’t over-sleeping.”

Silver’s voice makes him jump and he looks over as he stands up, to see the boy poking his head around the corner.

“Just sneaking around the house then?” He steps around the chair. “Did you need something?”

“You weren’t lying about the police? They can’t do anything?”

“Don’t worry about Interpol.” He ruffles Silver’s hair as he sinks down. “They can’t get to me. None of this is going away.”

Silver nods, catching his hand in his. “Okay.” His expression brightens as he adds, “I decided what I want to catch.”
Chapter 38

The nidoran is sitting on a rock, soaking up the little heat offered by the early spring sun, when Silver finds him.

Quietly, he inches closer. Sneasel shifts on his shoulder as he pokes out from behind a tree, pulling a berry from his pocket.

Catching Murkrow had been a long, drawn out fight that (being too young to go to the Center without raising questions) he’d had to steal supplies to recover from, and while that isn’t a problem now, he wants to try and catch the small, purple, pokemon without a struggle. If only to prove he can.

At Silver’s signal, Sneasel climbs to the ground without making a sound, and he slips around the tree.

He holds the berry out as he approaches, and the nidoran twitches its ear, studying him.

Taking care to not startle it, he steps closer, offering the berry as he sinks down in in front of it.

It stretches its neck, nibbling at the berry, and after a moment takes a small step closer, and takes a bigger bite out of it.

Silver stays still, moving only to offer another berry when the first one is gone. The pokemon still looks cautious, but it takes the berry, and doesn’t run off when Silver lets go of the it, simply sitting down on the ground to eat.

There’s a few pokeballs in his coat pocket, along with another berry, and Silver weighs his options. He doesn’t want to move too soon; he doesn’t doubt that it’ll attack the minute it’s startled, and even with Sneasel right behind the tree, he’s not sure he could dodge at this range.

And, yes, if he turned around and squinted, he’d probably be able to see Giovanni among the trees, so there’s no real danger, but he’d said he could do this without help, and he’s going to.

The nidoran is studying him, ears pricked, and eyes wide as it waits for his next move, and after another few seconds of thought, he holds out the last berry. As it takes a bite, he shifts the ball in his hand, tapping it against the small pokemon, who disappears into it with a startled squeak.

Silver watches as the light on the ball flickers, waiting until it stops, before tossing the ball up, watching as Nidoran reappears next to him. Silver stays still as he finishes the berry, and sniffs him.

Sneasel creeps over, and Nidoran tenses, before inching closer to examine her, and Silver sits back, criss-crossing his legs as he watches them.

He’ll introduce Murkrow (and Horsea if Green will hand her over) later, but for now this is good.

Footsteps draw his attention, and he looks back to see Giovanni sinking to his knees behind him.

“Interesting method, but well done.”

A smile darts across Silver’s face. “Thank you.”
“Why a nidoran?”

“You and Green both have one…” He trails off with a shrug, and feels a hand settle on his shoulder. He’s not copying, per say, he wants to know what their like to train, and he’s curious about what Giovanni sees in ground types in general. Even if he’ll need a moon stone to get that far.

“I think it’s a good choice for you.” Giovanni sounds thoughtful.

“Why?”

“You seem to do well with more stubborn pokemon.”

“Oh.”

Sneasel darts back over, and Nidoran follows, placing his front paws on Silver’s knee to look up at him as Sneasel continues on to a tree.

Silver hears the familiar sound of her claws cutting into wood as he holds a hand out to Nidoran. The pokemon sniffs at his hand before sitting down next to him.

Cautiously, Silver sets a hand on his back, before looking over for Sneasel, and finding her sharpening her claws on the base of a tree.

Better that than something in the house.

“Thanks for bringing me out here.”

He doesn’t look back at Giovanni as he says it, still focusing on the two pokemon. He’s hoping having a new team member to work with will at least help with the feeling of restlessness that’s still bothering him. Training is something familiar; maybe it will balance things out, and he’ll stop feeling like there’s something else that he needs to be doing.

“Of course.” Silver hears him move; shifting his weight as he sits down next to him. “You can have a few more minutes, but we should head back soon.”

Silver nods, waving Sneasel back over when she pauses in her carving.

She darts over, settling in his lap for a moment, before climbing to his shoulder.

Silver picks up Nidoran, starting slow, but when the pokemon doesn’t protest he lifts him off the ground and stands up.

“I’m ready.”

A look of amusement briefly crosses Giovanni’s face, before he nods, brushing himself off as he stands up.

“Do you have any plans for him, then?” he asks as they start back towards the forest’s main paths.

“Not yet.”

Giovanni nods, and Silver speeds up a bit, catching up, and walking next to him.

His thoughts drift to the conversation he’d overheard earlier, and after a moment he asks, “Are you planning on going back to the gym?”
“Most likely.”

“What’s that going to change?”

“For a while, not much. The building needs to be repaired before anything, and I’ll need a cover story for why I was gone.”

“That you were looking for me, right?”

“It’ll need more details than that, but yes.”

“Is there anything I can do?”

He glances up to see Giovanni studying him, the corner of his mouth twitching.

“You can get a very convincing innocent act down. And I’ll let you know if there’s anything else.”
Giovanni wakes up to the sound of drawers being dug through.

It’s coming from his study, and within seconds of his eyes opening, he’s sitting up, eyeing the door connecting the room to his bedroom as his hand slips between the mattress and headboard.

His fingers brush a revolver (a gift from Surge that he’s fired exactly three times), before he reaches further, finding a knife. No point in making more noise than he needs to.

In the far corner, he sees Nidoking standing up, alert and ready for a fight, despite being asleep only moments ago.

He slips out of bed, taking care to keep his footsteps quiet as he approaches the door, followed by Nidoking.

He steps to the side, waiting until Nidoking looks ready to strike, before taking a deep breath and pushing the door open.

Nidoking’s initial charge is quickly cut off, as the large pokemon stumbles to a halt, sniffing the air as he studies the supposedly empty room.

“Supposedly” because Giovanni can see Sneasel peering down at them from atop a bookshelf, and with a sigh, he sets the knife on a dresser behind him, before stepping around Nidoking and into the study.

He finds Silver under the desk, looking guilty, but not terrified.

“What do you have?” he asks as he sinks down.

Silver turns his head away, not looking up.

There’s something in his hand that he’s doing a poor job of hiding, and Giovanni holds a hand out.

“What do you have?” He’d weeded out anything he’d rather Silver not find months ago, but if he’d missed something this is not how he’d have wanted to find out.

Silver holds it out after a moment, and Giovanni slips it from his gloved fingers.

It’s a photograph.

One that makes his chest twist when he turns it over to see the image; a few-month-old Silver settled in Grace’s arms.

“I couldn’t sleep. I didn’t mean to wake you up.”

Silver’s voice pulls him from his thoughts, and he makes himself set the picture on the desk as he looks back to his son.

“I wasn’t going to keep it.”
That hurts. The guilt laced into his voice, the way he curls up tighter as he says it, the fact that he seems convinced that whatever he’d been after with it isn’t something he deserves to know.

“Come here.” Giovanni holds a hand out, waiting as Silver nods and crawls over, before picking him up and sinking into the chair behind the desk.

Silver settles in his lap, and he rests his cheek on top of the boy’s head for a moment, waiting until it’s not a struggle to keep his expression calm.

“Do you want to talk?” he says finally, sitting back.

Silver nods, not looking up at him. “What was she like?” he asks, his voice barely above a whisper.

Giovanni picks the photo back up, letting his gaze linger on the image as Silver hesitantly takes it from him.

“Your mother… Grace was…” What does he say? Kind? Loving? Simple fillers to avoid a real answer? He takes a deep breath. “Ambitious. She was a doctor, and had her own research along with that.” Always looking to help people. “And she loved you. More than anything.” The corner of his mouth twitches. “Sneasel was her idea.”

He’d suggested a persian. Or an ursaring, or kangaskhan, or anything with an ounce of instinct to nurture. Though clearly the dark type had developed one at some point.

Silver nods, and Giovanni watches as he runs a thumb over the picture.

“Would she have still liked me? After everything?”

“Nothing Pryce made you do is your fault, Silver.”

“I know.” His tone suggests otherwise. “But…”

“Yes. She would have.” Giovanni sighs, tracing his fingers through Silver’s hair.

It’s been years since he’s had to think about her.

He’d mourned, then closed off the memories to the best of his abilities; throwing himself into distractions. The gym, Silver, other work.

Then everything had gone to hell when he woke up to the sound of breaking glass, and he hadn’t had time to do anything beyond try and forget.

“What happened to her?”

“There was a car crash.” Memories of the hospital hit him without warning: a fussing but unharmed Silver being handed to him, a doctor (one of her co-workers) breaking the news. “She didn’t make it.”

But that’s not the full story.

No, the full story is that Nanu (the backstabbing scum) had somehow dug up a less-than-clean business deal, and, lacking proof because there never was any, had gone to her, expecting details. His work beyond the gym had always bored her, she knew nothing, but whatever she’d been told had been enough to send her running, with Silver in tow.

As if he’d ever laid a hand on either of them.
As if he would have.

He only found out after she was already dead; home from the hospital to find a note, and it’s the fact that had they made it Silver would have at least been safe from Pryce that keeps him from hating her.

“Oh”, Silver mumbles, and Giovanni pulls him closer.

“Anything else?”

Silver shakes his head, holding the picture up for him to take.

“You can keep it if you want.”

He slips it into the pocket of his sweatshirt without a word, before slipping his arms around Giovanni and curling closer.

“Do you want to stay with me tonight?”

He feels Silver nod. “If that’s okay.”

“Of course.”

He stands up, wincing when Silver’s weight shifts briefly to his injured arm, before he gets him positioned better and heads out of the study.

Nidoking had returned to his spot by the other door, and he looks up when they enter the room, before closing his eyes and rolling over.

Giovanni sets Silver on the bed, and lets him crawl under the blanket as he steps back to close the door to the study.

Sneasel darts in at the last second, and curls up next to Silver as Giovanni slips under the blanket.

Silver inches closer, and he slips an arm around him to pull him over.

“Are you okay?”

Silver nods, curling his fingers into Giovanni’s shirt. “Goodnight Dad.”

“Goodnight.” He presses a kiss against the top of Silver’s head. “I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

(This chapter has nothing to do with the anons on my Tumblr, it was planned anyway, they were just very well timed)
Chapter 40

Green’s off the ground barely a second before it splits, and she glares at Rhyhorn as she pulls herself onto Blasty’s back for the third time, ignoring the ache in her side.

Her cast (finally) came off yesterday, and she’d jumped at the opportunity to start more practical lessons with Giovanni, and is now being made to regret asking for any form of teaching, as the makeshift battlefield in the yard gets torn up around her.

She jumps off Blasty, no sense in wasting water, and signals for another blast at the ground type as he lands.

Did Giovanni just signal for him to stay put?

Rhyhorn’s claws dig into the ground, and as soon as Blasty’s attack ends, Green hears a snap of fingers, and the ground shakes.

She catches herself on a tree, and tries not to wince as Blasty falls backward.

On instinct, he catches himself with two jets of water. They look weaker than they should, and Green realizes what Giovanni’s trying to do; run them both out of ammo.

Well, if he wants a physical fight…

“Mega punch!”

Rhyhorn’s gotta be weak, if they just land this-

“Drill run.”

She flinches at the sound of contact, and it only takes a second for Rhyhorn to send Blasty crashing back to the ground.

Or that could happen.

Green forces out a sigh, before walking over, meeting Giovanni halfway across the battlefield.

“Do you know where you messed up?” he asks as he kneels down, checking Rhyhorn’s face.

“Getting up close.”

“Yes. And?”

“And what?”

“Not reading your opponent. One more hydro pump probably would have won you the match. If you had water left for it.”

That smirk is so much more tolerable when it’s on Silver’s face.

“You were trying to make me run out?”

“Yes.” He stands back up. “Don’t get too upset over that. Oak’s been handing squirtle out as starters for decades; I’d be surprised if there’s a gym leader in Kanto who doesn’t have their weaknesses
memorized.”

“That makes sense.” Her eyes drift around the yard as she slowly stretches her arms over her head; testing her mostly healed ribs.

He nods, recalling Rhyhorn. “You’re doing good. Especially since you’re a few months out of practice.”

“Thanks.”

“Anything else today?” He looks thoughtful as he steps back.

“No- Wait, why’d you have him take that attack?”

The corner of his mouth twitches. “Rhyhorn isn’t fast enough for dodging to be a reliable method for anything, and you’d go through more water on a successful hit than a miss anyway.”

“That’s a big gamble.”

“Only if it doesn’t pay off.”

Green nods, slipping Blasty’s ball from her pocket to recall him.

Before she can go anywhere though, Giovanni adds, “I’ll ask Silver this too, but do you want to keep things separate, or would you rather some lessons be together?”

She bites her lip. What little of a gap between their skills there had been has been closing fairly quickly, and it’s not like she dislikes working with Silver (and she doesn’t need to worry about him getting hurt here, so in theory she can focus more either way), but she’s also not convinced that her ability to fight on her own is as good as it should be. Five years working together, versus two on her own; it seems clear which skill set needs more work.

After a few seconds, she shrugs. “I’m fine keeping things separate, but if he wants to do it together I don’t mind.”

“Alright.”

Green hesitates, before nodding. “Thanks.”

She heads up for the house, not checking to see if he’s following, and finds Silver sitting on the porch, feeding his pokemon. Sneasel’s perched on the back of a bench, eating an egg, Murkrow’s eating out of a dish close to the door, and Nidoran is sitting next to Silver, eating out of his hand.

Green doesn’t miss the suspicious look the poison type gives her as she sits down next to Silver (she didn’t intentionally put him between her and Murkrow. Really).

“How are you?” she asks.

“Good.” He scratches Nidoran’s ears. “That’s an… interesting way to use a blastoise.”

She smiles. “I forgot you hadn’t seen that yet. Jiggly’s better to travel on still, but it works in a fight. Usually.”

Silver’s lips twitch before he looks up at her. “You’re still sticking around? Even with your ribs healed?”
“Yeah. I’m not going anywhere for a bit.” She’s not surprised he’d been wondering about that, but since Giovanni had mentioned going back to the gym she’s not sure she has another option.

As soon as anything gets up and running with repairs or whatever else it’ll be obvious he’s back, and from there only a matter of time before someone, probably the Professor, figures out about Silver. And then she can kiss any help from him, Red, and Blue goodbye. Along with her pokedex probably.

It doesn’t matter all that much; things will be easier for Silver if Interpol drops whatever investigations they’re bothering with, and it’s a matter of time before she or Giovanni dig up something on her parents, but it does mean that now’s probably not the time to be taking off on her own.

Silver nods, turning back to Nidoran. “Thanks.”

“Don’t worry about it. It’s easier for everyone if I stick around, I think.” She watches as he closes up the container he’d been feeding Nidoran from, before asking, “Do you want to go into town later?”

“Why?”

“I seem to recall you saying you wanted to do ‘something fun’ back in Violet.”

He glares at her, but shrugs. “If you want. Like what?”

“You could help me pick out new sheets and curtains for my room. The ones in there are really plain.” She’s also sick of looking at them after two months of bed-rest, and replacing them seems like a worthwhile goal.

“That sounds boring.”

“I didn’t say you couldn’t get something too. Like… What was that show you used to try and watch whenever we broke in somewhere with a TV? We could try and find that.”

His face is a bright shade of red. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Stop being difficult, I’m trying to be nice. What was it?”

He turns his head away. “I’ll probably recognize it if I see it. But that doesn’t mean I’m getting it.”

Green smirks as she stands up. “We’ll see.”
There had been a time when the Viridian Gym was indisputably the grandest in Kanto. The largest building, and battlefield, with enough room for a tournament, had Giovanni ever been inclined.

Now it is mostly a pile of rubble that he’s not completely sure he should be entering, let alone actively disturbing, but he wants an idea of how much work will be needed to get it all up and running again.

Timing is key; the moment anything noticeable is done it will be obvious he’s back, so he needs to take things slowly. Get a cover story together, make sure Silver (and Green if she’s going to be sticking around) can give it completely and consistently on command, and, ideally, get a better idea of what exactly is going on in Vermilion, lest that get pinned on him.

At the same time though, he can’t take too long; half the Kanto league is missing, replacements will be getting dug up soon, and all this will be easier if he doesn’t have to deal with being dismissed and reinstated.

At least the building is not as bad as he’d anticipated. Yes, the battlefield and its surrounding walls are trashed, but the rest of the building is, while shaken up, not in need of repairs so much as a thorough cleaning.

And refurnishing; scavengers seem to have made off with a decent amount of the contents of both the lobby and his office; lamps, books, and paintings missing, locks damaged, and the drawers of his desk seem to have gotten the worst of it, they’ve all been forcibly broken into. (Which is interesting, now he thinks about it; some bored adolescent looking for easy cash wouldn’t have put that much effort into an uncertain reward. Perhaps Interpol has somehow gotten even sloppier.)

He taps his fingers on the desk, before stepping away, letting his gaze drift around the office again.

This is not a position he’d ever expected to end up in; the gym had been one of many sacrifices early on. But it is the right next step, both to get Interpol off his back, and to ensure Silver has somewhere stable to piece things together from, which he won’t get if being able to pack up and vanish always has to be an option.

It’s going to be several months of work, and even more, repairing his image, but it’ll be worth it. This gym had been more than a front once, and it will be again.

But for now, there is nothing for him to do, covers and excuses take priority over the building’s sorely needed repairs, so with one more look around he slips out.

The path through the forest back to the house had been almost completely overgrown when he’d first led Silver down it months ago, and while it’s still not noticeable to anyone not looking for it, the plants have all been trampled back as a result of Silver and Green’s occasional joint trips into town, making for a more pleasant walk back.

He slips in through the back door, welcomed by the faint sounds of whatever show the two had bought on their last outing. A glance in as he passes the theater shows them curled up on the couch, under several blankets, watching a brightly colored cartoon.

The corner of his mouth twitches as he steps away, at least they’re both in a good mood.

He works his way up to his study. There may be no point in getting anything started yet, but there
are floor plans somewhere in his desk, he may as well did them up now.

Sorting through the desk takes less time than he’d expected, but then there isn’t as much to have to sort through now, and he finds them shoved in the corner of a bottom drawer.

With the papers moved to somewhere more easily accessed, he pulls a small box out of another drawer.

He sets it on the desk, before opening it to find a pile of small, metal badges. He pulls one out, leaning back in the chair as he runs his thumb over the smooth surface.

How long has it been since he’d awarded one?
“Can I braid your hair?”

Silver looks up from his book to see Green perched on the coffee table in front of him, a hairbrush already in her hand.

“Why?”

“Because your bangs are always in your face and it bothers me. I know you don’t want them cut, so why don’t you let me find a way to keep them out of your way?”

“They don’t bother me, and it’s my hair.” He looks back down at his book just as he sees her stick her lip out in a pout. “That’s not gonna work.”

“Can I just put it up, and then if you really hate it I’ll take it out? Please? Life is easier when you don’t have to constantly squint through your hair.”

He glares up at her, before quietly shifting so she can sit behind him and reach his hair.

“Don’t do anything weird.”

“I won’t.”

She sinks down next to him, and after a moment he feels the brush tug through his hair, pulling it back. Silver lets his attention drift back to the book.

After a few minutes, Green’s gloves land on his knee, and he feels her fingers skim through his hair.

“Your hair’s so soft now.”

He hums in acknowledgment, before turning a page.

It had taken over an hour back in Olivine to get all the twigs and knots out of his hair (it may or may not have involved him sitting rigidly on the bed while Giovanni picked them out), and since then he’d done his best to make sure he didn’t have to repeat the procedure. That it had wound up soft was merely a happy side effect that everyone else enjoys far more than he does.

Green tugs his bangs back, and Silver feels her divide his hair up, before she starts braiding it back along the top of his head.

“When did you learn how to do this?” he asks after a moment. He can’t see what she’s doing, but it feels more complicated than the simple braids she used to stick in his hair whenever he fell asleep in the wrong position.

“I mess around with mine a lot, I just don’t leave it in usually. Since I keep it neat anyway it doesn’t need to be pinned back.”

She really thinks she’s subtle, doesn’t she?

“I just don’t want a stranger by my neck with scissors.”

“I could cut it.”
“No.”
He turns his head enough to see her making a face, before he looks straight ahead again. “I like it long. And if I cut it short you can’t mess with it, right?”

“Stop making good points, it’s annoying.”

A smile pulls at his lips, but he doesn’t look back.

He feels a hair tie get slipped into his hair, and after her hands drop, he shifts so he’s facing her.

“How’s that?” Green tugs her gloves back on.

“It’s okay. I’ll probably take it out if we leave the house.” For as much as he doesn’t want anything on his face ever again, he likes having the option of hiding it.

“Good enough. What are you reading?”

Silver hands the book over, before reaching up to feel the braid. Just one, running back a few inches, before being tied off. At least she’d kept it simple.

“How? Do you just like researching or…?”

He shrugs. “I was digging through the library a lot when I first got here, and I didn’t know what a lot of the books were about. I’m just working my way through now.” They can both rattle off evolution methods, type match-ups, and battle strategies on command, but, outside reading, non-combative subjects hadn’t been a high priority.

“That makes sense.” She flips through the book before handing it back. “Filling in the gaps.”

He feels her inch closer as he opens it back to where he’d been, and after a moment she says, “You know, if it’s bothering you, you could talk to Giovanni about it. He likes teaching, even if he won’t admit it, and he’d probably help you.”

“I’ll think about it.”

It’s not a bad idea, and she’s right that he doesn’t like not knowing things, especially when said things are probably common knowledge to anyone with a… less specialized education.

“You should.” She wraps an arm around his shoulders for a few seconds, before standing back up. “Thanks for letting me do your hair.”

“Thanks for not doing anything weird.”

He looks up to see her smirking at him, before she walks out of the room, leaving him to return to his book.

Except he doesn’t, because after a few minutes of thought, he decides that he might as well mention Green’s idea, and no one’s doing anything else today so there’s no reason to put it off.

It takes a few minutes to find Giovanni; sitting in the hall, reading something on a tablet, that, when Silver leans over the arm of his chair to see, turns out to be the news.

“Need something?” Giovanni asks, gently steering Silver out of the way of the screen.

He nods. “I was thinking… I mean, me and Green were talking, and…” he pauses, not sure how to
put this. “And I realized I never really got anything school-like. I mean, I know stuff, but it’s mostly just whatever was relevant before. I was just wondering if we could maybe work some of that into the lessons we’re already doing?”

“That’s fine.”

Silver looks up, surprised at the quick agreement.

Then he feels guilty for being surprised; there was no real reason to say no.

“Thanks.”

“Of course. Did Green do your hair?”

“Yes.”

Warm fingers brush the side of his face, and Silver catches Giovanni’s hand to hold it against his cheek.

“You look nice with it out of your face.”

“It’s not staying that way.”
“Now repeat that back to me.”

“I ran into you in Olivine, you were on your way back from Sinnoh. You’d been there for a year working on some research, and were planning on going back to the gym from the start. And we didn’t know how it had been damaged until I called Green.” Silver counts each point off on his fingers, before looking up.

“Good. And Team Rocket?”

His head tilts to the side. “Team what?”

A smile briefly crosses Giovanni’s face as he nods. Silver’s end of things isn’t far from the truth, and that’s making things considerably easier; there’s nothing for him to memorize, just omit.

“Is this going to work?” Green pipes up from where she’s sitting at his desk, her feet propped up on the wooden top.

“Get your feet off the table.”

She sighs theatrically but slides them off, curling up in the chair as he adds, “And it will. No one in Interpol or the League necessarily needs to believe it, just take the easier solution to several problems.” Both replacing and arresting him would be a drain on resources that could be avoided by letting things be ignored. And people tend to believe what they want to be true, or what is most convenient, anyways.

She nods, resting her chin in her hand. She’s been far too agreeable lately.

Silver slides off the couch after a moment and turns back to Giovanni.

“Is that it for right now?”

“Yes. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

He slips out of the room, and Giovanni waits until he’s a ways down the hall, before turning to Green.

“You know I won’t kick you out if you don’t help, right?”

“Why does that matter?”

“I’m just pointing out that you don’t have to. You’ve been oddly helpful lately, I want to make sure you’re not thinking I’m trying to force you to, that’s all.”

She nods. “I know you’re not. Oak will probably figure everything out with Silver once you go back, so I’m expecting them all to stop talking to me once this is over whether I help or not. Which is fine; Silver’s more important, but they’re all lost causes either way, and you’re helping with my parents, so I may as well help you.”
“If you’re sure.” He probably should be concerned with how calm she is about this, but he’s also not the person she’s likely to let herself have a breakdown in front of, so he’s not in the best position to gauge her behavior.

“I am.”

Before he can respond, his phone lights up from where it’s resting on the desk, and he steps over, picking it up.

The number is from Blackthorn, and he sincerely wishes he didn’t know what it was about.

“Hello?”

“Were you still interested in updates on Lance?” the woman (who had he assigned to this? He can’t think of her name) on the other end asks.

“Yes.” He pulls a notepad from a desk drawer and ignores the way Green’s watching him as he picks up a pen. “What’s he doing?”

“He’s back in more regular contact with the other three. I think they’re after the boy from Pallet.”

“What a shame. Anything else?” He pins the phone against his shoulder as he jots down what she’d said, doing his best to not react to Green less-than-subtly trying to read it.

“They’re planning something in Kanto. He’s back to looking into the birds if that’s still relevant.”

“That problem has been resolved. Who else knows about this?”

“You said to go directly to you, that’s what I did.”

“Good.” This doesn’t need to get out. “Keep me updated if there’s anything else.”

“Yes, sir.”

The call ends, and with a faint sigh, he hands the note pad to Green.

“Who’s Lance? Why’s he after Red?”

“Lance is a dragon tamer and member of the Elite Four. They’re an exclusive branch of the League before you ask. He’s from Viridian, but spends most of his time in Blackthorn.” There is more, but he’s not elaborating now, it’s too complicated.

He sinks into the chair behind the desk. “As for why he’s after Red, I’m not sure. It depends on what he’s planning.”

“Planning?”

“He’s been looking into Ho-oh and Lugia for a few years. That’s how he caught my attention, but beyond that, I don’t know yet. He’s a self-righteous, egotistical, child with too many resources at his disposal, I doubt it’s good.”

She nods, still studying the papers.

“Don’t.”

“Don’t what?”
“Don’t try to make this your problem. It’s not.”

She looks up. “Then why are you looking into it?”

“Spite, mainly.”

Green crosses her arms, looking unconvinced.

“If it will make you feel better, I’ll share any other updates I get. And it’s completely possible this won’t go anywhere.”

It will. He knows this. Lance has been planning something for years, and with Kanto’s league the mess it currently is, now would be an ideal time to put whatever it is into motion.

But Green seems to relax a bit, the tension leaves her shoulders, and she stops glaring quite as much.

“If it does go somewhere, what are you going to do?”

“Depends. Most likely it’ll take time before anything happens. When and if it does I’ll decide then.”

She nods, setting the papers on the desk.

“Tell me if anything changes, and I want to know what your plans are.”

“No insistence on warning people?”

“What am I supposed to say? That you found it out?”

Fair point. “I’ll keep you updated.”

“And Silver?”

“Let’s just see how it plays out first.” And if he can find a way of getting the two of them out of the way before anything happens.
“Your parents moved to Sevii when they left Pallet. Your mother has a law practice and your father’s teaching.”

Green stares at Giovanni for at least a minute, not sure she’d heard anything he’d just said correctly.

He’d found them? Just like that?

It had only been a few months. She and Oak had been looking for over a year.

She watches as he sets a card with something written on it on the counter next to her.

“Phone numbers. Call when you’re ready.”

He starts to step away, and she darts forward, wrapping her arms around him.

“Thank you.” She doesn’t like how shaky her voice is, and she buries her face in his jacket to make sure he doesn’t see any tears.

He stiffens, but after a few seconds a hand settles on her shoulder, and she stays clinging to him. It should bother her that the way he smells of smoke and fresh tuned earth is comforting, but right now she just needs a minute to absorb everything.

She can go home.

It’s no longer a distant goal; it’s a phone call, and boat ride away, and then all of this is over.

“Thank you”, she repeats, stepping back.

Her hands are shaking, and she crosses her arms as she stares at the phone numbers on the counter. Her figurative ticket home.

“You’re welcome. Are you alright?”

She nods, making herself pick up the card, and tuck it into a skirt pocket.

“I’m fine.” She doesn’t sound fine.

She takes a deep breath as she steps back. Go for a walk, calm down, then call.

“I’m going to go-”, her voice breaks, and she gestures towards the door.

The corner of his mouth twitches, and he nods. “That’s fine.”

Green slips out, and a few minutes later is wandering down one of the main paths of the forest, trying to work up the nerve to call.

It’s not that she doesn’t want to, but it’s so much harder than it should be to just pull out her phone and dial a number.

She sinks down on a log, staring at the paper.

Written under Mummy’s number is the name of her practice’s website, and a smile pulls at Green’s lips. Research will help calm her down, even if it’s very unnecessary.
She pulls the website up with her phone, and the photograph at the top of the page catches her attention before anything else.

Her (vague) memories hadn’t been inaccurate, but they’d also been just off enough that it feels strange to see her real face.

Hair a few shades darker than Green’s frames a small face with blue eyes and a thoughtful smile, and Green stares at the picture for a few minutes, fingers tapping on her leg.

A blur at the edge of her vision catches her attention, and she looks up to see a pikachu sprinting down the path.

Well, “sprint” is the wrong word; it has an awful limp, and when she squints at it-

Is that a scar on its ear?

“Pika?”

The pokemon stops, turning around to study her with wide eyes, and Green slides off the log to kneel on the ground.

Pika sniffs the air, before walking over.

He’s hurt, Green notices. Messed up fur, scratches, and what looks like early stages of frostbite cover him. He was in a fight that did not go smoothly.

Which begs the question; where’s Red?

Pika gets close enough for her to reach for him, and she pulls him up into her lap to get a better look at his injuries. Nothing looks too urgent, but he needs to get to the Center.

Unfortunately, as soon as she gets him settled in her arms, he sniffs at her again and starts thrashing.

“Pika, stop! I’m trying to help!”

A weak bolt of electricity shoots up her arms, and she drops him, clutching her hands to her chest.

Pika takes off down the path again, and Green follows until he darts into the underbrush and she loses him, leaving her frantically searching through bushes and overgrown plants with no luck.

She ends up at the river, and since she still doesn’t know the forest that well (she doesn’t have Silver’s gift for navigating through trees), elects to stick to it. It meets up with the path she’d been on anyway, it’s possible she’ll run into Pika if she follows it.

Instead, she eventually comes across the familiar outline of a dozing Nidoqueen, and next to her Silver and Yellow are sitting on the river bank, in the middle of what looks like a fishing lesson.

“Has either of you seen a pikachu?” Green asks, too out of breath for a greeting.

They both look up, and Yellow’s eyes widen as Silver’s narrow.

“Miss Green, are you okay?” The concern in Yellow’s voice is oddly sweet, even if Green’s not really in the mood for it.

“I am. But the pikachu, have you seen one?”
Both their heads shake, and after a moment Yellow stands up, pushing the fishing rod into Silver’s hands.

“Ratty, come here!”

A Rattata runs over, and Yellow kneels down next to him, setting a hand on his head.

Green watches, confused, as Yellow closes her eyes for a few seconds before she looks back up.

“How did you do that?” Silver asks, staring at her.

Yellow glances at him. “I can... sense pokemon’s thoughts. I’ve always been able to do it.” Turning back to Green, she adds, “Why were you looking for a pikachu?”

“I saw Red’s run by. He’s hurt, and he took off when I tried to get a closer look.”

“Is Red in trouble?”

“Yes. He is. This happening only a week after Giovanni had gotten an update on Lance, who just happened to be after Red, is too much of a coincidence. He, or someone working for him, had gotten to Red, and Pika had somehow gotten away.

But Yellow doesn’t need to know all that. She’s just a normal girl (who can read pokemon’s minds), from a (currently) quiet city.

“He is, isn’t he?” Yellow asks, her hands curling into fists.

“Probably”, Green says finally. “But it’ll be okay, I’ll find him.”

“I want to help.” Green opens her mouth to protest, and she adds, “I’m eleven, that’s old enough to go on a journey. And if we find Pika, I can try and tell you where Red is from his memories.”

She’s eleven? She’s shorter than Silver!

But she also has a point.

And if Pika had bolted earlier because he’d smelled Giovanni on her then he probably won’t let her catch up to him again, and definitely won’t go near Silver.

Green crosses her arms, studying Yellow for a few seconds, trying to think of a plan.

Pika had probably been heading to Pallet. If something had happened to Red, it makes sense that his last- no, not last; most recent, that’s better- order to had been to alert Oak.

That still leaves the question of what had happened, but if Yellow can get him from Pallet they can find that out.

Or Green can go to Pallet and bring him back here. He might be more agreeable if someone’s treated his injuries.

What to do?
Giovanni should probably be told that Lance is putting whatever his plan is into motion, even if he’s not that likely to care about Red being gone. Maybe she can just run both options by him, then make up her mind. If nothing else, he knows more about who they’re dealing with than she does.

“How about this-”, she says finally, “-you meet us at the Center in two hours, and I’ll tell you how you can help, okay?”

Yellow nods and Green holds a hand out to help Silver up.

Her parents are going to need to wait a little longer.
Chapter 45

Green fills Silver in on what’s going on as they head back to the house.

He already knew that Lance might be a problem at some point, and doesn’t fully get why Red missing is the bigger problem in her mind (he’s one person, he can’t be that vital), but that’s not that big of a problem. They need to stop Lance and find her friend. That’s all he really needs to know anyway.

Giovanni doesn’t seem surprised that Red’s missing when they tell him though, and Silver watches from the couch as Green paces through the living room, explaining everything.

“And Yellow did this thing-”, Green continues, “- where she put her hand on her rattata, and she said she could sense its thoughts. And she seemed pretty confident that she could do the same with Pika if we found him. Do you know anything about that? Could she be a psychic?”

“She could be, but that’s not what that is.” Giovanni’s voice doesn’t change from his usual bored tone, but something in his expression changes. It’s faint, but something about what Green had said had apparently gotten his attention.

“Then what is it?”

“There’s a legend that every few years a child is born in Viridian with powers similar to what you’re describing. Lance is one, supposedly, and if Yellow is around your age, I believe she’d be the right age to be the next one.”

“So she might be helpful, is what you’re saying?”

“Depends on what you want her for.”

“Lance wanted Red for something, so it’s not impossible that he might go after Blue and me too. If that is the case, then it makes more sense to send someone new to Pallet to get Pika, and Yellow’s the only one who can find out what happened from him anyway.”

“If he didn’t want to go with you, why would he go with her?” Silver asks, not sure what piece of information he’s missing.

“Yellow knows Red somehow, and I think he bolted because he was hurt anyway. If Oak gets him cleaned up he should be more cooperative.”

“Or you can save everyone the effort. Red is most likely somewhere in Mount Moon.”

They both look back to Giovanni, and Silver tilts his head as Green asks, “What do you mean?”

“An injured pikachu isn’t going to make it very far on his own, especially with injuries as bad as you described. Through Pewter isn’t that unrealistic, but through the mountain, and possibly Cerulean as well, would be pushing it.”

Green crosses her arms, and Silver can see her trying to think her way out of this. Neither of them does well in caves, and their teams aren’t the best for the mountain either.

“I don’t know Mount Moon very well, it’d be easier to get Pika first than to search it blindly”, she says finally.
“I can search the mountains.”

“Why do you suddenly care what happens to him?”

“Lance clearly needed something from him. If he’s still alive, it’s possible he’ll know what. You can still send Yellow off for the pikachu if it will make you feel better, but the sooner someone finds Red the better, and searching the mountain now is the quickest way.”

Silver looks back and forth between them, trying to figure out what the plan will end up being, and where he’s going to fit into it. Because he is not sitting around the house while everyone else does the hard work again.

“So you think sending Yellow is a good idea then?”

“I think you’re going to do it no matter what I say, so my input doesn’t matter that much.”

Green wrinkles her nose then glances at Silver.

“You’re not going to stay here if we say to, are you?”

“No.”

Giovanni sighs. “Green, what are you going to be doing?”

“I’ll stick a tracker on Yellow, and tail her for a bit, to make sure she’s got everything under control. Then I can try and track down their base, or tip off the other gym leaders.”

“Can I go with you?” Silver asks before either of them can come up with an alternative.

She glances at Giovanni, who doesn’t look particularly happy about it, but he nods.

“Just be careful. I’ll head out tonight.”

“Okay. We should go meet back up with Yellow.” She glances at Silver. “Are you ready?”

He nods, sliding off the couch, before turning towards Giovanni. “Um…”

A smile pulls at his lips. “I’ll still be here when you two get back, it’ll take a bit to get everything together. But go get your friend set up.” He ruffles Silver’s hair as he stands up. “And be careful.”

“We will.” Green wraps an arm around Silver’s shoulders, and he nods as he starts to head to the door.

Green doesn’t follow him, and he glances back when he reaches the door to see her rocking slightly on her feet, looking like she’s thinking.

She glances over at him and smiles. “I’ll be there in a minute.”

He nods, stepping into the hall, but he doesn’t leave, just darts to the side and presses his ear to the wall.

“Did you call them?” Giovanni asks.

“I was about to when Pika showed up. It’s fine, I’d rather wait than have them get dragged into all this.”
Silver tenses. Had they found Green’s parents?

“Why don’t you just send Yellow to Pallet, and then call? I’m not saying to go to Sevii now, but you could.”

There’s a brief pause, before Green says, “If you want me to call and send Silver there I’ll try, but I’m not going to leave.”

“No. He wouldn’t stay. Just be careful.”

After a few seconds, the door opens, and Silver steps away as quickly as he can.

“Are you ready to go?” Green asks, and he nods.

“How are you gonna get a tracker on Yellow?” Silver asks half an hour later when they reach Viridian.

“I was thinking a hat.” Green glances in the windows of the stores they walk past, before pulling Silver into one.

She’s after a simple straw hat, and Silver wanders through the displays as she pays for it, before she taps his shoulder and they leave.

Yellow isn’t at the Center when they reach it, and they sit on a bench outside as Green tucks a small transmitter into the band of the hat.

“Where did you get that?” He’s never seen her with anything quite that high tech before.

Green smirks, “Stole it.”

“From?”

“Team Rocket.”

“Oh.”

Finally, she finishes with the hat, leaning back. Her fingers slip into the pocket of her skirt, and he can see the outline of her fist through the fabric.

“Is everything okay?”

She nods. “Red picked a bad time to get kidnapped, that’s all.”

“There would have been a good time?”

“Well, my schedule was clear last week. And I was bored. Now I’m not, he’s being very inconsiderate.”

Silver studies her quietly, not sure how to respond. She hadn’t mentioned her parents to him yet, but if she wants time to think things through that’s fine. Especially since it won’t do any good right now anyway.

Even if he’d like it more if she’d actually tell him when something is bothering her.

But Silver can see Yellow walking towards them, supply bag and fishing pole in tow, so he doesn’t say anything.
“What’s the plan?” she asks once she reaches them.

Green sits up, looking serious.

“You are going to go to Pallet. Red most likely sent Pika to Professor Oak, so I want you to go to the lab and get him. You don’t tell anyone that I sent you. Don’t give out your name either.”

“I can do that.”

“One more thing.” She stands up, and sets the hat on Yellow’s head, angling it so her ponytail doesn’t show. “We want to throw the bad guys off as much as possible, so keep that cute ponytail hidden as long as you can, okay?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Yellow pulls the hat further down on her head, before stepping back. She gives both of them a smile, then lets Dody the doduo out, and climbs on his back.

“Bye then. Be careful.”

“You too,” Silver replies, his tone awkward, but he waves as Yellow and Dody race off.
Leaving had been less stressful this time.

Pryce is dead, and neither Silver or Green is injured, of course it was easier for Giovanni to get out the door, even if they’re both also taking off to pick a fight with trainers well beyond them in terms of experience.

But then so was Sabrina, and she’d still been sulking over whatever Green had done last he’d seen her, so who knows; he’s here because he’s been wrong before.

“Here” being a cheap coffee shop in Pewter.

Compared to the other mountain ranges on the continent, Mount Moon is relatively small. It also lacks the storms, ice, and other such hazards of its grander counterparts. Which is not to say Giovanni was particularly eager to search it blindly, and he’s more than willing to take the lead that has so thoughtfully presented itself just now.

At the table next to him in this barely presentable cafe are a pair of teenagers, a girl with long, messy, blue hair, and a boy perhaps a few years younger, with stick straight, purple hair, arguing about a boy apparently frozen in ice in the mountain.

He’d followed them in here a few minutes ago, watched them pay from a clearly stolen wallet, and had been sitting here, sipping weak coffee since, piecing together a way of getting more information from them.

“Why can’t we just leave a note at the gym or something? We don’t even need to go to the police,” the boy argues.

“Because it’s not our problem, Will. Besides, if it was him then we need to get the hell out of here.”

“Will” sinks back in his chair, staring at the centerpiece on the table.

“We don’t know that it’s him.”

“It’s an ice sculpture. Just because it’s not chasing us through a room doesn’t mean he couldn’t have made it. And I’m not risking it just because you’re picking now to have a morality crisis.”

Giovanni goes still, listening closer as their argument continues for another few minutes before they leave, and he gives them only a few seconds head start before he slips out after them, catching up with relative ease, but he still gives them half a block of space.

He catches a subtle signal from the girl, and Will slips away at a crosswalk, vanishing into the crowd across the street before Giovanni can find him again.

So they’re setting a trap.

At least it makes his end of things easier.

He lets the girl lead him down an alley, and slips his hands into his pockets as he stops in the middle. He’s not in the mood for figuring out where she’d vanished to and how, but he can still feel her gaze
on him.

He leans against the wall at his back, and slips a cigarette from his jacket pocket and lights it, exhaling a breath of smoke as he studies the rooftops.

“You can come out, I’m just here to talk.”

The sound of a pokemon being released catches his attention, and he glances over to see Will standing next to an Espeon.

After a few seconds, the girl drops onto a fire escape above him, and sits down, a leg hanging through the railing’s bars and a pokeball hidden in her hand.

“What about?”

“The boy in the mountain.”

He’s careful to keep them both in his line of sight as he responds. If he’s right these two had nearly killed Green, some caution seems justified.

“What boy?”

He flicks a bit of ash off the cigarette. “An empty coffee shop is a poor place for a talk you don’t want to be overheard. A crowded restaurant would have worked better.”

The girl scowls. “What do we get out of telling you?”

“I’ll buy you a full meal. Take me to where you found him, and I’ll throw in enough money for boat tickets out of Vermilion. Or whatever else you might want it for.”

That gets their attention. Will looks up at his partner, and Giovanni can see her weighing their options.

“I can tell you who did it if that will help you make up your mind.”

“Go on then.”

“Her name is Lorelei. She’s an ice specialist from Sevii, and member of the Elite Four if that means anything to you.”

There’s a very faint glint of relief in her eyes.

“And the boy?”

“His name is Red, he won the last League Tournament.”

The girl studies him for another minute, before she stands up, climbing over the railing and dropping down in front of him, holding her hand out.

“Dinner first. Then we’ll tell you. Then tomorrow we’ll take you out there, and you can give us the cash when we get back to town. Deal?”

“Deal.” He shakes her hand, being mindful of the scar tissue that covers most of it. It’s from frostbite, and his theories are good as confirmed.

She nods. “I’m Karen. That’s Will.”
“Giovanni.” He drops her hand. Giving out his name has several ways of ending badly, but for now, he needs to keep them on his side, and not starting on an easily proven falsehood is likely to aid in that.

It takes very little time to get dinner. Neither of them is picky, and they both seem in a hurry to get a meal before all of this turns out to be a trap, and within an hour they’re all sitting in a restaurant, a map of Mount Moon spread over the center of the table.

“There’s a cave here,” Will explains, pointing on the map. “It slopes down a ways, and as you reach the bottom it looks like there was a fight pretty recently. We found him in the center of it. It’s pretty hard to get to, but we can lead you there tomorrow.”

Giovanni nods, studying the point on the map. The terrain won’t be an issue, out of the way though it is.

“You described him as an ‘ice sculpture’ earlier. How so?”

Karen shrugs. “He’s just frozen in place. If you’re not up close you’d just think he was an oddly posed statue.”

Getting him out will be a challenge then.

“Do you think he’s still alive?” Will asks after a moment.

“If they were trying to kill him there would be much less to find. Whatever Lorelei did, it’s meant to be survivable.”

Will nods, but Karen looks over, her brow knit.

“Who’s ‘they’?”

Mentally cursing his slip up, Giovanni studies her, thinking.

If they stick around they could be helpful. Two more people, not to mention skill-sets he knows how to work with.

But, if they don’t, there would be two wild cards running around knowing about both Lance, and the fact that Red is incapacitated.

Finally, he sits back. “The Elite Four is a branch of the League. It consists of Lance, Agatha, Bruno, and Lorelei. Each of them has their own specialties, and currently, they are planning something. Lance is the one in charge, and whatever it is they need Red out of the way.”

“Why’s it your problem? If you were with Interpol you’d have shoved a badge in our faces by now, so what gives?”

“I live in Kanto, and as such, I would prefer it not end up a crater as the result of an egotistical child, how’s that?”

She studies him for a few seconds, before shrugging. “Fair enough.”

Chapter End Notes
To spare everyone the mental math that took me longer than it should have; Will is 16, Karen is 19
“Did we lose her?”

“I don’t think she was following us.”

“Then she followed Yellow and Bill. That’s worse.”

“Well, I don’t see her so…”

Green bites her lip, and Silver watches as she scans the woods again, before her shoulders slump and she nods.

“Probably too optimistic to think she’d just leave them alone anyway. Come on.”

“Where?”

“There’s no point in going through Mount Moon, it’ll take too long, so let’s get to Pewter and take the train to Cerulean. If we time it right, we can check up on Bill while we’re there.”

“Who is he?”

“Some computer scientist. I don’t think he’s done anything you’re going to care about, but Professor Oak and the boys seem to like him. I think he’s kind of a wimp though.”

“Oh.”

Silver falls into step next to her, still scanning their surroundings. The woman with the ice types (Lorelei? He thinks that’s right) seems to be long gone, but he’s still on edge.

They’d been tailing Yellow through the forest, planning on branching off once they reached Cerulean, and had wound up having to help her and “Bill” get away from a member of the Elite Four, and now they’d lost all three of them. And the very important pikachu.

He just hopes she didn’t see them; they’re a day-long hike into the forest either way right now (and Green’s not… the best in the woods. He’s trying to ignore her jumping every time a bird leaves a tree), and another fight will complicate things even more.

“What’s the plan after that?” he asks once they reach the main path again.

“Depends on a few things. Where Yellow is, and how much she’s found out. And what’s going on with Red.”

“Sounds good.”

They make good time through the forest, and by the time it’s getting dark they’ve walked past a few markers informing them that Pewter is within reach for tomorrow morning.

They drift a little ways off the path to set up camp, and Silver spreads out sleeping bags as Green starts a fire.

He crawls into his bag, laying on his stomach, propped up on his elbows, and staring at the flames.

They’d stopped for supplies in Viridian before they left, and Silver’s glad for it. Curled up in a thick
sleeping bag, he can sort of see the appeal of camping where before it had seemed strange that anyone would want to sleep in the open.

Green hands him an energy bar, before laying down on top of her bag, studying the stars.

“We should get better food in Pewter if we have time”, she says after a moment.

Silver shrugs. “I don’t mind these.”

“They don’t taste like anything.”

“So they can’t taste bad, right?”

“I guess.”

Silver watches as she stretches out, and tries to figure out how she’s actually feeling.

She still hasn’t said anything about her parents, and as far as he can tell hasn’t called them.

But bringing it up means both admitting to eavesdropping, and risking stressing her out more than she already seems to be.

He finishes the bar, and rolls onto his back, letting Sneasel settle next to him in the bag.

If it was just him Murkrow would be perched in a tree keeping watch, but he’s pretty sure Green’s already close to her limit so he’s going to have to settle for just Sneasel. (Not that she’s a bad lookout, he’s just used to having both of them.)

After a few minutes, Green has Horsea put the fire out, and the water type curls up with Sneasel as Green slips into her own bag.

Something occurs to Silver, and he doesn’t want to wait until morning to ask.

“Hey, Green?”

“What?”

“Why didn’t you have Yellow tell Professor Oak that you sent her?”

She stays quiet for a minute, before, “In case someone was watching the lab. And I don’t have a good way of explaining how I know about Lance.”

She can’t say she found out from Giovanni, in other words. He wishes she’d just say it that way.

But wait…

“What are you going to tell your friends once things get started with the gym?”

She doesn’t say anything for long enough that Silver starts to wonder if she’d fallen asleep, until finally, she says, “Don’t worry about it.”

“That’s not an answer.”

“Sure it is.”

He sits up. “Is it gonna mess up everything for you?”
“It doesn’t matter.”

“Yes, it does.”

“No, it doesn’t.” She sits up. “I’ll work out a plan when we get there. If they all quit talking to me I’ll deal.”

“So it is?”

“If it does, it’s still not your problem.”

“But-”

“Silver. You’re more important, okay?”

“But I shouldn’t be.”

Green sighs. “I appreciate that you’re worried, okay? I really do. It’s really sweet. But you getting to have a normal life is more important to me, okay? And that means Giovanni has to go back to running the gym, so Interpol gets off his case. Does that make sense?”

Silver nods, not meeting Green’s eyes. “I just don’t want you to throw everything away because of me.”

“It’s not your fault if things go wrong, okay? I’d rather you be home, than me be friends with two nerds who fell for really easy cons and traps anyway.” He snorts, and she pokes his nose gently. “Besides, if I could have picked where you’d go home to, a mansion in the forest with a dad who’d spoil the heck out of you if you’d let him would have been at the top of the list.”

He looks back up, still feeling guilty, and sees her smiling.

“Everything’s going to be fine, okay?”

“Okay.”
Any improvements on the train ride to Cerulean over the one to Violet have been canceled out by Silver’s twitchiness.

Green minds the train itself slightly less; they’d apparently managed to get a not-as-busy time, and the knowledge that the ride is short makes it more tolerable.

Except for Silver squirming next to her.

He’s restless, and on edge, and she gets that, but this is the third time he’s accidentally (she assumes it’s accidental) kicked her in the leg in his attempts at looking around the train car.

“Quit wiggling and sit still.”

“What if someone followed us?”

“You’ve kicked me three times since we sat down. And spying is rude.”

He sighs, but sinks down in his seat, staring over Green and out the window.

Quiet at last.

She sinks back, turning her own gaze out the window.

Once they’re in Cerulean she’ll check up on Yellow’s location again (she’d been close to Celadon last night), then they’ll either warn Bill that there’s probably a target on his back or fill Misty in, depending on what’s going on on Giovanni’s end (and how helpful Green’s feeling; the “good gym leaders” don’t have the best track record regarding problem-solving and this might be easier if they just stay in their cities).

Worst case scenario, someone did follow them, and they just have to keep moving instead.

Nothing new.

Silver pokes her arm, and she glances back at him. “What?”

“You and Dad found your parents, right?”

She tenses, and he glances away, looking apologetic.

“I heard a little of what you said before we left to meet up with Yellow.”

“Oh.” Her fingers tap on the edge of the armrest, and she nods. “He found them, yeah.”

“Have you called them, or anything?”

“Not yet.”

“Why?”

“I want to wait until Lance is dealt with, that’s all. I don’t want to drop out while everyone needs help.” Especially since she has no idea if Blue and the remaining gym leaders even know if something is going on.
“You don’t have to go home as soon as you call. But you should let them know you’re okay, I think. They’re probably worried about you.”

She sighs and crosses her arms, not wanting to admit that he’s right.

But it’s not fair to call them while she picks a fight with an opponent like the Elite Four. If something does happen she doesn’t want to hurt them more, so the logical thing to do is to wait.

But Silver doesn’t look willing to drop this now that he’s started, and after a few seconds trying to find a way of distracting him, she asks, “What was it like, in Olivine? When you found out you were going home?”

He looks startled. “Sneasel pushed me into the hotel, Dad sat with me until I fell asleep after he told me, I think I cried a little. It didn’t really hit me until the next day; I was tired, and I think I’d only had a bag of chips to eat. Or maybe that was the day before…” He trails off when he sees how she’s looking at him.

“Did you just forget how to get cash, or?”

“I don’t want to steal if I don’t have to.”

“Trying to not starve to death counts as having to, Silver.”

He wrinkles his nose and sits back. “It didn’t seem that bad at the time.”

Green shakes her head, then turns her gaze back out the window.

Silver leans against her, and Green fully expects him to just doze off, but after a moment he says, “Call your parents once we get to Cerulean. Okay?”

“I’ll think about it.”

And she does, more than she really wants to, for the rest of the train ride, and the walk to the hotel (gym leaders have access to Center guest lists, she’s assuming the Elite Four do to so hotels it is), and as they settle into the room.

After Silver wanders into the bathroom to get ready for bed, Green settles on the bed, staring at her phone.

She hears the tub get turned on as she fishes the card with the numbers out of her bag.

There’s no harm in putting them in her phone, and that way she doesn’t have to worry about losing the paper.

She stares at the black numbers on the screen for longer than she should, and after a minute or so she sighs and hits the call button.

Silver isn’t going to drop it, and there’s a part of her that wants to anyway.

Her throat feels tight, and her stomach is doing somersaults as she listens to it ring.

Mummy picks up on the fourth ring.

“Hello?”

“Hi. It’s- it’s Green.” Her voice is suddenly very small. She pulls her knees into her chest, still half-
convinced this was a terrible idea.

But it’s her mom on the other end of the call. Her mom taking a ragged breath at hearing her name. Mummy’s voice in her ear for the first time in years.

“Green? Oh, sweetheart, I’m so glad you’re okay. Are- are you okay?”

“Yes.” It comes out barely audible, and she tries again, “Yes, I’m okay.”

She shouldn’t have called.

It’s horrible and selfish, and she shouldn’t have.

They don’t need to be dragged into this.

“That’s good. That’s good.” Mummy’s voice is sounding calmer, less fragile. “Where are you?”

“I’m in Cerulean.” That much can’t hurt. “You’re at Sevii right?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“I can’t… go there right now. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have called. I just wanted to-” Her voice breaks, and she rests her forehead on her knees as she tries to force down a deep breath.

“There’s something I need to do,” she says at last. “Some friends of mine need help. But after that, I can come home.”

“That’s okay. Take as long as you need, I’m just glad you’re okay. Is this number okay to call again?”

“Yeah. It is.” Green takes a shaky breath and lays back in an attempt to make herself relax. “I’m sorry,” she repeats, not really sure what for.

“It’s okay.” She hears her take a deep breath. “Is Jiggly still with you?”

“Yes.” She looks over to where the pink pokemon is napping with Sneasel in the corner. “She’s good.”

“Good. That’s good, I’m glad she’s still with you. I’ll be home in a few minutes, do you want to talk to your father?”

Green’s spared having to actually make up her mind by Silver slipping out of the bathroom, still wringing his hair out with a towel.

His eyes land on her with the phone, and she doesn’t miss the smile that darts across his face.

“Not right now.” They have plans to make still, and she wants a few minutes to calm down before they do. “I’ll call again though, I promise.”

“I’ll let you go then. Oh, but Green… I know it was a few days ago, but happy birthday.”

Green stares up at the ceiling, taking a moment to fully register what she’d said.

Her birthday…

She’d known the date (roughly) but had always let it slip past (there was no way Silver wouldn’t try
to get her something and he’d had other things to be worrying about), especially this year with everything going on, but it’s kind of nice to hear it acknowledged.

“Thank you.”

“Goodnight Sweetheart. Give Jiggly a hug for me?”

“I will. Goodnight Mum.”

She hangs up, before rolling onto her side and pulling a pillow to her chest to bury her face in.

Silver sits down behind her right when she starts crying, leaning against her silently.
Chapter 49

What Will and Karen had failed to mention (and what Giovanni should have noticed from the map) is that where they had found Red is an almost two-day hike from Pewter.

Which begs the question of why they hadn’t simply gone to Cerulean, it’s significantly closer, but if they don’t feel like sharing that’s their issue.

But finally, they do reach the cave, and as Giovanni kneels at the entrance, ignoring the pinch in his shoulders from camping, and examining the cave with the aid of a flashlight, he pieces together what might have happened.

“Tunnels are from onix. Probably abandoned, but that will still keep most hikers out. Most likely they lured him here with a challenge request. There’s no other reason to be this far off the main paths.”

He slides off the edge of the rocks, landing in the cave followed closely by Nidoking, and after a few seconds Will and Karen.

“If he’s so important why didn’t they just kill him?” Will asks, examining the cave walls. “It seems easier than all this.”

“Will!”

Karen’s scolding sounds more performative than genuine, and the corner of Giovanni’s mouth twitches as he glances back at the pair.

“Most likely they need something from him and he didn’t give it. This could be some way of convincing him to talk; leave him in the mountain and come back later to see if he’s changed his mind. Or they only need him contained for a little while.” Or it’s a trap, albeit probably not for him.

“That makes sense.”

Giovanni nods, before continuing down the cave. He can see what they meant about it being obvious a fight happened: chunks of the walls have been either knocked out or cracked, and there are a few holes in the ceiling revealing them to be closer to the surface than he’d first assumed.

A few minutes later Nidoking comes to a stop, sniffing the air.

“Are we close?”

Will glances around, before nodding. “He’s just up ahead.”

One more slope downwards and they find him, and what Karen had said about him resembling a sculpture is true. Not until he’s right next to Red can Giovanni tell that there’s anything under the ice.

“If either of you has a fire type it would make this simpler.” Nidoking could break the ice, but that runs the risk of shattering the contents.

After a moment Karen steps forward, a houndour materializing at her feet.

“Flamethrower,” she pauses, “Keep it small.”

The canine complies, and a controlled jet of flames connects with the ice.
Giovanni steps back, leaning against the rock wall.

Nothing to do but wait now.

Will sits down on the other side of the tunnel, and Karen slides down the wall next to Giovanni.

“So when were you going to mention being a gym leader?” she asks in what he’s sure is meant to be a conversational tone.

“It didn’t seem relevant. How did you find out?”

“There’s a computer at the Center.” She shrugs. “It seemed like a good idea to look you up.”

“Learn anything else?”

“Nothing too exciting. I’d say you’re just a boring businessman, but you also dragged us back out here, to rescue a frozen kid so he can help you stop someone else from blowing up the region or whatever so…” She tilts her head back, looking up at him. “I think you’re hiding something.”

“Well boring children don’t pay for bad coffee with stolen wallets so they can sit and argue about whether they should go to the police or continue on their way away from whoever they’re hiding from.”

Her eyes narrow, and Will looks over at them, but neither of them gets a chance to reply, as the ice breaks, and Red drops to the floor coughing.

Karen’s head tilts, and Will inches closer, pulling Red to his feet after a moment.

Which is a very thoughtful gesture, at least until Red registers who is in the room with him, and pushes him away, clearly reaching for a pokeball.

A wave of Giovanni’s hand is enough to call off Nidoking’s attempt at a preemptive attack, and Karen recalls the houndour before it can start anything, but Red still stays braced against the wall, a ball in his hand.

“Going off the damage outside, and the fact that you’ve been down here for at least two weeks, I doubt your team is in condition for a fight. Think carefully Red.”

Red’s eyes narrow, and he takes a slow step away from Will, but he replaces the ball on his belt.

“Why are you here? And who are they?”

“Lance wants you out of the way, and I see no reason to let him get what he wants. As for these two, the most I can tell you is that they know your friend Green.”

The response is predictable and immediate. Karen jerks to her feet, hands raised defensively, Will looks braced to run, and Red’s hands curl into fists.

“How much do you know?” Karen demands.

He shrugs. “Enough.” Much as he doesn’t want to deal with three on edge teens, he needs to keep Red around long enough to find out what Lance was after (plus he won’t hear the end of it if something happens to him), which means he may as well present them as allies for the time being.

There’s still suspicion written across all their faces, but it only takes another few minutes to get back on the road to Cerulean, and Red’s steps get significantly less shaky once they’re all out of the cave.
and in the sun.

Will and Karen make a point of staying far ahead, whispering amongst themselves. If they bolt once they have their payment it won’t be much of a problem, at least not for a while. They could become an issue later, or they could vanish off to another region, and never pop up again.

Scrambling footsteps catch Giovanni’s attention, and he glances out the corner of his eye to see Red catching up.

“What do you know about Green? And why?”

“Why would I answer that?”

“I’ll tell you what the Elite Four are after if you do.”

It’s practice that keeps his footsteps from faltering, and there’s a few seconds where Giovanni weighs his options.

Green had been right, it’s a matter of time before someone figures out that he’d been helping her, so it doesn’t make much of a difference what he says so long as it’s vague. Even if he doesn’t particularly feel like being directly responsible for it.

“I know enough,” he says finally. “And she told me.”

“Why?”

“I answered your questions. What does Lance want?”

Red pauses, studying the rocky path at his feet, before he looks back up. “Lorelei said they were looking for you. They need the Earth Badge. They probably have the other seven, but I don’t know for sure. If they dug through Silph it wouldn’t have been too hard to get them.”

“Just that?” Giovanni’s tone is indifferent, but he slips his fingers into his jacket, finding the thin piece of metal with little difficulty. Pinned in place out of a habit that refused to die when it needed to, and that would soon be necessary again.

At least he knows why the gym had been searched as roughly as it had, albeit pointlessly; he’s only ever kept the badges at the house, taking some daily and never leaving them overnight.

“What do you mean ‘just that’?” There’s a note of anger in Red’s tone, and Nidoking tenses, looking both ready and willing to lunge.

After a very brief moment of debate, Giovanni holds up a hand, waving him off. He hears a low growl of annoyance, but the beast drops back to his role of watcher.

“Well, it could be worse, couldn’t it? If they’re looking for it, then they don’t have one, and so long as it stays that way they aren’t really a threat. If an analogy would help, it’s like how if you had stayed out of Silph, the amplifier wouldn’t have been assembled in the first place.”

There’s a flash of annoyance across his face, and he looks away, muttering something about Green and being upfront.

Maybe he’ll try and get that story from her later.

Red bolts to the Center as soon as they reach Cerulean, leaving Giovanni with Will and Karen.
“Well, let’s head to the bank and get your cash. Then you two can go.”

They exchange a look, and Karen shifts her weight, before looking up at him. “How’s Green?”

“Why?”

“I heard what you told Red, and… the last time we saw her she seemed like someone was getting her better supplies and everything, or at least like she had funding. I’m guessing it’s you so… Is she okay?”

Giovanni studies the two for a moment, caught off guard. She sounds genuinely worried, and, while he’s certainly willing to believe that they had no investment in whatever Pryce had been planning, this level of concern over a girl they had tried to kill is surprising.

“She’s fine,” he says after some thought. There’s no reason to leave them stressing over her, but they also don’t need more detail.

Karen nods as Will asks, “Is she helping you go after Lance?”

“Yes.” Given the high chances that she and Silver are also in Cerulean, he doesn’t add on. Green will undoubtedly take this poorly if she finds out he had them helping him, and he’s hesitant to trust them with Silver. “If you want your payment today we need to go now.”

“Do you need more help?”

“Why the sudden interest?”

Will shrugs. “We don’t have anywhere else to be. And it’s like you said; as long as we’re in Kanto it’d be better if it didn’t get destroyed.”

A smile pulls at the corners of his mouth. “I’m sure I can find something for you to do if you want to help.”

Will glances back to Karen, who nods. “We do.”
“If you’re friends, why do we need to break in?”

Green glances up from the now-unlocked doorknob as Ditty slides back onto her wrist.

“Because we’re here to warn him, and we may as well make a point about his security sucking so he actually listens.”

Yeah, okay, and she wants to mess with Bill, but that is the main reason. That it will also throw him off enough that he might agree to her plan is a happy bonus.

Silver nods, still not looking overly happy about their current plan, but he follows her when she eases the door open and stays close as they creep down the hall.

Bill’s sprawled out on the couch, snoring, and Green gives him enough of a glance to be sure he’ll be staying that way, before sliding into the chair at his desk, slipping her phone from her pocket.

Might as well check on Yellow’s location.

Silver pads over, peering over the arm of the chair.

“Anything else from Dad?”

“Not since he said he’d found Red.” And had been frustratingly vague about both how, and what he’s doing next. “Looks like Yellow’s still in Vermilion. Hope nothing’s holding her up.” Specifically, nothing with a red R attached, but given her location that might be too much to hope for.

She hears something move behind them and casually pulls Silver out of the way of Vulpix’s flamethrower as she lets Blasty out.

“Hi, Bill!”

Bill stumbles backward, falling to the ground as Blasty materializes in front of him.

“Green? What the heck are you doing in my house?” He glances at Silver. “And why are you dragging a kid into your little burglary?”

“I haven’t stolen anything, thank you, and Silver’s here because he wants to be. As for why I’m here, it’s to personally warn you that after you and Yellow’s little scuffle, you’re probably the Elite Four’s next target. Aren’t I an angel?”

“Ya gotta be kidding. It’s not like I was trying to get in their way… And wait a minute, how do you know about that?”

“Because I bugged Yellow’s hat. And do they seem like the kind of people who leave loose ends? Now, we’re more than willing to protect you when they come to shut you up, but I’m gonna need one little favor. Mm-kay?”

“Favor?” He looks cautious.

“It’s not even a hard one! I just need you to tell Misty that you saw a record of Red withdrawing a pokemon from the transfer system once we chase them off.”
"But I haven’t!"

"Exactly, I’m telling you to lie. It’s easy, watch,” she clears her throat, “I’m a natural blonde from Kalos, my parents are movie stars, and I threw up in a private jet last week. See? Easy.”

Silver rolls his eyes, and Bill shakes his head.

“I can’t tell them to call off the search for him Green.”

“But he’s not missing anymore. So they don’t need to be pouring all their resources into looking for him.”

“So tell Misty or Erika that yourself.”

“I don’t have proof. But if you say that you have a record of a withdrawal by him they’ll have it.”

“Then why are you so sure he’s okay?”

“Someone I trust found him. But their word isn’t going to mean much to either of them, and Red needs to keep his head down so no one who doesn’t need to know finds out he’s back, it’ll mess everything up.”

Out the corner of her eye, she sees Silver wander over to a window as Bill stays on the floor over-thinking things.

“I can’t lie to them about something that serious. I’ll tell them your end of things if ya want, but that’s it.”

“Have fun with the Elite Four then.”

“Don’t try to scare me!”

“I wonder what they’ll do… If it’s Lorelei again she’d probably freeze you, which is a very unpleasant way to go if you ask me. I dunno what the others would do though. Maybe they’ll dip your feet in cement and throw you off the bridge like in the movies.”

“Stop being morbid.”

“It’s one little lie, that’s barely a lie. Please? Everyone will be safer if the gym leaders are all focusing on the actual problem, which isn’t Red anymore.”

“Green, something’s coming!”

She looks over in time to see Silver running away from the window as something smashes through it, destroying the computers on Bill’s desk.

She darts to the window, looking around the dimly lit yard until-

“There!”

There’s a hitmonlee at the edge of the yard, partly hidden behind some trees.

“See! What did I tell you? Silver, get on Blasty, we gotta go.”

He nods, darting to the water type, who’s already getting into position to take off, and Green turns to Bill.
“Are you going to help or not?”

“You can’t be serious.”

“Promise or we’re leaving.”

For a few seconds, Bill looks like he’s going to keep refusing, and Green starts to panic, because she doesn’t actually want to leave him here to die, or get kidnapped, or whatever they’re planning. But she also needs someone to tell the remaining gym leaders what’s going on, and he’s the only one with a believable way of finding out.

“Fine. That doesn’t mean I like it though.”

“You don’t need to. Now let’s get out of here. Hydro pump!”

Blasty grabs both of them as he launches himself forward, and Green tries to ignore Bill’s initial scream. She glances up at Silver long enough to ensure he’s staying in place, and while he doesn’t look too thrilled about their method of transportation, he and Sneasel are holding on tight as they jet past the city after the pokemon.

“Sun’s coming up. Keep your eyes open!” she calls after a few minutes. She’d made sure Blasty’s tanks were full before they’d set out for Bill’s, which meant he had enough water to make it past Cerulean. So no one else would get hurt (in theory), but they wouldn’t make it all the way to Celadon, and if she had to guess that supply is getting low. “As soon as we can see them we should take them out. Blasty’s not gonna last forever.”

“Green, I have an idea, but we have to split up.”

She looks up at Silver. “Split up how?”

“I’ll go with Murkrow. Sneasel should be able to freeze it, then we can get away.”

She nods and watches as he lets Murkrow out and disappears.

“How long do we have?” Bill asks, looking in the direction Silver had left in.

“Maybe another minute.”

“Wha-”

Blasty slams into something and Green realizes as they plummet to the ground that the hitmonlee had stretched itself out between two trees.

Hopefully it hadn’t seen Silver.

She groans when she hits the forest floor, looking around for Blasty as Bills pulls himself up next to her.

“So much for that. Where’s Blasty?”

“Over there!”

She follows Bill’s gaze, and swallows hard when she finds him; face to face with the hitmonlee, and too high up to get to.

“Looks like he’s waiting for an order. Give him one.”
“Yeah, but so is Hitmonlee. Do you see Silver?”

“What’s he gonna be able to do?”

If he couldn’t freeze Hitmonlee not much. Blasty might not listen to him for starters, but Green can’t do anything without giving herself and Bill away to any enemy trainers.

She slips her bag off her shoulders and sinks to the ground.

“Give me a minute, I’ve got something that might help. Just have to find it.”

“Hang on, what’s that?”

She looks up again, and her eyes land on Silver hidden in a tree on the other side of the cliff the pokemon are on. Except Bill is looking higher up, and when she follows his gaze she sees Sneasel creeping up the hill, making use of the early morning shadows to stay out of sight.

“Should we wait or…?”

“Give them a minute.”

This probably isn’t what Giovanni had had in mind when he’d been drilling Silver on disabling opponents before escaping, but she at least knows Silver’s done this before.

Except Sneasel’s at a bad angle, she realizes. The minute she pokes her head out to attack the fighting type will see her.

“Come on.”

She pulls Bill through the trees, creeping around the hill as she pulls a device from her bag.

Once they’re in position, she presses a button, turning the mic on, and murmurs an order, watching as a bubble forms at its base.

The bubble drifts up, and Hitmonlee takes the bait, following Blasty’s gaze up to it, and reaching up to pop it.

He doesn’t make it; instead freezing in place as ice solidifies around his legs and up his torso.

“Yes!”

She hears a thump somewhere as Silver drops out of his tree and watches as Sneasel scampers down the hill, back to him. Blasty follows, albeit less gracefully, and Green recalls him once he’s close enough.

They find Silver just as Hitmonlee breaks out of the ice, and Green wraps an arm around his shoulders as a scowl works its way over his face.

“You stopped him long enough for everyone to get away. Good job. Now we need to go.”

“Okay.”

He still doesn’t look happy about his trap not being permanent, but Green can deal with that later. For now, they just need to get to Celadon.
“Does that help?” Giovanni asks when Silver finishes repeating back what he’d said.

“I think so. Thanks.”

“Of course.”

He’d called early this morning with an update, and a question and Giovanni is relieved for the brief break from tense teenagers and planning.

“How’s Celadon?”

“Erika’s trying to talk Green into leaving me here with her and Bill.”

“You could stay,” he suggests, already knowing what the response will be.

“No.”

The corner of Giovanni’s mouth twitches as he leans back on the bench in the Pokemon Center’s lobby. He’s waiting for the nurse to finish lecturing Red on safety in the mountains so they can collect Will and Karen and leave for Cerise.

“Stay together then.”

“I know. I need to go. Cerise Island, right?”

“Yes. You two might need a boat to get there. The water’s usually too rough for pokemon to carry people through it.”

“I’ll talk to Green. See you soon?”

“I’ll be there. Be careful.”

“I will. Bye.”

He hangs up, and Giovanni forces out a deep breath as he tucks the phone back into his pocket.

He should have Silver stay with Erika. Should call again, tell Green to leave him there, take Bill with if she needs a helper. (He should have had Green call her parents back in Viridian, and get him well and truly out of the way.) But there is no way he would stay. At least he won’t run off on Green.

He lets his gaze drift down to the map of Cerise spread over the table in front of him as he hears footsteps to his left.

“What did Green need your help with?”

He glances up, unsurprised to see Red standing next to him. He’s been on about this since they arrived in Cerulean.

“It doesn’t matter how many times you ask, the answer is still that it doesn’t concern you.”

There’s a flash of annoyance across Red’s face as he sits down across from Giovanni.

“She was looking into you last year, said you weren’t a lead, and she’s been hanging out in Viridian.
You helped with something.” He pauses, before adding, “Or you’re both lying, and she was looking into you because you had something to do with everything.”

“Watch what you’re accusing me of.” He keeps his tone just barely neutral, but something in his expression is enough to have Red’s hand twitching towards a pokeball.

Good.

“If you have to know, we both had information the other needed. If she wants to elaborate that’s up to her.”

Red crosses his arms and turns his gaze to the rest of the Center’s occupants. After a few seconds, he asks, “How much do Will and Karen know?”

“I wasn’t planning on them deciding to stick around, so nothing. Keep it that way.”

Red looks back at him. “Why are you still in Kanto? Interpol’s looking for you.”

“Throwing off your enemies sometimes means doing what they expect least. In this case, that means sticking around. Why haven’t you gone running to Misty? Or is it just because I told you not to?”

“Green trusts you. Apparently. If she has a plan I’m not going to mess it up at the last minute.”

“That’s very trusting of you.”

Red’s eyes narrow, as behind him the front doors open, and Will and Karen slip in.

They’d apparently resupplied; with much fuller bags thrown over their shoulders, and they both have a knife up a sleeve. Given that he hadn’t paid them yet he supposes there’s now some poor bastard wandering around missing a wallet. So long as they kept it subtle it’s fine.

“What’s the plan?” Karen asks when they reach the table, earning a large jump from Red.

“Do you have to sneak up on people?”

She tilts her head. “Maybe if you watched your surroundings better, we wouldn’t have had to defrost you.” She looks back at Giovanni before Red can argue, “But is there a plan?”

He studies the map for a moment; seven stone pillars in a circle, around the volcano in the center. The pattern is vaguely reminiscent of the badge amplifier.

The amplifier…

A slow smirk works its way across his face as he motions for Karen and Will to come closer to the map.

“Yes, there is.”
Team Rocket’s bases were at least warm.
And not in the middle of choppy waves.
Or guaranteed to involve traversing cold, dark, caves.
Really, Green just doesn’t want to be on Cerise, and judging by how tense Silver is as Jiggly drifts closer to the island, neither does he.
But they don’t really have any other options; Pewter, Cerulean, and Celadon are all under attack as of them leaving Celadon, and of the remaining five gym leaders, one is helping, one is in hiding, and three are probably making things worse.
So they have to go to the island and hope that some combination of Blue, Giovanni, and Red (according to Yellow’s tracker she’s there already) show up before things go too far south.
What could go wrong?
Jiggly starts to descend as Green digs through her bag for a jacket.
It’s probably Lorelei’s doing, but the air is chilly and Green’s on edge enough without the added bonus of the cold.
“I see Yellow.”
She glances at Silver as she tugs the sweater on. He’s laying on his belly, looking through her scope at the island.
“Where is she?”
“That way.” He points, and Green squints, just barely making out the outline of a hat tucked away behind a bush.
“Alright, let’s meet up with her, and we’ll go from there.”
Jiggly changes trajectory and they drift down to where Yellow is, and Green slides off as they reach her.
Yellow spins around, both her and Pika looking startled, until relief crosses her face.
“Miss Green! Silver! When did you get here?”
“Just now. Are you by yourself?”
She nods. “I’m meeting up with Blaine soon, but right now it’s just me.”
“What about Blue? Erika told me you left with him a while ago.”
“We split up again. He might show up here, I don’t know.”
Green nods, patting Jiggly on the head when she deflates and wanders over to her.
Blue showing up would be good, but she’s not sure how much she wants Blaine here with Silver
along. Not that she expects him to blow things out of proportion, especially right now, but it would also just be nice to not have to worry about Silver being recognized. He’s also likely to share Erika’s opinion of nine being much too young to be picking a fight like this.

(Which Green doesn’t disagree with, but Silver had swiped her phone the minute Erika suggested he stay with her, and Green hadn’t gotten it back until it was too late to ask if Giovanni wanted her to leave him there or not.)

At Yellow’s feet, Pika looks up, sniffing the air as he studies Green. After a moment he darts over, jumping onto her shoulder. Apparently, he’s over his problem from the forest (even if he’s still giving Silver a wide berth).

“Well, let’s get going. Where are you meeting Blaine?”

Yellow raises an arm. “We need to head that way. I don’t know exactly though, the map’s pretty vague.”

“That works.” Jiggly puffs up and Green waits until Yellow and Silver have both scrambled on before climbing up. “Silver, have Horsea put up a smokescreen.”

He nods as they ascend, and Green sees a flash of light, followed by inky smoke filling the air.

“Keep your voices down, okay?” She slips her scope over her eyes, scanning the beach as she hears a quiet acknowledgment from Yellow. There are slowpoke and slowbro covering the ground beneath them. They’ll be staying in the air until they run into someone they know.

Green’s eyes land on a cave entrance, and she looks back to Yellow. “Do you think Blaine went in?”

“Maybe. Either way, the Elite Four are probably inside, right?”

Green nods, nudging Jiggly to tell her to land, and the three of them head for the cave.

Right before they enter, something catches Green’s attention on the rocks above them, and she tilts her head back to look up. But there’s nothing there, and after a few seconds, she follows Yellow in.

Silver stays closer than Green thinks he’s likely to own up to as they walk, with Pika lighting up the dark tunnels at Yellow’s heels.

Yellow stops and Green almost walks into her.

“Green, I think one of your pokemon can hear something up ahead. May I?” She holds out a hand, and Green nods.

“It’s probably Clefy.”

She sets the ball in Yellow’s hand and she closes her eyes.

“I hear voices… people talking. He doesn’t seem concerned… It’s someone we know?”

Through the casing of the ball, Green sees Clefy nod, and she looks down the tunnel.

It’s probably just Blaine, but who’s he talking to?

Either way, they need help right now so there’s no reason to not investigate.
“Well, let’s go see them, shall we?”

They round a corner into a more open section, and Green shoves Silver behind her when she sees who their “help” is.

“Well, hello there.”

Sabrina’s voice is cool as she stares at them from where she’s standing in between Koga and Lt. Surge. Her gaze drifts down to Silver briefly, and Green tightens her grip on his arm enough that he pulls at her fingers.

Had Giovanni told them to come here?

Off to the side of the cavern are Blue and Blaine, who look equally unhappy about the other three.

Yellow wanders over to Blaine, and after a few seconds, Green follows, still hauling Silver by the arm. Now Surge’s eyes are narrowing, and she’s sure this isn’t going to go smoothly.

“I’m glad you made it here safely Yellow,” Blaine’s saying, “And, Green, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” She’d only met Blaine once, when she’d innocently stopped at Cinnabar on her way to Viridian, to innocently grill him for information on Giovanni. He’d been sort of helpful.

“And who’s your friend?”

“This is Silver.” Can’t give a fake name in front of Yellow, much as she’d like to.

Silver finally gets out of her grip, and nods to Blaine, looking confused.

“Silver, this is Blaine, Cinnabar’s gym leader, and Blue, Professor Oak’s grandson.”

He nods again, and Blue looks over from where’s he’s been eyeing the other three.

His gaze drifts over Silver, but he doesn’t get a chance to say anything before Yellow asks, “And, who are they?”

She’s gesturing towards Sabrina and the other two, and Blue scowls.

“Lt. Surge, Koga, and Sabrina. They’re former members of Team Rocket. We just ran into them before you showed up.”

“And why are they here?” Green asks, catching Silver’s arm before he can slip out from behind her again.

“To defeat the Elite Four, of course.” Koga steps forward. “We can’t have them wreaking havoc on an area we’re supposed to control, can we?”

“But, seeing as that’s why you’re all here as well, I suppose just this once we could be persuaded to work with you. If you don’t get in the way.” Sabrina spreads her hands out almost invitingly.

Green glances over at Blue and Blaine, both of whom look like they’re mulling it over.

“Why not?” she says, and they both look over at her. “Enemy of my enemy, right?” Going off of what they’d said, they probably weren’t here because of Giovanni, but there’s safety in numbers either way.
And if she’s wrong, and he did send them here she doesn’t want to hear it about turning down help.

After a moment Blue nods. He turns back to them, “If you don’t get between me and Agatha, I don’t care what you do.”

Sabrina smirks, “So it’s settled then. We’ll split into teams of two; one Elite Four member each.”

Green nods, glancing back at Silver.

In theory, he's the one in the least danger, no matter who they all end up with.

Not that she likes it, but she tries to relax as Ditty squeezes her wrist, and she catches the spoon from Sabrina’s alakazam.
The spoons were stupid, and Silver didn’t want to work with Surge.

They also seem like an obvious way to divide and conquer (and the fact that Green and Blue had both apparently wound up with someone with a grudge against them has him even more convinced the whole thing was rigged) but Silver hadn’t thought to point that out until the former gym leader was marching him down a tunnel, away from everyone else.

Asides from that initial contact though he has made a point of giving Silver several feet of space, and has kept quiet since asking what his team consisted of. Silver’s pretty sure the odd behavior has something to do with whatever Sabrina had dragged Surge off to the side to tell him before they left.

Maybe she knows who he is.

He’s not sure if that’s a good thing or not.

Not that he’s complaining about the results; he doesn’t feel like small talk.

He does, however, wish that Giovanni or Green had told him more about Surge because he really doesn’t know anything likely to be of use. He’s an electric specialist, but Silver doesn’t have a ground type so that’s not helpful, clearly not from Kanto but that’s more trivia than useful, and that’s it.

Green would be asking questions right now, to come up with a way to play the rest of this, he supposes, and with a sigh, he asks, “Do you have a plan?”

Surge jumps, and glances back at him. “Depends on who we run into. They all fight differently, there’s no point in planning much. If it’s Lance your sneasel will be getting a workout though.”

Silver nods. He doesn’t really care who decides to show up, but he would prefer it not be Lorelei. Too much ice.

He stretches his arms over his head, weighing their options. Neither of them has a direct advantage over any of the Elite Four, except maybe Agatha, but for whatever reason Blue had seemed convinced she’d go after him.

Surge is probably right; planning won’t accomplish much.

“Why are you here?”

Silver looks over, confused. “Why?”

“Well, you didn’t seem that interested in the spoons, I’m just wondering if it’s because you don’t have a real reason to be here. If that’s the case, which is fine, you look too young to be away from home, let alone here anyway, you can take off. I’ll handle the fights.”

Wow, where has he heard that before?

“What did Sabrina tell you before we split up?”

“Why’s that matter?”

“What did she tell you?”
“To keep you in one piece or she’d rip my head off. But, if you’re wondering how much I’ve worked out, it’s that your sneasel looks a little too good to be wild-caught, she’s probably from some fancy breeder somewhere, they tend to be expensive as hell. And you left the restaurant in Viridian with Giovanni, who isn’t as subtle as he thinks he is; I know he was looking for something before, and it’s awfully convenient that you just happened to show up with the girl who was kidnapped from Pallet.”

Silver stares up at him, dread settling in his stomach like a rock. He’d been right, it was a plan to split them up. He needs to get to Green now.

He takes a slow step back, and Surge snorts.

“I’m not gonna hurt you. We’re here to deal with Lance and them, right? What would I get out of doing something to you?”

“Why are you really here?”

“Hmm?”

“You didn’t say anything earlier.”

He studies Silver for a few seconds, before shrugging. “Koga’s right; we need them out of the way for our operations to work. And no one trashes my city the way Lance did and gets away with it.”

“What happened in Vermilion?”

He raises an eyebrow. “Lance used a surfing contest to lure people out of the city, before leveling a decent chunk of the buildings.”

“Why?”

“Have to ask your friend that; I was… dealing with something else. We tried setting a trap for them, it went wrong.”

After a few seconds Silver nods. He can work with revenge as a motive.

Without saying anything, he continues past Surge, heading down the cave, but taking care to not leave the light from Electabuzz.

Gradually the cave widens out, revealing a lake with what Silver thinks are strange rock formations stretching over it.

“Well, only one way across,” Surge mutters, eyeing the rocks. “Can you get on your own?”

Silver ignores him as he scrambles onto a rock at the edge of the water with a little help from Sneasel. As he stands up he knocks a few small pebbles off the boulder and into the water, which… sizzles when they touch it?

“Surge?”

“Yeah?” The lieutenant climbs up behind him.

“Watch.” Silver drops another small stone into the liquid and again is met with steam and bubbles. “It’s not water.”

“Looks almost like victreebel slobber. Watch your step. You go in too deep, you’re not coming out.”
“Indeed.”

They both look up at the deep voice, and Sneasel and Electabuzz both dart to the front, looking defensive as a large figure walks up the bridge.

“But to win this battle you must cross it,” he continues. “You must be the first to traverse the battleground.”

As he finishes speaking, the rocks move, and Silver’s gaze follows the trail of boulders to what looks like a head.

“They’re onix,” he whispers, looking up a Surge, to see him staring at their opponent.

“An onix trainer… You must be Bruno then.”

“I am. This living bridge moves erratically. One false move will land you in the acid, from which there is no escape. Cross before me, and victory is yours.”

“If the onix is your pokemon why not just have it throw us off? If we land in the acid, no more problem for you, and you don’t even have to do anything.” Not that Silver wants to get thrown off, but he’d make it away with Murkrow, and Surge must have some method of air travel.

“These are wild onix. I am in the same position as you; one mistake and I too will suffer.”

“You didn’t answer my question. Why bother with a battle when you have an easy way to win right there? Even if they aren’t yours, you could have startled them into throwing us off.” Out the corner of his eye, he can see Surge shaking his head, telling him to stop, but Silver wants an answer. They need a trick up their sleeve to beat him, and that requires information.

“There’s no satisfaction in a fight won before it’s even begun.”

“I can sympathize with that.” Silver looks up as Surge and Electabuzz step forward. “Very well then Bruno, I, Lt. Surge of the Vermilion City Gym accept your challenge.” He throws a hand forward, “Electabuzz, thundershock!”

The electric type launches a bolt of electricity, and at a nod from Silver, Sneasel joins in, aiming a jet of ice at Bruno’s face.

He jumps back, and Silver watches as a hitmonlee, hitmonchan, and machamp materialize in front of him.

Fighting types.

Of course.

“Sneasel, get back!”

She darts back onto his shoulder, and after a moment of debate he lets Nidoran out.

“Sludge bomb!”

The attack splatters on the onix’s back, forming a brief barrier between them and the fighting types.

“You have a plan yet?” he asks Surge.

“Working on it. For now, get higher up.”
Silver nods, and after a glance around, drops onto the tail of another onix along with Nidoran, and works his way up its back, followed by Surge as Electabuzz fires another bolt of electricity at Hitmonlee.

“Running away? It matters not; I give no quarter to cowards.”

Silver looks over his shoulder to see Bruno and Machamp following.

“ Toxic spikes!”

Nidoran pauses, waiting until Surge has passed, before launching a spread of small spikes over the rocks. Bruno and Machamp stop, and Silver and Surge make it to the head of the onix.

And a dead end.

Silver’s gaze drifts to Electabuzz, and he’s not surprised to see him not making much of a dent in the two fighting types.

He could send Murkrow to help him, but he doesn’t want to send him away when he’s this high up, pit of acid or no.

“Good call.” Surge sounds out of breath.

“We’re not gonna be able to do much to his team.”

“Don’t be so negative, we’ll figure something out.”

“No, I’m saying we shouldn’t try to win that way.” Surge gives him a confused look, and he explains, “Bruno’s hung up on a fair fight right? He wants a battle more than anything if he was just trying to get rid of us he could have done it as soon as we got on the onix. Which means he might not see it coming if we go for him.”

“You want to attack the trainer?”

“When you’re fighting a herd of wild pokemon, you go for the one in charge. It’s no different here. If we stop him from giving orders, we should at least be able to getaway. They’ll probably stay to protect him, rather than follow us.”

Surge looks down at where Bruno and Machamp are still approaching, working their way around the spikes.

“You have a way to do that? Or do you need me to paralyze him?”

Silver slips Murkrow and Horsea’s balls off his belt and glances at Sneasel on his shoulder.

“I can do it.”
Would anyone care if Green shoved Sabrina off one of the icy cliffs?

For that matter, is it still considered murder if the “victim” is under investigation (or at least supposed to be under investigation) for terrorism?

Probably not.

And the idea is looking more and more tempting as she follows behind the psychic, trying to focus on looking out for threats, and not the constant glares or the rapidly dropping temperature.

(Maybe picking a fight with Lorelei hadn’t been her best idea.)

But she’s really not sure why Sabrina’s in such a bad mood. Sure, Silph happened, but now seems like a poor time to be sulking over it (especially since it was her pokemon that paired them up (and her idea to team up)), and Green can’t shake the feeling that there’s something else eating at her.

Maybe it’s just that Proton hadn’t killed her before Giovanni showed up.

Finally, though, Sabrina’s patience seems to snap, and she spins around.

“What did Giovanni need your help with?”

“Who said he did?” Green tilts her head, raising her eyebrows innocently.

“He did. What was it?”

“Why’s it matter?”

“Because you just so happened to show up with Silver.” Green stiffens. “And we’ve all been told repeatedly to leave you alone, and I’d like to know why.”

“If he didn’t tell you, then you don’t need to know.” Why’s this such a big deal?

“He didn’t have to save you from Proton. If he’d stayed out of it we wouldn’t have known he was back, which is clearly what he wanted. But he didn’t, which means you’re at least somewhat important.”

Green bites her lip, she hadn’t thought of that. But it doesn’t matter. “I’m friends with Silver. That’s all.” She could mention Pryce, but handing a murder confession to someone who’s probably not permanently on their side doesn’t seem like a good idea.

A scowl works its way across Sabrina’s face, but she turns around. “Fine. Don’t expect extra help just because he likes you.”

A coy smile pulls at Green’s lips. That’s why she’s pitching a fit. “You’re jealous because he didn’t go back to your shoddy attempt at reforming, aren’t you?”

“Don’t be a brat, let’s just get this done.”

Green grins, before following her down the tunnel.

Sabrina stops again after a few minutes, and Green’s about to tell her to take her own advice when
she sees what has her attention; footprints in the sand, circling around a rock structure that almost resembles a pedestal.

“You think it was one of them?”

Sabrina steps around the rocks, avoiding the footprints, before saying, “They look too small to be any of them or any of our teams, and there are at least two sets. There’s someone else here.”

“That looks intentional.” Green points at the rocks.

Sabrina nods, before she looks over her shoulder, suddenly on edge.

After a few seconds, Green hears it too; heels clicking against rocks.

She steps behind Sabrina so they’re back to back as Jiggly and Alakazam both brace for a fight, and then Ditty does something strange.

It slips the rest of the way up her arm and starts pushing against her fingertips, clearly trying to move her hand, and after a second Green carefully pulls her arm up, just as ice forms around her now fake wrist and Sabrina’s.

The psychic reflexively jerks her arm away, pulling Green into her as she slips her arm the rest of the way out of her sleeve, leaving just Ditty clinging to her shoulder.

“What is that?” Sabrina pulls at it. “It’s not coming off.”

A smug laugh echos from one of the tunnels, followed by an unfortunately familiar voice saying, “You two seem so attached to each other!”

Why did they have to run into Lorelei? Do ice trainers just have it out for her?

At least the ice is on Ditty, who can take the cold for a bit, and not her.

They could slip out of this now, but she’s not sure showing her hand this early is a good idea.

Lorelei steps out from behind the corner, holding two dolls in one hand.

“Jynx crafted these dolls with ice beam. A little bit of lipstick on their wrists and handcuffs appear on the real victims. And if they shatter, so do you. Your friend fell for a similar trap.”

A cloyster appears behind her, and Green slips Nido’s ball off her belt. Jiggly would put Sabrina to sleep too, and Green doesn’t want to have to drag her out of the caverns herself, so she’s going to have to work with Nido for this.

“Ice beam!” Lorelei waves her hand, and the cloyster attacks.

Green goes left.

Sabrina goes right.

The attack shoots over their hands as they fall to the ground.

“Pay attention to which direction we’re moving!” Sabrina snaps.

Green bites back an argument. They need to work together, the whole plan hinges on it. If she could get along with Giovanni she can put up with Sabrina for one battle.
In theory.

Ignoring Sabrina, she throws Nido’s ball.

“Double kick!”

At the same time, Sabrina sends out a venomoth. “Sleep powder!”

“Blow it away with blizzard.”

A scowl etches its way onto Green’s face as the attack blows the powder back, and onto Nido, who falls asleep almost immediately.

Don’t argue. Don’t argue. Don’t argue.

Lorelei sends out a jynx, who lunges for them.

“Jump to the right!”

Green follows Sabrina to the side and takes a large step backward when she sees how close they’d gotten to the edge of another cliff.

She hears the order for another attack too late to do anything, and everything goes black.
Chapter 55

Murkrow’s grip on Silver’s arm is starting to hurt.

But staying in the air is safer than staying on the onix, and he only needs to keep himself out of the way until Sneasel and Horsea are in position. Which should be soon.

Murkrow darts up, out of the way of another punch from Hitmonlee as Silver scans the room for Sneasel again.

She’s climbing up a wall behind Bruno, Horsea’s tail wrapped around her arm. They just need to get a little higher and he’ll be able to signal to Surge.

They’d worked out a plan, and split up. Surge is on the onix, dealing with Machamp and Hitmonchan. Nidoran’s with him, keeping up a wall of toxic spikes.

Distance is the key to this fight.

And, given Bruno’s obsession with a fair fight, so is playing dirty.

Sneasel reaches a ledge big enough for her and Horsea to sit on, and she flashes her claws at Silver, who waves to Surge, hoping the lieutenant will notice without a more obvious signal.

He does and throws a pokeball.

Electrode’s self destruct shakes the whole cavern.

After that, a water gun from Horsea and an ice beam from Sneasel is all it takes to have Bruno frozen to an onix.

Murkrow drops Silver in front of him, and a hand signal sends Sneasel jumping from her ledge to his throat, Horsea still clinging to her.

“Where’s Lance?” Silver demands as Surge’s magnemite set up a reflect barrier around them, keeping Bruno’s pokemon back.

The lieutenant steps up next to him, looking surprised. Silver tells himself it’s at how quickly Bruno had gone down, and not that his plan had worked at all.

“You won’t make it in time to stop him.”

“That’s not what I asked.”

Bruno smiles. “You’re very devoted to this, aren’t you?”

“And you’re not. You set this whole thing up to get an entertaining enough fight even though you had plenty of chances to stop us. So tell me where Lance is, or we’ll make use of your acid lake.”

“You’re bluffing.”

“Sneasel.”

There’s a flash of white as her claws extend, and Bruno cranes his head back as much as the rocks allow to avoid getting stabbed.
“Hey kid, maybe we should take it down a notch?” Surge suggests, looking somewhat concerned. Silver glares back at him and takes a step forward so he’s right next to Bruno.

So far Giovanni’s suggestion of adding a water attack to make the ice stronger seems to be working, and while Silver would normally feel bad for freezing a person, they have a job to do, and Bruno let his guard down.

The threats, however, he really doesn’t take issue with. Bruno might not have outright tried to kill them, but the threat of death-by-acid was still there, and as far as Silver’s concerned that makes everything he’s doing completely permissible. Even if Surge is protesting (hypocrite).

“What about Agatha and Lorelei then. What happened to them?”

“I don’t have a way of contacting any of them.”

Silver scowls. He has to have something of use. Surge sinks down next to him, suddenly looking more serious than Silver’s seen him.

“Why’d Lance trash Vermilion?”

“Said he was looking for something. Or someone, I don’t remember.”

Oh sure, Surge gets an answer. Murkrow and Sneasel both look up, and after a few seconds, Silver hears rapid footsteps.

He stands up, turning towards the sound as Murkrow stretches his wings out, getting ready for a fight.

Surge looks over and grabs Silver’s arm.

“Relax.”

“What-?” Before he can finish his question, Red appears over the curve of the onix’s back. Hopefully, that means Giovanni’s here somewhere too.

“Surge? And… Silver?” His eyes land on Bruno. “You already stopped him?”

Surge waves his hand, and the magnemite drop the barrier long enough for Red to slip through.

“One of them, yeah. No idea what’s going on with the other three. How did you get here?”

“I… It’s complicated.”

“Red…”

They all look back at Bruno, and after a few seconds, Red turns to Silver.

“Could you let him up?”

“Why?”

“You can’t leave him like that.”
“Why not? He’s the enemy, I beat him, we need to keep him contained.”

“I was telling the truth, you won’t make it to Lance in time. And I have no interest in his plans anyway. You gain nothing from keeping me here.” Bruno’s voice is shaky from the cold.

Silver crosses his arms, scowling. “I don’t have to listen to you. You had your chance to be helpful, you didn’t take it.” He turns to Red. “I’ll let him up to make you feel better, but if he gets away you can explain how when someone asks.”

Red nods and Silver turns to Sneasel, giving her a short nod.

She gets to work clawing through the ice, and a hand settles on Silver’s shoulder.

“Are you okay?”

He glares at Red as he shrugs his hand off. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

Red jerks his head towards Surge, who’s watching closely as Bruno starts to sit up.

“He’s been more helpful than you,” Silver says with another shrug, ignoring the look of surprise on Red’s face.

Maybe he’s being mean, but this would have been easier if Red hadn’t slipped up earlier and needed rescuing. There would have been more people here from the beginning for starters.

“Who else is here?” Red asks after a few seconds.

“Green, Yellow, Sabrina, Koga, Blue, and I think Green said his name was Blaine. We split up, everyone else has probably run into one of the other three by now.” He wants to ask where Giovanni went, but he’s not sure if bringing him up in front of Surge is a good idea.

Red nods. “They should be okay. Why don’t you come with me? I’ll get you out of the cave.”

“I don’t need your help.” He wants out of the cave, but if he has to pick he’s going to stay with Surge or go on his own.

“Yeah, I’ll take the kid. You go be helpful somewhere else.” Surge looks over from Bruno.

“I’ve got him,” Red counters.

“I don’t need to be ‘got’,” Silver snaps.

Red looks down at him. “I’ll get you back to Green. You came here with her, right?”

Silver nods, still glaring. “I can get to her by myself.”

“You shouldn’t be wandering through the caves by yourself,” Surge says, walking over.

Silver stays between them, trying to find a way out of dealing with them.

They don’t want him wandering off because of consequences from Giovanni and Green respectively. Fine. He doesn’t want to be babysat until one of them shows up.

But he’s pretty sure they’re not going to let him go on his own, and he likes Red the least, so after a moment he turns to Surge.
“I’ll go with you.”

The lieutenant shrugs. “Sounds good.”

“But-” Red starts before he sighs. “Get him to Green. I’ll know if you don’t.”

“I’m shaking.” Surge turns around, stepping around Bruno, who still seems to be trying to get movement back in his fingers. “Come on kid.”

“Stop calling me that.” But he still follows him down the onix, pausing only to recall Murkrow and Horsea, as Sneasel and Nidoran follow at his heels.

They’ve barely entered the tunnel at the other side when Red catches up.

“Bruno’s not a problem on his own. You might be.”

“Fine,” Surge muses as Silver scowls.
Giovanni makes it to Yellow in time to push her out of the way of a particularly explosive attack.

She yelps when he grabs her but doesn’t protest when he eases her onto her feet behind a boulder.

It’s not much shelter, but between it and Ryhorn at his heels, they should have a few seconds.

Those few seconds are enough for him to register that her arm is in a clearly makeshift cast, and her face is smudged with dirt and bruises.

“M-Mister Giovanni? What are you doing here? Green didn’t say anything about you coming.” She sounds out of breath.

“She doesn’t know I’m here yet,” he admits, taking a step back from the child once it’s clear she can stand on her own. “You can go.”

She shakes her head. “Lance can only be defeated by a trainer from Viridian. That means me.”

“Lance’s plans finished falling apart about twenty minutes ago, but if it makes you feel better, I am from the Forest too.” He can’t pull the same party tricks as her and Lance anymore, lack of use having rendered what gifts he may have had almost useless, but it’s true.

Her eyes widen as he steps away, and he hears her murmuring to herself before she’s cut off by a growl and the sound of electricity crackling.

Right.

The pikachu.

He glances down and doesn’t bother hiding his smirk as the creature bristles with electricity on the rocks.

“Pika? What’s wrong?” Yellow darts over before the rodent can launch an attack and Giovanni doesn’t stick around to find out what memories she’s drawing from its head.

Instead, he steps out, taking in the scene before him: Lance surrounded by two dragonair, floating in what looks like a bubble over a nest of strings resembling a web covering the mouth of the volcano. Clearly Yellow had had some plan, but he has no idea what.

He sees the moment Lance’s eyes land on him, and the confusion in his eyes.

“What are you trying to pull?” he demands. When Giovanni stays quiet, he scowls. “It doesn’t matter, no one gets in my way! Bubble beam!”

Out the corner of his eye, he sees Yellow darting back behind cover to avoid the barely visible attack, but rather than follow he waves Ryhorn over.

“Horn attack!”

The pokemon slams his horn into the rocks, crushing several into dust.

“Now, stomp.”
At the second attack, the dust flies up, revealing the bubbles.

“Now then…” he murmurs, slipping another ball from his pocket. “Nidoqueen, scratch!”

The pokemon materializes in front of him, claws gleaming. She lunges for the bubble encasing Lance, but her attack merely sinks into it rather than popping it.

“My turn!” Lance jeers. “Hyper beam!”

Three attacks burst from the bubble, and somewhere behind him Yellow yelps.

As Giovanni steps out of the way, he lets another ball fall, sent with just enough force that it rolls towards Lance.

“You left the underside open,” he muses in the moment of quiet after the attacks end.

Lance looks back just as Beedrill forms under him.

“Twineedle!”

The bubble pops.

Lance falls, landing in Yellow’s web and quickly getting entangled.

“You’ve boasted a great deal about your unbeatable power. Care to continue?” Giovanni asks, standing at the edge of the pit.

Lance scowls, and Giovanni snaps his fingers, sending Beedrill in to press a stinger to his throat.

Yellow pads up behind him, still holding the pikachu.

“Is he… Did we win?” she asks, looking startled.

“There’s a gleam in Lance’s eyes as a smirk works its way across his face.

Giovanni tilts his head, glancing around as that smirk melts to confusion.

“Was something meant to happen?” he asks, watching as Lance realizes the position he’d landed himself in. “Oh, I see; was this a trap? Were you hoping I’d bring the Earth Badge to you?” Beedrill presses harder into Lance’s throat as he continues, “The nearest one is at the bottom of Vermilion’s bay, you’re welcome to look for it. As for the rest of your collection, they’ve all been removed already.” Will and Karen had gotten here around when Green and Silver had, and worked their way around the island for the badges. Not necessary, without his, the whole thing wouldn’t work, but it’s one more wound to rub salt into.

Lance pulls against the cords. “How did you find out?”
“As a general rule, once you’ve shared your plans with someone and they’ve refused to join you, you don’t put them on ice, you get rid of them.”

“Red told you?”

“There was a bit of haggling, but he seemed to like the idea of you not getting to destroy the whole region.”

“You have no idea what I’m trying to accomplish.”

“You’re assuming that I care. I don’t. Your little game is over, you’ve lost.”

“What is this? Atonement?”

“No. You’re just a nuisance that I had the tools to stop.” He nods to Beedrill, and she pulls a stinger back to strike. The attack isn’t lethal, but the poison will keep Lance subdued for a while.

Slowly, he works his way back to the safety of the rocks, stepping up next to Yellow, who’s clinging to the pikachu like a doll as she stares up at Lance.

“What are you going to do with him?” she asks.

He’d like to cut the cords and send him falling into the magma beneath them, but with her right here he can’t.

“Once we’re back to the mainland I’ll get a hold of Erika and she’ll send someone out to collect him.” Or rather, Green will get a hold of her, and whoever gets sent out will likely find an empty web, but Lance is only so threatening on his own. “Come on. We should head down.”

She hesitates, and he glances back to her arm.

“Unless you need a minute?”

She nods, sinking onto a rock.

She stays quiet for a bit, just catching her breath, before finally asking, “You’re the Viridian gym leader?”

“Yes.”

She nods again, studying her cast.

“When did you fight Red?”

Giovanni glances to where the pikachu is sitting on a rock, still glaring at him. Damned rat.

“In Viridian.”

She’s quiet for a minute, before almost whispering, “You’re the one he went to stop, aren’t you?”

“Yes.” Anyone who lasted that long against Lance is too smart for a charade to last long.

“Why are you here? Are you with the other three?”

Other three?

So they decided to do something useful, did they?
“No. And I’m here to stop him, that’s all. There’s no hidden motive.”

She takes a shaky breath, still looking confused. “Red’s here?” she asks after a moment.

“Yes. Lorelei left him stuck in Mount Moon. I got him out.”

Yellow nods, before standing up.

“I’m ready to go. But Blaine’s somewhere up here, he… got hurt. We need to get him.”

Giovanni pulls himself up, taking a few steps back to give her space. “Lead the way then.”
This whole situation is Sabrina’s fault.

Green’s not sure how, given that she’d been unconscious, but it is.

She glances up through half-lidded eyes in time to see the jynx land another attack, and Sabrina’s grip on the cliff Lorelei had somehow sent them over slip. As they plummet she snatches at Blasty’s ball, and they both land on his shell as he propels himself back up to face Lorelei.

She spins around, surprise etched across her face as Green does her best to keep Sabrina balanced on Blasty.

“So you’re still alive? You’re a stubborn one.”

“I’ll pretend you’re not surprised.”

Lorelei snorts, looking up at her. “I’m sure you’ve worked out why I was targeting you specifically?”

“Because I helped Yellow and got in your way.”

“Very good. Before I get rid of you, I’d like to know your reasons.”

Green slides off Blasty, slipping Sabrina’s arm over her shoulders once they land.

“You hurt my friend, do I need a more complicated one?”

“That’s not the main reason. You don’t strike me as someone who gets overly attached.”

“Fine. I want to go home, and I can’t do that when there’s people like you wrecking everything.” She grabs Clefy’s ball, taking care to keep it hidden in her hand as she continues, “I knew you’d want to deal with all your loose ends, so I stuck a tracker on Yellow’s hat before we split up, and stuck close through Viridian and the forest. That’s how I knew when to butt in and help. And if you’re wondering why I told you all this…”

“Yes?”

“Call it my victory strut! Clefy!”

She throws the ball, and Clefy shrinks as he forms, vanishing and leaving Lorelei visibly confused.

“Where did it go?”

Green smirks, watching as a tiny Clefy picks up the two dolls from behind Lorelei.

“They are?”

Green smirks, watching as a tiny Clefy picks up the two dolls from behind Lorelei.

“I’ll give you a hint,” she teases. “Think about clefable’s powers.”

Realization dawns on Lorelei’s face, and she twists around in time to see Clefy racing back, still small, with the dolls in hand.

“Blasty, cover him!”

“No you don’t!”
Lorelei’s jynx readies what looks like a blizzard as Blasty launches a hydro pump at it.

The attacks collide over Clefy, and Green watches in horror as he stumbles and the dolls fall to the ground.

For a moment she thinks nothing happened, but then she feels Ditty separate from her shoulder, and she realizes the arm had broken off her doll.

Not what she’d planned, but she can work with it.

As her “arm” falls to the ground, she lets out a cry of pain, and doubles over, clutching her side.

She hears Lorelei laugh as Sabrina and Ditty hit the ground.

“That’s what you get for defying me. At best, you delayed the inevitable, and not by much.”

“Actually-” Green pants out (acting exhausted isn’t hard), “-I meant to do that. You told Sabrina to get rid of my dead weight… Cut off my hand right? Well… there you go. Now… I just…” She slumps onto the ground.

Lorelei laughs again. “You’re a fool Green. It’s over, I’ve won.”

She turns her back, starting to head down the tunnel, and Green nods to Ditty.

The pokemon slips out of the handcuff and lunges at Lorelei; stretching out to tie her to the jynx.

“What?” Her head snaps to Green as she pulls herself up.

“I said it was my victory strut, didn’t I?” She slips her arm back into her sleeve and brushes her skirt off. “I knew I wouldn’t be able to win without some kind of trickery, so I had Ditty in place from the beginning.”

“Very clever.” Lorelei squirms against Ditty as Green walks over.

“You weren’t so bad yourself.” Green stands over her, weighing her options.

Lorelei smiles. “Thank you. Still… it’s a shame…”

Whatever she’d been about to say gets lost when Jiggly starts singing, and Green steps away as Lorelei’s eyes close.

Time to get Sabrina up.

Or not. The spot on the ground where she’d left her is empty.

“I was tied to a ditto the whole time? We could have split up whenever?”

Green jumps, looking over at the psychic.

“Well, you know; ‘to fool your enemies, fool your friends’…”

She steps back cautiously, not sure how much Sabrina is likely to care about the “don’t kill Green” rule at the moment.

“We’re good. Right?” she asks as Ditty jumps back onto her wrist.

Sabrina glares at her for another few seconds, before she smirks. “Sure. While we’re on the subject
of friends though, what do yours think of your taste in allies? I’d certainly love to know how dear Professor Oak took the news that you’re working with Giovanni. Or did you not tell him? I can’t say I’d blame you if you didn’t; after all, that stunt at the tournament was over a stolen squirtle, I can only imagine how he’d react to something worse.”

Green’s breath catches as Sabrina brushes past her. She squeezes her eyes shut until she’s not seeing pidgey and a cloth mask her mind had done its absolute best to swap out for one made of ice.

“Oh well. It’s not my problem. I’m sure you have it all worked out,” Sabrina continues as she walks behind Green. “The other fights are over, by the way, you should go track down your friends. See you around.”

Green hears a faint swish, like the noise Abra makes when he teleports, and she sinks to the ground, shivering.

She needs to get out of here before Lorelei wakes up, and Jiggly is making a point of reminding her of that; tugging on her arm, while Clefy and Blasty pointedly look down the tunnel, but she needs a minute to catch her breath.

Sabrina’s just trying to get under her skin (except she’s right). It’s what she does (but she’s right). It’s probably half the reason Giovanni had hired her (she’s right). She should just ignore her (but it’s the truth).

One deep breath.

Two.

Three.

She stands up.

If the other fights are over she needs to track down Silver. She’s not leaving him with Surge any longer than necessary.

End Notes

want to find me elsewhere?
I have a Tumblr- http://shellys-apprentice.tumblr.com/

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