**Nuzlocke: Bits and Bobs**

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences

**Archive Warning:** Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings, Major Character Death

**Category:** Multi

**Fandom:** Pocket Monsters | Pokemon (Main Video Game Series), Hamlet - Shakespeare, Much Ado About Nothing - Shakespeare, Midsummer Night's Dream - Shakespeare, Romeo And Juliet - Shakespeare

**Relationship:** Wendy/Georgia, Matsuba/Minaki | Eusine/Morty, Carrie/Herman, Key/Archie, Saylee/Blue, Arthur/Helen, Marc/Kalle

**Character:** Tashigi, Tobias, Hernan, Carrie, Wataru | Lance, Wendy, Georgia - Character, Matsuba | Morty, Minaki | Eusine, Saylee, Ookido Green | Blue Oak, Tsuwabuki Daigo | Steven Stone, Mikuri | Wallace, Adan | Juan, Aogiri | Archie, Matsubusa | Maxie, Homura | Tabitha, Ushio | Matt, Izumi | Shelly, Handsome | Looker, Jenny Hawkshaw, Thomas the Grovyle, Shikoba the Swellow, Yanagi | Pryce, Nagi | Winona, Sakaki | Giovanni, Genji | Drake, Key - Character, Natsume | Sabrina, Mewtwo, Erika (Pokemon), Melody Hawkshaw, Shirona | Cynthia, Gen | Riley, Silver (Pokemon), Red (Pokemon)

**Additional Tags:** some random fluff, some complete and utter crack, a bit o' Shakespeare, some angstiness, some relevant omakes, some prequel, Some Backstory, Rocket!AU, Memes, NaNoWriMo 2016, Tabletop RPG!AU, C-Section

**Series:** Part 5 of The Keyleeverse

**Collections:** The Storylocke Compendium

**Stats:** Published: 2014-05-14 Updated: 2019-06-09 Chapters: 63/? Words: 152246

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**Nuzlocke: Bits and Bobs**

by DittoWithAHat, Mangaluva

**Summary**

Better title may later be applied. A random selection of oneshots set in my Nuzlocke universe (After Armageddon, Blood and Bond, Calamity Calls, Deliverance, Dimensional Destruction). LATEST: Announcing the birth of a child and a new name for this collection!

**Notes**

This oneshot is set sometime between the events of FR and SS, with Hernan, Carrie and
Tobias living in Lavender together and Tobias learning to use his powers. For my beta, Jack Falconer, without whom my attempts at fic would be an incomprehensible mess, and who thinks Toby is awesome :) Merry Christmas!
Today, Tobias wanted to know what was on the other end of the bridges.

“What’s there? How long is it to go there? Is it cool? Is it?” he asked. They were sitting and eating breakfast with all of the Marowak and Cubone, some kind of vine that grew all over the Tower. Tobias liked the leaves much better than the vine, because they were sweeter.

Mummy and Daddy looked at each other. “I’ll take him,” Daddy said. “You have two funerals today.”

“Work, work, work…” Mummy said. She picked up Tobias and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Toby, you stay close to Daddy and be good today, okay?”

“Okay!” Tobias said happily. “Tell the dead people goodbye for me!”

“I’ll tell their families that they have your condolences,” Mummy promised.

“Con-doe-lense-sis…” Tobias said. “What’s that? Where is it? Do I need to go get it for you to give it to them?”

“It means that you’re very sorry for their loss,” Daddy said, picking up Tobias and walking away from breakfast. “It’s a nice thing to say to someone whose friend has just died. Say ‘you have my condolences’.”

“You have my con-do-lences,” Tobias repeated carefully. “’Kay. Well, they do. Can we go see the bridges now? What’s a bridge anyway? Camilla an’ Carlotta an’ Carol were talking about the bridges an’ how you shouldn’t fall off…” He kept asking questions while Daddy carried him past all the human homes and out of Lavender. Daddy didn’t answer all of Tobias’ questions, but Tobias didn’t notice the ones he skipped because he had more questions. Tobias was only little and didn’t know much, so he always had more questions.

“Here we go,” Daddy said, walking onto some wood that was lying on the ground. “These are the bridges.” He set Tobias down on the wood, but kept one hand on Tobias’ back while he walked around, looking curiously at the old wood. Daddy gripped Tobias’ arm suddenly as Tobias got to the edge of the wood. “Be careful, Toby. You’ll fall into the water.”

“Water?” Tobias gasped as he looked over the edge of the wood and realized that it wasn’t on the ground, it was on the water, more water than he’d seen since they were on the islands. It wasn’t nice water like there, though; it was dark and murky and smelled funny. “Ew… what’s wrong with the water?”

“It’s poisoned, Toby, and it’ll make you very sick if you get in it, so don’t,” Daddy said, looking around. Whenever Tobias left town with Mummy or Daddy, they were always looking around for other humans or Pokémon. Outside of Lavender, Mummy had warned him, other Pokémon might try to eat you, so Tobias wasn’t allowed to leave Lavender without Mummy or Daddy. Tobias wasn’t frightened of other Pokémon. Mummy and Daddy were strong enough to fight anything.

Besides, Tobias had powers too. “Daddy, can’t we make the water better?” he asked. “If the water’s sick, can’t it get better? Like how people get better when they’re sick?”

“Not everyone does,” Daddy said, looking back at Lavender. “Do you want to walk along the bridges a little way?”
“Yeah!” Tobias said excitedly. He got to walk so long as he promised to keep close to Daddy. He liked getting to walk and use his little legs. When he wasn’t walking, he was being carried by Mummy or Daddy, which he also liked. There were a lot of things that Tobias liked. Happiness was his forte.

He wasn’t even scared when several Krabby suddenly scuttled up from the water and surrounded them on the bridge. He’d seen Krabby before, and Daddy could fight them easy.

“Look at the size of this one!” one of the Krabby said, peering up at Daddy.

“I’m so hungry I could eat him whole,” another one said.

“Don’t you dare, there’s enough for everyone to have a bit,” a third said, snapping at Daddy’s ankle. That was the first one to receive an electric fist to the head. Daddy picked up Tobias and held him in one hand while fighting off the Krabby with the other. He never hurt them enough to kill them, just enough to send them running away. Tobias giggled; they looked funny, trying to quickly skitter away sideways.

Then a big one got Daddy’s ankle hard again and Daddy stumbled backwards. Tobias suddenly fell out of Daddy’s hand and into the water.

It didn’t feel like proper water; it was oily, and when Tobias opened his mouth it tasted nasty. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t swim, so he reached for his power, the light that filled up his shell and tried to find a power that would work…

His hands turned briefly to vines, lashed out through the water and then turned to hands again. Little fireballs tried to blaze and were snuffed out by the water. Tobias was jerked back and forth by various bursts of power, but nothing took him above the water. He tried again and again, and then…

He suddenly shot straight up. He soared out of the water, above the bridges, and straight up into the sky...

“Wooooow,” he breathed. He was so high up that the Tower was below him, and the Tower was the biggest, highest thing around, except for the mountains, which didn’t count because they were part of the ground. The Tower was made, and it was huge, and Tobias was above it. He could see all around, the fields of coarse grass and the mountain ledges with some of the really old graves and the big group of people and Pokémon at a funeral, and he could feel wind under his wings…

Then the wings were gone, the brief burst of power was done, and Tobias was falling. “Wheeee!” he cried laughing in exhilaration as the wind rushed past him. Daddy came into view, his arms outstretched, and Tobias seemed to naturally fall into them. Daddy fell backwards onto the wood.

“Oooof,” he gasped, wrapping his arms around Tobias. “Are you… okay, Toby?”

“That was fun!” Tobias laughed, hugging Daddy. “I wanna do it again!”

“Better not, Toby,” Daddy said, slowly getting up. “I don’t think I can take another Fly attack like that!”

“Aww…” Tobias settled down to be carried back home by Daddy. “It was fun, though.”

“I’m just glad you’re okay, Toby,” Daddy sighed. He sounded scared. Tobias wasn’t sure why. Those Krabby hadn’t been scary at all, and flying had been fun.

That afternoon, he kept trying to get Fly again, until he got Bullet Seed instead and very nearly hit
the attendants of the second funeral. Then Mummy made him stop. Still, he decided to keep trying, until some day he got to Fly again.
“Hello, little one.”

The child looked up. A white Pokémon was fluttering over the water in front of him. It had a round body with funny red and blue shapes on it, really tiny white wings, and a pointy white head. It was almost as tall as he was, and he was four already so he was a big boy. Not as tall as his daddy or his big brother, but one day, when he grew up…

“That’s still a long way away, though,” the Pokémon said softly. “A little boy like you shouldn’t be out here alone.”

The boy frowned. “You’re talking,” he said. “Pokémon don’t talk. They just make noises.”

“Most humans will just hear noises when I talk, but not you.” The white Pokémon fluttered over to join him where he sat by the side of the lake. She hovered over the water in front of him. “Not little children like you.”

“Are you a wild Pokémon?” the boy asked curiously. “Mummy says wild Pokémon are dangerous, and aren’t friendly much to humans, and that they’ll eat me up. Could you eat me up? You’re littler than me. I don’t think you could.”

“I wouldn’t,” the white Pokémon said. She had a nice, soft voice that made the boy feel happy and safe. “I’m a Togetic. I’d never harm a child.”

“Gran told me that Togetic live in forests an’ when kids get lost, they lead ‘em home,” the boy said. “D’you live in a forest?”

“I live by this lake, protecting children from drowning,” the Togetic said, dangling her long, round feet in the water. “I’m not sure that I’d have to save you, though. The water likes you.”

The boy laughed. “I promise I won’t drown,” he said. “Daddy taught me all about swimming an’ I can hold my breath for a real long time an’ anyways Daddy’s got all sorts of water Pokémon an’ they’d come and get me if I got really stuck. Daddy’s got the best water Pokémon. Water Pokémon are really cool, I think. Are you a water Pokémon?”

“I’m not,” the Togetic said, shaking her head.
“Well, I think you’re cool anyway, saving other kids who don’t have daddies with water Pokémon,” the boy said, reaching out to the Togetic. She held his hand. It made him feel warm. “D’you ever get lonely up here? There’s not lots of people living here. I bet there’s not lots of kids to save.”

“There aren’t,” the Togetic agreed quietly. “Very few humans live around here now, and not many with children. I do so miss getting to play with human children. You’re the first one I’ve seen in a long time.”

“D’you wanna be my friend?” the boy asked, stepping into the shallows of the lake, still holding the Togetic’s hand. “Then we can play all the time, forever an’ ever!”

“You won’t be a child forever,” the Togetic laughed.

“Yeah, but then I’ll be a grownup, an’ I can have my own kids for you to play with!” the boy declared. “An’ I won’t make them go to bed early or eat yucky food or be too much older than their little brothers! My brother’s basically a grownup already, so he won’t always play with me,” he whispered to the Togetic. “So I’ll play with you all the time instead!”

“I like you, little one,” the Togetic said, fluttering her wings and flying into the air. The boy screeched with laughter as he was lifted up too, flying a couple of feet above the lake.

“Wheeeee!” he cried. “Awesome! Can you go higher?”

“Not today,” the Togetic said, setting him down. “Your parents are calling for you. I can hear them. They’re worried about you.”

“Awww… they’re gonna be mad that I ran off,” the boy said dejectedly, scuffing his feet on the ground. Then he hugged the Togetic. “But they won’t mind when they see how cool you are! C’mon! I want Mummy and Daddy to meet my new best friend! An’ I wanna show you off to my brother…”
Typo Triad

Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Notes

Warning for a high level of crack. Canon to my NuzlockeVerse except it’s not really at all. Not remotely.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Who are you, anyway?” Saylee demanded.

“Ghetsis is gone,” one of the triad said, putting their hands on their siblings’ shoulders. “What use is there now?”

“You’re right,” a second agreed. “On three?”

“One,” the third said. All three reached one hand behind their heads to where their masks were tied. “Two.” All three reached up with their other hand to dig under the front of their hair. “Three!”

White wigs and black masks were flung aside and Saylee found herself staring at three identical faces. Three familiar identical faces.

“Lance?!” she said in shock, looking from one to the other.

“That would be me,” the one on the far left said, brushing his hair aside to reveal a nasty blunt trauma scar. He swished aside his skintight black clothing, revealing that he somehow had a suit and cape on underneath. “And you’ve actually met Lace, in Blackthorn.”

“Greetings,” said the one on the far right, swishing aside his ninja costume to reveal a suit and a lacy white cape. He had a similar burn scar on his forehead. “And you may or may not have met our sister Lane…”

“You’re a girl?” Blue said in surprise, staring at the perfectly identical third sibling. She hmphed and removed her skintight (to a definitely male body, what the hell?) clothes to reveal that she was wearing a deep red cape and a suit which was most definitely not hiding her large feminine attributes.

“Is that even physically possible?!” Saylee yelled, staring from the tight black clothes lying on the ground to the huge clothing and in one case anatomy that the triplets in front of her were sporting.

“We’re ninjas,” Lane said.

“We can fit infinite mass under our clothing,” Lance agreed.

“And now we’re on dragons,” Lace said as they released three Dragonite. “TYPO TRIAD, AWAY!”

Saylee and Blue just stared, watching them go.

“What the hell just happened?” Blue asked.
“I don’t know, but let’s never speak of it again,” Saylee muttered. “C’mon, the mastermind’s still around here somewhere…”

Chapter End Notes

Something that’s probably well known to anyone who read After Armageddon from its early chapters is that I typo. A lot. It’s one of the reasons that I am eternally grateful to have a beta now, and even before the beta sees them my dearest muse Key-chan sees them more or less as they’re being written. I wrote a late-story chapter of Blood and Bond very late at night and typo’d so much that we concluded that Lance is triplets.

…like I said, it was very late.
“Oh, look!”

“Wendy, what’s up?” Saylee asked as Wendy suddenly flitted sharply off of the path and towards the bottom of a tree. Hovering in placed, she began wedging something out of the bark using the tips of her stingers, before picking it up between her delicate hind legs.

“Lee, do you know what this is?” she asked, flying up to Saylee and dropping it into her hand. Saylee turned the object over in her hands, running a finger along its smooth surface. It was small, smooth and sharp, dirty white and slightly curved.

“I think it’s a Meowth claw or something,” Saylee said, rubbing her thumb over the rough broken end. “Some people think that holding one makes you faster.”

“Does it really?” Georgia said with interest. The heavy Geodude was the slowest member of the team and sometimes lagged behind when they were travelling quickly.

“I think it’s just a superstition,” Saylee said with a smile, holding up the claw as Wendy fluttered closely again. “Do you want it back?”

“Actually…” Wendy plucked the claw out of Saylee’s hand and flew over to Georgia. “Georgia, would you like it?”

“Oi’d love it, oi would!” Georgia said happily, holding out her hand and smiling as Wendy dropped the claw into it. “Thank you, moi dear.”

“Oh no, this is to thank you for always protecting me,” Wendy said shyly. “It means a lot to me. It truly does.”

“T’ain’t no trouble, moi dear,” Georgia said as they started to move on again. The two of them dropped back a little; Saylee was leading the way, Chip trotting along at her heels, while behind them Tobias kept trying to talk to Mary but was continually interrupted by Nider flirting with her. “Oi wouldn’t want anythin’ t’appen t’you. Gave me a roight froight, it did, when that stupit sod smashed you…”

“I do wish I was as strong as you,” Wendy sighed mournfully. “I must seem so weak… you’re made of stone. What on earth could even damage you?”

“It can be done, moi dear,” Georgia said. “Don’t worry if you can’t ‘andle a few stones, moi dear. Oi promise oi’ll always be there t’andle ‘em for you.” She held out her hand. Wendy put her stinger in it.
“I should like that very much,” she said, smiling.
“Excuse me,” Eusine said, bowing politely to the monk that greeted them. “My name is Eusine Minaki. I’m here to see your archives?”

“Our archives are off-limits to those who are not members of our order,” the monk said apologetically. “If you wish to be ordained—”

“It is okay, Morty,” an older monk said, stepping out of the temple’s main hall. He wore the robes of a more senior monk. “The master of Violet Tower contacted me about you, young Eusine. He said that you show much promise and devotion, though little spiritual power.”

“I, er… thank you?” Eusine said, confused. “I’ve been fascinated by the Legendary Beasts since I was a child. I simply wish to learn all I can about them.”

“You are welcome to visit our archives under supervision from a member of our order,” the senior monk said. “Morty, please show him to the archives.”

“Yes, brother,” Morty said, bowing his head. “Follow me, please, sir.”

Eusine follow the young man off down a side corridor, unable to help staring around at the ancient temple. It was one of the oldest buildings in Ecruteak, having been one of the very few not to burn down during Lugia’s rampage, millennia ago. “This building is so beautiful,” he sighed.

“It is a privilege to be allowed to live and study here,” Morty said, smiling at him. “Are you sure you do not wish to enrol in our order?”

“I think I’d be rather out of place,” Eusine laughed. “I’m sure everyone my age has already been here for years and years. I mean—how old are you?”

“Eighteen,” Morty said. “I’ve studied here since I was eight. Most of the others my age have been here since they were eleven or twelve.”

“You see!” Eusine exclaimed. “I’d probably be the only eighteen-year-old novice in the temple. I don’t think I’d fit in. Besides, the vow of chastity isn’t exactly my style.” He winked at Morty, grinning when the other boy went red. He’d be cute if he had hair, he thought wistfully. A thought struck him. “What colour is your hair?” he asked, peering closely at Morty’s shaven head.

“Wh—blonde,” Morty said, going even redder. “Can you please stop doing that?”

“Sorry, sorry,” Eusine said, bowing apologetically.

“A-Anyway, here we are,” Morty said, stopping in front of a beautifully-carved set of double doors.
He pressed his hand to one of the panels in the door, which glowed, revealing that it wasn’t wood at all, but a touchpad to unlock the door at recognized palmprints.

“Very modern technology for an ancient temple,” Eusine said, following Morty into the library. He was faced with rows and rows of ancient paper-and-leather books, set out under transparent steel casing. “Oh, this is magnificent!”

“It is no longer permitted to touch the actual texts, since their sheer age could easily cause them to crumble,” Morty said, kneeling down at one of the traditional-style low tables. He tapped its surface and a holomenu appeared. “But all of them were painstakingly digitally catalogued by our predecessors centuries ago. You can easily view and interact with them here. You’re looking for stories of the Legendary Beasts, yes?”

“One of them in particular,” Eusine said, kneeling down and scooting up to the screen. “Suicune!”

“Why Suicune in particular?” Morty asked, typing Suicune’s name into the search bar.

“Because Suicune is the most beautiful of the three!” Eusine said excitedly. “Think about it. Entei causes volcanoes to erupt. Raikou brings down lightning storms. But Suicune? Suicune’s power is to purify. Suicune is the only one of the three who does not destroy things, but instead makes the world a better place! My grandfather used to tell me that Entei is the most powerful, and Raikou the most spectacular, but the best of the three to aspire to be is Suicune, because Suicune is kind. I have always wanted to meet Suicune, ever since I was a child!”

“Some scholars say that Raikou represents the lightning that lit the tower afire, Entei represents the flames, and Suicune the rain that put them out,” Morty said. “So it would make sense for Suicune, of the three, to be the one that represents kindness. Here,” he added, pointing to the list of documents on display. “On the left, full texts about the Beasts. In the middle are excerpts from larger texts which mention the Beasts. On the right are works of art depicting them.”

“Thank you!” Eusine cried, clasping Morty’s hand. “I am in your debt!”

“Wh—don’t worry about it,” Morty insisted, looking flustered. “Just—what do you want to look at first?”

“Oh, the paintings, I think,” Eusine said, letting go of Morty with one hand and scrolling through the works of art. “I want to see if you have my favourite… ah! Here!” He enlarged one of the paintings to full size and colour.

It was a gorgeous piece, depicting Suicune racing across ocean waves. The artist had somehow managed to capture a shimmer of purity radiating from Suicune’s paws, climbing up a wave behind it in a breathtaking manner.

“Isn’t it stunning?” Eusine sighed happily.

“Yes…” Morty agreed softly. “I’ve seen it many times, but your passion for it makes it seem as if I’m seeing it for the first time.” He smiled, then went bright red again as he looked down and realized that Eusine was still clutching his hand happily. “Ah, ah… if you could please…”

“Sorry, sorry,” Eusine insisted, letting him go. “I really am very sorry. I promise I’ll stop doing that.”

Morty sighed. “No, you won’t,” he mumbled under his breath. Then he smiled. “If you see the notes at the bottom of the screen, the artist claimed he witnessed this in the thirty-sixth century…”
Once Upon A Dream

Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Summary

Saylee’s dreamcatcher protects her from nightmares, but it doesn’t stop her dreaming. Spoilers for every death in After Armageddon.

Chapter Notes

I think I was originally going to incorporate this somewhere in Blood and Bond, but it never happened, so since it’s my birthday today I decided to indulge myself and inflict this one the world XP IDK what other people do with money that they get for their 22nd birthday, but I’m preordering Omega Ruby.

The wind streamed warmly through Saylee’s hair. She held out her hand in front of her and watched vapour trail through her fingers. She felt that she was flying, but in the fog she couldn’t see where.

Someone was ahead of her in the fog. She reached out and her hand came back hold a soft feather, pink except for the burned tip.

Pedro! She tried to call, but she had no voice. She couldn’t move. She could only watch as Pedro faded into view, circling lower and lower. She could feel herself crying. Pedro, her second ever Pokémon, her Pidgeot, he was here and she couldn’t reach him…

Then her feet were on grass and Pedro was above her, still circling lower. Ahead of her, a slender purple figure uncurled and peered upwards.

“Well, look at you!” Eliza called. “All evolved an’ badass!”

“Well, hi there, dollface,” Pedro said, landing and leaning down to peer at Eliza. “Long time, no see. Did you wait for me?”

“’Course,” Eliza said, leaning up and nuzzling his beak. “I missed you, big guy. You saved me.”

“One time too few, dollface,” Pedro said, nuzzling back. “Sorry about that.”

“Once was enough,” Eliza said, slithering up and curling around his neck like a scaly purple necklace. A bundle of feathers bounced off of Pedro’s beak.

“Oi, tailfeather, what the hell are you doin’ here?” Sparta said, fluttering around Pedro’s head. “How stupid do you have to be to evolve and then still get dead?”

“You I didn’t miss,” Pedro said, fluffing up his crest. “It’s still better than being a ‘Row.”

“Pedro!” Rachel ran out of the grass and tackled Pedro, bouncing off of his chest. “Ooof… you’re
“Hey, little Rachie!” Pedro peered down at the Rattata. “Yeah, I evolved a couple times. Check it.”

“I knew you could,” Rachel said enthusiastically. “You and Chaz were always tougher than anyone.”

“Yeah!” Cal said, flying up with Wilma clinging to his back between his wings. “Look at you! You’re huge!”

“Chaz’s toughest of all,” Pedro said. “I’m ashamed to demean him by calling him my bro, after I went and got killed by a tailfeather of a Machamp.”

“Well, he certainly thought of you as his bro, ’cause he flipped right out and wiped out everything,” Paul said, skirting around Pedro’s ankle. “Gonna introduce me to your old buddies? Ain’t anybody else much here I know.”

“Indeed,” Lorenzo said, appearing out of nowhere. “Please, allow us to meet your charming friends.”

“Guys, this is Paul, proper bro, and Lorenzo, a posh tailfeather but don’t let that put you off…”

None of them could hear or see her. Tears were pouring down Saylee’s cheeks and she repeatedly wiped them out of her eyes so she could see them, drinking it in. Miranda came up with Melvin running up and down her body, enthusing about how tough she was. Alan and Daisy floated over, Alan praising Daisy on how powerful she came and Daisy bashfully insisting that she’d have been nothing without him. Doug popped out of the grass looking surprised and grateful when Pedro and Daisy greeted him happily and apologized for not being able to protect him better. Geoff floated up, casually carrying Sloth’s massive bulk and laughing as he insisted that nobody could be as dumb as him, a rock/ground type attacking an Oddish. Vick rolled up and started trading snark with Paul, while Olivia asked Pedro about the little Cubone that they’d rescued and smiled as warmly as a mother when Pedro told her that Carrie was all grown up and even had a mate in Hernan. Valerie flew up to talk about how Carrie saved her, and even Edward bounced over, all six of him commiserating with Olivia over not getting to evolve. All twenty of them were there, in front of her, embracing and sharing stories, and Pedro knew every one of them, greeting and introducing and laughing…

*I’m sorry*, Saylee tried to call, but she had no voice, only silent, wracking sobs. *You all died fighting for me…*

“It was only Chaz, Hernan and Carrie left after me,” she heard Paul say. “They better have won.”

“Of course they won, they’re not here, are they?” Pedro said. “They better look after Saylee.” He looked around everyone. “She took every one of your deaths hard. Every time.”

“Hate to break it to you, pal, but she took yours *extra-hard,*” Paul said. “Like I said, Chaz was no happy Buneary either.”

“I hope she doesn’t blame herself,” Miranda fretted. “I really don’t want her to think I’d regret her buying me. I had a much better life with her than otherwise. I mean, *look* at me!”

“A Gyarados!” Melvin said, running over her. “I wish I’d stuck with her in training. If I’d lived, I bet I’d have been a Persian.”

“I have no regrets,” Alan said simply. “I got to leave such a fine, upstanding student behind.” He patted Daisy’s shoulder. “You were a magnificent psychic, Daisy.”
“Only because I had the best teacher in the world,” Daisy said bashfully.

“Yeah, shit happens,” Sparta said. “That stupid bitch better not have quit or shit like that.”

**Never, Saylee sobbed. I would never waste you all like that. Never, ever, ever…**

“She never would,” Pedro said simply. “She knows that’d be a damn waste.”

“If we have no regrets,” Lorenzo said, “shall we move on?”

“Yes, we probably should,” Valerie agreed. “Shall we?”

Everyone nodded and muttered their assent, then turned and walked towards Saylee. She reached out, but they went *through* her.

They were all so warm…

*I love you,* Saylee cried, hoping that they could feel her even if they couldn’t see, hear or touch her. *All of you. Doug, I only knew for a short while… Pedro, who was with me the whole way… and everyone in between… I love you, and thank you. No regrets, never give up… I promise…*

Pedro was last, Eliza still snuggled around his neck. He paused, staring up at the sky.

“You’re lookin’ for somethin’, doll,” he said softly. “We all are. Most’ve us found it, so you keep looking, okay? Don’t give up. Don’t you dare.”

*I won’t,* Saylee said, reaching for him. *I promise, Pedro… no matter what…*

*I’m sorry, and thank you…*

“Lee? LEE!”

Saylee wrapped her arms around a round, solid figure and bolted upright. She gasped, trying to stop crying.

“Lee… you bein’ alright?” a voice said. Saylee looked down to see that she was clutching Chip tightly.

“I’m sorry, Chip,” she said, letting him go and wiping her tears.

“No problem,” the Quilava said, leaning up and tentatively licking away a couple of her tears. “Were you having a nightmare? You didn’t stop crying…”

“No,” Saylee said, smiling warmly. “Well, it was sad, but… it was happy, too. And it’s made me determined to keep moving forwards.” She grabbed her pokégear and looked at the clock. “Seven’s not too early, I hope. Shall we go find some breakfast?”
Hamlet revised

Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Summary

So a while ago I was joking about Archie’s vendetta against Marc in our fics being a little Hamlet (poor communication kills and all) and Key-chan mentioned that she wasn’t familiar with the play. To be fair, Shakespeare can be hard to read even when English is your first everyday language… so I rewrote it with Nuzlocke characters :P Characters and relationships are somewhat altered from how they are in the fic to fit their parts in Hamlet (for example, Saylee and Key are not actually related, nor are either of them related to Juan). Anyway, this is one of my favourite plays, and it was pretty fun to write, so I hope you like it too, whether or not you’re actually familiar with the original play (but seriously, if you can… look up the Royal Shakespeare production with David Tennant as Hamlet. It’s brilliant.)

Merry Christmas y’all!

Chapter Notes

CAST

ARCHIE, HEIR TO TEAM AQUA as HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK
BLUE, friend of ARCHIE as HORATIO, friend of HAMLET
ADRIAN, LEADER OF TEAM AQUA as the late KING HAMLET
MARC, LEADER OF TEAM MAGMA as KING CLADIUS, uncle of HAMLET
KALLE, MAGMA/AQUA ADMIN and STEPFATHER OF ARCHIE as QUEEN GERTRUDE, mother of HAMLET and wife of CLAUDIUS
JUAN, GYM LEADER as POLONIUS, advisor to the KING
KEY as OPHELIA, daughter of POLONIUS
SAYLEE, daughter of JUAN and sister of KEY as LAERTES, son of POLONIUS and brother of OPHELIA
MATT and SHELLEY, AQUA ADMINS as ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN, friends of HAMLET
CYRUS, leader of TEAM GALACTIC as FORTINBRAS, PRINCE OF NORWAY

See the end of the chapter for more notes
SETTING

The AQUA BASE, now the MAGMA/AQUA BASE, on the coast of LILYCOVE CITY in HOENN. Inside the BASE are offices, rooms, corridors and open-water submarine bays. To the NORTH are the MOUNTAINS through which TEAM GALACTIC are approaching. To the SOUTH is the BEACH. To the EAST is the OCEAN. To the WEST is the LILYCOVE GRAVEYARD, with LILYCOVE CITY on the other side.

“Archie,” Blue said, knocking and pushing the door of his friend’s room open. He hadn’t seen his fellow student since Archie left the university in Sinnoh several months ago and returned to Hoenn for his father’s funeral. The other man looked in a terrible state, not his usual cheerful self but a shadow, slumped with his head in his arms, muttering about being. “You might want to hear this.”

“Hear what?” Archie asked, raising his head and forcing a smile. “Condolences for my father’s death, or congrats for Kalle’s remarriage? Might as well give them at the same time, they might as well have happened in the same breath.”

“It’s about your father,” Blue said. “The guys on the dock saw his ghost out over the water.”

“What?!” Archie yelled, leaping to his feet and shaking Blue by the shoulders. “Are you lying—”

“Come see for yourself,” Blue said, pushing himself away. “They’ve seen him every night at midnight. It’s less than an hour till then now. C’mon.”

It was Adrian’s ghost. There was no mistaking it. Archie stared at his father, the man he thought he’d never see again, with wide eyes and a pale face.

“Talk to him!” Blue demanded. “He wouldn’t speak to any of us, maybe he’ll talk to you! Say something!”

“Why are you still here, Father?” Archie asked. “Do you have something to say? If so, hurry up and say it!”

“Avenge me,” Adrian whispered. His voice was little more than a wisp on the wind that made the hairs on the back of Archie and Blue’s necks stand up.

“Avenge you?” Archie asked. “Against who or what?”

“They said that a Seviper bit me, sleeping on the beach,” Adrian whispered. “Lies. If a Seviper bit me, that Seviper now rules Team Aqua.”

Archie gasped. “Marc?”

“Murdering filth,” Adrian whispered. “And Kalle, switching to him so easily... but Marc is your only enemy. He must pay. Revenge...”

Adrian faded away into mist over the water.

“If it is...” Archie snarled, clutching Shanks’ pokéball. “He will pay. I swear it.” He turned to Blue. “You can’t tell anyone what you saw here! Nobody! Nobody can know that we know the truth!”

“I know, I know,” Blue agreed quickly. “You’re right. I swear I won’t tell anyone.”

Archie pulled off his blue headscarf, the one he had taken from among his father’s things before Marc could poach them all. “Swear on my headscarf.”

With an uneasy look at his friend, Blue gripped an edge of the blue fabric in his hand. “I swear it.”

“Do you have to go to Johto?” Key complained, watching Saylee pack up her things.

“I won’t be gone that long,” Saylee promised her. “Look after my Pokémon for me while I’m gone, okay? And look after yourself, too.” She gave her little sister a hug. “Especially around Archie…”

“Saylee…” Key groaned. “What’s wrong with Archie? Why don’t you like him?”

“He’s an overdramatic idiot,” Saylee said simply. “And his whole family’s trouble. Just be careful around him, okay? I’m sure Dad will tell you the same…”

“Great, I’m about to get the Guy Warnings in stereo,” Key complained as Juan strode towards them.

“Are you packed and ready to go, Saylee?” Juan said. “Your ferry is going to leave soon.”

“I’m ready,” Saylee said, hoisting her backpack onto her back.

“I’m sure you are,” Juan said, smiling and patting her on the shoulder. “Just be sensible. Dress well, don’t be tacky. Be polite. Don’t drink too much. Don’t borrow or lend money, that always leads to trouble. And above all…” he pulled her into a hug. “Just be yourself.”

“I’ll be fine, Dad,” she said, hugging him back, “but thanks.” She pulled away and ran past him. “Bye, Key! Be careful!”

“You too!” Key called after her. Juan cleared his throat, a noise to make any teenage daughter freeze. “I think we need to talk,” he said, “about your young man.”

“Archie?” Key said innocently. “I haven’t really been seeing him since his father died…”

“And you won’t see him anymore,” Juan said firmly. “He’s trouble, and he’s not right for you anyway. There’s no call to getting involved with Team Aqua or Magma. You’re never to see Archie again, got it?”

“Wha—but—Dad!” Key protested. This line of logic did not move Juan, and Key burst into tears, fleeing and locking herself in her room.

“…and Cyrus has come down hard on Mars’ messing about and has promised never to invade Hoenn,” Coral reported.

“Brilliant!” Marc said happily. “You’re relieved.” He glanced at Kalle as Coral wandered off. “What’s wrong?”
“You know what’s wrong,” Kalle snapped back. “Archie. We need to find out what’s wrong with him.”

“He’s always been a little headstrong, a little different…” Marc said dismissively. Kalle shook his head.

“Not like this,” he maintained. “So I’m employing a couple of spies to find out what’s wrong.”

“Spies?” Marc asked. The doors opened and two people walked in.

“Rosenmatt, Guildenshelley,” Kalle said, greeting them warmly. “Do you know why I called you here?”

“To spy on a dear friend who trusts us?” Rosenshelley said.

“And report his deepest secrets and innermost thoughts to you?” Guildenmatt added.

“In exchange, your pay will make Relic Statues look like cheap trinkets,” Kalle promised. Rosenmatt and Guildenshelley glanced at each other.

“We’re in,” they said in unison.

“There is no need for spies,” Juan announced, stepping into the hearing room. “I know exactly what’s wrong with Archie.”

“You do?” Kalle said, leaning forward. “Then what is it?”

“He’s crazy in lo-ove~” Juan sang. Marc rolled his eyes.

“Explain normally, please,” he demanded.

“He and my youngest, Key, were dating for a while,” Juan said. “She sat up texting him at all hours. I blocked his number on her phone, and then all of a sudden he’s knocking on the doors, screaming and howling and then just staring like a zombie, crying and wandering off.”

“I see,” Kalle said with a frown. “But we’d better know for sure if this is all it is.”

“I’ll prove it,” Juan declared. He turned to his younger daughter, who had trailed him into the room and was standing with her arms crossed and a sulky look on her face, pointedly not looking at her father. “Key, recently Archie’s taken to wandering around the complex. He ought to be in the main sub bay right about now. You can go see him if you like.”

Key brightened up immediately. “I can? Sweet!” She bolted before Juan could change his mind or reveal that he was joking.

“What now?” Marc asked boredly.

“Now we get our stalk on,” Juan said, motioning for them to follow.

“Archie!” Key shouted, waving to the dishevelled figure that was pacing around the quay, muttering to himself. He gave her a glassy-eyed stare.

“The fair Key!” he cried. “Or maybe not. If you’re a liar like me, then you’re not Key at all and never were.”
“…Excuse me?” Key said, thrown off by his blatant crazy. She hadn’t seen him in weeks, thanks to her father’s meddling, and hadn’t believed the rumours about his brain taking a long walk off a short pier. “Archie, it’s me… Key. Your girlfriend?”

“Once upon a time…” Archie said in a singsong voice. “And then the clock broke and the roses wilted and Prince Charming turned out to have twenty other princesses on the side. It’s the same one in every damn story, didn’t you notice? Every time, every story, the same charming dick!”

“Oh my god…” Key muttered. “Archie, pull yourself together. What’s wrong with you?”

“What’s wrong is that you’re a bitch!” he yelled, suddenly angry. “So fuck off and die alone! Or marry an idiot without enough brain cells to go mad! You have to be an idiot anyway to get married, don’t you? Perhaps I ought to deprive an idiot of the suffering of marriage!”

“Oh, what the fuck is going on?!” Key yelled, but he just skipped off, singing, “here comes the bride, legs spread a mile wide…”

Juan hurried over to comfort his daughter, but Key threw him off and stormed off. “Whatever this is, I bet it’s your fault,” she said acidly, glaring over her shoulder at Kalle and Marc. “You guys are messed up, and now Archie is too. Well done.”

“Don’t worry,” Marc said comfortingly to Kalle, “I have the perfect solution.”

“And that is…?” Kalle asked sceptically.

“The first ship to Unova we can throw him on!” Marc declared brightly. “At least, if it doesn’t solve his problems, they’ll be happening on a different continent to us.”

“Well, that went well,” Rosenshelley commented.

“There’s plenty more Goldeen in the sea, eh, Archie?” Guildenmatt called. Archie grinned manically and slung his arms around their shoulders. “Rosenmatt, Guildenshelley!” He said happily. “Welcome to Hoenn, you poor saps. You’ll never escape now, and they only let you have TV an hour a day.”

“If you’re not watching TV, I know some actors that are in town,” Rosenshelley said.

“And, being actors, it’s not like they work,” Guildenmatt added. “They’ll come and dance the Macarena for a crust of bread.”

“No, I like plays!” Archie said happily. “We’ll get everyone together, Auntie Mum and Uncle Dad and all the whores and jesters we can find, and let me tell you there’s plenty around here. C’mon, I want to come meet your actors. They think me mad, but if the breeze is from the sea, I know a Spheal from a beach ball.”

“I’ll give them a call just now and get them to meet us at the entrance,” Rosenmatt said, dialling his Pokénav.

“Do you have a particular play you want them to perform?” Guildenshelley said brightly.

“Do they know any plays about fucking bastards who murder the king and marry the queen?” Archie asked pleasantly. “That aren’t Oedipus?”
Rosenshelley and Guildenmatt glanced at each other. “They probably know Hamlet,” one of them ventured.

“Key!” Archie sang, leaning over the back of her chair. “You came to see the show!”

“The show, not you,” Key said, folding her arms and pointedly glaring at the fire curtain on the stage.

“C’mon, I didn’t mean what I said,” Archie said pleadingly. “I was PMSing!”

Key gave him a look. “Well, I’m sure there’s an ice-cream stand around here somewhere,” she said, looking away pointedly.

“Can I havva ice cweam anna bawoon anna sit on your wap?” Archie said, climbing over the back of her chair and sitting on her lap. Key pushed him off with a shriek. Archie just sat there, giggling.

“See? He’s in better spirits already,” Juan pointed out to Marc.

“At this rate, you’re gonna drive me crazy,” Key said, turning around and giving a “help me with this crazy person” look to Blue. Blue sighed and leaned over the chair to haul Archie up into an empty seat.

“So, what’re we watching?” Kalle asked Archie.

“Dad’s funeral, of course!” Archie said. “After all, it was only yesterday he passed away, and he must be properly laid to rest…”

“It’s been four months, Archie,” Key said, looking a little more pitifully at him.

“Really?” Archie said, checking his watch. “Then let’s watch Hamlet instead.”

They didn’t get far in; no sooner was the king’s ghost shouting the means of his death at his son than Marc got up and stormed out of the theatre.

“Did you see that?” Archie murmured to Blue.

“Why did nobody else see it?” Blue said, looking around at the confused expressions on everyone’s faces, as if they had no idea why a play about a king being murdered by his usurping brother could possibly upset the new boss of the now-merged Teams Magma and Aqua after his brother was murdered.

“Your uncle’s pretty upset,” Rosenmatt said, peering into Archie’s room.

“So’s Kalle,” Guildenshelley added. Archie ignored them, playing on his DS. The only sound in the room was the beeping of his game.

“He wants to see you,” Rosenshelley said after a prolonged silence. “Soon as.”

“Are you going?” Guildenmatt asked.

“Beat this level for me first,” Archie said, holding out his DS to the pair of them. Rosenmatt took it and saw that he was at Tetris level 25, where the blocks fell roughly at the speed of light.
“Sorry, man,” he said, handing it back. “I’ve never been much good at that game.”

“What about you, Guildenshelley?” Archie asked, holding the game out to her.

“I’ve never played it before,” she said, shaking her head. “I can’t pick it up at that level.”

“You can’t even move these simple blocks into place,” Archie sniffed. “So what makes you think you can move me where you like?” He slammed his DS shut and threw it at Rosenshelley’s head before storming out of the room, going in the opposite direction from his stepfather’s room.

A few minutes later, his Pokénav buzzed. “Would you like double-glazing?” he said as he answered it.

“Archie, Kalle wants to see you now,” Juan said disapprovingly.

“Juan, are you by a window?” Archie said, peering outside. “Can you see that cloud that looks like a Numel?”

“What? I— sure, yeah, I see it.”

“Although really, it looks more like a Linoone, doesn’t it?” Archie continued pleasantly.

“The shape of it’s a bit like a Linoone, yeah…”

“Actually, I think it looks like a Wailord,” Archie argued.

“Very much like a Wailord. Now get your ass over to visit Kalle.” Juan hung up. Archie snorted and turned around, preparing to give Kalle the bitching-out of his life.

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“Don’t worry,” Juan said soothingly. “I’ll hide in the Creeper Closet and keep an eye out in case he goes really crazy, okay?”

“Fine,” Kalle said as he heard the ring of Archie’s footsteps in the metal hallway outside. Why did they have to have so many damn metal hallways in the base? “Just bugger off, I hear him coming.”

Juan slipped into the closet with practised ease and was hidden before Archie came into the room.

“You know, Marc’s very upset,” he told Archie. “You chose the play, didn’t you? He doesn’t like the insinuations.”

“And what might I have been insinuating, Kalle?” Archie said innocently. “It’s a classic play, the sort we all ought to see so that we can say that we’ve seen it as an excuse to never see it again.”

“Be that as it may,” Kalle said firmly, “we think you need to get out in the world a little more and clear your head. We’ve sorted out tickets for you, Rosenmatt and Guildenshelley to go on a road trip to Unova together, won’t that be fun?”

“A road trip on the sea? Sounds terrific!” Archie said, spinning in a circle. “But who’ll keep Dad happy while I’m gone? After all, you and Marc have properly pissed him off. I mean, marrying your dead husband’s brother during his funeral? Not cool, man, not cool.”

“You are exaggerating,” Kalle said sharply. Archie turned and slapped him full across the face.

“Oi!” Juan shouted, pushing at the closet doors to open them.
“A sneaking Rattata, is it?” Archie yelled, releasing Shanks. “Bite!”

The powerful Sharpedo’s teeth ripped through the wardrobe and the man inside. Juan collapsed to the floor, gasping.

“I’m dead!” he croaked.

“Not yet,” Archie said, watching for a moment and then nudging Juan with his toe. “Now you are. That before? That was exaggerating.”

“Archie!” Kalle shouted. “What the fuck are you doing?”

“What the fuck are YOU doing?!” Archie bellowed back, pulling two photos out of his pocket. One was of Adrian, the other Marc. “Do these look like the same men to you? Are you blind, or crazy? I mean, I’m crazy, so if I think you’re crazy, then man, are you crazy.” He flung the pictures at Kalle, who batted them aside.

“Shut up!” he yelled, snatching up Shanks’ dropped pokéball and returning the ravenous water Pokémon that was still gnawing at Juan’s neck. Archie grabbed his wrist, shaking it to make him drop the pokéball, but suddenly stopped and stared wide-eyed at the far wall.

“Archie…?” Kalle said uncertainly, growing cautious about tipping the homicidal maniac that he was now alone with over the edge. “Archie, what are you looking at?”

“Him!” Archie said, dropping Kalle’s wrist and pointing at the wall. “Can’t you see him?”

“See what, Archie?” Kalle asked. “There’s nobody there. You said yourself that you’re mad.”

Archie dropped to his knees, slowly beginning to chuckle. “Yes, mad, and must clear my head,” he murmured. “And clear this room. I shall lug off the guts and away to Unova. Good night, Kalle…”

Kalle stood frozen, only able to watch as Archie lugged Juan’s corpse over his shoulder and strode off, chuckling the whole time.
Archie’s madness… one way or another.”

“Look, someone has to talk to Key and you’re the closest thing we have to another woman around here,” Blue insisted. “She just sits out on the beach, burying berries.”

Kalle frowned. “Berries don’t grow on the beach.”

“See? Crazy,” Blue said, pointing Kalle out to the blonde figure who was scrabbling in the sand, singing to herself. They were too far away to see the earbuds in her ears.

“Key…?” Kalle called. Key ignored him. “Key, are you alright?”

“My sister’s in another fucking country, my boyfriend’s fucking crazy and fucking murdered my fucking father, do you really think I’m alright?” she snarled, having evidently decided to hear them, before going back to singing along with whatever music she was listening to.

“How is she?” Marc called, walking up to join them. Key snarled at him.

“I’d be fine if all you messed-up bastards just left me alone!” she snapped. “Saylee is going to blow her top when she hears about this! Just...” she jumped to her feet and grabbed Blue’s arm. “’Mon. My boyfriend’s crazy and your girlfriend’s out of town. Let’s have some fun!”

“Hey!” Blue yelped indignantly as he was dragged away by the arm, mouthing “see? CRAZY!” over his shoulder at Kalle and Marc.

“Saylee already knows,” Marc muttered to Kalle.

“What?” Kalle said sharply. Marc nodded.

“Gossip spread fast about Juan’s death. I heard from the barkeep in town that Saylee was spotted in town, listening to rumours in the pub...” Marc shook his head. “Things are only going to get worse before they get better...”

“What do you think she’s heard about Juan’s death?” Kalle said, eyes suddenly fixing on something behind Marc’s shoulder.

“MURDERER!”

“Marc!” Kalle yelled as a blow from behind knocked Marc over. As he tried to get up, reaching for his pokéballs, a solid kick landed right in his... not pokéballs. Saylee punched Kalle full in the face when he tried to stop her.

“Top of the kickboxing class, motherfuckers,” Saylee snarled, planting a foot on Marc’s neck. He froze. “I want to hear it from your lips. What happened to my dad?”

“He’s dead,” Marc choked out. Saylee’s rage visibly increased.

“Marc didn’t kill him!” Kalle yelled.

“Then who did?!” Saylee yelled back.

“Let go… I’ll tell you… in private...” Marc croaked. Several of his henchmen were approaching from further down the beach, not close enough to see Saylee with her foot on their boss’ neck but growing closer. Saylee stepped back. She was raging, but she wasn’t stupid.
“Thank you,” Marc gasped, getting up and massaging his neck. “Come on.” He waved off the henchmen and led Saylee to the Magma/Aqua base.

“Tell me who killed my father,” Saylee growled, stomping after him. Her scowl faded into confusion as she heard the yelling. “Key!”

Key was standing in one of the submarine bays, straining towards the edge with Blue holding her back by one arm, looking like he needed all his strength. Key was pulling handfuls of berries out of her pockets and throwing them into the water.

“There, you finny bastards!” She screamed. “You want to eat my father? Eat that instead!”

“Saylee!” Blue shouted in surprise and relief. Key immediately stopped struggling and turned to Saylee.

“Do you have any Chesto berries?” she asked. “I already threw mine in.”

“No,” Saylee said, taken aback by the bizarre scene. “Why?”

“Because Blue is being a jerk and I want to eat them all and make him watch,” Key said, shaking herself out of Blue’s loosened grip. “He’s a jerk and Dad’s a jerk for dying and Archie’s a jerk and Blue’s a jerk and they’re jerks—” she waved at Marc and Kalle in a huge sweeping motion, before flinging her arms around Saylee’s neck.

“You’re the only one left who’s not a jerk,” she mumbled into Saylee’s shoulder as Saylee hugged her back. “Dad’s not coming back, Saylee. He’s not coming back because…” with a sob, she turned and ran off in the direction of her room.

“What’s going on?” Saylee whispered to Blue, tears starting to run down her own cheeks. He stepped back, looking uneasy. His Pokénav rang.

“I’m sorry…” he said, glancing at the caller ID. “I need to answer this.” He bolted, holding up the phone.

“Whoever did this to my sister… who killed my father…” Saylee snarled, cracking her knuckles. “I’m gaunnae fuckin’ waste them.”

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Saylee’s eyes slowly widened in horror as she watched the incriminating security footage of Archie dragging her father’s corpse through the halls.

“Bastard,” she breathed. “That’s why Key’s acting so strange… Son of a—” She punched the computer screen hard enough to smash it off of the desk and began stalking around the room, rubbing her knuckles and swearing under her breath. “I’ll kill him. I will tear him apart. Where the hell is he?”

“On his way to Unova,” Marc assured her, “where he will be—”

“He’s coming back to Hoenn.”

“Coral?” Marc said in surprise, staring at the girl who had stepped into the office. “What on earth are you talking about?”

“I heard Blue talking to him on the phone,” Coral said nervously. “Archie’s ship was attacked and he’s on his way back… Blue’s gone to meet him. He’s not going to Unova. I… thought you should know.”

“I see…” Marc slowly smiled. “Thank you, Coral, you’re dismissed.” After she’d hurried away, he closed the door again and turned to Saylee. “Well, now you’ve got the chance to kill him yourself, if you wish. Why don’t you challenge him when he returns, Saylee?”

“To a Pokémon battle?” Saylee said, frowning. “Those are supposed to be non-fatal…”

“Not if you treat your Pokémon’s claws with this,” Marc said, pulling a jar of purple fluid out of his desk drawer. “This is potently distilled Seviper venom. The barest scratch will kill him. All your Pokémon need do is dip their claws in the sea, and all evidence will be washed away… as a backup, in case you don’t scratch him, I’ll lace a bottle of lemonade with the venom. After the battle, if you’re both tired and thirsty and call for drinks…”

Saylee picked up and examined the jar. “Why do you have distilled Seviper venom?” she asked. “For that matter, why the hell do you keep it in your desk drawer?”

Marc was spared having to answer when Kalle burst through the door, pale as a Zangoose. His eyes locked on Saylee and he gripped her shoulder, almost shaking.

“Here you are, Saylee,” he moaned, looking utterly stricken. “I’m sorry, Saylee, so, so sorry…”

“What’s wrong?” Saylee asked, gripping Kalle’s hand. “Kalle, what happened?”

“Key’s body just washed up on the beach,” Kalle said. “She’s drowned. I’m so sorry, Saylee…”

Saylee stumbled backwards, gripping her chest and gasping. Sheer grief seemed to have stolen her breath. She tore off her glasses and pressed a hand over her eyes.

“Key’s had plenty of water,” she gasped, dragging her hand away from her face. “So I won’t cry. I will fucking murder Archie.” She snatched the jar of venom from Marc’s hand and staggered away.

Marc went to comfort Kalle, but he couldn’t help smiling.
“Yes! I was the only one who didn’t pussy out and hide, so they only took me prisoner.”

“So why’d they bring you home?”

“Beat the captain in a drinking contest. Oh, and I told them I was going to murder Marc, they were all for that.”

“Archie…”

Blue sighed in exasperation as the pair walked along one of the ornamental treelines that traversed the Lilycove Cemetery for Humans. The graveyard went up to the back wall of the Magma/Aqua base, and neither Adrian nor Marc had ever felt sufficiently blasphemous as to knock any of it down or install security beyond a couple of guards in it. The guards were easy enough to sneak past, and it would make a quiet route back into the base.

They stopped bickering when they heard singing. As they followed the treeline, they found the source was a new grave.

A young Cubone was sitting on the edge of a fresh grave, singing along with a pair of voices that drifted out of the grave along with the occasional clod of earth flung out onto a heap nearby.

“Now that’s disrespectful, singing in a graveyard,” Blue muttered disapprovingly. A Duskull floated out of the grave and pulled a face at him. Archie caught it in his hands and peered into the grave, where a Marowak had nearly burrowed six feet down.

“It’s like peering into death itself,” he said pompously, holding the Duskull aloft. “To be or not to be…”

“Stop being pretentious,” Blue snorted, looking down at the Marowak.

Archie grinned. “Whose grave is this?” he asked the Marowak.

“Mine, of course!” she said, waving her bone up at him. The Cubone giggled. Blue facepalmed.

“Obviously it’s her grave,” Archie told Blue, “because she’s in it!” then he frowned down at the gravedigger. “But you’re not dead yet,” he noted. “That’s not right.”

“Not at all, because it won’t be mine for long,” she said, climbing out of the grave. “Soon it’ll be a human lady’s, but she’ll be too dead to appreciate it. They always are.”

“A human lady?” Blue wondered, looking up at the base. A chill ran down his spine.

“Been a gravedigger long, then?” Archie said, letting go of the Duskull, which floated off. The Marowak nodded.

“Ever since the day young Archie was born,” she declared. “Y’know, the loony they sent off to Unova?”

“Oi—” Blue said angrily, but Archie put his hand on his friend’s shoulder and shook his head.

“Why did they send him to Unova?” he asked, smiling.

“Cause they’re all loony as Lunatone there, so nobody’ll notice one more!” the gravedigger laughed. The little Cubone burst out laughing again. His mother took his hand and began to tug him away. “Let’s go, little one. Too many living humans coming. They’re always too sad. They ought to smile; they’re not dead yet!”
“Who smiles at a funeral?” Blue said, dragging Archie back under the trees where they could stay hidden. He peered at the procession in the distance, trying to spot faces and not seeing the one he feared he wouldn’t see. His heart sank.

“Marc and Kalle?” Archie said in surprise, spotting the pair, clad in solemn black suits and leading the procession. “And Saylee too! When did she get back?”

Saylee was wearing a long, sombre black dress, but she’d forgone a hat and so the pure murder on her face was clear to see. Blue tightened his grip on Archie’s arm. “Archie… there’s something I haven’t told you. I think I know who’s in that coffin…”

Saylee had turned on the priest, who was muttering and looking indignant. Kalle and Marc grabbed her arms to hold her back as she shouted furiously at the priest, her voice carrying all the way to the two men hidden in the trees.

“Are you fucking kidding me? It was an ACCIDENT! Those riptides have killed plenty of people before! How DARE you accuse my sister of— Key was a million times a better person than ANY of you!”

“Key…?” Archie gasped, face draining of colour as he stared at the approaching casket. He sank to his knees and Blue sank with him, putting his arm around his friend’s shoulders to stop Archie from collapsing entirely.

“So this is my punishment,” Archie whispered, watching them lower the coffin into the grave. The mourning procession passed by one by one to drop flowers into the grave after Key. Kalle lingered a moment after dropping his flower in.

“If things had been better, you would have made a fine daughter-in-law,” he murmured, moving on at Marc’s gentle prompting, leaving only Saylee by the grave.

“Hold on,” she said as the Duskull levitated the heap of dirt into the air, ready to dump it into the grave. She dropped to her knees in front of the grave, shaking in rage and grief. Blue and Archie were close enough to see her clutching a bright, delicate Beautifly pin. It had been one of Key’s prized possessions. Archie had given it to her.

“Key… you deserved so much better than this,” Saylee choked out. “So much better. So for you, and for Dad… I swear, Key, that son of a bitch Archie is going to pay!”

Archie stiffened and then slowly stood up. As Saylee held out the pin, ready to drop it into the grave, he shot forwards.

“Stop!” he shouted, wrenching the pin from her grasp.


“Archie, stop!” Blue shouted, running towards him. He’d seen the look on Saylee’s face.

“YOU!” she screamed, launching herself at Archie. He was taller than her and probably twice her weight, and an ankle-length dress was not the easiest garment to move in, yet Archie ended up splayed on the ground with Saylee sitting on his chest with her hands around his throat. “I’LL KILL YOU, YOU BASTARD!” she screamed through tears. “I’LL KILL YOU!”

“Then do it!” Archie choked back, tears streaming down his own face. The sight of them gave Saylee pause, or at least made her loosen her fingers just enough for him to breathe. “You think you’re the only one who loved her?! If there were ten thousand of you, the lot of you together
wouldn’t love her as much as I did!”

“You… liar…” Saylee choked out, but her hands were shaking. Blue pulled her off of Archie with little resistance and wrapped his arms around her.

“You too…” Archie said weakly, staggering to his feet, clutching the hairpin to his chest. “You were like a sister to me. You still are, and always will be…” He staggered off alone towards the base.

“Go with him, Blue,” Kalle ordered. Blue glanced between Saylee and Archie, obviously torn, but Saylee had come to her senses and shook him off roughly. She stood with her back to him, arms crossed around herself. Blue took off after Archie, though he kept throwing nervous looks back at Saylee. She didn’t watch as Duskull dumped the dirt over Key.

“Now he is back, I will have your challenge delivered to him,” Marc promised, patting Saylee on the shoulder and striding back off towards the base. Kalle put his arms around her shoulders, both of them watching the Boss go with the same stricken conflict.

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“Archie…” Blue said, coming across his friend sitting on the beach, staring at the hairpin, turning it over and over in his fingers. “What did you mean by punishment? For killing Juan?”

“That sneaking idiot wasn’t worth half of her,” Archie laughed dryly. “Perhaps it’s cumulative. For him, for what I’ll do, and for them…” he held up a letter. “I stole this from them on the ship. From Rosenshelley and Guildenmatt. Did you know I was to be executed as soon as I reached Unova?”

“What?!” Blue gasped, snatching the letter and opening it up. Archie nodded.

“So I replaced it with an exact duplicate,” Archie said. “Marc’s been using Dad’s seal, and I have one of those. I replaced it with a letter saying that whoever bears the letter is to be executed immediately.”

“Whoever…?” Blue sank down onto the sand, his head in his hands. “So Rosenmatt and Guildenshelley will die as soon as they reach Unova, and they have no idea.”

“Don’t expect me to feel bad about it,” Archie snapped. “They knew what they were taking me to and didn’t care. They’re no friends of mine. I don’t care. I don’t.”

“Archie! Blue!”

They turned to see Coral running down the beach towards them. “Coral, now is not the best time…” Blue began.

“I’ll be quick and leave you alone,” she said quickly. “Archie, Saylee wants to settle things between the two of you. She’d like to battle you tomorrow, one on one, active combat.”

“That sounds wonderful!” Archie declared, waving his hand in the air but not looking back. “Tell her I will happily see her at noon tomorrow. Down here on the beach, if she’s all for that.”

Coral nodded and hurried off again. Blue stood up and walked around to crouch in front of Archie.

“Archie, do you know what you’re doing?” he demanded. “Saylee is as good as they get. You can’t beat her. And right now, she wants your head.”

“I think the odds are more even than you think,” Archie said with a smirk. “I’ve been training
continually since she went to Johto, whereas she was without her Pokémon. And if this is so personal to her, no doubt she’ll fight with Chaz. In this location, Shanks will be at a considerable advantage. I don’t have to lose.”

Blue frowned and stood up. “I hope you know what you’re doing. Because I have a bad feeling about all this.”

Archie stood up and patted Blue on the shoulder, giving him a vague smile. “You worry too much, my friend,” he said, turning and walking away down the beach, staring at the hairpin in his hands.

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“The rules,” Blue said, looking from Archie to Saylee, “are one-on-one. You get one Pokémon. No switchouts, you battle until one faints. The terrain is the beach and half a mile out into the sea. Active rules mean that you must ride on your Pokémon’s back while battling. Taking out a trainer is also a win. No fatalities, got it?”

“Understood,” Saylee said, looking down. Archie walked over to her, hand held out.

“Before we fight, I would like to apologize,” he said when she stared in surprise at his hand. “I have wronged you. You have suffered, and for that I apologize. You are not my enemy, Saylee. None are my enemy, except my own madness…”

He bowed his head, hand still held out. Saylee slowly reached out and wordlessly shook it, then turned around and marched away, clutching Chaz’s pokéball in her hand.

Archie turned around and walked back to his starting position, holding up Shanks’ pokéball.

Blue looked around uncertainly. Saylee and Archie, two of the most important people in the world to him, were standing twenty metres apart, facing each other, at least one of them ready to rip the other apart. Only he, Marc and Kalle were watching. Most of the rest of the team was out dealing with a suspected incursion by Team Galactic from the north.

“Choose your Pokémon now!” Blue called. Saylee, as predicted, chose Chaz, her tall and almost ridiculously powerful Charizard. She clambered up onto his back, having not needed a flying harness for years, instead fitting her ankles in under his wing joints snugly. Archie, equally predictably, released Shanks, his father’s huge old Sharpedo. Shanks had rough skin that would damage anyone who touched him, but Archie was well used to him and could climb up over the rough hide and cling to the razor-sharp fin without pain. “Begin!”

Shanks dove under the water as Chaz flew over his head. Chaz circled high, watching the water closely for signs of movement. Shanks leapt up at him from behind, jaws wide. Chaz managed to dodge at the last second, but the tip of Shanks’ fin scraped Chaz’s heel. Chaz swung his claws at Shanks, but missed, and Shanks and Archie dove underwater again.

“A hit, a very palpable hit!” Kalle laughed. “Well done, Archie!”

“He’s earned himself a drink, perhaps,” Marc said, raising a bottle of lemonade as if in toast. Kalle snatched it from him, laughter turning a little crazy.

“Just one hit, Marc, don’t call it so soon,” he sniggered, flicking the can open. He pulled away when Marc grabbed at him in panic.

“Wait, Kalle, don’t—” he shouted. Kalle knocked the can back in one.
“I did, too late!” Kalle laughed. Marc and Saylee both stared in horror as Kalle threw the can into the sand.

“Chaz, we have to scratch Archie now,” Saylee said urgently. “The next time he comes up. We have to.”

“Do you really want to?” Chaz asked, turning on the slight bubbles that were a sign of Archie’s presence below the surface.

“I have to,” Saylee repeated, but without certainty. Shanks and Archie leapt out of the water towards them. Chaz dodged again, but Shanks’ jaws locked around his ankle. Shanks’ bite kept him and Archie in close proximity, however, so Chaz was able to slash Archie across the chest with his poison-tipped claws.

“Gah!” Archie cried, clutching his chest as he fell from Shanks’ back. It wasn’t a deep cut, but it was enough. Shanks jerked sharply on Chaz’s ankle before letting go to dive after his trainer. The jerk caused Saylee to fall from Chaz’s back. On instinct, on long-learned reflex, Chaz sung around to grab her, tightening his claws around her arm.

Just tight enough to cut.

“Aaaaah!” she screamed as her arm began to burn. Realizing what he’d done, Chaz dropped her, but it was too late. She could feel the poison going to work as she fell into the sea.

“Saylee!” Blue shouted, wading out to grab her and drag her to shore as Shanks dragged Archie in. Both Saylee and Archie were pale and shaking as the venom burned into them. Kalle was also pale and shivering violently in Marc’s arms.

“How is Kalle?” Archie choked out, seeing Kalle collapsed.

“He’s fine, he’s fine!” Marc insisted, a little hysterically. “He’s just worried about you, but you’re okay, so—”

“Enough lies!” Kalle choked out, pushing away from Marc and staggering away before collapsing to his knees. “I’m… I’m poisoned… Archie…” He fell over, his shivering slowly subsiding.

“Kalle!” Archie called. He looked over as Chaz dragged Saylee towards him, apologizing profusely to his trainer.

“It’s alright, Chaz,” she said weakly. “It’s… it’s karma… I tipped Chaz’s claws with poison,” she gasped to Archie. “The same poison that was in the drink… the drink was for you… it’s all… it’s all Marc’s fault, isn’t it…?” she said, slowly reaching up to point at Marc, before collapsing entirely.

“Saylee!” Blue called, running and pulling her up into his arms. She convulsed.

“I just hope… I get to see Key…” she choked out. “But if… none of us… get to go somewhere so good… I hope I… see you… there…” She clasped Blue’s hand in one of hers, reaching out the other towards Archie. Then she jerked sharply and fell limp and still. Chaz raised his head and screeched in rage and grief.

“Marc…” Archie growled, staggering to his feet with Blue’s on-armed aid. He could feel death pulling on him, but he couldn’t go yet. Not yet. Not yet… “SHANKS! GET HIM!”

Shanks leapt forward, sinking his jaws into Marc’s throat. The Boss collapsed, gurgling and twitching.
“Go… see he’s dead…” Archie gasped. Blue set him and Saylee down on the sand and ran over to check, though it was hardly necessary. Marc’s head was barely attached to his body any more. Blue then stooped over Kalle, but he too was gone already. Blue shakily gripped the fatal lemonade can and turned to Archie, in time to see him slowly keel over into the sand.

“Archie…” he moaned, kneeling next to him. “You and Saylee and… I can’t take this…” he peered into the can. “There’s still a little left…” he threw back his head, raising it to his lips, but Archie surprised him by still having the strength to knock the can out of his hand.

“No!” he shouted. “Not you too… someone has to be left… someone who can… tell everyone… what happened… tell it right…” he choked out blood. He had no time left. “Goodbye, my friend… goodbye Kalle, Saylee… goodbye… the rest… is silence…”

And it was.

“Goodnight, Saylee. Goodnight, Archie…” Blue croaked. “May flights of Togekiss sing you to sleep…”

He crouched over Archie and Saylee’s corpses, with nobody left but the Pokémon to see him openly sobbing over everyone that had been lost in half a bloody, brutal hour. He didn’t know how long he sat there before he was aware of dozens of people surrounding him.

“What happened here?” Cyrus said, looking around, something that may have been horror registering faintly in his otherwise blank expression. “So many fine people dead in a stroke…”

“Too late to tell them the news from Unova,” Mars muttered, covering her nose from the stench of poison and death that rose from the area. “Too late to tell them that Rosenshelley and Guildenmatt are dead…”

Shanks had dived into the sea and vanished. Chaz was still crouched over Saylee, keening and howling, his tail flickering erratically. Blue slowly stood up, letting the last tears fall from his face.

“I will tell you everything that took place here,” he said firmly. “Just… help me take them away. At least see that they get their last rites. Bear them away like warriors, because all of them were, to the end.”

Chaz howled at the sky, and then took off, flying out over the sea until he could no longer be seen.

Chapter End Notes

…so apparently I ship Horatio and Laertes? (OTP)

Don’t worry, the next one’s a funny :P
Chapter Summary

I had a lot of fun doing Hamlet, so I decided to do my favourite comedy as well, Much Ado About Nothing. There’s also a theatrical production of this that I’m sure you can view on the internet somewhere, starring David Tennant as Benedick and Catherine Tate as Beatrice. It’s absolutely fantastic and I cannot recommend it highly enough. (Kenneth Brannagh’s movie version is pretty good too—I really like the read that Don Pedro’s proposal to Beatrice was genuine, and his decision thereafter to hook her up with Benedick was a “I Want My Love To Be Happy” kind of deal—and Joss Whedon’s is good too, especially Clark Gregg as Leonato and Nathan Fillion as Dogberry) Anyway… I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it :P

As before, some characterizations and relationships are altered to fit the play.

I hope y’all have a very merry Christmas, or whatever else you may be celebrating at this time of year!

Chapter Notes

Cast

STEVEN, Champion of Hoenn as DON PEDRO, Prince of Aragon

BLUE of Viridian, of STEVEN’s company as BENEDICK of Padua, of DON PEDRO’s company

SAYLEE of Pallet as BEATRICE of Messina

KEY of Petalburg, daughter of NORMAN as HERO of Messina, daughter of Leonato

ARCHIE of Aqua, of STEVEN’s company as CLAUDIO of Florence, of DON PEDRO’s company

MARC, STEVEN’s villainous brother as DON JOHN, DON PEDRO’s villainous brother

COURTNEY, follower of MARC as CONRAD, follower of DON JOHN

KALLE, follower of MARC as BORACHIO, follower of DON JOHN

WALLACE, NORMAN’s loyal brother as ANTONIO, LEONATO’s loyal brother

DAWN, waiting-gentlewoman to KEY as URSULA, waiting-gentlewoman to HERO

CYNTHIA, waiting-gentlewoman to KEY as MARGARET, waiting-gentlewoman to HERO
MORTY, random wandering holy man as FRIAR FRANCIS of Messina
JOHNSON, a foolish police officer as DOGBERRY, a foolish policeman
LOOKER, an Interpol officer as VERGES, his deputy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Setting

NORMAN’s home in PETALBURG CITY. NORMAN, his daughter KEY and his niece SAYLEE are listening to the report of a MESSENGER.

“Better shape up, ‘cause Steven’s on his way,” a messenger Swellow reported, perching on the Gym balcony.

“Oh, no,” Norman moaned, dropping his head on the table. “Girls, I’m locking you up for the weekend. Steven and a giant band of soldiers coming to stay? This is going to make Saylee’s twenty-first look tame.”

“I didn’t know you could drink that much vodka and live;” Key said, glancing at Saylee.

“To be fair, I think I spilled most of it down my shirt after the second bottle,” Saylee replied.

“You weren’t wearing a shirt after the second bottle.”

“Did Steven lose a lot of his followers in battle?” Norman asked quickly. “Please say he did. Didn’t. I mean, obviously it would be terrible if he did.”

“Luckily, they barely lost anybody,” the messenger reassured him. Norman sighed again.

“Better send word down to town that we’re soon going to have a lot of overpowered trainers lodging here,” Norman muttered. “I suppose we’ve got room to put up Steven himself and his closest five or six…”

“So, tell us about this new guy that everyone’s been singing the praises of,” Key giggled. “Supposedly tall, dark and muscular? Tell us more. Please.”

“Oh, yes, Archie,” the messenger said, raising an eyebrow. “He joined up with everyone else but he quickly turned out to be probably the greatest trainer in Steven’s army. He fought right alongside his Pokémon, you know! They say he punches like a Machamp!”

“And what about Richard Head? Did he make it back alive?” Saylee said sweetly.

“I, uh… don’t know of a Mr Head…” the messenger said uneasily.

“She means Blue of Viridian,” Key giggled. “That’s one of her… pet names for him.”

“Oh, right… him I know,” the messenger laughed. “Don’t worry, he’s back, same as ever!”

“So, did he actually kill someone?” Saylee asked, the sugar in her voice turning to ice. “I promised him I’d eat whatever he killed and still be a vegetarian.”
The messenger was starting to look frightened, so Norman cut in. “Leave Blue alone, Saylee,” he sighed. “He’s one of Steven’s closest friends. Which means he may have to stay under our roof for a while and I would take it as a kindness if neither of you murdered the other.” He smiled at the messenger. “Don’t worry, we’re all taking the piss. They’ve never tried to kill each other. They just can’t help meeting without threatening to kill each other. More of a battle of wits than anything else.”

“A battle implies that both sides are capable of fighting,” Saylee said dryly. “I honestly feel like a bully sometimes.”

“Not in your good books, then, is he?” the messenger chuckled.

“If he was, I’d burn my library,” Saylee growled. “Steven’s lucky he’s already special in the head so Blue can’t affect him. Let’s only hope poor Archie isn’t corrupted by his company.”

“STEVEN STONE IN DA HOUSE!” a voice shouted from the courtyard.

“I’d be more worried about Steven corrupting him,” Key giggled, hopping out of her seat. “C’mon, let’s go meet tall, dark and handsome!” She grabbed Saylee’s arm and towed her cousin after her.

“Get down to the town now,” Norman ordered the messenger, who bowed and flew away. Norman followed his daughter and niece down to the gym entrance, where a number of men and women had entered, with Steven Stone at their head.

Steven was an exuberant, silver-haired young man, tall and lean with the kind of face girls swooned over. He winked at Saylee and Key before sweeping over to hug Norman. “Are you prepared for trouble?” he asked Norman with a grin.

“You’re no trouble at all,” Norman lied, returning the smile. “It’s been years since you visited. I think Key was a child at the time…”

“Oh, of course! Is this your daughter?” Steven asked, gesturing to Key, who waved. Saylee was too busy glaring at somebody behind Steven.

“So her mother tells me,” Norman chuckled.

“Oh dear,” the somebody behind Steven said dryly. “You had to ask?”

“Of course not, Blue,” Norman responded. “After all, you were just a child when she was born.”

Key stifled a giggle, but Saylee just sighed and rolled her eyes. “Oh, you’re still here,” Blue said, pretending to just notice her. “Sure you’re not going to swoon at my feet?”

“I don’t know if swoon is the right word, but the smell off your feet is going to put someone on the floor soon,” Saylee sniffed, wrinkling her nose.

Blue scowled as he glanced at his feet, but then adopted a mocking smile again. “You know, ladies across the land are swooning for me,” he teased her. “Too bad for them I’m not a ‘love’ kind of guy, hmm?”

“You mean lucky them,” Saylee shot back. “They’re not swooning, they’re rejoicing that none of us will ever have to put up with you trying to flirt.”

“Good grief, if only I had a Rapidash as fast as you…” Blue grumbled, turning away from her to rejoin Steven. The pair of them had drifted away from the rest of the group as they argued. “You’d think an intelligent woman would know a great guy when she sees one…”
“I know exactly what you are,” Saylee said softly, but Blue wasn’t listening to her, instead focused on Steven as the Champion declared that his party would stay for a month (Saylee saw her uncle’s face twitch as he fought to maintain a grin) and introduced them to his brother Marc. Marc was as tall as Steven, but much more pale and gaunt, with lank red hair that shadowed his face. The last I heard, he was in prison, Saylee recalled.

“If you two are reconciled, then you’re both most welcome,” Norman promised. “Come on inside and we’ll have a drink, what do you think?”

“Thank you,” Marc said quietly as the party followed Norman into the building.

Key grabbed Saylee’s arm again. “I saw you talking to Blue,” she whispered with a giggle. “Exchanging sweet nothings, were you?”

“There’s nothing sweet about him,” Saylee snapped, casting about for a change of subject. “So, did you spot the famous Archie?”

“The one talking to your Blue just now,” Key replied, blushing a little. “Isn’t he a hunk?”

“Blue isn’t mine,” Saylee said, glancing back at the tall, burly man with the black beard and far too few buttons on his shirt who was muttering to Blue.

“What do you think of her?” Archie asked urgently.

Blue shrugged. “Eh… she’s too tall,” he said. “Too blonde. Why? Oh, ceez,” he said, spotting the way Archie was blushing. “Do you fancy her? Don’t do this to me, man!”

“I just don’t think she’s ‘too’ anything, except possibly too beautiful to be real,” Archie sighed.

“Oh no,” Blue groaned. “You think you know a guy, you think you have a bro, and then a pretty blonde walks by and—”

“Something wrong, Blue?” Steven asked, joining his friends as they walked into the Petalburg Gym’s cavernous main hall, where cushions had been strewn out so that people could sit on the floor in traditional style while they drank. Students of the gym were dragging open the door to the garden so that the visitors had a nice view of the lake. Steven sat down on a pillow and gestured for Blue and Archie to join them. “Did Saylee score another point on you?”

“Oh, I’m not the one with a lady problem,” Blue insisted. “Archie here—ah, well, I shouldn’t say,” he sighed, winking at Archie, who was going redder by the second.

“ShutupBlue,” Archie growled under his breath.

“Come on, you can tell me, can’t you?” Steven said. “If you won’t tell me as your friend, I can order you to tell me as your Champion…”

“Hear that? Orders are orders,” Blue said, patting the increasingly panicky Archie on the shoulder before flopping down on a cushion. “Archie and Key-ey, sittin’ in a tree…”
“Shutup!” Archie yelped, glancing around nervously.

“The lovely ladies went with Norman to get drinks,” Steven told him. “Is it true? Good call, man. She’s definitely pretty, and apparently she’s picked up some major battling talent from her father. If she likes you back, you’re a lucky son of a bitch.” He slapped Archie on the back.

“Lucky but dumb,” Blue groaned. “What is it with good guys always going off and getting themselves married?”

“You never change,” Steven sighed. “What’s so wrong about getting married? I mean, you can’t be ace, I saw you with—”

“There are plenty of lovely ladies out there, I’m just not dumb enough to try to be in a relationship with them,” Blue insisted. “Everything goes wrong as soon as you tell ‘em you love ‘em…”

“If you can get all hot and bothered over a lady, then one day you will, and I’m going to be there to see you do it,” Steven promised, giving Blue a nudge.

“You’ll see me hot and bothered in a heatwave or a fever, not love,” Blue growled, shooting to his feet. “I’m gonna go see where those drinks are.” He stormed off towards the kitchen.

“Wow, he’s so pissed off that he forgot that Saylee’ll be getting the drinks,” Archie commented.

“Yes, he did, didn’t he,” Steven chuckled. “Soooo… Key, huh?”

Archie flushed. “Uh… is she an only child?” he said, looking around the vast gym.

“Norman sometimes fosters kids, but Key’s his only biological child and heir to the gym,” Steven explained. “She might well have come to war with us if she wasn’t. I hear she’s already an even stronger trainer than her father, second only to her cousin.” He put a companionable arm around Archie’s shoulders. “So… you really feel like you’ve fallen in love with her?”

“For months and months, I haven’t thought about anything but the war,” Archie sighed. “The fighting consumed every moment of my time, but now… I was almost dizzy from the lack of anything to think about, and suddenly, there’s Key, and all that time and energy I once spent thinking about fighting… now I think about her.” He sighed again. “You date all the time, Steven. Got any tips? I’m terrified to even speak to her…"

“Not a lot if you’re looking for something long-term,” Steven laughed. “You know my relationships are lucky to last a month. But I have an idea for how to help you get started.”

“What?” Archie asked, going red at the mere thought of talking to Key. “What do I say? What do I do? How should I do my hair? What if she doesn’t like me? What if she thinks I’m dumb? What if I —”

“Archie. Archie. Archie! Shut up,” Steven said soothingly, squeezing Archie’s shoulder. “Calm down. I’m your wingman now. It’s all gonna be okay. Listen up. We’re going to have a costume party tonight because I say so and because I saw a pretty cool-looking costume shop in town. You and me, we’ll get some costumes that come with masks, and then I’ll go talk to her while pretending to be you, okay?” He glanced around as Norman, Key, Saylee and a couple of students came out with trays of cocktails. “I’ll butter her up, see how interested she is in you, make sure she’s very interested in you, all the good stuff, okay?”

“O-okay,” Archie said, gazing at Key with a dopey smile on his face while she handed out drinks to Winona and her air squadron buddies. “Sounds like a plan.”
“Norman! Norman! Nooooorman!”

“What is it, Wallace?” Norman asked, stepping into the garden as he spotted his flamboyant younger brother waving at him. Wallace dragged him behind an ornamental bush, giggling.

“You won’t believe what I just heard,” he said with a grin. “Archie confessed to Steven that he’s in love with your Key, and Steven offered to find out if she’s interested at the party tonight!”

“Really?” Norman said with interest. As a father, he naturally held no man to be good enough for his daughter, but if any came close it would be the Champion and his most trusted trainers. “Wait—what party? Oh, no… is Steven planning to throw a party?”

“A costume party!” Wallace said excitedly. “You can’t tell me you weren’t expecting Steven to throw a party. So… what do you think of Archie? He’s one of the best soldiers in the regiment, he has a wonderful record, everyone says he’s a good guy, and obviously he’s a very good-looking man…”

“It’s Key’s decision, not mine,” Norman said, which Wallace took to mean approved. “So I think I’ll go let her know about Archie’s feelings…”

“C’mon, Marc, what’s wrong?” Courtney asked. “You’ve been down all day.”

“Nothing’s wrong,” Marc said, “and that’s exactly the problem. Everyone’s so goddamn… happy. You know that pisses me off.” He sat down on the futon in his room. Like his brother, he’d been given a private room as a mark of respect. It pissed him off. Niceties generally did.

“I know, but keep a lid on it, will you?” Courtney said, folding her arms. “Do you want to land us all in prison? You’ve fooled your brother into trusting you for a while, so—”

“Oh, la-di-da, we get to bask in the light of the wondrous Steven,” Marc said bitterly. “I’d rather sit in the dark. Let’s face it, Courtney. I’m an asshole, and I do what I like, and I’m not interested in changing. Deal with it.”

“Yes, we get it…” Courtney sighed. “And trolling is fun, it really is, but jail isn’t.”

“I noticed,” Marc snapped, turning away from her as Kalle approached. “What’s with that grin on your face?”

“I ‘accidentally’ overheard Norman talking to his brother Wallace,” Kalle chuckled, sitting down next to his boss, “and you won’t believe the gossip I picked up! There’s gonna be a wedding!”

“What?” Marc said in surprise. Hoennian social customs and law were somewhat old-fashioned when it came to dating; asking someone out was still considered the first step towards marriage. If someone was daring to flirt, that meant true love was in the air. “Who is it?”

“Your brother’s new boy-toy,” Kalle laughed.

“That hulked-up idiot Archie?” Marc said, taking interest. Anything that could be done to upset Archie would upset his brother Steven, and Marc had never outgrown the childish love of seeing his perpetually cheerful brother upset or enraged. “So, who’s his other half to be? I don’t remember him having his eye on anyone…”
“That’s because she’s not in the army,” Kalle explained. “Norman’s daughter, Key. That skinny little blonde piece. Oh, but it gets better; your brother’s going to be Archie’s wingman at the party tonight. He’s going to talk him up to her, set them up, that kind of thing.”

“Oh, is he, now,” Marc growled. *He treats this Archie shit more like a brother than he ever…* “Well… the course of true love ought not to run smooth, eh?”

“We’re in,” Courtney said with a grin. “You sound like you’re planning something *fun.*”

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“Is Marc coming to the party tonight?” Norman said, trying on a mask that made him look like a Shiftry.

“He and his friends skipped drinks,” Wallace sighed, wriggling into a long, beautifully coloured skirt that looked like a Milotic’s tail.

“Marc always has such a sour face that my mouth dries up just *looking* at him,” Saylee complained, tying a pair of Charizard wings to her back.

“I know, right?” Key complained, reaching for a leaf headdress in the shape of a Grovyle’s leaves. “He looks like he could do with a drink. He never says anything. It’s creepy.”

“Oh, I don’t know… if you stitched him and Blue together, you might have a half-decent guy,” Saylee said thoughtfully, straightening the horns on her Charizard mask. “One never talks, one never shuts up.”

“And people ask me why my beautiful niece is so single,” Norman sighed.

“Just lucky, I guess,” Saylee said with a wink, before pulling the mask on.

“You’re lucky Key listens to you, at least,” Wallace sighed. “Why you and our dear Jo had to go and have daughters, I’ll never understand. They seem far much more trouble than it’s worth.”

“Well, it’s a daughter’s duty to say ‘as you please, daddy dearest’ when it comes to men,” Saylee sighed, helping Key adjust her mask before taking her cousin’s face in her hands and making her nod. “Well, unless the man is ugly or stupid or generally unappealing, in which case it’s your duty to yourself to say ‘as I please, daddy dearest.’” Key giggled and slapped her cousin’s hands away.

“Well, at least we’re in agreement on the subject of Archie, hmm?” Norman said, hugging his daughter.

“Oh, *definitely,*” Key giggled, blushing. “I can’t wait to see him at the party!”

“As guys go, I suppose they don’t come much better,” Saylee admitted, checking her appearance in the mirror. “Right, let’s get out there!”

Most of the guests had already made their way out in costume. Some, like Marc, hadn’t particularly bothered; he had a Blaziken masks and wig on, but other than that was wearing his usual red coat and sour frown. Others were so heavily costumed it was nearly impossible to see who they were. One tall, bulky figure bowed in front of Key and kissed her hand—well, pressed the lips of his mask to her hand and asked her to go on a walk. Saylee gave her cousin a thumbs-up and then made for the punch bowl, where she was soon joined by a tall figure with a blue hat and cloak, clearly dressed like the legendary Sir Aaron. He had his hat pulled low over his face.
“And you are…?” Saylee asked, waving at his costume.

“Sir Aaron,” he said, affecting a ridiculous Sinnon accent.

“Suuuuure…” Saylee said, rolling her eyes and taking a drink, before pulling a flask out of her pocket. “I can’t believe nobody’s spiked this punch yet,” she complained, dumping the contents into the punch bowl and giving it a stir before refilling her cup. “Honestly, this isn’t a children’s party.”

“You’re really a woman for speaking her mind, aren’t you?” ‘Sir Aaron’ said.

“You sound like Blue,” Saylee laughed.

“Who’s Blue?” the man asked, filling himself a cup.

“What, you’ve never heard of him?” Saylee said, feeling pleasantly warmed by the punch. “He’s the class clown of Steven’s regiment—or at least, he acts like one. I think he thinks he’s funnier than he is. He’s a snarky little shit, but that’s only funny for so long. You can’t laugh for long before you want to kick his ass.”

“Hmph… if I see him, I’ll tell him what you think of him,” the man said, taking a long drink of punch.

“Pfft, if you attach my name, he won’t listen to a word you say,” Saylee sighed, downing her punch, “but get ready for a truly breathless spiel of bile. Aye-yay-yay-ya-CONGA!” she hooted, joining the back of a conga line that came by.

“Class clown?” Blue growled, tipping his hat up as he watched her dance away, downing the rest of his punch and a second cup in quick succession. “Class clown? Screw her.” He dropped his cup and headed for the dance floor.

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“How… did he tell you he loves her?” Archie said shakily.

“He did,” Marc sighed.

“He said he’s marry her tonight if he could,” Courtney added. Marc let go of Archie, who he could feel shaking with anger, and walked away, at last allowing himself a smile as he left Archie to his rage.

“That felt good,” he sighed.

“It’s good to see you smile again, boss,” Kalle said.

“He’s in love with her?” Archie growled, tearing off his mask and flinging it in the pool. “SOME FUCKING WINGMAN! WHAT HAPPENED TO BROS BEFORE HOES, HUH?!” He stormed off towards the house, then changed his mind, turning and heading for the garden gate.

“Archie?” Blue called, spotting his friend storming off Norman’s property. “Mate, where the hell are you going? I’ve been looking for you! Steven and Key are in the main hall!”

“Good for them, I hope they have fun,” Archie growled.

“The hell is wrong with you?” Blue demanded, grabbing Archie’s arm. “What are you implying? What kind of bro do you think Steven is?”

“Leave me ALONE!” Archie shouted, punching Blue in the face. Blue fell to the ground, letting Archie go, and as soon as he did, Archie took off running.

“DUDE, WHAT THE FUCK?!” Blue yelled after him, rubbing his jaw, his head and hangover ringing. “Damn, that meathead really does punch like a damn Machamp… what’s his problem?” He watched Archie storm off towards the town, probably looking for another drink. Going after him is an action that I deem inauspicious at this time, he mused, turning back towards the house. I don’t know how I’m going to explain just went on… he spotted his hat dangling off of a tree branch. “I wondered where that went,” he said to himself, picking it up and patting leaves off of it. “I can’t believe Saylee didn’t recognize me… I wonder how much alcohol she had by that point… that woman can chug vodka like a queen.” He got a few moments of happy reminisces before Saylee’s voice floated across his memory again.

“Class clown!”

“Clown? Like hell anybody dares call me a damn clown,” he growled. “She just assumes that everyone’s as… bitter as she is. She’s not getting away with it…”

“Do you always talk to yourself about Saylee?” Steven commented. “Or do you need some alone time with your… thoughts?”

“Where the hell did you come from?!” Blue yelped, spinning around to see Steven leaning against the very tree he’d just taken his hat off of.

“Then again, Saylee was ranting about you to herself earlier as well,” Steven continued, walking over to Blue. “Seems she was ranting about you to pretty much every guy she danced with last night, too. I think half the regiment now has the impression that you make the poor woman suffer. To be fair, you’re just as bitchy to her as she is to you.”
“I didn’t say a damn word!” Blue snapped. “She called me a clown, she—I just stood there, like a man in front of a firing squad, taking hit after hit in silence! Every damn word that woman says is an insult! I don’t know if any poor fool is ever going to hate themselves enough to try marrying her, but it sure as hell won’t be me. Can we talk about something else? Anything else?”

“Well, here comes Key and Norman,” Steven said, nodding towards the house. “Oh, look! And up the path comes the lady in question, with Archie to boot! Didn’t I send you to find him?”

“Whatever, he’s found, I’m out of here,” Blue said quickly. “Anything you want me to get you? A toothpick from Unova? A pretty handbag from Kalos? Say the word and I’ll scour the ocean floor for a shiny Clamperl. Anything but hearing another damn word out of that woman!”

Saylee, coming through the garden gate, stopped and stared quizzically at Blue as his voice rose to a shout.

“Your entertaining company will do,” Steven laughed. Blue just growled.

“Sorry, no,” he snapped. “I’m too hungover to deal with this woman. I’m out.” He stormed off towards the house. Saylee crossed her arms and sighed before heading towards Steven.

“You’re not exactly winning Blue’s heart here,” Steven commented.

“Does he have a real one? He fooled me once, and he won’t do it again,” Saylee said, trying for scorn but too hungover to really manage the necessary venom. Instead, she murmured wistfully, “when he had mine, it didn’t do him any good…”

“Saylee?” Steven said gently. Saylee shook her head and smiled at her cousin as Key and Norman reached the tree, staring quizzically at her.

“Good timing,” she said. “Guess who I found on the way down to the store for more painkillers? Unfortunately not painkillers, but Archie’ll do.” She turned and grabbed Archie, who was trying to sneak towards the gate again, and dragged him forcefully back towards Steven, Key and Norman. When he tried to pull away, she elbowed him in the ribs to make him buckle and then flipped him over her shoulder. “Low centre of gravity, bitch,” she said to his shocked expression. “Now stay. I’m too hungover for your shit.”

“Are you okay?” Steven asked with concern. “You’re not still drunk, are you? Are you going to throw up?”

“No, I’m fine,” Archie grumbled.

“The green isn’t in his cheeks, it’s in his eyes,” Saylee grumbled. Archie flinched. “If you’re going to get jealous, you idiot, then don’t get your wingman to flirt for you!”

“Wait, you think Steven and I—hey!” Key yelped, kneeling down in front of Archie. “You’re the one I—I fell in love with when…” she mumbled, losing her voice as she went redder. “Actually, no, I just fancied you then. Steven’s told me all about you, and I…” she descended into shy mumbling as Archie turned flaming red.

“You have my approval,” Norman chuckled, “and frankly, with both of you blushing like children, I don’t feel like I have much to worry about…”

“C’mon, do I have to feed you lines?” Saylee said, kicking Archie in the small of his back. He stood up, holding out his hands to pull Key to her feet.
“I just…. I was too happy and forgot what words were,” Archie gasped. “Of course I love you, Key! I asked everyone about you and you’re not just gorgeous, you’re so sweet and an amazing trainer oh wow can I see your Pokémon can I—”

“Key, trust me, there are infinitely better things a man can do with his mouth than talk,” Saylee said loudly. Archie gaped until Key grabbed him by the beard and kissed him.

“About time he stopped babbling,” Saylee sighed, leaning back against the tree and high-fiving her uncle. “Once again, I’m the only single lady. Joy.”

“I’m single too—we could stop being single together,” Steven said, sweeping up her hand and kissing it overdramatically and peering up at her.

Saylee paused for a moment. Steven was always jocular, but there was a flash of sincerity in his eyes. _He’s a good-looking man, and definitely kind and responsible and… but no. I’m sorry, Steven._ “I think I’d need another to fight with, you’re much too fancy for me to have hanging off my arm all the time,” she laughed, squeezing his hand briefly before letting it go.

Steven nodded, then laughed along with her. “It’s good to see you laughing,” he said. “It suits you better. You were definitely born at a time for laughter.”

“I dunno, by all accounts my mum was crying,” Saylee responded. “And I’m going to cry if I don’t get either painkillers or more wine in the next ten minutes. Congrats, you two!” she called, waving to Key and Archie, who were chattering excitedly to each other and still holding hands. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do! Or most of the things I would! Key knows what I mean!” She winked at the happy couple and wandered off.

“It’s okay, most of what she means involves vodka,” Key reassured Archie.

Steven folded his arms, watching Saylee go with a contemplative expression. “There really is no faster way to chase her out of a room than to talk about marriage, is there?” he said thoughtfully.

“Oh, she’s always been like that,” Norman said. “I always wrap her birthday presents while having a loud monologue to myself about who she should date. She doesn’t date anymore, though. She chases them all away.”

“I bet she and Blue would make a great couple,” Steven mused. Archie choked. Key grinned evilly.

“I know Blue and Saylee had a history. After what Saylee said, I know they were in love once, a long ago. Maybe what was undone by the young and stupid can be redone for the older and wiser. “Maybe it’s the tequila talking, but I feel like making some miracles,” he declared. “Therefore, I’m gonna make like a Luvdisc and make Saylee and Blue fall in love, a process which should be at least hilarious and at best astonishingly successful. Who’s in?”

“I’m in,” Archie said with a grin. “Blue never shuts up about Saylee. This could be fun.”

“They say hatred’s the flipside of love,” Norman mused. “Count me in.”

“What about you, Key?” Steven asked.

Key gave him a thumbs-up. “I’m all for getting them back together,” Key said. “They were stupid teenagers back then. I’m all for making them grow up and realize that they’re stupid adults now.”
“Then you’re in charge of the Saylee department,” Steven declared. “Get some girlfriends in on that. Archie, Norman, you’re on my Blue Squad. I have a plan that’ll get them out of their own heads long enough to fall in love…”

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“Pfft… that plan was weak anyway,” Marc grumbled, pacing across the balcony and glaring down at where his brother spoke quietly with a smiling Norman, Key and Archie. *Probably wedding plans. Great. We’ll be stuck here through a wedding, full of stupid people being happy…*  

“I have a better plan,” Kalle promised.

“Good, because seeing that idiot smiling makes me sick,” Marc snapped. “What is your plan?”

“Weeeeell… you know Cynthia? That fine blonde foreign trainer who’s staying with Norman just now?” Kalle said. “She drafted me as a booty call last night.”

“Did you just want to show off about that?” Courtney asked.

“No! Well, yes but no,” Kalle said. “She was complaining that people keep assuming that she’s Key’s cousin instead of Saylee, and that some people have even mistaken her for Key herself.” He grinned lewdly. “Seen in poor light, from behind… you get what I’m saying?”

“As I understand the booty call rules, though, since you are her booty call, she controls where and how you shag, not you,” Courtney pointed out.

“We have time before Archie and Key get married,” Kalle commented with a grin. “Plenty of time for the rules to become… flexible… besides, the closer to the wedding, the better, right? You simply tell your brother that Key’s cheating on Archie, I create a scene that looks well enough like she is, everything comes together and all is not well.”

“You’re a genius,” Marc said, grinning like a Sharpedo.

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“A week until the brotherhood of bachelors loses a fine member,” Blue sighed, typing the date into his pokégear as he walked along the garden path. “That asshole’s gonna make me get a goddamn tux, too, isn’t he…” he started climbing up the steps to the porch running outside of the living room, but stopped with a scowl as he heard the music playing on the other side of the sliding door.

“*Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more… for men were constant never… one foot in sea and one on shore… to one thing constant never…*”

“What the hell is this pop shit?” Blue grumbled, turning and walking back down the steps.

“Beautiful song,” he heard Norman say on the other side of the door.

“It’s a song about how all men are assholes,” Archie pointed out.

“Beauty is truth,” Steven said, sliding the doors open. Blue quickly dived under the porch before they spotted him.

Steven glanced down at the boards under his feet with a smile. *Blue probably thought I didn’t see him,* he thought, pressing a finger to his lips and pointing at the boards as he glanced back at Norman and Archie. They started walking along the porch.
“Like Blue,” he said. “You’re right, Norman, he really isn’t worth the love of your niece.”

Archie grinned and stifled a laugh as there was a thump beneath their feet, almost as if someone had hit their head on the boards. They heard grass rustling as Blue followed them.

“I didn’t figure her for the type to fall head-over-heels,” Archie commented loudly as soon as he had his voice under control.

“The last person I’d expect her to fall for is Blue,” Norman replied. “I thought she hated him. But…”


“I just don’t understand it, but she’s absolutely crazy about him,” Norman continued.

“Are you certain that this isn’t a prank by anyone?” Steven asked. “Or Saylee herself just taking the piss?”

“If she was joking, she’d be happier,” Norman insisted at the top of his voice. “You can’t fake being that lovesick!”

“I don’t know Saylee very well,” Archie prompted. “How do you know she’s lovesick?”

“…Didn’t Key TELL you?” Norman asked, looking uncertainly at the pair of them.

“Of… of course she did!” Archie said, leaning over to Steven and whispering, “I have no idea what to say…”

“Just keep whispering,” Steven whispered back.

Blue leaned up against the boards as Steven and Archie started whispering. What the hell are they saying? What the hell are they SAYING?! What about Saylee? She couldn’t possibly be… they’re mistaken, they HAVE to be…

“Good gods, you’re right!” Steven gasped loudly. “And here I thought she’d never fall in love.”

“Or if she did, definitely not with Blue,” Norman agreed.

“Hasn’t she told Blue? Confessed her love?” Steven asked.

“Oh, she’d never do that,” Norman insisted. “That’s why she’s so upset.”

“She’s terrified that he won’t believe her because of how often they’ve fought,” Archie sighed.

“According to Key,” Norman added quickly.

“She said that Saylee cries in the night over it, crying and cursing and tearing her hair—” Archie declared dramatically.

“Key’s worried about her,” Norman interrupted, before Archie could ham it up too badly.

“We really should tell Blue,” Steven sighed.

“We really shouldn’t,” Archie objected. “He’ll just mock her, you know he will! I’ve heard him rant about how he can’t stand her!”
“You’re right,” Steven sighed. “There’s no need for someone as sweet as her to put up with that. She really is very sweet and kind when she isn’t dealing with assholes like Blue.”

“She’s so smart, too,” Norman added.

“You’d think she would be too smart to fall for Blue,” Steven continued.

“As her uncle, my heart aches for her,” Norman sighed.

“Blue doesn’t deserve her,” Steven insisted. “Any man would be lucky to have her love! I mean, if I were in Blue’s place, I’d marry her in a second and cherish her for her whole life!” He bit himself off, realizing that he’d stopped acting. “Blue ought to know of his good luck,” he finished.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Norman said.

“She’s terrified that he doesn’t love her, but she’s terrified of finding out, too,” Archie sighed. “She’d never tell him.”

“Poor woman,” Steven sighed. “Shall we go tell him?”

“I don’t think we have a right to,” Norman said, glancing at the door to the dining room. Steven nodded, and he slid it open.

“Maybe she’ll stop loving him,” Steven sighed. “Blue is one of my best friends, like a brother to me, really… but he’s not worth her, not with the way he treats her.” He closed the dining room door behind him, then gave Norman and Archie a couple of thumbs-up.

“C’mon,” he hissed, dragging them away from the door outside. “He was listening to us all the way down the porch. If I’m right, and he’s still in love with her and didn’t realize it, his feelings should flare up again if he hears she’s still in love with him. Once Key and her friends pull the same thing on Saylee… well, they can both be very singleminded people when they have a straightforward goal.”

“Dinner will be on soon,” Norman chuckled. “I’ll go find Saylee and ask her to fetch Blue for dinner.”

“Perfect,” Steven cackled.

“…they’re not wrong that she’s smart, he mused, watching her stalk towards him. She looks pissed off before we’ve even started talking. The whole time… has that been defensiveness? The lady doth protest too much?

“Get your ass off the ground and come get dinner,” Saylee sighed as she approached him.
“Checking out my fine ass, are you?” Blue said with a grin.

Saylee looked startled. “You are an ass, it’s unavoidable,” she said, turning around and heading back towards the dining room.

“But you’re not denying that I’m a fine one,” Blue quipped.

“Just come get dinner,” Saylee said, slamming the dining room door behind her.

“She’s definitely hiding something from me,” Blue chuckled, hopping to his feet. “She got so defensive… it’s almost cute, when you know what you’re looking at.”

Grinning happily, he headed for the dining room.

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look at them for more than five seconds without finding something to take the piss out of! She’s not the sort to fall in love. Especially not with Blue.”

“You’re right… I’ve seen the way she snipes at him,” Dawn sighed. “If she knew how he felt, she’d just use it to torment him.”

“I don’t get what her problem is anyway,” Key sighed. “I mean, I’m engaged, not blind. He’s hot, he’s smart, he’s a damn good trainer, he is pretty funny when he wants to be…”

“She only sees the bad in people, not the good, you know that,” Dawn insisted, biting back a giggle at an affronted gasp from the hall.

“I know that, but I’m not going to say it to her face,” Key pointed out. “Then I’d be the one getting tormented. If Blue thinks he’s suffering under unrequited love, then he hasn’t got a good enough imagination to realize what would happen if Saylee knew.”

“Are you certain?” Dawn asked. “I mean, isn’t there the faintest possibility that she’d ever love him back? I heard rumours…”

“Rumours!” Key interjected, knowing that Saylee would jump in and murder them both if she knew people knew about her relationship with Blue a few years prior. *They got on like a house on fire back then. Heat, passion… screaming… people fleeing in terror… destruction of everything in its path…* “I’ll get Blue to fall out of love with her by telling him gross stories about Saylee as a kid! Like that time she ate a bit of Grimer sludge because I dared her!”

“Wait, did she really do that?” Dawn said uncertainly. “I mean, I know she’s proud, but…”

“I’ll make Blue believe it,” Key said with a grin. “Break his heart and let him go find a girl worth his time. He’s probably the best catch out there, now that Archie belongs to me.” She tapped the sapphire engagement ring on her finger with a happy grin.

The floorboards outside creaked again. Key crept softly to her door and peered out into the hall in time to see Saylee vanish into the study at the end of the hall.

“Did we get her?” Dawn whispered.

“We got her,” Key replied, fistbumping her friend. “Oh, I hope I’m there the next time they see each other…”

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“You know how proud she is… she’d just torment him…”

“Is that really what they think of me?” Saylee whispered, slumping in the swivel chair behind the desk. Almost absentmindedly, she logged into her computer account and dove into the complicated warren of her picture files until she came across the old photographs and giffies.

*We were just stupid kids then,* she thought, looking at the pair of them smiling together and somehow, for the first time in years, remembering how happy they’d felt in the beginning, not the anger and bitterness of the end. *Could we make it work now? If… all this time… he’s…*

“It won’t be unrequited,” she declared to the computer screen, the index finger of her right hand idly tracing the ring finger of her left. “Never again.”

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“And here we see the spring fashion for stubborn idiots,” Steven muttered as Blue tried on a white tuxedo jacket.

“They’ve just been weirdly polite to each other for the last three days,” Archie replied. “And steadily redder every time they see each other.”

“Like I said, stubborn, neither of them’ll blink first,” Steven sighed. “So, Blue… planning to catch the garter at the wedding?”

“What for?” Blue said, suddenly mysteriously clumsy with his bow tie.

“So you can adopt a Shinx and move to Unova, what do you think?” Steven said. “Archie, when it comes time to throw, seriously, aim it at Blue’s head. You know he wants you to. And get your lovely bride to aim her bouquet at her cousin.”

“You’re both idiots and I’m not wearing this stupid thing,” Blue said, dropping the tie and shrugging off the jacket. “Forget it. I’m finding something to wear somewhere else. Norman!” He waved at the gym leader as the man passed by the store’s huge front window before running out to join him.

“Hey, Norman!” Steven yelled out of the door. “Does Saylee still like a man in a formal kilt?”

Norman grinned at Blue before being dragged away by the red-faced younger man. Steven sniggered and let the door slide closed.

“Oh, is the other gentleman not buying today?” the tailor said, stepping out of the back room. “I’ve finished your suit, Mr Irving. Will that be all?”

“Sure,” Archie said, getting his card out to pay.

“I can’t believe your wedding’s tomorrow,” Steven teased with a grin. “Then you and your beautiful bride will be off to Lumiose, City of lo-ove~”

“I know,” Archie said, grinning nervously but happily. “Thank you,” he said to the tailor, taking his card and new suit from her.

“Ready for this?” Steven said as the door slid open to let them out.

“Completely ready,” Archie said.

“Are you sure?”

“Ceez, Marc, don’t do that,” Steven gasped, massaging his chest theatrically as he spotted his half-brother leaning against the front wall of the shop, waiting for them. He had a scowl on his face, but rather than one of his usual angry glares he looked distinctly uncomfortable.

“Steven, I need to talk to you,” he said urgently. “Ah, good, Archie’s here too. It’s about him.”

“What about me?” Archie said uneasily.

Marc swallowed. “You… don’t want to get married tomorrow,” he said at length.

“I’m… sure I do,” Archie said with a frown. “I should know.”

“You don’t,” Marc said unhappily. “You don’t know the truth.”

“What the hell are you on about?” Archie demanded.
“Marc, stop dicking around and tell us what’s wrong,” Steven insisted.

“There’s no easy way to say this, but… Key’s cheating on you,” Marc said quickly.

“Real fucking funny,” Archie growled, dropping the bag with his tuxedo and grabbing Marc by the collar. “That joke’s gonna be even funnier when you tell it without any teeth.”

“I’m not lying!” Marc yelled. “I’ve caught her with her boyfriend! Courtney has too! We… we didn’t want to tell you, but she’s even meeting him tonight! The night before her wedding! I’m so sorry, Archie, but I had to tell you!”

“There’s no way,” Steven snapped. “I don’t believe you.”

“Then come see for yourself! Tonight!” Marc gasped. “She’s meeting him in the garden at midnight… you’ll be able to see for yourselves!”

“Fine,” Archie snapped. “You’re coming too, so as soon as the joke comes out…” he raised his fist, but his hand was starting to shake. He dropped Marc, trembling. “It can’t be true… if it is… it can’t be… but…”

“I’m coming with you,” Steven promised, patting his friend on the shoulder. “I was your wingman, I hooked you guys up. If she’s cheating on you the night before your wedding… I’ll help you take her down.”

“We’ll see at midnight,” Marc said, fighting not to grin. Hook, line… “Maybe it is a mistake after all.”

“Are you good men and true?” Johnson called, striding into the police station.

“Neither of us are men,” Jenny said, straightening her uniform skirt.

“I’m not even human,” Rose, her Gardevoir, pointed out.

“Yea,” Looker agreed, following his commanding officer into the room, “or else it were pity but they should suffer salvation, body and soul.”

“Nay,” Johnson argued, “that were a punishment too good for them, if they should have any allegiance in them, being chosen for the Champion’s watch.”

“Well, give them their charge, neighbour Johnson,” Looker encouraged his boss as he noticed Jenny and Rose beginning to automatically zone out of the senior officers’ banter.

“First, who do you think is the most desartless man to be constable?” Johnson asked Jenny.

“Neither of us are men,” Jenny repeated. “But I’m Rose’s superior officer, so…”

“Come hither, neighbour Jenny!” Johnson declared. “Jirachi hath blessed you with a good name: to be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune; but to write and read comes by nature.”

“I’m well-favoured not to be a man,” Jenny sniped, knowing that he wasn’t listening anyway.

“Well, for your favour, sir, why, give Arceus thanks, and make no boast of it,” Jonson continued, “And for your writing and reading, let that appear when there is no need of such vanity. You are thought here to be the most senseless and fit man for the constable of the watch, therefore bear you
the Lanturn.” He handed over the pokéball containing the only water-type in the Petalburg Police, and thus the only way to chase criminals if they reached the sea to the west. “This is your charge: you shall comprehend all vagrom men, and you are to bid any man stand in the Champion’s name.”

“Okaaaaaaay,” Jenny said, pocketing the pokéball. “Good thing I’m not a senseless man, but I’ll take it. So what do I do to those that don’t ‘stand in the Champion’s name’?”

“Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go,” Johnson assured her, “and presently call the rest of the watch together and thank Groudon you are rid of a knave.”

“If he will not stand when he is bidden, he is none of the Champion’s subjects,” Looker told Jenny.

“True, and they are to meddle with none but the Champion’s subjects,” Johnson said thoughtfully, striding over to his desk and hauling himself up to sit on the edge in a way that he probably thought made him look cool. “You shall also make no noise in the streets, for for the watch to babble and to talk is most tolerable and not to be endured.”

“Well, they don’t have anything to worry about, unless you start using Sleep Talk,” Rose commented telepathically to Jenny, who carefully schooled her features. Because Gardevoir were powerfully empathetic, Rose could sense the will of everyone in the city, and she could feel crimes being committed from anywhere around it. On quiet nights, Jenny generally had a nap in some dark corner while Rose watched over Petalburg.

“I won’t make a sound,” she promised honestly. “I don’t even snore, thank you very much. ‘I’m sure everyone will be getting a good night’s sleep before the big wedding, anyway.’”

“Why, you speak like an ancient and most quiet watchman!” Johnson declared. “For I cannot see how sleeping should offend: only, have a care that your bills be not stolen. Well, you are to call at all the houses, and bid those that are drunk get them to bed.”

“Uh…” Jenny said. “By those that are drunk’… I mean, what do I do if I run into Archie Irving’s Stantler party? I mean, I can’t exactly tell them to go to bed, can I?”

“Well, then, you let them alone until they are sober,” Johnson said dismissively. “If they make you not then the better answer, you may say they are not the men you took them for.”

[…]okay then,” Jenny said, starting to edge towards the door.

“If you meet a thief, you may suspect him, by virtue of your office, to be no true man,” Johnson continued, “and for such kind of men, the less you meddle or make with them, why, the more is for your honesty.” Looker crossed his arms and nodded seriously.

“Shouldn’t I arrest thieves?” Jenny asked.

“Truly, by your office, you may,” Johnson conceded, “but I think that they that touch pitch will be defiled. The most peaceable way for you, if you do take a thief, is to let him show himself what he is and steal out of your company.”

“You have always been called a merciful man, partner,” Looker said proudly. Jenny rolled her eyes.

“Truly, I would not hang a Poochyena by my will, much more a man who hath any honesty in him,” Johnson sighed.

“If you hear a child cry in the night,” Looker advised Jenny, “you must call to the nurse and bid her still it.”
“What, I’m supposed to break into somebody’s house to tell them to make their kid shut up?” Jenny said incredulously. “Who even has a nursemaid these days?”

“Well, then, depart in peace, and let the child wake her with crying,” Johnson suggested, “for the ewe that will not hear her lamb when it baes will never answer a calf when he bleats.”

“‘Tis very true,” Looker said with a solemn nod.

“I can’t believe these are our superior officers,” Rose thought at Jenny.

They won’t let me outrank Dad, so what can I do? Jenny thought, sighing.

“This is the end of the charge,” Johnson declared, to a mental celebration from Jenny and Rose. “You, constable, are to present the Champion’s own person, and if you meet the Champion in the night, you may stay him.”

“Nay, by’r lady,” Looker objected, “that I think a’cannot.”

“Five shillings to one on’t, with any man that knows the statues, she may stay him,” Johnson argued, “marry, not without the Champion be willing. For, indeed, the watch ought to offend no man, and it is an offence to stay a man against his will.”

“Is it an offence to waste a woman’s time?” Jenny muttered.

“By’r lady, I think it be so,” Looker said, making Jenny jump, but he seemed to be talking to Johnson rather than her.

Johnson laughed. “Well, masters, good night,” he said, waving to Jenny and Rose. “An there be any matter of weight chances, call up me. Keep your fellows’ counsels and your own, and good night. Come, neighbour.”

If nothing’s happened by two, I’m going to sleep, Jenny thought. Rose nodded with a smile.

“One word more, honest neighbours,” Johnson called as they were halfway out the door. “I pray you, watch about Leader Norman’s door, for the wedding being there tomorrow, there is a great coil tonight. Adieu: be vigilant, I beseech you!”

“Is vigilant even a word?” Jenny asked Rose as the door finally slid shut behind them.

“Come on,” Rose said, looking up at the stars that were starting to make their way out of the blackness. “Let’s go find somewhere quiet and away from all of the pubs.”

“What would I do without you?” Jenny sighed, putting her arm around her partner’s vaguely humanoid shoulders.

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“Jenny! JENNY!”

“What is it?” Jenny whispered, snapping instantly back to wakefulness.

“There is a tremendous amount of dark feeling rising around Norman’s gym and house,” Rose informed her.

Jenny checked the time on her pokénav. It was twenty to one. “I swear I didn’t meant to fall asleep this early.”
“The dark feelings have been rising and building for more than half an hour,” Rose explained. “And oddly... I feel no merriment from the town. I do not think the Stantler night has taken place.”

“What? What kind of man cancels his Stantler night?” Jenny grumbled, getting up and brushing grass off of her skirt. “Let’s head into town and check out some of the bars.”

They headed into The Black Bitch, the pub near the gym where Jenny had heard that night had been planned to start (she would owe Saylee Pryce forever for inviting her along to her cousins’ Torchic Weekend at the Lavaridge Spas, and she’d been able to pick up some good gossip there—not least that the Champion was trying to get Saylee and Blue together, so if either was murdered, Jenny already knew the motive).

She pushed open the door, with its iconic painting of a mother Mightyena on it, and walked into the astonishingly quiet and tidy pub. There was only one man sitting at the end of the bar, chugging a beer.

“’Nother,” the man hiccupped, putting the mug down and handing over his card. The landlady shrugged, swiped it, refilled his mug and handed it back. “Evening, Jenny,” she said, spotting Jenny and Rose coming in the door. “Here for a drink?”

“Give me a virgin pina colada, and Rose wants a leppatini,” Jenny said, sitting down at the far end of the bar from the drunk, who hadn’t looked up or noticed her. She didn’t recognize him. “Is he one of the Champion’s trainers?” Jenny asked, nodding at the man.

“I think so,” the landlady said, mixing Jenny’s drink. “Only one in all night. Y’now, that big party for the wedding tomorrow never showed anywhere? Everyone was calling up to see if they’d started here yet. I laid on so much beer for those guys too…” she glanced at the guy getting happily smashed at the end of the bar. “Although I think he’s handled most of it. Here you go.” She set both drinks down and went to refill the drunk’s mug.

“That man has a malicious feeling,” Rose commented, taking a sip of her drink. “His joy is made of schadenfreude.”

“Kalle! THERE you are, you lush!”

Jenny glanced over her shoulder as a blue-haired woman stormed into the pub and grabbed the drunk by the shoulder. “’Ey, Courtney,” he slurred.

“How much have you had?” Courtney snapped “How can you afford this?”

“’Sall on Marc’s card for t’night,” Kalle chuckled, waving the card. “He give it me. Y’know whyyyyy?”

“What the hell kind of dirty trick did you pull to make Marc give you his platinum?” Courtney said sceptically, sitting down next to Kalle and leaning in to talk quietly to him. She glanced up at Jenny and Rose, but both were looking away, sipping their drinks.

“Hey, Mary,” Jenny said, beckoning the landlady over. When she drew close, Jenny whispered, “lean close and mumble so we can pretend we’re having a conversation.”

“Earwigging them? Are they criminals?” Mary whispered.

“If they’re friends of Marc the Bastard, they’ve probably done something illegal,” Jenny replied, before tuning out Mary’s mumbling of drink prices to pay attention to Kalle and Courtney.
“Just tell me already, Kalle!” Courtney snapped. Kalle giggled drunkenly and slung his arm around Courtney’s shoulders.

“‘Kay, well… I got a booty call for the garden t’night, right? Midnight, the usual,” he chuckled. “She likes bein’ on top, so I just kinda rolled so her back was to the house an’ kinda pulled ‘er hair over her shoulder so you couldn’t tell how long it was an’ you couldn’t see nothin’ ‘cept a perky blonde riding a dude hell for leather in the bushes, an’ when I saw the boss an’ the Champ an’ Archie comin’ through I asked if I could call her Key—she just thought I was bein’ a kinky bastard—an’ oh, you bet they heard…”

“So they thought she was Key?” Courtney gasped.

“Steven an’ Archie, yep,” Kalle said happily. Jenny stifled her own gasp and saw Rose stiffen as she no doubt sensed the flash of rage and shock that went through her human partner. “Oh, the boss knew it was Cynthia, but he let his bro an’ Archie think the worst, an’ oh man, I’m glad the pair of ‘em managed to drag Archie back into the house ‘fore Cynthia noticed ‘em… or ‘fore he came out an’ started rippin’ heads off… oh, he looked ready to rip someone’s head off… probably gonna rip his bride-t’not-be’s off…” He chugged the rest of his drink. “Imma sleep through the weddin’ tomorrow. Can’t chance ‘im recognizin’ me, even if it was dark an’ all…”

Jenny’s stool fell over as she shoved it backwards, stalking towards the pair. “You’ll be sleeping it off in a cell,” she snapped. Rose psychically lifted both off of their seats.

“Why? What law have we broken?” Courtney snapped. Kalle just giggled.

“I don’t know, but you’ve definitely done something wrong and you don’t leave my custody until I figure out what,” Jenny snapped. “C’mon Rose, let’s take them to the station.”

“Is the bride coming or what?” Saylee said, carefully stepping into the fitting room. Her new, giant heels were her mortal enemy, but Key wanted her Maid of Honour to be as tall as her. For Key, I’ll put up with it… but only for today. “It’s nearly five!”

“How do I look?” Key giggled, twirling her long white dress. It had a wide, elaborate skirt but with a cleverly-placed slit that allowed her to flash a little leg.

“Gorgeous,” Saylee assured her, rubbing her forehead. “Argh… my eyes are sore and I’ve already done my eye makeup…”

“Don’t tell me you’re hungover at five in the afternoon,” Key chastised her.

“No, what do you take me for? I’d still be drunk if I was drinking today,” Saylee insisted. My eyes are sore because I was up until three o’clock this morning practicing dancing in these heels. Blue’s Archie’s Best Man, I’m Key’s Maid of Honour, it’s traditional for us to dance, right? Right…

“If you’re ill, you should take some of these blue pills,” Cynthia said, holding out a bottle of painkillers.

“Blue pills?” Saylee snapped. “Why blue pills?”

“Uh… ‘cause the painkillers are blue and we all agreed to pretend that I don’t have any white pills?” Cynthia said, throwing the bottle at Saylee and returning to doing Key’s makeup. “Do you have a problem with blue pills, Saylee? I thought you didn’t have a problem with blue… pills.”
“I… don’t,” Saylee said, looking suspiciously at the painkillers before popping two of the tiny blue pills. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Why are you all in here talking at all?” Dawn said, leaning into the room. “Everything’s set up and your dad’s waiting to escort you to the priest, Key!”

“Oh my gods! Where’s my jewellery?” Key gasped, tugging her gloves on.

“Saylee, find the jewellery, Key, shut up and stop moving your face!” Cynthia snapped, advancing with the eyelash curler.

“Hello, Captain Johnson, Sergeant Looker,” Norman said, waving at the two officers as they stepped into the front hall. “Are you here for the wedding?”

“Marry, sir, I would have some confidence with you that discerns you nearly,” Johnson declared.

“Can you make it quick? My daughter’s due out any second,” Norman said, looking up at the clock on the wall.

“Our watch tonight have taken a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Hoenn,” Looker informed him.

“Our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two auspicious persons,” Johnson confirmed, “and we would have them this morning examined before your leadership.”

“You want me to attend an interrogation on my daughter’s wedding day?” Norman said incredulously after a moment. He sighed and clapped both men on the shoulder. “I’m sure this once I can trust you fine gentlemen to run the interrogation yourselves and bring it to me? You will? Good!” he said, turning around as the door behind him opened. He went misty-eyed as his daughter floated out, a vision in pearls and white lace and elaborate blonde curls. Looker and Johnson both snapped off salutes as the bride hugged her father and headed out to the garden with him, with trio of bridesmaids in lavender dresses in tow. The blonde winked at the officers, the brunette ignored them, and the black-haired girl copied their salute before the three hurried after their bride.

“Go get you to your daughter,” Johnson said to Looker. “Bid her bring her tablet to the jail.”

Bows and banners were draped over every planet in the garden. A space had been cleared for an arch twined with roses, under which stood Morty, a wandering priest who had turned up the previous day, mere seconds after Norman had been phoned by the priest that they’d hired to officiate, apologizing that he was ill and wouldn’t be able to make it. Morty wore flowing, purple Johnton robes, their dark colour a contrast to the bright white suits that Archie and Steven were wearing and the white shirt and bright kilt that Blue had opted for. Archie, Steven and Marc stood out from the crowd with their dark scowls, but Blue didn’t notice, scanning the house for the moment when the bride and her bridesmaids appeared.

There was a gasp from the guests in attendance as Key floated down the aisle on Norman’s arm, smiling widely at her husband-to-be. Norman kissed her on the cheek and let her go, and she and Saylee stepped up to face Archie and Blue. Saylee and Blue caught each others’ eyes and smiled shyly. Key grinned at her cousin and then winked at Archie. His expression remained blank and stony.

.Maybe he’s just nervous, she thought as Morty started talking. Beautiflies were fluttering in her
stomach; the live one sitting in her hair, Wanda, fluttered her wings occasionally, making Key’s heart leap.

“Keyanu Weaves, do you take this man to be your husband, in sight of the gods of land and sea?” Morty asked.

“I do,” Key said happily.

“Archibald Irving, do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, in sight of the gods of land and sea?” Morty asked, turning to Archie.

“No,” Archie said quietly. Key’s heart dropped.

“How can I possibly repay you for such a gift?” Archie said, his voice breaking. Blue was starting to notice the discord under the arch, tearing his eyes away from the slinky lavender dress that Key had made her cousin get in order to stare in confusion at the groom.

Steven put his hand on Archie’s shoulder. “Repay him in kind,” Steven said coldly. The oddly frozen tone in the normally happy-go-lucky man’s voice sent a chill down Key’s spine.

“You’re right,” Archie said, putting his hands on Key’s shoulders… and flinging her aside, slamming her into her father’s arms. “You can have her back! I thought we were friends, Norman! Did you know?!”

“Know what?” Norman shouted, clutching his daughter. Saylee darted to her cousin’s side as tears sprang to Key’s eyes. “What the hell is wrong with you? What are you doing?”

“Not getting married,” Archie hissed through gritted teeth. “Not to this slut!”

“Steven, what the hell is he going on about?” Norman demanded.

Steven folded his arms, looking away with a scowl. “I am to blame for this,” he said softly. “I was the one who set up my friend with a woman who would not be loyal to him…”

“What?” Norman snapped. The guests were muttering to each other, trying to guess what was happening.

“I know these accusations sound incredible, but they are true,” Marc said sorrowfully.

“What accusations?” Blue said, bewildered. “What’s going on?”

“Who is he, Key?” Archie yelled. “The man you were with last night at midnight? The man you’ve been seeing for months? Who was he?! Do you even know his name?! How many have there been?!!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Key sobbed. “I wasn’t with any man last night! I was asleep!”

“Don’t lie,” Steven said flatly. “Archie, my brother and I saw you with him last night, Key. We
won’t speak of the details… I’m sure your father doesn’t want to hear them.” There was a gasp from the assembled guests.

“Goodbye, Key,” Archie said, his voice breaking as he pushed through the crowds, Steven and Marc in tow.

“Fuck off, all of you!” Saylee screamed at the staring crowd. “Go on, GO! Clear the area until we sort this out!”

“What… what were they talking about?” Key sobbed, her head on her cousin’s shoulder. “I don’t understand…”

“Oh, gods,” Norman said, sitting down with his head in his hands as the guests were chased out of the gardens by Blue. “Key… what have you done?”

“Dad… you… you think I…” Key mumbled weakly, before suddenly slumping in Saylee’s arms. Saylee nearly collapsed trying to hold her up.

“Key? KEY!” she yelled, patting her cousin’s cheeks as Blue helped her lay Key down on the grass. “KEY!!”

Archie and Steven looked back at the sound of Saylee’s shouted, but Marc put his hands on their shoulders and shook his head. “Don’t look back,” he said softly. “Don’t be fooled. She never thought she’d be caught out. It must be a shock.”

Norman just pressed his face into his hands, not looking up as his niece desperately tried to revive his daughter.

“Is she okay?” Blue said, trying to check her pulse. Morty knelt near Key’s head, putting his hand on her forehead, closing his eyes as he felt for her life force.

“I—I don’t know—her pulse is weak—she’s barely breathing…” Saylee gasped. “Key… Uncle, what do we do?! Is she dying?!”

“So what if she is?” Norman mumbled brokenly.

“Not too harsh,” Blue said bitterly. “That’s your daughter, dude.”

“Is she?!” Norman yelled. “I KNOW my daughter! I thought I knew my daughter! I don’t know the kind of woman who would betray her fiancé, who—WHO ARE YOU?!”

Key, barely drifting to consciousness, let out a sob, covering her face with her hands.

“Will you calm the fuck down?!” Blue demanded. “I’m seeing a picture of you under the dictionary definition of ‘not helpful’ right now! Saylee,” he said, turning to her, “you and Key share a room, right?”

“Not… not last night,” Saylee confessed. “It’s bad luck if the bride doesn’t sleep alone… but we’ve been sharing a room for years! I don’t know what they saw last night, but there’s no way it was her!”

“Steven, Marc and Archie all saw you!” Norman roared. “Why would all of them lie? Archie loved you! It hurt him to push you away! Why would he lie?!” Key wailed as he raised his fists. Blue grabbed him and dragged him away from his daughter.

“Everybody calm down,” Morty said, stepping forwards with his hands out. “I don’t believe that
Miss Key is lying. I don’t think Steven and Archie were lying either, but I think there’s a good chance they’ve been tricked or deceived somehow.”

“Ten to one Marc’s behind this somehow,” Blue growled. “I don’t trust that slippery bastard and I don’t get why Steven’s all pally with him all of a sudden.”

“He’s right,” Saylee snapped, letting Key go and stepping towards Norman. “You’re telling me you trust Marc more than your own daughter?” When Norman hesitated, she slapped him. “You asshole!”

“I… I don’t want to believe it,” Norman said softly. “If it’s true…” he clenched his fist. “But if it’s a lie, if they’ve framed Key, they will fucking pay.”

“That’s more like it,” Morty said with a smile. His eyes glazed over for a moment, and then he nodded. “The future that contains the truth… follows Key’s suicide.”

“What?!” Saylee shrieked furiously.

“It doesn’t have to be real,” Morty said quickly. “Tell everyone that Key committed suicide. Hold a closed-casket funeral.”

“Why? What good will that do?” Norman demanded.

“People think kindly of the dead,” Morty said softly, kneeling next to Key and putting his arm around her shoulders. “Archie’s true feelings will come out upon hearing that you’re dead. He’ll think of nothing but the best of you. And guilt will creep on those who will believe that they’ve caused her suicide…”

“Let’s do it,” Blue said. “Steven and Archie are two of my best friends, but I’m not siding with them on this. I think they’re mistaken and they’re being assholes about it. I may not know Key very well, but Saylee does and if she doesn’t believe it, I won’t either.”

“Really?” Saylee said in surprise.

“I… okay. Let’s do it. I don’t even know anymore,” Norman sighed in defeat.

“Are you willing to hide and pretend suicide?” Morty asked Key, holding out his hand. Key wiped her eyes and nodded, letting him help her to his feet.

“Somebody’s ruined my wedding day, and I want their balls on a stick,” she growled. “And look at these grass stains on my dress! Somebody’s gonna burn.”

“Mr Briney’s out on a long voyage and won’t be back for a couple of months,” Saylee said. “His house at the beach is deserted, and I’ve got a key. Remember when I saved his Peeko? He gave me a key and said that if I ever wanted to stay by the beach for a while when he wasn’t around, I was welcome to. The place might be a bit dusty, but it’s very isolated. Nobody’ll see you there.”

“Perfect,” Key sniffed, forcing up a smile. Saylee hurt to look at it. “I’ll go hide in the woods while you get it, okay? I’ll… I’ll run sobbing away from the house, so if people do see me they’ll believe that I could have killed myself.”

“Your father and I will come running after, and then escort you to Mr Briney’s,” Morty said, patting Norman’s shoulder. “And then we’ll return and tell everyone that your daughter has killed herself…” his eyes glazed over again, and then he smiled. “And then I see, not too far from now… another wedding day, where Archie kneels at your feet, Lady Key.”
“Bowing down sounds like a good start of an apology,” Key snapped, hitching up her skirts. “I’ll see you at Mr Briney’s, Lee. And bring me a change of clothes, too!” Tears falling from her eyes again, she turned and fled, sobbing.

“Come on,” Morty said, giving Norman a push as the pair of them gave chase.

“C’mon… let’s go find that key and some clothes for your cousin, okay?” Blue said, offering Saylee his arm. “I’ll never understand how people walk in those spikes.”

“Thanks,” Saylee said, taking his arm for balance as they headed into the house, avoided the dining room full of gossiping guests and headed up the stairs to Key and Saylee’s room.

“I really don’t think Key’s done anything wrong,” Blue ventured as they opened the bedroom door. “I swear I’m not just saying it.”

“Thanks, but someone needs to prove it,” Saylee sighed. “Anyone who could would be my best friend for life. I’d owe them anything.”

“If I could prove it, I would,” Blue said, hesitantly reaching up to wipe tears from her cheeks. “The only thing I want from you is for you to stop crying. Contrary to popular belief, I don’t like seeing you cry. I love you, you know. Weird or what?”

“It’s not—” Saylee said, taken by surprise. “It is, but it’s not… not that it’s weird, I just never thought… not that I’m not… I need to find the key for Key,” she babbled, turning towards her desk. She turned so quickly that she stumbled on her tall heels, and Blue caught her in his arms. She completely forgot what she was looking for.

“You love me too, don’t you?” he said softly. “Just say it. I already told you I love you.”

“Stop saying that,” Saylee muttered dizzily.

“What? That I love you? I’ve gone and said it already, I’ll say it all I like and anyone who disagrees can shove it,” Blue said, holding her tighter. “I love you. Do you love me?”

“You jerk,” Saylee said softly. “You beat me to it. Of course I love you. Weird or what?”

“Not weird at all,” Blue said, leaning down to kiss her. They clutched each other for a long moment, kissing for the first time in years, and when they finally broke for breath Blue whispered to her, “I love you, and I’ll do whatever it takes to prove it. Just tell me what. Anything.”

“Anything?” Saylee asked, leaning against him, a thought piercing through the fog in her brain. “Kill Archie.”

Blue stiffened, then held her at arms’ length, searching her face in horror. “Kill Archie?” he said.

“What are you on? No!” Saylee shoved him away. “Then GO!” she yelled, shoving him towards the door. “Get OUT! Don’t you DARE say you love me and then take HIS side!”

“Just because I’m not going to KILL him doesn’t mean I’m taking his SIDE!” Blue argued. He stepped back as Saylee sat down on her bed, wrenching her six-inch heels off of her feet. “I know he’s being an asshole, but do you really think he deserves to die?!”

“YES!” Saylee roared. “Even if he’s mistaken, if he’s been deceived, if he thinks Key cheated on him—coming out with it like THAT?! Attacking her at the altar of THEIR FUCKING
“Saylee, he’s a soldier for Hoenn and you’re not in the army,” Blue snapped. “If you challenge him to a battle, you’ll be charged as an enemy of Hoenn!”

“I don’t want a Pokémon battle with him,” Saylee snarled, clutching one of her shoes. “I just want to RIP HIS HEART OUT WITH MY BARE HANDS AND EAT IT!” She slammed the shoe into her desk so hard that the point of the heel stuck in the wood, splitting it along the length of the desk.

“Saylee—” Blue began, but she wasn’t listening.

“Shagging a man in the garden?” Saylee yelled furiously, tears pouring down her cheeks. “Who in their right mind would believe that?! If I were a soldier, if I could fight him—dammit, I will anyway, consequences be damned!”

“SAYLEE!” Blue shouted, grabbing her shoulders. “Stop. Please… stop. I can’t stand seeing you like this. I love you.”

“Stop saying it and start proving it,” Saylee said coldly.

“Then…” Blue took a deep breath. “I will. Archie and I are equal ranks. I can challenge him and kill him without punishment, nothing like what they’d do to you. I’ll do it. For you and Key, I’ll do it. I swear.”

“Now I believe you,” Saylee whispered, pulling him towards her and kissing him again.

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you hither, lady. A word about your ear.” He leaned close to Courtney, and said sternly, “I say to you, it is thought you are false knaves.”

“We aren’t,” Courtney said flatly. “Whatever that even means.”

“Well, stand aside!” Johnson declared, standing back and waving his arms. “’Fore the gods, they are both in a tale. Have you writ down that they are none?”

“What kind of interrogation is this?” Jenny demanded. “Shouldn’t you ask us what we heard first?”

“Yea, marry, that’s the eftest way,” Johnson conceded. “Let the watch come forth. Masters, I charge you, in the Champion’s name, accuse these men.”

“I’m not a man!” Courtney snapped.

“They’ve taken part in some sort of plot by Steven’s brother Marc,” Jenny began.

“Write down Lord Marc a villain!” Johnson cut in. “Why, this is flat perjury, to call a Champion’s brother villain.”

“Hey—” Kalle argued.

“Pray thee, fellow, peace,” Johnson interrupted. “I do not like they look, I promise thee.”

“Can I continue?” Jenny said irritably. “He had Marc’s platinum. Marc had paid him for taking part in the plot. Something to do with Lady Key and tricking her fiancé.”

“Flat burglary as ever was committed,” Johnson declared.

“Yes, by mass, that it is,” Looker agreed.

“…and it worked,” Jenny said in horror as a news article popped up on her tablet. “Two hours ago, in front of over a hundred guests, Archibald Irving accused Keyanu Weaves of adultery, attacked her and then left the ceremony.”

“The ill will I felt,” Rose said sadly. “And it has now been turned to grief…”

“O villain!” Johnson declared, turning on Kalle and Courtney. “Thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this!”

“It gets worse,” Jenny gasped, clapping her hand over her mouth. “Just half an hour ago, Miss Weaves’ father found her body. She hung herself in Petalburg Woods. Her funeral is tomorrow night.” Kalle and Courtney both paled. “You two could well be charged with murder for this! I’ll prepare this recording to take to Norman in the morning!” She ran off with her tablet.

“Come, let them be opinioned,” Johnson said to Looker and Rose.

“Let them be in the hands—” Looker began, unlatching Courtney from the chair.

“Get the hell off me!” Courtney yelled, struggling against him. “Let me go, you wanker!”

“God’s my life, where’s Jenny?” Johnson shouted, helping Looker restrain Courtney into handcuffs. “Let her write down the Champion’s officer wanker. Come, bind them. Thou naughty varlet!”

“Get off me!” Courtney yelled again as Looker dragged her away. “You assholes!”
“Dost thou not suspect my place?” Johnson said angrily. “Dost thou not suspect my years? O that she were here to write me down an asshole. But, masters, remember that I am an asshole,” he confided in Rose, “though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an asshole.” He rounded on Courtney. “No, thou villain, thou art full of piety, as shall be proved upon thee by good witness. I am a wise fellow, and, which is more, an officer, and which is more, a householder, and, which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any is in Messina, and one that knows the law, go to!” Looker nodded in agreement. “And a rich fellow enough, go to,” Johnson continued, “and a fellow that hath had losses, and one that hath two gowns and every thing handsome about him. Bring them away.” Kalle didn’t resist being cuffed, and Rose and Looker were able to drag both prisoners from the room with little further resistance. “O that I had been writ down an ass!” Johnson lamented, before shaking his head and following.

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“The truth will come out,” Norman snarled as they went.

“And when it does, you’ll pay, every one of you,” Wallace added bitterly. Archie looked back at them, looking lost, but Steven dragged him away.

“I guess we’ll have to find somewhere else to stay tonight,” Steven sighed, squeezing Archie’s shoulders and dropping his arm. “Ah, there’s Blue! BLUE!” he called, waving to his friend. “Man, you just missed it. Norman and Wallace went mental at us. I think they were about half an inch from murdering us.”

“Did they,” Blue said flatly. His expression was blank. “I’ve been looking for you two.”

“Good!” Archie said, bringing up a smile. “I think we all need a drink. I don’t care if it’s eight in the morning. The three of us, just like old times, what do you think?”

“I don’t think so,” Blue said flatly.

“Are you okay, Blue?” Steven asked, peering at his friend. “You look… down. Are you ill?”

“No shit,” Blue growled, anger beginning to flash in his eyes. “The pair of you, trying to act like nothing’s happened… you make me SICK!” He punched Archie full in the face, sending him reeling back towards the house, and then grabbed him by the neck, slamming him against the wall. Archie grabbed his friend’s arms, but even though Blue was slightly shorter and significantly less muscular than Archie, the man was possessed with a strange strength which kept his hands at Archie’s throat, cutting off his breath.

“Blue!” Steven yelled, trying to pull his friend off of Archie. Blue ignored him.

“You ASSHOLE!” Blue shouted. “Both of you! Do you even realize that Key is DEAD? Because of YOU?! She did nothing to deserve it! Unlike you,” he snarled, leaning close to Archie’s face. “You. Me. Fight. Fists, knives, Pokémon, I don’t care. Whatever you pick, I’m not letting you leave the fight alive while I still breathe. You get back to me by tomorrow with when you’re ready to go, unless you’re the fucking coward you’ve acted like so far.”

“Blue, let him go!” Steven ordered. Blue flung Archie to the ground.

“That’s the last order I’m taking from you, Steven,” Blue growled. “You’re a good Champion. You’re good at commanding an army and a country. Too bad you’re a shit judge of character. You’ve murdered a sweet girl, and of the three of you, only your brother isn’t pretending like he’s done nothing. He was seen fleeing the house less than an hour after Key’s death was announced last night, didn’t you hear? Why do you think that would be, hm?” He spat at Archie. “You have until tomorrow to pick where, when and weapons, Archie. After that… your ass is grass.” He shoved his hands in his pockets and stalked away into the gym.

“…I think getting him and Saylee to hook up has just come back to bite me in the ass,” Archie muttered, massaging his neck. “Fuck. She looked like she wanted to murder me, but I figured because I was in the army and she isn’t…”

“Frankly, I think it’s more likely Blue talked her out of trying to kill you by offering to do it himself than her talking him into doing it,” Steven sighed, helping his friend to his feet. “What the hell did he mean, Marc fled…?”

“Well, you could try asking his buddies,” Archie said, pointing at the front path up to the gym. “Isn’t that them there, in handcuffs?”
Two police officers were dragging Kalle and Courtney towards the gym. “Come you, sir,” one of them said to the pale-looking Kalle. “If justice cannot tame you, she shall ne’er weigh more reasons in her balance. Nay, an you be a cursing hypocrite once, you must be looked to.”

“Officers!” Steven called, running up to them. “Why have you arrested Kalle and Courtney? What did they do?”

“Marry, sir, they have committed false report,” the same officer said, saluting. “Moreover, they have spoken untruths. Secondarily, they are slanders. Sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady. Thirdly, they have verified unjust things. To conclude, they are lying knaves.”

“. . . clearly, I am just not intelligent to understand you,” Steven said, smiling at the officer. “Damn, you two look like you’re in rough shape. What is it, drunk and disorderly? Lewd and lascivious?” He grinned at them, but neither Kalle nor Courtney seemed able to smile.

“I’m sorry,” Kalle mumbled. “I really didn’t think it would go this far. I’m sorry…”

“Sorry for what?” Archie asked. Courtney looked away.

Kalle looked up, then stared at his feet, unable to meet either of their eyes. “It was me,” he said in a broken voice. “That night in the garden…it was me, with my girlfriend. She’s a blonde too, I got her to let me call her Key, she thought...she had no idea, but the boss knew what it would look like. We planned to break up your wedding, to make you think Key cheated on you… I didn’t think anyone would die!”

Archie dropped to his knees, all strength draining from him in an instant. “No…” he croaked. “You were… that wasn’t…”

“The boss… Marc,” Steven said in horror. “Marc… planned this…?”

“Paid me well for it, too,” Kalle admitted. “Not well enough, not for this…”

“Oh gods,” Archie croaked, wrapping his arms around himself. “Key… Key…!”

“Oh, Marc,” Steven groaned, pressing his hands over his face. “How could I have been so stupid?”

“Come, bring away the plaintiffs,” the same officer spoke again. “By this time, our Jenny hath reformed Leader Norman of the matter. And, masters,” he added, “do not forget to specify, when time and place shall serve, that I am an asshole.”

“Here, here comes master Leader Norman,” the other said as the front door of the gym slammed open, “and Jenny too.”

“WHERE IS HE?!” Norman roared, tears streaming down his cheeks. “Where is the BASTARD responsible for my daughter’s death?!”

“Me,” Kalle croaked, dropping to his knees and bowing his head. “I’m sorry, It’s all my fault…”

“SORRY?!” Norman shouted, kicking Kalle on the shoulder, sending him sprawling on his back. Jenny hurried over to stand protectively in front of the prisoners. “What good is that to my daughter?! Oh, but I forget, you’re not the only one responsible,” he snarled, rounding on Steven and Archie. “Marc’s bolted, but at least these two noble and honourable gentlemen are still here! Fine warriors, both of you, with another kill to add to your body counts! I’m sure driving an innocent girl to her death is something you’ll look back on in pride and boast of among your mighty deeds!” Steven and Archie both winced away from the withering scorn in the Leader’s broken voice.
“I’m sorry,” Archie whispered. “I… how can I make this right? No, I can’t, I know I can’t.” He reached out to Norman. “Tell me what to do,” he begged. “I’ll do anything you want, anything at all that will ease your pain. Blue’s offered to gut me in a fight, do you want to watch?”

“What I want is for my daughter to live,” Norman spat, “but if I can’t have that… at her funeral, tonight, I want you to tell, in front of the cameras for all of Hoenn to see, exactly what you did and how you were wrong. I want you to confess and apologize to the world. Then…” He glanced at his brother, then looked back at Archie, an odd gleam in his eye. “Saylee isn’t my only niece, you know,” he said. “Wallace’s daughter Kelsey looks almost exactly like her.”

“My…? Oh, yes, my Kelsey,” Wallace said with a nod.

“I didn’t know you were a father,” Steven said in surprise.

“Barely,” Wallace said glibly. “She lives with her mother. I don’t think either of them believe I count as a father, neither do I, but yes, of course I have a daughter, and my goodness, she and Key could be twins.”

“She’s looking to get married, isn’t she?” Norman asked. Wallace nodded. “I understand she’s not too picky about who.”

“She has a thing for soldiers,” Wallace prompted.

“Then tell her that her dream is coming true and she’s marrying one,” Norman declared. “Marry her, Archie. Take care of her like you should have taken care of my daughter. Love and fear and worship her, as any man should his wife.”

“Of course,” Archie said. “Whatever you say.”

“Good,” Norman said with a nod. “As for you…” he growled, turning on Kalle and Courtney. “Who’s the woman who helped you frame my daughter?”

“She didn’t know!” Kalle said quickly. “I swear! She had no idea that I was using her to trick you all, and frankly, she’s probably going to kill me herself when she figures it out.”

“Moreover, sir,” the senior police officer interjected, “which indeed is not under white and black, this plaintiff here, the offender, did call me an ass. I beseech you, let it be remembered in his punishment. And also, the watch heard them talk of one Deformed. They say he wears a key in his ear and a lock hanging by it, and borrows money in the names of the gods, the which he hath used so long and never paid that now men grow hard-hearted and will lend nothing for the gods’ sakes. Pray you, examine him upon that point.”

Norman zoned him out. “You’ve done well in arresting these two,” he commended them.

“Your worship speaks like a most thankful and reverend youth,” the officer said with a bow, “and I praise the gods for you.”

“Leave these two with me,” Norman said grimly, “and I’ll see to them.” Kalle and Courtney both flinched.

“I leave an arrant knave with your worship,” the officer said, ripping off a salute, “which I beseech your worship to correct yourself, for the example of others. Gods keep your worship! I wish your worship well. The gods restore you to health! I humbly give you leave to depart, and if a merry meeting may be wished, the gods prohibit it! Come, neighbours.” The other two officers also saluted as the three of them hurried away.
“Come on then, you two,” Wallace said, gripping both Kalle and Courtney by the shoulder. “Norman, why don’t you go fetch our niece? I think Saylee would love to meet the ones ultimately responsible for your daughter’s death… and so would her Charizard…” Kalle and Courtney both went extremely pale.

“I will,” Norman said, turning away from Archie and Steven.

“We’ll see you at the funeral,” Archie croaked. Norman nodded and walked away, heading for the coast.

A smile cracked across his face as tears began to trail down his cheeks. “She’s innocent,” he whispered to himself. “I should’ve known… I owe her such an apology. She’s innocent!”

“C’mon, Cynthia, help me out,” Blue said. “I’m trying to get the hang of being romantic and shit.”

“How do you know Saylee will even like a romantic poem?” Cynthia asked, hands on her hips.

“I don’t know she doesn’t, do I?” Blue grumbled. “Hell, maybe that’s where I went wrong before, no romantic poems and shit. I mean, I can only murder Archie for her once, gotta figure out something else to keep the flame alive after that.”

“Very sweet, but you’re asking the wrong woman,” Cynthia pointed out. “My romantic engagements tend to involve less romantic poetry and more barking on my command. Tell you what, I’ll go get Saylee and you can just ask her if she wants romantic crap or not. Not that I’ve heard anything from Key or anything, but I’m pretty sure that not being upfront with each other was where you guys went wrong before.”

“Yeah, maybe… hey, wait!” Blue yelled as Cynthia trotted off. “Godammit…” he looked back down on the piece of paper that he was trying to write a poem on. “Been in the army for too long, I can’t think of a different rhyme for ‘luck’…”

He stared at the paper so hard that he didn’t notice Saylee coming up behind him until she tugged on his hair.

“You could probably put somebody’s eye out with one of these,” Saylee said, tweaking his hair. Blue reflexively scrunched up the piece of paper. “What’s that?”

“Report,” he said. “Wait. I asked you to come see me and you actually showed up?”

“Sure,” Saylee said, leaning on his shoulder. “Problem?”

“None at all,” Blue assured her. Thinking was a little difficult when she was leaning so close to his back that he could feel where the neckline of her shirt was. “None whatsoever.”

“Not that I don’t have ulterior motives,” Saylee continued. “So I notice that Archie is still breathing.”

“I can’t just walk up to him and stab him in the face,” Blue objected. “For all my sins, I’m not a pure bastard like Marc. I challenged him.” Saylee smiled and kissed him warmly. “So,” he said in a low voice when she leaned back again, “which of those sins did you fall in love with first?”

“You are a sin in and of yourself,” Saylee laughed, “so it was kinda all in one. And which of my virtues did you fall in love with me for?”
“I’m pretty sure the falling part was less to do with virtues and more to do with a hook around my ankle,” Blue shot back.

“Poor you,” Saylee said, sitting next to him and rubbing his leg. “Want me to kiss it better?”

Blue wrapped his arm around her shoulder. “The problem with you and me is that neither of us speak plain,” he said thoughtfully. “Sifting through all the sarcasm, irony and pure, shining wit takes energy.”

“Call it a test,” Saylee said, leaning against him. “I’d be bored with someone who couldn’t make it through the maze.”

“Same,” Blue sighed. “Hell, even I couldn’t figure you out for the longest time… whoever designed the sexes to have to deal with each other did a piss poor job of it. Is your cousin doing any better?”

“She’s very depressed,” Saylee sighed, her smile dimming with a speed that belied how forced it had been in the first place. “Which does wonders for my mood too.”

“You know I’ll do anything to help,” Blue murmured, squeezing her shoulders. “If killing Archie is what does it, I’ll do it. If there’s anything else, anything at all…”

Dawn ran past the pair of them, grinning so widely the top of her head was at risk of falling off. She turned back to them so fast that she actually slipped on the grass and fell over.

“Are you okay?” Saylee asked as she and Blue both reached out to help her up. Dawn grabbed both of their hands and hopped to her feet, squeezing their hands and bouncing on the spot.

“She was framed! Key was framed!” she shrieked excitedly. “The reason Marc booked it was because he paid his friend Kalle to pick up a blonde and use her to frame Key! It wasn’t Key they saw that night! Kalle confessed to everything! Steven and Archie were tricked!”

“Who knows?” Saylee gasped, jumping to her feet.

“Your uncles, the police, and Kalle, obviously,” Dawn said. “We have to tell Archie and Steven—!”

“No we don’t,” Saylee immediately interrupted. “Let Archie suffer a little while longer, until Uncle Norman’s plan runs its course. You don’t have to kill him if you don’t want to,” she added to Blue, “but you can’t deny he deserves to suffer a while longer. Even if he was tricked instead of earnestly lying, he was still cruel and brutal towards her and he sure as shit doesn’t deserve her.”

“We should tell her, anyway,” Blue pointed out. “Let her decide for herself.”

“…You’re right,” Saylee admitted. “C’mon. Let’s head down to Mr Briney’s and tell her.”

The funeral that night was a solemn affair. Norman glared angrily at Archie from the moment that he stepped into the family tomb where Key’s coffin lay. Saylee sat with her face buried in Blue’s shoulder, her own shaking, while Blue simply watched Steven and Archie with a cold expression as they approached the coffin.

Archie cleared his throat as he turned to face the assembly, eyes swimming. He pulled a crumpled piece of paper out of his pocket.

“Done to death by slanderous tongues was the Key that here lies,” he recited.
“Death, in guerdon of her wrongs, gives her fame that never dies…

“So the life that died with shame

“Lives in death with glorious fame

“Pardon, Goddess of the Night,

“Those that slew thy virgin knight,

“With songs of woe,

“Round about her tomb they go.

“Midnight, assist our moan,

“Help us to sigh and groan…

“Graves, yawn and yield your dead,

“Till death be uttered…

“Now, unto these bones goodnight

“Yearly will I do this rite.”

Tears trickled down his cheeks as his voice thickened. “I will pray for her forgiveness every year,” he said. “I will never forget the wrong that I did her. I swear.”

Saylee shot to her feet, turning and running from the tomb. Blue followed after her without looking back.

“We’ll see you in the garden in an hour,” Norman said flatly to Archie. “Time for you to get married.”

“I know,” Archie said, reaching into his pocket and extracting the rings in their box and handing them to Steven. “I’m sorry.”

Norman just nodded before going after his niece.

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out. She, Saylee and Dawn were all wearing simple white dresses identical to the plan, wide-skirted one that Key had elected to use for her second wedding, and all four women were going to don veils. Key wanted a veil so that Archie wouldn’t be able to recognize her right away; Saylee insisted on the identical dresses to test if he really couldn’t identify Key without seeing her face.

“I’m glad your scheme worked,” Wallace said, nudging Morty.

“Very lucky indeed,” Morty muttered. “It doesn’t normally.”

“…let’s not ask and instead be grateful that I didn’t have to gut Archie,” Blue said. “Not that I won’t if he pulls shit again. Just say the word, Key.”

“I’ll bear that in mind,” Key laughed. “Thank you, Blue.”

“Alright, girls, positions!” Saylee said, reaching out for an arm to hold. Cynthia offered hers as the four of them went to wait in the dining room for Norman to all them out to the wedding.

“Ready to play father of the bride?” Norman asked Wallace.

“Ready as I’ll never be,” Wallace said, straightening his suit. “Really, it was very hard not to laugh during Archie’s little speech. At least he’s a better poet than you, Blue.”

“Very funny,” Blue grumbled as the other men laughed. “…hey. You, priest.”

“My name is Morty,” Morty reminded him.

“Yadda yadda,” Blue said, starting to turn red. “Listen, whatever happens with Archie and Key… by the end of the day, I plan to be married. What?” he snapped as Norman and Wallace grinned. “Either of you got a problem? I’m not asking your permission. I only need hers, and I’m pretty sure I’ll get it.”

“You’ll get no opposition from us,” Norman laughed, high-fiving his brother. “I look forward to happiness for both of you.”

“I look forward to the look on Saylee’s face!” Wallace giggled. “Any objections from you, Morty?”

“Love is a wondrous power that I fully endorse and encourage,” Morty said with a smile. “I’ll wait on your cue, Blue. But first…”

“Yeah,” Blue said, the mood growing grim. “Archie and Steven should be here any minute.”

Archie walked up the garden path with his heart in his throat. Norman, Wallace, Blue and the priest were all standing on the porch with stern expressions. Steven squeezed his shoulder, reassuring him and reminding him that he was not alone in his mistake and his failure.

“Archie, are you still willing to commit to my brother’s daughter?” Norman asked.

“No matter what,” Archie said firmly.

Norman nodded, sliding the door to the dining room open. Four women, identically dressed in white and wearing such thick veils that their faces were invisible, stepped out onto the porch. They stood still, their hands clasped in front of them.

Archie looked from one to the other, but to his eyes all four were identical. “Which… which one is
the bride?” he asked.

Wallace held out his arm and one of the women took it, stepping forwards. “This is my daughter Kelsey,” Wallace said, glaring sternly at Archie. Archie stepped up to the porch steps, climbing up to face Wallace and his daughter.

“Can I… see your face?” he asked the woman, holding out his hand. She unclasped her hands, but shied away from holding his.

“Not until you say your vows,” Wallace ordered.

“Very well,” Archie said, turning to the priest.

“Do you, Archibald Irving, take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?” the priest asked.

“I do,” Archie said. The priest turned to the woman holding Wallace’s arm.

“Do you, Kelsey Weaves, take Archibald Irving to be your lawfully wedded husband?” he asked.

“I would have,” the woman responded, “back when my name was Key…”

Archie tripped backwards and fell down the steps when the woman flipped up her veil.

“That… that is Key!” Steven gasped. “That isn’t just a girl that looks like Key, that is Key! But… but she’s…”

“Surprise, bitches,” Key said. “I bet you thought you’d seen the last of me. I’m alive, and I know what happened.”

“Key, I’m so sorry,” Archie said, crawling up onto his knees. “I’m so, so sorry… I never meant to… I’d never…”

“Okay, I’m going to stop you right there,” Key said, holding out her hand. “Never what? Never think it? You did, didn’t you? You believed Marc. You meant what you said to me at our wedding. And yes, wedding singular, because I won’t marry you today.” She dropped her hand. “I would never have believed it if somebody said you were cheating on me, Archie, no matter what proof they offered. I love you, Archie, but I won’t marry you if you don’t love me.”

“Key, I do love you!” Archie protested.

“How can you say that when you don’t trust me?” Key said, sitting down on the steps and staring down at him with her chin in her hands. “Maybe we will have our wedding one day, Archie. But you’ll have to earn it.”

“Trust me, Archie,” Key asked softly, “and learn what it means to be in love.”

There was a long silence after this proclamation. Archie bowed his head. Then Blue cleared his throat.

“Saylee,” he said, holding his hand out to one of the women. She took it, pulling off her veil with her other hand as she stared quizzically at him. “I… look, it seems a shame to waste a wedding, so… do you love me?”

All eyes turned to Saylee, who promptly blushed… and panicked.
“What? No!” she gasped reflexively. “I mean… no more than reason…”

Blue scowled. “Funny, that,” he snapped, “seeing as Steven, Norman and Archie seemed convinced that you were madly in love.” All three men suddenly became very interested in the clouds.

“Yeah, but don’t you love me?” Saylee demanded.

“No! No more than reason!” Blue shot back.

“Then what prank did you play on Key, Dawn and Cynthia to convince them that you were?” Saylee shouted.

“They swore you were sick with love!” Blue yelled.

“They swore you were practically dead with love!” Saylee screamed back.

“Well, since it seems that witness accounts are unreliable,” Cynthia said loudly, pulling up her veil and interrupting their fight, “allow me to present hard evidence. Exhibit A, a crappy attempt at a romantic poem by Blue…” she flung the paper into the air, where both Saylee and Blue immediately began to snatch at it. “…and exhibit B, similarly crappy attempt at writing a love letter by Saylee.” This paper she dropped to the floor, where Blue dove for it while Saylee snatched his poem out of the air and promptly fell over as she overbalanced trying to reach for her letter. Both of them ended up sitting on the ground, reading the other’s missive of love and slowly developing the kind of happy, dopy smiles that were so rare on both that Dawn immediately started snapping pictures.

“…You know how I say stupid shit a lot?” Blue said, putting his arm around Saylee.

“Oh, I know,” Saylee replied, leaning against his side. “I do it too. This poem isn’t too crappy…”

“Neither’s this letter,” Blue replied. “Y’know… when I say they swore you were sick… I didn’t just say I loved you out of pity.”

“Neither did I,” Saylee replied, “but if you are dying and marrying you were save your life, I suppose I could—”

“Those better count as ‘I Do’s,” Blue said, leaning down and kissing her.

“Do you two take each other as man and wife?” Morty asked. Blue and Saylee both gave him a thumbs-up without coming up for air. “Good enough. I pronounce you man and wife!”

The small congregation began clapping. “Oh my gods, we need a wedding party for you idiots!” Key squeaked. “We didn’t lay on a real one since the wedding ruse was only supposed to go as far as finding out I’m alive…”

“I’ll pick up the tab for short-notice party expenses,” Steven offered. A police officer came running into the garden.

“Errr… I hope I’m not interrupting anything,” she said, staring at the multiple wedding dresses, Archie kneeling in the grass and Saylee and Blue making out on the porch. “I, uh, came to report that Marc’s been arrested and, well, now we’re not exactly sure what to charge him with…”

“Ah, well…” Steven said, scratching his head. “What the hell am I going to do him…?”

Blue and Saylee finally split, starting at the police officer for a moment before sprouting identical evil grins. “Can you hold him for a couple days?” Blue asked.
“Excuse me, what kind of honeymoon only lasts two days?” Saylee demanded.

“Who says the honeymoon will be over?” Blue replied. “Don’t you like activities while you’re on holiday?”

“You’re right,” Saylee said thoughtfully, still grinning. “This could be fun.”

“I’ll let you two have him,” Steven chuckled. “Call it a wedding present. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a wedding party to organize.”

“Hey, Steven, don’t look so down,” Blue said, grinning at his friend. “You know what’ll cheer you up? Getting married!”

“I don’t want to hear that from you,” Steven said sourly.

“Cheer up, Champ,” Cynthia said, grabbing him by the arm. “C’mon, let’s go get drinks!”

As Cynthia dragged Steven off, a giggling Dawn in tow, Key smiled at her cousin as she smiled lovingly at her new husband, and he reciprocated. “Key?” Archie asked nervously. “I’d… like to start all over.” He held out his hand. “My name’s Archie, and I think you’re beautiful. And everyone says that you’re kind and funny and wonderful, and…” he swallowed. “Far too good for the likes of me.”

Key shook his hand. “Nice to meet you, Archie,” Key said. “My name’s Key. You up for a dance at the party tonight?”

Chapter End Notes

(Okay, I confess I change the ending, but it never sat right with me that Hero just immediately forgave Claudio everything and took him back. That asshole better EARN that woman’s love.)
Runaway Child

Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Summary

This oneshot is set maybe eight months or so after the end of Blood and Bond. Trigger warning for discussion of a parent-child relationship that is clearly emotionally abusive and implicitly physically abusive.

Chapter Notes

Because I just started reading Emilianite’s Folded—which is really well-written and has crazy cute artwork so you should definitely read it too—and I started having so many feels about her Silver that I just had to oneshot about my own precious angry baby boy. I’m saving up a few oneshots to post over the summer break between Calamity Calls and Dimensional Destruction, but I just had to post this one because I can’t even hold all my Silver feels today.

“There’s a college?” Saylee said in fascination. “Really?”

The guard nodded. “Sure,” she said. “Can’t speak for Kanto—I’m sure you’d know more about that than me, ma’am—but all prisons in the rest of the Fairlands have one. In regular prisons, it’s so once they get out, they’ve got a better chance of getting a decent job, y’know? Prevents repeat offenders. ‘Course, almost none of the people in here are ever getting out—at least, not before they’re pension age—but the warden figures it’s a good idea to keep ‘em occupied. People who’ve got hobbies and interests to get on with cause less trouble, y’know? And, well, it means that if they do cause trouble, we’ve got something to take away from them. Some of them clock on the fact that it can be hard to punish somebody once they’re already in prison for life, y’know?”

Saylee nodded, listening in some fascination. This was her fourth visit to the Johto Maximum Security Institute, and she considered her chats with the prison guards while she sat in the waiting room to be an important learning experience. International human rights laws were coming down hard on the labour gangs that had been Kanto’s main form of punishment for the past eighteen years, so a prison that met international standards was currently under construction. Saylee figured she’d have to contact the wardens of JMSI and a couple of regular institutions soon to find out how they were run, but speaking to the people who worked with the actual prisoners day in and day out was important too.

“I have to admit, I’m not sure that three free meals a day, a bed and an education are going to work as punishments in Kanto,” she said. “People might start committing crimes just to get in.”

The guard laughed. “Well, the trade-off is having someone telling you when to wake up, when to sleep, when to eat and shower and piss, and watching you do every one of those things,” she said, “as well as only seeing the same three or four rooms for weeks and months on end, having no control over which one you’re in when and being crammed in ‘em with other people the whole time. I mean,
I work on a four-days-on, two-days-off rotation and that’s enough to make me stir-crazy!”

Saylee’s next question was cut off when the door to the visitation room slammed open and Silver came tearing across the room, not quite running but walking fast with his head down and his hands fisted.

“I, uh, think we’re done here,” the guard at the door called as Saylee chased after Silver.

“Hey, kid, hold up,” the guard that Saylee had been speaking to called. “I’m gonna have to escort you out and stamp your flight pass.”

“Silver, are you okay?” Saylee asked as Silver stopped next to the door, waiting for the guard to unlock it and let them through. He nodded, but didn’t look up or speak as the guard led them back to the entrance and scanned Saylee’s flight pass in her computer.

“Safe trip back, ma’am,” the guard said, unlocking the outer door to let them out. Saylee and Silver stepped outside onto the dock and helipad that were the only way in and out of the island prison.

“Silver, what’s wrong?” Saylee asked, crouching in front of her little brother. He was staring fiercely down at the ground and resolutely refusing to meet her eyes. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” he muttered. “Just fine. Can we go home now?”

Saylee nodded and stood up, releasing a young Charizard. “Do you remember the way back to Goldenrod, Charlotte?” she asked. Charlotte had only evolved a week prior, the first of Chaz’ “children” to reach her full evolution after months of dedicated training. She was barely large enough to carry two humans, even small ones, but was so excited about evolving that she’d begged to fly Saylee around just to feel the air under her wings.

“Yep!” Charlotte said, crouching down to allow Saylee and Silver onto the harness on her back. “Did you have a good visit with your mother, Silver?”

“Shut up,” Silver muttered, climbing onto her back. Saylee caught Charlotte’s eye and shook her head before climbing on behind Silver.

The flight back to Goldenrod, and the subsequent train ride to Saffron and flight to Viridian, were all made in silence.

“What’s up with him?” Blue asked when they got back and Silver immediately ran into his room, slamming his door behind him.

“I don’t know,” Saylee sighed, giving her boyfriend a hug in greeting. “I still don’t really know how to talk to him about his parents. He’s never in a good mood after visiting her, but something she said must’ve really struck a nerve this time.”

“Wish he’d just stop visiting her,” Blue grumbled, hugging her back. “I know she’s his mum, but it’s not like she’s ever done anything good for him.”

“I know, but I can’t just decide for him that he can’t visit her,” Saylee said, stepping back and looking up at the clock. “Trust me, I wish I could. Do you think he’ll come out and eat dinner?”

“Nah, but I bet if we leave some food out, he’ll sneak out and steal it when he gets hungry,” Blue said, heading through to the kitchen. “So Daisy had a day of trying out fancy recipes and ended up sharing out the results because she made more food than she could ever eat. You wanna try this lasagna stuff?”
The next morning, Silver still hadn’t come out of his room. The lasagna they’d left on a plate on the kitchen counter had been eaten, but the nine-year-old was nowhere to be seen.

“Silver?” Saylee called, knocking on his door. “Do you want to talk about it?”

There was no response.

“C’mon, Silver, talk to me. I’m worried about you.”

Still nothing.

“At least let me know that you’re alive in there?”

Ringing silence.

“If you don’t say anything in the next ten seconds, Silver, I’m gonna have to come in just to check on you.”

Saylee counted to twenty under her breath, and when there was still nothing, she opened the door.

Silver’s room was pretty bare; the boy still had incredibly sticky fingers, but it was mostly food he tended to steal, and he didn’t seem to like accumulating a lot of things. His pokégear and the fossil that Byron had given him were both sitting on top of his desk, a few random items of clothing were strewn about the floor and his bed with the *Fullsteel Alchemist* bedcovers was an unmade mess, and Silver himself was nowhere to be seen.

“Silver?” Saylee called, checking under his bed and then stepping back out into the hall. “SILVER? Where are you?”

She checked the bathroom, living room, kitchen and even her and Blue’s room, but there was no sign of Silver, so she went out into the hall that separated the living area from the training room where most of the Pokémon stayed, her and Blue’s offices and the Viridian Gym battlefield. She could hear a battle going on inside, and the screen next to the doors had the details of a challenger on it; Kanto’s gym system was still fledgling, based on those in Hoenn and Sinnoh, but the prize money was enough to keep all the Leaders busy during battling hours. *Silver won’t be in there… he never watches Blue’s battles,* she thought, entering the training room instead. “Has anyone seen Silver?” she called, looking around for any sign of the little redhead.

“No, why?” Tyra asked, leaning out of the swimming pool.

“I can’t find him anywhere,” Saylee said, looking around. *Tyra, Siren, Alec, Mag, Zeb… all of his Pokémon are here, so where is he?*

Tyra looked around and abruptly spat an icicle across the room. Saylee heard a yelp and turned to see that the target was Perun. “You better not have been bullying him again, asshole,” Tyra yelled. “I warned you and your pink buddy what I was gonna do if I caught you at it again!”

“Bring it on,” the Pikachu snapped irritably, starting to spark, “and see how well it ends for you!”

Saylee stepped in front of Perun. “Do not go fighting each other without supervision,” she admonished him, “and you’d really better not be bullying Silver. But he was acting odd after he visited his mother in prison yesterday,” she added, looking back around at Tyra. “None of you have seen him?”
“Bet she said some shit to him,” Siren commented, sharpening her claws. “You sure I can’t slice her up even a little?”

“Tempting, but no,” Saylee said, looking around. “Zeb, Sheska, Yvonne, Sumiko, I need you four to go fly a search pattern. Come back immediately and let me know if you see Silver—or Suicune, Entei and Raikou, they’ll probably be around wherever he is. Hopefully he won’t have gone far—he left all of his Pokémon and his pokégear behind, after all…” The Crobat, Skarmory, Yanma and Fearow all nodded and flew out of the hatch in the roof. Of course, he doesn’t need his Pokémon with him to protect him, not with the Beasts, Saylee remembered, biting his lip, and all three of them can run very fast...

Her fears were, thankfully, unfounded; it took less than twenty minutes for Sumiko to return with news. “He’s headed up the path west,” she reported. “I didn’t see him, but I saw both Entei and Raikou heading up that way, and they weren’t moving very fast, so I figure they were keeping near him.”

“Thank you,” Saylee said, stroking the Fearow’s beak affectionately. “Tyra, Siren, do you two want to come with me to fetch him?”

“Sure,” Tyra said, hauling herself out of the water. Siren nodded. Saylee picked both of their pokéballs out of the rack on the wall and returned the two Pokémon before running back through to the home part of the building to grab her coat and shoes.

{}“Silver!”

Silver froze at the shout, looking warily over his shoulder. He would never, ever, ever admit the immense surge of relief that washed over him when he saw Saylee running up the path.

“Thank goodness,” she said, stopping to catch her breath in front of him. “I was so worried when I couldn’t find you anywhere… where are you going?”

“Nowhere,” Silver muttered, suddenly feeling stupid. He looked down, too ashamed to meet her eyes. “…Sorry I worried you.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Saylee said, crouching in front of him. “I was worried anyway. You’ve been acting down ever since we visited your mother yesterday. Are you okay?”

Silver opened his mouth to automatically say, “fine”, but stopped. She’s gonna be pissed off at me for freaking her out over nothing… he thought and chanced a glance up. She doesn’t look pissed off, he grudgingly allowed. He shook his head.

“Silver, what did she say to you?” Saylee asked. “You don’t have to tell me if you don’t want to, but I’d just like to know if I can help you.”

“I…” Silver looked back down at his feet, unable to look at her while he confessed. “I just wanted to know if you’d come looking for me,” he blurted out.

“Of course I would,” Saylee said in surprise. “I mean, I just did. I was scared that something had happened to you, or that somebody had said something to make you run away… have Blue or I done something? Or is it…” she growled in frustration and Silver stepped back nervously, but when he looked up, she wasn’t scowling at him, but looking over her shoulder. “Tyra said Eric and Perun were bullying you,” she said, glaring over her shoulder in the direction of Viridian Gym. “I know they’re still getting over losing…” she trailed off, anger turning to sadness as she looked back down.
“It hurts, I know that… but they have no right to treat you like that just for not being… not being Red. You haven’t done anything wrong.”

That did it. Silver lunged forward and hugged her, trying not to cry and failing.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Saylee said, hugging him back and stroking his hair. “Will you tell me what’s wrong now?”

“She was always ignoring me,” Silver cried. “She was always working on Team Rocket… I wanted to get Dad back too, but she ignored me all the time… so I ran away, and I asked her yesterday, I asked her if she came looking and she….” he shook his head. It hurt just to remember.

“Of course not, you stupid child! Don’t you know how few people we had left and how much work we had to do? I didn’t have anybody to spare to go find you, you selfish child!”

“She didn’t even try, she…” he caught himself, trying to pull out of the hug. “I’m sorry I ran off, it was stupid and selfish and—”

“It’s not stupid,” Saylee promised, not letting him out of the hug. Silver collapsed back into it with very little resistance. “It’s okay. I understand. You were just scared. But I’m not your mother, okay?”

“I know,” Silver sniffed. “You’re my sister. And, uh, for what it’s worth…” he leaned back to wipe his eyes and Saylee let go of him, sensing that he wasn’t about to bolt. “I’m probably a really crappy brother compared to Red, but you’re, uh, not a really crappy sister.”

Saylee smiled at him. “You’re the best little brother I’ve ever had,” she quipped. “Have you had breakfast? I checked on you before I went to get anything to eat myself and I’m starving!”

Silver shook his head, letting her take his hand and lead him back down to Viridian. “I, uh… I don’t wanna visit Mum anymore,” he said hoarsely, swallowing down the end of his crying jag and already hating himself for having one. Doesn’t make me weak, he told himself stubbornly. Saylee’s cried a bunch since she found out Red was dead, and she’s not weak. Crying doesn’t mean weakness. “All she cares about is whether or not I’ve heard anything about Dad. And she says all sorts of shit about you and gives me shit for not killing you in your sleep yet.”

Saylee shook her head with an angry scowl. “That… woman,” she growled, quashing Silver’s brief, involuntary flinch of angryatme. “That’s fine. While we’re being open… I didn’t like taking you to see her, because she always makes you so upset, but I didn’t want to make that decision for you. Not that I’m not willing to take you there if you decide you want to visit her again,” she added quickly, “but I think you might be better off without her.”

“Yeah,” Silver said, giving his sister’s hand a squeeze. Saylee smiled and squeezed back. “I think I’m gonna be okay. Can we have waffles?”
Chapter Summary

Omega Ruby is a fantastic game that beautifully reconstructs the already gorgeous nation of Hoenn, with some really inventive twists on the plot and the landscape, and I respect and honour this by taking the piss out of it.

Chapter Notes

Actually posted this some time ago on FFnet, but I only just realized that it's not up here so now here it is. Just a wee bit of crack. Consider it AU if you like :P

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Rock Tomb, Teddy!” Saylee called. Teddy leapt down from the machine, wrenching up a boulder and flinging it at Croy. Croy dodged the first one, but not the next two, and ended up pinned to the ground by his wings.

“What?!” Marc roared angrily. “I, Marc, was caught off guard?”

“Can’t say you weren’t warned,” Saylee said, putting her emblem away and stepping forwards. Zac wound around her ankles, snarling, and Molly began to stalk towards Marc. “Give. Me. The Meteorite.”

Marc scowled, but before he could say anything, the comm clipped to his belt buzzed. “I’m sorry, do you mind if I take this?” he said, picking it up. Saylee stared at him. Marc turned and looked across the crater, motioning downwards with his hand several times.

Saylee looked across the crater and saw the orchestra sitting at the far side setting aside their instruments. The trumpeter gave her a thumbs up.

“…Hoenn is weird,” Saylee muttered.

Chapter End Notes

Did anyone else laugh at the BGM turning down when Maxie (and presumably Archie in AS) was on the phone? Actually, I’ve been laughing at most of everything to do with Magma and Aqua, especially Maxie’s loss animation. His title isn’t “Magma Boss”, it’s “Nerdlord”.

Chapter Summary

This oneshot takes place at roughly the same time as Chapter 51 of Calamity Calls.

Chapter Notes

Fair warning that I have no education in psychology or biology beyond high school level, so apologies for however much of this is me talking out of my arse about how magical animals work :P

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Daisy, your two o’clock’s here,” Colleen said, knocking on Daisy’s door and peering in. “Tell me you’ve eaten lunch…”

“I have, I have,” Daisy said, holding up an empty yoghurt pot by way of defence. Her Blissey took the yoghurt pot and grabbed an empty tea mug and bowl from breakfast that were also lying around, tsing under her breath the whole way. Daisy paused the video feed, making two grappling Flygons freeze in midair, then put her computer to sleep and headed down the hall to the massage parlour where her client, an assistance Persian, was already lying on the table.

“Sorry to keep you two waiting,” Daisy said, smiling at the Persian’s trainer and patient.

Bill gave her a lopsided smile back. “He lives for these,” he informed Daisy. “And apparently, nobody in Goldenrod is half as good as you are.”

“Being fussy, Perry?” Daisy laughed, starting by gently rubbing the feline’s head and neck.

“I’m a Persian,” Perry purred. “It’s my prerogative.”

“Don’t I know it,” Bill muttered rolling his eyes theatrically, like he didn’t spoil Perry rotten. “How’s University treating you? You pass all of your first year assessments alright?”

“I think I could’ve done better, but yes, I passed everything and got a good review from my supervisor, which makes a nice change from the equivalency course,” Daisy sighed. “The problem with that was that it was written assuming that even if you didn’t go to or graduate from high school, you still attended primary school. Gramps did his best, but I guess we still missed some things…”

“Not going to school doesn’t make you dumb,” Bill said, shaking his right hand in what was his equivalent of a shrug, his actual shoulders being too twisted to perform the movement. “They don’t teach you everything you need to know, like ‘curiosity should have its limits: a class on not fiddling with unknown machinery in abandoned laboratories’.”

Daisy laughed. “You know, for such a lazy-looking Pokémon, you carry a lot of tension in your
lower back,” she commented to Perry. “Anyway, I’m enjoying the course. The supervisor’s pretty good at finding case studies to illustrate his lessons, which I like because it really helps me pick things up. Right now, he’s got us tuning in to watch the Hoenn League.”

“He’s a sports fan?” Bill asked.

“No… well, yes, but it’s also for a good look at a very unusual example of the Innes Effect,” Daisy explained.

“Can you clarify what that is?” Bill asked. “My ‘science nerding’ as my sister calls it, lies largely in the realms of physics and programming.”

“Sure,” Daisy said. “Okay, so—our brains release different combinations of hormones in response to different stimulations, right? The mix you get when you’re afraid includes things like adrenaline and cortisol, when you’re happy you get a mix of things like dopamine and…” she sighed, kneading up and down the muscles of Perry’s back and giving up with trying to remember the full combinations off the top of her head. “Well, anyway, chemicals that affect our bodies in different ways. The brains of Pokémon do it too, but with completely different hormones, and most of them aren’t found in humans. I have to admit that I’d have to look up the list of chemicals, but on average they have twelve syllables, and anyway the important part is that they govern how Pokémon grow and evolve.”

“Nah, go ahead and list the names,” Perry yawned. “A little science talk’ll help me sleep.”

“Most gracious of you, your majesty,” Daisy said with an exaggerated little bow before she went back to the massage. “So the two main mixes that we’ve been studying are the ones that combine to cause the Gray Effect and the Innes Effect. The Gray Effect is what happens when a Pokémon feels exceptionally happy and loved. From the way he’s purring, I think Perry’s undergoing it right now,” she added with a chuckle. Perry just purred louder. “It boosts things like health, reflexes and senses, and in the case of a small number of Pokémon, it also causes physical growth and can even make them evolve. You know Colleen, my Blissey? That’s how she evolved from a Chansey.”

“Ah, that’s how Eevee evolve into Espeon and Umbreon too, isn’t it?” Bill commented. “So the Innes Effect is…?”

“More common, for one thing,” Daisy explained, carefully moving down Perry’s right foreleg to knead his paw. “It’s how Pokémon grow, mostly, and it comes from fighting. Play-fighting releases a small quantity of the mix, enough to help baby Pokémon mature until they can take care of themselves. Scrapping, physical workouts and competitive battling are how most Pokémon grow further, because all of these activities release a middling amount of the mix. However, fighting for your life is a very different kind of fight from competitive battling, and it releases much higher levels of the mix. That’s why people like rangers, who regularly get into fights that could turn fatal—even if they don’t actually end in death—well, their Pokémon get very strong very fast and can even surpass Pokémon who’ve been training for longer but have never faced a potentially fatal fight.”

“I see,” Bill said with a nod. “The Dragon Clan in Blackthorn still permit fatalities in their matches, and they’re renowned for training some of the strongest Pokémon in the world. Because the dragons are fighting for their life in every match, they grow strong much faster, is that it?”

Daisy nodded. “It’s also how Team Rocket built up such a power base so fast,” she said softly. “When I was helping Blue gut their Viridian building, we found these pits where they trained their Pokémon, and they were full of…” she shook her head, then switched to Perry’s other foreleg and smiled. “I got extra credit for getting the bio-scans of a couple dozen species of wild Pokémon from around here for us to compare against the same species from other countries. Studying how the ‘hostile environment’ of Kanto amps up the Innes Effect, you know…”
“So, the Hoenn League… is somebody from Kanto competing?” Bill asked. “You said before that Saylee headed back out there, didn’t you?”

“She did, but to support a friend, not compete,” Daisy clarified. “But when she was there over the summer, she found some organized criminals to fight—”

“Got bored without Rocket around, did she?”

“—and her friend, Keyanu Weaves, fought with her. The life-or-death situations—death quite a few times, I’m sorry to say—would be enough for her Pokémon to feel quite a high level of the Innes Effect, but that’s not what makes this case unique.”

“Groudon and Kyogre?” Bill guessed. “Was she the one in Sootopolis along with Saylee? That was certainly hard to miss.”

Daisy nodded. “They weren’t just fighting for their lives,” she said. “They were directly combating gods, which hasn’t happened for a very long time.”

“Still hasn’t, if you believe the conspiracy theorists,” Bill commented, “in which case they fought a government conspiracy to hide the catastrophic failure of Hoenn’s tsunami early warning system. Or a conspiracy to kill the leaders of Team Aqua before they could reveal that they worked for the government. Or the Illuminati doing things for reasons.”

“Well, the satellite footage, security footage, hand-filmed video and eyewitness accounts are all pretty corroborative,” Daisy said wryly, doing a last run up the muscles of Perry’s back and neck. “Anyway, we can’t see the Pokémon Centre records on Saylee’s Pokémon or those of the Hoenn Leader Juan Irving for security reasons, and we need Miss Weaves’ permission to access the records on her Pokémon, which we’re not getting until after her last battle sometime today. So we can’t look at the hard numbers on their growth rates, but we can watch Miss Weaves’ League battles, and our hypothesis is that we’re seeing an unprecedented level of the Innes Effect. She’s sweeping through Elites with ease, one of whom trained at the Dragon’s Den, although admittedly that was fifty years ago. Her Pokémon are incredibly overpowered, and she’s only been training them a few months.

Right,” she added, stepping back from the massage table, “how do you feel, Perry?”

“Very Grayed up,” Perry purred, stretching languorously. “And how do you feel? You know the reason that furry Pokémon like me are in such high demand as assistance Pokémon? Because petting us gives you humans a big dose of your happy hormones. We are just that awesome.”

“The stress of studying has just melted away, I promise you,” Daisy assured him. “So, are you two headed straight back to Goldenrod?”

“Got to get back to work,” Bill sighed, rolling his neck slightly. “We chased out the virus that was hitting high-level trainers’ Pokémon storage and transfer accounts, but we haven’t caught it, and we’re pretty certain at this point that it’s an illegally modified Porygon. Lanette’s been chatting with the Porygon community, but this isn’t a modification that any of them have designed. They mostly patch themselves, anyway, they don’t mod on this scale… what are you doing?”

“You have a horrible kink in your neck,” Daisy said, carefully rubbing the twisted skin of his neck and shoulders.

“I keep telling him that if he’s gonna spend eighteen hours a day in front of the computer, he needs to see his PT more often,” Perry complained, rubbing up against his trainer’s legs. “If only to get him out from in front of the damn computer. Hunched over a keyboard is not the proper posture for a guy with your muscular and upper spine contortions, Bill.”
“I never get to hunch for long without you nagging me,” Bill pointed out, closing his eyes. “…Wow. You’re right. Daisy does do the best massages. This isn’t gonna cost me extra, is it?”

“I don’t have any other appointments this afternoon, and I may be putting off going back to studying,” Daisy said with a smile. “You really do need to take better care of yourself. There might not be much the surgeons can do to make your injuries better, but if you’re not careful you can make them a lot worse.”

“Don’t think I’ll get to, with you and Perry nagging me,” Bill murmured dozily. “D’you think that Gray Effect would impact my healing any?”

“Not to this degree, not in humans,” Daisy laughed. “And I’m afraid that if they tried injecting you with the chemical cocktail from a Pokemon’s brain, you’d go brain dead in a matter of minutes.”

“…I’ll call my PT about seeing him more often,” Bill promised.

Chapter End Notes

Don’t have much to say about this other than that I occasionally like to check in on how my minor characters are doing and I wanted to explain why Key is so goddamn OP in the Hoenn League XP. By the way, I made up the terms “The Gray Effect” and “The Innes Effect” and their definitions in the context of Pokémon (although I don’t think those terms exist in any other context…)
Loss

Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Summary

This is pretty much a deleted scene from chapter 26 that I removed due to awkwardness of scene flow. From now on I’ll probably start posting omakes like this alongside the chapter that they go with. I felt like it was important to post it SOMEWHERE since I feel like it helps understand Thomas.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Thomas curled up in the warm grass, staring out at the crashing sea. His fingers drifted up to grip the Everstone hanging around his neck. He was vaguely aware of the rustling counterwind as someone flew up to him, but whether it was Topaz, Skye, Shikoba or somebody else entirely, he didn’t know or care.

“Hey,” Shikoba said after a while of being ignored. “Are you okay?”

“They just told me that my best friend is dead,” Thomas snapped. “No, I’m not okay.”

“Didn’t figure you would be, I just needed a conversation starter,” Shikoba said. “I’m afraid I’m not as smooth with the gentlemen as I am with the ladies.”

When Thomas didn’t respond, Shikoba leaned over and started nipping at his head leaf. “What the hell are you doing?” Thomas yelped, yanking his leaf out of beak’s reach.

“It’s called social grooming, and I’m guessing your species doesn’t do it,” Shikoba said, cocking his head.

“Social grooming is what you do if you have hair or feathers or other extraneous crap that dirt and stuff gets into,” Thomas said, flicking imaginary dirt off of his arm. “I have scales.”

“And leaves, which have little dead-ends,” Shikoba said, nipping at the ends of the leaves on Thomas’ arm. “I’m trying to offer comfort that’ll come off as sincere, since I doubt you’ll take anything I say seriously. People rarely do, for some reason.”

Thomas snorted, but relented, allowing Shikoba to nip at his leaves. “Thanks, I guess,” he said. “And it’s not like I don’t know about social grooming, anyway. I did it for T… for Teddy once in a while, back when he was a little Torchic and didn’t have arms or a neck. He got so fussy because he couldn’t groom the feathers on his back or his head…”

“I imagine the adults do it for their young in their line,” Shikoba said softly. “So you two have known each other since you were that young, have you?”

“Well… Teddy’s actually… he was older than me,” Thomas admitted. “We both volunteered to come to the lab… I had nine siblings, I didn’t figure they’d miss me, and I think Teddy just really wanted to be a fighting Pokémon….”
“Fighting-types, am I right?” Shikoba chuckled.

Thomas forced out a laugh. “Yeah… stupid. Stupid asshole. Always jumped into fights… I should’ve… somebody should’ve been there to watch his back. Can’t expect humans to do it, too damn weak… dammit…”

“They were fighting in a volcano,” Shikoba gently pointed out, nibbling the edge of a leaf back to a cutting edge. “You are a grass-type. If you’d been out there, you would have died. Even if you were a Sceptile,” he added, causing Thomas to immediately drop his Everstone. “You said that this is not on Saylee. It’s not on you, either. It didn’t happen because you weren’t strong enough, or any such nonsense. It happened because Marc is insane, even for a human.”

“I know… I know,” Thomas muttered, examining the newly-groomed leaves on his right arm as Shikoba hopped around to start on the left. “I just hate it. Shit like this happens and it’s out of your control and it’s when you’re not even there… pokéballs are damn handy for getting around, but sometimes I hate ‘em. It’s not just that I couldn’t be there, it’s just… one second he’s there, and the next he’s gone and… I just didn’t want to lose him. Not yet.”

“Oh?” Shikoba chirped in surprise. “Were you two…?”

“Were we—? Oh, no,” Thomas said, shaking his head. “Nah, he wasn’t into males. Don’t know if he was all that into females either, to be honest. He was into fighting and getting stronger. Completely devoted to getting tougher…” he chuckled a little, slightly less forced than before. “How’d he die? Did he attack Groudon head-on? He would, if there were a bunch of dumb, fragile humans there to protect…”

“I don’t know for sure,” Shikoba said, shaking his head. “Key didn’t want to go into details… just that there was a lot of chaos when Groudon awoke and the volcano erupted, and Teddy died in the lava. I’m not used to being delicate, so feel free to push me off of the cliff if this is an intrusive question, but did he know you were in love with him?”

Thomas was quiet for a long time, then said, “Like being pushed off of a cliff scares you. Besides, you’re doing a good job on the leaves, for a featherbrain.”

“Well, it’s important for you to have a good cutting edge should we encounter Team Magma again,” Shikoba chuckled, moving on to his head leaf.

“Yeah,” Thomas said. “I mean, yeah, he knew I… I told him a long time ago, I don’t believe in sitting on stuff like that, you know? You feel that way about somebody, don’t hide it. Worst thing that can happen is that they don’t feel the same, but you can still be friends, you know? And that’s what happened. I didn’t push it, he didn’t make it weird, he was my best friend and I don’t have to regret anything that I didn’t tell him. I just… dammit…”

“You are grieving,” Shikoba hummed. “Still, it sounds like you were blessed to love a very good person and have a very good friend. As they say, do not be sad that it’s over, be happy that it happened.”

“Can’t I be both?” Thomas grumbled. “Or be angry that it’s over. Anger feels better. More active. Attacking people feels better than sitting around crying.”

“Well, now you are at your best to do that,” Shikoba chuckled, nudging Thomas’ head-leaf to indicate completion. “And put the Everstone down. You are entirely fine the way you are. And I mean fine,” he added with a wink. “What?” he added as Thomas stared at him. “I may prefer the fairer gender, but I can still appreciate fine when I see it.”
“And I can’t be grateful enough that you prefer to aim your dumb comments at the ladies,” Thomas said, spitting at seed at Shikoba, who chortled and ducked it.

“Shikoba! Thomas!”

“What is the matter, my darling?” Shikoba asked as Skye swooped towards them.

She landed a careful distance away from him. “Team Magma are attackin’ somewheres,” she reported. “You up to go get ‘em?”

“I think I am,” Thomas said, standing up and brandishing the keen edge of his wrist leaves.

Chapter End Notes

I really should’ve gotten more time devoted to the Pokemon in this fic. I promise the balance is different in Dimensional Destruction.
He opened his eyes and sat up as his alarm beeped. He rubbed his eyes, staring at the time. Six am… is that early? He looked blearily around at the room he was in. It was being slowly lit by sunlight filtering through a pair of curtained windows. The walls were practically papered with framed photographs and giffies. There was a bedside table in front of him with a lamp on it, with the alarm clock set into it. There was also a large chest of drawers with several ornaments on top of it. Hanging above it was a picture of an old man. When he moved, he realized that it was him.

He had no idea where he was.

He got up and walked closer to the mirror, feeling some creaking and popping in his joints, and stared at his reflection. It had to be his reflection, so why didn’t he recognize himself? Where was he?

He leaned closer, examining his receding silver hairline and ice-blue eyes, then jumped and whirled around when he spotted movement behind himself in the mirror. There was a woman in the bed he had been, sitting up and rubbing her eyes. She was silver-haired and wrinkled like him, but she struck him as beautiful. Her eyes widened at the sight of him, revealing them to be a striking blood-red. She scrambled on her bedside table, grabbed a pair of glasses and put them on, continuing to stare.

“Who are you?” she asked, looking around the room. “Where are we? What’s going on?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I’m Arthur Pryce.” To his surprise, the name came easily, even though he hadn’t recognized his face. “Who are you?”

“My name… is Helen Pryce,” the woman said after a moment of thought. She looked down at her hand. “Oh. Are you wearing a ring too?”

Arthur looked at his left hand, then walked back over to sit on the bed and compare his ring to Helen’s. They matched. “We’re married?” he said thoughtfully, looked up at her. Lucky me, he thought warmly. “I’m sorry… something must have happened. I don’t remember you at all. I didn’t
even recognize my own face in the mirror.”

“Don’t worry, it’s only fair,” Helen said with a wry smile. “I don’t remember you either… is there a mirror?” There was a second chest of drawers on her side of the room, with its own ornaments and mirror. She stood up and went to stare in it, finger-combing her silver hair out of its bedhead. “Goodness. Are we old?”

“We seem to be,” Arthur said, standing up again and grabbing a padded blue dressing gown that was hanging on the end of the bed next to a fluffy brown one. He handed the brown dressing gown to Helen and toed his feet across the floor until he found slippers. “I wonder if anyone else here knows what’s happened to us?”

“I’m sure somebody will,” Helen said, examining the photos. “Oh, look! We have children! I’m pretty sure this is us in this photo. That man looks like you, only younger and with black hair.” Arthur followed her pointing finger to examine the photograph that depicted him and a young-looking Helen with no glasses and light-brown hair. They were sitting on a beach, surrounded by three children; a young teenage boy, a little girl and a toddler of indeterminate sex. The sight of them gave Arthur a warm feeling, even though he didn’t recognize any of them, nor could he remember a thing about them.

“Hello?” he called, stepping out into the hall. They seemed to be in a traditional-style mansion; there was a polished wooden corridor outside of the bedroom that stretched away from him, with more doors on the right and intricately-painted screens on the left, some of them open to show a large ornamental garden.

A woman appeared in one of the doors to the garden, wearing pyjamas and staring at Arthur in confusion. She was middle-aged and plump, with dark red hair, and didn’t seem to be any of the people that Arthur had seen in the photos—throughout the photos, the older two children had the same light-brown hair that Helen had had when she was young, and the youngest boy had the same black hair that Arthur had. Also, the woman’s eyes were brown, not blue or red.

All of this flashed through Arthur’s head in a second as the woman narrowed her eyes on him. “Excuse me, but who are you?” she demanded. “And where on earth am I? How did I get here?”

Arthur frowned. “My name is Arthur Pryce,” he said, “and this is my wife Helen. And we don’t know how we got here either, or where we are…”

“Or anything that happened before we woke up this morning,” Helen added. “We were hoping to find someone who did.”

“Well, I don’t know a blasted thing that happened before I woke up,” the woman said suspiciously. “My name’s Greta Leonard. Do you—” her remark was cut off by a shout from down the hall.

“Look! There’s more people down there! Hello! Excuse me, but do you know where we are?”

“Mommy! Daddy!” Winona yelled. Wilbur and Amelia Nagi cracked their eyes open and looked around blearily.

“You know,” Wilbur mumbled, looking at the clock, “I can’t wait until she’s a teenager and wants to sleep until noon.”

“Well, right now she’s four and awake,” Amelia sighed, closing her eyes and rolling over. “Be a dear and go see what she wants, will you?”
“Four’s old enough to find her own cereal,” Wilbur mumbled, standing up and stepping into his slippers. As he walked into the living room, it struck him that there was an awful lot of chatter outside, despite the early hour. Was something happening?

“Winona, sweetheart, it’s half past six in the morning,” he sighed, opening his daughter’s bedroom door.

“But Daddy!” Winona cried. She was standing up on her bed, leaning on her windowsill, which several Wingull were perched on. “The birdies are talking!”

“Uh-huh,” Wilbur said with a yawn.

“Hey, we’ve always been able to talk. When did you learn how to talk properly?”

Wilbur’s eyes snapped open at the sound of an unfamiliar voice in his daughter’s bedroom. He looked around frantically, but he couldn’t see the boy who’d spoken anywhere.

“It was him, Daddy,” Winona said, pointing at the Wingull. “They’re talking!”

“Winona, Pokémon can’t talk,” Wilbur said patiently.

“Hey! That one can speak too!” one of the Wingull squawked.

Wilbur stared for a long moment, wondering if he was going mad. Then, at the top of his lungs, he yelled, “AMELIA!”

{} After scouring the house, they discovered that there were thirteen humans in the house—thirteen and a half, really, as one young lady was showing a small baby bump—and more than twenty Pokémon, all of whom were congregated in a vast freestanding hall that was freezing cold and contained a pool in which icebergs floated. All of the Pokémon seemed to be water and ice types, and some of them looked extremely large and powerful, so Arthur and Helen had closed the door again and hurried away after a quick peek inside, not wanting to startle or frighten any of them.

Aside from Greta and three small children that she was reasonably sure were hers—the girls both had her red hair, and while the tiny boy didn’t look much like her, with slightly darker skin and white-blond hair, he had immediately gravitated to her and started clinging to her leg without saying a word—the rest seemed to be Arthur and Helen’s children, in-laws and grandchildren. The pregnant girl was called Molli Pryce and, going by the photographs in Arthur and Helen’s room, was their daughter. Her wedding ring matched that of a short man with long, curly blonde hair called Van Pryce. There was also a dark-haired, middle-aged couple going by Graeme and Debbie Pryce; Graeme had black hair and ice-blue eyes and thus was probably Arthur and Helen’s older son. Debbie was holding a baby girl who had been sleeping in the same room as them, and thus they assumed to be theirs. There were two more little boys who both had Helen’s dark red eyes, so were presumably grandsons, although the boys couldn’t remember who their parents were or even if they were siblings, while none of them could remember whose children they might be. Arthur was sure they were his grandsons, though; the boys’ obvious distress was giving him a sick, angry feeling and a burning determination to find out what was happening and fix it.

“I’m hungry,” one of Greta’s girls started whining.

“I found a kitchen near my room,” Greta said, leading them down another exquisitely polished hall. “Let’s find some breakfast and hash this out.” She took both of her little girls by the hand, walking carefully to avoid jostling the little boy who still clung to her leg and seemed to be happy enough to
be swung along, giggling slightly. Van had a tentative arm around Molli, split between nervousness at closely touching a woman he didn’t remember and concern for the fact that she was looking extremely ill, nerves and fear no doubt exacerbating whatever morning sickness she was feeling. Graeme took the hands of the lost-looking little boys, both calming perceptibly at his touch. *His sons, perhaps?* Arthur thought. *Even if we don’t remember each other, we must still care for those who matter to us, right?* He looked at Helen, thinking of the little thrill of warm happiness he’d felt on realizing that she was probably his wife.

“We must have more photographs,” Helen muttered thoughtfully. “Probably videos, too. Oh! We must have a calendar somewhere, and a phone book…”

“We found our phones,” Molli said, holding up a Pokégear. “We tried calling the police, but the emergency numbers are all tied up.”

*Why can I remember what that device is called but not who I am?* Arthur thought irritably.

“We were going to look at things like our emails and social media profiles,” Van added, “but then we heard yelling and stepped out of our room to find little Alan and Conor there wandering down the hall, yelling for help.”

“We can check those out over breakfast,” Graeme suggested.

“I think I’ll forgo breakfast,” Arthur said grimly. “I’m not hungry. I think I’ll go out in person to seek out a police officer or… someone.”

“I’ll go with you,” Helen suggested. “Shall we go back and find something to wear other than pyjamas, first?”

{}
There were, as they’d suspected, plenty of clothes inside of the chest of drawers; there was a slightly awkward moment before, with a shrug and a smile, Helen started to get changed.

“I don’t know what we’re worried about,” she said, taking off her pyjama shirt and reaching for a bra. “We’re married, after all. Have been for quite a long time, I assume, if we have children and grandchildren.”

“True,” Arthur said, changing his own clothes, unable to help watching Helen change out of the corner of his eye, curious about the woman that he still didn’t know. He caught her watching him change out of the corner of her eye; their eyes met and they started laughing self-consciously.

“Solve the mystery of what’s going on first,” she suggested, buttoning up her blouse. “Investigate later.”

Arthur opened the door on his bedside table and found a Pokégear sitting in it, alongside an assortment of other odds and ends, including an elaborate brooch of gold and some kind of blue glass that depicted a dragon. There was also another ring with a snowflake design on it, which he found fit his middle right finger perfectly.

“This must be my Pokégear,” Helen said, opening the drawer on her side of the bed. “Oh, that’s awfully nice.” She held up a delicate silver necklace from which dangled the same snowflake emblem that was on Arthur’s ring. “And is this a brooch?”

“I have one too,” Arthur said, holding up the dragon brooch.

“Oh, that’s lovely,” Helen said, holding up her own. It was bronze, depicting a mountain, with a number of what looked to be diamonds dusting the mountain’s peak. “They’re emblems, aren’t they? That’s what I think when I look at them, anyway.” She frowned at her brooch for a long moment.

“The Emblem of… Coronet,” she said at length.

“The Order of the Dragon,” Arthur said, looking at his own. “What on earth is that?”

“Goodness knows,” Helen laughed, pocketing her brooch and looking through her Pokégear. “Feels rather momentous, though, doesn’t it? Oh, look, Molli’s in my phonebook.” She pressed the number and held the Pokégear up to her ear. “Hello, Molli, dear, it’s Helen. I just found my Pokégear and thought I’d try it out…”

Arthur tried dialling the police on his own, but only reached a recorded message telling him that the entire switchboard was busy and to please state the nature of his emergency. He hung up, a cold worry creeping down his spine as he wondered what on earth was causing so many people to call the police switchboard.

Instead, he opened his calendar. It told him that the present date was the fifth of Zanua, and that he’d turned sixty four months ago. He scrolled through the list of birthdays programmed into the calendar, tapping the filter to show only family birthdays. Molli, Van, Debbie, Graeme, Alan, Conor and Helen were all in there, as well as “Lucy”; when he tapped her name, it took him to next year and told him that she’d turn one in ten months’ time. The baby, he realized. Now we know her name, at least…

There was one more name that he didn’t recognize: Giovanni. Checking his name told Arthur that Giovanni was about to turn twenty-seven.

“The baby’s name is Lucy,” he reported to Helen as soon as she hung up, “and I think our third child is called Giovanni. He’s in my family birthdays calendar, and he’s an adult but younger than Molli
“I wonder where he is,” Helen said with a frown of concern. They started walking down the hall, trying to find their way out of the building, Helen scrolling down her phonebook as she went. “Here’s his phone number…” she dialled, held the Pokégear up to her ear, and frowned. “The number isn’t in service,” she said.

“I have an email from him,” Arthur said, opening his email client and seeing an email had arrived from Giovanni yesterday.

I’m sorry I haven’t been in touch in so long. The telecoms network went down a long time ago, but after the missile tests we lost contact with the satellites too. I’m sure you must’ve thought I was dead. I am very sorry about that. It just wasn’t safe to move and find somewhere with working telecoms for a long time. It still isn’t safe to move around, but it was even riskier to stay, so we left.

A lot’s happened in the past couple of years that I’ve been out of touch. I’m sure you’ve gotten a look at what’s been going on in Kanto on the news. However bad it looks, I promise you, it’s worse. There aren’t only terrible things, though. I’ve gotten married; we rushed into the relationship, but none of us really expect to live long, so there’s no point in waiting around. We have a baby son, too. It was something of an accident and I wouldn’t have chosen to bring a child into this country, but Johanna believes very strongly in clinging to whatever blessings you can get.

We have one more blessing; we made it to Vermillion City, and not only are there some working telecoms, there’s a ship leaving and I think I can get Johanna and the baby onto it. I’ve given them your phone number so that they can find you when they get to Johto. I know I’m springing this on you out of nowhere, but they need to get out of the country and go somewhere safe. I’ll come later; I’m going back to Viridian first to salvage what I can.

Take care of them. I’ll see you soon.

Giovanni.

The whole email made Arthur feel cold. Kanto, he knew in a clinical, fact-of-geography way, was a country to the east, but he had no idea what was going on in it. Missiles? A war? He wondered. There was mention of a daughter-in-law and grandson that he apparently hadn’t known about until yesterday. Where are they? Are they alright? Is he?

{}

Something was tugging at her arm. She opened her eyes to see a skinny young man trying to make off with the bag that was hanging off her arm. She tried to sit up and tug it back, but moving was difficult; she looked down at herself to see a massively fat belly that was hindering her every movement. After a moment, the feeling of alien movement inside her stomach told her that she was very, very pregnant.

The young man yanked the bag away from her and ran. She screamed, but none of the other people staggering around the docks did anything more than look around. None of them stopped the man before he vanished from sight with her bag. She drew a deep breath to scream for help again, but stopped at the sound of a whimper from behind her.

She turned to see a dark-haired little boy, barely more than a toddler, sitting behind her, looking around in bewilderment with big red eyes. “I’m scared,” he whined. “Wan’ go home! Wan’
“Sssshh,” she said, picking up and hugging the little boy and looking around for his mother. “It’s okay. My name’s Johanna. I’ll look after you. We’ll find your mummy.” The boy nodded, calming almost immediately and hugging her tightly. She stood up, holding him as best she could over her belly; he felt too heavy and awkward to hold, but she couldn’t bring herself to let him go. It was slowly dawning on her that many of the people lying on the ground around her would not be getting up again, and that they weren’t even providing the majority of the foul smell in the air. A couple of feet away, over the edge of the dock she was standing on, the sea was a sickly greenish-purple sludge, where it was visible among the bodies of humans and Pokémon alike floating in it and visibly, rapidly rotting. She tucked the boy’s head into her shoulder, hiding his eyes.

It was then that she realized that she had no idea where she was, nor how she’d gotten there.

{}
“Please let us speak to the police!” one of the girls was sobbing, trying to be heard over the crowd. “We woke up in the forest and we don’t know how we got there! We don’t know where our homes are! Please help!” Very faintly, Arthur could hear a voice trying to call for order and being completely ignored by the mob.

“Good grief,” he muttered, before taking a deep breath and bellowing, at the top of his lungs, “WILL YOU FOOLS BE QUIET?!”

It was a good bellow, strong and clear and loud enough to make even his own ears ring; the crowd quieted, staring around at him.

“Do you know what’s going on, old man?” somebody yelled. Arthur cracked an icy glare in the direction of the voice.

“You might try asking politely if you want help, young man,” Helen said sharply. “I think it is quite evident that everybody in the city has lost their memories, and yelling over each other certainly won’t help anything!”

“But the police aren’t doing anything!” somebody complained.

“I’m very sorry, but we’re still trying to figure out what’s going on,” an officer who was standing in front of the door called apologetically. “If you could just form a queue and we can help you one at a time with your—”

“I want my mummy,” one of the children sobbed loudly.

“Who is your mummy?” the police officer asked kindly.

“I don’t knoo-oo-ooowww!” the child wailed. There was a lot of unhappy muttering around the crowd.

“This street is looking awfully crowded!” Arthur shouted, projecting up a map from his Pokégear and expanding it as large as he could for the crowd to see. “If you are here because you do not know where you live, we will give you sanctuary here!” He pointed out the house that he was reasonably sure was his on the map. “There’s plenty of room and I’m sure we can see to getting food for people if it takes a long time to find homes for people! We will help the children find their homes first! The adults can start ACTING LIKE IT and wait patiently!”

“I’ll call Greta and get somebody on the door,” Helen said, dialling. “We’ll get a list of names, that should help people find each other. Thankfully, we all seem to know that much…”

Some people started moving away from the police station towards Helen and Arthur’s house, grasping onto any instructions from anybody who seemed to have a plan. “So, what have you done?” Arthur said to the police officer.

“There are only five of us in here,” the man said nervously. “We woke up at our desks or on the floor with no idea who we were or where we were… but we’re all carrying IDs, so once we’d figured out we were police officers and something had happened to our memories, we started calling other police stations. It’s the same everywhere in the country and nobody knows what to do…”

“Start with what you can do,” Arthur told him. “You are the police officers of this city. You are responsible for this city. We have a great many people who are lost and confused. Find out who should be here. There must be censuses, birth certificates…”

“School records,” Helen suggested. “They’ll have lists of all their students, and the children’s parents
or guardians. We can help everybody find their homes, at least.”

“And you must have records of all of the police officers at this station,” Arthur added. “Contact them. Tell them to do their duty. Patrol the city and send those who are lost to our house where they can wait safely until we find their families or homes. Promise people that they are safe and nothing is going to hurt them.”

“Is that true?” the policeman asked quietly.

“Yes,” Arthur lied firmly. *Whether or not it is, people must believe that it is. It will keep people calm.* The officer pressed his lips together in a thin line that suggested that he didn’t believe the lie any more than Arthur did, but he nodded and opened the door to the police station, calling for the station roster.

“Hello?” Helen said, picking up her pokégear as it rang. “Greta? Greta, calm down, what’s—I understand. We’ll be right there.” She hung up. “Greta’s panicking,” she explained quietly, walking away from the concerned-looking police officer. “The Pokémon in that shed are kicking up a fuss. They’re going to break out soon, she thinks.”

“They must be our Pokémon,” Arthur said, striding quickly back in the direction that they’d come. “Hopefully they remember us. If something *is* endangering us, we’re going to need them.”

He wasn’t sure whose blood it was that dripped from his brow and splattered his labcoat. His skin was tingling and his ears were ringing. He picked his way dazedly through the burned corridors of the laboratory to the crater where…

...bodies. They weren’t only burned, but twisted, distorted horribly by abnormal forces, lying in the crater. And above them stood other shapes, dark, wavy, indistinct, and they…

...as he slid down the crater, he hit one of the bodies. Retching, trying desperately not to throw up on the broken body of his colleague, he stared at the corpse. He could just about make out the face of Andrew Stanner, and yet, when he looked up, he could see the dark, semi-transparent shade of Stanner crowding around something with several more shades. They were wavering and unreal and…

...someone was laughing. He staggered over, trying to step around the shades, but one went through him, chilling him to his core and making him feel so clammy that he wanted to scrub his skin with tomato juice. On the inside. The horrible things, distorted imitations of his friends, were crowding and converging on…


“It woke up! It woke up, Fuji!” Blaine cackled madly. The man’s eyes were rolling in his head as he giggled, waving a hand around at the ruined remnants of the lab. “Isn’t it wonderful?”

“Are you alright? What’s wrong with you?” Minoru Fuji demanded. “What happened?”

Blaine just continued to giggle. “It worked!” he cried. “Look how powerful it is! We did it! We did it, we did it, we did it…”

“We did it,” Fuji agreed, horror edging over him as he stared at the ash under his feet. “What have we done?”
He looked up at the shades clustering around him and tried to pull Blaine to his feet. Blaine wrenched his arm away, staggering off, giggling.

The shades followed him, going through Fuji as they went. He finally threw up, and fled, the screaming of the dead filling his ears.

Nobody was visible outside of the house, having likely all fled inside to get away from the loud banging and yelling coming from inside of the shed.

“One of those Dewgong was the size of a car,” Helen said quietly. “We’d better be careful.”

Arthur edge up to the door, then knocked on it loudly. “Hello in there!” he called, taking full advantage of his evidently excellent projection. “My name is Arthur. I’d like to come speak to you all without having my face frozen off. Would that be acceptable?”

There was the sound of a lot of arguing from inside, then sudden silence. “Are you a human?” a voice called.

“I am,” Arthur called back.

There was more muttering from inside. “Will you let us out?” the voice called.

“Of course,” Arthur said, opening the door and immediately stepping back to be out of the way. A Jynx was the first to peer out.

“It’s awfully warm out here,” she said, making an unhappy face. “I’d rather talk this out in the cold, if it’s all the same to you…”

Inside, it was freezing, and the icebergs were different shapes than they had been earlier, suggesting that some fighting had been going on. Everyone had settled down, though, congregating around two particularly large and old-looking Pokémon: the Dewgong that Arthur and Helen had noticed earlier, tremendous and scarred and slightly greying but radiating power; and what Arthur had earlier taken to be a mound of earth and actually seemed to be a gigantic old Mamoswine, its hunched back nearly reaching the roof, fur grey and shaggy and chipped tusks large enough to sit on.

“Hello,” Helen said, looking around. “Goodness, so many of you… my name is Helen, and this is my husband Arthur. We’re reasonably sure we live here, but we’re not quite sure because everyone seems to have lost their memories.”

“So it has happened to the humans too?” the huge Mamoswine rumbled. “I am Margo. I believe that we live here too. This suggest to me that you are our trainers.”

“Don’t we get a choice in this?” a small Shellder said petulantly.

“I would presume that you had a choice, and chose to be here,” the large old Dewgong said sharply. “This place is comfortably furnished and well-stocked with free food, and outside seems uncomfortably warm.”

“You are welcome to leave if you wish,” Arthur said, stepping aside and gesturing towards the door. Some of the younger-looking Pokémon edged towards it, including the Jynx from before, but they kept looking nervously at the large Dewgong and Mamoswine.

“I am old, and I am curious about the trainer that I must have been with for many years,” the
Dewgong said, curling up. “My name is Seward, as it happens. I wonder if you are my trainer, old human?”

“I hope so,” Arthur said with a grim smile. “I would be proud to be the trainer of such impressive Pokémon. And I have to confess that I’m worried. Nobody knows what has done this to all of our memories.”

“A great discharge of psychic power, I believe,” the Jynx said, stroking her hair. “Certainly more power than I can offer.”

“Do you know where it came from?” Arthur asked.

The Jynx looked around, and tentatively pointed. Arthur and Helen stepped outside looking in that direction—looking east, at the huge mountain range that loomed over them.

He didn’t understand what was going on, not really, but nobody else needed to know that. Mostly, he had come to the same conclusions as everyone else: they had woken up somewhere that had clearly been torn apart by fighting, and nobody knew who had attacked who, but soldiers in uniform were clearly involved. Some of the soldiers had been lucky enough to come to this conclusion before the mobs had formed.

There were too many of these soldiers for that, but there were also too few of them to take power on this side of the tunnel, not when Giovanni already had it. He liked the feel of it, the taste of giving orders that people listened to because they were too frightened to think for themselves, the sound of cheering when he told the soldiers that they weren’t welcome here.

Giovanni enjoyed the victory. A small victory over small groups of frightened, battered people, but victory was victory and power was power, and he had no plans to give up either.

Slowly, steadily, the lists of names began to line up as people were connected to their homes and families. The streets of Mahogany Town were mostly empty aside from people seeking out their homes. The word seemed to have spread: Find your computer. Find your handheld. Check your social media for photos, for friends and family, for where you live and where you work. Find out who you are.

A few people had been taken to hospital, not for injuries but for mental breaks. A panic had spread in one street that the reason that none of them could remember anything was because they were all dead and, refusing to accept it, had been trapped in a dreamworld without their memories; others believed that they had been cursed by some god that they had somehow angered, and had begun to fight over what they could have done wrong and what they could do to fix it. Arthur and Helen did their best to
try and keep people calm and break up fights, but even they were starting to feel the strain of not knowing what to do.

It was almost a relief when the blue-haired young woman appeared as evening drew in, even if she did appear on a Dragonite large enough to draw hysterical screaming that they were under attack from across the city.

“Get on the city PA and tell them we’re not under attack, dammit,” Arthur said, sticking his head into the police station, “and even if we are, she has one dragon and I have a shedload of ice-types. We’ll be fine.”

“That’s what we keep telling them, sir,” Officer Visit said with a weak smile. “Do you know who she is?”

“No, but perhaps this means something to her,” Arthur said, pulling the blue-and-gold dragon pin out of his pocket and walking out to greet the woman. She was pale with dark gold eyes and short, light-blue hair. She was wearing some kind of black flight suit with a black-and-blue cape that was held up with a blue-and-gold pin identical to the one that Arthur had.

“Good… evening,” he said, checking the time on his Pokégear. “My name is Arthur Pryce. You are…?”

“Sar Cecelia Ryushi,” the woman said, bowing slightly to Arthur. “This is Drogo. Are you in charge here, sir?”

“I seem to be,” Arthur said. “Starting with the obvious question, I’m afraid: have you any idea what happened to everybody this morning?”

Cecelia sighed, shaking her head. “The first thing that any of us remember is an immense flow of some kind of power from the east,” Drogo offered. “But there’s no communication with Kanto at all…”

“I’m a member of the Dragon Clan of Blackthorn, which has kept very detailed records of our population and history for more than five thousand years, we’ve found,” Cecelia said, smirking proudly, “so we were able to restore our local infrastructure quite quickly, and are now spreading out to maintain peace and stability across the country.”

“Are you, now…?” Arthur said, folding his arms and straightening his stance to counter the arrogance that the woman was emanating. “A less obvious question next: what is the meaning of the brooch that you wear?”

“This? It’s an emblem showing that I have been knighted by the Order of the Dragon,” Cecelia said, tapping her emblem. “It means that I am one of the most powerful trainers in the land, but also one recognized as a respectable person who can be trusted with high authority.”

“Then we are of equal rank,” Arthur said, holding out his own emblem. Cecelia stared at it suspiciously, then took off a glove and pressed a finger to it, quickly pulling her hand back with a hiss. “Is something wrong?”

“It’s real,” Cecelia said grudgingly.

“Dragonglass becomes… friendly, I suppose, to the first living thing to touch it,” Drogo explained. “It burns anything else. We use it to protect our caves; when we create some for humans, for the emblems, we have to be careful that nobody touches it except for the intended owner.”
“Feel for yourself,” Cecelia said, removing and holding out her emblem. Arthur carefully touched it, then yanked his hand back, staring at his finger as it turned red. The glass had felt as if it was at the point of melting to him, but Cecelia was holding it easily in her bare hand. “So you are Sir Arthur Pryce.”

“Indeed,” Arthur said, putting his pin back on, and wondering about Helen’s Coronet pin. “If you have such detailed records, do you know who the governing body of this land is?”

“We know that it includes the Master of our clan, but does not consist solely of him,” Cecelia said. “If you are indeed a Knight of the Realm, you must meet with our Master. We are seeking out anybody who has taken charge to meet up and discuss what has happened, what we know, and where we go from here. Are you interested?”

“Very much so,” Arthur agreed. “Please come back to my house; my wife has a similar emblem that you might be able to explain to us. And any news at all about what’s going on is very welcome.”

And I will feel much more comfortable around you and your two-storey Dragonite when we’re nearer to a shed full of powerful ice Pokémon, he thought. I can’t cast any stones about you coming to take charge in the chaos, since that’s more or less what I did this morning, but I didn’t bring Pokémon to frighten people into listening to me… He started walking back towards his house with Cecelia and Drogo in tow. People were starting to stare out of their windows at the strange pair, some curious, some fearful. A thought struck him. “Do you know anything about Kanto?”

“Only that they are completely unable to communicate or be communicated with,” Cecelia said with a frown. “Our records indicate that I have an elder sister, Sophia, who went there some time ago to discuss ‘the situation’, whatever that means… my nephew left an hour ago in search of her, so perhaps he’ll come back with some news, hmm?”

“I hope so,” Arthur sighed, one hand clenching around his Pokégear in his pocket and the email that Helen had forwarded to him less than an hour before.

“One ship from Kanto. No living passenger by the name of Johanna. Many dead passengers. Will inform you if any match the given description.”

I do hope the poor woman’s not there, he thought, wondering about the daughter-in-law and grandchild that he’d never met—which, given the situation, didn’t make them any different from any of the rest of his family. Of course, that doesn’t prove that she’s alive, or Giovanni, but not knowing is better than knowing they’re dead… not knowing means that there’s still a chance.

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Somehow, the base managed to be worse. Bruno and the three Pokémon he had left were still finding and laying out bodies when the kid turned up, days later.

Mark had gotten there first, grabbed the kid to cuff him, when a goddamn dragon had flung the Machamp all the way across the entry hall, hard enough to smash into the walls. When Bruno heard the crash, he had come running expecting an invading wild force, not just a single Dragonite and a spiky-haired teenager.

“Can we be calm and not fight?” the kid asked. “I just have some questions, and I’m looking for somebody.”

“My name is Captain Bruno Siba of the 43rd,” Bruno barked. “Who are you, kid?”

“Sir Lance Ryushi,” the boy said with a bow, “of Blackthorn City.”

“You’re shittin’ me, kid,” Bruno snorted. “You’re a knight? How old are you?”

“Fifteen, and one of the youngest knights in our history, according to our records,” Lance said with a proud smile, unpinning the blue-and-gold pin that was holding his black cloak around his shoulders. He gripped onto the cloak with one hand while dropping the pin into Bruno’s hand. Bruno threw it back as quick as he could—the ornate little piece of jewellery felt like it was on fire. The kid handled it easily, though, using it to pin his cloak back together. “Tell me, Captain Siba, can you remember where you were, say… this time last year?”

“Classified information, kid,” Bruno said.

“Really? All we were doing was guarding this place,” Hiro grumbled. “Same thing we’ve been doing for years…”

“Shut it,” Bruno snapped. “Why do you want to know?”

Lance’s face lit up. “You remember,” he breathed. “You really remember further back than a week ago?”

“Well, yeah, of course,” Bruno said, staring at the way Lance and his Dragonite exchanged excited grins. Five days ago… wasn’t that when there was that psychic flare…? “Blackthorn City’s in Johto, right? Something happened there?”

“Five days ago, everybody woke up with no memories,” Lance explained. “Most people could remember their names, and things like... you know, what the police are, that Olivine’s on the sea, things like that. But all of our memories of ourselves and each other were just... gone. We’ve had to go through a lot of official records to find out who’s related to who, get families back together, things like that... we just haven’t been able to find out how or why this happened.”

“But all the psychics say the flare of energy came from the east,” his Dragonite supplied. “From Kanto.”

“And our clan records say that my mother, Sar Sophia Ryushi, left for this base a few days before we all lost our memories,” Lance continued. “Supposedly she came to speak to the Kanton high command about what’s going on. So I came to look for her and see if anybody here knew what, exactly, happened...”

Bruno inhaled sharply. “Damned if I know what happened, kid, but there’s nobody else here,” he said firmly. Which one of those bodies is his mother? “Go check out Kanto for all I care, but there’s nobody else here.”
“Well, ‘cept all the dead fo—mph!” Bruno didn’t slam his hand over Hiro’s mouth fast enough. Lance’s eyes widened and Bruno mentally cursed whatever had allowed Pokémon to speak.

“Let us look inside,” the kid said, much more quietly now, his smile gone.

“Not happening, kid,” Bruno said firmly.

“Damien?” Lance said quietly, ducking aside as the Dragonite barrelled forwards, Body Slamming into Bruno and his Pokémon and knocking them aside. Bruno cracked his head off the floor and fought not to black out as pain lanced across his skull. “Hold it!” he wheezed as Lance ran past, into the inner base, followed by Damien.

Bruno cursed himself for leaving all the doors open, but he hadn’t found another living soul in the whole building, and lugging bodies was difficult enough without having to go through full security procedures every ten feet. The result was that now this kid, who was running around with a Knight’s emblem even if he looked like he was still sucking his thumb, was able to run straight into the main council room, which was where Bruno had lined up the bodies. He’d managed to get photos of all the ones he’d found so far, for later reference, but he hadn’t gotten to taking any of them down to the lava for cremation yet. They were all, in his estimation, between and two and four days old, and had all died in unpleasant ways, crushed or sliced or stabbed or strangled. It was a sight to turn the hardened soldier’s stomach, never mind some teenager—

—who was on his knees next to the body of a woman that Bruno had found next to a dead Dragonite and Charizard, both crushed in a collapsed hallway. The woman hadn’t been crushed, though, aside from a leg that had trapped her; somebody had taken advantage of that to cut her throat.

“What the hell happened here?” Damien wanted to know, looking around in horror at the bodies.

“Some kina infighting went on,” Bruno admitted. “Haven’t accounted for all the personnel yet, but it looks a lot like everybody ended up dead.”

“How many people still missing?” Lance asked quietly.

“Five,” Bruno said, giving up on keeping anything a secret. “I’m still looking, but I need to start taking some of these bodies down to the lava pool below for cremating. They’re getting nasty. You’re welcome to take—”

“I’m going to help you look,” Lance said, standing up. “Some of those five might still be alive and holed up somewhere. They might be able to tell us what exactly went on here…”

“Lance, we don’t have to,” Damien said, putting one of his giant orange hands on his trainer’s back. “This is much, much worse than anybody expected. We can take Sophia’s body back and—”

“I’m not going anywhere until we find out what happened here,” Lance said, turning away from Damien, allowing Bruno to see his face again. The knight had a grim set to his mouth that made him look at least thirty years older.

Bruno led Lance to the inner labs, the only part of the base he hadn’t gotten a chance to search yet because he didn’t have clearance for the access doors. An Outraged Dragonite, it transpired, went wherever it damn well pleased, leading them to a room full of the crushed remains of destroyed prototype weapons, four more corpses… and one survivor, a half-mad woman with silver-streaked blonde hair and a bloodstained labcoat, surrounded by ghosts.

“I’ve seen you, creeping around the base, collecting ‘em up,” she hissed, gesturing to a bank of screens showing security footage from around the base. “Very noble of you, soldier boy, but which
side are you on, eh? Are you for it or against it? Well?!

“Doctor, I don’t have a godsdamned clue,” Bruno said, shivering as the ghosts surrounded them. Hiro and Hito closed in nervously around their trainer, knowing that no matter their strength, it couldn’t affect the grinning Haunter and Gengar.

“Doctor, please tell us what happened here,” Lance said, gesturing to the body of a man whose head had been beaten in. “Why did everyone kill each other?”

“And who the hell are you to be asking, hmm?” the woman snapped.

“Sir Lance Ryushi of Blackthorn,” Lance responded, tapping his emblem.

“Ryushi… ah. One of Sar Sophia’s relatives, huh?” the doctor said, pushing some loose strands of hair out of her face to peer at Lance. “She started it, in a way. Well, she didn’t start the argument. But she started the fight.”

“What fight?” Lance snapped angrily.

“Lost contact with everyone after that psychic flare, see?” the doctor said, leaning back against a desk, running her fingers over a Haunter’s head. “Figured the Mew Two project on Cinnabar must’ve gone bad. So how do we deal with that? Think it must’ve been General Raven who suggested just blasting the shit out of what’s left of the country. Pretty high civilian collateral damage, sure, but if that project went wrong, he said, there probably weren’t many left alive anyway. Get rid of the wild Pokémon once and for all, get all our refugees home, hunt down goddamn traitors like Irving and Overton, and rebuild. Well, let’s say that was up to a bit of debate.”

“Why would anybody agree to that plan?!” Hito yelled. “No Pokémon would destroy a whole country on command!”

“Well, hark at the talkie!” the doctor cackled, pointing at a cabinet full of purple pokéballs. “With those Master Balls, you can make a Pokémon do any damn thing you please! Breaks you in your minds, see? Makes you nothing but willing tools. Not my cup of tea, but then, I’m no military woman,” she added, smiling fondly at the ghosts.

“Damien, Hyper Beam that cabinet until there isn’t even dust left,” Lance snapped. The Dragonite responded enthusiastically. “So that’s what General Raven wanted to do? Use those balls to—?!”

“Actually, that was plan B,” the doctor said, tapping a computer panel and bringing up the schematics of what looked like a spaceship, looking entirely undeterred by the angry Dragonite destroying her tech. “You ever seen a spaceship explode on the launch pad? That’s what took out the whole Pewter Space Centre about ten years back. Killed nearly a hundred people, and Pokémon too, that’s how hot those explosions get. We’ve always fought our wars with the powers of Pokémon, but when you’re fighting against Pokémon, well, that’s when you need stuff like this. The argument was raging about whether or not to use ‘em, whether taking out any surviving populace was worth taking out the enemy, but Sar Sophia was the first to stand up and say anybody who wanted to fire those things would have to do it over her cold corpse. That’s when fighting broke out. And at the end of it, here we are.”

“And which side were you on?” Lance demanded.

“I’m the side of everybody’s dead anyway, so who gives a damn?” the woman cackled. “You bringing orders from Johto, kid?”
“Yeah,” Lance said through gritted teeth, “I’ve got orders. First, you’re going to explain what the hell went on here—not just in here, in Kanto—from the top. Then—can you disarm those… those missiles?”

“Not from here, I can’t,” she said with a shrug. “Manually, sure, but digging down to them could take months, and then the actual disarming and dismantling—”

“Captain Siba, how well is this place provisioned?” Lance asked, turning abruptly to Bruno. “It’s a bunker. There must be food and water, right?”

“Enough to feed an army for a thousand years,” Bruno affirmed. “What’re you thinking, kid?”

“I’m thinking that sounds like more than enough to keep us going while we dig so that Doctor—what is your name?”

“Doctor Agatha Kikuko, at your service, seems,” Agatha said, holding out her ID card for Lance to examine. “You wanna end this place and all the weapons in it, huh? Why the hell not!”

“Lance, what are you going to tell your grandfather?” Damien asked with a frown.

“Not a thing,” Lance said flatly. “There’s too much chaos in Johto. Too many people already ranting about how this is a judgement of the gods, or the end of days, or… nobody else is finding this place or getting this hands on anything in it. I don’t care what we have to do to protect it. Captain Siba… are you in agreement?” He turned a sharp look on Bruno, one that told the soldier that he wasn’t facing a kid anymore, and that options beyond helping out were probably limited.

He snapped off a salute. “Yes, sir!”

Over the years, only a small number of investigators made it anywhere near the bunker. Some took heed of their warnings to go. Some tried to attack, and were… dealt with. Only one young woman, from the Sevii Islands, agreed to stay and help bury the war bunker and its foul secrets.

Most people remembered the first couple of weeks that were the now the first couple of weeks in living memory as waiting. Most people didn’t work except for police officers, medical professionals, and those who only knew where they worked and not where they lived. Family registers, school records, censuses and lease details found home for almost everybody who was lost, though not everybody who was lost was found. Some people found out enough about their lives to figure that dropping out of them and getting a new start was a good idea. A religious mania swept Johto as people sought to find meaning in what had happened, some believing that it was the doing of Ho-oh, a curse on a nation of sinners or a blessing intended for people to start their lives anew. In Hoenn and Sinnoh, huge debates flared up over the suddenly well-spoken Pokémon, arguments that Pokémon were now participating in.

Nobody knew what had happened to Kanto.

Whatever had created the wave of psychic energy could not be found, but whatever it was left a psychic haze over the whole Fairlands that fuzzed any attempt at satellite imaging. Neither phone numbers nor web IDs nor teleporters registered to Kanto responded. Psychic humans and Pokémon across the Fairlands were suffering mental illnesses and difficulties with their powers and most were suffering difficulty teleporting ten feet, let alone into the country that seemed to be the epicentre of the event. Ships that tried to reach the country were turned back by corrosive waters that spread too far from Kanto’s shores to fly over; the mountains were impassable save for a small underground
network of tunnels, and of the only inspection team to make it through, there was only one survivor, who nearly died himself of lungfuls of poison. The very air was completely poisonous, he reported, the brief glimpse they’d gotten showing that the very ground was bare of plants and no sign of life but swollen, vicious poison-type Pokémon. The dragon clan’s heir tried flying through the mountains and never returned.

Barricades were built in the sea around Kanto to contain the poison water and the land itself was declared dead, desolate and dangerous. People rebuilt their lives and continued on, the political and popular focus shifting from the mystery of Kanto to the extended integration of Pokémon into human society, which Pokémon were demanding en masse now that they could converse with humans enough to understand it en masse. Life eventually went on as normal, or at least the new normal. Anything is normal if it happens for enough days in a row. In Hoenn and Sinnoh, speaking Pokémon became normal. In Johto, reading your own blog just to find out what your life was like Before became normal. In Kanto, hunger and brutality and cold necessity became normal.

At the bottom of a dark cave, pain and confusion and too many voices became normal.

For now.

Chapter End Notes

Posting this one randomly midweek because I just got my final results and I got an A on my dissertation and overall will be graduating my Bachelor of Arts degree in Drama and Performance, with Honours, with a 2:1 (Second Class, Upper Division) and I am SUPER PUMPED AND SO GODDAMN HAPPY RIGHT NOW :DDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDDD
Technological Summary

Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Summary

CALAMITY CALLS: ORAS VERSION

Chapter Notes

This one is a small alteration to chapter 23. Everything in the Magma/Aqua bases in ORAS is golden and well worth reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“What is all of this?” Saylee asked, looking at all the machinery around them.

“Well, that’s some sort of laser,” Lance said, pointing at a control bank nearby. “Theoretically for mining, I suppose, but a laser beam that can be fired ‘like whoa’…”

“Thanks for the technical summary,” Saylee said, rolling her eyes.

“Actually, that’s what the labels say,” Key said, reading the labels around the main dial. “Fire laser beam ‘delicately’, ‘a little bit more’, ‘fairly judiciously’ and ‘like whoa’…”

“Let me see,” Saylee said, running over to join her. There were, indeed, on formally printed labels, the four vaguest descriptions of high-powered lasers that she’d ever read in her life. “Okay, now I’m just amazed that they haven’t already set off the volcano,” she said, shaking her head.

“Oh, if you think that’s bad, you should meet the AI in charge of suit development,” Lance chuckled. “I don’t mean a Porygon. I mean an AI that… well, I’m sure it does its best.”

“…Let’s… let’s just go find Marc,” Saylee sighed, shaking her head.

Chapter End Notes

The signs in the Lilycove base absolutely cracked me up. Of course, infic Saylee and Key don’t go to the Lilycove base and it belongs to Team Aqua instead of Magma anyway, so I slightly moved things in the name of crack!AU XDXDXD
A Midsummer Night's Dream

Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Summary

And now, more antique comedy! In this case, the comedy that you’ve most likely heard of, and almost certainly studied if you went to school in the UK… also the one that inspired my Higher English teacher to spend an entire lesson on a tangent explaining Elizabethan sexual humour, so that was fun. Also features some characters who haven’t been in the fics yet, so just to clarify, Carlotta and Warren are based on the BW protagonists (Lotta and Warren are their default names in the German version of the game, and we liked those names better than Hilda and Hilbert).

Chapter Notes

CAST
N, King of Unova as THESEUS, Duke of Athens
CARLOTTA, Champion of Legend as HIPPOLYTA, Queen of the Amazons
NORMAN, Leader of Petalburg as EGEUS, a nobleman of Athens
BURGH, Leader of Castelia as PHILOSTRATE, Master of the Revels
KEY, daughter of NORMAN as HERMIA, daughter of EGEUS
DAISY, in love with RED as HELENA, in love with DEMETRIUS
RED, KEY’S suitor as DEMETRIUS, HERMIA’S suitor
ARCHIE, in love with KEY as LYSANDER, in love with HERMIA
SAYLEE, Queen of the Fairies as TITANIA, Queen of the Fairies
BLUE, King of the Fairies as OBERON, King of the Fairies
TOBY, or TOBIAS GOODFELLOW, BLUE’S Togetic servant as PUCK, or ROBIN GOODFELLOW, OBERON’s goblin servant
SILVER, adopted son of SAYLEE as BOY, adopted son of TITANIA
MEW, CELEBI, JIRACHI and SHAYMIN as COBWEB, MOTH, MUSTARDSEED and PEASEBLOSSOM
LANCE as NICK BOTTOM (Pyramus)
WALLACE as FRANCIS FLUTE (Thisbe)
CYNTHIA as TOM SNOUT (Pyramus’ father)
WALLY as ROBIN STARVELING (Thisbe’s mother)
LYSANDRE as SNUG (The Pyroar)
STEVEN STONE as PETER QUINCE (Thisbe’s father)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

SETTING

The city of CASTELIA in the nation of UNOVA, where KING N is to be married to QUEEN CARLOTTA. But love is not all in the air; KEY’S conflict with her father NORMAN over the man she is to marry is reaching breaking point, and in the nearby PINWHEEL FOREST, the inhuman
“Just four days left,” N said, wrapping his arms around Carlotta as the two enjoyed a little alone time between greeting various foreign dignitaries that had come to attend their wedding. “I may have won your heart in battle, but I will marry you in all pomp, ceremony and finery.”

“Fine, just do it quick,” Carlotta said, kissing him on the cheek. “You know how much I hate dresses.” She didn’t even wear a dress to court, preferring finely-tailored suits, and was in an ongoing debate with the castle tailors over the concept of “formal shorts”.

“Your majesties, we’ve got a biit of a problem,” Burgh said, slipping into the room and bowing. “Norman is here with his daughter and a couple of lovely young men, and none of them are happy. Not. One. Bit.”

“Show them in,” N ordered, letting Carlotta go. “It must be serious to bring it up to my court.”

Norman strode in when beckoned by Burgh, dragging his daughter Key by one arm. While Norman was tall, dark, and fairly solidly built, Key was small, slight and blonde, looking nothing like him. Despite the differences in their stature, Key was putting up a hell of a fight and if looks could kill Norman would be a puddle on the fine carpet already.

Behind them trailed two tall, dark young men, one quite buff, the other slighter, paler and younger-looking. The two of them were arguing intently and both of them were clutching pokéballs, clearly ready to tear each other to shreds given the slightest excuse.

“What is wrong, Norman?” N asked.

Norman scowled and shook his daughter by the arm. “My disobedient daughter,” he growled. “This man—” he gestured to the slimmer, younger man, who despite the argument looked somewhat bored with the whole affair, “is Red, a fine trainer, who came to me to ask my permission to propose to Key, and I gave it to him. Whereas this man—” he pointedly accusingly at the older and extremely buff guy who was trying to hold Key’s hand. “This is Archie, a layabout criminal who keeps sneaking into my daughter’s room and then gave her an engagement ring without ever asking my permission!”

“He’s got my permission,” Key grumbled.

“That’s not enough to be legally married to him!” Norman argued. “Not at your age! You’re not eighteen just yet, and that means you need my signature on the marriage certificate, young lady, and you will most certainly not get that unless the marriage is to Red here!” Red smiled smugly at this announcement. “I come to you with this, Lord N, so that you know that if my daughter attempts to marry this criminal and my signature appears on the certificate, it will be forged! If Key will not marry Red, I will disown her!”

“Forged signatures demand a jail sentence,” N said, looking to Key. “Key, your father is right. You ought to listen to him. Red is a fine trainer and a good man.” Red smiled and tried to take Key’s hand, but she batted it away.

“So is Archie,” Key argued. “And if I can’t marry him, then I won’t marry anyone! I’m not marrying Red, and I’m certainly not going to f—”
“Why don’t you both take a little time apart to think about it?” N suggested. “When Carlotta and I return from our honeymoon, we will all meet again. Key, if your father will only give consent for you to marry Red, then your only choices are for that, or to be disowned. At your age, if you’re disowned, you’ll be sent to a girl’s temple…”

“Think straight, Key,” Red pleaded. “Marriage to me will be infinitely better than going to one of those Arceus-forsaken places.” He turned a hard glare on Archie. “Stop messing with her, Archie. You don’t have her father’s acceptance!”

“No, but I have Key’s love, so I’ll marry her,” Archie declared, “and since you have Norman’s love, you can marry him!”

Key burst out laughing, which only made Norman angrier. “You’re a piece of gutter trash, Archie, not remotely worth my daughter!” he shouted.

“Lord N…” Archie said, turning serious. “My slate is clean these days. I haven’t committed a crime for years, not since I was young and stupid. Now I’m older, just as wise as Red, just as talented a trainer, and unlike him, Key actually likes me. So don’t I deserve to marry her even more? Besides, Red already has a girlfriend…”

“What?” Red said uneasily.

Archie sneered. “C’mon, is there anyone who doesn’t know about how you picked up Oak’s granddaughter Daisy?” he said loudly. “Or how hard she fell for you? She’s a sweet lady and she still fancies you rotten, everyone knows it. No matter how much you brush her off…”

“I had heard about that,” N admitted. “But, well…” he glanced at Carlotta. “I’ve had other matters on my mind.” He sighed and turned back to Key. “Key, the law is what it is. If your father doesn’t give his consent for you to marry Archie, then you cannot marry him. And if he disowns you, you must go to a girl’s temple. That is how the law stands. Now you are dismissed, and you too, Archie,” he said, nodding to the pair of them. “I need to speak to Norman and Red about the World Tournament.”

“…yes, my lord,” Red said reluctantly, not looking happy about Key and Archie going off alone but not willing to disobey his king. Archie and Key kept a careful distance from each other on the way out, feeling Norman’s eyes boring into their backs, but as soon as the door closed behind them Key flung her hands around Archie’s neck.

“The course of true love never did run smooth,” Archie said, patting her hair. They broke apart and quickly began to walk away, holding hands tightly. “Still, they say the strength of love is in the strength of the obstacles it faces. Listen!” he held her face in his hands. “My brother lives in Hoenn, far away from here. The marriage laws there are different, your dad doesn’t have to have anything to do with anything. So if we go there, we can get married, no fuss, no trouble, and they’ll never find us!”

“Really?” Key said, placing her hands over his.

Archie nodded. “I’ll meet you in Pinwheel Forest tomorrow night,” he said. “We’ll go to Virbank City and get a ship from there. Remember that clearing where we first met? Where you and Daisy were trying to call on the Faerie Queen?”

Key giggled. “I’ll meet you there,” she promised. Archie leaned in to kiss her, but paused when he looked over her shoulder.
“Daisy!” he called, straightening up. “How are you?”

“Oh, fine,” Daisy said morosely, wandering down the corridor towards them. “The man I love is getting the King to sort it out for him to get married to someone else. I’m just pechay. How do you do it?” she begged Key. “How do you make Red love you like that?”

Key shrugged. “Honestly, the more I tell him to get lost, the more he follows me.”

“The more I love him, the more he tells me to get lost,” Daisy said sadly.

“Daisy, I swear I don’t do it on purpose,” Key said, clasping her friend’s hand.

Daisy shook her head. “No, you can’t help being prettier than me, funnier than me, more talented than me,” she said bitterly.

“Oh, c’mon, everyone says you’re beautiful, and you’re smarter than me—anyway, it won’t matter for much longer,” Key promised her. “Archie and I are getting out of here, tomorrow night, through Pinwheel Forest. Red’ll forget all about me, and realize he has the best girl in Unova right at his side.” She hugged Daisy. “I’ll miss you. He’s all yours now!” She turned and waved to Archie. “I’d better go. I’ll see you then!”

“Can’t wait!” Archie called, turning and making his own way away.

Daisy watched them go sadly. “What difference does it make if ‘everyone’ thinks I’m beautiful when Red doesn’t?” she muttered to herself. “He shot me down completely because he loves Key more…” She bit her lip thoughtfully. “If he knows that she’s gone, that she’d abandon him so easily, maybe he’ll finally realize that she doesn’t love him, that I love him a million times more than she ever will… if he knew…”

She sat down on a bench, determined to wait for Red to come out, certain that he would fall in love with her again as soon as he knew that Key would soon be gone.

{}
“That’s nice,” Steven said. “Moving on… Wallace, you’re Thisbe.”

“That’s not fair!” Wallace said.

“That’s nice,” Steven said. “Moving on… Wallace, you’re Thisbe.”

“…The female lead?” Wallace asked, raising an eyebrow. “Shouldn’t Cynthia be playing that?”

“I always play Thisbe, dammit,” Cynthia said coldly, “and I told Lance that if he didn’t give me another part—any other part—I was letting my Garchomp off the chain.”

“So you’re Thisbe,” Steven said to Wallace. “We’ll do your hair and makeup for you. Learn to speak falsetto and walk in heels.” Wallace sighed and then flicked his hair.

“Then I shall be a fabulous Thisbe,” he declared in a high-pitched voice. “And for the record, I could run a marathon in heels.”

“I can play Thisbe!” Lance said excitedly. “I can speak falsetto brilliantly!” Everyone winced at the brutal squeak.


“Okay,” the kid said quietly. Since he was sixteen and still hadn’t hit puberty yet, he was used to getting put in female roles. Cynthia was the only woman in the troupe, and most plays had more than one.

“Cynthia, you’re actually Pyramus’s father,” Steven continued. “Bind up and drop your voice.”

“You know I can take all of you one-handed anyway,” Cynthia said, pulling her hair back and peering into a mirror nearby to see how she looked.

“Why, what are you doing with the other hand?” Lysandre asked, to general sniggering.

“I will be Thisbe’s father,” Steven said loudly over the laughter. “Lysandre, you’re the Pyroar, since none of us actually have one and you have the hair for it.”

“Rawr,” Lysandre immediately shot at Cynthia. “Wait, does the Pyroar even have any lines?”


“Let me play the Pyroar!” Lance said excitedly. “I can roar mightier than anyone! ROOOOAAARR!”

“Shut it!” Cynthia barked. Lance slapped his hands over his mouth, looking wounded.

“You are Pyramus, Lance,” Steven growled. “Deal. With. It.” He passed around a sheaf of scripts, throwing Lance’s at his head. “Put together your costume and we’ll meet in the clearing by the river in Pinweel Forest tomorrow evening to rehearse.”

“I can’t wait!” Lance said excitedly, running off. “I’ll see you all then!”

“Are we seriously doing this for the King?” Cynthia asked Steven.

“Perhaps I should amend my will before getting my costume,” Wallace sighed.
“Hi there! What’s a fairy like you doing in a place like this?”

Jirachi drew back nervously as a white figure fluttered down towards her out of the trees. She knew who this was. This was trouble.

“I go where the Queen bids me,” she said. “I’d better go. We must all attend upon the Queen…”

“Before she goes to meet the King? Bad plan there,” the white fairy said, shaking his head. “He is pissed at her. She spends all her time with that kid she adopted, and never spends any time with the King, know what I mean?” He winked at her.

“I know you,” Jirachi said nervously. “You’re Tobias Goodfellow. You lead travellers astray and laugh at their misfortunes!”

“I am that merry wanderer of the night called Toby!” Tobias said, flipping in the air and bowing to Jirachi. “Though you make me sound so cruel. I simply do what I can to make my lord laugh! Nothing’s better than a bit of a laugh, right?” He looked around. “Although here comes the King, so nobody’s going to be laughing tonight…”

“And here comes the Queen,” Jirachi said, flitting away. “This bodes ill.”

Two figures were appearing out of the mists of the wood as if they were materializing from nothing. Perhaps they were. Each was surrounded by fluttering clouds of fairies, all watching each other nervously as the King and Queen locked angry eyes on each other.

“Ill met by moonlight, proud Saylee,” the King said coldly.

“What crawled up your ass and died, jealous Blue?” the Queen responded. She gently placed a hand on the head of the small red-haired child who clung to her skirts. “Why are you even here? Last I heard, you were in Kanto. Aww, did you come all this way to see your ex getting married to N? Going to bless their wedding night, perhaps?”

“Who’s jealous now?” Blue sneered. “You’re hardly one to talk. I know all about that night with you and N. And Skyla. And Elesa. At the same time.”

“You just wish you were there,” Saylee teased. “Seriously, what’s your problem? We’re mythological, Blue. We don’t do fidelity. Neither of us have done fidelity for the past several thousand years and you’ve never had a problem with that arrangement until now. So why don’t you just spit it out? I mean, you know what happens when we fight. Rivers flood, crops rot, disease spreads… soon the seasons will fall out of order, do you realize that? That, to me, sounds neither groovy nor fun.”

“You know, you can fix this easily,” Blue said acidly. “I have told you that I’ve been needing a changeling boy to be my servant. You seem to have one to spare.” He pointed at the red-haired boy, who shrank nervously behind Saylee.

“You think I’m just going to hand him over??” Saylee laughed. “What are you on? His mum was my best friend! She died having him, so for her sake I promised to raise him safely, and nothing is going to take him away from me, got it?”

Blue sighed and looked away. “How long are you going to be around here?” he asked heavily.

“Until after N’s wedding day,” Saylee responded.

“No,” said Blue, shaking his head. “Just no.”
“Fine,” Saylee grumbled, crossing her arms. “Look, if we can’t sort this out, I’ll stay away from your party if you stay away from mine, deal?”

“We could party together if you just let me have the kid,” Blue said.

“Go fuck yourself,” Saylee said, taking the boy’s hand and vanishing. Her fairies followed her away.


“You rang?” Tobias asked, floating down before his lord and master.

“You remember the beach I told you about, the one where you can see all the mermaid babes playing with the Milotic?” he asked.

“Vividly,” Tobias agreed.

“Well, I was hanging out there one evening, and I saw a Luvdisc that had set its sights on a human girl nearby. It wound up to hit her with a Water Gun of love, making her fall in love with the next man she saw.”

“Handy for you, eh?” Tobias suggested.

Blue shook his head. “Unfortunately, the useless little sod missed and she wandered off,” he sighed. “But the water gun hit a berry bush, and the berries bloomed purple and swollen with love-juice. If a single drop of that juice falls into a person’s eye, that person will fall in love with the next person they see…”

“I get your drift,” Tobias said, nudging his master with a wink. “Back in a tick.” He flew away and was gone.

“What will you do with it, my lord?” his other fairies asked, clustering around him.

“Amuse myself, as my Queen so eloquently commanded me to,” said Blue with a smirk. “I shall slip some into Saylee’s eyes, and then see to it that she next sees something hideous… like a Conkeldurr, or a Throh perhaps…” The fairies tittered. “We’ll have front-row seats to a fantastic romantic train-wreck. And by the time it gets boring—which might be a while—I’ll have gotten the boy from her while she’s… distracted.”

“Why don’t you just give up on her?!”

“Someone’s coming,” the fairies hissed, flitting away in fright. Blue simply made himself invisible so that he could watch the approaching humans. It would be a little while until Tobias returned, so he’d have to find his own amusement until then.

“Would you leave me alone?!” a dark-haired young man was demanding. “When are you going to get that we’re over? Go home! I’m going to find Archie, who I’m going to kill, and Key, who kills me…” he sighed dreamily.

“She really will kill you if you lay a finger on Archie,” a tall and pretty brunette insisted. “But I’d never hurt you, Red! I love you! Come back with me!”

“No! Take a damn hint!” Red shouted, trying to push her away. She clung to his arm and he couldn’t shake her off. “Leave me ALONE, Daisy!”

“I’ll never let you be alone, Red!” Daisy said warmly. “Wherever you go, I’ll follow you!”
“Go AWAY!”

The two ran off, bickering. Blue shook his head, smiling.

“That poor girl,” he sighed. “Well, I won’t need all of the fruit’s juices for Saylee alone. Perhaps I shall be benevolent and solve Miss Daisy’s problem for her. I do so love to see young lovers happy…”

“My lord Blue!” Tobias called, appearing at his shoulder with a large, deep purple berry in his paws. Blue took it from him with a smile.

“Saylee likes to sleep in Virizion’s Glade,” he said, rolling the berry in his fingers. He conjured a small cup in his fingers and squeezed a little juice into it. “Not far from here, there is a young man with dark hair and a lady who loves him to stupidity. He does not love her back. See to that, won’t you?”

“Of course, my lord,” Toby promised, flitting away with the berry. Now alone again, Blue easily slipped through the woods, following the familiar sound of Saylee and her fairies singing. Once, such beautiful song had been for his amusement. Well, soon all would be remedied, and perhaps they would sing together again.

Saylee’s voice faded out of the song; lovely music often put her to sleep. The fairies faded out one by one, calling out charms to prevent wild Pokémon and lost humans from discovering where their Queen slumbered. Only Celebi stood sentential, and it only took a little push to put her ten years out of the way, leaving Blue standing alone over the sleeping Saylee with the berry in his hands.

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“…I may have forgotten the way just a little.”

Key groaned, sinking down next to a tree. “If only we could walk on the main paths…”

“We’d be seen, and then what would we do?” Archie said, sitting down next to her. “It’s very late… maybe we’ll see our way better in the morning. For now, we should sleep.” He lay back with his arm around her shoulders, trying to pull her down to sleep next to him, but she pulled away and lay down a few feet away.

“Let’s not sleep next to each other,” she said, blushing a little. “Even if I don’t give a shit about my dad’s permission, I’d like to do the rest of this properly.”

“If you want,” Archie sighed, lying back down. “But if you get cold, we might have to snuggle together for body heat…”

“Goodnight, Archie.”

The two of them dropped off quickly, exhausted by their wanderings. Not long afterwards, Tobias flew overhead.

*Down there! A dark-haired man!* he thought, flying down to circle Key and Archie. *And that must be the girl over there… poor thing, lying all alone on the cold ground… what a jackass that guy is! Well, then…* he leaned over Archie with the goblet and sprinkled some of the purple juice over his eyes.

“When you wake up, you will love that girl,” he muttered. “But don’t wake up yet… at least, not ‘till I’m gone.” He flitted off, feeling pleased with himself, to report the good news to Blue.
“Leave me ALONE, you STALKER!”

“Red!” Daisy cried, chasing after him. She was so focused on her target that she didn’t notice the ground growing rougher under her feet. She fell flat on her face as her ankle caught on a tree root. Red glanced back at her, but he didn’t stop running.

“Red!” Daisy cried. “You can’t just leave me!”

“Watch me,” he called back. He was soon out of her sight.

“Uhn…” Daisy tried to get up, but only succeeded in reaching a sitting position. She’d been running after Red for hours and she was only now realizing how exhausted she was.

_Lucky Key, being so attractive_, she thought bitterly, pulling herself up by a tree and slowly starting to walk after Red again. _Men fall all over her… I wish they’d fall all over me… Red, at least…_

She nearly tripped again as her ankle caught on something. Looking down, she was shocked to realize that it was Archie’s ankle.

“Archie?!” she said in shock. “Why’s he sleeping here? Shouldn’t they be gone by now?” She kneeled next to him, frowning nervously. “Or… is he dead…? Archie! Wake up!” She shook his shoulders, relaxing as he began to stir. His eyes were glazed for a moment as he stared at her, and then they filled with a curious warmth as he leapt to his feet, sweeping her up into his large arms. “Daisy!” he said happily. “How wonderful it is to see you! This is perfect! Come on, let’s get out of here so we can get married!”

“Wait… what?!” Daisy said, trying to push away from him. “What’s wrong with you?! You’re marrying Key!”

“Key? Pfft, please,” Archie said, rolling his eyes. “Who would want to marry her when a girl as lovely as you is free?”

Daisy slapped him and shoved herself away. “You jerk!” she yelled. “What is this? Are you taking the piss?”

“No, of course not!” Archie insisted earnestly, reaching for her, but she slapped his hand away.

“What did I do to you?” she snarled. “First Red won’t look at me, and then you have to mess with me when Key’s not around? Well, forget it!” She turned and ran off, searching for Red again.

“Daisy…?” Archie said in confusion, watching her go. He glanced back to where Key was sleeping. “Key’s right here… didn’t she see her?” He frowned. “Hell, who would want to with a woman as beautiful as Daisy around?” He brightened up. “Once I kick Red’s ass, she’ll see how much I love her! He doesn’t deserve a woman like Daisy!” He ran off, juggling Shanks’ pokéball in his hand.

“Archie!” Key shouted, jerking sharply out of a nightmare a few minutes later. “Archie…” she looked around, confused at being unable to spot him. “Archie, where are you? Archie?” she stood up, searching desperately for her missing fiancé. “ARCHIE!”

“Steven, this isn’t going to work,” Lance said.
“It will as soon as we can get Wallace’s padding to stop slipping,” Steven said, watching Wally sew up the top of Thisbe’s dress.

“I mean that Pyramus has to draw a sword to kill himself!” Lance cried. “The court ladies are delicate! It’ll terrify them!”

“I don’t know about that creep Shauntal,” Cynthia said, “but he does have a point about Caitlin. You never know what will set that diva off.” Steven sighed heavily, actually facepalming at the sight of Lance jumping up and down with his hand in the air.

“But I have a suggestion!” Lance continued. “Before we go on, you tell everyone that I’m not Pyramus, I’m Lance, and that the swords are just fake!”

“I’ll do that while you’re all getting changed,” Steven said, deeming it a white lie that was necessary to the smooth continuation of their rehearsal.

“If they’re afraid of swords,” Wally said softly, “would they be afraid of a Pyroar too?”

“Are you serious?” Lysandre said, glaring at the boy. Wally blushed.

“He’s right!” Lance declared. “A Pyroar is a powerful and terrible thing! Steven, you have to tell them that it’s Lysandre really, so they won’t be afraid!”

“I dunno, if he takes his mask off they’re sure to get a fright,” Cynthia opined, to much laughter.

“Fine, fine,” Steven agreed. “Right, now we’ve had a couple of staging problems come up. The first is the scene where the lovers meet by moonlight. We’re doing this inside, the interior hall that we’re performing in has no windows, and this is too short-notice to set up a lighting rig. We don’t have the time or people. So how the hell do we create a moonlight effect?”

“Lunatone!” Lance suggested brightly. “Or Clefairy!”

“And does anyone here have either of those Pokémon, or know anyone that does?” Steven asked pointedly. Everyone shook their heads. “Fair suggestion, but no.”

“We could turn the main lights down and light a lamp,” Wally suggested. “Just a little one, for dim moonlight.”

“I’m not onstage during that scene,” Cynthia said, flicking out her golden hair. “I can put on the Cresselia dress from Buneary in the Moon and carry the lamp in.”

“That way we can have the effect of moonrise,” Steven said, pointing his pen at her. “I like it.” He scribbled down some notes. “You’ll need to get changed again for the last scene, remember. Maybe wear a veil so you don’t have to take your makeup off. Right, now… Pyramus and Thisbe speak through a wall. Now I know that when we don’t have the set we just mime in a wall, but this is for the King and Queen. We are too classy to mime. Suggestions?”

“You can’t carry in a wall,” Wallace sighed.

“What about if we just paint some cardboard or something to look like a wall?” Lance suggested. “We’re actors! Everything’s made out of cardboard and sticky tape anyway! We don’t have to tell them it’s not really a wall,” he added in a low whisper.

“Wally, you’re also not on in that scene,” Steven said, pointing at the kid. “We’ll get some card painted to look like a wall and then you’ll walk in after the lights go down and hold it up.”
“Yes, sir.”

“Woohoo! Problem solved!” Lance cheered, punching the air. Wally held up Wallace’s dress to him.

“Right, simmer down,” Steven ordered. “Let’s get on with the actual rehearsing. Lance, you need to move around during the speech in the second scene, because even though you start out upstage left by the end you need to be…”

Something white flitted unseen through the trees above. Beady little eyes peered down at the players.

“Humans, so near where the Queen sleeps?” he murmured. “Ah! Actors! They’re always good fun, and when they’re not you get to throw peanuts at them, and that’s good fun too.” He flew down to watch the rehearsal, safely invisible to mortal eyes.

“Alright, scene three!” Steven called. “Pyramus and Thisbe meet by moonlight!” Wallace and Lance walked to their places. “You two, move when Cynthia stops. Go!”

Cynthia walked smoothly over to some imaginary mark on the ground, pretending to hold something aloft. As soon as she stood still, Wallace and Lance pranced towards each other, Lance clasping Wallace’s hand in his and holding an invisible gift aloft.

“Thisbe,” he declared, “the flowers have odious savours sweet!”

“Odorous,” Steven groaned.

“Still doesn’t really sound right, does it, when you really think about it?” Lysandre muttered, fiddling with his tail. “I don’t think that word means the same thing anymore.”

“Just say the line,” Steven ordered. “Nobody expects these old plays to make sense anymore anyway. They wouldn’t be classics if they still made sense. Odorous savours sweet!”

“By all the Birds and Beasts, that Pyramus is awful,” Tobias complained, circling the play. Lance was stepping behind the tree that marked “offstage” while Wallace mispronounced the name of the place where the lovers were to meet. Steven looked ready to hyper beam the pair of them. “Well, I know how to make things more fun.” He followed Lance, briefly hiding him from the eyes of the others while he worked a little magic.

“Lance, where the hell are you?” Steven bellowed. “It’s your cue! We’re all going to get hung…”

“Hanged,” Cynthia corrected him, apparently just to see if she could make him explode. Lance pranced out from behind the tree.

“If I were fair, fair Thisbe—”

Wally yelled and staggered back. “What the hell is that?” Cynthia screamed, producing a pokéball from somewhere. “Gina, get that Zebstri—whatever the hell it is!”

“What the hell!” Lance yelled—or rather, whinnied. He turned and fled, followed by Cynthia’s Garchomp and Tobias’ laughter. Gina soon lost interest and returned to her lady’s side, but Tobias followed, sniggering at Lance’s lopsided blundering as he tried to manoeuvre with his head the wrong shape.

“Oh, I see what they’re doing,” Lance grumbled. “Trying to make an ass of me, are they? Well, let’s see them rehearse without Pyramus! I’m not moving from this spot, no matter what they do! I’ll sing so they can hear that I’m having a good time without them!” He marched away from the other actors,
braying loudly and somehow failing to notice that Tobias had given him the head of a Zebstrika.

“Oh, man, this is great, this guy’s an idiot,” Tobias guffawed, following him invisibly and inaudibly. “Awful singing voice, too—oh shit, the Queen!”

Lance was marching right towards where Queen Saylee was sleeping. His terrible singing caused her to wake. Tobias saw her sit up, rubbing sleep from her eyes, and look at Lance.

Her eyes filled with warmth and love that showed through their purple sheen. She stood up, ignoring the human boy that slept by her side. “Did I die in my sleep and wake up in Heaven?” she whispered. “You’re an angel! You must be! You’re too wonderful not to be!”

“Well, I am pretty awesome,” Lance said, stepping back a little warily at the sudden appearance of a beautiful, glass-eyed woman.

“Don’t go, my love!” Saylee cried, noticing his backward step. “My wise, beautiful love…”

“I’m that too,” Lance said, nodding his oversized head. “Enough to know that this has to be another prank! You’re one of Cynthia’s actress friends, right? That’s it, screw them, I’m out of here—”

“YOU WILL NOT LEAVE ME!” Suddenly there were a dozen Faerie Queens surrounding Lance, hemming him in. The closest stepped towards him, reaching out to stroke his ears, and then all of them coalesced into one woman who kissed him tenderly on the bridge of his nose.

“Stay here,” she said softly, all sweetness and light again, “and my servants are yours. Mew! Celebi! Jirachi! Shaymin!” The pretty little fey appeared around their mistress when called. “This beautiful mortal is your master now. Take the honey from the Combee and the fruit from the Tropius to feed him with. Someone fetch Meloetta! We shall have music!”

“Hail, mortal!” Mew cried, flitting off. The others took up the cry of “hail!” as they left to their tasks.

“Thank, you, thank you,” Lance said, bowing to their retreating backs. “Well, if this is a prank, I’m going to enjoy it! I’ll sing for you, my lady!”

“Not now, my love,” Saylee said, kissing him on the cheek. Some sense had evidently made its way through the fog of her love. “The rest of you! Come lead him to my most secret glade!”

“Secret glade, eh?” Lance said, wiggling his eyebrows.

Saylee stood up, pulling him to his feet. “Tie up his tongue so we can go silently,” she ordered, still smiling.

“Kink—mmgh!” Lance’s mouth snapped closed and he couldn’t open it. Saylee lead him away by the hand.

Crying with laughter, Tobias flew away to report to Blue.

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“Well now…” Tobias dropped out several substitutes and began making them move, their heads shifting into the shapes of the players. “Near where the Queen slept, players played at acting. They sucked at it, so for amusement I gave the leading male the head of a Zebstrika.”

“As you do,” Blue said, watching one of the substitutes take on an equine form. The rest ran from it, all but one vanishing.

“I mazed the players, so they’ll stumble about the woods until dawn if you want to have more sport with them,” Tobias said, waving a hand at the woods. The second substitute morphed into a vague likeness of Saylee. “The idiot actor stumbled singing into where the Queen slept. His awful voice awoke her and she fell head over heels in love!”

Blue had grown a throne for himself out of the vines and bushes of the forest, and nearly fell out of it in his laughter. “Oh, this is even better than I imagined,” he laughed, clutching his stomach. “Well done, Tobias. What of the human boy?”

“She left him behind,” Tobias said with a grin. “No eyes for anyone but her dear lightning horse.”

“You, you and you, go lead him here,” Blue ordered, pointing to a Floette, Carbinkle and Ralts. They immediately scurried off. “If he’s mine at daybreak, he’ll be mine forever. Now, Tobias, what about the dark-haired mortal man and the lady who loves him? Is she out of the friendzone yet?”

“I did that too,” Tobias said, following as the King stood and began to stride through the trees after his goblins. “Well, there’s the girl now…” he frowned as he spotted the man the young blonde was arguing with.

“That’s her, but that isn’t him,” Tobias said. He dared a glance at his King and saw Blue glaring down at him, clearly having noticed his mistake and been displeased by it. “…Ah.”

“Key, you’re being irrational,” Red insisted. “I love you!”

“And I hate you!” Key shouted. “You killed Archie, didn’t you? You had to have! He wouldn’t have just left me!”

“You’re talking crazy,” Red sighed, rubbing his eyes. “I haven’t killed him. He probably isn’t even dead. Come on, let me get you home…” he put his arm around her shoulders and she kicked him in the crotch.

“They only thing you can get me,” Key snarled, “is to get out of my face!” She stormed away as Red slumped to the ground in pain.

“She’s so damn stubborn…” he groaned, curling up next to a tree and closing his eyes. Eventually, his pained gasps evened out into the deep breathing of sleep.

Tobias slowly backed away from Blue’s stern glare. “You idiot,” he growled. “You put the love juice on the eyes of a dark-haired man with a beard, didn’t you?”

“Well… maybe…” Tobias said.

“YOU IDIOT!” Blue yelled. “They were an eloping couple! They were in love! They were probably going to get freaky in my forest, and now he’s in love with the wrong woman!”
“Forgive me!” Tobias yelped as Blue stalked towards him.

“Go find Daisy of Castelia,” Blue snapped, pointing into the forest. “I will recast the spell on him. You bring her here before he wakes up. Do you think I can even trust you with that?”

“I’m going, I’m going!” Tobias squeaked, flying away as swiftly as he could. Blue drew the purple flower from his pocket and dripped it over Red’s eyes.

“I remember you,” he said with a malicious smirk. “You spurned that poor girl before. Now you will beg for her affections.”

“I’m back, I’m back!” Tobias cried a moment later. “Daisy’s coming, and the other black-haired Castelian. Shall we sit back and enjoy the fun?” He grinned hopefully, relaxing visibly when Blue grinned back. The pair faded out of human sight, standing over Red’s sleeping form. They could already hear Daisy and Archie shouting; the noise would surely wake Red soon.

“How can I convince you that I’m not taking the piss?” Archie cried, running after Daisy. “I’m nearly bloody crying over you, Daisy!”

“Then you’re a much better actor than I gave you credit for,” Daisy snapped.

“But I love you!” Archie said, grabbing Daisy’s hand and pressing it to his heart. Daisy snatched her hand away, patting it as if brushing dust off it.

“Earth to Archie: you say that to Key, not me,” she pointed out.

“But I mean it when I say it to you! Why won’t you listen to me?” Archie demanded. “Red will never say he loves you!”

Daisy looked around sharply at Red’s name. Not watching her footing, she tripped over Red’s leg in the dark and landed heavily in his lap. He yelled out in pain, jerking away. His eyes glazed as he started at Daisy, before filling with love.

“Daisy!” he cried, wrapping his arms around her. “Beautiful, perfect, divine Daisy! There you are! I’ve looked all over for you!”

“You… did…?” Daisy gasped, blushing. Red bent to kiss her. She slapped him and pushed away.

“No, you didn’t! You came after Key!” she yelled, on the verge of tears now. “Even you’re taking the piss out of me! I’ve had enough! You’re both a pair of fucking bastards! Think you’re funny, do you?”

“Red, how dare you?!” Archie yelled, enraged, pulling Red to his feet by the front of his shirt. “We all know you love Key! Don’t toy with poor Daisy’s feelings like that!”

“Says the man who just eloped with Key!” Red growled, pushing Archie away. “Don’t be an arse; we all know how much you two love each other. Go be disgustedly happy together. Daisy is mine, as she always should have been!”

“You’re both bastards,” Daisy sobbed, stalking away. Red started after her, but Archie pushed him back, trying to follow Daisy. The two started to push and punch at one another. Then they pushed each other back and pulled out pokéballs, clearly ready to battle.

“Archie!” Key cried, running into the clearing. “You’re here! You’re alive! Wait, you’re alive,” she said, euphoria turning to suspicion. “Why’d you leave me alone like that?”
“True love,” Archie growled, not turning his glare away from Red.

“Okay, that makes even less sense,” Key snapped, crossing her arms. Red released his Espeon; Archie countered with his Mightyena.

“What do you want from me, woman?” he yelled as his Pokémon and Red’s started to battle. “I’m fighting for Daisy here! You’re not important!”

“Wh… what the hell?!” Key gasped, looking from the fighting men to the crying Daisy, who released her Blissey. The large pink Pokémon bodyslammed Espeon and Mightyena both at her trainer’s command, knocking them both down.

“All three of you are in on it?!” she screamed, enraged. “Key! You, of all people? You’d do this to me, you bitch?!”

“What the hell is going on?!” Key yelled at her former friend.

“Don’t act like you don’t know!” Daisy shrieked back. “Archie and Red both love you! They’d do anything for you! You must’ve been the one who sent them to take the piss out of me by pretending to fight over me!” she pointed at Red and Archie, who, in the absence of their Pokémon, had begun to trade punches again. “You absolute bitch!”

“Daisy, I don’t understand what you mean!” Key yelled, starting to cry.

“Oh, yeah, cry and play the innocent, and all the men in Castelia fall at your feet!” Daisy snapped, storming away with her Blissey.

“Daisy, darling, wait!” Red yelled, returning his Espeon and running after her. “I love you!”

“He’s lying and you know it, beloved!” Archie yelled, returning his Mightyena and charging after them.

“Archie, please tell me what’s going on!” Key begged, running after him.

“Fuck off!” Archie yelled without looking back. Key gasped.

“Oh, wow,” Tobias cackled, watching the four run off. “What fools these mortals be!”

“Tobias…” Blue sighed, watching the men break out into another fight. They only broke up again when Key, finally snapping, leapt at Daisy, screaming “BITCH I’LL SCRATCH YOUR EYES OUT IF YOU CALL ME SHORT AGAIN”.

“Yes, m’lord?” Tobias said meekly, catching his master’s irritated expression.

“It’s well past time we wrapped up this little circus,” Blue said darkly. “I’ll give you a chance to redeem yourself.” He handed the purple flower to Tobias. “Get them lost in the dark again. Make Daisy and Red fall asleep near each other, and Archie and Key near each other but far away from Red and Daisy. Drip the flower into Archie’s eyes. Archie. The one with the beard. What will you do?”

“Drip the flower into Red’s eyes,” Tobias said. Blue raised his hand. “Kidding, m’lord! Archie’s eyes. Him with the beard. Archie. Got it. You can count on me, m’lord.” Blue looked over his shoulder and smiled at the sight of the child Silver sitting among his fairies, enraptured, his own ears beginning to elongate into a goblin child’s.
“Well, I’ve had my fun,” he mused aloud. “I ought to lift the spell on Saylee soon.”

“You’d better do it quick, m’lord,” Tobias said, looking up into the dark blue sky. “Dawn is soon. Look… you can see the ghosts going back to their graves.”

“We are no ghosts,” Blue said, watching the ethereal plane turn to rush hour. “I can have as much fun in day as night. Still, best to finish this now. Go.” Tobias bowed and flitted off.

“Oh, meathead!” he cried in Red’s voice. “Too scared to fight me?”

“What was that?!” Archie yelled, enraged. He ran straight into a blast of Hypnosis.

“One down,” Tobias muttered, watching the large man slump unconscious to the ground. He flew off to where Red was. “Come and have a go if you think you’re hard enough, you wimp!” he yelled in Archie’s voice.

“You’ll pay for this!” Red yelled, obligingly following the voice in the opposite direction from where Archie slept. When Tobias judged him to be far enough away, he used Hypnosis again until Red too lay unconscious on the forest floor.

“Two down… well, she makes life easy,” he commented, seeing Daisy staggering through the forest nearby. “She looks exhausted, poor dear… nighty-night!” A third blast of Hypnosis caused Daisy to fall asleep mere feet away from Red. “One to go…”

Key was storming through the forest not far away. Incorporeally, Tobias encouraged her to wander in Archie’s direction. She, too, was tiring from her long night in the forest, and was nearly asleep of her own accord before she reached Archie. When she was sound asleep within Archie’s line of sight, Tobias dripped the juice of the flower into his eyes.

“Gotta hope this Red chump isn’t a single-day-beard man,” he sighed, looking from Archie to Key. “Now he’ll love her again, and she loves him…” he flitted over to where Red and Daisy slept. “And he’ll love her, who always loved him. And they all lived happily ever after! Ahh, it feels good to do good deeds…” chuckling, he flew away into the forest.

“Do you want to listen to some music, my love?” Saylee asked, stroking Lance’s large, soft ears and spiky, staticy mane.

“Oh, yes, I love music!” Lance said brightly. Celebi obligingly produced a harp. “Hey, you don’t play the accordion, do you?”

“Good grief, he’s not just ugly now, he’s an idiot,” Blue sniggered.

“Do you want anything to eat, darling?” Saylee asked, stroking her deformed lover’s long nose.

“Well… I could do with some hay…” Lance said thoughtfully.

Saylee smiled slowly and kissed his nose. “I could do with you,” she whispered. “Bedtime, my love…”

“Good idea,” Lance said with a yawn, lying on his side and instantly falling asleep.

Saylee smiled happily as he began to snore loudly. “What a beautiful man,” she said lovingly, lying down next to him and wrapping her arms around him.
“This was so sad it was hilarious,” Blue commented as Tobias appeared, “but now it’s looped back around to just sad. I have the boy now, anyway.” He reached up into the sky where the moon hung low. When his hand came down, a pile of silver dust sat in his palm. “Time to fix her eyesight.” He stooped and picked up Saylee in one arm, gently sprinkling the silver dust in her eyes. “Time to awake, my dear,” he whispered.

“Mmmm… Blue?” Saylee said sleepily as she woke up. “I had a nightmare that I was in love with the ugliest creature… surprisingly not you,” she added, standing up and making to push away from him.

“Your ugly lover didn’t look anything like him, did he?” Blue asked, trying not to laugh as he pointed at Lance. Saylee yelled in shock and recoiled into Blue’s arms. Score.

“What the hell?!” she yelled. “What is that?”

“Tobias, get rid of it,” Blue ordered. “I saw Celebi with her harp earlier. Would you care to dance in the dawn?” He kissed Saylee’s hand. “We used to do that almost every night.”

“Y…yes,” Saylee said, slightly suspicious but simultaneously blushing happily at Blue remembering the old pastime of theirs that she had once loved, in times when they were closer. Maybe I’ve been too harsh on him lately. He can have a weird sense of humour, but he’s so sweet, too… I can’t even remember what we were fighting about.

Celebi started playing her harp and Jirachi her flute, and Meloetta sang as the pair began to waltz through the forest, dancing over the sleeping pairs of Red and Daisy, Archie and Key. The very trees sang to them as the King and Queen of the Fairies danced together for the first time in a long while and the earth returned to harmony.

“Tomorrow night is the wedding of King N and Queen Carlotta,” Blue commented. “Shall we dance in their honour?”

“I look forward to it,” Saylee said with a smile.

“My King and Queen, dawn is breaking,” Tobias called, pointing to the eastern horizon, where the sky was beginning to turn gold.

“Only here,” Saylee laughed, taking Blue’s hand. “C’mon. Let’s dance the night around the world. We haven’t done that in years either!” She glanced down at the four humans as they flitted over their sleeping forms. “What on earth are these humans doing here?”

“Funny story, actually…” Blue laughed as the pair danced away.

“Are you enjoying training in the forest?” N asked as his and Carlotta’s pack of Stoutland chased Pidove through the trees.

“I once trained with Cheren and Warren,” Carlotta said, flinging a pokéball and catching an Unfezant out of the air. “We fought a Beartic together. It was epic.”

“Still…” N wrapped his arm around her waist, pressing a kiss to her cheek. “Isn’t the forest more romantic than the frozen north?”

“I didn’t go with Cheren and Warren for romance,” Carlotta laughed, but kissed him back anyway.
The Stoutland suddenly started barking up a fuss. “They say they’ve found humans sleeping in the trees,” N said with a frown. “Come on, everyone!” he called, summoning the rest of their training party closer.

The party happened to include Norman, who let out a cry of shock as they came across the four young people sleeping on the ground near each other. “Key!” he cried, running to his daughter. “What is she doing here?!”

“It is Key,” N said wonderingly. “And Archie… and Red… and Daisy! All sleeping soundly together?”


“The hell is this?!” Norman demanded angrily. “Key!”

“Please use Howl to wake them,” N asked his Stoutland. The dogs nodded and began to howl. Archie and Key woke with a start, staring blearily at each other; Red and Daisy did the same.

“Good morning, all!” N said, striding over to them.

“K-king N!” Archie yelped, jumping to his feet reaching a hand down to pull Key up. Red did the same for Daisy.

“You and Red hate each other,” N said, looking from Archie to Red. “So how can you sleep so near to each other without fear that the other will kill you in your sleep?”

“I, uh, dunno…” Archie said, rubbing his eyes. “I remember meeting with Key and leaving into the forest… we were going to elope to Hoenn…”

“WHAT?!” Norman yelled. Archie and Key jumped a mile.

“Hi Dad, didn’t see you there!” Key squeaked.

Norman snarled angrily. “I DEMAND that he—” he pointed sharply at Archie, “be tried for kidnapping and EXECUTED! He’s tried to steal my daughter out of her rightful engagement with Red—”

“Oh yeah, I remember,” Red said, yawning. “Daisy told me they were eloping, so I came here to stop them, but, somehow…” Daisy gasped in surprise when he wrapped his arm around her. “I just… forgot all about Key. I remembered how much I love you, Daisy, and I’ll never leave you again…”

“Red!” Daisy breathed, grinning. “You mean it?”

“Of course I do!” Red said, pulling her close to him and kissing her passionately. Daisy leaned happily into the kiss.

“You go, girl!” Key cheered, hugging Archie.

Norman dragged her away. “You still do not have my permission to marry this lout!” he said angrily. “I forbid it!”

“N,” Carlotta muttered. “You know…”

“You’re right,” N muttered. “You may not bless their marriage, Norman, but I do,” he declared loudly. “Somehow, this forest has led all four of these young people to the path of true love, and
what curse would I be inviting to allow true love to die on the very day of my wedding?” He shook
his head. “No, Archie and Key have my blessing, as do Red and Daisy. All the lovers of Castelia are
invited to share in our wedding, and I should count myself honoured if you do the same.”

“Of course we will!” Key said excitedly, breaking away from her shocked father. “Isn’t this great,
Archie?”

“Brilliant!” Archie said, grinning so widely that the top of his head seemed at risk to fall off. Red and
Daisy didn’t break their kiss, but they gave the king a thumbs-up.

“Then let’s head back to the city,” Carlotta said, squeezing N’s hand. “I think I have some dress-
shaped scaffolding to get into before the ceremony, anyway…”

One of the Stoutland sniffed curiously at the trees, but hurried away when his master called him to
follow the humans back to the city. Tobias emerged from the bushes, wiping his brow as he watched
the lovers go.

“All well that ends well,” he sighed. “Still, that was fun while it lasted…” He looked thoughtfully
back at the forest. “Now, where did I leave those actors?”

“Nnnn…?” Steven rubbed his eyes and peered curiously at his watch. Then he leapt to his feet with
a howl. “WAKE UP, YOU IDIOTS!” he yelled, running around and kicking at the other actors
where they slept on the ground. “We’re supposed to be performing in three hours! We have to attend
the goddamn wedding in one! Wake UP! Let’s GO!”

“What the hell?” Wallace mumbled, getting to his feet. “Ack! My hair! It’s a mess!”

“You think you know what a bad hair day feels like?” Cynthia growled. They both stopped
bickering as Lysandre got up, clutching his costume and displaying a prime example of a bad hair
life.

“Umm… where’s Lance?” Wally asked. “I had a nightmare that… that he…”

“It was just a nightmare,” Steven insisted, heading for the path and not thinking too hard about the
nightmare he’d had about Lance and whether or not it could be the same as the one Wally had. “If
that idiot doesn’t turn up in the next—”

“My friends! I found you! Oh, happy day!”

“Lance,” Steven sighed, relieved but not entirely happy to see the idiot come running down the path
towards them. “Where the hell were you?”

“Oh, I had a wonderful dream!” Lance sang happily. “There was a beautiful lady, and wonderful
food, and pleasant music, and—”

“All our heads on spikes if we’re late,” Cynthia growled, grabbing him and dragging him down the
path. “Can we move? I need time for a shower to get all this grass out of my hair.”

The wedding of King N to his Queen Carlotta was a spectacle broadcast all over the world. Across
Unova, loving couples said “I Do” at the same time as a televised image of the king and queen. Only
two couples, however, said their vows in the presence of the king and queen themselves (as well as
one confused but happy mother, one confused but happy grandfather, and a blazingly furious father).

After the ceremony came dinner and dancing, and all of the talk around the king and queen’s table—at which Archie, Key, Daisy and Red had been offered seats of honour—was of the strange events in Pinwheel Forest.

“What a weird story,” Carlotta mused, watching the younger couples take to the dance floor. Red and Daisy waltzed beautifully, and only had eyes for each other. “Red is so different today… do you think—?”

“It couldn’t possibly have been real, though,” N told her. “Red just came to his senses, that’s all. He and Daisy have always been perfectly suited for each other, he was just too hotheaded to see it.”

“Still,” Carlotta insisted. “What if there is some power in that forest? What if—”

She trailed off, staring at the dancers on the floor. She kept thinking that she saw an odd couple, dressed in elegant clothes that looked as if they were made of leaves and living flowers, but whenever she looked closely she saw only a normal woman in a green dress or a man with a large corsage. Perhaps she was imagining it, but still, in the corner of her eye…

“There’s no power in that forest except the Pokémon who live there,” N insisted, “and the strange tricks your eyes play on you in the dark. That’s all! Burgh, is the entertainment ready yet?” he called, beckoning his assistant over.

“Actually, your majesty, there’s an absolutely delightful selection of entertainments prepared,” Burgh said happily, and handed over a sheet with a list of plays and musical acts. “Just say which you’d prefer to see and they’ll be onstage within five minutes!”

“Let’s see…” N said, looking down the music with a frown.

“That band’s terrible,” Carlotta whispered, pointing. “And that one… she’s not a bad singer but everyone knows she’s coked up to the eyeballs and I do not want her seen at my wedding… they’re good, but their music is pretty much all sad, that’s no good for a wedding…”

“What about the plays?” N suggested, looking down the offerings. “All classics, that’s good. Although that one’s a tragedy… so’s that one… that one’s a history, but…”

“Histories are inevitably tragedies,” Carlotta said. “What about that one? Pyramus and Thisbe is a romance, right? That’s perfect for a wedding! How long is it?”

“Tediously brief,” Burgh muttered.

“Tedious and brief?” N asked in confusion.

“Well, your majesty, normally I’d say half an hour is rather brief for a play,” Burgh said at length, “but considering the players, it’ll almost certainly feel tedious. But you’ll probably laugh, at least.”

“Is it a comedy?” Carlotta asked.

“Eeehh… theoretically a tragedy, and I’d certainly call anything put on by this lot tragic,” Burgh sighed, “but I can assure you that the last time I saw them perform, I couldn’t stop laughing.”

“Put on that, then!” N ordered. “It sounds fun.”

“I don’t think Burgh thinks it’ll be fun,” Carlotta said with a frown, watching the assistant sigh and
“Hurry off.”

“How bad can it be?” N insisted, squeezing her hand and smiling warmly at her as Burgh announced the play and everyone returned to their tables.

“Oh, this should be good,” Key said as Steven, wearing a suit and white cape, trooped onto stage, followed by Lance—who was clad in extremely tight pants and a huge, ruffly shirt of the sort only usually seen on the covers of bad romance novels—and Wallace, who was wearing a long dress and a lot of makeup.

“Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show,” Steven declared, flourishing his cape, “but wonder on, ’til truth make all things plain.”

“What the hell is he saying?” Archie muttered.

“Ssssh, it’s theatre language,” Key hissed.

“It means it’s a classic play,” Daisy whispered. “Nobody can understand classic plays.”

“Everybody ssssh!” Red hissed as Lance stepped forwards.

“This man is Pyramus, if you would know,” Steven continued. Lance bowed low and then held out a hand to Wallace, who minced forwards, skirts swishing. “This beauteous lady Thisbe is, certain.”

Someone came forwards behind a cardboard wall. Pyramus and Thisbe crouched either side of it, whispering to each other.

“This man, with lime and rough-cast, doth represent wall,” Steven said, somewhat redundantly, “that vile wall which did these lovers sunder, and through wall’s chink, poor souls, they are content to whisper.”

Pyramus and Thisbe blew each other ridiculously overblown kisses before hurrying away in opposite directions. The wall similarly retreated and Cynthia took the stage, holding a lantern aloft and wearing a beautiful dress of pink, blue and gold.

“Now this play’s getting interesting,” Archie whispered to Red, who nodded. Both of them doubled over as their blushing brides elbowed them in the ribs.

“This woman, with lantern, dog and bush of thorn, presenteth moonshine,” Steven declared, flourishing his cape at Cynthia. “For, if you will know, by moonshine did these lovers think no scorn to meet at Ninius’ Tomb, there to woo.”

“Where the hell is Ninius’ Tomb?” Archie whispered. “Who’s Ninius?”

“It’s probably from another play or something,” Key hissed. “Some classical reference or something.”

“Is that Lysandre?” Daisy whispered as another character came onstage.

“Sssshhh!” Red hissed again.

“This grisly beast, which Pyroar hight his name,” Steven declared.

“Roar,” Lysandre growled, slightly half-heartedly. Steven nudged him with his foot. “Fine… RRROOOAAAARRR!”
Wallace minced onstage again, peering around and freezing at the sight of the “Pyroar” in a state of mock shock.

“The trusty Thisbe, coming first by night,” Steven continued, “did scare away, and, as she fled, her mantle she did fall…” Thisbe gave an overdramatic scream and fled, throwing his shawl off his shoulders. Lysandre picked it up. “…which the Pyroar vile with bloody mouth did stain,” Steven said, glaring pointedly at Lysandre, who glowered but started gnawing on the cloth anyway before dropping it and wandering off.

“Why was its mouth bloody if it didn’t catch her?” Key whispered.

“Maybe it ate somebody already?” Archie suggested.

“Oh, I hope not,” Daisy said in distress.

“Shut up, all of you,” Red growled through gritted teeth as Lance pranced back onstage.

“Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth and tall…” Steven said, his professional tone of voice failing somewhat in the face of describing Lance thus. Pyramus picked up the “bloody” cloth, staring mournfully at it. “…and finds his trusty Thisbe’s mantle slain,” Steven continued, bowing his head sorrowfully. “Whereat, with blade, he bravely broached his boiling bloody breast.”

“His what?” Daisy whispered.

“That’s poetry for something, but I’m still figuring out what,” Key replied.

“Whatever it is, it involves swords, so hush!” Archie hissed. Red looked surprised and slightly put out by being beaten to telling them to shut up, but then turned his focus, like the rest of them, back to the stage, where Pyramus had drawn a sword, stabbed It through his armpit and promptly fell “dead” to the ground.

“And Thisbe, tarrying in mulberry shade,” Steven continued as Wallace wandered back onstage, saw the dead Pyramus and collapsed at his side in a show of grief, “his dagger drew, and died.”

“…what,” everyone whispered, even Red, as Thisbe grabbed a dagger out of Pyramus’ shirt, stabbed it to “her” chest and fell over dead.

The curtain fell and there was a smattering of slightly confused applause from the wedding attendees.

“Well,” Carlotta said flatly. “That was… special.”

“They were enthusiastic about it, if nothing else,” N said encouragingly. “You can’t deny it was diverting.”

“If you enjoyed the play, m’lord, will you watch the epilogue?” Lance shouted, sticking his head through the curtain and drawing much laughter.

“Thank you, but no,” N laughed, standing up. “Everybody’s dead, that seems pretty final. Besides…”

Above them, the Castle’s great belltower began to toll midnight.

“It’s midnight,” N continued. “Time for all the young lovers who wed today to begin the first day of their married lives. Besides…” his lips twitched into a little smile as he glanced at his new queen. “It’s no longer time for humans to make merry. After all, they call this time… the faerie’s hour.”
Later, almost everybody assumed that the music that was played as they left the dinner must have been organized by the king. N assumed that the music had been organized by Burgh and ordered him to pay the musicians double. Burgh nodded and agreed and then went in search of whatever musicians had taken it upon themselves to play the guests out, but none of the musicians present owned up to the music until they heard that double pay was on offer.

Nobody saw the tiny white figure that sang his way invisibly through the castle halls.

“Now it is the time of night, that the graves all gaping wide, every one lets forth his sprite, in the church-paths to glide.”

On top of Celestial Tower, the bell tolled midnight. This happened every night and none of the caretakers thought any of it until the ghosts started to rise from their gravestones and sing.

“And we fairies that do run, from the presence of the sun, following darkness like a dream, now are frolic.”

Throughout the forest, unseen by humans, fairy Pokémon danced, flitting towards the shining castle as the lights within were turned out for the night.

“I am sent with broom before, to sweep the dust behind the door.”

The servants, trying to get into the grand hall in order to clean it up, were mystified to find that all of the doors had locked themselves and a soft golden glow was emanating under the door. Some of them started trying to break the doors down.

“Leave it,” Princess Anthea ordered, running down the stairs with her sister.

“But, m’lady…” one of the waiters protested.

“Didn’t you hear her? Don’t touch it!” Concordia ordered. The servants backed away quickly when faced with the wrath of both princesses.

“Do you know what it is, m’lady?” one of them asked tentatively.

Anthea nodded, smiling. “It’s a good omen,” she said with a smile. “The King’s marriage is blessed.”

“Blessed by who?” the servants pressed.

“The King and Queen,” Anthea said.

Inside of the hall, Saylee and Blue danced, Tobias flitting in front of them and clearing away tables, chairs and rubbish from their path so that they danced uninterrupted in a ball of golden light.

“Though the house give glimmering light by the dead and drowsy fire,” Tobias hummed, sweeping away some paper streamers so his King and Queen wouldn’t slip.

“Come join us, everyone!” Blue called. Fairies began to stream in through the windows, dancing and singing around their King and Queen.

“Hand in hand, with fairy grace, we will sing and bless this place,” Saylee recited, blowing a kiss to the ceiling.
Faint golden light streamed throughout the entire castle as the fairies danced. Tobias flitted along the corridors, from bedroom to bedroom, bringing the King and Queen’s blessing to every new couple and the futures of their lines. The golden light and the way it seemed to turn the stone walls and floors of the castle into sparkling jewels was the shock of everyone… except the new couples, who were a bit too busy to notice.

“If we shadows have offended, think but this, and all is mended,” Tobias sang to them.

“That you have but slumbered here
while these visions did appear
And this weak and idling theme,
no more yielding but a dream
Gentles, do not reprehend
If you will pardon, we will mend.”

His work for the night finally done, he flitted up to the chandelier in the grand hall, watching the fairy revels below with a smile.

“And as I am an honest Puck,” he hummed, “If we have unearned luck…”

The King caught his eye for a moment, arms around his Queen, and winked, throwing Toby a quick thumbs-up.

“Now, to ‘scape the serpent’s tongue,” Tobias giggled, watching the King whisper in the Queen’s ear, “We will make amends ere long… Else, the Puck a liar call, so, goodnight unto you all.”

He smiled up and held out his hand. “Give me your hands, if we be friends,” he said with a wink, as if to some unseen watcher who had seen all that had transpired that midsummer’s night, “and Toby shall restore amends.”

The stars shone down on the golden castle as the fairies danced on.

The End.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this is a day late… I got a quick trip to London this weekend as a graduation present to see Book of Mormon (which was HILARIOUS) and hang out for an afternoon with my awesome AO3 reviewer, CynicalSkarmory! He’s writing a nuzlocke too, and feedback is always appreciated… we also had a battle between his Bethany and Saylee’s team between B&B and CC, so look forward to a special oneshot about that soon. It was a very close fight!

(Also, I fully believe that it didn’t take Titania long after the play to figure out what Oberon had done, and I imagine that the consequences were NOT pretty. Seriously,
Oberon is a DICK.)
Chapter Summary

This oneshot is set between chapters 46 and 47 of Calamity Calls.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Saffron City was no longer the ruined wasteland it had been just a few short years before, but nor did it have anything resembling the population that it had clearly sported before the war. On the one hand, nobody was homeless; there was already space to spare, even though only the centre of the city had been restored. Around the edges of town, there were a great deal of abandoned buildings, which even as wrecks were considered sufficient accommodation for many who’d lived the past twenty years of their lives in Kanto.

It was, fairly fittingly, in an empty old school that Sabrina met her friends three times a week. The echoed emotions in the school were gentle; some tears from childish playground spats and bullying, but so much curiosity, creativity and fun, too. Sabrina could feel it faintly radiating off of the rotting paintings tacked to the walls and crumbling toys scattered across the floors. Children’s emotions were fierce but oh so simple, the memory of them much easier to deal with than the resonant emotions of war still sunken deep into the rest of Saffron City.

She carried with her several bundles of flowers and a pot of glue. Inside of their preferred classrooms were several vases in various states of repair, and Sabrina passed the time waiting by applying the glue to the broken edges by hand and then trying to locate the correct broken piece and put it in place with her psychic powers. It had been a couple of weeks since they’d last all met, and she was concerned that… what had happened might have put them back to square one. The more backup vases, the better…

She had only been waiting for a few minutes when she felt a disturbance in the air and looked up to see Mewtwo and Hayley Fuji teleport into the room, the latter landing deftly on a pair of crutches.

“Hi, Sabrina!” Hayley said, accepting an enthusiastic—though careful—hug from the older girl. “You weren’t waiting long, were you?”

“No, no,” Sabrina insisted, letting go and turning and holding her arms out to Mewtwo. It didn’t do to startle or panic the overpowered psychic in any way, and it was usually safest to let him initiate any sort of physical contact—while clearly indicating that it was welcome, because otherwise the dour psychic was heavily inclined to stay away from everybody.

After a moment’s hesitance, Mewtwo reached out and allowed her to hug him. Sabrina tried to convey as much affection as she could in the hug, even though Mewtwo remained fairly still and didn’t give much back into it. She knew it wasn’t coldness or lack of affection that held him back. At every moment, fear radiated off of him—fear of breaking everything he touched.

“I thought we’d try again at the flower arrangements,” Sabrina announced as she stepped back. “I
know it’s frustrating, but I believe you can get the hang of it if you keep working at it. But first…” she unslung her bag from her shoulder and pulled out a box full of chunky wooden pieces. “It’s only a twelve-piece puzzle,” she explained, tipping the pieces out on the floor, “but they’re not as delicate as flowers, and maybe moving them and putting them together right will be a bit easier as a warmup exercise?”

“I will do my best,” Mewtwo promised, sitting on the floor and carefully reaching out to the pieces. They all trembled haphazardly, and Mewtwo’s brows furrowed as he focused intently on the precision needed to move a single piece without crushing it. Hayley and Sabrina sat down on a couple of chairs, repairing vases and watching him work. Talking to him and distracting him was inevitably a recipe for disaster, but feelings of positive support and encouragement could reach him unobtrusively.

“He’s getting a bit better at blocking things out,” Hayley thought to Sabrina. “He still can’t block out particularly strong emotions, but he’s getting the hang of keeping his mindscape free of everything around him.”

“He’s progressing fast,” Sabrina thought approvingly. Mewtwo managed to manoeuvre two pieces together in the air, though he crammed them together with a bit too much force, causing the wood to splinter. Sabrina thought “Good job!” as hard as she could and felt Hayley do the same. “It took me nearly two years to fully block other people’s thoughts and feelings from my mind, and my power and sensitivity aren’t a fraction of his.”

“I don’t think blocking is really the right thing for it,” Hayley thought with a shrug. “I don’t block anything, I just sort of… channel it. It’s there, running through my mind, it’s just sort of… running along a riverbank that I’ve set aside at the very back, away from anything else. It’s not in the way of anything else, and I don’t even notice it most of the time, but it’s still there if I need to dip my toes into it.”

“That sounds like Erika’s teachings,” Sabrina agreed. “She talks about not suppressing your emotions, but learning to control and direct their flow.”

Mewtwo managed to place a third piece into the puzzle, and the two girls beamed approval at him from their minds. As Sabrina looked back to her work, she couldn’t help catching sight of Hayley’s bandaged leg and forehead. Sabrina was doing her best to avoid thinking of what had happened in Lavender Town, at least in Mewtwo’s presence. The only thing she’d felt that day that had come even close to Saylee’s overwhelming grief was the guilt pouring out of Mewtwo in torrents—

The three pieces that Mewtwo had managed to put together, and the fourth that he’d been painstakingly moving into place, slammed into each other and exploded in a shower of splinters. In a blast of frustration, Mewtwo vanished.

“Oh,” Hayley said, fumbling to catch the vase piece she dropped. “It usually takes him longer than that to lose his temper…”

“I think it was my fault,” Sabrina said with a wince. “I let my thoughts stray to what happened… the other week.”

Hayley tapped her forehead and sighed. “He’s been… fragile, since then,” she admitted. “Angry at himself. Upset and rage and pain have all been overwhelming him…”

“He must know that nobody blames him for what happened,” Sabrina said, fidgeting with the remaining puzzle pieces, lifting and twirling them in the air kinetically.
“Yes, but… he’s lost faith in himself,” Hayley said sadly. “Or rather, he’s given up faith in himself. That he’s anything more than a weapon. Grandpa’s told me a bit about how Mewtwo was made,” she added. “There was a lot I didn’t understand, about how the brain’s made up and the bits interact with each other and how a psychic’s brain is different from a non-psychic’s, and how psychics are different from each other.” She gestured to the puzzle pieces that were floating and twirling in the air as Sabrina fidgeted. “I can’t do that, for example. The kinetic stuff. But I can interact with ghosts…”

“Which I can’t,” Sabrina said with a shudder. “At least, not in the way that you can. So… what did your grandfather say about Mewtwo’s brain?”

“That the…the part of it involved with… I’m not sure if it’s generating power or channelling power, but, well, to make it bigger, they made other parts smaller, or took them out entirely,” Hayley explained. “And one of those bits that they made small was the bit for self-control. They didn’t take it out entirely, because he needs to be able to stop using his power, but they didn’t mean for him to have finesse. You don’t need finesse to level a city. You just need an ‘on’ and ‘off’ switch. And mostly they pumped up the bit for kinetic power. They really reduced the—the…” She bit her lip, probing frantically in her mind for the word. “What was the term—refreshing, rejuvenating…”

“Restorative power?” Sabrina suggested. “Erika showed me some journals that she found about psychic power. They divided it into Mental, Kinetic, Restorative and Spiritual, although almost all the articles seemed to be arguing about whether those were the right divisions or not, let alone how to class specific powers…”

Hayley nodded. “Well, they pretty much took out the Restorative bit,” she continued. “That was why he couldn’t—well, he tried to do some healing, you know? Tried to repair some of the damage. But he just couldn’t. I think Grandpa was trying to reassure him by explaining this, but I think it just…”

“…confirmed, for him, that he’s nothing but a weapon,” Sabrina finished. “Trying to reassure him that it’s not his fault because it was decided for him.” Hayley nodded. Sabrina slowly lowered the puzzle pieces to the floor. *Six years ago, I couldn’t do that,* she thought. *I could only fling them across the room.* “Hayley?” she asked. “When Mewtwo’s losing his temper and he vanishes, where does he go?”

“He goes alone because he doesn’t want to hurt anybody,” Hayley warned. “He might bolt again if you follow him…”

“I know,” Sabrina said, standing up, “but I really have to tell him something, and I think it’s better if he hears it sooner rather than later. Where does he go?”

{}
“Go away,” Mewtwo said. His mental voice was faint and restrained, as if he was afraid to use even that tiny outreach of mental power. “I don’t want to hurt you.”


“It doesn’t matter,” Mewtwo thought-whispered. “I can’t help hurting people. My purpose is to hurt. It’s my function, what I’m built to do…”

“So?” Sabrina said, taking a breath and letting calm flow off of her in gentle waves. “I wanted to tell you about something. It’s about my parents. Will you stay and listen, please?”

Mewtwo didn’t respond, but he was still there. Sabrina took it as a sign to continue. She spoke aloud, because speaking mentally was an invasion into his mind, even of the most minor variety. If she’d learned anything from Erika, it was etiquette.

“I don’t really remember my parents, because they died when I was three,” Sabrina explained. “It was not long after they’d figured out that I was psychic. Some people were freaked out, so we found a different place to sleep than where we usually slept, away from other people. Then one morning, my parents were dead. People decided that I had killed them with my powers. Some people said that it was on purpose and that I was an evil child. Others said that it was just an accident, and a child like me couldn’t possibly be expected to control psychic powers, and that they could lock me up safely so I couldn’t hurt anybody else. And they did. They used psychic seals and locked me away and told me it was for my own good and to protect other people.” She took a deep breath, maintaining her calm. “I didn’t kill my parents. They found a nest of Kakuna in the roof a while later. They’d been dripping poison that had soaked through the ceiling and onto my parents’ faces while they slept. I was just lucky enough to be out of the drips, that was all. But they didn’t let me out, because they’d already told me that I was dangerous and decided that my purpose was to hurt people.”

“You are not like me,” Mewtwo responded. “You were not purpose-built to…”

“Erika’s found me all sorts of interesting reading about psychic brains and how they work,” Sabrina mused. “I’ve started thinking that I’d quite like to go to medical school and learn about brains, because even non-psychic ones are so complicated, and built in so many different ways. Of course, most of the time it happens just by—well, by accident of birth. This brain is better at math. That one is better at languages. This one is good at one kind of psychic power, that one at another. But the most interesting thing is that it doesn’t matter.” She leaned forwards, though she knew that Mewtwo was far out of her reach. The gesture of closeness was what mattered. “If how your brain was built decided things, we could just scan babies at birth and immediately put them into the job they’re built for all their lives. But that only happens in dystopia novels, because what’s so much more important is what you decide. When other people decide your purpose for you, they usually get it wrong. So what if somebody else decided you’re a weapon? That’s not their decision to make.”

“It is not so simple,” Mewtwo said despairingly. “My purpose is not to arrange flowers. I wish it were, but…”

“If you want your purpose to be arranging flowers, then your purpose is arranging flowers,” Sabrina said stubbornly. “And maybe arranging flowers is harder for you than somebody else. That’s okay. That doesn’t mean that you can’t arrange flowers, or shouldn’t arrange flowers, if you want to. It just means that… well, all it means is that arranging flowers is a little harder for you than it is for somebody else. But what’s wrong with that?” She reached out a hand, another gesture that was futile physically, but emotionally… “I’m your friend. So’s Hayley. If you want to arrange flowers, and you think you might need a little help, then we want to help you. And if you don’t want help, you just want to arrange flowers at whatever pace it takes you, that’s fine, too. We just want to see you do what you want to do, and be what you want to be. And I know you don’t want to be a weapon.”
“I don’t,” Mewtwo thought. “I don’t know what I want to be… I just don’t want to hurt anybody anymore. But I promised them I would—I killed the Pokémon who would fight for them, and in their place, I promised…”

“You don’t have to fight for Saylee and Blue if you don’t want to,” Sabrina urged him. “They won’t hold it against you. I’m sure they would love to help you resist the fate that was decided for you.”

“I… I promised them,” Mewtwo thought waveringly. “I do not want to go back on my promise… I want to help. But the only way I know how to is…”

“I want to help you too, Mewtwo,” Sabrina promised. An idea struck her. “I’ll go to Sinnoh in your place and try to help them.”

“You do not have to do that,” Mewtwo insisted. “You do not have to put yourself in danger—!”

“I don’t have to, but I want to,” Sabrina interjected. “Besides, I’ll be perfectly fine if I take Abdul and Aziz. Those Galactic people aren’t all that dangerous. They’d lost before they threatened to blow up the Tower. Please, Mewtwo,” she pressed, “I want to help. You’re my friend.”

She felt bulbous fingers touch hers. “I was not built to have friends,” Mewtwo thought to her tentatively. “But you are my friend? You’ve decided?”

“I’ve decided that I want to be your friend,” Sabrina said with a smile, “if you’ll decide that you’ll let me. And the best thing about deciding, Mewtwo? Is that you can always change your mind. And I mean that literally. Do you know that our brains change constantly, as long as I live? I don’t fully understand it, but—y’know, I heard there’s a great university in Sinnoh. Maybe while I’m there, I could visit it and see what I need to do to go study brains…”

She felt Mewtwo reach out to hug her, and she reached back, gently but affectionately hugging the strange psychic Pokémon. “I have decided,” Mewtwo thought quietly, “that I am very lucky. And that I am not sure yet if I want my purpose to be arranging flowers. And that studying brains sounds very interesting.”

“I know, right?” Sabrina giggled. “Do you feel better? Let me know if you do. I’m sure Hayley’s worried about us.”

“Yes… I think I can go back now,” Mewtwo said, pulling back. “I’m… sorry about your parents.”

“Don’t be,” Sabrina said with a shrug. “You didn’t kill them.” She grinned. “And neither did I!”

“Hearthome University?” Erika said curiously.

“Yeah… A lot of these journals mention it, so they must be doing a lot of brain research there,” Sabrina said, pointing at the list of titles on her reader screen. “I’ve got money saved up from working for the restoration companies and nothing else really to do with it. I thought I might make a holiday of it, you know, see the University and find out what I need to do to get in and maybe see some more of Sinnoh.”

“Is anybody going with you?” Erika asked, folding her petite hands delicately in her lap.

Sabrina focused very hard on all of the self-control and restraint of her powers that her mentor had taught her to prevent herself accidentally projecting thoughts like you’re so wise and kind or you’re so gorgeous or I think way too much about your beautiful, clever hands. Erika was her teacher, after
all, even if she was also the most stunning woman Sabrina had ever seen. “Well, I have Abdul and Aziz, but I don’t know of any humans that can come with me,” the blue-haired psychic said with a shrug. “Hayley gets too antsy when she’s outside of Lavender Town for long, and Saylee’s in hospital and after that she’s going back to Hoenn for a while first. I don’t have anybody else that can come…”

“Hmmm. In that case, I think I ought to go with you,” Erika said, pulling her pokégear out of one sleeve and opening up the calendar. “When were you thinking of going?”

Sabrina was momentarily both tongue-tied mind-tied. “You want to come with me?” she managed, more grateful than ever for Erika’s lessons in poise and controlling her emotions.

“Well, you haven’t any parents or family,” Erika said, looking up at her with her usual placid smile. “As your mentor, I feel responsible for you—especially if you’re leaving my teaching for a formal university! They usually expect you to have graduated from a high school, of course, but there are all sorts of equivalent courses for you to get the qualifications you need, and you’re such a fast learner that I’m sure they’ll be no trouble at all…”

Sabrina just nodded as Erika started planning out the trip, completely willing to let the elegant botanist take control of the outing and very, very fixated on the phrase ‘leaving my teaching’.

You’re doing this to help Mewtwo first and foremost, she reminded herself sternly. Looking at the University second. Getting to travel alone with your beautiful, poised possibly soon-to-be-ex-teacher is just a lovely, lovely bonus.

“So, does all that sound good to you?” Erika said as she finished outlining an itinerary. Sabrina nodded. “Wonderful! Then it’s decided!”

“Yes,” Sabrina agreed, smiling brightly, “it is.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey guess what guys THE FABULOUS KEY-CHAN IS DOING A THING! On AO3 as the_fabulous_Keychan, and posting to this account on FFnet, is Nuzlocke: Deliverance, a story running parallel to Calamity Calls and Dimensional Destruction and exploring the events in Sinnoh from another perspective. This isn’t just a sidefic—this is very much intertwined with events in Dimensional Destruction, and I highly recommend it both for that and simply the fact that it’s written by, well, the fabulous Key-chan, who continually inspires me to write cruel and heartless things and also writes WONDERFUL snark :D Please click the link to my profile up there and check it out!

There’s also another sidefic running on the nuzlocke forums just now called Isabelle’s AlphaSapphire Story. It’s nowhere near a proper fic, just a silly little sidestory about the girl who took the Mudkip that wasn’t in Professor Birch’s bag when Saylee and Key first met him, told mainly through her texts and snapchats to her best friend, brother and mother. It’s not plot relevant and she avoids most of the major plot events… it’s just a thing that happened when I thought “maybe I’ll do an AlphaSapphire nuzlocke just for fun” and the fabulous Key-chan said “or maybe you could take this idea and run with it” and I did :P Idk if it’s possible to link it here, but my username on the forums is SayleeK and I’m updating that one sporadically, so check it out if you want something a little lighter :)
Romeo and Juliet revised

Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Summary

Why do I keep putting Red in these roles…? Well, the only other “kinsman” that immediately came to mind was Silver, and I didn’t wanna do that to him, so… also, btw, the Courtney here is actually a different character from the Courtney in the fic, who does exist elsewhere in the main ficverse and is based on the ORAS design and personality of Courtney, who you cannot convince me is not a robot. Anyway, time for a most lamentable tragedy!

Chapter Notes

CAST
ARCHIE, son of ADRIAN as ROMEO, son of LORD MONTAGUE
KEY, daughter of MARC as JULIET, daughter of LORD CAPULET
KELSIE, wife of ADRIAN and mother of ARCHIE as LADY MONTAGUE, wife of LORD MONTAGUE and mother of ROMEO
ADRIAN, father of ARCHIE as LORD MONTAGUE, father of ROMEO
MARC, father of KEY as LORD CAPULET, father of JULIET
KALLE, husband of MARC and father of KEY as LADY CAPULET, wife of LORD CAPULET and mother of JULIET
COURTNEY, robot assassin constructed by MARC and KALLE as TYBALT, nephew of LADY CAPULET and cousin of JULIET
RAPHAEL, Ralts of KEY as THE NURSE, servant of JULIET
BLUE, friend of ARCHIE and boyfriend of LADY SAYLEE as MERCUTIO, friend of ROMEO and kinsman of PRINCE ESCALUS
MATT, friend of ARCHIE as BENVOLIO, friend of ROMEO
LADY SAYLEE as PRINCE ESCALUS
RED, noble brother of LADY SAYLEE as PARIS, noble kinsman of PRINCE ESCALUS
MORTY as FRIAR LAURENCE
EUSINE as FRIAR JOHN
THE CIANWOOD PHARMACIST as THE APOTHECARY
MAGMA GRUNTS, members of the MAGMA HOUSEHOLD as GREGORY, SAMPSON AND SERVANT, members of the CAPULET HOUSEHOLD
AQUA GRUNTS, members of the AQUA HOUSEHOLD as ABRAHAMN, BALTHASAR AND SERVANT, members of the MONTAGUE HOUSEHOLD

SETTING
The city of FAIR LILYCOVE. The great households of MAGMA and AQUA have long-held feuds that regularly disturb the peace of the streets, ruled by SAR SAYLEE OF KANTO. From this terrible conflict, two star-crossed lovers take their life…
"I can’t believe we can’t even go out in public alone anymore," one of the Magma grunts complained, kicking her heels against the pavement as they walked past the department store.

"Don’t come crying to me if some Aqua scum jump you in the street and send you to the bottom of the ocean," her senior said, giving her a push.

"I don’t even have a problem with any of the Aqua guys," the first grunt muttered. "It’s the boss who has trouble with the Aqua boss."

"If you don’t like it, leave Lilycove," the third grunt snapped. "You chose to follow Lord Magma, so that makes it your fight too…" He trailed off as the department store doors opened and three Aqua grunts stepped out, carrying shopping.

"Aqua scum," the senior Magma woman muttered.

"What was that?" one of the Aqua women asked with a cold smile.

"Nothiiiiiiing…" the junior Magma woman drawled, before biting her thumb with a grin.

"You biting your fucking thumb at us, bitch?!" the other Aqua woman yelled angrily, grabbing a pokéball.

"I’ll bite whatever I want, bitch," the junior Magma woman shot back.

"Bite me, bitch!"

"We’re just running our boss’ errands, same as you," the Magma man said with a sniff. "Well, when I say same…"

"Get out of the way," the senior Magma woman said, making to push past the three Aquas to get into the store. "Our boss’ errands are just as important as yours."

"You could do to learn some manners," the Aqua man said with a scowl. "Your boss is no better than ours."

"Oh, please," the senior Magma woman said, rolling her eyes. "Marc is ten times the man that Adrian will ever be."

"Like hell he is!" the Aqua man snapped, his temper finally incited.

"You wanna go, bitch?" the senior Magma woman yelled, releasing her Golbat as he released his Poochyena. As they leapt at each other, a snarling Mightyena leapt between them, intimidating both Pokémon back.

"What the hell do you idiots think you’re doing?!" Matt yelled, running up after his Mightyena. "Do you realize how arrested we’re all gonna be if you start a fight right in front of the Department Store?!"

"Do not fear, Matt… You will not be located in a cell… you will be located in a grave… ahahah…"

"Shit just got real," the junior Magma woman muttered to her senior as the pair of them started backing away from the battle. The Aquas were all were effecting an even faster backwards shuffle as Courtney approached, a slight smile on her face and her own Mightyena on her heels. Despite the
obvious insanity in Courtney’s glassy eyes, Matt tried his best.

“I’m not here to pick a fight, Courtney,” the redhead said, forcing a friendly smile. “Won’t you help me keep the peace?”


She pointed at Matt and her Mightyena, who was just as mad as her mistress, leapt for Matt’s head. Matt’s own Mightyena intercepted just in time, the two Mightyena becoming a battling ball of fur, fangs and claws. Freed from interception, the rest of the Magma and Aqua grunts present returned to their own battles. Curious tourists fled and shoppers hiding inside of the department store screamed as stray attacks started smashing windows.

Marc, the leader of Team Magma, and his husband Kalle came running against the crowd.

“Godammit, did those Aqua bastards attack my people again?” Marc growled. “Where’s my damn Camerupt?”

“What do you think you’re doing, trying to join that melee?” Kalle snapped.

“I don’t care about the melee,” Marc said angrily, pointing at the far side of the battlefield, where the Aqua leader Adrian and his wife Kelsie were also running towards the fight, their Crobat fluttering at their shoulders. “I’m gonna finish this here and now!”

“Marc!” Adrian roared, spotting his enemy. “What the hell are you pulling now?!”

“For the love of Kyogre, Adrian, don’t you dare make this worse!” Kelsie said angrily, trying to drag her husband back. She only barely got him out of the way of a wash of flame as a huge Charizard descended, scattering the combatants with fire. It was Chaz, the most powerful Pokémon of Sar Saylee, one of the strongest trainers in the country and as a result the one responsible for keeping Aqua and Magma under control.

“All of you return your Pokémon and stick your hands in the air!” Saylee shouted angrily, leaping from Chaz’s back and glaring around at the Aqua and Magma members. Despite her small stature, they all shrank back from her absolute rage. “This is the third goddamn time that you’ve started huge battles in public spaces!” she yelled, glaring around. “Get your dumb asses back to your compounds NOW! You’re all under house arrest! If any of you idiots—” Some of them actually ducked under her angrily pointing finger— “set food outside of your compounds in the next two weeks, it’s straight to jail! And if you start another fight in public…” She patted Chaz’ flank and the Charizard spat embers at the retreating parties. “…we’re having a bonfire. Are we clear?”

“Sar Saylee, we only just arrived at this fight,” Marc started to say. “I haven’t—”

“Save it,” Saylee snapped. “Even if it’s not your fault, it’s your responsibility. They’re your people. Now take them and get moving. Chaz and I will be escorting you idiots home.” She released her Togekiss and Ampharos, the latter hopping onto the former’s back and sparking threateningly at the nearest combatants. “Toby and Mary will be escorting the Aqua idiots back to their place. MOVE OUT!”

The three Aqua grunts kept their heads down as they walked back to the base under the watchful eyes of Sar Saylee’s Pokémon and the disappointed glare of Kelsie. Adrian avoided his wife’s dissatisfaction by focusing on haranguing Matt.
“What actually happened, Matt?” he asked. “Did you see how it started?”

“No,” Matt admitted. “But when I saw people running, I knew something had to be going on again. I found those three—” he gestured at the three grunts—“starting to fight with some of Marc’s people. I tried to jump in and break it up, but then Courtney turned up and, well, you know what she’s like…”

“I’m just glad that Archie wasn’t in this fight,” Kelsie sighed. “He doesn’t get out enough as it is. Have you seen him today, Matt?”

“I saw him walking alone down the beach this morning,” Matt said with a nod. “I tried to go talk to him, but he jumped into the sea and swam off.”

“He’s been doing that a lot lately,” Adrian sighed. “He keeps shutting himself up in his room with the curtains closed and playing Linkin Park loudly all day.”

“Do you know what it’s about?” Matt asked. “He’s a bit old to be having an emo phase.”

“We don’t know and he won’t tell us,” Adrian said, shaking his head. “I’d give anything to cheer him up.”

“Keepin’ aff the streets and outae trouble might dae you a wee bit ae good,” Mary advised as they walked through the front gates of the Aqua base. “We’re gaunnae be takin’ the day shift guardin’ yous. Any a’ yous try tae get oot and you’re getting’ tazed, got it?” Her tail sparked.

“Yes, ma’am,” the grunts promised chorused.

“We’ll keep our heads down,” Adrian promised.

“See that you do,” Tobias said sternly. “Now go talk to your son.” He waved his wing vaguely at one of the upper galleries, where they could distantly see the dark, hulking figure of Archie walking.

“Let me talk to him,” Matt offered. “Maybe he’ll tell me what’s up.”

Adrian patted him on the shoulder. “You three—I need to talk to you. With me to my office, please.”

“Yes, sir,” the grunts chorused dejectedly, following Adrian towards his office. Kelsie gave Matt a smile and then followed them away.

Matt ran up the stairwell, bursting out of the door of the gallery that he’d seen Archie on just in time to catch the man himself going past. “Archie! ‘Mornin! Fancy seeing you here!”

“Morning?” Archie said, looking a little bleary-eyed.

Matt sniffed. “Tell me you aren’t drinking at nine in the morning, Archie,” he complained.

“I’m not drunk,” Archie sighed, turning away, “just lonely.”

“Well, I’m here now, aren’t I?” Matt said, slinging his arm around his friend’s shoulders. Archie shrugged him off. “Oh. Ohhhh, I see how it is. Can’t believe I didn’t realize it before. You’ve always been a hell of a drama queen about women.” Archie just sighed. “Well, at least all your moping kept you out of the fight earlier. Guess who’s under house arrest again?”

“O brawling love,” Archie sighed, “o loving hate—shut the fuck up.”

“Sorry, sorry,” Matt giggled, trying to stifle his laughter. “Just—seriously, man, you’re not going for
an Oscar here, just go drink it off or something.”

“I can’t drink it off!” Archie snapped. “Love is a fire sparkling in lovers’ eyes, a sea nourished with lovers’ tears, a—alright, that’s it, I’m leaving.”

“Don’t go, don’t go,” Matt laughed, grabbing Archie’s arm. “I’m sorry. I’ll stop laughing, just, please… stop with the emo poetry. C’mon, man, at least tell me who she is.”

“What does it matter?” Archie said mournfully. “She said she’d never love me.”

“So stop moping over her,” Matt replied. “There’s plenty of other Carvanha in the sea.”

“Yes, but none as beautiful as her…” Archie sighed, brushing off Matt’s arm and stalking off.

“What a goddamn drama queen,” Matt muttered, folding his arms with a sigh. “Maybe Blue knows what’s up…”

“I apologize for rearranging our meeting, Red,” Marc sighed, leaning on his desk and rubbing his forehead. “Some of my people got into a fight with some Aqua thugs, and, well… you know how your sister is.”

“She’s just trying to keep the peace,” Red said, frowning slightly. “Don’t worry about it. It isn’t your fault if Aqua keep picking fights. It doesn’t reflect badly on you… or Key.” He folded his hands on his lap, twisting his fingers nervously. “I was wondering… what your answer is. To my request.”

“Key is awfully young,” Marc said, looking aside. “She isn’t eighteen yet.”

“I understand if you feel that way,” Red said with a nod. “But, you know, there’s a reason the legal age of marriage is fourteen. There are girls younger than Key with not just husbands but children too.”

“Well… ultimately, it is her decision, not mine,” Marc said, standing up. “Red, you are one of the greatest trainers in the world and I would be honoured to have you as my son-in-law, if Key says yes. Why not ask her at the party tonight?”

“There’s a party tonight?” Red asked, standing up and following Marc to the door.

Marc nodded. “Out of solidarity to those of us under house arrest, everybody’s staying in the base for a house party tonight,” he said with a little smile. “You’re welcome to join us.”

“Hey, Archie?” Matt called, knocking on his friend’s door. “I know you’re in there. You’re the only person in the building who has that much *Evanescence* on their playlist. Are you gonna let me in?”

Almost sullenly, Archie unlocked the door and then flopped back on his bed, staring at his phone. “What do you want?” he asked.

“So Blue heard from Saylee who heard from her brother that the Magmas are having a party tonight,” Matt explained. “He suggested we gatecrash, which could be pretty fun so long as we don’t get caught, because then Saylee will skin us alive, me for breaking my house arrest and Blue because that is her sacred right as his girlfriend. You should be fine, though…” He got close enough to see the screen of Archie’s phone and grinned. “…especially since Shelly’ll be there. You know, when I
was in high school, I remember hearing that if you had your crush’s photo as your phone background for three weeks and nobody saw it, they’d fall in love with you. Did I just screw that up for you?”

Archie snapped his phone closed and threw it at Matt’s head. “Alright, I’ll gatecrash the damn party with you guys, now get the hell out of here!”

“Raphael!” Kalle called. The little Ralts immediately materialized at his side. “Have you seen Key?”

“She’s in the garden, I think?” Raphael said, following as Kalle started walking down the hall. “What’s up?”

“I’ve got good news for her,” Kalle said happily. “It’s also a matter of utmost secrecy, but I can trust you, can’t I?”

“Of course,” Raphael promised, telepathically sliding open the garden door as they approached.

Key was sitting by the flowerbed, watching a Beautifly tend the flowers. “Hi, Dad!” she said with a giggle as her father embraced her. “Hello to you too, Raphael,” she added as the little blue-and-white Ralts hopped onto her lap. “What’s going on?”

“About the party tonight, Key,” Kalle began.

“Please don’t say you’re here to tell me to stay in my room, Dad,” Key said with a scowl. “I’m not a kid.”

“I know you’re not,” Kalle said with a smile. “That’s why your father gave Red his permission to ask you to marry him!”

“Red?” Raphael said curiously. “The guy’s a good trainer—the best—but he’s really serious, isn’t he? Got the personality of a lump of wax.”

“He’s a good man,” Kalle insisted, “and he feels very strongly about you, Key. Of course, it’s entirely your own decision, but do give it some consideration, won’t you? You really can’t do better in terms of a husband.”

“Well… you’re not wrong,” Key agreed, staring thoughtfully at the flowers. “And he’s been really sweet. Is he coming to the party tonight?”

“He is,” Kalle confirmed, “so wear something nice, won’t you?”

“C’mon, Archie, lighten up!” Blue said, slinging an arm around his friend’s broad shoulders as they and Matt joined the throng of partygoers waiting outside the Magma gates. “We’re going to a party, for Mew’s sake, so you are gonna eat and drink on the Magmas’ tab and then you’re gonna get out there and dance, not brood in the corner, okay? And keep your thoughts to yourself. Tobias might not be on shift tonight but he might be around somewhere.”

“I can’t believe I let you guys talk me into this,” Archie muttered. “I am not in a party mood.”

“What, because you got shot down?” Blue sighed. “All the more reason to get out there, have the
time of your life, and show her that you don’t need her either. And don’t say that you do need her. You guys weren’t even actually dating.”

“C’mon, people are starting to go in,” Matt said, giving his friends a shove to keep them moving with the crowd.

“I’d rather go home and sleep,” Archie grumbled.

“Ceez, you’ve really caught a Mab over this one, haven’t you?” Blue said, shaking his head.

“The hell is a Mab?” Matt asked.

“Haven’t you heard? It’s a fairy-type that turns its trainer’s brain to mush while they sleep so that they dream of love,” Blue teased.

Archie pushed Blue’s arm away. “There’s no such Pokémon, Blue,” he pointed out. “You’re talking crap.”

“Well, I was talking about your love life, but same thing,” Blue conceded. “Look, man, you know what your problem is? You don’t fall in love with girls, you fall in love with the idea of being in love, with the actual girl being incidental. They can smell that shit a mile off, and that’s why they’re never interested.”

“You don’t think true love exists?” Archie snapped.

“I know fine it does,” Blue said calmly, “and I know that you’re not gonna find yours until you wake up and smell the party!”

“C’mon, man, forget about her and have some fun,” Matt said, giving Archie a pat on the back as the crowd spilled into the coloured lights and loud music of the Magma main hall.

“This is not gonna end well,” Archie muttered.

The hall was quickly filled, with the main crowds forming around the two bars, the long table of food, and the packed dance floor. Archie spotted Marc standing on a gallery above them and calling out a welcome to his guests, his husband on one side and bloodthirsty niece Courtney on the other, but none of them noticed the small Aqua entourage.

Then he looked across the dancefloor and saw the most beautiful girl in the world.

She was dancing in the arms of a thin, dark-haired young man who surely didn’t deserve the absolute vision in a floating white dress who was blessing him with her radiant smile. Her hair was a long roll of perfect golden waves, her eyes were sparkling sapphires, her—

“Earth to Archie! C’mon, free beer!” Blue shouted over the music, dragging him off. Archie followed after without looking where he was going, his eyes glued to the laughing goddess with the sunshine hair.

“If I went blind right now, I wouldn’t care;” he sighed. “I’ll never see anything more beautiful.”

“I know exactly how you feel,” Matt said, smiling at the bartender at the free bar. “What whiskies do you have?”

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“Is there a problem, Courtney?” Marc asked sharply.

Courtney pointed down at the trio by the bar. “Target: Archibald Montague,” she said. “Montagues are the enemy. Proceeding to delete target…”

“You’re not going to do a damn thing to him,” Marc snapped, grabbing her arm. “He’s with his friend Matt. That young man should be under house arrest too. We’ll call the police, and when they show up those Aquas will either flee or be arrested. Either way, we’ll be rid of them peacefully and without ruining the party.”

“Negative,” Courtney ground out. “I must get him… away. Cannot endure…”

“Yes. You. Will,” Marc ground out, his grip on her arm tightening painfully—or what would be painful if she could feel pain. “I swear to Groudon, if you ruin this party…”

“What do you think?” Raphael asked in her head.

He’s really nice, and he is totally cute. I feel like he’ll really look after me, y’know? Key thought back.

“But?” Raphael prompted.

His butt’s cute too, Key teased.

“Don’t be glib. I can feel your hesitance. Is it because you don’t love him?”

Well, yeah… Key admitted, edging around a couple that must have been trained in circular breathing to stay liplocked as long as they were in the middle of the dancefloor, uncaring of the crowds around them. I mean, I’m sure I’ll love him in time, it’s just… that’s so boring, isn’t it? Is it too much to ask for a little spark?

“You could always ask him to give you more time to think it over,” Raphael suggested.

Yeah… that sounds like a good idea, Key agreed, continuing to push her way off of the dancefloor and promptly tripping over somebody’s leg. She almost fell, but somebody caught her in big, strong arms.

“Thanks,” she called over the music as she straightened up. The man kept his arms around her.

“You’re very welcome,” he replied. His voice was deep, much deeper than Red’s, and it sent a vibration through her. “Care to dance?”

Key turned to face him, to apologetically explain that she was kinda-sorta-probably engaged to Red Pryce, but her voice died in her throat as she laid eyes on the most gorgeous man she’d ever seen. He was tall and broad and muscular, with short, scruffy black hair and a scruffy black beard that was, in Key’s opinion, precisely the right length to be sexy-scruff instead of hobo-scruff. He stared down at her with a passionate intensity in his deep blue eyes that made her knees go weak.

“S-sure,” she said, looping his arms around his thick neck as they floated across the dancefloor. Suddenly, there seemed to be nobody around at all, nobody but her and the handsome stranger. She couldn’t even hear the music anymore, but danced all the same.

“Did you hurt yourself?” the man asked.
“Not at all, thanks to you,” she replied.

“I meant when you fell from heaven,” he said with a smile. It was so, so cheesy and Key just did not care, not when his voice was so deep that she could feel it rumbling through his firm chest.

“Not with you here to catch me,” she managed to reply.

He smiled and kissed her hand. “They say that kissing an angel purges all your sins,” he said in a tone that sent a shiver down her spine.

“Sin a lot, do you?” she teased.

“All… the… time,” he said, kissing his way up her arm.

“Key? Key, what are you doing?” Raphael asked in her head. “You wanna keep away from this guy, Key…”

I really don’t, Key thought back. “If I fell, though, doesn’t that mean I’m no longer an angel?” she asked, focusing on her banter with the gorgeous man.

“You’re not? Ah, then I suppose I should take my sin back,” he said, kissing her on the lips.

Key didn’t object to the logic, not when his arms were wrapped round her and his warm lips were pressed to hers.

“You really don’t have to take all of your sin,” she whispered when they broke for air, leaning up to kiss him again.

She was interrupted by Raphael appearing on her shoulder. “Your father, Sir Capulet, needs a word with you,” he said sharply.

“Sir Cap—?” the man began just as Raphael teleported Key away.

“Raphael, what the actual hell?!” Key exclaimed as they appeared in an empty back hallway. “Does Dad really need to see me that bad?!”

“He doesn’t, but you really needed to stop what you were doing and walk away,” Raphael chastised her.

“What? I haven’t said yes to Red yet, so it’s not like I’m cheating on him,” Key protested. “Besides, didn’t you see how gorgeous that guy was? And the way he kissed, oh my Groudon—”

“Look, Key, I don’t think your parents would disown you or anything if you turned Red down because you were in love with another guy,” Raphael interrupted, “but he’s not just another guy, Key! That’s Archie Montague!”

The words hit Key like a Water Pulse to the face. “He’s… he’s Archie Montague?” she whispered. “…Nobody told me he was hot.”

“Forget about him, Key,” Raphael begged her. “Going out with any Montague would be a bad idea, but him? It’d all end in tears, you mark my words. Better to forget about him now before it’s too late.”

It’s too late, Key thought dizzily, remembering his deep voice, his strong arms, his warm kiss. Way, way too late…
“I think I saw ‘im goin’ this way,” Matt muttered as he and Blue, arms slung around each others’ shoulders, staggered drunkenly down the side street running along one wall of the Magma compound.

“Archieeeeeeeeee! Oh, lover-boy! C’mon out!” Blue hollered. “Come out, come out, wherever you are…” he nudged Matt. “I got an idea,” he muttered. “Shelly’s leaving the paaaaaartyyyyyyyyy!” he called. “Don’t you want to walk her hoooooome?”

“Shut the hell up!” somebody yelled out of a window.

“He ain’t comin’, man,” Matt muttered. “C’mon, before somebody calls the cops. He’s probably bein’ a weepy drunk behind a trash can somewhere…”

“G’night, Archie!” Blue shouted as they wandered off. “G’night Casanova, Romeo, Lothario…”

Archie heard the distant calls of his friends, but he ignored them, wandering along the back wall of the Magma compound in a haze.

“Your father, Sir Capulet…”

That girl is Key Capulet? He thought, shaking his head. How can such an amazing girl be related to a jackass like Marc Capulet or that asshole husband of his? She’s worth ten million of them…

The cliff face that the Magma compound backed onto wasn’t quite sheer, meaning that it wasn’t impossible to climb with tenacity and shoes with good grip. Archie had done it before, as a child, in the name of pranks. How did I never see her before? he wondered, climbing up onto the top of the wall. Come to think of it, I think I heard something about her attending a high-class boarding school…

He nearly fell off of the wall when he spotted Key wandering in the garden with a Linoone.

“Why’d he have to leave the party, Les?” she asked her Pokémon. “I really wanted to see him again…” The Linoone licked her hand. “No, I don’t care that he’s a Montague. It’s just a name, anyway. Doesn’t stop him from being… I mean, if you love someone, stuff like that doesn’t matter, right?”

Archie’s breath caught in his throat. Did she just say… she loves me…?

“I just hope… I mean, I hope it doesn’t bother him that I’m a Capulet,” Key muttered forlornly. “I couldn’t care less about the whole stupid mess.”

The Linoone nodded, then sniffed at the air as the wind shifted. She stiffened sharply, rearing up and baring her teeth at Archie.

“Who’s there?” Key called, her brilliantly blue eyes searching the darkness.

“Your family’s enemy, apparently,” Archie said, dropping down from the wall with his hands raised.

“You’re Archie Montague,” Key breathed, her whole beautiful face lighting up as she grabbed her Linoone to stop her attacking. “You’re from Team Aqua!”

“I’ll abandon all that in a heartbeat if you want me to,” Archie promised. “Call me whatever name
“I don’t care about your name,” Key said softly. Her Linoone snapped at Archie as he drew closer, and Key quickly returned her. “…but my parents do. If any of Team Magma find you here, they’ll murder you. And I mean that very literally if it’s Courtney that finds you.”

“I’m not scared of them,” Archie said, taking her hand and kissing it. “The only thing I’m scared of is you, and how you make me feel…”

“I’m glad it’s dark so you can’t see how hard I’m blushing,” Key giggled.

“My lady,” Archie proclaimed, “I swear by the stars and the moon—”

“Oh, don’t swear by those,” Key tutted. “The light from those stars takes so long to reach us that they’re probably dead already, and the moon changes all the time.”

“What can I swear by that is as living and eternal as my love for you?” Archie asked, squeezing her hand.

“Swearing is rude,” Key giggled. “So don’t. I’ll believe you.” She squeezed his hand back. “But seriously, you should go before you get dead.”

“You want me to leave you so early?” Archie sighed.

“Why, what else are you hoping to do tonight?” Key asked archly.

“I just want to hear you say that you will love me forever, as I love you,” Archie said softly.

Key leaned up and kissed him. “Forever’s not long enough to love you enough,” she whispered. “I’d marry you tomorrow if I could.”

“Who says we can’t?” Archie replied. “All I need to make my life complete is you… and a priest to make it official.”

“I feel the same,” Key said, hugging him tight. “Find a priest and I’ll be right there.” She patted down her pockets until she found a tube of lipstick and used it to write her number on the back of his hand. “Call me?”

“I promise,” Archie whispered.

Key suddenly stiffened. “Raphael’s coming… my Ralts,” she explained. “You’d better go before he raises the alarm.” She kissed him quickly and ran off.

*Where do I find a priest at this time of night…?* Archie wondered giddily, heading back to the cliff face.

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Morty carefully went along the line of Pecha trees, looking closely at each berry before picking one. When ripe, they made a wonderful antidote to most poisons, but if they weren’t *quite* ripe enough, they could be fatal.

“Good morning, Morty!” a jovial voice called.

“Good morning, Archie,” Morty replied, smiling at the sheer joy radiating from the Aqua heir. The man had been infamously dour for more than a week, and his heavy mood had no doubt not been
helping the notoriously short tempers of the members of Team Aqua.

“It’s a beautiful day, isn’t it?” Archie said, beaming. He was dressed for clubbing despite it only being eight in the morning.

“You look like you haven’t been to bed,” Morty teased. “Were you with Shelly?”

“Of course not,” Archie laughed. “Who cares about her?”

Well, that’s quite a switch, Morty thought. “So where have you been, then?” he asked curiously.

“You’ve certainly brightened up.”

“I was with Key Capulet,” Archie sighed, breathing the girl’s name like a holy prayer. “I love her, I truly do, and she loves me too. I came to ask you to perform our wedding ceremony.”

“You love her,” Morty said slowly. Archie nodded enthusiastically, and entirely earnest smile on his face, which was just too much for Morty to handle. He burst out in uproarious laughter.

“Weren’t you in love with Shelly just yesterday?!” the priest howled, almost crying with mirth.

“I’m sure it doesn’t make any difference to a guy like you, but Shelly just doesn’t compare to Key,” Archie protested.

“She doesn’t, eh?” Morty laughed, clutching his stomach. “Oh, straight mens’ love lies not truly in their hearts but in their eyes!”

“If you’re just gonna laugh, I’m out of here,” Archie grumbled. “I’ll get Captain Stern or somebody at the docks to officiate…”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” Morty chuckled, grabbing Archie’s arm as the Montague heir started to walk away. “I just… you’re serious, aren’t you?” Archie nodded. “Then I’ll do it… if you two swear to start working on your teams to make peace with each other and make the streets of Lilycove safe again. With the two of you together, perhaps we can be done with this fighting.”

“Of course!” Archie said excitedly. “I can hardly call Magma my enemies when they’re my in-laws, can I?”

“Yes, I can tell you’ve never been married before,” Morty sighed, shaking his head. “Just pick a time and I’ll perform the ceremony. I’m sure Eusine will be happy to witness.”

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“Do you think he blacked out somewhere?” Matt said, checking his phone and waving at a patrolling ranger. “Don’t give me that look! I’m standing inside the gate, aren’t I?” The ranger gave him a Look before continuing on her patrol.

“Stop checking your phone every three seconds, it looks like he stood you up,” Blue complained. “Besides, if he comes back, some idiot’ll tell him that Courtney challenged him, and you know how Archie is.”

“He won’t ignore it,” Matt agreed.

“If he does, Courtney’s going to kill him,” Blue said flatly. “That girl is weapons-grade crazy and her Pokémon are worse—and if they have a deathmatch on the streets of Lilycove, Saylee’s gonna be spitting fire like a Mega Charizard.”
“Oh, hey, there he is now,” Matt said, pointing down the road where Archie was approaching, wearing last night’s clothes and a happy grin.

“There you are!” Blue called. “Where the hell did you get to last night, eh?”

“Doing something important,” Archie said, the dopy grin never shifting from his face.

“More important than us?” Blue gasped in shock. “Finally drove Shelly out of your head, I see. What the hell managed that when neither us nor copious amounts of alcohol could? A severe head injury, maybe? Take off the headscarf and lemme see, unless it’s holding your brain in.”

“I’m fine, Blue,” Archie said, humming merrily as he walked past his friend. “Never been better.” He yelped as Blue grabbed him in an armlock.

“That’s all you’ve got to say for yourself?” he demanded, shifting so he had his wriggling friend in a headlock. “C’mon, tell us, or else…” He licked the top of Archie’s ear.

“That’s disgusting, man, what the hell?!” Archie yelled, struggling to throw his best friend off of him. He was taller and much stronger than Blue, but Blue had the advantage of position and was starting to crush Archie’s windpipe.

“Just give up and tell us,” Blue encouraged him. “You’ve gone from moping about your room and writing terrible poetry to a regular walking Sunny Day. C’oooooon… who were you doing that was so important?”

Before Archie could do any more than sputter, there was a flash of pink energy and he disappeared.

“…it’s finally happened,” Matt observed. “He got so done with you that he actually learned to teleport.”

Archie stumbled into an empty cavern that, after a moment, he recognized as being one of the caves dotting the Lilycove beaches. “What the—?” he asked, looking around and then down at a tug on his ankle. A tiny blue-and-white Ralts was standing there. _That weird colouring…_ “Aren’t you that Capulet Ralts?” he asked.

“My name is Raphael,” the little Ralts said. “Key asked me to at least speak to you before I decide that you’ll be absolutely nothing but trouble for you.”

“Hey!” Archie objected. “The last thing I want is to cause her trouble!”

“Hmm…” the Ralts tipped his head to one side, apparently regarding Archie closely. “…you do seem sincere… you _believe_ you are sincere, at least.”

“I have never been more sincere about anything,” Archie insisted, crouching in front of the Ralts. “I’ve already spoken to Morty. He’ll officiate this afternoon, if she’ll meet me at his shrine!”

“He will, eh?” Raphael said thoughtfully. “We were thinking of asking him to officiate Key’s wedding to Red, if she agrees to his proposal. I have told her that he’s probably a better man than you—no criminal record, after all…”

“All that is in the past,” Archie said, drooping. “It’s… it’s her choice, of course…”

Raphael smiled.
“Half an hour, he said,” Key muttered under her breath, pacing the hall. “Just a quick chat, he said. Be back in no time, he said… nine to noon is three hours!”

She saw a pink flash of light under the door to her room. “He’s back!” she squeaked, running into the room. “Raphael! So? How’d it go? What do you think?”

“Give me a break, girl, I had to do a lot of teleporting just to even find the guy,” Raphael sighed, flopping across her pillow.

“Just… what do you think of him? Yay or nay?” Key said nervously, wringing her hands.

“Can’t say much for your taste,” Raphael commented. “I mean, sure, he’s good-looking, but I’m not sure there’s much going on under the bandana…”

“You’re just winding me up,” Key growled. Raphael grinned. “C’mon… what did he say?”

“Well… he did say…” Raphael said, looking around. “Where’s your father?”

“Wh… what?!” Key sputtered. “What are you on about? ‘He did say where’s your father’?! Just… what?! He’s not here, who cares?!”

“Hey, if you’re not happy with my answers, go ask yourself next time,” Raphael said with a shrug.

“Aaaagh!” Key whined, rubbing her eyes with her hands. “Raphael…”

Raphael smiled. “This afternoon, if you’ll meet him at the shrine west of the city,” he finally said, “you can walk away a married woman.”

Key thought about whether it was wrong to marry a man she’d only met twice… for all of half a second. *We really connected, I know we did,* she thought. *And if things continue the way they are between our families… either one of us could wind up dead any day now.* She squealed, nodding, unable to verbalize her sudden excitement. *I’m getting married! Maybe if he’s my husband, maybe Dad and Father won’t kill him…*

“I’ll teleport him into place later,” Raphael said, hopping to his feet. “Work, work, work…”

“Thank you, Raphael,” Key said, giving him a hug. “Thank you so much…”

While the morning had been cloudy, by mid-afternoon the sky was a perfect, unsullied azure. The sun shone down on Archie, wearing a suit and for once bereft of bandana, waiting outside of the shrine with Morty and his husband Eusine, the former in traditional robes and the latter in a much nicer suit and cape.

“Maybe that’s a good sign,” Eusine observed, shielding his eyes as he looked up at the sky. “A cloudless sky means a trouble-free marriage, right?”

“I hope so,” Archie said, smiling, “but no matter how much trouble might come our way… so long as we’re together, I know we’ll be just fine.”

“Trouble will come of this, you know,” Morty said softly. “Neither Aqua nor Magma will drop the history between the two of you so easily, and you’ve had as much a hand in that dispute as anybody, Archie.” His eyes glazed slightly. “The two of you may yet be the end of it, but I fear that such a bloody feud will claim more blood still before it ends. Be careful.” Then he smiled, looking over
Archie’s shoulder. “Ah… there’s your bride-to-be!”

Archie spun around with a broad grin, all ominous warnings forgotten as he set eyes on Key. Her golden hair was pulled up into a beautiful cascade of glowing waves, and she was wearing a simple white sundress, likely to allay suspicion but to Archie’s eyes the most beautiful wedding gown that he’d ever seen. Her Ralts was scuttling along beside her, smiling at his trainer. She smiled brighter than the sun at the sight of him.

“You look amazing,” Archie breathed as she walked up to him. “I mean, you always look amazing, but…”

“Well, I’ve heard girls get prettier when we’re in love,” she replied, taking his hand. “Cheesy, I know, but still.”

“If you can’t be cheesily adorable on your wedding day, when can you?” Eusine said, opening the shrine door.

“Come on in,” Morty said, leading them inside, “and we’ll begin…”

“I don’t see Archie,” Matt said as he and Blue walked along the path to the lighthouse. “I don’t see the Magmas, either. I don’t think they’re coming.”

“We’d better at least check out the lighthouse first,” Blue said, pointing at the tall white building. “Nobody’s seen him since he teleported away this morning, and if the Magmas have done something to him, I’m gonna have words for them…”

“Oh, shit, there she is,” Matt said with a grimace as Courtney stepped out of the lighthouse, freezing for a second when she spotted them and then striding up to them.

“You…” she said with a dark expression.

“Us,” Blue said, releasing his Blastoise, Sam. “What the hell do you want?”

“Blue!” Matt hissed. “You know I’m not even supposed to be here, if you start a fight—”

“I haven’t started a damn thing,” Blue said levelly, glaring at Courtney. “But you’re here to fight, aren’t you?”

“Affirmative,” Courtney said, turning and looking past them, ignoring Sam entirely. “Target… acquired. Archibald Irving!”

Blue and Matt spun around to see Archie, carrying a suit jacket over his shoulder with one hand and loosening his tie with the other. “Target?” he asked, looking from Courtney to Matt and Blue. “What’s going on?”

Courtney released a Crobat and a Mightyena. “You… will pay… Archibald Irving!” she snapped.

“Hey, I haven’t done anything to you,” Archie said, raising his hands defensively. “And I don’t want to do anything to you, or to any other Magma.”

“So back the hell off, got it?” Blue snapped, pointing at the Mightyena and Crobat. “Hydro Pump, Sam!” Courtney’s Pokémon scattered as the powerful Blastoise sprayed jets of water from the cannons on her back.
“Both of you STOP!” Archie shouted, grabbing Blue’s arm. “Saylee’s gonna kill you both for this, you know that!”

“So what, you’re just gonna let her attack you?!” Blue growled, trying to jerk his arm out of Archie’s grip. “Dammit, Archie—”

“BLUE!” Sam screamed as she was knocked back by an Air Cutter from the Crobat… just as the Mightyena leapt on her trainer, unable to move out of the way with Archie gripping his arm.

Suddenly, Archie wasn’t holding Blue back, but holding him up. Matt’s Mightyena appeared, tackling Courtney’s away, tearing its jaws out of Blue’s stomach and side. Archie and Matt caught Blue as he slumped to the ground, clutching his haemorrhaging wound.

“Blue! Blue, are you okay?!” Matt yelled, grabbing his Pokénav. “Just—just hang in, I’ll call an ambulance—”

“Sure, ‘m fine… jus’ a li’l scratch,” Blue rasped, coughing up blood. “Archie… what the fuck? Why’d you…”

“I just… I just wanted to stop you fighting!” Archie cried, his vision blurring as tears spilled down his cheeks and Blue’s blood pooled on the ground. “I’m sorry… I just wanted to make peace…”

“You wanna make peace… now…?” Blue slurred, his eyes drooping closed. “Your timin’… fuckin’ sucks… both of you… groups of… idiots…”

Archie pulled Blue out of the way as Courtney’s Mightyena made another lunge, before it was blocked by an angrily screaming Sam throwing Courtney’s Crobat at it. “Matt, where the hell’s that ambulance?!” he yelled.

“It’s coming, but… Archie, it’s too late,” Matt sobbed, clutching Blue’s wrist. “There’s no pulse, there’s no… he’s dead, Archie!”

The fog of joy that Archie had been in since meeting Key suddenly snapped aside, returning him to what he had always known. Magma scum, he seethed, staggering to his feet and stalking past the grappling Pokémon. “How could I have forgotten what you are?” he growled at Courtney. “Blue’s not dying alone… if you don’t want to go with him, you’ll have to send me instead!” He flung a brutal punch at Courtney, snapping her head to the side; she countered with a kick that made his ribs crunch.

“Affirmative,” she said sharply. “Now terminating… Archibald Irving.”

The fistfight was as vicious as it was short; both of them delivered bone-cracking blows, but with his longer reach, Archie was the first to get his hands around Courtney’s throat, and he didn’t hesitate a moment before wrenching her neck aside with a crack that rendered her instantly still and silent.

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“Archie!” Matt yelled as sirens approached them. “Get the hell out of here! Sar Saylee’s gonna have heads on spikes for this!”

Archie looked back at his friend, clutching Blue’s body, and the red haze dissipated. He dropped Courtney’s body to the ground, realizing what had just happened, what he had just done. “Oh, gods… I’m sorry, Key,” he mumbled, running and diving off of the cliff and into the sea as ambulances and police cars tore up the peninsula, a huge orange Charizard flying overhead.
Both Adrian and Kelsie Montague, as well as Marc and Kalle Capulet, knew that the abrupt summonses from their homes before their house arrest was up could not be good. Courtney’s Pokémon and Blue’s Blastoise being carried away from the lighthouse peninsula, unconscious, told them that it was bad. The sight of two bodies lying on the peninsula, with Sar Saylee of Kanto kneeling next to one of them, told them just how bad it was.

Kalle’s horrified scream at the sight of Courtney’s body was the first thing that Saylee heard since dismounting from Chaz’ back and seeing Blue’s body. She gave Blue’s cold, stiff hand a squeeze as she finally looked up, unable to feel any sympathy for either the horrified-looking Montagues or the crying Capulets.\textit{He wasn’t either of you. He shouldn’t have been a part of this!}

“Look!” Kalle cried. “Look what they’ve done! Those Aqua bastards have \textit{murdered my niece}!” He pointed at Adrian and Kelsie. “One of them has to die in exchange! It’s only \textit{just}!”

\textit{Thinking like that is what started this whole mess}, Saylee thought, standing up and looking around until she spotted Matt, sitting with his face pressed to his knees, clutching his head. “Matt,” she said, walking over to him. He looked up sharply, looking frightened. “What happened here?” she demanded.

“She… Courtney, she called Archie out for a fight,” Matt mumbled. “Blue came to… to see what was going on, to see if either of them had turned up, and when they did, when Courtney attacked Archie, he attacked her. Archie… he tried to step in, to stop them, but at that moment, when Blue was distracted, Courtney’s Mightyena…” Fresh tears welled up as his voice choked. \textit{Then Archie fought her. Not with Pokémon, with fists, and she hurt him but he, well… he won.}

\textit{“YOU HEAR THAT?!”} Kalle screamed, pointing at Matt. \textit{“Archie \textit{murdered} Courtney! You have to execute him!”}

Saylee turned to face him, folding her arms as she regarded the grieving uncle.

“You can’t execute Archie!” Adrian interjected. “He was Blue’s friend! He was just defending himself and avenging Blue’s murder! Courtney would have been executed for murder anyway! Was what he did really so wrong?”

“Yes,” Saylee said flatly. “Because he acted…” She glanced at Blue’s corpse again, her gaze hardening as she looked back to the Aqua and Magma. “…in self-defence, he won’t be executed, but he \textit{is} going to jail forever when I find him.” Kalle opened his mouth, then closed it again as Saylee threw a glare at him. “That won’t be the end of, though… \textit{for either of you,}” she growled, signalling to the forensics team to take the bodies away. “From now on, there’ll be no more excuses, no more house arrests, no more \textit{warnings}. Get the fuck back to your compounds \textit{now}. You’re not under house arrest, you’re under investigation. So help me gods, if I can prove that \textit{any} of you knew about Courtney calling Archie out…” She trailed off, following Blue’s body into one of the ambulances, but the mouthful of fire that Chaz spat at the two families’ feet as they fled back to their police escorts spoke for her quite clearly.

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Key hummed to herself as she glanced at the clock for the fiftieth time, then rearranged her hair in the mirror again. \textit{It’s my wedding night tonight}, she thought giddily and more than a little nervously. \textit{When’s Raphael going to bring him? He said ‘tonight’, but… agh, I can’t wait!}

She turned around with an excited grin at the flash of psychic power that heralded a teleportation. \textit{“Raphael!”} she cried, spotting her little Ralts. \textit{“Where’s Archie?”}
“…dead…” Raphael mumbled, swaying slightly.

Key fell heavily to her knees as the word sent a lance of pain through her chest. “A… Archie?” she choked, gasping for air. “Is Archie… did you say… Archie’s…?!” Raphael shook his head. “What’s happened, Raphael? Say something!”

“Courtney… Courtney’s dead,” Raphael said, hugging Key’s knee, resting his head on it as if exhausted—perhaps he was, by all of the emotional upheaval. “She’s dead, and… Archie killed her. And he’s going to maximum security for the rest of his life if Sar Saylee catches him…”

“Archie… killed Courtney?” Key whispered, pressing a hand over her mouth as bile rose up. No, no… he’s a killer? She thought dizzily. He’s… is he like the rest of them after all? No… he can’t be…!

“We shouldn’t have trusted him… he’s Aqua,” Raphael mumbled. “Shame on him, deceiving you like that, claiming he meant no harm to Magma…”

“Stop,” Key sobbed. “Please, stop talking about him like that…”

“He killed your cousin!” Raphael said, aghast. “You want me to be nice about him?!”

“He’s my husband!” Key snapped. “So don’t you dare say another word against him until we hear his side of the story, okay?!”

Raphael nodded. “He’s… hiding out at Morty’s, I believe,” the tiny psychic said softly. “I’ll bring him here so you can speak to him.”

“Thank you, Raphael,” Key sobbed, hugging the oddly-coloured Ralts. “Thank you…”

Archie looked up from his slump as the door to the hidden shrine room opened, letting in a little light and a lanky priest.

“Well… you’re not to be executed,” Morty said, closing the door behind him and turning on a small lamp as he sat down, “but Sar Saylee’s already handed down a life sentence at a maximum security facility for you.”

“A life sentence instead of death…?” Archie croaked. “What’s the goddamn difference?”

“Well, the point of a life sentence is that you’re not dead,” Morty pointed out, gesturing to the bandages around Archie’s chest. “You’re getting off lightly for murder, you know.”

“Either way, I never see Key again!” Archie yelled. “Prison’s worse, because then I’m alive to suffer it!”

“Archie—” Morty began, reaching a hand out, but Archie slapped it away.

“Shut up,” the Aqua heir moaned, burying his head in his arms. “Shut the hell up…”

“And just what is this tantrum going to help…?” Morty murmured, shaking his head. Maybe I was wrong…

There was a flash of pink and then Raphael, Key’s Ralts, appeared on the floor between them. “I have a message from Key,” he announced, looking at Archie. “…Who’s in pretty much the same state as him right now…” He shook his head with a frustrated sigh. “You’re not getting any
sympathy from me anymore, Archie. Maybe instead of crying like a baby, you can grow the hell up and face up to what you’ve done, and more importantly what it’s done to Key!”

“Key… oh gods, Key must hate me,” Archie mumbled. “I promised her I’d never hurt her or her family, and now… she despises me, doesn’t she? She has to. I’m a murderer, and more than that, her cousin’s murderer…”

“She hasn’t said anything about hating you yet,” Raphael said with a frown. “She’s just crying. And crying. And crying. Crying over you, over Courtney…”

“It’s all my FAULT!” Archie shouted, punching a hole through the wooden wall. He wrenched one of the shattered splinters of wood out of his bleeding hand and held it to his throat, tears running down his face. “This is all because I’m an Aqua, a Montague! If it weren’t for that… if it weren’t for me…”

“Will you shut up before a Ranger hears you?” Eusine snapped, slamming open the door to the hidden room and then slamming it shut behind him. “Good Gods, even I think you’re being a drama queen here, Archie. You really thing an overdramatic suicide is going to make Key feel a single bit better? You’re certainly not helping yourself by giving yourself even more wounds.”

“I…” Archie cried, dropping the splinter and burying his head in his hands. “It’s all gone so wrong…”

Morty and Eusine exchanged looks, and then Eusine sighed and stepped out of the room, coming back with a first-aid kit that he used to wrap up Archie’s hand.

“Well, not everything’s terrible,” Morty said soothingly. “You and Key are both alive, after all. Courtney’s vow to kill you no longer matters since you killed her first, and since she killed Blue first, you only risk imprisonment instead of execution if you’re captured. And you have the dedicated love of a wonderful young woman. For a murderer, you have things very good.” Archie flinched. “Skip town. Hide out in Johto for a while. Saylee was lenient to you because you avenged Blue’s murder; if the situation here shifts, she might be willing to extend more leniency yet, and if she does, we’ll contact you.” He held out his pokégear, which Archie numbly put his number into.

“But visit Key before you go,” Raphael insisted. “She needs to see you. The two of you need to clear the air.”

“Thank you,” Archie sighed, looking from Morty to Eusine. “Thank you both. I… I don’t know what to…”

“I had a vision,” Morty said gently, “of the fighting that’s plagued this city for centuries ending because of the two of you. I saw Adrian ad Marc clasping hands like friends and speaking your names. The two of you will finally bring peace, I’m sure of it.”

“I truly hope so,” Archie said, crouching down next to Raphael. “I hope to see you both soon.” With that, the little Ralts teleported them both away.

“I’ve been meaning to ask,” Eusine said as he and Morty left the hidden room, “but… in this vision of yours… did you see Archie and Key themselves? Alive?”

“No,” Morty admitted, “but I didn’t see them dead either.” He sighed. “Am I wrong to take this chance?”

“They’d take it themselves with or without you,” Eusine said, squeezing his husband’s shoulder. “Perhaps your help will improve their chances. We can only hope, hmmm?” There was a knocking
on the door outside that made them both jump.

“There’s a police van outside,” Maeg the Misdreavus said, coming in through the wall.

“Morty, love,” Eusine said nervously, gripping Morty’s shoulder tighter, “in your vision, were we in jail?”

“Calm down,” Morty said, patting Eusine’s hand. “If they were here to arrest us, they’d have burst right in, not knocked politely.”

“Unless they’re worried about arousing the wrath of the gods by breaking into a shrine,” Eusine pointed out.

“They have a body in a bag,” Maeg offered helpfully.

“Ah… I suspect they have finished their autopsy and brought Blue for his final rites,” Morty sighed, making for the shrine door.

“How is Key?” Red asked, sitting down in Marc’s office. “Courtney’s death must be hard on her…”

“Yes… she always did get too attached,” Marc sighed. “But Courtney was getting out of control… it was our fault that we did not stop her in time. You will pass on our sincerest condolences and regrets to your sister, won’t you?”

“I will, but I’m not sure that she wants to hear it,” Red said, shaking his head. “For what it’s worth… this doesn’t reflect badly on Key, or affect my feelings for her in any way. Has she… considered my proposal?”

“Yes,” Marc said, drawing a concerned look from Kalle. “She’s been too consumed by mourning to tell you, but she has accepted.”

“She has? That’s wonderful!” Red said, hopping to his feet with an excited smile before remembering himself and calming his expression. “Can I see her?”

“I think for now it would be best to leave her to her mourning,” Marc intercepted. “But we’ll tell her of your happiness, and—well, in such dark times, I think we could all do with a reason for joy, don’t you? I think we should hold the wedding on Wednesday.”

“But it’s only Monday now!” Kalle objected.

“You’re right… Wednesday is too soon,” Marc mused. “Thursday, then. Are you willing to be married on Thursday, Red?”

“I’d be willing to be married tomorrow,” Red said with a smile. “Thank you so much—I’d better go call my sister to let her know, and…” He paused on the way out of the room, his smile falling again. “…better figure out who my Best Man is going to be,” he murmured, closing the door behind him on his way out.

“Marc!” Kalle hissed, immediately rounding on his husband. “Key hasn’t agreed yet! Are you really going to rush her into this?”

“What choice do we have?” Marc sighed, rubbing his temples. “We can’t have Courtney’s autopsy put off forever. When Sar Kanto finds out that her lover was murdered not only by a Magma agent,
but one who is a very illegal AI, she will take us apart. Our only hope for survival is if her own brother becomes heir to Magma…”

“Didn’t exactly protect Rocket,” Kalle pointed out.

“This is different,” Marc insisted, “and it’s our best hope, so yes, I am rushing her into it. She’s considering it anyway, isn’t she? And what reason does she have to say no?”

“It’s not a Taillow calling,” Key insisted, stubbornly refusing to open her eyes. “It’s just a… a Murkrow, or a Chatot pretending to be a Taillow…”

Archie chuckled, tightening her arms around her. “Still…” he said reluctantly, “I should go before the real Taillow start calling. I’ve got some friends willing to smuggle me into Johto, but their ship won’t stay forever… the sun’s rising soon.”

“It’s not the sun,” Key argued, burying her head in his shoulder. “It’s just… the Littleonids.”

“Those are in Jinua,” Archie pointed out.

“They’re early… to light your way to Johto,” Key said, leaning up to kiss him for the thousandth time that night, still feeling a warm frisson every time. She scrunched up her closed eyes against the intruding light and rising tears. “I wish… you didn’t have to go,” she whispered.

“Ask me to stay and I will,” he responded softly. “I don’t care if they kill me for it. I’ll die happy. I’ve never been happier than I am right now…”

“What is he still doing here?!” Raphael hissed, appearing at the foot of Key’s bed. “Key your parents are coming! We have to get him out of here!”

“Go,” Key sniffed, sitting up and pulling on her discarded nightdress.

Archie stumbled around, dragging on his own clothes, then leaned over to kiss her one last time. “I’ll text every day,” he promised.

“Every hour,” Key ordered with a sniff. “Even that’ll feel like a million years…”

Archie nodded, smiled, then took Raphael’s hand, and disappeared just as there was a knocking on Key’s door.

In the pink flash, just for a second, the tears on Archie’s cheeks looked like dripping blood.

“I’m… I’m seeing things, she thought, wiping her eyes. It’s just because I’m scared for him… but he’ll be safe in Johto, right…?

“Key,” Kalle called, opening the door, “are you awake?”

“Leave me alone,” Key mumbled, wiping her eyes.

“Key…” Kalle sighed, misinterpreting her tears. “We’re all hurting over Courtney’s death. But you’re not doing her or yourself any good by shutting yourself away and crying all the time like this!”

“Well, sorry for grieving,” Key muttered.
“You wouldn’t have to if it weren’t for that bastard Archie,” Kalle growled. “I can’t believe that Sar Kanto’s decided to let him live…”

Key bit her lip against an angry retort, knowing it would be suspicious of her to defend his actions. “She pardoned him, and… so do I,” she said tentatively. “He killed in revenge for his friend… are we just going to keep that kind of bloody vengeance going? Surely we’re better than them?”

“Of course we are, but we will have vengeance for Courtney,” Kalle said lowly. “Rumour is he’s fleeing to Kanto… well, wherever he goes, we’ll find him, I promise. Then we’ll send him to apologize to Courtney personally…”

He’s gone to Johto, not Kanto, Key reminded herself, schooling her expression. He’ll be fine… “If you find him,” she said carefully, injecting unfelt hate into her tone, “I’ll go finish him off myself.”

Kalle nodded, then wiped a tear off of Key’s cheek with a smile. “Cheer up,” he said. “I’ve got good news as well! Marc’s sorted it all out!”

“Sorted what out?” Key asked.

Kalle smiled in a way that looked worryingly forced to Key. “Your wedding to Red!” he said brightly. “It’s going to be on Thursday morning… I know that seems a little soon, but you two have been dating for years, and of course in times like these we could all do with a little cheer. You were planning to say yes anyway, weren’t you?” he asked, misinterpreting Key’s shocked expression. “I mean, if you were really planning to say no, you would have al—”

“Fine! NO!” Key yelled, startling Kalle as she leapt to her feet. “You think I want to get married right now?! Are you kidding?! I’d rather marry Archie Montague!”

“What are you saying, Key?!” Kalle snapped. “Listen to yourself! What could Red have done to make you hate him more than Courtney’s killer?!”

There was another knock on the door and Marc walked in, frowning as he looked from his angry husband to his tearful daughter. “What’s going on?” he demanded. “Why are you shouting? Kalle, did you tell her…?”

“She’s refused,” Kalle sighed, shaking his head. “To the entire marriage. Says she’d rather marry Archie Montague than Red! Marc, I—”

“What?” Marc snapped, narrowing his eyes on Key. “What nonsense is this? You and Red have dated for a long time quite happily, and he’s been nothing but kindness and patience to you. He doesn’t even care that you’re part of Magma, which is probably more than can be said about anybody else in the country at this point!”

“I dated him to keep you happy,” Key snapped, “but I—!”

“I dated him to keep you happy,” Key snapped, “but I—!”

“So you’d abandon us all like this?!” Marc yelled. “Your marriage to Sar Kanto’s brother, a man who loves you very much, may be the only thing standing between Magma and annihilation! You condemn us all by refusing!”

“I can’t marry Red!” Key yelled. “If you’d just listen—”

“ENOUGH!” Marc roared.

“Marc, calm down!” Kalle yelled, dragging his husband away.
“You’re leaving this house on Thursday, Key,” Marc yelled, “and if it’s not with your new husband Red, then I don’t give a damn to hear from you EVER AGAIN!”

Key burst into tears again as soon as the door slammed behind her parents. In seconds, Raphael returned to her side.

“Archie’s safely out to sea,” he reported. “Key, what happened?! I could feel the argument from Petalburg!”

“They’ve arranged my wedding to Red on Thursday!” Key sobbed, hugging Raphael. “They pretty much threatened to disown me if I refused! What do I do? They wouldn’t listen!”

Raphael was quiet for a long moment, then said, “if you turn down Red, you might be better off to no longer be part of Magma. As it stands… I think you should marry Red.”

Key froze. “What,” she said flatly.

“Hear me out,” Raphael insisted. “Even if Archie gets away, he has to stay in hiding forever. Odds are slim that you’ll ever see him again, and you barely knew him anyway. But Red—you’ve known him for a long time, and you liked him well enough before Archie came into the picture. He’s a good guy.”

“That’s… what you really think…?” Key asked slowly.

“I do,” Raphael said, patting her cheek. “It’s up to you, of course, but…”

Key sighed, then smiled down at Raphael. “You’re right, of course,” she told him slowly. “I’m being stubborn. I’d… I’d better go talk to Morty and Eusine. After all, aside from you, they’re the only ones that know I’m already married, and we can’t have that coming out, can we?”

“Of course… good idea,” Raphael said, looking at her uneasily. “I’ll go tell your parents that you’re going to pray, shall I?”

Key nodded, smiling until Raphael had gone. Then she growled, slamming open her closet and yanking clothes out violently.

“You go through all that work to help me be with Archie and then you’re just ‘oh, forget him, hook up with Red’?” she seethed. “Over my dead body.”


“Well, between Courtney and Blue’s deaths, we’re all grieving just now, and it’s Marc’s feeling that we could all do with some more joy in our lives,” Red sighed. “It’ll have to take place at the Magma base, of course, since almost none of them except Key are allowed to leave, not even for the wedding….” He scowled for a moment in a way that suggested that this point had already been argued over. “Anyway, is that too short notice to officiate?”

“I’ll…” Morty said, glancing around and spotting Key walking up the path to the shrine. “…Tell you what, I’ll call you by tonight and let you know, how does that sound? If you’ll excuse me…” He gestured to Key, who had paused on the path at the sight of Red, her expression carefully blank.

“Key!” Red said, smile heartbreakingly bright. “Are you excited for Thursday? Ever since your father told me you accepted, I’ve been beside myself!”
“So have I,” Key said softly. “I’m sure that Thursday will be quite a day. But right now, I’m here to pray for my cousin.”

“Oh! Of course!” Red said, his smile gentling. “I won’t keep you. After all, soon we’ll have all the time in the world together…” He leaned over and kissed her on the cheek, then walked away, not seeing the tears that his kiss left in his wake.

“Come on in,” Morty said, ushering Key into the shrine quickly. “Key, what happened? Don’t your parents know that you already got married?”

Key shook her head, stifling her sobs behind her hand. “They were too angry that I was refusing Red to listen to why,” she cried. “They want me to marry him the day after tomorrow! What do I do?!”

“Key…” Morty began softly, “listen…”

“Oh, no,” Key snapped, grabbing the shrine door. “Don’t you dare advise me to go through with it. Don’t you dare. Not you too. I am not marrying a man I don’t love because of goddamned blood politics! I’d rather throw myself off the top of the lighthouse first, you understand?! I’d rather die!”

Morty’s gaze flickered for a moment, then he grabbed her arm with a panicked expression. “I know,” he said urgently. “You have the determination to kill yourself, I see it. But actually doing it isn’t necessary… we just need to come close enough.”

“Whatever it takes, I’ll do it,” Key said immediately. “I’ll hide in a grave with a corpse. I’ll tear off an arm and leave it in the water where Sharpedo gather. I’ll—”

“Calm down,” Morty instructed her. “We don’t need to do anything so dramatic. For now, go play the dutiful daughter—agree to marry Red, smile, bow, whatever will make your parents happy.” He got up and went over to a cabinet, extracting a small bottle. “This is a very rare Sleep Powder solution,” he explained, pressing the bottles into her hands. “It’ll put you into a coma. Your heartbeat will slow to apparently nothing, your breath will be indiscernibly shallow, your skin will turn cold and your joints will stiffen like rigor mortis. To anybody who doesn’t know about the solution, it will look like you died in your sleep. To you, it’ll just feel like falling asleep and then waking up forty-two hours later as if no time has passed. I’ll have the autopsy put off and your body put out for a wake until I can get in touch with Archie to come fetch you when you wake up. Then the two of you can leave together.”

“Thank you,” Key whispered, clutching the bottle. “I have to ask… why do you have this?”

“Hey, some people keep seviper venom in their desk drawers,” Morty said, rolling his eyes. “Once in a while, a little fake death does wonders for a relationship. It might be frightening, but it’s the best plan I’ve got.”

“I’m not afraid,” Key said firmly, tucking the bottle away securely and then hugging Morty tightly. “Thank you, Morty. I can’t thank you enough. If we never meet again… know that I can’t thank you enough.”

“Don’t thank me,” Morty said softly. “Just live… live and be happy, far from here and this bloody mess.”

“{}”

“Ummm… Dad?” Key called tentatively, walking into the main Magma base and spotting her father walking up the main stairs. “Can I… speak to you?”
“What is it?” Marc asked stiffly, not turning to look at her.

“I came to… apologize,” Key said, trying not to sound as if the words were choking her. “I was… startled and frightened by how soon my wedding is, so soon after Courtney’s death… well, the way I reacted was silly and childish, and I’m sorry. Of course I’ll marry Red. I’m looking forward to it!” she added brightly, wondering if that was one falsehood too far.

Thankfully, even a lie that huge went undetected by Marc, who ran down to hug her. “I’m so glad!” he said happily, swinging her off her feet. “I promise you, Key, you’ve saved all of us, and you’ve got a fine husband who’ll take good care of you!”

“Yes… I’m sorry I was stubborn,” Key said, accepting another hug from Kalle.

“You need an early night to get ready for tomorrow,” Kalle insisted, leading his daughter back to her room. “I understand why you were upset, Key, but I’m glad you came around. You’ll be happy with him, you’ll see.” He gave Key a last hug as they reached her bedroom door. “Goodnight, Key. Don’t forget to set your alarm. You’ll need to be up early for the rehearsal tomorrow!”

“Goodnight,” Key said softly, hugging her father back. “I’ll… I’ll miss you.”

Kalle gave her an odd look but said nothing as he left the room, closing the door behind him.

Key got dressed for bed and pulled the covers over herself. She stared at the bottle in her hands, chewing her lip. She yelped when a big Linoone head nuzzled her way under the covers. “Leslie!” she hissed. Leslie sniffed the bottle curiously. “It’s not fatal, Les,” she insisted. “It’s just… sleeping medicine. Les, can I tell you a secret?” The Linoone cocked her head curiously. “I’m leaving with Archie Montague. This is gonna make me look dead, so they’ll put me in the shrine and we can go from there.” Leslie’s eyes widened. “Morty said this’ll make me look dead… he wouldn’t lie, would he? I mean, what do you think… what if it’s just regular sleeping medication to make me stay here until the wedding?” Leslie sniffed and shook her head. “Or… what if it is poison? What if Morty’s afraid of what Magma’ll do to him if they find out he married me to Archie…” Leslie started shaking her head vehemently. “You’re right,” Key giggled, scratching Leslie’s ears. “He’s never been scared of Magma or Aqua, and if he was that scared he wouldn’t do it, would he?”

Key shivered, pulling her head out from under the covers and clutching the covers around her neck. Leslie licked her cheek. “Just didn’t want to be under there anymore,” she said, uncorking the bottle. “Next time I wake up, I’ll be under a shroud, after all… well, I won’t be if Archie’s already there. But if he doesn’t, if I wake up and he’s not there, and I’m alone with Courtney’s corpse… well, I did say I’d hide in a grave with a corpse if need be.” She scratched Leslie’s ears, gave her a last kiss on the forehead, then raised the bottle to the lips. Better drink it now, before I lose my nerve, she thought, closing her eyes and shooting the contents of the little bottle. Archie…

He was the last thought in her head before all thought and feeling faded to nothing.

“Gods, is it that time already?” Marc said, checking his watch. “Morty’ll be here any minute… Kalle, are you ready?”

“Just sent Raphael to make sure that Key’s dressed,” Kalle said, wrapping up his long blue hair in a bun at the back of his head. He dropped a handful of pins when Raphael appeared out of nowhere with a terrible scream.

“What is wrong with you?!” Marc demanded, grabbing the tiny Ralts.
“I-I’s Key,” Raphael sobbed. “She—she—” He held out a shaking hand to Kalle too, teleporting all three of them into Key’s room as soon as he took it.

Key was lying still in her bed, eyes closed, face peaceful… skin grey. The bottom dropped out of Key’s stomach.

“Key?” Kalle called, shaking their daughter’s shoulder, hysteria creeping into his voice as she didn’t respond. “Key, wake up! Key, can’t you hear me? Key! KEY! KEY, PLEASE!”

“Let me see her,” Marc ordered, grabbing Key’s wrist. It was cold and ice and stiff to move. Though he held it for what felt like an eternity, he could feel no pulse. “No,” he whispered, hovering a hand over Key’s mouth and nose and feeling only still air. “No, no, no…”

Through the roaring in his ears and Kalle’s sobbing, he faintly heard a voice. “Somebody said you were in here… is Key ready to go to the shrine?”

“The… the shrine,” Marc mumbled, gazing at nothing. “Yes… we must take her there… for her rites…”

“Marc? What’s wrong? Why’re you—” There was a sharp gasp from Red. “Key! What’s—?”

“There will be no wedding,” Marc mumbled brokenly. “Only a funeral…”

“Key… oh, Key,” Red sobbed, kneeling next to Kalle, who wept incoherently without showing any sign that he was aware of anybody else in the room. “How? Why? Why…?”

Morty placed a hand on Marc’s shoulder. “She is at peace,” he pointed out softly, gesturing to Key’s serene expression, “which is more than can be said for anybody else around here. Be happy for her that she will always be as she was on her wedding day: young, beautiful and happy.” He squeezed Marc’s shoulder, then dropped his hand. “We’ll take her to her wake today, and then call the police tomorrow, yes?”

“Yes… of course,” Marc mumbled numbly.

Morty stepped out of the room, leaving the grieving parents and fiancé in privacy. “You go dismiss all the wedding guests and get in touch with him while I make the preparations for her wake,” he said quietly to Eusine.

“Did it work?” Eusine asked softly.

Morty nodded. “I had a vision of her prepared for her funeral,” he murmured, “so she will be. The vision will be fulfilled, but she’ll be alive.”

“Is that cheating?” Eusine asked wryly.

“Only if it works,” Morty sighed.

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“Ah… Sar Kanto,” Eusine said, seeing Saylee lingering at the door of the Magma shrine. “I didn’t expect to see you here…”

“I’m not going to miss my brother’s wedding,” she said, smiling slightly. Effort had been made with makeup to cover how red and puffy her eyes were, but the main result was that eyeliner made her glare look much more intense than usual. “So why, tell me, is the rehearsal cancelled?”
“Because…” Eusine glanced around to ensure that the rest of the guests had already dispersed. “Because the wedding has been cancelled,” he said grimly. “Keyanu Capulet has died in her sleep.”


“No,” Eusine hedged. “We would also like to request that you hold off the formal investigation, particularly the autopsy, until after her wake.”

“You want me—Eusine, I agreed to hold off on Courtney’s investigation because there wasn’t anything to investigate,” Saylee snapped. “Archie Montague stabbed her in front of dozens of witnesses. His trial will not be lacking in evidence if we take a couple of days on the autopsy! But people don’t just drop dead in the middle of the night, certainly not perfectly healthy teenagers! With things being the way they are in this town, this could very well be a murder committed by Aqua, or —”

“Sar, you’d be taking a great risk by impeding Key’s funeral rites,” Eusine interjected urgently. “Unpopular as Magma are, you will infuriate people if you put her soul at risk. Besides, she was about the only moderate in this household, and she was extremely popular for that. People were hoping for her to reach out for peace once she returned to Lilycove…”

“Which is why it’s so imperative that I find out how and why she, of all the people in this household, is now dead,” Saylee argued. “I know who killed Courtney Capulet. I don’t know who killed my goddamn sister-in-law!”

“Sar Kanto, I understand that this is personally stressful and you only wish to do your job,” Eusine insisted, “but you must see reason! How can you help anyone if you are taken to be nothing more than an interfering foreigner with no respect for our country or customs?” Eusine knew he was taking a gamble; cultural sensitivity had been a big concern for Sar Kanto when she had first arrived in Lilycove, and negotiating the line between keeping order and interfering with local issues was something that she’d sought advice from Morty and Eusine about repeatedly. Either the request would reign her in, or make her snap and decide that she no longer cared, and if she decided to whisk away Key and Courtney’s bodies for an autopsy…

“I’m getting a little tired of hearing that,” Saylee snapped. Eusine restrained a flinch. “I agreed not to interfere in the feud between Magma and Aqua so long as they kept it between themselves, and in the last week alone I have four corpses to show for it, including the man I love and the woman my brother loved!”

“I understand, Sar, and… wait, four?” Eusine asked. Blue, Key, Courtney… who else?

“Kelsie Montague hanged herself this morning,” Saylee said flatly. “They haven’t been obstructing the investigation, at least…”

“Saylee…” They looked up to see Red, tears still running down his cheeks, approaching the shrine. “I… I understand that you need to do your job,” he said, “but… one day. Please. I can’t bear it if you cart her off now…”

Saylee sighed, then hugged her brother, stroking his hair as he sobbed into her shoulder. “One day,” she finally allowed. “We will take her for her autopsy tomorrow, but for today we will be searching her room and the building. Will that do?”

“It will,” Eusine said with a relieved smile, immediately hurrying off before she changed her mind to call Archie.
Archie sat on the beach, staring vaguely at the stars. They looked the same in Johto as they did in Hoenn, but the sea sounded wrong to him. It was cooler. I figured sleeping rough for a few nights until I could find a job wouldn’t be so bad in the middle of summer, he groused to himself, opening the burner Pokénav he’d gotten, intending to text Key. He sent off a quick I love you, I miss you, I’ve been tracing your name in the stars and then, bored, opened up his browser and started scrolling vaguely through the headlines.

He dropped it onto the sand at the sight of Key’s face.

What—what—what?! His mind screamed as he frantically scrambled for the device and opened the article. Once he did, he could barely comprehend any of it past the first few words.

...Lady Keyanu Capulet (18), who was to marry Lord Red Pryce (23), was found dead in her bed this morning...

No! No no no no no… Archie dialled Key over and over, roaring in frustration as it rang out time and again until finally he crushed the Pokénav in his hand. “Why… why… WHY… WHY?!” he bellowed at the stars. “This… THIS CAN’T BE! THIS SHOULDN’T BE! WHY?!”

There were no answers, only the night which suddenly seemed so much colder, so much emptier.

“…Fuck, you, stars,” Archie growled, staggering to his feet. “You won’t take her from me. If you try, I’ll follow…”

He strode purposefully down the beach, counting out the money that he’d brought. Won’t need this anymore, he thought, finding way to a back-alley pharmacy that Mr Briney had recommended to him. He knocked on the door relentlessly until it was opened by a red-haired man in dark glasses and a dressing gown.

“What do you want?” the pharmacist growled. “Do you know what godsdamned time it is?”

“You must be pretty poor, living in a hovel like this,” Archie said, nearly shoving the rickety door off its hinges as he stepped inside, pressing a stack of money into the pharmacist’s hands. “Let me help you with that.”

The pharmacist felt through the stack of notes, raising an eyebrow. “What on earth could be worth this much to you?” he asked suspiciously.

“Just a little poison,” Archie said calmly, “enough to give a man a quick and painless death.”

“My conscience says no,” the pharmacist said slowly, weighing the money in his hand, “…but my wallet says yes…”

“Embrace capitalism,” Archie suggested. “Your wallet is more important than your conscience.”

The pharmacist eventually nodded. “Well… I suppose a man looking to share wouldn’t be after ‘quick and painless’,,” he said, walking over to his worktable and running his hand along the bottles. He picked out a small red one and brusquely shoved it at Archie. “Here,” he said. “What you do with it is your own business.”

“There’s not much,” Archie said, examining the tiny bottle.

“It doesn’t take much,” the pharmacist said, shoving him out of the door. “But you didn’t get it from
me, and I—heh—never saw you.” He slammed the door behind Archie.

Archie examined the bottle, then tucked it into his jacket, walking back down to the water and releasing Shanks. “Hey, Kiddo, wassup?” the old Sharpedo asked. “You look kinda…”

“We have to get back to Lilycove as fast as possible,” Archie said, jumping into the water and then swimming over to climb onto Shanks’ back.

“We’re goin’ back?” Shanks asked, waggling his fin until he felt Archie grip onto it to secure himself. “Yer banishment’s over? Already?”

“Yes,” Archie said firmly. “It’s all over.”

“Well, then, what are we waitin’ for?” Shanks cheered, shooting off across the waves.

“Morty! Oh, sorry, ma’am,” Eusine said, bursting into the shrine and pausing to bow to the body of Kelsie Montague, which Morty was placing bowls of salt around. “They sent her over already?”

“The autopsy was fairly swift, and Adrian Montague isn’t impeding the investigation,” Morty sighed. “According to Matt, he’s probably not aware that there is an investigation. First with Archie disappearing, and then his wife killing himself… well, he’s pretty broken, and the whole thing’s very much taken the wind out of Aqua’s collective sails. A few individuals have let their anger get out of control and made trouble, but of course Sar Kanto’s taken the kid gloves off and come down hard on all of them… did you see her, by the way? How are things at Magma?”

“Hmmm? Oh, they’re going,” Eusine said, fidgeting with his tie. “Saylee’s investigating the building, but agreed to put off Key’s autopsy until tomorrow—Red begged her to, which I think made all of the difference. I don’t think either Marc or Kalle Capulet have too much to say about it… they’re rather broken too, losing their only daughter like that. She was very popular among Magma, so their collective fires have fairly gone out, much like Aqua. That part’s no problem. It’s Archie. Do you have any alternate means to contact him?”

“Only his phone number and email,” Morty said with a frown. “What’s wrong?”

“Calls and texts are both bouncing,” Eusine said in frustration, “and I must have left him thirty emails that he hasn’t answered. I called Mr Briney, and he said that he dropped Archie off safely in Cianwood…”

Morty bit back a curse, pulling the sheet over Kelsie’s face. “I apologise for leaving you early, ma’am,” he said formally, “but I must go see to your daughter-in-law so that she and your son may be reunited. I hope you understand. Verity, you’ll guard her, won’t you?” he asked the small Vulpix who was sitting in silent meditation by Kelsie’s head. The little fire-type nodded without opening her eyes.

“What are you planning to do?” Eusine asked, hurrying after his husband as Morty strode out of the shrine.

“It isn’t long until Key wakes up,” Morty said, checking his watch. “We’ll hide her here until we can get in touch with Archie. After they’re gone, I’ll explain everything to Sar Kanto. Hopefully, knowing that they’ve lost their children to elopement rather than death or prison will keep the rest of their families alive and knock some sense into them…”

{}
“Are you sure we should be doing this?” Eric asked, looking around nervously. The compound was dark and quiet, the entirety of Magma under a pall of mourning for the popular Lady who had been taken from them so young. There was no sound to be heard, and no light but the torches burning around the family shrine.

“Just keep watch for me, please,” Red said, stepping into the shrine and shutting the door behind himself. The interior of the shrine was lit by more torches, the two biggest burning over the two cloth-covered corpses.

Red had seen no shortage of corpses, human and Pokémon, friend and foe, and had thought himself immune to any fear or disgust at the sight of the leftovers of life. Yet the mere sight of the shrouds turned his stomach, albeit for different reasons. One covered the corpse of the murderer of his best friend, his brother, his would-be brother-in-law. The other…

He didn’t dare draw back the sheet, afraid too afraid to see death settled into the beautiful face that had seemed to be only sleeping the last time he saw it. Instead, he carefully, without thinking about much of anything, began to decorate the shroud with the flowers that Ben had grown for him. They filled the room with a sweet, gentle fragrance. First Blue, now you, Key… if only we’d never come to Hoenn… if only we’d…

“Red, somebody’s coming! They’re sneaking in the shrine roof!”

Red looked up as his Espeon’s warning flashed through his mind. Warn my sister, he ordered Eric, then find Perun and the others…

“Will you be alright alone?” Eric asked. Dust drifted down from the ceiling as something creaked.

I won’t be alone if you fetch everyone, Red thought, hiding behind the altar and then, on second thought, leaning around to snatch up one of the antique swords that sat on the altar in red sheathes embossed with the magma symbol. He drew it partially and was relieved to see that the blade had been maintained, not left to rust. Go!

He waited in the shadows as a tall, broad figure dropped from the ceiling, rolling across the floor with a grunt of pain. They stood, looked inside of their coat pocket, to check something, and then turned to the bodies with a tortured expression.

It was Archie Montague.

What the hell is he doing here?! Red thought, staring as Archie slowly approached the corpses. I thought he left the country? What is he planning?!

To Red’s horror, Archie approached Key’s body, clenching his shaking fists in the shroud before wrenching it away with a cry, sending flowers spilling to the floor.

“YOU KEEP AWAY FROM HER!” Red roared, ripping the scabbard from his sword and charging. Archie ducked Red’s wild, enraged swing, grabbing Red’s ankle to drag him to the floor too. Red landed hard on his stomach, sword arm outstretched, Archie sitting on his back.

“Leave,” Archie snarled harshly, snatching the sword away and standing up. “Just… go. Don’t make me do something I’m gonna regret.”

“You’ll regret whatever you came here to do!” Red snapped, rolling to his feet and swinging the scabbard like a club at Archie’s head.

Archie knocked the sword away with the sword and swung the blade back around, ripping open
Red’s chest.

Red’s strength left him in an instant as the pain tore into him. He dropped to his knees, then fell to his side, air bubbling from his chest as he struggled to breathe.

“Red?” Archie said, sounding surprised, apparently having somehow only just realized who he was fighting.

“Don’t let ‘em bury me… in Kanto…” Red coughed, reaching across the floor—for what, he wasn’t entirely sure, but his fingers found the soft petals of one of the flowers scattered across the floor. “Tell… my sister… to bury… me… here… with… Key…”

His vision faded, leaving only the faint scent of blood and flowers, and then nothing.

“Saylee?” Eusine said, knocking on the door of the temple room where Saylee sat, observing Blue’s wake. “I’m so sorry to disturb you, but Zac insisted that it was of the utmost urgency…”

“It is!” Zac cried, bursting into the room. “Key Capulet killed herself!”

“Zac, you can’t be in here,” Saylee admonished, wiping her eyes. “Wait. What?”

“Les found an empty bottle in her room that smells funny,” Zac declared as his sister followed him into the room, shaking a tiny bottle out of her fur. Saylee went into her bag for gloves before she picked it up and sniffed it.

“Doesn’t smell like any poison I’ve ever encountered,” she said thoughtfully. “Eusine, you and Morty make herbal medicines, don’t you?”

“Wh—yes, of course, why?” the man said nervously.

Saylee narrowed her eyes. “I was going to ask if you knew what this was,” she said darkly, “but I think you do. If you gave that girl poison—”

“It’s not!” Eusine said frantically. “It’s not poison! It just induces a coma, that’s all!”

“A co—?! That’s why you were so insistent on me putting off the autopsy?!” Saylee yelled. Caching herself, she took a deep breath, turned, and bowed to Blue’s body.

“I’m sorry, Blue,” she said softly, “but I need to go do what I should have done months ago—my job. Zac, Leslie, we’re going to the Magma Shrine, where I’m willing to guess that Keyanu Capulet is going to wake up soon,” she ordered, looking down at the pair of Linoone. “And you,” she added, striding across the room and grabbing Eusine’s arm to drag him out of the door, “are coming with me. And on the way, you are going to explain what the hell is going on…”

Red… what was he doing here? Archie wondered, dragging the man’s body over to rest next to Key’s. He couldn’t bring himself to not honour Red’s request, or to hate him for it. After all, I’m here for the same reason… to rest at her side. I’m sorry, Blue, to have killed your friend… or perhaps you’re glad to have company? Don’t worry… you’ll have more soon.

He walked around to the other side of the slab where Key lay, hands clasped over her stomach and a sash over her chest bearing eight Hoenn badges. She looked peaceful enough to be sleeping, her
cheeks still rosy, the illusion only belied by her absolute stillness.

He glanced over his shoulder at the other sheet covering Courtney as he uncorked the bottle. *Don’t worry, Courtney... I’m about to avenge your murder,* he thought, giving Key a last kiss before downing the poison.

No sooner had the cold liquid gone down his throat than his strength drained from him. He dropped the bottle to the floor as he sank to his knees, staring intently at Key, determined for her face to be the last thing he ever saw.

As his vision faded, he imagined that he saw her open her beautiful eyes and look at him, and the last thing that he heard was her voice calling his name.

*I’m coming, Key...*
“The rangers will be coming soon, and your parents…”

No… I can’t… she thought, wiping her eyes furiously. I refuse. I’m not staying here for all this… this mess, this Magma-Aqua shit… I’m not staying here without Archie… I’m not staying one damned minute longer!

Laying Archie’s body down, she looked around and spotted a sword lying on the floor. It was covered with blood, but that didn’t bother her. I’m so, so tired… she thought, picking it up. And that potion, that sleep… that was so nice… so comfortable… so peaceful…

She ran the sword through her chest, watching almost dreamlike as the blade pierced her. She barely even felt the pain, just watching it bloom, like it was happening away from her, nothing to do with her. She dropped to the floor and crawled forwards, slumping over Archie’s chest as her strength left her entirely and her eyes drooped closed. She reached out, in her mind, for the cool, comforting darkness, feeling only relief as it embraced her again, this time for good.

{}
“Sar…” Morty called from the door. “I-I’m sorry. By the time I got here… by the time I got here, it was too late… I…” Saylee stood up and walked over to the door. Her forensics team were coming up the path, and so was, under escort, Adrian Montague.

“What’s—ARCHIE!” he cried in horror as soon as he got to the shrine door. Saylee walked up and shoved him in the chest to stop him walking in.

“Forensics, there are three fresh corpses in there,” she said flatly. “Adrian Montague, Keyanu Capulet and Red Pryce. What’re you staring at?” Saylee snapped at the forensics team. “Get in there and do your jobs! Go!” The team of jumpsuits quickly scurried past her to set up shop in the shrine. She stepped aside to let them through, pointing at Archie and Key’s bodies. “Key faked her death,” she laid out flatly. “She faked her death to elope with Archie Montague. Only something went wrong, he killed himself before she woke up, and she killed herself too. They were in love, but because of your stupid goddamn feud, they had to hide it, and now they’re dead. Well done. Bravo. But, you know what? I’m being unfair,” she shouted, her voice steadily rising. “You’re just angry fucking idiots. My job here was to keep the peace, and maybe if I’d bloody well done that from the beginning… I should have. I should’ve done my damn job. But I didn’t, and now my brother’s dead too. Well done to all of us. We’ve all done a bang-up job with this city, and now we’ve been rewarded!”

Adrian sank to his knees, holding his head in his hands. “Archie… Archie’s dead because…because of…”

“Because of us,” Marc said, reaching down a hand to the Aqua leader and pulling the man to his feet. “Your son… Archie was a good man, and he didn’t deserve this.”

“Neither did Key,” Adrian said, squeezing Marc’s hand.

“Neither did Red,” Kalle added to Saylee. “Sar Kanto, I’m so…”

“I don’t want to hear it,” Saylee said hoarsely. “Di, you’re running the investigation,” she called to a woman sitting astride a Ponyta. Di nodded, hopping down from her Ponyta’s back and walking into the shrine. “Morty,” she said, pulling the priest aside, “Eusine told me… he told me you had visions of this feud ending because of… because of their love. How much did you see?”

“I saw Key in her tomb and them clasping hands, that’s all,” Morty swore quickly. “I was only trying to keep them alive, I swear. And I never saw Red here. I swear, Sar Kanto, I… I’m so sorry. This is all my fault…”

“It’s all of our faults,” she said, turning away. “And all of us are going inside to talk it over, now. We need to decide what happens to Aqua, to Magma, to the bodies… and make sure that everybody knows the truth,” she added. “The truth about Key and Archie…”

FIN

Chapter End Notes

This is the first one where I’ve added a couple of scenes, both ones with Saylee and Eusine. I was always fairly curious about Prince Escalus, particularly his relationships
with Paris and Mercutio and how their deaths and the events of the play affected him. We only ever see Escalus in the play in the context of him turning up to bollock Montagues and Capulets, and while Paris and Mercutio are only listed extremely vaguely as “kinsmen”, he seems to take both of their deaths fairly hard; “you shall all repent the loss of mine” sticks out as a line of his after Mercutio’s death, where he reduces Romeo’s sentence from death to banishment for having avenged Mercutio’s loss, and in reference to the deaths of Paris, Romeo and Juliet, his says “all are punished”, referring to himself being punished as well as the Montagues and Capulets for all that’s gone down between them. In fact, at the end of the play, the body count is an even 2-all; Romeo and his mother from the Montagues, Juliet and Tybalt from the Capulets, and Paris and Mercutio from the house of Prince Escalus.

I think I might’ve also missed a couple scenes, tbh... like Hamlet, I did this one mostly without the actual play on hand ^_^;

This is one of those plays that I went from hating with a passion to loving with a passion. My initial misinformed impression of the play, like everybody’s, was that it was a romance, and a terrible one about two dumb kids getting themselves and four others killed because they rushed into a dumbass relationship. The first time I actually read it, all of Romeo’s over-the-top emoness suggested to me that maybe it was meant to be a satire, taking the piss out of rushed overdramatic Twoo Bluv relationships like that, and it just made me even more pissed off that people hold it up so often as an example of a wonderful love. Then I actually studied it in Uni and realized that the big problem in the play isn’t their romance at all. It’s the Capulet-Montague feud.

Romeo and Juliet are dumb kids that rush into a relationship, it’s true, but nobody deserves to die for that. The way that Romeo flips immediately from Rosaline to Juliet suggests that, if they’d been able to have the relationship openly and normally, it would’ve burned out of its own accord after a couple of weeks. As it is, the events of the play take place over four days, which doesn’t give their infatuation time to burn out or even be revealed, despite the fact that both try and are shut down by the feud, which is responsible for most of the deaths. Tybalt calls Romeo out for a fight solely because he’s a Montague and Tybalt has made his feelings on them quite clear earlier in the play. Mercutio is not part of the feud, but has been jumping into the fights for a long time, apparently to protect Romeo and Benvolio but mainly, if you pay attention to his dialogue, for the lulz (which makes it a bit rich when he blames “both your houses” for his death). Mercutio’s death is down predominantly to the Feud and only tangentially to the Romance; most adaptations have Mercutio killed by a cheap shot that Tybalt takes while Romeo’s trying to call for peace, which is about as far as you can connect it to the Romance. Tybalt’s death is absolutely nothing to do with the Romance; he isn’t aware of it, and he’s fighting Romeo solely because Romeo is a Montague, and Romeo is just avenging Mercutio’s death, which is down to the Feud. This leads to Romeo’s banishment, which leads to his mother’s death (not suicide in the play, just simple death by despair), which again has jack-shit to do with the Romance. When Paris challenges Romeo, he hasn’t a clue that Romeo and Juliet were ever romantically involved, and assumes that Romeo “is come to do some villainous shame to the dead bodies”, because Romeo is a Montague and he’s in the Capulet tomb and there’s the Feud, so what else is Paris to think? Romeo somehow doesn’t realize that he’s fighting Paris until after the latter is dead and even tells Paris to just leave and not start a fight. Again, slightly down to the Romance because Romeo fights back because he just wants to be left to die peacefully next to Juliet, but the fight is started by Paris because of the Feud. The last deaths, Romeo and Juliet, are predominantly because of their Romance, because neither
wants to live without the other, but none of the misunderstandings and convoluted fake-death plans or anything would be necessary without the goddamn Feud.

Tl;dr: the play is barely even about romance, it’s about revenge and grudges and how perpetuating cycles of needless violence will get every young person in a five-mile radius dead except Benvolio.

Reading it as that makes me like it a hell of a lot better.
“Blue, can you go find Grampa?” Daisy whispered, grabbing her thirteen-year-old brother’s arm. “The meat’s nearly cooked and there’s not a lot of it. If he’s not here when we start doling out, he might not get any.”

“You sure you’re not just sending me away to steal my share?” Blue grumbled. Daisy gave him a shove. “Fine, fine… where is he, anyway?”

“Checking out the creepy old building again,” Daisy said, pointing at the crumbling hulk of the old lab that they’d found hidden in the rotten forest south of Viridian. With the roof gone and half the walls crushed by fallen trees, it wasn’t a safe place to sleep, and in any case who knew what all of the strange, rusting machines in there might do to them? The only person who had the vaguest clue about any of it was Blue and Daisy’s grandfather, Samuel Oak (affectionately called “Professor” by the rest of their scatty group of wanderers for the amount of random things that he seemed to know about everything), so he was left to explore the building on his own.

“Gramps?” Blue called, stepping warily through the empty doorway and into the dusty, rubble-strewn foyer. “Hey, Gramps, Daisy says there’s food. You coming or what?”

He waited for a response, shuffling his feet in the dirt and dead leaves from a fallen tree that had crushed a room to his right and lay half into the hallway, but there was no sound. “Gramps?” he called again, tentatively walking into the dark ruin. He thought he heard faint movement somewhere else in the building, but there was no reply from his grandfather, which was making him increasingly nervous. What if a wild Pokémon got to him…? “Gramps, are you here?” he called, carefully pushing aside a door that was hanging on its hinges and walking into a larger room that was half blocked off by fallen bookcases. “Are you okay? Answer me, Gramps!”

The beam of a flashlight swept across the room towards Blue. In the moment before it blinding him, he spotted his grandfather lying on the floor next to a fallen bookshelf. “GRAMPS!” he yelled, ignoring the light and running towards his grandfather. He dropped to his knees next to the Professor, onto whom the beam of light moved, showing that the old man was clutching a viciously bleeding stomach wound. Blue stared in horror at the purple pus that was oozing between his grandfather’s fingers. “Gramps, what hap—” he began, looking around wildly and finding himself face-to-face with a large Nidorino.

“Should I get him too, Miss Saylee?” the Nidorino asked, leaning towards Blue. “He’s a witness.”
“Who cares?” a voice said scornfully. Blue was too terrified to look away from the Nidorino, but the voice sounded like a kid’s. “What’s a kid like him gonna do against Team Rocket? Sorry about your old man, but if he’d just handed over the rare Pokemon like I told him to in the first place, he wouldn’t have gotten hurt.” The girl actually laughed, making Bleu angry enough to glare at her, but with her flashlight pointed at his face she was nothing but a vague, dark shape. “You just stay there pissing your pants or whatever and we won’t hurt you too, got it?” she said condescendingly. “C’mon, Neil. Let’s get these back to Dad.” The light of the flashlight vanished, followed in short order by the Nidorino. Blue heard it running off into the trees after its trainer.

“D…DAISY!” Blue yelled, unfreezing and desperately pressing his hands to his grandfather’s wound. “DAISY! SOMEBODY! HELP!”

“B…Blue…” his grandfather coughed, shakily waving a hand at the fallen bookshelf. “She… missed one… don’t know… which…”

“Blue?” Daisy called from somewhere in the building. “Where are you?”

“AT THE BACK! HURRY!” Blue yelled frantically. “Gramps, just… hang in there, Gramps, Daisy’s coming, she’ll… tell me what to do, Gramps, you always know what to do!”

His grandfather slowly shook his head, tears leaking out of his eyes. “Those… poor… Po…” he whispered, before giving a bloody, hacking cough and lying still.

“Gramps!? GRAMPS!” Blue screamed.

“Blue!” Daisy cried, running up to him. “What’s—Grampa!” She crouched down by their grandfather, feeling desperately for his pulse and breath. “No, no… no…” she sobbed, clutching his coat as she started to cry. “Blue… what happened to him?”

“Team Rocket,” Blue snarled, sitting back and staring at the blood and poison on his hands. Then he stuck one hand under the gap beneath the fallen bookcase that his grandfather had died reaching for, feeling around until he found rusted metal. He pulled out and opened a pokéball. In the flash of light from the energy materialization, he saw a small blue Pokémon with a round head and a hard brown shell.

“Hmmm… wha…? PROFESSOR!” the little Pokémon cried, scrambling over to the body. “Professor! PROFESSOR OAK! What’s—” There was a pause, turning her head, looking at Daisy, who was sobbing over her grandfather’s corpse, or Blue, whose tears were silent and who was clenching his fists so tightly that he could feel warm blood trickling along his palm. “What happened to him?”

“Rocket,” Blue ground out. “They murdered Gramps and stole some Pokémon from him.”

“They stole—?! Chaz?! Ben?!” the little Pokémon called, looking around. Blue would guess that she was a water-type, but when she looked back up at him he swore he could see fire in her eyes. “Who?” she growled. “Who are Team Rocket? Which one of them?”

“A Nidorino called Neil,” Blue recalled tersely, “and his trainer… a girl called Saylee.”

“Blue,” Daisy said sharply, “what are you planning? You can’t be thinking of going up against Rocket!”

“Not on my own,” Blue growled. “But me and—hey, what’s your name?” he asked the blue Pokémon. “What even are you?”
“I’m Sam,” she said, holding up a tiny paw. “I’m a Squirtle. Nice to meet you, I guess…”

“Me and Sam are gonna train our asses off and join Surge’s militia,” Blue declared. “We’re gonna help them take out Rocket, wipe out all their—” He shuddered violently. “—their godsdamned Nidos, and I am personally going to kill that bitch Saylee!”

Chapter End Notes

So my brain likes to do things like go “hey, you know how you started your series in a shitty, dystopic scenario? What if you made that EVEN WORSE”. The basic premise is “what if Saylee and Red were raised by Giovanni?” although this ended up being more about Blue than Saylee… I have ideas for a few other scenes in this ‘verse and I mostly know what happened to take things from Memory Ground Zero to this point, but I have no real idea where it goes from here… well, that’s not true, I have a lot of ideas, but they all take it in wildly different directions and I don’t even know if I’m going to write any more of it anyway XP Maybe sometime, if people are interested.
Music Meme
Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Summary

Music meme
1. Put your music player on shuffle and randomize up a song
2. Write for the duration of that song whatever it brings to mind
3. Do this 10 times

Chapter Notes

I went back and corrected a couple of grammar and punctuation mistakes, but otherwise I just wrote… this is a pretty fun writing exercise, and it’s always interesting to see what Shuffle throws up. I’m amazed there wasn’t more P!nk, to be honest… My head’s very much in DD right now, as is probably shown by a chunk of these featuring characters that haven’t shown up yet XD

1—Rooftops (Lostprophets)

As long as Janine could remember, Saffron had been a source of trouble. When she was little, she’d had a confused notion that it was some kind of hell, because Saffron was where all the bad things came from. Those men in black who’d killed people and stolen their Pokémon at the edge of the forest—they came from Saffron. That huge attack on the western gate of Fuchsia—the people and Pokémon who did that were from Saffron. The gang who were taking over so much of the country… they ran Saffron.

Seeing it now, with the southern part of the city ablaze and the screams of fighting in the streets, she figured that her childhood estimate wasn’t too far off.

She ran from one dilapidated rooftop to another, her keenly-attuned eyes easily picking out the Rockets and their Pokémon who were attacking the combatants below in the darkness and dropping silently on them with Shadeana and Zila at her side. Instead of trees on all sides, she was out in the open air with nothing but the smoky sky above her, and even as the battle raged on as they finally purged the hell from which all foul things came, she almost felt like laughing.

~

2—Decode (Paramore)

Everyone knew there was something odd about Steven Stone, and nobody knew it better than the
two from Celestic who’d been inseparable best friends since childhood. One day, as teenagers, this silver-haired foreign boy had wandered into their city to see the museum and two had almost seamlessly become three. It was like they’d known him as long as they’d known each other, and they trusted him just as implicitly, and yet…

…there’d always been something a little odd about him. His ever-changing eyes, his strange lack of visible aura, his wild theories, and sometimes that odd little smile…

Years later, they’d wonder if they’d been wrong to ever trust him, after they’d gone from knowing him as well as they knew themselves to not knowing him at all, and wondering if they ever had. But one day, they were certain, they’d figure it out.

~

3—Dance, Dance/violin version (Vitamin String Quartet)

Kel’s playing warbled gently through the night air, slowly growing quieter and quieter.

“Ça va, Kel?” Belle asked, looking up at the frowning Kricketune. “Are you tired?”

“No, just… it doesn’t feel right. I’m not playing it right,” Kel said, slowly drawing out another few notes. “I can’t get this right at all…”

“Perhaps you ought to play it faster?” Belle suggested.

“I’m not even playing it right slowly,” Kel pointed out. “How am I supposed to get it right fast?”

“Ah, ma cherie, you need not get it perfectly correct!” the little Budew laughed. “If you play it fast, then your mistakes will pass before anybody even notices them!” She pirouetted on her tiny, stubby feet. “And if you play with confidence, you shall sweep away the hearts and feet of your listeners!”

Kel laughed and began to play again, much faster, any mistakes she made unnoticed by the happily dancing Budew.

~

4—Good Old Days (P!nk)

It had become the norm now, but it still made Saylee smile to look out of the window in the morning and see blue skies.

“’Morning,” Blue said, leaning his head on her shoulder and wrapping his arms around her. “You look like you’re in a good mood.”

“Mmm,” Saylee said with a nod, patting his hands. “Just thinking… I never thought it would look like this.” She gestured out of the window. “Clear blue skies, soft green grass…”

“I would’ve thought you were crazy if you’d described Kanto looking like this… hell, maybe even ten years ago,” Blue said, shifting his hands lower to wrap around her belly. “Probably would’ve been surprised to hear we’d still be alive now, really.”

Saylee laughed. “Yeah… me too.” She lowered her hands too and felt a nudge back from inside her
swollen belly. “And to think… this one’s never going to know anything different. Beautiful days like this are gonna be normal…”

Blue poked her stomach. “You’d better appreciate it,” he ordered the little bump sternly. “You’ve got good days ahead of you.”

~

5—Shut The Fuck Up (The Coathangers)

“We shall rebuild the world,” Cyrus declared, spreading his arms. “It shall be reborn anew, without anger, strife or hate. For such a goal, can you not agree that… sacrifices… are necessary?”

“Man, shut the fuck up,” Saylee growled, flinging Caelin’s pokéball right between the man’s eerily blank eyes.

~

6—Here’s To Us (Halestorm)

“…and then one to the face, one to the ribs, one to the… weak point,” Key said, miming a series of punches to the laughing group. “I reconsidered the idea that she wasn’t upset pretty quick, let me tell you!”

“You can probably smell my lack of surprise,” Blue said, shaking his head and pouring another drink. “Here’s to… Winnie, was it?”

“Winnie,” Saylee agreed, clinking her glass against his. “And William. And Polly. And Teddy. And all those who died because of Magma and Aqua’s foolishness.” Archie lowered his head.

“At least they aren’t gonna have to deal with Galactic’s foolishness,” Key said, raising her own glass. “To all those who died because of Galactic.”

“And those of us left behind to clean the bastards up,” Blue said, tapping his glass to hers. “As per usual.”

“Here’s to us,” Saylee agreed.

~

7—This Is Hallowe’en (The Nightmare Before Christmas)

“Okay, don’t tell anybody, but I’m actually kinda impressed,” Silver allowed, shading his eyes as he looked up as the floatilla of ghost-shaped hot-air balloons (led, of course, by what was hopefully a Drifblim-shaped balloon and not an actual Drifblim with a basket full of victims) floated overhead.

“Hallowe’en’s fun and all but it’s best in Hearthome!” Barry declared, practically bouncing down the road in front of the other teenagers. “C’mon c’mon c’mon! We gotta get costumes!”

“We need what?” Silver asked, tensing slightly but allowing Dawn and Lucas to tug him down the
It’s Hallowe’en so you dress up,” Dawn explained, “and in exchange you get sweets. And we need to stop Barry or he’s just going to get an ugly mask, jump out on people, and steal any sweets they drop in flight.”


Lucas’ shoulders shook as he silently cracked up at Silver’s incredulity.

~

8—Frozen (Within Temptation)

“Good morning, Python,” Verity said, stepping daintily around a gravestone. “How are you today?”

Python didn’t even look up at the young Vulpix, merely flattened his ears and continued to lay with his head on his paws, watching the gravestone. A randomly wandering Duskull floated a little too close until the Mightyena snarled at it, showing off his large, sharp teeth.

“I see,” Verity said, sitting down next to Polly’s grave, her tails fanning out around her, ignoring Python’s snarling. “You’ve been here a week, you know.”

“I’ll stay here as long as I damn well want,” Python snapped. “I don’t wanna go anywhere. I don’t wanna see anybody. Go away.”

“Is this how you wish to spend the rest of your life?” Verity asked, laying down to mimic his head-on-paws pose. “Sitting frozen before her grave, seeing nobody in case you lose them, feeling nothing in case it hurts?”

“What do you care if I do?” Python snarled.

“This place is for the dead and their carers, Python,” Verity said softly, standing up and walking past him, leaving a trail of warm blue fire hovering in the air behind her. “You are neither. You are a mourner. And you are alive.”

~

9—Be Still (The Fray)

The peak of Mt Moon was never dark, not even in the depths of night. In the caves at the peak, fire flickered—low, because all of the young Charmander were sleeping, but nevertheless the night was filled with a warm orange glow.

That glow intensified around one young one as she whimpered and fretted in her sleep and a huge orange claw gently rested on her head. She opened her eyes with a gasp.

“Ssh, ssh,” Chaz said softly, scooping the little one up close to his chest. “What’s wrong? Did you have a nightmare?”

She nodded shakily. “It was so dark,” she whispered. “So cold, and dark, and I was lost and
alone…”

“You’re a Char,” Chaz promised her, nuzzling her head. “You’ll never be in the cold and dark.”

“I was lonely,” the baby whispered, cuddling closer to her father. “It was scary.”

“I know,” Chaz whispered, wrapping his arms around her. “Being alone is scary. But I promise you, I’m your Papa, and I won’t let you ever be alone.”

~

10—Master of Tides (Lindsey Sterling)

Breathe in.

The water rushed up to lap at his toes.

Breathe out.

The waves rushed away, leaving his feet dry.

Breathe in…

“Ethan! What are you doing?”

“Brother Jinn?” Ethan said, looking around, slightly annoyed that his concentration had been broken. The sea in front of him frothed as his focus slipped. “What is it?”

“Are you messing with the waves again?” the monk asked, scowling and folding his arms. “Ethan, the Master has spoken to you of—”

“The responsibility inherent in my power and my duty not to abuse it, and so on and stuff, I know,” the boy said, rolling his silver-tinted eyes. “I wasn’t actually messing with the waves. I was tuning into them. Like meditation… look.” He gestured to the water, which was lapping back and forth normally. “I can control the sea because I’m connected to it. And it’s connected to me. I realized when I was trying to meditate that my breathing and heartbeat were both in time with the water without me doing anything deliberately. So I thought, if I really focused… I’m not affecting the sea, Brother Jinn, I’m just trying to see what happens when I let it affect me.”

The monk nodded, looking the teenager up and down. Sometimes it was hard to believe that one of the most powerful gods of Johto resided in the boy who had been so young and sickly when he’d first come to Sprout Tower, but as he watched he realized that what Ethan had said was true; under his thin summer robes, Ethan’s chest was rising and falling slowly and in precise time with the evening tides.

“And what happens when you let the sea affect you?” Jinn asked.

“Well… I haven’t found out yet,” Ethan said, with a grimace that, even with a shaved head and monk’s robes, was so very teenager that Jinn almost laughed.

“Then will you forgive me by permitting me to join your meditation?” the older monk asked, bowing his head.

Ethan smiled. “Sure,” he said, sitting cross-legged on the sand. “Pull up a seashell.”
“Erika!” Julia called, running through the greenhouse in search of Celadon City’s green-thumbed Leader. “Erika! We need you at the East Gate!”

“What’s the problem?” Erika asked, straightening up from a tray of seedlings and patting dirt off of her hands. She glanced at Oleander, her Vileplume. “Is there an attack? Has something happened to Bakula?” The vicious Victreebel was usually responsible for guarding Celadon’s East Gate, commanding a thick wall of vines that blocked off the entire eastern side of the city from the Rocket-controlled Saffron.

“No, she’s fine, but she says there’s a stranger,” Julia said, walking with Erika and Oleander back out of the gym.

“So? We don’t let strangers in from the East Side,” Oleander pointed out. “Who is she? Where’s she from?”

“Don’t know, Bakula just told me to run and fetch you,” Julia said, opening the greenhouse door ahead of Erika and Oleander. The three of them hurried through the streets of Celadon together, to where curious rubberneekers were starting to gather around the point in the thorn wall where Bakula would open the gate—if Erika said so.

Erika had already rolled up the sleeves of her wrap-around shirt to work in the greenhouse, and hiked up her long, thick skirt as well so she could climb up the thorny wall to where her Victreebel was sitting on top.

“Down there,” Bakula said, pointing down at the stranger, who was sitting on the ground, her arms wrapped around herself.

The girl didn’t look much more than eleven or twelve and was skinny and filthy, wearing a torn, bloodstained dress and no shoes. She was rubbing her bruised arms as if cold, chewing her lip as she stared up at Bakula and Erika. “Hello?” she called up. “Please, help me…”

“My name is Erika,” Erika called down. “Who are you?”

“My name’s Lyra,” the girl called up. “This… this is Celadon City, isn’t it? Where you can be safe from Rocket?”

“It is,” Erika responded. “Where are you from, Lyra?”

“Not… not anywhere, really,” the girl responded. “I wander.”
“You think she’s a Rocket spy?” Bakula asked quietly.

“She’s awfully young,” Erika replied, “but I wouldn’t put it past them… a little girl like you, travelling on her own?” she called, raising her voice.

“I… I had my brother,” Lyra called back, her voice breaking into a sob. “Th-th R-R-Rockets, they… they caught us, th-they… they killed him, they took our P-P-Pokémon… please, h-help me, I-I’m scared…”

“…Let her in,” Erika finally decided, turning and climbing back down the thorns to the ground while Bakula curled them aside for Lyra to stagger in.

Close up, the girl looked in a truly sorry state; she was wearing cracked, bent glasses over a badly swollen black eye, dried blood was crusted on her cracked lips, and she was limping slightly. Her hair colour was indiscernible, so matted with blood and dirt, but her one visible eye was blue. Erika gave Lyra a warm hug, relieved to feel no sign of pokéballs or any other weapon through the girl’s thin, torn clothes—only bruised, shaking skin. “Th-thank you, Lady Erika,” the girl sobbed. “Thank you…”

“It’s alright, dear,” Erika said softly. “You’re safe now…”

It was nearly two in the morning when the eastern wall of thorns collapsed into the inferno. “Sand Attack, Rickard,” Red ordered his Rhyhorn. “Make us a way through.” The Rhyhorn nodded, digging his heels into the earth and then spraying it over the fire, damping it down until there was a sandy, ashy path through the flames and into the city, the majority of which was also on fire. Rockets flooded into the streets, dragging cowering people out from any corner where they sought to hide.

In the centre of the city, there was a dried-out basin under a tall, cracked pillar that had probably once supported a proud statue. It now supported a proud Charizard, who was watching the burning city carefully. “Red!” Chaz roared, spreading his wings. “About time you brought reinforcements!”

“Red! Don’t listen to him, we’ve got this all under control,” Saylee said brightly, hopping up from her seat at the edge of the cracked basin, Neil towering protectively over her.

Red gasped. “Saylee! You’re hurt!” he cried, running over to embrace his sister, careful of the bruises covering her. “I’m sorry, you should never have come in here on your own, I told Dad you’re too young, Charizard or no—who hurt you? Did you get them already? Because if they’re unlucky enough to still be alive—”

“Hey! I performed the infiltration perfectly, thank you,” Saylee huffed, giving her brother a shove. “It’s true what they said, Erika was a real bleeding heart for a little girl with a sob story—although she wasn’t really as soft as Dad said, you know. I felt her, patting me down for weapons under the guise of giving me a hug! Can you believe it? Kind of a shame to kill her, but she was definitely more dangerous than she looked, and besides it was the quickest way to get the rest of her fighters to give up. You would not believe how fast they broke when Chaz dropped her body in front of them!”

She pointed at a dark lump on the ground nearby, faintly lit by the flickering of Chaz’ tail and the raging fire in the city around them, a body that looked to have been in poor shape even before it hit the ground from a height. “A bunch of the fighters ran off west—I’m guessing they’re heading for Fuchsia. But the rest just gave up, and none of these flower-power puffs laid a hand on me, thank you!”

“I’m glad,” Red sighed, glancing over his shoulder at Archer, who, hearing the conversation, was
already yelling at Rockets to get a barricade up on the west gate and to finish sweeping the city to bring in all the citizens for a census. “But then how…?” he gestured to his own eye with a wince.

“Oh… these?” Saylee said, touching her black eye gingerly. “Well… Ariana suggested, to make it look more convincing… she was right, you know. Erika melted in no time when I cried at her!”

_And Ariana got to slap you around a bit, Red thought bitterly. Bet that bitch loved that… “C’mon, you should come back to Saffron, get a shower and some decent clothes instead of these rags,”_ he said, putting his arm around Saylee’s shoulders. “Then you can report to Dad.”

“Bet he’ll be burstin’ with pride,” Neil said with a grin, folding his thick arms. “His lil girl’s all of thirteen and already takin’ over cities! I barely had to do a damn thing myself with the flyin’ fireball up there,” he added pointing up to Chaz.

“I’m just glad the fighting ended quickly,” Chaz said, dropping to the ground and stooping to allow Red and Saylee to climb onto his back. Red returned Rickard, then climbed up behind his sister. “We hardly had to kill _anybody_, and their lives’ll be back to normal in no time—just with the extra resources they’ll get for obeying Rocket.”

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“Exactly,” Saylee said, returning Neil and hugging Chaz’ neck. “You did fantastic! Go on, take us back to the Saffron HQ.”

Chaz spread his wings and took off, flying east through the cold dark. “I’m just glad you’re alright,” Red called over the wind, tightening his grip on Saylee’s shoulders. “I was really worried, you know.”

“I know, you worrywart,” Saylee said, patting his hands. “You’re going to worry the whole time you’re on the supply run, right? Don’t be! Just _enjoy_ it. It’s a big responsibility, you know, and nobody deserves it more than you!”

“I know,” Red shouted back. “I just want to know you’ll be okay while I’m gone. I’d rather if you didn’t trust Ariana’s plans.”

“I don’t, ceez, what do you take me for?” Saylee said, turning her head so he could see her rolling her eye. “I had Neil standing by to stab her if she did any more than slap me—”

“Not just that,” Red said, shaking his head. “This whole infiltration was dangerous, even if Chaz _did_ make you the best person for the job. She’s just… tricksy like that, okay? She’ll find a way to put you in dangerous situations and make it look like the smartest solution. I’m not saying _never_ go with her plans, especially if Dad’s already approved them, just… be extra-cautious when you do, okay?”

“Red, I’ll be _fine_,” Saylee insisted, leaning back against her big brother as they descended towards the lights of Saffron. “She might be tricksy, but she’s not as clever as she thinks she is. I can handle anything that bitch dishes out.”

“Besides, she’s got me, Neil and Geoff looking out for her,” Chaz called back as he landed on the roof of the Silph Co Building. “You just focus on having a safe trip yourself, okay?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll have Ben and Rickard with me,” Red said with a smile, jumping down from Chaz’ back and helping his sister down. “I’ll be just fine.”

Chapter End Notes
Back into the darkness we go… There are other fire Pokemon in Kanto, of course, but as only Charizard are airborne (excluding Moltres, but the Birds aren’t even in Kanto at this point in any timeline), I always figured Chaz could have been a REALLY MASSIVE PROBLEM for Celadon City if he and Saylee had less benevolent intentions… of course, now that I think about it, she was pretty aggressive in the main timeline too, wasn’t she? The main difference in this timeline’s Saylee, I think, is that she’s been raised to believe that a) the ends always justify the means, and that b) everyone in Kanto really is better off with Team Rocket “looking after” them. Any deaths that have to happen to assert Rocket’s dominance are, while not regrettable, certainly a bit of a shame, but necessary nonetheless.

I have other AU ideas, this is just the only one that’s seriously gripped me right now. And once again, it’s not even from Saylee’s perspective, just Erika then Red’s…
"Dad?"

He looked up as his daughter grabbed the TV remote, turning down the volume on the live broadcast where a blonde girl was fighting one of the League Elites' Sealeo with her Linoone.

"You've, um, you've been really focused on that for a while now," Jenny noted tentatively, gesturing to the article he was holding. "Is there something wrong?"

He glanced back down, staring hard at the golden G-shaped logo and frowning. "It feels...It feels like a memory is attempting to surface," he admitted. "Something important."

Jenny wrung her hands nervously. "Well...I know you were looking into them. Before the accident, I mean. You never said why, but you sounded convinced that they, uh, 'needed messing with'."

"I [1] am still planning on it," he said grimly.

"When you're like this?"

He rolled his eyes. "I will travel to Sinnoh in a wheelchair, if I must," he said, gesturing vaguely to the seat he was in. "I believe, however, I can walk again as soon as the chips of my, um...pro-thesis are replaced."

"I'm not worried about whether or not you can walk, Dad, you’ve had those things for years," Jenny said quietly, placing a hand over his. "What I am worried about is you getting lost in the middle of nowhere trying to get around Sinnoh. According to uncle Richie, the entire porting system is down and travel methods just about boil down to either walking or using the occasional public transport."

"Could I not simply ask him to guide me?"
Jenny pressed her lips hesitantly. "I think he's busy with his own cases," she said eventually.

"In that case, a map will have to suffice."

"Dad, do you-- do you really have to go there?" she asked, squeezing his hand together. It sounded like she almost didn't dare. "I'm just-- I know things are hard right now. I know that any little bit of memory you can reach is important, I've seen what it did to everyone in Johto, we all saw it. But we have a home in Violet with photos and giffies and videos and anything you can imagine, and I just want to know that you're not going to get hurt because I just can't do this...!"

His heart sank. "Oh, Jenny, sweetie..."

He pulled himself over to his daughter's side best as he could with his unresponsive knees, reaching out to gently tug her into a hug and allowing her to finally break. He didn't say anything yet, silently waiting as she cried in his shoulder and carefully brushing his fingers through her hair.

It wasn't that he didn't understand where she was coming from. She'd lost her mother not six months ago, and she'd almost lost her other parent in such a short timeframe... He was obviously a magnet for trouble, too, and always seemed to pile injury over injury over things in his brain that he wished he didn't know he had. She had every right to feel the way she did. There was a small twinge in his chest that made him doubt his own decisions, that made him think about reconsidering-- that maybe he should go back to Violet with her and just let things come back to him at a pace he was comfortable with. But...

"Jenny," he whispered when, after a few minutes, she'd finally winded down to just the occasional hiccough. She pulled away slowly so she could look at him. He very carefully took her hand and gave it a squeeze, meeting her gaze and trying to pretend her eyes weren't red and puffy. "I know you are afraid," he said quietly, "and I do not blame you for it. I only need to look at myself to understand-- and you are right, there are many, many memories to be re-discovered at home, in Johto, where our pasts are shared. But those are memories for me to find again along the way, when there is time. For now..."

He used his spare hand to pick the article with the golden G-logo up again. "...For now, this is something I must do. Perhaps there is something personal behind it, but it feels...crucial, to follow this lead. A feeling where, if I do not take action, it could result in more than simply hurt. And I do not mean myself."

"Dad--"
"Seeing all these scars on myself...if there is something I have come to realize, it is that I am one who cannot be taken down so easily," he continued, a slight smirk tugging at his lips. "I can be bruised and battered and broken, but I always, always find a way to stand up again."

He shifted slightly, moving his hands up to cup his daughter's face and gently stroke her cheeks with his thumbs, smiling. "Jenny...I cannot tell you not to worry about me. But I can promise you that I will return to you, and that I will still be myself at the end of it. One way or another, even if I somehow find myself crawling to Reverse and back, I will come back and I will still be able to recognise you as my baby girl and love you all the same as I do now. I promise."

He'd managed to wipe the first couple drops away, but then there was a new onslaught of tears and he gently cradled her in his arms, holding her close.

He would come back. He knew it'd be okay.

He'd promised her.

Need another paragraph separation here

Chapter End Notes

For those who missed the light reference in the beginning, this scene takes place during the Hoenn League, at the same time Key is battling Glacia. Considering Jenny left mid-challenge to go find her father and no mention was made for the remaining chapters in Calamity Calls, we felt it was important to put something out there-- especially since Professor Hawkshaw’s murder is going to be a recurring subject in both Deliverance and Dimensional Destruction.
Chapter 22

Getting off the ship in Canalave, the first thing that crossed his mind was that he was very definitely lost. It wasn't necessarily a logical thought, considering he was standing by the docks and he knew they were docks, but he had no idea which way to go- or where he even wanted to go.

After having gone back to Evergrande with his daughter and retrieved his belongings that had been thankfully all still there and perfectly safe, he'd taken the first ship he could to Sinnoh. Jenny hadn't followed, instead deciding that she wanted to go find a friend who'd also been competing at the League. Now he finally had all of his identification papers, a solid team of five Pokémon, and a strangely large array of tools that he hadn't quite dared play around with despite being bored on the ship because he'd half-expected one or two of them to blast fire at his face. It made him wonder if he had some sort of secondary occupation as a stage magician.

He pressed his lips and marched forward, deciding that the first thing he needed was a map and some directions.

"You're finally here!"

The cheerful exclamation made him automatically turn around, simply from the curiosity of seeing who'd said it- and done so just in time to find himself being scooped up into a Beartic hug.

"Wha- Wha- H-Hey!" he spluttered, his legs dangling off the ground and kicking feebly in mid-air.

"Let go! Put me down! What on-"

He sighed deeply when he was finally set back onto solid ground, the other person chuckling and ruffling his hair, causing him to scowl and start batting at the other's hand so he could straighten his hair again. He was not fifteen, da**mmit. Honestly, the sheer height of the man now grinning down at him was...almost intimidating. He'd have thought that being six feet tall was already pretty impressive, but this guy seemed to be a good seven inches taller than him at least, broad shoulders and square jawline making the man look all the bigger. And yet, the man's grin was bright as Lumiose Tower.

"It's great to see you again!" the man said happily. "I've been waiting here since yesterday already, yeah? Booked a hotel room and everything just so I could wait for you here!"

"Forgive me for the odd question, but, um..." he started, confused.

"I bet you've got a lot of questions, yeah?" the tall man chuckled. "Don't worry, pal, Jenny already explained stuff to me. Told me you'd show up here, yeah? Also said that your memory is kinda weird right now and that you probably don't know who I am."

He winced. "That is correct..." he admitted guiltily. "However, if you have spoken to Jenny, would it be wrong to presume that you must be my brother?"

The tall man saluted, grin widening. "Detective Richard Hawkshaw, Criminal Affairs Department, at your service!"

"Detective? Is the police career a family trait?" he asked curiously.
"Sort of but not really," the detective said. "You and I have been in the force for years already, and Jenny's only decided on the whole police thing a couple years ago, but Dad is a retired surgeon, and Mom is a retired dancer, and your wife was an archaeologist, and--"

"Alright, alright, you can tell me more about it later," he interrupted quickly, his stomach giving an awkwardly sick lurch at the mention of his wife. He knew she'd passed away a few months ago, but it was strange to feel such a strong pang in his gut for a person whose face he couldn't even remember. Or maybe the guilt of not being able to recall her face was part of the reason for the knot in his stomach. "I need you to tour me around Sinnoh. There are matters to be sorted, and I am lost as to where to start. Would you be willing to help me?"

The detective beamed and scooped him up into another hug that made him squawk. "S-Stop that! Down! Down!" He huffed when his feet were on the floor again. "Is that really necessary?"

"Nah, I'm just happy," his brother grinned brightly. "You don't normally ask me for favors or anything, so I'm just...happy, yeah?"

He stared at his brother for a moment, thinking. Was he normally a proud man, if he didn't ask for help? Or was he previously on bad terms with his brother? But the detective looked so cheerful, it was hard to believe that they didn't get along before...or was it a one-sided thing, maybe? That was a disheartening thought, too.

He hesitantly reached out to the taller officer, deciding to lean in for a hug. Not the lung-crushing kind, not the dangling-off-the-floor kind- just a regular, gentle hug that visibly took the detective by surprise. "...Thank you for everything," he said, not looking up at his brother.

Eventually, after a long moment of nothing, the detective carefully returned the hug. "Don't worry about it, pal," his brother murmured. "I've got your back."

Chapter End Notes

Another Hawkshaw moment because we can.
Also, since about a dozen people have asked in various mediums if this AU is named after a song from RWBY: afraid not. It’s named after the original Star Trek episode where Kirk, Bones and Uhura wind up in an alternate universe populated by their evil selves. Don’t get me wrong, RWBY is great, but I don’t know the soundtrack, whereas I ADORE Star Trek TOS. Like good chunks of classic Doctor Who, it’s a great example of how it doesn’t matter if your budget is five pence and a piece of string if you have strong writing, fantastic characterization and genuine love and respect for the material you’re handling. (Whereas the latest two Trek movies and the Moffat era of Doctor Who are a great example of how fantastic special effects and good actors are not enough to save poor writing and a profound disrespect for the material that you’re handling. I don’t know who can save Doctor Who, but I have faith in Simon Pegg. Unlike JJ Abrahms, he actually likes Star Trek.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Oi! You! Blue, right?”

“Sir?” Blue said, quickly standing up and saluting as Lt Surge approached. The strict military lifestyle of Vermillion rankled the independent teenager more than a bit, but he couldn’t deny that Surge’s militia had successfully resisted the advances of Team Rocket for more than a decade, so there had to be something in it. In any case, with his best Pokémon being a Blastoise and a Pidgeot, he didn’t feel like antagonizing the Lieutenant and his powerful electric-types.

“You came from Vermillion, right?” Surge asked, folding his thick, muscular arms and peering over his dirty sunglasses to look Blue up and down.

“Near to it,” Blue said with a shrug. “Why?”

“We got a prisoner,” Surge said, beckoning for Blue to follow him at a quick march through the strict rows of patchwork shacks. “Claims he’s defected from Rocket. Wondered if you recognized him at all, could tell us how likely it is he’s legit.”

“Look, just because I lived near there doesn’t mean I was buddies with all of them,” Blue snapped irritably.

“Ain’t saying you were, and watch your tone, soldier,” Surge said sharply. “Anyway, this one ain’t a soldier that’s attacked here before. He’s a teenager, but he’s dressed like one’ve their officers. Figured there’s a better chance you’ve seen him around their home base.”

What part of I’m not their fucking friend didn’t you get? Blue thought but had learned the self-discipline not to say. He followed Surge into one of the dockside warehouses that was still full of rusted, empty barrels and some semi-repaired security fencing.

A teenage boy was kneeling between two fence posts, his arms above his head, tethered to the posts by two long lengths of wire. He was slumped forward, his breathing laboured, one of his eyes blackened and blood dripping slowly from his lips to join the spots spattered across the floor. He was
indeed wearing a black t-shirt with a red “R” stitched into it and trousers which, though filthy and torn, were clearly once white. Blue had seen enough of Team Rocket to know that its upper members wore white, as a means of differentiating themselves from their foot soldiers—except for Giovanni, who wore black suits and clearly felt that he needed no distinction.

“Kinda hard to recognize him with a broken nose and blood all over his face,” Blue pointed out. The guy shakily looked up, cracking open the eye that wasn’t completely swollen. *Black hair and red eyes? Ceez, even his face is in team colours,* Blue thought sourly.

“Ah, all we did was zap him a little,” Surge said, casually shoving the lid off of one of the barrels, which revealed a large lever concealed inside. “He claims all the lumps were from fightin’ his way away from other members of Team Rocket, but after what happened to Erika, ain’t none of us fallin’ for that little story.”

“Can’t… blame you,” the prisoner coughed. “I wouldn’… trus’ me… either… but ‘s better’n… goin’ back…”

“Look, I don’t know this guy and I can’t tell you if he’s legit or not,” Blue said to Surge, “so… tell you what, I just caught an Abra. Maybe you can sense something.” When Surge nodded, Blue released the sleepy-looking yellow Pokémon. “Alan, can you tell if people are telling the truth or not?” Blue asked.

“Well… a little,” Alan said with a nod. “I am sure I can feel if this person means good or ill, at least, and I… do you know, it’s very strange? He does not feel malicious, even though he is wearing a Rocket outfit…”

“I don’…” the runaway Rocket closed his eyes as he coughed violently. “…Don’ wanna… though’ it w’nes’sary, y’know? Though’ we… had t’fight… that if I wan’ed t’ look after my sister… had t’be Rocket…”

“So what made you suddenly realize that Rocket were a pile of shit?” Blue asked pointedly.

The prisoner coughed violently again, but after a moment it was apparent that he was trying to laugh. “Always… knew… Rocket wasn’ righ’…” he murmured with a vague smile, “but I always though’… better’n ever goin’ hungry… better’n abandonin’ Dad… but…” His head snapped up, good eye wide and a snarl on his lips. “He LIED TO US!” the prisoner roared. “He said… said th’ whole world was like this! Said EVERYTHIN’ was gone, everythin’ was… was…”

“Near as we can figure, the rest of the world is in pretty much the same shape as us,” Surge pointed out. “I mean, the few people who’ve dared the waters say they’re toxic past the horizon, and the only people who tried going past the mountains said the other side was no different…”

“Yeah… what HE paid ‘em t’say!” the prisoner snapped angrily. “He… he planted ‘em all! Killed all th’ ones wouldn’ do it… Lied t’everyone! EVEN ME! EVEN THEM!” His hands fisted in his restraints. “You gotta b’lieve me… all of this… th’ way this country is… it’s HIS doin’! WE NEVER HAD T’LIVE LIKE THIS!”

Blue took a step back from the absolute fury in the older boy’s voice. “Alan?” he said quietly.

“He is angry, but I still do not believe he is our enemy,” Alan said, teleporting behind the prisoner’s head. “Please, young man, allow me to read your mind.”

The prisoner closed his eyes, took a deep, ragged breath, and then nodded gingerly. Alan placed his long yellow hands on either side of the Rocket’s head, his eyes opening a slit to show a bright pink
After a moment, the prisoner gasped and slumped, collapsing forwards into unconsciousness, held up only by the conductive wire around his wrists.

“Whoa! Hey, don’t kill ‘im!” Surge barked, releasing Rick the Raichu. “Second Lieutenant—”

“Please be calm, the prisoner is not dead, merely sleeping,” Alan said, raising his hands defensively. “He is exhausted, starving and injured, and has risked mistrust and death to bring us valuable information. He needs rest.”

“You think I don’t know that, private?” Surge snapped. “I don’t want ‘im well-rested, I want ‘im too goddamn tired to lie!”

“Look, Alan said he was telling the truth,” Blue argued, fists shaking. “We didn’t have to live like this, he said… what did he mean? That we didn’t have to… that Gramps, that Mum and Dad, that they didn’t have to… “So take him down and question him normally, ceez!”

“Are you the commanding officer here, boy?” Surge yelled sharply. “NO! You came here to be a SOLDIER! That means that YOU WILL OBEY MY ORDERS, UNDERSTOOD?”

When Blue did nothing but glower back, Rick snapped a spark at him. “Answer the Lieutenant, you piece of garbage!”

“I want to know what he has to say,” Blue ground out, “Sir.”

“You think I don’t?” Surge growled. “He’s been strung up here six hours, and he’ll stay there sixty-six more. IF, at that time, there has neither been a Rocket attack NOR has there been any sign of them massin’ in wait of a signal, THEN and ONLY THEN will he be cut down and given food, and by all the Dragons, if he’s legit then I promise you he’ll get the best shit food we have to offer in recompense for the state of the guest quarters here. Until then, WATER ONLY. I will NOT risk this army going the way of Celadon City!” He folded his arms again, glowering down at Blue. “Y’know, I was gonna put you on guard duty for this guy, seein’ as how Alan there’s so good at readin’ his mind, but it sounds to me like you’re startin’ to miss latrine duty, soldier. Go relieve somebody, and on your way tell Dwayne to meet me here to get the brief. No, you stay here, Private Alan,” he snapped without looking up at the Abra. “Whenever this guy wakes up, you are gonna assist with interrogation, understood?”

“Yes, sir,” Alan said aloud. In Blue’s mind, he heard, Blue, please just do as he says. You’re losing his trust, and he has little enough for you as it is, given where you came from…

If I wanted to be a brainless little peon just following orders, I’d join Team Rocket, Blue thought irritably.

Unlike many a poor fool in Rocket, however, you chose to be here, Alan pointed out, so I recommend that you learn to live with your decisions, Blue.

“…Yes, sir,” Blue ground out.

Surge nodded. “You’re not a bad kid, Blue, aside from the fact that you need to stop bein’ a kid,” he said quietly. “I don’t give a damn that you’re fifteen. You’re a soldier and you’re fightin’ a war. Damn straight we’re fightin’ to return this country to democracy, but we are not democracy, we are an army, of which I am in command, and that means when I give orders, they will be obeyed. Understand?”
“Yes, sir,” Blue repeated, sparing a last glance to the kneeling prisoner on his way out. Alan was hovering by the young man’s head, half-protective, half-guarding.

Saylee opened the training room door to find that it was only occupied by Roark, who was yelling at his Pidgeotto.

“No! Why are you so stupid?! You—oh, it’s just you,” he said in relief, spotting Saylee. He dropped the lash he was holding. “I’m really sorry, Pedro!”

“Don’t worry ‘bout it, Niblet, I know you gotta keep the image up,” Pedro said, nipping at a bit of Roark’s hair before glancing critically up at Saylee. “Damn, Doll, what happened to you?”

Saylee self-consciously tugged up the neck of her shirt. Let Roark think the worst of it’s a split lip and a bruised cheek, she told herself. “I was punished,” she said flatly, “for failing to keep a traitor from escaping.”

“A traitor?!” Roark exclaimed in anger. “Who dared betray Team Rocket?! Was it Archer? Mum keeps saying he’s a slippery little—”

High praise coming from her, Saylee thought. If only it was… “The traitor is Red,” she said, careful to keep her voice and tone blank. “He attacked the Boss and ran away. He’ll be hunted down in no time.”


“It’s not a joke, Roark,” Saylee said firmly, kneeling down to be at his eye level. “Red betrayed us. He’s our enemy now, understand? You’re not to treat him like our brother anymore.”

“NO!” Roark screamed, clenching his fists as he started to cry. “NO! He’s our big brother! He’s NOT a bad guy! This is stupid! I’m gonna tell Dad—”

“Don’t!” Saylee yelled, grabbing Roark’s arms before he could move.

“Ow! You’re hurting!” the child exclaimed, wriggling.

“Doll, I like you, but you gotta let him go now,” Pedro said warningly, spreading his wings.

“Not until he listens to me,” Saylee said urgently, bringing her face within inches of Roark’s so that he had no choice but to look her in the eye. “Roark, Dad’s orders are that Red is an enemy now and you have to obey that,” she said fiercely. “Please. I…” She looked around nervously, in case somebody had silently come in while she was talking to Roark. “I don’t want him to be an enemy either,” she said as quickly and quietly as she could. “But that’s what Dad says, and it’s… it’s like being mean to Pedro when people are looking, yeah? You don’t have to actually mean it. You just need to not get in trouble, okay? Please, Roark…”

Shaking, looking down at his feet as tears dripped down his cheeks, Roark whispered, “but… we don’t have to hate him for real, right? We’re just pretending we are?”

“That’s right,” Saylee said, pulling the seven-year-old into a hug. “I’m sorry, Roark. I don’t want to scare or hurt you. I just don’t want you to get hurt for saying something wrong. Red wouldn’t want you to get hurt, and while he’s away, it’s my job to look after you.” She sat back, holding up her left hand with all her fingers curled but the pinky. “So the fact that we don’t hate Red is a secret, okay?”
Roark locked his left pinky with hers and nodded seriously. “Secret,” he agreed.

“Good. Now… let’s get you cleaned up,” Saylee said, pulling her sleeve over her right hand and wiping tears off of Roark’s cheeks. “Don’t want to let your parents know you’ve been crying about anything, right? I promise I won’t tell. And Pedro?”

“Yeah?” the Pidgeotto said, hopping over to stand by her knee.

“Any time you get a chance… I think I saw Red heading north,” she explained. “Just… if you can see him…”

“I’ll see if I can find ‘im before your Dad does,” Pedro promised. “I’m sure he’ll be back soon anyways. He ain’t the type to abandon you two in this dump.”

“But what if he joins up with Surge or those poisonous insects in Fuchsia?” Ariana demanded, slamming her hands down on the table. “The things he could tell them—!”

“He was last seen heading north, so perhaps, if he can make it past our guards and into the tunnel…” Giovanni shook his head. “I suspect his chances of joining up with any of our enemies are slim. None of them are foolish enough to trust him, especially after how successful Saylee’s infiltration of Celadon was last year…” He clasped his hands in front of him, elbows braced on the table, and tapped his chin thoughtfully. “Enough of them got away to spread the news, so I wager we’ve a poor chance of pulling the same trick twice… at least with her.”

Ariana bristled. “Roark’s not old enough to go on such a mission,” she pointed out.

“Precisely why he wouldn’t be suspected. But that’s a discussion for another time. For now… even though his chances are slim at best… better send word to Saffron to post more patrols near the Vermillion border to catch him if he tries to go that way. Make sure words of his treachery spreads so that he can’t go through Saffron or Celadon.” He frowned thoughtfully. “And… we’d better post somebody to the Johto gate,” he said slowly. “In case he goes that way…”

Ariana nodded. “Who are you going to send to take Lavender in his place?” she asked.

“Archer,” Giovanni said, sitting back and putting his clasped hands in his lap. “He’s the best admin I have to spare at the moment.”

“He’s a treacherous Ekans,” Ariana pointed out.

“As are you, my dear,” Giovanni said mildly.

“I would never betray you!” Arianna said quickly, her eyes widening.

“I know,” Giovanni said dismissively. “I am simply pointing out that it’s not a negative trait in my officers. I don’t trust him, of course, but he is certainly intelligent.”

“He’s too smart for his own good,” Ariana pointed out. “He’s ambitious.”

“Indeed, but not a resource to be wasted,” Giovanni said, tapping his chin thoughtfully again. “Perfect, in fact, if we could neuter his ambition… hm…” He glanced at Ariana. “You were once an ambitious, treacherous Ekans.”

“And I got my ambition,” Ariana said with a smooth smile, walking around behind his chair and
leaning over to massage her husband’s shoulders. “I’m as good as at the top of Rocket, and Roark will inherit the empire you’re building… along with Saylee,” she added reluctantly.

“Mm-hmm… ah!” Giovanni snapped his fingers. “That’ll do. Archer wants to stand at the top of Rocket? I’m happy enough for him to do so, after I’m done with it. We’ll marry Saylee off to him. If he feels he has a legitimate claim on Rocket, it’ll temper him. I’d rather not have to kill him. He’s just too good at what he does.”

Ariana’s hands paused. “I hope you’re not intending to throw Roark away on a questionable admin more than twice his age,” she said archly.

“His loyalty has yet to come into question,” Giovanni said smoothly. “After that little stunt she pulled earlier, letting Red get away, I’m sure Saylee’s eager to prove her obedience. And I am sure he will be a respectful husband to my daughter and a loyal admin of Rocket…”

“Or else,” Ariana said with a malicious grin. “There’s never been a man quite like you for efficiently managing your resources, love…”

Chapter End Notes

All aboard for the latest instalment of “Giovanni and Ariana Get Even More Opportunities to be Terrible People in the Bad Ending”! Also a few indications that it isn’t just the human characters who end up following different fates in this timeline… Oh hey, finally did one from Saylee’s perspective! Well, 1/3 of this oneshot, at least… (I still enjoy writing this ‘verse way, way too much.)
A little prelude of sorts to Dimensional Destruction… the first chapter of which is posting tomorrow! :D

"Are you alright?"

Key glanced up from her Nav and blinked. She hadn't cried, but she definitely hadn't looked happy before pulling the device out of her pocket. "Wha—oh, yeah." She looked back down at her Nav with a wry smile. "Just my ex wishing me luck in Sinnoh."

Saylee sat down beside her, leaning back against the rail. "You used to be dating someone?"

"He's a sweet guy. Purple hair, blue eyes, fun sense of humour. He broke up with me, but we're still on good terms. Happened after he heard about my Ralts. He got worried that I was only interested in him because his name was Raphael. I'd like to think I was better than that, but I don't really blame him, so we're fine just being friends." She shrugged. "It's been...about two years, now?"

"Would you date him again if he asked?"

"I've thought about it a couple times," Key admitted, typing up a quick 'Thanks c:' and hitting send before pocketing the Nav again. "Had you asked last year, I'd have said yes. Now...I probably wouldn't. I mean, he's still a fun guy, but after all that's happened in the last few months I feel like I'd need someone who can keep up with me." She grinned. "Oh, damn, missed my chance to tell him you and I were eloping."

"We're already at sea, he can't stop us now!" Saylee declared. Key laughed.

Saylee turned her head and craned her neck a little, trying to glance down toward the water. A bunch of Carvanha had started arguing about how one had supposedly tried to the shove the other into the cruiser and the other was adamantly denying it.

When Saylee turned her head toward Key again, she noticed that her friend was twirling an intricate-looking Beautifly hairpin in her fingers and staring at it pensively. She'd seen Key wearing it for a while now, it'd been in the blonde’s hair since the first League battle at least, but now that Saylee thought about it she'd never asked where it came from.

"So what's with the pin?" Saylee asked. "It's really nice."

"It is, isn't it?" Key said with a smile, not looking up. It didn't take long for it to falter. "It's...a gift from Archie."

"Archie?" Saylee repeated. "As in, the Aqua Leader Archie?" Key nodded. "...I have so many questions about that now and I have no idea where to start."

"It, uh, it was right before the League sign-ups were closed," Key began, still not looking up. "Went to Mt Pyre. I mentioned that Matt and Shelly brought the Orbs back of their own will, right? Matt had this in his pocket, and... he said it was from Archie."
"I'm not sure how to feel about that," Saylee admitted, pressing her lips. "It's...well, it definitely looks like something is going on. Did something happen between you two while I wasn't looking? I mean, you know, aside from the pin and Archie going out of his way to call you after Victory Road collapsed." She paused. "If you wanna talk about it."

"I kinda do and I kinda don't," Key said with a snort. "It's not secret or anything, and... to be honest, I don't know what's going on either. It's just—" She let her hand with the pin drop on her lap and leaned back against the rail, taking a deep breath. "I feel like I know him from somewhere. Before the whole deal with Groudon and Kyogre. I mean, he's always been the head of Team Aqua, there's been news and such and pictures and him going to events and trying to promote the protection of the oceans and stuff, but I feel like I'm supposed to have met him before, and... and I don't remember."

"Well, if you've only met him once—"

"It wasn't just once, though, I'm sure of it," Key interrupted. "I'm—remember when you and Shelly got thrown overboard, and I panicked and called Archie using the communicator thing that got washed up with me? He was... gentle, and patient. It was weird. The entire time we'd been in the submarine, it felt like I was talking to an old friend or somebody from the home like Wallace instead of some criminal dumbass we've been chasing down for months. I mean, we'd been butting heads since day one, and the one time I panic and call it's like he just dropped everything to come and find me. He said something that made me think he'd seen me in that kind of distress before, and I definitely haven't acted like that since I met you, so it had to be before. But when? He remembers and I don't and it's frustrating and it sucks and—and it's kinda scary, to a degree."

"Do you think he likes you?" Saylee asked bluntly, gesturing at the pin. "Jewellery like that to somebody you barely know isn't exactly platonic."

Key stared at her lap as she thought for a couple seconds. "I have no idea what the hell he's thinking. It'd probably make our lives a fuckton easier if I did," she grumbled.

"And how do you feel about him?" Saylee asked tentatively.

Key snorted. "It's too early for me to try and have any romantic interest in him, if that's what you're getting at. Plus, I think he's like ten years older than me or something." Despite that statement, she started looking at the pin and twirling it between her fingers again. "Lee, I... he's not a bad person. He's an idiot, and his actions destroyed so, so much, but... right before Matt and Shelly got arrested, they insisted that none of them wanted it to happen like this. And I want to believe them. It doesn't magically absolve them from their responsibilities, but they didn't want this and I want to believe that they all want to try and do better. I want to find Archie because I want to be able to help him with that, and him running away isn't going to. That, and... I need to know where he remembers me from, so that maybe I can remember it too."

"If he wants to make up for his mistakes, if he understands his mistakes... that's not worthless," Saylee allowed. "But... I just want to know that you're not going to go soft on him. He doesn't deserve it, and if he's really repentant, he doesn't want it."

"Hey, I'm Champion of Hoenn now!" Key pointed out with a grin. "I can legally kick his ass all I want, so I might as well make the most of it."

"Ah, the privileges of power..." Saylee sighed, fidgeting with her dragon pin. "Normally I wouldn't recommend abusing your power to abuse criminals, but for some reason the casualty numbers from Pacifidlog keep floating up behind my eyes."

"Well, hopefully one we get to Sinnoh we'll be quick enough to float up behind his back and drag
his ass back to Hoenn where he should be," Key said with another snort, standing up. She gave the
Beautifly pin one last look before sticking it back in her hair, pulling the bangs back on the left side
of her face. She turned to look at the ocean. "...I really hope I'll get my answers once we find him."

Saylee smiled, standing up as well and putting a hand around Key's waist. "Don't worry. I know you
will."
“Mary! Toby!” Saylee called, stepping out of Sprout Tower. Her two Pokémon, who’d ostensibly come with her to check up on Ethan but had probably been more interested in a little getaway to enjoy the warmer Johto summer, looked up from where they’d been relaxing by the Sprout Lake as their trainer called to them.

“How’s he daein’?” Mary asked, stretching before getting up and lazily wandering over to her trainer with her mate floating along next to her.

“He feels well,” Tobias added, his white-red-and-blue crest twitching slightly.

“He says he’s starting to harmonize with the flow of the oceans and the weather,” Saylee said, walking over the bridge over the lake. “I didn’t fully understand it, but I don’t think anybody but him does anyway. He seems pretty healthy, at least, though I think he’d rather it were raining…”

“That’s a storm god fae you!” Mary laughed.

“Sar Kanto? Saylee? Is that you?”

Saylee paused and looked around for the person calling out to her and spotted a tall, middle-aged blonde standing by the banks of the lake, waving to her. “Professor Hawkshaw!” she called, waving back and quickening her step to join the researcher from the Ruins of Alph. “Hello! How are you?”

“Very well! I wasn’t expecting to see you here,” the Professor said with a smile. “Hello, Mary, Tobias! How are you all?”

“Enjoying the sun,” Tobias said, ruffling his wings. “We don’t get summers like this in Kanto!”

“Ah, you’re on your holidays?” Melody asked, glancing up at the warm sun. “I’m about to go on a trip myself. My husband and daughter and I are going to Hoenn for a couple of weeks!” She held up a bag of shopping. “I’ve been stocking up on suntan lotion… I’m afraid I burn like I’ve been hit by a Houndoom!”

“That sounds lovely,” Saylee sighed. “Two whole weeks? I’ve never been on a holiday that long. We’re really just here for the day, visiting a friend.” She nodded at the Sprout Tower.

“One of the monks? You have interesting friends, Sar Kanto,” Melody chuckled.

“Aye, well, we’ve known Ethan since he wis wee,” Mary said, flicking her tail.

“Ethan? Ethan Goldberg?” Melody said, leaning forward curiously. “Definitely interesting friends. Indulge my curiosity—do you believe what the monks say, that he’s the human incarnation of the
storm god Lugia?"

“Is that what they’re telling everyone?” Saylee said, continuing to smile but internally cursing.

“Not everyone, I don’t think, but they did ask me what I thought of the idea as a scientist,” Melody laughed. “It’s certainly a curious idea, isn’t it? A sweet boy like that and one of the angriest gods in the Fairlands? Well, outside of Groudon and Kyogre!”

“Definitely doesn’t match up, does it?” Saylee laughed.

“Well, I’m sure it’d be better to trust a kind boy like Ethan over somebody as angry as Lord Lugia itself,” Tobias said thoughtfully. “And your daughter, Professor? I didn’t realize you had a child…”

“Oh, Jenny’s not exactly a child anymore,” Melody chuckled. “Well, she’ll always be my baby, of course, but she’s actually older than you, Sar. She’s twenty-three.”

“She’s—wait, how old are you?” Saylee said in surprise. Melody stared at her. “I’m sorry, that’s rude, but I never would’ve guessed you had a daughter older than me!”

“Well, I’m happy to take that as a compliment!” Melody said, bursting into laughter again. “Goodness, Sar, didn’t you realize I’m plenty old enough to be your mother?”

“Everybody in this country looks so young for their age!” Saylee groaned, rubbing her eyes.

“Tae be honest, hen, I figure it’s just folk in Kanto age quickly, the place bein’ shite an aw,” Mary pointed out.

“You’ll shrivel up into an old lady in no time yourself if you don’t take a few holidays,” Tobias teased, nudging Saylee.

“He’s right, dear, you’re too young to be working yourself so hard,” Melody said, folding her arms and peering thoughtfully at Saylee. “Surely you can take a week or two away from looking after Kanto? You can’t possibly be the only person the state of law there.”

“A state is a good description of it,” Saylee complained. “I feel like if I leave too long, I’ll come back to find that Team Rocket’s resurfaced or somebody’s brought down the apocalypse or something…”

“You sound exactly like every police officer I’ve ever met,” Melody sighed, shaking her head. “Trust me, dear, the world will not end if you take a little trip abroad. Even the monks here go on pilgrimages, you know.” After a moment, she smiled and added, “I’m sure you’d find yourself some trouble to deal with wherever you went. Officers of the law are awfully like that. I worry for Jenny once she starts at the police academy. It’s a curse that just can’t be shaken…”

“Too right,” Mary whispered to Tobias with a giggle.

“You never did tell us, Professor Hawkshaw,” the Togekiss asked, “what do you think about gods inhabiting humans, as a woman of science?”

Melody tapped her chin. “Hmmm… well, the Seer Chronos did predict gods becoming one with their chosen heroes one day, didn’t he?” she suggested. “There’s still so much about Pokemon that we don’t know, especially the gods. It could well be possible. And if it is…” She smiled, a little glint in her eye. “I am sure we can have faith in them to choose the right people to take responsibility for their power.” Her smile faded a little. “I have to wonder, however, what would become of the mortal soul of a human who merged with an immortal god…”
“Well… that’s your area of research, right?” Saylee suggested. “Do you have any theories?”

Melody smiled again. “Ahhh, Sar Kanto, very sneaky! You nearly tricked me into revealing my top-secret research!” she chided Saylee, waggling a finger in admonishment. “Just watch this space, young lady. I have some theories to publish at the end of the year, but I have some more research to do first…” She grinned brightly. “Or,” she suggested, “we could make a little deal. If I hear you’ve given yourself a little holiday, I might just be so proud that I publish early!”

“Are you bribing me with science, Professor Hawkshaw?” Saylee said with a raised eyebrow. “As the Chief Ranger of Kanto, I don’t think I should accept bribes…”

“I’m an archaeologist, dear, my work is hardly regarded as science by those who know themselves as scientists,” Melody said with a disinterested shrug. She adjusted her grip on her shopping bags. “Do think about it. Everybody needs a holiday, and you ought to see the world a little, while you’re young!”

“Maybe we ought tae go tae that Hoenn, eh?” Mary suggested. “Sounds nice and warm!”

“Look us up if you do, won’t you?” Melody offered. “We’re going to be going around quite a few sites of historical interest, especially Sootopolis City. And I really ought to properly introduce you to Jenny and her silly old father,” she added with a wink. “I’m sure you’d get along famously.”

“I’ll think about it,” Saylee promised. “I’d better get going back to Kanto. Enjoy your holiday!”

“…thank you, dear,” Melody said with an odd smile, hefting her bags in her hands again and, after a moment’s hesitation, walking off.

“Maybe we should go, if only to get her to publish,” Tobias said thoughtfully, watching the archaeologist go. “I’d love to know what it is that she knows about the gods that she isn’t saying.”

“Me too,” Saylee said, returning Mary and climbing onto Tobias’ back. “I can always go visit her when she gets back from holiday, though…”

A week later, Saylee woke abruptly from a nightmare about angry gods. A country away, Melody Hawkshaw closed her eyes forever.

Chapter End Notes

Since we’re awful people, we felt the need to share a bit of chat between Saylee and Mel the last time Saylee saw her alive. I sometimes regret killing Mel because she didn’t really have a character when I first came up with the idea, she was just a nameless researcher, then Key took her and ran with it and did that wonderful thing where she takes minor characters and develops whole worlds out of them XD
Chapter Summary

This takes place between chapters 5-6 of Dimensional Destruction.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“We’ve got a couple of spare bunks in here,” Silver said, pointing to a door labelled “Bunkroom 3”. “Sorry we don’t have anything fancier.”

“Hey, we’ve been camping for a couple of nights,” Saylee said, stretching carefully. “A warm bed will be luxury.”

“Cool. Hey…” Silver fidgeted with his glasses. “Can I talk to you?” He glanced pointedly at Key. “Privately?”

“I’ll go stake out a couple of bunks,” Key said, taking the hint and heading into the bunkroom.

“What’s up, Silver?” Saylee asked.

Silver shoved his hands in his pockets, frowning at his feet. “How’re you doing?” he asked. “Since you got hurt, I mean…”

“Mostly healed,” Saylee said, patting her arm. “Don’t worry.”

“I’m not,” Silver said immediately. “I mean… are you okay, going around without your regular Pokémon? Like, without Toby and Mary and Charlotte…”

“I… yeah, I wish I had them here,” Saylee sighed. “Toby could’ve easily Grass Knotted Obelle without anyone getting killed, and Charlotte could’ve easily fought that guy with the Sneasel… I hate watching Pokémon die getting caught up in fights that are beyond them.”

“Yeah… yeah, of course,” Silver said quickly. He still looked uncomfortable about something. “Yeah, I… shit. I’m sorry.”

“For what?” Saylee asked, thinking of the Pokémon he’d asked after and the ones he hadn’t. “Oh… were you glad that I don’t have Eric and Perun with me?”

“No, I… Yeah, I was, okay?” Silver said, throwing his hands up. “And I feel shitty because of course it’d be better if they were here and just… ignore me. Never mind. It’s dumb. This conversation didn’t happen, okay?”

“Silver, it’s alright,” Saylee insisted, grabbing his shoulder before he could run off. “I know why you feel that way about them. I’m sorry. I tried everything to get them to leave you alone…”

“Yeah, just… never mind. I know they’re important to you,” Silver said bitterly, folding his arms and look away.
“Well… they’re all I have left of Red,” Saylee said awkwardly. Silver’s expression just got stonier. “Silver, if you’re worried that they’re more important to me than you—”

“Look, I know they are, okay?” Silver snapped irritably. “I know Red’s still more important to you. I get it. He was your real brother, anyway—”

“And so are you! Silver, I… I’m sorry,” Saylee said, slumping. “Red’ll always matter to me, but… you matter too, Silver. You’re really my brother, too, and you’re still alive, and I’m so, so sorry if I made you feel like that doesn’t matter…”

“You didn’t do everything to make Eric and Perun leave me alone,” Silver muttered. “You could’ve sent them away to Sinnoh instead. I bet Jo’d love to have them around too…”

Saylee opened her mouth, then shut it again, unable to think of anything to really say to that.

“I could have,” she thought. Instead of keeping Eric and Perun around, I could’ve sent them to stay with Mum, if that’s what it took to get them to leave Silver alone…

“See? He is more important to you,” Silver said, folding his arms.

“Silver, are you unhappy here?” Saylee asked, folding her hands behind her back.

Silver stared at her. “Where the hell’d that come from?” he asked. “You completely blind now? Sinnoh rocks. I’ve got a cool job, Jo keeps sending me food, there’s fossils everywhere and nobody gives me shit because of Mum and Dad.”

Saylee nodded. “If you want to come back to Kanto, I will send Eric and Perun away,” she said, a hitch in her throat. “I’m so sorry, Silver. You’re right. I just… you’re alive. Even if I don’t see you every day, I can, I can see you and speak to you and… and I can never see or speak to Red ever again.” She wiped at her eyes as she felt tears welling up. “So I clung to that last little bit of him over you. And I’m so, so sorry if I made you feel like you weren’t important to me…”

“Hey, no no no, don’t cry!” Silver yelped. “Ceez, don’t… look, it’s, uh… okay, maybe I overreacted. I mean, you’re the only sister I’ve ever had. I’m used to being an only child and not sharing my stuff. And I know I’m not much of a substitute for Red…”

Saylee wiped her eyes and gave him a hug. “You’re the only brother I’ve got,” she said, “and that doesn’t make you a substitute or second best or… you’re just fine the way you are, Silver. You’re my little brother and I love you, and if you do want to come back, I’ll do whatever you need to feel comfortable, okay?”

“No way I’m going back, Kanto’s shit,” Silver snorted, hugging her back.


“Yeah… well, I figure if anybody can look after that shithole well enough to make it better, it’d be you,” Silver admitted, letting go of her and straightening his helmet.

“You were never that bad,” Saylee said fondly. “Didn’t take a lot of work to find a good kid in there.”

Chapter End Notes
This is basically a deleted scene from the main fic, since I wanted them to have this conversation but it didn’t really fit in the flow of the chapter. Also I couldn’t bloody well figure out how to finish the conversation XD
This has not been a happy week and this week’s chapter was not a happy one. So here’s flower crowns to maybe make everything a little better?

“Ma belle princesse?” Belle asked, trotting up to the scowling Chimchar who was repeatedly Mach Punching a boulder as if it wore Jupiter’s face. “You keep touching your head. Are your injuries paining you?”

“Hmm? No, we are feeling no pain,” Caelin said, glancing down at the little Budew. The princess’ hand unconsciously went to her head. “It… is nothing. A triviality, compared to the loss of so many of our subjects recently.”

“It is nothing trivial if it concerns you, ma belle princesse,” Belle assured her. “Much as I would love to, I cannot return our comrades from la mort. But if there is the slightest thing I can do for you, then you need not hesitate to call on me!” The Budew executed a flourishing little bow, waving the halves of her bud elaborately.

Caelin nodded, scratching her head again as if embarrassed. “It is silly, but… it is odd to be without my circlet.”

“Your…? Ah, of course,” Belle said, recalling the ring of glimmering, translucent stone that had adorned the princess’ head until it was shattered in the explosion atop the Eterna Building. “A memento of home, was it?”

“We suppose so, though we had never really thought of it in those terms,” Caelin said, tipping her head thoughtfully and folding her arms. “Each child of the royal lineage is presented with a circlet by their subjects. Of course, they must often be replaced due to growth, but nevertheless… we wear it from the time that we are born until the day we die, unless we should become Fire Lord and take the true crown. Ours was rough-hewn, of little quality, as befits a seventh child… but it has been ours since our birth, a constant part of us, and its weight has always felt, to us, a sign of the weight of responsibility that we must bear to our people.”

“Is that the feeling of all your family, ma belle princesse, or were all of those the royal ‘we’?” Belle asked. Caelin didn’t laugh, which had been the goal, but the princess did smile a little, so the tiny self-proclaimed knight chalked it up as a win. “It must be strange indeed to be without something you have borne since your birth.”

“With or without our circlet, our goals, duties and responsibilities do not change,” Caelin said, clenching her fists again. “It is a trifle, and not something we ought to concern ourselves with at this time. Please return to training with Basma, Belle.”

“As you wish, ma belle princesse,” Belle said, bowing and hurrying back to her sparring partner, followed by the sound of rock shattering under Caelin’s fists.
“Ma belle princesse? Forgive me, am I disturbing you?”

“We are not yet asleep,” Caelin said, cracking her eyes open to peer at Belle in the dimmed lights of the Pokémon Centre at night. “Is anything wrong?”

“Not at all, ma belle princesse,” Belle assured her, turning and dragging something across the floor towards Caelin. “I simply wished to present you with this.”

Caelin reached out to pick up what Belle dragging. It was a ring of flowers—surprisingly colourful for the rising winter, though the princess suspected that Gardenia’s florid gym would be discovering themselves to be victims of a robbery in the morning.

“You said that your people built your circlet for you, ma belle princesse,” Belle said, hopping up to tug the ring of flowers over Caelin’s head. “While there is, I confess, little weight to it, I suspect that you are the last person who needs any reminder. However, it does smell quite fine, and I shall see to it that they do not wither, so long as you take care not to set it aflame!”

Caelin reached up to gently touch one of the soft blooms. It was nowhere near as heavy as her stone circlet, true, but she could feel it constantly, gently encircling her. A reminder, perhaps, after all, she thought, reaching out a hand to pick up Belle, that I must be as gentle to my people as I am fierce to those who would harm them… “We are honoured, Belle,” she said, bowing her head. “Thank you.”

“You are most welcome, ma belle princesse!” Belle trilled, bowing elaborately again. “We are honoured to be considered your subject… and, if I may be so bold, your friend.”

Caelin smiled again. “Belle,” she said, “you will always be so bold, whether we will it or no!”

Belle had no defence but a merry laugh.
Two Halves

He stared at the entrance to the Solaceon Ruins uncertainly. While he had yet to see any evidence of Galactic setting foot in them, he'd heard that they'd taken interest in the ruins. Somewhere in the back of his mind, a small voice was telling him to leave the ruins alone. It felt like some sort of memory was just on the tip of his tongue. Had he been here before? Or maybe he'd just heard something about it? Since the incident in Hoenn he'd been slowly been putting his memories back together piece by piece, but there were still too many things that kept slipping from his fingers the moment he thought he had it.

He dug a hand into one of the inside pockets of his coat, fingertips brushing against the cold metal of a Pokéball. He didn't quite pull it out yet, still hovering around the entrance uncertainly. The closer he got, the more his guts were telling him to turn around.

What on earth could be in there that would give him such a bad feeling?

He swallowed nervously, bracing himself and taking a step forward.

In the darkness, a big, round eye suddenly materialized.

He jumped back a mile with a surprised squawk, lost his balance, and rolled down one of the rocky walls.

Fortunately for him, his fall was cushioned by a relatively less fortunate passerby.

"Oww..." he whined softly, trying to ignore the rising pain in his muscles. He slowly pushed himself up with his arms, spluttering out some hair. "...I do have to say, you have quite possibly the fluffiest hair I have ever seen. Or tasted."

"Thank you for the compliment," the other replied with a quiet groan of pain.

He shifted to the side, allowing the passerby to sit up and brush the dirt and dust off himself.

Staring at the man, he couldn't help wonder if he'd accidentally hit his head and was seeing things, or if the other person's appearance was just a really freaky coincidence. It was sort of like seeing a slightly younger version of himself- they were even dressed similarly. If he hadn't been able to pick out a few minor differences in their features, he might've believed in time travel (he really wanted to say that if time travel was a thing that could happen to him he'd have remembered going into the future, but with his memory being spotty it wasn't much of an argument).

He watched the man stand up, give himself a last few pats down his pants, and then lean down, holding out a hand and smiling kindly.

"Would you like some help?"

He blinked, surprised to hear the man switch from Fairlan to Unovan. He definitely preferred Unovan- not because his Fairlan was bad, but simply because Unovan was the language he'd grown up with and felt more comfortable when he spoke in his childhood tongue- but he wasn't sure if the man had it done consciously or not, or why.

Still, he returned the smile and gratefully took the hand that was being given to him.

"Thank you," he said as he was pulled up. "My legs aren't exactly what they used to be. I'm sorry for,
"Not to worry, not to worry," the man reassured him. "It was all accidental, yes? Although I am curious that your first words were to comment on my hair, of all things."

"Hey, it is nice hair," he said with a mild huff. "How do you even get it to stick up like that? If you tell me that gel is involved I'm not believing you."

The man raised a brow.

He blushed and ran a hand through his own hair. "...I don't think is how first meetings usually go," he said.

"I do not believe so either," the man agreed, visibly amused. "You are not normally this informal when meeting someone, are you?"

"No, I'm not," he sighed. "It's weird, though. I don't feel like I just met someone new. Have we met before?"

"This is your first time speaking with me, and we are not long lost brothers, I assure you," the man giggled. Dear Arceus, even the giggling sounded uncannily like himself… "Ah, but it is rude of me not to introduce myself to you. You may call me William."

"Hawkshaw," he grinned, saluting. "International Police. I usually give people my codename instead, but..."

"Hah, same here," William grinned back. "I have heard quite a few good things about you, and I can think of a few fellow agents who respect you a lot."

"Wait, pause-" he stammered. He stared at William for a moment, not sure if he should first be surprised that the man was also part of the International Police, or that there were people who apparently respected him. From what Richie had said, he'd only been a part of it for a couple years now.

William giggled again. "If you must know, there are quite a few stories about your presence in Goldenrod, during the mass-arrest of Rocket. Largely overshadowed in media, of course, by Sar Saylee and her companions, but officers hear about other officers more easily, and your actions that day have marked a few. You would be surprised about the amount of older stories that are shared, as well. Did you really jump down from a roof shouting 'Shining Bisharp Slash!' and land in mud with the thief you were pursuing once?"

"People know about that one?!" he squawked, horrified. William doubled over, wheezing and giggling uncontrollably. "How do you even find out about that sort of thing?! That was years ago! I was nowhere near becoming an agent of the International Police yet!"

"Well, I did say you would be surprised," William said between fits of giggles.

He just buried his face in his hands with a flustered groan.

"Ah, come now, Hawkshaw," William chuckled, giving him a pat to the shoulder. "Of course many of your past cases are entertaining to hear, but many of our fellow agents also know of your fearsome skills and your exceptional willpower! There is a reason I know some colleagues who respect you, after all." William inched closer, slinging an arm around his shoulders more firmly. "How about we return to Solaceon, hm? We can continue talking on the way, and perhaps grab some coffee, and..."
It was almost normal, being gently led away by William. He felt incredibly at ease with this person, and walking and talking with him was as natural as breathing. He couldn’t help being curious about this sentiment, and maybe hoped he could learn more about this man who said they weren’t long lost brothers but still somehow managed to feel like that twin he never knew he had.

The only reason it was almost normal was because- as he glanced back up the rocky slopes- he had the nagging impression that William was less just passing by and instead had appeared specifically to lead him away from the ruins.
How to Make A Spiritomb

Chapter Summary

Warning: gore and a dumbass sense of humour in terms of writing style.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

You will need:

--108 living humans
--a cauldron large enough to contain 108 living humans and deep enough that they cannot get out
--a Pokemon that can produce fire (or magma)

1. Throw your 108 humans into your cauldron. It is no matter if they are injured; however, if any die, they will have to be replaced. All 108 humans must be alive and in the cauldron before proceeding to step 2.

2. Light a fire under the cauldron. It will need to be vast, and heated to a blue flame.

3. Maintain fire until humans in the cauldron have not only expired, but in fact melted. Do not apply direct flame inside of the cauldron until all humans are dead. Using direct flame to render their corpses to bubbling grease will not affect the spell, but will yield a much smaller quantity of potion.

4. Stir in at least a half-pint of your own blood and season to taste with the blood of a dark-type Pokemon.

5. Sieve mixture through the crack in a stone split by lightning.

6. Place stone over the entrance or in the walls of your tower, fortress, castle, or other residence where you wish to be left very much alone, and paint its walls with the mixture (do this quick before it congeals!). The dark power will not harm you because of your blood in it, but any other human to come near is gonna have a bad time.

7. Enjoy your peace and quiet!

Chapter End Notes
I don't know if I feel worse about the idea itself or the way I wrote it

(The Pokedex said that Spiritomb is made of the souls of 108 sinners, and for some reason that reminded me of Kul Elna in YuGiOh and how the Millennium Items were created and then this happened)
When Richard heard the doorbell and went to open, his brother was one of the last people he’d expected. Well, no, his brother was actually pretty high up on his list of people he always secretly hoped were standing there— it was more accurate to say that he hadn’t expected to see his brother in such a visibly sad state.

It was far from the first time Richard had seen him like this— he’d seen the man at even lower points, in the past— but he still couldn’t help the split-second thought about how all that was missing was the heavy-rain-at-night effect.

"I'll, uh, go and make you some coffee, yeah?" Richard offered. He quickly left for the kitchen, allowing his older brother the time to quietly come in and set his things down.

When the cup was ready, Richard found the man silently hunched in the living room.

"You look terrible, pal," Richard said, setting the coffee in front of the man and scratching his head awkwardly. "You willing to tell me about it?"

His brother took the cup in his hands, but didn't drink. He simply stared at the dark liquid rippling inside. Richard pressed his lips; if his brother wasn't touching his coffee beyond staring at it, then whatever was going on was really affecting the man. "...I...remembered some things," he confessed softly. "About...Unova."

Richard tried to discreetly clench his fists. "...The trial about Dame Jasmine?" The way his brother looked up at him in confusion made him regret even bringing it up. "If you don't know what I'm talking about then don't worry about it, yeah? I wasn't in your head, but it probably ranked as your top worst memory of our time in Unova, so the longer you can go without it, the better, probably." Richard had only been twelve at the time, and didn't understand court systems as well as he did now, but what he did understand at the time was how terrifying it felt to see his normally smug, energetic, confident older brother on a witness stand looking so afraid and hurt and broken.

Richard dropped on the opposite sofa with a sigh. "Sorry for hinting that there's worse memories waiting for you, pal," he said morosely. "Pretty sure that's the last thing you'd have wanted to know, after coming in with a face like that."

His brother glanced down at the coffee in his hands again.

"When I got here, three weeks ago...you said that- that you were happy I asked for help," he started quietly. Richard listened attentively. "I wasn't sure what that implied. But recently I-" the elder paused and swallowed. "I've been recalling things. From Unova. When we were kids. How angry I used to be. At my classmates, at my teachers, at my parents, at you. I couldn't tell people what made me upset, so I just screamed at everyone and everything instead. They screamed back and it just upset me even more. I hated everything so much...I hated that you managed to be so much nicer to everyone, had such an easy time making friends, that you were able to say what you wanted and be given it. I was so jealous of you that it was pathetic."

"Bel-" Richard started.

"I was a terrible brother," he continued, voice cracking as he gripped the cup a little harder. "You
always made such a big effort to be my friend and to understand me, and I kept turning you away because I thought that there was no way you could. And then by the time things got better for me, I was too proud to come to you and apologize for everything. I tried to convince myself it was too late, and instead I dragged out something so selfish and immature for over thirty years! What kind of brother does that? My behavior toward you all this time was disgusting and.

"Bel, calm down," Richard chuckled. "It's no use beating yourself up over something like this. I'm not upset or anything at you, see? Besides, you still don't have all of your memories back, so don't go hating yourself already."

"Richie, I-

"I mean, for all the angry huffing you did, I thought you were the best brother I could've hoped for," Richard grinned. "It was pretty confusing for me, since you always sounded like I'd accidentally hurt you and you never dropped your grudge or something, but you never failed to come and help me when I was in a pinch. Not once. Not ever. You had your own bullies to deal with, yeah? But you've fought off more for me than I can count. Sometimes I wondered if maybe you tried to keep the world against you on purpose just so that I wouldn't have to deal with it. You just took everything life tried to throw and handled it for the both of us." Richard's grin softened into a smile. "At least that's how I liked to think of it. For some reason you were always the first to react when I started feeling upset and would look around for whatever needed some ass-kicking. You also used to be extremely bent on making sure we had equal shares of chocolate for some reason," the detective snorted.

"I know why," his brother said softly. "You were only four, so maybe you don't remember, but that year someone thought it'd be funny to put coal in my sock during the winter holidays. I knew in my head that it was supposed to be a joke, but I still took it as an implication that I was terrible enough to deserve that kind of thing. I barely even had time to be upset about it because tiny four-year-old you immediately hurried over and offered me your entire sock of chocolates."

"Oh man, you remembered something like that?" Richie chuckled, scratching the back of his head and feeling a little flustered. "I only have second-hand knowledge of it because our parents think it's a cute story to tell at parties."

"It meant a lot to me," he croaked.

"See? Our relationship wasn't all bad," Richard grinned. "Much better than you think, anyway. You just gotta look at it from the right angle. And I'm glad I made a difference for you that day. The only thing that made me sad about growing up together was that I wished I could've made your life just that tiny bit better by being there for you, just as you always were for me."

His brother carefully set the cup still full of coffee down.

Richard stood when he finally heard the first sob.

"I'm sorry," the elder apologized hoarsely, burying his face in his hands. "I'm sorry, I'm s-so s-sorry-"

"Don't worry, pal," Richard said soothingly, sitting beside him and tugging him closer. "I've already told you, yeah? I've got your back. I never thought you might feel like you should apologize for anything, so please don't hate yourself for things nobody blames you for. I know you do. And it hurts seeing you hate yourself so much."

Richard hugged just a little tighter.
"...I'm just glad you're finally willing to let me try and support you instead of taking on the world alone."

Chapter End Notes

One of these days I'm gonna end up just making a separate oneshot collection just for the Hawkshaws jfc
"Looker!"

Dawn raised her head at Lucas' sudden exclamation, and followed her younger brother's index as it pointed toward a man with a long, brown trench coat. Dawn hadn't been the only one to react to the shout, however, and when the agent turned to see who had called for him he beamed at the sight of them and immediately jogged over to them.

"Oh, it's that funny man from Jubilife..." Dawn said, nonplussed.

Looker huffed. "What is with that tone? How uncouth of you."

Dawn looked down at her feet. "Sorry..." she apologized. "Today wasn't exactly great, so I was really irritated..."

"It is of no matter," Looker said mildly, deciding to brush it off. He quickly brightened again. "Ah, but I see you are in Veilstone as well! Are you doing business here or simply visiting?"

"Visiting," Lucas replied, holding out some bags.

"Ah, yes, I see," Looker said, nodding. "Veilstone is known for having the largest shopping building of Sinnoh indeed. Have you found items of interest? I hope you bought warm clothing as well."

Lucas nodded enthusiastically. "Good lad. Winter is approaching and you can never have enough warm clothing in Sinnoh during winter," the agent commented, wrapping his arms around himself with a shudder.

"Are you here to buy warm clothes?" Dawn asked. "You look like you could use something more than just a suit and a thin-looking trench coat."

"Sadly, that is not the case," Looker said. "I am here to obtain further information concerning the actions of the Galactic Corporation. Incidentally, I have heard about what has happened to you in Jubilife, as a good friend of mine was present for the interrogations. It is good to see and know that you are both well and unharmed," he added sincerely.

Lucas gave Looker a pat on the arm and the agent smiled. "Thank you, Lucas."

"What are you planning to do? Galactic probably doesn't just hand out information about itself like that, y'know?" Dawn continued.

"Of course they do not. But, to investigate, it is also a very important part of my work! Currently, my intention is to patiently remain in the Game Corner of Veilstone and to listen as others speak. You would be surprised as to how many rumors are being shared in a such space, and all the more in a Game Corner which is rumored to be belonging to Galactic. It is an ideal location for gathering information, yes?"


Looker huffed. "I will not be distracted!" he claimed, folding his arms and blushing slightly. "The slot machines which are there require acute concentration and a good sense of timing, and I cannot allow myself to fall prey to such games in the course of my work!"

"Gambler?" Lucas snickered.
"...Yes, fine, I admit to enjoying gambling games," the agent grumbled, visibly pouting. Meanwhile, Dawn had to admit that she was both surprised at how unusually talkative Lucas was being, and how well Looker seemed to understand what her brother was trying to convey in just one or two words. "And that I have a particular weakness for slot machines. B-But that does not mean that I can not do my work while I am at the Game Corner!" he insisted.

"You look like the type who'd lose a lot and then keep going until you win because you're sore about losing," Dawn said. Lucas giggled harder.

"Slot machines fear me!" Looker asserted. "As do players of poker. I do not lose without being able to recuperate what I have lost afterwards, ha!"

"You're good at poker?" Dawn said, blinking at him incredulously. Considering his vivid gesturing and the massive amount of tics and quirks and how over half of his communication skills seemed to be relying on his body language, Looker being good at poker of all things was not what she'd expected to hear.

"Indeed. You would be surprised as to the extent of my latents," he said smugly. He paused, Klink visibly turning in his head. "...Talents. I was meaning to say talents."

"You're so weird," Dawn said with an amused snort.

Lucas tugged on her sleeve, shaking his head. "Not!" Her brother then pointed several times between himself and Looker. "Same."

Dawn frowned a moment. Same? Same what? They couldn't have that much in common, so Lucas was probably referring to something specific. What could that-

And then it hit her.

"Wait, so you're also-"

"Ack! Please keep that information to yourself!" Looker said quickly, looking flustered. "I, um, I do not normally tell others of this, yes? I was making exception for your brother because I understand very well how it is, but..." The agent stopped, taking a deep breath and letting out a sigh. "...But yes, we are the same. I, too, have language disorder."

"So that's why..." Dawn muttered. "But wow, even though I've got experience with Lou having aphasia, I'd have never guessed you have it too. Or that you'd be able to connect over it so quickly. I thought you were just a really weird foreigner. It feels like suddenly everything you say makes a lot more sense now, y'know?"

"Ah, well, I have required much effort to be able to speak as well as I do now," Looker said, smiling. "I admit, I am often placing more value in the speed of conversation over the correctness of my words or senses- sentis- things, which is the reason for which I am often sounding odd to those I speak with. I do not tell others of my condition, as it prides me to speak with only little trouble and for my speech errors to be regarded as simply the mistakes of one who is foreign. I am quite certain that Lucas is very capable of achieving the same- but only if he wishes for it, of course. Not being able to speak freely is tiresome, but so is the rehabilitation process."

Lucas groaned.

"Oh, believe me, I had given up on learning when I was still very young," Looker said, making a face. "Instead, I had found a friend who understood all of my words and emotions and who had become my 'Voice'. Unfortunately, my family left our home when I was seventeen. But more
fortunately, perhaps, I had then found someone for whom it was worth learning to speak," he said, smiling softly.

Looker carefully bent his knees, trying to match Lucas' height for eye contact as he took her brother's hand and placed it over his chest. "...What I am saying to you now, lad, it is that no matter how much others may push you to learn again, you are not required to do such if you do not want," he said softly. "It is not wrong to wait if you are not ready, and it is never too late to start once you are. It is your mind, your will, and your words. It is you who must set the pace. No one else."

Lucas nodded and smiled brightly.

"So what's with the hand-thing, anyway?" Dawn asked. "You already did that last time. It's kinda- I know it's rude to say, and I'm sorry, but it's kinda creepy, y'know?"

"Wha-oh, that. Yes. Um." Looker let go of Lucas' hand, straightening again. "My apologies. It is force of habit, and I did not stop to think that perhaps I was being invasive of your personal space…" Lucas shook his head and gave Looker a smile, which the agent returned. "Well, I am foreign to the Fairlands, and it is actually a very common gesture from my hometown, which is often used as a mark of honesty, and for making promises. It is also regarded as an exchange of emotions when it is being done by both. For example, it is something which is done at weddings while exchanging vows of love, or perhaps used during an interrogation at the police station. Because there are many who are superstitious, it is also used as a lie detective!" he said, grinning. "...I mean dec- de-tec-tor. Since it is a gesture seen as a promise of honesty, children are always being told stories of how when you lie or break a promise while another person is having their hand on your heart, you will be punished and be caused to burn in the fires of."

The agent jumped a mile with a loud squawk when something interrupted him with a loud ringing sound. Dawn simply watched as he frantically pat himself down before realizing that the ringing was coming from his chest and he dug a hand into one of his surprisingly many inside pockets. Dawn was pretty sure she could count at least three of them, and that was just on one side. "ACK! I forgot! I was supposed to go and meet a colleague of the International Police at the Game Corner, but I have let myself become distracted!"

Dawn and Lucas burst into laughter.

"Yes, yes, how very ironic, I know," he grumbled, pulling the ringing PokéGear out. "It was a conversation worth stopping for. But now, I must be off! Stay safe!"

"...He's still really weird," Dawn said, watching as the agent ran. "But I guess he's not so bad, y'know?" Lucas simply grinned.

...Two hours later, while running toward the gym, Dawn really wished she'd asked for Looker's number.
Friends With Benefits

Chapter Summary

This takes place between chapters 20 and 21 of Dimensional Destruction.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“A rose by any other name would smell as sweet,” Ephraim crooned, “but your name is music to my ears, mademoiselle!”

“Points for the combo,” Belle said, before flourishing her roses and saying, “is it hot out here, mon cher, or is it just you?”

“Would work better on a fire-type,” Ephraim suggested.

“Wouldn’t it just,” Belle sighed. “But, alas, boundaries of propriety must constrain even us. Still, there are no shortage of other fine flowers to be sampled!”

“Hmm… and why is it, do you think, that fine flowers seem to enjoy being sampled by you,” Ephraim groused, “whereas my compliments often raise a ‘shut up, Ephraim’?”

“Ah, mon cher, that one is simple,” Belle laughed. “They are not always met with derision, you know. But they often are, because you have not mastered the art of tailoring your compliments.”

“Then teach me, o wise teacher,” Ephraim said, rolling his eyes and flicking his tail. “What does that even mean?”

“It means, mon cher, that you tell every lady that she is beautiful, and while that is a fine sentiment, it falls rather hollow on many,” Belle said, bopping him on the nose with her blue rose. “Do you think Sally, our dear One-Eyed Sal, values her beauty? Non. She values her ability to crush her enemies. To achieve success, you must praise that. What Terra values is not her beauty; it is her loyalty and value to nos belle princesse. Praise not the beauty of her leaves, but their skill and accuracy, and how grateful la princesse must be for them. To that Rhyhorn that we encountered earlier, I praised her strength, her indomitability, her radiant power, for it is this that their kind values. You see, mon cher, to only thoughtlessly praise the beauty of all suggests that you are uninterested in other fine characteristics, or else that you simply hollowly praise all without truly knowing them, you see?”

“…I asked sarcastically, but I actually feel really educated now,” Ephraim said, resting his head on his paws thoughtfully. “I do think they’re all beautiful, though, in different ways.”

“Well, mon cher, you are welcome to praise my radiant beauty at any time,” Belle said, preening. “I assure you that I do praise my beauty quite highly.”

“Which is unmarred by that fine scar, I assure you,” Ephraim said, wavin a paw at the old wound that still crumpled part of her face. “That is the scar of a warrior who has left far worse on her enemies.”

“So an evolved Eevee can be taught new moves,” Belle said, smiling and bopping him on the nose
with her blue rose.

Chapter End Notes

This really doesn’t mean much. We were just too taken by the cuteness of the mental image of Belle and Ephraim being friends through swapping dumb pickup lines.
Chapter Summary

AU 1--Rocket AU

Chapter Notes

This takes place a few years after the previous bits of this AU… around the same time it would happen in the regular timeline, really XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Key bent low over Topaz’s back, feeling Jenny’s arms tighten around her as a blast of rain pounded down on them. Groudon roared in fury.

“Our attacks aren’t doing anything!” Jenny shouted, hooking her chin over Key’s shoulder and bringing up her wrist with her pokegear on it so they could both hear. “Seka! Do you think, if we knocked out Marc and Archie--?”

“I wouldn’t bet on it!” Seka’s voice was faint and fuzzy, distorted by static. “Just saw Marc crack Archie’s head off a fucking rock and he got right back into the fight like nothing--what the hell?! ”

“What’s going on, Seka?!” Key yelled, tapping Topaz’s head and pointing in the direction of the huge tree in the north end of the crater, where Seka said she’d seen Marc and Archie fighting. “We’re coming your way!”

“It’s that girl--the weird one who was sneaking around the Aqua base!” Seka said. “The psychic! I think she’s trying to hold ‘em still--she’s glowing like hell… even that’s not stopping them!”

“The psychic?!” Jenny gasped, grip tightening painfully. Key could feel the older girl grinding her teeth as they flew closer, spotting first the glow and then slowly picking out the details of the two men fighting within it.

Then there was another glow behind them, so overwhelmingly bright that the white cliff walls became blinding. Key, Jenny and Topaz turned just in time to see that the source of the light was
Groudon and Kyogre, transformed into light and then vanished into nothing an instant later. The waters crashed wildly as they reclaimed the titanic spaces left behind, while the wind and rain died almost instantly to nothing.

“What the fuck?!” Key heard Seka exclaim. She turned back to where her friend was, flying on Shikoba’s back over Marc and Archie. The two were on the ground, collapsed in the shallow water that was already draining from the plateau by the tree, their admins splashing over to them, calling their names. Key could just make out a slim, pale figure on the ground near Marc and Archie, before there was another brief flash as they released some kind of huge, orange Pokemon that Key had never seen before. It flapped its broad wings to keep itself out of the shallow water, holding its flaming tail high, while it picked the smaller figure up and cradled them in its large but skinny arms.

“The fuck is that?!” Seka demanded at the same moment that Jenny furiously yelled, “it’s the Charizard! Bring that fucking thing down! Topaz, hit it with Ancientpower!”

“Key?” Topaz asked quietly.

“Just try and pin its wings,” Key replied. Topaz’s eyes glowed as chunks of rock and debris were lifted and launched at the Charizard. Metal flashed along its wings as it smashed apart the first few projectiles before dodging the rest, surprisingly nimble for its size. Topaz and Shikoba were both forced to dodge aside as the Charizard blasted fire at them and flew past.

“Whoa!” Key yelled, clinging to Topaz’s back. “Are Charizard all that powerful?!”

“This one is,” Jenny growled. “Follow it! They’re incredibly rare--there’s only a handful left in the world--and with that steel armour, there’s only one trainer it could belong to…”

“Who?” Key asked as they tailed after the vivid fire-type.

“Remember that gang I told you about?” Jenny said grimly. “The ones that kidnapped my mother?”

“The ones that run Kanto and probably secretly Johto?” Seka put in. “Rocket, right?”

Jenny nodded. “That Charizard belongs to their boss. She’s very dangerous. She’s the one who put Dad in hospital when she took Mum…”
The Charizard had landed on the rim of the crater. Topaz swooped down to land a safe distance away, just out of the range of the fire blast they’d been treated to earlier, Shikoba hiding slightly behind her. The Charizard tensed at the sight of them, curling its wings protectively over two smaller human figures.

One was the psychic girl that had been sneaking around the Aqua base before, now wearing a dress that had probably been white before it was absolutely soaked through, her long, dark-blue hair plastered down her back and over her shoulders as she hunched over the Charizard’s tail flame to dry herself.

“Don’t apologize,” the other was saying, a hand on the psychic’s shoulder. “You did your best, and they were under the control of something much more powerful than you…” She trailed off as she noticed Jenny, Key and Seka, straightening up and adjusting her glasses.

Key wasn’t sure quite what she’d expected of the leader of the notorious Rocket gang that Jenny had told them so much about, but it wasn’t this pale, petite woman with a short bob of messy brown hair, wearing now somewhat sea-sprayed white trousers with scuffed black boots and a black tank top with a vivid red “R” on it.

Key and Seka grabbed Jenny as she jumped forwards. “YOU!” the Johton shouted. “You’re the one behind all of this! All this--all those people!”

“Oh, please,” the shorter brunette sighed, looking down at the remains of Sootopolis. “I only act like I secretly control everything. Aqua and Magma managed this just fine on their own. They’re the idiots that had to go waking up Groudon and Kyogre the split-second they found them…” She dipped her hands into her trouser pockets and came out with two of the biggest pokeballs that Key had ever seen, dark purple with glowing bulges on the top. “Don’t worry, they’re in more responsible hands now.”

“That’s the biggest joke I’ve ever heard,” Jenny snapped. “And just what are you planning to do with them?”

“Well… after this demonstration of their power, I don’t suppose I’ll have to do too much except have them,” the Rocket woman said with a smirk. “That alone ought to keep a lot of powerful people up at night.”

“Are you crazy?!” Seka blurted out. “There’s no way you’re saying that you put Groudon and
Kyogre in fucking *pokeballs*.”

“Those aren’t ordinary pokeballs,” Jenny muttered. “Remember those plans that Bacent found in the Aqua base? Those are the final product. The Master Ball.”

“Saylee, they’re the ones who were messing with Aqua and Magma’s operations,” the psychic girl said softly, starting to dry sections of her hair over the flame.

“Oh? I’ve heard about you three from my own spies,” Saylee said, folding her arms, pokeballs still in hand. “And at least one of you seems to have heard of me too. You look familiar, Miss Anger Management. What’s your name?”

“Jenny Hawkshaw,” Jeny bit out, “and I want to know what the hell you’ve done with my mother!”

“Ohhh… Professor Hawkshaw’s daughter, right?” Saylee said thoughtfully, unfolding her arms and holding out the pokeballs again. “Okay, first up, I’d recommend thinking it over before challenging a woman who you *know* is holding two gods—which I *will* use, because if you’re gonna make me destroy you, I wanna do it quickly. It’s been a long day for all of us and I’d like to get Sabrina home to rest. Second, hate to break it to you, but your mother was a bargaining chip, that’s all. A valuable one, for what it’s worth. You want her back, take it up with Galactic Energy Corp.”

“A--you *traded* her?” Jenny yelled in outrage.

“Jenny, calm down!” Key hissed, helping Seka restrain their friend. “We couldn’t even put a dent in Groudon and Kyogre!”

“Good to see that between you you’ve got brains and brawn,” Saylee said, pocketing the pokeballs and helping Sabrina up onto her Charizard’s back. “Let’s go, Chaz. Roark ought to be back at the ship by now.”

“What just happened?” Shikoba demanded as they ducked away from the blast of wind as the Charizard took off and flew away. “Are we going after them?”

“No… Key’s right. We can’t fight her now that she has those,” Jenny said, deflating. She slumped to her knees when Key and Seka let her go, running a hand through her hair. “Dammit…”
“Was she telling the truth?” Seka wanted to know. “About… I mean, Groudon and Kyogre did vanish. And, uh… your mom…?”

“Maybe… there’s no reason for her to lie about that,” Jenny sighed. “I mean, she wouldn’t just be trying to get us off her back--it’s not like she’s afraid of us…” She trailed off thoughtfully. “But, y’know, isn’t there something that can defeat Groudon and Kyogre?”

“Rayquaza?” Key and Seka said in unison. “But it didn’t appear to stop the fighting now, did it?”

Key continued.

“No, but I know where it is,” Jenny said, standing up again and smirking. “So… you girls ever heard of avatars?”

{}  

Flying over the carnage all along Hoenn’s coasts, Saylee was relieved that instead of docking, she’d left the S.S. Anne on a patrol course out at sea. Lt Surge had done a skilled job at turning the wrecked cruise ship into a floating fortress, a patch job that Rocket’s resources had been able to shore up and solidify after they’d seized the ship in the wake of the Battle of Vermillion, but it still wouldn’t be able to sail out of being beached on a street in Lilycove.

The decks were running with water, with Suicune patrolling placidly and helpfully draining an upper deck completely dry for Chaz to land on. Saylee relaxed at the sight of the Legendary Beast, knowing that its presence and apparent good mood meant that Roark had made it back safe and sound. Her life had become a whole lot less stressful after her little brother had acquired three permanent and powerful bodyguards, not to mention more than enough firepower to protect himself.

“Are you okay?” Saylee asked with concern as she climbed down from Chaz’s back and Sabrina all but fell off.

“Mmm… jus’ tired…” Sabrina said, rubbing her eyes sleepily.

“I’ll take you to your cabin to rest,” Saylee promised, picking up the teenager and giving Chaz a kiss on the cheek before carrying Sabrina towards the stairs down into the ship. The door was opened by Petrel before she reached it.
“H-Hey, boss,” he said nervously. The man was perpetually nervous, which made him not trustworthy -- Saylee trusted nobody but Roark, Sabrina and her Pokemon, and Rocket was not an organization that was best staffed by trustworthy people anyway--but reliable. “Your brother’s sleeping in his cabin. We, uh, lost some recon people in the earthquakes and tidal waves and shit, and the ship got a bit of a battering, but…” He followed Saylee down the halls of the ship as he gave his status report, occasionally running ahead to open doors that Saylee couldn’t get herself, her arms full of sleeping psychic.

“We don’t have time to wait around for the missing,” Saylee said at the end of the report. “Set course for Sinnoh.”

“Sinnoh?” Petrel asked in surprise. “Shouldn’t we head home and--”

“Show off? Not yet,” Saylee said, shaking her head. “You saw the last recon report from Sinnoh, right?”

“Well, y-yeah, but--”

“Set a course for Sinnoh, Petrel. Now.”

Saylee continued alone to her three-bedroom suite, tucking Sabrina into her own bed and checking in on Roark, who was snoring soundly, before returning to the upper deck where Chaz was sunning himself and chatting with Pedro, who’d apparently just returned from patrol.

“Hey, Doll,” the Pidgeot said, nuzzling her head. “Ya really did it! Ya got the gods themselves ta sit down an’ shut up!”

“I’ll probably need them, if we don’t get to Sinnoh before Galactic completes that Red Chain,” Saylee said, making a face.

“Ah… is that why you told those people where Professor Hawkshaw is?” Chaz asked. Saylee nodded.

“They didn’t manage to stop Aqua or Magma, in the end, but they were a real spanner in the works,” she said. “They should keep Galactic distracted enough for us to appropriate their research. It’s
incredible, what they’ve achieved, but using it to get rid of spirit? C’mon…” She leaned against Chaz’s side, folding her arms over herself. “I can think of much better things to do with the power to rewrite reality…”

Chapter End Notes

Why do I enjoy this verse so much…? I skipped ahead a bit because I couldn’t decide on the precise circumstances of certain events that happen in the course of Saylee’s rise to the top of Rocket. Suffice it to say that it happened, and Rocket has sustained rather than falling apart, so they still have eyes on what other criminal gangs of the world are up to...
"Did you find him?"

"No, nothing..."

The agent sighed. Losing the grunt so quickly... He felt so frustrated. There was something about Galactic that he needed to remember, he knew, but every time he started getting his hands on one of them something else happened and he suddenly had to change focus. He just wanted the rest of his memories back, dammit.

"Perhaps it is ideal to return to the Valor hotel," William suggested. "We could pose some inquiries regarding the incident, as we have lost our suspect, and gather information. And ascertain ourselves as to the status of those injured and the number of estimated casualties. I do believe I have noticed the presence of the Champion of Sinnoh earli-

"You saw Sar Cynthia? She's here?" he interrupted, wide-eyed. William stared for a moment. "I-I mean, it's a major incident, so I guess it's not unusual-"

"Yes, yes, of course, I understand what it is which you are saying," William said, patting him on the shoulder and smiling. "No need to get flustered, hm?"

"About what?" he asked, feeling the heat rise to his face. "She's the local Champion, stuff happened, she's probably here to- to- do Champion stuff or something-"

"Which will likely involve her inquiring about the investigation and questioning police officers-which, incidentally, happens to fit our choice of careers," William pointed out innocently.

The agent squeaked.

William's smile turned just that bit more smug.

"Goodness, Hawkshaw, are you feeling nervous about meeting her? It seems to me, my friend, that you have a c-r-u-s-h-"

"No I don't!" the elder agent objected quickly. The high pitch in his voice was probably betraying him. "I-I just have a lot of respect for her! I-I mean she's really strong both as a trainer and as a person and she's really kind to her fans and she's also really elegant and beautiful and- and stop giving me that smug face, it's not a crush!"

"Then surely you will not mind if I call her and ask if she would be willing to meet us to trade information regarding the incident, hm?" William asked, pulling out a phone.

"No!" the agent squawked, face flushing harder. "I-I mean no, don't call her! Williaaaam!"

"Ah, Sar Shirona?" William started brightly.

The agent squeaked again, frantically gesturing for him to hang up.

"Yes, this is William Lebeau. May I have a moment or three of your time?"
The squeak was a higher pitch this time, and his arms had gone for wild, circular flapping.

William raised an amused brow. "I simply wished to express to you that I do not actually have your number and that the reactions of my friend here were worth the teasing. Thank you!"

By this point, the elder agent was too flustered to actually manage any words and the only frustration he was able to vent out at William as the younger agent pretend-hung up was a lot of somewhat angrier-sounding squeaking, to which William eventually doubled over from giggling.

"Y-Your face is p-priceless," William wheezed.

"I'll have to agree on that one," a new voice said.

Both their heads snapped to look, and they were faced with a gorgeous woman with long blonde hair and a long black coat, gigantic Garchomp looming behind her. The agent's jaw dropped, eyes widening and mind temporarily freezing up. William did his best to straighten up again, blushing.

"Ah, pardon me, Sar," William said, a little embarrassed. "We have not expected you to appear and to overhear us- especially while we were speaking in Unovan. Perhaps it was rude of me to use your name for the sake of teasing, and for such I apologize." His smile widened, turning just that small bit more mischievous again. "I do have to say, however, that it is fun to tease my friend here. He has very, ah, vivid reactions."

"I can see that," Cynthia said, looking amused. The agent swallowed nervously. "Is everything alright, sir?"

"Yes," the agent squeaked, saluting. He cleared his throat best as he could. "I-I'm a-a- I'm a -a big spinny wheel, ma'am."

"Yes, I saw that before joining you in your conversation," Cynthia said.

Aside from William's renewed giggling and the Garchomp behind Cynthia snickering, there was a long, silent pause in which he felt his face go from being on fire to being stuck in molten lava.

"He means to express that he is a giant nerd for you, ma'am," William said helpfully after a while.

"Oh, you mean a fan?" Cynthia asked.

"F-Fan, yes," the agent repeated weakly. "I-I meant- I, um, I-I have a lot of r-respect for you, ma'am. More than I do the other Champions."

"That's very kind of you," she said with a smile. "Of course, it isn't as if I can diplomatically test my strength against other Champions, so I couldn't say for sure if I'm any stronger than any other."

"T-That's not it," he interrupted immediately. Cynthia blinked. "I-I mean you're strong and beautiful a-and I respect that too, but I- your words are important. To me."

"My words...?" Cynthia asked, waiting patiently for elaboration.

"The...way you encourage people is important to me," the agent said softly, slowly dropping the salute. "You don't use your position as a leader to step up on a tall stage and raise an entire nation with a single speech like you're trying to raise the spirits of a discouraged army. Instead you just...quietly lean down to the level of the one you're talking to, and convince them that they can do it. And they'll believe you when you say it, because you genuinely believe it too. You don't give blanket speeches that could be said by anyone, you make your encouragements deeply personal."
And I respect that a lot. I hope I can encourage people like that too, someday." He glanced at the ground and admitted with a whisper "Gods know I needed those reminders myself sometimes..."

"Well, I didn't set out to be a motivational speaker, but I'm glad," she said with a smile. "I wish I could achieve more with words without ever resorting to fighting... but if my words have helped even one person-if they've helped you -then I'm truly glad."

"You see?" he said weakly. "Like that. You are so- true."

Cynthia laughed. "You're charmingly honest yourself," she said. "I'm sure you know my name-might I ask who you are, aside from a spiny thing?"

"H-Hawkshaw," he stammered, feeling the heat rise to his face again. "And this is my colleague William. We, um- we work for the International Police."

"Interpol...? I wasn't informed that any Interpol agents were going to be investigating in Sinnoh right now," Cynthia said, folding her arms and raising an eyebrow.

The elder of the two agents cringed. "William isn't actually on-duty right now and supposed to just be here on vacation," he said quickly. "But you're right, I'm...not supposed to be in Sinnoh. It's incredibly unprofessional, but I have very personal reasons for being-"

"The incident in the Ruins of Alph, I imagine, if 'Hawkshaw' is your surname," Cynthia said.

He pressed his lips. ". . .My brother is a police officer in Veilstone, and I know that their hands are tied," he said quietly, fists clenching. "If the police in Sinnoh can't lead the investigation, wanting or not, then someone else has to do it. I won't let Galactic get away with whatever they're trying to do. I can't. It doesn't matter how noble your cause sounds-the moment you're willing to kill for your cause, you're fighting for the wrong one."

Cynthia shifted her weight onto her other leg. "In any other circumstances, I would bust you to your superiors for running renegade," she said eventually. "But right now, if you're not on the police or League's radar, you're also not on Galactic's radar, and that could really come in useful."

"Well, we technically are on the radar of the League now that you have found us, hah," William said jokingly. The Garchomp behind Cynthia rolled its eyes.

"Listen-there's a Galactic spy in the Sinnoh League," Cynthia continued. "I have a pretty good idea of who it is, but I need to do a little more research to be sure... In particular, I need to find out a little bit more about the Galactic agent who died in Lavender Town a couple of months ago."  

"We can do that," the elder agent said with a nod. "I've got subordinates in Kanto right now, they can probably gather more information from there."

"We will continue to investigate on this end and inform you of our findings as soon as we are aware," William said. "Perhaps we could exchange numbers to remain in contact?"

"How else are you going to keep me updated? Pidgey carrier?" Cynthia chuckled.

William rattled off his number to Cynthia fairly easily, and Cynthia did the same with hers. The second exchange was a bit less smooth and Cynthia ended up holding both phones before returning one to its flustered owner.

"Alright, let's go," the Garchomp behind her pressed. "We still have other things to do."
"Thank you for helping," Cynthia said to the two agents. "I know you can do this. I'm counting on you."

Both men saluted, quietly holding their pose as the Champion smiled and left.

"...So, Hawkie, how much worse did your crush get when she started speaking Unovan, *hmm*?"

"*Shut up, it's not a crush!*"

Chapter End Notes

And this was Key coming back with your necessary dose of Hawkshaw-isms because I'm still completely dry on Del writing right now.
Layers

Chapter Summary

This is one of the products of the two of us getting way, way, WAY too emotionally invested in the life stories of side characters.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Look at this,” Cynthia complained, as she walked back to the entry desk of the Celestic Museum, where her best friend and occasional boyfriend was working the admissions desk. She held up a ¥ 50 piece in her fingers. “This is what those cheapskates call a tip! For a ninety-minute tour around every room of the museum with so many goddamn questions!”

“They’re University students, not trainers,” Riley said, taking an earbud out of his ear. “On the upside, there isn’t another tour group waiting, so you can go check out the new guy.”

“Excuse me?” Cynthia asked, stealing his mints and taking the opportunity to have a look at the check-in roster on the desk. “New guy?”

“The one who’s staying in the Royal Suite at the Inn,” Riley explained. “He’s our age—had to show me his student ID to get an under-18s ticket and he’s actually just a couple months older than you—and he’s pretty, Cyn, he is goddamn pretty.”

“Steven Stone, huh?” Cynthia said, reading the register upside down. “How’s a seventeen-year-old afford the Royal Suite? Is he a trainer?”

“Yes, but I asked and he said his parents own some kind of big deal corporation in Hoenn, and they’re paying for him spending his summer here,” Riley explained. “So rich, cute, and very polite. He tipped me better than your students did just for giving him directions to the room on the archaeological digs around here because that has the most rocks in it.” He flashed a ¥ 500 note with a smirk. “Gonna try and get his number on the way out.”

“Bet you that ¥ 500 I can beat you to it,” Cynthia said, straightening her museum uniform and heading for the archaeological dig display via one of the storerooms.
Riley was right, he is pretty, Cynthia marvelled as she casually walked towards the tall teenager who was peering at a display of rock from different dig layers. Even though he was taller than Riley, he wasn’t as lanky, having a little more tone to him, and his messy silver hair looked very soft, perfectly matching the bright silver of his eyes. He wasn’t as tan as she’d expect for someone from Hoenn, but he was definitely more used to their climate, wearing a warm black vest and long trousers even though it was summer.

He also had an odd silver Pokemon hovering over his shoulder, peering at the exhibits with a single large pink eye. It took Cynthia a moment to realize that it was in fact a Beldum, just coloured differently from any she’d ever seen.

“I’ve never seen a gold and silver Beldum before,” Cynthia commented as she walked up to Steven Stone. “Are they all like that in Hoenn?”

“Oh no, they’re very rare,” Steven commented, tearing his eyes away from the rocks to smile at the Beldum, and then at her. “Silver Beldum like Bethan here are usually only born near deposits of extremely rare metals… I’m not sure that they would be seen in Sinnoh. Do you have a Beldum yourself?”

“No, just a Roselia and a Staraptor, but maybe I’ll catch one when I start travelling,” Cynthia said, tapping her name badge.

“You’re a trainer, then, miss Cynthia?” Steven asked.

“Not yet, Mister Stone,” Cynthia responded with a smirk, “but only because I promised Grandmother that I’d work the museum for one more summer before taking off. My best friend Riley and I train together after work up on the hills. You should join us,” she said, gesturing to Bethan.

“I’d be glad to,” Steven said with a smile. “I’m planning to be here all summer, but I suppose I can’t spend all of that in the museum, can I?”

“You absolutely could and would if it never closed,” Bethan chimed in. “He’s not an archaeologist or anything,” they added to Cynthia. “Just a nerd.”
Cynthia laughed. “A nerd for stones?” she asked, gesturing to the display. “I wouldn’t expect just the layers to draw so much attention, considering that the rest of this room contains rare fossils and stones that have been found during excavations…”

“On the contrary, a rock need not be exceptional to be fascinating.” Steven said, gesturing to the rock layers, eyes practically glowing. “These basic stones, in their order, are the very history of this planet. In these geological layers is the planet itself telling us its story, reminding us…” He trailed off, going a little red when he noticed Cynthia staring. “You can’t say Bethan didn’t warn you,” he said sheepishly.

“I’ve never seen anybody so enthusiastic about rocks before,” Cynthia laughed. “You’re very poetic, you know. I’ve lived here all my life and I’ve never thought about it that way.” She looked over the display thoughtfully. “Just reassure me that you aren’t a nerd about stones because of your name.”

Steven laughed. “Oh, no, I inherited the interest from my father,” he chuckled, “but then that’s where I got the name from too, so who knows about him?”

Cynthia laughed. “I came here to ask if you needed any information about the displays in this museum, since I’m this afternoon’s on-duty guide,” she said, “but it sounds like you’re already very well-informed.”

“Damn,” Steven said, snapping his fingers. “I mean, I have no idea. What is a rock?”

“Well,” said Cynthia, drawing her secret weapon out of her pocket, “this is, specifically a fragment of obsidian found in a four-thousand-year-old layer just outside of Celestic. Though of course you know nothing about rocks, care to tell me what’s unusual about it?”

“Well, taking an absolute stab in the dark…” Steven said, peering closely at the stone.

“Your eyes are brown?” Cynthia blurted out. Steven stared at her. “S-sorry, I just thought your eyes were silver before…”

“Oh, that’s just a trick of the light,” Steven said, turning his attention back to the stone. “They only look like they’re changing colour. It’s nothing. This, however, being a piece of igneous rock, should not be in a layer that’s three thousand years younger than Sinnoh’s last active volcano… however, it could have been formed by any fire-type with lava moves, or perhaps moved in the wake of a ground or rock Pokemon tunnelling underground…”
“Gold star,” Cynthia said, holding out the smooth black stone. “Would you like it?”

“Are you allowed to give away museum property like this?” Steven said with a raised eyebrow, taking the piece of obsidian and running his fingers lightly over it, taking care around the sharp edges.

“We’ve got a huge heap of obsidian from that layer, it won’t be missed,” Cynthia. She glanced at her watch as her poketch buzzed. “It looks like there’s a scout group coming in for a tour, so I’d better go,” she said, checking it. “If you need anything at all, there’s an intercom by the door in every room where you can buzz the front desk, and Riley or I will be right here to answer your questions.”

“I’ll try not to abuse that power,” Steven laughed. “About that invitation to train this evening…”

“Do you have a Poketch or something? Give me your number and I’ll text you the details,” Cynthia said, holding out her own Poketch.

“I am somewhat obligated to have a Pokenav, not a Poketch, but yes, I do have a number,” Steven chuckled, tapping his number into Cynthia’s Poketch. “I look forward to hearing from you, Miss Cynthia. Thank you very much for her assistance.” He handed her a ¥ 1000 note, which Cynthia pocketed while mentally punching the air. He held up the piece of obsidian, smiling at it as it glinted in the light. “I shall treasure this fine gift.”

“See that you do,” Cynthia said with a smile, turning and taking care to check that she was out of his line of sight before she started running back to the front desk to rub her success in Riley’s face and get her other ¥ 500.

Chapter End Notes

We have spent WAY too much time talking about these three and their past together. Here’s how Steven Stone, Cynthia Shirona and Riley Aaronson first met :P
Chapter Summary

AU 1--Rocket AU

Chapter Notes

Another hop back to something that went down at the equivalent time to After Armageddon.

Several of the baby Cubone wailed loudly as Archer kicked one of the cages. Even with the fury of the dead roaring in his ears, the sound tugged at Minoru Fuji’s heart. He didn’t move, though, eyes closed, head bowed, hands clenched in the empty imitation of prayer.

It was Meghan’s power protecting this plateau where her children were trapped, not any power of his, but as long as Archer thought Minoru was keeping him alive, Minoru would live. Usually, he was not afraid of the concept of death, but he was afraid of becoming part of the raging horde of souls below, as a few Rockets already had. Whenever he felt any pity for them, the Cubone started crying again, and the feeling vanished.

There was a burst of rage from Meghan’s spirit, and then, to Minoru’s surprise, he heard a live human voice.

“Archer, what the hell is going on?!”

Minoru risked a glance over his shoulder and saw Archer swaggering over to a pale, slight brunette girl in a black Rocket tank top and trousers that had probably once been white before they got covered in blood and dust. She was scowling, and her scowl only got darker as Archer smiled and put an arm around her shoulder.

“Things got a little out of hand… seems like the stories about Lavender Town aren’t just old wives’ tales,” Archer said with a smirk. “But I knew you’d make it up here alright, and with Chaz we can easily get out of here with our spoils.” He gestured to the cages full of captured Cubone. The girl cast an eye over them, raising an eyebrow.
“Cubone? Is *that* why I nearly got killed by some kind of ghost Marowak?” she asked angrily. “Archer, some of our people *have* been killed!”

“Hmph… if I knew dead Marowak were this much more trouble, I never would have killed it,” Archer snorted, waving a hand dismissively, “but the money we’ll make selling these Cubone in Johto will be *more* than worth it.”

“*You’re* the one that killed her, huh?” the girl said thoughtfully, wrapping an arm around Archer’s waist and raising her other hand up to hold Archer’s hand that was draped over her shoulder. The blue-haired man grinned, leaning closer into her, at which point she ducked, flipped him over her back and down the stairs that she was still standing next to. There were a series of cracks and screams as Archer fell down the steps, following a screech of mixed victory and rage from Meghan’s spirit. Archer’s screaming cut off abruptly.

Minoru stared openly at the girl, who was scowling down the steps. “Stretched thin enough as it is and he’s wasting troops picking fights with fucking ghosts,” she muttered, looking up at Minoru. “Hey, is bloody revenge on her murderer gonna get her to calm down?”

“…I suspect her spirit will only truly rest when her children are released,” Minoru said softly. Truth be told, he could already feel Meghan’s spirit fading with her murderer’s soul in hand, but if he could trick this Rocket into releasing the Cubone, so much the better.

“Yeah, I was worried about that,” the girl grumbled, peering at the lock on the closest cage, then looking speculatively down the stairs. “…Shit, he had the keys and I am *not* going back down that way.” She straightened up, releasing a huge orange Pokemon with a fiery tail. “Chaz, can you open these cages? *Carefully.* I’m trying to *stop* with the angry ghosts, because we really do not need that shit right now.”

“Sure,” Chaz said, his claws glinting silver as he began to carefully peel back the bars of the cages. The Cubone only shrank back nervously.

“You’re really letting them go?” Minoru asked suspiciously.

“I’ve got other ways of making money that *don’t* involve angry ghosts tearing my people apart,” the girl said, narrowing her eyes on him. “Like they unfortunately killed Archer, though he should’ve known better, stirring up angry ghosts like that. Shame I was too late to save him, wasn’t it?”
“What a shame,” Chaz said cheerily. “We’ll all miss him terribly.”

“You’re afraid of the ghosts here,” Minoru shot at her. “Which means you won’t do a thing to me. What reason do I have not to let your people know you killed their leader?”

“Tell them what you want,” the girl said, waving a hand airily. “You tell them your story, I’ll tell them mine, and they’ll believe whatever makes their lives easier. People often do.”

“Not everyone,” Minoru said coldly. “Some people prefer the truth.”

“You really think people like that join Team Rocket?” the girl said, rolling her eyes. “There isn’t an ideological conflict or conflict of loyalties in my organization. Just a lot of people who like to keep themselves alive. If believing me over you achieves that, then that’s what they’ll do. Besides, it’s not like anybody’s gonna miss Archer.”

“That’s the last of ‘em, Saylee,” Chaz said, stepping back from a cage full of huddling Cubone. “Ceez… get outta here, won’t you? I’m not gonna burn you.” One brave Cubone edged out of the cave, clutching her bone club tightly to her as she edged past Chaz and went for the stairs. Seeing her successful escape, the others followed, tripping over each other in their rush to get downstairs. The last one, however, looked back hesitantly, then turned and ran over to stand between Minoru and Saylee, who just raised an eyebrow at the sight of the little ground-type clutching her bone club and scowling a vicious scowl that reminded Minoru painfully of Meghan.

“Don’t, Carrie,” he pleaded, trying to pull the little Cubone out of the way. “There’s no need to fight. If Team Rocket are leaving, never to return, then we have no reason to interfere in what they do.”

“Glad to hear it,” Saylee said, rubbing her eyes. “I’ll send some people to collect our corpses soon—unless you want to handle them.”

“This tower’s for Pokemon, not blasphemous humans!” Carrie said sharply. “Get them out of here and never come back!”

“Never coming back sounds like a good idea,” Chaz said with a shudder, looming over his trainer’s shoulder. “Can we get outta here now? I keep hearing… things…”
“Me too,” Saylee said, rubbing her eyes again with a frown.

Minoru looked over her shoulder. Meghan’s spirit was gone, and with her most of the spirits of the Tower and their rage, but a few shades still hovered by her side. “Perhaps you should go,” he said coldly, “before the shades that reach for you find their mark…”

Saylee shuddered sharply, climbing onto Chaz’ back and flying away without a word.

Minoru looked back at the human shades still hovering on top of the tower, most of them beginning to fade as the rage of the ghosts inside the tower settled. “You weren’t chasing her, were you?” he asked one of them, a dark-haired young man with a purple-dripping hole in his chest. “Why not? Why would you protect a Rocket like her?”

The young man scowled, and there was an image for a moment. The same girl, but smaller than Minoru’s granddaughter, smiling sweetly up at him.

“…We were all children once,” Minoru said softly. “That absolves none of us of our crimes. Just because she is your… what, daughter?” The spirit bristled. “Sister?” The spirit settled again, nodding. “That means something only to you. It means nothing to Rocket’s victims.”

“Like my mum,” Carrie said softly, hugging her bone club tighter to herself. “They killed her, y’know?”

The shade hesitated, then crouched in front of Carrie.

_You and I have that in common_, his voice whispered softly as he faded away.

{}“Chaz?” Saylee asked quietly as they flew away from Lavender. “What… did you hear?”

Chaz was quiet for a long time, long enough that Saylee was starting to think he was ignoring the question, before he said, “my parents… I think. I did hear other Charizard. I haven’t since before I went to the lab. With the mountain destroyed…” Saylee could feel a sigh rumble through her
Charizard’s huge frame. “Part of me had kept hoping that some of them had… I don’t know, flown away, escaped somewhere, somehow, but…”

“I’m sorry, Chaz,” Saylee said, stroking his head between his horns. “I wish I could have seen them. When they were alive, I mean. They must have been magnificent.”

“In my memories they’re just… big. And warm.” They flew in quiet for a while longer before Chaz asked, “you saw… Red, right?”

“Looking just as he did when Da… when Giovanni killed him,” Saylee said around the lump in her throat. “Him too, I think…” She shivered, looking over her shoulder, half-expecting the ghosts to still be following.

“Well, he won’t be getting any revenge on you now,” Chaz assured her. “Or Ariana and Archer. And anybody living who wants to have a go…” He spat a brief gout of flame into the air.

“I know I have a team that could take down all of Team Rocket put together if I needed to,” Saylee said, smiling at him. “That’s why I’m in charge. But I’d rather not fight Fuchsia alone if I don’t have to.” She frowned thoughtfully. “Need to make sure there really wasn’t anybody properly loyal to Archer,” she murmured. “I don’t think there was anyone who was that fond of him personally, but I still don’t want to risk anybody retaliating. I could handle anybody attacking me, but if they decided to go after Roark… Proton would, he’s a psychopath. It makes him useful, but…”

“But he’s got Sabrina and her Alakazam to protect him now, right?” Chaz pointed out. “Isn’t that why you brought her from Saffron?”

“Well, that and growing up in a windowless box has to suck,” Saylee said, leaning down against Chaz’ back as he began his descent to Viridian. Seeing her home coming into sight settled her nerves somewhat; there were no ghosts down there, just her home, her base, her brother, her team—hers alone, now. Proton and Petrel were still admins, but they’d never been on the level of Ariana and Archer, and they knew it. They needed a boss to give them orders. They certainly weren’t taking Fuchsia without her.

Relief fully set in at the sight of Roark and Sabrina waiting on the roof for her, Pedro at Roark’s side, Aziz the Alakazam waiting next to Sabrina. Saylee knew she was more than a little paranoid, but Team Rocket was not staffed by trustworthy people, and she preferred to have her brother with her, where she could be certain of being able to protect him herself. Sabrina had latched onto Saylee like a Remoraid to a Mantine when Saylee had first taken the tiny psychic out of the manor where she’d been confined, frightened by the size of the world but grateful for being able to see it. Saylee knew
that the little girl’s attachment and gratitude made it unlikely that she’d ever try to hurt Saylee or Roark, which was why Saylee was willing to leave her only remaining brother under the young psychic’s protection, but the feeling was ever-present that Roark was her responsibility, and she could only trust herself to truly protect him.

“You’re back!” Roark called, running up to latch onto Saylee’s arm as she dismounted, pulling her towards the door into the compound. “You missed it! It was so badass!”

“Missed what?” Saylee asked, looking from Roark to Sabrina, who was shuffling her feet, looking more nervous than usual. “What happened?”

“There were ninjas!” Roark said excitedly.


“Calm down, doll, the kids ain’t hurt,” Pedro said, looking unruffled. “Fact is, they weren’t expectin’ the lil’ Glowball here!” Sabrina blushed at the sound of the pet name that Pedro had given her the first time he’d seen her psychic powers at work.

“Sabrina, you caught them?” Saylee asked.

“I heard them,” Sabrina said hesitantly. “Their minds. They poisoned the guards, and they were thinking about kidnapping Roark…”

“And then her eyes glowed and she slammed them into walls!” Roark burst out, grinning. “They had some Venomoth and stuff, but Abdul and Aziz wasted them! It was so cool!”

“They didn’t hurt either of you, did they?” Saylee asked, looking over Roark, nervously seeking potentially poisoned injuries.

“There is not a scratch on them, I assure you,” Aziz said calmly. “The infiltrators are imprisoned below with Abdul watching over them, should you wish to question them. There are two, a young man and a girl about your age.”
Saylee reached out, wrapping Sabrina into a hug. The girl tensed nervously for a moment before tentatively hugging back.

“Thank you, Sabrina,” Saylee breathed, relief melting into her very bones as she realized what they’d avoided. “You’re incredible.”

“You beat up ninjas,” Roark said.

“Pretty badass,” Chaz agreed. “Better than you’ve ever done against those poisonous bugs, Pedro.”

“Bite me, Pal.”

“I’m going to go question them just now,” Saylee said, letting Sabrina go but keeping one arm around her shoulders, the other wrapping around Roark’s as they headed for the staircase inside. “Any intel we can get on Fuchsia might help us finally take that bugs’ nest…” Then once we’re out of organized enemies in Kanto, I can worry about the West… “And if we go to Fuchsia,” she added, “how about you two come with me?”

“We get to travel with you?” Silver said, eyes widening. “Awesome!”

“Ya sure about this, Doll?” Pedro asked, flapping over to catch Saylee before she headed inside. “I mean, if yer hittin’ Fuchsia, Archer’ll be there too, right?”


Roark gaped at Saylee. “He’s dead?! he exclaimed. “Really?!”

“You’re lying,” Sabrina said softly, staring intently at Saylee. “You killed him.”

“I did,” Saylee agreed. She didn’t really know what the true extent of Sabrina’s powers were, but if she could sense lies, then there wasn’t much purpose in doing it—the last thing she wanted was to lose the girl’s trust. “He was just going to keep getting people killed unnecessarily just to get more power for himself. So I stopped him.”
“...I mean… it’s not a bad thing that he’s gone, is it?” Roark said hesitantly, looking at Sabrina. “He was an asshole.”

“You want power too,” Sabrina said, pointing at Saylee.

Out of the corner of her eye, Saylee saw Chaz and Pedro tense. She focused on Sabrina. “I want power because I want to protect my brother,” she said, “and I want to protect you too, Sabrina. I don’t want to control you, and I don’t think I could even if I did, because you’ve lived an awful life because of people trying to control your power. A lot of people in Kanto have been living awful lives for a very long time, and I just want to make things safe.” She tilted her head, looking Sabrina in the eye. “Am I lying?”

Sabrina stared back for a long moment, before shaking her head. She reached a hand out and took Saylee’s. “I want you to be safe too,” she said softly. “Are we safe?”

“We will be soon,” Saylee promised, reaching out with her other hand to take Roark’s. “You don’t have to be afraid of anything.”

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter of Dimensional Destruction is about two-thirds done, but then I suddenly figured out how Archer dies in this timeline so I had to write it out. With how much I’m generally struggling to write just now, I’ve got to write whatever demands to be written at any given moment. (Did anybody in this ’verse die naturally? I feel like everybody got backstabbed and murdered at some point….)
“Oh my fucking god,” Saylee groaned, sinking her head into her hands and spreading her fingers just enough to glare viciously at her d20, innocently sitting on the table and displaying a traitorous 2.

“At least it wasn’t a nat 1 again,” Silver sniggered. “What did you do to piss off the RNG this much?”

Steven’s wince was deepening as he tapped at the keys of his calculator behind his divider. “What is that face?” Blue demanded, putting his hand over his character figure protectively, like it was in any danger on the opposite side of the map from the Explosion that a wild Graveler had rolled up--though if he rolled as consistently bad as Saylee, that might actually be a possibility.

“Just lay it on me,” Saylee mumbled, covering her eyes again.

Steven sighed, carefully writing out his math and sliding it over to Saylee. Sitting on top of it was his own d20, showing--

“Natural 20?! Are you fucking kidding me?!” Silver shrieked, high-pitched enough that his hamsters started squeaking loudly in their travel cage. He spun around in his seat to mutter soothingly to them in between muttering invectives about Steven’s rolling skills.

“Language, Silver,” Red said absentmindedly.

“You didn’t tell her off,” Silver complained, pointing at Saylee.
“Family rules: when you’re old enough to drink, you’re old enough to swear all you like,” Red said, glancing up from the character sheets he was working on. “Please tell me that’s not Saylee’s character dead too. The party hasn’t even found my character’s body yet.”

“She’s not in the blast radius, but Peggy, Chaz, Tobias and Mary are,” Steven said apologetically. “Mary’s furthest out, she only takes quarter-damage, Chaz and Tobias are a little closer so they take half-damage, but Peggy’s right in the direct blast radius so…”

“Peggy’s dead,” Saylee groaned, scribbling HP notes on her character sheets and reluctantly moving her Pidgeot token from the board to what she called her graveyard and what Silver insisted on calling “the corpse pile”. “I’m gonna have to make a sub-pile--sub- graveyard for Explosion and Selfdestruct deaths. That’s the fifth this campaign!”

“Fourth on this map alone,” Blue observed. “Do you want to try my dice? I’d offer to trade but yours are definitely cursed.”

“I think we should just ban Explosion,” Silver said, glowering at Steven.

The DM raised his hands defensively. “I just get the movesets out of the rulebook,” he said. “If it makes you feel any better, that also damaged the Golem leader, and they’re all unsettled. Their defenses are lowered. Do you want to keep attacking?”

“Not if they’re all packing Explosion,” Saylee said, rifling through her character sheets. “Toby has ridiculously high Charisma now. Can I roll diplomacy?”

“It’s worth a shot,” Steven encouraged her. “I mean, it can’t be worse than--have I told you about the postgrad game I DM on Thursday nights? If you think you roll badly, you should see their Diplomacy rolls. They’ve split up into two factions who’re both trying to summon different gods and they spend too much time feuding with each other to actually do it or follow any of the million goddamn plotlines I spent ages seeding all over that map. You guys want to join them next semester? The undergrad game doesn’t seem to be picking up any new members. Might mix things up a little.”

“If I get on the postgrad exchange course I’ll probably in another country all next year,” Red said apologetically.

“Have you decided where you want to go?” Steven asked him. Red just gave an exaggerated shrug.
“We’ll come! We’ll kick their asses,” Silver cackled.

“You’re not going to a club with postgrads that we don’t know,” Red interjected. “And anyway, you can’t come over on Thursday nights, you’ll miss school on Friday.”

“Well, couldn’t you just move the postgrad night to Fridays if you’re not having an undergrad game?” Silver pleaded with Steven.

“Maybe, but I’d still need their permission and, y’know, agreement from the postgrads that they won’t tell the student union that a non-student is attending the Games Club,” Steven said.

“I’d really want to go to a couple of sessions with them to see what they’re like before letting you come play,” Saylee said, raising a hand to show her d20. “Now hush and pray for my soul while I roll.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to borrow mine?” Blue asked as Steven held out the box lid, presenting it in a ceremonial manner. Saylee just gave him a look and rolled.

“Oh wow,” Steven gasped.

“Holy f--elt tip pens!” Silver yelped.

“What happened?” Red said, standing up and staring at the dice.

Saylee raised her hands. “Nat 20,” she said, picking up her Togekiss token and kissing it. “Bless you, Toby, you most blessed of Pokemon.”

“Tobias pleads to the goodness and desire for calm that he believes lies at the core of every living being’s soul, and if that goodness wasn’t there before then it sure as hell is now,” Steven intones. “The leader Golem agrees that Chaz and his children have the right to a home and promise to respect their territory from now on. The whole gang leaves peacefully.”
“I’m going to play the entire rest of the game just rolling Diplomacy through Toby,” Saylee said.

“Your dice are militant pacifists that punish you for violence and reward you for peacefulness,” Blue said in an affected tone of piety, raising his hands in mock-prayer. “Either that or the RNG listened to our pleas to finally have some fucking mercy on your soul.”

“Your dice are militant pacifists that punish you for violence and reward you for peacefulness,” Blue said in an affected tone of piety, raising his hands in mock-prayer. “Either that or the RNG listened to our pleas to finally have some fucking mercy on your soul.”

“So what’re you doing for your next character anyway?” Silver asked as they walked back to the poky student flat that Saylee, Red, Blue and Daisy were splitting. He had his hamsters’ travel cage in his arms with his own jacket thrown over it to keep them warm and Saylee’s jacket around his shoulders.

“So what’re you doing for your next character anyway?” Silver asked as they walked back to the poky student flat that Saylee, Red, Blue and Daisy were splitting. He had his hamsters’ travel cage in his arms with his own jacket thrown over it to keep them warm and Saylee’s jacket around his shoulders.

“Dunno… I like that avatar character concept that Steven’s working on,” Red said with a shrug. “Maybe somebody a little mystical this time.. If I get on the postgrad exchange program next year it’s not like I’ll be here to play, anyway. I’ll have plenty of time to figure out some concepts, maybe take some inspiration from the myths I’m studying.”

“That’s what skype is for,” Silver insisted. “C’mon, you’re only going to, like, Norway or something, right? That’s no time difference, you could totally skype in!”

“Egypt’s pretty tempting, actually,” Red said thoughtfully. “Way warmer, too.”

“Also no time difference, right?”

“Also no time difference, right?”

“Technically you’re not supposed to be allowed to attend any of the clubs at our uni because you’re not a student, so don’t push it,” Saylee warned him, ruffling his hair affectionately.

“…right, good luck,” Blue said, hanging up the call he was on and shoving his phone back into his pocket as he jogged up to get back in step with the other three, slinging an arm over Saylee’s shoulders. “Daisy said she left some lasagna in the oven to keep it warm, but if we leave it for too long it’ll go dry and then there’ll be nothing for it but to spend the rest of our lives repenting our sins, so how’s about we dawdle a little faster?”

“I can’t wait until she’s done with night classes,” Silver grumbled. “Is she ever around at all this semester?”
“Between her vet assistant job and doing all the coursework she needs for her PhD… no, and she also doesn’t sleep, she is a being who exists entirely because of coffee and granola bars,” Blue sighed. “She needs to chill and let the rest of us do some more cooking.”

“She doesn’t let any of us cook because I set fire to spaghetti, Red set fire to oven pizza and you nearly gassed us all when you turned the hob on and didn’t light it,” Saylee pointed out. “And then you noticed that you’d left it on and tried to light it. If I hadn’t smelled gas and tackled you out of the kitchen…”

“I can make salad,” Red suggested.

“I’m starting to think you’d manage to set fire to it anyway,” Silver muttered. “She does know take-out food exists, right?”

“I did suggest that once, and she said we’d probably be healthier eating your hamsters’ food,” Blue said. “She also said anybody bringing take-out to the flat doesn’t get back into the flat. We have to eat our Domino’s pizza and fry-ups in hidden corners of campus while she’s at work, secretively, fearful of her wrath.”

“You said she’s never in the flat,” Silver pointed out.

“She would know,” Blue insisted, wide-eyed with exaggerated fear. “She’d smell the grease in the air, or she’d sense a disturbance in the Force or something. Trust me, I’ve lived with her all my life, and she would know.”

“She would,” Red agreed, getting his keys out as they came up to their block of flats and all gave the requisite baleful look to the staircase before starting up to their fourth-floor flat.

“Every other flat here smells of pizza,” Silver pointed out after a couple of floors. “Or weed.”

“Sssshhh,” Saylee said. “We promised Mum we wouldn’t let you get corrupted from the mere presence of Uni students.”

Silver wrinkled his nose. “I already knew about weed,” he said. “And swearing. And--”
“Go feed your hamsters,” Red said, unlocking their door. “And wash your hands after you do. I’ll get the lasagna out.”

Saylee followed Silver into the glorified cubicle that passed for her bedroom. Like most student flats, already-small rooms had been subdivided into even smaller rooms to cram more bedrooms—and therefore more paying renters—into the space. When Silver stayed over for the weekend, he and his contraband hamsters stayed in Saylee’s room. Saylee slung his weekend bag over the back of her desk chair while Silver dug out the hamsters’ larger cage and started filling their food bowl before transferring them over.

“You know, after Mom and Ron find a place, you probably won’t have to stay over here on the weekends anymore anyway,” Saylee pointed out, taking Silver’s jacket off of the hamsters’ travel cage. “Mom’s quitting one of her jobs. I mean, Ron’s got two too, it’s not like he’s gonna be able to get a mining job again, but still, I bet they could arrange things so at least one of them’s around on the weekends.”

“Don’t you and Red want me to hang out anymore?” Silver said, looking startled.

“Oh, no no no, that’s not what I meant,” Saylee said quickly, recognizing the look of fear in his eyes. “Silver, we love having you around, I just mean that it’s a long train journey, and if you’d rather get more time to play with kids from school, spend some time with kids your own age instead of uni students…”

“The kids my own age are all assholes,” Silver grumbled, dropping the bag of hamster food back into Saylee’s desk drawer and slamming it closed. “I don’t wanna hang out with them. I wanna hang out with you and Red.”

“And you’re welcome to as long as you like,” Saylee said, giving him a hug.

He relaxed into it a second before shaking Saylee off, grumbling, “I’m not a baby, lemme go, I gotta move the hamsters.”

Chapter End Notes

Day 1 wordcount achieved! I always forget quite how many words 1667 a day is, but I ended up going over anyway so it’s all good XD So I finally have a second AU idea that I came up with as a result of playing Pathfinder for the first time this year and loving
it, even if I keep rolling shit saves. I just imagined Saylee’s string of Explosion deaths being the result of a string of nat 1s and what is basically a very nerdy university AU came from that XD Is this a recursive AU, since Pokemon is an RPG anyway…? I wanted to make dumb jokes about bad dice rolls and Steven being a DM whose ideas always go haywire and then I kept building from it. I think the postgame section is longer than the game section...

So, I have a few more ideas for scenes in this AU that’ll turn up through this month. In this one, at this time, Saylee’s a second-year undergrad doing a BA in Politics; Blue’s a third-year undergrad doing Athletic Training (he’s gonna be a professional trainer geddit); Red’s in his Honours year studying Mythology and is hoping to do a postgrad; Steven, the DM, is a postgrad doing a PhD in Geology; Daisy is also a postgrad getting her PhD in veterinary medicine and she’s making money and getting some of her course credits by working as a vet assistant; and Silver’s a primary-school kid who stays with his big siblings on the weekends and brings his three hamsters with him :P

Anyway, good luck to everybody else doing NaNoWriMo! Let’s do this! (In the NaNoWriMo spirit, this is entirely unedited, so if it’s messy I apologize, but I won’t go back and edit until the end of the month :P )
“Do you think it should be more sheltered?” Chaz asked, straightening the segments of the armour plating on his wings. The armourer who’d originally made his armour still lived in the Sevii Islands and it was a long flight to visit him, but he’d designed the armour to be expandable as Chaz kept growing—which he was going to, if the Golem and Graveler in the area were going to keep trying to hold far more surface territory than they needed—and regularly sent new pieces to Professor Oak. He was regularly adding to and adjusting his armour as a result, but that was no detriment to its strength, thankfully.

“It’s fine, Chaz,” Carla said soothingly. The Clefable patted his side soothingly. “There’s plenty of space for all of them to be in out of the damp if it rains. You can carve out more if you need to.”

“Yes, but I want everything ready before I go get them,” Chaz said, scratching at the rocks. “I want them to feel safe, you know?”

“They are safe,” Carla said. “You’re going to be great at looking after them.”

“Am, I, though?” Chaz sighed, settling down full-length on the ground, his head lying next to Carla and peering up at her. “I only have the faintest memories of living here as a baby. I knew there was a Char clan up here but I lived at a lab, I don’t remember why. I don’t remember how adults look after the young. Can they start eating charcoal right out of the egg, or do they eat something else? Do they need meat, or berries? Can I groom their scales the same way? Do they need to be kept warmer? Do they need help fuelling their tails? I don’t know and nobody else can remember!”

“Calm down,” Carla said, a little more forcefully. “You know how to look after you. Baby Pokemon aren’t fragile, you know, not like little humans. If you’re so unsure, maybe go speak to those smart human friends of yours who know how to make baby Pokemon without parents?”
Chaz leaned his head to one side, staring thoughtfully at Carla. “My trainer had a thing called a Pokedex,” he said. “She could read all sorts of information about Pokemon on it, like how they grow and evolve. Professor Oak gave it to her. He might have something that can tell me more about looking about baby Charmander.”

“See?” Carla giggled, patting him on the head. “Stay calm, think carefully, and you know what to do. You’ll be just fine.”

“You’re not using some kind of calming Clefable power on me, are you?” Chaz asked.

“Is it a problem if I am?”

“...Thanks.”

The flight path from Mt Moon to Pallet Town was a familiar one by now. The miners on the west side of the mountain had gotten used to the huge orange fire-type flying overhead. He saw Johanna wave at him from her lunch stall in Pewter City, and children both human and Pokemon chased his shadow, shrieking with laughter. Viridian Forest was looking a little better with the amount of dead plants that he’d cleared out to burn to charcoal, even with the still-living trees and plants still bearing the tint of poison that was still sunk in the earth and flowing in the water in Kanto. Viridian was more sparsely populated than Pewter, most of the population working in the forest during the day, but the traders in the town square still looked up as he passed over. Some smiled; some scowled. Not everybody was happy with the fall of Rocket, especially those who had been turning a profit from working for them.

He could no longer fit through any of the entrances to the lab—and there were considerably fewer now that most of the holes in the walls and ceiling had been successfully patched—but Daisy Oak opened a window for him, allowing him to stick his head through and peer into the messy lab space. It was almost soothing in its messiness because the clutter wasn’t the leftovers of war, or an abandoned place slowly crumbling; the room was packed with every book, piece of paper and stray piece of technology that Professor Oak had been able to lay hands on. It wasn’t decaying anymore, it was packed with ideas and development and, now, fifteen glowing vats from Lavender Plateau, each softly beeping as lights flashed across the displays set into their sides while the baby Charmander incubated inside. In the beginning, the sight of the tiny blobs of cells slowly turning into little Pokemon had been weird and a bit unsettling, but now that they were fully formed and only a few days from “hatching”, the just looked like normal, sleepy baby Charmander, albeit ones whose tails weren’t lit. Thankfully, they kept moving slightly in their sleep, keeping them from looking dead.
Professor Oak had already assured Chaz that their tails would light when they took their first breaths, and, when Chaz had panicked that they weren’t breathing, explained that the gel that they were sleeping in was a chemical mixture designed to mimic the mix inside of an egg that developing baby Pokemon breathed until they were fully grown, the egg was emptied and they were ready to hatch from the now-hollow shell. Chaz didn’t quite understand how anybody breathed gel, but the Professor knew lots about Pokemon and the baby Charmander did look just fine and were clearly still alive, so he was willing to take the elderly human’s word on it.

“How are you, Chaz?” Daisy said, leaning against a desk and smiling at him.

“Nervous,” Chaz admitted.

“First-time parents often are, I hear,” Daisy teased. “Do you have things ready at Mt Moon?”

“I don’t know,” Chaz sighed, huffing warm air into the room. “I’ve gotten the rock gangs to leave me alone, for now, and I know I can deal with them if I have to, I’ve got charcoal stashed and a good cave, but… well, I just wish I could remember living in a clan better. I wish I could remember how Charmeleon and Charizard raise our young. It isn’t just that I’m worried that I’ll do something wrong and not look after them properly, it’s just… how do I teach them? What do I teach them? We must have had stories, but I don’t know any of them. I don’t know anything about what our community would’ve been like, or our culture, or… I don’t know anything.”

“Oh, Chaz…” Daisy stroked his head, gently scratching the base of his horns. Chaz closed his eyes, enjoying the feeling.

“I just never thought about it before,” Chaz said softly. “I knew there was a clan up there, but I don’t really remember anything about it, so it wasn’t really a real thing, you know? But soon it’s going to be real again, and I’m thinking for the first time about everything that’s gone.”

“You’ve lost so much that you didn’t even know you had,” Daisy said. “And now you’re trying to rebuild a society that you know nothing about. I wish I could figure out a way to bring that back, but… we’ve looked for other Chars out in the world, but there aren’t many, and we haven’t found any that grew up in a clan. They all went to labs or trainers very young, like you did. Maybe we’ll find something someday, but…” She started massaging Chaz’s neck, soothing muscles that he hadn’t even realized were tense. “We can help you figure out the proper care of them, anyway. We’ve got enough info on how to feed them and groom them and so on that we can definitely help you with, anything you need to know. As for the rest…” She paused and Chaz opened his eyes. She patted his nose with a smile. “Even if you’re nervous, you look very contented when you look at them,” she said, waving a hand at the vats. “You care about them. You love them. You’ve already got the complicated part covered. You might not know the old Char stories, but you’ve been a lot of places and done a lot of things that I bet most Charizard before didn’t, so you’ve got plenty of new stories to
tell them. You and them can build a whole new culture together.” She went back to massaging his neck. “I’m sorry we didn’t preserve what you lost,” she continued quietly, “but I don’t think these babies are going to be missing out on anything.”


“You’re not alone, Chaz,” Daisy promised. “You’re not the only one who cares about these babies. You have all the support you need. You only have to ask.”

Chaz chuckled. “Carla’s been telling me something similar,” he said. “The Clefs are all really friendly. I could always ask them to tell the Charmander some Clef stories if I run out of ideas.”

“I think I’d like to hear some Clef stories,” Daisy laughed. “I’d love to see them dance. I hear it’s beautiful.”

“It is,” Chaz hummed. There was a distant crash somewhere else in the lab building that made Daisy look around sharply. “I’ve been meaning to ask,” Chaz said, looking up, “where is the Professor?”

“He got given some kind of machine from Indigo Plateau to try and figure out what it does,” Daisy said. “So far, all it does is rattle noisily and give off sparks when you try to do anything with it. He’s keeping it in a different room from the babies just in case. I’m going to go see if he’s okay.” She patted one of the vats as she walked past. “Keep an eye on them,” she said with a smile.

“That’s my job,” Chaz said, watching the Charmander’s tails wave gently in their sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Set in mid-to-late Blood and Bond, just before the Chaz goes back to living on Mt Moon with the new, cloned baby Charmander. Being a first-time parent’s gotta be especially nerve-wracking when you don’t remember being parented, and very much so when you’ve lost your species and your culture and aren’t sure who to turn to. Thankfully, Daisy Oak is a perpetually relaxing presence XD

This one’s a few words under, but I was a fair bit over yesterday so I think it’s all good. Second day success!
Melody tried to focus on the distant peal of alarms as she sat in her cell, wondering if they were all Galactic alarms or if Sinnan police sirens sounded different from Johton ones. Probably not, she decided, listening to her sister-in-law comforting her children in the next cell over. If there really were Sinnan police sirens outside, Maggie would certainly have mentioned it when trying to reassure Basil and Jumana. She could also hear the Court twins speaking to each other, but their cell was further away so she could hear no more than a faint murmur of their voices. She waited for the guards to come banging on their cell doors to tell them to shut up, but it never happened.

She glanced up to the security camera in the corner as she slowly stood up. There was nothing in the cell but her and the mat and blanket that served as her bed. She walked up to the small window set into her cell door, and, when no angry voice issued from the mic under the camera, telling her to get away through the door, she peered out the window. She couldn’t see much of the hall, no matter what angle she craned her neck at to peer through, but she couldn’t see any sign of the guards outside, and there were still no shouts for the prisoners to keep quiet.

“HEY!” she shouted, rapping on the window. “HEEEEEEEEEEEY! ANYBODY OUT THERE?!”

Milo Hunter’s startled face appeared at the window of the cell across the hall, but even after several minutes of shouting and rapping, no guards were forthcoming.

“Mel?” she heard Maggie shout through the wall between their cells. “Mel, what are you doing?”

“Whatever’s going on, there’s no guards!” Melody called back. “Nobody’s watching the security cameras, either!”
“You think somebody might be coming to release us?” Milo called, his voice more muffled by the glass, steel and space of the hall than Maggie’s was by the dividing cell wall.

“If they’re not, it’s the perfect time to release ourselves!” Diana Court said brightly, trotting into view down the hall. “Hold on, Professor Hawkshaw, I’ll be with you in a jiff!” She crouched in front of Hunter’s door as her twin followed her into view.

“We took the fact that nobody had come to shut you up to mean that there weren’t any guards around,” Phoebus explained, finger-combing back his long fringe, which was almost greasy enough to stick up on its own. Like the rest of the prisoners, they looked like they hadn’t had a shower since they’d been kidnapped—they were taken for toilet trips, but not shower facilities.

“How’s she getting through the doors?” Melody asked, watching Hunter’s door swing open and Diana spring away from the locking mechanism, waving her hands with a theatrical flourish.

“A true magician never reveals her secrets!” Diana said perkily, bouncing over to Melody’s door. “Ladies and gentlemen, as you see I have nothing up my sleeves, because the creepers with weird hair who kidnapped me took all my stuff…”

Within a couple of minutes, Melody’s door was open and Diana was starting on Maggie’s. Melody stretched as she stepped out into the hall, looking around curiously. A small handful of other people were milling around, some of which she thought she might have seen around before. “I didn’t realize that many people were imprisoned here,” she said.

“You appear to be the only one here on your own merits,” Hunter said, looking around. “That’s… the DA’s daughter, he’s a prominent police captain’s husband, she’s the younger sister of another prosecutor in my office…” He hurried off to comfort a frightened-looking younger woman. Melody turned just in time to see Maggie, Basil and Jumana being released from their cell.

“Are you three okay?” Melody asked, going to embrace her sister-in-law, niece and nephew.

“Ready to go home,” Maggie said fervently. “I don’t hear any police sirens, but if we’re going to escape, now’s the time, right?”

“It is,” Melody agreed. “And I remember the way to the lab they took me to for the project that they’re working on, at least. It involves going through a few teleporters and at least one took us aboveground—I saw a window. If we can get there, we can figure out a way outside from there.”
“Sounds like a plan,” Phoebus said, folding his arms and nodding. “Di, is that everyone?”

“Yep, all cells cleared!” Diana said, saluting. “Lead the way, Prof!”

“This way,” Melody said, peering out of the door at the end of the hallway and, on seeing another empty corridor, leading the group of escapees down to the teleporters at the end, retracing the route she’d been taken to the lab.

*The lab…*

Three teleports took them to the hall she remembered, with a window outside. “Hey, we’re only a floor up!” Diana said, running over to the window. “Hey, Bussy, you think this is high enough to make Dad puke?”

“Yeah, but that’s Dad,” Phoebus said thoughtfully, following her over. “We’re right over a canopy over a door, too! I think it’s a short enough drop if I lower myself out the window--here, get it open, let me try--”

“Let me try,” an older man said. “I’m a cop, it’s not the first time I’ve had to drop out of a window like this, I know how to land it. I can catch the next couple of people down--”

Melody hung back as several other prisoners gathered around the window, trying to figure out how to open it and arranging an order to climb out and drop down. “Mel?” Maggie asked. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m not going yet, Maggie,” Melody said quietly. “I can’t. What they’re doing in that lab--I have to stop it. If we weren’t guarded, it might not be either.”

“But what if it is?” Maggie asked. “You can’t go alone. I’m going with you.”

“Maggie, no, you don’t have to--” Melody began.
The brunette ignored her. “Basil, look after your sister,” she ordered her teenaged son. “Find your
dad and let him know that your auntie and I are okay and we’ll be out soon, okay?”

“Maggie, go with your kids,” Melody insisted. “I’ll be okay!”

“Mel, I’m a cop,” Maggie said, knocking her glasses slightly askew as she saluted. “Even without
my Pokemon, I can fight, and I’m not leaving family behind in here. Besides, once the rest of the
prisoners get out and know we’re free, I’m sure Richie’ll be leading quite the rescue squad!”

“We’ll find him as soon as possible,” Hunter promised.

“Be careful,” Jumana admonished her mother solemnly, giving her a hug.

“Have fun!” Diana said cheerfully, finally popping open the window. “Ta-daaaa! Who wants to
jump out the window first?”

“This way,” Melody said, leading Maggie down the corridor to the next teleport pad.

There were two more jumps before she got to the lab, and the first one got them to their first Galactic
guard. “Hey!” she shouted, grabbing a pokeball from her belt when she spotted Maggie and Melody.
“What’re you--?”

“Hi-YAH!” Maggie shouted, grabbing the Galactic’s wrist and wrenching the pokeball from it while
flipping the woman over her head. “Get her belt,” she said quickly. “Don’t let her get another
pokeball!”

“The last time you visited Johto, you tripped over the single step from the street to our front door,”
Melody pointed out, taking the Galactic’s pokeballs from the belt.

“You can’t use aikido to climb stairs,” Maggie sighed sadly, taking the now-empty belt and using it
to tie the guard’s hands behind her back. “Just wait patiently for the police to come get you, okay?”
she said. “Okay, where to now?”

“This way,” Melody said, pocketing her pokeballs. “This is the last teleporter.”
“Onwards, then!” Maggie said brightly as the two of them stepped onto the teleport pad together. The world fuzzed briefly, taking them inside the lab, where there were no Galactics in sight, but--

“Bel?” Melody whispered, staring at the figure sprawled in the middle of a puddle of blood in the middle of the lab floor.

“Oh my god,” Maggie gasped, running to his side. “He’s still breathing!” she called, pulling off her jacket and pressing it to his neck. “His airway isn’t damaged, just the artery, but he’s already lost a lot of blood!”

“Oh gods,” Mel gasped, managing to make it over to them before collapsing to her knees, taking over the job of pressing Maggie’s jacket to her husband’s neck. “Maggie, we need--he’s unconscious, we can’t carry him and hold this on his neck--”

“Stay here with him, I’ll go back and see if there’s anybody who hasn’t gone out the window yet who can help us carry him out,” Maggie said, getting to her feet and running back to the teleport pad. “Just hang in there!”

Melody pressed the jacket harder to the jagged laceration in her husband’s neck, struggling to breathe herself. “Bel, please hang on,” she begged. “Please, please, don’t do this to me, we’re getting out, we’re going home, please just hang on, please be okay, Bel, please --”

“Me… lo…?” Bel whispered faintly, cracking his eyes open. “Me…”

“I’m here, sweetie, I’m here,” Melody said, trying not to cry and failing. “You’re gonna be okay, please hang on--”

“Mel… chay… chain…” he choked out. “...red… took…”

“The Red Chain?” Melody asked. “Bel, don’t worry about it, please, we’ll--”

He grabbed her wrist. “She… took… chain…” he said heavily and deliberately. “Not… Cy… her…”
“Her who--no, it doesn’t matter, just hang in there,” Melody pleaded with him. “Please don’t talk, just… just hang on…”

“...found… you…” he mumbled, his eyes sliding closed again. “Mel…”

“Please hang on,” Melody begged, feeling his blood soaking into the legs of her trousers and trying not to think about how much was already pooled around her. “Please... ”

His grip on her wrist slowly weakened. She watched his breathing with her heart in her mouth as he fell unconscious again, praying with all her heart for the return of Maggie, of anyone, for him to just keep breathing, stop bleeding, please be okay...

By the time Maggie got back with Milo Hunter and the DA’s daughter in tow, Beladonis Hawkshaw had not been breathing for four minutes and was not responding to CPR. He never did.

Chapter End Notes

Two happy, sweet oneshots in a row took a lot out of me, I had to do something utterly awful to restore balance to the universe. Contrasting the survival of a character who dies in the main timeline with the death of one who usually lives, especially mirroring the manner of death, is interesting to me. You know, most of the Mirror, Mirror oneshots aren’t from Saylee’s perspective, but I think this is the first one that doesn’t directly feature her at all.

The next three days I’m going to be in London for a job interview so I won’t be able to type up and post the next three days’ oneshots, but I’ll get them posted on Monday. Wish me luck! (Do I deserve it after this…?)
Long Walks On The Beach

Chapter Summary

NaNoWriMo Day: Friday, November 4th, 2016
Title: Long Walks On The Beach
Words: 1509

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Eusine winced as he felt rain hit his face, though perhaps it was sea spray, going by the strong scent of salt and the sound of crashing waves. Either way, his suit--his best suit, dammit--was definitely ruined. If he’d told me we were going on a hike instead of to dinner, I would've worn a more durable suit, he thought, shrinking under his cape. Then again, Morty had also put on a suit under his dark purple woolen longcoat, so there hadn’t been much to indicate that they were apparently going for a picnic for dinner rather than a restaurant.

“Sorry about that,” Morty said, putting an arm around Eusine’s shoulders and pulling him a little closer. “Stick close. No peeking!”

“Even with the blindfold on, I saw the green flash,” Eusine warned. “If I can’t ask where are we, can I ask when are we?”

“Nope,” Morty said cheerily. “Walk carefully, the streets are damp.”

“That wouldn’t be because it’s bucketing with rain, is it?” Eusine asked. “Is that rain or Kyogre in a foul temper? I can hear waves…”

“I’m sure you do,” Morty said. “Just stick close and I’ll keep the umbrella over your head, okay?”

“Gladly,” Eusine said, tucking his cloak a little more tightly around his shoulders. Now that he knew it definitely was raining, he could pick out the sound of raindrops drumming violently against the umbrella out from the crash of what sounded like huge waves. “Why on earth didn’t we go to a day with better weather? This is not exactly a romantic anniversary mood, darling, nor is it doing my suit any good whatsoever.”
“Wait and see,” Morty said. “We’re almost there… ahh, I think this might be a good spot. The awning’s holding up pretty well.” He untied the blindfold around Eusine’s eyes. His sight adjusted quickly to the dim, the rainclouds so heavy that it was almost pitch-black out--at least until a bolt of lightning threw into sharp relief the empty cafe ahead of them, its awning out front sagging under the weight of the rain but indeed still intact. The accompanying rumble of thunder from directly above their heads was more felt than heard.

“Hello?” called a figure who was huddled against the wall, the hood of their pale blue raincoat pulled far over their face and their arms folded across their chest, hands tucked into their armpits for warmth. “I’ve gotta warn you folks, this place seems to be both empty and locked up tight…”

“Mind if we stand under the awning with you?” Morty asked, shaking out the umbrella a little as they stepped under the shelter. Despite the noise of the rain and waves, there wasn’t much in the way of wind, so there was a space under the awning that was dry, if chilly. Another flash of lightning illuminated the tall, churning waves, and a large ship that was struggling with them. Even it seemed shaken by the thunder.

“Welcome in,” the hooded guy said wryly, peering up. It was too dark to see his face, though Eusine thought he might have heard his voice somewhere before. “Didn’t think I’d see anybody else out in this storm. You’re not from around here, are you?”

“Just passing through,” Morty said. “Are you local?”

“Not really, but I’ve been staying in a hotel on the other side of town for the past few weeks,” the stranger said. “I prefer to travel on foot, but the weather just hasn’t been good enough to leave. Seems like Lugia’s in a bit of a mood, eh?”

“I hope not,” Morty said, folding up the umbrella and setting it against the wall. “Those waves are bad enough without whirlpools springing up…”

“Perhaps we ought to have just booked a table at the Golden Plate instead,” Eusine muttered, holding out his cape to wrap around both his and Morty’s shoulders as they huddled for warmth.

“Sssh,” Morty said, putting a finger to his lips with a smirk. “Watch the ship.” Eusine peered through the gloom. His eyes were adjusting a little, but it was still hard to make out any more than huge shapes moving in the darkness, like giants battling. His imagination painted Kyogre fighting Groudon, Reshiram struggling with Zekrom, Regigigas towing mountains through the waves, even
Lugia whipping up a divine frenzy against whatever had pissed the tetchy bastard off this time. If it weren’t for the lack of whirlpools, he might’ve thought it really was Lugia in a towering rage.

But the only god out in the darkness was huddled under Eusine’s cloak with him. All that was out on the sea was a struggling ship, and he couldn’t fathom why his husband had brought him out in a storm to see that. A man who can see the future always has a plan, and I love him dearly, but sometimes I wish he wasn’t so damned cryptic...

“I’ve been watching it for a while,” the stranger said in concern, “and it really looks like any minute it’s going to--HOLY SHIT!”

To Eusine’s horror, a tall wave broadsided the ship, sending it slamming sideways into the rocks, the whole scene lit by another thread of lightning spreading across the sky and turning everything from night to day in that one horrifying instant that seemed to stretch on and on as rock tore open metal, spreading the gigantic ship across the shoreline. He turned to stare at Morty, who was watching the sea intently. “MORTY, WHAT THE HELL ARE WE DOING HERE?!?” he yelled, struggling to be heard over the roaring thunder. “You knew this would happen, right?! So what are we doing just watching?! Did you bring me here just to watch a ship crash?!”

“No,” Morty said, pointing, “I brought you to see that.”

Eusine looked where Morty was pointing and felt the breath leave his body.

Suicune was standing atop a wave, lit by a soft blue glow that was spreading over the water under their feet as the wave rolled slowly and gently towards the shore.

As the wave approached the fallen ship, Suicune ran down it. Wherever their paws touched down, churning black water glowed light blue and began to calm. The sea was stilling and clearing in Suicune’s wake, turning as flat and clear as glass. In the glow Eusine could see oil spilling from the broken ship. The oil, too, cleared and vanished under Suicune’s paws as clear calm spread across the angry sea. The water had gone so clear that under its glowing surface, Eusine could see the crowds of Shellder and Cloyster that lived near the shore peeking out from their shells, a shoal of Magikarp swimming closer to the surface as the water calmed, all the way down to the Krabby and Kingler scuttling about the ocean floor, seeming close enough to touch through the impossibly clear water. Rain continue to fall and lightning to branch across the sky, trailing rumbles of thunder, but it did not affect the now-calmed ocean, nor Suicune, who trotted across the placid water and into the now-beached ship.

“She’ll save the sailors,” Morty said softly. “According to history, nobody dies here today. Instead,
they see the most beautiful thing they’ll ever see. Eusine, are you okay?"

Tears were flowing down Eusine’s cheeks. He grabbed Morty and pulled him close, resting his head on his husband’s shoulder so he could hug the blond without taking his eyes off of the shining sea and the blue light that occasionally shone through the portholes on the ship and the breaks in the hull.

“IT’s more beautiful than I ever imagined,” he sobbed, unable to stop smiling. “So incredible! So powerful! So calming, so kind, so… so… so…!”

Morty kissed the tears off of Eusine’s cheeks. “I remember the way you glowed when you talked about that painting, the day we met,” he said quietly. “I always wished I could take you to see it for real… and now I can."

“The painting… oh!” Eusine gasped, looking around as he suddenly realized where he’d heard the stranger’s voice before--on an old, old interview recording, slightly fuzzed by age and the nature of the old-fashioned recording media used to make it. The glowing sea faintly illuminated the stranger distantly running along the shoreline. “Is he…?"

“About to go home, flushed with inspiration, and paint your favourite painting of Suicune? Yep,” Morty chuckled, leaning his forehead against Eusine’s. “Not that we’re on the right day anymore, but… happy anniversary, love.”

“I love you more than I can ever possibly express,” Eusine said, grabbing Morty and kissing him deeply. By the time they’d finally parted, the sea glow was fading, and even the rain was starting to calm down a little. “You bastard,” Eusine chuckled softly.

“Because I got your suit wet?” Morty asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Not that, even though I did put on my best suit and it most certainly is ruined!” Eusine exclaimed in exasperation. “It’s just that exactly how am I supposed to top this?!"

Chapter End Notes

A little under word count, but I couldn’t stretch this out any more and didn’t really want to. For Incasa/Cresselian, who asked for some Morty/Eusine!
I’m going to get to work catching up with the oneshots I didn’t get written while I was in London. Things I did get in London: some cool pictures at Madame Tussaud’s, an original cast recording CD of In The Heights, a scythe I caught at midnight on Euston Road and, oh yeah, A JOB IN A JAPAN! After a year and a half of job hunting, I’m going to be teaching in Tokyo starting next April! Writing is extremely difficult while unstoppably victory dancing, but I’m too jazzed to sleep for about a week anyway :D
Bri had spoken to Celebi avatars a few times before she got her own god, and they'd all described time travel as simply visualizing the *when* and *where* and then… being there. Easy as blinking.

It wasn’t that time travel wasn’t also easy for Dialga, just… stranger. More intense. It wasn’t just portalling from one point to another; the whole fourth plane was visible to her, some parts faint as mist, some more solid and real than anything of the first three dimensions put together. The previous Dialga had tried to explain how it worked to her somewhat when he knew that it would soon be time for her to inherit Dialga, but…

“You were right,” she said, moving through time like a swimmer swimming upstream, “you have to see it to understand it, and even then you don’t.”

She could hear him chuckle in her mind, and not just because she had a vivid memory; some of *him* was still tangled up in Dialga, and was as much a part of her as the god was. *But you know what you’re doing,* he said, more like he was reassuring her than like he was asking.

“Well, I don’t know if I really understand what I’m doing it, but I feel like I’m doing it right,” she said, trying to focus on when she wanted to go. “Have you ever done this?”

*I… did not travel backwards often,* he told her hesitantly. In that moment, she *knew* why, in the same way that she *knew* how to navigate the temporal plane despite having never done so herself. His memories, his experiences, his knowledge; they were all *there,* an extension of herself. The grief and pain that resulted from trying to change a past that couldn’t be changed throbbed like the ache in a phantom limb. She’d also never experienced a phantom limb, having never *lost* a limb, but Bel had, so she *knew* that, too.
You will, though, he added. Often. You already know not to make my mistakes.

“Damn straight,” she said, finding when she was looking for and stepping back into the flow of time, feeling the world coalesce around her into something that seemed a little more real. “Besides, time travel can’t get me what I want anyway. I get a whole other dimension to go through and I still can’t go home? I mean, this world is my home now and I accepted that a long time ago, and, hello, I’m a god now, that’s pretty awesome, but still.”

“You will get the hang of only talking to your god and past avatars in your head eventually,” an amused voice said behind her. “Hopefully sooner rather than later. External conversations cause much confusion.”

Bri turned around, hands on her hips as she took in the stranger. He looked a lot like Bel, or at least how Bel had looked when he was younger; tall, a little too skinny for his own good, scruffy black hair and a wry grin as he shoved his hands into his coat pockets. He felt familiar, even though she knew she’d never met him before. “Okay, I know I hit the right date for what I wanna see, going by the size of Ecruteak down there,” she said, pointing down at a collection of lakeside tents ringed by a number of Mamoswine and other sizeable ice-types. So many ice-types were swimming in the water that, even though it wasn’t winter, ice floes were forming. “And that style of coat definitely doesn’t exist yet, sooooo… Dialga?”

“Is this your first time meeting me?” the man said, his eyes positively lighting up with joy. “Oh, this is fun! Time travel is fun. Well, you can call me Will! I already know you, Bri--can I call you Bri? You already told me I could call you Bri but that was future-you, so--”

“You can call me Bri, Will,” Bri said, reaching out her hand for him to shake, which he did so enthusiastically. “Nice to meet you. Time travel is weird.” She looked around. “Um… are there a lot of other Dialgas here?”

“Well, I have been to see this before, so I am avoiding the most popular viewing spot,” he said, pointing to the far side of the lake. “I know it does not actually break time to see yourself, but it is really, really weird. I think there is an older you there, too. It will probably be pretty full…” He looked up at the sun thoughtfully. “…It is nearly time for the Dragon Clan to launch their attack. Clever, waiting for the middle of the day, when the sun is highest and it is as warm as it will get at this time of year.”

“Would’ve been cleverer to wait until it was actually summer rather than mid-spring, but I guess they wanted their country back ASAP,” Bri said, leaning against a tree and pulling on her gloves. “Are we going to be out of the way here?”
“Should be, yes,” Will agreed, peering around another tree at the mountains to the east. “Ah, there they are! Do you see them?”

Bri looked up, shielding her eyes against the sun. It took her a long moment to spot the distant black specks, looking like no more than a puff of ash in the air, but as she watched they grew larger, flying towards them, the movement of wings slowly becoming visible.

A huge fleet of dragons was flying towards the lakeside camp.

“So, am I not supposed to do this?” Bri asked as she pulled out her pocket camera and started filming, using the viewfinder to zoom in and see the dragons more clearly. The majority were Dragonites, the locals of Johto and Kanto, but there were also a number of Salamence, Flygon, Altaria and even a Druddigon. They might have some Garchomp or something else ground-based burrowing through the ground, she thought, but looking at those Mamoswine, I don’t think it would end well for them. They’re probably planning to capitalize on the fact that they can fly and almost no ice-types can, but that’s also not gonna end well for them…

“Film away,” Will said with an exaggerated bow. “At my age, avatars are starting to become common knowledge—we are public knowledge, certainly, although I think a lot of people still think that we’re con artists trying to accumulate cults of credulous…” He frowned intently for a moment. “Damn, I could not think of anything beginning with ‘C’,” he complained.

“Characters?” Bri suggested.

“Thank you!” Will cried. “Anyway… archaeologists and historians that believe have been tripping over each other to request lifts to various times and places of historical interest. I do not take others travelling through time, because, well, we all agree—” he tapped his forehead—“that it is a bad idea, but I am getting pretty handy with a camera!”

“I hope you’re charging well for those,” Bri said, zooming out the viewfinder a little to keep the full fleet of dragons in sight. “This kind of thing has gotta be worth a mint.”

“Knowledge should not be trapped behind a paywall!” Will declared. “…Is what I say to the ones who ask politely.”

“I like you,” Bri said, glancing away from her camera as the distant sound of shouting was carried up to them by the breeze. The camp was on high alert; tents were being flattened to the ground as
heavily-wrapped people and smaller ice-types flooded out of them. Others were surfacing from the lake, smashing the ice floes into smaller shards of ice. The land-based ones were forming into ranks.

“I know you do,” Will said cheekily. “They have prepared for this, look…”

“I see it,” Bri said, glancing at her camera to keep it on the approaching dragons. The wind was now noticeably colder as the massed ice-types began charging their power. “We’re too far away to see and I really want footage of the dragons, but I’m guessing a crapton of Ice Shards are about to really mess up the Dragon Clan’s day.”

“You would make a good general,” Will said, shivering and hunching into his coat. “Look at the Mamoswine getting grounded…”

“The Piloswine and Swinub helping them dig are kinda cute,” Bri noted. “Almost makes you forget they’re in the middle of a war.”

There was a flash from the dragons, the only forewarning that they got before several Hyper Beams punched into the ground, swiping through the scattering ranks of ice-types. One of the Mamoswine howled as a beam burned past it, even the sideswipe filling the air with the ugly smell of burned hair and meat.

“Holy shit,” Bri whispered.

“Not cute, no,” Will murmured. “You know of the Innes Effect, yes? Those who fight for their lives become stronger, faster. These are days of war. You will see power unlike anything you have seen before.”

“I’m seeing it,” Bri said, watching a few ice-types fire off their Ice Shards early and fall short of the distant dragons. The half-dozen who’d fired their Hyper Beams had fallen behind the rest, clearly tired, but there were plenty more to take their place, and another line of Dragonite was forming, charging up another round of deadly Hyper Beams. “Wait, if they can attack from that distance, why are they flying closer?”

“You would make a better general than the Dragon Clan’s Master,” Will sighed. “He… well. He is a man of honour, as they say. He does not believe that keeping distance and attacking with superior firepower is ‘proper’ warfare, that true warriors battle face to face.”
“Dunno, it worked out fine for people on my world,” Bri muttered, trying to measure the range between the ice camp and the dragons. Before the dragons were within range, however, they were assaulted by what looked like an upside-down rock slide. Huge boulders, glowing faintly purple, were slamming into the dragons from below. She saw the distant, tiny, doll-like figures of human trainers falling from their mounts; some dragons flew down to catch their trainers, while others fell with them, their wings torn and broken by crushing stone. “Holy shit,” she said, looking down and realizing that she’d underestimated both the frontline of the Ice forces and the number of Mamoswine on the field.

“Ancient power,” Will agreed. “Quite the sight. The Dragon Clan has been dominating for centuries due to their only weaknesses being ice—which, south of Sinnoh, is difficult to fully train, not being, as it were, in their element—and, of course, themselves. Is that ironic? Or perhaps some kind of metaphor? Anyway. They have, truth be told, had little need for real tactics when they have been flaunting such power. But the ice clan, well…” He gestured to the camp below, where the ranks of ice-types had reformed, firing Ice Shards towards the flying dragons. The Mamoswine on the ground were still sending a barrage of rocks upwards, and Piloswine were pouring out of the earth that they’d broken through, attacking those on the ground with ice, dragons and humans alike. Screaming filled the air. “They have spent a long time preparing. They take out the Dragon Clan’s forces here, then the city is undefended. Harsh mountains are nothing to ice-types and ice trainers. This is where they end the war. They cannot show restraint or mercy.”

It wasn’t the amount of ice flying around that made Bri shiver this time. “And you’ve been to see this more than once?” she said. “Hell, I’m going to see this more than once?”

Will nodded thoughtfully. “Not for the excitement,” he said softly. “I think you already know that this is not fun, this is not exciting. This is not some cool anime battle. That is what things feel like sometimes when you time travel much, you know? Not quite real. Like everything is a show that you are watching, people are characters playing out grand plots that only you can see weaving through time. But true war is real. Those people down there, they are real. Too real. It is… grounding.”

“Makes me wish I could do something,” Bri muttered, fixing the focus on her camera. Almost all of the dragons were on the ground now, and while they were still firing off Hyper Beams and Fire Blasts, they were chaotic, disorganized, while the ice-types were surrounding them, attacking with deadly purpose.

“Good practice in not interfering,” Will sighed. “There is nothing that one person can do here, in any case. But any avatar who took pleasure in watching true war… well, they would not be fit to be an avatar, would they?” Then he smiled. “I just got to advise you! How exciting!”

Bri kicked him halfheartedly in the shin. “Is younger you going to be less talky?” she said, glaring at him in favour of looking at the battle. Battles in movies didn’t have smells, and there was no fucking Wilhelm Scream among the agonized cries to throw her out of it.
“By no means,” Will promised. “Think of this; this is the end of a very, very long and bloody war and a violent, terrible empire. And if we are careful in our choices, and how we handle our futures, we can see to it that such war never happens again.”

“I’ll bear that in mind,” Bri said.

“I know you will,” Will chuckled.

Chapter End Notes

Oh hey, a whole oneshot about two characters that have never appeared in this ‘verse before and probably won’t feature heavily for a long time! What a great idea! XD This oneshot was originally requested by my friend Isis The Sphinx, whose own nuzlocke character, Bri, is loosely featured in my nuzverse as a future avatar of Dialga. As time travellers, Celebi and Dialga’s avatars tend to be friendlier with each other since they actually get to meet while they’re all still alive (gods possessing avatars is a story concept I was working on long before I watched Avatar: Legend of Korra, but a concept that I did slightly steal from that series and ATLA was an avatar being able to commune with previous avatars, as well as their god. It works differently here, of course; the dead avatar’s actual soul moves on, but a sort of imprint of them remains with the actual spirit of the god who moves on to a new avatar. Bri is Dialga’s second avatar, so has Dialga and Bel in her head; Will, being the third, has Dialga, Bri and Bel.

ItS: And then there’s Caelin, THE FIRE LORD. We were all cracking up about this joke ever since Caelin made an appearance in the Sinnoh fic.

Mangaluva: Yes, I confess, I flickered through various terms for members of Sinnan royal families before being consumed by ATLA and settling on Fire Lord, Water Lord and Grass Lord as a result XDXDXD Anyhoodle, to the other “new” character: Will. Will belongs to theagentlooker, a fantastic Agent Looker RP blog (Key’s looking-through-time is obviously the best, but this one is also so much fun and so dedicated) and her Looker is also in this ‘verse as a Dialga avatar from even further in the future and probably a reincarnation of Bel. He’s certainly inherited the Interpol codename Looker, anyway, and he’s doing it proud, I’m sure XD

I asked Bri to help me come up with a oneshot that would be thematic for November Fifth-- “something about somebody being inspired to try and blow up their garbage government or something” is along what I was thinking--and she recommended Bri as enjoying that kind of thing and then up came the subject of the biggest government
overthrow in the nuzverse thus far being the end of the Dragon Empire and then it got serious? I don’t even know. Bri, at least, will be back in at least one more oneshot this month!

Once more, for the people in the back: Isis_the_Sphinx is a great writer who you should definitely check out, and so is theagentlooker! They are both very lovely people, too, and I thank them for letting me take their babies out to play XD
Safe And Warm

Chapter Summary

NaNoWriMo Day: Sunday, November 6th, 2016
Title: Safe And Warm
Words: 1531

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chris gnawed on a bone, trying to get one last drop of marrow out of it. He was starting to hope that something would attack him just so he could fight back and get some food, but the local wild Pokemon were giving the scrawny little Charmander a wide berth now, waiting for exhaustion to make prey of him first. He was tired, so tired he could barely move, but he couldn’t sleep. If he did, they’d get him and then Lena--she already had bites all up and down one of her arms where some Rattata had gotten to her before Chris could drive them away.

He couldn’t let them get her. She was his human, she’d saved him, and he’d promised that he’d never, ever let anybody get her, that he’d keep her safe and warm and--

He shrank flat to the ground as a Pidgeotto circled overhead. He’d seen a few Pidgey around, and their chatter had indicated that Pidgeotto weren’t unheard of in this area, but none had come after him yet. But if one had heard that there was a human nearby, one whose only defense was a tired and starving little Charmander--

He relaxed a little when the Pidgeotto flew away, letting his eyes slip closed for a second before jerking himself awake, sinking his claws into his own side to wake himself up. Can’t sleep, have to protect Lena, he reminded himself. I promised her I’d protect her and I’m going to do that, no matter what.

He tensed up as the grass rustled. Somebody’s coming, he thought dizzily, trying to heat up some embers. His sense of smell was too faded to tell what it was, though, and his vision was blurring, too; his body was struggling to produce the heat needed to keep his tail burning, never mind attack anything.

But he’d die fighting before he gave up on protecting his trainer.
He weakly spat some embers at the sight of movement, but it didn’t stop. Squinting carefully, he realized that it wasn’t a Pokemon, just grass rustling in a slight wind.

The exhausted Charmander slumped, even those weak embers taking a lot out of him. The grass hadn’t even been set alight; the embers were already burned out--

“Hey, it’s okay, not gonna hurt you,” a disembodied voice said gently.

“Who’s there?!” Chris said, staggering to his feet and looking around frantically.

“It’s okay, it’s okay!” the voice said frantically. “It’s me, it’s Ben! C’mon, Chaz, I’m not gonna hurt you!”

“Who’s…?” Chris looked around. He didn’t see the strange Pokemon until they started walking towards him, revealing that they were the same faded colour as the grass, aside from their bright red eyes. “Who are you?” Chris said defensively. “What are you?”

The strange Pokemon tilted their head uncertainly. “I’m Ben,” he said. “I… are you Chaz? I’m sorry, I thought you were…”

“My name’s Chris,” Chris said, shaking his head. “I don’t even know what you are…”

“See, I told you it wasn’t him,” a Pikachu said, darting out of the grass next to Ben. “What the hell would he be doing out here?” He tilted his head, flicking his ears thoughtfully. “Are you okay, pal? You’re looking pretty skinny, and that human--”

“Stay away from her,” Chris said defensively, trying to warm up some more embers. “She’s my human. Don’t touch her!”

“Okay, okay!” the Pikachu said, backing away. “Look, calm down, our human is on his way over. And, anyway, it’s not like we can hurt your human, since she’s already looking pretty--”
“Perun,” Ben said, gently smacking the Pikachu on the nose with a vine. “Hey, Chris, listen… your human, is she… uh… okay?”

“She’s just sick,” Chris said frantically. “Humans get sick a lot. It’s fine. Last time she got sick she slept for a couple of days and then she was fine. She’s fine.”

“She doesn’t smell fi--stop that!” Perun yelped as Ben whacked him with a vine again, a little less gently this time.

“Just go get Red,” Ben said patiently. Perun huffed, but ran off into the grass. “Our human is called Red,” Ben said carefully. “He’s gonna come have a look at your human, okay? Humans know best how to look after humans, right? We’re not gonna hurt her, or you.”

Chris just backed up a little closer to Lena. “Why?” he asked. “You don’t know us. You have no reason to look after us. You just want me to let my guard down so you can eat us, right?”

“Well, I don’t, I only eat plants, poison doesn’t hurt me,” Ben said calmly.

“Your human, though,” Chris insisted.

“He’s… really not that hungry,” Ben said, looking uncertainly at Lena. “Trust me. Anyway, he wants to help. He looks after his humans at home. He’s got a sister. Does your human have any family?”

“I… don’t think so,” Chris said hesitantly. “Just me. She found my pokeball. She saved me, looked after me, and I--I promised I’d look after her, protect her from other wild Pokemon--”

“You’re doing a great job,” Ben said soothingly. He looked around as the grass rustled again, this time yielding a scrawny human wearing red. A Pidgeotto was sitting on his shoulder and Perun was following at his heels. “Red, this is Chris,” Ben said. “Chris, this is Red.”

“Hi, Chris,” Red said softly, setting down the pack he was carrying on his back and crouching down so he was closer to Chris’ height. “What’s your human’s name?”
“Lena,” Chris said, staying close to her side. “She’s sick. She’s been sick before. She got better.”

“Okay,” Red said. “Can you have a look around to make sure there aren’t any wild Pokemon?” he said to his Pidgeotto, who nodded and flew off. “Chris, can I look at Lena?” Red asked.

“Why?” Chris asked.

Red went into his pack and pulled out some dried meat. “Nobody needs to eat her,” he said, holding the meat out. “Look, we have food. You can have some. Okay?”

Chris sniffed the meat. It smelled so good, and his empty stomach grumbled. He nibbled at a bit, then wolfed down the rest.

“Don’t give him more, he’ll eat it all!” Perun complained as Red got out more dried meat.

“It’s fine,” Red said, handing more to Chris and then moving a little closer to Lena, hands in the air where Chris could see them. He flinched when he looked at Lena. “Chris…” he said. “Lena… she’s not getting better.”

“You only looked,” Chris said stubbornly, trying not to panic. “She got better before.”

“Yeah, but this time…” Red looked down at Chris sadly. “Chris, I’m really really sorry, but she’s dead. She’s been dead a while.”

*Dead*. The thing that Chris hadn’t even let himself think speared through him. He nearly dropped the food he was still holding. “She’s not,” he said hoarsely. “She’s not, she, she can’t be, she got better…”

“Hey, it’s okay,” Ben said for the millionth time.

“No it’s NOT!” Chris yelled, rounding on him. “She’s MINE! She’s all I’ve got and I’m all she’s got and I, I said I’d look after her, I’d protect her, and I--I have to, I can’t, I--”
“Calm down and breathe,” Red said, stroking Chris’ head. Chris rounded on him, biting his hand.

“Hey!” Perun yelled, sparking with electricity.

“It’s okay, Perun,” Red said, wincing. “He’s just scared. He’s too weak to really hurt me.” Chris tried to bite down harder, but even with the food he still felt weak and Red’s gloves were thick. “It’s scary, but even if Lena’s dead, you don’t have to be alone,” he said quietly. “We’re here. We can help you make sure nobody eats her. You could come with us afterwards, if you want. Or we could find you another home. You’re not alone. Okay?”

Chris had to take his teeth out of Red’s hand as he struggled to control his breathing. His chest felt cold and sharp. “I don’t want her to go,” he choked out. “I don’t want to be alone.”

“You’re not alone,” Ben promised, carefully edging over to him. “Red’s a nice human. He’ll look after you as good as Lena, alright?”

Chris looked up at Red, who smiled kindly at him, reaching out his hand again. This time, Chris let the human pet him gently, before burying his face in Red’s trousers.

“How do we make sure… she doesn’t get eaten?” he whimpered.

“Perun, Ben, can you go start digging a little pit?” Red asked. “Not too deep. Doesn’t need to be. Then start filling it with leaves, alright?” He looked down at Chris. “If we burn her, nobody can eat her,” he explained. “Is that okay?”

Chris shivered, but nodded. “Okay,” he said, looking up at Red. “And… I-I can’t do anything if you get sick, but otherwise… I’ll protect you, I promise. I’ll protect you with my life.”

“And I’ll look after you,” Red said with a little smile, putting his arms around Chris. “I won’t leave you behind, I promise.”

“You better not,” Chris mumbled, accepting the hug. “I don’t wanna lose another human ever again.”

Chapter End Notes
I should probably write something happy again sometime soon. Until then, here’s when Red first met his Charmander, Chris. I do have an idea of how he met his Squirtle, Sergei, and it’s funnier than this, I promise XD
Lt. Matis Surge leaned against the ship’s railing, smelling the clean sea air that was so different from the stink of Vermillion’s waters—even after Suicune’s visit, the toxic waste sunken deep into Kanto’s earth and water kept seeping out. He wondered if this cleaner tang of salt should smell familiar, but it didn’t. Then again, maybe he hadn’t grown up by the sea, not that he could remember.

But that was the whole point of this trip, of course. The Indigo Region’s new Champion had assured him that she’d pay for it, repayment for all the work he’d done for Kanto for decades, keeping the country from falling entirely into Rocket’s hands.

“*If you just don’t want to know, then that’s okay. But if you do, you deserve to know who you were and where you came from. Kanto will survive without you for a few weeks while you’re in Unova.*”

“All of it familiar?” Nick asked, gesturing to the distant towers of Castelia that were slowly rising over the horizon. Matis glanced over his older son, born and raised in Kanto. Nick mostly looked like his mother, aside from his bright blond hair. He and Melanie would never have worked as a couple, but Matis was glad he’d at least been able to still be a part of their son’s life, and it was Nick and his half-brother Tommy that were the reason that Matis had finally decided to take the Champion up on her offer to send him searching for his past. He’d spent more than half of his life in Kanto, had built up a life over the past two and a half decades that he was content with, but Nick was curious about his heritage, and if he had more family out there somewhere, family that could support him if he or Tommy wanted to leave Kanto and find a better life elsewhere… well, Matis wasn’t going to be the one to stand in their way.

“Nah,” the Vermillion leader said, pushing his sunglasses up his nose. It was high summer in Unova, and the sky was a shade of blue that Matis didn’t remember ever seeing. “Might just be that I didn’t come from Castelia, though. Hell, I don’t really know for sure that I come from Unova.”
“You speak Unovan and you were in the Unovan military, though,” Nick pointed out.

“Folks speak Unovan in a lot of places,” Matis said with a shrug, “and I coulda joined their military from a lot of places, too.” At the crestfallen look on the teen’s face, he quickly added, “militaries keep records, Nick. They’ll have somethin’ on me. Hell, they might even have my back pay!”

Nick laughed, brightening up immediately. It was astonishingly hard to keep the kid down. “Where’ll that be?” he asked. “Castelia?”

“There’s some offices,” Matis said. “Dunno if I have to get an appointment or what, but until then…”

“…free holiday?” Nick said with a cheeky grin.

“Castelia ain’t that far from Nimbasa,” matis said, clapping his son on the shoulder. “There’s a… a funpark there. It’s like nothin’ you’ve ever seen.”

“A funpark?” Nick said curiously. “Hey, do you remember that? When did you remember that?”

“Dunno,” Matis said, scratching his head. “Didn’t realize I remembered anything about Nimbasa until I said it. Maybe that’s another clue to follow, huh?”

“Through the funpark?”

“Of course, kiddo. Leave no stone unturned.”

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Pretty much none of Matis’ original uniform was still left, but he’d kept the scrap of sleeve with his stripes on it and tied it around his bicep like an armband before heading leaving his and Nick’s cabin and heading out into the city of Castelia.

“Holy shit,” Nick said, looking around a little wild-eyed at the hustling crowds thronging the streets. “I didn’t know there were this many people in the world.”
“Your mother’s gonna kick my ass if she hears you using language like that,” Matis said, a little overwhelmed himself but well-practiced at not showing it. He spotted a large display board with what looked like a city map displayed on it and started shouldering his way towards it, which wasn’t a difficult task with shoulders like his. He kept one hand around Nick’s wrist, keeping his son close.

“That’s why I don’t use language like that around her,” Nick said, almost falling over backwards as he craned his head back to look up at the buildings towering over them. “Holy shit.”

“Watch where you’re goin’ or you’re gonna step on someone,” Matis warned, hard-pressed not to do so himself. “Who the hell’s idea was it to put so many damn people in one city?” he muttered. “More people than they have the goddamn room for. Alright, let’s see…” He peered up at the map, looking for anything military. “This is the biggest city in Unova, one of the biggest in the world, there’s gotta be somethin’ military somewhere.”

“Don’t ask me, I can’t read Unovan,” Nick said, squinting at the board anyway. “You see that alright, old man?”

“Less yapping, more pamphlets, kid,” Matis said, gesturing to a display that was marked with various flags, including the Fairlan combined flag. “See if any of the ones in Fairlan say anythlin’ useful.”

“You think they’d mark it on a map, though?” Nick asked, digging through the pamphlets. “Hey, here’s one about the funpark in Nimbasa you were talking about!”

“Grab that and c’mon, then,” Matis said, hitching his pack up his shoulder. “There’s a recruitment office a few blocks away. They should be able to point us somewhere. Quick march!”

“There’s a whole pamphlet about ice cream,” Nick said, following in his father’s wake as the bigger man waded through the crowds. “Desert ruins? People pay to go look at ruins? Why?”

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government services. Two hours’ walk was nothing to the Kanto natives, but it was definitely overwhelming to be able to walk for that long and *still be in the same city.*

“Hell, this is *fancy,*” Nick whistled, looking around the building’s lobby, full of soft couches, pot plants, thick rugs and marble. Matis spotted a woman in uniform standing in front of one of the counters, speaking to a clerk, and headed over to it, listening to their conversation to tune into Unovan as much as to figure out if he was headed to the right desk.

“...harmless,” the uniform—a Colonel, going by her stripes, if Matis remembered right—said, “but still, we encourage—” She broke off as she spotted Matis and Nick approaching.

“Is this the desk for the… recruitment office?” he said, struggling for a moment to remember the word that he needed.

“Looking to join up?” the Colonel said, looking at Nick.

“Not exactly,” Matis said, saluting and then gesturing to the stripes tied around his bicep. “My name is Lt. Matis Surge. Twenty-five years ago I was on deployment in Kanto during the Indigo Region’s-” he hesitated for a moment, before switching to Fairlan—“Memory Ground Zero event.” He returned to Unovan. “I’m looking for information about when I signed up, since I don’t remember myself.”

“On deployment in *Kanto ?*” the Colonel said, raising her eyebrows. She examined his stripes carefully. “Do you have tags?” she asked. Matis pulled the chain of his tags out of the neck of his tank top and handed her the tags. “Hmm... well, I wasn’t part of the military twenty-five years ago, but the tags look genuine. Take them up to the recruitment office on the fifth floor and they should be able to withdraw your record from the system. You’re probably MPD, but they’ll have your DNA records for purposes of identification, so that could be withdrawn. Good luck, lieutenant.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” Matis said, saluting her.

“Elevators are over there,” the clerk said, pointing them the way. Matis glanced over his shoulder on the way over to see the Colonel watching them go thoughtfully.

“It’s kinda weird that *you’ve* gotta salute *her,*” Nick commented. “I mean, you’re older than her.”
“Yeah, but she outranks me, and MPD or not I’m a soldier, and that means respecting the chain of command,” Matis said, stepping into one of the elevators and pressing the 5.

“What’s MPD?” Nick asked, hopping into the elevator before the doors closed behind him. “Why’re there mirrors in here?”

“Damned if I know,” Matis said, glancing at the mirrored walls and shrugging. “MPD means Missing, Presumed Dead. You disappear in action for long enough, they declare you dead and start paying benefits to your family. Which, now that I think about it, means they must have records on my next of kin.”

“Who do you think that is?” Nick asked. “Your parents?”

“Probably, ‘less I was married,” Matis said, folding his arms and leaning back against the mirrors. “Can’t imagine that myself, but who the hell knows. Not me.”

The elevator doors opened, letting them out into a small waiting room full of chairs. A purple Meowth-like Pokemon was curled up in one of the chairs. A Purrloin, Matis realized, though he didn’t remember ever seeing one before. “This the recruitment office?” he asked the Pokemon.

It looked up sharply, staring at him wide-eyed. “Excuse me?” it said incredulously.

“Is this the recruitment office?” Nick asked.

“What the--how are you doing that?” the Purrloin said, shooting to its feet and staring at them. “How are you talking like that?”

“Oh damn, I forgot!” Nick exclaimed, slapping his forehead. “People can’t do that here, can they? Somebody on the ship said that. They think we’re really weird for talking to Pokemon or something.”

“We’re from a country where everybody speaks to Pokemon,” Matis explained to the Purrloin.

The Purrloin didn’t get a chance to respond before a door at the back of the room opened and a clerk
“Oh! I thought I heard voices,” he said in Unovan. “Can I help you? Are you here for recruitment?”

“Actually, I was told you could help me with this,” Matis said, displaying his tags again. “I’ve been lost in action for twenty-five years, and I could do with some help tracking myself down.”

The clerk gave him an odd look. “Come again?” he said, frowning.

“You ever heard of Kanto, son?” Matis asked. “Twenty-five years ago, there was a psychic event that wiped everybody’s memories, including those of my unit. I’m here to try and find out a little about myself. A colonel downstairs told me that you could pull my file from looking at my tags and DNA.”

“Well… we’re not exactly mobbed just now, so sure,” the clerk said, glancing at the waiting room, which was empty aside from Nick, who was petting the amazed-looking Purrloin. “Come on through to the office, lieutenant…”

"Is that the funpark?" Nick asked as they stepped out of the Nimbasa travel centre, pointing up at a circle of lights that stood out against the darkening evening sky.

“That’s the Ferris Wheel,” Matis recalled. “Folks say if you ride that with your partner, you’ll be together forever. Can’t remember if I ever rode it with anybody, but I remember that.”

“Cool—what the shit?!” Nick yelped, tensing up at a sudden burst of screaming. “What’s going on?!”

Matis had tensed up too, hand going to his empty belt for the pokeballs that he hadn’t been allowed to bring to Unova, but he calmed down after a moment when he realized what the screaming was. “It’s a rollercoaster, kid, it’s fine,” he chuckled, clapping his son on the shoulder.

“What the shit’s a rollercoaster?” Nick demanded. “Why’re they screaming?"
“They’re having fun,” Matis chuckled. “We’ll go check it out later. C’mon… I think it’s this way.”

The office had confirmed his identity and provided him with the contact details of the next-of-kin who had received his medals and death benefits; not his parents but his younger sister, Tiffany Surge Kamitsure. She was thirty-nine now, which, Matis had realized with a pang, meant she was fourteen when he’d vanished. He kept turning over his earliest memories, but there was no way he’d been able to get back to Unova before she aged out of state care, but he couldn’t help feeling a powerful guilt at the thought of the sibling he couldn’t remember growing up alone.

He recruitment records indicated that he was born and educated in Nimbasa City, which had to account for how he found his way through the streets without needing to refer to a map. He didn’t remember the city, but he knew it, knew the suburbs that the city turned into on the western side where his sister now lived.

“Do you think the office told them we were coming?” Nick asked.

“Let’s find out,” Matis said, spotting the block they were looking for and heading up to the flat that was Tiffany’s last known address. He hesitated for a moment, but as long as he could remember his response to being afraid of something was to swallow that fear and attack the source, so he straightened his back, set his jaw and knocked.

The door was opened a few minutes later by a bearded man with light skin and dark hair. “Can I help you?” he asked in Unovan.

“My name is Lt. Matis Surge,” Matis said, taking off his sunglasses. “I’m looking for Tiffany?”

“Surge?” the man said, frowning. “That was Tiffany’s name before we got married. You a relative?”

“I think so,” Matis said.

“TIFF!” the man yelled into the house. “There’s a lieutenant here to see you! Says he’s related or something? I didn’t know she had any family left,” he said to Matis, who just nodded. He felt Nick nudge him and looked to the side to see the kid smile at him.
“Lieutenant?” a voice called as a woman stepped into the hall, walking down the hall and freezing as soon as she laid eyes on Matis. She was a tall, handsome middle-aged woman with dark eyes and long, bright blonde hair. “Matis?” she whispered in shock.

“Your brother?” the man--her husband--said in surprise. “I thought he was dead?”

“So’d the army,” Matis said, pulling out his tags again. “I… damn, don’t know how to explain this. Dunno if you know ‘bout everybody in Kanto and Johto losin’ their memories twenty-five years ago, but that happened. I was deployed there. I’m here now chasin’ up who I was before that. I’m… sorry I didn’t do it sooner.”

“Oh Dragons,” Tiffany whispered, clasping her hands over her mouth. “When we heard there were people alive in Kanto I thought for a moment--but I really thought the army would’ve told me if you were--” With a muffled sob, she flung her arms around his neck, hugging him tightly. “I can reach you now,” she mumbled between sobs.

“Guess you were a squirt when I left, huh?” Matis said, hugging her back. It didn’t feel uncomfortable, like hugging a stranger. It felt like hugging his sons. “Why the hell’d I leave when you were so young?”

“Because you’re an asshole of a high-school dropout and it was the only job you could get, but you kept promising that once you’d finished your tour of duty and gotten a better job, you’d come get me out of care and we could live together again, like when our folks were alive.” She drew back, tears running down her cheeks, and gave him a really hard punch to the arm. “You asshole.”

“I deserve that,” Matis said ruefully. “I’m so--”

“Stop apologizing,” Tiffany said with a watery smile. “You’re home. And who’s this?” she said, looking at Nick.

“Hello,” Nick said in Unovan, waving.

“That’s my older son Nick, and ‘fraid that’s all the Unovan he knows,” Matis said, shaking his head before switching to Fairlan to speak to his son. “Nick, I’d like to formally introduce you to your Auntie Tiffany and I guess this guy’s your uncle--what’s your name?” he asked, switching back to Unovan.
“Mitsuhiko Kamitsure,” Tiffany’s husband said, shaking Matis’ hand. “Tiff’s told me so much about you, but I never thought I’d get to meet you. Being presumed dead and all.”

“Fair enough,” Matis chuckled.

“It’s so nice to meet you, Nick,” Tiffany said, giving her nephew a welcome hug. “You have to come meet your cousin Elesa!”

“You’ve got a kid?” Matis said, grinning.

“Yes, you too, come meet your nibling,” Tiffany laughed. “I think Elesa’s in their room with their friend. They’re thirteen. How old is Nick?”

“This one’s nineteen, but he’s got a little brother who’s seven,” Matis said, following Tiffany into the flat. It was small and a little tight, but the hallway was plastered with photographs—Tiffany and Mitsuhiko’s wedding, a blonde child that had to be Elesa starting grade school and junior high, and a frame containing several medals protected behind glass.

“Hey, are these yours?” Nick asked, pointing at the medals. The question was in Fairlan, but the context clues were obvious enough for Tiffany.

“They’re yours, Matis,” she said, pointing from the medals to Matis to underline her point. “Although I guess the one for dying in the line of duty isn’t valid anymore!”

“I won’t tell if you don’t,” Matis chuckled. Tiffany smiled and wiped her eyes stopping by a door with the name “Elesa” painted on it as part of a small but beautiful mural depicting native Unovan Pokemon. It was partly open, but Tiffany knocked on the door anyway before pushing it open and calling, “Elesa? Burgh? Can you take a break for a minute?”

A skinny teenager with short brown hair raised one long finger while frantically scribbling on a sketchpad without looking up. He appeared to be sketching an Emolga that was sitting very still, wearing a tiny coat and hat and perched on top of a sewing machine, where another equally skinny teen with purple, black and white streaks dyed into their blond hair was working on another tiny outfit. They spun around in their chair. From the photos in the hall, Matis realized that this was Elesa.

“Mom?” Elesa asked, raising an eyebrow as they looked at Matis and Nick. “Who’re they?”
“Elesa, this is your uncle Matis and your cousin Nick,” Tiffany said, putting a hand on Matis’ shoulder.

“Your dead brother?” Elesa said in surprise. Their Emolga tilted his head curiously.

“Looking good for a dead guy,” the other teen said thoughtfully.

“Nice to meet you, Elesa… Elesa’s friend,” Matis said, saluting. Nick also grinned and waved. “So… you like electric-types, huh?” he said, gestured to the Emolga, which had the same startled look as the Purrloin in the recruiting office.

“I adore them,” Elesa said, petting their Emolga on the head fondly.

Matis’ grin widened. “Smart kid you got there,” he said to his sister, who wiped away a tear and punched him on the arm again.

Chapter End Notes

Here, have a happy family headcanony thing to make up for the last one. “Niblings” is a real, if uncommon, plural unit for nieces and nephews; a singular form would be a great way to refer to a sibling’s nonbinary child. I don’t quite envision Lt Surge as the kinda guy to go in for romantic relationships, but if he had kids he’d definitely be very involved in their lives and probably have a good relationship with them. This is all taking place a few years after the end of Dimensional Destruction and, as you can probably take from Elesa and Burgh’s ages, a few more years before the beginning of the Black/White run fic.

Punny title provided by the Fabulous Key-chan. She’s also the source of a bonus headcanon, except it’s not really a headcanon because it’s for my own fic so it’s canon really: Surge sometimes called his younger son Spark.
Selection

Chapter Summary

NaNoWriMo Day: Tuesday, November 8th, 2016
Title: Selection
Words: 2085

Chapter Notes

This one probably counts as spoilers for DD, but I know that a) most of the people who read my main fics don’t read the oneshots and b) you didn’t really believe I was gonna kill off the main human cast with so much of Sinnoh left to cover, right? :P

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Johto was already sweltering in the high summer, and the great halls of Blackthorn City were even more so. Saylee felt like her black funeral clothes were sticking to her all over, even with the heat-reflecting properties of the formal cloak she was wearing, and she was looking forward to going back to her hotel room to change.

I could be there already if Clair hadn’t dragged Blue off for some ‘urgent League-forming business’, she thought, perhaps a touch bitterly. She was the one who’d forgone offers to be one of Kanto’s eight jurisdictional leaders in favour of continuing to run and build up the police, courts and rangers, and she respected that Blue couldn’t always share with her everything that was going on in the fledgling League any more than she could tell him all the inner workings of the justice system. They both had important jobs to do and were good at doing them, but it was still a little frustrating how often League meetings had been cropping up lately. Master Ryushi just died, couldn’t it wait another day or two? It’s still his funeral, for crying out loud!

The funeral party had, thankfully, moved to one of the halls without open lava flows, and Saylee had managed to steal a seat by the spread, slightly slipping her feet out of her formal shoes, which were squeezing her feet. She was trying to remember how many of the rolls she’d already eaten and whether or not she should take another when there was a tap on her shoulder.

“Nicole!” Saylee said, recognizing her cousin’s old friend, a dragon trainer that she’d met the first time she came to Blackthorn. She stood up and shook Nicole’s hand. “It’s good to see you. I’m sorry for your loss.”
“Thank you,” Nicole said solemnly. “It was a long time coming, but it’s still hard for all of us. I’m sorry about not making it to your grandfather’s funeral....”

“Lucy said you were abroad,” Saylee said, “but she showed us the message you sent. It was very kind of you.”

Nicole nodded. “The new Master asked me to find you,” she said. “He would like to speak to you, if that’s alright?”

“Of course,” Saylee said politely. *Suppose it would be more than a bit rude to turn down a request from the new Master at the old one’s funeral,* she thought, following Nicole out of the hall and towards the private quarters of the Master’s family. Here the living rock of the mountains was hidden under wood panelling and vibrant tapestries of dragons and great dragon masters of the past. The doors, too, were beautifully carved and inlaid with precious stones, and the double doors to the Master’s chambers were the most elaborate of all, a good ten feet tall and nearly as wide. “The new Master’s already moved in?” she asked.

“Not yet, but the Master’s formal sitting room was the most secure place for a League conference,” Nicole said, knocking on the door. “And he *does* have the right to use all the rooms freely now, of course...”

“So why would he pass that up?” Saylee said. Nicole threw her a little smile before schooling her features into a more sombre expression as the door was opened by a Garchomp.

“Guest of the Master,” he said, stepping aside, “welcome.”

“Thank you,” Saylee said, stepping over the threshold and looking back at Nicole. “You’re not coming?”

“I just got sent to find you, I don’t have the right to enter the Master’s chambers without invitation,” Nicole said, waving and turning to walk back down the corridor.

Saylee looked around while the Garchomp closed the door. The antechamber that she was in contained more statues and paintings of dragons. They were all beautiful, though the very singular subject of all the decor was starting to weary a little. “Through that door,” the Garchomp said, indicating the first door on the right before standing by the front door with his arms folded behind his
Saylee knocked carefully on the polished wood. She stepped back as Clair opened the door.

“Oh, you’re here,” Clair said with a frown.

“I was invited,” Saylee said with chilly politeness. She’d never gotten along with the older woman; Clair had started out arrogant, prideful and killing Saylee’s Nidoking, and had only gotten more disdainful of Saylee as a result of Saylee beating her and being recognized by the former Master of the Dragon Clan as a Knight of the Realm before Clair had. “Can I come in?” she said with a fake smile. Clair just scowled more deeply and stepped back to let Saylee in.

The Johto jurisdictional leaders were all there, having all been invited to the funeral--Falkner, Bugsy, Whitney, Morty, Jasmine, Chuck, Saylee’s cousin Lucy and Clair herself--along with Blue, her grandmother Helen, five Geisha and the new Master of the Dragon Clan himself, Lance. “Thank you for the invitation,” Saylee said formally.

“Take a seat,” Lance said, gesturing to an empty seat at the end of the long, rectangular stone table that they were all seated at, Lance at its head, Clair on his immediate right and the rest of the Johto Leaders sitting along that side of the table, with the five Geisha, Blue and Helen on the other. The only empty seat was at the opposite end of the table from Lance, between Blue and Lucy. Saylee wondered if there was some significance to the placement or if it was just the last seat left at the crowded table. “Thank you for coming, Sar Kanto, both to this meeting and my grandfather’s funeral. We appreciate it.”

“Your grandfather was a good man, and you have my condolences,” Saylee said, folding her hands on the tabletop. “I’m surprised to be invited to a League meeting, though.”

“The future of the Indigo League is what we’re here to discuss,” one of the Geisha said. They were all dressed identically in black kimono with sombre black-and-white makeup, to unsettling effect. “After the Memory Event, governance of Johto coalesced under those who first took leadership in the chaos--our order, Master Ryushi, Sir Blackthorn and the Chief Monk of Johto’s Holy Orders. We have been seeking to follow Kanto’s League in emulating the governance of other Fairlan nations, uniting jurisdictional leaders under a higher council, but this year we have tragically lost three members of our former council.”

“Now, we could of course replace Arthur, Master Ryushi and Elder Li with their immediate heirs,” Helen said, gesturing to Lucy and Lance, “but truth be told, that was a ramshackle council that was certainly not democratically elected, simply lacked and resistance from a frightened populace. Things
were chaotic in those days, and I’m sure even more so in Kanto, but we are no longer so frightened and lost, are we?”

“First step was picking out jurisdictional leaders who are supported by the majority of the residents of their jurisdiction,” another of the Geisha said. “The next step is choosing a Champion to oversee the League. General agreement among the leaders is that, given Kanto’s fragile social and financial position, it would be best for it to remain in union with Johto, so sixteen leaders would be overseen by a council of four Elites--two from Kanto and two from Johto would be fairest, of course--but before we choose them, we must choose a Champion.”

“And the two nominees are you and I, Sar,” Lance said, propping his chin on his hands with a smile.

Saylee looked at Blue. “I’m nominated for Champion ?!” she said in surprise. “As in, the person in charge of running all of Kanto and Johto ?!”

“I’m so sorry I couldn’t tell you until now, and you’re totally free to refuse the nomination,” Blue said, raising his hands defensively, “but just so you know, you’ve got unanimous favour among the Kanto Leaders. You established the entire formal justice system in Kanto, you know all sixteen of the Leaders already, you know most of the Leaders, Elites and Champions in Hoenn and Sinnoh, and if you turn down the nomination he’s the Champion.” He jerked a thumb at Lance, rolling his eyes.

“Watch how you talk about our clan’s Master,” Clair said, affronted.

“It’s fine, Clair,” Lance said, waving a hand dismissively. “I would gladly accept the position myself, but between the unanimous support from Kanto and the fact that five out of eight of the Johto leaders also voted for you, you have the first right to accept or refuse the role of Champion.”

Saylee put a hand to her forehead, sitting back in her chair a little. “That’s… a hell of a job offer,” she said, her mind racing.

“One everybody here genuinely thinks you’re capable of,” Lucy said, putting a hand on her cousin’s shoulder. “It’s not nepotism. Well, maybe a tiny little bit, but way less than Clair voting for Lance--”

“Um, the votes are supposed to be confidential, aside from the final results,” Jasmine pointed out softly.
“Aside from your competence and favour among the Leaders,” a third Geisha said—or maybe it was the first one, Saylee really couldn’t tell—“it may be best for you to switch to a less active and violent job than the one you currently hold. For the next half-year or so, at least.”

Saylee glared at her, then at Blue. “I didn’t say anything to them!” he protested, looking surprised. “I don’t know how she—”

“Our divinations are quite accurate when it comes to the gods and those connected to them,” another of the Geisha said. “Our congratulations to you and your partner, Sar.” The five Geisha inclined their heads to her and Blue.

“What—oh my gods!” Lucy shrieked, slapping her hands over her mouth. “Oh my gods, are you—!”

“Young lady, exactly how far along are you and when were you proposing to tell us?!” Helen cried, getting up to hug her granddaughter. “Oh my goodness!”

“Thanks,” Saylee said, accepting the hug. “I found out a month ago, but we wanted to keep it to ourselves until…”

“Until we knew for sure it was gonna be healthy,” Blue said quietly, squeezing Saylee’s hand. “There’s still a lot of toxic shit in the air and water in Kanto, not to mention us, after growing up there, and we didn’t wanna make a big deal until we could be sure…” Saylee’s other hand went to her stomach.

“Our divinations also indicate the birth of a healthy child,” one of the Geisha offered. “You have nothing to fear, Sar.”

Saylee rolled her eyes. “Thanks, but I’ll wait on the divinations of my doctor,” she said.

“ I could have a look for you,” Morty offered.

“That… is actually not a bad idea,” Blue said thoughtfully.

“I’m sure it’ll be fine! Oh my gods, congratulations!” Whitney squealed.
“That’s awesome,” Bugsy said with a big grin. “Congrats!”

“I didn’t know you guys were even trying to have kids!” Lucy said, hopping up and pulling both Saylee and Blue into a hug.

“We really weren’t, and given what health is like in Kanto, we didn’t even really know for sure that we could,” Blue admitted. “So. Surprise, but hopefully not a bad one.”

“A lot like this job offer,” Saylee said, standing up when her grandmother and cousin finally let her go. “I… want to know more about what the League’s drawing up in terms of the role, responsibilities and powers of the Champion, as well as what the selection process is going to be for Elites…”

“Champion nominates, each nominee needs at least seventy-five percent support from the Leaders,” Lance supplied.

“…but I’m not refusing at this time,” Saylee said. “And for the record, I’ve already put myself on desk work anyway.”

“After all the work you’ve done for the people Kanto, dear, I really do think you’d do a fine job,” Helen said, squeezing her granddaughter’s shoulders. “And I don’t just mean as Champion.”

“Not to rush you, but a fast transition is a smooth one,” Falkner put in, “so the sooner you decide for sure and nominate your Elites, the better.”

“Busy year ahead for all of us, then,” Lance said, clasping his hands together and smiling brightly.

“You’re awfully calm about this,” Clair said coolly.

“Well, she’s been voted up fair and square, and anyway being the new Master of the Dragon Clan’s going to be plenty of work,” Lance said cheerfully. “I’ve gotta move all my stuff, for one thing!”

Chapter End Notes
Y’know, when I first planned this one for the eighth, I thought it would be kinda funny-a fic about people choosing as their leader a qualified woman who’s spent most of her life in public service over a somewhat unstable man from an affluent background (though I’d say Lance would make an eminently better leader than Trump). Even after Brexit, I really didn’t imagine things would go this badly in the US elections, or maybe I just didn’t want to. My mum’s been crying most of the day, my brother’s really making a dent in the whisky, and we don’t even live in the US anymore. But I’m afraid for those who do—I’m afraid for the POC, the muslims, the queer people, the women, all the groups targeted by Trump who are now at risk from the white supremacists that voted for him and now feel validated. These supremacists are not everybody who voted for him, and are not the majority of the people in the US, but bigots are dangerous people. After Brexit here, there was a spike in hate crimes and rates still remain higher than before Brexit. American readers—I hope you can be safe. I hope you can look out for each other. White faces in the audience, in particular, look out for your friends, family and neighbours who aren’t white enough for Trump’s ilk. Look after each other. I know a lot of people are afraid just now, and have good reason to be, but we can still support each other, protect each other, play the upcoming new Pokemon games together, watch the upcoming new Star Wars movie together, watch season three of Young Justice together, outlive Trump together. He’s a seventy-year-old sweaty turd and one day, maybe one soon, we can dance on his grave together. You all deserve to live in a world without Trump in it, and you will, and until then know that whoever you are and wherever you are, I love you, I care about you, my inbox is open on FFnet and tumblr (sayleeofkanto or my main, mangaluva) if you need somebody to talk to or want to request fic or anything, and despite what I might write in the Mirror, Mirror stories, I really do want you all to feel happy and safe.

And for what it’s worth, I’m told from friends who’ve moved here that Scotland has a very welcoming immigration process.
Stepping off of the ship in Slateport was like stepping into a blast furnace. The sunlight reflecting off the waves was blinding, and the heat pressed down with an almost physical force that had Jenny sweating in seconds. She’d been to Hoenn before on summer holidays, and the heat to her specifically meant playing on the beach, swimming in the sea, watching contests… being happy.

With Mum and Dad, she remembered with a pang. This is my first time coming here alone... She shook her head, trying to shake off the thoughts. I’m not here on holiday, she reminded herself, resting one hand on Sarah-Jane and Jack’s pokeballs as she walked down the streets. They were vaguely familiar form various summer holidays; she was sure she could find her way to the street market and contest hall, but it was the Pokemon Centre she really needed to find. I’m here to take the League challenge. I just need to register and find out where the nearest gym is...

She didn’t feel rushed about finding the Pokemon Centre, though. She meandered through the streets, enjoying the atmosphere. It was a beautiful day, and Slateport was a lovely seaside city to walk around. The houses and shops were all brightly decorated, and as much space seemed to be dedicated to grassy spaces as buildings. To the southeast towered the lighthouse; to the northwest, the bulk of the bright Contest Hall edged over the rest of the rooftops. She used that to orient herself, reasonably sure that the Pokemon Centre was near the Contest Hall. The whole place was familiar, but completely different from anything in Johto.

As it transpired, she wasn’t wrong about the Pokemon Centre being close to the Contest Hall; it was directly across the road. The blast of air conditioning when she stepped inside was a blessed relief from the heat, though it was on so high that Jenny knew she’d be freezing before long. She looked around and spotted the main counter, with a couple of nurses and a clerk waiting behind it, though the only person being served was a girl with long, dark-blonde hair and a shovel slung over her back with her bag. One of the clerks spotted Jenny approaching the desk and stepped up to the counter, smiling brightly.

“Can I help you?” she asked.
“Can I register to compete in the Hoenn League here?” Jenny asked.

“Of course!” the clerk said, waking up her computer. “Are you already registered as a trainer?”

“In Johto, yes,” Jenny said, picking up her Pokegear, which was hanging from a cord around her neck, and withdrawing her ID from a slot in the side.

“Lovely,” the clerk said, taking the card and inserting it into a reader attached to the computer, filling the form onscreen with Jenny’s details. “It’s a Fairlan ID, so you don’t need to re-register. There you go!” The reader beeped and she withdrew the card, handing it back to Jenny. “Let me get you a badge case. It’s got a pamphlet inside with details on all of the Hoenn leaders.” She turned around, opening up a cabinet behind her and pulling out a silver case with the emblem of the Hoenn League stamped on it. “There you go!”

“Thank you very much,” Jenny said, opening up the case and looking at the eight soft indents for her gym badges.

“Ooooh, there’s foreign competition this year too, huh?” the blonde at the counter said, winking at Jenny and grinning.

“Flocking from far and wide,” Jenny said, withdrawing the pamphlet on the leaders before putting her badge case in her bag. “Have you got many badges already? I bet I’ve got some catching up to do, coming a few weeks into the summer season like this.”

“Don’t worry, you’re not that far behind,” the other girl said. “I’ve only got one myself. Seka Petalburg,” she said, holding out her hand.

“Jenny Hawkshaw,” Jenny said, shaking it. “Nice to meet you.”

“Same,” Seka said. “Are you planning to stay here for long and do the tourist thing, or are you straight on your way to your first gym? Thank you,” she said as the nurse handed her pokeballs to her.

“I’ve done the tourist thing here before, so…” Jenny flicked through the pamphlet. “Mauville Gym’s
“Yeah, but ‘closest’ still means several days’ uphill hike through wild territory, so I’ve got a proposition for you--not the sexy kind, we’ve only just met,” Seka said, putting her two pokeballs back on her belt. “Wanna make the trek as a team? I mean, I’ve got Pokemon--do you have Pokemon?”

“Two,” Jenny said, tapping Sarah-Jane and Jack’s pokeballs, “a Staravia and a Jolteon.”

“Jolteon, cool. What kind of Pokemon’s a Staravia?” Seka said, looking curiously at the pokeball. “Is it from Johto?”

“She’s a flying-type from Sinnoh, originally, but my aunt and uncle live there and we visit them every other summer, and I caught her there a few years ago,” Jenny recalled fondly. “But I’m looking forward to catching a few more. What do you have?”

“Zangoose and Poochyena,” Seka said. “Anyway, with them it’s not like I’d be making the trek _alone_, but loads of people make that trek in pairs or groups and double battle to train, so how about it? You up for having a travelling partner?”

“I’d love that,” Jenny agreed. “I’m looking forward to seeing more of Hoenn, but I’ve never been on my own before.”

“Family trips, huh?” Seka said as they started walking out of the Pokemon Centre. “You and your folks, or do you have any siblings?”

“No, I’m an only child, it was just me and my parents,” Jenny said, swallowing the lump in the throat that still arose at even alluding to her mother. It had gotten a little easier since her funeral, but not much. “You?”

“Well, I’ve got a ton of foster siblings,” Seka said, shielding her eyes with her hand briefly as they left the Pokemon Centre and stepped back into the blazing heat and sunlight. “My foster dad’s the Petalburg Leader, but I’m gonna leave it a while before I fight him. I’d like to give him a real fight, y’know?”

“Got any insider tips?” Jenny said, giving Seka a nudge.
“Slaking are the worst thing you will ever fight,” Seka said, dead seriously. “Your folks coming to watch if you make the League? Norman can get them some good seats, since he’s, y’know, in the League and all.”

“My dad’ll be coming,” Jenny said. *I hope,* she thought. He hadn’t been himself since her mother’s death, not that she could blame him, but he’d insisted that he’d be fine and that Jenny shouldn’t cancel the challenge she’d been planning to take for nearly a year on his account. “My mum, uh… she passed away a few weeks ago.”

“Shit… sorry to hear that,” Seka said, eyes widening. “You’re still taking the League challenge so soon?”

“I’ve been planning to do this before I entered the police academy, and I can’t delay my entrance another year,” Jenny said, tightening her hands around her bag strap. “I really thought about not doing it, but… Mum was so excited for me. Dad encouraged me to come, too. He said Mum wouldn’t want us to stop living our lives, y’know?”

“She sounds pretty cool,” Seka said, bumping her shoulder into Jenny’s.

“Sorry to drop all this heavy stuff on you when we’ve only just met,” Jenny sighed.

“You want heavy, try unlocking my tragic backstory,” Seka snorted. “Just focus on getting to the League for your mom. I mean, I’ll have to kick your ass once you get there, but it’s trying that counts, right?”

“Bring it,” Jenny challenged with a grin. “Soon as we get out of the city, we should have a battle to meet each other’s Pokemon and see where we stand, how about it?”

“You’re on, Johto,” Seka said, brandishing her shovel. “Get ready to get your ass handed to you, *Hoenn-style.*”

“You think you’re that hot?”

“Y’know, I wasn’t going for a pun, but I like it.”
Just a meandering little bit about how Jenny and Seka started hanging out in Calamity Calls. Title’s awful, I know, but I couldn’t really think of anything XP It’s a bit below wordcount, but I’m ahead as it is. I hope everybody’s feeling alright today and keeping safe *hugs*
Responsibilities

Chapter Summary

NaNoWriMo Day: Thursday, November 10th, 2016
Title: Responsibilities
Words: 2077

Chapter Notes

This one also takes place in the timeskip between DD and the first Unova fic, a couple years after Selection.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“...I’ll think about it and let you know after the funeral. Okay. Sure. See you then, Hayley.”

“Something about Mr Fuji’s funeral?” Blue said, walking into the living room just as Saylee hung up the call and reattached her Pokegear to her wrist. “It’s still tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah,” Saylee said, resting her chin on her hand and staring into space thoughtfully. “That was just Hayley saying that the priestesses and the clan have decided who they want as the next Leader.”

“Not Hayley? I figured it’d be her after her grandfather,” Blue said, sitting down next to her and poking her forehead. “The worry frown tells me it’s not that simple.”

“It’s not,” Saylee said. He poked her again. “Stop that,” she giggled, smacking his hand away.

“So who’d they pick?” Blue said, accepting his victory and sitting back with his arms folded. “Somebody you don’t like?”

“Exactly the opposite,” Saylee said, watching Blue’s face for his reaction. “They picked Hernan.”
Blue raised an eyebrow, opened his mouth, closed his mouth, and hummed thoughtfully as the gears visibly turned inside his head. “Can’t see why not,” he said eventually. “I mean, I’m betting a Pokemon as a Leader hasn’t been a thing ever before in Hoenn or Sinnoh, but first time for everything…”

“I need to have a look through the Leader selection laws, but I’m pretty sure none of the language specifies *humans*, just the ‘person who has the favour of the inhabitants of their jurisdiction’ blah blah voting procedures blah, and Pokemon are legally people in the Fairlands these days. *I know* I wrote *that* into Kanto’s legislation, at least.”

“I don’t think any of the other Kanto Leaders’ll be against it,” Blue said, looking up at the ceiling. “I don’t think there’s any solid grounds to dispute it, anyway. It’s not like there’s a *lot* of living people in Lavender, the most important thing is making sure that the needs of the dead are respected, and he knows all about that, what with his partner being the Clan Mother of the Cubone and Marowak at all… and it’s not like he’ll have to deal with foreign heads of state much or ever, that’s what you and the Elites are for.”

“Yeah, but foreign interests are what I’m worried about, every day of my goddamn life for the last two years,” Saylee said, throwing her hands up. “You know, when I became Champion, Steven, Cynthia and Wallace all took time to warn me that there are a lot of countries that don’t believe that the Gab is an actual thing, and I didn’t believe them because it’s so easily provable, y’know? But the problem isn’t that people don’t believe the proof, it’s that a lot of countries are too heavily built around the idea that Pokemon aren’t people, and the Gab’s the most indisputable challenge to that. Unova especially--Pokemon as commodities are worth *way* too much money. Not calling them all fucking assholes to their faces is the hardest part of the job.”

“So you say after every UN meeting,” Blue mentioned. “And like three-quarters of your ambassador meetings. And--”

“And it’s still frustrating as hell every time,” Saylee moaned, covering her face with her hands. “Figuring out how to help change things in other countries without accidentally starting a war is harder than arm-wrestling a Graveler. And I think appointing Hernan would really make a point about Pokemon as people, but I’m worried that the anti-rights countries are going to pick a fight over it. But I don’t want to let that stop me from appointing Hernan, because I think he’d be *great* and like you said there’s no *practical* reason not to, and pissing off people who can raise angry ghosts for no reason is a bad, *bad* idea… *ugh.*”

“Sounds like more reasons to do it than not,” Blue said, slinging an arm around her shoulder and pulling her to lean against him. “And this is probably not diplomatic of me, but if appointing him reads like a middle finger to Unova and the rest of them, *good*. ‘Cause the thing is, like you said, he’s not gonna be dealing with other world leaders or any international stuff *at all*. This is *our* internal politics, nothing to do with any other country, so if anybody wants to start shit, they’re the
one in the wrong, not you--politically, legally, and in, y’know, the real world. Besides,” he said, kissing her on the forehead, “giving anything resembling a fuck about what other people think of you when you’re doing what you know is the right thing is just not you.”

“Yeah, but being responsible for two whole countries has made me a bit less inclined to start fights than when I was just responsible for a handful of Pokemon,” Saylee said, nudging him. “You’re right, though, that there’s not much anybody can do except complain, and they do that anyway.”

“Exactly! If you gave a shit about politicians talking shit, you’d never have time for anything else,” Blue exclaimed. “You’re a woman with work to do, dammit, and that work is the welfare of everybody you’re responsible for--human and Pokemon. Right?”

“Right,” Saylee sighed, hugging him. “Thanks, Blue. I was going to accept the appointment anyway, but I feel a bit more secure about it.” She stood up, stretching. “I should probably forewarn the Elites before the formal announcement and talk about how to do this. Can you let the other Leaders know and let me know what they think?”

“Sure,” Blue said, getting up and following her down the hall to where their offices were. They both paused briefly to look into the nursery and check that their toddler was keeping up her new habit of sleeping through the night. Greta, now getting slightly elderly for a Growlithe, cracked an eye open and nodded at her charge’s parents before stretching out and curling up into a more comfortable position under the crib.

“You’re the Champion of two countries, and that’s a huge responsibility that I don’t think anybody would carry better than you,” Blue murmured, “least of all Lance. At the end of the day, what’s in the best interests of Kanto and Johto is up to you. Just don’t make any decisions you’d be ashamed to explain to her someday, ‘kay?”

“Hernan’s going to be a great leader,” Saylee said, with more conviction every time she said it. “He’ll look out for Lavender’s needs well. And somebody’s got to take this step.”

“That’s the spirit,” Blue said, giving her a thumbs-up on the way into his own office.

{}
human and Cubone alike--would pray aloud, but the procession was utterly silent. Carrie and Hayley lit the pyre together without a word, only hands clasped in prayer. Attendance was so small--Sabrina, Saylee and Blue were the only attendees from outside of Lavender, leaving Auntie Daisy to babysit back in Viridian--that Mewtwo was in open attendance, and was quite possibly kept small for that exact reason. He and Tobias, Mary and Hernan were hovering not far behind Carrie and Hayley, in that odd area of being closely involved with the proceedings but holding no formal positions.

Saylee regarded Hernan thoughtfully as they all waited in silence for the pyre to burn out. The Hitmonchan was one of the strongest Pokemon she’d ever trained, already a powerful fighter when she’d first found him in Saffron and only growing stronger as he fought across Kanto and Johto with her. Since Carrie became Clan Mother, he’d spent his time dealing with angry and unsettled Pokemon around Lavender and Saffron by diplomacy where possible and with his fists where necessary, with his son and daughter-in-law working alongside him. He taught me to punch, too, she remembered, lightly stroking the calluses on her knuckles as she remembered him teaching her the finer points of how to brace her wrist, straighten her elbow and knock somebody’s teeth out. It’s wasn’t a conflict resolution method that she got to use anymore, but it had certainly come in useful.

Lavender was a unique jurisdiction, ruled more by the needs of the dead than the living who tended to them, and Hernan knew the area as well as anybody. Hayley wanted to be a priestess, not a politician, and all the other humans in Lavender were also priestesses who considered politics to be less important than soothing the souls of the deceased. Having dealt with the restless dead in both the living world and… elsewhere, Saylee didn’t dispute the importance of their work, but Lavender needed an advocate. Whether it was in a year or a decade or sixty years, there would be another Champion after Saylee, and more afterwards, and an ideal world would be one where nobody else need see firsthand just what horrors the unsettled dead could create, but the result could very well be a Champion who didn’t appreciate just how important it was to properly care for Lavender without a Leader to argue for it.

“It’s down to embers,” Blue murmured, nudging Saylee and jerking her out of her reverie.

She felt a little ashamed that her thoughts had not been on Mr Fuji, as they should have been, but caring for Lavender Town and the lost dead had been his life’s work. Forgive me, she prayed, but I’m thinking about Lavender’s future. I’m sure you’d agree that that’s important, wouldn’t you?

“Sister Hayley,” Saylee said, greeting the girl--a young woman, now--with a formal bow.

“Sar Kanto,” Hayley said, greeting her with a deeper bow back. “Thank you for coming. My grandfather would be very honoured.”

“Your grandfather’s work was more important than most people will ever know,” Saylee said, her eyes briefly flickering over Mewtwo. Sabrina was gently holding her friend’s hand, the two of them
standing still and silent and likely in some form of psychic conference. The powerful clone had grown, over the years, to regard his last surviving creator as something of a father. Saylee had to imagine that his thoughts and feelings on Mr Fuji’s death were complex, to say the least.

“His work must be able to continue,” Hayley said. “Have you thought about our selection?”

“I have no objection, nor do any of the other Leaders or the Elites,” Saylee said. “I just need to formally propose the position to him. Is now the right time?”

“Can’t think of a better one,” Hayley said, leading her over to Hernan and his family.

“Good tae see you,” Mary said, giving Saylee a hug. “You too, big man!” she said, hugging Blue. “How’s the wean?”

“She says she loves you and to give you this,” Blue said, giving Mary a big, mock-childish kiss on the cheek. The Ampharos burst out laughing as he did the same to Tobias.

“Children are pure of heart,” Tobias declared.

“Thank you both for coming,” Carrie said.

“It’s a work call too, I’m afraid,” Saylee said, looking to Hernan. “I’m here to formally offer you the position of Lavender Leader. There’s a small swearing-in ceremony for the record, but otherwise there’s not much pomp and circumstance to it, just a lot of meetings. Do you accept?”

“Of course,” Hernan said, gently shaking Saylee’s hand. “Thank you, Saylee.” He looked over Carrie, Tobias and Mary, who were all grinning proudly at him. “Thank you for everything.”

“I should be thanking you,” Saylee said, dropping the formality and hugging him. “There might be a bit of a shitstorm over this, though. Are you ready for that?”

“Where is it on a scale of ‘being attacked by the unhappy dead’ to ‘fighting through a building full of Rockets?’” Hernan asked, making Blue and Mary laugh the loudest. “And is ‘shitstorm’ the formal political term?”
“No, but I only get to swear anymore when I’m not around my two-year-old or anywhere near a microphone, so let me have this,” Saylee sighed.

“C’mon,” Carrie said, taking Hernan’s hand. “Even if you’re not formally sworn in yet, I need to go present you as the one taking up Mr Fuji’s mantle. I’m proud of you,” she added, kissing his cheek.

“Proud of you too,” Blue said, kissing Saylee on the forehead.

“If this all blows up, I’m blaming you,” Saylee warned him.

“Noted and accepted.”

Chapter End Notes

This is one of those things that comes of me spending WAY too much time picking over the minutiae of my worldbuilding and planning out the next forty years’ (in-universe, or possibly out-of-universe too depending on if this franchise will ever die, which it probably won’t) worth of Leaders/Elites/Champions/etc and evolving Pokemon rights and the brief bit in B&B where I mentioned a Pokemon leading a competing team in the Pokeathlon and thinking about the possibilities of the first Leader who can fight in his own gym battles. Kanto doesn’t have a competitive League at this point, of course, but when it does… ingame I know there isn’t a gym in Lavender, but the whole Cinnabar area is just dead rock and Blaine’s gone, so there’s no gym there and the eighth Leader jurisdiction is Lavender, since as Saylee muses, it’s a VERY unique area.

Greta the Growlithe is actually a Pokemon I caught in my FireRed run, by the way. I never used her ingame so I don’t know if I’ve ever mentioned her being around in-text, but she’s been a police Growlithe ever since the founding of the Kanto police force and now she’s actually a member of the Secret Service, being the Champion’s daughter’s guard XD
The east wing of the campus was the den of the Sciences, so Saylee had never been down there before--the undergrad Games Club had been held in a room in the Arts and Humanities building where Saylee had had many of her lectures in first year. Theoretically, the layout of the east wing should mirror the west, both having been built at the same time, but as was usual in such old buildings, different departments had moved in and out and all about, acquired or lost space to each other and shifted room designations so often that she’d be lucky if room 219 really was on the second floor.

“Hold it!” a voice yelled as she stepped into the elevator. She left her foot on the line of the door, keeping her finger hovering over the “2” button as she waited for the tall blonde running across the lobby towards her to make it inside. “Thanks,” the girl gasped, diving in. “Second--oh, you too?”

“Yep,” Saylee said, stepping fully inside and pressing the button. “I’m headed to the Games Club. You?”

“Same,” the girl said, grinning. “Nice to know I’m not gonna walk in and it’ll just be a bunch of neckbeards. A friend of mine at Stirling Uni said their Games Club was like that.”

“I don’t actually know what the rest of the club looks like,” Saylee confessed. “I know the guy who’s DM-ing--he’s a postgrad, but I don’t think he can grow a beard--but the rest of the players are all going to be postgrads that I don’t know. Glad I’m not going to be the only undergrad left, anyway. Are you a first year?”

“World Literature,” the girl said, retucking some loose strands of her wavy blonde hair under a butterfly hairclip. “Key. Nice to meet you. Are you second year?”
“Third, Politics,” Saylee said, stepping out of the elevator as the doors opened. “Saylee. Nice to meet you.” She looked around. “Hmmm… rooms 201-230 that way, so… maybe a sixty percent chance room 219’s down there.”

“Our first adventure together: finding the damn club room!” Key declared, heading off down the corridor. “These old buildings are so weird. Are we really the only undergrads in the game?”

“As far as I know,” Saylee said. “The undergrad game got pretty small last year, anyway. My brother’s character died early into the campaign and he didn’t make another because he was Fourth Year and wanted to focus on his dissertation, and my boyfriend was going to come back but he can’t make Thursday nights because he’s Fourth Year Athletic Training so he’s got football teams to coach for his practical credit. Might just be you and me messing up the postgrads’ stale game.”

“Challenge accepted,” Key said with a wicked grin. “Also, I don’t see room 219. You think it’s down the other corridor?”

“I think so,” Saylee said as they reached the end of the corridor, turned around and started heading back, double-checking the out-of-order numbers on the doors. “Do you have a character already?”

“Yes,” Key said, patting her laptop bag. “Got my sheets and some backstory notes for the DM and everything. Picked my first Pokemon, too, unless I have to roll it up randomly?”

“Steven’ll have pre-selected options to pick from, since he likes to let everybody start out the map on a level field, so people can’t give themselves a Dratini or something,” Saylee said apologetically.

“Awww… I rolled up a really good Ralts, too,” Key sighed. “I think of a way to fit him into her backstory anyway. Oooh, there it is!” She pointed at Room 219, sitting between rooms 252 and 253. “Old buildings are weird.”

Saylee knocked on the door and peered inside. She spotted Steven sitting at the head of several tables that had been pushed together, a wall of information boards between him and the maps spread out over the table. The postgrads were sitting in two groups of three: on Steven’s left a burly, black-haired, dark-skinned guy sitting next to a tan and equally buff Brunet and a pale, freckly woman with a wild mane of bushy red hair, all wearing blue bandanas; and on Steven’s right an extremely tall, thin man with slicked-back red hair, a shorter guy in a bulky hoodie with long, bright-purple hair, and a woman with a purple streak dyed into the fringe of her black hair and a scowl on her face, all of them looking like they hadn’t seen the sun for some years. They were muttering to each other in their groups of three, but stopped to stare as Saylee and Key stepped inside.
“Saylee! Hi! Glad you could make it, thanks for letting me know Blue couldn’t,” Steven said brightly, “and tell Red congrats on getting the exchange he wanted!”

“Will do,” Saylee said. “Steven, this is Key, she’s a first-year who’s here to play. Key, that’s Steven, the DM. Rule Zero applies.”

“Nice to meet you! C’mon in and sit down,” Steven said, gesturing to the opposite end of the table from him, between the two factions. “Some new players’ll shake up this game. I mean, you can join Aqua or Magma if you really want, but my dice might just get so frustrated with you that they roll a lot of Explosions…”

“OI! Don’t scare off the new recruits!” the freckled woman protested. “Join Aqua, girls, and Matt here’ll make you some of these snazzy headbands.”

“Classy,” Saylee observed, sitting down and rummaging in her bag for her character sheets. “Steven, is it okay if I run my usual character and just roll up some new Pokemon?”

“I’ve got some starters for you to pick from, but yeah, go ahead,” Steven said, rummaging around in what sounded like his box of tokens. “Key, was it? Do you have a character?”

“Yep,” Key said, passing him her character sheets for him to flick through.

“Thanks,” Steven said, taking them and looking down the first page. “Let’s do some introductions while I’m checking this, okay? I’ll go first. Steven, postgrad Geology, DM, all shall love me and despair. The map we’re doing is called Hoenn, and this lot have been doing a solid job of screwing it up. Archie, you go next.” He waved a hand vaguely at Tall, Dark And Wearing Too Tight A T-Shirt.

“Archie, postgrad Marine Biology,” the guy said, saluting. “My character’s the leader of Team Aqua, and we’re planning to summon the ocean god Kyogre.”

“Shelley, postgrad Oceanography,” the freckled woman said, slinging an arm over the third man’s shoulder, “and this is Matt, likewise. We’re also Team Aqua.”
“Saylee, Third-Year Politics,” Saylee said, pulling out her character token. “My character’s got a few of the divine buffs, so your god can bring it.”

“Key, First-Year World Literature,” Key added. “I’ve never used this character before, so I don’t have a figure—should I get one?”

“If you want, I know a guy who makes them cheap,” Steven said, not looking up from the sheets. “Don’t worry about it, though, I can give you an NPC token to use for moving her around the map.”

“I’m Courtney,” the woman with the purple streak said, gesturing to her figure, which was in the middle of the map on what looked like a volcano. “Postgrad Programming. I’m in Team Magma. We’re trying to summon the earth god Groudon.”

“Kalle, postgrad Vulcanology,” the guy in the bulky mumbled, pulling his hood a little more over his face. “Go Team Magma.”

“Marc, also Postgrad Vulcanology and leader of Team Magma,” the last man said, squeezing Kalle’s shoulder. “Don’t mind him. He’s just not in the best of moods today.” He and Kalle both had faintly German accents; Saylee wondered if they were on exchanges abroad, like Red, or had done their undergrad study in Britain, too.

“Right, lovely, we’re all ready for sing-alongs and trust falls,” Steven said, passing Key’s character sheets back to her. “You’ll be starting out in Littleroot Town,” he said, setting down a figurine that Saylee thought she recalled being used to represent a Sevii chieftain in the past. Saylee put her figure next to it. “You ladies ready to pick your starters?”

“What’ve you got for us?” Saylee asked. Steven put three figures down on the table, drawing outraged cries from several of the postgrads.

“Torchic, Treecko and Mudkip?!” Shelley complained. “You gave us Zubats and Poochyenas!”

“They’re just joining a game that you’re already far into, of course they get something a little better to help them close the gap.” Steven said, winking at Saylee and Key. “now, I’m going to use my DM’s omniscience to guess that Saylee, being a bit of a pyromaniac, will go for Torchic…”

“I am not a pyromaniac,” Saylee objected, taking Torchic.
“Join Magma, pyromaniacs welcome,” Courtney said, lacing her fingers together and propping her chin on her hands with a grin.

“Being a bad influence on the undergrads means a penalty to saves,” Steven warned her. “You okay with choosing between Treecko and Mudkip, Key?”

“I like Treecko the best anyway,” Key said, picking up the little green figure and giving it a kiss before setting it down on top of her character sheet. “I’m gonna name him Thomas.”

“Then here’s their stat sheets,” Steven said, handing one page to Saylee and another to Key. “Fill in the names and then…” He gestured to the map. “Your very own adventure with Pokemon awaits! So, we’ll sort out the new players’ turns first, that alright?”

“Fair enough,” Matt agreed. “We still need to do some planning, anyway.”

“Do it by text, you know what happens if you talk over me talking to the players,” Steven said in a threatening tone before turning to Saylee and Key with a smile. “So. You’re both in Littleroot Town and you hear a scream. What do you do?”

Saylee looked at Key, who grinned. “Run towards it?” the blonde suggested.

“Run towards it,” Saylee agreed, picking up her new set of dice.

Chapter End Notes

Here’s more of the happy AU where nobody really fights, nobody really dies and everybody just plays games together :D Where’s the AU for real life where warfare is never more than a tabletop or video game and nobody ever has to really die fighting. Remember to give some time today to think of those who have died in wars past and present—both soldiers and civilians who suffer from warfare worldwide.

I went to university in a campus that had been built less than a decade before I started studying there, and the room designations were already all over the place. A whole corridor of studios were tucked behind a door in the canteen that looked a hell of a lot like a cupboard door and had no signage to indicate otherwise, so opening it was a bit like stepping into Narnia (especially once the Costume Design students’ projects got
going). My brother went to another university, which had campuses in some much older buildings that have become a bit of an Escheresque nightmare to navigate. Logic has no place in finding your lecture theatres. It’s the first test to see who can survive University.
“Stop! STOP RIGHT THERE!”

Red jerked awake even before Perun whacked him with his bolt-shaped tail to wake him. “Over there,” the Pikachu hissed, flattening to the ground with his tail and ears low as beams of light flashed through the darkness. It looked like half a dozen flashlights sweeping the area downhill, close to the shore, slowly moving uphill towards the Saffron gate. Red was camped closer than he’d like to the gate, but by the time he’d gotten out of the tunnel from Cerulean it was already dark and he’d managed to nearly sprain his ankle four times before he gave up, set Perun on night watch and hoped that Rockets didn’t bother to go looking for people to rob and kick about in the middle of the night.

The lights and shouting were coming from the wrong direction to be Rocket, though. “They’re coming from Vermillion,” Red whispered, checking the straps on his pack and patting himself down quickly to make sure that nothing had fallen out of his pockets in his sleep before starting to get to his feet. He ducked back down behind the bush he’d been hiding under when another light swept the area, larger and stronger than any of the tiny beams down the hill.

“That’s Rocket, though, right?” Perun muttered, sparking a little. They’d escaped every encounter that they’d had with the gangs so far, but sometimes it was a close thing.

“Ssssh,” Red said, ignoring the static shocks that he got when petting Perun to soothe him. “They’re not looking for us,” he whispered. “C’mon. We should move. Quietly.”

Perun nodded, following Red as he carefully felt his way across the steep, rocky slopes, crawling from scraggy bush to scraggy bush as they made their way towards the patches of tall grass that would hide them more effectively from the searchlight. Whoever had been doing the shouting had fallen silent at the sight of the Rocket searchlight, and the smaller lights had vanished too, but Red wasn’t sure that that didn’t mean they were still looking. He’d heard that the Vermillion militia were
enemies of Rocket, but that didn’t mean that they’d be any kinder to a lone traveller who was carrying two extremely rare Pokemon.

“Success,” he sighed in relief as he made it into the grass and climbed up to a crouch, wiping dust and grit off his forearms and knees. He started slowly straightening up, running a hand up the coarse grass to assess how tall it was and whether he could fully stand upright while still concealed, and was abruptly knocked on his arse when something barrelled into his shins. He went down with a grunt; Perun yelped loudly as the Pikachu was nearly landed on.

“Get outta the way!” whatever had run into Red yelled, trying to scramble over him. Red rolled over, pinning down the small Pokemon—it had to be a Pokemon, its body was hard as stone and it had a tail—to the ground, struggling to keep it from moving. “What the fuck?! Let go of me!” it yelped.

“Ssssshhhh!” Red hissed. “You’re running towards Rocket territory!”

“Lemme go!” the Pokemon growled, whacking Red with his tail until it escaped from his arms and was promptly felled by a Thundershock from Perun.

“You okay?” Perun asked, sniffing Red’s cheek.

“Fine, he didn’t do a lot of damage,” Red said, though he could feel a nasty, tail-shaped bruise forming on his right shoulder. He crawled over to the now-unconscious Pokemon, taking out his small pocket flashlight and turning it on. It didn’t light until he smacked it off the heel of his hand a few times—he tried not to think about how much life was left in it.

“The hell is that?” Perun asked as the light finally illuminated the small, blue-and-brown Pokemon that was knocked out on the ground. It had a big, round head and a curly tail, both protruding out of a hard shell, along with four short legs.

“Professor Oak had one of these,” Red murmured. “It’s a Squirtle.”

“’S it his?” Perun whispered, reaching out a paw to poke the Squirtle’s round head.

“Don’t think so,” Red replied, rummaging in his pack for an empty pokeball and tapping it to the Squirtle, who vanished. That didn’t necessarily mean it wasn’t Sam—if her pokeball had been broken, she’d be able to be captured by a new one—but he was pretty sure that Sam had a different
voice from the one he’d heard. “Let’s find a new place to sleep and deal with it in the morning,” he whispered, starting to stand up again. He was just short enough that the tips of the grass were over his head; unless the lights were directly on him, he’d probably be impossible to see. Nocturnal wild Pokemon would be impossible for him to see, too, however, and even with his better night vision, Perun would be hard-pressed to see anything coming until it was right on top of them, too. They needed to get to open ground, and hopefully manage it before dawn broke.

{} "Mornin’,” Chris yawned as he was released from his pokeball, looking around and noting that they weren’t in a battle before giving Red a hug. The Charmeleon was growing fast and was almost as tall as his trainer now. Red also released his Pidgeotto and Ivysaur to join them in the patch of bare ground by a stagnant pond that he’d found around daybreak. Tall grass surrounded them, hopefully hiding them both from the sight of Vermillion and Saffron.

“Quiet night?” Ben asked, using a vine to gently pet Perun, who’d curled up to doze as soon as Red had released other Pokemon.

“Nah, met some asshole that Red caught,” Perun mumbled, perking up his ears a little as Ben started giving him scritches. “I zapped it and it passed out. Red said it was a somethin’...?”

“Squirtle, like Sam, but I don’t think it’s Sam,” Red said, holding out the new pokeball. “It was running away from the militia down the hill. Had to catch it before it drew them or the Rockets to us. It’s a water-type, so Ben, it’s up to you to catch or stop it if it runs away again, okay?”

“Sure,” Ben said, lazily uncoiling a second vine without pausing in scratching Perun’s ears. “I got it.”

Red nodded--Ben tended to look like he was about to fall asleep, but Red knew that the sleepy-looking grass-type could be deceptively quick and was a wicked shot with his Razor Leaf--and released the Squirtle he’d captured the night before.

“Whuzza?” the water-type mumbled, rubbing its head as it appeared--Red didn’t have a potion or a healing machine, so he hadn’t been able to restore any of the pain or injury that the strange Squirtle was likely feeling from Perun’s Thundershock.
“Good morning,” Red said, crouching down to be closer to the little blue Pokemon’s level. “I’m Red. What’s your name?”

“Sergei… wait, what?” the Squirtle said, looking around. “What the fuck is this?” he said bluntly, stumbling to his feet. “What am I--hey! Did you catch me?!” he yelled, pointing at the pokeball in Red’s hand.

“You were being chased by militia people,” Red explained, “and you were making a lot of noise close to Rocket territory. They wouldn’t put you in a pokeball, they’d put you in a cage, and worse.”

“I can do worse too,” Ben commented idly, “so stay put and don’t attack anybody, ‘kay?”

“Do you always have to sound like a gangster?” Pierre wanted to know, perching on Ben’s flower bulb and glaring at him as pointedly as only a Pidge could.

“We’re not going to hurt you,” Red promised.

“Again,” Sergei muttered, rubbing his head.

“Unless you make us,” Ben reminded him.

“If you don’t want to travel with me, I can let you go somewhere safer,” Red continued. “I just had to catch you last night so you didn’t bring the militia or Rockets down on me. I don’t know the militia, but I know the Rockets would steal you and the rest of my Pokemon. Were the militia trying to catch you?”

“They were tryin’ to kick my ass for stealin’ food from them,” Sergei said, rubbing his stomach. “Don’t see why. They got tons, I was just takin’ a little…”

“You are pretty little yourself,” Chris observed, holding a claw down to about Sergei’s height.

“See! Don’t see why they’re makin’ such a fuss,” Sergei grumbled.
“Oh, I dunno, maybe because you were stealing food?” Perun said, rolling his eyes. “Maybe they’ve got lots of people and that’s why they’ve got lots of food! Sometimes you can get food from humans by just asking what you can do to help, and then they give you food, y’know. We do it all the time.”

“Who does shit like that?!” Sergei exclaimed. “Humans just catch you! Like you did!” he growled, pointing at Red.

“I’m really, really sorry,” Red said, “but you’re really rare, you know? You don’t want to get captured by Rocket. And I promise, I promise, I’ll release you somewhere else if you don’t want to come with me, because honestly I’m not sure if I can feed you anyway, but not here, okay? Not near Rockets. Trust me.”

“Yeah, right!” Sergei said, taking a deep breath.

“No!” Ben said sharply, tapping Sergei on the forehead with a vine. The Squirtle toppled over, vanishing into his shell in shock. “He was gonna Bubble you,” he said to Red.

“Figured,” Red said, returning Sergei to his pokeball. “...We’ll figure out what to do with him later, once we’re somewhere safe, okay?”

“Dunno ‘bout you, Red, but I don’t think I’ve ever been anywhere safe in my life,” Perun pointed out.

“Away from the Rockets, anyway,” Red said, getting the rest of his pokeballs. “I’m gonna check out the militia, so everybody away except Pierre until I’ve figured out if they’re gonna try and rob me, okay?”

Chapter End Notes

SPOILER: The militia didn’t rob Red and when Red actually released Sergei, the Squirtle was so surprised that the weird human actually kept his promise that he wound up following them. Also, food and friends are hard to come by, dammit.
“This is just disgusting,” Lorenzo complained, Ice Beaming another Tentacool as it lunged out of the water towards them. The frozen lump slowly bobbed away, the ice already starting to melt—more likely due to the state of the water than the actual temperature, which was growing cooler the closer they got to Kanto.

“We might not be far from land now, actually,” Saylee noted, peering at the horizon. Was that a wave or land? “I could probably fly on Pedro from here.”

“Please do,” Lorenzo sighed, turning up his nose at the polluted water around them. “He will not have to deal with this sludge.”

Saylee released her Pidgeot. “Are we near land?” she asked him as he looked around.

“Oh, yeah, I can see it from here,” Pedro said with a nod. “Ya wanna fly the rest a’ it?”

“Sure,” Saylee said, climbing up onto his back and returning Lorenzo. She clung close to Pedro’s back, watching the distant lumps of land slowly grow on the horizon. The Sevii Islands had been beautiful, but even so, she was longing the ramshackle huts and perpetually overcast skies of home. She was looking forward to familiar faces and seeing the people she loved, and bore a faint hope that maybe, after all the time it had taken her to get home, Blue had already found Red and returned home.
The blackened husk that was all that remained of Cinnabar Island rose up ahead of them; Saylee could roughly make out the shape of the volcano, but the buildings were gone. She clasped Pedro more tightly, her eyes burning at the thought of Miranda and her sacrifice.

“Nearly there, Doll,” Pedro said gently. “Pallet ain’t far past Cinnabar.”

Saylee just nodded, looking past Cinnabar. The cliffs near Fuchsia were rising up to the east of them, above the docks of Vermillion, but she was looking directly ahead to the cold, desolate beaches that lay south of Pallet. Not far beyond them were the rickety little collection of…

…the ruined remnants of their houses.

“No,” Saylee moaned as Pedro flew up and landed among the destroyed buildings. “No, no, no, no - -!”

“I don’t see nobody,” Pedro said, raising his wings uncertainly as he looked around.

Saylee ran to the remains of her house, completely collapsed in on itself. “MUM!” she screamed, grabbing a fallen beam and tugging at it. “MUM! DAISY! PROFESSOR! ANYBODY!”

“Doll! Saylee!” Pedro hooted sharply, fluttering over and tugging at her bag strap. “I don’t think they’re here, Doll,” he said, pulling her away from the collapsed house. “Look at the lab.”

Saylee turned. A large “R” had been daubed on one of the walls of the laboratory in a fluid that had had time to turn rusty brown.

“Rocket,” Saylee whispered.

“Musta happened after ya fought some on the Islands,” Pedro said quietly. “They musta found out this was where yer from an’…”

“ Took everybody,” Saylee growled, walking around the ruined settlement and taking it all in. The
buildings were collapsed, but aside from what was painted on the lab wall, she couldn’t see any blood. There were no bodies, either. Pallet’s miniscule population had been kidnapped, not killed. “We’re going to go get them back,” she said, climbing onto Pedro’s back. Hot rage was bubbling inside of her, rising like bile. This was her home. This was her home! “I know where Rocket comes from, too, and Viridian should be the only place they’ve got left.”

“They sure ain’t hidin’ it was them,” Pedro said, looking at the big R. “Like they want ya comin’ after them.”

“I don’t care if it’s a trap,” Saylee said stubbornly. “I’m not scared of Rocket. We’ve kicked their asses before, we’ll do it again, as many times as it takes.” The last time, she thought furiously as Pedro took off. If they’re going to destroy my home, I’ll destroy theirs!

{}  
The prisoners glared at Giovanni as he walked into the room full of cages--most of them containing rare Pokemon, including the ones Rocket had seized from the pathetic little settlement, but the group of human prisoners had been herded into one of the larger frames. The youngest woman, the Professor’s niece or granddaughter or something, sat up a little straighter, moving between the injured old man and Giovanni, as if she could actually defend him if the Rocket Boss decided he had a few prisoners more than he needed.

He ignored her. He maybe did have a few more prisoners than strictly necessary, but he wouldn’t have to hold them for much longer. Besides, she wasn’t the one he was here to see.

He withdrew the old photograph from his pocket, giving it a good, long look before scanning the handful of human faces, finding the one that had struck him as startlingly familiar. Her hair was mostly grey, unlike in the photo, and her face more lined, but--

She was staring at him, too, like she had been when he’d first noticed her--a glare of hate fading into something a little confused, like she was trying to figure out where she’d seen him before. “You,” he said, pointing at her, “what’s your name?”

“You don’t have to answer him,” one of the other prisoners said stubbornly, glowering at the Rocket Boss.

Giovanni sighed, releasing Narve. The Nidoking was taller than the cage, and the prisoners backed
away hurriedly from his long horn. “Answer the question and nobody gets hurt,” Giovanni said.

“Johanna,” the woman said, folding her arms and levelling a… familiar glare at him. “What do you want?”

“To talk,” Giovanni said, beckoning her to step closer.

“Jo, no,” the old man said, gripping her arm.

“I’ll be fine,” she said, squaring her shoulders and walking towards the bars. She was trembling, and she flinched when Narve looked at her, but she still looked Giovanni in the eye and said, “if you’re planning some kind of trap for my daughter, you--”

“Your daughter?” Giovanni interrupted. “You are that meddlesome girl’s mother, are you?” Johanna shut her mouth sharply, eyes widening in fright as she tried to figure out what Giovanni would do with this information. “I see,” he said slowly, mind spinning to process that information himself, taking care to show no outer sign of the shock that rippled through him at the implications. “And her father?” he asked, trying for more lightness than he felt. “Which of these gentlemen might he be?”

“Never found him,” Johanna said, her eyes flickering briefly down to her folded arms. She yelped when Giovanni reached through the bars and seized her left wrist, pulling her callused hand closer to examine the ring sitting there.

“Isn’t that interesting,” he said quietly, examining the ring closely. It, too, was of a familiar design. “Very, very, very interesting…”

“Let go!” Johanna yelled, trying to jerk her hand out of his, but she was too thin and weak to so much as budge him. “Please don’t take it, it’s the only thing I have to find--”

“I have no need to take it,” Giovanni said slowly, dipping his hand into his pocket and pulling out the photograph and the other item that he’d secreted away with it, years ago, when he’d noticed Ariana working so hard to catch his eye. He could tell himself that he was projecting if it was just the face of the woman in the photo, but the ring, thin and simple with only a single heart-shaped red gemstone in it and a wavy pattern cut into the metal … “I have one of my own.”

Johanna stopped struggling when she saw the ring, a perfect match for hers. She seemed to stop
breathing. With how pale she went, she would have looked like a marble statue if it weren’t for the movement of her eyes, darting rapidly back and forth from the photograph to Giovanni’s face. “No,” she whispered, so quietly as to be almost inaudible. “No, no, no…”

“Very interesting,” Giovanni repeated softly. He let go of Johanna’s hand. As soon as he did, she cracked it across his face. The backhand didn’t have a lot of actual force to it, but it did startle him into leaning back.

“HEY!” Narve said, leaning towards Johanna, his poisonous horn inches from her face, making her step backwards in fright.

“It’s fine, Narve,” Giovanni said, raising a hand to his cheek. The edge of the ring had caught him, cutting him shallowly and drawing blood.

“It’s not,” Johanna spat, shaking her hand out. “I don’t know what you’re thinking, but you stay away from her, you hear me? You stay the hell away from my daughter!”

“Sir!” a Golbat cried, flying into the room and landing on a smaller cage full of Clefairy. “Sir, I’m sorry to interrupt,” he said when Giovanni glowered at him, “but it’s urgent. You said to tell you straight away if she came back, and she just landed in Pallet with her Pidgeot—”

“Whatever you’re planning to do, she’ll beat you,” Johanna said shakily, though it sounded like rage as much as fear. “Like she has every time before.”

Giovanni didn’t look at her. It wouldn’t be long before the girl saw the Rocket insignia and came to Viridian. He had a lot to think about and very little time in which to do it. He released his Nidoqueen and Rhydon. “Move this into the main hall,” he ordered, pointing at the cage. “We’re going to have another guest soon, and we ought to be ready to greet her.”

“Leave her alone!” Johanna screamed at him again as he turned and left. He ignored her, no longer interested now that the mystery of the woman in the photograph had finally been solved. He had a much more interesting discovery to ponder.

Over the years, teenagers who came out of nowhere with rare and powerful Pokemon had been a serious problem, but not one he’d been unable to overcome—except for her. The one who’d chased them from Celadon and Lavender, who’d fought him personally at Saffron and won, who’d gone all the way to the Sevii Islands just to ruin his plans…
Of course the only person capable of really being his match would be his own daughter.

Chapter End Notes

...Might be more than one scene in this AU, then. I can’t decide quite yet how Giovanni or Saylee handle the ensuing confrontation.
“Is it happening now?”

“No.”

“How about now?”

“Why.”

“What about now?”

“Blue, I swear to god --”

“I’m just saying, you spent all week on your internship,” Blue pointed out. “Everybody at the Games Club is going to ask too.”

“They’re going to ask once ,” Saylee said, reaching for the door of their meeting room, “and then I’m going to tell them not yet, and then we’re all going to shut up and play the board game.”

“I’m just saying --hey guys,” Blue said, waving as they walked into the clubroom. Archie, Key, Ledah, Bacent and Steven were already there. Ledah and Bacent had their heads together on their side of the table, quietly discussing whatever their characters were up to now, while Archie jumped up like he’d been burned from where he’d been sitting next to Key on her and Saylee’s side of the
“Happy new year!” Key said brightly, hopping up to give them both a hug. “We’ve had a pretty relaxed week so far, just establishing all this semester’s modules—”

“--Because all of our lecturers are probably still hungover from Hogmanay,” Bacent put in. “Happy new year, by the way.”


“Clubs, nah, they’re still on break, but most of my private students don’t really stop practicing for the holidays, not if they want to go to Tokyo in 2020,” Blue said, setting down his bag. “How ‘bout you, Archie? You looking forward to your last semester on dry land?”

“I’m looking forward to finally finding out what the fuck Steven has planned for this map,” Archie grumbled, pointing at the furiously texting DM. “I am not sailing off into the Pacific until I know what the hell ‘Team Galactic’ is planning.”

“Does he know?” Saylee asked, looking pointedly at Steven.

He didn’t pause in apparently texting his entire thesis to somebody while he said, “a couple of friends of mine are coming to join in the game today. One of them just got back from a major archaeological dig that should get her her PhD once she’s done writing up her findings, so I invited her and another old friend of ours along for old time’s sake. You guys alright with waiting on them?”

“Sure! So hey, while we’re waiting,” Key said fake-casually, “tell us about your first week at Holyrood, Saylee! Have they decided when--?”

“No,” Saylee interrupted. “I spent most of the week learning my way around the building--which, by the way is actually way nicer on the inside than it is on the outside--learning the computer system, and sorting interdepartmental memos. And you do realize that even if I knew, I couldn’t tell you, right?”

“Aw, c’mon,” Ledah wheedled. “What happens in Games Club stays in Games Club, you know that!”
“At least tell us if there were any juicy memos,” Bacent put in. “C’mooooon, I’ve got more money in my inventory than anybody just now, if you tell me--”

“No meta-trading,” Steven interrupted. “Definitely no trading the contents of your inventory for real state secrets.”

“There are no state secrets!” Saylee said in frustration, throwing up her hands. “I mean, okay, state secrets are probably not a thing that exist, but not for undergrad interns! Call back when I’m an MSP and have a secretary to tell you to bugger off for me.”

“Well, my friends just walked into the building and are on their way up, so you could always ask about Sumerian state secrets,” Steven said, finally putting his phone away. “By the way, nobody here’s allergic to dogs, right?”

“Uh, no?” Archie said, looking around. Everybody shook their heads. “Why?”

“Riley’s got a service dog called Luke,” Steven said, digging into his bag. “Got some dog treats somewhere… I probably should’ve asked this more than thirty seconds before he gets here, but oh well, you live and learn.”

“You’re going to have a doctorate in less than six months, unless your thesis is rejected,” Saylee pointed out. “Shouldn’t you have done enough learning by now?”

“Rare gemstones don’t get allergies, okay?” Steven said defensively.

“I heard somebody saying something ridiculous about rocks,” a tall woman with incredibly long platinum-blonde hair said as she opened the door, “and I thought, that has to be Steven Stone!”

“Cynthia!” Steven said, hopping to his feet and carefully tipping his binders over his sheets to hide them before going to hug the woman. “Welcome back! Good to see you alive and uncursed!”

“Riley’s charms work after all,” Cynthia said, smiling at the equally tall man who followed her into the room, followed by a beautiful border collie—mostly pitch-black with his white patches unusually small. Riley was wearing a long blue coat and a hat in a matching shade that he had pulled down low
over his face. He smiled a little when clasping Steven’s hand, before looking around the room while his dog sniffed the air. “So, are these the folks that ran a stalemate game?” Cynthia asked, sweeping some of her hair out of her eyes.

“He’s the only guilty party for that, we turned up really late into that campaign,” Bacent said, pointing at Archie. “Hey, I’m Bace--”

“Hey,” Ledah said, waggling her eyebrows as she grinned at Cynthia. “I’m Ledah. Lovely to meet you. Postgrad archaeology, right? I’m undergrad World Literature myself. You single?”

Steven pressed a hand to his mouth to hide his sniggering as Cynthia just raised an eyebrow. “Nice to meet you, Ledah,” she said, “and I’m afraid my heart already belongs to ancient clay tablets.”

“Hey, that’s okay,” Ledah said with a wink. “I’m not asking for your love, just your loviiiiinnnn.”

“Oh my god, I didn’t know that you even flirt like that sober,” Key groaned, covering her eyes.

“Of course I’m flirting! Look at her!” Ledah exclaimed, gesturing to Cynthia. “Steven, you should’ve warned us that your friends are even prettier than you!”

“Nobody’s prettier than me,” Steven said loftily.

“Anyway,” Cynthia said, elbowing Steven in the ribs, “what are you all studying? Are you all World Literature?”

“Key is,” Archie explained. “I’m a Marine Biology postgrad--Archie, by the way, nice to meet you--and Blue there’s graduated and working as a professional trainer--”

“Good, Riley’s not the only non-student here, then!” Cynthia said, smiling at her friend.

“Riley studied Geology with me, and these days he uses his expertise in stone to sell ‘em to people who think they’ve got magic powers,” Steven explained, patting Riley on the shoulder.
“Crystal healing is not magic,” Riley said indignantly. “If you take care to choose the stones that resonate with your aura—”

“Hey! Wait! I know you!” Key blurted out. “You run that new agey-shop near the Grassmarket with the stones and the tarot cards and all that kinda bu--uh, stuff!”

“Crystal energy is not bunk,” Riley insisted. “Tarot cards are, but they sell well.” He scratched his dog’s ears. “This is Luke. He helps me balance my aura.”

“He’s lovely,” Saylee said, smiling at Luke. “Are we allowed to pet him?”

“Later, maybe, if he feels comfortable around you,” Riley said. He was looking a little more relaxed himself as he and Cynthia sat down next to Steven, who reconstructed his dividers to hide his notes from the two of them. Luke sat down between Riley and Cynthia, who both began to absentmindedly pet him while digging out character sheets one-handed.

“Nice to meet you all, Steven’s been telling us about the game ever since he offered to let us join--oh, we didn’t catch your name, did we?” Cynthia asked, looking at Saylee. “Saylee, right? She Of The Cursed Dice?”

“I got new dice again,” Saylee said defensively, holding up the handful of plastic.

“That clashes too much with your aura,” Riley said, pointing at them. “Light blue would bring you better luck.”

“I’ll bear that in mind,” Saylee said, setting the red-and-white dice down. “Seriously, Steven, is that all you tell people about our games? That I roll horribly all the time?”

“Hey, you came out of the Eterna fight better than I did,” Key said consolingly.

“Well, Steven said we could use our characters from our last campaign, Pokemon and all, so we should be able to amp up the firepower,” Cynthia said, laying out her figures. She had some pretty rare Pokemon, including a Togekiss and a Garchomp; Riley only set out an extremely well-made Lucario figure alongside his character figure. “Are you on World Literature too, Saylee?”
“No, final year of my Politics degree,” Saylee said. “Most of this semester’s going to be about my work interning at Parliament, anyway.”

“You’re working at Holyrood?” Cynthia said in interest. “So, do you know when the next Independence Referendum is?”

“AAAGH!” Saylee yelled, burying her head in her hands. “From now on I’m telling everybody that I’m working in the goddamn gift shop so people will stop asking me that!”

Chapter End Notes

They don’t actually spend much of these playing the game, do they…? IDK. This is mostly based on a friend of mine who was a Politics student himself and is working as a Civil Servant just now, and he recently complained to me that he’s started lying about where he works so people will stop asking him when the next Scottish Independence Referendum is going to be. He thinks people used to ask so much as a minor dig at the SNP (the Scottish National Party—a left-wing party whose primary goal is Scotland’s independence from the United Kingdom, and currently the majority party, holding 54 of 59 seats in Scottish Parliament, making their leader, Nichola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland), but since Brexit, people have been asking in more of a desperate “WHEN IS NICHOLA GOING TO GET US OUT OF HERE” way.

I don’t know, maybe this one’s only funny to Scots XP I also have to take a moment to ramble about how much I respect Nichola Sturgeon; she’s Scotland’s first female First Minister, she’s presided over tons of fantastic queer rights reforms in Scotland, in general she doesn’t have any policies that I find objectionable, and lately she’s been catching a lot of shit for refusing to retract any of her past statements about how Donald Trump is a bigot or “abhorrent”, and for saying that while of course she is willing to work with the next President for the betterment of both countries, she “will not maintain a diplomatic silence” about things he’s said or done. IDK. I just like her a lot. Besides, she always gives off the air that if you locked her in a cage match with just about any other politician (or the entire House of Lords), she’d be the one to come out alive inside of three minutes.

I also just really wanted to introduce TTAU!Riley who goes everywhere with his dog and runs a new age shop where he reads your aura. This concept is absurdly funny to me (the new age hippie part, not the dog part—I made Luke a service dog because I felt like just going “lol weirdo takes his dog everywhere” would be shitty. I hope it doesn’t come off as me knocking service dogs or people who need them—I think it’s fantastic, the range of things you can get a service dog to help you with these days, and I like that their positive impact on mental health is getting more widely recognized).

I probably really should write one where they’re actually playing instead of just meeting new people, though.
“Can I borrow this?” Morty said, walking into the living room and pointing at the couch pillows.

“What do you need it for?” Eusine said, sitting up and tossing the pillows to his husband.

“Something that’s going to happen in a couple minutes,” Morty said, examining the pillow. “Should give the best defense,” he sighed, walking back out of the room.

“Defense against what? You can’t not explain that!” Eusine complained, following Morty into the bedroom, where the mystic was standing in front of the bed, holding the pillow behind him. “...Ummmm...? Morty, love, what the fuck are you doing?”

“Just a minute,” Morty sighed.

A woman suddenly appeared out of the air behind him, not in a flash of light as Morty did when he time-travelled, but as if she’d just stepped forwards out of thin air. She was short and wiry, with short, shaggy blonde hair, an extremely heavy shower of freckles across her pale skin, and eyes that were settling from a blue glow into bright green. “Congratulations, Celebi!” she cried jubilantly, swinging her leg to give him a solid kick in the rear that sent him pitching forwards.

“What the hell?!” Eusine yelled. She winked at him and vanished. “What the hell?!?” he yelled again, rounding on Morty.
“Another time traveller, I believe,” Morty sighed, rolling over and sitting up. “I’m sure I’ll see her again sometime. Saylee mentioned that she turned up a few weeks after Silver became an avatar to...”

“...Give you dumps,” Eusine said, running a hand through his hair, dumbfounded. “She uses time travel... to give dumps.”

“Apparently,” Morty said, handing him back the couch cushion.

{ 5791 }

“Your fever’s gone down,” Saylee said, reading the thermometer with a raised eyebrow. “As in, you’re only running four times the temperature of a normal human now...”

“I feel fine,” Silver insisted. Saylee tossed the thermometer aside and put her hand on her little brother’s forehead. He felt a little warm, but not actually on fire as the thermometer suggested, and his cheeks weren’t flushed anymore. He didn’t seem to be sweating, either. “Can I get out of bed now?” he complained.

“C’mon, then, let’s try it and see how you feel,” Saylee said, hovering nearby as Silver hopped out of bed. He didn’t sway or stumble, and felt strong enough when he shoved Saylee out of his room so he could get dressed. She leaned against the wall, folding her arms and waiting patiently for her little half-brother to get out of his room for the first time since coming home from the hospital.

The Pryce manor was a beautiful traditional building, with the rooms ringing an interior garden and the hallways fulls of sliding doors that could be moved aside to view said garden. A couple of the doors across of Silver’s room were open, and Suicune, Entei and Raikou were all sitting and watching Silver’s door intently. Suicune put their head down on the raised hallway floor, peering up at Saylee.

“Do that all you like, you will not all fit in his room,” Saylee admonished them. “He’ll be out in a minute, anyway.” The Beasts all perked up noticeably when the door opened and Silver came out, stretching his arms above his head and standing up on his tiptoes. “How do you feel?” Saylee asked.

“Great,” Silver said, hopping into the garden and petting the Beasts as they crowded around him. “Weird thing is, Entei doesn’t feel really warm anymore,” he commented, leaning against the shaggy
brown Beast’s side.

“I know you don’t feel cold anymore, but you’ve still gotta put on shoes when you’re going out in the garden,” Saylee said, going into his door and picking up the trainers sitting nearest to it.

“*Fine,*” Silver sighed, leaning away from Entei. The Beasts moved aside, allowing him to get back to the hallway, and as soon as they did, a young woman appeared in the middle of them.

She was taller than Saylee, but not by much, and had notably more meat and muscle on her. She had appeared without fanfare, without lights or sound, but Saylee couldn’t help noticing there was a tinge of blue to her. “Congratulations, Ho-oh!” she cried, kicking Silver square in the ass and sending him faceplanting into Entei’s side.

“Hey!” Saylee yelled, leaping forwards at the same moment that both Suicune and Raikou tried to tackle the newcomer. She just grinned and vanished, causing Suicune and Raikou to crash into each other and collapse in a heap on Entei’s tail.

“What the fuck was that?!” Silver sputtered, turning around and rubbing his butt with a sour expression. He had brown fur stuck to his face. “Did somebody *kick* me?!”

“And yelled ‘congratulations, Ho-oh’,” Saylee said, scowling at where the mystery woman had been. “She was an avatar, too…”

“Why’d she *kick* me, though? Did she hate me or something?” Silver complained. He looked around the Beasts. “Are you okay? Do you know what she was?” The Beasts shook their heads, looking just as sour-faced as Silver.

Saylee just thought over the woman she’d seen, committing her face to memory. *Congratulations, huh? Didn’t sound like something an enemy would say…* “I’ll look it up later,” she promised. “You think you can sit at the table for breakfast?”

{ 5785 }

“Oh, there you are,” Juan said, walking into the swimming pool hall with an air of affected calm, like he hadn’t been frantically searching the entire building for his teenaged ward. In retrospect, the pool seemed an obvious place that Wallace would be, and he contrived to behave as if that was the first
place he’d looked. “How do you feel?”

“When I’m in the water? *Perfect,*” Wallace sighed happily as he floated over to the edge of the pool.

“What about on dry land?” Juan asked, offering Wallace a hand out of the water.

“Fine,” Wallace said, slicking back his hair with the pool water. “I promise, Juan, I feel *fine.* I mean, being on land will *never* feel as good as being in the water, but I don’t feel sick or weak anymore.”

“Good,” Juan said, squeezing Wallace’s shoulder. “Now, I know you like being on the water, but I *am* getting you a towel before you--”

The second he stepped away from Wallace, a young woman appeared next to the teenager, a short, curvy blonde who yelled, “Congratulations, Manaphy!” before booting Wallace in the butt, knocking him face-first into the pool.

“Hey!” Juan cried, reaching to grab the young woman’s arm. She just vanished mid-laugh, causing the Sootopolis leader to overbalance and fall into the pool with his protege.

“I just merged with a minor deity,” Wallace said, his voice clearly audible underwater, “and that was *still* really, really weird.”

{ 5796 }

“Good evening, Dialga,” Steven said as the young woman appeared behind him. “Ow!” he yelled as she kicked him in the butt. “What was that for?” he asked, frowning at the future avatar.

“Because you deserve it and you know it,” she said, sticking out her tongue before disappearing back into the flow of time.

“...I mean, you’re probably not *wrong,* but...” Steven muttered to empty air, “...that *really hurt*...”
“This is gonna be so cool though!” Barry gabbled as the three of them walked up the path to the Verity Lakefront, Lucas leading Dawn by the hand. She still insisted on wearing dark sunglasses pressed so closely to her eyes that there was no chance of anybody making direct eye contact from any angle. The other two understood why it was necessary, even if it meant that Dawn couldn’t see at any other time than the middle of the day. Uxie’s vision was infamously dangerous, and now the three of them knew for a fact that it wasn’t just a legend.

“We have to be careful about what we do with our powers,” Dawn warned him. Lucas squeezed her hand, feeling his agreement at them. “We can’t just go showing off to anybody…”

“Yes but we can show off to each other!” Barry exclaimed. “And the other gods and people that know about them and--”

Lucas paused, emanating a feeling of confusion a second before a strange voice yelled, “congratulations, Azelf!” followed by a startled squawking noise from Barry.

“What the hell?!” Dawn heard Barry yell. “Who was that?! Where’d she go?!”

“Congratulations, Mesprit and Uxie!” the voice said again, this time from behind Dawn, before Lucas hopped forward with a startled gasp followed by something prodding her in the butt, making her stumble forwards a step.

“There! Did you see that?! She appeared from nowhere and disappeared again!” Barry yelled. Dawn felt Lucas’ confusion and agreement.

“What was that?” she asked quietly. Even Uxie felt confused.

“And--hey! Why’d she give me a real kick but only prodded you two?!” Barry grumbled indignantly. Lucas’ shoulders shook with silent laughter.

{ 5832 }

Brienne staggered a little in the hall, yawning as she made her way to the front door of her flat. She was feeling a bit more settled about being able to access the broad spectrum of time through her
brain, but that still didn’t necessarily make her a morning person. “Oh, hi!” she said, opening the door to see the surprising sight of the Indigo Champion standing on her doorstep. “What’re you doing here?”

“Just checking to see how you’re feeling,” the older woman said, following Brienne into the flat. “Your future self said she settled pretty quickly because you’re not Dialga’s first avatar, but I still wanted to check up on you for myself.”

“That’s… really nice of you,” Brienne said, feeling touched. “I do feel fine, actually. It’s been trippy, but I think I have a handle on things now.”

“That’s good,” the Champion said, smiling. “I also came to give you something that I understand you’re owed.”

“That I’m owed?” Brienne said, starting to turn around and then giving a startled yelp as the Champion kicked her hard in the butt. “OW! What the hell?!”

“Some of the occasions when I’ve seen your future self have been times when you were setting to your quest of kicking the ass of every avatar that there ever has been or shall be,” the Champion said, her eyes twinkling with amusement. “Congratulations, Dialga.”

“Um… thanks?” Brienne said, rubbing her butt. That old lady could kick hard.

Chapter End Notes

Suggested by Bri: “Bri giving every avatar, across time, a kick in the ass. Because.”

There are probably plenty of other avatars who deserve a good kick up the arse, but aside from Brienne, I decided to stick with ones that have already ascended in-fic :P Wally probably only got a very gentle prod too rather than a kick.
Saffron City was the ruins of a sprawling metropolis that now boasted a population that had only recently broken four digits. As a result, many of the newly-formalized civic operations, such as the hospital and Pokemon Centre, were spoilt for space if nothing else. The Pokemon Centre had, among other things, taken over the dried-up wasteland that had probably once been a public park near the hospital, using the space to care for those Pokemon too large to fit inside of human-sized buildings. At the present time, the only residents were a recently three-armed Machamp, a newly one-winged Charizard and her visiting family.

“Mario’s got lots of human friends,” Cedric said, looking at the crowd of white coats surrounding the mutilated Machamp.

“They’re all doctors,” Charlotte explained, wincing as she accidentally flexed her wings--wing and stump, which was still extremely tender. “From what they said, this kind of thing is really rare. Lots of doctors have come from all over to look at Mario and figure out how to replace his arm.”

“Are they gonna fix your wing?” Caledonia demanded. Of the six of Charlotte’s siblings who’d evolved into Charmeleon, Caledonia was the largest and most likely to evolve next--likely a product of her being the most literally hot-tempered of the fifteen siblings. Chaz had dropped the six Charmeleon off with Charlotte, then returned to Mt Moon to look after those who were still Charmander, less willing to let the weakest members of the clan wander around among strange humans or leave them unprotected.

“There are doctors looking at my wing,” Charlotte promised. “It’s just that Pokemon losing wings is
more common than a Pokemon with four arms losing one, so they already know pretty well what to do.”

“Pokemon with wings are common, but Charizard aren’t,” Chico pointed out. “Are you sure they know how to replace your wing? Humans have arms, but they don’t have wings.”

“They’ll figure it out,” Charlotte insisted, to reassure herself as much as her siblings. The idea of never flying again was giving her nightmares, not to mention that it would mean the end of her getting to travel and fight with Saylee less than a year after she’d finally gotten to do so.

“I’m gonna go ask one of them!” Carmen declared, running off towards the group clustered around Mario.

“Wait! Dad said stay here --owwwww,” Charlotte grunted, getting up to follow after her younger sister and, once again, almost collapsing in pain as she automatically tried to move her wings, to use their lift to help her up, and instead twanged the severed nerves agonizingly.

“I’ll go with her,” Cedric promised, following Carmen.

“Is your wing still hurting a lot?” Chico asked, peering at the stump. “I thought they had medicine to make it hurt less?”

“They don’t have a lot of medicine, and because I’m big, I need a lot,” Charlotte explained. “I told them I’d only ask for it if I really need it, and I can handle this. It’s fine.”

“It’s not fine if you’re hurting,” Cade said, gently breathing soothing flames over the stump of Charlotte’s wing. Charlotte could never help wondering how the most gentle and sensitive of her siblings had managed to evolve into a Charmeleon, but she was grateful for his presence. “When Carmen and Cedric get a doctor, we should ask them if there’s any other way to make you hurt less…”

“Having you guys here helps,” Charlotte promised, gently nuzzling her brother’s head and tightening her tail around Callista, who’d decided to take a nap in the crook of her sister’s tail. None of Charlotte’s jostling had woken her, which really was unsurprising given that Callista had once famously slept through an entire cave-in.
“We got one!” Carmen called, running back over to Charlotte with Cedric and a short, skinny, pale human woman with long, dark hair.

“Dr. Oliver,” Charlotte said, recognizing the woman. “How’s Mario?”

“The good news is that we should be able to give him a new arm soon,” Dr Oliver explained. “We hit a goldmine. One of the other doctors--” she gestured to the small group around Mario-- “has a colleague in Alola who replaced a Machamp’s lower-right arm just a few years ago. He’s already sent us the schematics for the prosthetic he made, and hopefully he’s going to be able to come join us to perform the surgery. Machamp have a uniquely complex shoulder structure, so having him on hand gives us the best chance of succeeding. Now, your siblings said that you’re having pain?”

“I can handle it,” Charlotte said quickly.

“Charlotte, our painkiller supply is our problem to worry about, not yours,” Dr Oliver said patiently. “I promise you, you’re not going to run us out of supplies. Let me give you something.”

“I really don’t need it,” Charlotte insisted.

“You do if you want us to be able to replace your wing,” Dr Oliver explained. “If you’re in pain, you’re tensing your muscles. That can damage them and make it harder for the prosthetic surgery to go successfully. As your doctor, I have to give you something. So please, if I give you medicine, take it?”


“We have a frame and the materials for your wing, we’re just working on the nerve structure,” Dr Oliver explained. “It’s mostly based on other wing prosthetics from recent years, though, and we don’t have a recent-model Charizard prosthetic to work from, noting that uses modern nerve replacements. You’re a very rare species and, not to be morbid, but anything capable of doing this much damage to a Charizard is usually fatal.”

“But you can study the wing she’s still got, right?” Cedric suggested.

“We can, but we also need more time studying a Charizard with two functioning wings,” Dr Oliver sighed, tucking her hair behind her ears. “Your wings aren’t like your arms and legs. You always use
them in concert, almost never independently of each other. Do you know when Chaz is coming back?"

“He said he’d come pick us up later, but he can’t stay here for long,” Chico volunteered. “He has to look after our land on Mt Moon.”

“I understand,” Dr Oliver said, nodding. “You’re extremely rare, but not unique. I understand Miss Oak’s been contacting other Char owners elsewhere in the world to find out if any of them are willing to donate DNA samples—I can ask if any of them have a Charizard that they’re willing to send here for us to meet and study. Until then, let me get you those painkillers.”

“Thank you,” Charlotte said. Dr Oliver smiled at her and walked off in the direction of the Pokemon Centre.

“So… it could be a long time until you get a wing?” Cade said, looking sad.

“They need to study a Charizard,” Caledonia said thoughtfully. She turned to her siblings with a big grin, raising her claws. “Alright, who wants to fight?”

“Cally, now is so not the time,” Carmen said, rolling her eyes.

“Actually, it just might be,” Chico said, looking thoughtfully at his larger sister. “She’s closer to evolving than any of us, and if she does evolve, then they don’t need Dad to stay here or to find a Charizard from somewhere else, right?”

“Hey, yeah!” Cedric said, brightening up perceptibly. “I’ll fight you, Cally!”

“Then come at me, bro,” Caledonia said with a broad grin, embers dripping from her teeth.

“Just watch that you don’t hit me, Mario or any of the humans,” Charlotte said, shuffling back a little, tugging the still-sleeping Callista with her.
“...This is a hospital,” Chaz said, landing carefully next to Charlotte. “Sort of. Not a gym.”

“Cally’s doing really well, though,” Callista said lazily, getting up from her nap spot for the first time all day to hug Chaz and relocate to a nap spot on his tail. “I think she’s about to beat Cedric, Chico and Carmen all at once.”

“They’ve all been fighting all day, though,” Charlotte said, accepting a greeting-nuzzle from Chaz. “They’re all going to tire themselves out.”

“Why have they been fighting all day?” Chaz asked.

“Cally’s trying to evolve,” Cade explained.

“Wish they’d let me fight ‘er,” Mario said wistfully. The Machamp was sitting cross-legged on the ground next to Charlotte, his upper arms folded while he leaned back and propped himself up on his remaining lower arm.

“You also have a surgery coming up, which means no fighting,” Chaz pointed out. “Cally’s been looking forward to evolving for ages, it’s why she’s always picking a--”

“The doctor said that they can make Charlotte’s new wing faster if they can spend a lot of time studying a Charizard’s wings, both of them,” Cade said, wincing as Caledonia hit Carmen with an Iron Tail, sending her flying into both Cedric and Chico. “Cally wants to evolve now.”

“I understand that you can’t be here for them to study,” Charlotte said quickly at Chaz’ guilty look. “You’d have to stay here for hours, probably days. You can’t be away from Mt Moon for that long.”

“Wish I could,” Chaz sighed, nuzzling her again. “I wish I could leave the others here overnight, too, but none of them have pokeballs--”

“--making them much, much easier to steal than a large Charizard who would have to be moved without a pokeball, I know,” Charlotte finished for him. “It’s okay, Dad, really. But you’ll be back tomorrow, right?”
“Absolutely,” Chaz promised, looking speculatively at Caledonia, who was stretching and flexing her shoulders, scowling at her lack of wings. “Cally! Cedric! Chico! Carmen! Ready to stop beating each other up and go home?”

“I’m almost there, I swear!” Caledonia insisted, scowling at her siblings who were clambering back to their feet with much muttering and complaining. “C’mooooooon, fight me one more time!”

“Cally, I dunno if you’re getting there today, and I hurt,” Chico groaned. “Save us, Dad…”

Chaz gently plucked Callista off of his tail and set her down next to Charlotte, before moving closer to the four combatants, looking speculatively at Caledonia. “Attack me,” he said, extending his own broad wingspan.

“Awesome!” Caledonia said, looking not at all put off by the prospect of fighting an opponent several times her size and strength. She dove right in in a burst of Dragon Rage.

“Dad’s not even pointing back,” Cade said as they watched the ‘fight’. “He’s just letting her beat on him.”

“Not like she could really hurt him,” Cedric said, limping over. “...even though she is hitting really hard…”

“You think she really could evolve just from fighting Dad?” Carmen said curiously.

“She’s pretty big,” Chico said, shrugging. “What do you think Charlotte? You’ve evolved.”

“Maybe,” Charlotte said, watching Caledonia fight, trying to remember how it felt to be smaller and
wingless and at what point that changed. “She’s definitely closest…”

“C’mon, at least fight back a little!” Caledonia shouted. Chaz swung a Steel Wing at her that she easily dodged. “You could at least try, Dad!”

“I could really hurt you, Cally,” Chaz warned her, swiping a claw that missed her narrowly.

“That’s what makes it a real fight!” Caledonia insisted, hitting him square in the chest with another Dragon Rage. “Come on!”

Chaz flew up in the air, sending a Fire Blast down towards Caledonia, who dodged back and forth, trying to send more Flamethrowers back in Chaz’ direction. Each Flamethrower went further than the last, but they continued to fall short. Caledonia’s tail flared as her frustration visibly grew. With a yell, she leapt into the air--

“She did it!” Carmen screamed as Caledonia burst forward, a surge of energy causing her to grow larger, wings to unfurl and flap and propel her into the air to tackle her father. The two grappled in the air for a moment before Chaz pinned her to the ground, grinning widely.

“Congratulations!” he said, nuzzling Caledonia’s cheek. “You did it, Cally! Look at you!” He stepped off of her, gesturing to her new wings.

Caledonia got up, stretching her new wings and staring at them in awe. “This is awesome,” she breathed.

“I know, right?” Charlotte giggled. “Congratulations, Cally!”

“This is brilliant,” Chico said as he and the other Charmeleon gathered around their newly-evolved sister, cheering.

“I really did it,” Caledonia said, a grin spreading across her face. “Charlotte, I did it! Dad, please can I stay here, they need to start looking at my wings right away--”

“Not overnight, same reasons still apply,” Chaz insisted, “but you can fly back yourself first thing in
the morning to show the doctors, okay?”

“You need to go home and get some rest, anyway,” Callista said with a yawn. “Hey, can I ride on your back on the way home?”

Chapter End Notes

This one’s a day late because I spent all of yesterday writing DD chapters 57 and 58, holy shit… NaNoWriMo is really working to get me writing again. I think having FINALLY landed a job in Japan after a year and a half of searching has really helped me climb out of the massive dip of depression that I spent most of the year in, too. It feels really good to be able to write again.

This ended up being not quite so much about Charlotte as her family, but I hope you enjoy it, Song! Your reviews are always the highlight of my day :D
I'm getting too old for this, Looker thought, shaking himself out of a doze as Lumiose Station appeared out of the train window. Napping in the middle of the day like an old man...

"Dans quelques instants nous arriverons en gare d'Illumis, terminus de ce train," a voice said over the train PA. "Veuillez vérifier vos sièges et assurez-vous de n'avoir rien oublié avant de descendre. Nous espérons que votre voyage avec nous a été agréable."

Looker stretched, tried not to count how many bones popped and creaked, and stood up as the train slid smoothly to a halt, checking his pockets to make sure that all of his equipment was still in place and looking over his seat before filing into the aisle and out onto the platform with the rest of the train’s passengers. The sun was setting, but the evening was still pleasantly warm, and he took his time meandering down the streets and boulevards of Lumiose towards his Bureau.

The street lights were just turning on for the evening when he reached his front door. He reached into his left pocket to check the souvenir that he’d gotten for Emma one last time, then pulled off his glove so the print reader on the door handle to recognize him and let him in.

"Je--" he began calling as he stepped inside, stopping short as his Dad Senses started tingling. He dropped his register and whispered, "... suis rentré?"

The Bureau was full of what looked like the entirety of the Lumiose Gang, all fast asleep, some snoring softly.

He counted the sleeping punks softly as he crept towards the stairs that led up to the private residence part of the building. They were sprawled out his couches, some of them sprawled across each other,
and Nix was even sleeping on Looker’s desk, his head pillowed on an empty satchel and his boots very thoughtfully removed and sitting nearby the desk so that only his socked feet were dangling against the polished wood. It looked to be the entire gang.

Looker tiptoed past them as quietly as possible and started climbing the stairs, carefully avoiding the squeaky stairs (he could have them fixed, but after a lifetime in various law enforcement professions, silent stairs seemed like an unconscionable gap in basic home security). He found Emma in her room, lying on her bed and watching a cartoon on her Holocaster with her headphones in, and waved until Mimi noticed him and patted her trainer in the leg until Emma looked up, grinning brightly at the sight of her adoptive father.

“Papa!” she whispered, pausing her show and setting her Holocaster and headphones aside and launching herself off the bed to hug him. “Contente de te revoir!”

“Contente de te revoir, Emma,” he whispered, hugging her back, before pointing downstairs with a raised eyebrow.

“Punk est pas mort, just en train de dormir,” Emma whispered with a serious expression before launching into a quiet but enthusiastic story about the gang going to a garage concert and winding up chasing a bag thief across half of Lumiose.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, this one’s hella short but seeing as I’m 1400 words ahead on wordcount, I figure I’m safe to keep this one short, since it feels like it needs to be to preserve the light tone anyway. The whole thing’s for Bri, because we were talking about headcanons for the Lumiose Gang and we came to the “punk’s not dead, just sleeping” photosets XD

All the French provided by the Fabulous Key-chan, and it’s all there more to confirm the setting as Kalos than anything else, but hopefully it’s not too obstructive or confusing in context. For reference:

--The first paragraph is just a standard train announcement proclaiming their arrival at Lumiose City and asking passengers to check their seats and possessions etc
--When Looker walks in the door, he says “I’ve returned”
--Emma and Looker say “nice to see you again!” (literally “happy to see you again”) to each other
--and Emma says “Punk’s not dead, just sleeping” before starting on her explanation of why there is a gaggle of exhausted punks in Looker’s office XD
Nuzlocke Gothic

Chapter Summary

NaNoWriMo Day: Friday, November 18th, 2016
Title: Nuzlocke gothic
Words: 741

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

--You look at the screen. Your Pokemon has full HP. You look away for a minute and when you look back, your Pokemon has fainted. The enemy didn’t even attack.

--The first Pokemon you encounter is a Caterpie. They are common. This was expected. You capture it and move on. The second Pokemon you encounter is a Pikachu. You never see another Pikachu ever again.

--The last trainer in a difficult dungeon wipes your party. You realize with horror that it has been several hours and four badges since your last save. Do you sacrifice your party and start anew from your box? Or do you relive hours of your life to save your friends? It seems to you that the only logical response is to turn back time.

--They are only pixels. They are only numbers and pixels. But still you cry when the numbers run down and the pixels turn blank.

--One of your team members is only a handful of exp away from evolving. They die in their next battle, potential forever unfulfilled. You should never have checked how much exp they needed for their next level. It’s like looking at a picture of a soldier’s girl back home the night before a battle.

--There are better Pokemon of this type, with better stats, better movepools, more interesting designs. But this was your first capture, and they have been with you since the beginning, and you know in their heart that they will be there until the end.

--The enemy Pokemon never hurts itself in its confusion.

--Critical hits do more than double damage, but only when your Pokemon has enough HP to survive otherwise.

--The type effectiveness has changed from what you remember. In the next battle it is what you remember again, but a different type effectiveness has changed. You will not know which one until it kills you.

--You own no living Pokemon that can learn Waterfall. The game has placed a waterfall here for precisely this reason.

--You hear the Random Number God’s laughter mocking you. You know not what you have done to offend them so. You offer whatever sacrifice you can. Vegetables. Mutton. Your first-born child. Your starter still dies.

--A shiny appears. It is your first encounter on this route. You have never captured this species before. You have no pokeballs. You had pokeballs before this battle, but now you have none. After the battle ends, they reappear.

--The two areas are separated by half of the map, you cannot reach one directly from the other, there are different Pokemon in the grass. Yet according to the map, they are one area, linked by some twist in space that neither you nor the game code can comprehend. You cannot have that Nidoran.

--The new game has a battle that it requires you to lose to progress the plot. The developers’ cackles cause lightning to crack outside.

--Enemy Pokemon cannot learn Explosion, not naturally, nor by TM or breeding. Enemy Pokemon uses Explosion.

--It has been three gyms since you lost a Pokemon. Noticing this summons the angel of death upon your game.

--The new villain team are cultists worshipping a god they will not name. Every attack of their is a
critical hit. When the team leader goes into their villainous rant and reveal that they are cultists of the Random Number God, every attack of yours is critical. The Lady departs when named.


--You do not have the Exp Share yet. You bait-and-switch train your Magikarp. All enemy Pokemon now have Arena Trap.

--You need a new HM to progress. You need fifty Pokemon to receive the HM. You have forty-nine. There are no new areas to hunt. None of your Pokemon can evolve.

--The Pokemon that you have lost scream in your dreams, their digitized cries morphed into more visceral wails of agony. They died for you, for your sport, and the only way to exorcise their ghosts is to inflict the pain on others. You write, you draw, you pass on the curse, and you sleep no better because there’s a new game to play.

Chapter End Notes

But guess who doesn’t have the new games yet because they’re not out in Europe until the 23rd? What was even the point of Brexit if we still have to wait to get new Pokemon games

This one’s also undersized but the format isn’t exactly conducive to a large wordcount anyway. But tomorrow’s Table Talk one could be a longer one, and anyway if I do start to run low at the end of the month I can always add DD57 and 58 :P
“I take the Blue Orb from Kalle,” Marc declared.

“When?!?” Key groaned. “Why would you do that?! You know how badly that thing’s gonna react to you! You heard Saylee tell me about the avatars and the Orbs!”

“I did, my character didn’t,” Marc pointed out, to much groaning. “I take the Blue Orb.”

“Because I respect your dedication to characterization, I’m dropping the bar for success here,” Steven said, scribbling something on his notes. “Which basically just amounts to negating the penalty for Archie being in the area, but whatever. Roll to see how Groudon reacts to this.”

Marc rolled a 1.

“What’d you do, take Saylee’s dice?!” Key shrieked, running both of her hands through her hair as she stared at the dice in horror.

“Oh, honey, Marc’s been the king of bad rolls since long before you joined the game,” Courtney sighed, propping her chin on her hand as she gave the dice a baleful look.

“Well, that went well,” Steven said cheerily. “You hear a roar of fury so loud that it shakes the earth itself. The volcano begins to erupt. More land will collapse every turn.” He picked up a pencil and traced a circle around the volcano crater on the map. “Saylee, you and Teddy are in the radius of the first tremor and fall into the crater. Roll Dexterity to try and catch yourself.”
Saylee’s first roll was a 17. “With my Dex, that’s thirty… that’s enough right?” she asked.

“Roll for Teddy too,” Steven said neutrally.

Saylee rolled her eyes as she picked up her d20. This time, she got a 4. “Crap… but Teddy’s Dexterity is eighteen, so…”

Steven sighed. “You narrowly manage to catch yourself on a jagged outcrop of rock, and you dig in your heels to cling more tightly to the rock face,” he said. “Teddy, however, fails to get a grip and falls into the crater.”

“Nooooooooooo0000000000,” Saylee moaned, clutching her Blaziken figure before raising it like she was going to throw it at Marc’s head. “You asshole!”

“Do the rest of us have time to act?” Marc asked.

“Of course,” Steven said, gesturing to him.

“I’m standing closest, so I go to pull Saylee out of the crater,” Marc declared, rolling his dice. “19…”

“Good thing you rolled that well, your Strength is really low,” Steven noted. “But you’re successful, and both of you are now securely on the ground.”

“Thanks,” Saylee said grudgingly. “Do we have move actions?”

“Why not,” Steven said, pointing at the pencil-circle indicating the collapsed area. “I’m guessing you want to run out of the radius of the next collapse?”

“YES,” Saylee and Marc chorused.

“I want in on that running away action,” Key added.
“I’m standing by the Magma tank, I’m getting in that,” Kalle said as everybody scrambled to move their figures to safety.

“I’m already hiding in the tank, is that a problem?” Shelley asked.

“Well, I’m not kicking you out into the lava, so no,” Kalle said. “How much room is there in the tank?”

“There’s room for the five of you if you squish,” Steven said, checking his notes. “Are you all getting in the tank?” Saylee, Key and Marc all nodded fervently.

“I am so glad I’m not down there,” Matt.

“Same,” Lance said, nudging Archie in the ribs. “Aren’t you glad I stuck you in combat on the mountainside?”

“No! Because if we’d been in the crater, maybe we could’ve stopped Marc!” Archie complained, nudging Lance back hard enough to nearly knock the younger man off his chair.

“Question,” Courtney said, raising his hand. “Those of us still in combat on the mountainside--are we aware that the volcano’s erupting?”

“Well… there’s a loud, angry roar and the ground starts shaking violently,” Steven said, tapping his pencil idly on the top of his screen. “You can roll Intelligence to see if you realize that this is a thing you should run away from. You too, Matt and Archie, you’re creeping around nearby.”

Matt, Archie, Courtney and Lance all rolled, getting a 16, a 7, a 12, and a 15. “Is that enough?” Archie asked.

“Yeah, honestly I set the bar for that one pretty low,” Steven laughed. “You can all tell that something extremely wrong has happened down below, and all of you except Archie realize that Groudon has been awakened. Do you continue combat?”
“No, we run away!” Matt exclaimed. “I yell ‘Groudon is awake, we need to get out of here’ and I run the fuck away!”

“Because Matt is my best friend and I trust him, I’m joining in on the running away,” Archie decided.

“I am so returning my Pokemon and running away,” Courtney added.

“What about you, Lance?” Steven asked. “Do you want to chase after Courtney and continue combat, or are you also going to run away?”

“Run away? No,” Lance said, pointing at his Dragonite figure. “I get on Draek’s back and fly away now, fly away now, fly awaaaaaaaay~”

“Penalty for singing,” Saylee and Key chorused.

“They’re right, we agreed that singing was banned, on the basis that if you start you’ll never stop,” Steven said, pointing at Lance with his pencil. “I’ve decided that lava’s started randomly gushing out of points on the volcano.”

“Let us in the tank first!” Marc said, panicking.

“You’re in the tank, lava’s gushing, Lance and Draek get narrowly missed by one that does fifteen points of damage anyway,” Steven intoned.

“Worth it,” Lance snickered, making notes on his sheets.

“But we’re in the tank, right?” Saylee asked.

“Marc, Kalle, Shelley, Saylee and Key are all in the tank,” Steven said. “Who’s got Driving skills?”

“I do,” Marc volunteered. “I’ll drive us out of here.”
“Does anybody else have Healing stuff?” Saylee asked. “My HP’s really low.”

“Oh, fine, let me,” Kalle said, rolling his eyes. “How much HP do you need back?”

While Saylee was passing her HP notes to Kalle, Key said, “While they’re sorting that out, I think our characters really need to talk. If we tell Marc, Kalle and Shelley about avatars, can we get the story of how Archie’s first character died?”

“It really just was a tragic litany of bad rolls when we tried to summon Groudon together,” Marc sighed.

“To be fair, I also failed a Dexterity roll pretty badly,” Archie put in.

“You aren’t the one who rolled a one for Diplomacy when I tried to explain what happened to your new character,” Marc groaned.

“Damn,” Saylee said, putting a hand over her heart. “And thus began a tragic rivalry, a friendship gone terribly wrong…”

“This was like a month after I was their best man, too,” Archie added, pointing at Marc and Kalle. “It was more dramatic than most action movies.”

“To be fair, most action movies don’t have drama, just explosions,” Lance said, idly waving a spare Salamence figure around in the air like it was flying. “No matter what Michael Bay says, it’s not the same thing. Hey, is Groudon visible yet?”

“Not to the tank rolling out of the volcano but those of you on the outside already can see a claw bursting out of the earth,” Steven said, pencilling in more destruction areas around the crater.

“Can I attack it?” Lance said brightly.

“What,” Courtney said flatly, staring at him.
“There are stats for it, but they’re absurdly high because it’s, y’know, an upper-tier god…” Steven said, rifling through his sheets. “Are you sure you wanna initiate combat with the angry god?”

“I wanna Hyper Beam the angry god,” Lance said cheerfully, starting to roll his dice.

“I’m really not joining in on that,” Archie declared. “Who the hell initiates combat on an upper-tier god?!?”

Saylee very carefully did not make eye contact with anybody as she watched Lance’s dice roll.

{Three weeks later}

“Eighteen! Booyah!” Archie hooted, punching the air.

“You punch Marc in the face, and Kyogre hits Groudon with a towering wave,” Steven said, doing some math on the whiteboard, which he’d taken over to display Archie and Marc’s god-tier stats. Despite how overblown Archie’s damage roll was, Marc’s HP was now even more overblown and absorbed the attack easily. “Shelley, Matt, Kalle, still rolling to restrain?”

“Absolutely,” Matt said as Shelley and Kalle rolled. Steven also rolled on behalf of the NPC Leader. Everybody rolled less than 10

“So, everybody utterly fails to grab Archie or Marc,” Steven declared. “Marc, your roll?”

“Fifteen,” Marc called as soon as his dice came to a halt.

“You kick Archie in the chest,” Steven reported, doing more math and writing out the new HP stats. “Saylee? Key? You finished your evacuation last turn. What are you going to do now? Join in trying to restrain Marc and Archie?”

Saylee and Key looked at each other. Key raised an eyebrow. Saylee nodded. They both grinned.
“We want to attack Groudon and Kyogre with all of our Pokemon,” Saylee announced.

“Because of course you do,” Steven said, pointing at their sheafs of character sheets. “Give me combined attack totals on your teams and let’s see what happens.”

“Even with Saylee’s Double Team feat, you are not going to damage those things!” Courtney exclaimed, pointing and Groudon and Kyogre’s HP totals. “Lance nearly got himself killed just attacking Groudon! You’re going to die!”

“Got any better ideas?” Saylee asked, typing away on her phone’s calculator.

“I don’t know, running away again?” Courtney suggested. “Steven, this is ridiculous, there can’t possibly be a way to fight Groudon and Kyogre in normal combat! Saylee, why the fuck are you grinning?”

“You’ll find out,” Saylee promised, continuing to grin. Key just started giggling.

“You can tell us, our characters don’t have to know,” Matt suggested.

“It’ll be more fun to get your genuine reactions,” Saylee said. “Besides, Marc and Kalle are the only ones here who can keep character worth a damn in combat.”

“You’re all lucky that somebody here follows the sidequest plotlines and upgrades the NPCs,” Steven said, tapping his marker against the whiteboard. “Alright, ladies, give me your totals and then you can initiate combat with the angry gods. May I have mercy on your souls.”

Chapter End Notes

Lance is absolutely doing Drama and Performance. He doesn’t come to a lot of sessions because he usually has rehearsals, but when he does come along he likes to shake things up. He’s also that one guy whose flat is wall-to-wall pet lizards. He spends the majority of his food budget on crickets and lives on pot noodle himself and will tell anybody who will listen about the intricacies of their diets and habitats and behaviours.

I feel like Steven’s not the kind of DM to railroad, but he will forgive you a lot if you go investigate his plotlines anyway XD Luckily Saylee already upgraded the Wally NPC to avatar… (which characters are real human players and which are NPCs is not entirely at
random but is largely dictated by whatever will be interesting to write in this chapter :x )
“Who’s there?” Melody called, not looking up from the photographs she had displayed over her desk, trying to figure out the proper order of several stone fragments that appeared to be part of the same saga, although she was increasingly sure that the fourth photograph was of a bit of stone from an entirely different wall. “Ghaliya, can you see who’s there?” she said to her Girafarig as somebody knocked on the door again.

The Girafarig trotted over to the lab door, her tail sniffing the air, and perked up perceptibly. “It’s Jenny!” Ghaliya said, nosing at the door.

That was enough to get Melody to set aside her notepad and get out of her seat, hurrying over to unlock the lab door. “Jenny! What’re you doing here?” she said, standing on tiptoes to hug her daughter. The girl was as tall as her father.

“Dad asked me to bring you this, since he knew you’d been in all night,” Jenny said, holding up a plastic tub and a thermos with a grin that looked exactly like her father’s. “How’s the history?”

“Still intact, never fear,” Melody joked, accepting the warm thermos and tub and taking them over to her desk, minimizing the screen displaying her photographs and notes before opening the tub and immediately realizing that she was starving as soon as she saw the sandwiches. “That man knows me so well.”
“When it comes to your work, you’re a predictable woman, Mum,” Jenny giggled, dragging over a desk chair and sitting on it backwards, reaching up to scratch Ghaliya under the chin.

“What time is it, anyway?” Melody said, looking at the corner of her computer screen. “Oh, goodness. I’m so sorry, Jenny, you shouldn’t have to come trekking all the way out here at this time of the morning…”

“It’s fine, Mum, I was up anyway,” Jenny insisted, flapping her hand. “It’s not like I have a schedule right now, so I’m kinda slipping into my natural sleep pattern of five in the morning to noon. I wonder where I could possibly have gotten that from,” she said, mock-pensively.

“The erratic sleep cycle will serve you well when you start out as a police officer,” Melody declared, picking through sandwiches and finding one for Ghaliya, “but the sass might not.”

“Thank you,” Ghaliya said politely as her tail bit off half of the sandwich. She turned around to eat the rest, her ears flickering as she chewed. “Somebody else is coming to the door,” she added. “Quite a few humans. I don’t know who they are, though.”

“Who on earth would be coming here at this time of night?” Melody wondered, unscrewing the thermos as she stared at the door.

Jenny frowned at the resounding lack of knocking. “Are you sure there’s somebody there, Ghaliya?” she asked.

“Yes, they’re just--wait, there’s a Pokemon too… no, it’s gone,” Ghaliya said, shaking her head with a frown. “It’s very confusing…”

“What the hell? Mum, what does that mean?” Jenny said, pointing at the control panel by the door. The screen was flickering erratically, emitting a low buzzing sound.

Then something appeared from the screen--like a Porygon-2, but distorted, its head and limbs on at odd angles--and the door swung open on its own.

“Good evening, Professor Hawkshaw,” a woman said, striding into the lab. She was wearing a skintight black-and-white jumpsuit and had dark purple hair pulled up into a small high bun and a larger low one. She’d colour-coordinated her lipstick and eyeshadow to match perfectly. “Oh, I
didn’t realize you were entertaining,” she said, looking at Jenny.

“Who are you and how did you get in here?!” Melody demanded, standing up and pointing at the door.

“What the hell did you do to that Porygon?” Jenny said, narrowing her eyes on the warped-looking creature.

“I assure you that my modifications are quite painless, but very useful,” the Porygon said in a buzzy voice. “Not enough to access a computer that is not connected to a network, however…”

“Which is why we were forced to pay you a visit,” the purple-haired lady said, gesturing as three more people followed her into the room, all wearing slightly bulkier black-and-white outfits and with identical teal bowl-cuts. “Now, Professor Hawkshaw, we need all of the research that you have on--”

Melody kicked something under her desk. Her entire computer tower fell apart, sparking, and in one swift move she poured her thermos of coffee all over the scattered parts.

“Ply!” the purple-haired woman yelled angrily, pointing at the destroyed computer tower. In a flash of electricity, the modded Porygon vanished. “There was no need for that,” she snarled angrily.

“You just broke in here and told me you were planning to steal my research, of course I’m not just giving it to you,” Melody snapped. Ghaliya stepped between her trainer and the strangers, and Jenny stepped up too, releasing her Jolteon and Staravia.

“Get your Porygon back and wait here for the police,” Jenny said, slipping her hand into her pocket and texting her father an emergency code on speed-dial.

“This could have gone peacefully,” Purple snarled, releasing a hulking purple-and-white Pokemon that Jenny had never seen before. Her lackeys released a handful of Glameow and a couple of Zubat between them.

“Jack, Thunderbolt the Zubat! SJ, Aerial Ace the Glameow!” Jenny yelled, her voice mixing with the attack orders of several of the lackeys as they sent their Pokemon in to fight Jenny’s. She didn’t hear what Purple ordered her Pokemon to do, but the bulky Pokemon leapt at Ghaliya, its claws glowing an unpleasant black.
“Reflect!” Melody yelled. Ghaliya cast a shimmering screen that deflected the strange Pokemon’s claws.

“Run!” Jenny said, tugging her mother’s wrist as Ghaliya, Jack and Sarah-Jane fought the strangers’ Pokemon. The humans were still standing in the door, but the first one to reach for Jenny got his wrists grabbed and his whole bodyweight flipped over Jenny’s shoulder and into the wall. The next woman got a sweeping kick to the knees that caused her to buckle, and the third lackey backed away nervously, giving Jenny and Melody room to jump the one on the floor and go through the door.

“Our Pokemon--!” Melody yelled, looking back.

“We’ll hold ‘em ‘till you get the police!” Jack yowled, leaping over two lightly smoking and twitching Zubat to zap the Pokemon that had attacked Ghaliya. “GO!”

“They can handle it, c’mon!” Jenny panted, dragging her mother with her as they ran out of the private lab and into the reception area. “I know you wouldn’t have destroyed your research like that if you weren’t certain you could recreate it all. If it really is that destroyed, they’re probably gonna try and kidnap you--”

There was an earsplitting scream behind them. “Ghaliya!” Melody gasped, almost jerking her hand out of Jenny’s grip as she looked back to her lab.

“Mum, we have to go!” Jenny yelled, looking back and feeling her stomach drop at the sight of the large purple-and-black Pokemon barrelling towards them. “Look out!” she yelled, pushing her mother aside as the Pokemon leapt, ducking and rolling as it slashed its upper claws at her. They whizzed narrowly over her head, nicking her hair--

Its hind claws were just as sharp. Hot pain split across Jenny’s chest.

“JENNY!” she heard her mother scream as she slumped to her knees, clutching her chest. Everything felt slippery and pain and she couldn’t breathe

She felt arms around her shoulders and gratefully fell into them. Maybe lying back would make breathing easier, but it didn’t, everything still hurt. Through the ringing in her ears, she could hear somebody speaking.
“Leave with us now and we’ll leave her here for the police to find. If they find her quick enough, perhaps they can save her. Waste my time and I will finish her.”

Jenny’s vision swung wildly at the slightest movement of her head, but she still forced herself to look away from her mother’s tear-streaked face to see Purple stalking towards them, one hand petting the ears of her monstrous Pokemon. Jenny spat blood at both of them. She needed it out of her throat anyway, but more immediately rose to take its place.

“Jenny--Jenny, hang on, just--just hang on--” Melody was sobbing.

Jenny’s vision was fuzzing, but at least she couldn’t feel the pain anymore. She couldn’t feel anything. She could faintly hear crashing, yelling--familiar yelling…

“Bel!” she could hear her mother screaming. “Get a stretcher, hurry --”

“Jenny!”

Dad, Jenny tried to say, but there was still too much blood to speak, or breathe, or anything…

{}  

“I’m Sar Saylee Pryce,” Saylee said, withdrawing her dragon emblem from an inside pocket of her jacket. “What happened here?”

“Break-in at the lab, ma’am,” one of the police officers said, a Meowth with a police badge hanging around his neck. “Four human and eight Pokemon perps trying to kidnap an archaeologist and steal her research. They didn’t get either, but the researcher’s daughter and a coupla Pokemon were killed. We got the perps, but we had to make sure there weren’t any more shady characters creeping around. You haven’t seen any, have you?”

“‘Fraid not,” Blue said, getting out Pete’s pokeball, releasing his Pidgeot. “We were just checking something out, and we have, so we’ll be going now.”
“Keep up the good work,” Saylee said as she got onto Pete’s back behind Blue. “I hope you’ve got them all.”

“Us too,” a Growlithe sighed, resting his head on his paws. “I’m gonna go see how Detective Hawkshaw’s doing…”

Saylee watched the Growlithe trot off as Pete took off. Before the Pidgeot got too high for them to make out anything down below, she saw the small fire-type approach two people sitting on the ground outside a lab, watching a body bag being removed from the building. One of them was dark-haired, the other dark blonde.

“That’s… I think that would’ve been Professor Hawkshaw working there,” Saylee muttered. “She was just telling me about her daughter last week… she’s a little older than me. Was. She was going to join the police.”

“Shit,” Blue replied. “You want to go back?”

“No, they already got the killers, and I need to find Groudon and Kyogre,” Saylee said, shaking her head. “I think they’re major religious figures in Hoenn…”

Chapter End Notes

Back to the horrible, painful, terrible, no-good AUs! This is another one where I don’t know if I’ll do more but this is basically the premise: Melody was neither kidnapped by Galactic nor killed, but her daughter was. Maybe one day I should write an AU where all three members of this family get to live...
The beam of a flashlight danced across the stone walls, occasional dips of the shadow the only thing revealing the worn-down indents of ancient inscriptions. Key traced her fingers over them as she walked down the narrow hallways. Aside from scattered pictures of large Pokemon, the carvings were mostly rows and rows of dots and lines. According to Jenny, who’d compiled a translator for them, the ancient dot language was what modern braille was based on. The hallways of the three underground complexes included directions for how to navigate the mazelike corridors carved into the walls, and according to the archaeologists that had been camped outside of one of the domes, there were two major schools of thought as to why. The first was that the directions had been carved into the complex hallways so that native Hoennians could find their way around, but outsiders couldn’t and would be easy to ambush. The other was that written language would have only been known to priests and artisans, not commoners or soldiers, so the directions were to help them navigate, both in the process of building the place and by the priests living inside--and ancient Hoennian priests, Key had been surprised to learn, were almost always blind, because blindness or deafness were believed to indicate that a person had seen the face or heard the voice of the highest gods.

Which either doesn’t include Groudon and Kyogre, or they’ve really fallen from the top tiers over the millennia, Key figured, trailing her fingers over the rough wall. Worn from age, or fingers similarly tracing tens of thousands of times? She remembered studying a bit of ancient Hoenn in high school History class, and her teacher mentioning that an unusual amount was known about ancient Hoennian daily life compared to other contemporary cultures because even the most mundane records were carved into clay tablets rather than wood, and Hoenn had been relatively late to develop paper. Why had never been expanded on in favour of combing through the records to study what people ate and what goods were more valuable than others. Key had always figured that a preference for stone over wood was down to living in a country that regularly suffered floods and volcanic eruptions, rather than the likelihood that the most literate ancient Hoennians would get splinters in their fingers trying to read anything carved into wood.

She minimized the ancient Braille dictionary on her Pokenav screen briefly to check the signal, but underground as she was, there was no signal, so she had no way to know how Saylee and Jenny were faring in their own searches. Her fingers twitched over her pokeballs, tempted to get somebody out to join her, but she’d been warned not to release anything but the holy Pokemon described on the
front of the temple, and neither Wailord nor Relicanth were particularly adept at moving around small, cramped, dry hallways.

“I am the mountain… I am the sea…” Key sang softly under her breath, increasingly uncomfortable with hearing nothing but her own footsteps. *You can tell that not all the priests were deaf,* she thought. *The acoustics in here are amazing.*

She kept walking, singing to herself and imagining holy men and women singing hymns on their way through the temple, until she nearly walked headlong into a dead-end. “What the hell?” she muttered, running her hand along the wall. It was almost perfectly smooth, unlike the rest of the tunnels. *Did I mistranslate some of the directions, or…? Hang on.* There was a lot more space to her left than there should have been going by the width of the hallway, and Key realized that she’d wound up in some sort of end chamber. She shuffled her feet around; there was crumbled stone and dust all over the complex, but there was more here in front of the wall, ankle-deep *drifts* of dust, as if something had recently crumbled.

Key felt her way across the wall until she found three rows of dots and lines carved at head-height, as sharp and clear as if they’d been carved the same day. She brought up the dictionary on her PokeNav again, double and triple-checking her translation to make *absolutely sure* that she’d gotten it right before she did anything else. Weirding out gods was *not* high on her to-do list--not today, anyway. “First comes Wailord,” she murmured, picking up the two pokeballs and checking them by the light of her PokeNav. The Wailord that she’d borrowed from Wallace was in a tastefully glittery pokeball, while the Relicanth that Silver had revived and sent was in a chunky grey pokeball. Key put the Relicanth’s pokeball back on her belt and stepped a few steps back from the wall, then about a dozen more, hoping that the new hall was as cavernous as it felt before releasing Wallace’s Wailord.

Despite the steps back she’d taken, she still ended up being pushed backwards by the thin but extremely tough skin of the massive water-type. “Whoa whoa whoa!” she yelled, staggering sideways with one hand against the Wailord’s side and the other outstretched to keep herself from being slammed into the wall. She winced as her palm skinned off the stone.

“Hello? Oh, I’m sorry,” the Wailord said, exhaling slowly until he shrank enough to give Key some breathing room. “You alright? I can’t really move much here…”

“I’m fine,” Key said, wiping grit off of her skinned hand and squeezing it under her armpit. “Wayne, right? I’m Key. Do you remember me?”

“Yeah, you won your Champion fight against us! Congratulations!” Wayne said brightly. “Where’s--oh, no, I’m sorry!”
“What happened?” Key said, wincing at the sound of falling stone.

“I think I knocked over a wall,” Wayne said nervously. “There’s another one behind it, though…”

“Hang on,” Key said, edging around Wayne until she found the wall that had been empty aside from the two lines of carvings. There was even more crumbled stone and dust under her feet now, but as Wayne said, there was still a smooth wall with three rows of carvings that felt fresh, though they also felt different from what they’d been before.

_Last comes Relicanth_, she translated.

“Is it okay?” Wayne asked.

“It’s fine, Wayne,” Key promised, patting the massive Pokemon’s side. “Can you just hold still a minute?” she picked up the Relicanth’s pokeball, checking that she had the right one again, and then released the previously-extinct water-type. “Ow!” she yelped, jumping backwards as the heavy Pokemon immediately dropped onto her toes.

“Sorry,” she heard a voice say. “Dark in here…”

“Yeah, hang on… whoa,” Key gasped, feeling the wall disintegrate under her hands. “How the hell did they _do_ that? Actually, not sure I wanna know…”

In the darkness ahead of her, something glowed, seven orange dots blinking on one after another.

“Holy sh--” Key whispered, clapping a hand over her mouth because she _was_ in a temple, after all, and Hoennian gods were _famously_ tetchy.

_Whoa_, Wayne gasped. “Is that what I think it is?”

“Thanks for your help, Wayne,” Key whispered. “Thanks… what’s your name?” she asked, nudging the Relicanth with her toe.
“Reggie,” he replied.

“Fitting,” Key muttered. “Anyway, I couldn’t have gotten here without you guys. Thanks for your help.

“No problem,” Reggie said. Key returned him and Wayne and stepped towards Regirock.

The lights on its face flickered, then it took a step towards her. Key froze, but all it did was kneel down low. Something else was glowing on its back. Key carefully circled around it, but it didn’t move again, allowing her to see that what was glowing was a human-sized opening on its back. With Regirock kneeling, Key could reach into it.

“This better not be how ancient ritual sacrifices worked,” Key muttered, pulling her bandana off her head and wrapping it around her skinned hand before reaching up to haul herself into the Regi’s back.

Everything inside was soft orange light—she couldn’t feel hard stone around her at all. She let it wrap around her, then--

She was looking out at the cave, and could feel stone under her hands and feet, only she didn’t have hands and feet, she had huge clubs of stone. At the same time, she could still feel her fingers and toes, tangled in orange light. She tried pushing herself up from the kneeling position she was in now and heard stone scrape on stone as she—as Regirock moved.

Key? Is that you? Saylee’s voice said in her mind. You found one?

“Yeah!” Key said. Her voice didn’t echo around the chamber, didn’t seem to issue aloud at all, but Saylee and Jenny responded anyway.

I found Registeel! Jenny said. This is so weird...

I’m guessing you got Regirock, then? Saylee said.
“Since you got Regice,” Key guessed. “So… what do we do with them now?”

*We need to get out of these temples,* Jenny suggested.

“How?” Key asked, looking around. “I’m not sure Regirock fits out through those tunnels… nevermind,” she added, looked up as the stone above her head peeled away to reveal a skylight into the underground temple. “We never covered *this* in my History classes. How did they *do* that?”

*Don’t know, but leave it to the archaeologists,* Saylee said. We’ve got a meteorite to stop.

“So can these things jump?” Key asked, pushing herself off the ground and finding herself practically flying. “These things can jump!” she shrieked.

*I see you!* Jenny said. Key felt rather than saw Registeel approaching, the two of them landing near to each other at about the same time before launching themselves into the sky again. Regice joined them a moment later.

*Lock On!* Saylee said. The three of them looked up, drawn almost magnetically in the direction of the meteorite flying towards the planet. *Hyper Beam*!

Key planted her heavy feet and thought *Hyper Beam* as hard as she could. A blast of energy gathered from her and fired as soon as she willed it, joined by two more from Saylee and Jenny, but they weren’t enough to push back the meteorite.

“You’re kidding me!” Key exclaimed. “We’ve got the *Regis* and we still don’t have enough power to stop that thing?!”

*It might be the range,* Saylee theorized.

*We all jump and then attack together?* Jenny suggested. *On three… one… two… THREE*!

The three of them launched themselves into the air as hard as they could. This time, Key could actually *feel* the atmosphere thinning around her as they leapt into low orbit, the meteorite now visible to them without Lock-On.
Now attack together! Saylee said. Get ready… three… two… ATTACK!

Together, Key thought, charging up another Hyper Beam--

Something else happened when she thought together. Everything shifted, and then she wasn’t controlling arms anymore, and Saylee and Jenny were even more in her head.

What the--?! Jenny yelped. The arms that reached out ahead of them weren’t ice-blue or steel-grey or stone-brown, but smooth and white with black markings, huge golden rings around the wrists.

“Am I just legs now?!” Key yelled.

Don’t panic, just focus and ATTACK! Saylee shouted. As their six white fingers grabbed the meteorite, Key pushed as hard as she could, and felt Saylee and Jenny doing likewise. The meteorite was stopped dead its tracks, as if it was no more than a tennis ball that they’d caught in the air, and a second push sent it flying away from.

We did it! Saylee cried euphorically.

“We did!” Key shrieked. “Now can I ask what the hell happened?!”

Regigigas, form up? Jenny suggested, giggling almost drunkenly.

Chapter End Notes

This is absolutely not how Regigigas or the Regis work in the actual fic, but we couldn’t resist making a Voltron joke after getting very much into Voltron: Legendary Defender this year :P

(Why did I make the title an NGE meme reference when I don't even like NGE?)
“Key! There you are!”

“You know that human?” Thomas asked, peering over Key’s shoulder at the taller blonde who was running towards them, her dark green clothes almost causing her to blend in to the vibrant forest.

“Uh, yeah…” Key said sheepishly, waving. “Hey, Seka! Fancy seeing you here!”

“Don’t you ‘fancy seeing you here’ me!” Seka said threateningly, waving her shovel like she was going to whack Key over the head with it. “Norman’s been freaking out! He’s called everyone, and I mean **everyone**, to let them know that Professor Birch gave you a Pokemon--congrats, by the way,” she said, smiling for a moment before switching back to a scolding scowl. “Anyway, he said you two had a fight about whether or not you could do the gym challenge and that the next morning you’d taken your brand new baby Pokemon and run off! Is this him?” she added, switching back to the sweet smile as she reached out to pet Thomas. “He’s frickin’ **adorable**!”

“Hey, I’m not **adorable**, I’m--okay, yeah, I am,” Thomas said, letting Seka pet him. “I’m Thomas. Nice to meet you.”

“He’s not the only Pokemon I’ve got, by the way.” Seka said, patting the other pokeballs on her belt. “Everybody else is just kinda worn out by the long trek through the forest…”

“Well, Edge and Talyn are feeling just fine, so c’mon, let’s get to Rustboro,” Seka said, slinging her shovel over her shoulder and gesturing to the path north with an elaborate bow. “When we get there, you’re gonna call Norman and Kate and tell them that you’re okay and you’re with me, got it?”
“Fine,” Key groaned. “But I’m not just going back home.”

“Hey, I’ll support you on that,” Seka assured her. “The gym challenge is awesome, and I dunno why they’d want to keep you from doing it…”

“I just… want them to get that I’m not fragile,” Key muttered. “I’m not gonna fall apart the second I get into a fight or anything…”

“Hell no, you’re a tough kid,” Seka said, mussing Key’s hair.

“You are two years older than me,” Key pointed out, slapping Seka’s hand away.

“YOU! Devon researcher!”

Seka swallowed whatever retort she was going to make as she stepped forwards, one arm outstretched to keep Key behind her. “Oh, c’mon, not you too!” Key complained.

“Ssssh!” Seka hissed, creeping forwards to peer around a bend in the path. A man in a blue bandana and a black-and-white striped shirt had a shorter, fatter man in a green suit by the lapels and was snarling in his face.

“L-let me go!” the suited man cried nervously.

“Hand over the goods!” the man in the bandana yelled, drawing back his fist.

“OI!” Seka yelled, running forwards and brandishing her shovel, a move that succeeded in making the thug jump back, startled, while distracting him from noticing her withdrawing a pokeball from her belt.

“Back off!” Key added, grabbing the suited man by the elbow and tugging him back with her to stand behind Seka, who released Edge. The Zangoose immediately noted the way his trainer was glaring at the man in the bandana and immediately started snarling at the foe like he was a Seviper.
“Oh, thank you,” the suited man gasped.

“Stay the hell out of this!” Bandana snarled, releasing a Poochyena. “This is none of your business! Bite!”

“Slash!” Seka ordered. Zangoose and the Poochyena leapt into combat.

“Should I help?” Thomas asked, the Treecko crouching and preparing to spring from Key’s shoulder.

“No, Edge has this,” Key murmured. She eyed up the enemy trainer speculatively, but there wasn’t a huge amount of room on the forest path and she wasn’t sure that she could move through the dense foliage around it quickly and without being noticed. “As soon as that Poochyena goes down, we’re going after the human in the striped shirt, okay?”

“Looks like it ain’t gonna be long,” Thomas noted, watching Edge shrug off a Bite like it was nothing and Slash the Poochyena again. With a yelp, the small grey canine collapsed.

“Now–HEY!” Seka yelled angrily, spotting the enemy trainer. He was already running away down the path. “DON’T JUST ABANDON YOUR POKEMON AND RUN AWAY, YOU COWARDLY ASSHOLE!” She and Edge charged off after the runaway.

“I-I don’t think you should go near that…” the suited man said nervously as Key approached the collapsed Poochyena.

“We can’t just leave it here,” she objected, checking that the Poochyena was fully unconscious before stooping to pick it up. There was a loud yell of pain from down the path that didn’t sound like Seka. “C’mon,” Key said, tucking the Poochyena under her arm before running off down the path.

She was somewhat surprised to see that, while the thug was indeed in a painful-looking armlock and she’d expected, it was being delivered by neither Seka nor Edge but a tall woman with long black hair.

“There’s a lot of people out in the woods today,” Key observed, walking up next to Seka. “Who’s the new person?”
“I have no idea,” Seka said with a shrug, grinning. “I think she was just coming down the path and when she saw the guy running towards her, she clotheslined him. It was hot.”

“Thanks,” the woman said, tossing some of her hair over her shoulder and smiling briefly at them before turning a truly ferocious glower on the man on the ground. “So who the hell are you?” she demanded, pulling his bandana off his head with her free hand and dangling it in front of him. “What’s that logo?”

“Looks like the Aqua… Foundation or trust or whatever the hell it is,” Seka observed. “That ‘save the ocean’ gang or whatever it was. How does mugging randomers in the forest save the ocean?”

“None of your business!” the Aqua guy snarled. “Get off me!”

“Sure!” the strange woman said brightly, hopping to her feet and tugging him up by the painfully twisted arm. “Whatever you’re doing, you can tell the police in Rustboro.”

“You’ve gotta show me how to do that,” Seka said admiringly, peering at the armlock. “My name’s Seka, by the way, and this is Edge, and that’s Key with Thomas on her shoulder. No idea who Mugging Victim is--”

“Um, I’m--” the man began, but Seka kept talking.

“--and who might you be? Are you a tourist? Your accent doesn’t sound local…”

“Jenny,” the woman said, nodding at them. She smiled slightly, but there were dark circles under her eyes and she couldn’t quite seem to manage a smile that made it all the way up her face. “And no, I’m not local, but I’m… not exactly a tourist, either. I’m looking for someone, and I thought he might be… well, he’s not what I thought he was, anyway.”

“What are you looking for?” Key asked curiously.

“Well… have you heard of Team Rocket?”
“Uh… that gang or militia or whatever that turned up a few years ago, yelling about how Kanto wasn’t actually a barren wasteland but people were still alive and stuff?” Key recalled, remembering that it had been all over the news at the time and that opinion had been very split on whether Rocket were sympathetic for all that they and their people had been through for sixteen years, or dangerous, savage terrorists.

“They’re not just a gang or a militia, they’re an extremely dangerous organization, and it isn’t just Kanto they run,” Jenny said darkly. “There isn’t a lot that they officially own in Johto, but trust me, if the Rocket Boss says ‘jump’, there’ll be a loud chorus of ‘how high?’s from the Johto council.”

“And you think they’re here?” Seka said, frowning.

“I know their boss is, anyway,” Jenny said, her scowl only growing sharper. “I’ve been looking for her, and I saw her in Slateport… I just didn’t get off the damn ship fast enough to catch her before she vanished. But I will find her, I promise you that.”

“You need any help?” Key asked. “Do you know your way around Hoenn?”

“Well… not really,” Jenny said hesitantly. “I’ve been to Slateport on holidays before, but, well…”

“We can help you, then!” Seka offered. “We’re local, we know our way around, and we’re both Pokemon League contestant trainers, so we can fight!”

“And win,” Edge said, pointing at the unconscious Poochyena with a smirk.

Jenny looked unsure. “Team Rocket aren’t sportspeople,” she warned them. “They’re kidnappers and killers. Fighting them isn’t fun, it’s dangerous.”

“Danger? Hah! I walk on the wild side! I laugh in the face of danger!” Seka declared, letting off a distinctly un-heroic cackle.

“Yeah, usually while I’m doing the fighting for you…” Edge grumbled.

“If they’re so dangerous, isn’t it better that you don’t fight them alone?” Key suggested.
“I have Pokemon too,” Jenny said, patting her belt with her free hand. “And I can defend myself.” She twisted the Aqua man’s arm pointedly, making him yelp. “I’m training to be a cop. I’m going to start at the Johto Police Academy in the autumn… well, if I find what I’m looking for first.”

“So let us help!” Seka insisted. “Then you’ll definitely make it back on time and can train to beat up assholes like this all day!”

“A police officer’s job isn’t to beat people up,” Jenny sighed, rolling her eyes, “but… sure. It is important that I find Team Rocket as soon as possible… thank you.”

“My dad’s a Gym Leader,” Key added. “I can call to see if he or any of the other Leaders have seen anything…”

“While apologizing for running off?” Thomas reminded her.

Key winced. “…yeah, thanks for reminding me,” she muttered sourly.

Chapter End Notes

What’s this? A Mirror, Mirror where nothing utterly horrible happens? Maybe I’m just in a good mood because FINALLY, THE (POKEMON) SUN HAS ARRIVED TO BRING LIGHT TO MY LIFE AND JOY TO MY DAYS

I’m liveblogging my playthrough on my main tumblr, mangaluva, tagged “SuMo” if anybody’s interested in seeing me argue with flavour text
There was dead silence around the table, all of them gaping at the innocent little red dice that was sitting on the table, shining 20 facing upwards. Then Silver threw his hands up into the air and whooped.

“TOLD you putting all those points into cross-classing was worth it!” he cheered. “No way out of it now, Stone! Nat! Fuckin’! Twenty!”

It struck Saylee belatedly that she should probably chastise her little brother for his language, but she was too busy enjoying the way the gears were spinning so fast in Steven’s head that smoke was practically coming out of his ears. Lance had already started laughing.

“Where the hell were those when we were fighting Giratina?” Blue said, peering at the dice.

“I don’t think it would’ve mattered, that battle was *obviously* unwinnable without a creative solution,” Cynthia said, throwing a dark look at Steven.

“I don’t make unwinnable battles, what kind of cheap shit would that be?” Stevne murmured, flipping through a brick of a book. “Hmm… okay, Silver, I’m gonna need you to roll aaaaa… d10.”

“What’s that for?” Key asked as Silver picked through his dice bag.

“The resurrection successful, Red’s definitely been brought back, but now we need to see how successfully he’s been brought back,” Steven said, watching Silver roll the dice. He split into an unsettling grin as the dice landed on a 2.
“Oh man, he’s a zombie now,” Lance crowed.

“Are there even zombies in this game?” Archie asked with a frown.

“Listen, if he’s a zombie now, I’m not telling him that,” Saylee interjected. “Not when we get him at the airport, not after we get him home for a good dinner, not on the way to the next session. You can tell him he’s a zombie now.”

“No, he didn’t get a 1, so Red isn’t a zombie… but he is a baby,” Steven said with a smirk. Key and Barry both burst out laughing as Silver, Saylee and Blue all groaned.

“Can babies even take classes?” Saylee asked helplessly.

“He is technically a party member, and, uh… since he’s a minor, he needs a legal guardian, but if he has one and is with them, he can own Pokemon…” Steven said, grabbing more books out of his bag.

“Admit it, you’re having to make up a baby mechanic,” Silver said gleefully. “I got you! And you can’t cut it down for trolling because it’s in-character and based on established lore!”

“I’m so goddamn proud of him,” Blue whispered loudly in Saylee’s ear before leaning over to give Silver a double high-five.

“Hey, since we’re out of the Reverse now, are our disability modifiers back on?” Dawn asked.

“Yep, sorry, clock on those was frozen while you were in the Reverse,” Steven said, scribbling rapidly in a notebook without looking up.

Lucas and Barry both groaned. “Thanks, Dawnie, he probably wouldn’t’ve remembered that if you hadn’t brought it up,” Barry groused. Lucas just shook his head and started shuffling character sheets.

“You underestimate my power,” Steven said absentmindedly.
There was a knock on the door and a head peered around at them. “Goodness, what are you all still doing here?” a bespectacled, middle-aged woman with frizzy blonde hair asked. “You do know it’s well past ten?”

“Professor Hawkshaw!” Cynthia said, standing up and looking up at the clock. “We… were not aware of that, thank you. We should probably all pack up and go before the custodians kick us out again.”

“Seems like a good stopping point anyway, gives you all a chance to get prepped to start new missions back in the real world next week and me time to make up some baby mechanics,” Steven said, starting to load books and paper back into his rucksack.

“If only I could get my undergrads as dedicated to their study as you are to your board games…” Professor Hawkshaw said, shaking her head and *tsk* ing, though it was with a smile. “Though a little relaxation’s good for the brain, too. How is your study going, Cynthia? Did you get the samples you needed?”

“Yes, Mrs Hawes was very helpful,” Cynthia said, starting to chat to what was presumably her teacher about something to do with ancient pottery while the rest of them packed up.

Saylee noticed Silver hiding nervously under his hat. “Don’t worry, plenty of undergrads look like they should still be in high school, and if you’re not on her course she probably doesn’t expect to recognize any of you,” she murmured. Silver, Dawn, Lucas and Barry all still pointedly avoided eye contact as they hurried out of the room where Professor Hawkshaw was busy chatting to Cynthia.

“I’ll walk down with you,” the older woman offered as they stepped out of the room. “I’m just heading home too--my daughter’s on her way to pick me up.”

“How’s Jenny doing? She graduated, right?” Cynthia asked as they walked down the stairs.

“Top of her class and already on the beat,” Professor Hawkshaw said proudly. “You kids better behave if you’re out drinking this weekend,” she added with a twinkle in her eye.

“I don’t know about a drink, but now that I know how late it is, I’m *starving* ,” Key moaned, rubbing her stomach. “Anything open at this hour except the chippie?”
“Just the pubs,” Saylee said, catching Key’s eye and then nodding at Silver in a way that she hoped communicated “which I cannot take my underage brother and his friends to at this hour but I cannot mention in front of a member of faculty that we’re letting non-students onto the campus at this hour”.

“Oh, of course, you’re teetotal,” Key lied smoothly. “Chippie it is!”

“Ahh, the resilient digestive systems of youth,” Professor Hawkshaw said, shaking her head. As they stepped out of the front door, she waved at a car parked near the bus stop. “Well, you lot have fun—and Cynthia, I’ll give you that book on Ogham variants if you pop by my office on Monday, okay? Have a good weekend!”

“Thank you, Professor!” Cynthia called, waving as the Professor hurried off to her daughter’s car. “I am so glad I got her as my postgrad mentor, you have no idea.”

“Her daughter’s a cop? Nice,” Lance whistled. “She single?”

“Don’t bother, you’re barking way up the wrong tree,” Cynthia said, rolling her eyes. “So, somebody said something about getting some hot, greasy, delicious garbage for dinner?”

Chapter End Notes

I haven’t posted a oneshot since NaNoWriMo? Yay depression year! It’s not Christmas yet, so Happy Hannukah, I think? I have a few more things I want to try and post in the next few days, so watch this space!

Also, I am not introducing Professor Hawkshaw to this AU because she’s going to die soon. Nobody dies in this AU. Everybody is happy and plays games together and nobody dies for real.
After a few years of working with Wallace, Key was used to walking around Evergrande City like she owned the place, so she breezed past the secretaries sitting outside with a quick exchange of “hey, how are you?”s, high-fived the palmprint sensors and strolled directly into Wallace’s office. “Hi, Wallace, I—oh, hi, Juan,” she said, spotting the Sootopolis Leader sitting across a coffee table from Wallace at one side of the room rather than across the central desk. “Sorry, am I here early?”

“No, I didn’t have an appointment, this is just a casual call,” Juan said, standing up and bowing to Key in greeting, prompting Wallace to do the same. “I simply wanted to talk about Archie’s upcoming placement.”

“Has it been decided?” Key asked, taking a seat on the sofa next to Juan as both men sat down. Archie Irving was one of the most high-profile prisoners in the country after pleading guilty to the manslaughter of nearly ten thousand people and Pokemon during a three-day trial. He’d been so penitent that the only reason the trial dragged on was the confusion over how the hell to define the crime of “summoning an ancient god in response to somebody else summoning an ancient god knowing full well that said two gods hated each other and would fight”, including a brief spat between the prosecution and defense over whether the deaths were murder or manslaughter. A number of other thefts and assaults that Aqua had committed under his command had come in as trifling charges by comparison, but he pleaded guilty all the same. Archie had landed a formidable defense lawyer in the form of Godin Court, a Sinnan lawyer who had insisted on taking the case in gratitude for Archie saving some hostages in Veilstone that he was personally very close to. Court had managed to arrange a plan for Archie to have the opportunity to work for his redemption, like any other prisoner, due to his genuine remorse and having already contributed to saving reality itself from the machinations of Galactic Corp.

Six years after his arrest, Archie was finally being moved from maximum security to slightly-less-than-maximum security due to good behaviour. He’d studied tirelessly to get his Master’s in marine biology, was partway through a PhD, and had been working all hours he was legally allowed to on maintenance, cleaning and cooking shifts in the prison. The law mandated that prisoners be paid minimum wage for any labour they performed, but Court had helped Archie arrange a deal for every penny that he earned to go to foundations to support the families of those that died in the Calamity. Public feeling on Archie was very mixed, and certainly there were plenty of people who’d never forgive him, but he did seem to be gaining a small but dedicated support movement due to his work in Sinnoh and clear remorse, particularly in contrast to Marc Hyland, who still had yet to be found.

“He’s being moved to a secure facility in Evergrande to put all that marine biology knowledge to work,” Wallace said with a nod. “Reportedly he’s been working wonders as a medic and
physiotherapist for the guard water-types at Hoenn Max, though officially I never said that because prisoners are absolutely not under any circumstances to have access to the guard Pokemon when they’re not fighting fit. Aside from my own significant team, the majority of Pokemon in Hoenn are water-types and the majority of trainers have at least once, and medics with specialized knowledge in the type are in high demand…” While Hoenn had been pretty much rebuilt since the Calamity, the health service was still straining at the seams to deal with all of the long-term injuries and rehabilitation, child services was still struggling to keep all of its facilities under capacity, a new geological faultline was causing regular tremors and the ocean ecosystem was still an absolute mess.

On top of all of that, Key knew, Wallace was struggling to maintain good relationships with several foreign countries. Despite the videos of Groudon and Kyogre fighting, a number of powers were still insistent (at least to their own people) that the Calamity could not possibly have been caused by mythological powerful god-Pokémon. Others were insistent that the gods were to be found, captured and restrained for security or research purposes, and others still were afraid that the gods had already been captured by the Hoenn government and would be levelled against other nations as a weapon at any time. The unconditional support of the Champions of Sinnoh and the Tohjo Union was helping, but maintaining international relations was a job that Key did not envy of Wallace.

“He’ll work wonders for anybody who’ll let him near their Pokemon, I’m sure,” Juan agreed. “May I ask why you’re here, Lady Weaves, if not to ask after my wayward brother?”

“You may, but it’s nothing too interesting, just a personal report,” Key said with a shrug. “We got the old Unovan ambassador onto her ship without her getting hit by any of the stuff people were throwing. Ambassador Bettany seems alright. He’s speaking the Unovan government line, but he did let slip that he does actually believe that the Calamity was down to Groudon and Kyogre fighting. Oh, and I checked, and he did actually contribute a good chunk to the support donations that we got from Unovans, so this one’s not going to talk shit about how people are delusional about how their loved ones died.”

“Good to know,” Wallace said with a relieved smile. “Are you coming in next week when Archie’s moving in?”

“You may, but it’s nothing too interesting, just a personal report,” Key said with a shrug. “We got the old Unovan ambassador onto her ship without her getting hit by any of the stuff people were throwing. Ambassador Bettany seems alright. He’s speaking the Unovan government line, but he did let slip that he does actually believe that the Calamity was down to Groudon and Kyogre fighting. Oh, and I checked, and he did actually contribute a good chunk to the support donations that we got from Unovans, so this one’s not going to talk shit about how people are delusional about how their loved ones died.”

“Good to know,” Wallace said with a relieved smile. “Are you coming in next week when Archie’s moving in?”

“Of course,” Key said with a nod. “Really… thank you so much for giving him the chance to earn his redemption.”

“He’s earned the right,” Wallace said, exchanging smiles with Juan. The phone on Wallace’s desk rang and he sighed, standing and walking over to the desk to read the screen. “Oh, look, President Jackson. What a delight.”

“Well, if you have business to attend to, I shan’t detain you,” Juan said, standing up.

“Actually, Juan, can I ask you something?” Key asked, also standing. “I’ll walk out with you.”

“Thanks for coming in, Key,” Wallace said, reluctantly pressing the button to pick up. On his screen, a man that Key recognized as the Unovan president appeared. Key and Juan swiftly exited the office and started heading back down the hall.

“I could just call, of course, but I do feel like physically dropping in on somebody shows a great deal more care, don’t you?” Juan commented. “And of course, you cannot share a nice cup of tea over a phone call.” Key laughed. “Now, what did you wish to ask me?”

“Well… just kinda wondering, but have you ever gone back to Kanto?” Key asked. “I know you left as a teenager, but have you been back recently?”
“Never really had the urge to,” Juan said, shaking his head. “Hoenn is my home. Kanto was a terrifying place where my mother died horribly. I never exactly got homesick for it. Why do you ask?”

“Well… I don’t know. Trying to get a feel for the place, I guess. I’m going for the first time tonight,” Key explained. “Lee’s surgery date is tomorrow, so hopefully the fast ship should get me in an hour or so before she goes in.”

“Ah, of course… give her and her husband my best wishes and congratulations,” Juan said with a warm smile. Key nodded, but frowned vaguely. “Is everything alright? The last that I heard, she and the baby were both quite healthy…”

“No, there’s nothing wrong exactly,” Key said, staring intently at the floor buttons as they walked into the lift and selected the ground floor. “Lee’s just been… kinda weird about the whole thing. I mean, I just spoke to her this morning, and she was so… not-excited about it. Like she was just going in to have a cast taken off, not a baby. Actually, scratch that, last time I saw Seka she just got a cast taken off of her leg and she was ecstatic. I dunno what’s up. She has to want—she found out like seven weeks in, after all, so she had plenty of time to get rid of it if she didn’t want it, and she didn’t sound scared or upset or anything, just… I dunno.”

“While I have never felt the urge to actually return to Kanto, I have kept myself well-informed on its development and recovery,” Juan said thoughtfully. “I signed on with my old high school’s Facebook page and a few people who thought they might have gone there once got in touch to see if I knew them, so I’ve reconnected with a few people and made a few new friends into the bargain who I keep in touch with. I am aware of the dire long-term health situation there. Natural fertility rates are rather low, and the birth of a healthy child, one who survives without problems, is rarer still.”

“Yeah, but they haven’t noticed any problems with the baby,” Key said tentatively.

“There are, sadly, many things that can slip under the radar, and even when mother and baby both are perfectly healthy, birth is a complicated business that can so easily go wrong,” Juan sighed.

“That’s why her doctor scheduled her for a C-section,” Key pointed out. “C’mon, you don’t have to be a doctor to call that. Lee’s tiny and her health’s weird at the best of times. But she’s doing as good as she ever does, the baby’s fine, she’s got less than a day… I could see Blue and his sister fussing around like a tag-team of mother Kangaskhan, and Blue’s clearly nervous as hell, but… I dunno, Lee just seems like she isn’t feeling anything about it and it’s weirding me out.”

“You know Sar Kanto better than I, so feel free to tell me if I’m being presumptuous, but here is what I think,” Juan said carefully, walking out of the lift as the doors opened. “Among the medical reports concerning Kanto are concerns from the World Health Organization that hospitals there are somewhat poorly organized—rather than having specialized wards, they often simply put patients where there is room. One of my new friends is a nurse who has complained at some length about the lack of maternity or children’s wards in many places. Infants and children have such different health needs to adults, and it is widely regarded as unwise to expose them or expectant mothers to illnesses and infections that have brought adults to hospital. Sar Kanto has, I have no doubt, spent much time in hospital there, has probably seen just about every way that a birth can go wrong in hospital, and indeed in the course of her work has seen just about every way that there is for a human or Pokémon to die.”

“But she handles all of that,” Key said, following him out of the lobby of Evergrande Tower. “Usually by bottling it until she either has free time to cry or gets to punch somebody in the face for it, but she handles it. She’s been handling it forever.”
“I have lost both of my parents, several of my friends back in Kanto, and came very close to losing my brother,” Juan commented, “and none of that fear, pain or grief was the same as what I felt when Wallace was ill from merging with Manaphy and I began to seriously fear that he would die. As you said yourself, evidence is that she wants this child, so she is insistently preparing herself for the worst because she fears that even then, she will not be able to cope if something does go wrong.”

“Yeah, but… if it’s just ‘cause she’s scared of losing it… it’s not like it’s completely safe after it’s born, is it?” Key said quietly. “Lee’s got a pretty safe job these days, and she’s got all of the security, but accidents still happen. She can’t just act like an automan about the kid its whole life because she’s scared of losing it, can she?”

“No,” Juan said with a smile, turning and bowing to Key, “she can’t. Good day, Lady Weaves.” He turned and strode off down to the beach.

“How’re you feeling?” Johanna asked, brushing her daughter’s hair out of her face as Saylee lay on the operating table with Blue, Key, Daisy and Johanna standing around her.

“For the fiftieth time, I feel fine,” she promised. “The anaesthetic is doing its job. I can’t feel a thing.”

“Can you see anything from that angle?” Key asked, staring in fascination at the two surgeons who were intently focused on carefully opening up their Champion. “Because it’s disgusting, just so you know. I’m actually surprised to say this, but I’ve never seen this much of your innards before.”

“Please let’s focus on something else,” Daisy said with a wince. She was standing with her hand on one of Saylee’s shoulders, while Johanna was standing at her head and Blue and Key were holding her hands. “Are you thirsty? Do you need any more ice chips?”

“That’d be great,” Saylee sighed. Daisy passed her a few more chips out of the cup she was holding.

“We’re just about there, Sar,” one of the surgeons reassured her. “Just widen that incision there and we should be able to get it out.” She set down her scalpel and reached into the opening that the other surgeon was carefully widening.

“Okay, correction,” Saylee mumbled around an ice chip, “I can’t feel pain but I can feel that, and it’s weird.”

“Not as weird as it lo— whoa,” Blue breathed. Key stared, enraptured, as the surgeon pulled a tiny baby out of the incision, reminding her weirdly of a magician pulling a Buneary out of a hat. After a long moment, the baby began to scream shrilly.

“Good lungs,” Johanna yelled approvingly over the crying.

One of the surgeons stepped aside with the baby while the other cut the umbilical cord. “I’m just going to close up your incision while Dr Wen gives your baby their first bath, okay?” she said, setting the scissors aside and reaching for a needle and thread.

“It’s okay?” Saylee asked quietly. “Everything’s okay?”

“We’ll draw blood and a couple of other things to be sure, but to my eyes and ears the baby seems perfectly fine,” Dr Wen assured her. “Congratulations, Sar, you’re mother to a healthy baby!”

“I’m gonna go have a look,” Blue said, squeezing Saylee’s hand and giving her a kiss on the forehead and walking over to where Dr Wen was bathing the baby. Johanna and Daisy hurried
excitedly after him, but Key stayed crouched by Saylee’s side, squeezing her hand.

“I know you’re sick of hearing this, but how do you feel?” Key asked softly.

Saylee smiled tiredly. “I’m… glad it’s alright,” she said tentatively.

“Hey,” Key said quietly, “y’know, not all of the kids who wind up in the system are orphans. I’ve seen how much it damages a person to know for a fact, or even worry, that their parents don’t love them. So I know that you’re always worried about the worst happening because half the time it does, but whether that kid lives a century or an hour, you’d better make sure they don’t spend a second wondering if their mom loves them, okay?”

Saylee inhaled sharply, but didn’t get to say anything before Blue came back over, carrying a tiny bundle in a white blanket that had quietened to whimpering. “How do you feel?” he asked Saylee.

“I’m fine,” Saylee insisted, rolling her eyes.

“Hi, Fine, I’m Dad,” Blue said with the most ridiculous grin.

“Oh gods, how long were you looking forward to that?!” Daisy groaned. “Let her see her baby!”

“Can she sit up?” Johanna asked the surgeons.

“Not yet,” the one who was still stitching said.

Blue crouched down next to Saylee, turning so that while he was still holding the baby, Saylee could see it. “Hello, mother,” he said in a high-pitched, pompous voice. “Pleasure to make your acquaintance!” Daisy groaned again and went to hug a happily sobbing Johanna.

Saylee giggled and reached out, slightly clumsily, to gently rest her fingers against the baby’s cheek. “Hi, Scarlet,” she said, tears welling up in her eyes even as she finally, broadly smiled. “Welcome to the world, sweetie. I’m sorry, we’re doing our best.”

Key smiled, squeezing Saylee’s hand again and standing up to go out into the waiting room and announce the good news to the extended Pryce, Oak and Tougan families who’d turned up to meet Scarlet Oak-Pryce.

Chapter End Notes

So this is sorta half a little discussion of Archie working to earn his redemption, half Saylee facing an all-new kind of fear, all Key being great. I don’t think I’ve published anything with Scarlet in it yet, either, so I guess this is the official announcement that Blue and Saylee named their daughter Scarlet, as a compromise between both of their families going for colour names sometimes and giving their child a reasonable human name XD And, of course, a way of naming her after her uncle Red :)

You know Blue is THRILLED to make dad jokes now. He copes with shit with ill-timed humour as it is, so when facing the same fear as Saylee, of course he’d dive headfirst into the worst jokes he can lay hands on.
A Beautiful Song

Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Summary

For some, the way they experience the world is completely unique and always has been. But being unique doesn't mean you have to be alone.

Chapter Notes

This is specifically for you, Songwithnosoul, always the most beautiful song to see in my inbox whenever I write anything <3 I hope 2017’s been good for you, I hope 2018 will be even better, and thank you for always being so wonderful <3

Victini was a playful creature at heart and almost never still. When alone, they were always flying around every inch of their tower, in constant motion as they worked on the problem of devising games that were fun to play but not competitive, because then when they were lucky enough to have visitors, they could have fun playing together without the visitor getting tired of constant loss. A visitor, especially a favourite friend like Meloetta, ought to be a recipe for even more intense manic energy, as the two never tired of dancing together.

But today, for once, both little gods were sitting on the roof of the tower, looking up at the stars, waiting. Waiting for nothing, or waiting for nothing.

Meloetta had their eyes closed as they listened. Their ears were much smaller than Victini’s, but nobody could hear the world like Meloetta could. They’d described the “song of the world” to Victini many, many times, but the little fire-psychic had never quite understood it. Then again, their domain was luck, not sound. Victini could not understand the song of the world any more than Meloetta could understand seeing the ghosts of potential futures around every living thing, how to nudge them into following one ghost or another, whichever potentiality was the most fortuitous.

Of course, many people had different definitions of fortuitous.

Meloetta sighed, then smiled. “The song wavered, but all has been righted,” they declared in relief.

“That’s great!” Victini said, flitting up to slap their hand against Meloetta’s in the air. “So
“For now,” Meloetta agreed, “the song goes on. And… hmm.” They tilted their head to one side thoughtfully. “Dialga and Palkia… their songs have fused with humans.”

“Like Lugia and Ho-oh and Rayquaza and the Tapus and Manaphy and--”

“Yes,” Meloetta said with a nod.

“Well, good. I hope their humans are nicer than they are,” Victini sighed, plopping back down onto the grass and lying back to look up at the stars, still burning in the night sky. If they really reached out with their senses, they could hear the distant roar of fire.

They could remember when the stars were different. Stars burned on and off, the sky turned, and stars changed over time. In their hidden tower, it was one of the only things that ever really changed.

“I hear your heart singing longing,” Meloetta said softly. “You want it too, don’t you? Or you think you do.”

“I want to leave here, Meloetta, and not be afraid of humans or Pokemon seeing me and seeing my power,” Victini sighed. “I want to feel excitement at new things again. I want to play new games and maybe really have to try. The avatars can learn to turn their powers on and off, right?”

“They can,” Meloetta said, “but Victini… to join with a human means that your mind will never quite be your own ever again. You’ll share it with one human, then two, then three, and the part that is you will only get smaller and smaller…”

“I don’t think so,” Victini said, shaking their head. “I think I’ll get bigger and bigger, being so many people. So many different people, all as one. What do you think it’ll sound like, Meloetta? All those songs in harmony?”

Meloetta looked down at Victini in surprise, then smiled. “It sounds… beautiful,” they admitted. They closed their eyes, tipped back their head, and began to sing.
Meloetta’s singing didn’t have words, not as humans or most Pokemon would understand it. It had something that the ears couldn’t process but the soul could, like something that was alive and made its home in you, or maybe something that had been inside of you all along and came to life at the sound of Meloetta’s song. It was sadness, or rage, or fear, or hope, all made into living, intangible things.

Would that change, if Meloetta became part of a human?

When the song finished, the lingering notes still danced in the air, wrapping them both warmly. “You’re my best friend, Victini,” Meloetta said, even their own smooth, melodious voice somehow coarse compared to their singing. “I will find you the perfect human. I will find you a human who will show you the world brand new.” In Meloetta’s mouth, the words of a promise were the strongest binding magic there was.

“Thank you!” Victini cried, hugging their friend tightly. “Thank you so much, Letta. If you choose them, I know they’ll be perfect.” They sat down in Meloetta’s lap. “What about you, though? Do you ever want an avatar? It’s always been a choice, after all.”

“There are humans in the past that I have chosen who I might have made my avatar, had we been doing so at the time,” Meloetta mused. “The beautiful humans with songs in their souls. Those songs always return again. When I hear one again…” They listened thoughtfully. “Maybe.” They wrapped their arms around Victini. “If they are close enough to the perfect human for you.”

“Even when we’ve avatars, Letta, you’ll always be my best friend,” Victini promised. “No matter who we become.” They snuggled down into Meloetta’s arms. “I’m glad you came here. If the world ended tonight, I’m glad I’d be with my best friend when it did.”

“That’s why I came here, after all,” Meloetta said, hugging Victini more snugly. “I’ll start looking in the morning. Until then…” They stood up with a flourishing twirl, their long green hair swirling up around their head as it changed to a rich red-brown. “Shall we dance?”

“If you’re lucky,” Victini laughed, fluttering their tiny wings as hard as they could as they gripped Meloetta’s hands and the two danced across the grass to music that only Meloetta could hear, the music of a world that was still turning.
Ghost Story

Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Summary

Happy Hallowe'en 2018!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She spends a lot of time looking at the golden face she carries. There isn’t much else to look at. There were murals on the wall, once, she’s sure, but they’ve long faded and she can’t remember what they once looked like. She always warns other Yamask whenever she sees them: the longer they’re dead, the less you remember. Whatever you're still here for, sort it out quick, okay?

She knows what she’s here for. The stone. She has to watch the stone. It has to stay right here, forever. And so does she.

There’s something bad in the stone, she knows that much. Something so terrible that she gave up everything to guard it. It must be terrible, otherwise she wouldn't have given up everything to guard it, right?

She looks at the golden face in her misty black hands. It looks resolute. It does not look afraid. It looks so achingly familiar. Even if she can’t remember, after all these years--hundreds? Thousands?--she can reason, deduce. It’s her face, the moment of her death, and she died having made a decision, one she was very sure of. She decided to be here, and even if she can’t remember why, she trusts herself to have known what she was doing. If she can’t trust herself, who can she trust?

How long has it been?

~~~~~~~~~~

She hasn’t seen light in so long. When first sand, then sunlight, dribbles down into the room, disturbing it for the first time in… a long time… it burns. But she can’t move away from it, not without leaving the stone--
There are words, in a language she doesn’t understand. There’s a hand, pointing at her. There are eyes, glowing red, and fangs, tearing --

When did she last have to fight? The Pokemon around here know to stay away, have known for a long time. It’s been so long since she’s even seen --

When she comes to, the stone is gone.

She’s failed.

She weeps then, huge, red tears rolling down her cheeks. After all this time, after everything she gave up, after everything, she failed.

~~~~~~~~~~

“You promised to guard it, didn’t you? So go find it. Bring it back.”

She knows that voice. She knows that it’s been a long time since she’s heard it. It wasn’t a friend, though. She thinks she can trust it, in an odd way. They have the same goal, at least.

Then again, it seems friendlier, now, soft and gentle. She can’t remember the last time they spoke, but she knows it wasn’t friendly then.

“You need humans to travel now. Much as I find it distasteful, it will make things easier. Follow me.”

She doesn’t recognize the crumbling hallways, but she knows this place, she’s walked these halls before. She follow, and…

...there’s something about these humans. A scent? An aura? It’s familiar, in a way.

“They can help you. Hopefully.”
When the pokeball takes her, it’s the first time she’s slept in longer than she knows.

Chapter End Notes

Nanowrimo’s starting, and I’m focusing on EE for it this year, so here’s hoping I can write enough to get posting again soon!
Survivors
Chapter by Mangaluva

Chapter Summary

Set during the later chapters of Blood and Bond. It turns out people are alive in Kanto. Who knew?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Cynthia was focused on two things as her Elites logged in.

Primarily, she was focused on not throwing up.

Secondarily, she was focused on not looking like she was not throwing up.

The nausea only got worse as she looked over her council. Not so much Flint, who was younger than her, probably in kindergarten when it all happened. A little bit when she looked at Bertha, who’d been champion at the time. But she couldn’t even look in the direction of Argenta and Lucian, who…

“Well, now that we’re all gathered…” Bertha said, patting a little more bedhead out of her hair, “what’s the urgent matter, Sar Shirona?”

“The news is already broadcasting from Johto, Sinnoh stations will probably pick it up soon,” Cynthia began, focused on her hands. “There was a terrorist incident in Goldenrod City. A group calling themselves Rocket. They apparently came out of nowhere and occupied nearly the whole city. A number of high-level professional trainers rallied to help the struggling police round them up, but Rocket’s leaders were all defeated by a couple of teenagers… who claim that they, and Rocket, came from Kanto.”

“That’s absurd,” Lucian said immediately. “Investigators died determining that—”

“Investigators died and the sole survivor said that the air itself was so poisonous it ate through their protective gear, and all satellite and other technological surveys were corrupted beyond use by the
psychic fallout,” Bertha rattled off, a little glassy-eyed. “I remember. Things were chaos, with the Gab, the memory event in Johto and Sevii, and it was easy to assume that nobody could be alive in Kanto…” She pressed a hand over her mouth, the nausea Cynthia already felt writ large over her face. “Too easy. Gods, if it’s true—”

“Cold it be true?” Argenta choked out. “Cynthia, for the love of all the gods, tell me, could it be true?!”

“I don’t know for certain, but preliminary reports say that Rocket had a large force that came from nowhere and mostly consists of people with no ID records of any kind,” Cynthia said, scrolling on her own screen. “If they’re lying, they’re Johto’s problem, but if they’re not, we have to decide how to respond.” She nodded at Argenta and Lucian. “I’ve been checking. In the two years prior to the Psychic Event, during the Civil War, we took in over five thousand refugees from Kanto. Many still had friends and family living there…”

“They might still be there,” Argenta sobbed. “Gods, we left them there, all this time—!"

“If those kids in Goldenrod aren’t lying,” Lucian said sharply. “Just because they don’t have ID doesn’t mean they came from Kanto. There’s plenty of other places they could have arrived illegally from, and they could be lying to escape their crimes wherever they really came from.”

“Man, not too cold,” Flint complained. “Dude, don’t you want folks to be alive there?”

“I want harder evidence,” Lucian said firmly, frowning in concern while inclining his head in the direction of his mother’s hologram. “Not hearsay and false hope.”

“Honey, I’m in a call,” Bertha suddenly said, looking aside, presumably at her husband. Her eyes widened. “What? Oh my goodness—everybody, a live interview is streaming from Goldenrod now with one of the kids in question,” she said, flapping a hand at her fellow Elites. “Here, let me—” She pressed a few buttons on some invisible console, and then an invite arrived to view a news channel.

Ye gods, somebody get that boy a sandwich, was Cynthia’s first thought when she clicked the invite and a video stream opened up. The teenager in question was pale and wiry, all cheekbones and a horribly unkempt mass of auburn hair and green eyes flashing back and forth in a manner reminding Cynthia of a wary wild Pokemon, constantly on the lookout for an attack.

“… that mean?” he was asking.
“It means people all over the country are watching right now,” a voice off-camera said. “They’ll hear what you have to say, as you say it, with no time for anybody to edit anything. So let’s start with an easy one. Could you tell us your name?”

“Fuck, you’ve already got my hackles up,” the teenager snorted, accidentally proving that the feed was indeed live. “Alright. I guess. My name’s Blue Oak. I’m from Kanto.”

“And the girl in the hospital? Is she your sister?” the interviewer laughed.

Blue’s eyes widened, then he burst out laughing. The laugh sounded about ten years younger than the rest of him looked. “Fuck, no, but I do have a sister. Daisy. She pretty much raised me, her and Gramps. What’s with the typing?”

“I, uh, might have to add in a three-second delay if you’re going to keep swearing, just to bleep out the F-bombs,” the interviewer said apologetically. “And just checking something that rang some bells. What’s your grandfather’s name?”

“Uh... Sam. What, you gonna tell me you know Gramps?”

“Know of him, maybe. Professor Samuel Oak, affiliated with Viridian University?”

“Viridian what now?” Blue said, leaning forward and looking at a pokegear screen that was held up to show him something. His eyes widened. “Hey, that’s a photo of Gramps! Goddamn, so his hair was brown, huh? Just like Daisy’s and Mum’s... so I guess that makes him Mum’s dad. Always wondered about that.”

“Sources say he had a daughter. Sandra?”

“Yeah... that was Mum’s name,” Blue said, all the light in his eyes and curiosity on his face blanking out as abruptly as a door slamming closed. “Guess that tells you I’m not fucking lying, huh?”

The screen froze for a moment, the delay presumably being implemented, then went on with the interview. Cynthia watched, mute with shock and horror, as Blue described life in Kanto to the
interviewer. The desolation. The poison in the earth and water. The limited supplies, the fighting for them, the deaths, hunting, scavenging, dying —

The thing that woke her with a jolt was, “oh, the biggest one’s definitely Saffron. Last I heard there were nearly a hundred people there? Dunno if that includes the work gangs, though—”

“The biggest concentration of people is less than a hundred,” Bertha whispered. “There were thirty-nine million people in Kanto. I remember that report, when it all happened. Thirty-nine million declared dead. But if they weren’t, gods, they weren’t, and now—”

“I’ve heard of Professor Samuel Oak,” Cynthia said quietly. “His work on the Pokedex system is world-renowned. I used it all the time when I was training, if you buy a dedicated device then a little video of him plays the first time you…” She rubbed a hand over her face as she muted the stream but left it running with the subtitles on. Over Professor Oak’s grandson.

Who’d lived his entire life utterly abandoned.

“Roku,” Argenta gasped. “Koga… Erina… Will…”

“We need to send new investigators,” Lucian insisted. “We need to know for sure. If more people are alive, how many, we need to know, we need more than the guesswork of some half-crazed-looking—”

“We have to help them,” Bertha said urgently, looking at Cynthia. “I’m so sorry, Sar Shirona. This happened during my term of Championship and I failed to look into it properly.”

“Everybody looked,” Lucian said dismissively. “Don’t start blaming yourself and do something useful instead. Mother, I’m on my way over, I’ll be there in a few minutes. If you’ll excuse me, Sar Shirona…”

“Of course,” Cynthia said. “Flint, can you speak to the Rangers about forming an investigatory team? First to visit Goldenrod, then possibly to head into Kanto, once we know how those kids and Rocket got out.”

“Oh! Sure, yeah, absolutely, I’ll do that right now,” Flint said, logging off before he’d even quite finished speaking, looking almost pathetically relieved to be given a task to handle.
“I have to go, Cynthia,” Argenta said. “If anybody’s alive there—when I left to try to find a hospital that could treat Lucian’s eyes, I left my wife, my brothers, my son…” She choked out another sob. “Will was so little, I should have brought him with me anyway, I shouldn’t have left him—”

“I’ll arrange an interim Elite for as long as you need, Argenta,” Cynthia assured her. “Don’t worry about any of that. I’ll contact you once Flint’s sorted out that investigation team, okay?”

“Thank you,” Argenta sighed, logging off, leaving only Cynthia and Bertha still in the conference call. Bertha was still staring distantly at the video stream of Blue Oak’s interview. Several more delays and a slew of content advisory warnings had been added.

“I met him once, you know,” Bertha said vaguely. “A long time ago. Oh, not this boy,” she added quickly, gesturing at the screen. “His grandfather. Professor Oak. It would’ve been in the early sixties, I believe, he was doing a series of guest lectures in Hearthome and I invited him and his family to dinner with the League. One of the pre-eminent minds of the world at the time, and all that. Bit of an absentminded man, easily got off on a tangent, his wife Hannah was the most patient woman in the world, and his daughter Sandra… whipsmart little thing, a bit of a smart mouth on her, I must say. But so much passion. She couldn’t speak to Pokemon like her father—and he could, you know, back before everybody could—but she loved them. She wanted to go into politics in Kanto, change the way Pokemon were being treated. Born ten years too late to make it in time, I fear…”

“Bertha…” Cynthia began, unsure where this was going.

“She had brown hair, just like he said,” Bertha continued as if Cynthia hadn’t spoken, gesturing at the screen. “A good bit darker than this boy. But those green eyes. Exactly young Sandra’s eyes, just like her mother Hannah’s. He looks an awful lot like her, has her smart mouth too, from the looks of it…” She looked up at Cynthia, tears in her eyes. “Thirty-nine million people, Cynthia,” she said softly. “And they might not all have been that smart, or that kind, or that good, but by gods that doesn’t mean they deserved to die like that, and damned if I’m not afraid that it’s worse if they lived just to die in starvation and squalor…”

“They’re our neighbours,” Cynthia said firmly. “So whoever’s there now, we’ll help them. Maybe we did fail them before, maybe we all did, but we’ll make it up to them now, and that means I need you to hold it together, Bertha. I don’t blame you for having regrets. You were Champion at the time. But if you think you won’t be able to handle this, I need you to tell me now.”

“If I can’t handle this?” Bertha said, her eyes suddenly blazing. “My dear, I will not rest until I have made up for every second of the last seventeen years, I promise you that.”
“There’s the Sar Bertha Tougan we all know, love, and slightly fear,” Cynthia said with a smile. “I need to draft a statement concerning what we know about Kanto at this time. Can you speak to Dahlia about stepping in for Argenta for the time being?”

“Of course,” Bertha said, wiping her eyes, then furrowing her brow. “Only *slightly* fear?” she said with a frown before logging off.

Leaving Cynthia alone with her thoughts, and the muted stream of an interview with a teenage boy who’d just helped save a city in a country that had abandoned him.

*They didn’t come as part of Rocket to invade, or steal, or take some revenge. He and the girl in that hospital saved people’s lives.*

...*Fuck.*

~xxx~

As long as Janine could remember, her father had made it a point of pride that he was always the first person to wake up and the last person to go to bed, barring the night watch. So when she herself rose with the sunrise and went down through to the main dojo to do her morning kata, she wasn’t surprised to see her father already there. It was unusual, though, to see that instead of doing his own kata, or meditating, he was sitting on the floor surrounded by papers.

“Good morning,” she said, minding her steps carefully as she crossed the dojo floor, though there wasn’t a particularly wide spread of paper. He had an open file sitting next to him and was methodically removing and examining papers before adding them to one of three piles. “What is that?”

“Good morning, Janine,” he greeted her, glancing up from the papers long enough to smile at her before going back to reading with his brow furrowed. “A Pidgeotto courier arrived with these about an hour ago. A Missing Persons department has opened in Vermillion City. Anybody who travels to Kanto to look for friends or relatives they knew before has to submit the name and last known location of who they’re looking for there— it’s too dangerous to let people who aren’t familiar with Kanto just wander around searching…”

Janine tilted her head, eyes widening as she recognized the names on some of the sheets. “Baoba had
“a son?” she said in surprise. “Baoba has a son?”

“I imagine it’ll be a surprise to him too,” Koga said, “but a welcome one, I’m sure. That pile is for people who I know to be alive and here in Fuchsia. That pile…” He gestured to the next, slightly taller stack of paper. “Those I know to be deceased. I’m not sure what’s to be done about that, other than send their survivors my condolences. This third pile is for those who have left Fuchsia and I don’t know what’s become of them.”

“And what about that one?” Janine asked, pointing to a single sheet of paper sitting alone by her father’s side. He wordlessly picked it up and handed it to her.

Her eyes were almost immediately drawn to her father’s name halfway down the page, her mother’s immediately below it hitting her like an unexpected blow.

She looked back to the top, reading the list of names. It was her deceased uncle, her two deceased aunts, her father and late mother, and both of her cousins, even her grandparents, and the name and signature at the bottom said Kyo Argenta.

“Argenta… that was your sister’s name, right?” Janine recalled. She’d seen the name in the Kyo family registry, but the only photographs enclosed in the book had been memorial photos of the dead, the sort used at funerals. Janine had never seen her aunt’s face, and neither had… “She’s Will’s mother, isn’t she? She’s alive? She wasn’t in Kanto?”

“Apparently not,” Koga said, adding a request sheet to the “confirmed dead” pile. “She must have left before the Psychic Event, though what for, why she didn’t bring her wife or son… I don’t know. And it looks like she has no idea what’s happened to any of us, either…”

Two-thirds of the people on this list are dead, Janine thought, looking back at the request form. She must have given them up for dead a long time ago, and now that she’s got hope that they could all be alive… is she going to be happy that Will and Dad and Karen are alive, at least? What’s she like? “Should I feel left out because I’m the only member of the family in the last three generations not on this list?” she commented.

“You were born after the Event, so it’s likely she has no idea you exist,” Koga commented neutrally. He reached towards the file to pick up a new piece of paper, then rested his empty hand on his knee instead with a sigh. “I don’t relish this job. At the current rate, more than half of it will involve telling people who have hope for the first time in nearly twenty years that their loved ones really are dead, and in many cases we haven’t even ashes left of them. And the rest will involve telling them that yes, the person you lost is alive, but they don’t remember you, and they might not be remotely the same
person you remember them being… and I ought to check with those requested to see if they even want to be found, if they want to meet these people looking for them. I cannot assume that everyone will.”

“Then aren’t you lucky you have me to help you?” Janine said, squeezing his hand. It was rare that her father confided his feelings in her like this, but she also knew that since her uncle’s death, there wasn’t anybody else he considered close enough to him to entrust with his concerns. It never failed to make her sad for him. I hope Auntie will be somebody he can talk to… “Do you want to meet her?” she asked.

“I… am glad she is alive, but I don’t look forward to telling her of her wife’s death, or our parents, or that our brother’s fate is unknown but likely unpleasant,” Koga sighed, squeezing her hand back. “And I am concerned for Will. He does not remember her, and that at least is not unusual given how young he was, but I don’t like not knowing why she left him and Erina behind. I don’t know how much she knows about his psychic abilities, or how she’ll react to… how he handles himself.”

Janine loved her cousin, but she could see her father’s point. Will could be… off-putting. Psychics often were. He had a sense of humour so dark that Karen ought to be training it, and since he did need to use his kinetic powers to fling around or tear apart things sometimes just to keep them from overloading and tearing him apart, some people thought he was outright unhinged or dangerous. Generally, what other people thought of him didn’t get to him, possibly unable to reach whatever plane of reality his mind lived on, but this was his mother.

And she knew her father loved Will too, and Karen. He’d raised them both as much as Janine herself, singlehandedly after the death of Karen’s mother, and that was where she hit the concern that was really tearing at her dad.

He wanted to meet his sister. He wanted it with the same desperation that had had him combing the swamps well over a decade after his brother was last seen. But if Will was afraid to meet her, or if she reacted negatively to Will… Koga would do whatever it took to protect Will, the same as he would for Janine or Karen. And he was steeling himself for the worst.

“He’s got us, no matter what,” Janine reminded her father, squeezing his hand again. “And when she found out that people are alive in Kanto, she came all the way out here to see for herself. Look, the mark at the bottom of the form says she’s in Vermillion now. After all this time thinking we’re all dead, it’d be ridiculous for her to be picky about us being alive. Also, she gets a delightful bonus surprise in that she gets to meet me for the first time!”

Koga laughed. “Lucky her,” he said fondly, squeezing her hand back. “I need to finish sorting the rest of these forms to send back, but we ought to send back a full census as well, so they can check it at the office…”
“I’ll do that today, then,” Janine offered, standing up and stretching, going into her first kata and letting her thoughts and plans for how to go about the census flow and smooth while she moved, with her father going through the forms in a companionable silence.

~xxx~

Koga had no idea how to feel when he picked out the shape of the boat coming around the rocks, but he sure was feeling a lot of it.

Next to him, Will had his eyes closed and was clutching Janine’s hand as she counted aloud to guide him through some centering meditation, though given that he was levitating a small swirl of sand around himself, it didn’t seem to be working. All of Koga’s concerns about what Argenta would think of Will had to be experienced tenfold by the young man faced with the prospect of meeting the mother who’d left him behind for the first time.

Of course, Koga had his own fears about what she would think of him.

He had no memories at all of his sister, no knowledge of what their relationship had been like prior to her leaving Kanto, no knowledge of why she’d left in the first place. He had no idea how she would react to the news of her wife’s death, or their parents, or their sister-in-law’s, or that their brother’s body had never been found.

What would she think of how he’d raised Will, after her wife’s death?

Koga wasn’t used to this kind of anxiety. He was used to having seniority. Of course he’d always wished he could have known his older siblings, though perhaps it would be fairer to say he’d wished for others to share the responsibility of upholding Fuchsia City with. His parents had died in the confusion of those earliest days, and Tsuki in their first conflict with the then-unknown Socket. For a time, he had been a team with Sango and Erina, allied in their shared lost loved ones, but then they had died and left their children in Koga’s care. He would never and could never resent his children simply for living, and had never given less than his all for Fuchsia, but it was simply human to wish to be able to share the load sometimes, wasn’t it?

Well, he could have remarried after Tsuki died.

…No, he couldn’t. There were plenty of good, honest, noble people in Fuchsia. But none of them
were Tsuki.

He refocused on the boat as it drew close enough for him to make out people standing on the prow, checking himself to make sure that none of his tumultuous feelings were showing on his face. He was as well-practiced in that as he was any form of combat. **Everybody** gathered on the beach to meet friends and family they’d forgotten was anxious and afraid, and he needed to be their pillar right now.

“Get ready to dock the boat,” he said curtly, snapping Haruki and Hitoki out of their own slightly dazed fugs and into action, running to prepare ropes on the ramshackle jetty. The eruption of Cinnabar Volcano had destroyed the small one they’d had before, and truthfully, they’d had little need for a new one until now; with the threat of Rocket gone, it was safer to reach Vermillion overland or by air if needed, even if it took a little longer. Rebuilding the jetty had been a pet project of a small group of those more inclined to the water, the sort who dreamed that one day it might be safe to swim in the ocean, but not something worth a lot of labour or resources.

“Here they come,” he heard Janine mutter. He glanced over to see Will’s eyes snap open as the young man scanned the faces crowding the railing of the small boat. “I wonder what she looks like. Presumably at least a little like you, Will, although I wonder if she looks anything like Dad…”

Koga looked them over himself, trying to match faces to requests. There was a young man who was the spitting image of old Slowpoke as a younger man, right down to the receding hairline. There was a woman who, on close inspection, had a nose the exact same shape as Alice’s, and the same colour of eyes roaming the beach until she caught sight of the younger woman and clasped her hands over her mouth. There was—

There was a woman staring directly at **him**, a woman with purple hair, a woman whose dark eyes were widening as she leaned over the railing, gaping.

“**KOQA!**” she yelled. “**Ye GODS !**”

“Ma’am, please stay away from the water!” Haruki yelled on the end of the dock. “It’s not so bad as it was but it will eat into your skin if you touch it for more than a couple seconds!”

“I hear you, kid,” she called back, but the boat wasn’t even in arms’ reach of the jetty before she flipped over the railing, leaping off of it with enough power and momentum to land on the jetty and take off down it before the boat had even docked.
“That’s her then, huh?” Janine commented. Koga had to consciously restrain himself from reflexively falling into a defensive position as she barreled towards him, instead staying lax enough for her to hug him so hard that she lifted him completely off of his feet.

“Gods, Kocchan, I can’t believe it’s really you…” she murmured, so much affection and joy bursting from her words that it didn’t occur to him to be bothered by being addressed by a nickname for a baby. “You’re alive, and…” She leaned back, still gripping his arms as she looked over him, eyes turning sad. “Gods, we left you here, we left….” She looked around, eyes finally finding Will, who was staring at her in a slightly dazed manner. “Will? Baby, is that you?”

“Uh, yeah,” Will said, looking uncertainly from his uncle to his mother. “…Hi?”

“You look just like your brother… oh, gods,” she sobbed, reaching out to hug him too. His arms snaked cautiously around her, his uncertainty about what to do with the crying woman positively radiating off of him. There was a lot of crying going on now that the other passengers were disembarking properly, some laughing through tears as they introduced themselves, others wailing as they hugged their reunited loved ones.

“Shall we go back to the dojo?” Koga suggested. “We can talk, tell you about everything that’s happened…”

“Of course, of course,” his sister said, leaning back and lifting her glasses to wipe her eyes. “I need to know…” She stared at Janine, apparently noticing her for the first time, which Koga could forgive her for, all things considered. “Koga! Nobody told me you had a daughter!”

“This is Janine,” Koga introduced her. “Janine, your aunt Argenta.”

"How'd you know she's Uncle's daughter?" Will asked, tipping his head. "Are you psychic too?"

“Goodness, no, you and Lucian got all that from Erina,” Argenta said with a sad smile, pulling out a handkerchief to blow her nose. "You look just like Tsuki, Janine, dear."

“I do?” Janine said in surprise. Koga hid an internal flinch. She did, but he’d never told her so. He should have.

“You really do!” Argenta assured her, giving her new niece a hug as well. “I don’t see Roku’s
daughter… at the office they told me she’s still alive, is she…?”

“They already told you?” Koga asked, getting the nod from Haruki and Hitoki that everything was in hand before starting back up the beach towards Fuchsia. He was relieved not to have to deliver the news of the deaths himself, though it did feel like having the rug pulled out from under him somewhat.

“Yes… They told me that Roku is missing, presumed dead, that poor Sango’s dead too, and Erina…” She stifled a sob when she spoke her dead wife’s name. “Gods, I’m a mess. I mourned all of you years ago, crying about her death now is…”

“You had hope,” Koga told her. “It must be like losing them a second time. That can’t be easy.”

“No, but… well, they didn’t tell me anything about when, or how…” She stopped dead as they rounded the boulders and she got a look at Fuchsia City. “This… is what’s left?” she whispered.

Koga looked out over the city, as he was used to it, and tried to layer over it his earliest memories of it, in his mind’s eye. They weren’t pleasant either, but there had been more buildings, or the remnants of them. They’d let the trees grow and the swamp spread and hidden amongst them. He couldn’t even imagine what it had been, how Argenta remembered it. “You’ll have to tell me what it was like when we were growing up,” he said, starting to walk again. “I’m afraid I don’t remember at all.”

“That’s right, you don’t…” Argenta said distantly.

“Hey, you said I had a brother, right?” Will asked. The question worked to startled Argenta out of whatever daze she was in, which may have been the intention. “Didn’t he come?”

“Lucian? No,” Argenta said, smiling ruefully. “He’s very psychic, and he can’t even handle visiting Johto. The psychic fallout from whatever happened here… it’s too much for him. I’m sure he’d love to meet you if you came to visit us in Sinnoh, though. Ah!” her face lit up at the sight of the Kyo dojo. “Well, it’s a couple stories shorter than I remember, but good gods, it’s good to see this place again!”

“Hey, is that her?” Karen asked, leaning out of one of the upper windows, with her Umbreon, Ebony, doing likewise, head cocked curiously. “HEY! WILL! YOUR MUM LOOKS JUST LIKE YOU, BUT ACTUALLY COOL!”
“YEAH? WELL YOUR MUM LOOKS JUST LIKE YOU, BUT DEAD!” Will yelled back. Argenta stopped short, gasping in shock, then staring in confusion as Will and Karen both laughed and Karen disappeared back through the window, presumably to run downstairs to greet them.

“A lot of people have that sense of humour here,” Janine warned her aunt. “Don’t worry about it.”

“I… will try not to,” Argenta said, shaking her head.

~xxx~

Somewhere in Fuchsia, she could hear music. It sounded like it was being played live, not recorded, on a shamisen that hadn’t been tuned quite right, accompanied by off-key singing and laughter. What houses she could see were lit by the gentle glow of fires, not electric lights.

It looked nothing like the Fuchsia she remembered from her childhood, but it struck her that perhaps this was what it had been, thousands of years ago, when it was first founded. All of Kanto had been sent back in time. Or right into their graves…

“There you are,” Koga said, opening the door to the main house. “I was worried you’d gotten lost on your way back from the outhouse…”

“We never had that growing up,” Argenta said, looking at the little shack. It worked fine, it was just… strange to use. “Plumbing. You need to get somebody on that, as soon as possible.”

“We need a lot of things,” Koga said, walking over to join her when she showed no sign of movement. Every time he spoke, her mind conjured the image of the black-haired younger brother she’d left behind, not the greying, scarred man who looked ten years older than her now. Who didn’t remember her at all. “Are you alright?”

“No,” she admitted. “I’m happy that you and Janine and Karen and Will are alive, but…” She gestured out at the city. “Koga, we left you all like this. You were all here, this whole time, and if I’d just come and looked for myself, maybe—”

“Investigations were sent, were they not?” Koga interrupted her. “That is what the people of Johto
told us. And our investigations confirmed that Rocket agents killed them, to maintain the illusion that there was nothing here. They would have killed you too, had you come alone. What happened here is nothing to do with you.”

Argenta nodded, trying to swallow her guilt. Dammit, she knew all the what-ifs were ridiculous, but she couldn’t stop wondering… “Thank you for raising Will after Erina’s death,” she said quietly. “Him, and Karen, and this whole city… you took on so much. It was never supposed to be on you, any of it. You were the youngest. You were the one who was going to travel someday, you and Tsuki…”

“What was going to happen did not,” Koga said stoically. “We only have what happened…” he sighed. “I am sorry about Will’s conduct. He doesn’t know what to make of you. I think he’s afraid. His powers and… well, his personality… both tend to put people off.”

“In other words, he’s exactly like Lucian,” Argenta sighed. “I do hope Will will come to Sinnoh to meet him, but they’re either going to bond immediately or hate each other on sight. And either way, I’ll probably cry to see them in a room together.” She blinked hard a few times to ward off the tears that threatened to rise at the very concept. “It’s… strange. All of this. But finding you alive is worth the world to me.” She slung an arm casually over his shoulders, swallowing hurt that he hesitated a moment before half-hugging her back. “I’m a stranger to my own baby brother, and that hurts, but at least he’s alive. “It shouldn’t have been you doing all this, but… you did. You raised my son for me, and I can’t thank you enough for that, Kocchan.”

“Please tell me you were not still calling me Kocchan well into adulthood,” Koga said, giving a dignified sigh that was so much like their mother when she was exasperated that it hurt, and Argenta swallowed that too.

“Only when I’m feeling sentimental, and I am incredibly sentimental right now and will be for some time, so you might have to deal with it,” Argenta said, squeezing his shoulders.

Koga rolled his eyes, but then he smiled. “Gladly,” he said warmly. “Will you be here for long?”

“I have a week’s leave, but I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Argenta assured him. “I’m an Elite in Sinnoh, but I might retire from that position. Sar Shirona’s planning to set up an aid fund to send professionals and supplies out here, and if I change to running that fund, I can come work out here. I can help you get medicines, restore buildings, really rebuild…”

“That sounds ideal,” Koga said, squeezing his arm around her before stepping back. “Come back in. It’s just going to get colder overnight, and Janine has a million questions for you.”
“First order of business: getting you wifi so I can access my photos from here,” Argenta told him. “I have your baby photos to show her.”

“I take it back. You are forever banished from this place.”

“I have your wedding photos, too.”

“…Unbanished.”

Chapter End Notes

I was researching something else and came up against the fact that, based on the ingame data of FireRed, the population of Kanto is 391. Then I remembered that, early on, that tiny population was one of the inspirations for making Kanto post-apocalyptic. The population of the real-world Kanto region is about forty-two million...

About "Kocchan": "[single syllable reduction of name]chany is a common way to nickname babies in Japan, it's not uncommon for youngest siblings to still be called by their baby nickname by their elder siblings as they grow up. For example, one of my four-year-old students, Makoto, gets addressed as "Macchan" by his mother, and his baby sister Asa as "Acchan"; there's also a twelve-year-old called Haruto whose older sister still calls him "Hacchan" but he hates it when she does it and gets mad if other kids do it. It's definitely not common for adult siblings to address each other as such, though it's not unknown if one or both are very affectionate/sentimental people, and as Argenta's saying, she's very sentimental right now :P

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