Quartet Part Two: Sakura
Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/16860601.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>General Audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Pocket Monsters: Ultra Sun &amp; Ultra Moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>future Moon/Gladion, future Hau/Lillie, background Dr. Burnet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character:</td>
<td>Moon (Pokemon), Hau (Pokemon), Rotom Pokédex, Dr. Kukui</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Additional Tags:| Canon Compliant, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, why not both?, Nebby Refuses To Stay In The Bag As Per Usual, Gameplay and Strategy Are Mildly Relevant to the Story, Lillie's Mysterious "Friend" Who Is Definitely Not Gladion No Sirree Bob, Pokémon Ethics 101, Paniola Town Is Best Town, Flagrant Misuse of Spaghetti Western Tropes, Friendship, Rivalry, Author Consistently Makes Herself Cry, Light Angst, Conflict Between Friends, Excessive Profanity, I'm not even kidding it's like super extra, Pokemon eggs, Lillie Is Too Good For This Sinful Earth, Parenting 101, not really Imao, Even More Terrible Puns, Babies Are Messy, Lillie Is The Mom Friend We All Deserve, Willfully Misinformed Kantonian Media, Nebby Is Full Of Surprises, Author Is Unsure How The Exp Share Works, Minor Violence, Even More Excessive Profanity, Emotionally Mature Hau, The Author Is Awash In A Sea Of Her Own Tears, Iki Squad Birthday Party, Lillie Has PTSD And Anxiety, Lana Is A Troll, and that tag sums up the Brooklet Hill trial, Moon's Eevee Is A Tsundere, discussions of torture, Discussions of Medical Experimentation, Camping, Retconning Alola's Nonsensical Geography, Flashbacks, not the bad kind though, Friendly Reminder that Hapu Is A Badass, Terrible Shakespeare Puns, Photography, Pop Culture References That Keep Sneaking Their Way
In Because Why Not, Eavesdropping Is Bad, Battle Royals, Gladion Is So Done With Everything, Unsurprisingly The Author Made Herself Sad, awkward crushes, Moon and Hau: Ultra Bros, Wela Volcano Park Is Literally A Volcano Park Don't @ Me, Z-Dances, The Author Prays That Moon Is Not A Mary Sue, more light angst, Communication Is The Key To Good Relationships, Awkward Conversations, Texting, First-Aid, Flirting, kind of, Slow Burn, though I'd say it hasn't even caught fire yet to be honest, Mexican Food Exists in Alola, This Is Essentially A Training Montage Chapter, Moon and Hau Have Helpful and Supportive Families, flirting via text, Lillie Is The Best Wingwoman, Fuck Pyramid Schemes, The Lunarbean Company LLC Is Open For Business, Nebby Fails To Stay In The Bag, This Story Is Turning Into A Chatfic, Tin Hat Anti-Corporation Lillie, Unethical Aether Science, Rotom Invests In Bitcoin, Truth or Dare, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Lillie Deserves All Of The Compliments, The "Get Out" Easter Egg, Moon And Gladion Go On An Awkward Not-Date, Pure Unadulterated Fluff, The Author Perished Several Times In The Writing Of This Chapter, Moon's Bug-Type Phobia Has Returned To Bite Her In The Ass, Blatant Flirtation Via Text, Soup Ingredients Were Retconned For The Sake Of Creating Edible Food, Double Totem Rule Is Permanently In Effect, Please Wash Your Hands After Cooking With Habanero Peppers, Thumbing Your Nose At The Pokébean Market, Angst, not just light angst this time, Arquing, Massive Amounts of Worldbuilding and Infodump, sorry about that, Anxiety Disorder, Depression, Eating Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Borderline Personality Disorder, Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Moon Hau And Lillie Are Friendship Goals, The Author Vicariously Lives Through Moon, as in I want someone to seduce me with Shakespeare, Alola Has Diverse Characters!!!!!, The Classic "Nerd Girl Gets A Makeover" Trope, F L I R T I N G, animal cruelty, Moon Says Things She Regrets, This Is An Anti-Faba Household, he's a good villain because I hate him, Plumeria Is A Badass, I mean that's just canon right there, Moon and Co. Were Not Aware That Gladion Is Team Skull But This Has Changed, Random Flashback for a taste of "How Red and Blue Got Together", that's not a thing btw, Lillie Is Blessed By The Tapu, Decidueye: Exhausted College Student Post-Finals Week, Intense Argument, Painful Truths, Things Are Not As Black And White As Moon Believes Them To Be, Netballflix And Chill, not really it's just a great joke, Author Proceeds To Rip Her Heart Out Of Her Chest Before Throwing It Into The Oceans Of Alola, that's it that's the chapter, and also the fic

Part 5 of Conquer the Night

by Scribe34
Summary

With a trial and a Grand Trial apiece under her belt, Marion "Moon" Hawkins makes her way to Akala Island with her friends Hau and Lillie, to continue their Pokémon journeys.

Notes

These notes will, hopefully, be much briefer than the initial notes on the previous installment. But anyway— hi! Hello! You're back! I'm so pleased to see you. Thank you for all of your hits, kudos and comments for Windowpain, A Higher Standard of Cleanliness, Quartet, Part One: Frangipani, and Reflections on an Ivory Tower. On to the actual author's notes!

1.) Incidentally— yes, I am aware that the Quartet installments have terrible names. I am open to suggestions as long as they evoke fours or the island colors. [12/9 UPDATE: QP1: Yellow changed to QP1: Frangipani; QP2: Pink changed to QP2: Sakura]

2.) Author notes will likely continue to contain as much editorializing as in Frangipani, but I will do my best to reign it in. I've realized that my notes like to give away plot and I don't mind spoiling myself obviously— I'm writing the damn thing— but I will try my best to just make them funny, not spoilery.

3.) This work is unbeta'd and will likely remain so. I go over everything I write very, very carefully and I do my best to catch errors and typos, but it's likely I'll miss things here and there. I am also really flaky so beta readers would HATE me. I beg your leniency with me in this matter.

4.) Posting will be sporadic. I am about five chapters ahead of posting schedule and I would like to maintain that buffer. “Sporadic,” here, may mean as frequently as every few days, or as rarely as every few months. If I hold myself to a schedule I get anxious about it and when I get anxious my writing gets weird.

5.) Reminders of the AU rules for this universe:
— Characters are aged up. At the start of this story, the time is mid-late July after Moon and Hau have graduated high school in Viridian City and Hau'oli City, respectively. Hau and Moon are seventeen— Hau's birthday being in August and Moon's in October. Lillie is sixteen; her birthday is in December. Gladion is eighteen and his birthday is in April.
— I'm doing whatever the hell I want with gameplay and story. Plot is largely Ultra Moon on an Ultra Sun clock; Lusamine is Sun / Moon.
— Moon and Hau are second cousins. Moon's grandmother was Hala's older sister. Moon and Hau have a wide cast of supportive OC family members.
— Red and Blue are only six years older than and friends with Moon; their relationship with her is best described as “ambiguously gay older brothers.” The events of HG/SS took place only six years previous to the start of QP1:Y. Red is not sitting on a mountain being silent and angsty; he is the reigning champion of Kanto, and Blue is Viridian City's gym leader. I'm not tagging Red/Blue unless I actually write something where they're acting like boyfriends.
— This series is brought to you by the number four. (Insert Count von Count laugh here.)

6.) Please continue to show this series your love and support. I adore comments. Thank you so much.
See the end of the work for more notes.
Rendezvous

Chapter Summary

Heahea Beach, Heahea City, Tide Song Hotel

Chapter Notes

Moon and Hau arrive in Heahea City after a long day of Mantine Surf. Lillie has a surprise, and a meeting with a mysterious stranger.

Teams:
Moon: Puck (Dartrix), Ariel (Trumbeak). Has a naming theme of Shakespearean characters.
Hau: Poppy (Brionne), Uila (Pikachu), Sonar (Noibat). Has no distinct naming theme.
Lillie: Lapin (Buneary), Umber (Zorua). Nebby (Cosmog) also travels with her, but is not part of her team. Has a naming theme of words related to the Pokémon in question.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The sun shone a deep, eye-watering yellow and the skies above Akala Island glowed orange and pink as dusk fell over Heahea City. The beach itself was mostly deserted at this time of day, except for the most devoted surfers, and the occasional gooey couple who especially desired to witness the sunset with their significant other.

Two Mantine, each bearing a Trainer, glided into the part of the beach that had been cordoned off for Mantine Surf users. The lifeguards in charge of the Mantine competed in a quick game of fire-water-grass to see who had to go and rub the Mantine down post-Surf. These particular Mantine wore saddles that indicated they had come all the way from Melemele Island, and they were very likely tired and hungry.

“Hi there, welcome to Melemele Island!” chirped the loser of the fire-water-grass tournament. “You must have set out really early to get here before the sunset, huh?”

“Thanks,” said one of the Trainers. He grinned at the lifeguard with a blinding smile. “Yeah, we got up pretty early. My Noibat woke me at a quarter to five.”

“Lucky,” muttered the other Trainer, rubbing her eyes. “Ari started peeping at four-twenty and wouldn't shut up. She woke up Puck and he joined in. Be so, so glad you don't have a pair of birds on your team.” The Pokéballs at her belt vibrated indignantly. “Guys, you know I didn't mean it like that. Hau, where are we headed?”

Hau Akiona, grandson of Melemele's kahuna and aspiring Trainer, stretched out his arms, yawning. “The professor said he and Lillie would meet us in the city. I don't remember where, though. You could call them?”

“Yeah, let's do that.”
“Though I am pretty hungry, Moon, we only packed the one meal and that was ages ago. You think maybe we could stop for m—”

“If you say malasadas right now I'm going to throttle you.” Marion Hawkins, better known to all and sundry except her own mother as “Moon,” glared at Hau. “I am running on about five hours of sleep and we spent the entire day on the ocean. I like Mantine-surfing, but my Mantine was disappointed in my complete lack of desire to do aerial tricks. I am starving, but I would like to find Lillie and I would like to eat something that has actual nutritional content.”

“Aww, the tricks are the best part!”

“I am afraid of heights, you absolute walnut—”

The two young Trainers continued to bicker as they plodded across the beach. The lifeguard, grinning, shook his head and returned to his work.

Moon pulled out her Pokédex, pausing at a set of stone stairs that led up to the streets of Heahea City. It blinked innocently at her.

“You’ve been awfully quiet today,” she said to the Rotom that lived inside the Pokédex.

“I figured you were nervous enough as it was, bzzt. I thought you would appreciate it if I stayed quiet, instead of telling you every time you came across a new Pokémon. All of the information has been recorded for your later perusal, bzzt.”

“I do appreciate that, actually. Thank you. Could you call Professor Kukui?”

“Sure thing. Video or audio, bzzt?”

“Um, video’s fine.”

“Calling Maleko Kukui, bzzt.” Rotom's screen filled with a loading circle, which was then replaced by Professor Kukui's squinting, beaming face.

“Ah, Hau and Moon! It looks like you finally got to Heahea City, yeah?”

“Yes!” said Hau cheerfully, resting his head on Moon's shoulder. “We just got here and we're exhausted and starving. Moon is grumpy. Where should we meet you guys?”

“We only sailed into the harbor a couple of hours ago, and we thought we would stick around the docks and wait for you guys—we have your backpacks and camping equipment on the boat, yeah?”

“Oh, right. Thanks, Professor.”

A small, pale face, shaded by a floppy white hat, appeared in the corner of the screen. “Are the two of you planning on staying at the Pokémon Center?”

“Yes!” Hau beamed. “Did you like sailing, Lillie?”

The professor's assistant smiled back. “Oh, yes, it was a lot of fun! Though the professor's sailboat has certainly seen better days.”

“She’s still seaworthy, and that's what counts, yeah!” Professor Kukui did not appear to be at all offended by Lillie's observation. “Hurry on over. I'll treat you all to dinner— there's a grand all-you-can-eat buffet place just a block or so from the dock. And Lillie’s got a surp—”
“Professor, you weren't supposed to say anything!” squeaked Lillie, cutting him off. “We'll see you very soon, bye!”

The video call ended.

Hau whistled softly. “So Lillie has a surprise for us, huh? What do you think it could be?”

“Well, the last time she said she had a surprise, she told us she was getting a Trainer's license and she caught Lapin.” Moon tucked the Pokédex back into her pocket—a difficult task, for a person wearing a wet-suit—and began ascending the staircase to the streets. “The faster we find them, the faster we can find out.”

Hau bolted past her, taking the steps three at a time. “Last one there's a stale malasada!”

“You're a dirty cheater, Hau Akiona!” shrieked Moon, but she picked up her exhausted feet and followed him at a sprint.

The race was cut rather short as Hau skidded to a stop on Main Street, frowning. “Wait, I don't actually know which way the docks are.”

“I repeat: Hau Akiona, you absolute walnut.” But Moon grinned and pulled out her Pokédex again. “Rotom, would you mind mapping us a route to the docks?”

“I'll do you one better, bzzt— I can use GPS to track the Professor's phone.” A map appeared on Rotom's lower screen, showing that the docks were only a few blocks away.

Hau spared Rotom only a passing glance before taking off again. “Stale malasada, Moon! Maybe I should start calling you Moon-asada!”

They turned the corner that led them onto the pier. Moon, squinting against the full effect of the setting sun, spotted Professor Kukui's sailboat and two familiar figures in front of it. With as much effort as she could force into her tired legs she put on a sudden burst of speed and arrived at their destination first. “Look who's a stale malasada now!”

“Fair enough. Hey, Professor! Hi, Lillie!”

Professor Kukui waved enthusiastically as Moon and Hau skidded to a halt. “Hey there, Trainers! Listen, do you want to change clothes on the boat and shower later, or do you want to drop your stuff off at the Pokémon Center and shower before we eat?”

“I would really like to shower, but I am also starving and happy to do whatever.”

“I just want to eat,” agreed Hau. “The restaurant isn't something too fancy, right? They won't care that we look like drowned Rattata and smell like salt and Mantine pee?”

Moon wrinkled her nose at him. “Gross, dude.”

“We do, though! What, do you think the Mantine waited all day when it had to go? No, it probably just went in the ocean. I know I did.”

“That's disgusting,” said Lillie, but she was giggling. “So, I have a surprise.”

“Yeah, we kind of figured before you cut the Professor off. What's your surprise, Lillie?”

Lillie opened her bag. A small, nebulous cloud zoomed out, whirling around her head. “Nebby, that was not permission to leave the bag— come on, get back in. I was just getting Lapin.”
“You should get a Trainer's belt,” suggested Hau. “You can carry Lapin without having to get into your bag every time.”

“I'll think about it.” Lillie nodded and withdrew not one, but two Pokéballs. “You know Lapin already, of course— and this is Umber.”

Twin flashes of light revealed the familiar Buneary, blinking shyly up at them; but there was also a small black-and-red fox, tilting its head to stare up at Hau and Moon with a curious expression on its face.

“Oh, you caught a Zorua!” squealed Moon, crouching to look at the baby fox. “Can I pet it?”

“Yes, go ahead. He's very affectionate,” said Lillie with a smile. She bent down herself, watching as Moon offered her hand for Umber to sniff. “I wasn't totally sure I wanted a Zorua— they are Dark-types, and sometimes Dark-types can be malicious. But I recently talked with my br— with a friend, who told me about the experience he's having raising his own Zorua. They're tricksters, but they make very loyal companions.”

“You can use that to your advantage in protecting Nebby,” pointed out Hau. “Nobody's going to look at you and think you use a Dark-type Pokémon, Lillie. They'll think you like Fairy-types, or Psychic types— cute, cuddly Pokémon.”

Umber let out a soft purr, blinking up at Lillie with large blue eyes.

“Well, I do like Fairy-types,” admitted Lillie, scratching behind Umber's ears. “But we've all studied Pokémon for years. There are merits and drawbacks to every typing and every Pokémon. And Zorua is cute and cuddly, so anyone making that assumption wouldn't be wrong.”

She recalled both Lapin and Umber to their Pokéballs, tucking them back in the bag. “Anyway, you should both get changed.”

“Fire-water-grass to see who gets changed first,” said Hau, sticking out his fist immediately.

“Yeah, shoot. Fire, water, grass!”

They both threw grass and tried again; on the second round Moon won, with water to Hau's fire. She climbed onto the sailboat with a grin and ducked into the tiny cabin. “Be right out!”

There were two rooms in the cabin: a parlor-type room with couches, and a tiny bathroom with a toilet, a sink, and a mirror. Moon picked up her backpack from where she'd stowed it early that morning and began peeling her wet-suit off.

There wasn't a shower, but she could and did get a washcloth out of one of the cupboards and wet it, wiping as much of the salty sea residue and sand from her body as she could manage. She put on clean clothes and her Trainer belt and stuck her head in the sink, trying her best to rinse out her dark hair. It was beginning to get a little longer than she liked— she usually kept it quite short, but now it fell two inches or so past her chin. Moon brushed her wet hair and did her best to towel it dry— a futile effort in humid Alola, but no one could say she hadn't tried.

Feeling slightly more presentable, if not fully herself, Moon put on shoes and socks and a light jacket, since the sun had gone down. She put on her backpack and equipment and went back outside. The sun was close to fully setting— the sky was somewhere between scarlet and magenta and the streetlights had turned on. Professor Kukui and Lillie were sitting on the stone pavement, talking quietly; Hau was on the boat, waiting for her to finish.
“That was quick,” he said, surprised.

“If there was a shower, I would have rinsed. I did use a washcloth and wipe myself off, though. Cupboard below the sink,” Moon informed him, before he could ask.

“Thanks, Moon-asada.”

“Stop trying to make that happen,” said Moon, but she honestly didn’t mind the nickname that much. Her name was already a nickname— and it sure beat the time Blue had decided to watch a bunch of old Unovan musicals and had called her Marion the Librarian for an entire month.

She sat down on the pavement with Lillie and the professor. “Do you guys mind if I let Puck and Ariel out? They're getting cabin fever from being cooped up all day.”

“Go right ahead,” encouraged Professor Kukui.

Moon took out Puck and Ariel, already vibrating madly in their Pokéballs, and released them. Ariel, a lithe Trumbeak, immediately took off with a shriek. She shot high into the sky to properly stretch her wings. Meanwhile Puck, a stout Dartrix and Moon's starter Pokémon, stretched his own wings wide and flicked a curtain of soft green feathers out of his eyes.

“Hoo hoo hurr,” he rumbled, with a slight frown at Moon.

“Yeah, buddy, I know. Sorry I had to keep you in all day, but I didn't think the Mantine would like carrying you out of your ball. I probably could have let Ariel out, because she's a flyer.” Moon paused, turning to the Professor. “Hey, I've been thinking about Dartrix's evolution—”

“Already?” teased Kukui, a grin on his face.

“I just mean in general. I finally got around to reading up on the final evolution stages for Puck and Ariel, and I was wondering why Puck loses Flying-type and gains Ghost-type, of all things.”

“Did you see pictures?”

“Yeah.” She liked the look of Decidueye— something about it reminded her of herself. Rowlet looked like a plump, roly-poly toddler, and Dartrix looked like an angsty teenager— but Decidueye, with the round markings of glasses and a feathery hood that fit tightly over his face, reminded her of a tired college student, walking to classes in pajamas. Moon had put off her acceptance to l'Academie Lumiose, but Decidueye's aesthetic was still utterly relatable.

“What about videos?”

“Nah, I haven't seen much.”

“Well, you should look some battle videos up sometime, yeah? Decidueye uses its wings and feathers a lot in attacking. They slim down a lot as they evolve up from Rowlet, but they're still pretty bulky as Decidueye— the average is a bit taller than you, I think. The point is, they're too heavy to fly quickly or effectively— though they're still very fast on the ground, yeah.”

“Ariel's faster right now,” pointed out Moon, just as the Trumbeak herself came in for a landing, settling firmly on Moon's thigh. “Ow, talons. Watch it, girlfriend.”

“And Toucannon will be pretty fast too, once you get her to that point,” agreed Professor Kukui. “Though the way your Ariel eats, she might end up more bulky, as Toucannon go. I can't wait to see what direction you take with your Training, yeah!”
Moon smiled. She already had some plans regarding strategy, though they weren't at all finalized and would have to wait until she could see Decidueye and Toucannon in action.

“Are you planning on catching more Pokémon soon?” Lillie asked.

Both Puck and Ariel let out indignant squawks.

“Yes,” said Moon pointedly. “They're just being difficult, because they're spoiled rotten. Sometime in the next few days, I'm going to be sitting down with them and having a long chat about this very subject.”

Ariel, at least, looked slightly cowed by this. Puck rolled his eyes, grumbling softly.

Lillie carefully hid her smile. “Do you have any plans for your team?”

“I only have one really solid idea— I'd like an evolution of Eevee. I haven't decided on which one yet— though I'm pretty sure Leafeon is out, as I don't really need two Grass-types on my team. And since Puck's gaining Ghost-type, it's probably not strictly necessary for me to have a Dark-type on my team, so that rules out Umbreon as well. I still have six options, though.”

“An Eeveelution is always a solid choice, yeah,” said Professor Kukui with a nod. “And Akala Island's the place to catch 'em, too. You could get one pretty soon, actually— they run wild around the nursery at Paniola Town, and that's your first stop after Heahea City.”

“Really?” Moon perked up, pleased. “Huh. I'll have to talk with my team sooner rather than later.”

“Talk with them about what?” asked Hau, emerging from the boat.

“The temper tantrum they both throw every time I mention a new teammate. I'd like an Eeveelution, and I'd like them to stop whining about it.”

Professor Kukui got to his feet, and Lillie followed suit. Moon recalled Puck and Ariel to their Pokéballs, tucking them away before standing. “They'll learn eventually, yeah. Birds are pretty territorial, so maybe they're just jealous about sharing you?”

“That's probably it, but they got used to sharing me with each other. They can get used to sharing with an Eevee— and three more members, because I plan on having a full team.”

“I think I want an Eeveelution, too,” said Hau, with a nod. “I'll pick up a Fire Stone, and then you'll really have to watch out, Moon.”

“Oh, you wish,” teased Moon. “Maybe I'll pick up a Thunder Stone, then.”

“You've already got type advantage over Poppy with Puck, you don't need a Jolteon. That would be overkill.” Hau paused, frowning. “Hey, Professor. Where would we pick up evolution stones, anyway?”

“Great question!”

It wasn't the professor's voice than answered, but a woman, striding toward them with a bright smile on her face. Moon's jaw actually dropped slightly because the woman was beautiful. She had never actually seen a human being this good-looking in her entire life, outside of the clearly photo-shopped models in advertisements and movies. She wore pink shorts and a strappy pastel top that criss-crossed over her dark skin; and her hair was cut in a cute pixie-style cut.
“Oh, Miss Olivia, hi!” said Hau cheerfully.

“Hello, Hau! Wow, time really does fly— I didn't realize you were old enough to start your island challenge!”

“Is this Kahuna Hala's grandson?” asked another woman, appearing from behind the first. Moon had to do a double-take because this woman had green hair, braided into two long tails.

“That's right,” said Olivia, with a nod. “Let's see— I know Maleko, of course; and Hau. And I've met Lillie too. But this other young lady isn't a familiar face. Professor, would you mind introducing us?”

“Sure thing!” said Professor Kukui cheerfully. “This is Moon Hawkins— Hala's great-niece. She's just moved here from Kanto about a month and a half ago, yeah, and she's on her island challenge with Hau. Moon— this is Olivia, the kahuna of Akala Island. And also Mallow, one of the trial captains.”

“How many trials are on Akala island?” asked Moon, filing this information away as well.

“Three, plus the Grand Trial,” replied Olivia.

“That's right!” chirped Mallow. “My trial is a Grass-type trial. There's also a Water-type trial and a Fire-type trial.”

Moon decided she liked Mallow. Mallow was generous with information.

“As the kahuna, I'm pleased to welcome you all to Akala Island,” said Olivia warmly. “Have you all just come from Melemele?”

“Moon and I surfed over on Mantine, but the Professor and Lillie took the boat.”

“Ahh, that's right. Trainers who aren't on their island challenge aren't really supposed to use the Ride Pagers or Mantine Surf.” Olivia nodded knowingly. “But Maleko, I'm surprised at you. You're escorting two young ladies around— you really ought to be wearing a shirt.”

Moon choked on air. Lillie, next to her, muffled a giggle.

“Hey, it's not my fault I don't have many good shirts,” protested Professor Kukui. “I get to playin' with my Pokémon and they just tear everything I own right up! It's easier not to bother with more clothes than I have to, yeah.”

“It's a double standard,” said Olivia severely. “If you're allowed to walk around without a shirt all the time, then I should be allowed to do the same thing, shouldn't I?”

“I'll look into getting more shirts,” mumbled the Professor, buttoning his coat and staring down at the ground. It was the first time that Moon had ever seen him looking chastened.

“Now, to answer Hau's question— you can buy evolution stones at my store in Konikoni City. It's a little ways away, and you can't get there until after you've completed all of the trials; but we sell Fire, Water, Thunder, and Leaf Stones.”

“Awesome! So once I've trained up an Eevee, I'll have to come and buy a Fire Stone from you?”

“That's right. I'll look forward to seeing you in my shop.” Olivia smiled. “Now, I also had a question for Miss Lillie, here— I had an email from Kahuna Hala about wanting to visit the Tapu dens?
“Oh, yes.” Lillie cleared her throat. “As you might remember, I'm, um, I'm protecting a Pokémon called Cosmog. I'm trying to help her get home, but there are some people looking for her. I don't know why, but she seems to want to visit the Tapus. She tried to take me on her own to see Tapu Koko, and we got into some trouble on the bridge leading to his den and accidentally, um, destroyed it.”

“As one does,” laughed Mallow, but there was no reprimand in her tone. Olivia smiled.

Lillie flushed, clearing her throat again. “Anyway, I think it will help Nebby—Cosmog, I mean—to visit with the Tapus. I think she knows more about what she needs than I do.”

“Pew,” said Nebby cheerfully, poking her head out from behind Lillie's ankle.

“When did you get out of the bag—”

“You do leave it open most of the time,” pointed out Moon.

“Is she not captured in a Pokéball?” asked Olivia.

Lillie shook her head. “She has a special ability to warp away when she's in danger,” she explained. “We're not really sure how a Pokéball would affect that, so we've decided to leave her uncaptured for now. She stays with me by choice. Um—would you be willing to escort me to Tapu Lele's den, at some point?”

“Of course,” said Olivia, with a nod. “I'm sure Tapu Lele will be happy to help your—Cosmog, was it?—with whatever she needs.” Moon, watching the kahuna, was unsurprised as something...not fully human...flashed in the woman's eyes. She'd seen it on a few occasions when Hala had spoken about Tapu Koko. There was some kind of bond that the kahunas had with the guardian deities, some bond that transcended Trainer and Pokémon—especially because the guardians were not confined to Pokéballs.

“Anyway, that was all I wanted to ask you about,” Olivia said to Lillie. “Thank you for clarifying for me. Mallow and I are headed to Konikoni City—we're glad we caught you. Lillie, Moon—it was very nice to meet you. Moon and Hau, please work hard at your island challenge. I look forward to meeting you in battle at your Grand Trial.”

“Bye!” called Mallow, waving as she followed Olivia away. “Have fun, you guys!”

“Well, that's that,” said Professor Kukui cheerfully. “Olivia always comes to greet Trainers on their island challenge as they arrive. She says it's to make up for the lack of welcome they get on Ula'ula—old Nanu's a bit of a hermit, yeah. Are you all ready to go and eat now?”

They debated the merits and demerits of various Eeveelutions as the four of them walked along the streets of Heahea City. Lillie listened with a smile, occasionally throwing in a good word for Glaceon and Sylveon—her favorites, she admitted. Moon's favorite Eeveelution was also Glaceon, but according to Professor Kukui, the only part of Alola cold enough to induce evolution conditions was on Mount Lanakila—a place that Trainers on their island challenge were not permitted to go until they had completed all eight trials and four Grand Trials. It would be very impractical to train up an Eevee without letting it evolve for the entirety of her island challenge. Hau's favorite Eeveelutions were Flareon and Jolteon, and Moon could easily see why—Fire- and Electric-types both tended to be loud and cheerful and bright, things they had in common with Hau himself. Professor Kukui proclaimed his love for all of the Eeveelutions, but admitted to having a soft spot for Espeon.
“It learns lots of cool moves,” he said warmly, as they walked into the all-you-can-eat buffet restaurant he had told them about. “You can have it learn Dazzling Gleam to cover for those Dark-types, yeah—and even Shadow Ball for other Psychic-types.”

“Hmm, maybe I'll get an Espeon, then,” said Moon thoughtfully.

They enjoyed dinner, talking and laughing and playfully arguing about potential teammates and type advantages. It was more fun to talk it out, Moon decided. The conversation was giving her plenty of ideas. She’d more or less decided that she would need to pick up a Ground-type at some point, though she had no idea when that point would be; and she wanted a Water-type as well. She was not ashamed to admit that she was very much building her team around Puck, as the first Pokémon she'd received. Moon had been pleased to learn that Puck gained Ghost-type when he evolved into Decidueye. Grass- and Ghost-types were two of her four favorite types. She'd never been able to pick just one favorite, between Grass, Ghost, Ice, and Fairy.

When Moon was stuffed, and the seemingly endless pit that was Hau's stomach was at least partially satisfied, Professor Kukui yawned and nodded. “I'm going to head down to my wife's apartment, yeah? Rotom can show you how to get the Pokémon Center.”

“Sure,” said Moon, slightly confused. “Er— your wife? I didn't realize you were married.”

“ Heck yeah, I'm married!” Professor Kukui burst out laughing as he set a tip of a few hundred Poké on the table. “Ellie runs a research lab here on Akala, and most nights she's too busy to come home so she has a little apartment here. She usually makes it to Melemele on the weekends, yeah. I'm surprised you haven't met her yet, actually.”

“Professor Burnet is very kind,” said Lillie, with a nod.

“Oh, I've heard you mention her before! I guess I just didn't realize she was Professor Kukui's wife.”

“I'd invite you all to stay at the apartment, but there's just the bed and the couch, and we don't have sleeping bags or air mattresses. Plus Lillie's a Trainer now, so she can stay at the Pokémon Center at Trainer rates.”

“I'm pooped.” Hau held the door open as they walked out onto the well-lit street—the sun had fully set while they were in the restaurant, but it wasn't dark outside. “And I really, really want a shower now that I've gotten something in my belly.”

“Same,” said Moon, with a great deal of feeling.

“Mmm,” said Lillie, a touch absently. “I actually have an errand to run, so why don't the two of you go on to the Pokémon Center without me?”

“An errand? Where?”

“I'm meeting up with— um, a friend.” Lillie flushed, glancing at Professor Kukui as though pleading for help. “He sent directions to my phone, so I should be able to pull it up on PokéMaps. And I have Lapin and Umber to protect Nebby and me, too.”

Professor Kukui smiled. “That's true,” he said gently, “but it's also pretty dark out. Are you sure you'll be okay?”

“I think so. You should go on home, Professor.” Lillie nodded, clearly determined. “I should be able to make it just fine.”
“Be sure and call any of us if you need help.” Professor Kukui began walking away, waving as he went. “You’ve got all our numbers, yeah! And I’ll get you Olivia’s number, too. See you tomorrow!”

Lillie was already opening her phone, tapping PokéMaps. A slight frown appeared on her face.

“It would seem I spoke too soon,” she said, with a sigh. “I ought to have downloaded the map last night— I don't have Wi-Fi right now and it isn't loading properly.”

“I’ll walk you,” suggested Moon, pulling out Rotom. “What's the address?”

“Oh, no, that's fine—”

“I'd feel better if one of us walked you anyway,” cut in Hau, folding his arms. “Lapin is still a baby, and you only just caught Umber. I know you'll work hard to train them and you'll be able to protect yourself soon, but until then, we'd like to help you as much as we can.”

“O-oh.” Lillie flushed. “I guess you make a good point. Um, which one of you will go with me?”

“Fire, water, grass,” suggested Moon, holding up one fist. “Loser takes all the bags to the Pokémon Center and pays for rooms for the night.”

“You're on. Fire, water, grass!”

Moon won again, with fire against grass; and a disgruntled Hau took Moon's camping equipment and hiking backpack, carrying everything down the street to where the Pokémon Center shone brightly in the evening.

“So, what was that address?” Moon asked Lillie again.

“Um, it's the Tide Song Hotel.”

“Rotom, pull it up for us?”

“Sure thing, bzzt!” After a second or two, a map popped up on Rotom's screen. “It looks like it's about a twenty-minute walk from here, bzzt.”

“Wow, now I'm really glad I'm going with you. A twenty-minute walk at night in an unfamiliar city is no joke.” Moon nudged Lillie companionably. “Let's get going, huh?”

The walk was rather pleasant, but Moon noticed things around the streets that further solidified her decision to go with Lillie: there were a few kids in the rag-tag black and white of Team Skull, chatting and hanging around— they didn't seem to be doing anything illegal, so Moon didn't challenge them. And there were, of course the usual kinds of people that tended to hang around on city streets in the evenings— strangers that leaned on the bricky walls of alleyways, cigarettes dangling from their fingers and smoke curling from their mouths; tipsy groups of people walking to or from bars, stumbling with their arms over each other's shoulders for support; and pairs or trios congregated in alleyways, heads bowed as they spoke quietly, directing furtive glances over their shoulders. Moon knew it was unlikely that any of these people posed a threat to Lillie— they were probably just people out smoking and going to bars and meeting up with friends; but she didn't want to take the risk that Lillie, with her round eyes and pastel wardrobe and hunched-over posture would be viewed as an easy target for any kind of harassment. Moon herself didn't look that much older, but she was a couple of inches taller than Lillie and she tended to carry herself with confidence and bravado— a side effect, she supposed, of growing up down the street from Blue Oak.

“What friend are you meeting?” she asked Lillie.
Lillie paused before answering. “Um— a friend from home,” she said softly. “The one who told me about raising a Zorua. He’s very kind, though he doesn’t always show it.”

Clearly, Lillie didn’t want to tell Moon this friend’s name, or anything identifying about him. Moon could respect that. “Cool. I’m sure he’ll be excited to see Umber, then.”

“Oh, I think so, too. I’m not sure he’ll be as excited about the Buneary, but then again he’s not much for cuddly or cute, generally speaking.” Lillie cleared her throat. “And I can have him walk me back, so you can just go back to the Pokémon Center. No need to wait up for me.”

“Are you sure?” said Moon. “If he’s not there, I could wait with you until he gets there.”

“I should be perfectly safe inside the hotel lobby. That’s where we agreed to meet up,” explained Lillie. “There will be plenty of hotel employees to make sure nobody bothers me.”

They rounded a corner and saw the hotel. Moon realized it was right on the beachfront— she could see the Mantine Surf zone, closed for the night, from the street they walked on. “Looks like a nice place,” she commented.

“He said it was,” agreed Lillie.

Moon could not resist walking Lillie inside the hotel itself, peering around for a possible glimpse of Lillie’s mysterious friend. She could rule out all the women— Lillie had used male pronouns. And she didn’t think Lillie was very likely to be friends with an older man, so it was probably someone around their age. She couldn’t see any teenagers or young men in the lobby, though; so she withdrew, disappointed, and headed back down the road toward the Pokémon Center.

Someone shoved roughly past her, knocking her to one side. “Watch it, dummy!” called Moon, annoyed. She glared at the retreating figure, who didn't respond as he stomped in the general direction of the Tide Song Hotel. She hoped it wasn't Lillie's friend. For a moment she considered sneaking back and trying to catch a glimpse of whoever it was.

“Ah, you there!”

Moon was distracted from her thoughts by a pair of Trainers walking toward her— a man and a woman. They both smiled and waved as she looked at them. They spoke Kantonian, as most people did; but their accent was... Kalosian? yeah, definitely Kalosian, thought Moon, thinking of Captain Ilima on Melemele Island. He wasn't Kalosian, but he had lived in Kalos for a long time and spoke with a similar accent.

“Hi,” she said cautiously. “What can I do for you?”

“You are on your island challenge, yes?” the woman smiled, pointing at the amulet hanging from Moon's bag. “I’m Sina, and this is Dexio. We’re visiting Alola— we work for Professor Sycamore, of the Kalos region.”

“Yeah, I'm on my island challenge. I'm Moon.” She shook their offered hands.

“Would you be willing to favor me with a battle?” asked Sina. Dexio was already pulling out a tablet and a Pokédex. “We're researching Z-Moves here. Augustine— excuse me, the Professor wants to make a formal comparison between Z-Moves and Mega Evolution. The concepts are similar, but they don't seem to be related.”

“Oh. Yeah, I guess I can do that.” She'd brought Puck and Ariel with her, of course. “I don't have any healing items, though. Could you patch me up afterward?”
“Of course, of course!” said Dexio. “It's the least we could do. Thank you very much for your help. And you don’t actually have to use a Z-Move— we aren't yet at that stage in the research. Oftentimes a Pokémon simply holding a Mega Stone derives power from it, and we wish to see if Z-Crystals function in the same way.”

Moon nodded, taking a few steps back to face Sina. Her opponent withdrew a Pokéball from her own belt and tossed it to reveal a Smoochum. Moon did her best to keep a straight face but she was wincing. Both Puck and Ariel were weak to Ice-types... but then, Smoochum was also a Psychic-type, and Puck knew Astonish, a Ghost-type move. She sent out Puck.

“Ah, a Dartrix!” said Sina eagerly, taking a small step forward. “You must be a very skilled trainer, yes? Only those who achieve well in school are able to use elemental starters!”

“I did okay, yeah.” She hadn't made valedictorian, but she'd graduated summa cum laude and it had to count for something. “Are you ready?”

“Naturally. Let us begin! Besa, confuse him with Sweet Kiss!”

“Puck, avoid it and use Astonish!”

The little Smoochum tried its best, but it was still a baby and Dartrix was faster and more confident. It fainted quickly. Sina nodded, face impassively pleasant, and tossed out a Glaceon.

“Oh, wow!” said Moon, excited. “I was just talking about Eeveelutions with my friends. Glaceon is my favorite!”


“Puck, another Astonish!”

She knew the instant the Glaceon moved that she had made a mistake. The Glaceon was much quicker than Puck— and, she remembered just in time, was at quadruple strength against Puck. Grass- and Flying-types were both weak to Ice. Puck struggled for a little while longer, but eventually fainted. Moon recalled him, patting his Pokéball in consolation, and threw out Ariel.

The Trumbeak was also weak to Ice-types, but she had the advantage of knowing Brick Break. Moon had picked up the TM during her first trial, and it had proven itself valuable in the trial itself and the weeks that followed.

“Glitter, another Ice Shard!”

“Ariel, use Brick Break!”

Sina's pleasant expression twitched with sudden worry. Ariel blitzed through the air and smashed into the Glaceon, knocking it out instantly.

“Wow!” said Dexio, furiously tapping on the tablet. “Your Trumbeak is so strong!”

“Great battle,” agreed Sina, recalling her Glaceon. “Let's patch everyone up— a Revive for your Dartrix, and for Besa and Glitter. And here are a couple of Potions to get everyone back to fighting strength.”

“Thanks.” Moon accepted the medicines and got to work reviving her team. “This was fun.”
“And your prize money,” added Sina blandly, passing Moon a clip of money.

Moon gaped at the wad of cash. “That is a lot of prize money, are you sure—”

“We have a very large research fund, and your battle will be very helpful,” explained Dexio. “You're clearly a skilled trainer, and it was interesting to see you battle. Could you answer a few questions for us? You will be listed in any published material as... let me see... Alolan Trainer number thirteen, and your team will be noted as Dartrix and Trumbeak— no names.”

“Um, sure.”

“When did you start your island challenge?” inquired Sina.

“About a month ago.”

“And you started on Melemele Island?”

“Yeah.”

“What Z-Crystals have you obtained so far?”

“Uh— Normalium, Fightinium, and Flyinium.”

Dexio cleared his throat. “And finally, would you care to explain how Z-Power has, so far, benefitted you and your team?”

“Well, I don't typically use Z-Power very much,” admitted Moon. “That's mostly because I've just started my challenge. Ariel— my Trumbeak— is holding Flyinium Z. I've only had it for like, two days, so I haven't had much opportunity to train with it. Once I get a Grassium Z, I'll give that to my Dartrix. I'm looking forward to using more Z-Moves and learning how to use them with my team.”

“Great, thank you.” He tapped a few more times on his tablet. “This will be very helpful for our research. Thank you for your time, Moon. Good luck on your island challenge!”

“Thanks. Good luck with your research.”

As Moon walked back to the Pokémon Center, hands shoved into her pockets, she decided she was definitely going to use Z-Moves more often. She could give Puck the Normalium— he only had Tackle, but even Tackle could be transformed into the powerful Breakneck Blitz move with the aid of the Z-Ring.

Hau was waiting for her in the café of the Pokémon Center, a sleepy expression on his face. “You've been gone for like an hour,” he said, handing Moon a pair of room keys. “One for you, one for Lillie.”

“Thanks.” Moon accepted the keys. “It was a twenty-minute walk to the hotel both ways, and I also met a couple of Kalosian researchers who asked me to battle with them for science.”

“Nice. Did you win?”

“Of course I did, what do you take me for?” Moon grinned. “The girl I battled uses Ice-types, so it was pretty difficult— but we won out in the end.”

Hau's face suddenly became pensive. “Ice-types, huh?” he said thoughtfully. “Huh, maybe I should pick up a Glaceon.”
“You'd have to wait ages,” pointed out Moon. “It's only cold enough to evolve them at Mount Lanakila, right? I think she must have brought hers from Kalos.”

“Fair enough. I've got Uila for your birds anyway— and I'll get a Flareon for your owl.” Hau grinned.

“Don't form your team around beating me, that's silly.”

“I'm not, don't worry. Realistically, it's pretty sensible to have a complete type loop of some kind on your team. I've got Water and Electric, so it would be cool to have a Fire-type.”

“That's just a chain, not a loop.”

Hau smirked. “Yeah, but nobody uses Grass-types—”

“I beg your pardon,” said Moon, raising one eyebrow as Puck, inside his Pokéball, vibrated furiously.

“Ha ha! Just kidding, Puck.” Hau laughed. “Grass types have a lot of weaknesses, but Electric just has the one. I'm happy with Uila, thanks.”

“Fair enough.”

“So did you meet Lillie's friend?”

“No. She talked about him a bit, but she didn't say much. I think it's going to be one of those things where we don't ask and if she feels like telling us, she will.”

“Right.” Hau sighed, rubbing at his temples. “You ever feel like she doesn't trust us?”

Moon didn't answer immediately, because she had felt like that sometimes. But it wasn't accurate to say as much, either.

“I think she doesn't trust herself, maybe,” she said finally. “Being honest with people can be kind of hard.”

“But there's nothing to it. You just... I don't know, you just don't ever lie.”

“That's how you are,” said Moon, waving one hand at him. “You're the most honest person I know. But not everyone is like that. Sometimes it feels safer to hide how you feel, or things that have happened to you.”

Understanding dawned in his eyes. “And Lillie's definitely had some bad stuff happen to her— not that she's said much, mind you, but what she has said has been pretty telling.”

“And it's not just that. She gets nervous about all kinds of things, but she doesn't really like asking for help. She only does it when she thinks she has to, but even then she just looks miserable the whole time.”

“Yeah, I've noticed.”

They sat in silence for a moment. Moon tried to think of ways she could help Lillie, but she was doing pretty much everything she could already.

“She said her friend would walk her back to the Pokémon Center, and if I'm honest I'm hoping to catch a glimpse of him,” she said finally.
Hau's frown deepened. “I hope whoever it is, is worthy of her trust. A stranger walking her back to the Pokémon Center at night in a strange city— I really don't like that.”

“Whoever it is, she's known him longer than she's known us, so she probably does trust him,” decided Moon. “I hope she'll introduce us. I'd like to know all of Lillie's friends. I wonder if she's going to tell him about Nebby.”

“Or if he already knows about Nebby.”

“That too. So we're waiting up for her?”

“Yeah. I'd have to wait up anyway, to give her the room key. You're just keeping me company, like a good friend.”

“Sure, of course,” said Hau mockingly. “It's not like we're trying to nose into our friend's business at all. No, of course not.”

Lillie did not return for nearly an hour, during which time Hau had resorted to napping on the floor of the café with Poppy on his stomach, Uila on his chest, and Sonar clinging to his hair. Puck had taken Hau's seat, sitting up straight in a dignified fashion as he stared fixedly at a Caterpie that was slowly crawling up the window on the outside of the Pokémon Center. Ariel sat in Moon's lap, preening as Moon absently petted her. But finally the door did jingle, and Lillie walked in. She spotted Moon and Hau immediately and turned around in the doorway, speaking softly. Moon could see whoever was holding the door nod slightly. They wore a dark hood, so she couldn't see more than part of their face— thin nose, sharp jawline— before they turned and began walking away from the Pokémon Center.

“Was that your friend?” Moon asked, as Lillie approached.

“Mm-hmm.” Lillie raised one eyebrow at her. “You should have gone to bed.”

“Had to give you your room key, and Hau said he would keep me company.” Moon nudged Hau with her foot. “Wake up, sleepy. Go sleep in a bed.”

“'M tired,” complained Hau, not moving.

“Yeah, that's why you should sleep in a bed. Your back is going to be completely borked tomorrow if you don't get up.”

“A'ight, a'ight. I'm up,” he sighed, sitting up. Uila startled awake, sliding down his chest and tumbling onto Poppy—accidentally shocking her in his surprise. Poppy naturally woke up at this, shrieking in annoyance and pain. Uila began growling back grumpily, and the volume steadily rose until Sonar opened his mouth and let out a piercing shriek that rang through the entire Pokémon Center, attracting everyone's attention. Poppy and Uila fell silent.

“Thanks, Sonar.” Hau patted him on the head. “Sorry, guys, didn't mean to knock you into each other. Let's go to bed now, 'kay?” He recalled all three of his teammates to their Pokéballs. “Did we see Lillie's friend?”

“Nah, she saw us and probably told him to go,” answered Moon, laughing.

“He values his privacy,” said Lillie. There was only a very mild rebuke in her voice. “He and I are on similar... missions, if you will. I'm protecting Cosmog, and he has something he's protecting too.”

“We won't pry,” promised Moon, feeling guilty. “We were just curious, and we worry about you.”
Lillie seemed mollified by this. “I appreciate it. He was worried about me, too— until I explained that you walked me here. He sends his thanks.”

“I accept the thanks, but I'd like them more if I know who they came from,” laughed Moon. “I said I wouldn't pry, but I didn't say I wouldn't tease. Hau's got the right idea— let's go to bed.”

Chapter End Notes

Pokémon's used fire-water-grass as a substitute for rock-paper-scissors before. I thought about water-ground-electric or fighting-psychic-dark but I like fire-water-grass the best.

Birds are very noisy in the mornings. Source: there's a cardinal that lives outside my family's house that likes to scream at arse o'clock in the morning. The cardinal also sees its reflection in our windows and periodically slams itself into them because it wants to fight. Birds are dumb.

“you absolute walnut” —look, I haven't been on Tumblr in the longest time but I highly value a lot of the rhetoric of insults one can find there

“No, it probably just went in the ocean. I know I did” — in which Hau is any and all of my brothers whenever we go swimming at Bear Lake on our annual Utah road trip vacation

“Stop trying to make that happen” — Moon-asada is definitely happening though. Also, Mean Girls.

“it sure beat the time Blue had decided to watch a bunch of old Unovan musicals and had called her Marion the Librarian for an entire month” — so this may or may not have been the complete and entire reason I gave Moon the name Marion. I also love the name SO MUCH but that is entirely beside the point. The Music Man is a hilarious musical.

Decidueye 100% looks like a college student who is completely DONE during finals week, fight me about it

So, uh, Moon's feelings about Decidueye's typing being Grass and Ghost are my feelings about his typing. And Moon's four favorite types— Grass, Ghost, Ice, and Fairy — are also my four favorite types. Moon's like 50% author-insert, remember? I don't know what it is about these types I like so much. I think it's probably something to do with the fact that I love special attackers so much more than physical attackers, in general. My favorite Pokémon include: Roserade, Gardevoir, Froslass, Alolan Ninetales, Chandelure, Togekiss, and my favorite Starter ever, Torterra. My second-favorite starter is actually a tie between Decidueye and Primarina. I love both of them so much, wow.

“As one does” — I've always felt that Mallow has a much drier sense of humor than the games show. You really have to have a sense of humor to be a good cook.

“When did you get out of the bag?” — Lillie is so done with Nebby lmao
“Heck yeah, I'm married!” — then why do you sound like a twelve-year-old boy. author why do you make these dialogue choices.

I love Sina and Dexio so much honestly. They're just so cute. GIVE ME MORE NON-BATTLING PROFESSOR'S ASSISTANTS. Bianca was the first in B2W2, and then we have Sina and Dexio and now we have Lillie— all fantastic characters, in my opinion. Not everyone you take your journey with has to be your rival. You've got FOUR of them in X and Y. God bless Shauna, Trevor and Tierno. They were cute as hell, but they weren't strictly necessary as characters. You could have done all of their character arcs with Calem or Serena instead. Trevor would have been so cute in a Lillie-type role where he never fights you. I think that having two rivals (Cheren and Bianca in BW; Hau and Gladion in SMUSUM) is the perfect amount and any more than that is overkill.

“Yeah, but nobody uses Grass-types” — this is my subtle way of saying that I'm salty about how Calem/Serena uses a Jolteon instead of a Leafeon if you pick Chespin in XY
For the first time during her island challenge and Pokémon journey, Moon was traveling on her own. She and Hau had decided that it would be a good idea for them to spend time working individually with their teams, so that they didn't grow too reliant on one another.

Everything on Melemele Island was close enough together that it only took a few hours to walk from one Pokémon Center to another—and if you started early enough in the morning, it was possible to complete an entire loop of the island's routes in one day. Akala Island was much larger than Melemele Island—everything was more spread out. As a result, Moon would also be camping out for the first time on her journey on Route Four. A car could make the drive in a few hours, but a walking Trainer usually made two, sometimes three days of it. She had prepared for this. She had a tent and a tarp, a hammock and a sleeping bag, a teapot, and plenty of water that she could boil for instant cocoa or cup ramen.

As the sun began to sink in the sky, she decided that it would probably be a good idea to stop for the night.

She found a patch of dirt, perhaps twenty feet by twenty feet, off to the side of the road. The dirt-patch had quite likely been used as a campsite before—there was no grass or wild Pokémon, and the faint scent of Repel lingered at the edge of the area.

Puck, ambling along at her side, wrinkled his nose. “Hoo.”

“It's as good as we're going to get,” said Moon, setting down her hiking backpack. “I promise I won't spray any more Repel around the area. You can hunt as many Caterpie as you like.”

One of the things she'd had to get used to in the last few days on Melemele Island, as well as on Akala, was that Rowlet could live on Pokébeans, but Dartrix and Decidueye were hunters, tending to prey on Bug-types and, very occasionally, small rodents like Rattata. Puck was beginning to reach the point where he turned his nose up at beans more often than not. Moon knew she could purchase freeze-dried Bug-types at any Pokémon Center, but she didn't like looking at dead Pokémon if she could help it. At some point Ariel would begin to reject beans as well, and then she really would have to get used to freeze-dried Bugs, or let her birds hunt fresh ones on their own.

She unbuckled the tent from where she'd wrapped it up and unrolled it. The tent poles snapped
together easily, sliding into the correct slots. Moon had practiced putting the tent together in her yard at home before she'd ever gone to Hau'oli City. A large, matching tarp was included with the tent, and she used some of her Ariados-silk rope to tie it to trees above the tent—hopefully directing any rainwater away from her little home. Moon would have preferred to use her hammock, but Rotom had checked the weather and reported overnight rain.

It was getting darker, so the next point of business was to start a fire. Moon didn’t have any Fire-type Pokémon and frankly hadn’t planned on getting one, so she dug in her backpack for the lighter and fire starters she’d brought.

“Hey, Puck, wanna help me get some firewood? And Ari, will you help me guard the camp?”

Ariel, investigating a small nest of Durant beyond the dirt patch, looked up and chirped approvingly, fluttering over to Moon. Puck had sat himself down on a rock and looked very disinclined to get up.

“Pal, I need you. You have Razor Leaf and I don't have an axe or anything. Come on, up and at ’em.”

Puck sighed, an expression of long-suffering gracing his features, and slowly got to his feet. Moon beckoned him into the shrubby woods that lined either side of Route Four, as Ariel stood sentinel on top of Moon’s backpack with a fierce expression on her face, fully intent on defending the borders of their camp.

She found a small tree, thin enough for Puck to break down. “This should do, right? I'll pick up sticks while you cut that down.”

Puck sighed again and began half-heartedly slicing at the tree with Razor Leaf. Moon, pleased, began picking up sticks. She could see a few Caterpie and Wurmple around, but there was nothing too threatening in the area.

“Hoo ho ho,” said Puck finally.

Moon turned to see that Puck had chopped the tree into neat, even pieces. “Wow, great job. Thank you so much, Puck.”

She carried the firewood and kindling back to camp. Ariel greeted them with her usual cheerful trill and watched as Moon set the firewood down in a heap near the tent—beneath the tarp.

“Now we have to collect a few rocks for a fire circle,” she explained. “Otherwise the wood just gets everywhere. Puck, that one you're sitting on is about the right size.”

“Darrrrr,” whined Puck, his eyebrows pulling down into a scowl.

“Why don't you go hunt yourself some dinner,” sighed Moon.

Puck rose to his feet again, all offended dignity, and returned to the shrubby woods. Ariel tried to pick up rocks with her talons, but she really wasn’t strong enough to carry them. She was good at finding them though, and soon she and Moon had formed a team where Ariel would find the rocks and twitter at Moon until she could pick them up and carry them back to the slowly-growing circle.

Soon they had a suitable circle, just outside the tarp. Moon took her backpack inside the tent and dug out a small teapot, and a few bottles of water, carrying them back out to the fire circle before returning for two styrofoam cups of ramen.

It took her a few tries, but she was eventually able to get a fire started. Moon poked the logs down
with a longer stick, doing her best to ignore the heat of the flames. Once she had a nice coal base going, she began filling her teapot with water.

“This has been fun,” she said to Ariel, “but I think I'm going to get one of those little gas stoves and a can of fuel.”

“Trrrrrum,” agreed Ariel. “Pipi trrrrii.”

“Yeah, I should have gotten one from the beginning, but we never actually camped on Melemele and I wanted the authentic camping experience at least once. Red always liked camping. Blue hated it, though.”

She pulled out her Dex and pulled up the camera, taking a picture of her steaming teapot over the fire. Ariel hopped into the picture, spreading her wings wide as though to say, “Look, I did this all by myself!”

“I did most of the work, but okay, sure,” snorted Moon. She sent the picture to Red and Blue by email, and in the group chat with Hau and Lillie.

“Hrr hrr,” announced Puck, returning to their campsite with a vainly wriggling Wurmple in his mouth.

“Gross, buddy,” said Moon, wrinkling her nose. “Don't play with your food. Ariel, do you want to go hunting, or do you want beans?”

“Trrrrm.”

“Beans it is.” Moon retrieved a fresh sack of Pokébeans from her backpack and opened it, pouring a healthy serving into a bowl. Ariel picked at the beans with her long beak, and Puck swallowed the Wurmple before letting out a quiet belch and sitting down a healthy distance from the fire.

Her teapot began to whistle. Moon took it out of the coals and opened up her ramen cups, pouring the boiling water inside. She had chopsticks— a nice metal set she'd gotten in Kanto ages ago. When the ramen was done cooking she began eating.

“If I get a little camp-stove then I'll probably need one of those good lanterns, so I can see at night.” Moon glanced at Puck. “Though I guess you already have pretty good night vision.”

“Hoo hurrr,” said Puck smugly.

“Nice.”

When she was done eating, Moon took off her shoes, stretching out her legs so that her toes could get nice and toasty.

“All right, guys, let's talk.”

Both Puck and Ariel stiffened, turning to look at her with wary eyes.

“Yeah, you know what we're talking about already. Come here. I'm not yelling at you. We're just gonna talk, okay?”

Puck's scowl returned as he shuffled a little closer to the fire. Moon, knowing it was his Grass-typing that made him uncomfortable more than his attitude, let him stay a little further away. Ariel pushed her nearly-empty bowl of beans closer on Moon's other side, looking questioningly at Moon.
“You can finish your food while I'm talking, as long as you can hear what I'm saying,” Moon assured her. Ariel bobbed her head in a nod and returned to her food. “So, as we all know, every single time I or anyone around me brings up more teammates, you both throw hissy fits.”

Puck merely blinked at her. Ariel sighed softly.

“I know you're both Flying-types, but guys. This is simply not gonna fly with me.” Moon fought to hide her giggle at the pun as Puck rolled his eyes. “Hey, that was funny, okay? Anyway, my point is, we're going to be getting new teammates at some point, and we're going to start that pretty soon. Hau's going to be picking up an Eevee, and then he'll have four Pokémon on his team. That's more than what we have, and it's just not going to work for us if we only have two Pokémon. So the temper tantrums need to stop.” She paused, looking each of them in the eye. “Immediately.”

Ariel ducked her head, ashamed. Puck maintained eye contact, but he did look slightly uncomfortable.

“I had to have a talk with Puck about this when I caught you, Ariel,” said Moon conversationally. Ariel blinked in surprise, turning to look at Puck. “He was really jealous of the idea of me catching another Pokémon. But like I told him then— just because I catch more Pokémon doesn't mean I love him, or you, any less. It just means my heart grows a little more to include the new Pokémon. And I want that for you guys, too. You've gotten used to each other, right? You're friends now.”

Ariel nodded again. Puck let out a huffy sigh, then bobbed his head once in confirmation.

“Yeah, that's what I thought. Now, Trainers can carry up to six Pokémon at a time, and usually a Trainer ends up with a full team of six Pokémon. Don't worry— I'm not going to go right out and catch four new Pokémon right away! But I need the two of you to be open and welcoming for new teammates. I need you to do your best work as they watch you train, so that they can learn from you. You guys are going to be like the older brother and sister to the other Pokémon. They'll learn from you, okay?”

She seemed to be getting through to them. Puck and Ariel both nodded again. Moon could see the relief in their eyes.

“Now— and I think this is what you were really worried about— I'm not just going to make my decisions without consulting you guys. You're my team, and you're important to me. Your input is valuable to me. I know we're not super experienced with battling yet, but I want to talk to you about things that I'd like to try, and Pokémon I've considered for the team.”

“Hoo hoo?”

“Yeah, I've got a whole list, my dude.” Moon dug in her pocket, pulling out her dex. “It's in the memos, could you pull that up for me?”

“Pulling up memo Potential Teammates, bzzt,” murmured Rotom.

“Thanks.” Moon flicked through the list, which she had updated after catching Ariel but hadn't touched since. “Okay, so I can actually cross a few of these out, because I learned recently that Puck is going to get Ghost-type when he evolves. Ariel, you maintain your typings through your last evolution. So that's four types down, and it leaves us with fourteen to choose from.” Moon deleted a few of the entries from the list. She was kind of sad to see Mismagius and Froslass go, but it just didn't make sense to have overlapping types in her final team.

“So to start with, I think we're going to want a Water-type.” She glanced at each of her teammates.
“You both get along pretty well with Poppy, and we want to have a teammate who can cover Puck's weakness to Fire, as well as Ari's weakness to Rock. Does that sound like a good idea?”

They both nodded again.

“Great. I also think that a Ground-type might be a good idea. That covers Fire as well, but it also covers Electric-types— which is a problem for both of you right now. That brings us to a glaring Ice-type weakness for Puck, Ari, and our future Ground-type teammate, so we need something to cover that. Fire, Fighting, or Steel are our options there. And that leaves one slot open for something else— which I haven't decided on yet. I like Ice and Fairy types a lot. A Dragon might be cool, but that's a fourth weakness to Ice and I really don't like that. A Psychic-type could also be pretty neat. Rock, Electric, Poison... all okay options. I don't think we really need a Dark-type since a lot of what Dark-type covers, Ghost-type will do just as well and Puck can take care of that eventually. And I really, really do not want a Bug-type. It's my very last option. If absolutely nothing else will do, we'll pick something up—but they creep me out. Like, a lot.”

She paused to look at Puck and Ariel. They were both staring at her, wide-eyed.

“I know it's a lot of information. I don't expect you to remember all of it. I just want you to keep it in mind. Let me look at my list... so, for Ground-types, how do you feel about Mudbray? They're pretty chill, and they aren't birds so you won't have to share food at all. A Diglett might be fun, too—or a Cubone.”

“Diglett and Cubone both have Alolan regional variants, bzzt,” said Rotom out of nowhere. “Just as the Meowth found in Hau'oli City are Dark-type rather than the Normal-types you find in Kanto and elsewhere in the world, Diglett gain Steel-type in addition to their Ground-typing. Cubone themselves remain Ground-type, but their evolution Marowak has Fire- and Ghost-typing, bzzt.”

“Okay, never mind on the Cubone,” murmured Moon, slightly disappointed. “Hmm. A Steel-type Diglett could be very cool. Where could I find them, Rotom?”

“Hmmm... caves and tunnels would be your best bet. You may also be able to find them in outdoor burrows or dens, similar to the ones that housed Rattata and Yungoos in Verdant Cavern, bzzt.”

“Neat. We'll keep an eye out.” Moon turned to regard Puck and Ariel, both of whom were blinking in confusion. “What I really want to talk to you guys about right now is an Eevee, because you can actually catch them right around here and near Paniola Town, where we're going to stay tomorrow.”

“Truuuuuuuuuuuuu?” inquired Ariel.

“Eevee's a little foxy cat dog thing. Rotom, pull up a picture off the Internet?”

“Here's a picture of an Eevee, bzzt.”

Moon showed Puck and Ariel the image of the Eevee. Puck shrugged, clearly unaffected by the sight; but Ariel leaned in, intrigued.

“Truuuuuuuuuum,” she murmured, tapping on the screen with her beak.

“Ow,” complained Rotom.

“Sorry,” said Moon. “Ari, don't touch the screen. I think Eevee are really cute. I've always thought they were cute, and I've always wanted one. My friend Blue from Kanto, he's trained up an Espeon pretty well and it was the cutest thing. The nice thing about Eevee is that it can evolve into eight different kinds of Pokémon. Obviously we're going to skip the Grass-type, and I don't really see
much point in the Dark-type one either. And we can’t get an Ice-type for a very long time. But there are five other options, and those include Water, which we talked about—and Fire, which would be good for that triple Ice-type weakness that we’ll have if we pick up a Diglett or another Ground-type. The others are Electric, Psychic, and Fairy. I like all five of those options for our team.”

“Hmmm,” said Ariel, still staring at the Eevee. “Hmm trrrrmnnnn.”

“Do you think they’re cute, too?”

Ariel nodded. Puck made a scoffing noise, rolling his eyes.

“Then we’re definitely going to catch one.” Moon smiled, pleased. “And that will probably be tomorrow or sometime in the next few days, so I want you both on the lookout.”

She looked at each of them once more. “Are we all clear? Any questions?”

They did not have any questions.

“Great. Let’s get ready for bed.”

She poured water onto the dying coals, and Puck dug up dirt to spread over them as well. Rotom floated around with a bright light to illuminate the area as Moon picked up her shoes and ushered Puck and Ariel into the tent.

She had a sleeping bag and a travel-sized pillow, and she set up padded mats for Puck and Ariel as well. Moon pulled off her dusty T-shirt, changing it for a tank top; her jean shorts were replaced with a pair of long basketball shorts. She went back outside to brush her teeth and wash her face with a bottle of water.

“Ready to sleep, guys?” she asked them, zipping herself into her sleeping bag.

“Ho ho, hoo.”

“Trrrrmnmnn.”

“Great. Rotom, lights out.”

“Good night, bzzt.” Rotom’s screen slowly dimmed to black, and Moon laid down, closing her eyes as the warmth and hum of the semi-tropical Alolan woods sang her to sleep.

She woke the next morning to Ariel’s shrill cries in the darkness of the early morning, and briefly pondered whether Pokémon journeys were even worth the pain they put her through.

“Okay, okay, shush,” she said wearily, sitting up. “Rotom, a light? Not white light, though. Pink or yellow or something.”

Rotom stirred from its own slumber, the screen brightening to illuminate the tent with a soft pink glow. Ariel blinked at her a few times, falling silent. Puck cracked one eye open and sat up.

“One of these days, I’ll make you sleep in your Pokéball,” muttered Moon. “Rotom, what time is it?”

“Four forty-five, bzzt.”

Moon sighed. “Seriously? I’m going back to sleep.”
“Bibibibibibibi,” yodeled Ariel, stalking toward Moon with a scowl.

“You are the actual worst.” But Moon got up. It was cold, but not unpleasantly so. Moon found a clean t-shirt and shorts in her backpack and changed before pulling on socks, shoes, and an oversized hoodie that had probably belonged to Red or Blue at some point, but was hers now and had been for years.

It was not raining so much as drizzling outside, and the tarp hanging over her tent had done its job in redirecting the rainwater off to the sides. Moon's fire circle, just inside the tarp, was only slightly damp; and the firewood was completely dry.

“I was prepared,” she told Puck and Ariel, who had followed her outside. “See, nice things happen when you think them through first.”

“Pi pi trrrm?” inquired Ariel.

“Yeah, yeah. Hold your Horseas.” Moon glanced at Puck. “Do you want to hunt, or should I break out more beans for you too?”

Puck turned and hopped into the rainy woods without so much as a word.

“I guess that answers that, then.” Moon poured another bowl of beans out for Ariel and set to work starting another fire. She had instant cocoa packets and some oatmeal, and she poured another bottle of water into her teapot to prepare both.

“Rotom, when's the weather supposed to clear up?”

“It should be fully dry and sunny by around ten this morning, bzzt.”

“And how far are we from Paniola Town?”

“You're about eight miles from Paniola Town, bzzt. I estimate a three- to four- hour walk from your present location.”

Moon ate some oatmeal, frowning. It was about five-twenty now.

“Yeah, okay,” she said finally. “If we pack up and leave in about an hour, we should get there by ten, and I can shower at the Pokémon Center.”

“Trrrrrm?”

“Yeah, I can wash you and Puck, too.” She wrinkled her nose— Ariel didn't mind baths, but Puck hated them with a passion and Moon usually ended up soaked and exhausted afterward. “And then we'll take a nap or something, because you might be an early bird but I am not.”

“Piki trrrrm,” murmured Ariel, not looking sorry in the slightest.

Puck bounded back beneath the tarp, looking entirely satisfied with himself. “Hoo hoo darrr.”

“I'm glad you ate well.” Moon held out her hand, and Puck butted against it cheerfully. “I just need to clean up and then we can set out for Paniola.”

Breaking camp fortunately did not take nearly as much time as setting it up. Moon had an umbrella, which she used to keep her backpack dry while she was folding up the tent and the wet tarp. Puck and Ariel huddled beneath the umbrella as well until Moon took pity on them and recalled them to their Pokéballs. The sun had just risen, giving the clouds a soft pink glow, as she finished strapping
the wet roll of tarp and tent to the base of her backpack.

She ran into a few Trainers on Route Four, but she saw tents as well— tents that probably belonged to Trainers who didn't have Pokémon that woke them up before dawn. Moon couldn't really be mad at Ariel—it was her own fault for not making her team sleep in their balls—but she was still a bit grumpy, and she'd only had the one packet of oatmeal so she was still hungry.

True to Rotom's prediction, the soft rainfall had almost completely stopped by nine forty-five, when Moon walked beneath the wooden archway that proclaimed her arrival at Paniola Town. The town itself was rustic, built with a lot of wood and logs in the style Moon always remembered seeing in the old western Unova movies— cowboys astride trusty Mudsdale, herding Tauros, Miltank, and Mareep over the rolling hills and defending their livestock from bands of thugs that were clearly styled after Team Rocket.

The Pokémon Center was as bright and modern as any building in Hau'oli or Heahea, though. Moon walked in and took Puck and Ariel to the healing station first, before moving along the counter to rent a room for two nights. She took her things up to her room and unrolled the tarp, laying it out on the floor to dry.

Ariel cheerfully submitted to a bath, but it took Moon well over an hour to convince Puck to be washed. After that she took her own shower, reveling in the hot water and her favorite Sitrus Berry-scented shampoo before taking her dirty laundry downstairs to the Pokémon Center laundromat to wash everything up before the rush of Trainers trying to wash their own things arrived.

“Hey there, stranger!”

Moon turned and grinned at Hau and Lillie, who looked as damp and uncomfortable as she had been before she took her shower. “Hi, guys. Did you camp together?”

“Professor Burnet drove me down Route Four to catch up with Hau,” explained Lillie. She wore her own hiking backpack— brand-new. Moon wondered if Professor Kukui or Professor Burnet had paid for it, the way they had paid for Lillie’s cell phone. “I walked the rest of the way here with him. I’ll be staying here in Paniola Town for a few days.”

“I’ve gotten a room for two nights. Do you want to share?”

“Yes, please. I’d rather not stay with a stranger.”

“You’re lucky you’re both girls,” said Hau, wrinkling his nose. “On Route Two I had to share a room with this weird guy who smelled like garlic. His team was weird, too— two Banette and a Flabebé.”

“There’s nothing weird about that.”

“You weren’t staying with him. Trust me, it was weird.” Hau eyed Moon's packet of laundry detergent. “You wouldn't happen to have any extra of that laying around, with you? I ran out on Route Three and did my laundry at home before we came here.”

“Yeah, knock yourself out.” She tossed the packet and he caught it.

“Thanks. I'll spot you for the next time you have to buy some.”

“May I use it, too? I can contribute,” offered Lillie.

“Sure. What's mine is yours, in terms of like supplies and stuff. Obviously I'm not giving you my
Pokémon or my Shakespeare."

“Nobody wants your Shakespeare,” pointed out Hau. “It's a literal brick of a book and we're basically hiking for the next few months. Why would you take it anywhere?”

“Hey, that Shakespeare has been through hell and back with me. I carried it through all of high school. Of course it's coming on my Pokémon journey.” Moon grinned, to show them that she wasn’t offended. “Hau, if you'll wait a minute and watch my laundry, I'll take Lillie over to the desk to get her another key for my room.”

“Yeah, sure thing.”

Moon fell into step with Lillie. “How have things been?” she asked. “How's Nebby? Are Lapin and Umber training well?”

“Oh, yes! Nebby is just fine— I think she's taking a nap.” Lillie patted her bag, and indeed a soft and drowzy “pew pew” emitted from within. “I did some training with Lapin and Umber this morning, on Route Four. They're a little bit under-powered, and I went through a lot of medicine— but Hau was with me, so I wasn't worried. And now I can stock up here and train well for a few days.”

“That's great.” Moon smiled at Lillie as they approached the Pokémon Center's main counter.

“How are you and your team, Moon?”

“We're doing good.” Moon waved down the clerk. “Hi, my friend wants to share my room with me. Can we get another key?”

Lillie paid for two nights as well, and received another key to Moon's room. “That's that, then,” she said, satisfied. “I think I'll probably take a shower, and maybe bathe Lapin and Umber— they're pretty wet and muddy from their training.”

“Does Nebby bathe?”

“I haven't really tried,” admitted Lillie. “Water just goes through most of her, you know— she's made of space dust, I think. And she hasn't really gotten dirty... I don't think she needs it.”

“Fair enough. I better get back to my laundry. Oh, my tent tarp is laying out to dry on the floor. You can move it if you need to, but I'd really like it to dry out properly.”

“That's fine. Thank you, Moon.”

Moon relieved Hau at the laundromat, and he headed out to rent his own room immediately. It was not too long at all before Lillie, freshly bathed and dried, returned with Nebby in her bag and Lapin and Umber tucked in pouches on a brand-new Trainer's belt.

“Feel free to tell me to shove off if this is a rude question,” said Moon.

“Um, okay?”

“Are Professor Kukui and Professor Burnet like, paying for your stuff?”

“Oh.” Lillie turned bright red. “Um— yes and no. They're paying for my stuff, but I'm reimbursing them out of a personal account. I didn't have access to that account until fairly recently, but it has plenty of money in it. They pay for things, and I withdraw from the ATM and pay them back. Does that make sense?”

""
“Yeah, sort of. Why not pay for things directly?”

Lillie offered a half-smile. “It's more difficult for anyone to track me through debit card activity,” she said simply. “The ATM withdrawals can be tracked, of course— but ATMs are always located in or near Pokémon Centers, and it would be very difficult to track one particular Trainer through any given Pokémon Center.”

“That's clever,” said Moon, nodding. “And it makes sense, given that you're, you know. On the run, or something.”

“Quite. It's advice I took from my friend. He does something similar, but he actually has accounts under several different names and he makes sure to spread the use of them out so that he appears to be three different people.” Lillie paused, turning pink. “That's probably more than I should have said. Um— please don't mention that to anybody.”

“I'm pretty sure that's illegal, but I won't say a word,” promised Moon. Her curiosity had only been heightened by the conversation, but she resisted the urge to ask more questions.

“Hey, Moon! I just had the greatest idea while I was in the shower!”

Hau was sprinting toward them, shouting cheerfully and drawing the attention of everyone in the Pokémon Center. Uila raced alongside him at his ankles and Sonar soared above his head. Poppy was tucked under one of his arms, and under the other—

“You didn't mention you'd caught an Eevee!”

The Eevee blinked up at her in mild surprise.

“Oh, yeah, this is Oliver,” said Hau, looking affectionately down at him. “I caught him this morning. Four Pokémon is just about as much as I can handle right now, though— I've literally got my hands full. I'm gonna train Ollie up into the best Flareon ever.”

“He's cute. I had a chat with Puck and Ariel last night about how they're not going to throw temper tantrums every time I talk about picking up new teammates, and I showed them a picture of an Eevee. Do you mind if I let them out so they can meet him?”

“Sure, go for it!”

Moon tossed Puck and Ariel out, and Hau set Poppy and Ollie down on the ground.

“Puck, Ari, this is Ollie. He's Hau's new teammate, and he's an Eevee. We talked about Eevee last night, remember?”

“Peki trrrrrrrrm,” murmured Ariel, stepping forward to stare closely at Ollie. He shied back a few steps, nervous under her intense gaze.

Puck rolled his eyes. “Hoo darrr.”

“I know you have to pretend like you're cool and unbothered because you're one of the oldest Pokémon in our group, but I know you actually think he's cute and your attitude doesn't bother me,” Moon informed him.

“Ollie, it's okay,” said Hau gently, patting the little Eevee's head. Hau had large hands, and even though the Eevee was already an adolescent it was still dwarfed by them. “These guys are Puck and Ariel. They're Moon's teammates, and we're going to battle against them later.”
“Oh, are you now?” Moon raised one eyebrow.

“Oh, that was part of my idea! I haven't told you about it yet. So you know how Paniola Town kind of looks like it was ripped right out of one of those old Unovan movies? My dad calls them 'spaghetti westerns.’ ”

“Right, yeah.”

Hau grinned. “So in the spaghetti westerns, you always have the epic showdown at the end of the movie, where the cowboy Trainer faces off against the knockoff Team Rocket boss, and they meet in the town at high noon and face off in a Pokémon duel.”

“Okay, I think I see where you're going with this.”

“So we should totally have a Pokémon duel in the streets of Paniola Town at high noon.”

“Brilliant. I love it, let's do it. When's noon?”

“It's eleven-thirty right now,” said Lillie, checking her watch. “We could eat lunch after that.”

“Sounds great. I want to check out Paniola Ranch after lunch and see if I can't catch my own Eevee.” Moon looked at Ariel, who had continued to sidle closer to Ollie and was now draped over him in the way that a wild Pokémon bird might settle herself over her nest and hatchlings. One of her wings was softly brushing over Ollie's head, mimicking the way Hau or Moon might have pet him. Ollie seemed slightly uncomfortable, but had submitted to the petting with good grace. “I better get one so that Ariel will leave Ollie alone.”

Hau laughed. “With your luck, you'll get one that doesn't like being petted.”

“Don't jinx it,” Moon warned him. “Seriously, dude— these two are difficult enough.”

She finished her laundry shortly after, carrying her clean things back up to her room to fold and put them away. It left her with only a short time before the scheduled battle, so she put on her jacket and took Puck and Ariel outside to warm up.

The sun had come out completely, drying out Paniola Town— insofar as it was possible to dry anything out in Alola, given the humidity. The ground was mostly dry.

“Use Razor Leaf on that fence post,” Moon said to Puck, pointing. “Not strong enough to break it— just scratch it.”

Puck stared at her with his usual impassive, slightly annoyed expression; but he did as she requested, carving eight or nine neat scratches into the post with the glowing leaves.

“And Ari, use Brick Break on that, um, brick.”

Ariel chopped the brick into two pieces with a strength that Moon would not have expected from a slim Trumbeak, if she hadn't seen her teammate in action as often as she had.

“I think we're as ready as we're going to get, guys,” she told them. “Hau has strength in numbers, but he's had to spread out his training between all of them. I've been able to focus solely on the two of you, and I think you're stronger.”

“Hoo,” said Puck, with a single nod.

“Trrrrm,” agreed Ariel.
“That's the spirit.” Moon, pleased, recalled them to their Pokéballs and walked over to the street where she and Hau had agreed to meet for their “duel.”

Lillie, Nebby, Lapin, and Umber were watching from the steps of one of the houses between them. Hau had found a red cowboy's bandanna somewhere and tied it around his nose and mouth—kind of like the way Team Skull occasionally wore their black-and-white bandannas.

“This town ain’t big enough for the two of us, Trainer Hawkins,” he called, putting on an exaggerated western Unovan accent. “It's high noon, and I'm fixin' to face you in a duel.”

Moon grinned, adopting the same accent. “Suits me fine, Trainer Akiona. I reckon I'll show you a thing or two about Pokémon battling.”

Lillie and her teammates were giggling.

“Shake hands,” said Hau decisively, striding forward. “Then we'll each take five paces and draw.”

“Draw with Pokéballs or finger guns?”

“Eh, pick your poison.” Hau's face was twitching under the bandanna, which told Moon that he was trying not to laugh.

She walked forward and shook his hand. Then they both spun around and took five steps away from one another. A small crowd had gathered, attracted by Hau's exaggerated acting and the laughter of Lillie and her Pokémon.

Moon spun around with Ariel's Pokéball in one hand and a finger gun in the other, to see that Hau had done the exact same with one of his Pokéballs.

“Yippie-ki-yay!” yelled Hau, no longer bothering to hide his laughter as he dramatically tore off the bandanna and threw his ball. Moon did the same.

It was Uila versus Ariel—not the best type matchup for Moon, but she still had faith in the Trumbeak. “Ari, use Echoed Voice!” she ordered. “Stay in the air, don’t let his attacks hit you!”

“Uila, get her with Electro Ball!”

Ariel soared upward, narrowly avoiding a wave of electricity from Uila that fizzled out just before it reached Moon’s ankles. She let out a loud, piercing cry.

“Echoed Voice, one more time!”

“Direct that Electro Ball up this time!”

Ariel's wing was clipped by the stream of sparks and she jerked to one side, but recovered before she could fall fully and let out another cry—this one louder, powered by the strength of the first. It was too much for Uila—who was strong, but still quite young for a Pikachu. He slumped over, stunned. Hau recalled him and sent out Poppy in his place.

Moon probably could have won the battle entirely with the momentum of Echoed Voice—it gained power every time it was used in succession, and Ariel's Echoed Voice was probably strong enough at this point to bring Poppy down to near-fainting. But it seemed like an awfully cheap way to win a battle. “Ariel, use Pluck!”

“Poppy, hit her with Aqua Jet!”
Poppy, properly getting into the dramatic spirit of things, stood on her tail and hit Ariel with Aqua Jet—her flippers acting like little guns. The gathering crowd laughed, which further fueled the Brionne’s excitement. She scored a hit, but Ariel managed to pull off a decent Pluck.

It was by the absolute skin of their teeth, but Ariel’s next Pluck was strong enough to knock Poppy out, while Poppy’s second Aqua Jet had flagged Ariel to the point where she could barely stay in the air, fluttering only a few feet above the ground and trying to shake the water from her wings. Hau’s mouth was set into a thin line, and Moon really hoped that he hadn’t assigned either of them roles as villain or hero in their high-noon duel.

She recalled Ariel as well—she could send her out in a pinch, but there was no point in letting her faint if she didn’t have to—and sent Puck onto the field. Hau tossed out the ball containing Ollie, who looked nervously at impassive Puck.

“Ollie, use Quick Attack!”

“Puck, get him with Razor Leaf!”

Ollie darted forward, but Puck was faster, hurling the glowing leaves and halting the Eevee in his tracks. Moon bit back a gasp as Ollie keeled over instantly, eyes fluttering closed. Even Puck looked slightly alarmed at the speed with which he had defeated the Eevee.

“He’s all right,” murmured Hau, but his voice was slightly choked as he returned Ollie and sent out Sonar, his last conscious teammate. “Sonar, use Bite.”

He sounded defeated already. Moon swallowed back guilt. “Puck, hit him with Pluck.”

Sonar tried his best, sinking his fangs into Puck’s wing; but Puck shook him off easily and his counterattack hit the Noibat squarely.

“You can do it, buddy.” Hau’s voice was almost a whisper. “Come on—one more Bite, that’ll do it.”

It wouldn’t do it, and they both knew it. Puck glanced back at Moon, who nodded once when they made eye contact. Before Sonar could dive at him, Puck flicked glowing leaves upward in a familiar Razor Leaf. They knocked Sonar out of the air, and he fell limply to the earth.

A few people in the gathered crowd cheered, but it quickly faded to silence as neither Moon nor Hau spoke. Hau knelt, gathering Sonar back into his Pokéball. He remained on the ground for a few moments.

Then he looked up, a smile on his face. “I reckon you really did show me a thing or two about Pokémon battling—eh, pardner?”

It was a show for the crowd; the smile didn’t reach his eyes. But Moon played along. “Always happy to help a fellow cowboy,” she answered, and meant it with her whole heart.

That earned more cheers, and Moon and Hau shook hands as the crowd began to disperse. Lillie had already gathered Lapin and Umber back in to their balls, scooping Nebby into the bag and hurrying over to Moon and Hau.

“I—” began Moon, not sure what to say.

Hau shook his head. The smile was still fixed to his face—which was much more painful to look at, decided Moon, than if he had stopped smiling.
“Not now, Moon,” he said softly. “Let’s just go have lunch, okay?”

Moon swallowed. “Okay.”

“It was a good battle,” said Lillie.

Moon turned to look at her, surprised. The younger girl nodded firmly, meeting first Moon's eyes, then Hau's.

“It was a good battle,” she repeated. “All of the Pokémon tried their hardest, and so did the Trainers. That's what counts, isn't it?”


Chapter End Notes

Please forgive my plotsplanation of how far apart things are on the different islands and why I didn't write Moon camping at all on Melemele Island. Everything really is a whole lot closer together there imo

Pokémon Ethics Time!
---Do Pokémon eat other Pokémon? Yes, absolutely. A lot of Pokémon are based on carnivorous animals and they aren't just going to eat beans or Poffins or Puffs or whatever the kids are nibbling on these days (though Pokébeans are designed to be universally edible and packed with nutrients). Owls (Puck) are omnivorous and will eat birdseed as well as bugs and fish and rodents, and most other birds (Ariel) eat bugs and maybe fish. Seals (Poppy) eat fish. Most rodents (Uila) are herbivores, but bats (Sonar) are omnivorous and eat bugs as well as fruit and veggies. Rabbits (Lapin) are herbivores, but foxes (Umber) are omnivores and will eat just about anything.
---Do people eat Pokémon? The answer (in this universe at least) is yes, sometimes—but most people don't do it very often and make do with like, tofu or veggie or artificial meat burgers, instead of Miltank steak. Slowpoke Tail is a “delicacy” that's always sounded kind of gross to me.

Cup ramen is actually one of the most efficient things to eat when you're camping—the food is lightweight and all you have to do is boil water. MREs come in lots of fun flavors and they're usually pretty tasty, but they tend to come in larger portion sizes than cup ramen so you eat like half of it and you're full. Oatmeal, cocoa and tea packets are also great to bring when you're camping.

“I know you're both Flying-types, but guys. This is simply not gonna fly with me.” — author pls

Paniola Town is honestly my favorite town in terms of ambiance in Alola. It has unique theme music and an aesthetic that's unlike any of the other towns. It's also more “American” to me than Driftveil, which I understand is supposed to be some kind of Los Angeles-Las Vegas hybrid and is just really... not. ANYWAY I love Paniola Town, thank you for listening to my TED talk
“On Route Two I had to share a room with this weird guy who smelled like garlic” — Hau I'm so sorry sweetie it was for the comedy

“Nobody wants your Shakespeare. It's a literal brick of a book and we're basically hiking for the next few months. Why would you take it anywhere?” — shhhh Hau, Moon is not impressed with your Logical Thinking

Can You Give A Miniaturized Nebula A Bath? Sure, but only if you give it a sack of Pokébeans to go with it.

Moon: “Feel free to tell me to shove off if this is a rude question” *proceeds to ask literally THE RUDEST QUESTION* — Moon pls

“It's advice I took from my friend. He does something similar, but he actually has accounts under several different names and he makes sure to spread the use of them out so that he appears to be three different people” — allow me to introduce Gladion Arthur “it's-not-paranoia-if-they're-really-out-to-get-you” Mohn, everyone

Hau: “So in the spaghetti westerns, you always have the epic showdown at the end of the movie, where the cowboy Trainer faces off against the knockoff Team Rocket boss, and they meet in the town at high noon and face off in a Pokémon duel.”

Moon: “Okay, I think I see where you're going with this.”

Hau: “So we should totally have a Pokémon duel in the streets of Paniola Town at high noon.”

Author: YOU'RE WELCOME

“This town ain't big enough for the two of us, Trainer Hawkins. It's high noon, and I'm fixin' to face you in a duel.” — Hau is too good for this world tbh

“Yippie-ki-yay!” — I really REALLY wanted to have him say “yippie-ki-yay motherfuckers” but 1) I think that may be copyrighted by the Die Hard franchise, if memory serves correctly and 2) Hau only swears when he's Very Emotional

“Then he looked up, a smile on his face. 'I reckon you really did show me a thing or two about Pokémon battling— eh, pardner?' It was a show for the crowd; the smile didn't reach his eyes.” — why do I have to write things that make me cry
Incubation

Chapter Summary

Paniola Town, Paniola Ranch, Pokémon Nursery

Chapter Notes

Moon and Lillie defeat a pair of Team Skull Grunts, and Moon picks up an egg.

CW: extremely excessive profanity, which you shouldn't really be surprised by if you've read A Higher Standard of Cleanliness (Part Two in this series)

I did NOT expect to finish a whole two chapters in one day. I have a system where I'm five chapters ahead of what's posted, and when I finish a chapter I post one. I finished two chapters today, so you get two chapters.

Moon, Hau, and Lillie ate their lunch in a rather subdued fashion. Moon paid for all three of them, since she had won prize money from Hau anyway. The Pokémon Center café offered sandwiches as well as drinks and snacks, so they didn't have to try and find somewhere else to eat. Hau didn't speak, merely feeding his Pokémon. Poppy was her usual dramatic self, chattering and eating with Ariel and Nebby; but she didn't seem to resent Puck or Ariel for the loss. Uila was quiet, as he usually was; Sonar clung to Hau's shirt and Ollie looked around at the chaos with wide eyes. Lapin and Umber, like Lillie, were both fairly shy Pokémon, and stayed still and fairly obedient as Lillie fed them. Nebby was neither shy nor obedient, and made as much noise as she could get away with. Ariel was similar— though she was younger than both Poppy and Nebby, she often acted like one of the oldest Pokémon. The three girls were loud, squabbling happily in the café and drawing smiles from strangers. Puck, as per usual these days, hid behind Moon and sulked over the packet of frozen Grubbin she'd purchased at the Mart for him.

“Ah, I guess Puck's getting too old for Pokébeans, isn't he?” observed Lillie, looking at Puck.

“I mean, he can still eat them. He just prefers to hunt.” Moon cleared her throat. “Um, Hau... do you ever get fish for Poppy? Is she at that point?”

“No,” said Hau. He smiled. Moon was almost fooled by that smile. “She still likes beans. Between you, me, and all the malasadas I've bought her over the last month, I think she has a bit of a sweet tooth.”

“Like you don't, yourself?” said Lillie dryly.

“The thing is though, is that it's just her and me. Uila and Ollie both like the spicy malasadas, and Sonar prefers the bitter ones.”

“Ari likes the bitter ones, too,” remarked Moon. “You know how I get the Nomel-berry ones, right?
She likes the Nomel-berry jam *without* sugar.”

“Your birds are as weird as you are,” said Hau, but the smile was a little more genuine this time and Moon knew he didn't mean it as an insult. “Does Puck reject malasadas as well as beans?”

“I dunno. We haven't had them in a week or so. Maybe I'll try and pick some up next time I see a malasada shop. He liked the sour ones.” Moon glanced at Puck, but he was pointedly ignoring the conversation and did not indicate any malasada flavor preferences.

“There was a malasada shop in Heahea, but I think the next one is on Royal Avenue,” offered Lillie. “I could pick some up— I’m not really restricted by the island challenge barriers the way both of you are.”

“Maybe if you’re headed that way before I am for any reason, you could pick up a box for me. I don't want you to go out of your way, though. It's not an emergency.” Moon shrugged.

“For me it is. I might die if I go too long without malasadas.”

Lillie sighed. “Hau, I don't think it's possible to get addicted to malasadas.”

“If anyone could, it would be Hau.” Moon offered Hau a smile of her own, and was heartened when she received a grin and a nod in response.

The tension in the atmosphere seemed to dissipate as they finished their lunch. Moon was trying very hard not to be too careful or sensitive with Hau— her conversation with Hala had only reaffirmed her suspicions that it would be a bad idea to treat him as though he were made of glass. Her friend might not be able to defeat her in a battle, but he was still very strong in his own right.

“Well, I'm headed to the ranch just north of town,” she told Hau and Lillie, crumpling up the paper wrapper that had contained her sandwich. “I want to try and catch an Eevee. I was also thinking about Mudbray because I want a Ground-type, but Rotom mentioned Alolan Diglett— and presumably Dugtrio— have a different typing than they do back in Kanto.”

“Really?” Hau perked up. “What are they like in Kanto?”

“Just Ground, no Steel at all.”

“Oh. That's... kind of disappointing, actually.”

“I'm not disagreeing with you,” said Moon dryly. “Though I looked up an image of Alolan Dugtrio on the internet and honestly, I thought it should have been Ground- and Fairy-type, with that beautiful hair. It looks so majestic, which is something I never in my life thought I would say about Dugtrio.”

Both Hau and Lillie laughed at that. “I want to do laundry,” said Hau, though he didn't quite meet Moon's gaze as he spoke and her heart sank a little bit again. “Lillie, have you got any to do?”

“I only have the one set of dirty clothes at the moment, so I can do mine tomorrow,” answered Lillie. “Moon, would you mind if I accompanied you? I could get some more training done with Lapin and Umber.”

“The more the merrier,” said Moon lightly. “See you later, Hau.”

“See you around, guys. Thanks for lunch, Moon.”
Moon and Lillie both recalled their teams, and Nebby was tucked into her bag. It was not until they went outside that Lillie said softly, “If it helps, Moon, I think you're handling Hau very well.”

Moon sighed. “I'm glad you think so, but I just— gah.” She ran her fingers back through her loose hair, probably ruffling it into something messy and wild. “I want him to feel like he can talk to me about it, but I don't want to make him talk to me about it, because that would probably just make it worse. And I'd love to see him win a battle, but I'm sure as hell not throwing one. I think he'd be able to tell and he would probably actually hate me for it, if he doesn't already.”

“I don't think Hau is angry with you.”

“I don't think he is, either. It's just a touchy thing, and I'm afraid of ruining the friendship if I do or say the wrong thing. And Lillie—” Moon, to her own surprise, found herself choking on the words, trying to hold back tears. “Arceus, Lillie, I do not want to ruin this friendship. You and Hau are my best friends— honestly my only friends, because Red and Blue are pretty much my older brothers—and I can't stand the idea of losing either one of you.”

“You won't,” said Lillie firmly, reaching out to clasp Moon's hand with her own thin one. Moon remembered that she had done the same thing for Lillie only a few weeks ago, somewhere on the streets of Hau'oli City. “I promise you that you won't.”

Moon took a moment to discreetly sniffle and wipe her nose with a tissue— she started keeping a packet of them in her backpack after she learned that Hau was allergic to pollen— and they continued their walk through Paniola Town, headed north toward the Pokémon ranch and nursery.

“Yo, Vulpix, hand it over!”

The shout rang out loudly through the street. Moon and Lillie both turned to see a pair of Team Skull grunts approaching a fluffy white Pokémon, which cowered away from them as it backed toward a fence.

“Stop that!” scolded a nearby woman, walking over with her hands on her hips. “Leave the poor thing alone!”

“Lady, this ain't none of your business.” The grunt who spoke was a girl, with bright-orange hair— Moon remembered her from the crowd of grunts at Big Wave Beach. What was her name— Millie? Maisie? “The Vulpix doesn't need a fucking Bottle Cap. Those are for Trainers.” She turned back to the Pokémon— a Vulpix, evidently. Moon was certain that Vulpix were usually a reddish brown color, but perhaps this was an Alolan regional variant.

“Moon?”

“Yeah?” Moon glanced at Lillie.

“We— we should help.” Lillie flushed pink under her scrutiny. “Shouldn't we?”

Moon smiled at her. “Yeah, we should. Let's go.”

They walked over to the grunts. Moon was surprised to find that she recognized the second grunt as well: Kohaku of the lavender hair, who had half-heartedly attempted to help Emmett, a far more annoying grunt, ruin Moon's first trial.

“All right,” she announced, her hand on Puck's Pokéball. “Knock it off, guys.”

Kohaku and the orange-haired grunt both turned to look at her. “Oh,” said Kohaku, eyes lighting up
in recognition. “It's this chick.” He glanced at the orange-haired grunt. “She's the one who's been
kicking Emmett's ass halfway to Kanto.”

“Oh,” said the orange grunt, nodding. “Yeah, okay. I can respect that. Emmett's a fucking idiot.”

“Do you really have to use such language in public?” asked the woman, shaking her head.

“Fucking cocksucking tittyshits,” said the orange-haired grunt, glaring at the woman.

“That makes no sense,” said Moon, shaking her head. “Listen up, guys. We know how this is gonna
go. There's two of you, and there's two of us.” She indicated Lillie and herself. “We can do this the
easy way, where you guys walk away and leave the Vulpix alone. Or we can do this the Double
Battle way. It's up to you.”

Kohaku glanced at the orange-haired grunt. Moon remembered that she had been the one in charge
on Big Wave Beach, too. The grunts had some kind of inner hierarchy that Moon had no intention or
desire to learn about. Though if the orange-haired grunt was in charge, perhaps she could answer a
question that had been on Moon's mind for about three weeks.

“Incidentally,” she said, just as the orange-haired grunt was about to speak. “I was wondering if you
could tell me about a couple of specific girls in Team Skull. One has hot-pink hair, the other has
blond hair with lime-green streaks in it.”

“Moon,” protested Lillie, recognizing who Moon was asking about.

“Why the fuck would I tell you anything about my sisters?” said the orange haired grunt, narrowing
her eyes at Moon. “I'm not a sellout.”

“Don't worry, I wasn't going to report them to the police station or anything,” Moon rolled her eyes,
hoping it would irritate the orange-haired girl. “I just owe them both a battle, that's all. They're the
reason I don't like Team Skull in the first place.”

Surprisingly, the orange-haired girl sighed. “Oh, god. What the fuck did they do?”

“I was shopping with my friend here, and they started being mean to her for absolutely no reason at
all. I get that you guys vandalize stuff and steal Pokémon so you aren't exactly bastions of moral
fortitude to begin with, but I didn't think you were bullies.”

The orange-haired girl chewed on her lower lip for a few moments. Moon studied her. She was a
little bit heavy-set, and her hair had been curled into tight ringlets; but she had a surprisingly kind
eexpression when she wasn't frowning.

“Usually we ain't, not like that,” she said finally. “And you're lucky you talked to me about it. I'm
supposed to make sure they ain't doing shit like that.”

“Color me surprised,” butted in the woman who was still standing nearby, hanging onto every word
of the conversation. “Team Skull, actually doing the right thing.”

“Fuck off, lady.” The orange-haired girl ignored the woman's squawk of outrage. “Listen— you're
Moon, right? That's your name?”

“Yeah, that's me.”

“We'll take you up on that Double Battle. If you guys win, I'll tell you who you're looking for. If you
lose...” Her head tilted to the side, eyes gleaming. “We get that Vulpix's Bottle Cap. And you know
what, fuck it, we get the whole Vulpix.”

“If you can capture it, that is.”

“If we can capture it,” agreed the orange-haired grunt. “Kohaku, you ready?”

“They’re gonna beat us, Molly,” said Kokahu flatly. “I dunno about the cute one, but this Moon chick is actually like, scary good. She might even be able to beat G’s weird dog thing.”

Moon snapped her fingers. “Molly! That’s what your name was. I saw you at Big Wave Beach and couldn’t remember.”

“The cute one?” squeaked Lillie, turning scarlet.

Kohaku shrugged. “I said what I said.” He pulled a Pokéball from his belt. Molly did the same.

As Kohaku had predicted, Moon and Lillie easily won. Molly had a Yungoos, and Kohaku had his Drowzee. What surprised Moon was that Lillie tossed out *Umber*, rather than Lapin who was a bit older and had more experience— though she supposed that they had only been caught about a week apart from one another. She actually thought it was Lapin at first, thanks to Umber’s Illusion ability— but when Kohaku's Drowzee tried using Confusion to no effect, she realized the deceit. Puck, of course, knocked out the Yungoos easily; and it was a pleasure to watch Lillie's triumphant grin when Umber defeated the Drowzee as well.

Molly sighed, recalling her Yungoos and pocketing him. “Well, can't say I didn't give it a try.”

“Now scram!” called the random woman. Moon was almost more annoyed with her at this point than with Molly and Kohaku. “You’ve learned your lesson, haven't you?”

“Seriously, lady, would you just shove it up your ass? We're going, we're going.” Molly sighed and turned to Moon. “The pink-haired one is Trinh, and the blonde with green is Uilani. I'm sorry you had to deal with them being bitchy.”

“Trinh and Uilani,” repeated Moon. “Okay. I'll know to look out for them.”

“Moon, you don't have to,” said Lillie softly.

“Yeah, but I want to. And now that you're a Trainer, you could fight them yourself, if you wanted.”

“They would probably deserve it,” said Molly flatly. “I know them. They're my sisters, and they've got issues, but they shouldn't have been taking it out on you.”

Kohaku rolled his eyes. “They're gonna be pissed you set someone on them. Come on, let's go.”

They walked away, leaving the random woman and the Vulpix. Moon turned to eye the little fox. “Rotom?” she asked.

“In Alola, Vulpix and Ninetales are Ice-types. Ninetales also gains Fairy-type on evolving, bzzt.”

“Nice.” The Vulpix shivered, even in the humid sunshine. Its fur was dirty, and there was dried blood on its ear- which seemed to have had a hole chewed through it.

“You poor thing,” said Lillie softly, kneeling down. “Have you got a Trainer somewhere, or are you running wild?”

Moon bent down as well, balancing on her feet in a squat. “More to the point, who hurt it, and where
“It was probably those Team Skull ruffians,” sniffed the woman. “Thanks for running them off. It’s what they deserve.”

“I think they were probably just after the Bottle Cap.” Moon stretched out her hand, but the Vulpix flinched backward so she quickly retracted it. “Hey, come on now. I’m not going to smack you around. You’re safe.”

“We should take it to a Pokémon Center. They can heal it properly.” Lillie opened her bag and withdrew a sack of Pokébeans, tearing it open and scattering a few on the ground. The Vulpix jumped backward, a soft warning snarl rumbling from its mouth. “Hush, little one— it’s food. It’s good for you. Try and eat, okay?”

Her voice was soft and coaxing, and she smiled without teeth at the suspicious Pokémon. The Vulpix sniffed the air a few times, then cautiously took a few steps forward, swiping a bean with one paw before retreating out of reach of either Moon or Lillie.

“Moon, you should head on out to the ranch, if you wanted to go.” Lillie’s eyes never left the Vulpix. “I’m probably going to be here a while. Vulpix has to learn to trust me.”

Moon frowned. “I think there’s one of those wild Pokémon clinics in this town. You could call them and ask if they would pick up the Vulpix.”

“Oh, yes, the Aether Foundation!” Honestly, Moon wished this random woman would just go away. “They’re such lovely people— I’m sure they’d be happy to take care of Vulpix.”

“That’s quite all right— I’ll manage,” said Lillie. Her mouth was pressed into a thin, unamused line. Moon wondered if she found the woman as annoying as Lillie did. “They would just be doing the exact thing I’m doing anyway, and I got here first. Really, Moon— I don’t want to keep you here. It’s going to be very boring and probably a little bit frustrating, and I know you wanted to find an Eevee today. This is honestly a one-person job.”

“Well, okay. Give me a call if you need me.”

“I’ll do that, thank you.”

She left Lillie to it, continuing north toward the ranch that spread across most of the northern half of Paniola Town. Most of the fields were fenced in, with the main road cutting through the center of the ranch. There were a few Tauros wandering here and there, with many more Miltank standing in small clusters. Another fenced-off area contained a massive of Mareep, with the occasional disdainful Flaaffy lounging at the edges of things and one single Ampharos in the center of the herd, sitting with a Trainer that patted it lovingly and a placid Stoutland. Flocks of Ducklett and Swanna made their homes around a large, marshy pond; and in a squared pen with higher fences, a family of Grumpig lounged in the shade while the energetic Spoink babies hopped around them.

“Well, hi there, Trainer Moon!”

Moon looked around, startled, and spotted a familiar pair of green braids. “Hi, Captain Mallow.”

“Oh, no need for all that. Just call me Mallow.” Mallow beamed at Moon. “What brings you to Paniola Ranch today?”

“I’m trying to catch an Eevee— I’m told you can find them around here.”
“Yeah, you came to the right place.” A Trainer astride a Mudsdale led a larger herd of Miltank over to the pond to drink, pointing and shouting encouragement. “But it’s a bit noisy here, isn’t it? Walk with me for a bit. I can help you get hold of an Eevee really easily, actually. How do you feel about baby Pokémon?”

Moon frowned as she and Mallow walked down the main road, away from the loud moos of the Miltank. “Do you mean like, Pichu and Cleffa, or do you mean Pokémon that have barely hatched from their eggs?”

“I mean hatchlings. They’re a little harder to care for, and for at least a couple of weeks you would barely be sleeping—but the ranch nursery found a pretty big nest of eggs recently. The ones that they’ve been able to hatch have all been Eevee, so we’re assuming the rest are Eevee as well. You could raise your Eevee from an egg—or I could just leave you to catch your own.”

“Hmm.” Moon had never really thought about raising a Pokémon from the egg before, but the more she did think about it the more she liked the idea. “That sounds like a pretty neat project, actually. Where do I get one of these eggs?”

“We’ll head into the nursery and I’ll show you.” Mallow pointed at a large house at the edge of the ranch, where the main road forked into two separate roads. Moon glanced at the southern path and saw one of the colorful barriers that separated Trainers from the trials they hadn’t yet reached. The northern path had no such barrier.

“That’s Route Five and Six you’re looking at,” said Mallow, following her gaze. “Route Five’s another two days of hiking, like Route Four—but there’s a Pokémon Center at the end of it, just outside of Brooklet Hill.”

“Brooklet Hill?”

Mallow only smiled. “You’ll probably meet my friend Lana there,” she said simply. “She’s a fellow trial captain.”

“Is Brooklet Hill a trial site?”

“Yes! It’s a beautiful place, too—but it’s a little too open for me. I like more trees around me.” Mallow gestured around at the trees that lined the very edges of the ranch. “Even this isn’t really enough for me. Here’s the nursery.”

She knocked twice and pushed open the door, holding it open for Moon. “Hey, Tane! Rachel! Anybody home?”

“Rachel Jacobi.” The girl stuck out her hand for Moon to shake. “Thank Arceus you came. We’re
trying to place all of the eggs before any of them can hatch, and one of them is getting way too close for my liking— it should only be a couple of days. The last thing we need around here is an Eevee that's decided to imprint on either Tane or me as its mother— the babies are needy as he- I mean, heck. Speaking of which— are you sure you want an Eevee egg? They're cute and everyone wants one, but they're more work than you think. The adolescents you can catch outside are way more mellow.”

“I'm not afraid of a little work,” declared Moon, but a thought occurred to her. “The two Pokémon I have are kind of territorial— a Dartrix and a Trumbeak. It took me a lot of persuading to convince them to accept an Eevee. Do Eevee get along well with birds?”

“Once they've grown up, Eevee get along with everything.” A tall, broad-shouldered man with round, wire-rimmed glasses and curly hair came out from the back room. His voice was deep and soft, and he smiled kindly at Moon. “Hello there, Trainer. Do you want one of the Eevee eggs, then?”

“Yes, please.”

“Please say you'll take the one that's close to hatching, I'm gonna go out of my mind if another baby Eevee is convinced I'm it's mother,” said Rachel. There was a desperate tone in her voice.

“That would be ideal, actually. I don't know how well I trust either of my teammates with an egg, rather than a live Pokémon.”

“Wonderful.” The man smiled at Moon again. “I didn't quite catch your name, Trainer.”

“Moon Hawkins,” said Moon, shaking his offered hand. “Originally from Kanto, but my family just moved here and I'm taking my island challenge.”

“Pleased to meet you, Moon. I am Tane Smith, and I manage the Nursery here. It's similar to the Pokémon Daycare Centers you'll find in other regions, but we don't train Pokémon here at all— we just breed them and care for unwanted eggs and hatchlings.”

“Let me grab that egg for you,” said Rachel, pulling on a pair of latex gloves. To Moon's surprise she pulled a Pokéball from her belt and tossed it into the emptiest part of the room. The expected flash of light revealed a Kangaskhan— though the first thing Moon noticed was that the Kangaskhan didn't have a joey in her pouch, as most Kangaskhan did; instead, it bulged with eggs.

“Hey, Sunnyside, will you get out that egg that's really close to hatching?”

The Kangaskhan reached into her pouch and removed a single egg, holding it out carefully with both paws. Rachel took it, examining the egg and holding it up to the light. Moon was surprised to see that the shell was ever so slightly translucent— she could see light around the edges.

“Yeah, wow, that's a big for an egg. It's about ready to pop.” Rachel offered the egg to Moon.

"Thanks." Moon opened an as-of-yet untouched pocket on her Trainer's belt: it was a padded, structured pouch, designed to carry an egg. She placed the Eevee egg— surprisingly heavy— inside the pouch.

“Be sure and spend some time touching it with your bare hands every day,” advised Mallow. “Egg babies respond well to Trainers who have touched their shells.”

“Oh, neat.”
“Though I wouldn't get my hopes up about this particular Eevee,” said Rachel darkly. “It's been the most difficult egg to care for, of the entire litter. The ultrasound we took with Tane's Swoobat was blurry because the little sh— I mean, the little stinker wouldn't stay still. So we don't know whether it's a male or a female. I guess you'll find out when it hatches.”

“You can swear around me,” said Moon, amused. “I'm nearly eighteen.”

“It's not you I'm censoring for. There's a lot of impressionable young Pokémon in this nursery. What their Trainers do with them is their business, but it's not my place to set a bad example.” Rachel paused. "Also, boss man said he would fire me if I didn't make an effort to stop.”

“That I did,” agreed Tane, evidently unbothered by the glare that Rachel directed his way. “I hope you are able to raise the Eevee well.”

“Thanks.” Moon smiled at both of them as Rachel recalled her Kangaskhan to its ball. “It was nice to visit. Um— do you care for hurt or traumatized Pokémon, by any chance?”

“Occasionally, but we usually leave that sort of thing to Aether,” replied Tane. Rachel muttered something under her breath that sounded a lot like fucking do-gooders. Moon hid her smile. “They have better resources for it. We're more or less a maternity center. Why, have you seen a hurt Pokémon recently?”

“There were a couple of Team Skull kids bullying a Vulpix in town. It was pretty badly hurt. My friend and I stopped them, and she's trying to get the Vulpix to eat something so she can take it to the Pokémon Center.”

“Vulpix and Team Skull, eh?” Tane exchanged knowing looks with Rachel. “Vulpix is a long way from home. They— heh, they Hail from Ula'ula, get it—”

“Boss, that was a terrible pun.”

“... Anyway, your friend should really take that Vulpix to Aether. Pokémon Centers can heal injuries from most battles, but if there's something seriously wrong— broken limbs, internal bleeding, that sort of thing— then they need a hospital and the only non-Aether hospital in Alola is on Poni Island— a bit out of the way.”

“I don't think it was hurt that badly, but its ear was really chewed up.”

“Well, a Pokémon Center Blissey should be able to help with that— but you tell her if it has more issues, she should definitely take it to Aether.”

“I'll do that. Thank you.”

Moon and Mallow left the Pokémon nursery. As they walked, Moon kept one hand on the pouch containing the egg. She slipped her hand inside the opening, brushing one finger along the smooth surface.

“Well, I'm still spending some time here,” said Mallow, stopping at a gate that led to a field containing the noisy herd of Miltank. “I was whipping up a Mallow Special for one of the Tauros— he's a bit unruly, but then Tauros usually are. Thanks for helping Tane and Rachel out with that egg.”

“Oh, it wasn't any trouble,” Moon demurred. “And it's not too bad to care for newly-hatched Pokémon, is it? You just pick up a parenting kit at the Mart and follow the instructions for your Pokémon's egg group.”
“Still, if you'd said you didn't want a difficult egg, they would have given you one of the more placid ones.” Mallow seemed to come to some decision. “Hey, hand me your Ride Pager for a second. You'll like this.”

Moon, nonplussed, dug out her Ride Pager and handed it to Mallow. The trial captain pressed a few buttons, typing on the keyboard, and handed it back to Moon. “Here you go— I've registered Stoutland for you. Usually, I wouldn't do that until you'd passed my trial, but you seem like you'll be responsible with the privilege.”

“Stoutland?” Moon could see a couple of the big dogs around the ranch, helping the Trainers and Pokémon breeders who worked at the ranch with herding and discipline. “Um, I probably wouldn't ride Stoutland the way I would Tauros, right?”

“Actually you do, but it works a little differently. Stoutland are built for speed, rather than power. They're nice for if you need to get somewhere really fast without stopping to fight wild Pokémon on the way— all but the most persistent Pokémon won't be able to catch up to you. But what most people use Stoutland for is finding hidden treasure. They're scent hounds, Stoutland— they can track people across all four islands, but they can also smell things like rare truffles and mushrooms, evolutionary stones, and medicine. Trainers drop things all the time, but a Stoutland can help you comb up lost items. You can sell what you don't need and keep the useful stuff. You're gonna be dropping a lot of money on that parenting kit, and Eevee are known to be picky eaters.”

“Wow.” That could come in handy. Moon examined her Ride Pager once more, then pocketed it. “Thank you, Mallow. I really appreciate it.”

“It's no problem!” Mallow beamed at her. “Have fun raising your Eevee! I expect to see it growing up strong and healthy when you get to my trial!”

“I'll do my best,” promised Moon.

The walk back to the Pokémon Center was uneventful, but when she walked inside she saw Lillie at the counter with the Vulpix in her arms— still dirty. She was speaking with the nurse at the counter.

“I'm permitted to heal the other Pokémon that's traveling with me, but isn't on my team,” she said, as Moon walked up to the counter. “Why can't you do the same for this one?”

“That's different. The other Pokémon you have with you falls into the Code Purple category. Usually only employees of the Aether Foundation are equipped to heal Pokémon without a Pokéball to contain them. Code Purple is only for uncaptured legendaries and mythicals, and that Vulpix is neither of those—”

Moon pumped her fist in silent victory— finally, she had learned what Code Purple meant— but her satisfaction was promptly doused by a fresh wave of curiosity. Code Purple was what Lillie used to heal Nebby. Surely Nebby wasn't a legendary Pokémon? Lillie and Professor Kukui had both talked about Cosmog in plural terms— they were just rare, weren't they?

“Lillie,” she said gently, causing her friend to start and whirl around, terror on her face, “if it's that much of a problem, you could always catch the Vulpix, couldn't you?”

Lillie's eyes widened. “C- catch her?” she squeaked.

“Yeah.” Moon looked at the Vulpix; it had fallen asleep, snoring lightly and drooling on Lillie's shirt. “She seems to like you.”

“I don't want to catch her unless she wants it,” said Lillie doubtfully.
“Why don’t you ask her? Get some beans and maybe a Potion and go over to the café, wake her up and talk about it. If she doesn’t want to go with you, we can take her to the Aether clinic.”

“It’s worth a shot,” encouraged the nurse. “I really do want to help you—the poor thing looks positively worn to shreds! But I’m not allowed to heal wild Pokémon that aren’t in the Code Purple category.”

Lillie’s gaze, uneasy, flicked up to Moon and back down at Vulpix. She took a deep breath. “Okay. I suppose I owe it to her to make sure she’s cared for, regardless of whether that ends up being through me or not.”

“Cool. I’ll be over in the Mart—I have to buy a parenting kit.”

“A parenting kit?” Lillie glanced down at Moon’s belt, surprised. “Oh, you have an egg! Where did you get it?”

“The Pokémon nursery is giving out Eevee eggs. Mallow helped me get one.” Moon patted the egg pouch. “They said this little one is very close to hatching, but it was moving during the ultrasound so they don’t know if it’s a boy or a girl.”

“Wow.” Lillie smiled. “Well, good luck with that.”

“Thanks. Good luck with Vulpix.”

“Thank you.”

Moon walked into the Mart area and made her way over to the Pokémon Care aisle. There were shelves full of brushes, washclothes, bean and Poffin cases, toys, and beds. She picked up a parenting kit and read the label. It contained two empty bottles, a teething ring, a leash with a harness, a sling, three packets of wet-wipes, a burping cloth, and a small sleeping mat with a matching blanket. That was a lot, but from what Moon knew of baby Pokémon and their propensity for making messes, she would be going through the wet-wipes very quickly. Baby Pokémon were much like baby humans, but they grew much faster. A Pokémon’s first ten to fourteen days of life was just about equal to a human’s first three years. After that, they could start to battle and grow like regular Pokémon. But human babies and toddlers were messy—from both ends. She would need much more than three packets of wet-wipes.

She stopped only to pick up a can of formula before taking her purchases to the counter. The clerk rang her up and Moon winced at the price of the parenting kit, but she paid up. She had enough money left to last her for a while longer, but it was probably time to start thinking about where to pick up odd jobs. And now she could go out and look for things to sell with Stoutland.

When she walked back into the café, Lillie was holding out a pale-blue Pokéball to Vulpix, sitting on the table. Vulpix sniffed it cautiously, then bobbed its head once in a nod, looking up at Lillie. Lillie pressed the button and, with a flash of light, the Vulpix disappeared into the Pokéball. It didn’t even shake once; the capture was immediately validated.

“Did you catch her with a Dive Ball?” asked Moon, squinting at the ball.

“It matches her coat,” explained Lillie. “They're white, but they have almost a blueish shimmer when they’re clean.” She picked up the Pokéball and opened her phone to where her Pokédex app had prompted her to name her catch. Moon watched as Lillie typed a name into the box.

“This is Snowfall,” she said, looking up at Moon with a smile. “I would introduce you properly, but I really need to take her to get healed.”
“Yeah, definitely do that first.” Moon followed Lillie back to the counter.

“Oh, she accepted you!” said the nurse cheerfully, holding out her hand. “Good. I'm a little worried about that ear, but Blissey and Audino should be able to take care of it. It might take a little longer than you're used to.”

“That's fine. The important thing is that she's healthy.” Lillie gave Snowfall's ball to the nurse and she leaned on the counter next to Moon to wait. “Now that I've caught her, I'm not really sure what I was thinking. I can barely handle two Pokémon on top of Nebby, and now I've thrown another into the mix— and she's got some personality issues, too.”

“Does she?”

Lillie held up her arm, and Moon saw a faded scratch mark. “I tried to pet her before she was ready. It was my fault, and I got it taken care of.” She paused. “But... that lady who was watching us fight Team Skull— when Snowfall scratched me, she was horrified. She said that Pokémon who attack people don't deserve pity.”

Moon wrinkled her nose. “What did you say to that?”

“I ignored her,” said Lillie. “I never know what to say in those kinds of situations, and I didn't want to get into an argument. I know I can train Snowfall out of the urge to hurt people. She's just a little jumpy, poor thing. I don't blame her. And— maybe I'm just a hopeless optimist, but I actually don't think it was Team Skull that hurt her.”

“I don't think so, either. That looks like a bite mark— something bigger and meaner tried to take a chunk out of her.” Moon folded her arms. “Team Skull sometimes try to bother Pokémon, but they seem to like them too much to want to hurt them. So maybe it was a wild Pokémon— something more predatory than a fox.”

Eventually she did leave Lillie to wait for Snowfall to be fully healed— she had heavy shopping bags. Moon took her things up to her room and opened the parenting kit, packing the components into her backpack. She took out Puck's and Ariel's balls and released them on her bed.

“So, I know you pretty much heard everything that was going on from your balls, but just in case, let me recap.” Moon opened the egg pouch on her belt and carefully lifted the egg from inside, cradling it in her hands. Both Puck and Ariel hopped closer to look. “No pecking— the Eevee inside will have to get out on its own. And before you ask, I have no idea whether it's a boy or a girl. It was wiggling during the ultrasound and they couldn't see.”

Puck sniffed at the shell, then turned away, clearly no longer interested. Ariel's blue eyes remained fixed on the egg, barely blinking.

“It might be a couple of days before it hatches, don't get your hopes up,” Moon told her. “I actually have a name picked out already. If it's a girl, she'll be Beatrice; if it's a boy, he'll be Benedick. They're characters from my favorite Shakespeare play— Much Ado About Nuzleaf.”

“Trrrrmm,” said Ariel, still staring at the egg.

“Now, I want you both to listen to me. I wasn't thinking about an egg originally— I thought I would just catch an Eevee in the wild. This is fine, but it also means that I'm going to be working really hard to care for it in the next couple of weeks. I'll try to make sure you're taken care of, but a lot of my attention is going to be on taking care of the baby. I hope you'll be willing to help me.”

“Pikibee,” agreed Ariel immediately.
Puck sighed. “Hoho hoo.”

“Thanks, guys. I appreciate it.”

Chapter End Notes

“Your birds are as weird as you are.” — Hau isn't even being bitter by saying this, it's just the Honest Truth

“Though I looked up an image of Alolan Dugtrio on the internet and honestly, I thought it should have been Ground- and Fairy-type, with that beautiful hair. It looks so majestic, which is something I never in my life thought I would say about Dugtrio.” — *coughs loudly in Game Freak's general direction*

“'It's this chick. She's the one who's been kicking Emmett's ass halfway to Kanto.' 'Oh,' said the orange grunt, nodding. 'Yeah, okay. I can respect that. Emmett's a fucking idiot.'” — I just want one character that I can rag on relentlessly without it being detrimental to the story, and you can bet your bottom dollar that character is Emmett lmao

Molly is an actual sweetheart with a potty mouth. Swearing is always associated with people who are bad or troubled or a n g e r y and I am here to Make The Change because sometimes people just got into the habit because everyone around them swears or whatever.

“'They're the reason I don't like Team Skull in the first place.' 'Oh god, what the fuck did they do?'” — remember how Guzma essentially promoted Molly to the female equivalent of Gladion in AHSoC? Plumeria is the Big Sister™ of Team Skull and is in charge of the grunts as people— listens to them vent and cry, comforts them when they're sad, helps them to train and gain confidence; but Molly is the coordinator of the practical stuff like grocery shopping. Plumeria's first instinct would be to protect and defend Trinh and Uilani because they're her little sisters and she loves them; Molly's first instinct is to apologize for them because she knows they're capable of being mean.

“She might even be able to beat G's weird dog thing” — I love hinting at Gladion before he actually appears in the story

“'The cute one?' squeaked Lillie, turning scarlet. Kohaku shrugged. 'I said what I said.'” — It is My Favorite Thing™ to have random people give Lillie compliments. Since Kohaku is super blasé and chill, the fact that he has an opinion about anything is hilarious to me

Lillie taking advantage of Umber's ability to fool Drowzee into thinking the “Buneary” would be an easy KO— I am such a proud mother. Who's Lusamine, never heard of her, Lillie is my daughter now

“They would just be doing the exact thing I'm doing anyway” — hmmm I wonder where Lillie learned how to take care of hurt or frightened Pokémon???
It bothers the hell out of me that Tauros and Miltank are clearly a paired set of Pokémon, gender-exclusive, but that there isn't a baby cow Pokémon that, if male, evolves into Tauros or, if female, evolves into Miltank.

Rachel and Tane (pronunciation: ta-nay) are my own creations, and look nothing like their in-game “sprites,” the Pokémon Nursery employees

“Hey, Sunnyside” — yes, Rachel has named her entire Pokémon team after types of cooked eggs, why do you ask

You know how in the games you can't tell if an egg is male or female until it hatches? Yeah, that's dumb and we're not doing that. If you can do an ultrasound on a person, you can sure as frick do one on an egg. Crobat, Noivern, and Swoobat can all do Pokémon ultrasounds, but it makes sense for Tane to use a Swoobat because they're cutesy and happy and they're probably the most maternal of the three bats. HOWEVER despite Pokémon ultrasound technology, we still don't know what gender Moon's egg is because it's temperamental lmao

“They— heh, they [Hail] from Ula'ula, get it—” so Tane is only like late twenties early thirties, and he's not married and doesn't have any kids; but he's basically a Dad™ anyway.

“Boss, that was a terrible pun.” — Rachel shut up you named your Kangaskhan “Sunnyside” because it carries eggs in its pouch.

I know Tauros moves faster than Stoutland in-game, but I want you to pretend like that's not a thing. In real life, dogs are a LOT faster than bulls.

I BET YOU THOUGHT WE WERE NEVER GOING TO LEARN WHAT CODE PURPLE WAS but a Mamoswine never forgets

You have to wait at least two weeks before sticking a newborn baby in a fight with wild animals in this universe. We're not complete savages.

Duh, Trainers would bottle-feed baby Pokémon with formula??? Moon is sure as hell not feeding the baby with mammary glands, or eating and regurgitating food for the babies lmao

It just randomly occurred to me that Alolan Pokémon Centers are basically Target.

Lillie is Absolutely That Person who tries for Pokéballs matching the personality and aesthetic

Team Skull aren't brainless bullies. They're occasionally stupid and they do things that are arguably wrong or illegal, but they like Pokémon and they have compassion.

*louder, for the people in the back* TEAM SKULL AREN'T BRAINLESS BULLIES

Will Eevee be Beatrice, or will Eevee be Benedick? Find out in the next installment of — yeah, okay, I'll stop now.
“Trtrtrtrmmm, Trtrtrtrtrmmm,” repeated Ariel, more insistently this time.

Moon sat up, rubbing her eyes. “Rotom, dim pink light.” Her Pokédex obliged, and the room lit up softly. “What time is it?”

“It's two forty-seven a.m, bztt.”

“Arceus. That's it, you're sleeping in your ball from now on. I don't need an alarm clock at arse o'clock in the morning or whenever you decide I need to be awake—”

“Trtrtrtrtrmmm,” repeated Ariel a third time, gently pecking Moon's hand and then walking down to the edge of the bed where Puck was sitting, wide awake and staring at the towel-nested Eevee egg— —the Eevee egg, which had a single crack in the top of it.

“Oh, shoot, we're hatching? Sorry, Ariel. I'll never doubt you again.” Moon scrambled down to the edge of the bed, glancing over at Lillie. The other girl hadn't stirred, but all of her Pokémon were awake, watching with interest. Snowfall sat up straight on her sleeping mat in the corner, away from the others; Lapin and Umber were cuddled together at the end of the bed. Nebby's bag was wrapped up in Lillie's arms, and her perpetually smiling face was sticking out of the small opening, beaming at the egg.

“I'd ask you guys to watch, but the baby really needs to imprint on me as its parent,” explained Moon. “Which means— Puck and Ariel, I'm going to need you guys to chill on the floor— not now, eventually. When there's like, a hole in the egg.”

She was glad that she had had the foresight to make a nest for the egg out of a towel; hatchings were usually messy. The crack ran a little further down the side of the egg, and forked into two paths; some of the amniotic fluid dripped out onto the towel. Moon wrinkled her nose at the smell.

“Eeee,” she heard faintly, from within the egg.
“Wow, baby's first words!” Moon grinned at Puck and Ariel, who looked unimpressed by her observation. “Is it nonsense, or did it actually say something?”

Puck rolled his eyes. “Hoo.”

“Yeah, I didn't think it would be saying anything that made sense at this point. Human babies don't really start saying things that make sense until they're about eighteen months old.” Moon turned her attention back to the egg as another crack appeared, forming a triangular shape with the forked crack from before. “Oh, we've got a hole. Come on, kiddo, punch it!”

In retrospect, that might not have been the wisest thing to say. The egg quivered for a moment; and then the triangular chunk of shell shot out of the egg with surprising force, spinning end over end until it hit the wall and broke into two smaller pieces, crashing on the floor.

Moon peered into the hole that had been left by the triangular piece, and saw a soft, dark eye peering out at her.

“Come on,” she said encouragingly. “You've got to do it yourself. Develop those muscles, kiddo.”

“Moon?” said Lillie sleepily. “Who are you talking to?”

“Baby Eevee, who's hatching right now.”

Lillie blinked a few times, then sat up and rubbed her eyes. “Oh, wow.”

“They kicked a bit of eggshell all the way across the room. I'm so proud, honestly.” Moon reached for her backpack, fumbling for a Nest Ball— she liked the green and gold colors, and it would definitely capture a baby Pokémon.

“Eeee,” said the baby, the noise echoing weirdly within the shell. Another piece of shell snapped off, and now she could see the cute little face— though the cuteness was dampened, quite literally, by amniotic fluid that soaked it from ears to tail.

“That's the spirit. Just a couple more pieces, and you'll have room to climb out. We'll take a bath, and get you something to eat, and get you in the ball. How does that sound?”

“Eeee,” repeated the Eevee. Its little face scrunched up in concentration.

“Do you want me to make a bottle of formula?” asked Lillie, climbing out of her bed.

“That would be amazing, if you don't mind. I bought a tin of formula, and there are two empty bottles in the middle pocket of my backpack.”

“It's no trouble. I've done it plenty of times.” Lillie smiled, kneeling to rifle through Moon's backpack.

“Eeee,” said the Eevee, drawing Moon's attention. Another crack appeared, this one heavier and more defined; and then the eggshell exploded, sending chunks flying across the room. One piece shot over toward Snowfall, who promptly hid under the bed with a snarl; several landed on Lillie's bed and sent Lapin and Umber diving for cover inside of the bag with Nebby. Another piece struck the doorknob, making a peculiar ringing noise. Puck twisted his entire head to the side as a piece whizzed past him, embedding itself in the wall; and Ariel let out an enraged squawk at the whole thing.

In the end, there were only a few chunks of eggshell sitting on the towel, surrounding a wet,
shivering baby Eevee.

“Hi!” cooed Moon, and it looked up at her. The liquid brown eyes, full of confusion and fear, calmed to something approaching content. “I'm your mama, hi there! Let's go get cleaned up, okay?” She lifted the entire mess of towels and climbed off the bed. “Puck, Ari, you're on cleanup duty. You don't have to wipe off the eggshells or anything, but I'd like them all in a pile next to the trash can so I can dry them and throw them out later. Rotom, could you come with me?”

“Sure, bzzt.”

Moon carried the Eevee into the bathroom. The bathtub seemed a bit overkill, so she turned on both the hot and cold water taps in the sink, checking the temperature with her finger and adjusting until the stream was very warm, but not quite hot. She lifted the Eevee with her hands, grimacing at the sticky dampness, and began rinsing away the fluid. A tiny bead of the shampoo she used for Puck and Ariel was helpful in removing the scent, but she didn't want to use too much.

“Remember, the optimal way to wash a baby Eevee is with a damp washcloth, bzzt,” chirped Rotom. “The roughness simulates their mothers licking them clean after birth.”

“I am both grossed out and intrigued.” Moon picked up a washcloth, soaked it in the water, and began gently scrubbing at the Eevee. It squirmed slightly, but didn't struggle against her. “You doing okay there, kiddo?”

“Eeee,” said the Eevee, not understanding her but willing to make conversation all the same.

When the Eevee was clean, Moon got a dry washcloth and towed it off; the damp fur fluffed up naturally as it dried. She took the Nest Ball out of her pocket where she'd tucked it, and pressed the button. There was a flash of light, and the Eevee vanished inside.

“It's a boy,” said Rotom, after a few moments. The command prompt to name the Eevee popped up on his screen. “Shall I go ahead and enter the name Benedick, bzzt?”

“That would be brilliant, thanks.” Moon washed her hands as Rotom recorded the Eevee's name. “Can I get a readout of his stats?”

“There's not much to look at just yet, bzzt. Ability appears to be Adaptability... and he has a Quiet Nature.”

“I'm not sure I believe that, the way he's been chattering and exploding eggshells,” chuckled Moon, drying her hands. She let Benedick out of his ball, watching him as he blinked at the bright flash of light and wiggled around on the washcloth. “Arceus, you're cute. Come to mama.” She wrapped him up in the washcloth and carried him back into the bedroom.

Lillie sat on the side of Moon's bed, shaking the bottle of formula with her fingers pinched over the nipple. “I took it downstairs for hot water from the café,” she explained. “The nurse was very kind about letting me into the kitchen; I think she has a soft spot for Snowfall.”

“Did she go with you?”

“Of course.” The Vulpix had taken to following Lillie everywhere, twining around her ankles to the point that she had nearly fallen over a couple of times. “The nurse was excited to see your Eevee for his first checkup. What did you end up naming him?”

“Cute.” Lillie smiled and held out the bottle. “Here you go.”

“Thanks.” Moon took the bottle and pushed the nipple up to Ben's little mouth, squeezing it to squirt formula inside. It took him a few seconds, but once he grasped the idea that *sucking on the squishy thing makes the food*, he began eating with enthusiasm. “Attaboy.”

Puck and Ariel had gathered the chunks of eggshell, piling them next to the trash can as Moon had requested. “Trrrrrm?” inquired Ariel, hopping onto the bed.

“Yes, you guys can look at him.” Moon angled her body so that Ariel could watch Ben gulping down formula.

“Darr,” said Puck, nudging the bottle with his beak.

“That's formula, dude. It's full of nutrients for baby Pokémon and it probably tastes okay, but it's just powder and warm water mixed together.” Puck made a disgusted face, hopping away.

“Piki truuuu,” cooed Ariel, perching on Moon's shoulder for a better look. She was much too heavy for it, decided Moon, shifting her shoulder to force Ariel to move.

“You can go back to sleep,” Moon told Lillie. “Sorry for waking you all up.”

“It's a one-time thing, hatching an egg. I'm glad I didn't miss it,” Lillie assured her. “But I'll take you up on that. Do you mind if I turn off the lights?”

“Go ahead. Rotom, dim pink light again?”

“Sometimes I think you just use me as a lamp, bzzzt,” said Rotom, but he complied.

Moon fed Ben the entire bottle in the dim room as Lillie and her Pokémon went back to sleep. Puck also settled back down on his mat, but Ariel was busy staring at Ben, watching him as he ate. By the time the bottle was empty, he was blinking sleepily, looking up at Moon. She dug through her backpack one-handed for the sling that had come with the parenting kit and put it on, winding it around her torso a few times until it was mostly tight. She unwrapped Ben from the washcloth and tucked it under the sling first, then tucked Ben beneath as well. There was enough washcloth at either end of Ben's body, hopefully, to catch the spit-up or poop that would inevitably occur in a few hours— whichever came first. By the time she got him settled in, tucked in against her chest, he was fully asleep.

“Show's over,” Moon whispered to Ariel.

Ariel blinked, disappointed; but she nodded and hopped over to her own bed, curling up. Moon laid down on her back, placing her hands on top of Ben's bundled body and closing her eyes.

She naturally woke, of course, to something warm dribbling down her neck. It was spit-up. Moon sighed and went to the bathroom to wipe Ben's face— the baby hadn't even woken up when he burped.

“Rotom, what time is it?”

“Five-twelve a.m.”

Moon sighed, reaching for another wet-wipe to wipe off her neck and hair and shirt. She didn't bother changing— spit-up from formula was pretty pure, as bodily fluids got; and if she changed she would have to move Ben and she didn't want to risk waking him up.
The next time she woke up, Ben was crying softly and she could smell that he'd relieved himself, so she carried him to the bathroom with wet-wipes and a spare shirt. His sobs wound down to teary whimpers as he looked up at her, but soon he was calm. Moon smiled as she wiped him up.

“There you go, buddy! All the poop is gone, and mama's here. How does breakfast sound?”

Ben blinked at her. Moon knew he had no idea what she was saying, but she continued to talk to him, carrying on a running stream of commentary as she wrapped him back up in a clean washcloth and tucked him back into the sling. Lillie was just waking up as she walked back into their room.

“Good morning, Moon,” she said, yawning. “Would you like me to hold him while you get changed?”

“Sure.” Moon unwound the sling, passing Ben over to Lillie; but the second the sling left her hands, the baby let out an ear-splitting shriek, which instantly woke up every other Pokémon in the room.

“Okay, okay! I get it, fine!” Moon took the sling back, and Ben fell silent.

“I guess he's a little bit afraid of strangers,” laughed Lillie, not at all offended.

“I guess.” Moon sighed and set the sling down on the bed. Ben didn't seem to object to this, but he watched her with suspicious eyes as she changed into clean clothes. She put his sling on and grabbed all of the dirty washcloths and clothes, wrapping them in a towel so she could do a load of laundry. She took an empty bottle for Ben, scooping a spoonful of formula into it; and she got a packet of beans for Ariel—she could get freeze-dried Bugs at the Mart for Puck, that would be fine—and money for her own breakfast, where in Alola had she put her wallet—

“Moon, calm down.”

Moon looked at Lillie, wide-eyed. “I have come to the sudden and inconvenient realization that I'm probably the least qualified person to be a parent in all of Alola.”

“That's definitely not true. I think you're doing fine— you just need to not overthink things, that's all.” Lillie patted her shoulder reassuringly. “And look at Puck and Ariel— they're ready to help you, too.”

She looked down at Puck and Ariel and was surprised to find that Puck had selected a pair of socks from her clothes, setting them on top of her sneakers; and Moon's wallet dangled by its strap from Ariel's beak.

“Thanks, guys.” Moon smiled, petting Ariel. “I haven't even said good morning to you guys, have I? Sorry about that. Babies are pretty demanding.”

“Hoo tri hoo.”

“Trrrm bi bi.” They forgave her easily. Ariel surrendered the wallet as Moon tucked it into her pocket. She put her socks and shoes on, awkwardly working around Ben's sling. Lillie finished getting ready first, and she looked fresh and cute like always, with her Pokémon assembling around her. Despite the fact that Snowfall was the newest member of Lillie's team, she was older than Lapin and Umber and had immediately assumed dominance over the team.

“It's kind of funny that you have two foxes on your team,” commented Moon, looking from Snowfall to Umber. “And they're so different from each other.”

“Heh, heh,” murmured Umber, grinning a fox-grin at Snowfall. She flipped her tail up in response,
When everyone was ready, they made their way downstairs. It had to be an amusing sight. Moon knew that for convenience, many Trainers kept their Pokémon in their balls unless it was necessary to bring them out; but Puck and Ariel liked being out of their balls and Snowfall was busy protecting Lillie from what she believed to be the dangers of the world—mostly other people's shoelaces and ankles, snarling at them when they got too lose. Lillie had picked up a vest with clear pockets on the sides for Snowfall to wear, and had tucked cards reading _Please do not pet me, I am recovering from trauma and will bite you_ into the pockets. Nebby, of course, had escaped from the bag and floated daintily behind Snowfall, pewing cheerfully whenever the Vulpix snarled at her; and Lapin and Umber trotted obediently after Nebby like a little trail of Duckletts.

Hau was already in the café, picking at a breakfast sandwich while Poppy, Uila, Sonar, and Ollie ate their beans. He looked up when Nebby let out particularly loud pew, and his eyes widened in surprise as he saw Moon with the sling strapped to her chest.

“Oh, you hatched?”

“Yes,” sighed Moon. “At a quarter to three in the morning. I'm running on about four hours of sleep, and I feel like crap. Children—” This she directed to Puck and Ariel. “—do you want to stay here while I get your food, or do you want to come with me?”

Ariel hopped up to Moon's shoulder again, staring fixedly at Ben.

“Get off, you're heavy. If you're coming, you're walking.” Moon gently grasped Ariel by the scruff of her neck, putting her on the ground. The Trumbeak grumbled, but didn't attempt to fly back up. Puck shrugged indifferently.

“I guess we're all going, then.”

Moon went to the laundromat first, to throw her dirty laundry in a washing machine; then she detoured to the Mart to pick up some freeze-dried Grubbin for Puck; then finally made her way to the café for her own breakfast and hot water for Ben's formula. She wasn't fond of coffee as a rule but today she needed it and she ordered the largest sugary, whipped-cream-filled concoction available on the menu along with a Leppa-berry turnover. Ariel got a packet of beans, which Moon ripped open for her before starting the work of shaking Ben's formula to mix it together.

She felt Hau's eyes on her as she stumbled from the Mart to the café, from the café to the table that Lillie had commandeered for her. It had been an awkward few days since she had beaten Hau in their spaghetti western showdown; they had mostly avoided each other and Moon could tell that Lillie was getting increasingly frustrated with both of them.

“Look,” said Hau finally. “If I say I'm not quite ready to talk about it yet, we can pretend like there's nothing wrong for a little while longer, can't we?”

Moon blinked at him. “No,” she said flatly.

Hau deflated. “Oh.”

“I don't have the energy right now to pretend like nothing's wrong. But we don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. Just like we have an agreement to not push Lillie about things, I can also not push you about things.”

That earned her a rueful smile. “Moon, I don't deserve you.”
“Like I deserved you in the first place.” She grinned at him, pressing the bottle to Ben's mouth again. He began inhaling formula as a slightly alarming rate. “So this is Benedick, but we're calling him Ben for short.”

“And what dusty old play is the name Benedick from?”

“Much Ado About Nuzleaf is a masterpiece, thank you very much. It might be old, but it's a classic romantic comedy and my favorite play of all time—”

She accidentally took the bottle out of Ben's mouth to gesture threateningly at Hau, and the result was that Ben let out the second piercing scream of the morning, a shrill cry only punctuated by pants for air that lasted until Moon stuck the bottle back into his mouth.

“Sorry!” she called at all of the Trainers and Pokémon Center employees that were glaring at her. “He just hatched like five hours ago, sorry…”

“Well, with lungs like that, I guess I can see why you're so tired,” snickered Hau. “Ollie's so laid-back— it's weird to think he might have been like that once.” Ollie, hearing his name, looked up and made an inquiring noise. “Yeah, we're talking about you. Look, Moon got a mini-you! It's attached to her chest, like a little Remoraid.”

“You're the actual worst,” Moon informed him, through Lillie's giggling. “I'm about to have the worst two weeks of my life. I'm not even going to leave Paniola Town until he's on solid food— the first thing I'm doing after breakfast is extending my stay. I have to go through the equivalent of about three years of parenting a human child in the next two weeks.”

“Oh, good— that's two weeks for me to try and catch up with you.” He stuck his tongue out at her.

“I'll probably stay around Paniola Town, too,” said Lillie. “Professor Burnet wants to check up on me, and I'm planning on going on a trip with my friend.”

“The mysterious one we're not asking you about?”

“The very same,” confirmed Lillie. “I told him about Snowfall and he's paranoid that she's going to hurt me, so he's taking me to get rabies shots.”

Both Moon and Hau stared at Lillie.

“Wouldn't we know if Snowfall had rabies by now?” asked Hau.

“And where do you even get rabies shots in Alola?”

“We would definitely know by now, but my friend is, as I said, paranoid.” Lillie smiled patiently, shaking her head. “And my friend has arranged to take me on a trip to Poni Island to get rabies shots at the hospital there.”

Moon raised one eyebrow at Lillie, remembering something that Mallow had mentioned the other day. “The only hospital that's not run by the Aether Foundation?”

Lillie nodded once, but her lips pressed together tightly and Moon decided not to press the matter further— even though she was honestly dying to know more.

Her curiosity did not last long— not because it no longer existed, but because she quite forgot about it over the next few days. By the end of the first day, Ben had developed enough strength in his little body to roll over, gurgling cheerfully as he did so. Moon's hasty research on Pokémon parenting had
given her a timetable for when a baby Pokémon ought to be developing specific skills. Most Water-types were born with the inherent knowledge of how to swim, but other types did not learn to walk or fly with ease. It made Moon wonder how Ariel had learned to fly—she’d only been a few weeks old when Moon had caught her. And would Puck have learned to fly if he’d been raised in the wild, instead of being bred for a Trainer?

At any rate, Ben’s timetable suggested that he would be rolling over on the first or second day, and beginning to creep along on the floor on his stomach on the second or third. Crawling or, in the case of quadruped Pokémon like Ben, stumbling drunkenly around to get used to paws and walking occurred around the fourth day. During all this time, Moon had to feed him every two or three hours, including the middle of the night. She had to entertain him when he was bored—which was often—and she had to clean up when he burped up his meals or relieved himself on surfaces he wasn’t meant to relieve himself on.

The fifth day was the worst. Lillie left on her field trip, taking her Pokémon with her; Hau had already headed out to the Pokémon Center on Route Five to do more training of his own; and Moon was alone as Ben’s little teeth began poking out of his gums. She spent most of the day in the café, periodically having a teething ring re-chilled by a Sneasel belonging to one of the Mart workers and trying her best not to cry in sympathy as Ben howled his frustration and pain.

They were mostly grown in by the sixth day, but Ben was grumpy and refused to touch the teething ring or his bottle. He spent that entire day either screaming or sulking, and Moon could not for the life of her figure out what he wanted until late that evening, when she finally got around to feeding Puck and Ariel. Instead of gulping down formula like it was his last meal, he scrabbled at Ariel’s beans, stuffing one in his mouth.

“Ben, no!” Moon stuck her finger in Ben's mouth, lifting him by the scruff of his neck and scraping out the bean. “You're too little for—ow, shit, maybe you're not, I don't even know anymore—”

Ariel trilled reproachfully at Moon.

“Yeah, I know, I shouldn't swear in front of the baby—”

“Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!” howled Ben, as Moon extracted the half-chewed bean and her bleeding finger from his mouth. “Eee vee!”

They all paused at that, Puck looking up with interest from his half-eaten meal of freeze-dried Caterpie.

“It's mostly because I don’t speak Pokémon,” said Moon cautiously, petting Ben as he sobbed in her lap, “but I know that was different than the usual screeching. That's his first word, right? What did he say?”

Ariel rolled her eyes, nudging the bag of beans. “Bee piki.”

Moon mostly understood her team by context at this point; but then again she didn’t exactly have context for this. “Beans? Did he want beans?”

Ariel shook her head, then reached down and pulled the bag of beans closer to herself, covering them protectively with her wings. “Bee piki,” she repeated.

“Hoo ho ho,” added Puck, making the same gesture with his wings over his own meal.

It clicked. “He was saying they're his beans?”
Puck and Ariel both nodded.

“Eeee vee!” repeated Ben, reaching his paws out toward the beans.

“No, they're not, buddy. Those are Ariel's beans, and they're too big for your itty bitty esophagus right now.”

Ben's tiny, adorable face scrunched up into a frown. “Eeee vee! Eeee vee!”

“No,” said Moon simply. “We're gonna stick to formula for today. Tomorrow your teeth should be completely grown in, and I've got a little Pokéblender that I'll be using to puree some of the beans for you.”

Ben took a deep breath, his whole face straining; then he began screaming. It was loud and drawn out, and he only stopped briefly to take ragged breaths before going back at it full tilt.

Puck winced, clapping his wings over his head. Ariel looked guiltily away from Ben, down at her beans. Moon sighed softly and tried her very hardest to repress the tears; but they came anyway. It wasn't as though she were the only one crying, either— Ben's shrieks were punctuated by loud, gasping sobs.

“I know, buddy, it's not fair.” she murmured, picking him up. “Life just isn't fair, is it?” Ben thrashed in her grip, but he was still small and Moon was easily able to put him into the sling. The screams were slightly muffled by her chest, but they were still loud enough that Puck was staring daggers at Ben as he covered his ears— though Moon was not entirely certain where Puck's ears were. She'd never seen them.

There was a knock at the door— not Hau's cheerful triple-rap or Lillie's polite double tap, but three firm knocks. Moon, petting Ben's head, walked over to answer it.

A Trainer she'd never met stood there, an irritated expression on her face. “Excuse me, but you know your Pokémon is screaming loud enough to be heard from outside the Pokémon Center, right?”

Ben was still shrieking, though she could hear him flagging slightly— there wasn't as much energy in it as there had been originally. Moon arranged her face in an expression meant to channel “unimpressed Red,” a look she'd seen both on television and in person more times than she could count. It seemed to work; the girl's eyes widened and she took a step back.

“Yes,” said Moon flatly. “I know that my six-day-old Eevee, who has been teething for two days and refusing food all of today, is screaming. Furthermore, I know that he is screaming loudly, because I am right next to him.”

“I—”

“This is my first, and I hope to Arceus the last egg I will ever hatch,” continued Moon. “I am very excited to raise an Eevee, and when he's happy he's the cutest little thing. But right now he is not happy, and the Pokémon Breeding and Parenting Guide written by Johtonian Champion Gold himself suggests that very occasionally you just have to let babies scream until they are distracted or exhausted, both for the development of their lungs and to prevent them from getting spoiled.”

The Trainer frowned at her. “Couldn't you like, put him in a Pokéball or something?”

And with that, Moon lost her patience entirely. “No,” she snapped. “Arceus, it's like nobody's ever cracked a book open before going on their Pokémon journey. Obviously you're supposed to capture a domestic baby Pokémon after it hatches, to get it recorded in the computer system. But you aren't
supposed to keep the baby in its ball long-term until the early developmental period has passed—basically, when they're weaned and toilet-trained. If you can't deal with this for one evening, then I hope you never raise a Pokémon from the egg because you would make a terrible parent.”

The girl's jaw dropped. Moon could see tears forming in her eyes and instantly regretted it.

“Sorry. I'm exhausted, I just—I shouldn't have said that. Sorry.”

The Trainer turned and ran down the hallway, opening a nearby door and slamming it closed after her. Ben's screaming had died down to pathetic whimpers, curled against Moon's chest as he was.

“Um, Moon?”

Moon closed her eyes, resigned. “Hey, Lillie.”

“I'll see you around,” said a low, soft voice she didn't recognize.

Moon's eyes shot open. Lillie was watching her with a concerned expression on her face, but capturing her more immediate attention was the Trainer standing next to her. He wore blue jeans and a heavy gray jacket with a hood, as well as a Kantonian-style face mask—she couldn't see anything but his eyes and forehead and even those were partially hidden as he was already turning away. All of his Pokémon were contained; so were Lillie's, with the obvious exception of Nebby.

“Yes, see you,” said Lillie absently, before walking forward to look at Moon. “Moon, are you okay? Was that girl unkind to you?”

Moon craned her head at Lillie's friend, who turned and disappeared down the staircase that led down to the main Pokémon Center. “Um—no. She was just understandably annoyed about Ben screaming. I get it, because it's pretty late at night and I wouldn't want to listen to a shrieking baby for twenty minutes straight, either. But she came in with such a snotty attitude about it, and I'm already exhausted and grumpy and I just—”

Lillie wrapped her arms around Moon. For a minute, she didn't really know what to do—Lillie almost never initiated affection—but then Lillie patted her back and Moon was reminded of her mother, so strongly and suddenly that the tears that she'd nearly banished returned, and she all but collapsed into the hug.

“It's okay,” said Lillie gently. “Why was Ben crying?”

“He was teething all day yesterday, and most of today as well. His teeth have grown in, and he was trying to get into Ariel's beans—which I am not ready for, we're going to puree the beans for a few meals before I try him on solid food. I had to dig one out of his mouth, and he bit my finger, and he said his first word—which you know, didn't sound like a word because he's a Pokémon, but Puck and Ariel said he was basically saying the beans were his, and then I told him no and he screamed for twenty minutes and he's only just now winding down.”

“I think he's asleep,” said Lillie gently, stepping back to look down at where Ben was indeed snoring fitfully against Moon's chest. “He must be really worn out.”

“I bet. He wouldn't eat anything all day. I tried and tried to give him formula and he just would not drink.”

“Well, he feeds well as a general rule so it's not going to be a big deal if he misses a meal or two—but if you try pureed beans tomorrow, it will probably go much more smoothly.” Lillie put one arm around Moon's shoulder, guiding her back into their room. “Let's get you settled for the night, Moon.
— I'll get a bottle of formula ready for you in case he wakes up hungry, and you can go change into pajamas and brush your teeth and all that.”

Moon, slightly dazed, allowed herself to be led into the room. Lillie took Ben's sling; he only sighed once and let out an even louder snore during transferral. Puck and Ariel were already on their sleeping mats; they had finished their suppers and Moon cleaned up after them, patting their heads. She put on pajamas and washed her face, wincing at the dark circles beneath her eyes, which were dull and red-rimmed after crying.

Lillie set the extra bottle of formula on the night table, where Rotom was playing solitaire against itself. Moon strapped Ben back to her chest and laid down in her bed, closing her eyes.

“Thanks, Lillie,” she mumbled, as exhaustion overcame her. “I didn't see your friend but his jacket was cute. Too warm for Alola, but cute. You can tell him I said so.”

“I will,” said Lillie, clearly amused. “Good night, Moon.”

Chapter End Notes

Pokémon breeding doesn't make sense. WHY DOES EVERYTHING HAVE EGGS EVEN IF IT'S A MAMMAL. GAH. Anyway, the difference between Ben and an actual bird is that Ben doesn't have egg feathers or whatever it's called, because Eevee don't have feathers to begin with. Mammals and birds are born with some kind of amniotic fluid, so I'm pretending that an egg is kind of like a womb or something, and you have to wash your mammal Pokémon after they're born.

“In retrospect, that might not have been the wisest thing to say.” — Moon I love you, but I also love putting you through Mild Suffering™ haha

“The egg quivered for a moment; and then the triangular chunk of shell shot out of the egg with surprising force, spinning end over end until it hit the wall and broke into two smaller pieces, crashing on the floor.” — Ben is S T R O N K

“Another crack appeared, this one heavier and more defined; and then the eggshell exploded, sending chunks flying across the room.” — if this doesn't indicate what Ben's personality is going to be like, I don't know what will lmao

I adore Much Ado About Nothing. I'm sure Shakespeare would be horrified at the use to which I'm putting the names of his characters, though.

“Sometimes I think you just use me as a lamp, bzzzt.” — uhhhhh welllllll you're actually not wrong, I forget Rotom exists because I'm so busy writing interactions between characters who don't annoy the ever-loving fuck out of me in the actual game

“She naturally woke, of course, to something warm dribbling down her neck. It was spit-up.” — I love babies, but there's no denying that they're gross. I'm assuming that Pokémon babies are similar.

“The second the sling left her hands, the baby let out an ear-splitting shriek, which
instantly woke up every other Pokémon in the room.” — this happens every time I hold a baby tbh, I love them but they hate me

“I have come to the sudden and inconvenient realization that I'm probably the least qualified person to be a parent in all of Alola.” — you can interpret this as “mild imposter syndrome” or “new parent jitters,” both readings are equally valid

Hau: “And what dusty old play is the name Benedick from?”
Moon: “EXCUSE YOU WHAT THE F*** DID YOU JUST SAY ABOUT SHAKESPEARE. PUCK, HOLD MY FLOWER.”
Puck, wearing sunglasses: “Kick his ass, I got yo flower.”

“Look, Moon got a mini-you! It's attached to her chest, like a little Remoraid.” — Hau you can't just call other people's Pokémon parasites lmao

We interrupt this story to bring you the reprise of Gladion Arthur “it's-not-paranoia-if-they're-really-out-to-get-you” Mohn, but also to introduce Gladion Arthur “I-will-go-to-hell-and-back-for-Lillie-even-if-it-means-blowing-my-cover-right-the-fuck-open” Mohn, who is definitely CANON

Why yes, I have reduced Moon's ten days of “parenting” to a few paragraphs. Her suffering isn't strictly plot relevant except to show the fact that she now has an Eevee.

I have based Moon's childcare experiences heavily on my own. I am not a mother, but I did babysit a teething six-month-old and a toilet-training two-and-a-half-year-old one summer. It was fun, but also exhausting. Moon crying in sympathy over teething is a thing I did with the six-month-old.

I know there's no context about what the Pokémon are saying when I write them—you're meant to assume what they're saying based on their expressions, the dialogue tags I use, and Moon's reactions and responses. Pokémon are as intelligent as humans and they understand human speech naturally (mostly because I'm too lazy to explain how they understand it), but they obviously can't speak in the same language—some legendaries and mythicals being the notable exceptions, but I have a headcanon that Chatot and Murkrow are capable of learning (because of parrots obviously, but some crows are also capable of learning human speech, they are seriously smart little dudes).

I know the Pokéblender is for making Pokéblocks. Let a girl live, it's a blender so you can puree stuff with it.

“unimpressed Red” — Google Search: Did you mean “Red.”

I was looking for “trainers known for breeding” on Google and the Internet told me that in the manga, Gold was known for hatching and breeding Pokémon. I've never read the manga, but it makes sense because the concept of the Day Care was introduced in G/S/C. So that's a thing.

I know it isn't canon, but Gladion only wears the Team Skull stuff when he's on Team Skull business; and even then most of the time he prefers to wear plain black or gray. (Lusamine made him wear a lot of white.) So he has a couple of casual outfits in gray and navy blue and green or w/e that he wears when he's hanging out with Lillie. You can't tell me that they didn't meet up and chat sometimes in-game— we just never got to see it because NPC magic.
Lillie is a soft, sweet caretaker and Mom Friend™ and I cannot be convinced otherwise.
Rivalry

Chapter Summary

Paniola Town, Paniola Ranch, Route Five.

Chapter Notes

Moon makes a new rival.

[HELLO YES IT'S THE CHAPTER I HAVE BEEN MOST EXCITED TO WRITE SO FAR. Also, cw for: even more excessive profanity]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a fine and sunny morning, and Moon was, for once, feeling like she was not an utter failure as a Pokémon parent as she ate breakfast with her team— dried Bugs for Puck and beans for Ariel and Ben— the latter having finally graduated to solid food in the last few days. Moon herself, of course, had pastry and a Tapu Cocoa. Such was the way to properly enjoy such a nice day.

Chat: IKI SQUAD (Creator: walking malasada)

walking malasada: hey guys, wanna meet up on rt 5

shakespeare jr: I mean, I am going that way today so sure, why not

lillie-pad: It would be fun to meet up with you guys, but I don't think I'm ready for the wild Pokémon along Route Five. I would like to get stronger first. I'll stay in Paniola Town to train for a few more days. (^u^)

walking malasada: r u gonna b ok by urself

lillie-pad: Of course! Professor Burnet is only a phone call away. And the Pokémon Center nurses have been very nice to me, so I know I can ask them for help if I need it. (^u^)

shakespeare jr: Awesome. Good luck with your training, and you can always ask Hau or I for help as well.

walking malasada: yea we're always happy 2 help u out lilz, srsly just let us know if u need anything

lillie-pad: Of course. I would probably call either of you first, actually. Have fun with your training as well, both of you! (^u^)
Moon had barely put Rotom back into her pocket when he chimed softly. “Hey, you have a new message.”

“Wow, already?” Moon opened her dex back up, but the message was from Hau and not the group chat.

Chat: sprechen zie cousins? (Creator: walking malasada)

walking malasada: moon help me she's so CUTE AAAAAAAA

shakespeare jr: I know better than to try and get your friends together on purpose even if it's painfully obvious that they're pining for each other

shakespeare jr: So you aren't getting any help from me lmao

walking malasada: w8 did u just indirectly confirm that red and blue r a Thing

shakespeare jr: Yeah. The Kantonian newspapers crack me up. Headlines are like “Champion Moves In With Former Rival, Viridian City Gym Leader, As Platonic Roommates”

shakespeare jr: “Two Guys Being Dudes, Sharing Apartment, Totally Not Together, That Would Be Weird”

walking malasada: OMFG THEY DO NOT

shakespeare jr: Blue's actually referred to Red as his partner in press conferences, and all of the media is like “ahahahaha you mean TRAINING partner don't you”

walking malasada: IM DYING LMAO THAT'S THE BEST THING I'VE EVER HEARD

shakespeare jr: One time they did an apartment tour video, for some celebrity drama TV show interview. They have one bedroom, with one bed. The interviewer was like “haha, who sleeps on the couch?” and Red straight up said “I only kick Blue out when he snores”

shakespeare jr: And the interviewer actually said “haha you must be very close friends!” I think the camera guy knew what was up though, because he zoomed in on the guys as she said that and they just gave each other the most exasperated looks. Lmao I died laughing

walking malasada: omg I just choked on my sandwich, that is amazing. meet u on rt 5 later?

shakespeare jr: Yeah. Did you want to camp with me then?

walking malasada: yea there's no way i can meet u and get back to the pkmn ctr before like 3 in the morning lmao, c u tonight

shakespeare jr: See you later
She tucked the Dex back into her pocket, turning to look at her team.

“Okay, guys,” she said, clapping her hands to catch their attention. “So, today we're going to head out in the general direction of Route Five. We aren't going to make it to the Pokémon Center until sometime tomorrow, so we'll be camping on the way there, and Hau's gonna meet up with us so we'll all be spending the night together. And what that means, with all the wild grass along the route, is that Ben's going to be starting to train with you guys.”

Ben sat up straight, his eyes fixed unwaveringly on Moon's. Puck and Ariel looked at one another, then at Ben and Moon.

“He's not gonna battle right away, don't worry.” Moon reached into her pocket and pulled out an Exp. Share. “We'll give him this to hold at first. It will help get him up to where he can defend himself, and then we'll try battles against some of the weaker Pokémon. Does that sound good?”

Ben nodded once. Puck and Ariel exchanged glances again, then both nodded as well.

“Fantastic. Let's go pack up.”

Lillie was in the shower when Moon got back to their room, and her team were all sitting on her bed, appearing to have a quiet discussion of some kind. Moon let Puck, Ariel, and Ben down to join them while she packed up her things.

It was the first time that Ben had really interacted with Pokémon that were not Puck or Ariel— he was about ten days old, and more or less ready to begin properly training. Moon kept an eye on him while she was folding her clean laundry. Puck and Ariel joined the little circle of Nebby, Lapin, Umber, and Snowfall; Ben followed, looking curiously at the new faces.

Umber approached first, as the friendliest by far of Lillie's Pokémon. Ben accepted Umber's curious sniffs and even sniffed back. Moon supposed this had to do with the shared fox biology. Encouraged by Umber's success, Lapin hopped forward to do the same. This was tolerated as well.

Snowfall, on the other hand, gazed with thinly-veiled contempt at the baby Pokémon and made no move to greet it. Ben took a cautious few steps forward, sniffing curiously; Snowfall let out a warning growl.

“He doesn't know what that means,” Moon told the Vulpix. “You're going to have to try and explain it nicely. He's just a baby.”

Snowfall rolled her eyes at this. Ben took another step closer, and she reached out and swatted his nose.

Moon sighed. “What part of 'nicely' were you not hearing?”

Puck and Ariel both began scolding Snowfall— from a safe distance, because they had learned it was better that way. Ben let out a surprised whine and backed away from Snowfall, whose teeth were beginning to show as she growled back at Puck and Ariel.

“All of the Pokémon fell silent immediately. Nebby's smile was as bright as ever, and Moon could hear no trace of sternness in her voice; but Snowfall straightened up, turning toward Ben.
Moon wasn't as fluent as Lillie was in Snowfall's expressions, but she could tell that it was the sort of apology that one gave when they didn't really want to apologize. The disdain, at least was very clear.

“Pew pew,” repeated Nebby.

Snowfall sighed, then stretched out her paw and patted Ben once on the head, the way she had likely seen Moon or Lillie do. Then she turned around, flicking up her tail to indicate that further conversation was over.

“Pew.”

And that seemed to be that. Puck, Ariel, Lapin, and Umber resumed whatever conversation they were having, and Nebby approached Ben with the same smiling face as always. Ben regarded her warily, but in short order they were chattering together like old friends.

Nebby was just as old, or possibly even older than Puck and Poppy, the eldest Pokémon in their group of friends. Despite Nebby's seniority in their ever-expanding ranks, she had remained one of the least mature personalities, continuing to escape out of the bag whenever she could manage it and constantly running off to investigate whatever looked interesting to her at the moment. Until now, Moon had assumed that Nebby didn't seem to care about the hierarchy of the Pokémon in their interactions.

But Nebby had just rebuked Snowfall— thoroughly, by the looks of it. Snowfall had immediately made herself the leader among Lillie's Pokémon. Lapin was too shy, and Umber too good-natured, to object. Puck, Poppy, and Snowfall were the obvious leaders among Moon, Hau, and Lillie's Pokémon. Nebby, it seemed, was a less obvious leader.

Or perhaps she wasn't a leader as much as she was a force of nature. Moon watched as Nebby reached out teasingly and tugged on one of Ben's ears with her little dust-cloud arms, then darted away when Ben yelped and tried to swat her back. He began to chase her around the room— up on Lillie's bed, under Moon's, inside the lampshade and circling around Moon and her backpack as she finished zipping it up.

“Okay, we're ready,” she told her Pokémon.

“Wait just a few minutes!” shouted Lillie, from inside the bathroom. “I have something I was going to give you, hold on!”

“Yeah, sure.” Moon sat down on her bed, amused. Puck and Ariel hopped over to join her. Ben was still chasing Nebby, who soared up across Moon's lap. When the Eevee made to leap over her thighs, Moon caught him by the scruff of his neck and tucked him into the sling.

“Eeeeeeeeeeee vee!” whined Ben.

“I know, you were having so much fun and I'm the meanest mama in the world,” said Moon absently, opening her backpack. “I need to give you the Exp. Share— yeah, there you go.” She slipped the Exp. Share around Ben's right paw, tightening it just enough that he wouldn't be able to get it off on his own. Ben shook his paw a few times, sniffing at the band with a frown.

“It's gonna help you grow big and strong, kiddo.”

Ben redirected his frown up at Moon. She decided it wasn't worth arguing over.
Lillie came out of the bathroom finally, with her hair wrapped in a towel. She hurried over to her own backpack and dug in it for a few moments, then pulled out a smooth gray rock.

“Here,” she said breathlessly. “It's an Everstone.”

“No kidding?” Moon examined the Everstone, impressed.

“If you're not sure how you want to evolve Ben, you can have him hold that until you figure it out.” Lillie beamed at her. “I got it from Professor Burnet. There's one for Hau, too— I just haven't given it to him yet.”

“I could take it to him, if you want,” offered Moon. “He's planning on walking about halfway back from the Route Five Pokémon Center. We're going to camp together tonight.”

“Would you?” said Lillie gratefully. “Thanks.” She pulled an identical stone from her backpack, handing it to Moon.

“No problem. I guess I'll see you around.”

Lillie nodded. “I might come to Route Five myself in a few days if I feel like training has been going well.” She turned to smile at her Pokémon. “And I just know it will.”

Moon and her team set out after that. She had allotted plenty of time for them to explore the wilder reaches of the ranch as well as getting to Route Five. Puck and Ariel, just as eager to show off for Ben as they were to teach, defeated both random Trainers and wild Pokémon with ease. Ben observed with wide eyes. Moon had already taught him a few of the TMs she'd picked up on the journey so far, and after only a few battles he was wiggling in the sling every time Puck or Ariel achieved a victory.

“Do you want to try?” she asked him.

Ben nodded vigorously. Moon had packed plenty of Revives, so she detached him from the sling and summoned Puck and Ariel back to her side to observe.

The Eevee bounded into the tall grass, snuffling and rooting around. A few moments later, a little Grubbin waddled into view. Ben flattened his ears and crouched.

“Wait,” ordered Moon. “You have to do what I ask you to do, in a battle. Use Echoed Voice.”

Ben blinked, straightening up. He opened his mouth and snarled at the Grubbin, the sound echoing around them. The Grubbin responded by darting forward to clamp onto him with sharp pincers.

“Vee vee vee!” objected Ben, attempting to shake off the bug.

“Don't struggle, Ben. It's a Grubbin, he's not going to kill you. Use Echoed Voice again.”

Ben glared at Moon, but obeyed. He appeared to be surprised when the move increased in power, knocking the Grubbin off his shoulder entirely.

“And one more time, buddy,” Moon encouraged him.

The third Echoed Voice knocked the Grubbin out.

“Hoo?” inquired Puck, inspecting the unconscious bug hopefully.

“Make sure Ben doesn't see you, but sure, go ahead.”
Moon gathered Ben, turning around and petting him. She could hear Puck eating quietly, and when he was done they moved on.

They had a picnic lunch at the intersection of the Pokémon ranch, Route Five, and Route Six. Moon could see the Trial barriers up on Route Six—she wouldn't be able to pass until she'd beaten Akala Island's first trial.

"It's way too soon, but have you thought about how you'd like to evolve?" Moon asked Ben. "We have a lot of choices, you know. Puck and Ariel don't have any. You can't evolve into a Glaceon on this island at all, and I'd rather you didn't go for Leafeon or Umbreon— but any of the others would be okay. Hau's Ollie is going to be a Flareon."

"Veevee," said Ben, almost absently. It wasn't really a response, but it wasn't like he had to decide immediately or anything so Moon let it pass.

Baby Pokémon grew so much faster with the Exp. Share. Puck and Ariel, in an effort to be helpful, sought out stronger Pokémon in their own training so that Ben would benefit that much more. After only a few hours, Moon was already noticing a difference: most of Ben's lingering baby fat had dissolved into the slender grace of an Eevee in childhood, and his fur seemed longer and glossier.

It was not until four or five in the evening that Moon, hiking in silence after a long day of walking, heard her name called.

"Moon-asada!"

Hau waved cheerfully at her from about thirty yards away. He wasn't alone, interestingly enough; a lanky blond Trainer with a scowl on his face stood nearby, arms crossed. Hau knelt, digging in his backpack; he pulled out a handful of Revives, applying them to the four Pokéballs at his belt.

Moon waved, drawing closer. She had only ever seen Hau defeated by herself and Hala, and she was rather curious to see what kind of Trainer had beaten him.

Plus... okay, she would be absolutely lying if she didn't admit to herself that this new Trainer was kind of cute.

"Are you even taking this seriously?"

He even had a nice voice— a little bit raspy. Moon steeled herself to experience yet another inconvenient crush. She hadn't thought of Illima in weeks, which was honestly a relief.

"You're only the third Trainer to ever beat me," said Hau brightly. "So yeah, I think I am. But that was fun, dude. Thanks for the battle."

"Fun?" The Trainer rolled his eyes. "You can have fun in a battle when you've put everything you've got into it— which you clearly haven't. You're holding back."

"Okay, dude, you beat him," said Moon, crossing her arms and frowning at the Trainer. "You don't need to be a dick about it."

He looked up at her with green eyes, and her stomach turned over in a surprisingly pleasant way. There was something familiar about him, too— very familiar. She had no idea what it was, and it was annoying because the crush-feelings were not leaving, despite the fact that this guy was being a jerk to her friend.

"Moon Hawkins?" he said shortly, crossing his arms.
“You're looking at her. Who's asking?” Moon crossed her own arms, raising one eyebrow at Cute Asshole Trainer.

“Not very cautious of you to admit it.” His eyes narrowed slightly. “There are probably wild Pokémon that have a better sense of self-preservation than you.”

Ben, in his sling, hissed disapprovingly at this. Cute Asshole Trainer's eyes flicked to the Eevee, then back up to Moon's face.

“Self-preservation— uh, dude. Are you threatening me?”

“No.” He paused, tilting his head at her. “What I'm doing is challenging you to a battle.”

“Do it, Moon,” encouraged Hau, grinning. “You have to defend my honor.”

Moon rolled her eyes, but she couldn't quite help the smile that slipped onto her face. It was nice to just joke with Hau, like they hadn't been struggling with their uneven battle dynamic. “Well, when you put it like that, sure. Anything for a friend.”

“He's also really strong, as you can clearly see,” said Hau, indicating his own Trainer's belt. “So either I get to watch you beat him as my revenge, or I get to watch you get beaten, which would be kind of amazing.”

“Amazing for you, sure.” Moon looked at the Trainer. “So what's your name?”

The frown deepened. “Does it matter?”

“Kind of, because I'm currently thinking of you as 'Cute Asshole Trainer' and I'd rather attach a name.”

There was a long silence, only broken when Hau was no longer able to suppress his mirth.

“Moon,” he laughed. “Moon-asada, platonic love of my life, best friend forever— do you realize you said that out loud?”

“As I heard someone else say a couple of weeks ago, I said what I said.” Moon could feel herself blushing; on the bright side, Cute Asshole Trainer was also blushing and that was, well, cute. “'Cute Asshole Trainer' does abbreviate to CAT, so I guess I could call you CAT—”

“I'm Gladion.” He was still flushed, irritated and embarrassed.

“Gladion,” repeated Moon, because she knew it would annoy him. “Great. Do you need to heal up before we battle?”

Instead of responding he opened a worn black satchel slung over one shoulder, pulling out two Revives and a handful of Potions and Super Potions. Moon noted, with satisfaction, that of his three Pokémon, Hau had made two of them faint before his team was taken out. Gladion had won his battle with Hau, yes— but not by much. She healed her own team, refreshing them after the long day of training.

They faced off, standing on the road. Ben still had the Exp. Share, and was clearly dying to join the fight; but if Gladion had beaten Hau then she was certainly not sending a baby out to fight. She selected Ariel's ball first.

Gladion threw his ball as well: a surprisingly calm Zubat that settled on the ground, not flapping for
the hell of it the way Zubat always seemed to do even when sitting still. Ariel offered the Zubat a condescending look.

“Rey, use Faint Attack and get away quick.”

“Ariel, hit him with Echoed Voice and dodge his attack.”

The training they had done that day had evidently paid off. Ariel was much faster than the Zubat, and she opened her beak to let out a ringing Echoed Voice as she soared into the sky to evade the Zubat. The attack blasted over the other Pokémon like a wave—and it vanished, to reveal a small black-and-red fox standing at Gladion's feet.

“You could have given me a heads-up about the Zorua,” Moon complained to Hau.

“I could have, but I wouldn't have. That's bad etiquette and you know it. The point of Zorua's Illusion ability is that you're meant to be able to trick your opponents. It doesn't work if they know you have one in the first place.”

“Yeah, true.” Ariel's attack had still hit the fox. Gladion was listening to their conversation, but seemed to be waiting for Moon to give her orders. “Another Echoed Voice, Ari. I think you can take him out.”

“Rey, dodge the Echoed Voice and try that Faint Attack again.”

The little Zorua was much faster than his Zubat illusion, and he managed to pull off his attack, smacking into Ari; but her second Echoed Voice was much stronger and the little fox fainted dead away. He was older than Lillie's Umber, but Moon guessed that it wasn't by much.

Gladion's face remained impassive. He tossed out another Pokéball, revealing a Zubat. Now that she'd seen the Illusion, Moon could definitely tell that this Zubat was the real deal. It was very, very excited, soaring in a circle around Gladion's head and darting straight up into the sky before diving back down to cling from his outstretched finger, awaiting orders.

“You know what to do, Imp.”

Giving an indirect order was a good strategy—annoying, but not illegal in battle. Red had been the first one to make it popular; he had also trained his team with hand signals and facial expressions, to the point where he could conduct an entire battle in the terse silence he was known for. Moon swallowed her annoyance and nostalgia and gave her own command. “Ari, another Echoed Voice. Give it all you've got!”

The Zubat—Imp, apparently—shot up into the sky, then dove toward Ariel, a slender streak of electric blue. Ariel landed on the ground to brace herself, opened her beak skyward, and let out a third Echoed Voice attack. A sheer wall of noise shot skyward; Moon, Gladion, and Hau all covered their ears.

There would have been no way for Imp to dodge it. He jerked to the side as the sound hit him, ears twitching violently. Moon suddenly remembered, horrified, that Zubat were blind and often oversensitive to sounds. Gladion took several steps forward and hurled his Pokéball upward. Light flashed and the bat was recaptured, his ball falling harmlessly into Gladion's outstretched hands.

“That was a knock-out,” he said brusquely. “Thought you might have killed him for a second there.”

“I'm glad you caught him! I— I wasn't thinking about Zubat's noise sensitivity. I'm so sorry.”
His mouth tightened, and his eyes narrowed even further as he took the last Pokéball from his belt. “Don't fucking apologize.”

White light flashed, and Moon—well, to be perfectly honest, she wasn't exactly sure what she was seeing.

“I know, right?” said Hau, in a half-whisper.

Moon blinked. “Uh— Rotom?”

Rotom flew out of Moon's pocket. “Type: Null is categorized as a man-made Pokémon... but there appears to be no further information on it in the International Pokédex, bzzt. An Internet search reveals nothing.”

The Pokémon snarled, sinking into a crouch. Its beady eyes were fixed on Rotom, not Ariel.

“Um—Rotom's not part of my team,” Moon explained, more for the benefit of the Pokémon—Type: Null, it was called.

“Then put it the fuck away,” snapped Gladion. He had paled slightly on seeing the Rotom—not that he could get much paler than he already was. “Are you going to keep battling, or what?”

“Yeah, just a second. Good job, Ari.” She recalled Ariel to her Pokéball, and tossed out Puck's ball instead. “Puck, use Razor Leaf on—uh, the other guy.”

“Girl,” corrected Gladion.

“Type: Null are genderless,” called Rotom, his voice muffled slightly by Moon's shorts pocket.

“Biologically, sure. Null's still a girl, so you can fuck right off. Null, Tackle him.”

It seemed like a fairly basic move, but Puck's Razor Leaf didn't seem to make much of an indent—whereas the Type: Null loped forward with surprising speed for its size and slammed into Puck—who let out a pained cry that jolted a horrified Moon back to life.

“Shit! Puck, use Pluck while you've got her close!”

Puck frantically thrashed and pecked at the Type: Null until she let go, taking a few steps back toward Gladion. Moon clenched her fists, studying Puck; but other than the sheer force of the hit, he didn't seem to be too badly hurt. He was breathing heavily, though.

“Use Razor Leaf again, and dodge her this time.”

“Null, Tackle him again!”

Puck dove out of Null's path, and Moon was surprised when Null didn't seem to stop, careening toward her. She stepped out of Null's way as she put on speed, loping around in a circle to aim for Puck once more; but a barrage of glowing leaves hit her legs and ankles, rather than the large, heavy head. Null let out a soft whine, flinching back from the attack. She was strong, but it looked like she was beginning to lag.

“You've got this,” Moon whispered to Puck. “One more Razor Leaf should do it.”

Puck nodded firmly and whipped his wings at Null with a rumbling cry. The glowing leaves spat towards her, catching her all along her front; and she stumbled and fell on her side, breathing heavily.
Gladion knelt next to Null, placing one hand on the ruffled, square feathers around her neck. “Keep going, or rest?”

Null barked— or maybe she squawked. The sounds she made were strangely muffled, with a metallic ringing noise to most of them.

“You win,” said Gladion to Moon. He immediately recalled Type: Null to her ball and began fumbling in his backpack for medicine.

Moon recalled Puck as well. Ben finally stopped squirming in the sling, but he was making grumbling noises. She petted him absently, reaching for her own medicines.

“That was an amazing battle!” said Hau cheerfully. Moon had to agree— she’d forgotten that Hau was even there.

Gladion mumbled something under his breath. Moon only caught the tail end of it. “…still not ready.”

“Not ready for what?”

“None of your fucking business.”

“Fair enough.”

Gladion straightened, slinging his black satchel over his shoulder once more. He turned to look at Hau with cold eyes. “Your Pokémon aren't weak,” he said flatly. “Sure, it's fine to enjoy battling. It's fine to have fun while you're doing it. But you're using that as an excuse because you can't beat her.”

Shock and rage rippled through Moon in two quick waves. She strode forward, furious. “Who the fuck do you think you are, you absolute dickwad—”

“Moon.”

Hau’s voice was quiet— quieter than she’d ever heard him speak, even when she beat him in Paniola Town— even when he had watched her complete her Grand Trial on the first try.

“It's fine,” he said, still quiet. “Don't worry about it.”

“But—”

“We'll talk about it later.” Hau's mouth was pressed into a thin line, but his eyes were suspiciously damp. Moon had never wanted to punch a person more than she wanted to punch Gladion in that moment; but fistfights between Trainers were generally frowned upon. If you couldn't solve things with a battle, you agreed to let it go.

“Fuck, there you are!”

All three of them turned to see Emmett the Team Skull grunt and— Moon's rage doubled— one of the female grunts who had made Lillie cry: the one with blonde hair and lime-green streaks. She was chewing gum, and she blew a lazy bubble and popped it.

“I've been looking for you for ages, asshat,” Emmett said to Gladion.

“You know each other?” Moon wrinkled her nose.

“Unfortunately.” Gladion crossed his arms. “And what the fuck do you want?”
“I was going to challenge you, but I can do that any old time.” Emmett's gaze slid to Moon, and his mouth curled up into a suggestive leer. “Look who it is— the bitch who doesn't know when to quit with Team Skull.”

“Oh, fuck right off, buddy.” Moon flapped her hand dismissively at him. “It's your girlfriend I'm going to be having words with.”

“Gross, Emmett is so not my type,” said the blonde girl, wrinkling her nose.

“You're Uilani, right?”

“What the fuck is it to you?”

Moon walked forward, jabbing Uilani in the shoulder with one finger. “You and your friend Trinh made one of my best friends cry.”

“Bitch, I make a lot of people cry. You'll have to remind me.”

“Hau'oli City, cute little clothes shop, the most adorable blonde girl you've seen in your entire life trying on a pink floral dress.” Moon fought the urge to slap the girl, clenching her hands in fists. There was a sharp intake of breath behind her— Hau knew this story. Moon had told him one night in the Hau'oli City West Pokémon Center, while Lillie was occupied with doing laundry. “She ran away, so I didn't have time to challenge you like I wanted to. But we can fix that.”

“Oh, yeah!” Uilani's eyes lit with recognition. “Yeah, I remember that chick. Arceus, that was so funny. Trinh and I laughed forever—”

Moon stopped fighting her urges. The smack of her palm against Uilani's cheek was one of the most satisfying sounds she'd heard that day.

“You bitch!” shrieked Uilani, swinging a surprisingly well-formed fist at Moon, who ducked beneath it and shoved the other girl over. “What the fuck, I thought you were supposed to be a fucking Trainer—”

Moon slapped Uilani again. “I am a fucking Trainer, and you're calling me a bitch? Pot, meet the damn kettle—”

Uilani's second punch landed. Moon's nose didn't break, but pain exploded in her face and she snarled, grabbing at Uilani's hair.

“All right, all right, break it the fuck up.” Strong hands closed around Moon's arms, yanking her back and away from the other girl. She could see Emmett restraining Uilani as well, his eyes wide with surprise. Gladion's raspy voice sounded directly in her ear. “She's right, you're a Trainer.”

Moon tried to pull out of Gladion's grasp, but he was surprisingly strong for being as lanky as he was. “If she and her friend are going to run their mouths about my friend, they deserve what they've got coming.”

“I'm not disagreeing with you, dumbass.” She could practically hear him rolling his eyes. “But you should fight her like a Trainer, not like Team Skull. You're better than that.”

Well, that was a good idea too.

“Fuck, no,” said Uilani, shaking her head and batting Emmett's hands away. “I'm not fighting this bitch. She beat Emmett and Kohaku, and they aren't half bad. What's the point in getting my
Pokémon beaten up for no reason?"

“She also beat me,” said Gladion.

“Exactly. I repeat: *fuck* no. I'm out. Bye.” She turned and started running off along Route Five. Emmett shrugged and ran after her.

“Come back here, coward!” screamed Moon. “Let me go, asshole!”

“Moon, there's no point,” sighed Hau. “It's Team Skull, they couldn't offer you a fair fight if you paid them. And you hit her hard enough that she's probably going to bruise.”

“She punched me in the nose,” muttered Moon. She knew she sounded whiny.

“Uilani's been doing kickboxing since she was like ten, you had it coming.” Gladion let go of Moon once it was clear that Uilani and Emmett were too far away for the chase to be worth it.

Moon promptly turned around and slapped Gladion, instead. “That's for what you said to Hau, you dick.”

He turned his head to the side, eyes closed— mouth neutral.

“Moon, knock it off.” Hau put a gentle hand on her shoulder. “Let him go. Your nose is bleeding. We've probably got something that can fix that.”

“Don't use Potions.” Gladion rubbed at his face. “They don't work very well for humans on anything other than surface wounds.”

Moon opened her backpack, ignoring Gladion. After a few moments, he began walking away, following Uilani and Emmett down Route Five and disappearing into the deepening evening.

“Here, tissues.” Hau shoved a plastic packet in her face. “And you should maybe not talk for a couple of minutes— just listen to me. I want to say what I need to say to you, which I've been working on saying for a while. I didn't want to be too quick about it because I wanted to be sure I wasn't speaking in the heat of anger. You can't take back words spoken in anger.”

Moon wadded the tissues up to her nose, wiping blood away from where it had run down her chin. A few drops had gathered on her shirt, which was fortunately a dark purple color— it wouldn't show much.

“I can't beat you.” Hau's voice was quiet— a little raw. “He was right, you know. Gladion. I can't beat you, even when I'm taking the battle as seriously as I might take a Grand Trial. I trained for the one in Paniola Town, you know. Ollie's still training, but I taught Poppy, Uila, and Sonar some good moves. I bought some TMs at the Mart in Heahea, and they learned a few just by training. We've worked so hard, but I still can't beat you.

“And the worst thing is that I— I can't even be *mad* about it.”

Moon looked up at him, horrified to hear the crack in his voice. Hau sniffed and wiped at his eyes roughly, clearing his throat.

“I can't be mad at you,” he repeated. “I *am*, a little— but it's not fair to you, and I know that. I'm an adult, and I know where the blame lies. It's on my own shoulders. We've both worked hard and studied, but it's very clear that you just have a gift for it— for being a Trainer. I'm pretty good, but you're *amazing*. That's just how it is, and there's no point in being mad about it.”
“Hau—”

“I’m not done,” he said, shaking his head. Moon fell silent. “What Gladion said hurt me, but that's because he was right, not because he was trying to be mean.”

“I think he was definitely trying to be mean,” said Moon, before Hau could stop her.

“Maybe,” allowed Hau, mouth twitching as though he were slightly tempted to smile. “But he might've been like you—you know, tactless.”

“I'm not tactless—just kind of rude, when I'm not really thinking about—okay, maybe you have a point.”

“Of course I have a point. I've been thinking about this for like a month. Now shut up and let me talk.” Hau cleared his throat again. “I think that the healthiest thing for both of us is to not battle each other anymore.”

Moon had been trying to think of ways to solve the problem on her own over the last few weeks as well, and this solution had occurred to her; but she hadn't thought Hau would go for it. “Ever?”

“Not until I've learned exactly what it is that's keeping me from beating you, besides raw talent. That's only going to get you so far.”

“I work hard, too.”

“Neither of us work as hard as we could.” Hau shrugged. “Okay, that's it. Is your nose okay?”

Moon checked her bloody tissues. “I think I'm beginning to dry out.”

“Great. Do you just want to camp here, or do you want to walk a little bit longer?”

“That depends. Does Uila know Flash?”

“Yeah. I switch it out with Protect a lot on him.”

“Then we can keep going for a bit. As long as I have light to set up my hammock and tarp, I'll be fine.”

“Neat.”

They both let out their teams—Moon deciding that she was done training on Route Five for the day. It was more humid here than in Paniola Town, which was about as dry as it was possible to get in Alola. Puck and Ariel were uncharacteristically quiet, despite Poppy's chattering and the polite overtures of Uila and Sonar. Ollie still seemed a bit shy, and Ben was too curious about the world around them to say anything. His neck kept twisting from side to side, staring at the trees and sky around them.

“I did feel bad,” stated Moon, after a few minutes of walking.

“Oh, boy, here we go.” Hau grinned when she scowled at him. “I know you, and I know you don't like not having the last word. I'll listen now.”

“Punk,” said Moon, punching his shoulder affectionately. “Anyway, I did feel kind of bad. I wouldn't have like, thrown a battle for you or anything—but I thought you were starting to resent me.”
“I was,” admitted Hau. “But you're my friend, which is way more important to me.”

“You're my friend, too.” She could feel herself choking up, and fought back the tears. “So I felt bad, because I could see how frustrated you were. I knew I wasn't ever going to throw a battle— we would both hate that, and our Pokémon wouldn't understand it. So it just felt like there was nothing I could do. I was trying to get up the courage to talk to you about it, but I didn't want to push you, either.”

Hau nodded. “Yeah, I could tell you were feeling bad. That kind of made me feel worse, to be honest.”

“It wasn't pity,” said Moon quickly. “It's not pity, it's never pity with you. I know you're a good Trainer, and when I beat you it does feel... honorable, I guess? You're a worthy opponent, regardless of how good or bad you feel about the battle.”

His eyebrows lifted in surprise. “Huh. That actually... I think that actually helps.”

“Good. So— as long as we're not battling, we're good?”

“Yeah.” His smile— the blinding, brilliant grin she'd first seen walking onto the docks of Melemele Island— returned with full force. Moon had to admit that this felt better than any victory ever could.

Chapter End Notes

It's the group chats! I hope you find all of Moon's nicknames silly and fun, I had fun making them up.

Hau is having Lillie Feels™, which is totally a thing

Red/Blue is a thing in this universe but it's low-key background stuff. I love the willfully misinformed media trope, too.

Echoed Voice is kind of OP for how early you get it in the game. I think you find it in Hau'oli City, and a lot of Pokémon can learn it. The power increases every time you use it. If your Pokémon is tanky enough to take a few hits, they're more or less unstoppable with Echoed Voice.

I wasn't sure how to write the Exp. Share. I like to have all of my team at similar levels and Moon is literally raising Ben from a baby. It's unrealistic and I am so sorry

About Gladion: 1) If the Pokémon games ever had voice actors, Gladion's actor should be Dante Basco, the voice of Zuko from Avatar: The Last Airbender and Rufio from Hook. I know he's older now and he probably can't do the “angsty teenager” voice quite the same as he did for Zuko and Rufio, but that's how Gladion sounds in my head. 2) I love Gladion so much, he is my favorite character in Gen 7

“You're only the third Trainer to ever beat me. So yeah, I think I am.” — clap BACK, Hau

Moon straight up admitting that she thinks Gladion is cute— I wish I were that brave
Moon quotes Kohaku here, if you didn't remember. Kohaku was talking about Lillie, though. I wonder how Gladion would feel if he knew that there were some Team Skull grunts who thought his sister was cute... hmm...

So Gladion is a jerk. He was a jerk in canon too. He's a much more profane jerk in this story, since he's eighteen. (Consider this: to an extent, Red and Blue are (canonically) also jerks— Red because he didn't tell anyone when he went to spend years on Mount Silver, and Blue because, well, Blue. Moon had a crush on Red-and-or-Blue, depending on the day, when she was twelve or thirteen. Ergo: Moon is attracted to people who are jerks, which may in part be because Moon herself is, occasionally, a jerk. Ilima is not a jerk; he was a fluke and we are all prone to crushing on flukes from time to time.)

There's no information about Null on the internet because Wicke is a magical hacker boss: a TED talk by me

Friendly reminder if you haven't read Windowpain or AHSoC: Type: Null are biologically genderless, but Gladion's Type: Null is a girl because she wants to be a girl.

Gladion: *mumbling* “...still not ready.”
Moon: “Ready for what?”
Gladion: “None of your fucking business.”
Moon: “Fair enough.”

I love writing curious Moon getting Shut Down, idk why I think I just enjoy prolonging her suffering

I was actually SHOOK by Gladion's canon line to Hau: “But this brat... he's using that as an excuse not to try hard because he can't beat the kahuna. Because he can't beat Hala when he's serious!” Stab, twist knife, repeat.

I know Gladion canonically says he's part of Team Skull at this point in the game, but 1. he's not dressed the same as them and 2. he doesn't look like them and 3. the canon game grunt's remarks to Gladion about how “you'll never really be one of us” hit me like a ton of bricks and I decided that Gladion (and Guzma, probably) would probably want to capitalize on his being *not technically affiliated* with Team Skull, so he acts like he hates them as much as he hates everyone else (which 1. he does and 2. tbh everyone hates Emmett). So Moon and Hau don't KNOW that he's Team Skull.

“What's the point in getting my Pokémon beaten up for no reason?” — this general sentiment was originally expressed by Gladion in-game but I gave it to Uilani b/c I like writing dynamic antagonists

About Uilani: If Plumeria is the big sis and Molly is the overworked housekeeper, Uilani is the barber, hairstylist, and colorist. She does all of the hair dye for the Grunts, who have a rainbow of colors amongst them. This includes Guzma and Plumeria as well.

“Moon promptly turned around and slapped Gladion” — Moon would you calm down

Neither Moon nor Hau has any idea how to correctly treat a nosebleed lmao

“We've worked so hard, but I still can't beat you. And the worst thing is that I— I can't even be mad about it.” — don't mind the author, she is Awash in a Sea of Her Own
Tears

“But he might've been like you— you know, tactless.” — ok drag her sis

So Hau and Moon aren't going to battle each other anymore, until Hau feels like he's figured out what's keeping him from winning. liek dis if u cri evertiem

“I know you don't like not having the last word” — OK DRAG HER SIS

“But you're my friend, which is way more important to me.” — writing emotionally mature Hau causes this author Nothing But Suffering but it's okay because it makes for Good Writing
“Moon, wake up.”

Moon stirred, looking up at Lillie. “Is it already time?” she asked, yawning.

“Mm-hmm.” Lillie was still in her pajamas, but her face was flushed with excitement. Nebby, Lapin and Umber were squirming with excitement, though Snowfall remained as sedate as ever. Puck and Ariel were just stirring from the noise—and so was Ben, having just about doubled in size in the two and a half weeks since he’d hatched. He’d recently graduated to his own sleeping mat, too big to sleep wrapped in the sling on Moon’s chest; and with that change had come a combination of curiosity, grumpiness, and affection that Gold’s *Pokémon Breeding and Parenting Guide* had described as “Eevee toddlerhood.”

“Awesome.” Moon sat up, yawning. “Are we getting dressed, or are we just going for it?”

“I don’t think it matters, since we’re coming back here anyway. Help me with these decorations?”

Moon counted it fortunate that the Route Five Pokémon Center Mart *had* party decorations. They taped things to the walls, twisting different colors of crepe-paper together and hanging them in billows from the wall. Lillie had even gotten Professor Burnet to drive a helium tank over from Heahea City so they could blow up some balloons. Moon put the gift she’d wrapped up for Hau on her bed, and Lillie added her own package. They made a card with a sheet of card stock and an ink-pad, so that all the Pokémon could add their footprints to it.

They’d also put in a special order with the café the day before, and as Moon crept downstairs in the early morning, the workers beamed at her and presented the finished cake.

“This looks great, thank you.”

“And here’s the other order, the one we drove in from Royal Avenue,” said one of them, pushing a stack of white bakery boxes over to her. Moon opened the box on top and grinned at the malasadas inside. “Whoever this is for must be pretty special.”

“It’s my best friend’s birthday, he’s eighteen today,” explained Moon. She dug in her wallet to pay for the cake and malasadas.
“Wow, what a fun occasion! Enjoy your party.”

“We will, thank you!”

With food and decorations ready to hand, the only thing left to do was to put on their party hats and summon the guest of honor. This was Moon’s job—as Lillie put it, Hau would freak out if she pretended to have some kind of emergency over the phone. Moon slipped party hats onto Puck, Ariel, and Ben before putting her own on, then picked up Rotom, who had watched the party preparations with interest.

“Call Hau— audio only,” Moon instructed him.

“Calling Hau, bzzt.”

After a few moments, she heard a sleepy yawn on the other side of the line. “Moon? It's like seven in the morning. You okay?”

Moon kept a straight face, ignoring Lillie's muffled giggling as she spouted a complete lie. “I'm not totally sure, actually. I think Ben might be evolving early and I don't know what to do— he's got an Everstone, so he shouldn't be showing signs, right? Could you come take a look at him?”

“Oh! Yeah, that sounds kind of weird. Are you in your room?”

“Yeah, Lillie and I are in our room. It's open, so just knock and walk in.”

“Okay. Be right over.”

The call ended, and Lillie handed out cheap little noisemakers to all of the Pokémon capable of using them. Moon hastily lit the candles on the cake, and they turned out the lights to wait.

Eventually, several set of footsteps approached their door, growing louder and stopping just outside. Hau’s tread was the most obvious, but Poppy's slap-hop, Uila's bouncing step, and Ollie's pattering were also discernable. Moon could hear Sonar squeaking as well.

There was a rap at the door. “Moon? Lillie? I'm coming in.” It swung open. “Hey, why are the lights—”

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!” Moon scream-sang at the top of her lungs, as several kazoo blasts sounded from the noisemakers. Lillie tried to join her, but between her helpless giggling and quieter voice, she couldn't muster up the same volume. “HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU! HAPPY BIRTHDAY DEAR HAU, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!”

Hau flicked the light switch on, staring at the lit cake and the balloons and the Pokémon in their party hats. Poppy stood on her tail, clapping delightedly at the surprise, and the rest of Hau's team let out excited barks and squeals at the sight of the decorations.

“Wow,” he said finally. “I was definitely not expecting this. So there's nothing actually wrong with Ben, right?”

“Nah, he's good.”

“Make a wish and blow out the candles, Hau!” said Lillie excitedly.

Hau studied the cake for a few moments with a thoughtful expression. Then his usual grin returned, and he blew out all the candles in one go. Moon, Lillie, and all eleven of the Pokémon clapped and
cheered.

“What did you wish for?”

“If I tell, it doesn't come true.” Hau winked at Lillie—a bold move which amused Moon to no end as she watched Lillie turn pink. “But trust me, it was a good wish. Where did you guys get a cake?”

“We special-ordered it from the café.” Moon pointed to the white boxes. “We special-ordered you something else, too.”

“Arceus, you did not.” His grin widened as he walked over to the boxes. “You got me malasadas?”

“Paid one of the café workers to pick it up on the way in this morning,” confirmed Moon. “It's your favorite food. Even if there's not a malasada shop nearby, you should get to have your favorite food on your birthday.”

“And presents! We got you presents,” Lillie chimed in, pointing at the bed. “And all of our Pokémon signed you a card.”

“And I only used like half the helium tank for the balloons, so we can fool around with it before Professor Burnet has to take it back to Heahea.”

“Helium? Arceus, you guys really went all out for little old me.” Hau hugged Moon hard. “Seriously, best friends a guy could ask for.”

“But you're a man now,” teased Moon, letting him go. “Eighteen years old, a whole adult and everything.”

Hau turned to Lillie as well, wrapping his arms around her. Lillie smiled and hugged back, having grown used to hugs; but it seemed that Hau's courage knew no bounds, because he turned his head and pecked Lillie on the cheek before letting her go. Moon eyed Lillie, who had gone from slightly pink to full Cherrim-red, her eyes round with surprise. Hau was also turning red, seeming to realize what he'd done. Clearly, it was Moon's duty to smooth things over.

“So, do we start with cake or malasadas?”

“I'm probably not the most unbiased person to answer this question.”

“The birthday boy speaks; malasadas it is.”

Moon opened one of the boxes, divvying out the contents among the Pokémon. Hau picked up a whole box for himself, looking at the contents with satisfaction.

“Today is going to be a brilliant day,” he declared. “Hey, someone pass the helium tank.”

Lillie picked up the half-empty tank, setting it down next to him. “The helium tank?”

“Have you never heard someone's voice on helium?” Hau took the tank and opened the nozzle, inhaling the helium. Then he turned it off and began singing, “Happy birthday to me, happy birthday to me—”

Except, of course, that it came out in squeaky Pidove chirps instead of his usual voice. Lillie's eyes grew round before she burst out laughing.

He opened their presents after that. Moon had gotten Hau a baseball cap that read #1 TRAINER, as well as a gift card to a highly recommended sushi restaurant in Malie City, on Ula'ula Island. She'd
written him a card, too— trying her best to keep it thoughtful but light-hearted, not touching on the heavy topic of their rivalry that they'd only discussed a few days prior.

Lillie had gotten him a hoodie. It was a warm, dark red color, but it had a small pattern of Pokémon footprints in white on the front.

“I have to apologize,” she said quickly, as Hau stared at the footprints with a slight frown on his face. “I actually borrowed your Trainer passport, so I could access your computer account. The PC system stores Pokémon footprints, and it had records of Poppy's prints before she evolved. I printed it out and had the screen-printing company use it as a pattern.”

“You mean these are Poppy's footprints?”

“As a Popplio, not a Brionne. But yes, they're Poppy's footprints.”

“Bri bri bwork!” said Poppy proudly, examining the hoodie.

“I— Arceus, Lillie. Wow.” Hau shook his head in disbelief. “This is amazing. I don't even know what to say. Thank you so much. I'm going to treasure this forever.”

“I actually ordered one for you, too,” Lillie said to Moon. “It's in my backpack. It's kind of a dark purple plum color. Consider it an early birthday present, since you're not turning eighteen until October.”

“That's so cool,” said Moon, pleased. “Puck, you hear that? I've got a hoodie with your footprints on it.”

“Piki pi,” sulked Ariel.

“I don't love you any less, come on. Puck was just the first one, that's all. It's about nostalgia and beginning the journey. Hey, Lillie— you should get yourself one with Nebby on it.”

“Technically, Lapin is my first Pokémon,” said Lillie with a smile.

“Unlike my drama queen here, Lapin probably wouldn't care if you printed Nebby's footprints— wait, you might have to do Lapin. I don't think Nebby has feet.”

“Pew pew pew!” agreed Nebby, wiggling joyfully.

It was not until some days later, after Moon, Hau, and Lillie had spent time training their Pokémon on Route Five, that Moon felt like she was ready to challenge the Brooklet Hill trial. She knew a little about it already— the trial captain's name was Lana, and she was friends with Mallow. The name *Brooklet Hill* suggested a Water-type trial, just as Wela Volcano Park and Lush Jungle suggested Fire-type and Grass-type trials— but she wasn't going to rush into any assumptions.

“Brooklet Hill is where Nebby dropped us when we, um, escaped where we were before,” said Lillie, the morning that Moon and Hau had determined they would challenge Brooklet Hill. The three of them and their Pokémon had taken over several café tables, ordering lots of breakfast. The café workers always smiled and waved at the three of them now, remembering the birthday cake (that had long since been devoured) and the specially ordered malasadas.

Hau's eyebrows rose. “Just smack in the middle of a trial site?”

“Actually, she dropped us in the Totem's den,” murmured Lillie. “That was rather frightening, honestly.”
“Ooh, so you know what kind of Pokémon the Totem is?”

“Yes, but Captain Lana already asked me not to tell any Trainers who hadn’t already passed her trial what it was.”

“Oh.” Hau deflated slightly. “Well, shoot.”

“You should both do just fine, though,” Lillie assured them. “You’re very good Trainers, and you both have type advantages against the Totem.”

“Good to know.” Moon stored that information in her mind, thoughtfully regarding her team. Puck would obviously have an easy time of it in a Water-type trial; and Uila would also be very strong.

They played fire-water-grass to see who would go first, and Hau won. Moon stayed in the café with Lillie, watching as Hau and his team headed out into the foggy morning, walking toward Brooklet Hill.

“What happened?” Moon asked her. “When Nebby warped you into the Totem's den?”

“Well, I don’t swim very well, so I was struggling to begin with. But then something started splashing me— and I don’t mean Magikarp splashes, I mean full waves of water. I saw the Totem as I went under— or rather its eyes, because it was night. Nebby sort of floats, but she was weak and panicked about the circumstances of the escape and she was starting to sink too. It was very lucky that Captain Lana happened to find us; if she hadn’t, I think it’s quite likely that we would have drowned— and nobody would have been the wiser.”

Lillie spoke in almost a detached tone of voice; but there was a glimmer of fear behind her eyes and Moon immediately felt guilty for asking. “That sounds terrifying.”

“It was. There's a reason I elected to take the boat with Professor Kukui, instead of Mantine-Surfing with you and Hau. I don’t feel comfortable in water deeper than my waist anymore.”

Moon swallowed. “What happened after Lana rescued you?”

“She took us to the Route Five Pokémon Center and called Kahuna Olivia, who told her to bring me to Heahea City. Olivia and Professor Burnet met me, and I explained... some of my circumstances to them. Enough for them to understand what I needed. Professor Burnet took me in for a few weeks, and then she sent me over to Melemele Island to assist Professor Kukui. I was only there for a few days before I met you and Hau at the starter ceremony.”

“So you didn't escape all that long ago?”

“It would be nearly three months, now.” Lillie frowned at the window; her eyes were far away. “It seems like much longer. So much has happened, since then.”

Lapin climbed onto Lillie's lap, butting his head underneath her hands— which Moon noticed were twisting around each other, clenching and unclenching. Lillie looked down at him, startled; but she separated her fingers and began petting him instead of fidgeting.

Moon decided that was enough prying questions for the moment. “It does seem like it's been longer. I can't believe we've only been friends for two months.”

She'd been thinking about things like this— she'd graduated in early June and her family had moved to Alola around the middle of the month. She'd begun her Pokémon journey in late June, and now it was almost September. It was strange to think that she wouldn't be starting another year of high
school. A Pokémon journey in Kanto could be done in two or three months, but Alola was much more spread out, every town and route separated by oceans and wilderness. There were no established railroads in Alola, and the only airport was a little cargo-plane garage on Poni Island. Everything else came and went by boat. Moon fully expected her Pokémon journey to last at least into the next year. She would be eighteen in October.

“I can say without hesitation that it's been the best two months of my life.”

Moon blinked. Lillie's hands were still occupied by Lapin; but her mouth was trembling and her eyes were fixed carefully on the table.

“I'm glad I could be a part of that for you,” Moon said finally. “I know you've been through some things— it's kind of hard not to pick that up, no matter how many details you decide to give. If I've helped you to be happy, that makes me happy too.”

Hau returned in the early afternoon, triumphantly clutching a brand-new Z-Crystal. “I think I did all right,” he said cheerfully. “Lillie was right about type advantages, too— so you shouldn't have any trouble at all, Moon-asada.”

With that in mind, Moon packed up her team, refreshed her supply of Super Potions and Revives at the Mart, and began walking down Route Five toward Brooklet Hill. It wasn't a long walk by any means— in fact, Moon could see the bright banners of the Trial Gate from the room she and Lillie were renting on the second floor of the Pokémon Center.

“The general plan is to rely on Puck,” she told her teammates. Ariel flew in wide, lazy circles around them; Puck hopped at her side; and Ben trotted to keep up. “He has the type advantage here. I imagine Hau did the same thing with Uila. And that's okay, because Ariel and Puck took equal part for the first trial, and Ariel took on most of the Grand trial. There's no shame in playing to our strengths.”

“Hoo,” said Puck, proudly fluffing his feathers.

“Vee vee?” inquired Ben.

“I don't think you're quite ready to face a Totem all on your own, but I'm planning on training you while we're here. You'll keep thinking about evolution, right? Do you have something in mind?”

Ben sniffed, a bit disdainfully. Moon decided to ignore the attitude.

She reached the crest of the first hill before the Trial Gate and spotted a petite, blue-haired woman standing in front of the gate. Moon considered Mallow's green pigtails and decided that this was probably Lana.

“Hi!” she called, waving as she approached the gate. “Are you Captain Lana?”

“That's me.” Lana offered a very slight smile. “And if my last challenger was to be believed, you are Moon Hawkins?”

There are probably wild Pokémon that have a better sense of self-preservation than you, a voice that sounded suspiciously like Gladion reminded her. Moon ignored this voice; Trial Captains were trustworthy people. “Yep! Pleased to meet you.”

“Likewise. Are you ready to begin the trial of Brooklet Hill?”

Moon glanced at her teammates. Ben rolled his eyes; Ariel dipped her head in a nod; and Puck
blinking slowly.

“Yeah, we’re ready.”

“Very good. You will want to recall them, for the moment.”

Moon did as Lana requested, and the shorter woman beckoned for her to enter Brooklet Hill.

They walked for a few moments in silence before Lana cleared her throat.

“How is Lillie?”

Moon was taken a bit by surprise. “Um— she’s doing all right. She has her own team of Pokémon, and everything. But she’s not doing the island challenge.”

“She wouldn’t,” said Lana, with a nod. “She’s too young for it, yet— though if Ellie Burnet is correct, then Lillie has the equivalent of a GED and could very well begin an island challenge whenever she liked. Is she— happy?”

The hesitancy in Lana’s voice told Moon volumes. Lillie must have been miserable, when Lana found her. “She says she’s the happiest she’s ever been.”

A fond crinkle appeared at the edges of Lana’s eyes. “Good,” she said simply. “I was worried for her. That kind of background leaves its mark.”

“What kind of background?”

“If she has not told you, then it is not my place to say anything.” Lana's eyes fell away from Moon as she studied the path before them. “Kahuna Olivia and my friend Mallow both say you are intelligent. You may consider trying to discern some of the details on your own— there’s nothing rude about that, as long as you are not given to baseless speculation.”

“I like to have evidence before forming my theories.”

“There’s a great deal of evidence about Lillie’s past, if you know what to look for.” Lana glanced back up at her briefly, before coming to a halt and digging in her pocket. “But, of course, it’s knowing what to look for that you will likely find difficult. Please hand me your Ride Pager.”

Moon dug the pager out of her pocket. Lana typed something into it before returning it to Moon.

“I have registered Lapras to your pager,” she explained simply. “You will require the use of one for this trial.”

“Cool. What do I have to do?”

Lana pointed. Moon had been so focused on the conversation about Lillie that she had barely noticed as the path opened up into a clearing with a large, tranquil pond. There was a path around the pond that led beyond it, but Moon had the feeling that she would not be using the path.

“Do you see the splashing Pokémon?”

She could see a few splashing Pokémon— it was breezy, so the water rippled beneath the splashes and she couldn’t see what the Pokémon actually were. “Yeah.”

“Your task is to herd them downstream— through the two main ponds and down the little falls to the Totem’s Den.” Lana put her hands in her pockets. “And I will remind you that you may not catch
any Pokémon here until you have completed the trial—not that you are likely to find anything here that will help you. Your own team, presuming you have adequately trained them, should be more than sufficient to take on the Totem. Do you have any questions?”

“Yes. How, exactly, am I supposed to herd a bunch of fish?”

Lana's mouth twitched. “That is entirely up to you,” she replied. “I'll walk down to the next pond and wait for you there.”

“Helpful,” mumbled Moon under her breath; but there was no heat in it. She liked Lana and her dry sense of humor.

She opened the Ride Pager and summoned a Lapras, climbing onto the saddle and settling in. After a moment of deliberation, she let out Puck, allowing him to sit in the passenger seat.

“You might get splashed, but you're more than ready to handle anything here, right?”

“Hoo,” agreed Puck.

It took Moon a few moments to get the hang of steering Lapras—Ride Pagers didn't exactly come with instruction manuals, and Lapras were quite a bit larger than the average pickup truck. Moon had learned to drive on a pickup truck—Red and Blue had taught her, with her parents' permission. There wasn't much point in having a driver's license in Kanto when there was public transportation and just about every Trainer had Fly for major distances; but it had been one of the compromises that Red and Blue had made about Mount Silver. Red went back fairly often to train—the Pokémon there were among the strongest in all Kanto, and he liked a challenge. Blue worried himself sick over it, and the compromise they had agreed on was that Red would have the truck to use as emergency shelter in case the weather went from generally horrible to an actual blizzard. And Moon had wanted to learn how to drive, so they had taught her.

What was it about today that kept bringing up memories? Lillie's story, Gladion's cutting words, Red and Blue teaching her to drive—it was nice to reminisce, but Moon had a trial to do. She got the hang of guiding the Lapras and eventually turned her attention toward one of the especially splashy areas.

A little water-skater Bug skittered toward her. Moon flinched back automatically, lifting her legs away from the surface in revulsion as she realized it was not a water-skater but a spider with a bubble of water on its head.

“Rotom, what exactly is that?”

The Bug's bubble expanded slightly, and then a jet of water shot toward Moon and Puck, splashing them both. Puck let out a warning, rumbling growl.

“Use Razor Leaf, in the meantime,” she ordered him. Puck complied, knocking the little spider back a few feet with a barrage of glowing leaves.

“That's a Dewpider, bzzt,” said Rotom, after making the initial scans. “A Water- and Bug-type Pokémon. They have sacs of water around their heads, which protect them from burns, bzzt.”

“Gross,” said Moon frankly. The Dewpider made a gargling sound at her that she interpreted as a hiss or a growl. “No offense or anything, I'm just not fond of Bug-types.”

“Hoo hoo ho?”
“I'm going to go ahead and say no, you may not eat any of the Pokémon here. Lana might need them. Now, one more Razor Leaf.”

Puck sulked, but complied with the order. The Dewpider squealed as it was hit, and skittered off in the general direction of the little waterfall that fell into the next pond.

“I guess that's downstream,” decided Moon.

She made her way over to another splashy spot and found a tiny Pokémon that oddly resembled the sardines she had occasionally seen her dad eat with pizza, on the rare occasions they had splurged and ordered pizza. Rotom informed her that it was called a Wishiwashi, and that they generally preferred to travel in packs— which Moon supposed made sense. If she was that small, she would want to have friends around, too. Puck eyed the Wishiwashi with the same interested expression he often offered Bug-type Pokémon, and Moon remembered that birds of prey were often known to eat fish and rodents as well as bugs.

“We'll see about trying you on some fish later, but again— we're not eating the trial Pokémon.”

Puck rolled his eyes. “Ho hoo.”

“Yes, whatever to you too, buddy. Razor Leaf.”

Razor Leaf was much more effective against Wishiwashi, which suggested a pure Water-typing— a hypothesis which Rotom confirmed, when she brought it up. As it darted downstream, Moon spotted several other shadows of a similar size, following from all over the pond— these were probably more Wishiwashi, traveling in schools.

They made their way over to the path that would lead down to the next pond, and as promised, Lana was waiting at the shoreline. She nodded once. “Good job.”

“I didn't really do anything.”

“No, but they're sort of conditioned to head downstream when they get close to being knocked out.” Lana shrugged. “It does rather defeat the purpose, but the point is the battle, not the act of herding fish. The Mareep and Miltank at the ranch know where to move when the Stoutlands nip or swat at them; it's the same principle.”

“Right.” Moon studied the second pond. There were two more areas where the water was turbulent with splashing. “Same thing?”

“Indeed.” Lana offered a brief half-smile before shoving her hands into her pockets once more. “I'll see you at the Totem's Den.”

Encouraged by this, Moon summoned the Lapras again and rode out onto the pond, heading straight for the third patch of turbulence. She met another Dewpider, this time. Moon was still grossed out by the little bug, but this one seemed to be friendlier, and squeaked politely at her before blowing a soft bubble at Puck. He batted it away in disgust before driving the Dewpider downstream with a strong Razor Leaf. The fourth and final splashes revealed another Wishiwashi, and upon its defeat there were at least five, ten— maybe twenty shadows that joined it in the rush downstream.

“I think it might be prudent to advise you about Wishiwashi's ability, bzzt,” said Rotom.

“Oh, yeah?”

“Wishiwashi have the ability Schooling. This allows them to summon others of their kind, bzzt.”
“Like a Totem Pokémon?”

“No, because the Wishiwashi move together and act as one large fish, bzzt. One Wishiwashi, depending on how powerful it is, may summon at least twenty or thirty of its kind— more powerful Wishiwashi can summon fifty or sixty. Some Trainers have observed up to one hundred Wishiwashi in the same Schooling form. These schools of Pokémon can be many times more powerful than regular Pokémon, bzzt.”

Moon swallowed. “So what you’re saying is that I might have just encouraged a bunch of tiny fish to gang up on my poor Pokémon team?”

“It’s quite possible, bzzt,” agreed Rotom. “In either case, I recommend fully healing your team before you face the Totem.”

“Yeah, no kidding. Thanks for the advice.”

Wishiwashi were tiny, sure— but a whole school of them was probably intimidating as hell. The Totem was probably a powerful Wishiwashi that could summon a good forty or fifty fish. Hau and Uila wouldn’t have had any trouble with that— Electric-type attacks were often able to chain to more than one wild Pokémon at a time. Razor Leaf could hit more than one opponent, but Moon had never tested it against more than two at once. She had complete faith in Puck’s abilities, but fifty might be asking a bit much even for him.

The path at the other end of the pond led Moon down to another Trial Gate— this one clearly marking the difference between the general trial site and the Totem’s Den. Moon spotted Lana, already inside the Den; she was watching the final pond. It was rockier and deeper than the first two ponds; and Moon noticed with surprise that a thick rock wall separated it from the open ocean between Akala Island and Melemele.

As she approached the gate, the gray skies opened with a gentle patter of rain. Puck snorted indignantly, and Moon paused and opened her backpack to put on the plum-purple hoodie that Lillie had gotten for her, flipping the hood up to cover her hair so that she wouldn’t feel like a drowned rat while trying to fight a Totem.

“Very good,” said Lana as she approached, without turning around. “The Totem is waiting for you. Be on your guard.” She pointed out at the most turbulent splashing that Moon had seen yet— sprays of foam leaping high into the air, small waves crashing in a frenzy just before the fall of water that came from the ponds above.

That clinched it, then— a school of Wishiwashi. Moon summoned Lapras one more time and climbed on, settling Puck next to her; they rode out onto the water.

The wind whipped up and the rain increased as they approached the splashing. Moon could see it in the water— a fishy shape, growing ever larger as smaller shadows raced forward and bled into it. Lightning cracked in the distance, and an even darker shadow fell above them. Moon, confused, looked up and saw a pair of gleaming blue eyes before a large, spindle-legged shape leaped into the water.

The resulting splash was loud and cold. Moon yelped as her hoodie was completely soaked— all of her efforts to remain dry had been fruitless. Puck squawked indignantly as he, too, was doused in cold water. And naturally, all of the Wishiwashi had scattered at the approach of this Pokémon.

“Araquanid, bzzt,” said Rotom, from her pocket. “The evolved form of Dewpider.”
Dewpider were larger than Wishiwashi, but Moon had the feeling that this Araquanid was much, much bigger than the average of its species.

“That was cheating!” she yelled back towards the shore as she turned Lapras around for easier battling. “I thought it was going to be a school of Wishiwashi!”

She only heard Lana's laughter over the wind and rain. Lana had a beautiful laugh— silvery and warm.

“Well, then,” she said, turning back to face the Araquanid. “This calls for a change of plans. Puck, back to the ball.”

Puck sighed loudly, but returned to his ball. Moon hesitated, looking over the teammates at her belt; but she had made a promise to Ben earlier so she sent him out first.

The center of the Totem’s Den was slightly shallower than the deeper water around it. Presumably, the pond had been built with battling in mind. Moon parked Lapras at the edge of the deep water and waded into the shallow end with Ben, who was regarding the Araquanid.

“Do you want to try and fight it?” she asked the Eevee.

Ben vehemently shook it.

“Yeah, I kind of figured.” She recalled him to his ball and sent out Ariel instead.

The Araquanid made an amused clicking noise— it had mandibles instead of teeth, which was creepy— and blew a bubble at Ariel before letting out a harsh, squeaky cry.

A Dewpider crept up to join.

“Right, you get to cheat. Ariel, use Pluck on the Dewpider.”

The Araquanid rolled its eyes and blew another bubble at Ariel. She dodged it, in the process of attacking the Dewpider; and managed to knock it out in a single hit.

“Attagirl!” cheered Moon, patting Ariel on her return. “That's what I'm talking about.”

The rain pounded down around them as the battle continued. The Araquanid was powerful— the bubbles it blew at Ariel— and occasionally Moon herself— were cold and unpleasant, and the shock of them could easily knock Ariel into the water. After a few mishaps, Moon had to fight a more defensive battle, focusing on dodging the bubbles just as much as attacking the Araquanid.

Once she'd adjusted her strategy, the Araquanid's eyes glimmered in amusement and it let out another harsh, squeaky cry.

The Pokémon that arrived this time was vaguely familiar— another Bug-type, she knew that much. “Rotom?”

“Masquerain,” recited Rotom. “Native to Hoenn, Kalos, and Alola, bzzt. Pokémon researchers have found biological similarities between Masquerain's pre-evolution Surskit and Dewpider, but it would seem that they diverge in evolution when Araquanid and Dewpider develop bubble sacs to survive above and below water, and Masquerain develop wings in order to make their homes around water-based plants such as lilies and lotus flowers, bzzt.”

“So they're like cousins?” Moon grinned. “Like Hau and me. Would he be the Araquanid, or the
Masquerain?"

“Knowing what I do of the two of you, and the information that researchers have done on general Pokémon species temperaments, Hau would undoubtedly be the Araquanid. They are more even-tempered and inclined toward a sense of humor than the Masquerain family, bzzt.”

“Hey!”

The Masquerain rolled its eyes and flapped its wings toward Ariel, releasing a puff of powder that glowed briefly yellow in the dim light of the rainstorm.

“Oh, come on, not Stun Spore— ugh.” Moon glared at the Masquerain as the powder made contact with Ariel, who let out a dismayed yelp as she crashed into the shallow part of the pond, attempting to shake off the powder before it fully numbed her limbs. “You are so lucky you’re part of a Trial, or I would let my owl eat you for an afternoon snack. Come on, Ari, you can get through this.”

She sprayed a Super Potion over the struggling bird. Ariel stopped moving for a moment, clearly thinking; then toppled over into the water with an undignified splash, rolling around. When she got to her feet again, she was dripping wet but free of stun-spores.

“Oh, smart thinking! Good girl,” Moon praised her. “We've got just the thing for this Masquerain. Give it a Smack Down!”

Ariel let out a pleased, vengeful trill and summoned rocks to drop onto the Masquerain's head. She was promptly hit by Araquanid's Bubble, but it seemed to have less effect this time— possibly because Ariel was already completely soaked.

The Masquerain went for Bug Bite, which was fine—it wasn't like a Bug-type move could do very much damage to Ariel. The Araquanid, however surprised Moon by attacking with Aurora Beam, which was an Ice-type move and therefore definitely not okay given the fact that Ariel and Puck were both weak to it— Puck doubly so. Ben was just weaker in general. Her whole team could get wrecked by Aurora Beam, if she wasn't careful.

“Okay, no.” Ariel came to land by Moon, breathing hard and trying to shake off the chill of Aurora Beam. “Here— Full Restore. You can't get hit by that again, Ari. Your main priority has to be dodging Araquanid's attacks, but I want you to try and pull off a Pluck on the Masquerain. It will be easier to deal with the Araquanid on its own.”

Ari chirped in agreement, bolstered by the Full Restore, and took off. Araquanid sent another Bubble, which she easily dodged; and another Pluck took out the Masquerain, which went off to sulk somewhere in the pond. Good riddance, thought Moon. Masquerain were very pretty, but they still kind of creeped her out. Bug-types in general did. She didn't mind them dead when Puck was eating them, but living ones— ew, no.

The Araquanid began gearing up for another Aurora Beam.

“Pluck it, Ari!”

Ariel barrelled into the Araquanid, pecking hard. The Aurora Beam went wild, glancing over Moon's shoulder and beyond Lapras into the pond. She could hear Lana laughing again, but that wasn't important; the important thing was that the Araquanid shook Ariel off and turned around, retreating as it skated back up to its lair above the waterfall.

The rain faded, and the wind died away; even the gray clouds parted slightly to show the sun. Moon winced as the general heat of Alola's sun returned, leaving her in wet clothes and humid sunshine.
“Fantastic!” called Lana, clapping. “Come back to the shore, please!”

Moon turned around on Lapras, recalling an exhausted Ariel to her ball, and rode back to the shore.

“Very good.” Lana's smile this time was broad and warm. “I wasn't sure whether you would fight the Araquanid or the school of Wishiwashi. Most Trainers fight the Wishiwashi, you see— they don't make the connection about the Schooling ability unless they read their Dex very thoroughly before they take on the Totem, and this Trial is designed to surprise the Trainer. But your Rotom-Dex warned you, and so the Totems decided to switch places.”

“They can do that?”

Lana nodded. “Most of the island trials have more than one Totem,” she explained. “It really just depends on the day, for most of them. My trial is designed to surprise and challenge a Trainer, to force them to use different strategies. You performed admirably, and you have passed the trial of Brooklet Hill with flying colors.”

She held out her palm; resting on it was a blue crystal, identical to the one she had seen Hau holding just an hour or two ago.

“Here is Waterium Z. Please watch as I demonstrate the dance you must perform to use the Water-type Z-Move... **Hydro Vortex!**”

Lana's voice grew stronger, building up to what Moon fully expected to be an impressive climax; but then she began doing the hula.

Moon stared at her. Lana's face was completely serious. She completed the dance and folded her hands behind her back, looking impassively at Moon.

“That was the hula.”

“It is one of many dance moves used in the complete hula dance,” Lana corrected her. “But it is one of the more recognizable ones, so— essentially, yes, it is the hula.”

Her mouth twitched slightly. Moon burst out laughing, and eventually Lana joined her.

“And here's a little gift, something I hope will help you as you continue your island challenge.”

Lana turned and walked over to a plastic cupboard— a cupboard that Moon had not noticed because it was painted the same color as the rocks behind it, blending into the landscape. She opened it and pulled out a fishing rod.

“For the Pokémon that prefer deeper waters,” she explained, offering Moon the rod. “The fishing line is made from dried Araquanid silk, which is far stronger than any artificially made fishing line. If you run out, you can visit my family's shop in Konikoni City and purchase a new roll.”

“Does your family like fishing?”

Lana's eyes glimmered with amusement. “You could say that,” she said vaguely. “Perhaps you have heard of Marlon, the Unovan gym leader?”

“I know the name.”

“Siebold, of Kalos?”

“He's Elite Four, right? Totally.”
“Crasher Wake, of Sinnoh?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Wallace, of Hoenn?”

“Who hasn’t?”

“And Misty, of Kanto?”

“Duh.” Moon raised an eyebrow, impressed against her will. “Do you mean to tell me they’ve all visited or trained with your family, or something?”

Lana snorted—a change from the warm silvery laugh Moon had grown used to. “No, of course not. That would be ridiculous, and if you actually believed me then I have a red Gyarados sighting to tell you about.”

Moon groaned, clapping her hand to her forehead as Lana dissolved into laughter. “First the Totems, then the hula, now this. Am I ever not going to fall for it?”

“It’s unlikely. I still catch Mallow and Kiawe, and we have been friends for years.”

“Kiawe?”

“The trial captain of Wela Volcano Park—you will face him next. I advise you to train hard, and to catch a Water-type from here.”

Moon nodded. “I’ll keep it in mind.” She sort of liked Wishiwashi, but Puck’s possible culinary interest in the fish made it seem like a bad idea on principle. She definitely wasn’t going to catch a Dewpider or a Surskit. She’d spotted some Poliwag and Marill playing in the grasses, but nothing had really caught her eye. Maybe she would go fishing, after all.

Then it occurred to her that Puck, Ariel, and Ben would very likely have a lot to say on the subject of a new teammate—especially if Moon didn’t consult them first. They had only just begun to adjust to the dynamic of three-to-a-team; she didn’t think she could subject them to another change so soon. She would have to talk the matter over with them.

In the meantime—she had two trials under her belt, and a new Z-Crystal for her efforts; and even though her clothes were soaking wet, she was quite content with herself and with the world at large.

Chapter End Notes

GET YOURSELF A SQUAD WHO THROWS YOU A BIRTHDAY PARTY

“Scream-singing” is what my friends in high school and college always did whenever it was anyone’s birthday.

I had to think about this, but Moon, Hau, and Lillie have all expanded their parties by one or in Lillie’s case, two Pokémon since the end of QP1:Y. So all together, they have eleven Pokémon. THAT’S A LOT. Also something to consider: by the end of this series
they're each going to have six, and Gladion will also have six, and that's twenty-four Pokémon. Plus other characters have Pokémon that may or may not be named depending on how important they are to the story. Writing the Pokémon with personalities is one of the things about this series that is most important to me—largely because Nebby had such a big personality in the games, and you can see the starter sprites walking around the world with Hau. Type: Null's backstory is also very compelling to me in terms of writing personality. So I have at least 24 original characters to write—most of whom are nonverbal, all of whom are important. Oy vey.

“Hau winked at Lillie.” — smooth, my dude

DON'T SUCK HELIUM KIDS, it's not good for you lmao

“It seemed that Hau's courage knew no bounds, because he turned his head and pecked Lillie on the cheek before letting her go.” — AYY GET IT SON

Lillie's never heard of helium voice before, wow I made myself sad writing a chapter that has so far been nothing but FLUFF

I would also be emotional if the person I had a crush on special-ordered me a hoodie with the footprints of my unevolved starter Pokémon screen-printed onto it. Lillie is girlfriend goals and they aren't even dating lmao

Yes, I did just do a time-skip out of the birthday party because I can't write transitions whooooo

What's that? Lillie washed up on Melemele Island, not Akala? I'm sorry, I can't hear you over the sound of Lillie's CANONICAL association with the color pink (more of a “Z-Powered Lillie” thing in the games, but getting new clothes happened earlier in this story).

Yeah so Brooklet Hill is the second scariest trial site—after the dragon cave on Poni Island, because I can never remember when the little shits are going to jump out and attack. At least with the Thrifty Megamart I can use the camera to initiate fights. But anyway, Brooklet Hill is scary because both Wishiwashi and Araquanid call a storm, and it's also right next to the open ocean and I dunno I find it creepy. And you can bet that Araquanid was Not Pleased to have a random chick and a ball of space dust dropping down on her in the middle of the night.

“I can say without hesitation that it's been the best two months of my life.” — AWW LILLIE

Lana is my favorite trial captain. She's SUCH A TROLL and she's so cute and I love her so much ugh

Moon doesn't like Bug-types. She's trying to be open-minded... kind of. We'll see how THAT progresses as the story goes on.

I find the principle of Wishiwashi fascinating. If a Trainer uses a Wishiwashi, where do all the other ones come from when it's in School form???? I think it summons them from the wild, instead of from the void of the Pokéball.

“Moon, confused, looked up and saw a pair of gleaming blue eyes before a large, spindle-legged shape leaped into the water.” — I want to say that I set Moon and the
readers up for a Totem Wishiwashi battle, but I did the same thing that Game Freak did so I can't take credit. I love that Lana's trial sets you up for a specific Totem battle but then BOOM the party is crashed by Araquanid. It fits with the way I've written her character to subvert expectations.

I think Surskit and Dewpider look alike, which is why you can find them in the same place. So they're related and they just developed differently into Masquerain and Araquanid.

I like the idea of Wishiwashi and Araquanid BOTH being Totems. I think Raticate and Gumshoos would both be Totems as well— as would Salazzle and Marowak, and Vikavolt and Togedemaru. I also kind of want to petition for Totem Ribombee to share duties with a Ninetales, because it would make a LOT of sense for a Ninetales to be a Totem. They're based on kitsune/gumiho myths and the Totem Aura would lend credence to those myths. Lurantis would probably share with Tsareena but I could see a giant Shiinotic, too. The dragon cave would have Kommo'o and Alolan Exeggutor. You walk into the cave and you're like “wtf is this random tree doing he— oh SHIT”

“Lana's voice grew stronger, building up to what Moon fully expected to be an impressive climax; but then she began doing the hula.” — my FAVORITE trial captain

“No, of course not. That would be ridiculous, and if you actually believed me then I have a red Gyarados sighting to tell you about.” — I made myself laugh writing this lmao
Shall we stop for lunch?” Moon suggested, around noon.

She and Lillie were on Route Five, headed back toward Paniola Town. Hau had elected to remain at the Route Five Pokémon Center for a few days longer to train privately. Despite the newfound truce they had come to with regards to Pokémon battles, Moon thought it would be best to avoid training together too often, and besides that she was eager to get to the next trial. Since Hau had Waterium Z, he had an advantage with Poppy. Moon wanted to get her hands on Grassium Z as quickly as she could, and that meant getting Firium Z along the way.

She'd also seen this part of Route Five already. In fact, the clearing they were in was suspiciously familiar— Moon was fairly certain that this was the exact place where she and Hau had first fought Gladion, the cute asshole trainer.

“Hau and I battled someone here, the other day,” she told Lillie. “Another Trainer. He beat Hau, but he couldn't beat me. He was kind of an asshole.”

“Hmm,” said Lillie vaguely.

“What kind of name is Gladion, anyway?”

Lillie blinked at her for a few seconds. “I don't know,” she said thoughtfully, after a few moments. “Though a gladiolus is a flower— the birth flower for the month of August, I believe.”

Moon cackled. “We should tell Hau.”

They ate peanut butter and honey sandwiches, Moon putting them together with the sandwich supplies she kept in her backpack. The Pokémon had beans, of course— though Puck wandered into the tall grass to scavenge for Bug-types, and Snowfall and Umber decided to go hunting together. Ariel, Ben, Nebby, and Lapin opted to remain with Moon and Lillie, content with their beans.

Moon opened up Pokémaps with Rotom, studying the route she'd planned for them that morning. “We seem to be making good time,” she told Lillie. “We could stop at Paniola Town tonight, or we could camp just past the Ranch, at the beginning of Route Six. Then tomorrow we can press on to Royal Avenue and stay at the Pokémon Center there for a while.”
“Either one sounds fine to me,” Lillie assured her. “I've never been camping before, really. I've been staying in Pokémon Centers, and Professor Burnet has driven out to transport me if I've needed to make any trips that are more than a day's walk.”

“Then let's camp on Route Six,” decided Moon. “It'll be fun, unless it rains. Rotom, how's the weather looking?”

“The forecast for this evening shows slightly cloudy weather with a five percent chance of rain, bzzt. Tomorrow is predicted to be sunny all day.”

“Thanks.”

“You're quite welcome, bzzt. It seems like perfect weather for camping.”

“That it does.” Moon tucked Rotom back into her pocket. “What do you say, Lillie? Want to go camping with me?”

“It sounds like fun,” said Lillie brightly. “Snowfall prefers to be outside anyway. Er— do you have a tent?”

“Yeah. You can use it, if you need to— I prefer my hammock when I'm camping.”

“Thank you. I haven't needed one so far, so I haven't purchased one. I don't really anticipate needing one very often in the future, either; I prefer Pokémon Centers, and if I'm camping I'd rather travel with you or Hau or one of the Professors, anyway.”

“Or your mysterious friend?”

“Or my mysterious friend,” agreed Lillie, her eyes softening. “He hates camping, though. He would much rather stay at a Pokémon Center or a hotel.”

After lunch they kept hiking. Moon trained Ben as they walked— battling him against wild Pokémon. She watched with pride as he defeated a wild Yungoos that had skittered out of the bush, indignantly guarding its territory.

“He's getting quite strong,” observed Lillie.

“I've been working extra with him, so he can catch up to Puck and Ari,” Moon explained. “But he's still weaker, because he's younger and because he doesn't have a middle stage evolution.”

“Have you thought anymore about how you'd like to evolve him?”

“Yes, but I don't think he's quite ready to evolve. It's a big step, and he's...”

Ben turned his head, looking up at Moon with sharp eyes.

“Immature,” concluded Moon, raising her eyebrows at him. Ben scowled, hissed, and scampered into the wild grass after a fat Charjabug basking in the sunlight.

“I see what you mean.” Lillie chuckled at the temperamental Eevee. “Even if I had the means to evolve Snowfall right now, I'd probably wait. She's the same way.”

“What about Lapin and Umber? Are either of them getting close to evolving?”

Lillie nodded. “Lapin is getting close,” she admitted. “Buneary evolve when they trust and love their Trainers. With Umber it's more a matter of time, and of course I need a stone for Snowfall. I wonder
“if Kahuna Olivia sells Ice Stones?”

“You could probably ask Professor Burnet to get one for you— doesn't Route Six connect back to central Heahea City?”

“Yes, it does. Royal Avenue is actually an extension of Heahea City— an outlying suburb, really. They share the same postal code.”

“Why are they kept separate, then?”

“I presume there were noise complaints regarding the Battle Royal Dome.”

“Good point. Do you think—”

“Pew!”

Nebby's voice was louder and more cheerful than Moon had yet heard it, and she zipped out of the bag before Lillie could grab at her.

“Would you come back here!” scolded Lillie, racing along the path.

“Pew, pew pew, pewpewpew!”

“What do you mean, friends? You don't have—”

Moon caught up with Lillie, as her friend fell silent. Two figures stood at the junction of Route Five and Route Six, studying the island challenge barriers that blocked the path to Route Six. A group of Sudowoodo were attempting to climb the barriers, stiffly swiveling their limbs; the trial guide who stood at the barrier gate watched everything nervously.

“Pew pew!” sang Nebby.

At this, the two figures turned around. Phyco's bushy blue eyebrows shot up in surprise, and Soliera's mouth curled into a smile.

“Greetings, little one,” she said, bending down and holding out her hand. “It's been some time, hasn't it? About the length of a moon cycle. Where is your guardian?”

Nebby turned around, zipping back to Lillie and circling her ankles. Phyco and Soliera noticed Moon and Lillie and the rest of their Pokémon, then. Ben hissed warily at the strangers, eyes narrowing; Moon decided it would be prudent to recall him to his ball, and in fairness recalled Puck and Ariel as well.

“Ah!” said Phyco, with a nod. “Very good.”

Lillie seemed to have frozen in place, green eyes round and full of fear as they flicked rapidly from Phyco to Soliera— both of whom appeared to be waiting for her to speak.

When it was clear that Lillie wouldn't— or perhaps couldn't— say anything, Moon stepped forward. “Hey,” she said, waving to draw their attention. “I don't know if you remember me—”

“We are hardly likely to forget you, Moon.” Phyco's gaze flicked back to Lillie once; but realization seemed to settle over him. “As we have not forgotten Miss Lillie, or the runaway Cosmog. However, studying Cosmog's attributes is a very low priority on our list of things to do—”

“Studying,” said Lillie flatly. “Is that what you call it?”
“We were studying,” Phyco’s voice was sharp. “We do not condone what the other researchers did. Think what you like of us, but true scientists need not harm a living organism to learn more about it.”

“It would seem that Cosmog volunteers more information when it is happy, anyway,” added Soliera, in a pacifying tone. “As do most sentient beings.”

“The point is, we are not going to attempt to return Cosmog to— prime laboratory conditions. So as we told Moon when we last met her, you have nothing to worry about, as long as you are endeavoring to keep her safe.”

“I’m doing my best,” muttered Lillie. “What are you doing here, anyway?”

Moon stared at her friend. Usually Lillie addressed adults with at least some level of respect; so to hear her sound so sullen and, well, *teenagery* was something of a surprise.

“We are tracking these Sudowoodo.” Soliera turned back around, clasping her hands behind her back. “They fled from Route Five after being sprayed with water from a Z-Move, which the local Trial Captain kindly demonstrated for us in battle. Since then we have been observing them.”

“They’ve been standing here for like, eighteen hours,” called the trial guide. “I went home after my last shift and came back and they were still here.”

“Do you not have to eat or sleep?”

“Our suits take care of all of our biological functions when we are busy,” explained Phyco.

“All of them?”

“The left arm of the suit contains a saline solution for hydration, delivered intravenously. The right arm contains a mix of adrenaline and other chemicals that will keep us healthy and awake as long as we desire it, for up to a week. It is also delivered intravenously. The helmets can be closed or open if the weather or environment is hostile. The inner lining of the suit is treated with a chemical that periodically cleans everything in contact with it— both the outside of the suit, and our bodies. We carry protein shakes and other nutrient-filled substances for food, and the suits are catheterized—”

“Oh, gross, too much information.” Moon made a face.

Phyco frowned. “I do not believe there is any such—”

“I believe it’s a figure of speech, sir,” Soliera interrupted him. “She means she has no desire to hear about either of our private bodily functions, and frankly neither do I. Let us change the topic. Moon, would you be willing to indulge me in another battle?”

“A Pokémon battle? Sure, sounds fun.”

Soliera grinned. “I have brought a Pokémon from home this time,” she revealed, pulling a blue-and-gold ball out of her pocket. “It may provide me with an advantage. But your team has likely changed since we last met.”

“Not that much, actually.” Moon took Ben’s ball from her belt and released him. “I just hatched this little guy from an egg a few weeks ago.”

“Ah! Fate has gifted us with a match, for I too have brought a hatchling.”

There was a flash of starlight, and Soliera’s teammate appeared, floating a foot or so above the
ground. It had a long tail that hung rather like a kangaroo, and a large head. Its eyes sparkled with mischief and joy, and it was a vibrant shade of purple—Moon’s favorite color.

“Arceus, it's the cutest thing I've ever seen in my life and I need one.”

“Poi poi poi,” said the floaty purple Pokémon, and did a lazy little flip in midair before giggling.

“Rotom, give me the deets.”

“One moment, bzzt,” said Rotom, peering carefully at the floaty purple Pokémon.

“It is awfully cute,” murmured Lillie, almost too softly to be heard.

“...I cannot find any information on this Pokémon.”

Moon stared at Rotom. “I beg your pardon?”

“I have been able to ascertain that it is a pure Poison-type, but that is all my scans have showed.” Rotom looked just as disappointed as Moon felt. “Some of the scans are illegible, possibly written in an alien script. I will set up a code-breaking program immediately.”

“This is a Poipole,” explained Soliera.

“Could you spell that, bzzt?” Rotom inquired, opening up an entry box.


“Poly poi!” chirped the Poipole. “Po poipole!”

“Purple,” said Moon, “but with one of those heavy Castelia City accents.”

“Fuheudebboutit,” agreed Rotom. “I have submitted this information to Professor Kukui's Rotom-Dex for immediate review.”

“I do not know that there is much of a point in adding Poipole to your Pokédex,” said Phyco, shrugging. “It is not native to this planet, and this is the only one here. Just a visitor.”

“Can I get one?”

“It's highly unlikely.”

Moon deflated, somewhat disappointed. “It's so cute, though. Man, that's disappointing.”

“Shall we begin the battle?” Soliera smiled, patting the Poipole with her gloved hand.

“Yeah, let's do this.”

Ben growled in approval, the fluffy fur around his neck standing on end as he crouched in preparation for an attack.

“Let's start out with Swift and see where that takes us,” decided Moon.

Ben leaped forward—faster than Moon had ever seen him move. The glowing stars of Swift formed around him before shooting forward at the happy little Poipole.

The attack hit. It didn't seem to do very much. Soliera nodded thoughtfully and gave her own orders... in another language.
“Okay, that has to be cheating,” complained Moon. The Poipole squealed with excitement and shot a jet of steaming fuschia liquid at Ben, who hissed as it made contact.

“I checked in the International Battle Rulebook,” said Soliera, a touch smugly. “It is not against the rules.”

“What language even is that?”

Soliera visibly hesitated, her gaze flicking over to Phyco.

“My international translation database found zero matches, bzzt,” announced Rotom. “Conclusion: the language is not spoken on this planet.”

“Oh, yeah, no problem. I'm good at keeping secrets.” Moon mimed zipping her lips, partly to emphasize the fact that she could, in fact keep a secret; and partly to prank Phyco and Soliera. “Zipping your lips” was an idiom fairly unique to Earth, and she hid her giggle as they stared at her in confusion. Lillie didn't bother hiding her laughter; there was a malicious note in it that Moon found rather unsettling. “Ben, use Quick Attack!”

Soliera gave her command in the same alien language. The Poipole giggled and launched another splash of purple in Ben's direction. He was, fortunately, quick enough to dodge the attack as he sped forward to make his own.

It took a little longer than Moon would have liked, but she wanted Ben to complete this battle on his own. Puck and Ariel, confined to their balls, were both vibrating with excitement and, she hoped, pride. Ben and the Poipole traded attacks, occasionally dodging but slowly, steadily wearing one another down. They were more or less evenly matched— in fact, Moon would probably have said that the Poipole was the stronger of the two, if Ben were not in earshot. What Ben lacked in power, he made up for in sheer stubbornness, and with a screechy cry that cracked in the middle, he launched a final Swift into the tired Poipole and knocked it out. Lillie and her Pokémon cheered and clapped.

“Ah,” said Soliera ruefully, recalling the Poipole. “I ought to have known. My battle skills leave much to be desired, it would seem.”

“Nah, we were like neck and neck there at the end.”

“But you had two more Pokémon, if Soliera had defeated your Eevee,” pointed out Phyco. “You are the superior battler, Moon— you succeeded with the weakest member of your team, against the only member of ours.”

Ben, panting, looked up at Moon.

“Good job, buddy.”

His mouth twitched briefly into something approximating a smile. She sprayed him with a Super Potion and put a handful of beans on the ground for him, letting him scarf them down. Soliera applied a Revive to the Poipole as well.
“At any rate,” said Phyco, his gaze dropping to Moon's wrist, “it is clear that merely wearing the Z-Ring gives a Trainer and their team more power. Perhaps it has something to do with the Totem Auras described by Captain Ilima and Captain Lana; perhaps it is merely a placebo effect, and the Pokémon become stronger because they believe themselves to be stronger in the presence of the Z-Ring. Whatever the reason is, you fight with strength and skill.”

Moon held up her wrist with the Z-Ring, examining the black-and-white stone that always seemed warm to the touch, even when it was cool outside. “Ariel has Flyinium Z,” she said thoughtfully, examining the grooves in the ring where three of her four Z-Crystals rested—the fourth was with Ariel in her ball. White Normalium, orange Fightinium, and blue Waterium sparkled in their slots.

“The light from your ring feels somehow... nostalgic.”

Moon looked up at Phyco. Neither he nor Soliera had so far shown much in the way of emotion, but now he looked sad.

“There's a lot of light here, in Alola,” agreed Soliera. “Our home is darker and emptier and colder.”

“That would explain the blue skin,” muttered Moon under her breath.

“And the scans we make with our own equipment suggest the presence of a relationship between Totem Auras, Z-Crystals and Z-Rings, and a legend of our home.”

Soliera raised an eyebrow at Phyco. “Do you think there is a connection between the Z-Ring and the Blinding One?”

Phyco's expression went suddenly grim. “It is our duty to find that out.”

They both turned to look at Moon and Lillie at the same time, as though only just remembering that they were there. Lillie crossed her arms, lifting her chin and looking down her nose at them in a challenging fashion. Moon raised her own eyebrows, stuffing her hands in her pockets.

“It has been pleasant to battle with you,” said Soliera, sticking out her hand for Moon to shake. Even through the gloves of her suit, her hands were ice-cold. “I look forward to facing you again someday. I will endeavor to improve, so I may be a worthy opponent.”

“See you around,” said Moon, with a nod.

Neither Phyco nor Soliera approached Lillie with a handshake; instead, Phyco offered her a slow nod. “Thank you for caring for Cosmog,” he said solemnly. “She will grow well with you. She would have grown in laboratory conditions, but growth under duress is... not ideal.”

Lillie sniffed. “Thanks,” she said. Under the veneer of civility, there was a heavy dose of sarcasm. “I'm glad you approve.”

That seemed to be enough for Phyco and Soliera— or perhaps they didn't understand sarcasm very well— for they merely nodded and turned around, walking away from the trial barrier in the direction of Route Five. The pile of slowly climbing Sudowoodo all turned as one to watch them go. Moon put Ben away, as he'd finished eating his beans; Lillie recalled her Pokémon as well—with Nebby the obvious exception.

“Where to, ladies?” asked the trial guide.

“Straight through, please.”
“Headed to Royal Avenue? Great. Can I see your amulets?”

“I don't have an amulet,” Lillie explained, as Moon lifted the strap on her backpack where the amulet dangled. “I have a letter of universal permission from Professor Kukui and Professor Burnet to travel on all of the main roads of Alola and in some of the trial sites.”

“I'll need to see that.”

“Naturally.” Lillie fished the letter out of her bag. Moon noted, with amusement, that respectful Lillie had returned. The trial guide scanned the letter before nodding and handing it back. He opened the gate, and Moon and Lillie walked through the barrier.

Or rather, they attempted to walk through the barrier. About four Sudowoodo grabbed at Moon's ankles, slender fingers piercing holes in her socks and scraping the skin beneath—not hard enough to break the skin, but hard enough to hurt. Lillie was dealing with a few more of them.

“Oi, get off!” said Moon, irritated. “This isn't a free ride!”

“I'm sorry, I don't really want to take any of you with me,” said Lillie apologetically, attempting to pry one of the Sudowoodo off.

Moon reached for her belt, intending to get Puck out to use Razor Leaf. Several of the Sudowoodo sprang backward, looking distressed.

“Ah,” said the trial guide knowingly. “They've seen that you have Waterium Z. They're not too fond of it.”

Moon waved her wrist at the Sudowoodo, and they began to flee. A few stubborn ones clung to her socks, but a quick Razor Leaf from Puck as she released him did the trick.

“Little shits,” she said under her breath. “I hope you all eat something that mildly disagrees with you.”

Lillie laughed. “That's an interesting thing to wish on someone.”

“Like you can talk, I bet you would have wished the same thing on Phyco and Soliera if you'd gotten the chance,” snorted Moon.

Lillie's face, relaxed in her amusement, immediately tensed at the mention of the aliens. Moon raised an eyebrow at her, but didn't press the point.

They walked in silence for a little while along Route Six. There were large, shady oak trees lining either side of the road—it seemed to be more maintained than any of the wild routes Moon had seen in Alola so far. The tall grass grew around the trees and behind them, leading into woods on either side of the road.

“It's hard to see them like this.”

Lillie's voice was soft. Moon turned to look at her, surprised that her friend was actually volunteering information for once. She thought back to her conversations with Phyco and Soliera on Melemele Island, about the apologies they had made and asked her to convey to Lillie—and she thought about the panic attack that Lillie had, when she'd seen them on Route Two. Her friend hadn't ever said it was a panic attack, but Moon had done some research on Rotom's internet browser and come to the conclusion that Lillie had either been experiencing a panic attack or heart failure. Since she was still alive, Moon was inclined to believe it was the former.
“It makes sense,” she said, trying to sound diplomatic. “From what I understand, the last time you saw them, Nebby was having a less-than-stellar experience.”

Lillie’s mouth flattened into a thin line. “The last time I saw them, we were running away from them,” she said flatly. “They had us cornered. Them, and some of the other scientists. I was convinced that we were caught and I was going to be in so much trouble— but the next thing I knew, I was trying not to drown at Brooklet Hill.”

“It’s just how your brain sees them,” said Moon. “They’re nice to their Pokémon.”

Lillie sighed. “They were nice to Nebby, too,” she admitted. “It’s just— the association. They couldn’t really do anything to stop what Nebby went through, so I hold them partly responsible. And they saw some other things, too— things I wish they hadn’t seen. They know more about me than I want them to.”

“What did they see?”

“I’m not ready to discuss that with you.”

“Oh.”

“Sorry,” Lillie amended herself. “I know that sounds cold, I just— I am really, really not ready to talk about that. You and Hau will be the first ones to know.”

“Do the professors know?”

Lillie hesitated. “They know some things,” she said finally. “I had to explain a little bit, to them. Enough that they didn’t send Nebby and I right back to where we came from. But I wish they didn’t have to know. They look at me differently— both of them. And so does Captain Lana, and Kahuna Olivia. Kahuna Hala, as well.”

Moon nodded. “And your mysterious friend?”

“He knows more than anyone.” Lillie’s mouth tightened even more. “He— he actually went through some of it with me. He escaped before I did.”

A distinct memory popped into Moon’s mind— Lillie had once almost said the word “brother” before replacing it with “friend.” It would make sense, if the mysterious friend was actually Lillie’s brother. Probably an older brother— Moon remembered from the night she’d seen him in the Paniola Town Pokémon Center that he was taller than Lillie.

She didn’t say as much to Lillie, though— it would be unkind to make Lillie reveal more information than she wanted to, just because Moon had a strong hypothesis. It would be more of the baseless speculation that Lana had warned her against, at Brooklet Hill.

Moon, Lillie, and all of their Pokémon continued to walk until the sun began to sink low in the sky. There was a niche between two of the oak trees where someone had cleared a lot of the tall grass away; the smell of Repel lingered near the edges of the clearing. Moon set her backpack down.

“This looks like a good camping spot,” she decided. “Lillie, do any of your team know Flash?”

“Er— I don’t think so. Sorry.”

“It’s fine.”
“Pew,” said Nebby thoughtfully, floating over to Moon's backpack.

“Oh, now you want to learn moves?” Lillie crossed her arms, frowning slightly at Nebby. “You've learned Splash and Teleport, not to mention the over-powered version of Teleport that you only use when you're in trouble. I tried to teach you Flash, back on Melemele Island. What's changed?”

Moon, amused, opened her TM case and offered it to Lillie, who flipped through the book while muttering under her breath. She selected the TM for Flash and held it out to Nebby, who moved one of her incorporeal limbs to brush over and through the disc.

There was a bright flash of light, and the whole clearing lit up— sending several wild Pokémon scattering.

“Pew, pew!”

“Unbelievable,” said Lillie, shaking her head as she handed the TM case back to Moon. But she was smiling a little bit, and there was pride in her eyes.

“That's definitely enough to set up camp by.” Moon began unbuckling her tent from the bottom of the hiking backpack, snapping poles together as Lillie and her Pokémon shook out the tent itself. Puck and Ariel worked together to unzip Moon's backpack, carefully pulling out the small sack that contained her balled-up hammock. They also pulled out a pair of socks and Moon's entire stash of human food, but it was the effort that counted, in the end.

Soon enough they had set up the tent, with most of their sleeping bags and belongings inside; and Moon strung her hammock up between the two oak trees closest to the road. She got out her teapot and camping stove, setting them up in the middle of the open ground they'd left between the tent and the hammock. Nebby, still shining brightly with Flash, spun in place as she admired her effect on the shadows around them.

“Chicken, beef, or shrimp-flavored cup ramen?” Moon asked Lillie, examining her options.

“Er— beef, I suppose.”

“Great. One cup or two?”

“Just one, thank you.”

Moon filled her teapot with water bottles and lit the jar of fuel below the camping stove, waiting for the water to boil. Lillie unfolded a small camping-stool and sat down on it with a sigh. She was holding a battery-powered lantern, which she flicked on.

“You can stop using Flash now,” she said to Nebby. “I don't want you to get tired out.”

“Pew.” Nebby's light flickered and dimmed back to the usual. The lantern wasn't nearly as bright, but it was enough light for them to see by. They didn't really need a fire— it was still early September and the night was soft and warm. Lillie began methodically laying out bowls and filling them with beans for her Pokémon team's dinner. She added a bowl for Ben as well. Puck had already gone off hunting, and in a surprising turn of events Ariel had gone with him. Moon was already recalculating her bean budget.

The teapot began to whistle, and Moon took it off the camp-stove to prepare the ramen— a cup of beef-flavored for Lillie, two cups of shrimp-flavored for Moon— and two cups of hot water. Lillie put a packet of Simisage tea in her cup; Moon's, of course, contained instant cocoa. They ate in silence, listening to the sounds of wind in the trees and nocturnal Pokémon.
“The Megalopolis Recon Squad,” said Lillie suddenly, but didn't continue.

“How?”

“Er— Captain Phyco, and Private Soliera.”

“Oh, right. What about them?”

“They and— two others, who aren't here. They are working with a— research and development group, here in Alola.” Lillie's hands twisted around her empty ramen cup. “They are looking for ways to create permanent— gates, if you will, between planets. Their home planet is in need of resources that are no longer available to them. They are located quite a long way from Earth— at least five hundred light-years, if not more. They were only able to arrive here with the help of a legendary Pokémon. I don't know which one— though if I remember correctly, Palkia controls all of space and would have the ability to transport them. It would be the most likely candidate.”

“Arceus,” muttered Moon, shaking her head.

“He could probably do it too, but I think he's a bit busy running the universe to bother.”

“That's not what I— oh, you were teasing me.” She caught the humor in Lillie's eyes a few moments too late. “But go on, I was being rude.”

“Well, the— experimentation, that was done on Nebby? Er, the research and development group was trying to get her to warp by causing her a great deal of pain. Cosmog will warp if placed under sufficient stress. They didn't really have any say in what the research and development group decided to do, in the end; but Captain Phyco did say that hurting Nebby was an option, even if it was an inadvisable one.”

Moon waited, but Lillie seemed to have talked herself out for the moment. “He seems like the person who would want to list all of the options,” she ventured, “even if some of the options aren't ethical.”

“Yes, I think you must be right.” The styrofoam cup collapsed with a soft crunching noise, and Lillie looked down at her hands in surprise before sighing softly and setting the cup down on the ground. “Private Soliera did not say much, when I observed her with the research and development group. She is much more talkative than I remember.”

“How old are they?”

“Oh, I have no idea. It might be different for them.”

“Alien biology?” Moon grinned when Lillie nodded. “Cool. I'm going to ask them, if I see them again.”

There was another pause. Lillie seemed to be weighing her words, but finally she opened her mouth once more. “Today was different. I was on the defensive because I expected them to behave a certain way. But they surprised me. I don't really like surprises.”

“I could tell.”

“I was— a participant, in the research and development group.” Lillie shrugged, when Moon raised an eyebrow. “It was for my education. I would have preferred to attain my science credits in the IT department, but I didn't really have any say in the matter. I did, however, raise objections to the experiments done on Nebby. I was harshly reprimanded before the entire group. Captain Phyco and Private Soliera were witness to the reprimand, so seeing them reminded me both of my public
humiliation and the pursuit that occurred when I absconded with Nebby.”

“And that’s why you were mad at them?”

“That’s why I was mad at them,” confirmed Lillie, nodding once.

“Thank you for telling me.”

“It’s hard to talk about things,” Lillie said quietly. “I’m so—I’m so used to keeping it to myself. I had two people I could talk to at home. They understood everything that happened to me. I can still talk to them, but they’re more distant now. I think they have healing of their own to do, and I don’t wish to be a burden to them or to anyone else.”

“Well, you’re not a burden to me or Hau,” declared Moon, on a sudden whim. “You’re our friend, and when our friend is having a hard time, we’ll help her, because we know she would do the same for us. You helped me with Ben for the first couple of weeks, and you spent a lot of time with Hau when he and I were avoiding each other. I don't know if our friendship would have survived without you. You’re not a burden—you’re strong.”

Lillie’s eyes filled with tears. She quickly swiped them away with the sleeve of her pink jacket. “That means the world to me, Moon. Thank you.”

Chapter End Notes

Lillie nonchalantly pretending like she doesn't know the name Gladion lmao
Gladion hates camping lmao, he's always staying in hotels or Plumeria's trailer.
Ben could evolve into Espeon, Umbreon, or Sylveon at this point but he doesn't want to, because he's a little shit.

“What do you mean, [friends]? You don't have—” omg Lillie I never thought YOU would join in on Roast Nebby Day
Writing Nebby as the facilitator for Lillie's interactions with other characters gives me all of the uwus

“Usually Lillie addressed adults with at least some level of respect; so to hear her sound so sullen and, well, [teenagery] was something of a surprise.” — because Lillie is a Mom Friend™ and that means sometimes she goes full I Want To See Your Manager on behalf of anyone for whom she has decided to be a Mom Friend™

“They've been standing here for like, eighteen hours” —Phyco and Soliera didn't torture Nebby but they are singularly invested in the pursuit of SCIENCE

“We carry protein shakes and other nutrient-filled substances for food, and the suits are catheterized—” —Here is a factual reason for them to wear the suits all the time. Otherwise, I would have had to write Phyco wearing a horrifically ugly Alola-print shirt and a wide-brimmed straw hat.
Do you ever think about the fact that “too much information” is what we say when sometimes we actually mean “I don’t want to hear about this specific thing you’re talking about because I find it gross or disturbing”? Because I do.

“She means she has no desire to hear about either of our private bodily functions, and frankly neither do I.” — drag her, sis

It doesn’t make any sense that Rotom could find information about Poipole in the dex if it’s an alien Pokémon. So Moon is Contributing To Science here. My baby is grown up and adulting and making academic contributions <3

Poipole is “purple” in a terrible New York accent. YOU CAN NEVER UNHEAR IT, SUFFER WITH ME.

It makes sense that aliens would speak alien languages???? don’t @ me, it’s a legitimate battle strategy. Soliera will use whatever resources she has available.

Ben is... kind of a tsundere lmao

So just having the Sudowoodo sitting there seems kind of a silly way to make an arbitrary game barrier. I fixed that so there's an actual challenge barrier in the location where the Sudowoodo are, at the intersection of Route Five and Route Six; and I just made the Sudowoodo into both a reason for Phyco and Soliera to be in the area, and a mild inconvenience for Moon and Lillie to deal with.

“I hope you all eat something that mildly disagrees with you.” —This is a curse similar in vein to “I hope you sleep funny and wake up with an aching back” or “I hope someone moves all of the furniture in your house two inches to the left and you stumble and stub your toes on everything for weeks” or the more extreme version, “I hope you step on a Lego.”

“Moon had done some research on Rotom's internet browser and come to the conclusion that Lillie had either been experiencing a panic attack or heart failure.” — cough, cough “Web MD” cough, cough

“From what I understand, the last time you saw them, Nebby was having a less-than-stellar experience.” — I would just like to point out that this is a BRILLIANT PUN that neither Moon nor Lillie gets, because Cosmog is a cloud of space dust, but Cosmoem is a heavily condensed ball of space dust (a pre-star) and Solgaleo/Lunala are basically stars (even though I know they're the sun and the moon, shhh)

I know that the point of Cosmog (Nebby, specifically) is that they’re useless until they evolve into Solgaleo or Lunala, but Nebby is literally a ball of loose, sparkly space dust and if you tell me it’s not logical for her to learn Flash then I will FIGHT you.

And yes, I know that Flash is no longer a TM. RIP in tiny pieces, it was on par with Defog for Most Annoying Parts of the Gen 1 Through 5 Games.

Chicken, beef, and shrimp ramen could be written in as Combusken, Miltank, and Clauncher ramen, but we’ve already discussed Pokémon food ethics in the author notes so we're not gonna do that today lmao

“Moon was already recalculating her bean budget.” — I don't know why this is funny, it just is
‘Arceus,’ muttered Moon, shaking her head. ‘He could probably do it too, but I think he's a bit busy running the universe to bother.’” — observant readers will notice that this echoes a joke that Wicke makes with Gladion in Windowpain. You pick up your sense of humor from the people that you laugh with the most. Over the two years that Gladion and Lillie have been separated, I would venture to guess that Lillie has laughed most often with Wicke.

“You're not a burden— you're strong.” — in which the author once again makes herself cry
Blossoms

Chapter Summary

Route Six, Royal Avenue.

Chapter Notes

Moon reflects on old memories while traveling on Route Six, and challenges Team Skull with the help of a new acquaintance.

[1. Please note that the total chapter installment for Sakura has been changed from 24 to 23.]
[2. Merry Christmas.]

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

In the morning, Moon met Professor Burnet for the first time when she drove up in a mud-spattered gray pickup truck to drive Lillie back to Heahea City for a few days. Moon had known Lillie was going back; she just wasn't sure why. She wasn't about to question it, though—not when Lillie had been so open with her the night before.

Professor Burnet was tall and slim, and she strode right up to Moon with her hand outstretched and a smile on her face. “You must be Moon,” she said warmly, as they shook hands. “I've heard a lot about you from both Maleko and Lillie. Thank you for taking care of her.”

“We both take care of each other.”

Professor Burnet's smile widened. “As it should be, between friends.” She turned to Lillie. “Are you packed and ready to go?”

“Yes, Professor.”

“Great! I'd love to stay and chat longer, but duty calls, as it always does.” In contrast with Professor Kukui's dark, happy eyes, Professor Burnet's eyes were a beautiful amber-gold color, and they sharpened as she turned back to Moon. “I do need to sit down and have a chat with you and Hau, though. Lillie ought to be there, though she may opt out of the conversation if she wishes.”

“It's the kind of conversation you'll be very pleased about, Moon,” called Lillie, her back turned as she put her backpack in the truck. “It involves answering questions.”

“Oh, now you've got me all excited,” said Moon, grinning. “Just tell me when and where. I'll be there.”

“Speaking of which—you've got a Rotom-Dex, right?”

“Hi, Professor!” said Rotom, flying out of Moon's pocket as it always did when it had new information to offer, or a comment to make. “Nice to see you, bzzt!”
“Nice to see you too, Rotom. Can you add my contact information? Just lift it from Maleko’s Rotom-Dex, if that’s easier.”

“Will do. New contact— Dr. Elizabeth Burnet. Alternate names: Elikapeka Burnet, Ellie Burnet, Professor Burnet. Added Dex number and email address.”

“Text me with your name sometime so I have your number,” Professor Burnet said, nodding at Moon. “I’m usually far too busy for casual conversations, but in a pinch I’ve got your back— as does Maleko. Or you can contact your local trial captain at any Pokémon Center. I think you’re still in Lana’s territory for now, but once you get to Royal Avenue you’ll be on Kiawe’s turf.”

“Do the kahunas have territory on the islands, too?”

“They do,” said Professor Burnet, with a nod and a grin. “I'm not surprised you picked that up. Melemele is split two ways— Ilima has control over the west side and Hala runs the east side, essentially. Akala is obviously split four ways. Mallow has the north, Lana has the west, Kiawe has the east, and Olivia has the south. The boundaries aren’t truly even in terms of landmass— Mallow has a much smaller territory than any of the others, because the Lush Jungle area is less populated than central Akala. But look at me, chattering away when I have a ton of work waiting at my desk!” She offered her hand to Moon again. “Ha, you've got me answering questions for you, too. I'll see you around, Moon.”

“See you later!” called Lillie, lifting her Pokémon into the truck one by one.

“Bye!”

They left. Moon sent both an email and a text to Professor Burnet before starting to tear down her camp.

“Well, it's just us now,” she said to her team. Ben was still wolfing down beans as though there were about to be a shortage; Puck and Ariel had just returned from hunting. “Ari, are you going to eat Bugs full-time?”

Ariel nodded enthusiastically. Moon made a face. “Well, it saves me money,” she muttered under her breath. “I think we’re going to have to start thinking about a fourth teammate soon. I think we can take Kiawe’s trial with just the three of us, but I’d like to have four for Mallow and the Grand Trial.”

Puck and Ariel each sighed once, but other than that made no objection. Ben looked up slowly from his beans and began to growl, the fluffy fur at his throat standing on end.

“Get used to the idea,” said Moon firmly, crossing her arms and maintaining eye contact. “You don’t get any say in whether you get more teammates. That happens with or without your permission. But you do get a say in what kind of teammates you get. Puck and Ari can tell you all about that.”

Puck and Ariel moved to either side of Ben, the three of them having a quiet conversation in hoots, trills, and squeaks. Moon took down the tent and the hammock, folding both of them up neatly and strapping the tent bundle to the base of her backpack.

“We're going to find a nice patch of grass and train for a while,” she told her team. “And then we're going to Royal Avenue. We'll probably stay there for a little while. Rotom, how long does it take to get to Wela Volcano Park from Royal Avenue?”

Rotom was silent for a few moments. “An Internet search says that it's about half a day's walk to the entrance, but the park itself covers a lot of the island, bzzt. It's about a day's walk from the entrance to the area cordoned off for the Totem's Den. The path to get to the trial site travels through the
volcano in some places, to avoid the outer lava flows. Everything is constantly monitored to make sure that trialgoers and other Trainers are in no true danger, bzzt— but surviving the conditions of camping close to an active volcano is considered one of the informal aspects of the trial itself.”

Moon stared at Rotom, jaw dropping slightly. “I have to camp next to a volcano?”

“Most trialgoers choose to camp inside the tunnels that pass through the volcano, bzzt. The lava flows are diverted to avoid the main paths, but camping inside the tunnels poses less of a risk than camping outside.”

“Arceus.” Moon shook her head. “I'd better look into some fireproof or protective gear. That sounds kind of terrible.”

“The Totem's Den itself is located at the highest point of Wela Volcano, bzzt. There is a stone column in the center of the volcano with stairs leading up to it; the lava flows from around the stone column, out to the rest of the volcano. But the Den itself is perfectly safe, bzzt.”

“It would kind of have to be, if you're sending a bunch of high school graduates up there. Arceus.” Moon swore again. “Well, let's get going, guys. Thanks for the info, Rotom.”

“You're welcome, bzzt.”

The sun shone softly on Route Six, tempered by a few clouds and the massive oaks that lined the road. Moon and her team had been walking for perhaps an hour when she spotted something white on the landscape ahead of them.

“I wonder what that is?”

“Hoothoo?” suggested Puck, the tops of his wings shifting in a shrug.

“Nah, it's too early for snow.”

Ariel soared high into the air, drifting in a circle above them for about ten seconds before landing on the road.

“Biki pek,” she stated.

“I don't know what you mean by clouds, Ari. I guess we'll find out when we get there.”

As they drew closer to the whiteness on the landscape, realization and an odd homesickness hit her hard. Moon loved Alola with all of her heart, though she hadn't yet seen all of it— but she was sucked into a surprisingly vivid memory of Kanto as they approached the trees that did, in fact, look like clouds.

“The meteorologist on the TV beamed with a very real pleasure, pointing with her stick at a map of Kanto. “The first cherry blossoms have been sighted in southern Kanto, on the few trees remaining on Cinnabar Island after the eruption. Please look forward to seeing cherry blossoms around Fuchsia City and Routes Fourteen, Fifteen, and Eighteen next week. We will continue to update you all on the progress of the cherry blossom front, so you may plan your parties accordingly.”

“Mom, what's a cherry blossom front?” asked six-year-old Moon, munching on a bowl of Pika Flakes.
“It's when the cherry trees bloom with pink and white flowers,” answered Kapua Hawkins. Her hands were busy packing lunches for both herself and Moon; they had long days of work and school, respectively, ahead. “They call it a front because it crosses the country the way a cold front or a warm front does. The cherry blossom front runs from south to north, because spring comes a little sooner down south than it does up north.”

“They said Pallet Town was next week.”

“That's right. Next week we'll see the cherry trees blooming on your way to and from school. Professor Oak is hosting a party for all of Pallet Town two Saturdays from now, in the park.”

“The Pokémon Professor?” squealed Moon. “I really get to meet him?”

“That's right. His two grandkids just moved in with him— their parents passed away rather suddenly, poor things. But they're both quite a bit older than you. Daisy is fifteen or so, and I believe Gary is twelve.”

“Still, it would be so cool to live with Pokémon all the time,” sighed Moon, already daydreaming. “I really wish I could get a Hoothoot, but you can only find them in Johto...”

“Trrrm?”

Moon had stopped walking. Puck, Ariel and Ben were all watching her, confused. The petals of the cherry blossoms rained gently around them in the bright sunlight; the wind carried the bitter odor of the flowers past her nose.

“Let's just sit for a while,” murmured Moon, half-smiling at another memory.

“My dress is itchy.”

“It was a gift from your father's mother, and it's traditional to wear them at viewing parties or I would have let you come in shorts and a T-shirt.” Moon's mother also wore a yukata; her dad would be arriving late after work and would likely come in his usual three-piece suit.

They held hands as they walked over to Pallet Town's little park and playground. There were quite a few people gathered already; Professor Oak had apparently invited the whole town. Someone had organized food— Moon could smell dumplings and pickles and even the strong, sweet scent of alcohol.

Her mother allowed her to run over to the playground to look for her friends. Moon didn't have very many friends— she was a little bit shy, and even though she was a Kantonian native, “Marion” and “Hawkins” were both Unovan names— “Marion” was also a Kalosian name. Her skin was also a shade or two darker than most Kantonian children— a peachy golden color, instead of their porcelain tones.

“Oh my god, look at her, she's so cute!” Moon turned around, alarmed by the happy squealing. A teenage girl with gingery brown hair was staring down at her— Moon could almost see the hearts in her eyes. She was wearing a T-shirt and shorts. “What's your name, sweetie?”

“Moon,” said Moon, before she could think about it too hard. “Um— I mean Marion. But everybody calls me Moon.”

“Aww, that's adorable! Oh my god. Blue, look at her little yukata, isn't she cute?”

Moon blinked up at the younger boy who stood behind the girl. He was also in a T-shirt and shorts,
his hands shoved in his pockets; he looked bored. “Sure, whatever.”

“Are you Daisy and Gary?” she asked them.

“Yeah! How did you know?”

“My mom said you were moving here. What's it like to live with a Pokémon Professor?”

“Shitty,” said the boy.

“Blue Oak!” Daisy put her hands over Moon's ears. “Watch your mouth, there are innocent children here.”

“There's really no other way to put it. We're only living with Gramps because our parents died,” he explained, looking at Moon. His brown eyes were hard, but they glittered with unshed tears. “I'd rather have my parents back.”

“Of course,” said Moon, with a nod. She peeled Daisy's hands away from her ears. “But would you like it if you weren't sad?”

Blue's eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Huh,” he said, after a few moments. “Yeah, I probably would. Never thought of it like that.”

He smiled at her, eyes crinkling at the corners. Daisy, next to Moon, let out a relieved giggle.

“I'm going to be a Pokémon groomer,” she explained to Moon. “At least, at first. I might become a doctor later. I really love Pokémon.”

“And they love you,” said Blue, shaking his head. “ Seriously, it's unfair. We had a pet Growlithe back home. It hated me and our parents and it yapped its head off if anyone but Daisy touched it.”

“We have a Meowth at our house,” said Moon. “We just got him a couple months ago. He's still a kitten, but he's really cute and he loves pets.” She hesitated, but Blue was sad, and she knew her mom wouldn't really mind if she made the offer. “You can come over to my house and pet him any time you want.”

“I... might take you up on that.” He said it under his breath, so Moon knew she hadn't really been meant to hear it; but she didn't mind. “You have any siblings, or is it just you?”

“Just me.” Moon beamed, which startled another smile out of him and produced more squeals from Daisy. “I'm six. How old are you?”

“I'll be twelve in three weeks. Daisy's fifteen.”

“When I turn ten, I'm going to catch a Nidoran, to practice battling. And then when I'm eighteen, I'm going to pick a Squirtle and go on a Pokémon journey,” Moon informed him. She told everyone she met about her future plans; it was important that nobody would be confused about what she wanted to do with her life. “And then I'll come back and go to college and read a lot of books to my Pokémon, and we'll build a castle and fill it with books and I'll be the librarian queen.”

Daisy and Blue both stared at her for a few seconds; but then Daisy made a softer noise, more of a coo than a squeal. “You are the cutest kid I've ever seen in my entire life,” she said solemnly. “I'm adopting you. You're our little sister now.”

“Okay,” agreed Moon. “I always wanted to have a brother and a sister. Mom said I could only
have younger ones, but when I asked her why she wouldn't tell me. But I wanted an older brother and an older sister anyway, so I'm happy now. Do you want to eat food?"

"Hell yeah, let's eat some food," agreed Blue at once.

"Blue, watch your mouth!"

Daisy took one of her hands, and Blue took the other, and Moon led them both in the general direction of the food. As they walked, they passed Moon's mom and their down-the-street neighbor, Mrs. Red.

"Oh, Marion! Who have you got with you?" laughed Moon's mom.

"This is Daisy and Blue. They're adopting me," explained Moon.

"Is that so?" Moon's mom grinned. "Good riddance, she eats like a Mudsdale, and every pair of jeans she owns is worn through at the knees."

"A Mudsdale?" said Daisy, curious.

"It's a 'Lolan Pokémon," said Moon, eager to share her knowledge. "They're big horses. Mom's from 'Lola."

"Alola, Marion," her mother corrected her. "Well, if you're all off to get food, why don't you take Satoshi with you?"

Moon hadn't noticed Mrs. Red's quiet son, standing just behind her with his hands in his pockets. He looked up, flushing as his name was spoken; he'd been staring at someone's Farfetch'd with curiosity.

"Hi," he said softly.

"This is Daisy and Blue," repeated Moon. She was used to Satoshi's silence—he let her follow him over to Route One to watch Pidgey and Rattata, as long as she was quiet and didn't scare them away. "They're adopting me. That's Satoshi. Let's eat food now."

"In retrospect," said Moon out loud, making her three teammates jump from where they had curled up around her, all sitting at the base of a cherry-blossom tree, "they have me to thank for everything."

Ben made an inquiring noise.

"Red and Blue, my two best friends before I moved to Alola—now I have Hau and Lillie." She really couldn't claim that Red and Blue were her best friends anymore, not when time and more recently, distance kept them as far apart as it did. They were her oldest friends and she still loved them; but she didn't rely on them for companionship the way she had done in Kanto. She was still friends with Daisy as well, though the older girl's enthusiasm for what she saw as Moon's cuteness had faded considerably when she realized that Moon was much more of a tomboy than the neat purple yukata had indicated. Daisy had also been busy working as a Pokémon groomer and had recently gone back to school to get a doctorate, to become a full-fledged professor like her grandfather.

The cherry blossoms made her smile as a breeze rustled the route and a shower of petals swirled down around them. Moon took Rotom from her pocket, opening the camera app and snapping a few pictures.
She got to her feet, moving Ben off her lap and onto the ground as she did so. “I’m done reminiscing,” she promised them. “Let’s train.”

And train they did, among the raining petals. Puck seemed to really like them, looking up at the snowy blossoms in approval. Ariel largely ignored them, except when a petal landed on her beak and she jumped about a foot in the air. Ben kept batting them away, hissing and scratching when they landed on him.

It was the middle of the afternoon before Moon caught sight of the gate that led from Route Six to Royal Avenue. She was looking forward to a late lunch at the Pokémon Center, and her teammates seemed equally eager to eat.

At the center of the gate Moon spotted a Mudsdale—sheer coincidence, she thought, remembering that her mother had mentioned Moon’s appetite rivaling that of a Mudsdale. She also saw a pair of feet, but not a head, on the other side of the Mudsdale; and she could hear voices—obnoxious, familiar ones.

“Oh, hello,” she muttered with grim good humor, walking around the Mudsdale to see Emmett and Kohaku, the Team Skull grunts, arguing with the Trainer who was the likely owner of the Mudsdale.

“It’s just a Drifloon, yo!” said Emmett derisively. “They’re evil. They suck the souls out of little kids. Think of the kids, Miss Trainer.”

“I highly doubt that either of you were thinking of protecting innocent children when you stole that Pokémon,” said the Mudsdale’s Trainer, placing her hands on her hips.

“Floo-woon,” agreed the Drifloon, bobbing up and down.

“Like Team Skull’s ever spared a thought for anyone who wasn’t one of them,” said Moon, walking forward and placing her hands on her hips. “Hi, coward.”

She nodded at Emmett when she spoke, and he sputtered indignantly. Kohaku smirked, but said nothing.
“Do you... know them?” The Trainer turned to look at Moon. She had a cute little button nose, slightly wrinkled in distaste.

“Unfortunately, yes. We keep running into each other.”

“Hah, you just can’t leave us alone,” sneered Emmett, in an attempt to recover some bravado.

“Oh, can’t I?” Moon rolled her eyes. “To my knowledge, I’ve only battled you once. I fought the blue-haired guy on the marina, and I fought you on Big Wave Beach. You had him fight me in Verdant Cavern—” She pointed at Kohaku, who lifted two fingers in a lazy peace sign. “—and my friend and I fought him and the orange-haired girl in Paniola Town. You were bullying a Pokémon there, too.”

“You saw Uilani and me on Route Five.” Emmett glared at her. “You gave her a bruise.”

“Oh, poor thing,” said Moon flatly. “She deserved it for being a jerk to my friend, so you can take your self-righteous hypocritical bullshit, lubricate it with your own tears, and shove it up your grimy little—”

“So you are not only Pokémon thieves, but bullies as well?” said the other Trainer, raising one eyebrow at Emmett and Kohaku. “Life in the big city is... something else. The scum of Alola brazenly roam the streets, stealing Pokémon and bullying those they perceive to be weaker than them. Perhaps it is because of my own sheltered upbringing, but I have never seen such moral degeneracy in all the years I have lived. Have you no shame?”

“They literally don’t, you’re wasting your breath asking,” snorted Moon.

“Oh, yeah?” Emmett’s fists clenched. “We’ll fight you, and then we’ll see who has no shame. Kohaku, you take her, I’ll take the horse chick.”

“Nah, bro,” said Kohaku unexpectedly. “I’ve fought her twice in a row. It’s definitely your turn to take the ass-whooping.”

“Are you fuckin’ kidding me, dude?”

“I would tell you both to mind your language, but I am led to believe it would fall upon deaf ears,” remarked the Trainer. “And from the looks of things, I am the youngest one here. If you are to be believed, you are in charge, of the pair of you— so would it not be your duty to challenge the older of us in battle? A responsible leader cares for their subordinates.”

Emmett glared at her. “Kid, you use a lot of big fuckin’ words—”

“Then allow me to clarify.” The Trainer placed one hand on her Mudsdale’s flank. “Epicentre and I will fight your friend, and you will fight this other Trainer. Are those small enough words for you, delinquent?”

Moon cackled as Emmett's face turned a mottled red; even Kohaku was snickering a little bit. “Fine!” he shouted. “Shut up and fight me, then.” It was an easy victory. Clearly, Emmett didn't train very much— his Drowzee ought to have grown since she fought him on Big Wave Beach, but Ben defeated it in one hit— his very first one-hit KO, Moon realized. Emmett had also picked up a Zubat at some point— which Ben conquered equally rapidly.
The other Trainer was equally successful. Moon suspected that the Mudsdale was far more powerful than any Pokémon she'd seen so far. Admittedly, her hypothesis was mostly founded on the fact that the Mudsdale was absolutely massive, but when Kohaku's Drowssee and Rattatta fainted instantly after little more than a huff of amusement from the Mudsdale, Moon knew that her theory had some merit.

“And that, as they say, is that,” said the other Trainer, making a show of dusting off her gloved hands despite the fact that there was no dirt on them. “Now, if you gentlemen would kindly leave this Drifloon with me, I will ensure that it returns to its Trainer safely. You can make your way to the gates of hell, as far as I am concerned. Good afternoon.”

She didn't move, watching them with raised eyebrows.

“Look,” said Emmett, putting his hands on his hips. “This is a legitimate business. We're protecting an innocent kid from having its soul stolen by an evil Pokémon—”

“That's a misconception, Drifloon aren't evil—” began Moon heatedly, having read his argument online far more often than she would have liked.

“Epicentre,” said the Trainer loudly, cutting over both Emmett and Moon, “shall we stomp these scoundrels? It will be rather difficult to clean up afterward, and I'd prefer to spare this Drifloon the sight of delinquent viscera spread over the road— but I am willing, if you are.”

The Mudsdale snorted, and took a single step forward.

Emmett let out a terrified screech and bolted, running into Royal Avenue with his arms pumping for dear life. Kohaku, silent but slightly pale, followed.

The Trainer turned to look at the Drifloon. “Would you like me to guide you home,” she said gently, “or can you find your own way from here?”

“Driff,” answered the Drifloon.

“Are you sure? It would be no trouble to make sure you find your Trainer safely. I don't want you to run into those thugs again.”

“Floon driff.”

“If you're sure.” The Trainer reached out, patting the Drifloon on the head. It closed its eyes, beaming behind the patch-work that covered its mouth, and bobbed up and down several times before floating into Royal Avenue.

“You have to teach me to do that,” said Moon, shaking her head.

“What, speak to a Drifloon? I'm afraid I can't help you there. Most Pokémon communicate through expression and intuition, and centuries of partnership have hardwired human brains to understand them— as long as they consistently spend time with Pokémon, that is.”

“No— I mean get Team Skull to scatter. I always beat them, but they aren't afraid of me.”

“I think you will find that they are, actually.” The Trainer's mouth quirked into a rueful smile. “They were both rather reluctant to battle you, if you recall— and they underestimated me as a result, for which I must thank you.”

“Oh— um, you're welcome, I guess.”
“What is your name, Trainer?”

“Moon Hawkins.” Moon offered her hand, and the Trainer put her tiny gloved hand in it and shook.

“And your teammates?”

“Right— this guys are Puck, Ariel, and Benedick.” Moon indicated each of her Pokémon.

“I see you are an aficionado of the Bard.”

Moon pumped her fist into the air. “Finally, someone else who reads Shakespeare!”

“I'm afraid I do not regularly enjoy his works— I have read Hamlet, Prinplup of Denmark and Luvdisc's Labour Lost, but only as requirements for completing my education. Where are you from?”

“I'm from Melemele Island— well, I'm actually from Kanto, but I just moved here and my home is on Melemele Island.”

“But you are from Melemele Island,” agreed the Trainer, surprising Moon. “I am acquainted with Kahuna Hala— we began a correspondence several months ago— and he mentioned that his niece's family would be returning to Alola after long years in Kanto. You are Kahuna Hala's great-niece, are you not?”

“That's right,” said Moon, surprised. “I didn't know he wrote about me.”

“Kahuna Hala believes in celebrating the achievements of the young— especially when the young in question are family in whom he may take personal pride, as well as professional. I have heard much about you, and I have heard much about Kahuna Hala's grandson Hau, and I have heard much about the girl who has traveled with you and worked with the Professors. I will meet her in due time, though I suspect we have actually met before.”

“Really?”

“Did she, perchance, visit Poni Island sometime during the last month? It would have been a visit to the local hospital, for a rabies shot.”

“Oh, yeah! Did you meet her then?”

“I did. I happened to be home for a few days and I visited my grandmother, who is the director of Poni Island's hospital. She was with a young man, who kept his head and face covered and refused to tell me anything; but he paid the entire bill in cash, without complaint.”

“Yeah, that would be Lillie and her friend.”

The Trainer cleared her throat. “You need not worry about my discretion,” she said, a little quieter. “Kahuna Hala expressed to me the importance of keeping both Miss Lillie's identity, and that of her uncaptured companion, as secret as possible— though given the circumstances of her journey and the help she will require of the island kahunas and trial captains, I do not think it is much of a secret these days. There is an old adage that is perhaps a bit morbid for the situation— but I think it still applies. Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead.”

Moon snorted before she could help herself. “Yeah, a lot of people know about Lillie. But that means that everyone will help her, so I'm not going to complain.”

“I must commend you for your mature opinion on the matter.”
“Thanks. Can I ask you your name?”

“Oh!” The Trainer blushed. “Look at me, asking your name and chattering at you without even introducing myself first! I beg your pardon, Moon. My name is Hapu Kahonua. I hail from Poni Island. I am only sixteen years of age, but I have been given special permission by the kahunas to take my island challenge early. There is a... situation on Poni Island, a situation which requires my completion of the traditional challenge as soon as I am capable of completing it.”

“What kind of situation?”

“To put it bluntly, Poni Island does not currently have a kahuna.” Hapu's eyes, clear and gray, burned with a fire that Moon could not name. “The last kahuna was my grandfather, who passed away in April. Tapu Fini chose her successor, but it is an unconventional appointment. The kahunas wished to be sure I was qualified for the role.”

“You're the kahuna?”

“Future kahuna,” corrected Hapu. She held up her wrist, and Moon spotted a Z-Ring with many crystals on it— most of them in colors that Moon did not have on her own Z-Ring. “I am fairly close to finishing my challenge, I think. I've done the trials and Grand Trials for Ula'ula already, and I believe I've done the Akala trials in reverse order. I just have Captain Lana's trial left, and then I will face Kahuna Olivia.”

“Good luck,” said Moon sincerely. Hapu was two years younger than Moon, but there was something about her that seemed— appropriate, for the role of a kahuna. There was age and depth in those gray eyes, despite Hapu's short stature, round face, and button nose. Moon wondered what her Type specialty was. “If you're going to be a kahuna, you've probably got a really strong team.”

“Indeed.” Hapu patted her Mudsdale. “It is a little unfair of me to use Epicentre on something like the island challenge— she belonged to Grandfather, and she is much more powerful than most of the Pokémon one may find in the wild. But we are old friends. I could not imagine taking the challenge without her.”

“Mudsdale are... Ground-types, right?” Moon tried again.

Hapu's mouth twitched with amusement. “You're fishing for information,” she countered. “Kahuna Hala warned me you were as curious as Tapu Koko himself. Evidently his assessment was correct. I will not answer your questions about my team until you have earned the right to face me in battle by earning the Z-Crystal from Captain Mina, on Poni Island.”

“Hey, I had to try.” Moon grinned. “I should get going, though. My Pokémon are hungry, and so am I. It was really nice to meet you, Hapu.”

“Likewise.” Hapu offered her hand for Moon to shake once more. “I look forward to facing you in battle, Moon Hawkins. I wish you well.”

“Um, you too.”

Hapu climbed onto Mudsdale, sitting in the high molded saddle in a way that told Moon she had been doing it for years. She nudged Mudsdale into a walk, and the horse turned, plodding northward through the cherry blossom trees, toward Route Five.

“I think,” said Moon to her teammates, “that we have made a new friend.”
I kept forgetting whether I'd named Professor Burnet “Elizabeth” or “Elikapeka,” which is “Elizabeth” in Hawaiian. I was going to make her an Alola native, but then I did more research and learned that she's from Unova, which I didn't know because I never used Dream Radar when I was playing Black or White 2. So her name is Elizabeth, but when she married Kukui and moved to Alola full-time, she began using Elikapeka kind of informally as a way to assimilate with the culture. (Similarly, when Kukui and Burnet go on very, very rare vacations to Unova to visit Burnet's family, she calls him “Mark.”) Basically she just goes by Ellie anyway, and Moon's only ever going to call her Professor Burnet or Dr. Burnet probably. So it's not super relevant information, but it's an explanation to make up for the fact that I'm a complete ditz lmao

Splitting the islands into territories run by captains and kahunas makes sense until you get to Poni Island, which is a complete mess anyway. I wonder if someone will eventually... do something... about that...

Wela Volcano is an active volcano. There is visible lava on the ground as you walk around. It comes nowhere near the path so obviously measures have been taken to protect trialgoers and other Trainers, but it's still an active volcano and it's going to be 1) hot as frick and 2) just straight up dangerous???? and they canonically send 10-year-olds there???? so here have some headcanon about Kiawe's trial so that it's more than just a game of “find the difference” lmao

Okay, so here is a thing that actually REALLY bothers me about the Alolan map. On Melemele Island, you catch Pom-Pom Oricorio in Melemele Meadow, in the presence of yellow flowers. Okay, great. On Ula'ula Island, you catch Baile Oricorio in Ula'ula Meadow, in the presence of red flowers. You see a pattern? On Poni Island, you catch Sensu Oricorio by that single purple-leaved jacaranda tree on the way to Resolution Cave or whatever it's called. The leaves are purple. Makes sense. But on Akala Island, you catch Pau Oricorio on Route Six, in tall grass with NO PINK FLOWERS in sight. This is sort of explained by the lone tree in Royal Avenue, where you find the Pink Nectar; but I kind of hate that they didn't take the opportunity to turn Route Six into a literal road of cherry-blossom trees. That would have been SO PRETTY. So basically I've done it for you. You're welcome.

I was TOTALLY not expecting to write flashbacks to how Moon met Red and Blue but uh, it happened anyway and I'm oddly pleased with the result. I tried to do my research and be respectful about yukata— Moon is one-quarter Kantonian (read: Japanese) by heritage and a Kantonian citizen by birth, and her paternal grandmother (full Kantonian) gave her the yukata so I don't think it's appropriation? One would wear them at summer events usually, and cherry blossom viewing parties are generally spring events— but my research suggested that yukata would be the appropriate garment for a little girl at a cherry blossom viewing party.

Drifloon do not “suck the souls out of kids.” Is anyone really surprised that Emmett has no idea wtf he's talking about lmao

“You can take your self-righteous hypocritical bullshit, lubricate it with your own tears, and shove it up your grimy little—” Moon pls, this is a PG-rated fic
“Have you no shame?” “They literally don't, you're wasting your breath asking.” —
DRAG HER SIS

“Are those small enough words for you, delinquent?” —Hapu is more savage than
Moon will ever be

“even Kohaku was snickering a little bit.” —Emmett's only consistent plot function is
for me to get my jollies off writing pain, suffering, and public humiliation lmao

“You can make your way to the gates of hell, as far as I am concerned. Good
afternoon.” — yes, I know that I've written Hapu to basically sound like a character
from a Regency romance novel; no, I don't care; yes, it will continue

“ ‘That's a misconception, Drifloon aren't evil—' began Moon heatedly, having read his
argument online far more often than she would have liked.” —in which Moon is me
reading political debates on Facebook

I forgot that Hapu literally threatened to curbstomp the Team Skull grunts in canon and I
would just like to remind you that HAPU LITERALLY THREATENED TO CURBSTOMP THE TEAM SKULL GRUNTS IN CANON okay that is all, thank
you for listening to my TED talk

“Emmett let out a terrified screech and bolted, running into Royal Avenue with his arms
pumping for dear life.” —I will allow this man no dignity, ever

“Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead.” — Credit to Ben Franklin for the
brilliant quote.

Hamlet, Prinplup of Denmark and Luvdisc's Labour Lost were invented by me. I now
have a reason to re-use the tag “Terrible Shakespeare Puns.”
Competition

Chapter Summary

Royal Avenue, Royal Battle Dome.

Chapter Notes

Moon overhears some things she almost wishes she hadn't.

[A/N: This chapter marks what I believe to be a much more pointed divergence from canon— which continues on into the remainder of Sakura. Which I have written, by the way. The five-chapter gap has grown... a lot. Anyway, if you're not a fan of the way I've changed things in-universe, then it might be time to uninvest yourself from this story haha.]

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

From: satoshired@pmail.co.kan
To: marionhawkins@pmail.co.alo
CC: garyo@pmail.co.kan, daisyoak@celadon.edu
RE: Re: Remember when we all met for the first time?

Thanks for the pictures. You should send more.

From: garyo@pmail.co.kan
To: marionhawkins@pmail.co.alo
CC: satoshired@pmail.co.kan, daisyoak@celadon.edu
RE: Re: Re: Remember when we all met for the first time?

Moon, Red occasionally forgets that it's impossible for you to interpret tone through text. Luckily, he has me. This is what he actually wants:

1.) A really nice landscape-oriented shot, so we can take it to a professional and have it blown up on canvas to hang on the wall of our apartment. It's a good memory for us, too.
2.) A selfie with your current team, because you mentioned you got an Eevee in your last email and Daisy wants to see your team.

3.) Pictures of you and your friends, which we promise will stay private. We just want to put faces to the names of Hau and Lillie.

Smell ya later, kid.

—Blue

Moon, armed with Rotom and the camera, set out the next morning with her teammates to look for good places to take pictures. She hadn't really thought she would enjoy taking pictures, but then she had never had a good camera— her family had been too poor for her to use anything more advanced than the camera on her ancient flip phone. Rotom's camera was as good as a mobile-device could get. Maybe someday she would get a really good camera.

Lillie was still in Heahea City, so the friend pictures would have to wait. According to the group chat, Hau had finally left the Route Five Pokémon Center yesterday morning and would be in Royal Avenue himself sometime in the afternoon. Moon planned to meet up with him so they could check out some of the sights— and knowing Hau, probably go for malasadas.

But she could take a landscape shot and a selfie or two easily. There was a really beautiful tree just outside the Pokémon Center, in a small park with benches and a grassy meadow around the edges of the stone path. Moon sat on a bench and gathered her team close. Rotom hovered in the air to take the picture as she held Ben on her lap. Puck and Ariel sat on either side of her— the former sulking at being asked to pose for a picture, the latter pressing her face against Moon's face.

Click. “Well, it's certainly got personality, bzzt,” commented Rotom, floating back down to show Moon the result.

It had caught Puck mid feather-flick, so that his face was slightly blurred and the fringe of feathers that frequently rested over his right eye was sticking out in all directions. Ben had closed his eyes.

“Let's try that again,” decided Moon. Rotom obligingly floated back up for a second attempt. “Eyes open wide, and all of you stay still, please.”

Click. “Oh, that was much better, bzzt.”

It was much better. Moon handed Ben a few beans, and let Puck and Ariel scavenge for Bugs while she held Rotom, peering through the view-finder to look for a good shot. It was fully sunny, but the sunlight was more light than heat and the clouds were pearly white, promising cooler weather or possibly even rain later.

Eventually she found a good angle on the big tree, taking a wide shot with her back to Royal Avenue's Royal Battle Dome. There were other sakura-trees in the background of the shot, smaller ones scattered around the park and all of Royal Avenue. There were a few people in the shot, so Moon set Rotom up and waited for them to move.

“Why do I do this, Null?”
That was a familiar voice. Moon, instantly on edge, turned to see Gladion the cute asshole Trainer. He sat on a park bench with his back to her—leaning forward, petting a Pokémon she couldn't see. She would have bet every Poké she had it was the Type: Null, though. It seemed to be his favorite, or at the very least his first or eldest Pokémon.

Hala disapproved of base eavesdropping when it involved her friends— but Gladion wasn't her friend, was he? Moon took a few casual steps backward, pretending to fiddle with Rotom until a new chatroom appeared on the screen.

Chat: Rotom-Dex System, Moon Hawkins

Rotom-Dex System: I know what you're doing.

Moon Hawkins changed her name to shakespeare jr

shakespeare jr changed Rotom-Dex System's name to GLaDOS

GLaDOS: WOW, RUDE.

shakespeare jr changed the chat name to the cake is a lie

shakespeare jr: SO DELICIOUS AND MOIST

GLaDOS: I get it, you can stop now.

shakespeare jr: If you're going to judge me electronically, you have to be prepared to pay the consequences lmao

Gladion was still talking to his Pokémon, but he'd lowered his voice a bit. Moon took a few steps backward, looking at the sakura tree through Rotom's view-finder and straining to hear.

“Every time something brings me down, I end up coming right back here again.” He sighed. “Null, I don't even like people. I thought I would, after knowing all of ten or twelve of them my whole life; but I just don't. They're loud and annoying and selfish and I would just rather be with you and Imp and Rey.”

GLaDOS: Mood.

shakespeare jr: Shhh let me eavesdrop in peace
**shakespeare jr:** Also is it actually possible for an AI to be an introvert

**GLaDOS:** Yes, it is— but I wouldn't know, because I'm not an AI. I'm a Rotom.

**shakespeare jr:** Idk you kind of kicked the original AI out of the dex and took its place, seems like an AI thing to do

“But even though I'd rather be alone... there's something about this place.” Gladion's voice cracked slightly on the word something, and he cleared his throat. “Oh, stop laughing at me, Null. It happens to everyone. You're just mad because you don't have vocal cords— ow, okay, I won't tease you. Stop ripping my clothes, I just fixed them yesterday.”

Moon pressed a fist to her mouth to keep from giggling out loud. It seemed as though Gladion's teammates had just as many personality quirks as her own teammates.

“There really is something about this place.” His voice was quieter. “I don't like people, but when I'm on that stage, with a victory under my belt and you at my side— that's the best feeling in the world. They think you're an Absol with a medical issue, and that's why you wear the helmet.”

There was a soft growling noise.

“I know you don't like the helmet, but there's nothing I can really do about it. You know I would, if I could.”

Null made another noise, this one more like a purr than a growl.

“Amelia said not to, but— I wish we could have done the island challenge together. You and me, against the world.” Moon was surprised— she thought she'd seen a Z-Ring on his wrist. “We would have done so well. And the rumor is that they're going to be setting up a League here in Alola over the next few years— Null, we would have shone. But of course that was fucking ruined for us. Everything is fucking ruined for us. We have to keep our heads down and do our jobs and pretend like it's not eating away at our souls— the hiding, the running, the loneliness.”

Moon's hands, still clinging to Rotom, dropped slowly to her sides. Something uncomfortable swirled in her stomach, heat rising to her face.

**shakespeare jr:** Oh my god I shouldn't be hearing this.

**GLaDOS:** Are you really just now coming to that conclusion?

“Let's go, Null.” She heard him shifting, standing up. “We have to get stronger, don't we? We can't do our jobs unless we're strong. We're going to be strong enough to protect them.”

There was a long pause, during which he stopped moving. Moon was afraid to turn around, wondering if she'd been discovered— but she wasn't really in control of her own limbs at the moment and her feet shifted before she could think about it.

“We have to be. I don't know if those kids can do it on their own.”
Gladion was standing up, looking at the Battle Royal Dome. Type: Null, next to him, sat still and obedient; but she was facing Gladion and her gaze flicked over to Moon, eyes glowing a soft purple shade in the depths of what she now knew was a helmet.

Moon swallowed. One of the purple eyes briefly vanished, then reappeared.

“All right. Let's go.” Gladion opened a Pokéball and recalled Type: Null before walking off toward the Royal Battle Dome.

When he was well out of earshot, Rotom spoke up. “Well, that was interesting, bzzt.”

“Oh my god,” repeated Moon. “I shouldn't have heard that. I shouldn't have heard any of that.”

She sank down to the ground, sitting in the middle of the stone path.

She hated Gladion. That was a given. He'd been unkind to Hau, and he'd been a self-righteous dick about Emmett and Uilani, and he was kind of unfairly good-looking.

And now she'd heard him in a private moment with one of his Pokémon, and something new was rising up to combat the anger she had for him. Not pity, exactly—sympathy. He had a goal he was working toward, and he probably didn't think of Moon or Hau from one second to the next. But he was kind to his team, and he worked hard, and he was smart and funny, and still unfairly good-looking—

“Stop it, that's not what this is about,” Moon hissed to herself. “He's awful. He's a jerk. He dislikes you just as much as you dislike him. Snap out of it.”

“Somebody's in denial, bzzt.”

“You shut up, you were trolling me the whole time. Oh my god.” Moon buried her face in her hands. “And I think Type: Null winked at me. What the hell.”

Eventually she calmed down enough to focus on her landscape shot once more. There were simply too many people in the city, and Red probably just wanted a natural shot with no people in it. He didn't like people, either.

Stop it, Moon repeated silently to herself. Stop it, stop it, stop it.

She ate lunch at the Pokémon Center and headed back over to Route Six to get a good shot. There were far fewer people to worry about here, and soon she had several nice pictures of the cherry-blossom trees, taken from a variety of angles. She would send all of them to Red and Blue— they could pick their favorite to hang on the wall.

“Hey, Moon!”

It was Hau, beaming and waving as he and his team walked toward her.

“Hey! I didn't expect you until later.” Moon grinned at him, though her heart wasn't really in it.

“I got an early start. Wow, the cherry-blossom trees sure are pretty, huh? You have them back in Kanto, right?”

“Boy, do we ever. I met Red and Blue at a cherry-blossom festival when I was six and they were twelve. I sent them a picture yesterday and they want more pictures, which is what I'm doing out here.”
“Oh, nice. Are you nearly done?”

“Yeah. I've got about eight good shots and that's enough for them to pick from.” Moon passed Rotom over to Hau, who flicked through the pictures with a raised eyebrow.

“These are really good, Moon,” he said seriously. “You could probably submit one to National Geographic or something. I bet you would get a prize.”

“Thanks.” Moon took Rotom back, pleased. “I bet you're starving, though. Go on and get some lunch, settle in. We can visit the Royal Battle Dome later—maybe even wait until tomorrow.” If Gladion was in the Royal Battle Dome, there was no way in hell she wanted to be there with him. She wasn't sure she could look him in the face without blushing.

“They don't close until after midnight, we've got plenty of time,” laughed Hau. “Are you feeling okay? Your face is kind of red.”

“I'm fine— just a little warm, that's all. It's nice out today.”

“Oh yeah, makes sense.”

They walked back into Royal Avenue together. Moon went up to her room and laid down on her bed and proceeded to scream into her pillow.

“This is stupid,” she told herself. Puck, Ariel, and Ben were staring at her, and Rotom was snickering quietly in the corner. “This is really, really stupid, Moon Hawkins. When have you ever gone all noodle-brained over a boy? Never, that's when. You are an intelligent, independent woman who does not now and will never need a man, and you need to snap out of it. Just because he's clearly having a rough time does not excuse the shit he said to your friend. He's a jerk and a bully and you do not like him. Maybe you pity him, but you do not like him. Not even the slightest, tiniest bit.”

“I think you're in denial, bzzt,” said Rotom, still laughing. “And if my memory banks are processing correctly, he already knows that you find him attractive.”

That was a good point. Moon sat up to consider this. “I guess I can't humiliate myself any more than I already have, can I?”

Puck chirped questioningly.

“Ilina? That's a thing of the past, buddy. It took me forty-five minutes and a sleeve of Oricoreos to get over him.” Granted, they'd been “Double-Stuf” Oricoreos— but sue her, he'd been cute. “Lillie told me he has a girlfriend or something— they write letters, apparently.”

Ben's nose had been steadily wrinkling further and further in disgust as the conversation went on, but at this he got to his feet, crossed over to Moon's leg, and sank his teeth into her foot. She was wearing shoes, so it didn't hurt— but she did feel the pressure. Ariel pecked him scoldingly, and he let go of Moon to snap at her in response.

“Hey, break it up.” Moon picked up Ben by the scruff, so that he couldn't wiggle around and bite her. He glared indignantly. “No biting. We've got a rule about biting in this household. But I know you were trying to distract me from all this gross romantic stuff, so I'll let you off easy this time. In the future, you do not bite anyone, except in battle and only when I give the order. Got it?”

Ben whined and grumbled, but eventually bobbed his little head in a nod. Moon set him down and turned to Ariel.
“And I'm in charge of the punishments around here,” she informed Ariel. “No pecking, except in battle and only when I give the order.”

Ariel nodded.

They had quite distracted her from the Gladion problem, as she had already begun to think of it, and it was in a much better mood that Moon found herself walking toward the Battle Royal Dome with Hau. The screaming crowds could be heard clearly from outside, and only grew louder as they walked into a gleaming chrome lobby. Groups of people stood chattering excitedly; Moon could smell popcorn and cotton candy.

“Should we try a match, or do you just want to watch a few?” Hau asked Moon.

“Don't you have to meet a certain level cap with your team or something?”

“Nah, they have different brackets based on how many Z-Crystals you have. Twelve to eighteen is the advanced group, six to eleven is the intermediate group, and less than six are the beginner's group.”

“That works out pretty nicely,” said Moon, nodding as she did the mental math. “We've each got four crystals at the moment, but most people don't find Flyinium Z unless they're really looking for it. So if Trainers come to Akala Island with two crystals, they earn four more here and they can try the intermediate battles before they leave.”

“Yeah, and they try to match you with people who have exactly as many Z-Crystals as you do. That way you don't have someone with six and someone with eleven in the same match— the person with eleven has more options and a serious advantage.”

“Yeah, yeah!” said a loud, familiar voice. “Sounds like you know what you're talking about, kid!”

Moon and Hau turned, and Hau actually gasped out loud. A man in a wrestler's mask and a pair of traditional red wrestling pants strode toward them. He was shirtless, but his abs, in addition to his voice, were very familiar.

“Professor Kukui?” said Moon, raising one eyebrow.

“Who now?”

“I can't believe I never explained this to you,” said Hau hurriedly. “One moment, sir. I need to have a word with my friend.”

He physically turned Moon away from Professor Kukui. They were still within his earshot, but he lowered his voice as though it would have made a difference. “That's the professor, but when he's dressed like that he's not the professor. Understand?”

“No,” said Moon flatly. “That's clearly the professor.”

“He does Battle Royals as the Masked Royal.” Hau shrugged. “Mom named her Machamp after him. She and Gramps both really love Battle Royals; I was basically raised on them. I figured out it was the professor after a few years of watching him on TV. Pretty much everyone knows it's him, but he always insists that he has no idea who we're talking about so there's really no point in arguing. It's like, his alter ego or something.”

“Holy Arceus, you're actually serious.” She was laughing so hard that it was beginning to impede her ability to speak. “He pretends— but everyone— the abs—”
“I know,” said Hau, patting her on the back. “I know. Just humor him. It's kind of fun, like we're all in on the same big secret.”

“If everyone knows the secret, it's not a secret.” But she let Hau turn them both back around, where Professor Kukui was waiting with the same grin on his face.

“Hello,” said Moon, fighting to maintain her own poker face. “I am relatively new to Alola and I have absolutely no idea who you could be.”

“That's okay! You can call me...” He punched one fist up into the air. “The Masked Royal, yeah!”

“Winner of the Annual Battle Royal Dome Championships in the Level Three bracket for four years and counting,” Hau informed her. “That's the advanced group I was telling you about— twelve to eighteen Z-Crystals.”

“It seems like you know a lot about Battle Royals,” said Professor Kukui, putting his hands on his hips. “How do you feel about trying one out?”

“Yeah!” cheered Hau. “Come on, Moon, let's do it!”

“Why not? Sounds like fun.”

“Great! So we've got the two of you and me, that makes three— but we need a fourth.” Professor Kukui turned to scan the lobby, pointing. “Hey, you! I've seen you battling around here before, haven't I?”

Moon turned and promptly choked on her own spit. Professor Kukui was pointing at Gladion. Hau thumped her on the back while Moon reflected on what seemed to be the undeniable fact that the universe was out to get her today.

“Given that I'm here about once a week, you probably have,” said Gladion flatly.

His eyes flicked to Moon briefly before passing over Hau and back to the Professor. Moon did her best to ignore Gladion and the heat that was slowly but surely creeping over her face.

“What's your name, Trainer?”

Gladion visibly hesitated. “Gladion,” he said finally.

“Are you still mad at him?” said Hau quietly, in Moon's ear. “I'm fine, you know. Takes more than a couple of mean words to knock me down.”

“Yes. You know, it's the principle of the thing,” said Moon stiffly.

“Wait, no, you're not mad at him.” One of her best friend's eyebrows rose inquisitively. “I've seen you like this before... at the Trainer's School... with Ilima...”

“Hau Akiona, you shut your fat mouth—”

He snickered, dodging the punch Moon threw at his shoulder.

“What do you say, Gladion?” Professor Kukui put his hands on his hips again. “You'll make up the fourth member of our party, yeah? How many Z-Crystals have you got?”

“None,” snapped Gladion. “I'm not doing the fucking island challenge.”
“That's fine, that's fine! We'll just play so nobody uses Z-Crystals, yeah. Does that sound fair to you?”

Gladion glanced at the door. He looked as though he wanted to be there as much as Moon did—which was to say, not at all. “I suppose,” he said, in a long-suffering tone.

“Great! Then let's sign ourselves up.”

Professor Kukui took Moon and Hau through the sign-up paperwork—safety waivers, signing away the right to sue in case of serious injury, and so on. Gladion did his own paperwork, scrawling lazily on the forms with a practiced hand that told Moon he'd done this a lot. Moon and Hau removed their Z-Crystals from their various teammates—Flyinium Z from Ariel and Sonar, Normalium Z from Puck and Ollie, Waterium Z from Poppy. Professor Kukui did the same. He was only carrying two Pokémon—a Torracat and a Rockruff. The Torracat greeted Puck and Poppy familiarly—and their responses suggested that they were equally excited to see it.

“Is that the one who didn't come with us?” Moon asked Hau, indicating the Torracat. “It's very friendly.”

“Torracat are friendlier than Litten, usually. They mellow out in puberty.”

“Arceus, maybe I should have picked Litten.” Puck squawked indignantly. “Just kidding, buddy. I wouldn't trade you and your difficult adolescence for all the happy kittens in the world.”

“Blazer seems to like your Starter Pokémon!” said Professor Kukui, a knowing grin on his face. “It's almost like they know each other, isn't it?”

“If you're all finished, do you think we could start the battle?” said Gladion tersely.

“Yeah, we're coming. Hold your Horseas.”

They were each made to stand at one corner of the enormous Battle Royal Dome. Moon was on the green corner, below an archway shaped like a Tyranitar's head. She could see Hau on her right in the yellow corner, standing underneath Giratina; Gladion was on her left in blue, below a Gyarados. To Moon’s surprise, quite a few people cheered for him. Gladion lifted one hand lazily in response, which garnered further approval. But the cheers of the crowd swelled to a deafening roar when they caught sight of Professor Kukui, stepping out onto the red corner from the Charizard archway.

“Masked Roy-al! Masked Roy-al!”

“Hello, hello, hellowoooo!” shouted a microphoned announcer. “We've got a very, very special battle for you today, folks. We've got a couple of fresh Trainers on their island challenge, from Melemele Island. Please welcome, on the yellow corner and the green corner... Hau Akiona and Moon Hawkins!”

They both got polite applause and some moderated screaming.

“And maybe a dedicated fan will recognize this familiar face in the blue corner: it's the one and only... August Green!”

Hau's expression mirrored what Moon was feeling—a mix of confusion and amusement. Evidently Gladion battled under a false name. “August Green” lifted his hand again, waving politely.

“And of course, you all know the fellow in the red corner. He's a fighter, he's a scholar, he's got shredded abs to rival a Machamp... it's... The Masked Royaaaaaaaaaaaal!”
Moon clapped her hands over her ears, not caring if it looked rude— she'd rather keep her hearing, thank you very much. Almost unwillingly, she glanced over at Gladion and saw that he had something red in his ears— probably foam earplugs. That was smart.

When the crowd had died down a little, the announcer went on. “This match will be played under the following rules: no mythicals! No legendaries! And nooooooo... Z-Crystals!”

He paused for a few moments, waiting as the slightly confused cheers died down. “That's right, folks, you heard it here. The Trainers will not be using Z-Crystals in today's battle. It's pure skill versus pure skill... versus pure skill... versus pure skill.

“And remember: the first KO signals the end of the battle. Trainers: are. You. Ready?”

Moon lifted her hand in a thumbs-up. Hau did the same. Gladion waved again, and Professor Kukui pumped his fist in the air.

“The Trainers are ready. Is everyone else ready?”

Moon winced as the cheers rang through the stadium and her ears.

“Then get ready for a free-for-all, no-holds-barred Battle Royal... in three! Two! One! Gooooo!”

The word “go” coincided with an air horn. Moon weighed her options. Ben was out— it wasn’t likely they would all gang up on her, but if they did, he probably wouldn’t last more than two hits. Professor Kukui had a Rockruff and a Torracat— which had type advantages against Ariel and Puck, respectively. She wasn’t worried about Hau— though part of her felt slightly guilty for thinking that way— but Gladion had his Type: Null which was really strong, and a Zubat and a Zorua on top of that.

She went with Puck, in the end. Professor Kukui tossed his ball and threw the Rockruff, which she counted a blessing. Hau chose Poppy, and Gladion, with a wary glance at Professor Kukui, tossed his ball to reveal Type: Null.

“Oh, man!” cheered the announcer. “We’ve got not one but two elemental Starters, folks— clearly these Trainers from Melemele aren’t to be underestimated! It must be something in the water, eh? And we’ve got the Masked Royal's go-to, a rumblin' Rockruff! And of course, the Pokémon that keeps everyone guessing— August's helmeted Absol! Or is it a Houndoom? The world may never know!”

Hau caught Moon's eye again, raising one eyebrow in confusion. Gladion had mentioned how everyone thought Type: Null was an Absol with some kind of medical issue, when she had been eavesdropping on him. She would tell Hau about it later.

Professor Kukui was also eyeing Type: Null, with an interested expression on his face. It was too loud for Moon to hear any of them if they decided to speak to each other; but he mouthed something at Gladion, who responded by flipping him the bird.

“Keep it clean, folks!” laughed the announcer. “We'll have to censor that one for the kids, haha.”

The battle began in earnest, then. It seemed that there really weren’t many rules in a Battle Royal. Gladion targeted Poppy, with a Tackle from Type: Null— which made sense to Moon, because statistically Hau was probably the weakest Trainer present. Hau went for Professor Kukui, ordering Poppy to use Bubblebeam on Rockruff.
Razor Leaf could hit multiple targets, so Moon had Puck use it on all three of them— but was surprised when it barely seemed to affect any of them.

“Oh, it seems like Trainer Hawkins has forgotten the Battle Royal bumper for multi-target moves!” chuckled the announcer. “Long-time fans and participants will know, of course, that moves hitting multiple targets have their power greatly reduced in a Battle Royal... but that's okay, it's her first Battle Royal. She'll get the hang of it!”

Professor Kukui went for Type: Null, which Moon supposed was not surprising— he was clearly intrigued by the Pokémon, and the best way to find out what a Pokémon was like was to battle it. Rockruff's Rock Tomb definitely affected the Type: Null, but she had no way of knowing how much damage had been done, or what type a Type: Null actually was.

That was one turn for each of them. Moon watched each of her opponents, trying to decide what her best option would be. Razor Leaf wouldn't be very useful, even if it was super-effective against Rockruff and Poppy. Pluck wouldn't be too helpful either— not unless Type: Null was a Fighting-type. She doubted it; Fighting-types tended to be bipedal, and Null was a quadruped.

She did have Ominous Wind, though. Moon had Puck use Ominous Wind on Rockruff— a safe bet, because if Type: Null was a Normal-type she would have been really humiliated to find out that it was immune.

Gladion targeted Poppy again, knocking her out. Hau frowned, but nodded grudgingly— it was a fair win. Rockruff hit Type: Null again, and since Poppy was knocked out the battle was over.

The judges, sitting at a small table in the announcer's room, conferred for a few moments, scribbling and writing things down. Eventually, it was determined that Gladion had come in first place, followed by Professor Kukui, then Moon, and then Hau in last place.

“Knockouts net you the most points,” explained Hau, as they got their Pokémon healed at the counter in the lobby. “So obviously Gladion won. But after that, the judges calculate the amount of damage you do. If you'd gone for Ominous Wind earlier instead of using Razor Leaf, you would have beaten the Prof— I mean, the Masked Royal. Puck's a lot stronger than that Rockruff.”

“Give it time, yeah!” laughed Professor Kukui, unoffended by Hau's analysis. “That was a strong battle, Trainers. I hope to see you here again sometime!”

“I can see you any old time I want by literally dialing your number on my dex,” said Moon under her breath. Several feet away, Gladion exhaled audibly— it might have been a laugh. Moon was illogically pleased by this.

“You were all on fire in that battle!”

“Ah, Captain Kiawe!” Professor Kukui grinned at the tall, handsome man walking toward them. “Great to see you here again. Are you here for a Battle Royal?”

“I had some free time, so I came down to see a match before I head to Paniola for the evening,” answered the man— Captain Kiawe. Moon studied the trial captain. He was her next obstacle in the island challenge, but she didn't know much about him at all. Mallow and Lana had both mentioned him briefly, and Moon knew his trial was a Fire-type trial; but other than that the man before her was a complete mystery. He wore traditional Alolan dancing shorts, as well as a long necklace that she remembered reading had to do with performance of some kind— so it seemed clear that he was a dancer, as well as a Trainer.
“Of course, of course. I think you'll be seeing these three soon at your Trial, yeah?”

“As I said,” said Gladion, before any of them could speak, “I'm not doing the island challenge, so no, you won't be seeing me.”

“That's too bad,” said Kiawe, unruffled by Gladion's rudeness. “I was looking forward to seeing the Pokémon you fought with. It's unusual, isn't it?”

Gladion's hand automatically moved to his belt, covering one of the Pokéball slots. “You could say that.”

“It's kind of funny, seeing you here,” said Hau to Gladion. “I didn't think you'd be the type to do well at Battle Royals, but I guess you've literally made a name for yourself, huh?”

“It's none of your business what names I use,” said Gladion, correctly interpreting Hau's accusatory tone. “Why wouldn't I be the type to do well at Battle Royals?”

“You don't seem like you'd be the type to pander to the crowd,” explained Hau. “There's usually kind of a storyline with Battle Royals, yeah? The Prof— I mean, the Masked Royal is a hero, everybody loves him. Then you get Battle Royal Trainers like Sasha the Hex Maniac, who's definitely a villain. We like to watch her lose, because she pretends to be a lot meaner for the battles than she is in real life. It's kind of, um—”

“It's a narrative,” said Moon, jumping into the explanation. “Done solely for the benefit of the crowd's entertainment. The actual battles aren't faked, of course. It's easy to tell when someone's rigged a Pokémon battle. But when you have an alter ego, people expect different things of it, than they do of you. I think what Hau is saying is that you seem like you'd be too real for that kind of thing.”

Gladion was silent for a few moments, his gaze falling to the ground. “I'm not here to play games like that,” he said finally. “I'm here for one reason, and one reason only. I want to get stronger.”

“That's a noble goal, yeah!” said the Professor encouragingly. “But you seem pretty popular with the crowd, too.”

Gladion's green eyes flashed with heat, but his voice was calm and quiet. “Haven't you ever wanted to be a hero?” he asked, shoving his hands in his pockets. “Haven't you ever wanted to protect the people you care about?”

Moon thought of Puck and Ariel and Ben. She thought of Lillie, who was safe and sound at Professor Burnet's home; and she thought of Hau, even though she knew he could protect himself; and she thought of her parents, and of Red and Blue who definitely did not need to be protected—but logic seemed to be overruled by sentiment. Of course she wanted to protect the people and Pokémon she cared about— whether or not they needed it.

Gladion turned around and walked away, before any of them could say anything in response to his question.

“What a ray of sunshine,” said Hau, a little flatly. He turned to the Professor. “It was really nice to meet you, Mr. Masked Royal. I've been a fan for years.”

“Have you now?” Professor Kukui's eyes twinkled. “Well, a long-time fan like you deserves an autograph! Have you got anything you want me to sign?”

“Arceus, this is the best day of my life,” declared Hau, pulling his Pokédex out of his pocket. “Can
you sign my Dex case?"

Moon, amused, watched as Professor Kukui signed Hau's Dex case— “To Trainer Akiona, from The Masked Royal”— and then they parted ways. Kiawe went back into the Battle Royal Dome to watch battles, and Moon and Hau headed back out to the Pokémon Center.

Fortunately, Gladion was nowhere to be seen, and for a few moments Moon thought that she might be able to get away with not talking about him to Hau— but then Hau spoke.

“So, you like him,” he said bluntly.

“If it helps, I'm trying really hard not to.”

“Whatever for?”

“Because he's an asshat.”

“The heart loves whom it loves, Moon,” said Hau solemnly. “I've already forgiven him for being mean; I don't think he meant it. Now I have to make sure he's worthy of your love, of course—”

“I do not love him, Hau, Arceus—”

“But you think he's cute, and you're itching to figure out what exactly Type: Null is.”

Moon glared at him. “I hate how you can read me like a book.”

“I have two little sisters,” Hau reminded her. “And it's a darn sight easier to read you than it is to read Lillie. For instance, I also know that just being good-looking and having a cool Pokémon aren't high enough standards for you to develop an actual attraction to someone. If that was the case, you'd have said yes when that Ace Trainer asked you out on Route Three—”

“Oh my god are you going to bring up every boy I've ever interacted with—”

“Red, Blue, me. Now I have.”

“You are the actual worst.” Moon punched him in the shoulder again.

“But the point is, something's changed between the last time we both saw him, and you seeing him today. Did you meet him or something?”

“Or something,” mumbled Moon. “I regret everything. He was sitting here in the park and I eavesdropped on him, because I'm an idiot who doesn't think before she does anything. It was a mistake, Hau. He has an actual personality, he loves his Pokémon, he works hard, and he's funny. It's a serious problem.”

Hau looked at her for a few moments, expression slightly incredulous. “Sounds like every woman's dream man, if you listen to my mother. Is this actually Gladion you're talking about? Are you feeling okay? Do I need to take you to the Pokémon Center for a checkup?”

“I hope you choke on a malasada.”

“I'm glad you like him.”

Moon glanced over at Hau— up at Hau. It seemed like he'd grown a couple of inches since the last time she'd seen him. “Why?”
“He hasn't been very kind,” said Hau, shrugging, “but I don’t think it's because he doesn't want to be. I think he literally might not know how. Remember how he told us not to use Potions for your bleeding nose? It was good advice, but you were too mad to think of it that way. I think you'd be the best person to teach him kindness.”

Moon shifted, uncomfortable with the compliment. “I'm not really a kind person.”

“You're only unkind when you get mad, which is completely normal,” pointed out Hau, and okay, that was true. “You're kind, but you also don't take anyone’s BS. That's the type of kind everyone should aspire to be.”

They walked into the malasada shop, getting in line at the counter. “All right,” said Moon finally. “I'm not saying I'm going to tell him I like him or anything crazy like that— Arceus willing, this is just going to be a crush, because I need to focus on my island challenge.”

“Darn, there goes my plan to distract and finally defeat you,” murmured Hau.

Moon rolled her eyes. “Anyway, I guess I can be kind to him.” She raised one eyebrow at Hau. “I'll be nice to Gladion, and you can keep sending memes to Lillie while agonizing at me in our private texts, and everything will just stay the way it's been.”

Hau offered his hand, and they shook on it before turning to the counter. “Hi, can we order three dozen assorted malasadas?”

Chapter End Notes

Group pictures never quite go how you plan them to. The question is, did Puck and Ben screw up on accident... or on purpose? [Answer: Puck by accident, he was just flicking his hair; Ben on purpose because he's a little shit.]

The Portal games definitely exist in this universe. Moon's not really a gamer, but she knows her pop culture references.

“GLaDOS: mood” — Rotom is a troll tbh, I haven't written its interactions with Moon very often but they're good friends and they tease each other all the time.

“But of course that was fucking ruined for us. Everything is fucking ruined for us. We have to keep our heads down and do our jobs and pretend like it's not eating away at our souls— the hiding, the running, the loneliness.” — Oh Look I Made Myself Cry Again

*sings and dances* Moon has a cru-ush, Moon has a cru-ush

National Geographic is also totally a thing that exists in this universe

“I think you're in denial, bztt.” — man, I wish I had an iPad possessed by an electrical poltergeist that would tell me when I'm being dumb about boys

“It took me forty-five minutes and a sleeve of Oricoreos to get over him.” — stolen shamelessly from The Fault In Our Stars by John Green— except he says Thin Mints instead of “Oricoreos,” which is my own creation. Obviously, Oricoreos are Oreos, but
they're represented by Oricorio.

Ben biting Moon to distract her from her problems— I mean, that's one way to do it, but could you have picked a more stereotypically tsundere way to do it lmao

I categorically refuse to believe that Hau or, frankly, ANYONE AT ALL is stupid enough to believe that Professor Kukui and the Masked Royal are two separate people— unless, of course, they've never met the professor. So I've decided that instead of it being some kind of secret, it's going to be a "secret." Professor Burnet is the exception to this. She's a workaholic and usually too sleep-deprived to notice when her husband and his washboard abs are on TV lmao

Hau and Moon aren't battling each other. You'll notice that they don't attack one another in the Battle Royal.

Hau being observant when it's most inconvenient to Moon is my FAVORITE thing

Gladion's been interacting with them for five seconds and he's already so done lmao

“August Green!” — ok so let me explain: the gladiolus, after which Gladion is named, is the birth flower for the month of August (Gladion was born in April, but Lusamine wasn't about to call him Daisy or Sweet Pea), and his eyes are green. That's literally it.

Gladion is That Person who will flip someone the bird on live television

Hau is a Battle Royal NERD and it's giving me a lot of heckin' uwus

“I can see you any old time I want by literally dialing your number on my dex.” — Moon pls

“Haven't you ever wanted to be a hero? Haven't you ever wanted to protect the people you care about?” — stab, twist knife, repeat

This entire conversation between Moon and Hau was so fun to write. It was like writing me talking to my siblings. You give each other shit, but you also give each other unconditional love and support.

“ 'Oh my god are you going to bring up every boy I've ever interacted with—' 'Red, Blue, me. Now I have.' ” — okay so Hau just came for Moon's entire LIFE and I don't think I've ever laughed so hard at something I've written

Also: I love writing Hau as the most emotionally mature member of the quartet, it just suits him because he's so laid-back. He gets up in his feelings about things, but he usually handles it really well.
The change from “summer” to “fall” was not as distinct in Alola as it had been in Kanto. Alola’s islands were all tropical— warm temperatures, high humidity, and gentle ocean breezes. So it was rather startling one morning when Moon woke up in the Royal Avenue Pokémon Center on the fifth or sixth morning of her stay there, and went downstairs to find it nearly abandoned. The nurse was there, of course; but there was only one Mart worker and only two café workers, and perhaps three or four Trainers at the tables.

“Why is it so quiet here?” she asked Hau, sitting down with breakfast for herself and her team.

He blinked at her for a few moments, before realization crossed his face. “Ah, right. I forget you only just moved here. It’s the first day of school, so most of the family crowds aren’t here anymore— it’s just full-time Trainers and locals, most of the year.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yeah. All the kids that live on Royal Avenue get bussed over to Heahea City High School, I think. There’s a few of them that live further north, but they either homeschool or they go to the high school in Paniola Town— which is tiny, mind you. Second smallest high school in Alola.”

“What’s the smallest one?”

“Tapu Village. It’s on Ula’ula.” Hau hummed thoughtfully. “You know, we’ll be headed to Ula’ula after this. It’s the biggest of the islands, but there’s a lot more public transportation available, and you can get Mudsdale registered to your Ride Pager to cover ground faster.”

“You can’t do that with Tauros or Stoutland?”

“You can try, but neither of them really has the endurance for it. Stoutland is fast, but it’s better for short distances. And you want Tauros for power. If you need to get somewhere faster than walking, but it’s gonna take you a while— that’s what you want a Mudsdale for.”

“I met the coolest Mudsdale the other day, actually...” Moon told Hau about Hapu, Epicentre, and the Team Skull Grunts.

“Wow,” said Hau, shaking his head. “Team Skull never learns, do they? And you said this girl was only sixteen and she’s got a lot of Z-Crystals already?”
“Yeah. I guess Hala knows her? She's training to be Poni Island's next kahuna, because they don't
have one— the last one was her grandfather, but he passed away earlier this year.”

Hau frowned. “Huh. He never mentioned anything about a new kahuna, but I guess he wouldn't—
that's strictly kahuna business, and nothing to do with Melemele. But she sounds really cool. I guess
we'll meet her on Poni Island.”

“She is really cool. It's genuinely ballsy of a teenage girl to threaten to curbstomp someone— but she
could do it, and I think she would have done it, if she had to. Do you think she'll be ready to be the
kahuna by then?”

“Yeah, I think so. Kahunas aren't really trained, you know. The Tapus pick them, and they pick trial
captains too. It's not always the same kind of kahuna or captain, either— I think Wela Volcano Park
has been a Ground-type trial before, and I know Verdant Cavern has been a Rock-type, a Bug-type,
and a Normal-type trial in the past. Brooklet Hill is pretty much permanently a Water-type trial. But
the locations change, too— I remember Gramps saying something about a Flying-type trial at Ten
Carat Hill.”

“That makes sense, because of Flyinium Z.”

Hau nodded. “And the Melemele kahuna before Gramps was a Poison-type specialist... I never knew
her. Gramps has been the kahuna longer than I've been alive. But Poni's last kahuna... I think he was
a Ground-type, maybe?”

“Maybe Hapu is a Ground-type specialist. She did say that her Mudsdale belonged to her
grandfather.”

“Seems likely.” Hau scratched his head. “It would be kind of fun to be a trial captain, wouldn't it?
Coming up with your own trial for Trainers to beat, training Totem Pokémon... that would be cool.”

“It's a lot like gyms, in other regions. Except all the trials are outside, and so far you don't usually
fight other Trainers— just wild Pokémon.”

“It seems kind of weird to fight other Trainers inside a building. I know we do it for Battle Royals,
but they're so big it doesn't really count.”

“It doesn't seem weird to me, but then I grew up in Kanto, where it was expected.”

Moon and Hau had been training on Route Six and Route Seven over the last few days, and they
had more or less come to the conclusion that the best way to approach the Wela Volcano Park trial
would be to travel together inside the trial boundaries, and fight Kiawe separately at the end. After
Rotom's warning about Wela Volcano Park, Moon had done more research on the equipment she
would need to survive the area. Technically they didn't need anything out of the ordinary— it was a
hostile climate, but it was still part of the island challenge, and it would be unfair to put some sort of
gear or monetary cap on who could enter the park. Not everybody could afford fireproof jumpsuits,
after all; but Moon, after her continued victories on the road, had more than enough money to get one
for both herself and for Hau. She would be comfortable, and her clothes wouldn't get filthy from ash
and soot.

They hiked out to the entrance of Wela Volcano Park, then stopped to recall all of their Pokémon to
their balls and put on the fireproof jumpsuits. They were an ugly brown color, with bright yellow
flash-tape at the knees and elbows; but they fit well enough. Moon laced up her rubber boots—
though they weren't rubber, they were some kind of high-grade plastic that would only melt if
exposed to heat levels consistent with nuclear radiation. They felt like rubber, which was more the
point. Moon had chosen to skip on a helmet, but she had a packet of Kantonian-style face masks with air filters, and she took one out and put the straps behind her ears before pulling on heavy gloves.

“I think you've gone a bit overkill,” said Hau, watching her with amusement on his face. He had accepted the jumpsuit at Moon's insistence, but hadn't bothered with boots or gloves or headwear. “Most people get through it just fine without all this stuff.”

“I don't have anything to counter Fire-types on my team,” said Moon, shrugging. “I've considered catching a Water-type, but we're still getting used to Ben and he would be the most difficult one to deal with, if I added another teammate at this point. So I'm relying mostly on Ariel for pretty much this entire trial. She has Smack Down, which should deal with most Fire-types even if she doesn't have STAB.”

“Your funeral, I suppose.” Hau waved at the trial guide, who had watched them gear up with an approving expression. “Hi there! We're allowed to travel and camp together until we get to the Totem's Den, right?”

“That's right,” said the trial guide, with a nod. “This trial is about strategy and memory skills. You can do whatever you need to do, in order to reach the Totem's Den. After that you'll be required to face it separately. Good luck!”

“Thanks,” said Moon and Hau in unison. They walked through the gate into a rocky canyon.

It was a couple of hours before anything interesting happened. Moon and Hau chatted and walked together, both keeping an eye out for wild Pokémon; but there was not so much as a blade of tall grass to be found in the canyon. Eventually, however, the path began to slope uphill, and Moon spotted a rock that was cut in too square of a shape to be found in nature.

“Welcome to Wela Volcano Park,” Hau read, from the carvings cut into the rock. “Temperatures will rise as you proceed. Please take appropriate caution with yourselves and your Pokémon. Enjoy your stay. Trialgoers, continue westward to the first Seismic Sister.”

“The first what now?” said Moon blankly.

“Seismic Sister. I wonder what a Seismic Sister is.”

The canyon opened up onto a grassy field— though the grass was rather brown and shrubby, in comparison to the lush greens that Moon had become accustomed to seeing during her stay in Alola. There were a few Trainers here, hunting through the grass in the search for Pokémon.

“What can you even catch here, Rotom?” asked Moon, looking around.

“I'll scan for local species, bzzt.” Rotom was silent for a few moments, then stated, “Several different species make their homes here. Cubone, Magby and some Magmar, Salandit, Kangaskhan, and Fletchling.”

“Fletchling?” Moon was intrigued. “Heh, that's funny.”

“What's funny about Fletchling?”

“If my dad hadn't gotten the job offer from the power plant on Ula'ula, I would have gone to l'Academie Lumiose,” explained Moon. “Good literature program, and I had a one-year renewable scholarship. But I'm still poor, so I probably wouldn't have done the gym challenge— I'd have gotten a Fletchling instead. Fletchling are tiny and fairly cheap to care for, and their evolutions are quite
powerful.”

“Nice,” said Hau. His tone became thoughtful. “You know, I never knew you before June, but I can't imagine doing the island challenge without you. Lillie probably wouldn't have been comfortable enough to make friends with me, and I dunno what would have happened with the Spearow... Nebby would have died, probably.”

Moon shivered. “Let's try not to think about that,” she suggested. “I'm so glad to be here, even if we're walking straight up a volcano.”

They walked for a little while through the scrubby grass, occasionally waving to and even battling with the other Trainers who were present. Moon won a decent bit of money, tucking it into her wallet triumphantly before politely offering to heal her opponents— that was the etiquette, she'd learned, after some time on the road.

The path continued at the other end of the field, turning and rising with the curve of what appeared to be the actual volcano. Moon and Hau exchanged glances, shrugging, and began walking.

As the path rose in elevation, so did the temperature. Soon Moon was sweating, and not just from the exertion of walking— the hot air stung her eyes and warmed her entire face.

They rounded a bend in the path and she immediately saw why. An active lavaflow was running down a divot in the mountain. A bridge had been carved over the divot, leaving holes beneath the path for the lava to flow through; but the black and scarlet glow of the liquid rock was so hot that the air shimmered and danced around them.


“That looks like death,” disagreed Moon, but she got out Rotom and snapped a few pictures anyway. There wasn't any internet signal this far into Wela Volcano Park, so she couldn't send them to Red or Blue— and there was no way she was sending closeups of an active volcano to either of her parents. Her father, at least, would be sure to freak out.

A small black lizard skittered across the lava, leaving glowing red footprints in its wake.

“I'm getting a prompting to read you a Pokédex entry, bzzt,” said Rotom.

“A prompting? What do you mean by that?”

“A local message, broadcast through Bluetooth. It orders Pokédexes and Rotom-Dexes alike to read the entry aloud, bzzt. Shall I do so?”

“I'm getting that, too,” said Hau, pulling out his own Dex to show Moon.

“Weird. Go for it, Rotom.”

“That's a Salandit,” Rotom informed her. “They are a Poison and Fire dual-type—”

“Ooh, that's a unique combination!”

“— with the ability to withstand extremely high temperatures, bzzt,” continued Rotom. “Salandit are a matriarchal species, and defer to the alpha female in any given group. Sometimes the alpha female is a Salandit, but more often the evolved form, a Salazzle, takes that role.”

“Are there male Salazzle?”
“None have been observed in nature, bzzt.”

“Huh.” Moon frowned. “Is that all you're supposed to read? I bet it's part of the trial somehow.”

“I believe you are correct. A local Bluetooth broadcast would make the most sense for electronic promptings on the volcano—there's no public Wi-Fi and no nearby data towers, bzzt.”

Hau had allowed his Pokédex, with the robotic masculine AI, to begin speaking; but he muted it as he listened to Moon and Rotom's conversation. “What about Ride Pagers? Do they work up here?”

“There's only one Pokémon anyone would want to page up here, and that's the Fly Charizard, bzzt,” said Rotom. “It seems as though you have earned the use of a Ride Pokémon for every trial you overcome, so it would make sense for the Ride Pokémon you earn here to be Charizard.”

“I got Stoutland from Mallow,” remembered Moon, “but she did say she was giving it to me early. Good thing, too—Ben's been eating me out of house and home, the beans he goes through. I don't know how you afford it, Hau.”

“I write home if I really need money. You could do that, couldn't you?”

“I could, but I'd rather not,” admitted Moon. “Asking my parents for money just goes against the grain with me. We were poor for such a long time, it's habit not to ask them for anything if I can help it.”

The path curved around the volcano to reveal a large cave entrance that went straight into the volcano. A young woman stood in the entryway of the cave entrance, her hands folded behind her back.

“Hello!” she said brightly, as Moon and Hau approached her. “You must be trialgoers, am I right?”

“Yep! Can we pass?”

“Not so fast, buddy,” chuckled the woman. “I'm the first of the Seismic Sisters—you'll run into my other sisters as you make your way up Wela Volcano. To pass me, you have to answer a question.”

“Can we both answer the same question, or do we answer different questions?” asked Moon.

“You'll need to answer different questions. I have a few prepared. Which of you would like to go first?”

Hau held out his fist to Moon, a wordless request to play fire-water-grass. Moon obliged him and promptly lost when she played water to Hau's grass.

“Ladies first,” he said with a grin.

“Thanks.” Moon rolled her eyes, but stepped forward. “I'm going first.”

The Seismic Sister had watched their exchange with amusement, and now she cleared her throat. “Fantastic. Please supply the missing word from the Pokédex entry you were read earlier by your Dex: Salandit are a blank species, and defer to the alpha female in any given group.”

“Matriarchal,” said Moon promptly, remembering the passage at once.

“Very good.” The Seismic Sister grinned at her before turning to Hau. “Are you ready for your question?”
“I think so,” said Hau with a nod.

“Please supply the missing word from the Pokédex entry you were read earlier by your Dex: Sometimes this is a Salandit, but more often the evolved form, a blank, takes that role.”

“That would be Salazzle, right?”

“That is correct. You may both enter the Eastern Passage.” The Seismic Sister stepped aside, letting Moon and Hau enter the cave.

It was cooler in the tunnel, but not by much— and not for very long. A thick, heavy layer of glass appeared on one wall of the tunnel, showing a large cavern filled with bubbling magma. Moon squinted upward— it appeared to be open to the sky, but she couldn't tell because her whole body had backed away from the glass wall and floor, which showed lava about forty feet below her toes.

“Cool,” said Hau, pressing his nose to the glass. “Look, it says on this sign that this glass is about six feet thick, and reinforced with a super-heat-resistant alloy of titanium and silicon. How did they get it to stay so clear?”

Moon shuddered. “Remember how in the Lord of the Rings books, they have to drop one of Hoopa's rings into the volcano so that Sauron will die? This is Mount Doom, and we're going to die here.”

The tunnel was perhaps a mile long, but only a quarter-mile or so of it showed the interior of the volcano. Moon kept her nose pressed against the warm rock wall behind her, carefully not looking at the lava or the glass or anything that made her want to throw up or contemplate death.

When they emerged on the other side of the volcano, Moon was surprised to see that the sun was sinking in the sky. “Look,” she said, pointing.

“Oh, wow,” said Hau. “It's a beautiful sunset.”

“I was thinking, 'oh, wow, we've been stuck on this deathtrap of a mountain for a whole day,' but I'm glad you can keep your glass half full. Do you think we should get to the next tunnel before we camp, or should we go back into this one and camp?”

“Next tunnel,” said Hau promptly. “The lava will light things up well enough to see by, and even if it doesn’t, Uila has Flash. We can set up camp in the mouth of the next tunnel.”

“Onward and upward, then.”

“Let's do it.”

There was more wild grass, and Moon had to detour onto a large, rocky outcropping to take pictures of an entire valley where most of the lava runoff from the volcano seemed to go— splotches of black-oozing-red rock crawled over the landscape, and with the fiery sun in the background, it made for magnificent photography. She had been noticing things like that more and more since the impromptu photoshoot that had made her remember how she met Red and Blue, all those years ago.

“Didn't they want you to take pictures of me and Lillie?” Hau asked her.

“Yeah, but I want to take one of all three of us at the same time. I'm not sure when we'll next meet up with Lillie, so it'll have to wait.”

They finally got to the next tunnel; but it was, of course, guarded. “Hello!” the woman called,
waving at them. “I'm the second Seismic Sister, and I'm here to test your memory of the signs you've seen on your way up through the park.”

Moon and Hau looked at one another, slightly panicking. “Oh, crap,” said Hau under his breath. “I dunno if I remember the signs...”

“Your turn to go first,” said Moon pushing him forward.

“Are you ready?” the second Seismic Sister asked him.

“What happens if I don't get the question right?”

“Then you don't pass me,” said the second Seismic Sister, shrugging. “You'll have to go back and find the signs and read them. Do you want your question now?”

“Uh— sure, why not.”

“Great! Please fill in the following blanks from the first sign in the park: Please take blank blank with yourselves and your Pokémon.”

“Whew.” Hau scratched his head, frowning. “It's been a few hours since I read that one... but I do know it, hang on. Was it 'appropriate caution?'”

“That's correct!” said the second Seismic Sister brightly. “Very good.”

“Yeah!” shouted Hau, pumping his fist into the air. “Your turn, Moon!”

“Are you ready?”

“I don't know if I remember any of the signs, but sure, let's give it a try.”

“Please fill in the following blanks from the sign in the Eastern Passage— the first tunnel you walked through: The glass is also reinforced with a super-heat-resistant alloy of blank and blank.”

“Oh, I know this!” said Hau, excited. “If she doesn't get it, can I help her?”

“Technically no, but as long as you're not in my earshot or my line of sight I can't stop you.” The Seismic Sister grinned at them.

Moon racked her brains. She'd been trying desperately not to throw up in the Eastern Passage, feeling ill at the sight of lava and open air below her; but Hau had definitely read the signs and he had a fairly good memory. Moon closed her eyes and tried to remember.

“Titanium,” she said finally. “That was the first blank. And, um... I think it was silicon?”

“Great job!” said the Seismic Sister. Moon sighed, relieved, and Hau clapped her on the back. “Most Trainers have to go back and re-read that one.”

“I didn't read it in the first place,” admitted Moon. “Hau read it out loud. I was trying not to throw up because I hate heights and the glass is kind of on the floor so you can see the volcano below you.”

“I'm sorry to hear that,” said the Seismic Sister sympathetically. “If it helps, the upper passages don't have glass floors— just walls.”

“That does help, thank you.”
It was fully dark outside at this point, and it was pitch-black inside the tunnel. Hau let Uila out of the
Pokéball to light things up with Flash. There wasn't much point in setting up a tent, and there was
nowhere to hang a hammock; so Moon and Hau both contented themselves with laying out sleeping
bags and padding on the rocky cave floor. Neither of them bothered changing into pajamas, but
Moon filled her teapot with water bottles and walked it further into the cave to sit on the hot floor
until it whistled.

“I don't even have to build a fire here.”

“Do you have ramen? I've got MREs but I'm kind of sick of them, to be honest.”

“Chicken, beef, or shrimp? Can I look at your MREs? They're sounding pretty good.”

“Sure. Pass me a chicken, please.”

“One or two?”

“Well, two, if you're offering.”

Moon passed two cups of chicken ramen over to Hau, who poured the hot water in and set the cups
down to wait. In turn, he handed her a grocery bag where he'd stowed his MREs. Moon rifled
through the contents— noodles with red or white sauce, beef stew, chicken noodle soup, macaroni
and cheese, bean hotpot.

“Can I dibs the noodles with white sauce?”

“Go for it. I prefer the red sauce anyway, but the Mart had a two-for-one deal.”

“Oh, nice.” Moon poured hot water into the MRE pouch and closed it, waiting for her meal to heat
as well. “Do you have water bottles? I'd offer you one of mine, but I used two for cooking and I
don't want to run out before we hit the peak.”

“Sure, here you go.”

At least they wouldn't have to worry about getting cold, reasoned Moon as she drank lukewarm
water from Hau's storage. It was night, and they were high in the air; but the volcano itself would
keep them warm.

Hau laid on his stomach, playing a game on his Pokédex; it was the only thing that lit up the cave
after he'd recalled Uila to his ball. Rotom was in hibernation mode, completely dark-screened but
probably eavesdropping anyway— the hypocrite. Moon grinned and rolled over to stare at the dark
ceiling of the cave and wished she were back at the Pokémon Center. So far, the volcano experience
had gone better than she'd expected it to; but it was possible that she'd overprepared herself. And
they hadn't seen many wild Pokémon, either.

“Hau?”

“Yeah?”

“We saw that Salandit earlier, but have we seen anything else?”

“I think I saw a couple of Cubone down by the very first sign. Why?”

“Rotom mentioned a bunch of different species, but we've hardly seen anything.”

“They're probably mostly down by the grass,” said Hau, shrugging. “Unless we run into some
Magby or Magmar in the tunnel— which is a distinct possibility. They like caves and lava.”

“As long as nobody chases me out of my sleeping bag, we can see a Magmortar for all I care,” decided Moon.

“I'd kind of like to see a Magmortar. Not a wild one, though— they're kind of aggressive. I thought about catching a Magby and raising a Magmortar.”

“Me, too.”

“But I really wanted a Flareon, so I decided on Ollie, in the end.” Hau shifted, and the light from his game shut off, leaving them in pitch-black darkness. “What about you? Have you decided how you want Ben to evolve?”

“Sort of.”

“What you mean, sort of?”

“I'm going to let him pick.” Hau wouldn't be able to see, but Moon held up her own fingers to help herself keep track. “I've already ruled out Leafeon, Glaceon, and Umbreon for him— they're not going to help much with our team as it is currently. That leaves Vaporeon, Jolteon, Flareon, Espeon, and Sylveon. Of those five, I'd be happy to use any of them. And you know that Ben is temperamental—”

“That's putting it lightly,” snorted Hau. Ben's Pokéball vibrated furiously. Moon thought he'd been asleep.

“Oh, calm down, you know you're difficult,” Moon scolded Ben. “Anyway, if I pick something he'll be annoyed at me no matter what I end up picking, so the best way to avoid that unnecessary drama is to let him choose on his own.”

“Huh.” Hau was silent for a few moments. “That's actually really logical. I thought you were going to say it was for sentimental reasons and giving him freedom of choice, and all that.”

“If I thought a specific Eeveelution would benefit him or fit his personality, then I'd absolutely pick for him. But Ben reminds me a lot of Red's Pikachu, and Red let Pikachu choose whether to evolve or not.”

“Right, yeah. I'm definitely going to evolve Uila, but I guess Raichu is different in Alola than it is in Kanto.”

“I think I read something about that. Another Alolan form?”

“Yeah, Raichu gains Psychic-type in Alola.”

“Oh, that is so cool. It's just Electric in Kanto, and I guess everywhere else, too.”

They talked for a little while longer, but the warmth of the volcano soon lulled Moon into a deep, dreamless sleep.

The morning came, and with it the heat returned. Moon woke up in more or less a pool of her own sweat, as did Hau. They packed up their sleeping bags and packpacks and began trudging through the second tunnel. The thick glass appeared further inside the cave, but thankfully, as the second Seismic Sister had promised, there was no glass on the floor and Moon could walk straight ahead without looking at the lava. There was a sign, though, and she and Hau stopped to read it, mindful of
the memory games they might have to play later on.

*Please watch out for wild Charmander, Charmeleon, and Charizard. From here until the top of the peak has been designated a Catch-Free Zone. The wild Pokémon are in training to become Ride Charizard. Anyone violating the laws by catching a Charmander, Charmeleon, or Charizard will be fined accordingly.*

“Is it illegal to raise a Charmander here, then?”

“No, but you have to have documentation proving that it wasn’t born here on the volcano,” explained Hau. “If you want one that badly, it’s easier to special-order from another region than it is to try and get hold of one here. You get a few black-market traders who’ve caught them here and have bred up Eggs to sell, but the police usually crack down pretty fast on that sort of thing.”

“Who trains the Pokémon?”

“Kiawe’s in charge of it, but he’s got other people who help when he has trial duties and stuff.”

They emerged from the second tunnel onto what appeared to be a large plateau, on one side of the mountain. There were several fenced-off areas on the plateau, with several sleeping Charizard and a great many Charmander and Charmeleon playing around them. Moon, peering out at the faraway land below, could see a familiar-looking area.

“That’s Route Five and Brooklet Hill, right?”

Hau squinted in the direction she was pointing. “Yeah, I think so. Looks like this second tunnel comes out on the west side of the volcano.”

The hike to the third and (according to Rotom) final tunnel was much shorter; the volcano was growing thinner as they approached the peak. A third woman, presumably the final Seismic Sister, guarded the entrance.

“Good morning!” she said brightly, as they approached. “You’ve nearly made it to the Totem’s Den. Congratulations!”

“Thanks,” said Hau. “Do we have to answer questions to pass?”

“You sure do! Are you ready for your question?”

“Bring it on,” said Hau, with a nod.

“Great! Please fill in the following blanks: *From here until the top of the peak has been designated a Catch-Free Zone.*”

“Catch-Free Zone,” said Hau promptly.

“Very good.” The Seismic Sister turned her attention to Moon. “Are you ready?”

“Yeah, go ahead.”

“Please fill in the following blanks: *Anyone violating the laws by catching a Charmander, Charmeleon, or Charizard will be fined accordingly.*”

“Charmander, Charmeleon, or Charizard.”

“Fantastic! You’re both approved to enter the Totem’s Den. Good luck with the rest of the trial!”
The last tunnel was less than a quarter of a mile long, and did not have any glass windows at all; it emerged at what had to be just below the peak, and Moon was surprised to feel a cool breeze crossing her face when they exited the tunnel.

“It's nice up here,” she said, surprised.

“I guess it makes sense. The elevation's so high, and the lava doesn't reach the top of the mountain unless it's really active. Hey, there's a trial gate!”

Hau pointed at a trial gate, where a woman and a man in the bright aqua-colored T-shirts of the trial guides waited for them.

“Hi!” said the woman cheerfully. “Welcome to Wela Peak— the Totem's Den. Kiawe and the Totem are waiting for you up there.” She pointed through the gate. “If you or your Pokémon need to be healed, I have medical supplies here. And you can ask my friend for advice regarding the Totem, if you like.”

Moon regarded the man warily. “How much advice are we talking, here?”

“It's a good idea to have a Water-type or a Ground-type Pokémon on hand,” said the man, with a nod. “And Kiawe's trial will continue to test your memory.”

Moon waited, but that appeared to be all the advice he would give. Hau was taking the first trial guide up on the free healing, and she elected to do the same.

When they were ready, Moon turned to Hau. “Fire-water-grass for who goes first?” she suggested.

“Yeah.”

Hau won again, using water to Moon's fire; and he strode up the stone-carved steps, whistling cheerfully. Moon sat down on the first step to wait.

“What's his team lineup like?” the male trial guide asked her, to make conversation.

“He'll be fine, he's got a Brionne. And he has three other Pokémon, all of them well-trained. He won't have any problems.”

“And you?”

“I'm hoping I can power through this one on sheer strength,” admitted Moon. “I have a Dartrix, a Trumbeak, and an Eevee.”

The trial guides exchanged glances. “It's not too late to turn back,” said the woman gently. “You can go catch a Water-type and return. We'll give you a token that you can show the Sisters, so you don't have to answer their questions again.”

“I think I'll be okay, but thank you for offering,” Moon assured them. “I've come all this way, I won't turn back now.”

She could hear music, of all things, coming from uphill; and then she remembered that Kiawe was a dancer. “Do I have to dance?” she asked the trial guides.

They exchanged glances again— more amused than worried, this time. “No, you do not,” the man assured her. “The only dance you might do up there is learning the Firium Z-Dance, after you've completed the trial.”
“Good. I'm really not much of a dancer.”

There was a ringing roar that set the hair of Moon's neck on end, and she could hear Poppy’s sharp barks and squeals as well. “That's the Totem, then?”

“Er, no. That's probably David.”

“Who now?”

“David.” The woman rolled her eyes, but it was affectionate. “He's apprenticed to Kiawe, and he helps out with the trials. He can be very— er, enthusiastic.”

It was something of a surprise when Hau came striding down the mountain about twenty minutes later, beaming as he clutched a Firium Z. “That wasn't too bad at all,” he said, letting the woman patch up his team. “And now I've got Charizard in the Ride Pager, which is fantastic— now I can get anywhere I've been in Alola in just an hour or two. I could go visit Mom and Auntie Kap.”

“Wait for me, if you're going to do that.”

“I wasn't planning on it right away. I'm just going to head back down to Royal Avenue. I'll see you there.” Hau opened his Ride Pager, summoning a Charizard. The screen read ETA 3:00 and began counting down immediately.

“Well, I guess it's my turn,” said Moon, getting to her feet. “Wish me luck.”

“You're going to need it,” Hau warned her. “You don't have type advantages, and the Totem hits hard.”

“That's comforting, thanks.” Moon grinned at him and waved as he climbed onto the Charizard. “See you later.”

“See you!” Hau and the Charizard took off, soaring into the sky.

“I'm probably going to puke when I first do that,” remarked Moon. “I hate heights.”

“Good luck,” said the the trial guides in unison.

Moon walked up the stone steps and found herself at a circular platform, too round to be natural. She remembered seeing the underside of the platform from the glass window in the first tunnel, before her whole body had objected to the principle of a glass floor. If she were to look over the side of the circular platform— which she would not be doing, thank you very much— she would be able to see the scarlet lava, burning and bubbling hundreds of feet below them.

Kiawe stood at the center of the circular platform, talking to a sturdy-looking blond man who Moon decided was probably David. Three Marowak— a different color than she was used to seeing— sat at the edge of the platform, chattering to one another.

“Hi,” called Moon.

Kiawe and the blond man turned toward her. “Ah, Moon, hello.” Kiawe smiled at her. “Hau just finished his trial, and did spectacularly well— but you probably know this already. Are you ready to show me what you can do?”

Something uncomfortable twisted in Moon's stomach, but she pushed it down and nodded firmly.

“Very good.” Kiawe turned and said something quiet to the blond man, who nodded and moved to
the edge of the platform, sitting down. “Then let us begin the rest of the trial. As you traveled up the volcano, you met the Seismic Sisters, who tested you on your memory of Pokédex entries, the signs in the park, and the laws of Alola pertaining to Ride Charizard—a protected class of Pokémon, which we train up here on Wela Peak. Your memory is one of the most important tools you have in battle. You must memorize type advantages and disadvantages; you must memorize the move combinations that will best lead you and your team to victory; and you must memorize the strengths and weaknesses of your own Pokémon, knowing them by heart so that you may think and move as one in battle. Dancing is the same, and through Z-Dances you are able to even further enhance the power of your Pokémon. So this trial will continue to test your memory—and will introduce to you some of the Z-Dances of Alola, which are not taught elsewhere.”

Moon was intrigued. “Sounds fun.”

“I rather think so.” Kiawe smiled and beckoned the three Marowak to join him at the center of the platform. “Though they are unlikely ever to know any moves with which they can use this dance... we shall present to you the dance of Icium Z: Subzero Slammer! Watch carefully the first time—it will be the correct version of the dance. Then we will show you the dance a second time, and you must tell us the difference between the dances.”

“Got it.”

Music started up, and Moon realized that the blond man had pressed play on some kind of stereo system. Kiawe and the Marowak began dancing—stepping backwards, crossing their arms in a pattern that resembled a snowflake.

“And one more time,” said Kiawe, when the dance was done.

The Marowak and Kiawe danced one more time. Moon studied them carefully, trying to spot the difference.

“And the change is?”

Moon pointed to the central Marowak. “I think that Marowak used a different ending pose.”

“Correct! And since you are correct—you will face that Marowak in battle. Are you ready?”

Here she was in her element. Moon grinned and let Ariel out of her ball.

It was a short battle—the Marowak was good, but Ariel was much stronger and Moon had been training over the last week with the trial in mind.

“Wonderful!” said Kiawe warmly. “Now, instead of observing me with the Marowak, you will observe David, my apprentice.”

“Hi!” said the blond man brightly. “I help train the Charizard, and I assist Kiawe with the trial.”

“Nice to meet you, David.”

“They will be showing you the dance of Psychium Z: Shattered Psyche,” explained Kiawe. “Just like before, they will show it to you twice, and you must spot the difference between the two dances.” He sat where David had done, fiddling with a remote that had to be for the stereo system. The music began again, and David and the Marowak danced.

“And the difference is?” Kiawe inquired, when the Psychium Z dance had been performed twice.
“David posed differently at the end.”

“Excellent! Now you will face David in battle.”

David grinned at her, letting out the ringing shout she’d heard further down the peak, and tossed out a Magmar. Moon sent out Ariel again. It was a difficult match, but Ariel had Smack Down and in the end, it was more than enough to take out the Magmar.

“And now we will show you the dance for Firium Z— Inferno Overdrive!” Kiawe switched places with David again. “Two dances, and you must spot the difference between them.”

David pressed play, and the music began. Kiawe and the Marowak danced the first time, and nothing out of the ordinary occurred— but as the second dance came to its conclusion, a teal-and-purple blur launched high into the air from behind the circular platform and did an impressive series of flips and twists before landing in the center of the platform, immediately before Moon.

“And the difference is?” asked Kiawe dutifully, grinning as Moon took a step backward.

“Well, I'm going to go ahead and say that the Totem Pokémon definitely wasn't present during the first dance.”

“And how do you know that is the Totem Pokémon?”

“Well, it's clearly an Alolan Marowak, but it's as tall as I am and it's staring at me like it wants to pull my soul out of my body.”

“Marowak would have no use for your soul; it prefers the impure ones,” laughed Kiawe— which was not exactly comforting. “And you are correct: this is the Totem of Wela Peak. You may begin your battle!”

Moon sent out Ariel, immediately healing her with a Super Potion as she didn't have the opportunity to do so earlier.

The Totem Marowak spun its burning bone and launched a wheel of flames directly at Ariel, who didn't have time to dodge it. She let out a pained cry as the fire licked over her feathers.

“Hang in there!” Moon encouraged her.

Marowak made a thin, whistling noise, and a large black lizard scuttled out from the rocks. There were purple and magenta streaks on its belly and legs.

“That's a Salazzle, bzzt,” said Rotom helpfully.

“I kind of figured, but thank you anyway.” Moon frowned thoughtfully at the Salazzle. Marowak and Salazzle, she was certain, were both fully-evolved Pokémon. They had strength to hand that Puck, Ariel, and Ben... simply didn't.

“Ariel, use Smack Down on the Salazzle! We've got to level the playing field.”

The Salazzle grinned, showing sharp teeth, and moved to stand on its hind legs, hands moving in a circular motion. Ariel's Smack Down bounced harmlessly off a shield of some kind— Protect or Detect, Moon decided.

Marowak sent another circular burst of flame at Ariel, who tried her best but didn't quite manage to dodge it.
It was statistically unlikely that Salazzle would be able to pull off two shielding moves in a row, so Moon had Ariel use Smack Down again. It hit the Salazzle, knocking it out instantly—which cheered Moon up greatly—but Marowak sent a third jet of flame at Ariel and she passed out as well.

That was concerning. Moon swallowed and let out Ben, hoping—praying, to Arceus and Tapu Koko and whatever other gods might be listening—that he could pull off a miracle. Or that if he couldn't defeat the Marowak, that he could weaken it enough that Puck could pull off an Ominous Wind, which would be super-effective.

“Ben, use Echoed Voice!”

Ben opened his mouth to roar at the Marowak, but it darted forward and made a familiar chopping motion, the bone smacking down onto Ben and knocking him out instantly.

“You know Brick Break?” shouted Moon, incensed. She recalled Ben to his ball. “Of course you know Brick Break. Why am I not fucking surprised. Puck, let's finish this!”

Puck eyed the Marowak with extreme distaste, then turned to offer Moon a judging look.

“Hey, don't give me that. It's knocked out your sister and brother already. It's going to throw something fiery at you, so dodge that and use Ominous Wind.”

The Marowak attacked almost as she finished speaking. Puck jumped out of the way, but he was slow, and a bit of flame caught his wing. Ominous Wind was super-effective, but Puck didn't catch the stat boost she'd been hoping for.

“Okay— one more ti—”

Moon watched, horrified, as the Marowak swung its flaming bone at Puck, smacking him hard before Puck could so much as move. Puck staggered, attempting to remain upright; but he tripped and fell heavily to the ground, and did not get up.

There was a long pause; then Marowak turned around and leaped over the edge of the circular platform, to wherever it went when it wasn't beating Pokémon up.

“You have failed my trial,” said Kiawe softly.

Moon recalled Puck to his ball. She said nothing—she couldn't say anything.

A hand rested on her shoulder for a few moments. “It is clear that your Pokémon are well-trained, and they have worked hard. But the Totem Pokémon are powerful—far more powerful than we know. Marowak judged you, and it decided that you were not ready.”

“Not ready?” whispered Moon. “I've been training. I don't understand.”

“You were going to rely on brute strength to win this trial. You wanted to coast through with Trumbeak's help, yes?”

“That was what I planned, yeah.”

“Even though you were advised to catch a Pokémon that would give you the advantage?”

Moon's throat tightened. “I—yes.” She cleared her throat. “I would have liked to catch another Pokémon, but Ben—my Eevee. He's not much more than a baby, and they're all kind of temperamental, if I'm being honest. They weren't ready for another teammate.”
“Hmmm.” Kiawe frowned. “It’s good that you kept them in mind, then. You will have to figure out another way to get through my trial. Wela Volcano Park and Route Seven are open to you for training, of course. And the trial guides will give you a token that will allow you to pass the Seismic Sisters without answering more riddles— you have already proven that your memory is not at fault, in this trial. Marowak, and my other Totem—the elder sister of the Salazzle you defeated— have both been the undoing of many a confident Trainer. Try not to let it get you down.”

Moon inhaled hard, biting her lip— she would not cry. *She would not cry.* “I’ll try,” she finally said.

“That’s the spirit.” Kiawe smiled, patting her on the back. “I will fly you back down to Royal Avenue, so you may recover in safety and comfort. Train hard, and I will see you soon.”

Chapter End Notes

“It's genuinely ballsy of a teenage girl to threaten to curbstomp someone”— in which Moon is me, reminding you exactly how much I love Hapu

Don't mind me, just real subtly setting up some post-game plotlines...

I'm definitely, totally mixing fandoms here; but if you're ARMY then I want you to picture Moon in one of the outfits from the MNET comeback stage for Anpanman. Specifically, Namjoon's orange jumpsuit, and Yoongi's outfit with the stripe placement. (Why yes, they are both my biases, thank you for asking. My wrecker is Taehyung.) Add work boots, work gloves, and a medical face mask that you see people wearing all the time in South Korea and occasionally in Japan, and voila you have Moon's outfit. If you're not ARMY... um, just Google what I described above, and then listen to BTS's entire discography and become a fan because they are amazing and they deserve every ounce of support they can get UWU

Wela Volcano Park takes up a HUGE amount of space on the Akala map. A lot of the travel time in it has to be cut out with black loading screens, but real life doesn't have loading screens so I'm filling it ALL in. *insert Kim Kardashian gif: It's what she deserves.*

I made up the Pokédex entries in this chapter. I could have written it with canonical dex entries, but I preferred to write my own for this one.

So Kiawe's trial is a “spot the difference” game, and I get why— it's a memory test, which is going to be even more difficult when you're walking up a volcano with hot, shimmery air and bright light from the lava and the sun. You can't be sure if you're seeing things correctly. But in the game itself is easy, so we're starting the memory games earlier down the mountain. The Seismic Sisters fit perfectly into what I had in mind, and their little puzzles on top of surviving the hostile environment have made me very happy writing Kiawe's trial.

Can you picture Moon NOT reading Lord of the Rings is the real question here, and the answer is no, so it exists.

Moon is sick of this volcano and she's less than halfway up lmao
It would be easy to remember the questions about Pokédex entries, because there's a system that sends out the prompt for Dexes to read the Salandit entry and that's unusual; but not everyone pays attention to signs. Moon likes to read literally everything, including signs; and Hau is showing that he has a pretty good memory, too.

Moon and Hau easily sharing food and water, working together to conquer the volcano — this is aesthetic, this is squad goals, this is the whole damn reason I'm writing this fic and I just love them so much UGH

You get Charizard Fly after you do Kiawe's trial, and I didn't see Charizard anywhere else in Alola so I have to assume that they all live on the volcano or something. So here's a new headcanon about Ride Charizard and how they're trained and so on. It seems like Dragonite, Salamence, and Hydreigon would work equally well as Ride Pokémon, but Charmander seems to be the easiest one of the four to get ahold of.

Kiawe teaching the dances for Icium Z and Psychium Z hit me like a bolt from the blue and I knew I just had to write it. I know I was angesting about who teaches dances in the notes somewhere in Frangipani, but Kiawe would definitely know all of them. He's a dancer, for heaven's sake. So he teaches Icium Z and Psychium Z, and everyone else has a specialist to teach the Z-Moves except for Dragonium Z... which I have plans for anyway, heh heh. And of course he teaches Firium Z as well— which is fine, because Moon can't use it without a Z-Crystal anyway.

So Moon's failed a trial. I always planned for her to fail at least one trial, and I decided it would be Kiawe's trial because it counters Puck, who is by far the strongest member of Moon's team. Ariel is strong too, but she's actually tankier than Puck. Ben, of course, is still a kid— he's in Eevee adolescence already thanks to the Exp. Share, but he's still young. And Kiawe's trial is pretty difficult even if you have advantages— the Marowak has Brick Break to cover the Rock and Normal-types, and that Salazzle is wicked fast with the poison. Moon didn't stand a chance, tbh. It will be interesting to see how she moves forward from here...
Moon walked into her room at the Royal Avenue Pokémon Center, and took a deep breath.

“You can do this,” she told herself, and pressed the buttons to release her team.

They all appeared on the bed in front of her. Ben blinked several times, a sleepy expression on his face before he realized where he was and scowled. Ariel immediately hid her head beneath her wings, and Puck made eye contact with Moon once before turning around to face the wall.

So far, this was not going well.

“Guys,” said Moon softly. “Statistically speaking, it had to happen sometime.”

Puck didn’t move. Ariel hunched over further, and Ben sniffed haughtily. Moon decided that Ariel was in most need of comforting at the moment.

“You did really well,” she whispered, gathering up her bird. “It was just one battle. You're so strong, and you've worked so hard. We'll get through this, okay?”

Ariel trilled softly, resting her head in the hollow of Moon's collarbones. Moon swallowed back guilt and shame—her Trumbeak had perfect faith in her, even when she didn't deserve it.

“Vee vee eee,” pronounced Ben, glaring at Moon with beady eyes.

“I wouldn't have sent you out at all if I didn't have to, kid. I was desperate. Marowak was scary, wasn't it?”

Ben sniffed again, but he trotted across the blanket to Moon's knee, butted his head against it, and curled up by her leg. Moon interpreted this as forgiveness of some kind.

“Puck.”

Puck didn't move.

“Come on, buddy.”
Slowly, the Dartrix turned around. His dark eyes met Moon's, and what she saw there reflected her own state of mind: anger, guilt, apology, and the determination to work harder.

“I'm sorry,” she told him. “I let you down, and that's on me.”

Puck lifted his chin.

“I will do everything I can to make it up to you,” promised Moon. “And we'll train hard and rest well before we try again, okay? I've got some TMs we can all try— Protect would probably be really helpful, and I think I picked up Thief somewhere— that's super-effective against Marowak.”

“Trrrmm?” inquired Ariel.

“A new teammate? Yeah, I know that Lana and the trial guides and Kiawe all suggested it, but Ben's definitely not ready for that and I don't think the two of you are, either. We'll get a new teammate before we face Olivia for sure— I don't know about Mallow yet.”

All three of them looked relieved, and Moon knew she'd made the right choice.

The next morning, she woke before dawn, ate a quick breakfast, and began the hike out to Wela Volcano Park once more. By the time she reached the first sign and the scrubby grass, Rotom informed her of a great many texts and a few missed calls.

Chat: sprechen zie cousins?

walking malasada: yo are u comin down for breakfast

walking malasada: ur usually up by like 7 r u ok

2 missed calls from: walking malasada

walking malasada: either u sleep like the dead or ur not in ur room, I knocked a LOT & I called u twice

walking malasada: so the café ppl said u left at like five thirty?? moon r u ok????

Missed call from: walking malasada

walking malasada: moon????

Missed call from: walking malasada

walking malasada: im telling lillie on u

Chat: IKI SQUAD

walking malasada: so moon apparently got up at the crack of dawn & left the RA pkmn ctr w/o
walking malasada: which is weird b/c we both did our trials yesterday but I never saw her after she did hers, she didn't try to find me or anything

walking malasada: so im kinda worried & im spammin her with texts both here and in our private chat so hopefully she'll see it soon

lillie-pad: Oh my gosh! Moon, please answer your phone!!!!

lillie-pad: I really hope she's okay.

walking malasada: she's prob fine but she didn't say anything and that's what's bothering me

Chat: girl power

lillie-pad: Moon, are you okay? Do you want to talk to me privately?

2 missed calls from: lillie-pad

lillie-pad: Please at least let us know that you're safe. If we don't hear from you by nine a.m, I will call Professor Kukui and ask him to track your Rotom via GPS. I don't want to do it, but we're really worried about you.

“It's eight forty-five, bzzt. You should probably text them back,” advised Rotom.

Moon sighed, sitting down at the base of the sign. “Yeah, I'm getting to it.”

Chat: IKI SQUAD

shakespeare jr: I'm fine, guys, please don't sic the prof on me

walking malasada: THERE U R, THANK ARCEUS, I WAS THIS CLOSE 2 CALLING THE POLICE

lillie-pad: Moon!!!! We were so worried. Where are you? Are you sure you're okay?

shakespeare jr: I'm fine

shakespeare jr: Ok actually I lied I'm not fine, I failed Kiawe's trial

shakespeare jr: I'm at Wela with my team, we're gonna train for a while

walking malasada: u want a training buddy???
shakespeare jr: No, but thanks for offering

lillie-pad: Do you want to talk about it? You can call me anytime, I don't have anything going on today. And I'll be arriving at Royal Avenue tomorrow, if you want to talk in person!

shakespeare jr: I appreciate the offer but I would really just like to be left alone for now

shakespeare jr: I'll probably be okay by tonight, I'll see Hau when I get back and Lillie tomorrow so it's all good, don't worry about me

walking malasada: we're gonna worry anyway but ok, sure jan

lillie-pad: I'm not sure who Jan is, but I agree. We're going to worry about you anyway, because we love you. Train hard, but don't overdo it in that volcanic heat. Please call if you need anything!

shakespeare jr: Thanks, guys. Love you too.

There were a few other Trainers battling or hunting for wild Pokémon in the scrubby grass, and it seemed as though there were more of them early in the morning. Moon spotted a flock of Fletchling, chirping happily and hopping around; it made her smile despite herself. She tried to find Cubone and Salandit to train against, as she would be facing Marowak and Salazzle; but the problem was that Cubone and Salandit simply weren't as powerful as their evolutions, and the training was therefore more tedious and time-consuming. Furthermore, Moon could defeat Cubone easily—but Marowak completely changed types on evolution, so she had no way to practice for that.

Puck worked quietly and hard, saying almost nothing as he obeyed Moon's commands. Razor Leaf could take out Cubone instantly, but he was struggling with the Salandit and the occasional Magby that wandered by. Ben worked hard, too—in fact, he very nearly evolved before he cried out in dismay and Moon hastily replaced his Exp Share with the Everstone that Lillie had given her. They both breathed a sigh of relief. The evolution would have been Espeon or Sylveon—both good choices, but Ben and Moon both knew that Ben wasn't emotionally ready to evolve. And privately—Moon would never tell Ben this, but she didn't think either of those Eeveelutions would really suit Ben's personality. She would still let him pick, and maybe he would surprise her; but Sylveon tended to be cuddly, openly affectionate types and Espeon were generally placid and unruffled. Ben was only affectionate when nobody else was watching—the rest of the time he was a little shit, and he knew it.

“All right,” said Moon, after the evolution scare. “I need a break. Rotom, what time is it?”

“It's nearly noon, bzzt.”

“Sounds like lunchtime.” Moon glanced at Puck and Ariel. “I don't think there are any Bugs around here, but I have plenty of beans. If we had Charizard we could go to the Pokémon Center and get you some... but, you know. We don't.”

“Here.”

Moon leaped to her feet, heart pounding wildly. Two packets of dried Bugs landed on the ground in front of her.

She met calm green eyes, and struggled to keep both her face and her heartbeat under control. “You scared the shit out of me,” she finally managed.
Gladion shrugged. “Sorry.”

After a few moments of awkward silence, Moon bent to pick up the packets of bugs. One was Grubbin; the other was Caterpie. Puck and Ariel were both staring at the packets, practically salivating.

“Eee vee,” whined Ben.

“I get it, you're hungry.” Moon looked at Gladion again. “Um— thanks. It's very kind of you.”

“I had extra,” was his response. “Imp likes them, too.”

“That's your Zubat, right? Do you have enough for him, too?”

“I had extra,” he repeated, and sat down on the ground, several feet away. Moon stared down at him as he pulled a plain black backpack off his back, unzipping it and rifling through. He pulled out another packet of Bugs and a large sack of Pokébeans. He opened the sack of Pokébeans, setting it on the ground like a bowl.

“Where do you get that size bag of beans?”

“Thrifty Megamart. It's that shabby store on the left as you walk toward Route Seven.”

“Oh yeah, I know where that is.”

Gladion reached for his belt, pulling out all three Pokéballs and tossing them to his right, away from Moon. His Type: Null, Zubat, and Zorua all appeared at once, blinking and looking around.

“Lunch,” he told them, tearing open the Bugs.

“Zuuuuuuuuuuu,” cheered Imp, flapping over Gladion’s head in excitement.

“Would you shut up for once in your life?” But Gladion held out his hand, resting his arm on his knee, and Imp latched onto his middle finger with tiny feet and dangled upside down, eating the Bugs from the packet in Gladion’s other hand. Null and Rey went to the sack of beans, putting their heads down to graze from the opening.

Moon’s heart was really not made to handle such cuteness. She quickly busied herself with tearing open the Bug packets for Puck and Ariel.

Ben trotted toward Null and Rey, sniffing at their sack of beans.

“Ben, those don't belong to you. I've got yours over—”

“He can eat with them if he wants, I've got plenty.” said Gladion, shrugging. “He's tiny, he probably doesn't eat half as many in a week as Null goes through in a day.”

Null let out a coughing bark that sounded rather like a laugh.

Ben looked at Moon, a question in his eyes.

“Um— sure, yeah. Go ahead, kid.”

Ben stood on his tiptoes to reach the top of the sack. Null stopped eating to regard him with a quizzical eye for a few moments, then reached out with a sharp claw and tipped part of the bag down, so it would be easier for him to reach.
“You're kind,” said Moon, watching Ben instead of looking at Gladion. “I misjudged you.”

Gladion didn't say anything to that, merely watching Imp wolf down Bugs. Since both of his hands were occupied and Moon's hands were free, she opened her backpack and began pulling out sandwich ingredients.

“Are you allergic to peanuts?”

“No.”

“What about Rawst berries?”

“No. Why?”

“Would you like a sandwich?”

Gladion looked over Moon's supplies as she laid everything out on a towel, to keep it off the ground. “Sure, if you're offering.”

Moon made three sandwiches with the last of the bread—she would have to get more at the Mart—and wrapped one of them in the empty bread bag. She wrapped the other two in napkins and took one of those and the plastic-wrapped one over to Gladion.

“This one's for later, if you get hungry on the road,” she said, holding up the one in plastic and setting down on his backpack.

“I don't need it.”

“Consider it my thank-you, for sharing food with my team.” Moon set the sandwich wrapped in a napkin on his knee. “And this is for now.”

“It'll wait until Imp is done eating.” Gladion paused, looking up at her with a raised eyebrow. “Unless you wanted to feed me?”

“Hell no.”

He huffed out a laugh without smiling—something Moon hadn't thought was possible. “But you think I'm—”

“How about we just don't talk about anything that happened on Route Five. It didn't happen, we met at the Battle Royal Dome.”

He still didn't smile, but she could see humor glimmering in his eyes. “Whatever you say.”

They fell into a silence that was not exactly uncomfortable—but neither was it comfortable. Moon snuck glances at Gladion whenever she thought he might not be looking, trying to decide whether or not he had actually been flirting or whether he was just getting her back for saying he was cute in the first place.

“Baba shuuuu,” said Imp, his mouth full of Bugs. “Shu shu baba, ba shu, bat shuuuu?”

“Because I felt like it. Don't talk while you're eating, it's disgusting.”

“What was he saying?” asked Moon, curious.

Gladion went slightly pink. “He wanted to know why I'm here today. I—well, I don't have an island
challenge amulet, so I'm not supposed to be here.”

Moon stopped eating, staring at him. “How did you even get in?”

“There's a little footpath that you can access from Royal Avenue, which connects with the main canyon.”

“How did you know about it?”

“Found it on my own.”

“How long have you been a Trainer?”

“A little over two years now. You ask a lot of questions.”

“I figure if you don't want to answer one of them, you'll let me know.”

Gladion made a slight noise which Moon interpreted as a general assent to her assumption, and they fell into the silence once more; but it was a little more comfortable than it had been.

Imp finished eating, and Gladion wiped off his hands, grimacing as bits of dried Bugs fell onto the ground.

“I've got soap and water, if you want to clean your hands?”

“That'd be nice, thanks.”

Moon dug in her bag for her pump bottle of soap and a water bottle, tossing each one to Gladion. He caught them, cleaned his hands properly, and returned them before picking up his sandwich.

“Zuuuuu!”

Imp had flown high into the sky, but now he dived, aiming directly at Gladion. Gladion ignored this, except to tilt his head to one side so that Imp whooshed harmlessly past him.

“Does he— do that a lot?”

Gladion swallowed a mouthful of sandwich. “All the fucking time,” he said wearily. “I caught him in Diglett Tunnel—the road that connects Heahea with Konikoni. He wouldn't leave me the fuck alone, so I captured him to make him stop.”

“But you care about him.”

“He's grown on me.” Gladion tipped his head to one side again as Imp rushed him, squeaking happily. “But he's grown more like a wart, than a flower. Harmless, but annoying. If I really can't deal with it I recall him, but I suppose it makes him happy.”

Ben turned and waddled back to Moon, clearly full and slightly uncomfortable. He let out a loud belch and rolled over, looking pleadingly up at her with large eyes.

“You brought this on yourself,” Moon informed him, but she picked him up and rubbed his belly anyway. “Silly kid.”

“I thought Eevee were fairly picky eaters.”

“Oh, he is. I bet if you look in the bag you'll find you're missing a lot of yellow and white beans.
Those are the only ones he'll eat. I don't know why— but if he likes those, who am I to deny him?"

The Pokémon all finished eating before their Trainers, and Puck and Ariel cautiously approached Null and Rey with inquiring noises. Rey seemed friendly enough, and Imp fluttered down to join them with cheerful squeaks; but Null stalked away from the group and climbed into Gladion's lap, even though she was really too large for it. Gladion glared at her, but she ignored him, as she ignored the other Pokémon.

"Stop being a snob, play nice," he said, half under his breath. "You'll probably like the owl. He doesn't seem to like many people, either. And I think the bird is a girl, too. You never get to play with other girls."

Null's head perked up at this, the helmet clipping Gladion in the chin. His head jerked back and to the side and he winced, keeping his mouth tightly closed.

"Are you okay?"

Gladion leaned backward, away from Null as she jumped out of his lap. He turned to one side and spat. Moon was horrified to see scarlet froth landing on the ground.

"Oh my god, you bit your tongue!"

"It's nothing that hasn't happened a billion fucking times before." He sighed, reaching for his backpack.

"I've got Super Potions, and, um—"

"Don't be an idiot. None of the Potion line are actually designed for use on humans. I've got stuff for it." He pulled out a thin white tube and what appeared to be a small flask.

"What are those?"

"Oral numbing gel," he said, holding up the tube. "And some moonshine."

"Moonshine?"

"Cleans a damn sight better than mouthwash, and it's cheaper. I can't exactly say I like the taste, though." He sipped from the flask, swishing it around in his mouth, and spat it out on the ground.

"That's definitely not legal."

Gladion offered her a flat, unimpressed look as he twisted the cap of the flask closed.

"Okay, you don't really prioritize legality, fair enough."

That earned her another unsmiling huff-of-breath laugh before he dabbed some of the gel onto his finger and stuck it in his mouth, working around for a few moments. Then he made a face, nodding.

"Gross," he remarked, "but useful. After all, not everyone can afford to go running to a Pokémon Center every time they scrape their knee. Trainers on the island challenge get a discount, but the rest of us pay full rates so we have to make do."

That was useful to know. "Hypothetically, if I wanted to carry some things that would save me money in the future, what would you recommend?"

He nodded slowly and reached into his backpack, but instead of putting his things away he withdrew
a red plastic box, opening it up and gesturing at her to come and look. Moon scrambled over to join him, doing her best to ignore the fact that they were sitting next to each other.

“Moonshine for disinfectant,” he said, indicating his flask. “That will clean things, if you don't have the time or resources to boil water. Hot water is the best thing to clean with, though. The ora-gel is good for numbing pain in your mouth and even your nose, as long as you keep everything hygenic. It won’t stop bleeding, though. For that you want gauze and medical tape—” He lifted those things out of the box, to show her. “—and adhesive bandages in all sizes, for little things. That stuff gets used fast, especially if you've got a teammate like Null.”

“Why?”

Gladion shot her an irritated look. “You literally just saw why. Don't interrupt.”

“Sorry,” murmured Moon, chastised.

“Then you want some bacitracin— that's the chemical name, but it's usually branded as triple disinfectant cream, the stuff you put on adhesive bandages. It's good for making sure cuts and scrapes don't get infected, but you can also put some just inside your nose during cold season and you won't get sick. And there's also duct tape and school glue— both of which will close a surprising number of wounds, but they're only emergency placeholders until you can actually get help. Then, of course, there's painkillers. I've got some things that you probably won't ever have access to, but—”

“Why not?”

“Because you're not likely to purchase black-market narcotics,” said Gladion, through gritted teeth. “And if you interrupt me again, we're done with this conversation.”

Moon winced. “Sorry.”

He raised an eyebrow at her, to show his skepticism, but then returned to explaining the first-aid kit. “I've got morphine for the really bad injuries, but I've only ever had to use that a few times and I don’t like it, because it's habit forming. Codeine cough syrup is a little nicer, because you can take it orally instead of through a syringe. You get a bit loopy on it, as with most narcotics, so you want to make sure you're not doing anything important when you take it.”

Moon raised her hand, feeling kind of stupid, but Gladion nodded and she figured it was permission to speak. “What kind of black market do you get narcotics from?”

“You don't touch the black market with a ten-foot pole,” said Gladion flatly. “If you're that pressed about needing morphine or cough syrup, I'll get some for you.”

“Oh. Um, thank you.”

Gladion shrugged, a tinge of pink returning to his face. “You've got a clean criminal record. Don't fuck that up.”

Moon cleared her throat and let boldness take over. “And... if hypothetically, I were to need something like that, how would I get in touch with you?”

Gladion opened his mouth to reply, then closed it abruptly. After a few moments of silence, he cleared his own throat; and as he spoke the pink tinge deepened into a full blush. “Well— hypothetically. Hypothetically, I suppose I'd... have to give you my number.”

Moon pulled Rotom out of her pocket, opening the contacts and adding a new one, then passed the
Dex over to Gladion. He studied it for a few moments, eyes flicking over the options of contact; then he entered a single phone number, under the name GAM.

“I assume that's your initials?”

“Has anyone ever told you that you're incredibly nosy?”

“I've usually gotten feedback along the lines of 'curious' or 'thirsty for knowledge,' but if you consider the terms synonymous then yeah, probably.” Moon promptly changed his name to cute asshole trainer, in his line of sight so that he would see, and opened a chat with his phone.

Chat: hypothetically

shakespeare jr: This is Moon, now you have my number

cute asshole trainer: I thought we agreed not to discuss Route Five.

He was a fast texter. “We did,” she said, watching as he changed her contact name to something she couldn't quite make out, “but I rename all of my contacts, it's nothing personal.”

“I prefer your version anyway. It's more anonymous.”

“I guess you must value your privacy,” concluded Moon. “That's why you do Battle Royals under a fake name, right?”

“Indeed.”

“So what's my name in your phone?”

“That's for me to know, and for you to be insatiably curious about for the rest of our acquaintance.”

“Oh, come on!”

No amount of teasing or begging would make him divulge the name— but at some point they began training again in the scrubby grass. Gladion mostly worked in silence, but he would occasionally answer her questions when she gathered up the courage to ask him. It was in this way that she learned that his favorite colors were red and black, that his birthday was in April, and that he liked Leppa-berry flavored anything, from jam to malasadas to turnovers to pie. She tried to be equally forthcoming with information— not that he asked, but she didn't want the exchange to be one-sided. So she told him that her favorite colors were purple and green, that her birthday was coming up in October and she would be eighteen, and that she liked Nomel-berry malasadas and even Nomel-berry sherbet.

“I don't know why anyone would ruin perfectly good ice cream with such a sour flavor.”

“They sweeten it, obviously!” Moon rolled her eyes. “The only time you don't sweeten Nomel berries is when you're using the juice to season meat or fish, and even then you usually combine it with something else.”
“The only good ice cream flavor is vanilla. Everything else is pointless.”

“I guess they don’t really make Leppa-berry ice cream, do they?”

His nose wrinkled. “Attempts have been made, but not everything makes good ice cream. Vanilla ice cream goes nicely with most Leppa-berry pastries anyway, so it’s easy enough to order something I like at a malasada shop or a café.”

“I can’t really picture you in a malasada shop or a café.”

“I don’t often have occasion to go to either.”

“Not even for Battle Royal victories?”

He laughed again— still without smiling. Moon sort of wanted to see him smile, so she found this frustrating. “Not even then. The ones who really deserve rewards for victories are my teammates, of course; and Null doesn’t do well with crowds so the malasada shop is out, and I try to avoid Pokémon Centers as a general rule.”

“Why doesn’t Null do well with crowds?”

Gladion paused, about to give his Zorua an order against the wild Salandit that had challenged them. His face had been almost relaxed, but it tightened again as he spoke.

“You’re observant,” he said quietly. “Can’t you figure it out on your own?”

“I think she might not do well with crowds because you don’t do well with crowds,” offered Moon tentatively, “but that’s only a partial guess.”

He nodded once, jaw working as though he were trying to decide what to say. “Null wears a helmet,” he said finally.

“I figured.” She’d also overheard him say as much, but she wasn’t about to admit to it.

Another nod. “She’s not terribly… spacially aware, I suppose would be the best way to put it. She doesn’t quite understand her own strength, and I’m not going to file down her claws, as they’re her only weapon at the moment. She knows the helmet isn’t part of her, but she forgets that it takes up more space than it does.”

“And that’s why you carry first-aid equipment.”

“That’s why I carry first-aid equipment,” confirmed Gladion, with a third nod.

“And there’s the whole thing where she’s unique and you probably don’t want anyone getting too close a look at her.”

Gladion went still at that. “There’s that,” he said, and his tone was decidedly cool. “And anyone includes you, so if your Rotom’s recorded any information about her, I’ll have to ask you to delete it.”

“Rotom?” asked Moon.

“Type: Null was already in the Pokédex, bzzt,” said Rotom promptly. “There wasn’t much information except the basic entry. I have a small amount of information compiled, but I haven’t sent it to the Professor’s Rotom yet.”

“Please delete it.” The words were polite, but Gladion’s tone was not.
“It goes against my purposes, bzzt— but you're the Trainer.” Rotom paused for a few moments. “I could send it to you, if you want.”

Moon glanced at Gladion, but he shook his head. “I already know what I need to know about Null. Just delete whatever you've got.”

“Deleting information, bzzt.”

“That's what the Professor was asking you about during the Battle Royal, right? When you flipped him the bird on live TV.”

“I've never met the Professor,” said Gladion blandly. “The Masked Royal had some questions about Null, but I didn't answer them.”

“Oh come on, everyone knows they're the same person!”

“If he wants to indulge himself in a public display of make-believe, it's not my place to stop him.”

“That's what Hau said, but it seems kind of...” Moon paused, trying to search for a word that would properly express her mild annoyance without being too rude.

“Stupid?”

“Childish, I suppose. Not stupid, though— you said it yourself, we all want to be the hero sometimes.”

Gladion's mouth tightened. “There's a difference between playing at being a hero and really being one.”

“What's the difference?”

He raised one eyebrow at her.

“I mean, intellectually, I'm aware of the difference, but I've never really experienced either so I'd like you to explain it.”

“That's a load of bullshit if I've ever heard one. What do you call stepping in for your friend on Route Five?”

“That wasn't heroic, anyone would do that for their friend.”

“And whatever all that was with the Team Skull girl, about your other friend.”

“I lost my temper, so that definitely wasn't heroic.”

“She deserved it,” he said unexpectedly, “but you're right, too. I'm sure you've helped your friends in other ways.”

“That's what you do for your friends, though. You help them, they help you.” Moon shrugged. “My Pokémon, Hau, and my other friend have helped me with lots of things. My team keeps me responsible. Hau keeps me grounded, Lil— my other friend keeps me kind. You keep me challenged.”

There was a long silence.

“We aren't... friends,” said Gladion, but he sounded very unsure of himself. “Are we?”
“We're friends if you want to be friends.” Moon grinned at him. “Even if you are an asshole.”

Still no smile, but she got a huff of laughter for the remark. “I... suppose we're friends, then.”

“Great. Now, friends would definitely tell each other what their contact names are in one another's phones.”

“Nice try.”

The afternoon passed almost before Moon knew it, and as the sun began to set in the sky her stomach rumbled and she realized she was hungry again. Gladion recalled Null to her ball and stretched out his arms above his head, cracking his knuckles.

“Productive day,” he said, picking up his backpack. “See you around.”

“Thank you,” said Moon, before he could leave.

“You're welcome.”

“I was having a really bad day. I failed Kiawe's trial yesterday, and I've never lost a battle before.”

At this he paused; then he turned around. “That sucks,” he said finally, looking at her unflinchingly. “Is your team holding up okay?”

“Puck and Ben were kind of cross with me. Ariel felt guilty. I think they're okay now.” She was kind of pleased he'd asked; not many people would think to ask about how her Pokémon felt. “What I'm trying to say is that I was feeling like shit, but you made it better. So really— thank you.”

“Uh— sure.” He lifted one hand in an awkward wave. “I'm going now.”

“Okay. See you around.”

Moon trained for a little while longer, but eventually she also packed up and headed back to Royal Avenue. Gladion had given her a lot to think about— and not just in a silly, daydreaming kind of way, either.

Hau was waiting for her in the Pokémon Center café, a scowl across his usually happy face. “If you ever disappear again without letting me know where you've gone, I'm going to have Lillie follow up on that threat with Rotom's GPS,” he said sternly, wrapping her into a hug. “How was your day?”

“Surprisingly good.” Moon patted Hau reassuringly and sat down across the table from him. “I ran into Gladion and we trained together.”

“Oh, did you now?” Hau's eyebrows wiggled dramatically, and he leaned forward, resting his chin in his hands. “And was it everything you hoped and dreamed of?”

“Oh my god, you are the actual worst.” Moon rolled her eyes, but she couldn't quite resist bragging. “I got his number, though.”

“EYYYYYY!” yelled Hau, drawing curious glances from passersby. “Attagirl, Moon! That's what I'm talking about! Breaking hearts, wrecking homes, getting numbers—”

“Hau?”

“Yes?”
“Shut up.”

His shout of laughter echoed through the entire Pokémon Center.

Chapter End Notes

AND WE’RE STARTING OFF STRONG WITH THE ANGST. In all seriousness though, it's Moon's first loss. Hau's team is better adjusted because they mostly win, but they've obviously lost before. Moon's team of teenagers hasn't experienced that, and they don't know how to react.

And even more angst with Moon not texting her friends until she has to. Friendly advice for real life: DON'T DO THIS, COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT

Lillie doesn't know pop culture references because she was homeschooled and Lusamine limited her media intake, but Hau definitely watched The Brady Bunch growing up. This is now canon, no take-backsies.

Okay so the whole concept of an Everstone is that it prevents unwanted evolution. This obviously means that sometimes evolution will happen without the Pokémon's or the Trainer's consent, and that means that even for high-friendship or high-affection evos like Espeon and Sylveon, it can happen by accident. Ben is kind of tsundere so he doesn't always show it, but Moon is his mother and he loves her so much that his body is like “Okay, let's do this” and Ben is like “WAIT NO, I'M NOT READY, HELP ME MOM”

So remember how Moon mentioned the first Gladion incident to Lillie a few chapters ago, and Lillie was remarkably poker-faced about it? Well, Lillie got in touch with her brother pretty quick and was like “EXCUSE ME, WHY ARE YOU BEING MEAN TO MY FRIENDS” and Gladion was like “I was just testing them to see if they could look after you” and Lillie was like “That's nice of you and everything but they're still my friends and you would probably actually really like them if you bothered to get to know them” and Gladion was like “nah fam” and Lillie was like “:)” and Gladion was like “what does that mean” and essentially what happened is that Lillie has more or less ordered Gladion to make up for being a jerk so when Moon was like “I'm on Wela training, pls leave me alone,” Lillie immediately texted Gladion and was like “I want you to buy a couple of packets of Bugs and go give them to Moon and be nice to her, she's sad and she's at Wela Volcano Park” and Gladion was like “I can't go there, I don't have a challenge amulet” and Lillie was like “:)” and Gladion was like “ugh okay fine” and that is why this entire chapter happened

“Unless you wanted to feed me?” —THAT WAS SMOOTH AS HELL, WHO TAUGHT YOU HOW TO FLIRT (the answer is Plumeria, because of course it is)

Imp constantly dive-bombing Gladion is my favorite headcanon that I came up with in AHSoC. He's a little shit, kind of like Ben is; but he's mostly unaware of the fact that he's a little shit. Ben is a little shit entirely on purpose.

I also cannot help writing Gladion as Such A Dad, I know it's a bit out of character but
my Gladion is older and I think he really does have kind of a dad personality when he isn't angsting. I'd apologize but I'm not sorry lmao

Gladion carries bootleg alcohol because the Grunts have a distillery somewhere in Po Town. Some of them have even done Science to figure out how to make it semi-palatable, but they still sell the medical-grade blind-proof nasty stuff that will kill you if you drink it. The non-Aether hospital on Poni Island is one of a few frequent buyers.

“And... if hypothetically, I were to need something like that, how would I get in touch with you?” — why is it easy to write characters being smooth as hell, but in real life getting someone's number is awkward? “Hi, I would like to talk to you sometimes when you're not here?” Would that work on anyone?

In case you're confused about flavors— Moon loves lemon everything (because she's like 50-60% self-insert and I love lemon everything), and Gladion likes apple everything. Moon carries peanut butter and strawberry jam in her backpack, and Hau's favorite malasada filling is guava.

Gladion's patented “laughing without smiling” is the thing we all do when we're scrolling through Twitter or Tumblr or Pinterest and we see something mildly amusing. I'm going to try my hardest not to have Gladion smile at Moon (at least not that she sees it) until he does so in canon— so it's gonna be a long time coming, I'm afraid.

Gladion talks more in my story than he does in canon. In fact, Gladion is probably one of the most changed characters from canon to this story— but Gladion is also eighteen and a half and he's been through some shit.

“I'm sure you've helped your friends in other ways” — This is as close as Gladion will ever get to saying “THANKS FOR SAVING LILLIE'S LIFE ON PLANK BRIDGE” before Moon actually learns that they're related lmao

Moon and Gladion being Friends is not going to actually affect much of the Plot, just the Character Development. And, you know, the Romance. But we are so, so far from that. Time-wise this is not really slow-burn; but in word count it's VERY slow-burn so I'm probably going to tag for it lmao

Everyone needs a hype friend like Hau tbh
Strength

Chapter Summary

Route Seven, Royal Avenue, Heahea City, Hau'oli City, Route One, Melemele Bay, Kala'e Bay.

Chapter Notes

Moon takes a trip back to Melemele Island, looking for new places to train and inspiration to overcome Kiawe's trial.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hoo ho hoo.”

Moon looked up from the Rotom-Dex. Puck, Ariel, and Ben were all looking at her, solemn expressions on their faces; the sandy shore of Route Seven laid before them, and a series of defeated Trainers floated in the water, sulking and glaring at Moon.

“What was that?” she asked, not sure if she'd heard Puck correctly.

“Hoo ho hoo,” he repeated, raising one eyebrow.

Moon sighed, putting Rotom back into her pocket. “I know,” she said ruefully. “Training around here isn't really helping all that much, is it? We won't be facing Water-types on Wela Peak.”

“Trrrrrm,” suggested Ariel. Her voice was growing deeper, Moon noticed. It reminded her of when Ariel had evolved from Pikipek to Trumbeak. “Trrrm meh.”

It was a sound that Ariel hadn't made before, but Moon still recognized it. “You want to visit Melemele Island? Why?”

“Veeon,” said Ben.

“Oh, that's true. You've never been, have you?” Moon considered. It wasn't a bad idea. Now that she had Lapras registered on her Ride Pager, she could explore some of the places she hadn't been able to access before. There was Kala'e Bay on Route Three, and Melemele Bay just past her own home and the Professor's beach house. The Pokémon might be stronger there— or she might find one that wouldn't clash with her teammates.

“Okay,” she said finally, getting to her feet. “Let's see— from here we can probably just take the bus back to Heahea City, and we can take the ferry from Heahea to Hau'oli City. Mantine Surf was interesting, but I don't think I really want to do that again. Heights, and all that. The ferry might be an overnight trip, but we can sleep on the boat and go to my house in the morning. How's that sound?”

“Hoo.”
“Trrrm.”

“Vee.”

“Great. I'm glad you guys came to me, it's a good idea. I'll invite Hau and Lillie, but I don't really think they'll want to come.” Moon opened her Dex and sent a text to Hau and Lillie.

Chat: **IKI SQUAD**

**shakespeare jr**: My team just told me I need to take a vacation lmao

**shakespeare jr**: So we're making an impromptu trip back to Melemele, if either of you want to come with

**lillie-pad**: It sounds like fun, but I'm doing some work for Professor Burnet this week and I won't be able to make it.

**walking malasada**: yea same, im gonna stick around Royal Avenue 4 a lil bit

**walking malasada**: have fun tho!!!

**lillie-pad**: Yes, please have fun! And stay safe! (^u^)

**shakespeare jr**: Haha I will. Thanks guys, see you in a few days!

She was about to tuck Rotom back into her pocket, but then she noticed the conversation just below the group chat she had with Hau and Lillie.

“It can't hurt,” she reasoned to herself. “And Ariel and Null got along pretty well, didn't they?”

Chat: **hypothetically**

**shakespeare jr**: Have you ever been to Melemele?

She was surprised when the response came within seconds.

**cute asshole trainer**: Well, I do have a Zorua.

**shakespeare jr**: Okay so yes

**shakespeare jr**: I'm going back for a few days, if you're not busy you're welcome to come with
shakespeare jr: No pressure obviously, I'm just gonna train and visit my mom, it'll be boring.

cute asshole trainer: You have a habit of making life eventful, so I doubt I would be bored.

shakespeare jr: Idk if that was a compliment or shade.

cute asshole trainer: I don't know if it was, either.

shakespeare jr: Was that a yes though?

cute asshole trainer: Unfortunately, I'm going to be fairly busy for the next few days, so I'll have to decline. Thank you for the invitation.

shakespeare jr: Oh well, maybe some other time.

cute asshole trainer: Careful, that's a tempting offer.

shakespeare jr: You would want to meet my mom?????

cute asshole trainer: If she's anything like you, she's probably delightful and annoying in equal quantities.

shakespeare jr: HEY

cute asshole trainer: But I was mostly referring to traveling with you in general. I've had worse traveling companions.

“I'm fine,” Moon told herself, getting to her feet. Puck, Ariel, and Ben trailed after her as she walked up onto the main road of Route Seven, headed back toward Royal Avenue. “Really. I'm fine. It's cute as hell, but I'm a strong woman. I can get through this.”

cute asshole trainer: And I think Null misses your Trumbeak. She doesn't get to spend time with other girls very often.

Moon was slightly appalled at the squealing noise that escaped from her mouth before she clapped her hand over it. Puck and Ben made alarmed noises, and Ariel cooed soothingly at her, flying up to land on her shoulder even though she was far too heavy for it.

“Oof— okay, okay, I won't make noises anymore. Sorry.”

shakespeare jr: Omg we should arrange a playdate or something!!!! I am all about proper Pokémon socialization.

cute asshole trainer: Let me know when you get past Kiawe's trial and we can schedule something — I'm staying out on the Route Eight hotel on a fairly long-term basis.

shakespeare jr: Definitely!!!! I have to go pack though, I'll talk to you later.
Traveling was quicker than she remembered—mostly because Royal Avenue was so close to Heahea City to begin with, and she could take a bus through the city instead of walking, which would have taken most of a day. The ferry terminal was open, and Moon was pleased to find that a ferry trip to Melemele Island would only take five or six hours—and it was affordable. She texted her mother to let her know that she would be coming home to visit, and got a novel's worth of excited texts in response.

Puck and Ariel were both from Melemele Island, but they'd never been on the ferry, since Moon and Hau had opted to Surf between islands. Puck didn't seem to like the boat, scowling and hunching over next to Moon as the waves rocked it gently from side to side. Ariel was in better shape, though she periodically hopped onto the railing and flew into the air above the ferry. Other birds belonging to the passengers were doing the exact same thing, so Moon decided it was okay.

Ben loved the boat—which Moon had not expected. He wanted to go everywhere, sticking his head out between the bars of the railing and staring down at the ocean with wide, dark eyes. Moon had to take a picture, which she sent to everyone she knew with the caption "Maybe he wants to evolve into a Vaporeon???” The usual herd of people who wanted to pet every Eevee they saw came over to investigate, but for once Ben wasn't snapping or snarling at them—he was too focused on the ocean to care. Moon still told them off, of course. Petting other people's Pokémon without permission wasn't just rude, it was stupid.

“You could go swimming, if you evolved into a Vaporeon,” Moon suggested.

Ben turned to her and raised one eyebrow, a withering expression on his face.

“Seriously, if you want to evolve I bet we can find a Water Stone in Hau'oli City. It would really help with Kiawe's trial, too.”

Ben shook his head and turned back to the ocean. Moon decided it wasn't worth pursuing; it was rare to see Ben in such a good mood.

The sun had set completely by the time the ferry arrived in Hau'oli City; and Moon was surprised to find her mother waiting for her, along with Leilani, Melika, and Wikolia.

“Oh, Marion, look at you!” cried her mother, wrapping her up in a hug. Mel and Wiki cooed over Puck and Ariel, though Moon kept Ben well out of their reach. “You've gotten even more tanned, and I see some freckles, too!”

“Really? I hadn't noticed.”

“And you must be at least an inch taller—all your shorts are probably much too short by now. We'll have to go shopping.”

“That sounds fun,” admitted Moon.

“Hi, Moon!” said Leilani warmly, also giving her a hug. “How is Hau doing these days?”

“He's doing great! He's done two of Akala's trials. I've only done one, which is actually kind of why I'm here.”
“Well, let's get in the truck and you can tell us all about it,” suggested her mother.

And that was exactly what she did, as Leilani drove the five of them not to Moon's house, but to Iki Town and Hala's house— Hau's home, Moon was reminded. Hala and Kai were both home— Hala wearing an apron, stirring a large pan of something that smelled of garlic, onions, and Haban berries.

“It's Orrean food,” explained Kai. “They're called fajitas. We used tofu instead of meat, but there's also beans, rice, garlic, onion, and bell peppers— with a little bit of Haban berry sauce for extra kick.”

The fajitas were delicious, and Moon didn't even mind when Leilani asked her to re-explain her dilemma for the benefit of Hala and Kai, who had not heard it the first time.

“So essentially, you're stuck because you need something different to face Kiawe, but you don't think your team is ready for a new teammate?” concluded Hala. “What makes you say they aren't ready?”

“It's Ben, mostly.” Moon petted the drowsy Eevee in her lap; Mel and Wiki had both wanted to pet him but his good mood from the boat had vanished the moment they got into the truck. Ben had not liked the truck. “I raised him from an egg— and let me tell you, that was an experience. He's clingy — he won't really let anybody but me touch him, and he'll try to bite anyone who tries. I'm working on it, because you don't just let your Pokémon bite people, or other Pokémon unless it's in battle. He's a picky eater, he's whiny, and he cries and sulks when he doesn't get his way. I've done my best to make sure he's not spoiled, and he's not. He's just difficult.”

“Vee?” murmured Ben, blinking up at Moon.

“Yes, you little sh— brat, we're talking about you.” Moon glanced apologetically at her mother, who frowned; and Leilani, who waved a hand in amused forgiveness. “You're a brat, and you know it.”

“Vee,” agreed Ben, and promptly fell asleep.

“And evidently he's quite shameless about it,” chuckled Kai.

“The dynamic between him and me is different than it is between Puck and Ariel and me.” Moon did her best to explain. “Puck is my starter, so he'll always be special to me in that way. And Ariel is the first and only teammate I've caught on my own. I'm their Trainer, and they're my Pokémon. But I hatched Ben from an egg, because the nursery at Paniola had a surplus. When you raise a Pokémon from the egg, they imprint on you and you're their parent, essentially. I only hatched him— oh, it would probably be a little over a month ago, now. He's grown a lot in that time thanks to the Exp Share, but he's still a kid. I'm his mama, as much as I am his Trainer.”

“And here I was, wondering with your dad if you would ever give us grandkids,” joked her mom. “I guess we didn't have to worry about that after all.”

“I'm not even eighteen yet, so you can slow way down on that line of thinking,” Moon grinned, continuing to pet Ben even as he slept, snoring softly in her lap. “Puck and Ariel took a lot of talking to and arguing to get used to the idea of a new teammate, and I probably neglected them shamefully right after Ben hatched. They're used to him now, and they know his quirks and flaws; but a new teammate doesn't just have to learn Ben's issues, they have to learn Puck's issues and Ariel's issues and my issues, come to think of it. Hau really lucked out with his Pokémon— they're all really easy-going. Lillie adopted a Vulpix that had been attacked or abused or something— the Alolan ones are Ice-type, which is really neat. But her Buneary and Zorua were also pretty easy-going to begin with, and I don't think Nebby could care one way or the other how many teammates Lillie has.”
“That is true,” said Hala, nodding. “Well, it looks like your only options are to evolve Ben, or to simply train your whole team up until they are strong enough to defeat Kiawe's Totem Pokémon.”

“That's more or less the conclusion I've come to.” Moon sighed. “I'm much stronger than most wild Pokémon, but it's still not enough to beat Kiawe's trial. And I want to let Ben decide how he evolves — which probably means waiting until I get to Konikoni City to get an elemental stone for him. I don't think he wants to be an Espeon or a Sylveon. His personality is suited to an Umbreon, but Puck is going to gain Ghost-type eventually so it would be redundant.”

“Then you know what you have to do.”

“Train my ar— behind off,” agreed Moon.

“Marion Hawkins, I'm beginning to suspect that you've picked up a swearing habit,” said Moon's mother, half-joking.

“I usually only swear when I'm frustrated. You should be glad you never heard Blue when he got mad.”

After a sound night's sleep in her own bed, Moon and her Pokémon ate breakfast with Moon's mother and Meowth, who was delighted to see them. Ben, as was to be expected, did not like Meowth all that much; and the older cat wisely ignored him after the initial greeting was met with bristling and snarls.

“Goodness, he really is temperamental,” said Moon's mother, shaking her head.

“He’s better than he used to be, believe it or not. I can deal with him barking and snarling at other people, but I can't deal with him attacking Puck or Ariel. After some really harsh punishments, he knows very well that I won't let him get away with that.”

“I used to be afraid that your love of Pokémon would get in the way of your discipline for them,” remarked her mother. “I used to be like that, and I think that's why Shadow left.”

“Your Murkrow, right?”

“He was a Honchkrow by then. If I'd raised my team with more care, he wouldn't have thought he could get away with breaking his ball. But I was never was much for disciplining my Pokémon. It's why your father and I decided to get a Meowth instead of a Growlithe— Meowth are generally well-behaved, and the Kantonian variety aren't as easily spoiled as the Alolan ones. Growlithe take a firmer hand to raise— and we didn't want to deal with fireproofing everything on top of raising you.”

“I've always liked Meowth more than Growlithe, so I'm glad you got a Meowth.”

Her mother laughed. “That's what we say in front of Meowth, anyway. Haha— just kidding, Meowth!”

After breakfast Moon walked down to Melemele Bay and went sailing among the rocky outcroppings she first saw from the boat that brought her and her family to Alola. Gliding along the water on Lapras was pleasant for everybody— Ben seemed to prefer the boat, but he stared at the water from the safety of Moon's lap, and was unusually obedient and quick on his feet in the battles with wild Pokémon and Trainers alike. Puck and Ariel also performed well, though their growth was slower because none of the wild Pokémon in the bay were quite strong enough to truly challenge either of them. When it came time for lunch she dropped by Professor Kukui's house and found him at home, fixing himself a sandwich and feeding the rotating horde of Pokémon in residence.
“Hi there, Moon! Grab yourself a sandwich, yeah? Lillie says you're struggling with Kiawe's trial. Want to talk about it?”

She rehashed the problem with him again, but they came to the same conclusion that Moon had already formed.

“Can I examine your Pokémon with the fancy computers in the basement?” he asked, after a short silence.

“Sure, if you want.”

“It's just extra information for the Dex, yeah. Most Trainers don't come back to visit at this point in their journey, so I don't have quite as much information as I'd like on Dartrix, Torracat, or Brionne. I've got more on Torracat recently, yeah— thanks to Blazer.” The Professor grinned at the Torracat as it chowed down on a bowl of Poké kibble. “Tell Hau to drop by, when he's got a few days to spare. I could use a look at his Brionne, yeah? But I don't actually get to see many Trumbeak, either. Everyone wants to show me the Pikipek they just caught, or the Toucannon they've worked hard to raise.”

Moon hadn't been in the basement lab before, but she was unsurprised to find it as much of a mess as the rest of the house— though it was a mess of paper and electronics, rather than a mess of Pokémon dander, broken wood and glass, and ripped furniture. The Professor's Rotom-Dex, always in residence in the basement, popped partly out of its casing to wave hello. Moon's Rotom-Dex flew out to greet it, beeping and booping in some language that was probably quicker for Rotom to use than it was for them to adapt to human speech.

“We'll let them go at it, yeah,” chuckled Professor Kukui. “I don't need either of them for what I want to do with your team, anyway. Why don't we start with your Trumbeak? She's the most tractable, so if your other two see that she's just fine, they should be willing to help out, too.”

“Good idea. Where do you want her?”

“On the table, yeah.”

Ariel hopped up onto the table with a rustle of wings. Puck watched with sharp, wary eyes; Ben was sulking for some reason or another but he was watching, too.

“Hey there, Trumbeak! Do you mind if I run a couple of scans on you? It's just a few colorful lights, yeah— won't hurt a bit, I promise.”

“Trrrrm,” assented Ariel.

“Thanks! Here we go.”

A blue light flashed over Ariel, followed by a green one and a yellow one. The yellow one was much slower, traveling up and down her entire body before a red light concluded the scan.

“That's it!” Professor Kukui leaned over his computer, quickly scanning the data that was flooding onto the screen. “Ooh, that's pretty cool!”

“What do the scans do?” Moon and Ariel both approached the computer to see closely— even though Ariel couldn't read, as far as Moon was aware.

“The blue one's a general information scan. I've scanned other Trumbeak before. Not very many, yeah; but it adds her to the list and records basic statistics like height, weight, gender, and so on. It's a
lot like your regular Dex scan. The green one is a health scan; it's a medical checkup. It would show
me if your Trumbeak had any major medical issues, but she's good to go on that front— perfectly
healthy and full of energy, yeah!"

“And yellow and red?”

“The yellow scan shows moves, moveset potential, battle statistics, and general power. It's a little
tweaked because she's holding Flyinium Z, but it's easy enough to calculate that out, yeah. She's a
strong Pokémon— more defense oriented than your average Trumbeak, but that means she'll make a
tanky Toucannon. That's a good thing, yeah— Toucannon's signature move, Beak Blast, takes a
while to warm up. If she can take a hit while she's at it, you'll have a mighty powerful attack in your
arsenal.”

Ariel puffed up proudly.

“And the red scan?”

“That's a scan Ellie's having me do recently,” chuckled Professor Kukui. “It's to test for different
auras around Pokémon— like Totem Auras, or the ones that come from Z-Crystals, yeah. She wants
to see if anything matches up with her wormhole research. Flyinium Z shows up as a blip on the
radar again, but it doesn't mean much in terms of data for her.” He turned to look at Puck and Ben.
“Which of you wants to go next?”

Moon was surprised when Ben leaped onto Professor Kukui's computer chair, and from there onto
the table. His expression remained defiant and stubborn, but he sat still, fluffy tail waving from side
to side.

“I guess you're next, Eevee!” Professor Kukui smiled at him, but made no attempts to touch him.
“Here we go!”

The colored lights flashed over Ben once more, and Professor Kukui studied the data in silence for a
few moments before nodding. “Oh, wow,” he said, half-laughing. “You weren't kidding, he is really
young! That Exp Share must have done wonders for him. No wonder he's so grumpy all the time—
his body's growing faster than his mind, huh?”

“I think so too, but I don't regret using the Exp Share. He would have wanted to battle sooner or
later, and if it's helped him battle sooner then I'm happy he got to experience that.”

“He's bright and healthy, just like Trumbeak. And he's pretty strong, too— got a nice Special-Attack
stat.” Professor Kukui turned to look at Ben, nodding approvingly. “So you want to make sure you
pick an evolution that makes good use of that. Normal-type won't do much for him right now, but
he'd do well with any of the elemental stone evolutions, or as an Espeon.”

“Eevee evolutions are as much about temperament as they are about statistics, though,” pointed out
Moon, which earned her an impressed nod from the Professor. “Ben might be a little too high-strung
to be happy as an Espeon.”

“I think you're right, but he'll have to pick something eventually, so you should both keep that in
mind. And there's no funny auras— you're not having him hold a Z-Crystal?”

“Puck has Normalium Z, but if I haven't evolved Ben by the time I get to Mallow's trial, I'll let him
use it then.”

“Hmm. It might be more use to him than it is to Dartrix, yeah? Just something to consider. And
speaking of Dartrix— want to hop up on the table for me?”
Ben returned to Moon's arms by springing off the table in her general direction. Moon was used to this and she caught him, but Professor Kukui jumped in surprise and immediately began laughing once he realized what had happened. Puck made his way onto the table, rolling his eyes at the silliness going on around him, and sat serenely in the center.

The scans flashed, and Professor Kukui hummed to himself as he read the data. “Nice healthy Dartrix—he's a bit overweight, but you actually want that in a Dartrix before they evolve to Decidueye, yeah. Decidueye are naturally thinner than Dartrix, so they need a bit of fat to keep themselves warm. If you've got extra left over, they don't have to work so hard to build up that heat layer. Yours is pretty tall for his species, too—he'll probably be just a bit shorter than you when he evolves, yeah.”

“Hau's already taller than me, and at the rate Lillie's going, I bet she'll be taller by the time I get back,” grumbled Moon. “I'm not even that short! I'm five foot six. How does an owl get to be just under five foot six?” Puck preened where he sat.

“Domestic Starter Pokémon are always bred larger than the ones you find in the wild, yeah. I bet you anything that Champion Red's Charizard is much bigger than any of the Ride Charizard you'll find in Alola.” Professor Kukui grinned. “Now, your Dartrix has the classic good stats for a strong Decidueye—great attack and great speed. You'll want to find a moveset that helps him with that, yeah. If you can pick up some good TMs, you can supplement the rest with what he learns naturally. And that Ghost-typing will come into play, too. It's always great to have an immunity on your team, yeah.”

“Hoo ho ho,” said Puck proudly, hopping off the table.

“I already knew you were all strong, but this has been really helpful, actually.” Moon was already recalculating some of her current movesets. Ben's Swift would come in much handier than Tackle—and if she gave him Normalium Z, that would be even better. She'd been thinking about replacing Puck's Tackle with False Swipe, anyway—in preparation for catching a new teammate. “I'll want to test some things out, but I'm headed over to Kala'e Bay tomorrow so I'll try it there.”

“I have faith you'll work things out, yeah,” said Professor Kukui, a twinkle in his eyes. “You're a really strong Trainer, Moon—you and Hau both. You'll both be well suited for a project that I've been working on over the last year or so—in fact, you arrived just in time to see some of it falling into place. I'll tell you more about it on Ula'ula Island, yeah—not to frustrate you, but because it'll be easier to explain over there, where you can actually see what I'm talking about.”

“Fair enough.” Moon didn't like being baited with information like that, but at least he offered a good reason for it. “It was nice seeing you. Thank you for the scans and the advice.”

“It was my pleasure, yeah. Don't be a stranger—and tell Hau I want him to visit before you both head off to Ula'ula Island, yeah!”

She spent the rest of the day shopping with her mother, who had been quite correct about the state of Moon's wardrobe—and about her height. Moon had grown an inch, which mean she was now five foot seven. With fall beginning to roll in, Moon decided to get some warmer clothes—though in Alola, warm clothes meant T-shirts instead of tank tops, and Bermuda shorts or capris instead of short-shorts.

“Do you think I'd be cute in glasses?” Moon asked her mom, holding a pair of purple frames up to her face.

“You'd be cute in anything,” said her mom loyally. “But yes, I think you'd be cute in glasses. Not
that you need them.”

“No, but I can always get a cheap pair and punch out the lenses. Maybe I'll pick up a set or two.”

“There's always sunglasses, which would probably be more useful.”

Moon thought of sunny Wela Peak, and the bright lava that glowed day and night with red-white heat beneath its blackened surface. “I probably should pick up a pair of sunglasses, actually.”

“What makes you ask, about looking cute in glasses?”

Moon tried extremely hard not to think about Gladion, but failed miserably.

“Oh... I know that look. There's a boy, isn't there?”

“No! No boys, I am a strong independent woman on her island challenge and I am not thinking about boys at all, ever.”

“If you wanted me to believe you, you shouldn't have denied it so vehemently,” said her mother, amused. “But I'll humor you; we won't talk about this boy that clearly has you very, very flustered.”

“It's stupid,” said Moon flatly. “I've never gotten stupid over a boy, and I'm not about to start now.”

“Are you afraid you will?”

Moon absorbed the question for a few moments, picking up a navy-blue bucket hat and jamming it onto her head, looking in the mirror.

“Yes and no,” she said finally. “I'm not going to let something like that affect my choices.”

“Good.”

“But you know— I haven't really dated before. I've had crushes, but none of them was anything more than that.”

“And you think this one might be more?”

“It will be more, if I let it.” Moon looked away from the mirror. “If he lets it.”

“Hmm. Well, don't worry about it.”

“I can't really help worrying.”

“Okay, try not to worry about it. Just let things happen how they happen. Don't pressure him, and don't pressure yourself. Focus on your Pokémon— if it's meant to be, he'll work around that with you.”

Gladion had made a point of agreeing to a playdate for Ariel and Null. Moon smiled. “Thanks, Mom. I think I needed to hear that.”

“I'm glad I could help you.”

It wasn't until the next day that Moon could make it out to Kala'e Bay to train with her team. There weren't any Trainers, as far as she could see— but there were plenty of wild Pokémon to fight. Moon even spotted a few Bagon, which were rare in Alola, Hoenn, and Kalos.
“We're going to try a few different things today,” she told her teammates, pulling out her TM case. “Puck, I'm going to let Ben hold Normalium Z— but I've got the Everstone to switch, in case of accidental evolution. And we're eventually going to put False Swipe on Puck, replacing Tackle. I want to see how well Ben can pull off Breakneck Blitz on Swift. Ariel, your moveset is working pretty well as it is. I wish you and Puck both had a Flying-type move that's a little stronger than Pluck, but we'll just have to see if you can learn anything new as you grow. Sounds good?”

They all gave their assent. Moon had Puck and Ariel watch as she worked with Ben first, pitting him against a wild Yungoos for a base comparison.

Ben hadn't used Z-Moves before, and he was a little clumsy; but Moon had practiced Breakneck Blitz with Puck often enough that she was sure-footed, and the sheer power of the move was enough to guide Ben's movements. He attacked with a grace that she was only used to seeing from Ariel. Puck was powerful, but his movements could not often be described as anything approaching “graceful.”

“Wow!” she said, as the little Yungoos screeched and made a hasty retreat. “That was really great, Ben. How are you feeling?”

“Vee vee,” huffed Ben, but there was a sparkle in his eyes that she hadn't seen before.

“Oh, you like Normalium Z, huh?” Moon grinned. “I guess I should have done this ages ago. Puck, do you want to give it a go?”

He hopped forward willingly enough. There was a slight reduction in power since she had taken the Z-Crystal from him, but it didn't affect Razor Leaf, Pluck, or Ominous Wind— which were the attacks she usually had him use anyway. He knocked out a wild Mankey with ease, glancing skeptically back at Moon as though to ask if she had anything better to offer him.

“And let's try Ariel. Nothing's really changed for you, but it's always good to practice, right?”

“Truuuke.”

It was a new sound, in a deeper voice than she'd heard yet from Ariel. As a Pikipek, she'd been squeaky; as a Trumbeak, she had a beautiful trilling, lilting voice. Moon recalled that Ariel had been especially heavy lately— and she'd been hearing a deeper voice for a little while, too.

“Huh,” she said out loud, but she didn't voice her suspicions. If Ariel was close to evolving— and Moon really, really hoped she was— then it would probably give her team enough of an edge to get through Kiawe's trial. She didn't want to pressure Ariel, so she kept silent.

Ariel knocked out one of the little Bagon very quickly. Moon studied her— studied the way her beak was growing, the way her feathers shone with an unusual gloss to them.

“I'd like to work with you a little longer,” she said finally, to Ariel. “Puck, Ben, you guys just watch, okay?”

“Trrrrrm kana?”

Another new sound. “You're not in trouble,” Moon assured her. “I just want to test something, that's all. Let's find another wild Pokémon to battle.”

They fought a few more wild Pokémon, but then Moon heard a rumbling, oddly creaky roar as the tall grass shifted, rustling in their direction. An angry blue head peered out from the grass, followed by scarlet wings.
“Oh, shit, that's a—”

“Salamence!” chirped Rotom. “Native to Hoenn and, apparently, Alola. The final evolution of Bagon. Known to be highly aggressive and protective of their territory and their young. It might have been a bad idea to bother all the little Bagon around here.”

“Sala sal!” hissed the Salamence. It was rather thin, and its voice cracked as it rose onto hind legs. Moon wondered if it was an adolescent, rather than an adult.

There wasn't time to run away, unfortunately. Moon hastily did the steps of the Flyinium Z-Dance. “Ariel, Supersonic Skystrike!”

Ariel darted high up into the air, drawing the Salamence's ire; and then she came hurtling back down. She was obscured by light and speed, her shadow rapidly growing and her beak glowing with a scarlet tinge that Moon had only read about, back when she'd been doing research on Decidueye and —

The Salamence fainted instantly. Moon gaped at the highly satisfied Toucannon that turned to look at her with knowing, amused eyes.

“Puck, Ben,” she said, beckoning them forward. “Look how pretty your sister is. She just evolved into Toucannon.”

Puck peered at Ariel, blinking a few times; then he shrugged, nodded, and went off to look for wild Grubbin to eat. It was a surprisingly anticlimactic reaction.

Ben stared at Ariel for a few seconds.

“Tou kana trrrm,” said Ariel encouragingly.

“Vee vee eee vee eee vee vee eeeeee—”

“Oh, that's enough shouting,” said Moon, picking Ben up by the scruff of the neck. Ariel as a Trumbeak would have had her feelings hurt by this; Ariel as a Toucannon merely let out a laugh that Moon had to admit was impressively ugly— “caw haw haw!”

“I'm getting a prompt for Ariel to learn Beak Blast, Toucannon's signature move,” said Rotom.

“Sweet. It's a Flying-type move, right?”

“Indeed it is, bzzt.”

“Then let's swap Pluck out. I like Echoed Voice for the STAB, and Brick Break and Smack Down are really nice for coverage.”

“One moment, bzzt.... and Ariel's learned Beak Blast. Congratulations on your Toucannon's evolution.”

“Thanks.”

“Kanna tou,” agreed Ariel.

“You're welcome, bzzt.”

Moon looked at her teammates— Puck, impossibly mellowed from his first angsty days as a Dartrix; Ben, unsettled by the change but bearing up well with newfound power from Normalium Z; and
Ariel, fully evolved and majestic, flying over to Moon's shoulder in an attempt to sit.

“No,” said Moon, fighting back giggles. “Absolutely not. You weigh like fifty pounds. You can fly, you can walk, or you can travel in the ball. Take your pick, but you are not perching on me. Let me remind you that my favorite cereal, Berry Hoops, is brand-represented by a Toucannon. Do you want me to look like a pirate?”

Ariel considered this question gravely. “Trrrm pek tou.”

“*That was a rhetorical question!*”

Chapter End Notes

I guess this story is like 10% chatfic now lmao. Also: Gladion basically just asked Moon on a frickin DATE I am so done with both of them

If I'm going to use Pokémon fanfiction to soapbox about anything, it's this: DO NOT TOUCH PEOPLE'S PETS OR SERVICE ANIMALS UNLESS YOU ARE GIVEN PERMISSION okay that's it thank you for listening to my TED talk

The Orre region is based on Arizona, of all places; so I'm assuming that the cuisine of Orre involves Tex-Mex. Therefore, the Pokémon world has Americanized tacos, enchiladas, fajitas, burritos, and all the other tasty Tex-Mex dishes.

Moon having supportive family and adults to discuss her problems with is something that I've wanted to see in Pokémon games FOREVER. I love that the player character in any game is helping the regional Professor with their research, and I love that they always have the option to go back home and talk to their mom. I wanted to show that Moon's (and Hau's) network of family members will listen to and validate her when she's doing something right (versus Lillie's and Gladion's family member who does neither of those things).

Moon having Professor Kukui scan her teammates in the basement just came to me in a flash. It's like going to the doctor for your regular checkups. Professor Kukui is actually a doctor, too—at least, the title comes up on his AO3 tag, lmao

Moon's mother's advice about boys is the advice I always want to give to any girl I know who's been tricked into believing that she *must* have a boyfriend. I think that the media likes to do that to us— to teenage girls and college-age girls. If you don't have a boyfriend, you must be a nerd or a prude or something. It's simply not true. Focus on the things you're passionate about, and you'll eventually meet someone with whom you have much more in common than you will with someone who's simply “cute.” Attraction fades; personality lasts forever.

I really just love writing Moon bonding with her team, it's soothing for the soul tbh

AND HEY LOOK AT THAT, ARIEL EVOLVED. *insert Lady Gaga video: Talented, brilliant, incredible, amazing, show-stopping, never the same, totally unique, completely not ever been done before...*
In all honesty though I love Toucannon as a Pokémon. It was the Right Bird for a
tropical Pokémon region (though I was really really hoping it would gain either Steel- or
Fairy-type before the game files were hacked— Pikapek was based on a woodpecker
and it would have made sense to be a Steel-type; and I just really want more Fairy- and
Flying-types besides Togekiss. But Toucannon is amazing as it is, too, and Beak Blast is
OP as frick at this point in the game, especially with STAB Z-Power.
“Ah, Moon!” Kiawe greeted her as she approached Wela Peak. “I was wondering when I would see you here again. Mallow and Lana both said you would not be the type to give up after one setback, but it's been nearly a week. I was beginning to worry.”

“I had to figure some things out.” Moon smiled back at him. “But I'm ready to face the Totem Pokémon again, if that's okay.”

“Ask them yourselves,” said Kiawe, gesturing behind him.

The giant Marowak and an equally large Salazzle sat in the center of the platform, holding a quiet conversation. They both glanced at her with sharp, knowing eyes. Then the Salazzle let out a chittering laugh and raced away, scuttling over the side of the platform. Marowak rolled its eyes, getting to its feet and turning to face Moon properly.

“I could be wrong, as I'm not used to hearing Salazzle speaking,” said Moon to Kiawe, as the Totem approached. “But did that one just say something along the lines of ha ha, sucks to be you?”

“You are not wrong.” Kiawe chuckled, stepping to the side to sit down next to David, who was watching the whole thing with interest. “The Totem Salazzle can be quite spiteful. The two of them had already agreed that Marowak would face you, and she couldn't resist rubbing it in— especially since your aura is much more confident, this time. Are you ready?”

“Bring it on.” She reached for Ariel's ball, tossing her out.

“Oh, a Toucannon!” Kiawe looked delighted. “You have been busy.”

The Totem Marowak eyed Ariel for a few moments, then swung the bone in a circle overhead, forming some sort of shield.

“Ariel, let's warm up a Beak Blast.”

Ariel nodded, bracing her feet against the rock. Her beak began to glow a soft red, slowly increasing in intensity.

Marowak whistled, summoning a smaller Salazzle than the other Totem. It seemed to recognize
Moon and Ariel, which meant it was probably the same Salazzle she had fought last time.

“We'll aim Beak Blast at the Salazzle,” she said to Ariel. Her bird nodded, unable to speak while she was super-heating her own beak.

The Salazzle slapped its tail down on the ground, hissing tauntingly at Ariel.

“And... go!”

Ariel spread her wings and shot forward, slamming into the Salazzle. It cried out in pain, whimpering and retreating.

“Nice job!” cheered Moon. “Let's do that again.”

Marowak spun its bone, sending a gout of flame at Ariel. It was not quite as traumatic as it had been when Ariel was a Trumbeak. She hissed in pain, but remained focused on the task at hand. After a few moments, she turned to look at Moon with a frown.

“Kana kana.”

“You can't use it right now? Huh. We've never had to deal with recharge for Beak Blast...”

“The Salazzle used Torment,” called Kiawe. “Your Toucannon has to wait a bit before she can use her move again.”

“Oh, that was clever. Annoying, but clever.” Moon considered. “How about Smack Down? Think that'll do for a minute?”

Ariel nodded, and sent a barrage of rocks flying at the Marowak. It took the hit, but it was beginning to look slightly nervous as it rolled more wheels of fire at Ariel.

“I think we can take him out this time,” Moon whispered to Ariel, and began the steps of the Flyinium Z-Dance.

Ariel let out a majestic, ringing cry and launched high into the air. Marowak spun the bone, sending fireballs up at Ariel; but she dodged each one of them and slammed hard into the Marowak.

It scrambled to get away from her, running for the rocks and leaping over the edge of the platform.

“Where do they go?” Moon wondered. “Isn't it just lava down there?”

“There's a series of rock formations, pillars and caves in the volcano where both Totems make their real homes,” answered Kiawe. “We call this the Den because it's the only place humans can safely reach. The Totems are willing to meet us halfway. Well, Moon, you've passed my trial.”

She was honestly surprised when the tears came. Moon didn't usually consider herself a sentimental person. “Oh,” she said, rubbing at her eyes. “Wow.”

“It's understandable,” said Kiawe gently. “You've struggled with this, but you worked hard and your persistence paid off. You remember the dance for Firium Z, yes?”

He was holding out a red crystal. Moon took it, slipping it into the slot next to Waterium on her Z-Ring.

“Yeah, I remember.”
“And, if you'll just hand me your Ride Pager, I'll register Charizard for you.”

“Great. Do you know if there's any way to fly blind on a Ride Charizard?”

“Most of them do know their way around Alola, so probably. Why do you ask?”

“I really, really do not like heights.”

Kiawe chuckled. “That's unfortunate, given that Ride Charizard are the most common method of transportation in Alola.”

“I can ride it, but I might throw up and I will hate every second of it.”

“Try not to throw up on the Charizard,” called David, a pained expression on his face. “I'm the one who has to clean it up.”

Kiawe offered his hand for Moon to shake. “Now that you have Firium Z, you'll be able to pass through the barrier at Dividing Peak Tunnel and make your way to Route Eight. Mallow is excited to see you at Lush Jungle.”

“Thanks.” Moon shook his hand. “See you around.”

“I'm sure you will,” he said dryly. “Mallow likes to involve Lana and me in her trial whenever possible. She'll probably insist that we be there for both you and Hau.”

“Why?”

“You'll see, when you get there.”

Moon did her best to suppress her irritation at the remark. “Oh, okay. Bye, then.”

He waved in response, and Moon made her way down to the trial gate, where the two trial guides and, to her surprise, Hau and Lillie were all waiting for her.

“I didn't expect to see you here,” she said, surprised. “Lillie isn't technically allowed to be here, is she?”

“I can technically enter any trial area as long as I don't go into the Totem's Den,” explained Lillie. “Professor Burnet's letter lets me do that.” She was wearing the fireproof jumpsuit that Moon had purchased for Hau; it was far too big for her, and she'd rolled up the both the sleeves and the legs, so that she wouldn't trip over her pink high-top sneakers. Hau wore his usual attire and seemed mildly uncomfortable.

“The jumpsuit's spoiled me rotten,” he said to Moon. “It's really hot here, let's go. Call up a Charizard— Lillie can ride with either of us.”

“Do I have to?” complained Moon, but she summoned one anyway. The screen read ETA 2:00 and began to count down at once. “And Lillie's definitely not supposed to be able to use a Ride Pokémon, is she?”

“Stop being a spoilsport. What do you want me to do, leave her here?”

After a nerve-wracking ride down to the Royal Avenue Pokémon Center— which Moon spent with her eyes tightly closed— she went to the nurse's station to heal up her team and took them all out for malasadas in celebration. Hau and Lillie and their Pokémon joined her, and they spent a crazy forty-five minutes laughing and joking and eating more sweets than could possibly be good for them.
When all of her team was settled, happily scarfing down pastries, Moon pulled out her phone under the table and sent a text.

Chat: hypothetically

shakespeare jr: So I just passed Kiawe's trial

shakespeare jr: Can I just say, fuckin FINALLY.

cute asshole trainer: Good for you.

shakespeare jr: So are we still on for that playdate for Ariel and Null? Ariel recently evolved into a grown-ass Toucannon, but evolved Pokémon still usually recognize each other

cute asshole trainer: That might be a bad idea, actually.

cute asshole trainer: Null will be very jealous that Ariel evolved.

Moon was disappointed, but she remembered her mother's advice: Don't pressure him, and don't pressure yourself.

shakespeare jr: Fair enough, I don't want to upset her

cute asshole trainer: If it was just a matter of being upset, I would still ask you to come. But Null gets violent when she's upset, and I'd rather not have to patch you or Ariel up.

That was oddly sweet of him— or perhaps it was just practical. Moon could see elements of both.

“Who are you texting?” said Hau, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively at her.

“Nobody,” said Moon, quickly shoving Rotom into her pocket.

“Hey, Rotom, who was she texting?”

“Nobody,” said Rotom smugly. “I'm Moon's Dex, and I'm not allowed to give you any information she doesn't want you to know.”

“Aw, come on— what she doesn't know won't hurt her,” wheedled Hau.

“I'm literally sitting right here, I will know if Rotom tells you anything.”

“Shhh, I'm talking to Rotom.” But Hau was grinning. “Were you talking to your boyfriend?”

“Joke's on you, I don't have a boyfriend. Single and forever alone, that's me.”

“I'm sure there's somebody out there for you, Moon,” said Lillie earnestly.
“Oh, there's someone out there for her all right. You were talking to Gladion, weren't you?”

Moon frowned at Hau. “That's none of your business.”

“I'm happy for you. Really, I am,” said Hau in an earnest tone. “Invite me to the wedding, won't you?”

“I'll invite him to your funeral, you absolute walnut.” But Moon laughed as she punched Hau's shoulder; she couldn't stay mad, especially when it seemed like Gladion wanted to be her friend.

“I've heard you... mention that name before,” said Lillie, looking from Moon to Hau with a confused expression on her face. “How did you meet him, again?”

“He challenged me on Route Five and totally wiped the floor with me.”

“He did not,” countered Moon. “I watched you both heal after that. He has three Pokémon and you knocked out two of them. You had him on the ropes.”

“That's nice of you to say, but you're wrong. Uila beat his Zorua and his Zubat, but the other thing wrecked my entire team in four hits. Anyway, I was meeting Moon anyway on Route Five, and I mentioned to Moon that she should avenge my honor, and he started running his mouth about how I don't take battling seriously because I know I can't beat her, or something like that.”

“Oh my gosh!” said Lillie, looking appalled.

“That was basically my reaction, too,” Moon assured her. “Anyway, I got mad and we kind of challenged each other over it. I beat him.”

“It was kind of brilliant, she beat Zorua and Zubat with Ariel and switched to Puck for the other one. I think he might have been sore about losing. Anyway, a couple of kids from Team Skull came along and started giving all of us a hard time. Um— one of them was one of those girls, from Hau'oli City.”

Lillie's eyes widened. “The ones that were unkind to me while we were shopping?”

“Yeah,” said Moon. “I told her off, by the way. I didn't get the chance to say anything in Hau'oli, because you were running and Nebby was running and I had to pay for the stuff and scram, but she was right there and I started yelling at her—”

“And then Moon hit her!” said Hau, gleefully interrupting.

“Moon, you didn't!”

“She deserved it,” insisted Moon. “She was being awful! I wanted to fight her, but the other Team Skull guy— you know, the completely useless one with the black hair—”

“Oh, yes, that one,” said Hau. Lillie nodded.

“He held her back, and Gladion held me back, and then the useless guy and the mean girl ran off. And then I hit Gladion.”

“Moon!”

“I regretted it as soon as I did it,” admitted Moon. “I didn't punch him or anything— I slapped him, the way I slapped the Team Skull girl. But he took it and he didn't even say anything, and then he told us not to use Potions for nosebleeds and walked off without saying anything.”
“I'm afraid to ask— but nosebleeds?”

“The Team Skull girl punched me.”

Lillie stared at Moon, and then at Hau, who was grinning. Then she laid her arms down on the table and sunk her face into her arms. Her shoulders were shaking.

“Um, Lillie?”

Lillie looked up, made eye contact with Moon, and accidentally let out a snort of laughter before clapping her hands over her nose and mouth.

“Oh my gosh,” she wheezed. “Moon— I don't know whether to scold you or hug you.”

“And then we met Gladion again at the Royal Battle Dome,” said Hau. He was laughing at Lillie, not unkindly. “I guess he goes there a lot, but he battles under a fake name. And then Moon ran into him when she disappeared to train at Wela, and they spent like the whole day together and she got him to give her his number and they've been texting.”

“You say texting like it's a dirty word.”

“It could be, I don't know what kinds of things the two of you talk about— ow!”

It was Lillie who had smacked him this time. “Don't joke about that,” she said, attempting to sound stern; but she was still giggling. “Moon's nearly an adult, she can text anyone she wants.”

“As long as you don't send him any nudes before your birthday, neither of you will get arr— ow, okay, I'll stop!”

And when Moon got back to the room she was sharing with Lillie at the Royal Avenue Pokémon Center, she had another text waiting for her.

cute asshole trainer: We could still meet up, if you wanted. I need to help Null realize that evolved Pokémon aren't a problem for her anyway, and if you don't mind taking the risk then you'd be doing me a favor.

cute asshole trainer: If you send me pictures of Ariel before and after her evolution, that would help.

cute asshole trainer: But you don't have to, of course. It's up to you.

Moon smiled at her Dex.

“Are you texting him?” Lillie asked her.

Moon glanced over at Lillie. The younger girl was sitting on her bed, watching Moon with a curious expression.

“Yeah,” she admitted. “I have no experience with boys— not this way, anyway. Could you help me with something?”

“Sure.”
“Could you take a picture of me and Ariel?”

“I could do that, bzzt,” said Rotom indignantly.

“You would just snap the picture however you felt like it. Lillie will get my good angles.”

“I don't know about that. I have no photography experience.” But Lillie gamely got to her feet and took Rotom, peering through the viewfinder at Moon and Ariel, sitting on the bed. Moon held up two fingers, and Ariel preened.

“Smile.” Lillie took the picture. Moon examined it and was satisfied that she didn't look like she had a double chin. She found an older picture she'd taken of Ariel— it was a selfie she'd taken with her whole team by the cherry blossoms, which she'd sent to Red, Blue, and Daisy. She sent them both to Gladion.

shakespeare jr: Picture Attachment: [sakurabefore.jpeg]

shakespeare jr: Picture Attachment: [extremelyrecentselfie.jpeg]

shakespeare jr: That's the best before picture I have, sorry it's not just her

cute asshole trainer: No, this is better. She'll understand better that they're both Ariel, since she'll recognize you and your team.

“If you don't mind my asking, what did you want a picture for?”

Moon explained Null's dilemma to Lillie, even showing her some of the messages. Lillie's gaze remained neutral as she read through the messages.

“ 'Cute asshole trainer? ’ ” she read, raising one eyebrow at Moon.

“It sounds so weird to hear you swear.”

“I'm quoting you.”

“I may have said he was exactly that, to his face, on Route Five,” admitted Moon.

Lillie studied her. “Between Ilima and this boy... you're really not very subtle when you like someone, are you?”

“I've liked maybe five guys in my entire life, and Ilima and this guy are two of them.” Moon cleared her throat. “I say maybe, because two of the other three were Red and Blue and I'm not sure if I just liked them because they were the only boys I knew, or because I actually liked them. I grew out of that really fast, thank Arceus.”

“New message in chat: hypothetically,” announced Rotom, a touch smugly.

“Just because I'm talking about it with Lillie doesn't mean you need to broadcast it,” said Moon, picking up her Dex.
“Eep.”

“What did he do now?”

Moon passed Rotom over to Lillie. Lillie's eyebrows rose as she read the text, and she touched the keyboard and began to type.

“What are you doing?” demanded Moon, grabbing at her Dex. Lillie held it out of her reach for a few seconds—her arms were longer than Moon's—and Moon watched despairingly as she hit send.

“You're welcome,” she said, handing the Dex back and returning to her own bed.

“Rotom, you're a traitor.”

“If I thought she was actually going to sabotage you, I wouldn't have let her send it, bzzt,” retorted Rotom.

Moon stared at her Dex.

shakespeare jr: Turnabout is fair play. Do I get a picture of you?

“Lillie!”

“Trust me on this,” said Lillie, unbothered by Moon's mortification. “And don't tell him that your friend took your Dex and sent the message; that looks like you're insecure and you're not, Moon.”

Moon groaned, because Lillie was right, and rolled over to screech into her pillow.

“New message—pardon me, two new messages in chat: hypothetically,” announced Rotom. “Shall I read it out loud while you're indulging in an existential crisis?”

“Hell no.” Moon rolled back over and opened the message.

cute asshole trainer: You're right, but I can't promise you quality. My phone camera isn't as good as your Rotom-Dex.

cute asshole trainer: Picture Attachment: [IMG003.jpeg]

Moon opened the picture. It was a selfie. Gladion sat unsmilingly in some kind of window seat, illuminated on one side by moonlight and the other by a dim yellow lamp as he held up the camera. Null was in his lap, looking curiously up at the camera; Rey sat on top of her and Imp was draped over Gladion's unevenly cut hair.
“Shall I save it as his contact picture, or your background, bzzt?”

“Contact picture, and a little less of the sass, if you please.”

“Can I see?” asked Lillie. “I did get it for you, after all.”

“Thank you, by the way; I will never doubt you again,” vowed Moon, showing her.

Lillie smiled fondly. “Oh, that’s cute,” she said, nodding as she passed it back. “He should smile, though.”

“I've tried. I think I've made him laugh, but he never smiles.”

“Well, now you know what you have to work on,” said Lillie sagely.

The next morning, the three of them made their way down Route Seven. Moon had already trained on the beaches, fighting the Trainers who congregated there in her effort to grow stronger for Kiawe's trial. Hau hadn't done so but he wanted to, and Lillie walked down to the beach with him as Moon sat up on the road to wait. She didn't want to get sand in her shoes for no reason, and it wasn't like she or her Pokémon would get bored. They watched Trainers walking past, as well as the occasional truck or car; and Moon tried to resist the urge to text Gladion. He was usually asleep in the mornings and busy at night, but he had free time around late afternoon and early evening, so she tried to stick to his schedule even if it didn't always match hers.

“Well, hello there!”

Moon looked up and flinched at green eyes before she realized it was not, in fact Gladion—though she could be forgiven for the mistake. The man in front of her was slightly overweight and dressed like a tourist, complete with straw hat; but he was blond-haired and green-eyed.

“Hi,” she answered. “Um, can I help you?”

“As a matter of fact, you can.” The man offered his hand for her to shake. “The name's Arbutus, but you can call me Arby. You're a Trainer, right?”

“Yes,” said Moon cautiously.

“Fantastic. I'm looking for a Trainer to help me with a business.”

“If it's a pyramid scheme I'm not doing it,” warned Moon. “I'm busy enough, I don't have time to peddle fake insurance or holey leggings.”

“Don't worry. The business I have in mind is quite legitimate, and it will also be going toward a good cause. You see, I've lost my memory.”

Moon blinked at him, surprised.

“Really,” he added, peering at her face. “I'm not lying. I woke up on this very beach about five years ago, with no memory of how I'd gotten here or what my life had been like before. I couldn't remember anything but my own name. It's a rather unusual name, isn't it? I believe it's a type of tree that doesn't grow in Alola.”

“I know a surprising number of people with plant names, actually.”

Arby nodded placidly. “At any rate, I've been working hard ever since to try and purchase a bit of real estate, and I've only just recently managed to get my hands on some prime land. Have you ever
heard of the Poké Pelago?”

“I have not,” said Moon.

“Well, as it turns out, Alola is actually made up of nine islands, not four! Er— I suppose that's ten islands if you count the Aether Paradise, but it's man-made, so I don't think it counts. Anyway, there are five more islands, entirely uninhabited, in Alola. They are all situated quite close to one another — within sight lines and an easy boat ride or even a swim; but much easier to traverse with the help of a Ride Charizard.”

Moon was intrigued. “Where are they?”

Arby beamed at her. “I'm glad you asked! They're about ten miles northeast of here, which puts them about seventy-five miles due north of Ula'ula Island. It's only twenty minutes on a Charizard from here, or a bit over two hours from Malie City.”

“Huh.”

“Now, we come to the nature of my proposition. The real estate I purchased is, in fact, the Poké Pelago in its entirety. They're beautiful islands, and I've managed to build myself a floating raft hut that sits just off the island I've named— er, Isle Abeens.”

“Isle of beans?”

“No, no. Isle Abeens. It does sound similar, and I must admit that I did name it with something of a pun in mind— you see, Pokébeans grow quite freely on Isle Abeens.” Arby paused, glancing over at Ben, who was sniffing at Moon's backpack. “And if I'm not mistaken, you as a Trainer would have an interest in obtaining beans cheaply, or even for free?”

“Well yes,” said Moon immediately. “I'm not agreeing to anything, but I like the sound of free food, especially for these bottomless pits.” She indicated all of her teammates. “What do you want me to do?”

“I'd like to set up the five islands of the Poké Pelago as a Pokémon resort. Pokémon could travel out there to rest, relax, play, and explore. Isle Abeens, you understand, will be able to provide plenty of food for the Pokémon who come to visit. Another island, which I have dubbed Isle Aplenny, features quite a bit of arable farmland, which may be used to grow Berries and vegetables to feed human visitors. The third island, Isle Aphun, has an extensive cave system that goes beneath the ocean— it may even connect to Akala Island, but I'm a bit large to wiggle my way through all the caverns. I've found many interesting items there— from colorful shards of terracotta to whole Evolutionary Stones. Selling what I find there has helped me to fund my progress so far, but I think Pokémon would enjoy exploring it far more. The fourth island, Isle Evelup, is not much more than a sandbar— but it would make a very nice beach resort, if we built some houses and facilities. And finally, Isle Avue is home to the most marvelous hot springs, which people and Pokémon alike would find relaxing and refreshing.”

“It kind of sounds too good to be true,” said Moon frankly.

“If you allow me to take a look at your Dex, I can show you the islands on PokéMaps.”

“Poké Pelago definitely exists, bzzt,” said Rotom, whooshing out of Moon's pocket. “According to the Alolan Department of Real Estate, the most recent owner of Poké Pelago is... yep, one Arbutus Lu.”

“Lu?” said Moon.
“I’m afraid that my surname is one of the things that has been lost to amnesia,” said Arby regretfully. “But I did remember that something about the name Lu was very important. It might have been part of a longer name. Lu-something. So I decided it would be my last name.”

He seemed honest enough. “And what was it you wanted me to do again?”

“Well, it would be awfully inconvenient for most Pokémon to come out by sea, and Pokémon can’t exactly use Ride Pagers— so really, the only viable way for Pokémon to get to Poké Pelago would be for them to arrive through the computer I have there. Many trainers catch Pokémon for the Pokédex entries and just put them in the box, consigning them to boredom. If you send any Pokémon in your PC to me, I can let them play at Poké Pelago.”

“And that’s the part that sounds kind of like a scam.”

Arby’s face fell. “I don’t get anything out of it, if it helps,” he said ruefully. “Except company. I am awfully lonely out there. I think I used to have a family. I don’t really... like being alone.”

“Tell you what,” said Moon, taking pity on him, “when I’ve got some free time, I’ll come check it out myself— sometime this week. I don’t think I’ve got much happening. And if I like what I see, I’ll try and think of ways to help you. I don’t really catch Pokémon I’m not planning to use on my team. Except once, but that was just to prove I could do it, and I let it go right afterward.”

“What about this,” said Arby. “I want to start selling the extra beans from Isle Abeens. I can bag them up and you can come get them on Charizard, and you can sell them and keep the profit.”

“All the profit?”

“All of it. I don’t really need it, and I have plenty of beans— I mean, food, for myself.” Arby cleared his throat, looking slightly nervous. “I can get money from selling the things I find on Isle Aphun.”

Moon considered. “Okay,” she said finally. “I’ve got some traveling to do yet, and I want to get settled at the Pokémon Center on Route Eight— but I’m probably going to be training there for a while anyway, and it’s not that much longer to get from there to this Poké Pelago, right?”

“It will add perhaps another half hour to your journey.”

“Yeah, that’s fine.” It wasn’t really— but perhaps Moon could persuade whatever Charizard she managed to summon to fly at the absolute minimum height requirement. “Do you have a Dex or a phone, so I can add your number?”

“I do have a phone!” said Arby brightly, pulling it out of his pocket. “I purchased it when I purchased the computer, and the hardware that lets me connect to the Internet via satellite.”

“Great. Hand me your phone for a second.” Moon added herself into Arby’s contacts and sent herself a text. Rotom buzzed softly, to let her know he’d gotten it. “I’m right here.”

“Moon Hawkins,” read Arby, nodding and putting away his phone. “Nice to meet you, Moon. Well, if you’re going to come by the Pelago in a few days, I should head back and get ready for you, shouldn’t I? In the meantime— feel free to catch Pokémon and send them to me, but if you need to visit first to establish that trust then you don’t have to.”

“You could catch your own Pokémon,” suggested Moon.

Arby blinked at her for a few moments. Something distant passed through his green eyes; Moon wasn’t sure if it was sorrow or just gravity.
“I— I suppose I could,” he said slowly. “I don't know why I didn't think of it before.”

“What's your favorite Pokémon?”

Again he hesitated, blinking rapidly. “I— perhaps I'm remembering incorrectly, but it seems to be an actual memory, which is more than I've ever had in the five years since I washed up here. I think I owned some kind of dog Pokémon.”


“Lillipup...” Arby murmured. “Yes, I think it might have been a Lillipup. And I had probably evolved it into a Herdier and then a Stoutland, at some point. Yes, that seems familiar.”

“Well, you can catch them over on Route Four and Route Six.” Moon pointed back toward Royal Avenue. “You could probably catch one pretty quickly, Route Six is just beyond Royal Avenue.”

“Perhaps not today,” decided Arby. He seemed rather shaken. “I— I really don't know why I never thought of it. I must not have caught Pokémon very often in my old life. I know I worked with them, because I seem to know quite a lot about them; but I think they were always provided for me, somehow.”

He looked at Moon, green eyes piercing. “Thank you,” he said earnestly, sticking out his hand. “I think this is going to be the beginning of a beautiful partnership.”

“The Lunarbean Company, LLC,” said Moon hopefully, shaking his hand.

“You can name the bean business whatever you like, as it's going to be yours,” he chuckled. “I think The Lunarbean Company has a nice ring to it.”

Arby left, hiking toward Dividing Peak Tunnel—he probably flew to the Poké Pelago from the beginning of Route Eight, as it was on the northeasternmost corner of Akala Island.

“Who was that guy?” called Hau, from the beach.

“The first supplier of The Lunarbean Company.”

“The what now?” said Lillie, walking onto the road and shaking the sand out of her shoes.

“The Lunarbean Company. That guy owns the Poké Pelago and he wants me to sell beans, I guess? I'm going to be a one-woman business: The Lunarbean Company.”

Hau nodded. “Oh, I've heard of the Pelago. It's all uninhabited, though isn't it?”

“He lives there, so I guess not. He was very nice. Little bit weird, seemed kind of lonely. And he has amnesia.”

“Are you sure it's not a pyramid scheme?” said Hau skeptically. “You're too good to sell garbage makeup and toxic oils, Moon. I won't let you go down that path.”

“I thought it was, too. Once we get to the Pokémon Center on Route Eight, I'm going to fly out and visit him and see if it's legit.”

“Unfortunately,” said Lillie, frowning down at her bag, “I don't actually think we're going to make it to Route Eight at all today.”

“What? Why not?”
“Nebby's not in the bag, and I can't see her bouncing around like she usually does when she's gotten out. The last time this happened, she went exploring and ran into Captain Phyco and Private Soliera.”

Moon looked around, squinting at their surroundings.

“I'll check the beach again,” said Hau, walking back down the hill. “She seemed to like the beach.”

“Good idea,” said Moon with a nod. “Lillie, you head back toward Royal Avenue. I'll check Dividing Peak Tunnel. If one of you finds her, text the group.”

“Will do!”

“Thanks, both of you,” said Lillie, turning back toward Royal Avenue. “I appreciate your help.”

“No problem.” Moon cupped her hands around her mouth, running toward the Tunnel. “Nebby! Where are you? Come back and stay in the bag!”

Chapter End Notes

Okay so the whole two Totems alternating roles, which I mentioned in the notes of Chapter Six, is now A Thing in this universe. Ilima never discusses Raticate versus Gumshoos; people usually figure it out for themselves at some point when they're comparing trial experiences. Araquanid and Wishiwashi have an agreement about Wishiwashi being the default unless a Trainer does their research, because they both like tricking people, but Marowak and Salazzle probably just play rock paper scissors for it lmao. We'll see how the other trials go as we reach them...

Moon and Rotom give each other crap, but they also have each other's backs. It's a friendship I did not anticipate????

Moon and Hau are telling Lillie The Story Of How They Met Gladion as though she doesn't already know lmao, Gladion told her about it ages ago

Emmett isn't even in this chapter and I'm still not letting him live

Lillie totally snorts when she's laughing hard enough, and she gets really embarrassed when she does it even though it's HECKIN CUTE

Lillie says “Don't joke about that” and provides an explanation of Moon having free will, but we all know what she really means is “I don't want to hear about my brother and one of my best friends possibly sexting, ewwwww”

“As long as you don't send him any nudes before your birthday, neither of you will get arr— ow, okay, I'll stop!” —in all seriousness, kids, don't send nudes. If you're underage you can get in huge trouble, and even if you're an adult then you could be in trouble if they're leaked or something.

Lillie is now the captain of the U.S.S. Gladimoon, I don't make the rules here. (Lunaredge? Ionashipping? I don't fuckin' understand this fandom's ship names.)
I remembered as I was writing this chapter that I decided in Windowpain that Mohn was the family name of the Lusamine-Gladion-Lillie unit, so Professor Mohn was, in fact, Professor Mohn. However, I gave him the first name of Alder, managing to COMPLETELY forget the fact that Alder is the name of the Unovan Champion during Black/White. I only used it once in the entire series, a brief mention in Windowpain; so I have taken the liberty of changing his name to Arbutus. Both Alder and Arbutus are types of trees—a theme in keeping with nearly every NPC character having the name of a plant, tree, or flower. (Olivia doesn't seem like a plant name, but Olive is, and she's called Lychee in the Japanese versions anyway. Looker doesn't count either, as he's from another game.)

I hate pyramid scheme and pyramid scheme businesses. LuLaRoe, Amway, Mary Kay, Avon, Rodan & Fields, Arbonne, Young Living, doTerra, Younique, Jamberry, Color Street, Paparazzi Jewelry, ItWraps, Herbalife, Thrive... that's like a tiny portion. There are hundreds. They prey on people who are desperate to make money, especially people who are struggling to support families and are looking for extra income that will fit into their schedules. It's all bullshit, it's all predatory, and 99.99% of people who join one of these businesses will spend more money trying to get into the business than they will actually make from it. So, you know... All Tea, All Shade, Full Offense Meant. Fuck every one of these nasty-ass, predatory companies. I sincerely hope that the people who run them (the people who KNOW that they're cheating others out of their money, not the ones who have been tricked by the false lure of riches) get venereal diseases, that their spouses and children leave them, and that they die miserable, unfulfilled, and alone. I'm dead fucking serious. Fuck pyramid schemes.

I'll be honest: I debated skipping the Poké Pelago story arc entirely. It's going to be kind of tedious to write. But then I remembered that Mohn (Arby, here) is kind of an important character, and eventually it IS going to tie into Very Important Plot so I kind of have to do it. I might skip over some parts, or write it very transitionally—emails from Mohn/Arby, Moon selling beans to people, and so on. A lot of the actual Development of the Poké Pelago will happen offstage though, I'm not writing Moon working in the bean fields or filling her PC box lmao

Also: remember the post-game cutscene where Mohn visits Aether Paradise and talks to Lusamine, and it's confirmed that he's lost his memories forever? Yeah, screw that, we're not doing that. That was some Tasty Angst, but trust me I am going to make it So Much Tastier.

I'm literally going to have every character rag on pyramid schemes, you can't stop me. I know I've already gone off in the notes but let me reiterate: fuck pyramid schemes. Watch the John Oliver clip about Herbalife.

If you haven't been to Reddit and found r/nebbyinthebag, I advise you to visit. It's probably a dead subreddit at this point but I was there during its heyday right after Sun and Moon came out, and the memes were spicy.
Chapter Summary

Dividing Peak Tunnel, Route Eight.

Chapter Notes

Moon, Hau, and Lillie run into the Ultra Recon Squad and meet a scientist; and a game of Truth or Dare changes things.

I'm VERY SORRY that this chapter has taken me like a month to post. I've been very very stuck on chapter three of the next major installment in the fic, but I think I finally managed to write something I'm happy with. And when I finish a chapter, I post a chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Dividing Peak Tunnel was cool and rather dim. Moon thought she could see shapes and shadows moving on the walls, but she couldn't be certain and she didn't have time to stop and investigate.

“Nebby!” she shouted, and the echoes spiraled ahead of her down the tunnel. “Nebby, where did you go?”

She continued down the tunnel for probably twenty minutes or so, trying to look for the familiar, colorful glow of Nebby's stardust; she'd only made it about halfway when Rotom buzzed loudly.

“Did they find her?” said Moon, pulling Rotom out of her pocket.

“Looks like it, bzzt.”

Chat: IKI SQUAD

**walking malasada**: Picture Attachment: [IMG047.jpeg]

**walking malasada**: she's so pleased w/ herself lol

**lillie-pad**: Oh thank goodness! I was afraid she might have been kidnapped or hurt.

**shakespeare jr**: Glad you found her! Where should we meet up?

**walking malasada**: tunnel entrance is prob the best place. i can c lillie from where I am rn. when we both get there we'll go in and catch up w/ moon
Moon pulled off her backpack and sat down at the edge of the tunnel. She'd recalled Puck, Ariel, and Ben so that she didn't have to keep track of them while she was looking for Nebby, but she didn't want to let them out in the dark, when the occasional car or truck went whizzing past on the main part of the road.

“Kec!”

“I mean, I'll battle you if I have to, but I'm not bothering you, swear to Arceus,” Moon informed the Kecleon that was slowly creeping toward her, blending in with the asphalt and bits of gravel.

“Unless I'm literally sitting in the middle of your house, I haven't done anything.”

She let Puck out anyway, more as a warning than a true threat. The Kecleon eyed Puck speculatively; Puck eyed it back, probably wondering if he could eat it or not.

“I don't think a whole big lizard's gonna agree with your digestive system, buddy. Don't try it. Remember when you tried to eat a Metapod, when we visited Melemele?”

Puck shuddered and turned away from the Kecleon, no longer interested. The Kecleon turned tail and ran for it, skittering away with only a soft squeak that barely echoed in the cool tunnel. Moon, satisfied, recalled her teammate.


Chat: hypothetically

cute asshole trainer: You mentioned you were headed to Route Eight soon, right?

shakespeare jr: Picture Attachment: [tunnelselfie.jpeg]

shakespeare jr: I split up with my friends to look for a lost Pokémon but we found her. I'm waiting for them to catch up with me and we're probably gonna camp a little ways onto Route Eight.

cute asshole trainer: I think there's an Aether Foundation outpost around the beginning of Route Eight.

shakespeare jr: Seems kind of out of the way for them, doesn't it?

cute asshole trainer: There's a high rate of injuries for Pokémon around the Dividing Peak Tunnel. Most of it is due to vehicular collision, but the darkness also makes it a popular place for nocturnal Pokémon, who are grumpy and prone to attacking if woken during the day. It makes sense for Aether to set up shop nearby.

Moon frowned, considering. Lillie would probably want to avoid the Aether Foundation outpost—
she didn't seem to like them all that much. There were plenty of places to camp along Route Eight, though.

Rotom buzzed again, and Moon glanced down.

cute asshole trainer: I've been meaning to ask— why do you rename your pictures?

shakespeare jr: That's all Rotom lmao, I don't know how to do it on my own

cute asshole trainer: Picture Attachment: [IMG007.jpeg]

cute asshole trainer: You'll probably be at the Pokémon Center sometime tomorrow, then. We could have Null and Ariel hang out the day after?

Lillie, decided Moon, was an evil genius and a dangerous woman. It seemed that selfies were now fair game for both of them. Null occupied most of the camera in this picture, squinting curiously at the camera; but she could also see Gladion's eyes, crinkled with amusement at the corners. His nose and mouth were cut off, but Moon really hoped he was smiling.

shakespeare jr: Sounds great, actually. I'm definitely not ready to challenge Mallow yet so I'll be staying on Route Eight for a while

cute asshole trainer: What's stopping you?

shakespeare jr: I think my team might be close to ready for another teammate. They haven't been so far, but we've talked about it a lot recently and I think they're willing to try and adjust

cute asshole trainer: Do you have a specific Pokémon in mind?

shakespeare jr: Not really. I might travel around. Mudbray and Salandit both looked cool, and I read that Alolan Diglett and Dugtrio are Steel-type as well as Ground-type

shakespeare jr: So I might go for one of those

cute asshole trainer: Salandit are pranksters. Especially the females, since they evolve and the males don't—I assume you would prefer a female. Most Trainers do.

cute asshole trainer: You might want to rethink that one, especially with your team being as sensitive as they are.

shakespeare jr: HEY

shakespeare jr: But also good point, Ben would be PISSED if a Salandit pranked him lmao

cute asshole trainer: Ground-types tend to be more mature, so you would probably luck out with one of those.

shakespeare jr: It won't help me with Mallow's trial, but I haven't really been picking my team
based on what will help me with the trials

“Moon!”

The echoes of her name spiraled through the tunnel toward her, preceding Hau and Lillie, who were still some distance away.

**shakespeare jr:** My friends just caught up with me, gotta go but I'll talk to you later

**cute asshole trainer:** No problem. Until next time.

Moon tucked Rotom back into her pocket and shouldered her backpack, getting to her feet. Lillie was clutching a cheerfully pewing Nebby with both hands, clearly annoyed and unwilling to let the Pokémon out of her sight for even a second.

“So there's an Aether Foundation outpost on Route Eight,” said Moon.

Nebby fell silent at once.

Lillie's eyes widened. “Um—”

“Gladion mentioned it in passing, but I remembered that you don't seem to like the Aether Foundation for whatever reason so I thought I would let you know.”

“You don't like the Aether Foundation?” said Hau, looking confused. “They're nice people— they help Pokémon and stuff, right?”

“It's not that I don't like them,” said Lillie stiffly, reaching for the bag where Nebby usually stayed. She tucked Nebby into the bag and zipped it mostly closed, as she usually did. “I just don't trust them. They're a large, privately owned corporation receiving government money— only a small portion of which actually goes into the conservation efforts. Most of the conservation is sponsored by donations, charities, and individual efforts. I would want to see a budget report before I let my Pokémon anywhere near them.”

There was a long pause. “Huh,” said Hau finally. “I never really thought about it like that before.”

“I don't know much about the Aether Foundation,” admitted Moon. “I'm Kantonian, so I'm more accustomed to the technology made by Silph Co. And the conservation efforts in both Kanto and Johto are pretty much limited to the Safari Zones and the government rebranding of Cinnabar Island as a Pokémon haven, after the volcano erupted a few years back.”

“Well, we don't have to camp near the outpost if you're uncomfortable with it,” Hau assured Lillie. She seemed relieved at this. “Route Eight is full of nice places to camp. We'll go a mile or two past before we set up.”

“And the further we walk today, the less we have to walk tomorrow to get to the Pokémon Center,” added Moon. “Nebby delayed us a bit, but at least we found her in the end.”

The wall of light that indicated the northern end of Dividing Peak Tunnel was growing steadily
larger as they approached; but Moon spotted two dark blurs that gradually coalesced into distinct forms.

“What a coincidence,” she said quietly to Hau and Lillie. “Nebby runs away on Melemele, and I meet Phyco and Soliera. Nebby runs away on Akala—”

“And that's Phyco and Soliera?” asked Hau, squinting.

“Yeah, I'm pretty sure it's them.”

Moon could hear them speaking as she approached. “—the aura intensity appears to be increasing, Captain. I'm not sure what the cause could be—”

“Well, three Trainers with what I believe to be ten Z-Crystals between them are approaching,” said Phyco, as he turned to face them. Soliera also turned around, looking surprised; but her expression relaxed into something rather like a smile as she turned around.

“That would throw off the data, yes,” she agreed. “Moon Hawkins, it has been some time. How goes your island challenge?”

“I'm doing good, thanks.” Moon glanced at Lillie and Hau. “Um— you obviously know Lillie, but I don't think you've met Hau. He's our friend.”

“Hi,” said Hau, lifting one hand. “Nice to meet you.”

Lillie stood slightly behind Hau, not making eye contact with either Phyco or Soliera. The interesting thing was that she was clutching Hau's other hand— rather hard, judging by the slightly uncomfortable expression on Hau's face.

“Well met, Hau,” said Phyco politely. “I see you wear a Z-Ring. You are also on your island challenge, I presume?”

“Yeah. Moon and I both just got Firium Z.”

“The Z-Crystals are interesting, from a scientific standpoint.” Soliera clasped her hands together, behind her back. “The power they produce is very similar to the aura of a Totem Pokémon— almost as though the Totem imbues a little piece of the crystal with power. And both auras are similar to the Blinding One, who once provided light for our own planet— far from here.”

“We have since adapted to the darkness, of course. It would be difficult for things to return to the way they were.” Phyco half-smiled, but there was a note of regret in his voice. “But it would be wonderful to see the Blinding One in all its glory again— even if it were only for a little while.”

A thin, tinny beep sounded. Soliera lifted her wrist, looking slightly alarmed at the time displayed on what had to be a watch of some kind. “Captain, I think we will be late for our rendezvous if we do not hurry.”

“Ah, of course. Do forgive our hasty exit. It would be nice to stay and talk for a little while, but we are meeting with a scientist who has previously collaborated with our sponsors, and has both advice and data for us.”

Lillie inhaled sharply.

“If you are nervous, you may wish to wait here for a little while; Dr. Colress shouldn't be outside for very long. He's staying at the nearby outpost, since they have equipment he is using.” Soliera spoke
carefully, not looking at Lillie.

“Thanks for the tip,” said Moon, when it was clear that Lillie wasn't going to respond.

“Good luck— and may the light of Alola illuminate your path.”

Phyco and Soliera turned, walking out of the cave.

“I'm assuming that you want to avoid this Dr. Colress guy, whoever he is,” ventured Hau.

Lillie sighed, letting go of Hau's hand. “He's a lot like Captain Phyco and Private Soliera,” she said finally, sitting down at the edge of the road. “If you studied the Team Plasma scandals of Unova, you won't see his name— but he was employed by Team Plasma for a time. Dr. Colress studies power— how Pokémon use it, and how Trainers may increase it. He unwittingly supplied the people who hurt Nebby with the knowledge of how to hurt her, in the pursuit of power. I still don't believe he knows the extent of what he did— and to be honest, I'm reluctant to find out.”

“Why?” said Moon curiously, sitting down next to Lillie as Hau wiggled his fingers behind his back, trying to regain circulation without Lillie noticing.

“Because he was nice to me.” Lillie stared at the ground. “I'd really like to believe that he didn't know and would be horrified to find out— but if he did know, then he's just another monster, like the rest of them.” She swallowed hard. “Just another monster, but one who speaks softly and smiles kindly. Those are worse.”

Moon couldn't really think of anything to say to that— but Hau, apparently, did not have that problem.

“Then you should tell him,” he said stoutly. “If he's not a monster, he probably doesn't want to be. If I hurt someone and didn't know about it, I'd be grateful if someone told me. I could work on making it better. If he was already a monster to begin with, then you don't have anything to lose.”

Lillie blinked at him a few times. “Well— if he knew, he might try to get hold of Nebby again, and he would probably tell the people who hurt her about it. I don't want to risk that.”

“Oh, good point.” Hau's face fell slightly. “Well, you don't have to talk to him, I guess. Maybe Moon or I should check to see if he's still out there. What's he look like?”

“Um— he has yellow eyes and he wears glasses,” said Lillie hesitantly. “And he has blond hair— a little darker than mine.”

“Right. Moon, fire-water-grass?”

They played for it and Moon won, so she decided to check Route Eight. She got to her feet, slinging on her backpack and brushing off her backside. “I'll come back for you guys when he's gone,” she told them. “Don't worry— I'll be fine.”

Lillie smiled, but it didn't reach her eyes. Hau put one arm over Lillie's shoulders, patting her on the opposite shoulder and, thought Moon, looking rather pleased with himself. “No worries here. See you in a bit.”

It wasn't a very long walk to the end of the tunnel, but Moon still approached it cautiously. Route Eight stretched before her— open to the ocean on the north, with few patches of tall grass and even fewer trees. A small, neat white building stood off to the side of the road about a hundred feet from the entrance to the tunnel. Moon guessed that this was the Aether outpost.
Phyco and Soliera stood just outside the white building, talking to a man who was sitting on the steps, typing rapidly on some device that was attached to his wrist. He nodded and spoke as he typed — and sure enough, he was blond-haired and yellow-eyed, and he wore glasses. The lab coat seemed a little on the nose for a possibly-evil scientist, but Moon wasn't going to complain about the stereotype if it helped her identify her enemies.

Phyco and Soliera both made the Alolan greeting sign — still oddly squared, but it seemed to be a farewell this time. They marched along Route Eight, past the man. Moon waited for him to get up and go inside, but he didn't move.

Abruptly he looked up, making direct eye contact with her. Moon froze in place— she hadn't made a sound.

“Come here a minute, will you?” he called.

Moon didn't really have a choice. She shoved her hands in her pockets and walked over to the Aether Outpost.

“How did you know I was there?”

“Oh, I have a scanner on my device that tells me when something interesting comes within a mile or so of my person,” he said brightly. “And that Pokédex of yours appears to contain a living Pokémon, if I’m not mistaken. I haven't ever seen a Rotom-Dex in person before. Would you mind indulging my curiosity?”

Moon relaxed. It wasn't about Lillie, then. “Sure.”

She pulled Rotom out of her pocket, passing him over.

“Did you name it?”

“I didn't really want a nickname, bzzt,” said Rotom.

“Oh, you speak!” he said, clearly delighted. “Wonderful. I had heard that young Clemont was having difficulty in getting the vocal interface to function. What was the issue?”

Rotom beamed at him. “The base Pokédex AI interfered with microphone usage, bzzt. The bugfix was to remove the AI entirely.”

“So you are your own creature then, and not subject to this Trainer?”

“I wish,” said Moon under her breath. “He wouldn't sass me half as much if I were his Trainer.”

“I'm employed by my Trainer, bzzt,” explained Rotom. “She pays me one one-hundredth of each of her battle winnings.”

“Wait, I do?”

“It seems a rather poor rate, for someone working as hard as you likely do.” They were both ignoring Moon.

“I've invested in bitcoin, bzzt. My personal account is thriving,” said Rotom, rather smugly.

“Nobody tells me anything,” complained Moon.

“And she treats you well?” Colress continued to tap at the device on his wrist.
“We're friends, bzzt.”

“Good.” He smiled, his gaze returning to Moon as he passed Rotom back. “Allow me to introduce myself: I'm Dr. Colress, a Unovan native and a scientist by trade. The general theme of my research is— bringing out the power of Pokémon. I've come to Alola to study several phenomena unique to the region— trials, Z-Crystals, and Totem Pokémon, among other things. I've already studied Mega Evolution in both Kalos and Hoenn, as well.”

“I have a friend who did a study abroad in Kalos,” said Moon, thinking of Blue. “He has a Mega Ring and a few stones— though I've only ever seen him Mega Evolve his Pidgeot.”

“Mega Evolution is fascinating, isn't it? I'm also working on a device that will allow a Trainer to use Mega Stones through a Z-Ring— that way, a Trainer may have both Mega Evolution and Z-Power at their very fingertips! And I'm working on other projects too, of course. Incidentally, the scanner that alerted me to the presence of your Rotom also lets me know about Z-Rings, Z-Crystals, and the presence of certain Pokémon. So I must ask: why are you and your friend traveling with a Cosmog?”

Moon's heart sank into her stomach. He'd said the range was nearly a mile— of course he'd have picked up on Nebby.

“That's not any of your business,” she said firmly.

“Is your friend a girl, or a boy?”

“That's also not any of your business.”

“I could always walk over to the tunnel and find out for myself— but I suspect that I already know who the other member of your party is. I didn't know she had taken on an island challenge.” His voice grew thoughtful. “Miss Lillie must be doing very well, if she has five Z-Crystals already. I underestimated her— everyone has, I think.”

He'd mistaken Hau for Lillie— which meant that his device couldn't record human presence. Moon studied him, but he didn't seem inclined to leave his seat on the steps of the Aether outpost.

“You came alone, leaving Lillie and the Cosmog to hide in the tunnel. You knew I would be here. Ergo, Lillie has told you about my relationship with the Cosmog.”

Colress was sharp, Moon had to give him that. “All right,” she said stiffly. “You're not wrong, but she's hiding because she's afr— because she doesn't want to see you.”

His hand stilled over his wrist. “I see,” he said quietly.

Just another monster, but one who speaks softly and smiles kindly—

“In that case, I will go inside.” Colress stood up, dusting off his coat even though there was nothing on it. “I enjoy working out of doors, in remote, lonely places like this. They remind me of my private laboratory in Unova. A little taste of home, if you will. But I am not likely to go back home anytime soon. I made mistakes in Unova, mistakes for which I have been attempting to atone.”

Moon swallowed. She was fairly sure she understood what Colress was saying. “According to Lillie, you've made mistakes here, too.”

Colress sighed. “I placed my faith in the wrong person,” he admitted. “And Miss Lillie will likely have to admit she has done the same, lest she brand herself a hypocrite. But I am no fool, Trainer. There are things I did in Unova that are recorded and hidden away in some dusty archive, never to
see the light of day— things that it would take more than a bit of empty flattery and a few glasses of wine to get out of me. You may tell her so.”

He got up and went inside the Aether outpost. Moon, stunned, stared after him for a few moments; then she turned and raced back to the Dividing Peak Tunnel.

Lillie remained quiet as they made their way past the Aether outpost, not looking at the building at all. Moon had switched Lillie's usual floppy, wide-brimmed hat for one of her baseball caps, which went a surprisingly long way toward changing Lillie's usual look; it was a simple precaution but it had made them all feel better.

“Do you really think he's sorry?” she said finally. “The general opinion of Unova seems to be that he wasn't sorry until he was caught.”

“I think someone had to have changed his mind,” decided Moon. “I know one of the more recent Unovan Champions was involved in that whole mess— either Nate or Rosa or Hugh, I don't remember which.”

“They go through Champions like gallons of milk over there,” snorted Hau.

“My point is, Dr. Colress was talking a lot about Mega Evolution and Z-Power. I think he must have met people who increased their power through those things, instead of through whatever Team Plasma was doing.”

“So it wasn't that his desire for power changed, it's that he realized that doing the right thing was a better way to do it,” said Hau bluntly. “That's still not the right reason to do something.”

“Doing the right thing for the wrong reason is better than not doing the right thing at all.”

“Not always,” said Lillie softly. “Intentions can twist results. If you do something good because you know it will make you look good, then it's more about feeding your own ego than about doing the good thing in the first place.”

They set up camp in a rather subdued fashion about two and a half miles away from the Aether outpost. Moon wanted to find two trees close enough to string up her hammock, which was rather difficult on Route Eight due to the general lack of trees. They did eventually find a pair, however, and Hau set up Moon's tent for Lillie, followed by a tent of his own.

“Dinner's on me,” said Lillie, as Moon began rifling through her bag for food. “I bought some things at the Mart this morning— but I'll need a fire for it.”

“Firewood team,” said Moon decidedly. “Puck and Lapin are probably the best for that. Lapin's getting so tall, isn't he?”

“He's close to evolving,” said Lillie. She smiled— the first sincere smile Moon had seen on her face since Nebby had gone missing. “It's going to happen any day now, I think.”

“Oh, cool! Hau, you should go with the firewood team— they can chop and you can carry. We don't need a whole forest— seven or eight big pieces should do it. Digging team is Umber, Ben, and Ollie — a round circle, not too deep, right in the middle of the camp. And the rock team will be Uila, Snowfall, Lillie, and me, with Ariel, Nebby, and Sonar on guard duty.”

“Bossy, bossy,” said Hau, grinning; but he left with Puck and Lapin. Ariel perched on a branch of one of the trees where Moon had strung her hammock, keeping a sharp eye out; Nebby lit up the camp with Flash, and Sonar began making a wide, lazy sweep of the perimeter. Umber and the two
Eevee began digging— Ben keeping his distance from the others, growling and showing teeth if they got too close. Moon paired up with Uila, and Lillie with Snowfall, to look for rocks to place at the edge of the fire pit.

When they had all completed their tasks, Moon and Hau lit the fire and Lillie pulled out a sack of buns and a package of hot-dogs. “They're artificial meat, but I think they're still quite good,” she explained. “And I've got ketchup and mustard in my bag, too. I wish I could have brought sauerkraut, but I haven't found any place that makes good sauerkraut in Alola.”

They shaved the bark off some long, thin sticks and roasted the hot dogs. Hau liked to set his on fire so that they had a blackened, crunchy skin; Lillie was more patient, slowly turning hers in circles so that they cooked evenly with golden-brown bubbles in the skin. Moon liked hers crispy but not black, so it was a careful balance of how close she could get the hot dog before it caught fire. The Pokémon ate beans or Bugs and watched, amused, as Hau ate not two or three but fourteen hot dogs. Moon had to stop herself after five, and Lillie managed only three before she was full.

“Let's play a game,” suggested Hau.

“Did you bring cards?”

Hau shook his head. “I meant like I Spy, or Mafia.”

“I know I Spy, but what's Mafia?” asked Lillie.

“Well, it's better with big groups of people,” explained Moon. “One person is a moderator, and you have about a third of the group secretly chosen to be Mafia—or you draw cards or something. Every round, the moderator has everyone close their eyes because it's night. The people in the Mafia pick someone to kill. There are other roles too— like a doctor, who can save someone that the Mafia have killed.”

“Or a detective, who can point at any given person and ask the moderator if they're Mafia,” added Hau. “Anyway, after everyone's been killed or saved or figured out, the moderator tells everyone to open their eyes, and all the people have to try and figure out who the Mafia people are. The people who get killed can't give hints unless you're playing with a Hex Maniac character, who can talk to the dead people and ask them who killed them.”

“We never played with a Hex Maniac, that's so cheaty!” said Moon indignantly.

“Oh, it is not. But everyone has to argue and talk about who the Mafia member is, and then they all vote and decide on one person, who they execute. Then the moderator says whether the person is Mafia or not, and then you go to the next night where everyone closes their eyes again, and the Mafia pick someone else to kill and it starts all over again. You play until everyone but the Mafia is dead, which means that the Mafia wins; or until the Mafia have been executed, which means that everyone else wins.”

“It sounds like fun, but I think more than three people and eleven Pokémon would be required to play,” laughed Lillie. “I don't mind I Spy.”

“Or we could play the ultimate sleepover game,” said Hau, spreading his hands for dramatic emphasis.

“Don't say it,” said Moon, shaking her head.

“Truth—”
“Don’t say it, you little sh—”

“—or Dare!” finished Hau triumphantly, dodging the hot dog bun that Moon threw at him. Sonar promptly absconded with the discarded bread, flying up to a tree to eat his prize.

“I've heard about Truth or Dare,” mused Lillie. “I've watched some movies where the characters play.”

“You've never played it?”

“I didn't really have anyone to play it with,” admitted Lillie.

“Oh, now we have to play it, Moon. Truth or Dare is a rite of passage. Come on.”

Moon sighed. “Fine, but only because I never pick Dare anyway.”

“Oh, don't you now?” said Hau, raising his eyebrows and grinning. “You're going to regret saying that, Moon... you're really going to regret saying that. Truth or Dare, Moon?”

“Truth, obviously.”

“How much, exactly, do you like Gladion?”

Lillie began giggling.

“Oh for Arceus' sake,” muttered Moon, but she always picked Truth and she wasn't going to back down now. “I like him more than I liked Ilima.”

“That's not a very exact answer.”

“It's as exact as you're going to get. I can't answer a question if I don't know the answer myself.”

“Okay, fair enough,” allowed Hau, but he looked disappointed. “Your turn to ask.”

“Then I'm turning it around on you,” said Moon, crossing her arms. “Truth or Dare, Hau?”

“Dare.”

Moon considered this for a few moments. The classic dare of streaking was out— she didn't think either Lillie or Hau would thank her for that. They'd eaten most of the hot dogs already, though they still had some fixings left... “Drink a shot of ketchup.”

“Oh, that's not bad at all. I've had worse. You don't have a shot glass, do you?”

“I've got paper cups, but they're bigger than shot glasses.”

“Well, you don't have to fill it all the way.”

Moon filled a paper cup about half full with ketchup and handed it to Hau. He downed it without so much as blinking.

“That's disgusting,” said Lillie, wrinkling her nose. “I like ketchup, but I don't like it that much.”

“My turn,” said Hau smugly. “Lillie, Truth or Dare?”

Lillie considered for a few moments. Her eyes flicked to Moon inexplicably; then back to Hau. “Truth,” she said cautiously. “Though I reserve the right to ask for a different question.”
“We won't touch on the hard topics in a game,” said Hau generously, waving his hand. “That's a quick way to ruin a friendship. But you don't have to say or do anything you're not comfortable with. This game is supposed to be fun. Um— who was your first kiss?”

“I've never kissed anybody,” admitted Lillie, flushing pink. “There weren't many opportunities for that sort of thing, where I was living.”

“Oh, you've given me such a good idea for a dare,” said Moon, grinning at her.

“I'm already uncomfortable with whatever you've come up with, and I don't even know what it is yet.” But Lillie was laughing, and Moon was mostly bluffing anyway—she'd said it because she wanted to see the fear in Hau's eyes as revenge for springing a question about Gladion on her as soon as the game started.

The game went on. They weren't drinking, so everything stayed light-hearted and fun. The Pokémon watched them or drifted off to sleep, depending on their temperaments. Moon answered a question about her own first kiss (a boy from Kanto whose name she didn't remember, at a party she hadn't really wanted to go to; they both happened to be playing spin the bottle and it had been nothing but a dry peck), but mostly she answered questions about Gladion, because Hau and Lillie both seemed to want her to suffer.

“What's your favorite physical feature on him?” Lillie wanted to know.

“Say his butt, say his butt, say his butt—”

“Well, now I know what your favorite physical feature on him is,” snarked Moon.

“Eh, his is okay, but I know mine is so much better.” Hau patted the side of his hip approvingly, as Lillie giggled. “Answer the question, Moon-asada.”

Moon sighed. “I like his hands,” she muttered, glaring at the fire. “Oooh.”

“Not like that, you pervert.” She threw another hot dog bun at Hau. “They just look—I don't know, graceful? Elegant? Something like that. I can totally see him playing the piano, or the violin.” Moon cleared her throat. “Hau, Truth or Dare.”

“Truth.” He yawned. “I'm getting sleepy though, we should probably head to bed after this one.”

Moon grinned. “Who's the prettiest girl you've ever seen in your life?”

When Hau didn't answer immediately, she knew she'd struck gold. He looked up at her, with resignation in his eyes; then he looked at the fire and said simply, “That would be Lillie. I'm off to bed. Good night, both of you.”

He got up and went over to his tent, ducking inside. Moon felt a little bad for making him admit it to Lillie's face, but her wide-eyed surprise more than made up for it.

“What?” she said finally, turning to look at Moon. “Did I hear that right?”

“You heard that right.”

“But—” Lillie's eyebrows creased, and she began shaking her head, almost self-consciously. “That can't be right. I'm sure there's girls in his graduating class—or, or one of the Pokémon Center nurses,
or a café worker or a Mart worker. Or a trial captain! Lana and Mallow are both really pretty, and so is Kahuna Olivia. Not to mention you, Moon— though I understand that it would be kind of strange to call your second cousin pretty, especially if she's interested in someone already—"

“Nope!” called Hau, from inside his tent. His voice had regained its usual cheerful tone, which probably meant he was over the embarrassment. “You're the prettiest, Lillie. You can't change my mind and I don't want you to try.”

Lillie went scarlet.

“If you're looking for some kind of statistical confirmation, there are a lot of girls who would kill to look like you,” pointed out Moon. “You have fantastic bone structure and beautiful eyes, and you take good care of your hair and your skin. Plus you have legs for days. You could be a model, honestly.”

“A m-model?”

“Hell yeah!” shouted Hau from his tent. The flaps opened and he emerged, wearing pajamas and holding a bottle of water and a toothbrush. He leaned over the fire, brushing his teeth. Lillie stared up at him, still red-faced and wide-eyed; she was worrying at her lower lip with her teeth and Hau was pointedly not looking at her mouth. Moon had to admire his self-restraint.

“You could totally be a model, Lillie,” he continued, after spitting froth into the coals; it hissed, and a smell that was half mint and half saliva rose into the air. Moon wrinkled her nose. “And you've got a really pretty smile, too.” Lillie's hand moved to cover her mouth, almost automatically. “Nuh-uh, stop that. Don't hide when people compliment you, that's silly. You're pretty. Accept it.”

Lillie swallowed. “But— I'm not?” She seemed genuinely bewildered.

“Who told you you're not pretty?” demanded Moon. “Actually, you know what— it doesn't matter who told you that. It's bullshit, and you don't need to listen to it. Whoever told you that was probably either jealous or probably blind.”

“Well, they say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” quoted Lillie, her voice shaking. “I guess if the two of you really think I'm pretty—”

“We do,” said Hau firmly, “and we're your best friends, so our opinions count for more than whatever crazy person said you aren't pretty.”

Lillie abruptly got to her feet. “I-I need to go to bed now,” she stuttered, blinking rapidly. “It was nice to play that game with the two of you. Good night!”

Hau immediately frowned down at where Moon was sitting. “That was kind of mean, Moon,” he whispered, folding his arms.

“Admitting you think she's pretty is relatively benign,” pointed out Moon. “Face it, I could have asked you much worse questions.”

“That doesn't mean this was okay! Now she's upset, and I don't know how to fix it!”

“Look, clearly she doesn't think she's pretty, which we both know is more bull than Tapu Bulu. For something like that to sink in, someone has to tell you that, a lot. So—"

_There's a great deal of evidence about Lillie's past, if you know what to look for. But, of course, it's knowing what to look for that you will likely find difficult._
“So?” said Hau, glancing over at Lillie's tent in consternation.

“So... somebody told her that,” said Moon slowly. “Probably someone important to her. Someone she would believe implicitly—an authority figure. Maybe even a family member. That's...”

“Still a load of bullshit?”

“The word I was looking for is *sick*, actually.”

They were both silent, staring at the dying fire. After a few moments Moon sighed and got to her feet. “Lapin?” she called, looking over at where about half of their combined Pokémon had formed a large cuddle-pile.

The Buneary stirred sleepily, drawing long legs out from the group.

“Can you gather Lillie's teammates and go in her tent with her? I think she might need you.”

Lapin blinked, growing more alert. Then he turned and picked up Umber, tucking him under his arm. A soft call to Snowfall, off napping by herself, stirred the Vulpix; and Nebby detached herself from the cuddle-pile and followed the three of them to Lillie's tent.

“Good call,” said Hau, though he still sounded slightly annoyed. “Team Hau, it's bedtime. Come on.”

Moon picked up Ben, who had been napping by himself, like Snowfall. Ariel had been in the cuddle-pile, holding warm wings over the rest of them as a blanket; she and Puck followed Moon sleepily over to Moon's hammock. She recalled them for the night, brushed her own teeth, and climbed into the hammock. It had been a long day, full of information and, unexpectedly, emotion.

Chapter End Notes

Nebby running away is a Plot Device that I'm thinking about using at least once on every island. It's dramatic, it's tasty, and it's inconvenient for all parties except Nebby, who I secretly believe is a sadist.

I would apologize that this story has been turning into a chatfic, but... *whips out microphone* IT'S MY STORY AND I CAN DO WHAT I WANT TO, I CAN DO WHAT I WANT TO

Is it cheating to use Lillie's angst to introduce Unethical Aether Science? I don't think it's cheating, since we already been knew. Also: this tin-hat, anti-corporation Lillie is a new aspect of her character and ngl I really like it

Lillie is holding Hau's hand because she's scared. This is fine, I'm fine, REALLY I'M FINE

“May the light [of Alola] illuminate your path” is remorselessly tweak[ed from The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild because 1. it's an amazing game and 2. it's actually really fitting for what appears to be the Ultra Megalopolitan (religious?) practice of referring to Necrozma as “The Blinding One.”
Colress knows how to hurt a Pokémon to get it to do powerful things. Kyurem was chilling (heh, chilling) in the captivity of the Team Plasma ship and was essentially their Evil Science Freeze Ray. It's logical that he would have been invited to Aether Paradise to work and study. They would have said they invited him for other reasons, but Faba and Lusamine wanted his torturing expertise.

“Just another monster, but one who speaks softly and smiles kindly. Those are worse.” — This is one of my favorite lines I've ever written

So I totally had no idea that Clemont invented the Rotom-Dex???? I should have researched this when I was writing Rotom's introductory chapter. Colress and Clemont would totally be pen pals though, they're both blond, glasses-wearing genius scientists

Rotom embezzling tiny amounts of Moon's money to invest in bitcoin is Pokémon fanfiction crack aesthetic, change my mind

This is what happened with Colress: He comes to Aether Paradise to do science. Faba invited him for drinks or smth and asked him about some of the More Benign things he did while working for Aether, which branched out into the Less Benign things. And Colress explained some of how he was able to get Kyurem to Do Things. Faba had the conversation recorded so he could try Said Things out on Nebby. Once Colress left for field research, Faba bragged about it because he's egotistical. Lillie and Wicke would both have heard about it, and Lusamine would have been like, “Great, let's apply it to this thing and see if we can't get a wormhole out of it.” But as Colress said, he's not an idiot. He didn't tell Faba the whole story. He had to tell the Unovan government the whole story, to avoid a sentence of twenty-to-life like most of the Seven Sages and Ghetsis. But he gave him enough that Faba would feel like he'd learned something, and wouldn't go digging for the rest of the story. I'm telling you this because I'm probably never going to write that story—I don't know Colress well enough to write his POV and I kind of really loathe Faba.

“If you do something good because you know it will make you look good, then it's more about feeding your own ego than about doing the good thing in the first place.” — Lillie, Highkey Shading Lusamine

Lillie is me here, because I CAN'T FIND DECENT SAUERKRAUT ANYWHERE SINCE GRADUATING COLLEGE BUT I WANT IT ON MY HOT DOGS, DARN IT

Hau's method of cooking hot dogs over a fire is GROSS, the only correct way to do it is Lillie's way. Eating fourteen hot dogs in a row is either goals or the direct antithesis of goals and I'm honestly not sure which at this point

Mafia is the same thing as Werewolf, though both are sometimes simply called Murder. I've always called it Werewolf, but that doesn't really work in the Pokémon universe because werewolves aren't really a Thing so the game would be called Lycanroc, and that's kind of a weird name for a game so Mafia it is. I also like calling it Mafia here because it implies Team Rocket, without directly referencing them.

Truth or Dare is a rite of passage. There are other party games I could have had them play, but Truth or Dare is so much fun to write. The only problem with writing a game of Truth or Dare is that it usually degenerates into Straight-Up Crack—which I admit this has come close to doing.
Hau and Lillie's relationship is so WHOLESALE I could just punch a brick wall

Lillie doesn't think she's pretty because Lusamine used that against her—this is actually canon tho, like just watch the S/M Ultra Space cutscenes if you don't believe me

And instead of being embarrassed and mad at Moon for days (which is what I would be, if someoneouted me like that to my crush), Hau sulks for like thirty seconds and then confidently owns it.

LILLIE DESERVES ALL OF THE COMPLIMENTS. That's it, chapter's over, go home
Stray

Chapter Summary

Route Eight.

Chapter Notes

Moon and Gladion hang out on their promised “playdate” for Ariel and Null, and Moon picks up a stray.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

chat: hypothetically

shakespeare jr: Picture Attachment: [rt8groupselfie.jpeg]

shakespeare jr: We made it to the Route 8 Pokémon Center!!!!

cute asshole trainer: You seem far too excited to arrive at a building that's identical to about twelve or thirteen others in the region— furthermore, a building at which you've already spent quite a bit of time.

shakespeare jr: Oh piss off, I'm excited for the playdate

shakespeare jr: You usually have afternoons free right?

cute asshole trainer: That's correct. Does three p.m. tomorrow work for you?

shakespeare jr: Yep! I'll probably train a little bit in the morning. Meet you at the hotel?

cute asshole trainer: Works for me. Room four, don't bother going into the lobby. The receptionist doesn't like me.

cute asshole trainer: I recognize Hau, but who's your other friend?

shakespeare jr: That's Lillie, our other friend. She's Professor Kukui's assistant, she's helping him out by traveling with us and sending him Pokédex data

cute asshole trainer: I see.

cute asshole trainer: You'll forgive me if I remind you that I'd rather that Null was kept far, far away from anyone who is actively assigned to send the Pokémon Professor any kind of Pokédex data.
“Aw, come on!” said Hau, for what felt like the millionth time that morning. “You can't just tell us that you're going on a date and refuse to give us details!”

“It's not a date,” repeated Moon, also for the millionth time. “It's a playdate, for Gladion's Type: Null and Ariel. Type: Null doesn't get to have girl time with other Pokémon very often.”

“Why not?” wondered Lillie, clearly fighting back laughter.

“I've kind of been assuming it's because he's a misanthropic loner,” admitted Moon, which made them both laugh. “But I mean, if I'm not with you guys then Ariel doesn't get much girl time either. I don't think I count—it's like hanging out with your mom.”

Hau snickered. “I never thought I would think of you as the mom who's trying to be cool enough to hang out with her kids, but now that image is never going to leave my head, thanks. Are you sure you don't want us to come with you?”

“Very sure,” said Moon firmly. “He also mentioned that Null gets jealous of evolved Pokémon for some reason, so he's trying to show her that there's no reason to be jealous.”

“Maybe she wants to evolve.”

Moon tried to think of what an evolved Type: Null would look like, but rolled a blank. “That's kind of a scary thought, honestly. Null's a little bit intimidating—especially because I know Gladion's kind of a softie.”

Hau made a retching noise. “Arceus, the look on your face. That was soppy.”

“Was not!” Moon glared at him, while trying and failing not to blush.

“It wasn't,” said Lillie. “Stop teasing, Hau.”

“I was kidding, keep your hair on.” He grinned at Moon, who merely sighed in response. “What are you guys gonna do?”

“Um—watch them play, I guess?”

“I suppose you could talk,” reasoned Lillie. “You text a lot, so I don't think you'll run out of things to say to each other.”

“You could hold hands, since it's your favorite physical feature of his.”

Moon balled up her napkin and threw it at Hau. “You are the actual worst.”

“As your slightly-older male relative, it's my duty to give you a hard time about boys.”

“I already have Red and Blue for that, you half-baked idea.”

At two-fifty she tucked Rotom into her pocket and recalled her team to their balls—it would probably be easier to start that way. The hotel was not more than five minutes walk from the Pokémon Center, but Moon was going to need the extra five minutes to calm herself down.

“It's not a date,” she told herself, because Hau had gleefully insisted it was a date so many times that
she had almost started to believe him. “It's not a date, Moon. Snap out of it.”

She hadn't dressed up, because it wasn't a date. Sure, she'd made sure her clothes were neat and clean and that they matched, and she just so happened to be wearing a new pair of shorts she'd bought when she and her mom had gone shopping on Melemele Island— shorts which were her new favorite pair because they made her legs look really good— but it wasn't a date.

And maybe she'd bought a cute pair of reading glasses in Heahea City, on her way back from Melemele Island, and she'd popped out the lenses because she didn't actually wear glasses; but she kind of liked the way her face looked in them. But she hadn't dressed up, so it wasn't a date.

Gladion had told her not to bother going into the lobby, so she went straight to the door marked with a four, raising her hand to knock— but the door wasn't closed, so it swung open under her fist.

“Hi, your door was— oh, shit!”

“Get out!” shouted Gladion, throwing himself flat on top of Null and pressing her helmet against the ground in a desperate bid to hold her back. Her legs scrabbled for purchase, and the talons on her forelegs clawed desperately at the carpet as she shrieked and lunged at Moon. “It's not safe— wait a couple of minutes!”

Moon hastily closed the door. The sound of the metal helmet crashing into the door, moments after the latch clicked, sent chills down her spine.

“It's okay, it's okay!” she heard him saying, through the door. “It's okay, Null— she's the same person, I promise. She just had something different on her face—”

The glasses, Moon realized, mortified. She yanked them off her face, stuffing them into her pocket. Arceus, if that was where vanity got her then she was never going to try to be cute again.

“It's okay, shh. It's okay, girl.” His voice cracked. Moon recognized the same shame welling up in her chest that had happened when she had eavesdropped on him in Royal Avenue. “It's okay. You're okay. We're both okay.”

“I took off my glasses,” Moon called meekly, through the door.

“It's my fault, I should have warned you.”

“No, I was a dumbass and I should have thought of it. It's part of why we're meeting, because Ariel's changed her look too.”

The door opened. Gladion was slightly ruffled in appearance, but from what she could tell that was normal— all his clothes seemed to be many times patched over, and he liked to wear layers of shirts and jackets, most of them in dark colors even under the hot Alola sun. Null stood slightly behind him, a low, warning rumble in her throat.

“Should I come in?”

“No, we'll be safer out here.” Gladion put one hand on Null's neck, running his hand over the feathers of her ruff. “Thanks for coming.”

“I'm happy to be here.”

“Can you show her the glasses? I don't wear glasses, but I know some people who do. She should learn that they're harmless.”
“Oh, sure.” Moon took them out, unfolded them, and put them on. Gladion's hand slid waringly up to the helmet when Null stiffened; but she seemed to be more confused than anything. Moon knelt down.

“See, I can take them off and put them on,” she explained, taking them off and putting them back on one more time. “Mine don't do anything. I don't wear glasses. But some people need them to see properly.”

“You don't wear them?”

“No,” admitted Moon. “I, um—” She coughed, looking down at the ground and away from Null's judging gaze. She didn't even want to know what Gladion was thinking. “I like how they look so I bought them and punched the lenses out. Pure vanity.”

“Hmm.” There was a pause, and then, neutrally: “Well, let's go.”

“Right, sure.” She took the glasses off for a third time, tucking them into her pocket. “Where to?”

“There's a rocky little beach down here— it's not very popular with Trainers. There aren't many wild Pokémon on this side of the Center. Most people training on Route Eight head back toward the Aether outpost.”

“Should I let out Ariel?”

“Down at the beach.”

They walked in silence. Moon was still mortified that her vanity had nearly ruined the entire afternoon, and she wasn't sure what to say.

“You don't need them,” said Gladion abruptly.

“Right. I have perfect vision.”

“No, I—” He paused, then looked away. “I mean, you don't, uh, need them, to... to look nice.” His voice trailed off into a mumble.

Moon arranged her face into a carefully neutral expression, to hide the fact that she was screaming internally. “Um, thank you.”

“Don't mention it.” He coughed. “Ever. So, the beach is over here.”

There was a steep, rocky little hill that sloped down to an equally rocky beach. The rock was a grayish white color— very different from the brown and reddish rock she had been used to seeing around Wela Volcano, which bordered Route Seven and Route Eight.

“What kind of Pokémon can you catch around here?”

“On the beach? Not much. There are some fishing spots, I think— it's mostly saltwater Pokémon here, but you can find a few freshwater fish and Bugs that have gotten down from Brooklet Hill.” He pointed southward, and Moon saw a wall of darker gray rock that she recognized as part of Brooklet Hill— though she remembered seeing it from the opposite angle. The waterfalls clinched it— she was looking at the Totem's Den.


He waited patiently as Moon snapped a few pictures, trying to find an angle that would capture the
rainbows that danced in the spray of the falls. She was self-conscious enough to feel his eyes on the back of her head.

“Null is curious about your Dex,” he said, as she turned around.

“Would Rotom freak her out, do you think?”

“Nearly everything freaks Null out,” said Gladion dryly, “so I wouldn't be terribly surprised. But she's seen Rotom before, both on Route Five and at the volcano park.”

“Right.” Moon tentatively held Rotom out to Null, who sniffed it curiously. “Er— she didn't really like him on Route Five.”

“Nobody really liked anybody on Route Five,” said Gladion, though his eyes glimmered with humor and Moon already knew what he was going to say next. “Except you, maybe.”

“Arceus, you're the worst.”

Null let out a soft snarl.

“Ah— I forgot to mention. Null doesn’t like the A-word.”

“The A-word,” snickered Moon. “Censorship, from a guy who throws the f-bomb around like confetti?”

“I only swear when I'm annoyed,” said Gladion, but he sounded amused.

“Which is most of the time.”

“Which is most of the time,” he confirmed. “Anyway— please don't use that word around her.”

“I'll try and watch my language.”

They stopped near the center of the beach. Moon could see a few people—a trio of Trainers by what was probably one of the fishing holes, a couple of preteen boys crouching near a small pool of water, and a small family having a picnic. Gladion had chosen a spot that was far away from all of them.

“All right,” he said, putting his hand on Null's helmet as he crouched next to her. “We talked about this, remember? You played with Moon's Trumbeak at Wela Volcano Park. Her name is Ariel. She evolved—”

Null snarled, attempting to back away; but Gladion held her in place with one hand.

“No, listen,” he said firmly. “She's evolved, but she's the same Pokémon. She just has a different form. She's a Toucannon now. She's pretty, right? We looked at the picture on my phone.”

Null snarled again, but it was softer and a little more hesitant.

“Moon wants to bring her out, so you can play together again.” His voice grew softer, which made Moon go ever so slightly weak in the knees. “But Ariel won't want to play with you if you're going to attack her. She might have fun battling with you, but she won't want to fight. Two different things, remember?”

It occurred to Moon that she had not really explained the difference between battling and fighting to Ben— Puck and Ariel seemed to implicitly understand it. Perhaps that was why he was so wary of other Pokémon— every interaction could be an attack, if he didn't understand the difference. She
might have mentioned it, initially— but it was once, or twice. Gladion had clearly gone over the difference with Null many times, and repetition seemed to be the key.

“Do you think you can play nicely with her? You know she's not really why you're mad about evolution.”

There was a long silence, but Null eventually acquiesced with a quiet purring noise.

“Attagirl,” whispered Gladion. He blinked suddenly, turning toward Moon as though only just remembering she was there. “Er— you can bring out Ariel now. It's best if you move slowly, and maintain eye contact with Null as much as you can.”

Moon looked at Null and selected Ariel's ball from her belt. Ariel vibrated excitedly, and Moon tossed the Pokéball straight up, pressing the button as she did so.

Ariel flew upward and around their group in a circle before landing. Moon tucked Ariel's ball back into her belt, still watching Null. Gladion kept one hand on Null's helmet, clearly ready to restrain her if necessary.

“Tou kana kana!” said Ariel, taking a careful step toward Null.

Null studied Ariel for a few moments. Then she took a step forward as well, sniffing the air.

“That's right,” said Gladion, sounding relieved. “She smells the same as she did before, doesn't she? Do you want to play together? You don't have to play too hard— she'd probably be happy to sit and talk with you. I'll be doing the same thing with Moon. You can even come and sit with us, if you want.”

Null shook her head immediately, which drew an actual chuckle from Gladion. Moon looked up quickly, but she'd missed any smile that might have accompanied it.

“That's what I thought, but we'll be nearby if you change your mind.”

He glanced at Moon, raising his eyebrows; then he let go of Null's helmet.

Null sniffed Ariel again, then turned around, jerking her head in an indication that they should go for a walk. Ariel cawed happily and followed.

“They'll be fine.” Gladion turned away and walked over to a patch of beach that was less rock and more gravel. “Do you have something to sit on?”

“I've got a couple of towels in my bag.”

“That will work, unless you would rather, um— sit on the blanket I brought.”

“A blanket sounds better than towels,” admitted Moon.

He opened his backpack and pulled out a folded blanket— a navy-blue quilt that looked surprisingly new. Moon helped him unfold it and they sat down, putting down backpacks. Null and Ariel were investigating a small tide-pool, on the opposite end of the beach from any of the other humans on it.

For a few moments neither of them spoke, but then Gladion reached for his backpack again. “I brought food,” he muttered, pulling out a grocery bag. “You said you liked Nomel berries.”

He had a box of a dozen malasadas— which had to have come all the way from Royal Avenue, the closest place with a malasada shop. Moon wasn't sure if Gladion had a Ride Pager or not, but she
wasn't sure she wanted to know. He wasn't on an island challenge and it would be technically illegal for him to use one. Three of the malasadas had Nomel-berry filling, and Moon noticed that three had Leppa-berry filling so he had chosen to treat himself as well. The others were all different flavors.

“I think there's napkins too, hang on— oh, in the grocery bag.” He passed her a small stack of napkins. Moon, still too shocked to say anything, picked up a Nomel-berry malasada with a napkin in her hand.

“Thank you,” she finally said, when it occurred to her that she was being rude. “You didn't have to— I didn't expect you to treat me, or anything.” She began eating.

“There's something I've heard you say a couple of times now,” said Gladion, selecting his own malasada from the box. “You've said that you would do anything for a friend. You said it on Route Five, when you challenged me in defense of Hau; and you said it at Wela Volcano Park, when we were discussing the philosophy of heroism.”

“I would do anything for a friend. I've had few enough in my life that I consider those I have worth any effort I can make.”

Gladion squinted at her. “You're friendly,” he said, sounding confused. “How haven't you had many friends?”

“I grew up in Kanto, and my only friends there were a couple of assholes who grew up, got famous, and started dating.”

“I... don't follow.”

“I'm from Pallet Town. I was friends with Red and Blue.” Understanding dawned in his eyes, he nodded. “But they're six years older than me, and they were always so much more about each other than they ever were about me.”

“And they would have been very busy, in the last few years.”

“Yeah, they have high-pressure jobs and a lot of press appearances— that happens when you're two of the youngest Champions in the world.” Blue had become the Champion at eighteen years, two months, and six days old. He was the world's youngest Champion for exactly forty-seven minutes—and then Red had become the Champion at seventeen years, eleven months, three weeks, and four days old. He still held the record, though Blue's second-place position had been taken by Iris of Unova. Red and Blue had both started when they were seventeen, barely out of high school— just like Moon, but she had no intention of trying to beat their record. “So I've spent less and less time with them, as the years have gone by. We still email each other, because international texting rates are ridiculous. I consider them my older brothers— Red, more so than Blue. Blue already had a sister.”

“But you didn't have many friends your own age?”

“Acquaintances, more like.” She shrugged, feeling a little self-conscious. “Most kids in Kanto get a Pokémon around ten or eleven— just a pet, something to take care of while they're in school. My family couldn't really afford it. I think I was the only kid in my sixth-grade class who didn't get a Pokémon for her birthday.”

Gladion remained silent— but he was listening intently, green eyes fixed on hers. Moon swallowed. “I didn't have much in common with them. So, no— no friends my own age. Not until I graduated high school and moved here, about three months ago. Hau's my second cousin, and Kahuna Hala is
my great-uncle. I'm half-Alolan by heritage, actually. And Hau and I are only a few months apart, in terms of birthdays. So we became friends right away. And we met Lillie the day we got our starter Pokémon, and we... um, long story short, we saved her life and now we're all best friends.”

“You really know how to end a story,” said Gladion, with one of his unsmiling huffs of laughter.

“That's not the end of the story.”

He raised an eyebrow. “It's not?”

“Yeah, on Akala Island I met this guy who was an asshole to my friend, but he was kind of cute and later down the road he helped me when I was having a bad day so I forgave him and we're friends now. That's the end of the story.”

Another huff of laughter; his mouth didn't form a smile but his eyes crinkled at the corners, the way they had done in the picture of Null investigating the camera. “That's a shitty ending to a story. He sounds like a terrible friend.”

“Terrible friends don't treat friends to malasadas.”

“Ah, that brings me back to my original point,” said Gladion, seeming to remember. “You said you would do anything for a friend, and I've seen you in action enough to know that those aren't empty words, from you. So a simple box of pastries isn't nearly the same— but it's some sort of reciprocal gesture, or something. Don't think too hard about it.”

Moon had to physically stop her jaw from dropping. “Oh my god, you're actually a huge softie.”

“I'm not a fucking softie. I told you not to think too hard about it.” He glared at her, drawing his knees up to his chin as he took a ferocious bite out of his malasada.

Moon pulled Rotom out of her pocket. “Too late, already thinking about it.”

“I'll take the malasadas back to my fucking hotel room and eat them by myself, watch me.”

“Too late,” singsonged Moon, waving Rotom in the air. “I've changed your name in my phone to fucking softie.’”

“You're not funny.”

“I'm hilarious. And you're a fucking softie.” She grinned at him, receiving another glare in response. “What about you? What's your story?”

Gladion's face went abruptly blank. He blinked at her a few times, eyebrows creasing into a slight frown. “I don't have a happy story like you do,” he said, after a few moments. “It's depressing, and I don't like talking about it.”

“Well, I do have experience with friends who don't like talking about things,” Moon offered, thinking of Lillie. “So the question's out there, and I'd like to know— but I've also learned that I don't get to have what I like all the time, so you don't have to talk about it if you don't want to.”

He shrugged. “I grew up homeschooled, sheltered, and very wealthy. My dad fucked off when I was twelve, I don't know where he is and I don't really care. When I was nearly sixteen I met Null for the first time, and eventually we ran away from home together. We've been getting by on odd jobs and Battle Royal money ever since.”
Moon studied him. “That tells me like, nothing. Did you have friends?”

Another shrug. “Two, if you don’t count my team. We mostly communicate through email or texts these days.” He shifted, mumbling something that Moon couldn’t quite hear.

“What was that?”

“And you, but I don't know what the fuck you are,” he repeated, a dull flush rising over his face.

“We're definitely friends,” insisted Moon.

Gladion turned away, staring resolutely out at the ocean; the flush was growing deeper. “Friends who send each other selfies, at least one of which finds the other attractive?”

And he'd hit the nail on the head. Moon pressed her hands to her Cherrim-red face, trying to think of what exactly she ought to say to that.

“Wiiiim!”

Moon looked up, surprised; then she shrieked, leaping to her feet in an extremely undignified manner as a small gray Bug-type Pokémon raced toward her. “Oh, hell no! I do not like Bugs, get the fuck away—”

“Haha, see?” The preteen boys were running toward her, grinning at the Bug. “Quit running, wimp! She's not gonna protect you!”

Moon paused, at that. The Bug had stopped behind her, quivering with—fear, she realized. One of the boys was holding a stick.

“What— are you doing?” she said slowly, staring at the boys. “This isn't your Pokémon, is it?”

“Nah,” snickered the boy with the stick. “Like we'd ever use a fucking Wimpod. They're gross. We're just playing with this one.”

The other boy laughed, eyeing the Bug. It let out a high-pitched mewl, shrinking further away.

Moon swallowed her distaste for the Pokémon. “Are you hitting it?”

“Who cares if we are?”

“Even if I don't like Bug Pokémon—and trust me, I fucking don’t—I don’t go around hitting them with sticks.” She took a step toward the boys, fists clenched. “What are your names?”

“None of your business, lady. Now hand over the bug, we weren't done with it.”

“I think the fuck not.”

“It's not yours,” said the boy without the stick, attempting to walk around their blanket.

“Don't fucking try it, kid,” said Gladion quietly.

“Kana tou,” said Ariel loudly, landing with a puff of dust in front of Moon. Null appeared next to Gladion, remaining silent but glaring at the boys with glowing green eyes, shining from within her helmet.

“You know who used to hit Pokémon, back in the day?” She was trying so, so hard to stop herself
from punching them. They couldn't have been older than twelve or thirteen, arrogant little sods without a worry in the world— they didn't know. “Team Rocket. They carried whips. They hurt Pokémon, and people, and they enjoyed it because they were violent, fucked up, sadistic monsters. You know where they're all at now? They're in jail.”

The boy without a stick took a small step backwards, eyeing Null nervously.

“Get out of here,” said Moon, her voice shaking. “Go home, and think about that. Think about how fucked up the people who like hurting Pokémon actually are.”

There was a long silence. Ariel cleared her throat, to draw everyone's attention; her beak began to glow red.

“Oh shit that's Beak Blast we're going bye!”

Both of the boys sprinted away, leaving the beach entirely. Ariel's beak stopped glowing, and she laughed a triumphantly ugly laugh— “caw haw haw!”

Moon turned around, crouching in front of the Bug Pokémon. “There you go,” she said, cringing when it wiggled two long antennae at her. “Ugh— gross, stop that. You're safe. You can go home now.”

The Bug didn't move, staring up at her with round yellow eyes. Disturbingly, Moon thought she could see adoration in them.

“I think it might want to go with you,” remarked Gladion. He sounded amused.

“I'm glad you think this is funny, but I actually have a fucking phobia. I really, really don't like Bugs. They creep me out.”

“But you still defended it from those little assholes.”

“Yeah, because hitting Pokémon is wrong. It doesn't matter how I feel about the Pokémon— you don't hit them, ever.”

“Wiiiim,” said the Bug softly. “Wim wiiim.”

It shuffled slightly closer, on tiny gray legs. Moon counted four of them, though there might have been more— you never knew where Bugs were hiding their legs. The Bug wasn't totally gray; its face, antennae, and tail were purple, as well as some triangular markings on its back. It blinked once at her; Moon noticed that one of its eyes was bruised.

“Oh god, stop looking at me like that, like I hung the moon or something. Anyone else would do the same thing, I'm not special.”

Gladion coughed, but it sounded suspiciously like he was saying “bullshit” under his breath.

“Wiiiim,” repeated the bug.

Moon sighed. She reached for her belt and picked up Puck's and Ben's balls with one hand. “Rotom, what exactly is this little thing? Those boys called it a wimp or something, right?”

“That's a Wimpod, bzzt,” Rotom informed her. “They're Water- and Bug-type Pokémon. They are known cowards, hence the name. They scavenge for food and shiny objects along Alola's rockier beaches.”
Moon studied the Wimpod for a few moments, then turned to the side and released Puck and Ben.

“Guys,” she said, drawing their attention. “Er— this is Wimpod. Well, you heard what was happening. A couple of jerks were giving it a hard time, I rescued it, and it, um. It seems to want to come with me. With us.”

Puck made a disgusted noise, hopping backwards.

“We talked about picking up another teammate soon,” Moon reminded them. They'd discussed it the night before, and all of them had heard about the idea at length while she had been training for Kiawe's trial. “It's a little different than what I was thinking of, but... well, I don't want to just leave it here.”

Ben stepped daintily forward, staring at the Wimpod. It blinked back at him with yellow eyes, trembling as he approached.

“Play nice,” Moon warned him. “No scratching, no biting, no growling. It's already terrified, you don't need to try and intimidate it.”

Ben offered her a withering look before turning back to the Wimpod, carefully sniffing. He lifted one paw, raising it—

“Ben—”

—and gently setting it down on the Wimpod's shaking back, brushing it back and forth in a soothing motion.

“Holy shit,” muttered Moon, fascinated. She could hear Gladion laughing behind her, but she ignored him. “You're voluntarily touching another Pokémon. Without trying to murder it.”

“Vee veeon,” Ben informed her.

“What?”

“Vee veeon,” he repeated, rolling his eyes.

“You're shitting me. You think it's cute?”

“Tou tou kana trrrm,” said Ariel, hopping closer to examine the Wimpod. It flinched back from her, wide-eyed.

“Hey, it's okay. She helped chase them off, remember?” Moon grimacing, tentatively reached toward the Wimpod and patted it. It had a cool, hard shell, which she supposed was better than fuzz or, Arceus forbid, slime.

“Wiiiiii,” murmured the Wimpod, its voice rising in pitch as its eyes closed under her touch. “Wiiiiii.”


Puck waddled forward, glaring at the Wimpod. It blinked fearfully at him, scooting closer to Moon and Ben—who was still petting it. “Dar hoo ho.”

“Ar— um.” She remembered just in time that Null was still present, watching silently. “Puck, buddy, you can't just say things like that. It's right there. How would you feel if someone told you that you would be too difficult to eat?”
“From Dartrix, that's probably a compliment,” suggested Gladion. He was still laughing. Moon resisted the urge to turn around and catch him smiling; she didn't want to spook the still-terrified Wimpod. “They usually eat Bugs— as do Toucannon. If Dartrix is saying that the Wimpod is too difficult to eat, he might mean that he thinks it's tough, or even brave.”

The Wimpod's eyes widened, at this. Puck rolled his eyes, but he let the statement stand— which was enough for Moon.

“Okay, then.” She sighed, reaching for her backpack. “I think I've got a Quick Ball in here somewhere— that's probably the best thing. You might freak out if I throw something that doesn't take. Do you really want to come with me?”

The Wimpod reached out with its purple antennae; brushing along Moon's arm; she shuddered, but didn't jerk away. “Wiiiiim,” it squeaked.

“All right, then. Ben, back up.” Moon opened the Quick Ball and dropped it on the Wimpod. It engulfed the Bug in a flash of light. The ball vibrated intensely, but it only did so once before the capture took.

“Oooh, a critical capture, bzzt. It— excuse me, she must really have wanted to come with you.”

“It's a girl?”

“Tou kana!” shrieked Ariel, hopping up and down.

“Sure is! What would you like to name her, bzzt?”

Moon considered for a few moments. The Wimpod was a Bug. Moon hated Bugs on principle. The Wimpod had a shell and antennae and gross little wiggly bits around her mouth; she was, in every aspect, a Bug and Moon did not like her.

But she was also tiny and scared and helpless. Puck seemed to tentatively approve of her; Ariel had been interested but now seemed downright ecstatic at the prospect of another girl on the team; and Ben, for some reason, was completely taken with the horrid little thing.

“If she's on our team, we're going to help her,” she said, addressing Puck and Ariel and Ben.

They all nodded— Ariel and Ben eagerly, Puck reluctantly.

“We're going to show her that she doesn't have to be afraid anymore.”

“Good luck with that, Wimpod are biologically designed to be cowards,” pointed out Gladion; there was laughter in his voice.

“Shush, I'm naming my Bug.”

“It doesn't sound like it.”

“It's a process. I repeat, shush.” She flapped one hand at him, dismissive, and returned to her teammates. “We're going to train her into a strong fighter and a powerful Pokémon. We're going to make her into a bad-ass lady.”

“Veeon vee,” said Ben emphatically.

“A cool, scary badass lady. Damn straight, kid. And a cool, scary badass lady on our team needs to be named after a cool, scary badass lady from the works of William Shakespeare, in keeping with the
“You're insane,” Gladion informed her, still laughing.

“Yeah, probably. Rotom, this Wimpod's name is Lady Macbeth. Give me her stats.”

“Hmmm— she's around level nineteen, so she has some catching up to do with the rest of your team, bzzt. She knows two moves, Struggle Bug and Sand-Attack. Her ability is Wimp Out, which— oh, that's unfortunate. She'll automatically retreat from battle when she takes enough damage.”

“Could be worse. Anything else?”

“Her nature,” said Rotom simply. “She has a Brave nature, bzzt.”

Moon ignored Gladion, who was by now laughing wildly, lying down on the quilt and rolling from side to side. “All right,” she said, after some consideration. “Heavily ironic, considering the biology; but I'll take it.” She picked up the Quick Ball, noticing how it cooled immediately in her hand— the sign of a calm, content, or sleeping Pokémon— and pressed the button to release Lady Macbeth, who blinked up at her with adoring eyes.

“Wiiiim,” she said, crawling onto Moon's lap. Moon tensed, then forced herself to relax. “Wiiiim pod pod.”

“You're not gross, you're not gross, you're not gross,” Moon chanted under her breath. She cleared her throat. “Hey, Lady Macbeth— okay, I'm just going to call you Macbeth. You're a girl, the Lady is implied. I'll read you the play sometime, okay? It's about a dumb general who wants to rule his country, so he kills the old king and sets himself up as the new king. Your namesake is his wife, who is like twice as evil as he is but also twice as batshit crazy. She starts hearing voices and seeing things at the end, and she eventually kills herself...” Moon paused, as Macbeth's eyes grew wide. “Okay, maybe I didn't think this namesake through. Don't go crazy and start killing people. But even though she's crazy and evil, the original Lady Macbeth is a badass, and she didn't let anyone scare her. You're gonna be a badass, too. Just you wait.”

She began petting Macbeth's carapace. It probably didn't make much of a difference in terms of comfort, but Macbeth made soft, squirmy cooing noises that seemed to express her content.

“I wouldn't call anyone a Lady Macbeth as a compliment, given that the woman is crazy,” said Gladion, after a few moments of silence. Puck had wandered off to look at the water, and both Ariel and Ben were watching Macbeth with fond expressions in their eyes. Moon had never seen Ben look so enamored of anything in his life— it was frankly disturbing. Gladion had let out Rey and Imp at some point, when Moon was occupied with Macbeth; Rey followed Puck over to the water and Imp began his usual practice of dive-bombing Gladion, who dodged each one with lazy movements of his head. Null settled down on the quilt, on Gladion's far side.

“She was written as a remarkably empowered female character of her day and age. All those old countries near Kalos were chauvinistic as hell.”

“But badass is definitely a compliment.” He looked directly at Moon, tilting his head to one side as Imp rushed past and running his fingers through Null's feathery ruff. “And after what I witnessed you do today, I think it's safe to say that you're a badass.”

Moon grinned at him, trying to force her heart back into its usual beating pattern— she didn't need any of this fluttery nonsense, it wasn't healthy. “Why, thank you. I do try.”

“And like your Macbeth, I think you must be very brave.” His voice grew softer, as he looked down
at Null. “It takes a lot of courage to embrace something you're afraid of.”

Moon watched him for a few moments, watched his hands as they moved ceaselessly through Null's feathers. It was not until they stilled that she looked up, to find him watching her as intently as she had been watching him.

“Um,” she said quickly, realizing she hadn't responded to him. “It helps that she's not hairy or slimy or even really that creepy. She's got a hard shell. I can get used to that. And she's so timid that it's kind of hard to be afraid of her to begin with. I'm not really scared, I'm just kind of... I dunno, disgusted? Not anymore,” she added hastily, though Macbeth blinked calmly up at her, seemingly unoffended by the remark. “She's okay.”

“I know a guy who trained a Wimpod for a while,” said Gladion. “Serious training, too. He's a good Trainer.”

“What happened to the Wimpod?”

“It evolved.” Gladion sighed and got to his feet. “The sun's getting close to setting. I probably have to get going.”

Moon gathered Macbeth up in her arms before remembering that Macbeth was a Bug, and felt a soft, squishy underside under her hand. She grimaced, tucking the Wimpod between her left arm and her chest, and stood up so that Gladion could fold up the blanket.

“Team Lunarbean, come on back,” she called— mostly addressing Puck.

“Lunarbean?”

“I met some dude the other day who's helping me start a business, I think. I'm gonna sell beans. I have to fly out and visit him soon— which is annoying, because I like heights about as much as I like Bug-types.”

“Not at all, but you'll make exceptions for the important things?”

Moon raised one eyebrow. “Yeah, that sounds about right.” She stuck her hand out for Gladion to shake. “Other than my vanity and nearly punching a couple of brats in the face, this was pretty fun. We should do it again sometime.”

“You have training to do,” said Gladion, and Moon's heart warmed. *Priorities.* “So do I. But maybe we can find the time.”

“You make time for your friends.”

He huffed out a laugh— still no smile. Moon was sort of mad she'd missed it. “So you do.”

They shook hands. Gladion's hand was warm in hers— fingers long, slender, and graceful. She'd first noticed them when he had held her back from fighting with Uilani; but he was deliberate with each Pokémon in battle, and he touched Null with love and strength, tenderness and restraint.

*Gross,* Moon told herself. *Stop it.*

She looked at him, flushing under his oddly knowing gaze, and let go of his hand. “See you around.”

“Until next time.”

Back at the Pokémon Center, Lillie eyed her with amusement as Moon flopped down onto her bed,
face-first so she could screech into her pillow. “How did it go?”

Moon reached for her belt, pulled out Macbeth's ball, and released her without looking up. Macbeth made a series of chittering, squeaky sounds and climbed onto Moon's back.

“Huh,” said Lillie, after a few moments. “That's a Wimpod, isn't it?”

“Yep.”

“They're Bug-types.”

“Yep.”

“Hau is going to laugh himself silly at you.”

Moon sighed. “Yep.”

Chapter End Notes

“You seem far too excited to arrive at a building that's identical to about twelve or thirteen others in the region— furthermore, a building at which you've already spent quite a bit of time.” — Gladion has no chill lmao

I have always wanted to call someone a “half-baked idea” in real life. I don't know, it's just funny and it could be really insulting if you used it on the right person

“It wasn't a date.” — denial isn't just a river in Egypt, Moon

I wanted to use the “Get out.” easter egg, but I've developed Gladion a bit differently, so it wouldn't have played out in quite the same way. Did you enjoy my take on it?

“Moon arranged her face into a carefully neutral expression, to hide the fact that she was screaming internally.” — if that ain't a MOOD

Don't mention it. Ever.” — this is also a mood. Gladion's SO much smoother over text lmao

Gladion is such a good Trainer, he's so good with Null, I am Up In My Feelings and I am never coming down

AND THAT'S ONE REASON WHY BEN IS DIFFICULT. I've been planning that reveal for ages and I'm finally relieved. The other reason is because he is, genuinely, a little shit.

“Attagirl” — MY HEART

Moon: This is not a date.
Gladion: *brings a blanket to sit on and snacks in Moon's favorite flavor*
Moon: Oh fuck, this is a date
Also Moon: This is not a date.
Gladion: *exchanges general life stories and discusses some minor philosophy and worldview things with Moon*
Moon: Oh fuck, this is a date

Gladion wasn't going to be “cute asshole Trainer” forever, even if that would have been HILARIOUS to include in some far-into-the-future-beyond-the-post-game fic involving wedding vows or something like that. He's also not going to be “fucking softie” forever — that happened because it is justifiably hilarious.

You have three guesses as to who Gladion's two friends are, and the first two don't count.

More non-Team Skull villains! It's just a couple of dumb kids, but kids can be really cruel.

Moon's Bug-type phobia has led entirely up to this point. I did say that I had her entire team planned from the beginning; Wimpod (eventually Golisopod) was always going to be part of it— in fact, I'd decided on Decidueye and Golisopod before any of the other team members. I knew I wanted an Eeveelution, but I decided on what Ben would evolve into last. It's still a little ways away, but he will evolve before the end of Sakura.

And please give a warm welcome to (LADY) MACBETH THE WIMPOD!!!!! I have such plans for her, I love her so much, Wimpod are really really cute and Macbeth is gonna be so cool omg. Macbeth in my game file really does have a Brave nature. I laughed myself silly when I saw it. I know it's a detrimental nature because Golisopod relies on both attack AND speed, but the irony was too good for me to soft reset.

“All those old countries near Kalos were chauvinistic as hell.” —it took me ages to figure out how to reference Britain, which is currently unrepresented in the canonical Pokémon universe, without making up a name for a Britain-like region (in case we get one in the future, please Game Freak if you love me). Also: the Scottish play doesn't have a pun name, because it doesn't really work with one. None of the histories, or any of the plays that are just titled with someone's name, do either.

Canonically, Gladion is rough around the edges, but he cares deeply about his Pokémon — Silvally, Crobat, and Lucario all evolve through high friendship!!!! I wanted to show that warm, affectionate side of Gladion in this chapter. I hope you didn't melt into a puddle of goo like I did.
Soup

Chapter Summary

Route Eight, Lush Jungle.

Chapter Notes

Moon takes on her fourth trial.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Let's give you Protect,” Moon decided, pulling the TM out of her case.

“Wiiiim.”

“Yeah, I thought you would like that. Nice, safe move. And I picked up Toxic the other day— how does that sound? You were spitting something at that Rattata the other day, might as well try to weaponize it.”

“Wiiiim,” repeated Macbeth, wiggling her antennae. Moon cringed— internally. She was getting better at hiding how generally grossed out she was by Macbeth.

“Eeon vee,” said Ben, staring daggers at her. Moon hastily applied Protect and Toxic to Macbeth's Quick Ball, waiting for Rotom to confirm that she'd learned the moves. Puck, Ariel, and Ben could all tell that Moon wasn't quite as fond of Macbeth as she was of the rest of them, and they had been working hard to make her feel guilty about it. It was probably a good thing— because it made her try harder with Macbeth, feeding her beans and petting her cool, smooth shell until Macbeth's squeaks turned into purring or, occasionally, snores.

And Macbeth wasn't so bad. Sure, she had weird wiggly bits around her mouth that moved when she was chewing on beans, and she liked to reach out and touch Moon's hands and arms with her antennae, making the hair stand on end; but she was very sweet, in a creepy way.

“Ariel's all ready to go,” she decided, nodding at the Toucannon, who lifted her head proudly in response. “And so's Puck. Ben... I wanted to try Hidden Power on you.”

Ben shrugged. Moon applied the TM to his ball.

“It looks like his Hidden Power is an Ice-type move, bzzt.”

“Oh, hell yeah. That's perfect.” Moon beamed at Ben, who merely sighed in response, waving his fluffy tail from side to side. “I think we're ready. Let's go— actually, all of you sit on the bed with me, I want to take a picture.”

She had Rotom snap a few pictures of all five of them, and she wasn't really satisfied with the angle on any of them but it was the only way to get all of them in the shot. She emailed the picture to Red, Blue, and Daisy and to her parents; then she sent it to the group chat with Hau and Lillie and then to
Gladion, as well.

The responses flew back as she packed up her team, walking back downstairs. Lillie waved as Moon passed—lingering over a late breakfast with her team. Hau was already on Route Eight, training; they'd already played fire-water-grass to see who would challenge Mallow first and Moon had won.

Chat: **IKI SQUAD**

**shakespeare jr**: Picture Attachment: [pretrialsselfie.jpeg]

**walking malasada**: YEAH MOON GET IT

**lillie-pad**: Good luck with your trial! (^u^)

**shakespeare jr**: WE GON GET IT

**walking malasada**: YEAH GET IT

**shakespeare jr**: WE GON GET IT

**walking malasada**: YEAH GET IT

**lillie-pad**: I never have any idea what either of you are talking about, but I'm glad you're both excited. (^u^)

Chat: **fair household in verona**

**shakespeare jr**: Picture Attachment: [pretrialsselfie.jpeg]

**bringin home the francis bacon**: Wow, your team is growing well! Have fun at the trial. I hope I'll get to see you drop by the Power Plant in a few months!

**marlowe mum**: We love you! Work hard with your Pokémon and visit whenever you want!

**shakespeare jr**: I'll try! Love you both!

To: marionhawkins@pmail.co.alo

From: garyo@pmail.co.kan

CC: satoshired@pmail.co.kan, daisyoak@celadon.edu
RE: Re: yoooo what up starting my fourth trial today

WOW I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE THE DAY WHEN YOU WILLINGLY CUDDLED UP TO A BUG-TYPE LOLOLOLOLOLOLOLOLOLOLOLOLOLOL

Haha, just kidding, love you. That Eevee's looking good, too— have you decided how to evolve it yet? Give 'em hell and write back soon!

Blue (and Red, he's reading over my shoulder)

To: marionhawkins@pmail.co.alo
From: daisyoak@celadon.edu
RE: Re: yoooo what up starting my fourth trial today

Hey, Moon! Cute picture. Trials are kind of like a gym challenge, right? You've gotten so tall and pretty— I bet guys are falling all over each other to talk to you, haha! I know you'll do great on your journey. Keep us posted!

Daisy

Chat: hypothetically

shakespeare jr: Picture Attachment: [pretrialselfie.jpeg]

shakespeare jr: I'm gonna try Mallow's trial today, wish me luck haha

fucking softie: You don't need luck if you actually have talent. You'll do just fine.

shakespeare jr: Picture Attachment: [screenshotofthischat.jpeg]

shakespeare jr: Angry misanthropic loner where, all I see is a S O F T I E

fucking softie: Wow, I see how it is.
Moon spotted Mallow waiting at the entrance to Lush Jungle, talking on a phone or a Dex at about a hundred miles a minute.

“Yeah, I'm sure they're coming today, they've both been training hard for about a week now, it's got to be today or tomorrow—” She caught sight of Moon. “Speak of the devil! Moon is literally walking up to me right now. Wake up Ki for me, I need him to start the fire, so you can get the bonewater boiling while we're in the search stages. No, Lana, you don't have to chop any onions. I know you hate chopping veggies, I did all of that last night. They’re in the mini-fridge with the tofu, so— wake! Up!”

This last line was shouted into the phone, and then Mallow hung up, turning to grin at Moon. “Hi!” she said enthusiastically. “It's been a while, hasn't it, Moon? You must be here to challenge me today!”

“Yep. You're not busy, right? You sounded kind of busy.”

“Oh, no! We're making soup today.” Mallow beamed. “Or, I should say, you're making soup.” She put an arm around Moon, leading her through the trial gate and the bamboo tunnel that led into Lush Jungle. “That's the trial— you have to collect ingredients for the soup, which will attract the attention of one of the Totem Pokémon.”

“Am I making it in the Totem's Den?”

“Yeah. Lana and Kiawe are already there— I like them to help me with the trial. They can't always make it, because they've got their own trials to run; but when they can manage to come, the soup is tastier. We're making a really good one today— minestrone with a Rare Bone broth. Kiawe is kindly providing the bone and helping with the fire, and Lana’s brought pure water and Kelpsy berries from Brooklet Hill.”

Lush Jungle was exactly that— lush, thick with trees, bushes, and grass. The cries of the Pokémon were loud and close, echoing strangely through the vegetation.

Mallow stopped in a fairly large clearing, clapping her hands together. “Right!” she said brightly. “Do you know what minestrone is?”

“It's like a vegetable soup, right?”

“Right! You can have meat in it, of course; but it's usually based on vegetables— specifically Tamato berries.”
“Aren’t Tamato berries a kind of fruit—”

“Shhh, that is blasphemy,” said Mallow solemnly, putting her hand over Moon’s mouth. “Knowledge is knowing that Tamato berries are a fruit. Wisdom is not putting them in a fruit salad. Tamato berries are a botanical fruit, but a culinary vegetable. I am a chef, so they are vegetables. Understand?”

“Perfectly,” said Moon, struggling not to laugh.

“Good. Anyway, minestrone broth is usually based on Tamato berries, but I have a family recipe that uses not only Tamato berries but a Rare Bone. It’s hard to find Rare Bones, as you might guess by the name— usually you only find them when a Marowak or a Cubone passes away. Kiawe collects and saves them for me, so don’t worry— we certainly haven’t gone around hunting Pokémon!”

“Bones in soup sounds kind of weird.”

“Oh, we take the actual bone out before we serve it. But bone marrow makes a really, really good flavoring and it compliments the Tamato berries nicely. I’ve also chopped up a whole bunch of vegetables— garlic, onions, Kelpsy berries—”

“Botanical fruit, culinary vegetable?” said Moon dryly.

“See, you’re catching on! There’s also celery, cabbage, peas, carrots, potatoes, Cornn berries, and a special variety of red Pokébeans— they’re cross-bred with Haban berries so they’re pretty hot. I also add tofu for more protein, along with the bone marrow. And there’s some Haban berry sauce in the soup itself as well.”

“Sounds tasty.”

“It sure does! But there are a few missing ingredients, which are best gathered fresh.” Mallow handed Moon a small burlap bag and held up one finger. “First, I want two Balm Mushrooms. They’re pretty rare, but I know a good spot where you can find them in this forest. They’ll really bring out the flavor of the bone marrow.”

Moon nodded. “Two Balm Mushrooms, got it.”

Mallow put up a second finger. “I also want a Big Root. Those are pretty easy to find; there’s a lot of different varieties. I’d really prefer a parsnip or turnip root, but I will also accept radish or beet. You can find all of them here.”

“A Big Root, check.”

“And lastly,” said Mallow, putting up three fingers, “I want fresh Haban berries, for that sauce I was talking about. There’s a bush growing pretty close to the Totem’s Den, so we’ll head there last.”

Moon blinked. “We?”

“Of course! Did you think I was going to make you go foraging all by yourself?”

“Kind of, yeah.”

“I would never,” said Mallow seriously. “Mostly because you have no idea what you’re supposed to be looking for, but also because I’m a very nice trial captain who wants to watch you succeed. I have a feeling that your soup is going to be one of the tastiest ones that’s come out of this trial in quite some time. Are you ready to start?”
“Yeah, I think so.”

“Then let's go!”

Mallow first led Moon to a part of the jungle that featured a lot of short, squat trees and bulbous plants. “We'll find a Big Root here,” she whispered. “But quite a few of those trees are actually sleeping Sudowoodo, so you should try not to disturb them.” She passed a small knife to Moon. “A parsnip or turnip root will be white or kind of cream-colored, with green leaves sticking out at the top. Look for one with small leaves; it will have bigger roots. Cut off a piece that's about as large as your hand, then put the rest of the root back in the ground so it will keep growing.”

Moon took the knife and ventured out among the short trees, looking for white or cream-colored vegetables with small green leaves. She had to go quite a ways into the field to find one that looked good, but when she managed to unearth it from the ground, it was larger than her head, with a lot of fat, knotty sections that grew below the ground. Moon held it up, looking at Mallow questioningly.

Mallow gave her two thumbs-up, eyes wide as she nodded emphatically.

Moon grinned and got to work, cutting two pieces off the root before putting the rest of it back into the hole where it had been. She tucked the two pieces into the bag and tiptoed back to Mallow, who snatched the bag, peering inside.

“Oooh, those are some really nice parsnip roots!” she whispered, passing it back to Moon. “A lot of Trainers don't go as far out into the field as you did. You would make a good cook.”

“I doubt it,” snorted Moon, thinking of her diet that was mostly cup ramen and café sandwiches. “But I'm flattered you think so.” She briefly wondered if Gladion liked cooking. She would have to ask him.

“Okay, now we're going to go look for Balm Mushrooms!” Mallow grinned. “This is the part of the trial where I would register Stoutland for you, but I've already done that. Have you been putting the Ride Pager to good use?”

“I think so. It was really helpful at the beginning, when I was still buying a ton of beans for my team. They get really expensive after a while, beans.”

“Yeah, they do,” agreed Mallow. “Beans aren't really part of most Pokémon's natural diets, but they've been cross-bred and enhanced so that every Pokémon can eat them, except for the few that are strictly carnivorous. They get pricey, to encourage Trainers to get Pokémon to return to their natural diets. I bet some of your Pokémon do their own hunting or foraging at this point, right?”

“Yeah, my Dartrix has been hunting for his food since before we got to Paniola Town, and my Toucannon started doing the same as a Trumbeak around Route Six.”

“Exactly! Who are your other teammates, again?”

“I have an Eevee and a Wimpod at the moment.”

“Right, yeah. Eevee can eat just about anything vegetarian, but they really like fresh berries—you can try a few kinds and see what yours likes. Berries are more expensive than beans though, so unless you've got somewhere to grow them it's not usually a viable option.” Moon thought of Poké Pelago, and the arable farmland that Arby had mentioned. “And Wimpod are true foragers—they can and will eat just about anything. Some of them will even eat trash, like Muk and Grimer.”

“That's kind of gross.”
“Gross, but environmentally friendly,” Mallow reminded her. “Though if you ever want to give your Wimpod a treat, you can either pick up some live Tympole at the Thrifty Megamart, or you can get ahold of some Tynamo— though you want to make sure those are frozen. The live ones can hurt Wimpod, but they really like Tympole and Tynamo.”

“I’ll keep it in mind,” said Moon. “Rotom, make a note for me?”

“Adding memo, bzzt.”

“Nice,” remarked Mallow, grinning as Rotom returned to Moon's pocket. “Sometimes I wish I had a hands-free Dex— as a chef, that could be really useful. All right, Moon— call up your Stoutland.”

With Stoutland’s help, it was quite easy to find the Balm Mushrooms— in fact, Moon was fairly certain that she would have been able to find them without Stoutland. Balm Mushrooms had a strong smell. Moon wrinkled her nose as she pried them up from the ground and dropped them in the bag.

“They taste way better than they smell,” Mallow assured her. “And the smell mellows out when it’s combined with the broth, too. Now we’ve just got the Haban berries— and you'll want to put Stoutland away, because they have sensitive noses and Haban berries are spicy.”

As they walked deeper into the jungle, Moon could hear nearby rustling, growing closer and closer. “What's that?” she asked Mallow, looking around.

Mallow smiled. “Well... the Sudowoodo consider the Big Roots to be theirs. And Morelull are known to be quite protective of Balm Mushrooms. They might come to challenge you for the ingredients.”

Moon grinned back. “Ah, there's the twist I was looking for. I thought gathering ingredients was deceptively simple. What's guarding the Haban berries?”

“Bounsweet, or possibly even Steenee. They get possessive over berry bushes.”

“Of course they do.”

Mallow had Moon fill the rest of the bag with Haban berries, until her fingers were stained and her eyes were beginning to water at the spicy smell. Then they walked even further into the jungle, with rustling Pokémon following, until they reached a small clearing.

Lana and Kiawe sat on a log. There was a fire burning merrily in the middle of the clearing, with a huge pot of bubbling water sitting over it on a metal rack. Moon was also surprised to see a small electric generator, powering a mini-fridge that sat beneath an ordinary-looking kitchen table.

“Hello, Moon,” said Lana. She yawned, rubbing her eyes. “It's early, isn't it?”

“It's not early, you're just a night owl.”

“It's still too early for soup,” mumbled Kiawe.

“You're both being spoilsports.” Mallow strode over to the pot. “We've got water and the Rare Bone. Thanks, Ki.”

“You're welcome. Can I go now?”

“No, you may not. You're staying to see Moon finish her trial, and you'll stay for Hau's trial as well,” said Mallow sternly.
She went to the fridge and withdrew several large plastic zip-bags full of chopped vegetables, as well as a pitcher of something that seemed to be thick and red. The contents of the pitcher went straight into the bubbling pot—the cold slowing the boiling for a few moments as Mallow stirred with a long wooden spoon. “That's the Tamato broth,” she explained. “It just needs to set in with the Rare Bone for a little while. Moon, bring your ingredients over here and separate them on the table. Use that knife I gave you to start chopping up the Big Roots.”

Moon did as she asked. Mallow roped Lana and Kiawe into helping as well. Kiawe was on stirring duty, blinking away tears as smoke from the fire followed him around the soup; but he moved the long spoon in a gentle, continuous motion. Mallow and Lana took turns pouring the contents of the plastic zip bags into the pot. Carrots and potatoes were first, as they would take the longest to cook; then celery.

“Sudo.”

A polite hand tugged on Moon's shorts. She looked down to see a Sudowoodo, frowning up at her.

“Are you challenging me for the parsnip roots?” she asked it. Mallow, Lana, and Kiawe had all stopped what they were doing to watch her.

The Sudowoodo nodded.

“Cool. Let me get out my Pokémon.” Moon debated internally for a few moments, but she had been training hard with all of her team and even if she didn't do perfectly, it would be a good opportunity for Macbeth to get used to performing in important battles. She sent out the Wimpod.

“Wiiiim,” said Macbeth, scooting away from the Sudowoodo.

“Hey, stop that. He's literally a walking shrub. You can take him, easy. Come on, use Struggle Bug.”

Macbeth was still scared, but she peeked out from behind Moon's leg before scuttling forward to attack. Both she and Moon were surprised at the amount of damage it did— Moon raising an eyebrow in impressed approval.

The Sudowoodo reached out, smacking at Macbeth. She squeaked in dismay and climbed Moon's leg, promptly disappearing into her ball.

“Ah, that's Wimp Out for you,” chuckled Lana.

Moon sighed and brought out Puck, who knocked out the Sudowoodo with a lazy Razor Leaf.

“All right, you're good to go with the Big Roots. I'll add them to the pot.” Mallow swept Moon's pile of chopped roots into an empty plastic zip-bag and dumped them into the soup.

The change was immediate—a warm, homely smell rose from the pot. Moon blinked, surprised, as it filled the clearing.

“Oh, that's nice,” said Kiawe. “You picked a really good root, Moon.”

“It was bigger than her head,” bragged Mallow, grinning. “I knew it would make good soup. Okay, Moon—you can start chopping up the Balm Mushrooms while we add more ingredients.”

The garlic, onions, rice, peas, and Cornn berries went into the pot as Moon cut the Balm Mushrooms into slivers. This time she was keeping an eye out for approaching Pokémon, however; so she wasn't surprised to see a small pink-and-lavender mushroom bouncing toward her.
“Lull, lull!” it called.

“You must be Morelull,” said Moon.

“Grass- and Fairy-type,” Rotom informed her.

“Oh wow, really? Cute.” She grinned at the Morelull, who seemed taken aback by the compliment. “Give me just a sec.”

She sent Macbeth out again, and immediately sprayed her with a Super Potion to negate the damage done by the Sudowoodo. Macbeth blinked at the Morelull, but she seemed a bit less intimidated than she had been by the Sudowoodo.

“Lull,” said the Morelull, sending a short Vine Whip out to smack at Macbeth.

Macbeth took the hit, flinching back; but then she took a deep breath, seeming to steady herself.

“That's good,” Moon encouraged her. “Stand your ground. Hit it with Struggle Bug.”

“Wiiiim.” Macbeth took another deep breath and attacked. The Morelull fainted in one hit— had it been super-effective? Bug would have done well against Grass, but she was fairly sure that Fairy resisted Bug. Or perhaps Macbeth was just that strong...

“You're really cool,” Moon informed Macbeth.

Macbeth blinked at her for a few moments; then closed her eyes, covering them with her antennae. “Wim wim,” she squeaked, even higher-pitched than usual.

“Don't be embarrassed! I mean it.” Moon crouched down to pet her. “You might be the new kid in town, but you're doing great. Own it.”

She sprayed Macbeth with another Super Potion before recalling her— it was a bit overkill, but she wanted to be sure Macbeth felt safe when she was battling. The poor girl was practically scared of her own shadow; Moon would do what she could to fix that.

“Now for the Haban berries,” said Mallow, setting a very large stone mortar and a pestle as long as Moon's forearm on the table. “Dump them in, smash them up, let's go.”

“You're taking out the seeds, right?”

“We'll strain out the seeds and the skin before we mix up the rest of the sauce.”

Lana dumped a bag of what had to be Kelpsberries into the soup, along with Moon's chopped Balm Mushrooms. Mallow got out another bowl and a sieve, as well as a slim white carton and a bottle of clear liquid; and Moon ground the Haban berries to a pulp. It was hot, smelly, spicy work, and her eyes were beginning to water ferociously. She didn't dare wipe them— there were horror stories on the Internet about wiping your eyes when you had Haban berry juice on your hands.

The tears meant that she didn't see the Steenee until it began kicking her ankle. “Stee nee!” it shouted, clearly very cross at seeing the smashed berries.

“Oh, you got the hot-tempered one,” laughed Mallow. “Fitting, since we're going extra spicy today. Hold on, little one— let Moon wash her hands and face, so she can give you a fair fight.”

“Where?”
Mallow directed her toward a pond at the edge of the clearing; there was a basin of water right next to it, with a wet bar of soap inside. Moon washed her hands very, very thoroughly, then wiped off her sweaty face and blotted away the tears.

“Rotom, tell me about Steenee,” she said, facing off against the petulant Pokémon.

“It’s the evolution of Bounsweet—a pure Grass-type.”

Moon, accordingly, sent out Macbeth again. Macbeth took one look at the angry Steenee and retreated to the safety of Moon’s legs.

“No, no. She’s mad, but she’s mad at me, not you. You have to defend me, that’s your job.” Moon patted her reassuringly. “She’s a pure Grass-type, so you should be able to take her. Struggle Bug will work, right?”

“Stee stee!” said the Steenee, crossing her arms and pouting. “Stee nee!”

“Oh, quit your bellyaching, you like the soup just as much as the Totems do,” said Mallow, rolling her eyes.

Steenee attacked first, with Magical Leaf. Macbeth squirmed away from the attack, uncomfortable; but it was a Grass-type move and not terribly strong against her so she ventured forward to attack with Struggle Bug. It took two hits this time, but Macbeth was able to defeat the Steenee as well.

“Nice one,” Moon praised Macbeth. “You’re doing such a good job today. You don’t want to take on the Totem for me, do you?”

Macbeth shook her head violently.

“Would you like to see it and then go back to your ball?”

The Wimpod was still for a few moments, but then she offered a timid nod. Moon grinned at her. “Okay. You can stay out until the Totem shows up, and then I’ll recall you. How does that sound?”

“Wiiiim pod pod.”

“Awesome.”

“All right, come help me mix this sauce,” said Mallow. She put the sieve over her own bowl, which contained both heavy whipping cream and a splash of vinegar. Moon picked up the heavy mortar and dumped the smashed Haban berries into the sieve. The liquid went through; the seeds, skins, and pulp of the berries remained in the sieve.

“Pod?” inquired Macbeth, sniffing curiously. Moon remembered what Mallow had said about Wimpod eating nearly everything.

“Um— could she eat the leftover Haban stuff?”

“Of course!” Mallow smiled approvingly. “Just tuck her on the edge of the mortar. She can sit and watch you fight the Totem. Lunch and a show— huh, Wimpod?”

“Wim wiiim,” said Macbeth shyly, as Moon set her down on the mortar.

“Moon, stir this sauce for me while I go check on the rest of the soup.” Mallow handed her a spoon, and Moon stirred. The heavy whipping cream negated a lot of the spiciness of the Haban berries, though it still smelled pleasantly strong. The acidity of the vinegar would enhance the flavor without
increasing the spiciness. There were a few other things in the sauce as well—flour, a bit of canola oil, and a tiny bit of sugar.

Mallow stirred the soup, nodding. “It's nearly ready!” she called. “Bring that bowl over, and we'll add it in!”

Moon brought the bowl over to the pot. The rich scents of Tamato berries, Rare Bone, and Balm Mushrooms rose and she blinked, surprised at how good it smelled in combination.

“Bottoms up!” said Mallow, and Moon poured the sauce into the pot as the trial captain stirred it into the soup. Lana took the empty bowl of sauce back over to the table; Kiawe went with her.

“It'll be a few minutes before the Haban sauce fully mingles with the rest of the soup, but the Totems know their cue,” Mallow assured her.

“What Totem am I fighting?”

“Oh, I have no idea. They never tell me that sort of thing. But I have my suspicions, since you fought that particular Steenee... she's a rambunctious one, but she's also a bit of a crybaby and she tends to want her mama after she's beaten by Trainers. So you'll probably get the Totem that isn't her mama.”

They waited. Lana and Kiawe were talking quietly; Macbeth was happily slurping up Haban berry leftovers, unbothered by the spiciness. Moon wondered if Wimpod even had taste buds—if they were willing to eat trash, they couldn't be too particular about flavor.

“Oh, there's that smell,” said Mallow, inhaling deeply. She pulled a spoon out of her pocket and dipped it into the soup to taste. “Oooh... yep. Yep, this is a good soup.”

“Can I try it?” It did smell really good—spicy, rich, warm. Moon was already hungry—breakfast had been hours ago.

“I think you'd better wait a little bit, actually.” Mallow grinned, her eyes drifting over Moon's shoulder. “The Totem likes to have the first serving, and this guy is definitely hungry.”

Moon turned around and made an extremely undignified squeaking noise that was definitely not a scream, before she put her hand over her mouth to suppress it. Lana and Kiawe were laughing at her, but she didn't really mind that.

A large praying-mantis in striped trousers was walking toward them. It was several feet taller than she was, its head brushing against the leaves of the palm trees.

“Lur luran,” it said gravely, eyeing the soup.

“It does smell nice, doesn't it?” agreed Mallow. “But you know the rules. Battle before eating.”

“What the hell is that?” whispered Moon, staring at the Pokémon as it turned to look at her.

“Lurantis,” supplied Rotom. “A pure Grass-type, and the evolution of Fomantis.” Moon remembered seeing the little mantises on Route Five, which made sense—Route Eight connected back to Route Five. “They're known for their careful grooming and glamorous appearance.”

“I mean— you're not wrong, those pants are fabulous.”

“Luran,” said the Totem, bobbing its head toward her with a pleased expression.

“Oh— you're welcome. It's not a Bug type? It's literally a praying-mantis.”
“Wrong!” said Mallow cheerfully. “Lurantis certainly disguise themselves as praying-mantises, but they're actually closer biological relatives to flowering Pokémon such as Comfey and the Florges family.”

“Huh.” That was kind of cool. And Lurantis was kind of pretty, for something that looked so much like a bug.

“Lur?”

“Right, the battle. Sorry.” Moon glanced at Macbeth, who had stopped eating, staring at Lurantis with wide eyes. “Want to watch, or do you want to come back?”

Macbeth raced toward her and practically dove into her ball.

“That's okay. Ariel, let's go.”

Lurantis held up its arms in a sword-like fashion, and light streamed down from the trees above them. Moon released Ariel, preparing to take the hit.

“Luran!”

The blade of light— there really wasn't much else Moon could call it— slammed into Ariel, knocking her off her feet. The Lurantis's cry also summoned an ally— a familiar looking lizard.

“Oh, hey, a Kecleon. I ran into a few in the Dividing Peak Tunnel.” Moon studied Ariel, who seemed rather shaken by the hit. “Do you want a Super Potion, or do you think we should go on the offensive?”

“Kana.”

“Super Potion it is.” Moon sprayed her teammate. Lurantis began calling light again, but it seemed to be taking much longer this time. Kecleon leaped forward, punching Ariel with a tiny fist. It didn't do a whole lot, but it was still kind of annoying.

“Brick Break on the chameleon, I think— just to get it out of the way.”

“Tou kana.” Ariel dipped her head in a nod and slammed into Kecleon with Brick Break. It fainted immediately.

The blade of light hit Ariel again— harder, this time. Ariel winced, and Moon didn't have to ask before spraying a Super Potion.

Lurantis went for a quick, chopping move— an olive-green flash told Moon that it was X-Scissor. Ariel was largely unaffected by this; but they hadn't actually done any damage to the Totem and it was time to change that.

“All righty,” she said to Ariel. “Let's get down to business. Use Beak Blast.”

Ariel's beak began to glow immediately. Lurantis saw this and began powering up the light blade attack again. Ariel shot high into the air, beak glowing red hot; and dove down to slam into the Lurantis with burning speed. It staggered back, hissing.

“Nice one, Ari!”

“Trrrm tou kana,” said Ariel proudly, puffing up her chest.
The Lurantis, breathing hard, swung its light blade. Ariel took the hit fairly well, though she too was beginning to look tired.

“Let's end this.” Moon performed the Flyinium Z-Dance, grinning when Mallow groaned quietly behind her. Lana and Kiawe both laughed as well. Ariel's Supersonic Skystrike easily defeated the Totem.

“That was awesome. Put it here.” Moon held out her fist toward Ariel, who bumped Moon's fist with her beak.

“Very nice,” said Mallow. “And that's it for the trial. Congratulations, Moon.”

“Thanks.”

Mallow held out her fist, opening it to reveal a bright green crystal. Moon smiled and took it, sliding it into place on her Z-Ring.

“Let me show you the dance for Grassium Z: Bloom Doom.” Mallow performed the dance—ending by sinking into a crouch before springing upwards, hands spread wide as though she were a sprouting flower. “Well, you've done all three trials on Akala Island! All you have left to do is face Kahuna Olivia for the Grand Trial!”

“And the Grand Trial is always a battle, right?”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

“You probably weren't supposed to say that,” said Kiawe delicately.

“Piffle. She would have found out eventually anyway, and it's not like I've told her what the kahunas specialize in—though she might already know about Olivia.”

“Thank you!” said Moon emphatically. “People don't like telling me things, because it's more magical if I discover it for myself or whatever—but the really magical things happen by surprise anyway. I like to research and be prepared.”

“Life doesn't always allow you to do that,” pointed out Lana, amused. “For instance, I did not tell Araquanid and Wishiwashi to switch places when you completed my trial. They did that on their own.”

“And even with knowledge in advance, it's not always enough to prepare for what life throws at you,” added Kiawe. “You learned that on your first attempt at challenging my trial.”

Mallow regarded them both with amusement. “Moon will find things out with or without your assistance,” she pointed out. “It's better to point her in a generally correct direction. She'll figure it out on her own just like everybody else. Now, who wants some soup?”

The bushes rustled again, and a rather sheepish-looking Totem Lurantis emerged—followed by a tall, long-legged Pokémon with vibrant green hair like Mallow's. The angry Steenee bounced after it, pointing indignantly at Moon.

“Control your kid, Tsareena,” said Mallow to the second Totem. “Moon didn't touch any of the baby Bounsweet—it was all Haban berries, which is what she was supposed to do for the trial. If she doesn't want Trainers to pick the Haban berries, she shouldn't ask for the spicy soup.”

The Tsareena turned to regard the sulking Steenee with a raised eyebrow. “Tsa,” she said tersely.
Steenee sighed. “Nee nee stee,” she mumbled, jerking her head at Moon.

“Apology accepted,” said Moon. “Nice to meet you, Tsareena.”

Tsareena nodded politely. Kiawe was holding two enormous clay bowls, and he passed one to Lurantis and one to Tsareena. Steenee, and everyone else, got a regular-sized bowl. Mallow served them all soup, ladling about a third of the pot into Lurantis's bowl and a third into Tsareena's bowl. Both Totems nodded their thanks and promptly left with their soup. Steenee, struggling with her own bowl, rushed after them.

“And that leaves the rest for us! Moon, there's enough for your Pokémon if they'd like to try it— it's perfectly safe for them to eat.”

“I'll offer, but it's probably going to be kind of difficult to figure out how to feed soup to a bird.”

Neither Puck nor Ariel was interested in the soup— though Moon let them stay out to look for Bugs to eat. Ben sniffed it cautiously, and seemed willing enough to try it when Macbeth showed a great desire to sample the soup.

It was very good soup— extremely spicy; but Moon was fairly used to spicy food. There was plenty of it in Kanto and Alola alike, and her parents had always kept a bottle of hot sauce in the fridge since she was tiny. Kiawe ate steadily— he was a Fire-type specialist, but it didn't seem to extend to spicy food. Tears streamed down his cheeks as he ate, blinking rapidly. Lana picked at her food— Moon noticed that she had a Dewpider under the table and was feeding most of her serving to the little spider. Mallow ate voraciously— four whole bowls, whereas Moon barely managed seconds. But Macbeth ate a whole bowl, and the latter half of Ben's bowl when he decided he didn't like the soup halfway through.

“Ah, your Wimpod's a good eater!” laughed Mallow. “And a good fighter, too. She did well with the Pokémon who guarded the ingredients.”

Macbeth squirmed under the praise. Ben nudged her encouragingly with his ankle. “Vee veeon,” he said proudly.

“Your personality change with her is the weirdest thing I've ever seen in my life,” Moon informed him, shouldering her backpack.

“Tell Hau to wait at the gate for me!” called Mallow, as Moon headed out toward the entrance of Lush Jungle. “Good luck with Olivia!”

“Please wait at least an hour,” begged Lana. “I can't eat that much soup in one day. I'm too small, and it's too spicy!”

To Moon's surprise, Professor Kukui was waiting for her at the entrance of Lush Jungle, along with Hau and Lillie.

“Hey there, Moon!” he said brightly. “Did you pass Mallow's trial?”

“Yes, and I'm full as can be,” said Moon, patting her stomach.

“Can I go in yet?” asked Hau.

“Mallow said you should wait here for her. She met me here, too.”

“I came to extend both of you an invitation, as well as Lillie, yeah,” said Professor Kukui, putting his
hands on his hips. “When Hau's done his trial, you'll have a few days to finish exploring Route Eight, as well as some parts of Route Five that you wouldn't have been able to access earlier. But in about— oh, let's say five days, I'd like all three of you to meet up with Ellie and me at her lab in Heahea City. We've got some things we'd like to talk to you about, yeah— and Lillie has some things she'd like to talk with you two about, too.”

“I've been working on it,” said Lillie quietly, when Moon and Hau both looked at her in surprise. “I've been trying to write things down. It helps, if I can just read it off the page instead of trying to find the words in the moment.”

“Sure,” said Moon, nonplussed— though she was hoping that Lillie had decided to tell them about her past. “We'd be happy to come.”

“Let's say ten in the morning, yeah,” suggested Professor Kukui, with a nod. “I don't know how long we'll take for this meeting, but after that you can relax in Heahea City for the rest of the day, and then you can start making your way over to Konikoni City. That's where Kahuna Olivia takes on challengers, yeah! And her stone shop is over there, too. That's where you'll be able to pick up elemental stones for your Eevees.”

“And I believe Tapu Lele makes her home on that end of the island, in the Ruins of Hope,” added Lillie. “So I'll be travelling to Konikoni City with you, so that Nebby can visit the Tapu. Professor Burnet and I have been trying to study Nebby a little, and we think she managed to visit Tapu Koko after all.”

“How can you tell?”

“The Tapus have a certain aura about them that measures at a distinct frequency on one of Professor Burnet's scanners,” explained Lillie. “We've scanned Nebby with the same parameters and found the same frequency.”

“Pew pew,” said Nebby proudly.

“You're a menace,” Moon informed her.

“Pew!”

“That was all I wanted to tell you,” said Professor Kukui, with a nod. “See you at Ellie's lab, yeah? Good luck with your trial, Hau!”

“Thanks, Professor!” said Hau.

“See you in five days!”

Chapter End Notes

You Can Give An AO3 A Chapter, But You Have To Give Them A Chatfic To Go With It: a book by me

The "fair household in verona" chat is new but it's just Moon and her parents lmao
[IMG010.jpeg] is probably going to be recycled a lot. Moon and Gladion are those people who jokingly flip each other off.

Mallow's recipe for minestrone-with-Rare-Bone-broth is my own invention. Tamato berries are obviously tomatoes; Kelspy berries are kelp or seaweed (hence why you can find them growing at Brooklet Hill), Cornn berries are corn, and Haban berries are habañero peppers. I really like cooking and I have now made myself hungry. Maybe I'll go to Subway later lmao.

I will also never be tired of the aphorism "Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad." Like I smile literally every time I read it. It's cheesy and done to death and I love it.

Don't mind me, I'm using the same general principles that the game does for Mallow's trial but I'm making something that actually sounds logically tasty. How do Mago berries (based on mangoes) and honey make something that turns out spicy? They don't, unless you add pepper— hence the Haban berries.

I know that plants don't grow really well if you keep pulling them out and putting them back but shhh it's a story.

Lush Jungle doesn't have a Totem's Den, but it does now. I aim to please.

Moon battling with Macbeth—yes. Moon encouraging Macbeth to do her best and fight bravely—Yes. Moon praising Macbeth for doing well—YES. Macbeth fighting her hardest because Moon saved her from those bullies on the beach and she thinks Moon is the coolest, most badass Trainer in the entire world—YES YES YES YES YES.

I know making a really good soup like this would probably take way longer, but 1. they're cooking over an actual fire so it is Very Hot and 2. shhh author, issa fanfic. It also would have been really funny to use the whole “Mallow, it's Pokémon food” gag, but Mallow is literally a chef, so she knows the difference between people food and Pokémon food. The minestrone-with-Rare-Bone-broth is both, in my opinion.

Did I already say that double Totems are canon in this fic? They're now canon in this fic. It's going to be one of the Fic Rules starting at the beginning of the sequel to this one.

Macbeth has stolen all of my uwus, I have none left to give. In fact, Macbeth is the definition of the uwu face. She actually has the pointy jowly things on her mouth, but she's got like four of them so a Macbeth face would look like this: (uwwu)
“It looks like we're approaching, bzzt.”

Moon cracked one eye open, peeking around Charizard's neck. She instantly regretted it: there was nothing but miles of ocean below, though she could see the five islands of Poké Pelago rapidly moving closer—as well as a small house-boat that was anchored to one of them.

“Land there,” she told the Charizard, which grunted in affirmation. “And stick around, please. I don't know how long I'll be here, but you'll probably still be the closest one when I need a ride back.”

They landed, and Moon was promptly greeted by an enthusiastic Arby, who raced up to her, shaking her hand profusely.

“I took your advice!” he said excitedly. “I went back to Lillipup and caught a Route—I mean, I went to Route Six and caught a Lillipup!”

“Ruff, ruff!” barked the puppy at his feet.

“And I also caught an Oricorio.” He pointed up at the roof of the houseboat, where a pink bird was dancing, swaying in the salty breeze. “I'm not sure why, but it felt right.”

Moon couldn't help smiling. “That's really neat, Arby. I'm glad you could do that.”

“I think I'd like to try and catch a lot of Pokémon, but I wouldn't really be able to train them, the way someone like you could. I'm simply too old to do some things—and I'm definitely not as healthy as I used to be.” Arby looked a little embarrassed. “I've had to rough it a bit, for the last few years. I think I must have been quite wealthy before I lost my memories; my clothes were mostly ruined but they
were expensive brands.”

“That sucks. So, you've got some beans for me?”

“I certainly do! Er— there's not much to do around here besides harvest beans, honestly— at least, not much that I have the resources to do on my own. So Prince and Lula and I have been figuring out how to separate them by color.”

The bean-sorting setup wasn't half bad, for a hermit who had clearly put it together with his wits and little else. All of the beans were dumped into a large funnel, and somehow the colors were separated automatically into large metal tubs. There were several huge burlap sacks of each color.

“How does the machine know where to send them?”

“I had to program in some machinery,” admitted Arby, pointing at a small camera that was connected to a metal sheet, twisting it and turning it to slide beans in different directions. “But it works quite well— we only have a five percent error rate and those are usually visible enough that we can pick them out by hand before we bag them. Er— would you like to take some bags?”

“Yeah.” Moon considered the Charizard that had brought her, waiting patiently next to the houseboat. “Though I'm not totally sure how much my ride can carry, so I'd better stick with two or three sacks. I'll take a yellow, a red, and a purple.” She planned to keep the yellow bag for Ben and Macbeth, who wasn't terribly picky about her diet; but red and purple were fairly popular flavors and she knew they would sell faster. “And I'll tell other Trainers to come and buy directly from you. It's not that long a trip, and this many beans for that cheap a price is a big draw.”


“A hundred Poké for half a pound.” Moon had already worked the numbers out on her own; it had been a way to focus on something that wasn't the ground or the ocean, on her trip to the Pelago. “We're not upsetting the current market too much, but it's definitely a competitive price. You should probably find a scale and work on a bagging system.”

“I can do that,” said Arby with a nod. “I'll find a sewing machine— I can make smaller bags from the empty sacks I have here. Or maybe I should catch a Sewaddle, and hope it evolves into a Leavanny fairly quickly. I wonder where I could catch a Sewaddle...”

“I don't think they're native to Alola.”

“Oh.” Arby frowned. “Well, that's disappointing. For some reason I thought I remembered seeing one... somewhere. Perhaps that's another memory I should attempt to explore.”

Moon left him attempting to make a sewing machine out of a couple of old blenders and a vacuum cleaner, which he was pulling to pieces on the sandy beach of Isle Abeens. The Charizard seemed slightly annoyed by the extra weight, but it was able to carry her back to Route Eight with no trouble at all.

“That's a lot of beans.”

Moon turned, pleased and surprised, to see Gladion, walking up with his hands in his pockets.

“I told you I was starting a business,” she answered. “My supplier is on Poké Pelago. You can fly out, if you've got a Ride Pager.”
His mouth twitched ever so slightly. “It would be illegal for me to own a Ride Pager.”

“Like that would stop you.”

“Can I buy beans from you?” he asked, nodding at the sacks. “It's good to support your local businesses. Your money doesn't end up in the bank accounts of soulless CEOs.”

“I've only got red and purple— the yellow sack is for Ben and Macbeth.”

“I'll take some of both, if you don't mind. How much?”

“It's a hundred Poké for half a pound. I don't have a scale or anything, but this is a ten-pound sack.”

It took some finagling, and Moon had to buy a box of plastic zip-bags from the Poké Mart; but they eventually used the bathroom scale in Gladion's hotel room to weigh out two pounds of red beans and two pounds of purple beans, which he tucked into his backpack. “Good price,” he said, with a nod. “You're not ruining the economy— you're just biting your thumb at it.”

Moon peered at him. “Was that a Pyukeo and Mukiet reference? Because if it was, I'm pretty sure a Ride Charizard can get us to the Heahea town hall in about forty minutes and we can just elope. Like, right now.”

Her brain caught up with her mouth approximately half a second after she'd finished speaking. Moon opened her mouth, then closed it again. Gladion's eyebrows had risen, but he didn't seem terribly offended.

“I mean— Arceus, I'm sorry, I don't know what the hell is wrong with me—”

“At least buy me dinner first,” said Gladion briskly, though a telltale blush was creeping up his neck. “How are your teammates doing?”

It wasn't the tidiest exit from an awkward conversation, but Moon seized on it gratefully. They discussed training and strategy for a few minutes after that. Moon sat at the desk in Gladion's hotel room, while he stretched out on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

“Do you ever,” began Gladion suddenly, but then he stopped speaking, a frown creasing his eyebrows.

“Do I ever what?”

“It's— not something that you would relate to, I don't think. Sorry, I shouldn't have brought it up.”

“You can talk to me about it, if you want.” Moon folded her fingers together in her lap. “I know I'm nosy and I ask too many questions, but I try to be a good listener.”

“You are a good listener,” he said, almost automatically. “I don't want to bother you, though.”

Moon remembered a similar conversation she'd had with Lillie, back on Route Six. “You don't bother me,” she told him. “You aren't a burden, Gladion. You're a strength.”

He turned to look at her, green eyes oddly sharp. Moon met his eyes, willing him to understand that she would be there, because that was what friends did for each other.

Abruptly he let out one of his unsmiling huffs of laughter— this one mirthless, almost bitter. “All right,” he said, with a sudden venom that surprised Moon. “Let's say I actually believe you. I don't, though I believe that you believe what you're saying.”
“Agree to disagree, got it.”

“If I am a strength, as you say— then I shouldn't have fucked up my life. I should have stayed home and graduated high school properly and taken my island challenge, like I was supposed to do. But I fucked it up, the way I fuck everything up. I got used to it, though. When you've fucked something up for long enough it just becomes normal. And then you come waltzing into my life, with your listening and your forgiveness and your happy, beautiful life with good friends and parents that actually give a shit, and you make me miss all the things I can't have.”

He was trembling. Moon's heart ached with a feeling she didn't know how to put into words. She wanted to comfort him, she wanted to cry with him, she wanted... well, she didn't know what she wanted.

She stood, walking over to the bed. She reached out, with a hand that shook the way his voice had done.

“Don't.”

He sounded tired. Moon stopped moving, her hand a few inches from his shoulder.

“Don't what?”

“Don't— *pity* me. I don't need your fucking pity.”

“You know perfectly well it's not just pity.” They'd been dancing around it, but Moon figured he would appreciate her forthrightness at the moment.

“I'm— not interested.”

He'd paused, just long enough that Moon could reasonably hope he was lying. “I wasn't reaching out with that intention, in any case. Are we friends, Gladion?”

“We shouldn't be.”

“Answer the fucking question,” snapped Moon, because that *hurt*.

He remained silent for a few moments; but then he sighed softly. “I guess we are.”

“Then let me be your friend, you asshole.”

He said nothing to that; so Moon put her hand on his shoulder, just resting it there. Gladion stared up at the ceiling and said nothing.

“Are you a hugs kind of person?” she asked him. “Pats on the back, totally platonic hand-holding? Or do you not like when people touch you at all?”

“I haven't really figured that out.”

“I don't know what's okay and what's not. Do what you want, I don't care anymore.”

Moon frowned. “That's... really not okay.” She withdrew her hand. “You have to figure out your boundaries. I don't want to do or say anything that makes you uncomfortable.”

“You existing makes me uncomfortable. I didn't fucking ask for this.”
“Oh, and you think I did?” Moon got to her feet and gathered her things, thoroughly done with the conversation. “Look, I don’t know what you’re going through or why you’re trying to push me away, but I’m not fucking having it. Text me when you realize what you’ve done wrong—I’ll have forgiven you by then.”

He remained silent. Moon did not slam the door, because it would have annoyed both of them. Instead, she slung her Pokébeans over her shoulders and stomped back to the Pokémon Center to sulk.

She was still in a bad mood by the next morning, which was the day that Professor Kukui had appointed for them to meet at Professor Burnet’s lab. Hau took Lillie along by Ride Pager—still illegal, but neither the Alolan police nor the professor seemed to care. Moon, climbing onto the Charizard she’d summoned, glanced back at the hotel; but whatever demented, deluded part of her brain that thought Gladion would be peering out of the window with a sad look on his face was disappointed. He was probably asleep anyway—he was up late most nights.

Still, it would be kind of mean to leave without saying anything so she opened up Rotom as they rose into the air.

chat: hypothetically

shakespeare jr: I know I told you to text first, but I wanted to let you know I’m headed to Heahea City, and after that I’m on my way to Konikoni. I’m not abandoning you

shakespeare jr: You’re kind of a massive dick but you’re still my friend

shakespeare jr: No pressure or anything, you don’t have to respond until you’re ready

The flight to Heahea City took less than an hour, and the Charizards were even kind enough to deposit them in front of Professor Burnet’s lab, rather than the Pokémon Center.

A metal plaque on the high brick fence labeled it the Interdimensional Research Lab. Moon yawned and stretched and let her team out of their balls; Hau and Lillie did the same. Macbeth blinked at the unfamiliar surroundings, then immediately raced up Moon’s leg in an attempt to return to her ball.

“Nope,” said Moon firmly, grasping Macbeth around her middle. “Calm down, babe. Nothing scary is happening, it’s just different.”

“Wiiiim...”

“I’ll protect you,” Moon promised her, which earned her adoring eyes and a series of increasingly squeaky coos.

“I’m not Bug-phobic like you,” said Hau, grinning at them, “but even I have never seen an insect as cute as that one.”

“Cutiefly was pretty cute,” mused Moon. She still remembered seeing a Cutiefly that had been living with the Professor when he had first video-called her in Kanto. “But Wimpod’s growing on me. Bug-type mandibles in general still creep me out, but hers sort of look like a little fuzzy mustache so it’s
“She absolutely worships you.” Lillie smiled, too. “And it seems well-deserved, the way you treat her.”

Moon shifted. She was uncomfortable with this line of conversation, though she couldn't really pinpoint a reason why. “It's not anything special. I try to give my whole team what they need. She needs reassurance.” Her jaw tightened. “I'd probably need reassurance too, if I'd been poked and prodded with a stick for hours by a couple of assholes. Did I tell you that the Pokémon Center nurse found bruises underneath her shell?”

“Yes,” murmured Hau. “This is probably the fourth or fifth time.”

Moon ignored him. “Bruises! Underneath her shell! It's designed to protect her, and they were hitting hard enough to bruise beneath it! Honestly I want to go back and find those little shits, so I can drag them to wherever the police station on Akala Island is. I could definitely get them to press charges. Pokémon abuse has been taken far more seriously ever since Red put a stop to Team Rocket; and I, for one, welcome this change to the international culture of raising and training Pokémon—”

Lillie cleared her throat. “As much as I'd like to let you talk—”

“Rant,” corrected Hau. “For the fifth time.”

“—our appointment is in a few minutes, so we'd better go inside. I just have this to say, Moon: you're a fantastic Trainer and a good person, and I'm glad that Macbeth has someone like you to take care of her.”

Moon felt her whole face color up—not because she was terribly embarrassed by the compliment, but because it reminded her of the things that Gladion had said on the beach after she had rescued Macbeth. Hau smirked at her and followed Lillie inside. Moon did the same, her team trotting or hopping alongside her.

The receptionist sent them up to the third floor. Lillie was obviously familiar with the lab, leading them to the elevator and typing a password to enter it. All fifteen of them—three humans, twelve Pokémon—crammed themselves inside and waited as the elevator took them upstairs.

“Ellie!” called Professor Kukui, striding over to the library door. “Come out, the kids are here!”

“Just a second!” Professor Burnet appeared, with a stout Wigglytuff following her. “Hey, guys. Jack, want to help Maleko get some snacks?”

“I'm getting snacks?” said Professor Kukui, confused.

“You're getting snacks.” Professor Burnet pressed something into his hand. “Vending machine is on the floor below this one. Soda pop for the kids—flavor preferences?”

“Nomel berry,” said Moon promptly.
“If they’ve got Cheri cola, I’d like that, please.”

“And root beer for me, thanks!” Hau beamed.

“Um,” said Professor Kukui, looking slightly panicked.

“Tuff tuff!” the Wigglytuff assured him.

“Jack will remember it for you. You just need to carry everything—his arms are too short. And grab a few bags of chips, too. Three plain, three flavored, it doesn’t matter what flavors you pick.”

The Wigglytuff herded a confused Professor Kukui out of the room, and Professor Burnet clapped her hands together. “Right! We’ve all met each other before—Hau's met me, when I occasionally manage to make it up to one of Hala's dinners; obviously Lillie and I know each other, and I met Moon just the other day on Route Six.”

“That was at least three weeks ago, Professor,” said Lillie, amused.

“Was it really? Wow, time sure flies when your research is progressing. Anyway, there are two main things we're discussing today. The first is a more general topic, which is why we’re out here with all of the science boys.” Professor Burnet waved a hand toward the lab-coated men, a few of whom waved at their group. Moon noticed that quite a few of them were staring at Professor Burnet with something slightly less professional in their eyes— but she didn’t seem to notice. “We’re talking about Nebby.”

“Pew!” said Nebby delightedly, bouncing up and down.

“So, Lillie said she's already told you a few things, but I'm about to lay down some science for you. Nebby, or Cosmog as her species is known, are capable of creating what we here at the lab have decided to call Ultra Wormholes.”

“Nebby’s warping ability,” clarified Lillie. “The one she used to get us out of where we were before—and the one she used on Plank Bridge.”

“She warped on Plank Bridge?”

“You weren't pulled into it because she broke the bridge, but Professor Burnet went back later and did scans. Nebby definitely formed a wormhole there.”

“Exactly,” said Professor Burnet, with a nod. “Cosmog are very rare Pokémon in Alola. Most Trainers will never see one in their lives—so the fact that the three of you have formed a fairly long-term relationship with one is pretty remarkable! This Cosmog comes from Poni Island, though they have been known to appear on Ula'ula Island as well. Cosmog are, essentially... little balls of space dust.”

“We kind of figured,” said Moon dryly.

“Pew pew!”

“No offense, Nebby, but you weren't really fooling anybody.” Hau grinned.

“We've learned that Cosmog's connection to space is what enables it to form Ultra Wormholes. Ultra Wormholes are, in and of themselves, a fascinating phenomenon. They are gateways that can allow people or Pokémon to travel instantly from one point to another. It's essentially a teleporter, like from those old television shows about space travel.”
“Cool!”

“Definitely cool,” agreed Professor Burnet, “but not really a viable form of transportation. Cosmog are rare, but they are also quite weak. The amount of energy it takes for them to form Ultra Wormholes is massive, and it often causes them to faint and in some cases, to die.” Professor Burnet made eye contact with each of them, her yellow eyes sharp. “This is why Lillie has asked you both to help her protect Nebby. Nebby can and will warp away, if she is truly threatened and there are no other options available to her. But it takes a lot out of her— mostly when she actually goes through the wormhole. Sending the power source of the wormhole through said wormhole doesn't just tear a hole in the space-time continuum— it ties a complete knot with it.”

“There are also a lot of drawbacks to using Ultra Wormholes for transportation,” said Lillie softly. “We've been able to ascertain that Cosmog can choose where they make Ultra Wormholes on their end, and that they can generally aim where the other end of the wormhole will lead; but it's more of an art than a science. Nebby dropped me and herself in the middle of the Totem's Den at Brooklet Hill. She was trying to land in Konikoni City.”

“Exactly.” Professor Burnet nodded. “But there's another wrinkle. Ultra Wormholes can lead not just from place to place, but from world to world. Nebby could potentially open an Ultra Wormhole here, which leads to another planet entirely.”

Haw's mouth fell open. “How?”

“Is that how Phyco and Soliera got here?” asked Moon.

“Indeed. They have access to a different Pokémon that has the ability to create Ultra Wormholes.” Professor Burnet answered both of their questions at once, but her nose wrinkled slightly at the mention of the aliens. “They've been working with a different group, so they haven't shared much information with us. We know it's a legendary Pokémon that's helping them out, but we don't know the species, or if it's even native to this planet. There are legendary Pokémon on other planets, too. Arceus made a whole universe; we're just a tiny fraction of it.”

Moon glanced at Lillie, at the mention of the “other group” which presumably consisted of Nebby's torturers; but Lillie seemed quite composed.

“Anyway, the thing about a door is that things can go out, but they can also come in.” Phyco had said something similar, on Melemele Island. “We've theorized that when a Pokémon opens an Ultra Wormhole, there's an entry point, an exit point, and a place in-between. The in-between place is what's really interesting, because the Pokémon that Phyco and Soliera are using to travel between worlds is able to control the location of both the entry and the exit. They seem to have come to this world on purpose, not by accident. And other Pokémon, not native to this planet, can come through as well. Or we think they're Pokémon, but they don't really register the same way in the Dex as the ones native to this planet.”

“And the energy that pours from both ends of an Ultra Wormhole— energy which must come from the place between them— is extremely similar to energy found in other sources, here on Alola,” added Lillie. “It's the same energy that Nebby gets when she visits one of the Tapus— well, she's only visited one so far, but the readings were exactly the same. I'll be taking equipment to scan when we visit Tapu Lele.”

“And we're not quite as sure about this theory, but we think it's also the same energy source that gives Totem Pokémon that extra power— and the same energy that's given off by Z-Crystals and Z-Rings alike.”
It was a lot of information. Moon raised her hand, mind whirling.

“Oh, you're in for it now,” said Hau quietly.

Professor Burnet crossed her arms, but she was smiling. “Yes, Moon?"

“How is the energy source the same if there aren't Ultra Wormholes sticking out of the back end of every Totem's Den? What's this 'other group' that are sponsoring Phyco and Soliera, because from what Lillie's said they did some really nasty sh— I mean, crap to Nebby? And how do the Z-Rings and Z-Crystals give off the same energy as well? Are we all carrying tiny Ultra Wormholes on our wrists and in our bags? Why don't alien Pokémon register the same way in the Dex as the natives? Why do the Tapus have that energy too? And what happens to the Wormholes after they're used?”

“I told you so,” said Hau smugly.

“Oh, and how rare exactly are Cosmog? Are there other non-legendaries that can make Ultra Wormholes? And—”

“I can't keep track of all the questions,” laughed Professor Burnet. “You've got an inquiring mind, Moon— you could be a Pokémon Professor in the making!”

“You think so?” Moon was delighted. She'd planned to study literature for most of her teenage years, assuming she wouldn't be able to afford Pokémon for a long time, if ever; but being a Pokémon Professor sounded really cool as well.

“I do. Now, I can't answer all of your questions, either— not because I don't want to, but because I don't know the answers or because I'm not authorized to tell you. Some of what we've already told you about is actually confidential information— so you're not to repeat any of it, to anyone who isn't already in the know.”

“Got it.”

“Lillie, why don't you take the questions regarding the energy source? You know quite a bit about that— it's been a theme of your own research, with Nebby.”

“Indeed,” murmured Lillie. She turned to Moon. “The role of the Tapus, in Alola, is that of guardian deities and protectors. We don't fully revere them, as we do Arceus; but we have great respect for them and we listen to their wisdom regarding nature. The Tapu Dens have gone largely unexplored, because they will not hesitate to defend their territory from Pokémon and humans alike— to the point of killing, even. So the running theory is that the Tapus have some kind of energy source in their dens. Do you remember that Tapu Koko gave you the stone that formed your Z-Ring? It also gave Hala the stone that formed his Z-Ring— and Hau's Z-Ring, for that matter. Tapu Lele gave Olivia the stone for hers, and Tapu Bulu and Tapu Fini give their kahunas stones for Z-Rings as well. There's been success with artificially made Z-Rings, which are put heavily into use with the majority of Trainers. The Kahunas actually handpick Trainers who are worthy to use Tapu-made Rings, which is the case with Hau. All of this obviously begs the question—"

“Where do the stones come from,” realized Moon, saying it in chorus with Lillie.

“Exactly. Z-Crystals are artificially made, but the raw material is the same as that of the stones that form Z-Rings. All of the stones and crystals have some of the same energy as the Tapus, since the Tapus distribute the material to begin with; so they are hoarding it somewhere, likely in their Dens, since nobody has survived entering a Tapu's Den without permission in the first place. The energy is used by Totem Pokémon, as well; and it also appears to come from the Ultra Wormholes. Therefore
— the running theory, in this lab and also in the group that sponsors Phyco and Soliera, is that a long
time ago, four Ultra Wormholes opened over the four islands of Alola, and comets and meteors from
a storm in Ultra Space came through the wormholes and crashed on the islands. The stones and
crystals are pieces broken off from the comets and meteors. And since they are, as far as we know,
an infinitely renewable resource—it's clear that there's enough energy for certain Pokémon to visit
with Tapu approval, and gain the power necessary to become Totems.”

“Holy shit!” screeched Moon, startling most of the scientists in the lab. “I can't believe I didn't put
that together on my own. It makes so much sense!”

Hau and Lillie both began laughing. “Well, you didn't exactly have access to all of the data that we
do,” pointed out Professor Burnet, also laughing. “So don't beat yourself up about it. For some of
your other questions—we will be covering a few of them in a slightly more private venue, but we've
compiled research about other Pokémon who can possibly make Ultra Wormholes or, at the very
least, travel between dimensions. It's summarized in some of the crib sheets we keep for new interns
and scientists—the boys over there can give you one. And as far as we know, Ultra Wormholes can
be closed by the Pokémon that make them, if they are close by. If the creator of the Ultra Wormhole
gets too far away—we've calculated it to be about fifteen miles—then it will collapse on its own.”

“And the Dex probably can't record stuff about alien Pokémon because of all that weird energy,
right, Professor?”

“You're not too far off the mark, Hau. We refer to alien Pokémon as Ultra Beasts, or UBs for short.
UBs have a strong aura like Totem Pokémon, which we've been calling Beast Boost. The problem is
that we don't have a baseline for what they would be like without that aura—it seems to come from
Ultra Space, and a UB that makes its way to Alola doesn't usually stay very long.”

“Why not?”

“The Tapus chase them away,” said Lillie. “UBs are much, much less reserved about attacking
people than wild Pokémon are. Research on them is mostly conducted by Interpol, because they're a
safety issue. We don't have access to more than the basic information.”

The door to the lab opened, and Professor Kukui returned carrying bottles of soda and bags of chips.
Jack the Wigglytuff trotted up to Professor Burnet and handed her a pile of change, left over from
using the vending machines.

“Thanks, Jack. Maleko, let's take the food in my office. We're having the second discussion now.”

“Aw, you had the first one without me? I wanted to tell them all about Ultra Wormholes, yeah!”

“You get too excited and go off-topic,” said Professor Burnet serenely, ignoring her husband's
pouting as they all went into the office. She hadn't made Jack get anything for the Pokémon out of
the vending machines, but as they all filed in and sat down, she opened a drawer of her desk and
pulled out a large sack with the Thrifty Megamart logo on it, tearing it open and simply dumping
about half the contents on the floor.

“I vacuum regularly, and they'll eat everything,” she explained, as nearly all of the Pokémon dove for
the beans in a mad rush. Macbeth looked interested, but she remained firmly in Moon's arms. “Lillie,
shall I turn it over to you?”

Lillie got to her feet. She had forgone her usual floppy white hat today, braiding her hair into two
tails that fell nearly to her waist; and she was holding a small book bound in pink leather.
“Dear Hau,” she read out loud, glancing up at him for approval. Hau nodded composedly, though Moon was amused to watch him flush. “I know I will have trouble articulating all of the things I'd like to say to you and Moon, so I've written you both letters. Here is yours. Thank you for being patient with me, and thank you for your sweet, simple support and friendship. My life is complicated — my emotions doubly so. You have a knack for uncomplicating things.

“I don't really know where to begin. Four months ago, Nebby and I were both elsewhere in Alola. I won't say where— this is one of the few secrets I don't dare reveal to you or Moon, though I would not mind if either of you discovered it on your own. We were in a place I have lived in all my life.”

Her voice was shaking, and her eyes had filled with tears. Moon wished that she had not been quite so curious—that she had not pressed Lillie to give them answers.

“Home and family are the people who ought to protect you, but mine did not. I had only a single friend at home. She helped me with my studies and treated me kindly, even though she had many other things to do. As I grew older, I was expected to begin a course of studies in Pokébiology. It was one of the classes I was not particularly excited for— I have never felt that I was strong enough to train or discipline Pokémon, and I never planned to become a Trainer. But it was required of me, so I went. It turned out that the people who were meant to teach me Pokébiology were the people who were hurting Nebby. I first met her in a class where I was expected to silently observe and take notes. But how could I watch and listen when all I saw and heard was her pain? She struggled and cried and finally went limp. I was sure she had died. But she had not died; she was just weakened by the torture.

“I knew in my heart that I could not endure it. I went to my friend and asked her to help us escape. She agreed to help, and we arranged a method of removing Nebby from the lab where she was kept. She had been stored in a Pokéball, which my friend told me to break. Unfortunately, after a similar escape some years earlier, precautions had been taken with other lab specimen Pokémon, and Nebby and I were discovered and pursued, by Phyco and Soliera as well as other scientists. They and others chased us to the top floor of the home I had always known, finally cornering us. We were on the point of recapture and guaranteed discipline; but the moon came out from behind a cloud, and Nebby seemed to gain a second wind. She opened an Ultra Wormhole— and the next thing we knew, we were falling into the waters of Brooklet Hill. The Araquanid and Wishiwashi that make their home in the Totem's Den were hostile, and we narrowly escaped death by drowning before Captain Lana came to our rescue.

“Hau Akiona, I cannot begin to describe to you how grateful I am for your friendship. It is like nothing I have ever had in my life. I have an older brother— the mysterious 'friend' who has taken me places and visited me. He wishes to remain anonymous, so I will not tell you or Moon anything more about him. But I have never had any friends my own age, male or female. You and Moon were my very first friends. I didn't know that it would be this amazing to have friends.

“And I will close this letter with another thank you, even if it seems a little frivolous: thank you for saying that I'm pretty. Nobody ever said that about me before. From your friend, Lillie.”

Hau sniffled, wiping his eyes. Professor Burnet passed him a box of tissues, with tears in her own. Lillie kept her eyes fixed on the leather journal. Hau blew his nose, dried his face, and got to his feet, walking over to Lillie and wrapping her in a hug. Moon, subtly drying her own eyes, heard Lillie gasp softly and wondered if Hau's crush might not be at least a tiny bit reciprocated.

“You're welcome,” he said, his voice thick. “And thank you for telling us all this. It's obviously really hard for you, so it means a lot to hear it.”

“Um— sure, you're welcome,” said Lillie faintly.
Hau released her and sat down, and Lillie turned a page in her journal.

*****

“Dear Moon,” she read, and Moon’s stomach dropped. “Though you and Hau will both hear the letters I’ve written to you, I’m addressing this one to you because I believe it will satisfy some of your curiosity— though perhaps that will be a tall order.”

Hau snorted, and Moon punched him in the shoulder. Lillie’s mouth quirked into a smile before she continued.

“I told Hau what happened to me— or a modified version of it, because there are secrets in my past that are not mine to share, secrets that would risk my safety and Nebby’s, as well as yours and Hau’s and both of the professors.” This appeared to be news to Professor Kukui and Professor Burnet, who exchanged surprised glances. “To you, Moon, I will attempt to explain some of the why, because that is a question you often have for me. Why do I do this or that, or why do certain things bother me?

“Sometimes I don’t know the answer.”

She paused, closing her eyes and taking a shuddering breath.

“Sometimes I do know the answer— but I wish I didn’t.

“After witnessing my panic attack on Route Two, you may have come up with an armchair diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder, or even panic disorder. Though I have not yet been to see a medical professional, I believe it is safe to say that I struggle with both. I have been anxious my whole life. I worry and worry, and sometimes I cannot make myself stop worrying. There are other things that plague me as well. I have a very mild form of depression— my older brother has it much worse than I do, but his anxiety is somewhat lessened in return. For a certain time in my life, I also struggled with an eating disorder— but my one friend from home was able to help me get the medical intervention I needed. Even now I am not fully comfortable with eating, though I enjoy food and I am capable of eating enough to stay healthy.”

“Fuck,” muttered Hau, scrubbing at his eyes with tissues. He didn't usually swear, but Moon had to agree with the sentiment.

“Many of my issues stem from my relationships with my family members. I don't wish to talk much about them, because that is something I am truly not ready to discuss, and likely will not be for a long time. My older brother, though I love him dearly, abandoned me at a time in my life when I needed him most— though I understand now why he had to leave, and I have long since forgiven him. It was not long after he left that I was hospitalized for malnutrition due to the eating disorder. My father passed away when I was nine or ten, which destabilized our family dynamic.”

Lillie paused. She closed her eyes and took a few shaky breaths. Lapin looked up from his beans, then darted over to her, wrapping his arms around her legs.

“I have made my own armchair diagnoses of my m-mother—” She stumbled over the word. “— which match up with the ones made by my only friend from home. She suffers either from borderline personality disorder or narcissistic personality disorder— I lean toward the latter, my friend believes it is the former. She may also be bipolar— though that could very well be a product of borderline or NPD. She is not well, and she has not been well for a long time. I did not realize how her illness affected her treatment of my brother and I until I left and was able to meet both Hau’s mother and yours, Moon. The kindness, gentleness, and unconditional warmth shown to me by Leilani Akiona and Kapua Hawkins was overwhelming. I didn't know mothers could be like that.
And I also watched you raise Ben from an Egg, Moon. You essentially became a mother, with minimal preparation time and no support from a spouse or partner— but you did so with your characteristic grace and warmth. You were tired and frustrated sometimes, but you never, ever took it out on Ben or any of your Pokémon. After that, it only became clearer to me that the things my mother said to me, the things she did to me... were abusive. And keeping that in mind, it is fair to say that some of my anxiety can be attributed to post-traumatic stress disorder.

“I can't answer all of your questions now, or perhaps ever. But please trust me when I tell you that I want to. I want to share everything with you and with Hau. When I am worrying and hurting, the two of you are the people I think of first— even before my own brother. You have encouraged me to be myself, to trust myself. Nebby saved me, when she warped me out of the place I once called home; but you and Hau have helped rebuild me, piece by piece. I've learned more about who I am in the last four months than I have in the rest of my life, and that is due to you and Hau. Thank you for the gift of your friendship. I can only work harder to give back a little of what you have given me.

“From your friend, Lillie.”

*****

Lillie closed the journal, looking at Moon with worried— no, anxious— eyes. Moon stared at her, trying to pick some of the ideas that swirled together through her mind.

“I can't say I know a whole lot about mental illness,” she said finally. “I've got some experience with it. Red has social anxiety—”

“Really?” said Hau.

“He literally lets Blue do all the talking for him, which isn't a problem, because Blue's a chatterbox. But that's not the point. I know a little bit about it, and I know that it's really hard to deal with. Your own brain is working against you, or something. So I just— Lillie, how are you even doing all this? That's a lot of shit to deal with, and yet you're raising three and a half Pokémon, and being a good friend, and protecting and researching Nebby and the Tapus and the Ultra Wormholes. What the actual hell. How did we get so lucky to have a literal angel for a best friend.”

Lillie went Tamato-red. “Moon—”

“No, no no. Shush. Let me compliment you. You've got to be superhuman or something. I don't think I could do it.”

“I know I couldn't do it,” put in Hau.

Lillie buried her face in her hands. “I'm only doing what I have to do,” she murmured.

“The thing is, though— you don't have to.” Moon glanced at the Professors, uncertain; but Professor Burnet nodded approvingly at her. “Like, you got out of your home. You're safe here. You could just— rest, and figure yourself out.”

“That was the plan, originally,” admitted Lillie. “But I was getting bored at Professor Burnet's apartment, so they arranged for me to come to Melemele Island and assist Professor Kukui. And then I met you and Hau.”

“You should have seen the change, yeah,” said Professor Kukui. “It was like night and day. We walked home, after we went to the Pokémon Center to heal up Nebby and Popplio and Rowlet after Plank Bridge; and I've never seen Lillie talk so much in her life. She was telling me all about how kind and brave the two of you were, to help her and Nebby out. So I thought, what better way for
her to relearn what normal life is like than to travel around Melemele Island with the two of you? And then she said she wanted to be a Trainer, just like you. I'm proud of all three of you, yeah—Lillie, for working hard to stay busy and battle her demons; and Moon and Hau, for being good friends as well as good Trainers.”

A short silence fell over the group of them, but then Professor Burnet cleared her throat. “I've compiled a list of things that Maleko and I have observed will trigger a strong reaction of some kind in Lillie.”

Lillie sighed. “Here we go,” she murmured, shaking her head.

“It's a PokéDoc file, which you can access if I give your email addresses permission and send you the link. So I'll be doing that, and you can add things that you observe so that we all know what to avoid, and what's safe.”

“I'm not a child, you don't need to avoid things just because of me.”

“But we want to, yeah?” Professor Kukui smiled softly at Lillie. “We'd like to make sure you're comfortable. If you eventually decide to see a therapist, you can work through the list with them in a safe, healthy way. Did you tell your brother to start making his own list?”

“He said, and I quote, 'Why would I make a list of triggering bullshit if it's going to trigger me every time I look at it?'”

“Oh, that's a good point. You didn't really make your list, we did.”

“Will we ever get to meet your brother?” Hau asked Lillie.

“I doubt it.” Lillie's gaze slipped briefly to Moon before she looked down at her lap. “He's a bit of a recluse.”

“You should at least give Moon and Hau his emergency contact information,” said Professor Burnet mildly. “That way we don't have to try to play phone tag with him if you're in trouble.”

“I'll ask him about it.” Lillie's hands twisted together. “He has a phone and a Pokétch. In fact, I think he might have two phones. He's a bit paranoid about who contacts him.”

“Bun bun,” said Lapin, climbing up in Lillie's lap and carefully pulling her hands apart. “Neary bun, lo neary—”

There was a flash of bright white light. Moon yelped, eyes watering; when she could see again, Lillie was struggling to balance in her seat with an tall, fluffy Lopunny in her lap.

“Oh, wow!” said Professor Burnet, laughing. “Congratulations, Lapin!”

“Pun lo neary,” concluded Lapin, hopping off Lillie's lap and standing tall with his hands tucked behind his back. “Lo pun lo.”

“Thank you, Lapin,” murmured Lillie, opening her arms to hug him. “I appreciate it.”

“Well, that's it,” said Professor Kukui, getting to his feet. “Thank you all for coming, yeah! I'm glad we could meet up and share this information with you. And remember, Diglett's Tunnel and Konikoni City are waiting for you whenever you're ready!”
“I went back to Lillipup and caught a Route— I mean, I went to Route Six and caught a Lillipup!” — this man is a mess. Don't eat Pokébeans, kids.

We aren't doing patterned beans or rainbow beans. In no universe will the atoms and particles remain organized enough to form a pattern as complicated as plaid on something as small as a fucking bean. Something something entropy and chaos and the laws of thermodynamics, I don't make these rules but I'm unfortunately obligated to follow them.

I like tin-hat anti-corporation Gladion just as much as I like tin-hat anti-corporation Lillie.

Pyukeo and Mukiet is partially Game Freak's, based on the Pyukumuku cutscene on Hano Beach; and it's partially mine, because Game Freak either had Pupeo and Pukiet or Mukeo and Mukiet, I don't remember which.

“Because if it was, I'm pretty sure a Ride Charizard can get us to the Heahea town hall in about forty minutes and we can just elope. Like, right now.” — Moon you are a ME S S

“At least buy me dinner first.” — SMOOTH AS HELL, MY DUDE

Ah, did you think Gladimoon were moving too quickly? You were correct! Moon is mostly emotionally mature enough to be in a relationship, but not one with Gladion— not yet, heh heh. Gladion needs to unfuck his life through Plot before he'll be ready for anything. SLOOOOOW BURRRRN

“I'm— not interested.” — *sings* Caught in a LIIIIIIIE (shoutout to my fellow ARMYs, are u ok right now with all the Quality Content or are u dead like me)

Remember how this ship is also called “lunaredgeshipping” or what the fuck ever? So here's some of that edge, a more familiar aspect of the the soft boy I have been writing

“It's essentially a teleporter, like from those old television shows about space travel.” — Beam me up, Scotty.

“It was a lot of information to take in.” — Game Freak really should have spread out some of the information so that I didn't have to infodump on y'all all at once. It would have been nice to see Professor Burnet more often in the story to explain things, too. (Which should tell you that she's gonna show up again lmao)

The explanation about Sparkling Stones and Z-Crystals is pretty much all stuff I'm theorizing on from game canon. There's some of it that's yet unexplained— a whole fucking NECROZMA, for instance— but in the meantime read the lovely Saphruikan’s oneshot Lobotomy, here on ao3. I've added it to my own bookmarks, it should be easy for you to find. 12/10 would recommend, made me cry... gave me ideas... ;')

“You get too excited and go off-topic.” — Professor Burnet really out here dragging her husband, huh
“Lillie grew taller and paler and softer, molded into the perfect, ladylike daughter that their mother wanted.” The description of Windowpain, the first work in this series, is as subtle a reference to Lillie's eating disorder as I could manage. Lillie references, but doesn't state it, in Reflections from an Ivory Tower— part four in this series. I've been planning this outright reveal for a while.

Lillie's inability to express her feelings out loud and eloquence with words is a thing she shares in common with me. In terms of art: Hau is a performer, Moon is an orator, and Lillie is a writer.

Moon and Hau praising Lillie: literally me, about Lillie

Lillie's deadass talking about Gladion to them, and only Professor Kukui and Professor Burnet know that's she's talking about Gladion. I AM CACKLING SO HARD

Lapin has been functioning as an “emotional support / service Pokémon” for Lillie, more or less since she caught him. He's more emotionally mature than pretty much all of the named Pokémon in the fic, and it makes sense that the friendship they share and the support he provides for her in this moment would be the catalyst for his evolution. I'm not crying, you're crying
Chapter Summary

Heahea City, Diglett's Tunnel, Route Nine.

Chapter Notes

Moon and Hau head through Diglett's Tunnel, but encounter some unexpected obstacles.

[HELLO READERS HAVE YOU SEEN THE POKEMON DIRECT ABOUT THE NEW GAMES???? SWORD AND SHIELD LOOK VERY VERY GOOD I AM GOING TO GET SHIELD AND IT IS GOING TO BE AMAZING MY FAVORITE IS THE WATER STARTER AND I HOPE IT GETS GHOST-TYPING BECAUSE IT WAS INVISIBLE AT FIRST THAT WOULD BE VERY COOL.

okay, fangirling aside: it is now my goal to finish the main story of all this (which means everything through Rainbow Rocket) before Sword and Shield come out. That's a lot of story to get through in not a very long amount of time. Please expect many updates and me writing like a fucking madwoman, as though I am not already one.

ALSO: we now officially have a region where I can say that fucking Shakespeare is from. Amen and Hallelujah, thank you Game Freak, I know you're not actually reading this but a UK region is all I've ever fucking wanted thank you very very much

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I think I'm going to stay with Professor Burnet for a few days,” said Lillie, the next morning.

Moon looked up from her breakfast as Lillie sat down with her own, her Pokémon trailing after her. Lapin settled in the seat next to Lillie, picking up Umber and setting him on his lap; Snowfall curled up under Lillie's chair; and Nebby floated up onto the table, peering at Moon's toast and hashbrowns.

“Aww, you're not coming through Diglett's Tunnel with us? That's too bad,” said Hau.

“For one thing, I don't need to go through Diglett's Tunnel to get to Konikoni City— there's a monorail that goes over Memorial Hill. And I also wanted to train Lapin with some new moves, now that he's evolved. Professor Kukui will be on Akala today and I wanted to ask his advice about a moveset.”

“Well, he'd be the go-to guy for that,” agreed Moon. “It'll be a shame you're not traveling with us, but it's just a couple of days.”

Lillie nodded. She took a pillbox out of her satchel, opening a single compartment and dumping a handful of pills into her palm.
"What are all those?" asked Hau.

"I used to take them upstairs so you wouldn't see me, but now that you know I've got some, um, issues, I don't feel like I have to hide." She pointed at each of the pills in her palm. "This one's an antidepressant, this one is for anxiety, this one is for the side effects of the anxiety medication, and this one is a multivitamin, because I'm never sure if I'm eating enough to get the nutrients I need and it's better to be safe than sorry."

She tossed the pills into her mouth, chasing them down with a sip of water.

"You're really cool, Lillie," said Hau, resting his chin in one hand as he grinned at her. "Like, really cool. I don't think I've met anyone as cool as you in my whole life."

"Stop it," said Lillie, rolling her eyes; but she was blushing a little bit.

"The coolest," emphasized Hau. He waited until she took another sip of water, then added, "And the prettiest."

Lillie spat out her water. Most of it landed on Moon's plate, but she'd been mostly done eating anyway.

After breakfast, they waved good-bye to Lillie and headed over to Diglett's Tunnel. It was a bit of a walk through the city, but soon the smooth, steep mound of Memorial Hill loomed before them, with the entrance to Diglett's Tunnel tucked at the base. Two lanterns, dangling from intricately carved metal poles, stood on either side of the cave.

"Looks pretty dark inside," said Hau. "Uila, do you have Flash or Protect on right now?"

"Piki pi!"

"Ah, okay. Let me re-teach you Flash... there you go. Want to light us up?"

"Chu piki," agreed Uila, taking the lead as they went into the cave. A bright glow from his cheeks and tail lit up the cave as they walked. Sonar flew around Hau in wide, lazy sweeps; Poppy bounced along at his ankles and Ollie was nestled comfortably in Hau's arms. Moon opted to carry Puck in his arms, since he was a bit of a slow walker, and quickly grew tired after jumping or gliding. Ariel was also in her ball, since she had neither echolocation nor night vision to show her where in the cave would be safe to fly; but Moon was carrying Macbeth and Ben—the former because she was scared of literally everything, the latter because Ben had whined until she gave in and picked him up.

"You're getting way too heavy for me to do this," she informed him. "Once you evolve, it's not happening anymore. And you're going to evolve soon. We're going to go to the store and look at Kahuna Olivia's stones and you're going to point at the one you like the best, or something."

Ben wrinkled his nose, but said nothing.

"Wouldn't it be funny if we both ended up with Flareon?" mused Hau.

"It would kind of be funny, but you kind of lucked out with Ollie's personality on that one. He'd be good for just about any of the Eeveelutions—except maybe Umbreon."

"Too cheerful by half," agreed Hau.

"Veeon," murmured Ollie.
Ben hissed at him in response, and Moon gently poked him in the nose. “Stop that. Use your words.”

“Speaking of words,” said Hau, his tone growing serious, “are we gonna talk about Lillie?”

“Yeah, we should.”

After they had left the Dimensional Research Lab, Lillie had gone straight into the room she shared with Moon at the Pokémon Center and had locked herself in the bathroom for three hours. She texted them both to say that she was fine, but wanted to be alone for a little while. When she came out she was red-eyed, but oddly calm. They hadn’t talked about any of it.

For a few moments, neither of them said anything, but then Moon sighed. “I knew there was some bullshit about her not thinking she’s pretty,” she said. “I bet that’s about her mom. Imagine your own mother telling you that you’re not good-looking. That’s like, in the basic job description for moms.”

“Right, they’re supposed to be biased for you.” Hau shook his head. “I don’t know about that brother of hers, either. We saw him that one time at the Pokémon Center, right after we got here.”

“I saw him another time,” remembered Moon. “It was after you left Paniola Town and I was raising Ben. Lillie went to the hospital on Poni Island for rabies shots, because her brother was worried about Snowfall. He brought her back to the Pokémon Center in the evening, and he and Lillie both saw me yelling at some random Trainer who was mad about Ben throwing an admittedly noisy temper tantrum.”

“You yelled at someone?”

“I’m not proud of it, but she had the most snotty, condescending attitude.” Moon threw her voice into a higher pitch. “Excuse me, but you do know that your Eevee is screaming loud enough to be heard outside of the Pokémon Center, right? Yes, you emotionally constipated meatball. He’s screaming in my damn ear.”

Hau snickered. “Well, if she was being that nasty about it, she probably deserved the scolding.”

“I told her I hoped she would never raise an egg Pokémon, because she would be an awful parent. And I think Lillie and her brother heard that part, because the Trainer kind of ran away in tears and then suddenly there they were.”

“Well, they would know about awful parents, I suppose,” said Hau darkly. “Did you get a better look at him?”

“No. He was wearing a hooded jacket and a Kantonian face mask. I caught a glimpse of cheekbone, but that was like it.”

“Hmm.” Hau pondered for a moment. “Did you look over the list thingy?”

“Yeah. I was surprised that they wrote down things that make her really happy, as well as the triggers.”

“Maybe they figure we can use that to help her when she’s not feeling too good.”

“Oh, good idea.”

“Some of them were really random, though. Like there was a whole section on smells, of all things. Apparently bleach and lavender and metal are all bad smells?”
“Well, blood often smells like iron or copper because it has those things in it, so that's probably what that's about. Bleach and lavender are common enough household scents, especially if her mom preferred a lavender perfume or something.” Moon shrugged. “I don't like lavender anyway— I've always preferred fruity smells to floral ones.”

“Oh, right. Whatever you use for your hair is kind of citrusy. Smells nice.”

“It's literally Sitrus berry, yeah. Thanks.”

“Lillie's shampoo is nice, too, but I've never actually seen it so I don't know what it is. She always smells like cupcakes and sunshine.”

Moon grinned. “It's vanilla and Pecha berry, but I'll tell her you said so.”

“Don't you dare,” Hau warned her. “Or else I'm going to tell Gladion you think his hands are pretty.”

Moon's mood slipped, at the mention of Gladion. “Haha— sure, you do that.”

Hau turned to look at her, one eyebrow raised. “Trouble in paradise?”

“There wasn't a paradise to begin with, but there's certainly trouble. We had an argument. I don't even know what it was about anymore, but he was definitely not being nice and I told him to text me when he's ready to apologize.”

“Oh, that sucks.”

“I mean, I'll probably start texting him in a week anyway to let him know that I'm not like, mad for keeps. Because I'm really not, but he was being a dick and he needs to know that.” Moon shook her head. “But that's depressing, let's talk about something else. I picked up the crib sheet about Pokémon that can make wormholes or Ultra Wormholes or some kind of portal to another dimension. Want me to read about it?”

“Ooh, yeah! I forgot to grab that and I was curious too. Go for it.”

They already knew about Nebby, but Moon read about Giratina and Palkia— which made sense, seeing how Giratina literally lived in another dimension, and Palkia controlled all of space. Dialga was a surprise; but apparently time-travel was a category of travel that involved the space-time continuum, instead of just space. Celebi was also a time traveller, so it was on the list as well. Mew wasn't a surprise— there wasn't much Mew couldn't do, which Moon supposed was why Team Rocket had wanted it cloned in the first place. And of course Arceus could do anything and everything, since it had made the universe. Hoopa, a mythical Pokémon that had only been sighted in Kalos and Hoenn, could open portals using rings that were part of its body— but nobody had been able to keep it in one place long enough to discern how the portals worked, or where they led. Many Ghost-type Pokémon were observed to use Shadow Sneak and other moves that made use of small, local portals. And Bronzong, a non-legendary native to Sinnoh, apparently brought rain to ancient civilizations by opening portals in the sky.

“I hadn't realized that so many legendaries could open portals,” she commented, folding up the crib sheet and tucking it in her pocket. “And yet Nebby's among them... hey, do you think Nebby is a legendary?”

“Nah. The Professor said Cosmog are rare, but she didn't say they were legendaries.”

“I'm just wondering,” explained Moon. “You know how Trainers can't get wild Pokémon healed at Pokémon Centers?”
“Well, yeah.”

“What about Nebby?”

Hau blinked for a few moments; but then his jaw dropped and he stopped walking, turning to look at Moon. “I never thought about that!”

“But there's like an exception clause or something. It's called Code Purple. I'm not sure what that means, but I guess legendaries and mythicals can be healed at Pokémon Centers even if they aren't in a ball. Nebby can be healed under the Code Purple clause.”

“Right, yeah. So she must be a legendary or a mythical, or something. Wow.” Hau frowned. “What kind of dirtbags would do sick experiments on a legendary or mythical Pokémon?”

“I mean, I hardly need to remind you about Team Rocket, they literally cloned a mythical Pokémon. And it doesn't matter if the Pokémon's mythical or legendary or not, it's still sick.”

“Right, but usually the legendaries and mythicals affect nature in some way. Like if some scientists were torturing— oh, let's say a Thundurus, then storms would be affected by that. Whereas if they were just hurting a Caterpie, it doesn't hurt the world as much. It's still wrong and they shouldn't do it, of course.”

“Of course.”

The path of Diglett's Tunnel was beginning to slope downhill, and Moon heard voices ahead. She and Hau approached, carefully peering into the dim light beyond the radius of Uila's Flash.

“Oh, it's Kahuna Olivia!” realized Hau.

Olivia turned around, hearing his voice. She smiled at them. “Hello, Hau and Moon! I hear you've finished your trials on Akala Island!”

“That's right! We'll be training our teams up for the Grand Trial pretty soon.”

“I'm glad to hear it!” Olivia turned to the two people she was speaking with— a man and a woman. They both wore all white, with gold buttons, clasps, and zippers. “These are two representatives of the Aether Foundation. They're helping me out with a bit of a tricky situation at the moment.”

“Team Skull has been known to hang out in Diglett's Tunnel from time to time,” said the woman earnestly. “Normally, Kahuna Olivia is kind enough to let them stick around, as long as they don't harm anything— but whatever they've been doing recently has been disturbing the wild Pokémon. The Diglett have been very agitated, coming out to attack anyone who passes their dens.”

“And there are Zubat here as well, but Zubat aren't an at-risk population,” added the man. “Alolan Diglett aren't rare, but they're also not exactly common. We don't want any of the wild Pokémon to get hurt, though. We're looking for hurt Pokémon and patrolling to find Team Skull, so we can ask them to stop whatever they're doing.”

“It's rather unusual for Team Skull,” added Olivia, with a slight frown. “They're obnoxious and they can be quite annoying, but they're not usually malicious. They like Pokémon.”

“The problem is, our outpost in Konikoni is fairly small— we're close enough to the Aether Paradise that it's easy to call for backup. So there's only five people on duty at any given time, and they can only spare two of us at a time to investigate outside of the outpost. We don't have the resources to calm the Diglett and to look for Team Skull. And Kahuna Olivia knows this cave better than anyone
— she knows how to guide us to the Diglett dens. But if Team Skull isn't stopped, we'll never finish calming them.”

“There's an easy solution, then,” decided Moon. “Hau and I will look for Team Skull and ask them to knock it off, and you guys can work on finding the Diglett.”

Relief creased Olivia's face. “Oh, would you? That would be incredibly helpful... we've been here since early this morning and gotten nowhere.”

“Absolutely, Miss Olivia!” Hau grinned at her. “You can count on us. We've whooped Team Skull a few times now— they know better than to mess with us.”

“If they agree to leave, go easy on them,” Olivia reminded them. “They're just a bunch of kids, so usually I don't mind them spending time in the tunnel— but I won't stand for anyone harming the Pokémon. Thank you so much!”

“No problem!”

Moon and Hau set off to look for Team Skull. Not a hundred paces away from Olivia and the Aether employees, however, Moon noticed a series of small dens in the walls. She pointed them out to Hau.

“If they're agitated, they'll probably be on the defensive. We'd better be ready to battle.”

They attempted to walk past; but the ground rumbled and an Alolan Diglett rushed out at them. Moon admired the metallic shavings in the earth that set it apart from regular Diglett— and the thin golden wire sprouting from its head was a surprise as well.

“Poppy, use Bubblebeam!”

“Bri pop!” sang Poppy, shooting a jet of water at the Diglett. It squealed loudly, rushing back into the dens.

“Thanks.”

“My pleasure,” said Hau. “It'll be good training, too. Hey, aren't Wimpod part Water-type? Does Macbeth know any Water-type moves?”

“No, and I don't have any TMs for it either. It's kind of silly, but apparently she'll learn some really good ones when she evolves, so I'm willing to wait until then.”

“Fair enough. Well, Puck might not do so well against Diglett— they're part Steel-type, and I think Steel resists Grass.”

“Ariel still has Brick Break if I get desparate, but I might try Macbeth on a few of them, even without a type-advantageous move. She's been training really well.”

“She's eager to please,” laughed Hau. Macbeth wiggled, embarrassed at their praise.

They battled more Diglett and a few Zubat. The pace was slow, and Uila eventually began to find it difficult to maintain Flash. Hau recalled him, leaving them in extremely dim light. Diglett's Tunnel was occasionally lit by a lantern hanging from the ceiling, but only on the main pathways.

“And Team Skull probably isn't on the main pathways,” theorized Moon. “If Olivia and the Aether people couldn't find them by now, then they're probably hiding out somewhere.”

“Right, I see what you mean. Well, I think I've got a flashlight in my bag, but I've used it a bit so I
don't know how much battery it's got left.”

“Do you have spare batteries?”

“I don't think so.”

“Well, that was kind of dumb of you.”

“Oh, go jump in a lake.” But Hau grinned, so she knew he wasn't really mad. He dug the flashlight out of his backpack, and they kept moving.

Despite all their efforts, not a single Team Skull grunt was to be found in the little side passages or hidey-holes of Diglett's Tunnel. Rotom had helpfully provided them with maps so that they knew more or less where they were going; but it was a maze of curving paths, occasionally supplemented by lanterns to light the path and steel staircases built to traverse ledges and drop-offs. At one point they ran into a dead end because of a large white boulder that blocked the path— but Moon could see daylight beyond the boulder.

“We probably need to have Machamp on the Ride Pager to move that one,” pointed out Hau, after attempting to break the boulder with a Ride Tauros did nothing more than irritate the Pokémon. “Yeah, I think I can see a hole behind it. You have the Machamp push the boulder into the hole, and then you can just walk across.”

“That's lame,” griped Moon, but she turned back and followed Hau out of the dead end. “I think we've covered every tunnel in this stupid cave. It didn't look too bright outside, either. I don't think we'll make it to Konikoni City today.”

“Yeah, we'll probably have to camp on Route Nine. In the dark.” Hau sighed. “Hopefully letting Uila rest for a while will let him hold Flash for us to set up camp, though. And there's plenty of trees on Route Nine for you to hang your hammock.”

“Fair enough.”

Rotom's map guided them to the Route Nine exit of the cave. Moon could see the sun setting in an orange sky as they approached it— but then she heard a voice.

“Oh shit, it's that Trainer bitch!”

“Oh, hell yes,” murmured Moon, sending Hau into muffled laughter as she turned around.

Three grunts were walking toward them: orange-haired and foul-mouthed Molly; a thin, teal-haired boy with glasses that Moon vaguely remembered battling in Hau'oli City; and, of course, Emmett. It was Emmett who had spoken. Both Molly and the teal-haired boy looked exasperated.

“For fuck's sake,” said Molly, rolling her eyes. “You never shut the fuck up about her. If I didn't already know you have terrible taste in women, I would think you liked her.”

“FUCK NO, GROSS!” shouted Emmett, outraged.

“You done talking about me like I'm not here?” said Moon, raising an eyebrow at him. “Because I've got a message for you from Kahuna Olivia. She wants you to stop whatever you're doing that's upsetting the Diglett.”

“We aren't upsetting the stupid Diglett,” retorted Emmett.
“I'm not talking to you. I'm talking to Molly. She's clearly in charge.”

Molly folded her arms. “It's been a while, Moon. How the hell are ya?”

“Pretty good, thanks.” She was slightly surprised that Molly was so friendly, but they had parted on decent terms in Paniola Town. “What are you guys doing in here, anyway?”

Molly indicated the teal-haired boy. “Rogelio's looking for fucking mushrooms, and since he's useless in battle we had to come with him.”

“I'm not exactly sure how well fungus will ferment,” admitted the teal-haired boy, pushing his glasses up his nose, “but I'd like to try it.”

“Fermenting?” Moon was intrigued. “Do you make alcohol or something?”

“Recreationally, yes. I've experimented with potatoes and Cornn berries, of course— vodka and whiskey are staples. But I'll be trying early Grepa berries, to see if we can get brandy and wine, and sugarcane for rum, and barley for beer— er, that's not very interesting. Sorry.”

“It sounds super cool, actually. But how are you picking mushrooms? I didn't know any grew in here.”

“There's a little dead end with a bunch of them growing on the wall,” explained Rogelio. “I've been trying to spread them to other areas of the cave, since they don't grow as quickly as I need them.”

“It kind of sounds like you should invest in a Paras or a Morelull. Don't they produce mushrooms?”

“Well, I do have a Morelull, actually— but I think it's unethical to harvest from a Pokémon for purely recreational purposes.”

“It's not all recreational, dumbass,” said Molly, but she sounded affectionate. “We sell a good bit of it, too. A couple of nightclubs in Malie buy our booze to use for cocktails. We know it's pretty shit quality, but if you're looking to get fucked up it's fantastic.”

“Arceus's balls,” sighed Emmett, placing his hands on his hips. “This is boring as fuck. Can we just go home already?”

“Hey, Emmett,” said Molly conversationally.

“What?”

“Shut the fuck up.”

He spluttered indignantly.

“Is spreading the mushrooms something you're doing loudly, or with a lot of vibrations?” asked Hau. “Because the Diglett have been really defensive about something— they're attacking everyone on sight.”

“That would be Emmett's fault,” murmured Rogelio.

“Fuck off, nerd!”

“Emmett, seriously shut the fuck up or I'm gonna deck you.” Molly rolled her eyes again, turning to Moon. “Yeah, it's his fault. He accidentally stepped on a Diglett and tripped, and when it squealed he kicked it because he's an asshole.”
“It bit me!” yelped Emmett. “It’s not my fault—”

Molly reached out and smacked Emmett upside the head. He flinched away, grumbling under his breath. “So it went to its family, and they’ve probably just been on the lookout for us ever since.”

“In that case, it would probably be smart for you to leave anyway,” advised Moon.

“No way, bitch!” sneered Emmett. “Team Skull’s not a bunch of pussies.”

“Those are gendered slurs. I’m totally telling Plumeria on you.”

Emmett fell silent at once.

Molly smirked before turning to Moon. “Right, well if the Diglett are mad then we’d better go. I don’t want Kahuna Olivia to say we can’t chill here anymore. A lot of us like the cave.”

“It’s quiet,” said Rogelio, a dreamy tone in his voice. “Peaceful.”

“I don’t even know why the boss let you join,” said Emmett to Rogelio, disgust in his voice. “There’s nothing badass about you at all.”

“There’s nothing badass about you either,” pointed out Hau.

Emmett rounded on Hau. “Say that to my face, fucker! Come on, battle me—”

“Nope,” said Molly, grabbing Emmett by the arm and dragging him toward the exit. “Even if I hadn’t already decided we’re leaving, you’re still a Skull bro. Skull bros do not let other Skull bros humiliate themselves in front of other Trainers.”

Rogelio lifted a hand to half-wave at Moon. “It was nice to talk to you,” he said softly. “Thank you for listening, even though I’m in Team Skull.”

“It was nice to meet you too. You seem like a nice kid.”

“You’re only a year older than me, at the most. I’m seventeen.”

“Really?” Moon was surprised. “We’re the same age, then. You don’t look it.”


“Bye.”

Hau looked at Moon, who shrugged. They waited a few moments, then followed the grunts out of the cave.

Route Nine was cooling down in the evening, the sky going from gold to peach to orange. Moon and Hau found a spot by the side of the main road with two trees where Moon could hang her hammock. They didn’t bother with a fire, using Moon’s camp-stove and the jar of fuel that went with it to boil water while the Pokémon hunted or ate beans.

“Maybe they’re not all bad,” said Hau thoughtfully, scooping pasta and red sauce out of his MRE pouch. “You know, Team Skull. I kind of thought all of them were losers, but Rogelio was nice.”

“Obviously Emmett’s an ass, but Molly’s pretty cool, too. She told me about the two girls who were nasty to Lillie, so I think I kind of owe her one.”
“Right, yeah.”

“They seem young, though. Like, just about our age or younger.”

Hau nodded. “I think there's a mix. I've seen kids as young as fourteen or fifteen, but there's a few of them in their twenties, too.”

“Do they drop out of school?” Moon drank the broth from her first cup ramen and wiped her mouth before picking up the second cup.

“It probably depends on the kid,” pointed out Hau and yeah, that made sense. “Rogelio's seventeen, so either he just graduated or he's got another year left of high school. But the guy makes alcohol as a hobby, which means he definitely knows his organic chemistry. I dunno what he's doing in Team Skull— with a mind like that he could definitely go to college.”

They finished eating in silence, pondering the many facets of Team Skull. It had been a long day of Digletts and darkness, so Moon curled up in her hammock and opened a sudoku puzzle game on Rotom. Macbeth laid on her chest as she held the game on her stomach; Ben was curled up by her feet, his fluffy fur keeping them warm. Ariel was perched in one of the trees above them, and Puck had one of Moon's towels wrapped around him as a blanket where he sat beneath the other tree. Hau and his Pokémon were in his tent; Moon could see the light of his Dex through the material, and the shadow of Sonar dangling from one of the top poles.

A notification slid across the top of the screen, and Moon's heart pounded.

Chat: hypothetically

**fucking softie**: eddfuwd

**shakespeare jr**: ????

**fucking softie**: Excuse me. Apparently Null decided it was time for me to apologize.

**shakespeare jr**: Oh

She sighed, disappointed. It didn't mean as much like this. The Dex buzzed again.

**fucking softie**: I wanted to apologize the second you closed the door.

**fucking softie**: But I wondered if you had really forgiven me.

**shakespeare jr**: But are you actually going to apologize

**fucking softie**: I was getting to it.

**fucking softie**: I'm sorry, Moon.
fucking softie: I'm sorry that I hurt you, but I'm also sorry for shattering the illusion you had of me.

fucking softie: Because I'm really not a good person, no matter what you think.

Moon closed her eyes and sighed deeply.

“Wiiiim?” inquired Macbeth.

“I'm just talking to the stupidest boy in the world, don't mind me.”

shakespeare jr: Did I ever ask you to be a good person

fucking softie: ...

shakespeare jr: I'd rather you were just you. Good, bad, somewhere in the middle

shakespeare jr: Doesn't really matter to me

fucking softie: It should.

fucking softie: But I understand what you're telling me, so thank you.

Moon turned on Rotom's camera. The sun had long since gone down, but she turned up the flash and cradled a sleeping Macbeth close to her chest.

shakespeare jr: Picture Attachment: [sleepyselfie.jpeg]

shakespeare jr: If I can overcome my fear to sleep with a clingy bug, you can overcome whatever it is you're afraid of

shakespeare jr: Even if you've got to take it slowly, day by day or even hour by hour

shakespeare jr: I'll cheer you on

Moon waited a few more minutes, but he didn't respond. She set Rotom down on her stomach, running her hand over Macbeth's shell.

She had nearly fallen asleep when Rotom buzzed again.

fucking softie: Picture Attachment: [IMG015.jpeg]

fucking softie: “The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.”
Moon opened the picture to see Gladion, his face close to the camera. His nose and mouth were covered by his arms, and he seemed to be laying on his stomach.

**shakespeare jr**: EXCUSE ME

**fucking softie**: Did I do something wrong?

**shakespeare jr**: JULIUS CAESAR

**fucking softie**: I believe it was Marcus Antonius, actually.

**shakespeare jr**: And you even know which character said it

**shakespeare jr**: That elopement thing is totally still on the table you know

**fucking softie**: If you aren't with someone else by the time you turn thirty, I'll take you up on it.

**shakespeare jr**: This better not turn into a cheesy rom-com

**fucking softie**: Purely a business arrangement, I promise.

**shakespeare jr**: That's how every cheesy rom-com starts

**fucking softie**: You're too practical to end up in a romantic comedy.

**shakespeare jr**: So was Beatrice, and look where that got her

**fucking softie**: Beatrice wasn't practical. Intelligent, witty, and passionate— but not practical.

**fucking softie**: Hero was far more practical than Beatrice.

**shakespeare jr**: Ok buster

**shakespeare jr**: You wanna talk Shakespeare, let's fuckin talk Shakespeare

**shakespeare jr**: Except maybe not tonight because it's kind of late and I should go to sleep

**fucking softie**: I can always visit Konikoni City.

**shakespeare jr**: Whenever you've got time and you feel like hanging out, let me know

**fucking softie**: I'll do that.

**fucking softie**: Sleep well, Moon.

“I think he actually might be trying to kill me,” Moon mumbled under her breath.

**shakespeare jr**: You too, Gladion.
Hau is just deadass flirting with Lillie at this point, he's about as subtle as a gold brick wrapped in lemon to the face.

Memorial Hill is what the game calls the graveyard, but I'm pretty sure that the graveyard is not on an actual hill. The actual hill is the giant green unlabeled lump on the map, which Diglett's Tunnel runs beneath. The graveyard at Memorial Hill is going to be called— well, the graveyard at Memorial Hill. The monorail is for non-Trainers, because otherwise how would anyone get to Konikoni City by land? Trainers can take the monorail, but the ones on the island challenge usually opt to pass through Diglett's Tunnel because it's good training for Olivia.

Moon and Hau are discussing the list of Lillie's triggers, but not to her face because they are Good Friends™

“She always smells like cupcakes and sunshine.” — Hau your uwu is showing

Okay so like time travel is totally a form of dimensional travel and Mew is basically omniscient (not quite as omniscient as Arceus but STILL) so the time travellers should have been included in the Dimensional Research Lab. Thanks for listening to my TED talk

Machamp is a Ride Pokémon, but like hell is it going to be carrying anybody while pushing the boulder. We don't have a control pad to worry about so Moon's just going to be standing on the side and watching while Machamp pushes with all four arms.

And we have a new Team Skull grunt: Rogelio! I had to make at least one grunt who was sort of an innocent nerd, and that would be Rogelio. He just wants to do science and make booze lmao

I decided not to have the fight here because Molly and Moon (the leaders of the separate operations here) are both reasonable human beings who are willing to talk things out. If Emmett had been in charge instead of Molly, there would have been a fight. And Rogelio's just confused, the poor dear.

“There's nothing badass about you either.” — every day is Roast Emmett day in this universe, I'm not even joking

“Skull bros do not let other Skull bros humiliate themselves in front of other Trainers.” — this is deadass something Plumeria has taught all the grunts, the only ones who haven't absorbed it are idiots like Emmett

Null is literally out here matchmaking, wtf author why are you letting other people do ur job

Okay but Gladion is out here seducing Moon with Shakespeare and honestly this is just wish fulfillment, I wish somebody would seduce me with Shakespeare but no, I'm forever alone lmao. I think Gladion's as lonely as Moon is tbh
Chapter Summary

Route Nine, Konikoni City.

Chapter Notes

Moon and Hau arrive in Konikoni City to prepare for their Grand Trials; Ben chooses an evolution.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Ah, there's the police station,” said Hau, pointing. “Which means we're about half a mile out from Konikoni City.”

“Thank Arceus, I'm starving. Is Lillie meeting us there, or is she still with Professor Burnet?”

“She's probably going to take the monorail over tonight— depends on how much training she gets done with Lapin today. And I guess Umber might be pretty close to evolving, too? She said probably not until Ula'ula, but it will be pretty soon after that.”

“Right.” Moon sighed, tipping back her head and letting the warmth of the afternoon sun brush over her freckling nose. Her skin tended to stay a pale brown, but the amount of time she had spent out of doors in the last few months had had the effect of brightening everything up with a golden tan and the occasional freckle.

When she put her head back down, a sharp tug on her hair made her wince. “Ow— shit, my hair's caught in my backpack strap.”

“Need help?”

“Nah, I got it.” She carefully worked her thin hair out from where it had tangled in the strap. “This is getting way too long for me. I think I'm going to get a haircut.”

“There are a few salons in Konikoni City, bzzt,” Rotom informed her. “In fact, there's one on the same street as the Pokémon Center and Kahuna Olivia's stone shop.”

“Perfect. I'll get a chop and pick up a rock.”

Hau reached up, brushing one hand along the dreadlocks he kept neatly tied back into what Moon had been trying to avoid thinking of as a man bun. “Maybe I should cut my hair,” he mused.

“Do you like your hair?”

“Yeah. It's a lot of work, but I've been growing these babies out for a couple of years now and it would be kind of a shame to waste it.”
“That's true. Do you ever put beads and stuff in it?”

Hau laughed. “Not since I was little,” he said, with a grin. “Mel and Wiki still do, when they've got cornrows. My dad used to wear his hair in an afro, but he started putting in dreads when I was about ten. I wanted to be just like him, so I started doing the same thing when I was... oh, I dunno, thirteen? Mom's got some pictures of me with an afro, before then. I should ask her to send some, they're hilarious.”

“I vaguely remember some Christmas cards with family pictures in them. You looked really different with big hair.”

“I looked stupid,” snorted Hau. “I was a tiny kid with huge hair. I'm so glad I grew into it.”

“And you haven't stopped, apparently. How many inches have you grown since we left home, again?”

“Two,” said Hau, smirking at her. “Don't hate me because you're a shrimp.”

“Excuse you, I have also grown an entire inch since we left on our journey, my mother was bewailing the length of my shorts when I went to visit home—”

They kept bantering as they approached the police station. An on-duty officer glanced up lazily from the crossword puzzle he was doing on the front porch, but looked back down when it was clear that they weren't going to bother him.

“Ah, Trainers! Excuse me!”

Moon and Hau turned, surprised, to see an oddly nondescript man walking toward them. He had plain brown hair and brown eyes and he wore a long trench coat— unusual for an Alolan autumn, but he didn't seem bothered by the heat.

“Hi, can we help you?” Hau asked him.

“But of course!” The man offered his hand for them each to shake. “My name is— well, it isn't terribly important what my name is. I am with Interpol.”

“Oh, really? Wow!” Moon was intrigued, remembering what Professor Burnet had said about alien Pokémon— Ultra Beasts— falling under the jurisdiction of Interpol.

“Yes, it is a fascinating profession— a most thrilling lifestyle. But I am getting off-topic already! What do the two of you know about Team Rocket?”

“Team Rocket?” Moon frowned, glancing at Hau. He shrugged. “Er— they disbanded ages ago. My dad worked for Silph Co. so he was a hostage during the takeover, and Champion Red helped save him and everyone else.”

“But of course, but of course!” The man nodded. “Have you seen anyone reminiscent of Team Rocket here in Alola? There have been reports of Team Rocket activity here— or at least, people who profess to be part of Team Rocket.”

“The closest thing I've seen is Team Skull, but they're just a bunch of delinquent teenagers, not sick yakuza who get their rocks off on hurting people.”

“Quite so! I have heard about Team Skull as well. They are... how shall I say this... occasionally unpleasant but largely benign? Yes, that is a good way of putting it. Like finding a toenail in one's
cheeseburger, yes.”

“Um... sure, yeah.” Moon struggled not to laugh at either the off-the-wall comparison or Hau's disgusted expression.

“Well, please take this.” He held out a pair of business cards; Moon took both and handed one to Hau. “If you should see anyone acting suspicious or hear anything about Team Rocket, please do not hesitate to contact me and report your findings. I would be most grateful, yes.”

The business card read International Police Agent: LOOKER and listed both a phone number and an email address. Something about the name Looker was familiar, though Moon couldn't quite place it.

“Thanks,” she said, pocketing the card. “We'll let you know if we hear something.”

“Thank you, thank you! It is most appreciated, yes. I wish you the best of luck and the healthiest of lives.”

“Thanks, man,” said Hau, holding out his fist.

Looker peered at him for a few moments, then slowly held out his fist in response. Hau bumped his fist against Looker's. The man blinked several times, but waved all the same as Moon and Hau resumed their walk toward Konikoni City.

“Team Rocket, here in Alola?” said Moon, after a few moments. “That would be shitty. I don't know that they'd have a whole lot of room to operate— there's only so much space, after all. And the trial captains and the Kahunas really know the land. They would know if there was something wrong, wouldn't they?”

“Yeah, they would.” Hau frowned. “That makes me think Hau'oli or Malie City, honestly. Hau'oli is the biggest city in Alola, as well as the place where most incoming ships go. And Malie has a lot of Kantonian influence— no offence, but Team Rocket is pretty solidly Kantonian.”

“None taken,” Moon assured him. “I called them yakuza for a reason. So we'll keep an eye out when we go to Malie, you think?”

“Yeah, that seems like a good idea to me.”

They arrived at Konikoni City around lunchtime, which was perfect. Hau insisted on picking up several dozen malasadas along with their usual sandwiches from the Pokémon Center. At this point a whole dozen were still for Hau, but Moon could only ever eat three or four malasadas at a time and the rest went to their Pokémon— though Puck and Ariel declined, preferring freeze-dried Bug packets.

“I think the first thing I want to do after renting out a room is evolve Ben,” decided Moon.

Ben looked up from his malasada, scowling. “Veeon veeon ee,” he muttered, tearing savagely at the pastry. Golden Sitrus jam spurted onto his face, which Macbeth shuffled over to lick off with her slobbery mandible things. Moon looked away so she wouldn't get creeped out.

“I'll come with you,” offered Hau. “I have to pick up a Fire Stone for Ollie, too— and actually, I need a Thunder Stone for Uila, now that I think about it.”

“Pop bri bri!” said Poppy indignantly, placing her hands on her hips.

“Yeah, I know you want to evolve first, but you're not ready yet. You and Puck are getting close, but
it's still not going to be for a while. And I bet Puck evolves first anyway.”

“Actually, I think Macbeth is going to evolve before Puck.” Moon patted her little Bug on the head, and Macbeth crooned contentedly. “She's been working really hard and growing well— and her shell seems a little bit flaky. She might shed or something, right? I don't know how Bug evolution works.”

“Well, she's definitely not going to form a chrysalis, but shedding is a possibility. That's how Ekans and Servine and the like evolve, right? Servine gets too big for its skin and bursts out as a Serperior.”

“Right, yeah.” Moon was suddenly very glad she hadn't ever harbored the desire to take a Pokémon journey in Unova; she probably would have chosen Snivy and the mental image was disturbing. “Do you ever think about what Starter you would have picked in another region?”

“Oh, my favorite game to play when I can't sleep!” Hau grinned at her as they began clearing the remains of their lunch from the table. “Let's start with Kanto, your homeland.”

“Squirtle,” said Moon promptly. She'd harbored that dream for ages, and Red's Blastoise was her favorite of his Kantonian starters— he had all three, picked up on his journey. “What about you?”

“I'm really torn between Charmander and Squirtle, actually,” admitted Hau. “They're both cute. I think I would have been happy with either.”

“Johto?”

“Chikorita, for sure.”

“Hey, same here!” Moon high-fived him, grinning. “What do you like about Chikorita?”

“Meganium is tanky. They're made for defense, and you don't often get Starters like that— a lot of them are attack or special-attack focused.”

“You mean Puck and Poppy,” said Moon dryly, drawing a laugh from her friend.

“Yeah, exactly. And I guess Litten's line are attackers, too. How about Hoenn?”

“Mudkip.” Moon gave her answer unflinchingly. “I was torn up about that one for a while, because Torchic and Treecko are also really cute— but I have to go with Mudkip.”

“I'd have picked Torchic, I think. Blaziken is kind of badass.”

They went on trading answers as they walked down the street to Olivia's stone shop. In Sinnoh, Moon would have picked Piplup and Hau would have picked Turtwig; in Unova, Moon's choice was Snivy and Hau's was Tepig. And in Kalos— which had at one point been a very real possibility, for Moon— she would have chosen Fennekin, while Hau's pick was Chespin.

Olivia's stone shop was a busy, beautiful place. A lot of the architecture of Konikoni City was either Kantonian or Johtonian in nature, and it especially showed in the stone shop: the layered roofs and red-painted wood, as well as the lanterns hanging from hooks along the edges of the roofs, reminded Moon of home and of festivals in Celadon and Fuchsia City. Inside the shop were shelves and shelves full of sparkling, beautiful stones.

Moon returned her whole team to their balls, except for Ben because she needed both hands to keep him restrained while he looked at the stones. He was wearing the Everstone— Moon wasn't stupid— but she still didn't want him touching anything until he'd made his decision.
“All right, kid,” she told him, as Hau wandered over to a long shelf containing different cuts of Fire Stone. “You have five choices, you hear me?”

“Vee vee,” murmured Ben, sounding uninterested.

“Good. So, we don't have to use a stone at all. You could evolve into Sylveon whenever you like; and if we replace Baby-Doll Eyes with Protect or something, you would evolve into Espeon instead.”

Ben's nose wrinkled. “Eon vee,” he said flatly.

“Yeah, I didn't really think you would go for that, either.” Moon carried him closer to the shelves of orange, blue, and greenish-gold stones for a closer look. “That leaves only the original Kantonian Eevee line— Flareon, Vaporeon, and Jolteon. Ollie is going to be a Flareon; would you like to be like him?”

“Vee.”

“Okay, I guess not.” Moon chuckled. “You really did like the water, when we were sailing to Melemele Island. I asked you about becoming a Vaporeon then, but you kind of blew me off.”

Ben considered thoughtfully, but then his gaze fell.

“What? What is it, dude?”

His tail flicked from side to side, a bit hesitantly; but then he murmured, “Ee vee, vee veeon vee ee.”

Moon's jaw dropped open slightly, but she did her best to close it before Ben could look up and see her surprise.

“I mean, you really shouldn't take Macbeth into account for something as important as your evolution,” she told him, trying to keep herself from getting emotional. “That's the rest of your life you're talking about, you know? And she's also part-Bug. I love you both. I wouldn't get rid of either one of you if you both turn out to be Water-types.”

Ben shook his head emphatically. “Eon vee,” he insisted.

“Are you absolutely sure?”

“Vee.”

Moon reached out to the shelf and picked up a Thunder Stone. She wouldn't lie and say she hadn't considered it— especially as she thought about the personality types of the Eeveelutions in comparison to Ben. He was most suited to be either an Umbreon or a Jolteon, out of the eight options.

“Vee,” repeated Ben.

“You can't take this back,” Moon reminded him.

“Ee veeon.” His mouth quirked slightly, leaning forward in her arms to sniff at the Thunder Stone. It was harmless, as he wore the Everstone; but his fur stood on end and his nose twitched. “Vee vee.”

“Jolteon it is.”

They went up to the counter to pay for the stone. Hau had picked up both a Fire Stone and a
Thunder Stone, much to Poppy's chagrin.

Moon and Hau took their teams down to a fenced park that bordered the ocean, and by mutual, unspoken agreement split up to do their evolutions. Moon and Ben walked uphill through the park to the Kononoki City lighthouse, sitting down beneath the shade of a slim maple tree.

“Are you ready?” she asked him.

“Veeon,” said Ben, with a nod; then his mouth quirked. “Ee— jol veeon?”

It was an attempt to mimic the sounds that Jolteon made. Moon grinned and set the Thunder Stone down on the grass, then reached for the collar that held Ben's Everstone on him, unbuckling it.

The moment Ben was free, he bounded over to the Thunder Stone, clearly about to leap on it.

“Wait,” Moon told him. “Let me send out your siblings. They'll want to see this.”

Ben rolled his eyes, but waited as Moon released Puck, Ariel, and Macbeth. All three of them predictably shied away from the Thunder Stone, being weak to Electric attacks. Puck offered Moon a look that said, “Really?”

“It was his choice,” said Moon, shrugging. She considered how Vaporeon would have made all of them weak to Electric, and decided that they were better off. She turned to Ben, whose tail was wiggling quickly from side to side. “All right, kid. Are you ready?”

“Vee.”

He pounced on the stone. Bright light and crackles of electricity flickered around them; Moon dove for Macbeth and Ariel, attempting to shield them both from harm. Puck had resistance in his Grass-type, so he merely watched unblinkingly as Ben's fur grew longer, as it twisted into sharp, stiff peaks and valleys instead of loose fluff and then it turned a lovely, bright shade of yellow— though the ruff around the neck remained white.

The Thunder Stone cracked into two pieces, the greenish-gold glow fading and leaving only a clear, blue-ish crystal behind. Moon picked up the pieces and was surprised when it melted against her fingers like sand, drifting into the afternoon breeze.

“Jol vee jol,” said Ben.

His voice had gone a bit deeper, but there was nothing unfamiliar about it— he sounded like the same Ben he always was. He took a few cautious steps forward, shaking out his legs.

“I'm receiving a prompt for Ben to learn Thunder Shock, bzzt,” said Rotom helpfully. “Shall I replace Baby-Doll Eyes with Thunder Shock?”

“Yeah, you do that.”

Ben closed his eyes as he learned the new move.

“Ben has learned Thunder Shock, bzzt. Congratulations on your healthy Jolteon.”

“Thanks,” said Moon dryly. “Much appreciated.”

With that out of the way, they made their way down to the other end of the park, where Hau and his team had settled on a park bench to do their own evolving. Ollie was now a fluffy Flareon, bounding forward to sniff curiously at Ben before nodding and leading them back to the group. Poppy was
crying, Hau was attempting to comfort her, Sonar appeared to be enjoying the drama— and Uila had evolved into the Alolan form of Raichu.

Moon studied the Alolan form. She’d seen pictures of Kantonian Raichu many times, though she’d never actually seen one in person as Red refused on principle to evolve his Pikachu. Alolan Raichu was different— rounder, softer, made of less sharp edges than its Kantonian cousin. He also hovered on his own tail, standing on it like a surfboard and reminding Moon of when she and Hau had Mantine-surfed to Akala Island over two months ago.

“He's gained Psychic type, right?” she asked Hau.

“Yeah,” said Hau. He blinked a few times. “Er— he can send thoughts now. It's a lot like Pokémon speech. They don't really use words, but you get the gist of it with facial expressions and emotions.”

Moon was suddenly the recipient of a foreign thought— looking up at Hau from below, as Hau held out a Thunder Stone. “Oh,” she said, blinking at Uila. “Wow, that's actually really cool, Uila. Thanks for sharing that.”

“Pika rai,” murmured Uila, bobbing up and down on his hovering tail-surfboard.

Ben sniffed at Uila and seemed to recognize their shared typing, hopping up onto the surfboard without so much as asking permission. Uila patted him on the head and steadied the board, so they could both sit there.

Macbeth had been shrinking away a bit from Ben, but Moon thought it had more to do with the type weakness than any actual intimidation. Her suspicions were confirmed when Macbeth hesitantly ventured from Moon's arms, antennae waving up at Ben from the ground. Ben seemed surprised by this, but he leaned off the edge of the board, stretching his paw toward Macbeth. Uila obligingly dipped to accommodate him, and Moon watched in surprise as Macbeth crawled onto Ben’s leg, clinging with her tiny legs, and let Ben pull her up onto the board as well. She sat on Ben's back, keeping well away from Uila.

“They're a good bunch of Pokémon,” said Hau affectionately. “So your brat went for Jolteon, huh? Good choice.”

Ben hissed at him.

“Evidently, I'm the only one allowed to call him a brat.” Moon reached out and ruffled Ben's fur affectionately. Static tickled along her fingers, and she wondered if Macbeth was uncomfortable but simply enduring it to be with her friend. The thought was endearing.

“Now I've just got Sonar and Poppy to evolve.”

“Noibat don't evolve for a long time, do they?”

“No, he's got a long while yet. But when he does evolve he'll be very powerful, so watch out!” Hau grinned. “And Poppy's going to gain Fairy-type, so she'll become a whole new force to be reckoned with.”

He didn't state directly that he would challenge Moon, when his teammates had evolved; but the suggestion was implicit in his tone. Moon considered the possibilities. She wasn't worried about Poppy or Sonar, frankly— Ben could take care of them both easily and Puck would always have the advantage over Poppy. Macbeth might be a liability until she evolved, so Moon hoped that Hau wouldn't challenge her until then. She never had to think about Ariel doing well in battle. Considering that Moon had conquered nearly all of Akala's trials relying mostly on the now-
Toucannon with assistance from Puck, it would still be an honorable battle, if Hau decided to challenge her soon.

They went back to the Pokémon Center and found that Lillie had arrived, waiting in the café for them to return so that she could arrange to share a room with Moon once again. Moon showed off Ben, and Hau showed off Ollie and Uila; Lillie made the appropriate remarks about cuteness and increased strength and all was well and good with the world.

The next morning, Hau left for Route Nine and Diglett's Tunnel, to begin training in earnest for the Grand Trial; but Moon delayed her own training by visiting the salon. Lillie, claiming she had nothing better to do, tagged along.

“Hi,” Moon said to the receptionist. “I don't have an appointment or anything, I just want a haircut.”

“Awesome! Well, we've got a few free stylists right now, so we can get you set up right away. What about your friend?”

“Oh— no, I'm just here to watch,” said Lillie quickly.

“You sure?” Moon asked her. “It might be educational.”

Lillie raised an eyebrow.

“I mean, I don't know, it'd be something different? You have really long hair, you probably haven't cut it in ages and it might be, um, liberating?”

“I know what you meant,” Lillie assured her, a soft quirk of a smile appearing. “And I appreciate the sentiment— and I may actually try it, someday. But not today. I'm not ready.”

She followed Moon and a stylist over to a table with tall stools behind one of the styling chairs, where Moon sat and submitted to the cape tied around her neck.

“How short are you thinkin, hon?” the stylist asked Moon, picking up a hairbrush and briskly running it through Moon's hair.

“Short,” admitted Moon. “I've usually kept it about as long as my chin.”

“Hmm, that'd be cute. Do you want to go for that again?”

Moon considered. Her gaze drifted to Lillie in the mirror. Lillie was rapidly typing something into her phone, but she looked up and smiled at Moon.

“I won't be much help,” she admitted. “I like your hair however it looks, Moon.”

“Yeah, I figured.” Moon chuckled. “But you know what? I'm an adult, and I can do whatever I want with my hair.”

She looked at the stylist. “Let's go short. Let's go really short.”

“Trial captain Lana, or Kahuna Olivia?” countered the stylist. “Or somewhere in between?”

Moon considered this— it was a good way to measure a short haircut. Lana's hair came to just above her chin, cerulean blue; Olivia had a closely cropped pixie cut.

“More Olivia than Lana, I think,” she decided. “I'd like it longer than hers, but still distinctly short.”
“Ooh, that'll be cute!” the stylist beamed at her. “I'll just get started, then...”

About forty minutes later Moon ran her hands through her newly shorn hair and grinned at her reflection in the mirror. She looked older, she decided; the cut made her face look more angular, though she was still the same round-cheeked Moon she had always been.

“Want to try hair dye?” asked the stylist hopefully.

“Maybe some other time.” Probably never, thought Moon. She liked her natural color, and maintaining a good color was a lot of work, not to mention expensive.

Though she did secretly imagine how cross-eyed she could make Gladion get if she were to color her hair as platinum blonde as his own. That would be hilarious.

Moon and Lillie found Hau training just outside of Diglett's Cave, in the tall grass of Route Nine. Lillie joined him, working with Snowfall. Olivia didn't have Ice Stones in stock, unfortunately—they were primarily found on Mount Lanakila, and apparently she only went there when she was called in for an island challenge champion battle. So Snowfall would remain a Vulpix, for the moment. Moon was looking forward to seeing what Alolan Ninetales would look like.

It wasn't until that evening that she received a text from Gladion.

chat: hypothetically

fucking softie: How are you today?

shakespeare jr: Made it to Konikoni yesterday, safe and sound

shakespeare jr: Picture Attachment: [mysteriousselfie.jpeg]

shakespeare jr: There's a salon just down the road from the Pokémon Center.

fucking softie: I assume that this message has something to do with the fact that you're wearing a hat in the picture.

shakespeare jr: Sorry you must be a level 5 friend or higher to unlock the New Haircut Selfie perk

fucking softie: And how does one become a level 5 friend or higher?

shakespeare jr: Doing friend stuff idk

shakespeare jr: Talking, doing stuff for each other, spending time together

fucking softie: Shall I come to Konikoni City, then?

fucking softie: As I recall, I owe you a chat about the Bard. That should cover all three requirements for a level 5 friendship.

shakespeare jr: Omg how are you real
She met Gladion the next day, walking out to Diglett Tunnel. He was waiting for her when she got there, hands shoved in his pockets. Moon had anticipated this, wearing the bucket hat to cover her new haircut. He raised his eyebrows as she approached.

“That bad?”

“No, you jerk.” Moon rolled her eyes, reaching for the hat. “I just wanted to surprise you.”

And surprise him it seemed she did. Gladion studied her hair—or lack thereof, eyes sweeping across her forehead and down to her ears and neck. Moon flushed under the scrutiny.

“You look nice,” was his only comment. “But it would be hard to make you look bad, I think. Do you want to train for a while?”

“I— yeah, sure,” mumbled Moon. The compliment did not help with the blushing.

They headed into the dark of the Tunnel, picking largely on Zubats with the occasional Diglett. Gladion seemed to know his way around the tunnel without even the need for a map or a flashlight, and he worked with Rey as Moon brought out Macbeth.

In the darkness she was more aware of him than usual—not in the least because they stood with their backs to one another, only a few inches apart. It was a strategy as much as anything; cave Zubat liked to swarm sometimes, so it was nice to have a friend at your back.

“You caught Imp here, right?”

“I did.” Moon smiled, unseen in the darkness, when she heard the fondness and irritation in his voice. “The little shit wouldn't stop dive-bombing me, and he was much too quick for Null to hit him— she wasn't as well trained at the time. So I threw a ball at him. He was my first capture.”

“Ariel was my first capture.”

“I assumed as much. The Pokémon you begin your journey with is always special, no matter how you chose it—but the ones you capture have to consent to come with you as much as you pick them. Imp chose me, and Ariel chose you.”

“And Null didn't choose you?” asked Moon carefully.

A few moments of silence fell over them. Gladion didn't up and leave, but he also didn't answer the question. Moon had just about accepted that she'd crossed some kind of line and was trying to prepare a way to change the topic when he cleared his throat.

“In a way... I suppose she did. Have you ever heard the phrase *any port in a storm*?”

“I think I've read that somewhere.”

“I believe that's what I must have been to Null—at the beginning, anyway. I was the least objectionable option.”

“She must really trust you.”

“It took some time. And I must admit that I did not fully trust her, either.” Gladion cleared his throat. “She has... killed humans before. In self-defense.”

Moon was stunned into silence. She had never before heard of a Pokémon that had killed humans and gotten away with it—except for legendaries, because they were largely benign forces of nature.
If you did something to piss one off then it was commonly accepted that you probably deserved to die for it anyway. But regular Pokémon that killed humans were almost always put down for it.

“And there were times I thought she would kill me, too. So I didn’t trust her at first. But we’ve gotten to a point where we can work together. In her own way she probably cares about me, the way I... care about her.”

“You love her,” corrected Moon. “And she loves you. Anyone can see that.”

Gladion let the corrections stand.

They worked hard through the afternoon and evening, and eventually they made their way out of the tunnel. Moon half-turned to look at Gladion.

“Want dinner?” she asked him. “I can fly us over to Konikoni. There’s a nice restaurant near Olivia’s stone shop. We never did get around to discussing Beatrice versus Hero.”

He seemed to consider it for a few moments; but then he shook his head. “No, I should be going. I have a couple of errands I need to run tonight, and they’re going to be tedious and time-consuming. But I’ll look forward to it.” He coughed. “I mean, to the discussion.”

Moon fought back the urge to reach up and ruffle his uneven hair; but she had the feeling that Gladion would not appreciate this in the slightest so she refrained.

“Well, it was nice to see you today,” she told him, instead reaching up to rub the back of her neck. “You really earned that level five friendship.”

He snorted. “What’s the level cap?”

“Ten is max for platonic friendship, anything further strays into the romantic,” said Moon. She was making the numbers up on the spot, but it seemed to amuse Gladion. “At twenty you’re married.”

“Hmm.”

Moon pulled out her Ride Pager, calling up a Charizard. The ETA was only a minute or so—Konikoni City wasn’t far away at all. “Do you need a ride anywhere?”

“No, I’ve got my own transport. But thank you for offering.”

When he wasn’t being abominably rude, Moon realized, Gladion was unfailingly courteous. It was interesting how the two things coincided.

The Charizard arrived, and Moon shouldered her backpack as she climbed up onto the saddle. A hand on her waist steadied her, and Moon flushed when she realized it was Gladion. She buckled herself in, taking a deep breath to prepare for her fear of height.

“Ten and twenty,” said Gladion.

She blinked at him, confused.

There was a dry, tiny smirk on his face— the corner of his mouth barely turned up, but it was still the closest she had ever gotten to seen him smiling.

“It’s nice to know I’ve got something to shoot for.”

Moon gaped at him as he reached past and patted the Charizard’s shoulder, as any Trainer might do
to signal that they wanted to leave. The Charizard spread its wings and took off.

“I'm going to kill him,” she announced to her team, and to the uninterested Charizard. “I'm going to murder him dead. He can't just say things like that. My poor heart.”

Chapter End Notes

So Hau has a man bun— he keeps it tied up at the back of his head and a few pieces stick out in that Classic Anime Hairstyle. IT'S A MAN BUN OKAY. But I would also like to point out that the dreads are a thing, too. You can interpret them as not being a thing, but like... the two sections on either side of his face are short and kind of thick and you cannot tell me that a man of Hau's melanin, with long hair like that, would not have at least considered dreads as a convenient way to deal with hair that is generally inconvenient to deal with it. (I've done some research re: textured hair care, for writing purposes, and I'm kind of exhausted just thinking about it. Textured hair looks magical, but it requires a lot of upkeep and I'm just amazed that people who have it have the energy to deal with it on top of any other bullshit that life swings their way.)

Hau is black, Hala is black, their family is black, don't fuckin @ me when the Gen 7 games are the most diverse ones we've had yet. Gen 5 was pretty good— we had Lenora, Iris (Wikipedia says she's also Latina?? look at YOU Game Freak ';), Marshall, and Marlon. In Gen 6 we had Grant and MAYBE Olympia, plus the first-time option for the player character to choose a non-white avatar. This makes sense— I'm Pretty Sure there are less black people in France than in America. But in Gen 7, we've got Hau, Hala, Professor Kukui, Professor Burnet (idk if she's black but she's definitely not white), Kiawe, Olivia, and Hapu, not to mention the non-white avatar options and a literal fuckton of unnamed NPCs. Even your own mother definitely isn't white. (Which is why I made Moon's mom originally from Alola, and her dad from Kanto.)

I'm sorry but Looker cracks me up. He's got the most hilarious speech patterns, which like Fantina were originally based on French before Kalos was a thing. Pls indulge as I try to imitate his speaking style lmao

Fist bumps are my favorite thing for awkward or oblivious characters. I think Big Hero Six kind of solidly cemented it in my head with the whole “balalalala” thing.

I actually have “team plans” for Moon for literally every region. Most of them just include a lot of my favorite Pokémon lmao. And I tried to make sure that Hau got a type advantage over her sometimes. And in just about every case, Gladion would have picked the leftover Pokémon— Bulbasaur, Crocodile or Cyndaquil (either would have worked), Treecko, Chimchar, Oshawott, and Froakie.

In case there wasn't enough context: Moon gives Ben the options of evolving into Sylveon, Espeon, Flareon, Vaporeon, or Jolteon. The first three were ruled out for reasons explained, but Ben had been leaning toward becoming a Vaporeon until they picked up Macbeth. After that, he decides he wants to be a Jolteon. Not because of type advantage or making Moon's team balanced, but because he doesn't want to compete with Macbeth in the same type and give either of them reason to feel inadequate. Ben
genuinely loves Macbeth, and she’s the only creature in the universe with whom he is all
dere, no tsun.

BUT DID YOU GUESS THAT BEN WOULD BE A JOLTEON???? I am
legitimately curious, please let me know in the comments. I've never actually used a
Jolteon before the Ultra Moon playthrough I'm doing right now with Moon's team— the
only Eeveelution I've never used, actually. And Ben in my game file has a Quiet nature,
so as a Jolteon he's gonna have hella Special Attack. It doesn't matter about the Speed
loss to me, because Jolteon are already fast anyway and I don't really play competitively.

In this universe, some of the more powerful Psychic-types are capable of
communicating mentally with humans. A few of them manage words— obviously
Mewtwo is capable of human speech but Mew can speak telepathically with words. But
most Psychic legendaries and a few non-legendaries can communicate with images,
ideas, and emotions. A few of the non-legendary Pokémon I think can do this are
Alolan Raichu, Alakazam, Jynx, Gardevoir, Medicham, Metagross, Gallade, Gothitelle,
Delphox, Malamar, and Oranguru. Alakazam, Gardevoir, Medicham, Metagross, and
Gallade can communicate with words when Mega Evolved.

Moon's getting her hair cut, and tbh I'm so fond of the “nerd girl gets a makeover” trope
that I think we all know where this is going, even though Gladion definitely isn't the
popular football captain type

“But it would be hard to make you look bad, I think” — author is a sucker for
compliments confirmed

“Moon fought back the urge to reach up and ruffle his uneven hair.” — Moon is like
50% me and when I like someone I always want to touch their hair. Probably because I
love having my hair played with, and I make cat noises and melt into the floor when
anyone touches my scalp. SOFT SCRATCHY SCALP MASSAGES ARE THE
WAY TO MY HEART

All of this soft and forgiving Gladimoon... it would be a shame... if something... were to
happen to it...
Chapter Summary

Memorial Hill, Akala Outskirts.

Chapter Notes

Moon approaches the Ruins of Life with the intent of facing her Grand Trial, but encounters two obstacles along the way.

[Content Warning for: minor violence, animal (Pokémon) abuse]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After about a week of intense training, Moon and Hau had both decided that their teams were ready to challenge Olivia's Grand Trial. Ordinarily they would simply have gone to the stone shop to look for Olivia, but Lillie also had business with the kahuna: now that they were on the part of the island where Tapu Lele lived, Nebby had been getting more impatient about visiting Tapu Lele. As such, Olivia had arranged with the three of them to meet up just outside the Tapu's den: the Ruins of Life. They would be joined by Professor Burnet, who wanted to accompany Lillie and Olivia into the Ruins to do some scans. Moon and Hau would wait outside, and the Grand Trials would be conducted outside as well.

“I'll come with Professor Burnet,” Lillie decided, over breakfast. “She probably wants to do some preliminary scans of Nebby before we visit the Tapu, and I don't have the equipment to do that... you two should go ahead. Maybe you could have one Grand Trial before I get there, and the other when I get back.”

It was a sound idea. Moon and Hau set out after breakfast, and after a brisk morning's walk found themselves arriving at the cemetary by Memorial Hill.

“It's interesting that you have to walk through a cemetary to get to a place called the Ruins of Life,” remarked Moon. “Seems a little contradictory.”

“Not to me.” Hau shook his head soberly. “What do you know about Tapu Lele?”

Moon tried to think back to the story that her mother had told about the Tapus. “She looks like a butterfly, right?”

“Kind of, though I always thought she looked more like a snail with a curly shell. Like Gastrodon, except they don't really have shells...” He trailed off, frowning.

Moon's nose wrinkled. “Gastrodon is cheating,” she said flatly. “It looks like a Bug, but it's not a Bug. That's absolutely cheating.”

Hau snickered at her. “It's probably a survival technique. Bright, poisonous colors even if it's not
poisonous, and most things will know to leave it alone. Anyway, my point was that Tapu Lele is... I dunno, a healer? A cleric might be a better term, actually. You know in video games where you have different categories for characters, and you kind of choose what your character will be like?”

“Right, yeah.”

“Tapu Lele is basically a cleric. She can heal strongly and powerfully—in fact, she's occasionally been known to raise mortally wounded Pokémon from the dead. But she can also suck the life out of everything living around her. She can kill flowers and grass and trees... and Pokémon, and people.” Hau shook his head emphatically. “To me, she's the most dangerous Tapu. I am happy to stay well outside of her den, thanks.”

“Like Xerneas and Yveltal?”

“Maybe not on the same scale,” conceded Hau. “But yeah, basically.”

“As long as we don't piss her off, we should be perfectly safe.”

“Yeah. Walk on the path, be nice to the wild Pokémon— and for the love of Arceus, don't step on any flowers.”

The graveyard itself was still and quiet. Moon and Hau passed and challenged a few Trainers working there, defeating them easily; the battles were subdued, respectful of the dead around them. Moon was especially pleased with Ben's rapid progress as a Jolteon and Macbeth's hard work. Ariel performed as well as she always did; and so did Puck, but he was being suspiciously quiet. Moon vaguely remembered that Olivia was a Rock-type specialist, which meant she would be largely relying on Puck for the coming battle.

“You okay there, buddy?” she asked him quietly.

Puck looked up at her and nodded. His eyes were unusually soft, and he seemed tired but not grumpy. He'd gotten fairly fat as well, waddling slowly along the path when Moon didn't recall him for easier travel.

“Are you close to evolving?” she asked him.

Puck considered this, then nodded.

“How close?”

“Hoo tri ho.”

The answer was immediate, firm, and quiet. Moon grinned, pleased. “Think you could do it by the end of the battle with Olivia? That would be sick.”

“Ho hoo,” murmured Puck thoughtfully.

Moon held out her hand for him, and he butted his head into it—for once allowing her to ruffle the curtain of feathers he usually kept so carefully maintained. That was a good sign, too—she'd read that Decidueye were not nearly as vain as Dartrix about their appearance.

“Oh, shoot.” Hau came to a stop, Poppy bounced along at his side.

“What?”

Moon followed his pointed finger downhill along the path, to where four people were having some
kind of altercation. She recognized two Team Skull uniforms and an Aether uniform, though the fourth was unfamiliar. There were also a few Slowpoke huddled on the ground. Most of them were intact— but one was crying, its tail a bloody stump. One of the two Team Skull grunts was carefully wrapping something up in plastic.

Her blood boiled. “Oh, fuck no.”

“Here we go,” murmured Hau to Poppy, following her down the hill. Moon didn't snap at him, though it was a near thing— she knew he was more amused at how hair-trigger her temper got when it came to Pokémon than he was amused at the situation— because there was absolutely nothing amusing about this situation.

“What the fuck!” she shouted at the grunts. She was surprised that Emmett was not among them; instead she recognized lavender-haired Kohaku, who looked bored; and the pink-haired girl who had taunted Lillie so cruelly in the mall. “What is wrong with you?”

“Oh,” said the pink-haired girl, her tone going frosty as she regarded Moon. “It's you. The self-righteous bitch who tried to beat up Uilani.”

She tucked the plastic-wrapped item— the Slowpoke Tail— into her pocket before picking up a bloody knife and wiping it on the grass, still crouching.

Moon strode forward, lifting her foot to kick the girl flat; but Hau grabbed her shoulder, pulling her back.

“Moon,” he said warningly. “Not like this. Don't stoop to her level.”

Even in her rage, she could recognize that Hau had a point.

“You're Trinh,” she said to the pink-haired girl.

“I guess some snitch gave you my name too, huh? Just like Uilani. Come to scold me about upsetting your little friend at the mall? I'm not gonna fucking apologize.” Trinh rolled her eyes and flipped the blade in her fingers, offering it handle-first to Kohaku. He tucked it into a sheath that was buckled to his bare arm. “We're done here.”

“You can't just go!” said the Aether employee. She and the man with her had been noticeably silent up to this point, observing Moon and Hau's arrival. “You have to be licensed to harvest Slowpoke Tails, and you have to get permits and proof of purchase if you've got a buyer, and most importantly you have to do it in a clean, sterile environment with anaesthetic for the Slowpoke— not outside in the dirt! The poor thing could get infected!”

“Ask me if I give a fuck,” said Trinh, rolling her eyes. “Client's paying us nice money for this. He didn't say anything about all that other shit, so... yeah, I don't actually care.”

The next thing Moon knew, she had blood on her knuckles and pain bursting along her cheekbones. Hau was pulling her back; Kohaku was holding back Trinh, whose nose was bleeding.

“You fucking bitch! Kohaku, give me the knife.”

“Nah,” said Kohaku easily. “As entertaining as it would be to watch you cut her up a bit, Plumeria will be pissed if you actually break anymore laws.”

Trinh sighed. “All right, good fuckin’ point.”
“Which usually I wouldn't give a shit about, but they don't let me leave the house when I'm not pretending to care. I kind of like being able to leave the house.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Trinh shook his grip off, wiping blood off her sleeve. “All right, bitch. Let's settle this with Pokémon.”

She pulled a Pokéball out of her pocket and tossed out a Salandit. Moon glanced at Puck, knowing he didn't have type advantage; but he merely waited for her orders, looking steadily back at her.

“Use Pluck,” she decided.

“Geck, use Flame Burst!”

Puck neatly side-stepped the attack, though Moon hadn't even asked him to dodge, and darted forward to deliver a fairly nasty Pluck with his curved beak. The Salandit yelped, skittering backwards.

“Oh, come the fuck on!” shouted Trinh. “You can do better than that, Geck. Flame Burst, again!”

“And Pluck,” repeated Moon, crossing her arms.

Puck, again, dodged the attack. The Salandit was knocked out at once.

The next opponent was a Cutiefly, which was interesting. They tended to prefer gentle Trainers, according to Moon's research. She had often thought it would be fitting to see Lillie with a Cutiefly. But this Cutiefly bore up admirably, hitting Puck with Draining Kiss on Trinh's command.

“Use Pluck again— that will be super effective,” decided Moon.

It was; the Cutiefly fainted in one hit. Trinh's mouth was sour, but she folded her arms.

“So you win,” she scoffed. “Big fuckin' deal. It's not like you've beaten literally all my friends in battle or anything.”

“Have I really? Thanks for the tip.” Moon smirked at her, trying to annoy the other girl. “Hand over the tail.”

“What for?” pointed out Kohaku. “It's already detached from the Slowpoke, and it's probably been too long to reattach it surgically. The Slowpoke will live. They always do.”

“That's not the point,” said Hau unexpectedly. “How are you going to learn from your mistakes if there aren't any consequences?”

“This wasn't a fucking mistake. This was a simple retrieval, which was going to end in a lot of money until you swanned in to white-knight all over the Aether Foundation.” Trinh rolled her eyes. “You're a self-righteous, hypocritical bitch— both of you. Focus on your damn island challenge, don't worry about us.”

“I'm not worried about you,” retorted Moon. “You're not worth the effort it takes to worry about anyone.”

A very brief silence fell over the group, and Moon's mind caught up with what her mouth had said. A soft, sick feeling spread up from her stomach to her throat, and she opened her mouth to apologize —

Kohaku's dark eyes had gone flat and cold, fixed on Moon; but he followed Trinh as she walked past all of them, back uphill into the graveyard.

There was a slightly longer silence, and then the man with the Aether Foundation employee said, “Well, that could have gone better, but at least we were able to minimize the casualties.”

“There's no we about it, Chief. You don't even have Pokémon with you.”

“Of course there's a we. I'm here, aren't I? I am the Aether Foundation's last line of defense. If I have to battle in the first place, we've made a grave mistake.”

Moon turned to look at the pair of them, incredulous; but the man was kneeling over the Slowpoke, picking up the ones huddled around their injured fellow to get them out of the way.

“Whitby, take this one to the outpost,” he ordered, lifting the crying one and handing it to the employee. “Clean and treat its wound, and observe it for further damages. Hopefully we'll be able to release it back to its clan in a few days.”

The Aether employee sighed, patting the weeping Slowpoke as it bled on her uniform. “Yes, sir.”

She pulled out a Ride Pager to summon a Charizard, and the man stood up, dusting off his white coat.

He turned to study Moon and Hau. He wore green-tinted glasses, which matched his hair—a blond color with a greenish tint, as though he had gone swimming in a pond of algae or a chlorinated pool without washing his hair out properly.

“You battled well,” he said serenely, looking down at Puck. “That Dartrix is close to evolution.”

“Thanks,” mumbled Moon, but she was still too horrified at herself to take the compliment properly.

“You and your friend are close to finishing your Grand Trials here on Akala Island, correct?”

“Um— yeah. How did you know?”

“I know many things, Moon Hawkins.” The man sounded smug. Moon's spine tingled unpleasantly, but she ignored it—she hadn't exactly been concealing her identity or anything. “I assume your friend is Hau Akiona? The service you both provided the Aether Foundation in assisting with the agitated Diglett, approximately a week ago, made its way to my ears. The Aether Foundation believes in rewarding volunteers. If you would like to visit and tour the Foundation for a few days, then I will be staying in the Grand Hano Resort for up to a week from today. I invite you to find me, and I will personally provide you with transport to the Aether Paradise, and from there to Ula'ula Island.”

“Um, okay.” Moon was kind of intrigued. Lillie probably wouldn't want to go, but Hau's expression indicated that he was interested, too. It would be a fun adventure. “We'll come find you and check it out. Thanks for the offer.”

“You're quite welcome.” The man nodded amiably, then walked uphill, typing into his own Ride Pager.

That left Moon and Hau.

“He looks like a Bug,” said Hau finally. “With big green eyes.”
Moon snorted before she could help herself. “Yeah, he does.”

They walked a little further along the path before Hau said gently, “I know you didn't mean what you said to her.”

Moon swallowed, looking down at the ground. Puck chirped softly, butting his head against her hand again.

“It was easy to tell just by looking at you,” added Hau. “You're kind of an open book, you know. You show your feelings really easily. And you regretted it the second you realized what you said.”

“I— yeah.” Moon sighed. “Her reaction made it so much worse.”

“She might have been trying to make you feel bad. I mean, that made me feel bad and she wasn’t even talking to me.”

“I don't know if she was, though. Did you see the way Kohaku looked at me? Like he wanted me dead or something.”

“He’s f**ked up,” said Hau darkly, which surprised Moon because Hau almost never swore unless he was really angry. “He's not right in the head. He was way too calm about hurting the Slowpoke. Even the girl was more reactive about it— she was pretending not to care, but her hands were shaking when she was cleaning the knife.”

Moon hadn’t noticed. “They were?”

“Yeah. I feel sorry for her— she's clearly got issues. But that Kohaku guy is something else. I don't know what he is, or what he's been through. But it's done a number on him. He's not sane.”

Moon shook her head. “I've fought him a few times now. He seems okay to me.”

“That's the thing about people like that— either they can't hide what they're like, or they're really good at hiding it. I think he's got to be the latter.”

“Are you just sore because he said Lillie was cute one time?” said Moon, attempting to lighten the mood.

Hau's nose wrinkled. “I didn't know that, actually, but I'm glad you mentioned it because now I have an excuse to keep her very, very far away from him.”

A familiar archway rose on the path before them. Moon recognized it as the same one that stood at the entrance to Mahalo Trail, the path that led up to the Ruins of Hope and Plank Bridge— the entrance to Tapu Koko's den, on Melemele Island.

“It looks like we're here,” she said to Hau. “Let's take a five-minute breather and heal up our teams— we've got to be ready for Olivia.”

“It shouldn't be too hard for either of us.” Hau swung his backpack off, rooting inside for Super Potions. “She's a Rock-type specialist. You've got Puck, and I've got Poppy. We'll be just fine.”

“Yeah.” Moon nodded. They had both trained hard over the last week— and if Puck was close to evolving, that gave her an extra edge. He was probably full of energy, and he had Grassium Z to boot.

“You must be Moon.”
Moon jumped, turning around.

“Arceus,” gasped Hau. “I didn't hear you coming at all. Wear a bell or something!”

The woman's mouth quirked up into a smirk. “Kind of defeats the point.”

Moon had never seen this woman before— she would have remembered if she had. Her hair was dyed into neon yellow and hot pink sections, tied together into two long ponytails. She wore a black-and-white cropped, strappy tank top and matching sweatpants, along with a pair of gray high-top sneakers that Moon kind of wanted.

“I love your shoes,” she blurted out. “And also your makeup is super cool.”

One of the woman's eyebrows rose. “Huh,” she said thoughtfully. “Well, I can't say I expected that. You're interesting, Moon.”

“Um... thanks?”

“Unfortunately for you, you're also proving to be kind of a pain in my ass.”

She folded her arms. Moon noticed a pink, flowery tattoo on her midriff, partially obscured by the waistband of her sweatpants. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, I've had like three or four of the kids calling me up and whining about how you keep beating them in battle, you're preventing them from doing their jobs, blah blah blah.” The woman rolled her eyes. “Admittedly, Emmett's an idiot. He couldn't do his job if his life depended on it.”

“Emmett— wait, you're Team Skull?” exclaimed Hau.

The woman nodded once. “Uilani's sweet,” she continued, “but she's also an idiot, except where hairstyling is concerned. If Molly is complaining, though— that carries a little more weight. Same for Kohaku.” She paused, pulling a cell phone out of her pocket; her voice went cold. “And when I get a call from one of my kids, sobbing her eyes out because you told her she was worthless— we've got a real fucking problem.”

“Trinh,” realized Moon, her stomach sinking. “Arceus, I know. I was sorry the second I said it, but I didn't have the chance to apologize. I'm really sorry. I'd like to tell her myself, too.”

The woman studied her for a few seconds. “All right,” she said finally. “I'll make sure she runs into you at some point. You'll get to apologize. Because I think you actually mean it, and that's kinda rare in the circles I run in.”

“Sincere apologies?”

“Well, yeah. When you're half responsible for running a damn gang, you get a lot of fucked up kids who learned that apologies are things you say to get out of trouble, and not because you actually mean them. I'm working on fixing that, but it's an uphill battle.”

“We're not apologizing for Moon beating her in battle,” said Hau, crossing his arms. “And she and the other one were cutting off a Slowpoke's Tail. That's not really forgivable.”

The woman sighed, closing her eyes to reveal purple-grey eyeshadow, smudging into the heavy black eyeliner. “Fucking kids,” she muttered, almost under her breath. “I told them to just capture it and bring it back— the kitchen's a hell of a lot cleaner than it used to be, we could have done it all nice and sterile. Rogelio's got the moonshine for disinfectant, and Trinh knows we keep morphine at
the house. But no, they cut it off out here, in the goddamn dirt, and get fucking Aether breathing
down our goddamn necks. This has Kohaku written all the fuck over it.”

“Knew he was screwed up,” said Hau triumphantly.

The woman's eyes shot open, and she frowned at Hau. “He's screwed up, but he's our screwed up.
Don't be mean.”

“What's your name?” Moon asked her.

“Plumeria.” The woman stretched her arms high over her head. “I want a battle, Moon. You seem okay— and besides the complaints from my dumbass little brothers and sisters, there's also been some praise and admiration. But I'm still not letting what you said to Trinh go. I get that you're sorry, but she'd do the same thing for me in a heartbeat.”

“No, I get it. I'll battle you,” Moon agreed.

Plumeria smirked. “Then let's go.”

Puck was already out, so Moon readied him. Plumeria tossed her first ball, revealing a Golbat.

Rotom beeped softly, letting her know that he was recording the data— which meant that Moon hadn't seen a Golbat on her journey so far. “Puck, use Ominous Wind.”

“Zoob, Wing Attack!”

Puck was strong and full of energy, nearly ready to evolve; but he was also slow and overweight, preparing for that evolution. The Golbat was fast and mean, and it was clearly well-trained. Moon was surprised when Puck fainted in one hit.

She looked up at Plumeria, surprised. Plumeria was watching her, a knowing expression in her eyes.

“Done yet, kid?” she taunted.

“Not on your life,” returned Moon.

She sent out Ben, who hissed and snarled at the Golbat.

“Zoob, use Poison Fang.”

“Ben, hit it with Thunder Shock!”

It took a couple of rounds, and the Golbat managed to poison Ben badly; but Thunder Shock was able to take it out.

Plumeria sent out a Salandit, like Trinh's— except this Salandit was a bit larger, and had intelligent, malicious eyes.

Moon didn't dare send out Macbeth— she didn't yet know any Water-type moves, and the Bug-type weakness to Fire negated the resistance she would get from Water anyway. Ben was hurt too badly to continue fighting, and Puck was still out cold— which meant it was Ariel's fight to win.

“Sally, Flame Burst.”

“Ari, use Smack Down!”
Plumeria winced as the attack hit. The Salandit was badly damaged, but it didn't faint. “Good job, girl,” she said quietly. “Hang in there. One more Flame Burst.”

“Another Smack Down, Ariel! You've got this!”

The Salandit was out. Plumeria nodded, recalling it to its ball.

“Well, fuck me sideways. Good job,” she said simply, digging in her pocket to reveal a rubber-banded stack of Poké, which she tossed to Moon.

Moon caught and pocketed the money. “I would have thought you had more Pokémon.”

“I do, but they're not ready. Reanie's a little trigger-happy— she likes to attack everything within range, not just Pokémon. I've lent Grime out to the kids at home— bit of a Spinarak invasion, they need laundry guards. And I only just caught Gas.” Plumeria shrugged. “I'm sure we'll battle again. I'll bring more of ’em next time.” Her mouth quirked. “Maybe I'll be able to beat you, even if Gladion can't.”

Moon's heartbeat stuttered. She clapped a hand to her chest, slightly concerned; but it resumed its normal pattern— at double-time, but still functional.

“You— you know Gladion?”

Plumeria smiled at her. It was much more genuine. “He really likes you, kid,” she said gently. “He's changed a lot, in the last month and a half.”

“How do you know him, though?”

“He's one of my dumb brothers and sisters. Same as the rest of Team Skull.”

Moon opened her mouth to speak, then closed it again.

“He never mentioned he was part of Team Skull,” said Hau, voicing the exact thought thrumming through Moon's head.

“He wouldn't.” Plumeria shrugged. “Gladion keeps to himself. Always has. In his own way, he's as fucked up as the rest of the kids. So play nice.”

She waved and sauntered off, back toward the graveyard and Konikoni City.

“He lied to me.”

Hau turned to look at her, eyes serious and slightly wary. “Moon?”

“Gladion. He lied to me.”

“What, you asked him if he was Team Skull?”

“Well, no. But kind of. When we met him on Route Five I asked him if he knew Emmett and Uilani. He said—”

Her throat closed.

“What did he say?”

“He said, unfortunately.”
“He didn't lie, then. He knew them.”

“But— I've just been thinking all this time that he was a lonely Trainer, not doing his island challenge. I didn't think he was Team Skull. It was a lie of omission. He let me think that.”

“You're crying, Moon.”

“Am I?” Moon blinked, and discovered that she was, as a cold teardrop rolled down her cheek. “I guess I am.”

Hau was quiet for a few seconds. “Heal your Pokémon,” he said finally. “We're going to go into the Ruins of Life, and we're going to wait for Olivia and Professor Burnet and Lillie and Nebby. You've got to get yourself together for the Grand Trial.”

“Right, yeah.”

She revived Puck and gave all of her teammates Super Potions, plus an Antidote for Ben's poisoning. They were fighting fit and ready to face Olivia; the problem now was Moon.

Gladion was part of Team Skull. There was no way to explain or justify it. Gladion was part of Team Skull— against some of whom Moon had a personal vendetta. Moon had talked to him about it— had explained why she'd been so angry with Uilani and Trinh. She'd brought up Emmett multiple times, complaining about him.

It made sense: Emmett and Uilani were both intimidated by Gladion. Molly had even mentioned him before— something about Gladion's “weird dog thing.” That had to be Null. And Gladion worked at night, sleeping in the morning— it was just common sense. Crime happened at night.

He wore all black, instead of the black-and-white uniforms. He even wore other colors, sometimes. He had never once approached her with the false bravado that every other member of Team Skull had shown her— possibly because he had the skill to back it up properly.

Whenever she'd mentioned Team Skull, Gladion's response had been to nod and listen and change the subject— evasion, of course. He hadn't wanted to talk about Team Skull with her. He didn't want her to know.

He had lied to her.

Moon wiped away her tears and made herself a sandwich. She took a few deep, calming breaths. She would be okay.

She handed a sandwich to Hau.

“Feeling better?” he asked her.

“No, but I can deal with it later.” She didn't dare get Rotom out of her pocket— if she did then she would call Gladion and yell at him, or something like that. “I'm focusing on the Grand Trial now.”

Puck hooted gently, nuzzling into her side. Moon petted him absently, holding Macbeth on her lap. Ben sat on one of her feet, curling up and pretending to sleep; Ariel let out an elegant, stately trill and sat on Moon's other side.

“Thanks, guys,” she murmured. “I think we're ready.”
This headcanon about Tapu Lele came from a discussion I was having with my fifteen-year-old brother about why the Tapus are referred to as “guardian deities.” Most legendary Pokémon are basically small gods, so it makes sense that there's sort of a pantheon of worship— though most people in Alola swear by Arceus as the most obviously powerful, or by Solgaleo and Lunala since they're the home gods. But the Tapus are powerful, capricious nature spirits, definitely also deities, and not to be fucked about with. It's easy to understand why you wouldn't cross the other Tapus. Tapu Koko could literally zap you into a fried mushroom. Tapu Bulu could shrivel you to bits with a harsh sandstorm— not to mention the fact that he's a bull who could gore you on his horns as easy as blinking. Tapu Fini is a siren and she would drown the fuck out of anyone she didn't want in her home. But Tapu Lele seems kind of innocent, until I read the Pokédex entry and talked with my brother and came up with the idea that Tapu Lele has an ability that's like Xerneas and Yveltal at the same time. Xerneas can give life, and Yveltal can suck it out of things. Tapu Lele can do both, and that makes her the most dangerous one to me.

Also: Koko = thief, Lele = cleric, Bulu = knight, Fini = wizard, all we need is Nebby to pick up a set of dice and we've got a DM ready to go so we can Dungeons and Dragons our way through Alola lmao

So Kohaku is a little messed up. Trinh has issues, too. I mean, Uilani has issues and Emmett definitely has issues and everyone in Team Skull, to an extent, has issues. But Kohaku's issues are that he's essentially a sociopath. We'll get more into Trinh later.

Moon's temper has already gotten her into trouble in this fic— and here it is again. Moon, you can't just hit people when you get mad at them.

Moon is a reader, and an orator. She likes Shakespeare, which is meant to be performed. She knows how to craft an insult. What she said to Trinh was something that I have said to someone before— and it's the worst thing I've ever said to anyone. I have never regretted saying anything so much as I have regretted telling someone that they weren't worth anything. Don't ever tell anyone that, no matter how angry you are with them. It's not true. Everyone is worth something, to someone.

And here's Faba. If he seems benign at first, don't worry. He's gonna get real fuckin annoying, real fuckin fast. That's all I have to say about that.

This chapter introduces not one, but two important characters. If you consider the amount of time I've spent on each of them, you can probably tell that I Greatly Prefer Plumeria.

Also, in the games when you beat her, Plumeria says “Phooey.” THAT'S AN F-BOMB SUBSTITUTE. So obviously here she's gonna say the actual thing. Also I think “fuck me sideways” is one of the funniest swears

Plumeria's Grimer helping the Team Skull kids with laundry is a direct reference to A Higher Standard of Cleanliness; pls go read if you haven't already

Yeah so you know how I kind of purposefully avoided having Gladion state that he was
part of Team Skull? That was for this exact reveal. But it's not just for extra drama, either—there's a point to it that hopefully will reveal itself as a Theme either at the end of Quartet Part Three: Hibiscus (yes, it's already named) or in the between-islands interlude after that.

Also: Plumeria likes Moon because she makes Gladion happy?? If Lillie is the captain of the USS Gladimoon (which I know, it's sprung a leak) then Plumeria is the first mate and I'll gladly be like the chief gunner or something, idk
Moon and Hau walked into the Ruins of Life and found Olivia waiting, along with a floating pink Pokémon that made Hau stop dead in his tracks.

“Calm down,” said Olivia, with a chuckle. “She just wanted to say hello. I think Tapu Koko told all of the others about meeting you at Plank Bridge, and she was curious.”

Tapu Lele— for it could only be Tapu Lele— floated forward to look at Moon. In the calm of the situation, compared to the chaos and fear of her meeting with Tapu Koko, it was easier to observe. Tapu Lele's dark face was mild, bearing no emotion beyond simple curiosity. She had pink hair, curling around her face underneath a leaf-like cap that formed part of her pink chrysalis-body.

“Le,” she murmured, voice soft and high. “Tapu le.”

“Thank you for letting us visit,” said Moon politely. “We won’t intrude for very long. Lillie and Professor Burnet and Nebby should be here soon.”

Tapu Lele bobbed her head once, then went to examine a clearly terrified Hau. She peered at him a few moments, her eyes bright; then she returned to Olivia's side.

“She says that you are brave, to come here despite your fear,” Olivia told Hau. There was a light in her brown eyes that almost flickered pink. “And she says that Moon has good manners, which Tapu Koko also mentioned.”

“He did?”
“Evidently you made quite the impression,” chuckled Olivia.

“Does she speak to you?” asked Moon, suddenly curious. “Hau just evolved his Pikachu, and it's part Psychic-type now and it can speak to him. Pink is a Psychic-type color, right?”

“Lele,” said Tapu Lele, before Olivia could answer.

Olivia half smiled, inclining her head toward Tapu Lele. “Just as a kahuna is the intermediary between the Tapu and the people—they are also the intermediary between the people and the Tapu. Tapu Lele speaks to me, and me alone—as Tapu Koko speaks only to Hala, and Tapu Bulu speaks only to Officer Nanu. And Tapu Fini has no kahuna, at the moment.”

“But she will soon,” ventured Moon. “I met Hapu, and she told me about her journey.”

“Ah yes, you are correct. Tapu Fini has spoken with Hapu—it's how they choose kahunas. They will only speak with the ones they find worthy. We were quite surprised when Tapu Fini chose Hapu; generally the Tapus choose specialists who have similar or neutral types... Tapu Fini and Hapu do not exactly compliment each other in typing, and they share a major weakness. But it will work out well. The Tapus always know what is best for Alola, even if the people do not.”

Moon looked around at the clearing, as Hau asked Olivia a question. The Ruins themselves were walled off, with only a blocked stone archway to grant access within; this was probably the Den proper. They were in a small clearing. Moon noticed two low stone pedestals with shallow, bowl-shaped grooves cut out of them—probably offering plates of some kind, in case people wanted to give something to Tapu Lele to show their devotion.

About ten minutes later, the rest of their party walked into the Ruins of Life. Professor Burnet smiled easily, though her eyes grew round and excited at the sight of Tapu Lele. Lillie stopped walking immediately, the way Hau had done; and Nebby—because she was irreverent and irrepressible—squeaked loudly and zoomed forward, rushing around Olivia and Tapu Lele in rapid circles.

“Nebby!” shouted Lillie, recovering herself. “I am so sorry, Kahuna Olivia—and to you as well, Tapu Lele. She's not really being rude, she's just far too excited to be here.”

“Tapu le, lele tapu,” said Tapu Lele gently.

“It's quite all right,” translated Olivia. “Moon and Hau, will you wait here? I think whatever business Cosmog has with Tapu Lele would be best conducted in the privacy of the Ruins themselves.”

“Sure,” said Hau, sitting down on the ground.

“And you both had better be prepared to face me, when I return,” added Olivia, with a smile. “Your Grand Trials await. Lillie, Ellie, and Nebby—please follow me.”

Professor Burnet was holding some electronic device or other, but she put it into her pocket, a satisfied expression on her face. “Of course! Lead the way, Kahuna Olivia.”

The five of them went to the stone archway. Olivia pressed her hand to the center of the door, and it slid smoothly downward, revealing darkness. Nebby pewed softly and lit up with Flash as they went inside.

The stone closed after them, and Hau let out a sigh of relief. “Thank Arceus,” he mumbled. “Tapu Lele is scary.”

“She's really cute.”
“That just makes her scarier. That much power over life and death, crammed into a tiny pink shell? *Yikes.*”

With nothing to do but wait for the return of their friends and the kahuna, Moon's mind went back to Gladion again, and bitterness flooded her mouth. She knew she was probably overreacting, but it still hurt to think of him lying to her. She had been nothing but honest with him; why couldn't he have offered her the same courtesy?

“You're thinking pretty loud,” said Hau conversationally. “And just when you'd gotten calmed down, too. Come on, Moon— don't think about it.”

“Easy for you to say. You haven't been lied to like that.”

“No,” admitted Hau, “but Lillie doesn't like talking about things, either.”

Some of Moon's anger sputtered out. “But— but at least she tells us when she doesn't want to talk about things!”

“I'm not fighting with you, Moon.” Hau's dark eyes were tranquil. “In fact, I agree with you. It's some bullshit that Gladion let you think he wasn't part of Team Skull. Things would have been different if you knew, right?”

“Very different.”

“You might have let that get in the way of how much you liked him.”

“Yeah, I— what?”

“You wouldn't have seen past that for who he is,” continued Hau, raising an eyebrow at her. “You would have found it really easy to say, 'Oh, he acts like this because he's part of Team Skull,’ instead of actually asking him *why* he is the way he is.”

The clock ticked aimlessly on as fourteen-year-old Moon sat on the floor of her bedroom, looking at her phone. Despite all of the texts she'd sent, Red was not answering, or picking up when she called. She'd only had slightly more luck with Blue.

Suddenly her phone rang, and she picked it up at once.

“I found him,” said Blue softly.

*There was something wrong; Moon could tell that much by his tone. “What happened to him?”*

“Oh, he's fine.” Blue's voice went suddenly acidic. “He's absolutely fucking fine. He's holed away up here on the fucking peak of Mount fucking Silver, in blizzards and hurricanes and fuck, probably tornadoes for all I can tell or see or hear. He's got a nice fucking camp set up, one of those ten-man tents with separate rooms inside, and there's a fucking generator and space heaters and a fancy camping stove, and he brought plenty of clothes because apparently, he's. Not. Stupid.”

The last two words were spat with such venom that Moon winced silently on the other end of the line. “How are you getting such good reception? Mount Silver is like a black hole for service.”

“Not when your best friend brings a bunch of stuff to jerry-rig a GODDAMN FUCKING SATELLITE DISH ON TOP OF THE TALLEST MOUNTAIN ON THE CONTINENT!” bellowed Blue. Moon held the phone away from her ear. “A FUCKING SATELLITE DISH, HE'S GOT PERFECT FUCKING RECEPTION AND FULL BARS, BUT DOES HE CALL OR TEXT
“EITHER OF US, OR HIS OWN FUCKING MOTHER? NO, HE FUCKING DOESN'T.”

“Maybe don't shout at me, I'm not the one you're mad at,” suggested Moon.

Blue sighed. “Yeah, I know. I'm just really pissed at him. And he's got the nerve to be pissed at me. Because Mount Silver is dangerous. He thinks I shouldn't have come alone.”

“Let me talk to him.”

“I'll ask. Maybe he'll actually fucking say something to you. I don't know what the fuck I've done to deserve this. Well, I've probably done a lot of fucking shit that I deserved to be punished for, but this seems like a little much.”

There was a pause, but then Red's soft voice sounded over the line, clear as a bell. “Hey, Moon.”

“Why didn't you call or text me back?” she asked him.

“I only just got the satellite up this morning. I've been busy training.”

“Oh.” Moon swallowed. “I mean, I guess that's pretty important. I was just worried.”

He was silent for a few moments. “Sorry,” he said finally.

“It's okay. Why did you go up there, anyway?”

“Well,” said Red, his voice careful in a way that made Moon think that Blue was close by, “I... needed someplace to think.”

“You can think anywhere.”

“All right, let me rephrase that. I needed somewhere to think while being distracted by other things at the same time. So I came to a place where I would be distracted by the basics of just surviving from day to day.”

“Are you taking care of your Pokémon?”

“Of course. Venusaur doesn't like it here, so she mostly stays inside with the space heaters. But Blastoise and Lapras both love it, and Snorlax helps keep everyone warm. Charizard helps with that, too. And of course Pikachu doesn't really care where he is, as long as he's with me.” Red's voice was fond.

“What did you need to distract yourself from?”

There was another long pause. Moon heard him moving, heard the crunch of something that had to be snow and a noisy, shrieking background sound that was probably the blizzard winds of Mount Silver. Blue started yelling, but Red called out sharply, “In a minute, Blue.”

A few moments later, he cleared his throat. “Sorry about that. Um, it doesn't really matter what I needed to distract myself from. It didn't work, anyway.”

“I'm not stupid, you know. Anyone with eyes can see that you're in love with him—”

“Moon.”

Red's voice was abruptly icy— the voice he used when he was angry with reporters, or even occasionally with Blue. Moon had never heard it directed at herself before.
“You don't know what you're talking about,” he said, in barely more than a whisper. “And it's none of your business anyway.”

“It's my business if my two best friends are miserable—”

“If you fuck this up for either of us—”

“I won't fuck it up, you're doing a great job of that on your own,” snapped Moon, furious. “He loves you too, Red! He walked up a mountain for you! He wouldn't bring me with him—”

“Rightly so, as your parents would murder us.” Red's voice softened. “Look, I get what you're trying to do. But that's not what's going on here—”

“Oh, stop lying to me. Give the phone back to Blue, you fuckwit, and don't you lie to him, too.”

“I have to,” murmured Red. “It's for his own good.”

“Moon?”

Moon blinked, brought back to the present by Hau's hand on her shoulder, weighted with concern. “Sorry,” she muttered. “Really vivid memory. I just— when you like someone, you shouldn't lie to them.”

“Does he like you?”

“Plumeria seems to think so.” Moon thought of Gladion, flirting openly as she'd gotten onto the Ride Charizard to go back to Konikoni City. “I know I like him.”

“Which is why you're hurt,” concluded Hau sensibly. “Well, you've got to talk to him about it, obviously. Let him know that you're hurt. If he's really a good guy, he'll know he made a mistake, and he'll try to fix it.”

Moon was reminded of texts that Gladion had sent. I'm sorry for shattering the illusion you had of me. Because I'm really not a nice person, no matter what you think.

That hadn't been a lie. Maybe she should have listened to him then.

“This is what I get for thinking with my heart and not my head,” she sighed. “You're right. I have to talk to him about it.”

“Good.” Hau nodded approvingly. “Let's talk about something else— get your mind off things. Do you think you're all ready for Olivia?”

“Yeah, I do. Puck is going to really carry us through this battle, I think— but I bet the others can contribute, too. Maybe even Macbeth, if she's up to it.”

“And didn't that green bug dude say that Puck's close to evolving?”

“Yeah. He told me so himself, too.” Moon put her hand to her belt, where her team was resting in their Pokéballs. “I think we might be able to get it when we beat Olivia. It's going to be a fun battle, I can already tell.”

“That's the spirit! I think Poppy is really going to carry us, too. Uila might help some, but if Olivia has any Ground-types then there wouldn't be much point. Sonar and Ollie won't do so well.”

“Neither will Ariel or Macbeth,” agreed Moon. “So it comes down to both our Starters, which have
an advantage to Rock-types.”

“Fire-water-grass to see who goes first?”

“Loser goes first,” corrected Moon, holding up a fist in agreement. “It would be an advantage to watch a Grand Trial before you had to actually do it.”

“Yeah, that's true.” They played, and Moon lost. Hau, grinning, stretched out on the ground with his hands behind his head.

Eventually the stone door opened, and Olivia, Professor Burnet, and Lillie came out of the Ruins, with Nebby at their heels. Tapu Lele was nowhere to be seen—but running through Lillie's hair, from her left temple down into the braid on that side, was a rose-pink stripe of hair.

“Whoa, Lillie, nice hair!”

“Like my grandma,” remembered Moon. “Did the Tapu touch you?”

Lillie nodded shyly. “She was very sweet,” she said softly, face flushing. Her eyes were rimmed with red. “She— she understood some of what I've been struggling with. When she touched me it was— healing. Pure kindness.”

“And Nebby communicated with the Tapu as well,” said Professor Burnet, beaming. “It was an amazing experience to witness. Just look at her!”

Nebby, as well as Lillie, was rather pinker than she had been before. Moon abruptly remembered something.

“Hey, remember when we were on Route Two and Three, and Nebby ran away to Melemele Meadow?”

“Like I could forget,” said Lillie, with a slight frown at Nebby.

“Yeah, so when I found her in Seaward Cave, she was a whole lot yellower than usual, so she must have visited Tapu Koko. And there was some blue there too, which is normal because usually the space dust is a lot of dark blue and purple and black. But like, this was a light blue.” Moon considered. “She'd just been around Phyco and Soliera, too. They're aliens, so would they have had some of the weird energy?”

“That's an excellent hypothesis, Moon,” said Professor Burnet warmly. “So it would seem that there are places in Seaward Cave that can connect to Tapu Koko's Den. We should let Hala know about that. And I may need to arrange to meet Phyco and Soliera on my own, so I can do my own scans... if they consent to it, of course. That might explain some of the anomalies we've found while scanning Nebby.”

Hau frowned. “They didn't do anything to her, right?”

“No, but the energy that would linger around Phyco and Soliera would be distinct from the energy provided by the Taps. Phyco and Soliera aren't native to our planet, and the Taps are. The scans would have picked that up. I'll have to do some more testing, but I think that's most likely the case. Very good, all of you.”

“Tapu Lele was very pleased to meet all of you,” added Olivia, with a soft smile and that same pinkish gleam in her eyes. “I have no doubt that she'll be gossiping to the other Taps about it... they have some way of communicating with each other, and they're a very chattery bunch.”
She blinked a few times, and the pink was gone. “Now— the Grand Trials. Are you both ready? Who's going first?”

“That would be me,” said Moon.

“Very good.”

They faced one another, standing across from the stone bowl pedestals. Hau joined Lillie, Nebby, and Professor Burnet at the edge of the clearing to watch.

Olivia studied Moon, a smile on her face. “It's been a pleasure to watch you work your way around the island. Lana, Kiawe, and Mallow have all reported that you've worked hard, and done well. Now — are you prepared to face me?”

Moon nodded.

Olivia reached for her belt, pulling out a Pokéball. Moon did the same, selecting Puck's ball from her belt; they both released their first fighters.

Puck was facing an Anorith.

“Oooh…”

“Shush,” said Moon, flapping one hand in Hau's general direction. He snickered, but didn't say anything else.

It was on Moon to begin the battle, so she took a deep breath. “Puck, use Razor Leaf!”

“Ani— knock him down with Smack Down!”

Moon winced as Puck took the hit. At least until he evolved, he was part Flying-type— and the move did more damage than she would have liked. But Puck turned to look at her, eyes shining earnestly, and she knew it would be all right.

All of it, not just the battle. The things going on with Gladion, her thoughts of Red and Blue coming back to haunt her, the worries she had for Lillie, the rivalry she had put on hold with Hau— it would all be all right.

As long as she had this, she would be all right.

They went through the dance again— another Razor Leaf, another Smack Down. Anorith was part Bug-type and resisted Razor Leaf for net neutral damage, but Moon didn't really have anything better to work with. Rock resisted Flying, meaning that Pluck was also neutral; and Ominous Wind was neutral anyway. False Swipe was only half effective. None of her other teammates really had anything for this, either— Rock and Bug were an interesting pairing. Steel, Ground, or Water would be ideal, but Macbeth hadn't evolved... maybe she should pick up a Diglett.

Olivia and Moon traded a few rounds of Razor Leaf versus Smack Down. Moon had the feeling that Olivia was biding her time, trying to wear Puck down— but eventually Puck was able to knock the Anorith out.

“Great job!” Moon praised him, ruffling his feathers. Puck hooted softly in response, his eyes fixed on Olivia’s hands.

“Hmm,” said Olivia, with a nod. “That's fair.”
Moon really ought to have expected the Lileep— Anorith and Lileep were the most common Fossil-types, after all. It undulated wildly, eyes peering out of the dark interior until it spotted Moon and Puck.

“Prairie, use Ancient Power!”

“Puck, use Razor Leaf!”

Ancient Power hit hard, and Puck staggered. Moon knew that he couldn't take another hit. Conversely, Razor Leaf didn't seem to do much, and it was with chagrin that Moon remembered that Lileep were part Grass-type— and Grass resisted itself.

She weighed her options. Macbeth was definitely out. She didn't have any Water-type moves, and she was weak to Rock anyway. Ben was a possibility, but if the Lileep had any Ground-type moves — a fairly regular phenomenon with Rock-type Pokémon— then he would also be easily knocked out. Ariel was weak to Rock-types in the same way that Puck was, but she also had Brick Break. Moon hadn't bothered with Brick Break on the Anorith— Bug resisted Fighting so it would have been a waste of a turn. But Lileep would be weak to Brick Break.

“Puck, come back for now,” she ordered, spraying him with a Super Potion before recapturing him. Olivia raised one eyebrow, waiting for Moon to send out her next Pokémon.

Ariel appeared, standing tall and proud.

“Ariel, Brick Break!”

“Ah, right,” said Hau conversationally to Lillie. “I forgot about Brick Break. I shouldn't have. She always surprises people with it. They think they're getting a nice, mild Toucannon and then she unleashes an absolute monster.”

The Lileep squealed as Ariel slammed into it. Moon grinned.


“Brick Break again, Ariel!”

It took a little longer than she had thought— the Lileep seemed to be a bit of a drama queen, fussing as though it were hurt twice as badly as it actually was— but Ariel was able to knock it out as well.

Now Olivia smiled, running her hand back through her cropped hair. “All right,” she said, with a nod. “You're doing well, Moon.”

She reached for her belt and the last Pokéball remaining there. Moon eyed her suspiciously, then recalled Ariel and sent out Puck at the same time.

A wolf appeared on the battlefield. Its eyes glowed red with either malice or mischief; Moon couldn't tell which. Its lips lifted to show brilliant white teeth as it snarled at Puck, who hooted threateningly back.

“Lycanroc,” murmured Rotom. “The evolved form of Rockruff. This is the Midnight Form—
occasionally called the Moon form, bzzt.”

“Are you serious?”

“Completely, bzzt. The Midday Form is sometimes called the Sun form. There’s also a rarer version called the Twilight or Dusk Form, but it’s a little finicky to get so most Trainers don’t bother, bzzt.”

“I’ve never managed a Dusk Form, myself,” added Olivia, with a smile for Rotom. “You have to evolve Rockruff in a two- or three-minute window of sunset when the sun is half above and half below the horizon.”

“That sounds tedious.”

“It’s immensely tedious, which is why I haven’t even gotten one. I tried with Remula here for a while, but after a bit she told me she preferred Moon form anyway.” Olivia smiled. “It’s what I first thought of, when I heard your name.”

The Lycanroc’s tongue lolled out of its mouth on one side, and abruptly it did not seem so intimidating—she could see a Rockruff’s playfulness in it.

Olivia squared her shoulders, a sign that the battle was back on. Puck regarded Lycanroc warily before tipping his head back toward Moon.

“Let’s start with Razor Leaf,” suggested Moon. “Rockruff is pure Rock, so it stands to reason that Lycanroc is, too. And even if it gained Dark or Ghost or something, Razor Leaf wouldn’t affect that.”

Olivia took a step to one side, and Moon realized she was doing a Z-Dance.

“Go, Puck, now!” she yelped.

“Remula! Use Continental Crush!”

The Lycanroc let out a blood-chilling howl, and Moon watched, horrified, as it pressed straight through the scratches of Razor Leaf to send rocks hurtling toward Puck. They hit him squarely, and Puck staggered backward, throwing up his wings to shield himself from the blows. His feathers were glowing—the green was deepening, from the usual pale color.

When it was over, he put down his wing, turning to nod once at Moon as though to say, I’m ready.

“Damn straight,” whispered Moon. Tears came to her eyes. Puck loved her so much, even through all her personal problems and drama, that he would battle his very best for her. They would be together through everything.

She crossed her arms and sank into a crouch. “Puck—use Bloom Doom.”

Puck spread his wings, gathering glowing green power as Moon sprang up from the crouch, spreading her arms wide as Mallow had taught her.

“Remula! Use Rock Tomb!”

But Lycanroc never had the chance. Puck unleashed Bloom Doom in a burst of power that spiraled around him in violent green shadows, flowers and grass barrelling through the earth as they snagged at the wolf’s feet and ankles.

Moon wasn’t watching the Lycanroc, though. As the green lights and shadows around Puck faded,
he blinked at her with new eyes, surrounded with circular markings that reminded Moon of glasses. His careful bang-fringe of feathers had expanded into a dark green hood that wrapped around most of his face, leaving it shadowed. The hooked beak remained the same, but the fat had melted away as Puck had grown taller, legs lengthening and feathers sprouting to cover them.

“Congratulations on Decidueye's evolution, bzzt!” sang Rotom. “And let me just measure him... you're five feet and seven inches tall, aren't you, Moon?”

“Oh, come on, no, let me have my dignity,” pleaded Moon.

“Your Decidueye is on the tall side, bzzt.” Rotom paused for effect. “It measures five feet and eight inches.”

Hau and Lillie both burst out laughing, and Moon groaned as she reached forward, wrapping her arms around Puck. His wings came around her in response. It was the first time she'd properly hugged him since he evolved into Dartrix— Puck as a Dartrix had been very touchy, very grumpy.

“Hi,” she whispered into his ear. “Thank you.”

“Deci,” answered Puck.

“That's a brilliant ending to your Grand Trial, Moon.”

Moon had almost completely forgotten about Olivia. The kahuna was smiling at her, eyes soft and gleaming oddly pink once more.

“Thank you,” said Moon sincerely. “It was an honor.”

“Allow me to demonstrate the Z-Dance that you will use in conjunction with Rockium Z.”

Olivia jumped in place, holding her fists up with arms squared; then she swiveled to the side, lunging forward on one foot and stretching out her back leg.

“Does it matter what leg you lunge with?”

“Not really,” said Olivia, with a chuckle. “I have noticed that it works better if you lean on your dominant leg... but most Trainers don't think to ask. I'm left-handed, but right-legged.”

“Got it.” Moon didn't have any Rock-types, and she wasn't really planning on catching any; but it would be useful to know if she ever did use one in her life. “Thank you for the battle.”

“And here is your Rockium Z.” Olivia pulled a brown crystal from her pocket, offering it with an open hand to Moon, who pressed it into the next open space on her Z-Ring. Now she had seven of them, glittering brightly in the afternoon sun. “What do you plan to do next, Moon? Will you head to Ula'ula Island?”

“Well— probably not right away, actually.” Moon glanced at Lillie, remembering she didn't like the Aether Foundation. “Um— we ran into a couple of Team Skull grunts on our way here. They cut off a Slowpoke's tail—”

Lillie, Professor Burnet, and Olivia all made disgusted, horrified noises.

“Yeah, exactly. But there was also an Aether Foundation employee, and some other dude with her. We fought off the grunts, and the guy invited us to visit the Aether Foundation for a couple of days before we go to Ula'ula Island.”
Olivia frowned. “That's not a lot of information. Did he introduce himself?”

“Um— no, actually. But he said we could find him at the Hano Grand Resort.”

“He kind of looked like a Bug,” laughed Hau. “Big green glasses. But it would be kind of neat to go — not a lot of people are invited to visit the Aether Foundation, are they? Once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. So we'll check it out, maybe do an overnighter, and then head to Ula'ula.”

Lillie was gazing at the ground, a slight frown on her face; but she didn't seem too upset.

“That sounds just fine,” said Professor Burnet, nodding. “Maleko is back on Melemele for a few days, but he's about to go on a trip to Ula'ula as well— he's got a long-term project he's working on, did he mention it to either of you?”

“He said he'd explain when we got there,” said Moon, with a sigh.

“Then I'll let him do it— I know you don't like that, but he'd be sad if he didn't get to tell you about it. It's his baby, after all.” Professor Burnet smiled fondly. “We can ask him to stop by the Hano Grand Resort before you meet the Aether Foundation man— he'll tell you where to meet up in Malie City.”

“Sounds good,” agreed Moon.

She and Puck walked over to where Hau, Lillie, and Professor Burnet were sitting. Hau got to his feet, walking over to stand where Moon had been. Olivia was healing her team, quietly applying Super Potions she'd been carrying in a small pink clutch with a long strap; Moon dug in her backpack for a few, offering them to Puck and Ariel, after letting her out. She let Ben and Macbeth out as well, settling into watch Hau's Grand Trial.

“Puck looks very strong and healthy,” said Lillie, smiling at Puck as he settled down next to Moon. “Congratulations on your evolution.”

“Deci hoo,” murmured Puck, bobbing his head in thanks.

Ben hissed at Puck, his fur standing on end— though that was normal, for a Jolteon. Puck regarded him for a few moments, then reached out with one wing and patted him on the head. Ben stared at him indignantly, but Moon had just about trained him out of trying to bite other Pokémon outside of battle so he allowed it to happen.

“Maybe don't antagonize him,” Moon advised Puck.

Puck rolled his eyes, but let out a low series of hoots that Moon was surprised to recognize as a laugh. He was certainly easier-going as a Decidueye than he had been as a Dartrix.

Ariel peered at Puck for a few moments, as though trying to decide whether he was up to scratch; then she nodded once, leaning forward to tap her beak lightly against his cheek. Puck bobbed his head in a nod.

“Moon,” said Rotom, from her pocket. “Puck is now able to learn Decidueye's signature move, bzzt — Spirit Shackle.”

“Ghost-type, right?” Moon tapped on Rotom's screen, studying the information. Puck leaned in to peer at the screen as well, though Moon didn't think he could read.

“Correct. A physical attack move, with an approximate damage count of eighty hit points, increased
due to same-type-attack-bonus developed on evolution and the change to Ghost-type—"

“Oooh, yes. Scrap Ominous Wind, that's special attack and Puck's special isn't that great to begin
with.”

“Hoo ho dedu,” protested Puck.

“You're designed to be a physical attacker anyway, buddy. Ominous Wind wasn't going to cut it for
very long. Do I have any TMs he could learn?”

“One moment, bzzt— ah, there we go. Ominous Wind has been replaced with Spirit Shackles, bzzt. If
you get out your TM case, I'll scan them and see if any of them are suitable...”

Hau began his Grand Trial, sending Poppy out immediately against Olivia's Anorith.

Moon watched, letting Rotom scan her TMs quietly. It wasn't nearly as much of a struggle for Hau
and Poppy as it had been for her and Puck— Bug-type didn't resist Water, so it was much more
effective than Puck's Razor Leaf had been.

It was strange to sit next to Puck, seeing him at the same height— or nearly, because he was an inch
taller. Moon was still slightly annoyed about that— well, she was annoyed that Rotom and Hau had
poked fun at her about it. She leaned on Puck. He tensed in surprise, but then allowed the contact,
even putting a feathery wing around her shoulder.

“You'll walk by my side, won't you?” she asked him softly. “You'll stay with me forever?”

Puck chuckled softly. “Hoo hoo deci.”

Moon shuffled through a list of TMs that she owned which Puck could learn— Toxic, Protect, and
Return were expected since just about everything could learn those. Smack Down was interesting—
she'd taught it to Ariel as a way of combating Fire-types when she was preparing for Kiawe's trial;
but now that Puck had lost Flying-type, it would be a very good move to counter all of his Grass-
type weaknesses: Bug, Flying, Fire, and Ice. Low Sweep and Steel Wing were also interesting
choices, and Swords Dance was sorely tempting; but in the end she decided she liked Smack Down
best.

Hau and Poppy defeated Anorith easily, and Olivia sent out Lileep. Moon watched warily— Hau
didn't really have anything to counter a Rock- and Grass-type Pokémon at the same time; but he
stayed composed.

“Poppy, use Icy Wind!”

Now that was new— or perhaps it wasn't. Moon hadn't actually fought Hau that many times before
they had agreed it was detrimental to their friendship. Poppy might have known the move for quite a
while, or she might have learned it recently.

The coverage move did the trick: the Lileep fainted in only two hits, and Olivia sent out her
Lycanroc— opening once again with Continental Crush. Hau countered it with Hydro Vortex,
which was more than enough to knock out the Lycanroc.

“Congratulations,” said Olivia warmly, shaking his hand. “You've passed my trial, Hau. Your
grandfather would be proud.”

Hau's expression flickered into melancholy for a few seconds before he threw on his brightest smile.
“You think so? That's great to hear, from a strong Trainer like you. I hope I get to be strong like that
someday."

“But you are strong.”

The bright smile dimmed and faded. “Well— sure, in comparison to a lot of Trainers out there. I can beat just about anyone on the road. But I can't win against the people who count.”

“And who are those?”

“Moon, her friend Gladion, and— Gramps.”

This last was uttered so quietly that Moon almost couldn't hear him.

“If you didn't defeat Hala, you wouldn't be here,” pointed out Olivia sensibly.

“But I didn't win, not really. I used Super Potions and Revives and I wore him out. There wasn't really any strength involved. I just wanted to be done with it at that point.”

Olivia placed a hand on his shoulder. The pink glimmer was in her eyes again.

“Hau Akiona,” she said softly.

The hair on Moon's neck stood on end. There was something... not fully Olivia... in her voice. This was Kahuna Olivia, chosen by Tapu Lele.

Hau swallowed. “Yes, ma'am.”

“When you challenged Hala of Melemele Island in the Grand Trial, did you try your hardest to defeat him, each and every time?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“And did you train hard, in addition to relying on items?”

“I— I guess I did, yeah.”

“You guess, or you did?”

“I did,” said Hau, a little more firmly.

“And you did not defeat him the first time you faced him, but you did defeat him the second time. So it follows that when you defeated him the second time, there was improvement in you as a Trainer, and in your team's power.”

Hau stared at her, eyes wide.

Olivia smiled remotely. “You're just you, Hau,” she said gently. “What's wrong with that? Don't worry about being as good as your grandfather, or as good as Moon or her friend. They're not the ones you need to compete with. In order to be a truly outstanding Trainer, the only person you should be attempting to defeat is yourself. If you work hard and train your team well, you will do better in each battle than in the one before. And maybe you won't win every battle, every time. But you will come closer and closer to it. Maybe you knocked out one of your opponent's teammates last time; the next time, you'll knock out two or three of them.”

“Oh my gosh,” whispered Lillie.
Moon glanced at her friend, who was staring at Hau with wide eyes and clasped hands; her gaze traveled from Lillie to Hau and she saw, with astonishment, that their friend was crying.

“Hau,” said Olivia, “today you didn't show me what Moon or her friend or your grandfather could do. You showed me what you could do, and what you can do is defeat the kahuna of Akala Island— easily. You had a smoother battle than Moon.”

“Agreed,” called Moon. “I didn't have anything for Anorith, that was literally just the two of us playing attack tag to see who knocked who out first.”

“Maybe you fight someone, and you don't win,” continued Olivia, with a wink and a nod for Moon. “But you learn something. You learn something every time you battle, or it's just senseless violence and there's no point. Even if it doesn't feel like you've learned something— you can always ask your Pokémon, because they're the ones doing the actual battling. And when they learn something, you learn something. That's how it works.”

Hau slowly sank to his knees, burying his face in his hands as he sobbed. Moon and Lillie both sprang to their feet, running forward to hug him— or in Moon's case, tackle-hug both of them since Lillie got there first.

The tears turned to teary laughter, then; Hau still crying but also giggling forlornly at the cuddle pile they formed on the ground.

“You're okay,” said Lillie softly, pushing one of Hau's loose dreadlocks behind his ear. “See, I told you it would be okay.”

“I'm so sorry,” gasped Hau, clinging onto Lillie's hand; but he looked at Moon, his face crumpling again. “I should have been thinking about beating me, not you. I'm so sorry.”

“It's okay,” Moon reassured him. “It's not easy to do something like that.” She laughed, thinking of Red and Blue. “Blue still gets sore about Red beating him most of the time. He beat him once, and they both agreed it was because Red was suffering from severe frostbite and a fever that was probably high enough for him to be hallucinating.”

“Still,” said Hau.

He took a deep breath. “I'm going to work on thinking this way,” he declared, wiping his eyes. “I'm going to work hard to change the way I think about it. And when I'm ready, when I can think of it as bettering myself instead of beating you— then I'll challenge you again.”

Moon grinned. “I'm really, really looking forward to it.”

Chapter End Notes

Moon's now met two Tapus. Yes, she is going to meet all of them. Main Character Privileges, and all that. Hau has also met two Tapus; and Lillie has met two Tapus. Gladion has not met any Tapus... yet...

Nebby has no chill and no shame
HAU, BEING THE SUPPORTIVE AND EMOTIONALLY MATURE FRIEND WE ALL DESERVE, GIVING MOON THAT KICK IN THE PANTS THAT SHE KIND OF DEFINITELY DESERVES

The Red and Blue memory came out of literally nowhere, as all of the Red and Blue things seem to do in this story; but my point in writing them, as ever, is because this is a coming-of-age story. Moon is seventeen, nearly eighteen at this point; she's almost an adult but still, in many ways, a child. Red and Blue were only twenty in that flashback, and they were dealing with a lot of leftover emotional residue from the Team Rocket stuff and their own fractured relationship. Being young and in love is tough. It's not as tough as some of life's problems, but when you're in the middle of it—it sucks.

"Well, I've probably done a lot of fucking shit that I deserved to be punished for, but this seems like a little much." — in reference to all the times Blue was an asshole to Red in the original games

Remember how Tapu Koko “blessed” Moon's grandmother Keahi by striping her hair up with dope golden-blonde forever? Tapu Lele just did the same thing to Lillie, but obviously with pink. You best believe I had this planned from the very beginning of QP1: Frangipani. I just hadn't decided who was going to get what hair. Hau, with gold for Tapu Koko? Gladion, with red for Tapu Bulu? Moon, with purple for Tapu Fini? All of them would have been cool (except Moon's, because her hair is dark and you wouldn't really have been able to see the purple anyway), but I decided to go with Lillie in the end. Lillie deserves it.

I would also like to mention that I have hinted at Moon getting Alolan Diglett at least twice in this story. That tells you she's either definitely getting one, or she's definitely not getting one. I don't actually, um, LIKE Alolan Dugtrio, so... yeah, no. She's not getting one. (If it had been Ground/Fairy maybe... but we've been down this road before lmao)

The word "kibitz" is underused in both fanfiction and real life. It's a Yiddish verb that essentially means “to backseat-drive.” Moon is not Yiddish and has no Jewish or European heritage at all; but I am (Jewish, that is; or rather a Christian who's descended from Russian Jews), and I think it's a shame that the English language doesn't have a single-word verb for “the act of backseat-driving.” I had to ask my dad how it was spelled, too; it could be incorrect. I might use it again. It's a fun word to say out loud, too. It's pronounced exactly how it looks.

Okay but like Midnight form and Midday form are a mouthful in comparison to Dusk form, which is nice and short. So I gave Dusk form a longer, more formal name (Twilight form), and Midnight and Midday forms are Moon and Sun forms. Given the sun/moon and Solgaleo/Lunala binary thing in Alola, I thought it would be kind of cool.

The other thing about Lycanroc is that I REALLY wanted Game Freak to add Psychic type to Midday and Dark type to Midnight. I also wanted Fire-type for Dusk Lycanroc — and I wanted a fourth form, Dawn (or Daybreak) form Lycanroc, which would gain Fairy type on evolution. It would look a lot like Dusk Form but it would be a little fluffier (the same way Midnight is fluffier than Midday or Dusk, who are both spiky) and would have pink fur and golden eyes. Game Freak pls hire me :')

According to the Pokédex, Decidueye are only 5'3" but 1) I already established that Starter Pokémon are bred larger than the ones you find in the wild like the Ride Charizard, and 2) I wanted Puck to be taller than Moon lmao. It's five inches, it's not too
much of a stretch (if you'll forgive the pun.)

The whole reason that the “Hau feels inferior because he can't beat Moon” arc even occurred is because of a canon line that Olivia says: “You're just Hau, right? And what's wrong with that! Who cares if you're Hala's grandson? Now show me what Hau can do!” It gave me feelings and it gave me ideas.
Rage

Chapter Summary

Konikoni City

Chapter Notes

Moon loses her temper.

[Content Warning for: a VERY intense argument. This could be triggering for some people so I'm tagging for it, sue me.]

Also: UM GUYS LISTEN I GOT FANART BY THE LOVELY fairytonic AND IT'S THE CUTEST THING, THEIR PROTAG AND MY PROTAG ARE SHARING A DREAM, I BUSTED THE FATTEST UWU. I don't know how to link it because I'm an html n00b but if you wanna look at it, it's in last chapter's comments!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chat: hypothetically

shakespeare jr: Hey, I want to talk to you about something

fucking softie: Of course.

shakespeare jr: In person though

fucking softie: I figured. If you didn't care about discussing it in person, you would have brought it up directly by text. Where would you like to meet up?

Moon sighed, setting Rotom down on her lap. “I can’t do this,” she whispered.

Puck, leaning on her shoulder, cooed in her ear. Ariel pecked at the screen, and Ben, draped over Macbeth at her feet, let out a lazy yawn.

“Yes, you can,” said Lillie briskly. She was folding her clean laundry. “What do you need to say to him?”

“He wants me to pick somewhere to meet up.”

“The park by the lighthouse.”
Moon blinked at her.

“It’s only a couple of blocks away, so it will be easy for you to get back if things go poorly.” Lillie’s mouth tightened. Moon wasn’t sure what her friend truly thought about Gladion being Team Skull and not telling Moon about it, but she had been nothing but supportive. “It’s open-air, so you won’t be making a scene in a restaurant, and if you want to battle then you can do that too.”

“This doesn’t seem like the thing that you can solve by battling.”

“A lot of things can’t be solved by battling.” Lillie hesitated. “A lot of things... can’t be solved by talking, either.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that he’s still his own person. He must have reasons for not telling you, Moon. The texts you’ve shown me and the conversations you’ve told me about suggest that he does care about you. But I know what it’s like to have reasons not to talk about something. Maybe he struggles with that.”

“With being part of Team Skull? They’re usually pretty loud and proud about it.”

“From what I understand, Gladion doesn’t seem loud and proud about anything.”

That was true enough. Moon turned back to her phone.

shakespeare jr: By the lighthouse in the park?

fucking softie: Perfect. I’m free around four.

shakespeare jr: See you then

Moon threw Rotom onto the bed.

“Ow,” complained Rotom, fitting itself back into her pocket. “What did I do to deserve that?”

“Nothing,” sighed Moon. “It’s not you.”

“Did you come to an agreement?” inquired Lillie.

“Meeting at four by the lighthouse in the park.”

Lillie nodded placidly. “What are you going to wear?”

“Does it matter?”

“Not if you don’t want it to matter.”

It did matter, a little. She didn’t know why, it was stupid; but it made her feel better. Moon went to dig through her backpack for clean clothes, and came up with a T-shirt and jean shorts. She put on the plum hoodie with Puck’s baby footprints, because it was now her favorite jacket; and then she had regular socks and sneakers to go with it.

“Comb your hair,” added Lillie. “Your cowlick is defying gravity in the back.”
“It does that no matter what I do. Short hair problems, I suppose.” Moon laughed and patted the back of her head. “Flat yet?”

“No, but I'm sure you made a valiant effort.”

Moon combed down her wild cowlick with water and studied her reflection in the mirror. She looked tired— which she supposed was an accurate enough representation of how she felt.

“I'm sure he'll understand once you explain things to him,” said Lillie softly.

“I hope so. I just— I was really mad at those kids from Team Skull, and it kind of hurts my heart to think he could be part of that.”

At three fifty-five Moon left the Pokémon Center, shoving her hands in her pockets as she walked down to the park. To her own surprise she arrived first— usually Gladion was early, waiting for her wherever they had arranged to meet. The bench by the lighthouse was unoccupied, and she sank down onto it and tried to collect her thoughts. If she collected herself, she wouldn't get emotional. Hopefully.

She spotted Gladion at three minutes past four, walking into the park with his hands in his pockets. His eyes flitted around the park. Moon noticed this more than she ever had— there were a few Team Skull kids hanging out around the bench closest to the water, talking and laughing, a few smoking cigarettes. Gladion avoided them, instead walking up to Moon and sitting with his back angled to the Team Skull kids. He wore a beanie, jammed over his blond hair; and a dark green hoodie with jeans.

_He doesn't want them to recognize him_, she realized. _He doesn't want them to know he meets with me._

“Hello.”

He was looking at her, and Moon realized that he already knew something was wrong. She hadn't greeted him, or even said anything at all.

“Hi. Um— so, yeah. I met someone who knows you.”

Gladion went still. “Who?”

“Her name is Plumeria.”

“I see.”

Nothing in his face changed. He still watched Moon— careful, wary. Uncertain.

“Why didn't you tell me you're Team Skull?”

“I don't see how that would have been any of your business.”

“Well, given how poorly they've treated my friends and I in the past, it might have been something worth discussing.” Moon did her best to keep her tone neutral.

“I can't control what the others do.”

It was a good point, but it wasn't what she was looking for. “You lied to me.”

“I never said I wasn't part of Team Skull.”
“No, but you let me think it. Emmett and Uilani came looking for you on Route Five. You, not me. They knew you. I asked you if you knew them.”

“And I said that I did. That wasn't a lie.”

“But you didn't say you were one of them.”

Gladion's mouth tightened. “Emmett, in particular, has made it very clear that I am not one of them. The dress code isn't exactly mandatory.”

“But you are, though. Emmett's an idiot, he's not in charge. Plumeria's in charge.”

“She's second-in-command, and I hope you never meet the boss— though at the rate you're decimating those morons, he'll want to meet you sooner or later. Did Plumeria battle you?”

“Yeah.”

“Did she give you a Z-Crystal?”

“What?”

“One of the powerful Trainers,” said Gladion, a touch sarcastically. “Plumeria's a powerful Trainer who was asked by Professor Kukui to keep a supply of a Z-Crystals. She gives it out to Trainers that earn it. Most people don't expect it to be her— she's Team Skull, after all. And she almost never gives anyone a Z-Crystal— even if they beat her.”

“No, she didn't. But she didn't fight me for that, she fought me because I said something mean to Trinh.”

“Trinh probably deserved it.”

“She definitely didn't,” retorted Moon. “You weren't there. And part of me is glad you weren't, because I'd really, really like to think that you aren't part of an organization that condones mutilating Slowpokes, because that's what Trinh was doing in the first place.”

“I don't hear about what the others do.” Gladion shrugged. “I get my orders, I carry them out. Mostly it's bait and switch. Distraction. I battle people, while the idiots sneak around to do stupid shit like graffiti and vandalism.”

“Let me repeat myself. Trinh cut off a Slowpoke's tail. That's really fucked up.”

“I agree with you, but some people pay a lot of money for it, so I'm not surprised.”

“And that Kohaku guy—”

Gladion's voice sharpened. “What about him?”

“I thought he was chill, but he's actually kind of creepy.”

“Stay away from him. He's not right in the head.”

“And you're part of a group that lets him be like that!”

Gladion sighed. “I'm not about to try and explain to you how Team Skull works, Moon. I don't fucking understand it myself most of the time. But they took me in, so I owe them.”
“What do you owe them, exactly?”

“I’m not in debt. It’s not that kind of gang.” His eyes flicked away from her. “Plumeria taught me how to sew, back when Null was so violent that she kept ripping up all the clothes I owned. Molly taught me how to cook. Rogelio gives me moonshine for free, so I can use it for disinfectant.”

“So they’re your family, or something?”

“They’re a damn sight better than my real family,” he fired back. “Stop making this about them. It’s not about them, Moon. You’re mad because I didn’t tell you something.”

“Yeah, I am mad! That seems like kind of an important thing to know about someone you’re trying to be friends with.”

“Oh, now we’re only trying to be friends? I thought we were friends, Moon. It seems being part of Team Skull’s demoted me. I didn’t think you were that prejudiced.”

“I’m not fucking prejudiced! I have literally seen Team Skull hurting people and Pokémon, and I thought you were—”

“What?” shouted Gladion, standing up. It was the first time he’d ever interrupted her; Moon remembered it was one of his pet peeves. “What did you think I was, Moon? Did you think I was a good person? I fucking told you I wasn't. I said it over and over again. It’s your own fucking fault if you didn’t believe me.”

“You showed me that you were a good person! You don't have to say you're a good person to be one. You do good things, and that makes you a good person.”

“And doing bad things, obviously, makes you a bad person! Here’s a novel concept for you, Moon Hawkins. I didn't lie to you about this. If I tell you I'm a bad person, it's because I've done bad things!”

“And clearly, your definition of good and bad is skewed as fuck, because you joined Team fucking Skull!”

“Oh, thank you so much for that absolutely brand-new information. Silly me, my moral compass is obviously broken, because I found some people who, for the first time in my life, didn't treat me like absolute shit. And I wanted to make them happy, I wanted them to fucking like me. So yes, I've done some bad things. I agree with you about the Slowpoke Tail, that's sick and wrong and it reeks of Kohaku. But I've marked places up with graffiti, and I've stolen the stupid fucking Totem stickers, and I've been into trial sites to bother hardworking Trainers like you. Yeah, really bad things in the big picture of life.”

“You—” Moon found she was losing steam. “You still lied to me,” she said finally. “That's the kind of thing you should tell someone.”

“No, it's not. Not if they're going to react like this.”

Moon looked up at him. He was staring at her— his voice was angry, but his eyes were damp.

“I thought you were different,” he said, turning her own words around on her. “I thought you wouldn't care. Molly said you were friendly with her. She said you were really nice to Rogelio—and Arceus knows he could use a bit of fucking kindness, he's an orphan and he was living with his aunt and uncle before he ran away and joined us. They're completely batshit and thought he was possessed by a Banette, so they used to beat the shit out of him.”
“I don't have a problem with Rogelio. I have a problem with people like Uilani and Trinh, who were bullying my friend.”

“Bullies are almost always ten times more deserving of your pity than their victims. There's nothing wrong with the victims. People don't become bullies unless they're fucked up in the first place.”

“You didn't hear them! They told her she was being stupid, and it was the first time she'd ever gone shopping in her life and she cried about it.”

“I don't know what they've gone through, but your friend is a better person than they are, and she probably knows it. She doesn't need your pity. Trinh and Uilani are pathetic.”

“Well, people like Emmett—”

“Emmett is a categorical moron, so whatever example you decide to bring up with him doesn't fucking count. He's the kind of person who should have died years ago by saying the wrong thing to the wrong person, resulting in being savagely beaten to death. And before you go on, Kohaku is a sociopath, you can't measure other people by his standards because he doesn't have standards. They don't exist. He vaguely values human existence because we provide him with entertainment, but he has about as much regard for it as he does a bag of Pokébeans.”

Moon stared at him for a few moments, then crossed her arms. “You still didn't tell me.”

“We've fucking been over this, do you not listen?”

“I don't like being lied to!”

“No, that's not what you don't like, Moon.” Gladion's hand reached out, gripping her shoulder— not hard enough to bruise, simply holding her in place, holding her captive as each icy word landed on her soul. “What you don't like is that other people refuse to cater to your massive fucking ego by occasionally withholding information from you. You don't like when people don't tell you things, because you like to learn and somehow you've got it into your head that the person with the most knowledge is the person who wins at life. You like to be the smartest person in the room, and you like everyone to know just how smart you are. You're lucky you ended up with Hau and Lillie as your friends. They're nice enough to feed your ego. But I'm not going to do that for you. The reason I don't tell you things, sometimes, is because it's none of your business. And no matter how close we get, no matter how hard we fall—”

He cut himself off abruptly. Moon swallowed, knowing exactly what he'd been about to say and wishing that he'd said it. They were only a few inches apart, shouting in each other's faces; his breath was warm on her face and his eyes were wild and Moon was getting dizzy, she was falling, she was leaning—

“No matter how much you might trust me,” said Gladion quietly, releasing Moon's shoulder and stepping backward, “I'm never going to be able to trust you. It's not your fault. It's my shitty background, it's my shitty problem to deal with. What you have to deal with is taking no for an answer.”

There wasn't a response she could make to that. Moon breathed through her nose, trying to calm down.

“I'm still angry,” she told him. “I'm still hurt.”

“Sucks to be you, I guess.”
It was now, or never. “I'm hurt because I care about you.” She shoved her hands into her pockets. “I hoped you cared about me enough to be honest with me.”

“You're not subtle,” Gladion reminded her, and Moon felt herself flush. “And I'm not honest with anyone except my Pokémon team.”

“How do you care about me?”

“That's a manipulative fucking question if I ever heard one,” he snapped, scarlet rushing to his cheeks. “Yeah, I care about you. You're nice to me and my team, except when you're being a self-righteous, egotistical know-it-all. That doesn't mean I'm going to be honest with you. There are plenty of good people who lie, and there are plenty of bad people who are honest. It doesn't matter. I lie to protect people, you among them. I don't fucking like lying. It sucks, and when people like you find out about it, they give me shit about it.”

“Because people don't like being lied to!” exclaimed Moon.

“That's too fucking bad! Life sucks, everyone in the world is out to rip you a new one, and if you expect everyone to be honest you're in for disappointment.”

“But I'm not everyone to you, am I? Why can't you be honest with me?”

“No!” He was shouting again— backing up, shaking his head. “This isn't an argument you're going to win. Stop that fucking shit, right now. Stop trying to manipulate my feelings.”

“I'm not trying to—”

“Yes, you are! You're asking me to say how I feel about you, because saying that your feelings got hurt wasn't working. Don't fucking play these games with me, you will never win and it's fucked up of you to try.”

“That's— not fair,” said Moon helplessly. “When you care about people, you take their emotions into account when you make decisions.”

“Sure, but that's a choice that I make.” Gladion's mouth twisted into something stubbornly ugly. “You can't force me to take your emotions into account by guilting me into it. I made the decision to keep my presence in Team Skull as need-to-know information. You didn't need to know.”

“Blame your friend, she's the one who told me.”

“She's not my friend, but I'll talk to her about it.” Gladion turned and began walking away. “I don't have friends, Moon. Not a single one.”

And that was perhaps what broke her, more than anything else he could have said.

Moon sat alone on the bench for a good forty-five minutes before Rotom murmured quietly, “You have a message from contact: lillie-pad.”

She listlessly opened the chat.

Chat: girl power
lillie-pad: How did everything go with Gladion?

shakespeare jr: I don't think it could have gone any worse

lillie-pad: I'm sorry.

lillie-pad: Do you want to talk about it?

shakespeare jr: Yeah

shakespeare jr: Actually, no

shakespeare jr: Fuck, I don't know

lillie-pad: Come back to the Pokémon Center, okay? Hau and I are here for you.

shakespeare jr: On my way

Moon slowly got to her feet, tucking Rotom in her pocket. Her eyes felt puffy, and her head spun slightly when she stood up; she remembered she hadn't eaten much lunch.

Chat: IKI SQUAD

shakespeare jr: Hey can one of you guys spot me a sandwich? I'll pay you back but I'm starving and I don't wanna wait in line

walking malasada: yea no prob

shakespeare jr: Thanks

walking malasada: yw

Hau and Lillie had not one, but two sandwiches waiting for her, as well as packets of Bugs and beans for her Pokémon. Moon let her team out to tear into the food, and started in on her own.

“So what did he say?” said Hau finally.


“What? It's the only way to ask the question. There's no polite way to say it.”

“He basically said it was none of my business, and that I want people to tell me things because my ego is fed by being smarter than other people.”

She was afraid for a moment that they would agree with him— gently, which would have been worse; but Lillie frowned.
“What ego?” she said blankly.

“No, Moon’s definitely got an ego,” said Hau shrewdly. “But it’s average, it’s just like everyone else’s ego. And you don’t get your kicks from being smarter than other people—you just get them from being smart. You always share the smartness with others.”

“Thanks,” mumbled Moon, though she wasn’t sure it was true.

They let her eat and brood in silence after that.

“Let’s go shopping,” suggested Lillie, as Moon was finishing her second sandwich.

Hau’s nose wrinkled. “Um... okay?”

“Not you.” She flapped one hand at him. “Just us girls. I’ve never been able to experience what they call ‘retail therapy’ before, but it seems worth a try.”

“Oh, thank Arceus. I love you both but I really, really don’t want to go shopping with you.”

“Why not?” Lillie looked slightly hurt by this.

“Because Moon will get grumpier and grumpier, and you’ll get cuter and cuter, and I can't deal with either of those things.”

Lillie squeaked, covering her flaming cheeks with her hands.

chat: sprechen zie cousins?

shakespeare jr: smooth

walking malasada: thx i try

Moon was reminded of when she had first taken Lillie shopping; she thought of Trinh and Uilani and then of Gladion, which hurt too much so she stopped thinking about that. Lillie picked outfits for Moon that she wouldn't ever have chosen on her own—ruffled blouses, plaid skirts, floral dresses. Moon tried them on, because she was going to be a good friend and do what Lillie wanted. She was surprised to find that she actually liked a couple of the outfits, enough that Lillie watched in satisfaction as the saleslady rang up her purchases.

“Do you feel better?” Lillie ventured, as they left the store.

“Kind of,” admitted Moon. “It’s silly. Why does something so superficial make me feel better?”

“In your case, I suspect it’s because you’re a visual person. You like things that look nice. In my case, it’s because I like helping people and seeing you cheer up makes me happy.”

“You’re a much better friend than I am.”

“I keep secrets from you, too.”
Lillie's voice was soft.

“I know that. But you actually tell me that you're keeping secrets, and that you'd like me not to ask. He didn't do anything like that.”

“It's taken me a while to trust you with my secrets,” pointed out Lillie. “Do you think he might have told you eventually?”

A sick feeling crept into Moon's gut; tears blurred her vision and she swallowed. “He won't now. Oh, Arceus. Lillie, I fucked up, I fucked up so bad—”

“No, you haven't. Shhh.” Lillie crouched in front of her; Moon realized that she'd sat down in the middle of the store, bawling her eyes out— people were staring at them. “You'll be okay, Moon. It was a natural reaction to have, and if he's got any heart at all he'll forgive you eventually.” She spoke firmly, patting Moon's shoulder. “Come on, let's go back to the Pokémon Center. We'll pick up some ice cream and find a terrible action movie on Netballflix. It will be okay.”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah so I apologize that this chapter is mostly drama and not really plot, but, uh... sometimes they're the same thing, and the emotional developments in character relationships in this story are just as important here than Things Actually Happening are. So we still have a little ways before we end Sakura.

Lillie, giving Moon advice like she doesn't already know Gladion (and like she isn't equally annoyed at him for not telling Moon something this important; Lillie knew he was part of Team Skull but she gets why Moon is feeling betrayed)

Please also consider: Moon only found out that Gladion is Team Skull. She STILL doesn't know that Gladion and Lillie are siblings...

I, like Moon, have Short Hair Problems where the fucking cowlick sticks up in the back and I can't get it to lie flat. However the cowlick thing is a small price to pay for the freedom of not having to deal with long hair all the time.

“They're a damn sight better than my real family.” — obviously Gladion's talking about Lusamine, who he's replaced with Wicke (mother), Plumeria (older sister), and, to an extent, Molly (same-age sister or friend). He definitely DOESN'T mean Lillie.

As with many arguments, Moon and Gladion are both right, and they are both wrong. Moon doesn't like being deceived, and that's a valid feeling. Gladion, however, has the right to keep things to himself. So they're both right.

“Your friend is a better person than they are” —but Gladion, you've never met Moon's friend Lillie, how would you know? ;)

“What you don't like is that other people refuse to cater to your massive fucking ego by occasionally withholding information from you. You don't like when people don't tell you things, because you like to learn and somehow you've got it into your head that the
person with the most knowledge is the person who wins at life. You like to be the smartest person in the room, and you like everyone to know just how smart you are.” — so you know how Moon is 50% author insert? this is probably my biggest flaw irl. I have shit self-esteem and one of my quick fixes when I crave validation is to get people to tell me I'm smart.

This argument was really difficult to write because it's an internal monologue I've had with myself so often that it hasn't been articulated— it's conscious and sub-conscious and I don't know what to do with myself sometimes ugh

"They were only a few inches apart, shouting in each other's faces..." — The 1996 Pride and Prejudice, starring Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth, is FAR superior to the 2005 Pride and Prejudice, starring Keira Knightley and Matthew Macfadyen. But in the 2005 version, when Darcy proposes to Elizabeth (in the pouring rain, outside in a gazebo, which is inaccurate to the book but aesthetic I guess), they have a moment where they're yelling and then they stop and they're REALLY close to kissing, it's an almost-kiss but they DON'T ACTUALLY KISS and I want you to know that I am invoking that Exact Situation with this bit here.

Gladion's really not playing games with his emotions and he's really wary of Moon trying to appeal to his better nature— guess who's used his emotions against him before? Three guesses and the first two don't count

Lillie's never done retail therapy and I Am Sad Now even though I was already sad writing this chapter

I'm so sorry about Netballflix, all I can tell you is that there might be some “Netballflix and chill” jokes eventually lmao
Chapter Summary

Konikoni City, Heahea City, Grand Hano Resort, Hano Beach.

Chapter Notes

Moon attempts to make amends with Gladion before leaving with Hau for Aether Paradise.

[okay so fairytonic taught me how to do links so fanarts are HERE and HERE. I love them so much and I hope the links work uwu]

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

chat: hypothetically

shakespeare jr: I had an epiphany in the store the other night with my friend Lillie

shakespeare jr: I still think you shouldn't have lied, but I definitely shouldn't have yelled at you about it

shakespeare jr: Can we meet up and talk, so I can apologize properly?

Contact: fucking softie has blocked you. They will no longer receive messages from you.

shakespeare jr: I guess I deserved that [Message Unread]

“I'm already so done with today, and it hasn't even started yet,” muttered Moon, setting Rotom down on the bed.

Lillie didn't say anything to that, which was unusual— she tended to offer encouragement or advice when Moon was grumpy. They were both packing their bags— Lillie in preparation to head to Professor Burnet's apartment, Moon to go with Hau to the Grand Hano Resort to look for the man from Aether Paradise.

“Chin up!” said Hau brightly, leaning on the doorframe. He'd already finished packing. “I've got a surprise for both of you. Gramps sent me a gift through the PC.”
“The only things you can send through the PC are Pokémon and registered Training items like Potions,” said Moon, raising one eyebrow at him.

“Good guess!” Hau held up a Pokéball.

“Another one? Wow, you've nearly got a full team.”

“What kind of Pokémon is it?” asked Lillie.

“A Tauros!” Hau beamed at them. “I took him out to play a little bit last night. It's not the one that Gramps and I were trying to raise— he's been sent to the Ride Pager program at the Ranch. Rumble is a calf, so he's been weaned already but I still get the fun of mostly raising him.”

“Are you going to train him to carry you?”

“No, but I might fit him with saddlebags so I don't have to carry my backpack and stuff— kidding, kidding!” He dodged the sock Moon threw at him. “Don't you need to pack that?”

“I do, actually. Toss it back.”

He lobbed it at her head. Moon caught it and stuffed it into the pocket with her clean laundry.

“What do you think Aether Paradise will be like?” wondered Hau.

“You could probably look it up on the Internet,” said Lillie— and Moon wondered if that was not a drop of acid in her normally sweet voice. “I'm sure people have taken pictures before.”

“Oh, good point!” If Lillie had been sarcastic, Hau was either electing to ignore it, or he genuinely hadn't noticed. “But that will ruin the surprise— I want to see it for myself.”

After eating breakfast, Moon and Hau summoned a pair of Ride Charizard. Lillie rode with Hau as usual as they flew to Heahea City; Moon spent the journey with her eyes closed, trying to think about what Aether Paradise would be like, pushing every other intrusive thought from her mind.

“Call if you need anything,” said Lillie abruptly, as they dropped her off at the Dimensional Research Lab.

Moon blinked at her, surprised; but she was looking at Hau, who flushed under scrutiny.

“I— yeah. Of course, Lills.”

Moon politely ignored the nickname slip. “We'll let you know,” she promised, drawing Lillie's attention. “And we'll see you on Ula'ula Island.”

“Yes, Professor Kukui will take me over by boat tomorrow. The two of you should arrive tomorrow evening or the morning after that— I don't know how long your invitation extends, but Aether Paradise doesn't seem to be a very large place.”

“I'll bring you a souvenir,” said Hau, with a cheesy wink.

“Make sure it's edible. We'll have to do a lot more walking on Ula'ula Island than we've done so far, and I'd rather eat something tasty than carry extra weight.”

“Will do.”

She went inside the Dimensional Research Lab. Moon wiggled her eyebrows suggestively at Hau.
“Lills, is it?”

“Don't you start,” groaned Hau, flushing even deeper. “It just slipped out, that's all.”

“It's cute! I won't tease you... much.”

They began walking down the road toward the Grand Hano Resort. The luxury hotel was visible from practically all parts of Heahea City, which spanned the entire east-west length of Akala Island.

“Do you think... she might like me back, a little bit?”

“Lillie? I've wondered a couple times, but I can't tell. She doesn't seem the sort to wear her heart on her sleeve. You and I do that.”

“With how much she's been hurt in her life, I don't blame her.”

They walked in silence.

“Does Gladion do that?”

“Wear his heart on his sleeve?” Moon snorted. “Hell, no. He gave me shit about it when we were fighting, too.”

“I'm sorry.”

“Don't be, it's not your fault. It's pretty much all my fault. And I mean, I'm still mad that he lied to me. But I approached him poorly. I should have waited and thought about it more.”

“You haven't really dated much, have you?”

“No. I've had crushes, but they never got anywhere. Which is a good thing— imagine if I'd left a boyfriend in Kanto.” Moon shuddered. “The long-distance bills alone would rack up a fortune.”

“I had a girlfriend for like, seven months my junior year.” Hau shrugged. “It was fun and everything, but we both knew it wasn't really going to work out. And I think she joined Team Skull, actually.”

“Oh, really? What was her name?”

“Cassie. Really nice girl. And she was smart, too— but incredibly lazy. She aced all the tests but she never did her homework.”

“Arceus, I hate people who can do that.”

“Me too,” said Hau, with great feeling. “I used to get on her case about it. We argued all the time. I don't think Lillie's ever dated, has she?”

“She's never mentioned it to me if she has.”

“What about Gladion?”

“Not as far as I know.”

“So I'm the one with the most relationship experience?” Hau made a face. “That's not exactly comforting.”

“It also doesn't make you an expert.”
“Don't I know it. We're all just a bunch of kids, pretending to be adults and hiding the fact that we've got no clue what we're doing.”

“As far as relationships go, that is,” Moon was quick to point out. “I'd like to think I'm pretty on top of the rest of my life.”

The Grand Hano Resort was enormous, with huge signs and flashing lights to light everything up even in broad daylight. The hotel had a private beach, with boulders sunk into the outer sandbars to prevent swimmers from being washed out to the real ocean.

“Where do you think we find this guy?” Hau wondered. “Probably inside, right?”

“You check the inside, I'll scope the beach.”

“Aww, I want to scope the beach!”

“That's exactly why you're not scoping the beach. You'll literally wade into the ocean and get completely soaked.” Moon shoved him in the direction of the hotel. “Call me if you find him, I'll do the same.”

“Yes, Mom.” Hau rolled his eyes, but went inside to search all the same. Moon walked down onto the beach, squinting at the beachgoers. She was fairly certain she wouldn't find the Aether Foundation man out here, but stranger things had been known to happen.

She didn't find the Aether Foundation man— but she did find Gladion.

He was walking along the shoreline, wearing plastic gloves. Occasionally he would bend, pick something up, and chuck it into the water. Moon, looking down at the ground, realized there were Pokémon sitting on the waterline.

“Pyukumuku,” Rotom informed her. “They continuously try to crawl on land, even though they're water dwellers, bzzt.”

“Seems kind of futile,” commented Moon. “What's the point in trying to get somewhere that's going to kill you?”

Rotom didn't have an answer for that, which was fine because it was a rhetorical question anyway. Moon braced herself, then walked up to Gladion.

He noticed her about fifteen feet away, gaze flicking briefly over her in recognition before returning to his work. It was as though a stranger were looking at her, from those eyes.

“I'm sorry,” she blurted out.

“If I wanted to talk to you, I wouldn't have blocked your number.”

His voice was quiet and cool— worse, somehow, than if he had sounded angry. Moon swallowed.

“I fucked up,” she said, because they were both right there and she might as well say her piece. “I'm allowed to be mad at you, but I shouldn't have yelled at you like that, and I shouldn't have tried to make it about me. That was selfish.”

Gladion didn't say anything. He walked past her, picked up another Pyukumuku, and tossed it into the ocean.

“It's nice of you to throw them back,” she tried.
“I’m getting paid for it.”

“It’s still nice.”

“If I weren’t getting paid, I would sit here on the beach and watch them suffocate to death.”

Moon gritted her teeth. “You probably have better things to do with your time.”

“True. I’d have to schedule it somewhere between graffiti, vandalism, and making nice Trainers cry.”

“Gladion, I’m trying to apologize here.”

“No.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, no,” he said calmly. “I don’t accept your apology. I don’t want your apology. I want you to leave me alone and forget about me. Do your island challenge and move on with your life. Be happy.”

He picked up another Pyukumuku and tossed it into the ocean before turning to look at her. His eyes were oddly soft. “It wouldn't have worked out, you know.”

A lump rose to Moon's throat; she tried to swallow it down. “You're not even willing to try?”

“No. You’re a distraction to me. I have more important things I need to worry about, and so do you. You're a nice girl, and some day you're going to make someone really happy.

But that someone can't be me.”

He picked up a Pyukumuku, threw it in the water. Picked up another, threw it in the water. Picked up another—

“That’s it?” Moon's voice wobbled dangerously and she cleared her throat, trying to steady it. “You're— breaking up with me.”

“We weren’t together in the first place.” Bend, scoop, stand, toss. “Good-bye, Moon. Have a fantastic life.”

The worst part was that he actually meant it. She could hear the sincerity in his voice.

Moon turned and walked away, back toward the hotel. Her feet marched her along like a robot; it was a good thing, because everything around her had blurred into colorful, indistinct shapes.

“Incoming call from contact: walking malasada,” said Rotom. “Do you want to accept it, bzzt?”

“I— I can't talk right now.”

“Do you want to send a text instead?”

“Yeah.”

Chat: sprechen zie cousins?
shakespeare jr: On my way in, need a minute

walking malasada: bug dude is in the lobby, he's like right there u cant miss him

walking malasada: he's weird

walking malasada: like rlly weird

shakespeare jr: Lol

She stopped just outside the hotel, sitting down on a waist-high concrete barrier that held bright, colorful flowers. A pair of bellhops eyed her suspiciously, but the nature of the Grand Hano Resort was such that the beach was open to Trainers who wanted to work or fight so they couldn't tell her to move. Moon wiped her eyes on her sleeve and ran her hand over her belt, where her teammates were quivering anxiously in response to her distress.

Chat: sprechen zie cousins?

walking malasada: i've decided i don't like bug dude

walking malasada: in the last three minutes he's made passive-aggressive remarks about

walking malasada: 1) “natives” by which I think he means brown people like u & me????

walking malasada: 2) “kids these days who won't get off their damn Dexes”

walking malasada: 3) how women apparently can't be on time

walking malasada: also are u ok b/c u don't sound ok

shakespeare jr: I kind of ran into Gladion

shakespeare jr: Totally by accident

shakespeare jr: We are no longer a thing and will never be a thing, let alone friends

shakespeare jr: As I said, need a minute

walking malasada: OMG

walking malasada: MOON

shakespeare jr: Seriously I just gotta stop crying, it'll be like 30 seconds, bug dude can chill tf out

walking malasada: I DON'T GIVE A CRAP ABOUT BUG DUDE, MOON OMG DO U NEED A HUG
“Moon, is that you?”

Moon looked up, surprised and slightly embarrassed to see Professor Kukui and Olivia approaching.

“Hi,” she said, trying to smile.

“Are you all right, Moon?” Olivia looked concerned, which meant that Moon probably looked like a mess—*at least the outside reflects the inside*, she thought dryly.

“Yeah, just having a rough morning. Sorry. I'm gonna meet Hau and some dude from Aether Paradise in the lobby. We were invited to tour.”

“Lillie mentioned it, yeah,” said Professor Kukui, nodding. “It's a pretty rare opportunity, so take lots of pictures and some video, if you can manage it!”

“We'll do that.” Moon patted Rotom before tucking it into her pocket.

“We wanted to see you off,” said Olivia. “I like to try and both welcome, and see off, as many of the Trainers who pass through Akala on their island challenge as I can manage. I'm very glad I got to make time for you and Hau— you're both very special Trainers, you know.”

“Thanks, Kahuna Olivia.”

The three of them went inside. As Hau had said, it was easy to see the man that Moon now had difficulty thinking of as anything other than “Bug Dude.” He really did look like a bug— the green glasses slightly magnified his eyes. Hau leaned on a large potted plant that looked vaguely like an Oddish, an uncomfortable expression on his face; he looked massively relieved when he spotted Moon, Olivia, and Professor Kukui.

“Faba, isn't it?” said Olivia easily, sticking her hands in her pockets.

The bug dude jumped, turning around. “Kahuna Olivia!” he said. He sounded slightly surprised, and not too pleased. “What brings you to this magnificent establishment?”

“I'm seeing off my kids,” laughed Olivia, slinging an arm over Moon's shoulder. Hau, beaming, walked over to join them; he got a pat on the head for his troubles. “It's been great to have them here on Akala Island, so I wanted to wish them luck and farewell before they move on.”

“Oh, you're Faba?”

Professor Kukui's tone was decidedly cool— a surprise, because Moon had never heard him be anything but warm and inviting.

“I am Branch Chief Faba, of the Alola Division of the Aether Foundation,” said Bug Dude, drawing
himself up and puffing out his chest slightly. “I am the head of the Research and Development
department, though I also play a significant role in the Engineering, Conservation, and Budgeting
departments.”

“Oh, cool,” said Moon, intrigued. “Wouldn't you be like, super busy though?”

Faba's smile remained fixed in place as he turned to look at her. “I am generally quite busy, yes.
Which is why we ought to be leaving as soon as possible. My personal watercraft is waiting in the
private dock of the Grand Hano Resort.”

“One moment, please,” said Olivia.

Faba sighed loudly, crossing his arms.

Olivia ignored him, turning to Hau. “Are you doing better?” she said kindly. “Has the lesson you
learned at your Grand Trial been helpful to you?”

“Absolutely,” said Hau, nodding. “I'm even more excited to train than I was before.”

“Then I've done my job. Good luck, Hau; and may the light of Solgaleo and Lunala accompany you
wherever you may find yourself.”

“Thanks, Kahuna Olivia.”

Olivia turned to Moon next. She was silent for a few moments, studying her; Moon felt abruptly self-
conscious, aware of her eyes that were probably still red-rimmed and the completely un-cute outfit
she was wearing in comparison to Olivia's fashionable clothes.

“Moon,” said Olivia gently, lowering her voice to a whisper. “Some advice, from one strong woman
to another?”

Moon blinked in surprise at being called a “strong woman,” though it had always been a goal of
hers. “Um, sure.”

“One of the things that will bring you strength is vulnerability. Don't be afraid to reflect on your
mistakes and on the past. Let yourself be weak sometimes. Let your guard down. Trust, with an open
heart and an open mind, that things will work out in your favor. In doing so, you will gain even
greater strength—a strength that is not nearly so easily broken as mere emotional fortitude. Look to
Lillie, if you seek an example. And remember—as I have taught Hau, your greatest opponent should
always be yourself.”

“Thank you,” whispered Moon.

“You're very welcome. Thank you for spending time on our island. We will always welcome you
back.”

She stepped back from Moon, turning not to Faba but to Professor Kukui and nodding.

“We'll meet up in Malie Garden in three days time,” said Professor Kukui, with a nod to Moon and
Hau. “You can spend one night or two at the Aether Foundation; depends on how extensive your
tour is. And then you can settle in at the Malie City Pokémon Center. My assistant and I will meet
you in Malie Garden at two p.m.”

Hau opened his mouth, confusion in his eyes; but Professor Kukui shook his head ever so slightly
and Hau fell silent.
“Cool,” said Moon. “Sounds good, Professor. We'll take lots of pictures and video for you.”

“Only in approved areas,” said Faba suddenly. “Certain areas of the Aether Paradise do not permit photography or filming.”

“Sure, we'll follow the rules and stuff.”

“And with that, I think it's time to leave.” Faba began walking out of the lobby, his gait surprisingly quick. “Come along, Trainers.”

Moon and Hau exchanged glances— Hau rolled his eyes. “Okay, sure Jan,” he muttered under his breath, which made Moon giggle as they followed him. Olivia and Professor Kukui waved them off, as they stepped outside into the bright Alola sun.

~FIN PART TWO~

~Moon and co. will return in: Greyscale~

Chapter End Notes

This chapter took me forever to write lmao, I'm assuming it's because I was done with the main storyline for Sakura and I really wanted to get going with Greyscale. <3

Gladion blocked Moon, Big Oof

I realize that Hau could have picked up a Tauros at literally any point on this island after he fought with Moon in Chapter Two, but I thought he needed to slow down a bit. He's got a whole Ula'ula Island to work on training the Tauros, as well as the Crabrawler/Crabominable he's eventually going to have. (That's not spoilers, it's literally game canon)

Lillie is So Done with the idea of Moon and Hau going to Aether Paradise lmao

"'I'll bring you a souvenir.' 'Make sure it's edible. We'll have to do a lot more walking on Ula'ula Island than we've done so far, and I'd rather eat something tasty than carry extra weight.'" — that's totally the only reason Lillie wouldn't want a physical souvenir from Aether Paradise. yep. nothing at all to do with her upbringing.

I couldn't in good conscience write a story about four teenagers in approximately the same age group without giving them varying romantic experiences. Hau's the only one I've written as having dated— though Moon's had her first kiss, and all four of them have had crushes before. Gladion and Lillie were obviously sheltered, and even with Gladion's Rebellious Years in Team Skull, he was busy with Null and was like "dating wtf no" until he met Moon who was Not Subtle About It At All. It seems unreasonable to expect them all to be new to dating though— especially someone who is handsome and confident, like aged-up Hau. Also, we're totally going to meet Cassie at some point.
So Gladion probably seems like a complete jerkass here. I'd like to remind you that Gladion is, in fact, a complete jerkass. He's also a great big softie, but that doesn't mean he's not a jerkass. Moon was really mean to him last chapter; he's being really mean to Moon now. It's a delicate balance, a give-and-take. They're both at fault. I hope I've written them in a balanced way. And yes, this does mean that we're not going to see much of Gladion anymore... that's so sad. Alexa, play Despacito.

“You're— breaking up with me.” “We weren't together in the first place.” — OOF okay ouch why do I write things that hurt me

The game literally references how the blue potted plants in the Grand Hano Resort look like Oddish so I thought I'd throw that in too.

I'm going to make Faba literally as annoying as I can, pls be prepared or you may throw things at your computer screens

Look forward to Greyscale!!!!!!!!!!

End Notes

These are the end notes proper for the entire work, so I'm going to be a little more serious than I have been up to this point.

First of all: thank you.

Thank you for reading this fic. I'm still incredibly surprised that people are enjoying it— not because I think I'm a bad writer or anything, but because it's Pokémon fanfiction and that's a very Niche Interest lmao.

Special thanks to HealthInspector, who if they haven't commented on every chapter have come damn near it. Bless you. Special thanks also to fairytonic, who made DELIGHTFUL fanart and who is engaging with my characters and providing more of the hilarious Twitter-esque commentary that I've been trying to evoke in the end notes for each chapter lmao. Thanks also to ChewieCookies, who is unbelievably sweet; to ImJustYourEverydayPerson, who leaves really insightful comments; and to Crystal_Shapeshifter who's been following this story for A While. All five of you are da real MVPs and I adore each and everyone of you faceless Internet denizens. <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 <3

And thanks to everyone else who has commented, given kudos, bookmarked, or even just silently lurked to read the fic—I love you all, and I encourage you to comment!!! Say hello and tell me what you liked or didn't like about my writing. (As long as you're nice about what you didn't like, because I am a Fragile Flower lmao).

I must also give special thanks to my sixteen-year-old brother, who is my Pokémon buddy. We each have a 3DS and I got him into Pokémon so we have most of the paired sets of games between us— from Gen 4 up, that is. He's a total science nerd who's a year ahead in high school math, whereas I have an English degree lmao; but he's one of my literal best friends despite being ten years younger and he's the one I go to with the "will this fake science kind of work" questions and also the "what do you think of this game mechanic
being incorporated into the story” kind of thing. He's not my beta reader, because he thinks
fanfiction is Weird (which it is, let's be real); but he knows I'm writing it and he supports me
and I just love him a lot uwu

From here on out please expect some... um... darker content. DON'T WORRY WE ARE
STILL HEADED FOR HAPPY ENDINGS, THIS IS A HAPPY ENDINGS
HOUSEHOLD but we've got a whole Aether and a whole Lusamine and a whole Necrozma
to deal with. I actually HAVE figured out what I'm doing up until the Rainbow Rocket
episode, which I do want to write as well as some stuff beyond that because I have some
Post-Game Itches to scratch. ANYWAY please look forward to Grayscale and Quartet, Part
Three: Hibiscus, the next two fics on the agenda. I'm about halfway done with Hibiscus but
progress is steady!!!!

I look forward to seeing you all in the next bit!!!! I love you!!!!!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!